



## The London Nobody Knows

REBECCA WALLERSTEINER meets local artist Martin Millard, the talented painter of Chelsea's local landmarks and vibrant daily life

"WORKING OUTDOORS IN CHELSEA is very enjoyable as it enables you to engage with the life of the streets. You notice details that people usually miss. As an artist I hope to bring these to people's attention," Martin Millard tells me. Thankfully the rain has stopped, allowing him to set up his easel on the corner of Walton Street, where he has lived and worked for 15 years. He has invited me to watch him paint an elegant mid 19th century building. "Painting is quite a lonely business and working outside helps you to feel part of the local



community. People come up to you to see what you are drawing and chat. They very often commission me to paint their own house or street." Indeed, as we chat, several passers-by stop and admire his picture. Martin draws confidently using a beautiful old pen. "This once belonged to my grandfather and is around 100 years old," he proudly tells me.

After Martin has finished drawing the building, he invites me home for lunch. Entering the Georgian building, my eyes stray

From top/ Royal Albert Hall; Martin Millard; the Albert Memorial

towards the library, with its impressive collection of books about London. Martin explains that it's Geoffrey Fletcher's illustrated books about the city in the 1960s that inspire him. "Fletcher's book, *The London Nobody Knows*, and his little book of walks, made wandering around London seem very exciting, especially in the East End." Following in Fletcher's footsteps, Martin discovered many little corners with unexpected views and intriguing buildings, like Hawksmoor's splendid churches, that you might miss driving past. Another important influence on Martin's work is the Polish artist Feliks Topolski, who fell in love with London when he arrived in 1935 and spent the next 50 years chronicling the city's life, drawing mainly in

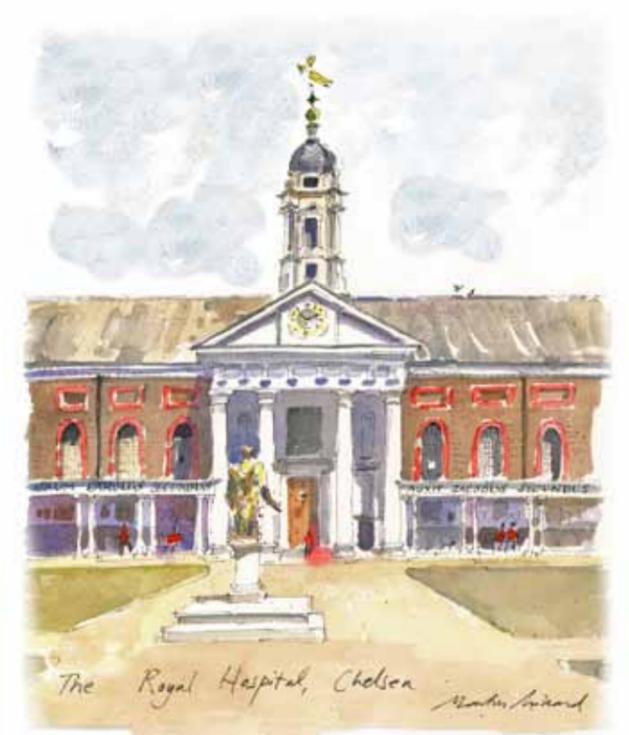


pen and ink. A small white rabbit belonging to Martin's children scampers around while we eat al fresco on his terrace, bathed in sunshine.

Martin has always specialised in depicting buildings and while he prefers working in watercolour, he also draws in pencil. "I do a lot of drawing in Chelsea and have got to know it well." The artist can often be seen outside painting local landmarks, including the Thames at Chelsea Bridge and Westminster. These pictures are delicately observant and burst with joie de vivre. He follows in a long tradition of artists painting outdoors in Chelsea; Whistler, Sargent and Augustus John lived just minutes away from Walton Street in its bohemian early 20th century heyday. Augustus John and John Singer Sargent famously painted portraits of sensuous society beauties a few streets away. Like Whistler, Martin likes to set up his easel by the Thames and draw the Albert Bridge, the Chelsea Embankment and the mighty river flowing past when the weather is fine.

