



# EMBRACING THE LIMITATIONS

ARCHITECTURE PROFESSOR AND  
URBAN SKETCHER MATTHEW  
BREHM IS AN EVANGELIST OF  
THE ANALOG, DISCOVERS  
**MARK ALAN ANDERSON.**

CEDRO

*Vicolo del Cedro*

5.28.15



Students of Matthew Brehm quickly learn that drawing on location means there's no "Command Z" to fall back on. A self-described "evangelist of analog," Brehm speaks with passion about how we use our hands, eyes, and minds to explore and develop ideas. He believes drawing can be a primary means of "loading our minds" about art and architecture, and in doing so using the act of drawing by hand as a way to more thoroughly absorb the world.

"The more we learn about the world, the more able we are as designers to be informed in decision-making," says Brehm.

While he is no technophobe, Brehm realized computers were taking over the design studio. "When drafting tables got hauled off in favor of low computer desks I started to ask the question, if everything is going to be on the computer, are we losing something in the process?" He's been asking probing questions about digital and analog approaches ever since. "The lines are blurred and to me that's exciting. I'm very interested in what tactile drawing

experiences offer that other drawing approaches can't."

When sketching on location, Brehm's students are informed that no erasing is allowed. He describes sketching as a "constantly forward moving process" where the act of committing something to paper is also an act of decision making. "The 'Undo' command allows people to exist in a sort of limbo, rather than owning their decision. Sketching from life is about critical thinking, making judgments based upon a previous judgment. If you eliminate that previous judgment, you've nothing to compare it to." He prefers to leave tentative marks on the page as an informed record of the process.

And thus, no erasing.

The drawing tools he emphasizes – pens, pencils, brushes – are a further distillation of this thinking. In a world where one's focus may be interrupted by constant distraction, Brehm finds value in literally being limited, physically, in terms of the tools sketchers choose to use. He notes that the choices technology



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offer are often overwhelming, exacerbating an already limited attention span – a distraction he considers to be the enemy of mastery. “If you want to master something,” he says, “it takes a long span of attention. If at the very moment you start to get frustrated with something, you bounce to something else, that’s the moment you stop learning.”

Matthew Brehm is Professor of Architecture at the University of Idaho. He leads an annual workshop in Rome, a city for which he has an abiding love and where he opens students minds to architecture, art, urbanism – and above all else, to learning how to draw.



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SPOLETO

Spoleto

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