

Drawing Davis: Sketches chronicle 'urbane' city

By Jonathan Edwards | Enterprise staff writer | February 20, 2009 14:54



Pete Scully shows off his sketchbook, filled with images of Davis. 'A photo shows how something looked, but a drawing shows how you saw it,' he says. Wayne Tilcock/Enterprise photo
Pete Scully saves the world every day.

Pete saved City Hall, the Varsity Theatre, a sink full of dirty dishes. He's saved UC Davis dozens of times.

The 33-year-old university employee saves the world for his toddler son, for friends and family back home in London, for himself.

In sepia and in color, he saves it all quietly in his leather sketchbook, a Moleskine 'wrapped up in plastic, safely away from baby hands.'

Saving helps Pete remember.

'I forget faces, names, reasons for falling out,' Pete wrote in a sketch titled 'Oublier.' 'But I never forget how people take their tea.'

Black and white, the frame shows the railroad crossing next to the Fifth Street Dairy Queen. Pete catches the bus there sometimes.

'I want a record of where I am in the world at the moment,' he said while throwing back a pint of Krusovice Imperial at Little Prague.

'A photo shows how something looked, but a drawing shows how you saw it.'

'It means you've sat there and observed it,' he added. 'We take hundreds of pictures, because we don't really want to look at a place till we get home.'

'If I'm really pissed off or don't have enough light, that comes through (in a sketch). If I'm

feeling uninspired the drawing will end up like crap. It's a non-verbal record of how I was feeling that day.'

Pete wasn't sketching regularly when he first came to the states 3 1/2 years ago. For two months he and his wife, Angela, crashed with family in Santa Rosa. Then they moved to Davis at the end of 2005 when Angela landed a job at UC Davis.

Seven months later, Pete started 'drawing incessantly.'

Davis sparked Pete in a way London, France and Belgium had not. He started sketching frat houses, the farmers market and lots of bikes.

While on his lunch break, he would jot down campus scenes for a series titled 'you see, davis.'

Pete became a correspondent for the Web site Urban Sketchers, posting Davis cityscapes side-by-side with ones from Johannesburg, Barcelona and Sao Paulo.

'It's hard to make Davis look urban. It's more urbane than urban. But I still find things to draw,' he says. 'Davis is flat like a pancake - Crepeville.'

The low buildings make it less claustrophobic than bigger, taller cities, he explained. And unlike London's 'dreary' oranges and grays, Davis has a distinct palette dominated with yellows and blues.

'And lots of greens,' Pete added. 'Nice lawns.'

With its 'big wooden houses and lovely old picket fences, (Davis) looks like America,' Pete explained.

'That's how we see America from north London. That's the fantasy, and (Davis) lives up to (it). That's why I draw so I can show the people back home that it's really what this place looks like.'

Pete doesn't plan on living here forever, but he'll keep his Davis sketches long after he leaves.

Pete saves what his son won't remember.

'He'll inherit these one day, and they'll really be about him in a way, because they're where he's from, Pete said. 'If we end up moving to another city or back to Britain or wherever, he'll have them when he's older.'

In the mean time, Pete will continue saving the world in his sketchbook, wherever that world happens to be.

ON THE WEB: Check out Pete Scully's sketches at his blog, <http://petescully.com/> or his flickr account, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/petescully/>

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