Much of Martin's work is commission-based – anything from an elegant Georgian Square to an office block. "I like to work closely with clients, getting to know them and what they want, whether they have asked me to portray their house, yacht, car or even their child's favourite teddy bear," he explains. Martin has often been asked to paint country houses and enjoys the challenge – even when clients want him to paint a snowy scene for

From top/ The Royal Hospital, Chelsea; Smith Terrace, SW3; The Antelope

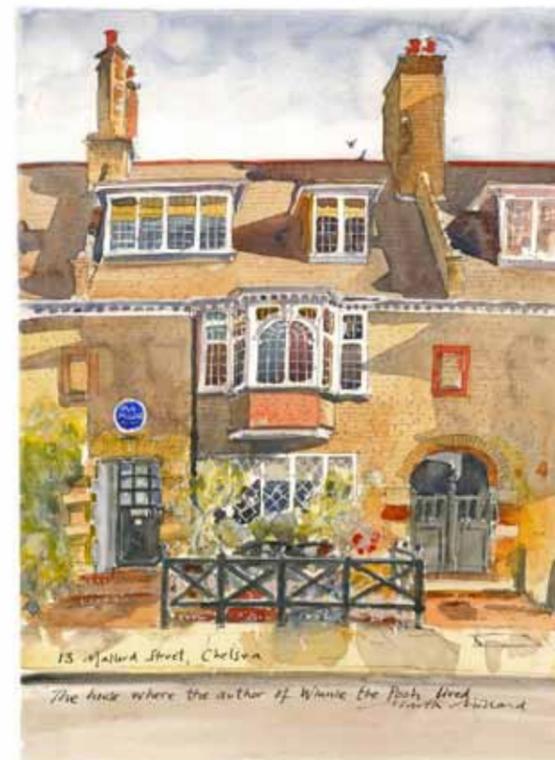
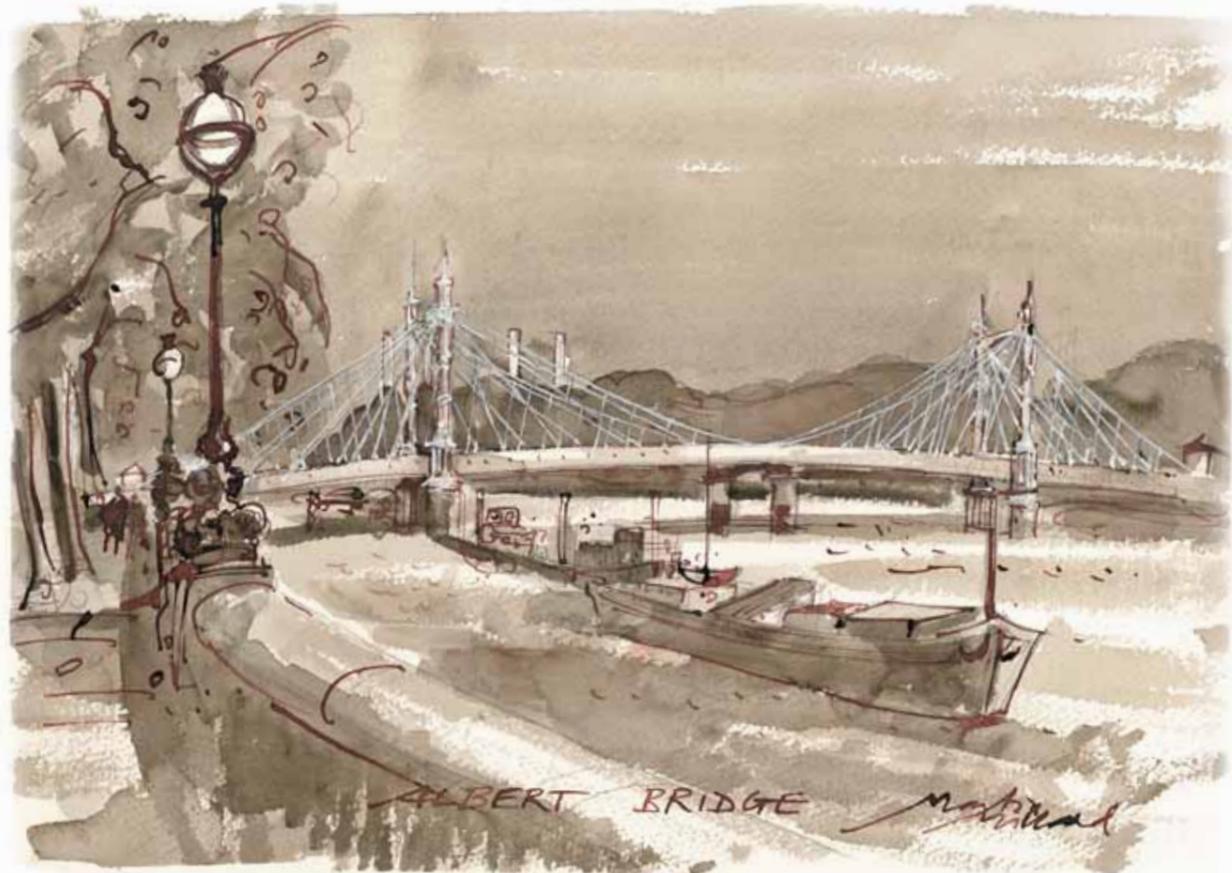
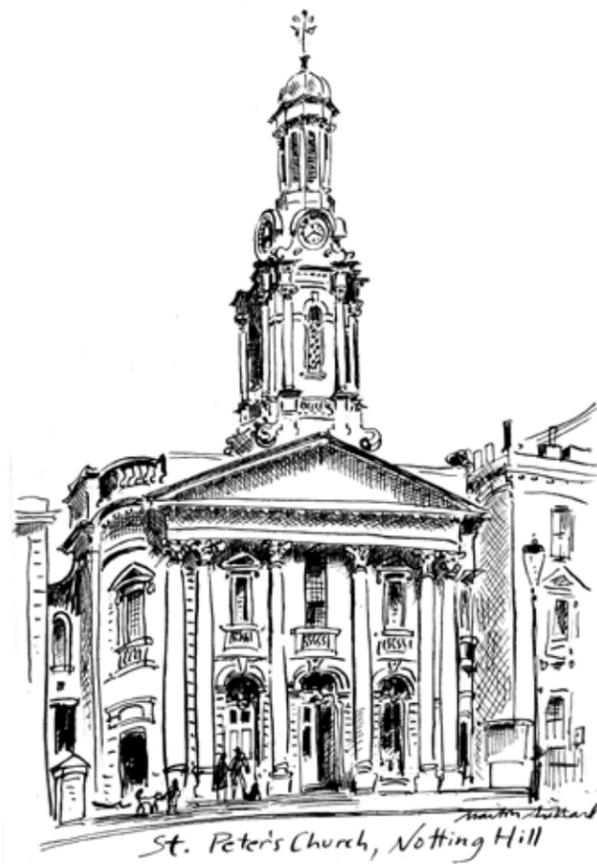


