

DEEP DIVE

Architectural Sketching

Drawing buildings and constructed environments with enough structural accuracy to be convincing, sketched quickly enough to be practical.

Architectural sketching requires precise application of perspective principles combined with the ability to simplify complex structures quickly. Urban sketching has emerged as a major artistic practice, and the skills of architectural sketching underpin most environment concept art in games and film.

ESTABLISHING PERSPECTIVE QUICKLY

When sketching architecture on location or from reference, begin by identifying the horizon line (eye level) and the major vanishing points. Many buildings share the same horizon but have different vanishing points depending on their orientation. Sketch the horizon line lightly, then draw the major structural lines of the primary building -- these will converge toward your vanishing points. Work from large structure to small detail, never the reverse.

ELLIPSES AND CURVED ARCHITECTURE

Circular architectural elements (arches, domes, columns) require understanding how circles project in perspective. A circle in perspective becomes an ellipse. The minor axis of the ellipse always points toward the center of the circle in 3D space. Arched windows recede to the same vanishing points as the building's rectangular elements. Getting curved architecture wrong is immediately visible.

LINE WEIGHT AND HIERARCHY

Architectural sketches become readable through deliberate line weight hierarchy. Structural edges (the major corners and outlines of buildings) get the heaviest lines. Detail elements (windows, bricks, texture) get lighter lines. Cast shadows are often filled with a mid-weight tone. This hierarchy prevents architectural sketches from becoming uniformly complex -- the eye can identify structure vs. detail at a glance.

EXERCISES

Day 1: Sketch a simple exterior -- a house or building corner -- establishing perspective correctly before any detail. Day 2: Urban sketch of a street scene, establishing the horizon and at least two vanishing points. Day 3: Draw an arched interior (cathedral, tunnel) with correctly converging ellipses. Day 4: Draw a building from imagination using two-point perspective from scratch. Day 5: Sketch from life in 15 minutes -- urban sketching speed forces efficient simplification.