

Landscape Painting in Provence with Susan Abbott



We are staying in a tiny hamlet called Les Bassacs, a cul-de-sac courtyard that is lined with very old and charming row houses. Les Bassacs is a typical rural Provencal community--unlike my home in Vermont, where a farmhouse and barn sit amid 50 acres, in France a collection of dwellings will cluster together surrounded by orchards and fields. Now these are a mix of vacation and fulltime homes, but Les Bassacs is still a quiet rural place centered on agriculture. You'll find it a wonderful retreat offering a unique opportunity to focus on your art amidst the special beauty of Provence.



You can find Les Bassacs on a Michelin map of southern France—it's a tiny dot on the D2 highway between St. Saturnin Les Apt (a half hour walk away by footpath, and the nearest village with cafes, post office and stores) and the famous town of Gordes. Cherry orchards, olive groves, vineyards and lavender fields surround the hamlet. We will be near the ochre quarries of Roussillon, many medieval villages, a Roman bridge and busy market towns. Provence is an area rich in history--Julius Caesar supposedly camped in the valley below Les Bassacs--and you might enjoy picking up a guidebook before our trip to help you get acquainted with this area's very interesting culture and past.



We will be hosted by Liz and David Atkinson, a British couple who own and run “Arts in Provence”, a workshop facility that provides opportunities for art study in the beautiful setting of Les Bassac and the surrounding countryside. "Arts in Provence" sponsors painting programs from spring to fall every year. They generally bring over British teachers and students; we are one of the few American groups that come. I met Liz and David through a mutual artist friend twenty years ago, and have been back to paint and teach there every summer since then.

David is an painter, and Liz is a potter and a very talented chef. Twenty years ago they were inspired to move to Provence and create a place for

people to come and study art, learning from each other and their teachers, inspired by the wonderful sights, tastes, scents and sunshine of Provence.

Liz and David renovated the 13th century building where we will be staying, and are full-time residents in a house across the courtyard.

The art center's main space and our group's home for two weeks is a unique dwelling on three levels, built in the 12th century, with spiral staircases, cozy rooms, and original beams.

The bedrooms are furnished simply and comfortably, Provencal style. We will be living as many Europeans do when on vacation: with common rooms for socializing, a mix of shared and private bathrooms, and large windows opening to lovely views (and no air conditioning!) The pool provides instant relief from summer heat, so bring your bathing suit.



The rooms in the main house and a secondary house across the courtyard are a combination of singles and doubles. Downstairs is the dining room, a sitting room and library, and the terrace and swimming pool. There's a studio for our classes and critiques with tables and chairs on the second floor (in what used to be a hay loft) with a panoramic view over the countryside.



This is an informal place, with a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, run for and by painters. We are living communally for two weeks, eating three meals together and sharing workspace. We will also share the common purpose of learning from each other, and experiencing a uniquely beautiful place with the eyes of artists.

My groups always fondly remember the food at Les Bassacs! Liz and her assistant prepare delicious Provencal cuisine made from fresh local ingredients. Breakfast is continental style: bread and delicious croissants from the local artisan baker, lavender honey, homemade muesli, yogurt and fruit. Lunch is either a picnic at our painting site or a buffet of cheeses, bread, pates, salad, fruit, and the local rose wine served on the patio. Dinner is a delicious three course meal, again with local wines. Anticipating the menu is one of the enjoyable events of the day!



If you are a vegetarian or have any dietary restrictions, please let me know so that I can alert Liz, who will plan your meals accordingly. And my advice on dieting is--enjoy the croissants, cheese, and sauces. You won't be snacking, and can walk off any extra calories.

Our Schedule

We'll eat breakfast by 9:00 am, then leave for our site (David has a van, and I drive a car) to paint in a nearby village or countryside all morning. You can work on your own, or set up next to me while I paint. We paint until 12:30, then have lunch back at home, or a picnic at our painting site if it's an all day session. We look at paintings from the morning session and have a class on color or composition in the studio after lunch. Then you'll have time for painting on your own or a nap or swim in the late afternoon. Dinner is at 7:30. After dinner you can relax on the terrace, walk (there are many paths from Les Bassacs through orchards and fields) or continue working in the studio. We sometimes go out as a group to paint in the late afternoon and early evening, and enjoy a picnic dinner at our site.