Martin is inspired by Geoffrey Fletcher's illustrated books about the city of London in the 1960s



a Christmas card in summer. Other clients commission a summer scene during the winter but helpfully send photos of what their house looks like during this time. He has also produced Christmas cards for the Royal Hospital Chelsea, Bentley and the English Gardening School, among others, and will turn his hand to most subjects.

Although he is passionate about London, Martin loves to travel, packing up his paints to go and capture buildings and sites overseas that catch his eye. He studied drawing at the School of Visual Arts in New York in the 1970s and has retained a fondness for America. Last year, his show in New York was acclaimed by the US press and he has drawn many American universities. Although he enjoyed his time painting there, he felt more at home with London subjects. So he returned home, became a barrister and met his wife Isabella, also a barrister, in the 90s. They now have three children; Olivia (14), Hugo (12) and Xavier (10). After the couple had Olivia, Martin decided to go back to being an artist, even though he had enjoyed practising as a barrister for years. One of his favourite aspects of the Bar was exploring the surrounding historic area, including Doctor Johnson's House, Temple, Gray's Inn and Smithfield Market.



"Nowadays, there is so much architectural blandness and ugliness that you have to look hard for the interesting and unusual buildings," explains Martin. Some of his favourite buildings include the quirky Michelin House, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the National History Museum. "If you look closely you can still see bomb damage on the outside walls of the V&A. Blackened bricks and shrapnel pitted stones tell us the stories of London's buildings."

Thanks to this ardent interest in celebrating our city's history and subtle beauty in a wonderfully talented way, Martin's work has been on display in many group shows and he exhibits annually at Art for Youth in the Mall Galleries and at the In & Out club in St. James' Square. In July 2006 he won the Gwen Mandley Watercolour Award at the Chelsea Art Society exhibition. He also teaches drawing at local schools and has acted as a judge at the Royal College for two years.

Spending the afternoon watching Martin paint brings to mind Dr Johnson's words: "When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life". ■

Photographs provided by The Walton Street Stationery Company  
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From top/ St Peter's Church, Notting Hill; 13 Mallord Street – the house where the author of Winnie the Pooh lived