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Issue 281

Artists & ILLUSTRATORS

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Jessica Brown
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Painting holidays

A Winning Break

When *Artists & Illustrators* competition winner **Margaret Burnell** invited her non-painting friend **Gay Graham** on holiday it proved a revelation. Here the pair tell Martha Alexander why you needn't share an interest in art to both enjoy a painting holiday

Dear Sir/Madam

I was thrilled when my friend Margaret won a painting holiday in France through *Artists & Illustrators*. I am no artist and was going along as a companion, a little apprehensive that I would be at a loose end. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Each day, after breakfasting in sunshine, we were driven through charming French landscape. As the artists settled down to paint, I found plenty to see and do.

It occurs to me that there are probably plenty of artists, with friends and partners who aren't artistic. Can I reassure them a Tarnincolour week ensures a wonderful holiday in the best accommodation, being waited on hand and foot – though the artists do have to do all those lovely watercolours themselves.

Yours etc

J & Graham

We were delighted when Gay Graham's letter popped through our postbox, detailing her painting holiday with recent *Artists & Illustrators* competition winner Margaret Burnell. What makes Gay's story so engaging is her status as a non-painter and how easy it was for her to slot in with the painting agenda while not once picking up a paintbrush, instead opening up her laptop in a nearby shady spot.

While Gay has never painted, Margaret was passionate about art at school and was accepted to Glasgow School of Art, although she never took that path. "My mother, at that time, wanted me to go to teacher training, which was safer, and I went right through the education system," she explains.

When she was offered early retirement eight years ago, her daughter enrolled her in an art class and she was able to revisit her passion for art. "I've attended >



TOP Margaret focuses her attention on the French landscape under Allan's tuition **RIGHT** Margaret (left) and Gay (right) outside the Boulangerie **INSET** One of Margaret's watercolours





A moment with the tutor

Name: *Allan Kirk*

Course: *Tarn In Colour*

Location: *Tarn, Southern France*

Is it easier to teach accomplished artists or absolute beginners?

Teaching beginners and accomplished artists alike brings its challenges and rewards. Accomplished artists often wish to challenge themselves by developing their style. Beginners learn to paint in a structured way and are shown loose watercolour approaches and techniques.

Is there a chance for non-artists to have a go?

Key to the success of Tarnincolour is the small groups of both painters and non-painters. At any time during the holiday non-painters have the opportunity to have a go and paint.

How does Tarnincolour cater to people who are not involved in painting?

There are opportunities for cycling, walking and exploring the medieval villages and delightful

countryside, meeting up with the painting group for lunch. The less energetic are happy to relax in the garden with hobbies such as embroidery or writing, or float around the pool – book in hand.

Do you find that your guests get on?

People who choose this type of "small group painting holiday" are keen to meet and share ideas with others with a common interest. It's rewarding seeing people exchanging addresses at the end of the holiday and rebooking to return together.

Is Tarn a haven for creativity?

In Tarn, artists find inspiration at every turn. Many have their sketchbooks out before they have unpacked their clothes, as the view from the garden is so inviting. The landscape is an undulating patchwork of sunflower, maize and wheat fields with the Montagne Noire backdrop.

ever since. I've tried various mediums but very little watercolour and I was interested in learning."

On the Tarnincolour residential courses in the Southern French region of Tarn, tutor Allan specialises in watercolour painting for artists of any level. "Because I did acrylic, I tended to apply the paint too thick and he kept encouraging me to use more water," remembers Margaret. "I did definitely improve. My drawings were OK anyway but it was the technicalities of watercolour that I really learned about."

Margaret had been on painting holidays before in the same region, although Tarnincolour offered plenty of new features. "That Allan met us at the airport, and he and Lesley were so friendly, was lovely," she says. "Allan was a good teacher. He does beautiful drawings and he was good at demonstrating and showing you as you painted alongside him. This was helpful and of course, he knew all the best locations."

Each day when the painting group found a new location to paint, Gay would join them, setting up her own creative world under the shade of nearby trees or in local cafes. Despite attempts by Margaret to convince her friend to give painting a go, Gay was not persuaded. Instead, she became so engrossed in the complete history of her family during the holiday that

"It was like visiting friends but with all the bonuses of a boutique hotel"

*Are you going on a painting holiday?
Contact us...*

Send an email to us at info@artistsandillustrators.co.uk telling us where you are going next – and why!

she wrote 11,000 words on the subject.

However, the pair both do have artists in their respective families, with Margaret's daughter and Gay's uncle and nephew all earning a living as artists. Gay's nephew, Saul Robertson, even came second in the BP Portrait Award in 2005. "I'm sure if I applied myself I could become wonderfully mediocre but I'm

surrounded by enough gifted people to know it's not where my skills lie," laughs Gay.

As ever, the makings of a truly exceptional painting holiday are based on more than just the tutorial time, especially if some guests are not directly involved in the classes. "It was a wonderfully carefree holiday – ideal for single people or people with a non-artistic spouse," says Gay, remembering the guided tours of local towns and bicycle rides around the picturesque countryside, as well as trips to both markets and the Toulouse-Lautrec Museum in nearby Albi. Swims in the private pool and food also featured heavily.

Allan's wife Lesley would whip up a storm in the kitchen, providing picnic lunches and restaurant-standard dinners. "The food was beautiful," says Gay. "Everyone would sit round the table together eating and talking. It was idyllic. Allan and Lesley are very approachable. It was like visiting friends but with all the bonuses of a boutique hotel." 