You don't need to stick to this group schedule; if you'd rather stay at Les Bassacs than come on a painting trip, or take a day off, that's fine. The group will have two free days, including an optional trip to Apt's wonderful market, during the workshop.

Since there's so much to see and paint within easy driving distance to Les Bassacs, we will not need to spend large stretches of time in the van. This is a painting rather than sightseeing trip, but we will visit some towns, markets and historical sites for sketching and shopping opportunities. You'll find that the quieter villages off the tourist track are the most enjoyable places to paint.



Teaching Philosophy

Participants will be working in oils and/or watercolors, and at a range of painting experience levels. I'll be able to offer both group and individual instruction, given the ample time we'll have. I will teach studio classes on color and composition, and whatever else you may find helpful. I always keep a sketchbook going, and encourage students to bring one, too.

I was very appreciative of this letter recently received from a student:

"I want to compliment you on the workshop. It was wonderful and substantive. I tire of self professed art gurus gathering little old ladies together to spend half a day demonstrating their work and the other half

making us feel bad that we don't paint like they do. Meanwhile, I am armed with new color courage and some actual art education. “

My approach to teaching is to focus on helping you develop your own painting, not just show you how to paint the way I do. My classes emphasize understanding the language of visual art (drawing, value, color, composition), rather than “how-to” paint different subjects or technique. I emphasize learning from art history, and provide a broad exposure to both master painters and contemporary artists. I hope you leave my workshops enthused about your own painting, and with an appreciation of art as an always challenging, ever-engaging lifelong journey.

I agree with Albert Einstein: “The supreme art of the teacher is to awaken joy.”

Please don't have performance anxiety about your work while you are in Provence! Just being in a new place can be a painting challenge. I think you'll find so much to look at and experience that's inspiring and interesting that you'll just want to keep sketching, painting and taking photos. Don't pressure yourself to produce “framing” pieces. My motto is: “Focus on the process, and don't worry about the product.”



Practical information

Arrival and departure: We will be taken by minibus to and from the airport in Marseilles, which is about an hour and fifteen minutes from Les Bassac. We need to arrive in Marseilles on Saturday by the mid-afternoon--check with me as the trip gets closer on the exact time we will be picked up (David and another driver usually get the whole group at once in two minivans.) **If you have a later arrival (say, after 3:00 pm in Marseilles) or early morning departure flight (before 10:00 am) from Marseilles, or if your flight is delayed, you'll probably need to take a taxi to or from the airport, either alone or splitting the fare with other group members. If your flight is delayed, call David as soon as you know and he will arrange a taxi for you.** The taxi fare from the Marseille airport to Les Bassacs is over \$150. and paid in euros. David can will help you book a taxi ahead of time if he knows that you'll need one. There are hotels at the airport, another option for arrivals the previous day or very early departures. **Please let me know the details of your flight plans as soon as you have them.**

Money: There will be opportunities to buy gifts and local wares as we travel to towns, and you may want to go to a cafe, or buy snacks for your room. Many shops will take credit cards, but some cafes and most market vendors will only accept euros. Since we will be going to a great market (L'Isle Sur la Sorgue) the day after we arrive, and will not be going back to it again, bring some euros with you on the trip to get you started on Sunday. You can use the ATM at De Gaulle or Marseilles airports if there is time before transfers. There is an ATM in the market town we visit on Sunday, but it sometimes runs out of cash, so bring euros for shopping with you if you want to be sure to have funds for that first Sunday. Later in the trip we will be in towns with ATM machines, so you can replenish your cash. **Make sure you have a numerical, rather than alphabetical, pin number for your debit card. Also, notify your credit and debit card companies that you will be traveling, as they will freeze a card if they don't know you're using it out of the country.**

Weather: it is usually dry and can be quite hot, so bring cool, casual clothes: cotton pants or capris, cotton shirts, a summer dress, sandals, a

pair of walking shoes, a long-sleeved shirt or light sweater for evenings. French people tend to dress more formally than Americans, so you might feel less conspicuous in capri pants or bermuda length shorts rather than running shorts. Bring a sun hat and sunscreen. Dips in the pool are a great way to keep cool, so bring your bathing suit.

Packing: David is always amazed at the amount of baggage we Americans travel with, and it's a bit of a challenge to get everything into his van at the airport. Usually people tell me that they didn't need all the clothing they brought. You'll mostly be wearing painting clothes. You'll want room in your bags on the way home for what you purchased in Provencal markets. I'd suggest you try to pack light. There is a washing machine at Les Bassacs and a clothesline.

