

Personalizing Your Sketchbooks

Like anything in life, going the extra step can make all the difference between the prosaic and the inspired. The same is true for premade sketchbooks and those that you've personalized or created by hand. Here's how you can raise the status of your own books—or build your own.

By Wendy Shalen With Celia Wedding



A brand-new drawing or watercolor sketchbook brings with it a sense of anticipation and untapped potential. A drawing or watercolor sketchbook that you embellish or make yourself—either by collaging the cover or by assembling the book from scratch—could elevate the sketchbook experience and take on personal significance as it becomes your treasured sketching companion.

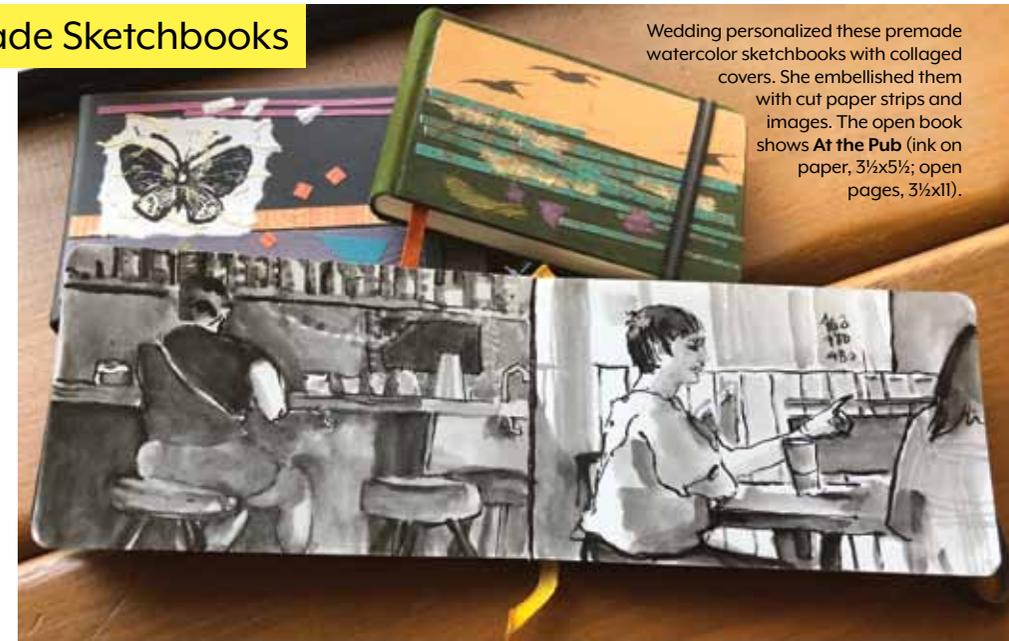
California watercolor artist Celia Wedding has been embellishing premade sketchbooks and creating her own by hand for years, which she believes adds to the sketching experience. She shares her beloved travel sketchbooks with us—as well as her tablescape sketchbooks—and reveals how she gives them a creative flourish.

Wedding paints in her handmade watercolor sketchbook.

Embellishing Premade Sketchbooks

"I began the practice of decorating portable, purse-sized unlined journals with collaged covers to give them a personal touch," Wedding says. "I use the books as a place for drawings, calendars, lists and random thoughts." To decorate the covers, she affixes handmade paper or recycled images using PVA glue (such as Elmer's white glue), a brayer and a bone folder, followed by two coats of polymer varnish.

When you're decorating your own sketchbook covers, consider these decorative options: ephemera, ticket stubs and other memorabilia, washi tape, dried flowers, photos, magazine images, and alphabet or word stickers.



Wedding personalized these premade watercolor sketchbooks with collaged covers. She embellished them with cut paper strips and images. The open book shows *At the Pub* (ink on paper, 3½x5½; open pages, 3½x11).

