



An artist's eye for colour in the garden



Even the humble kitchen is a subject

Photography by **George Reszeter**

BRUSH with TRAVEL

Kathy Stott talks to a couple who carry paints in their suitcase

When thrown together with strangers at a party, the conversation invariably turns to jobs. How often, in such circumstances, have you heard an "Oooh, that must be interesting . . ." or an "Aaah, what a nice way to earn a living." In my experience, the object of such envy doesn't usually see it *quite* that way and is quick to fire back the well-worn reply: "Not really", before proceeding to disabuse you of your illusion.

People often envy the way Ann Manly and Dennis Harrison earn their living. But they are different. Instead of putting you right by talking about the tedium and drudgery of their employment, they wax lyrical. Because this husband-and-wife team from West Oxfordshire genuinely do enjoy the way they make a living, which is hardly surprising as they appear to live the idyllic life of an artist, more

often to be found in fiction than in fact.

They are fortunate enough to be able to earn a crust by selling watercolours of the views they love to paint — Venice in particular. But a scene does not have to be grand for this pair to see beauty in it. Sifting through photographs of paintings from their last trip to Venice, we come across a courtyard scene complete with washing flapping on a line. And, as pictured here, they are often to be found painting the rooms of their cottage — not in the sense that you or I would be painting ours, of course!

Lately, they've been busy preparing for an exhibition of some of their most recent work; 76 of their watercolours are currently being displayed by the West Oxfordshire Arts Association at the Town Hall, Bampton — their home territory. *Venice Explored* runs until November 22.

Another factor distinguishing this couple is that they paint largely 'on the spot', rather than from photographs. This sounds easier than it, in fact, is. In Wales last February, for example, their equipment included hot-water bottles, handwarmers and rugs! And then there was the time when an overhead pigeon dropped a calling card in Ann's paintbox!

Their way of working also means travelling a lot. They reckon to make about half-a-dozen trips a year to places as diverse as the Lake District (with its lofty peaks and mists), East Anglia (those great wide skies) and, of course, Italy. Why is Venice a particular favourite? "The



The studio with its delightful 'homemade' tiger mural

light's so wonderful there," says Ann.

How do they manage to make a living when their work doesn't cost an arm and a leg (prices range from about £80 to £400)? Probably because they manage to produce so much. They are painting all the time, it seems.

Though they have very different styles, they do criticise each other's work — in a constructive way of course. And there are other advantages to them both being painters, as Ann explains: "We almost always finish a scene at the same time. One of us puts the brush down and you'll hear the other one closing up their paintbox!

"If you're married to someone who's not an artist, they're always hurrying you to finish and you end up saying 'go and get a cup of coffee' or something."

Their enthusiasm for painting clearly shines through. And so it seems fitting that this couple, both previously married, met through, and now share their lives with, this great love.



The couple take time off from painting to thumb through their travel photographs



■ **Piazza, Evening** by Ann Manly



Gondolas by Dennis Harrison

News in brief

Venice and local art

Bampton artists Ann Manly and Dennis Harrison are staging an exhibition at The Gallery, Town Hall, Bampton from November 1 to 22.

Venice Explored is a follow up to their successful show of three years ago and will feature work from their recent trip to Italy as well as paintings of France, the Cotswolds, the Lake District and Wales.

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