Bring walking shoes, as there are wonderful paths all around where we stay. Village paths are hilly, cobbled and uneven, so you'll also need sneakers or sturdy sandals for painting excursions.

Bags are sometimes delayed in transit. Carry on anything you would need immediately: a change of clothes, important toiletries, medications, your watercolors, brushes, and sketchbook, and your camera. Hopefully you won't have a tight transfer connection, but when folks have, luggage can be mislaid by the airline. Lost luggage will be driven to Les Bassacs, but in the past has sometimes arrived days after we did.

How I pack (I will send another attachment with a more detailed art supply list):

I check a suitcase with my clothes (some of these I wear): 1 pair of cotton capri pants, one pair shorts, a skirt, 2 tee shirts, a long sleeved painting shirt, underwear, sneakers, sandals, 2 pairs socks, bathing suit, a sun hat, toiletries.

This bag also holds some art supplies: all oil paint tubes, extra watercolor tubes, a watercolor block, about 10 canvas pieces cut to size and sandwiched between foam core (or linen panels), a disposable palette for oils, duct tape for canvas, a pochade box (easel) and tripod, and painting umbrella.

I carry on an art bag that holds my iphone, adapter and charger,

earphones, sketchbook, pens, Pike's palette loaded with dried watercolors, and watercolor and oil brushes in a flat brush wallet.

Sundries:

I bring all my toiletries (shampoo, toothpaste, sun lotion etc) in small sized bottles, and check them in my bag. There's a pharmacy and small grocery five minutes away by car in St. Saturnin (our closest village) or in the market town we go to Sunday. Soap for both bath and laundry is provided. You can also buy lovely soaps at the market.

And don't forget your passport (make sure that you are at least 6 months from expiration), a printout of your flight itinerary, your credit card and a debit card for ATM, xeroxes of all these items carried separately from originals, and David's cell number in case you're delayed.

Electric gizmos:

Many battery chargers, laptops, and other appliances sold today are capable of being used overseas without a converter (the gizmo that takes our US 110 volt and converts it to European 220 volt.) If you see a CE on your appliance, it will work in Europe, or if it says 110-220, you're ok without a converter or transformer.

However, you WILL need an adapter, which is just a non-electrical device that fits the prongs of our appliances into a foreign socket. Every country has a different style socket, so you want a French one. The plugs in southern France are a circle recessed into the walls, so you'll want an adapter small enough to fit into the recessed circle.

We will not be near a camera or computer store, so make sure you bring everything needed for your electronics with you.

The phone and reception can be uneven at Les Bassacs. There is wifi but it is only dependably available in one common room (the library), and there is no computer for group use. Many students bring ipads or smartphones that they use for cameras, music, web, etc.

You may want to buy an international phone, text and data plan from your service provider.

Contact info: Our address is:

C/o David and Liz Atkinson
Les Bassacs

84490 St. Saturnin les Apt
Vaucluse, France

HAVE DAVID'S CELL NUMBER ON YOUR PERSON IN CASE YOUR FLIGHT IS DELAYED, SO THAT HE CAN MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR YOU TO GET TO LES BASSACS. David's mobile number is 06 79 81 15 13, the prefix for France from anywhere in Europe is 00 33, in which case you drop the first 0 from the phone number.

Please call me at 802-454-1621, or email sa@susanabbott.com with any questions. I'll see you in Provence!

About Susan Abbott



Susan Abbott graduated Summa Cum Laude with a BFA and MFA in painting from the Maryland Institute, College of Art. She has worked as a professional artist since that time, exhibiting in galleries and museums

around the country, and her paintings are represented in numerous corporate and individual collections. Her work has appeared in publications

that include “American Artist”, “International Artist” and “Watercolor Magazine”, and has been featured on NPR’s Diane Rehm Show and the Oprah Winfrey Show. She has been the recipient of grants from the Vermont and Maryland Arts Councils, and of numerous private and public painting commissions. Susan Abbott is also a popular teacher of art workshops in France, Italy, the Bahamas, India and sites around the United States. She lives in northern Vermont.

Student comments:

<http://www.susanabbott.com/comments-on-teaching/>

More information about Susan's work:

<http://www.susanabbott.com>