Making Sketchbooks

"The jump-start for making books specifically for ink drawing and watercolor was finding a pack of Arches 90-lb. hot-pressed watercolor paper on sale," Wedding says. She followed directions in Kathy Blake's book, *Handmade Books: A Step-by-Step Guide to Crafting Your Own Books*, and fashioned a perfectly sized 5x7-inch watercolor landscape sketchbook using just two sheets of 22x30-inch watercolor paper. She became hooked on the bookmaking process.

Wedding has since made books in a variety of sizes, using different types of papers that complement her sketching and watercolor needs. Her hardbound crafted books open flat into a landscape format, which is ideal for her various travel and tablescape scenes.

Wedding's handmade watercolor and ink sketchbooks feature pasted-paper covers, fabric bindings and sewn signatures.



See a demo of Wedding's bookmaking process.

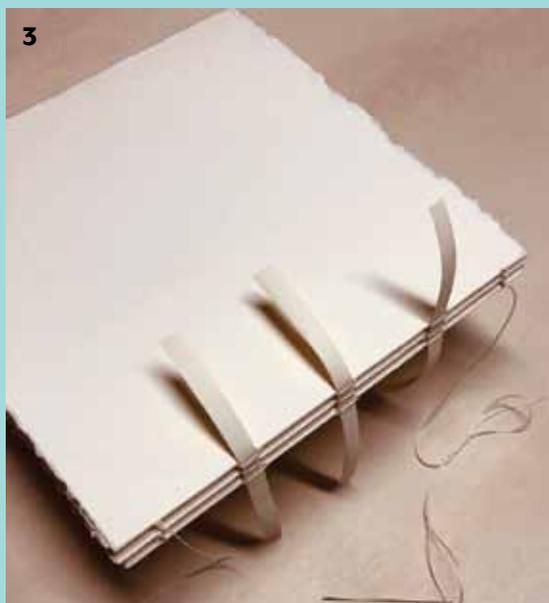
MAKING BOOK SIGNATURES

To begin, select your paper; drawing, watercolor or printmaking paper works well, depending on the book's use.

You can make books any size to suit your painting style. Two sheets of Arches 90-lb. watercolor paper can be used to make a 22x30-inch book that can fit 30 or more double-page paintings.

Traditionally, linen tapes are used to secure the pages and covers, but if you have some woven ribbon, you can use that instead.

Wedding shares her bookmaking tools (right, clockwise from top): bookbinding needles (although any long needle with a large eye will work); woven cloth tape or ribbon about ¼-inch wide; strong heavy thread; lightweight watercolor paper; template made from scrap paper; bone folder; square; straight edge ruler for measuring and tearing; bookmaker's awl (although any awl will work if it's very sharp); and additional watercolor paper.

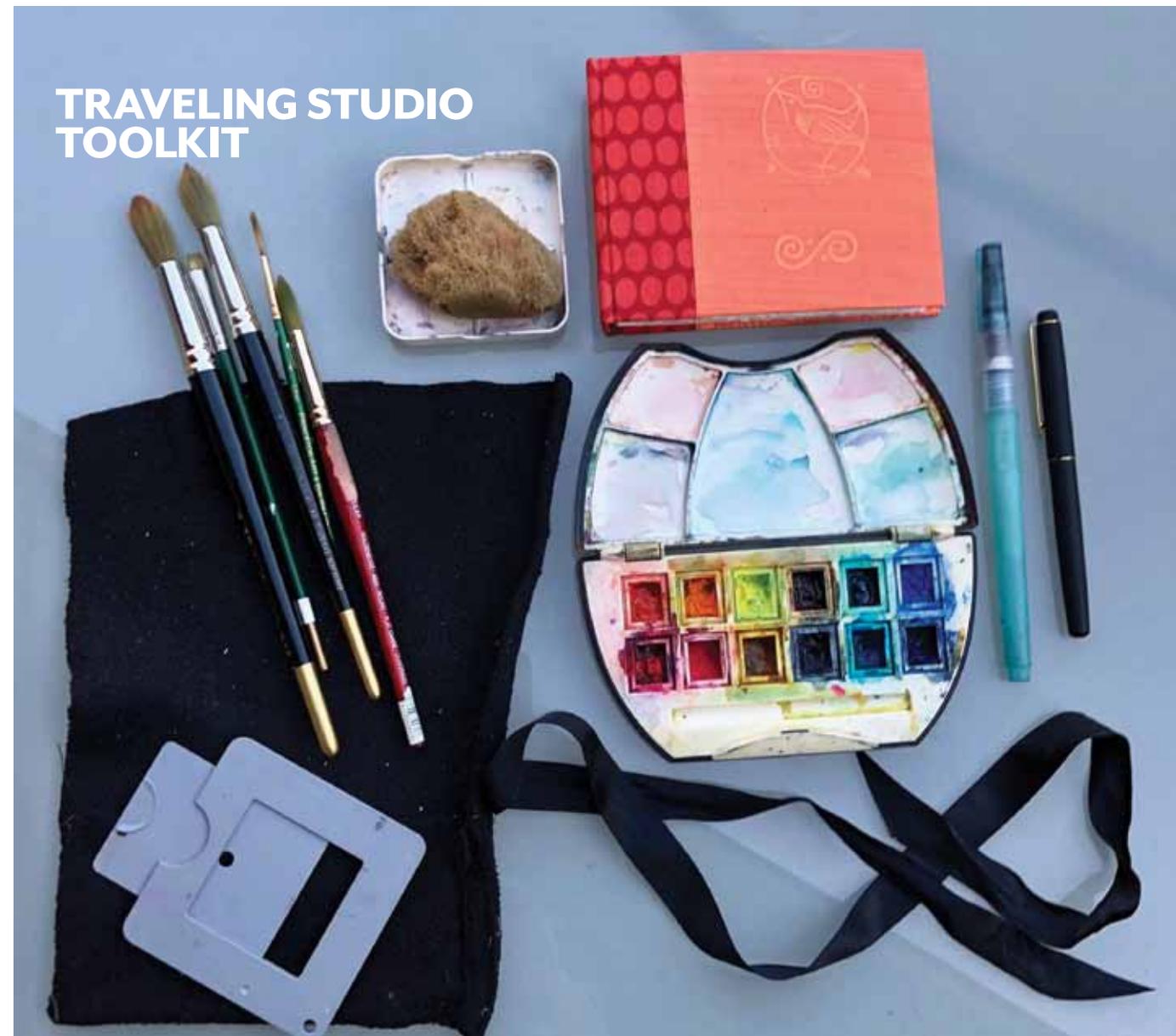


1. Cut or tear the sheets and fold them in half. A folding bone is useful for making a sharp fold in each page. Build signatures using the folded pages by nesting them together in equal groups. (The number of pages in a signature will be governed by the weight of the paper.)

2. Make a template the same size as the fold of the page. This will enable you to puncture the signatures so the holes will line up when you sew the pages together. Punch holes at the top and bottom of the fold ½-inch from the ends and make three more pairs of holes. The space between the two holes of each pair should match the width of the hinging tape. The three pairs of holes and the holes at the top and bottom of the fold should be equidistant apart.

3. Attach the hinging tape to the backs of the signatures by sewing through the punched holes. Also sew the signatures together at the top and bottom holes.

TRAVELING STUDIO TOOLKIT



BOOK IT

Want to explore the art of handmade sketchbooks further? There are numerous how-to books available on the subject; here are a few that Wedding recommends based on her own bookmaking experience:

Handmade Books: A Step-by-Step Guide to Crafting Your Own Books by Kathy Blake (Bulfinch Press, 1997)

Little Book of Book Making: Timeless Techniques and Fresh Ideas for Beautiful Handmade Books by Charlotte Rivers and Esther K. Smith (Potter Craft, 2014)

Making Handmade Books: 100+ Bindings, Structures & Forms by Alisa Golden (Lark Crafts, 2011)

Surface:

handmade watercolor book

Paints (in alpha order):

cadmium lemon yellow, cadmium orange, cobalt blue, opera, Payne's gray, peacock, permanent red deep, quinacridone burnt scarlet, quinacridone gold, ultramarine blue, vermilion, viridian or phthalocyanine green

Brushes:

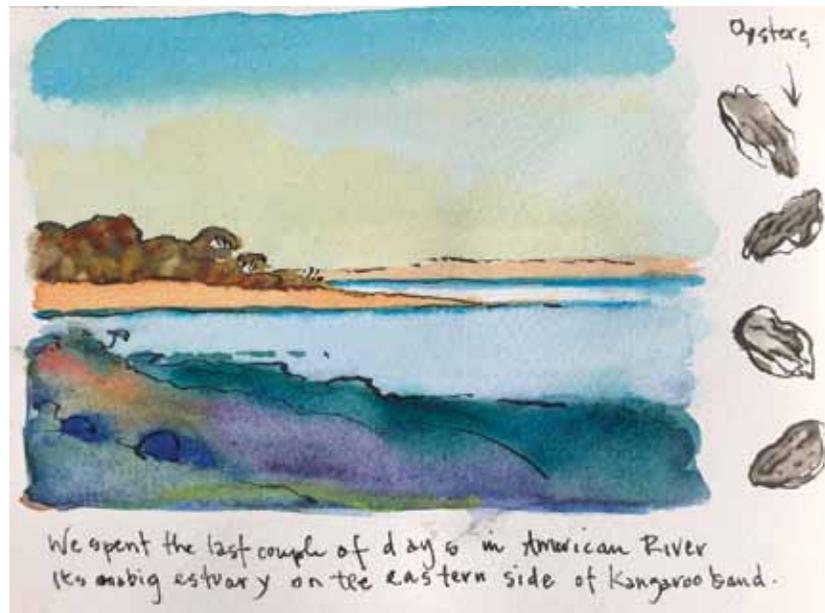
No. 16 watercolor brush, ¾-inch gouache brush, No. 14 round, liner round, No. 8 round brush, Aquaflo water pen

Miscellaneous:

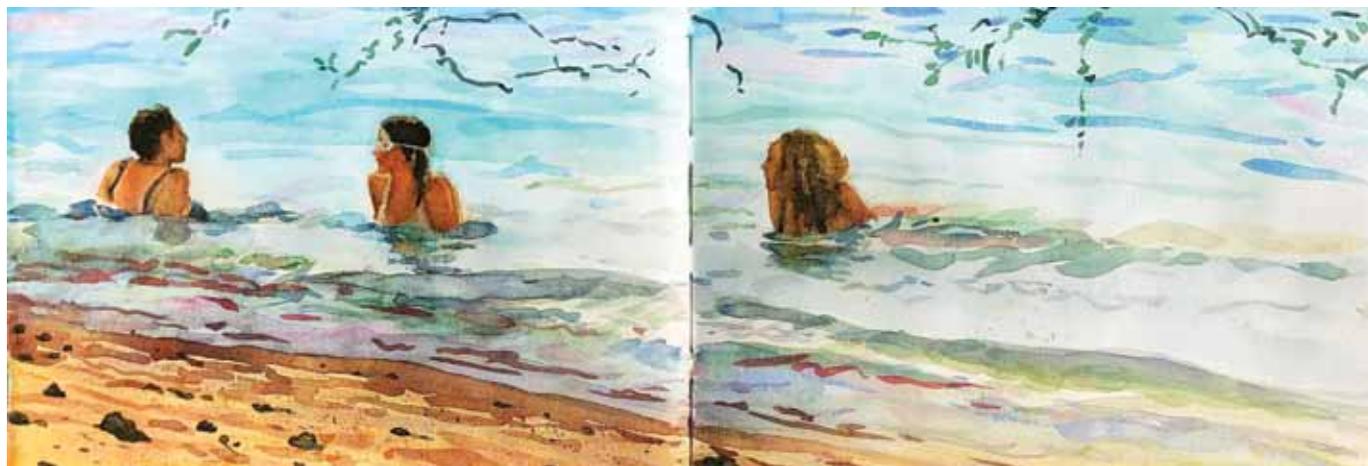
viewfinder, roll-up brush holder, pan for mixing, sponge, black ink pen

Traveling Gets Personal

An intrepid traveler, Wedding has documented her trips to Hawaii, Australia and beyond with the spirit of a 19th-century artist explorer. She carries her handmade sketchbooks in her handbag, along with the essentials she deems necessary for sketching and watercolor painting (see "Traveling Studio Toolkit," page 59).



Oysters, Kangaroo Island, Australia (watercolor on Arches paper in 5x7 handmade book)

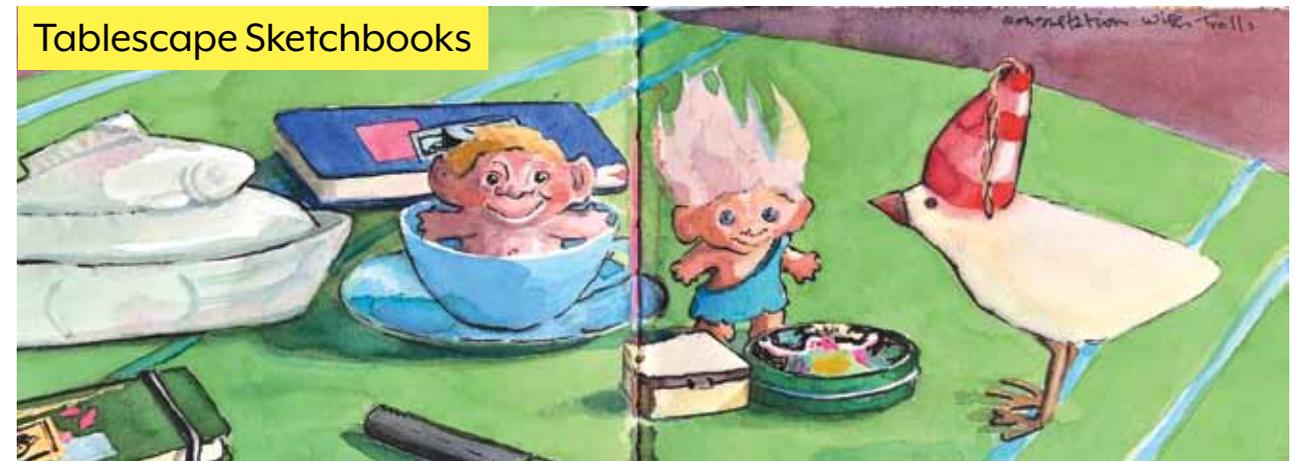


Mermaids, Hawaii (watercolor on paper, 7x20; 8x10 closed book size)



Cradle Mountain, Australia (watercolor on paper, 5x7 each)

Tablescape Sketchbooks



Trolls (watercolor on paper, 5½x15)



Tablescape at Tink's House (watercolor on paper, 5½x15)



Tea for Two (watercolor on paper, 5½x15)

In addition to handmaking watercolor travel journals, Wedding also creates watercolor books that she fills with tablescape watercolor sketches, usually humorous images of beloved possessions, animal figures and flowers. Some are sketched quickly while others are more studied, depending on how much time she has available. **WA**

Wendy Shalen (wendyshalen.com) is an award-winning artist whose work has been featured at numerous galleries, museums and private collections. She has taught figure and landscape drawing and painting courses for more than 35 years. Celia Wedding (celiawedding.com) works in a variety of media, including watercolor and oil, and covers a variety of genres, including wildlife, figures, still lifes and landscapes.