

Around the World w/ Norman Rockwell on Pan Am



Scenes from upper left going clockwise: London, Paris, Rome, Istanbul, Beirut, Waikiki, Tokyo and Hong Kong.

by William C. House III
(with William C. House Jr. and Norman Rockwell)

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Norman Rockwell called it his worst fiasco ever; but to my father it was a wonderful memory that lasted forever. My dad was an art director at J. Walter Thompson, one of the biggest, if not the biggest Ad Agency in New York during the fifties. They had the Ford and Pan Am accounts among others. J. Walter and Pan Am wanted to make a big splash, so they decided to send Norman Rockwell, a Pan Am photographer (Blackie Kronfeld), and my dad (William C. House Jr.) around the world. My dad's boss, Wally Elton, and his wife accompanied them to Rome. Right from the start it turned sour. As my dad told it, Mr. Elton didn't want local color, he wanted bright, beautiful people. Fortunately for the travelers, Wally Elton was only with them for a couple more cities. But the die had been cast—one of the greatest artists in the last 100 years who had the innate ability to capture all that was good and noble about the subject before him was told to muzzle his creativity. The result after two months of globe trotting was a canned advertising campaign. Only four ads came out. They appeared in magazines like *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life* and *Holiday*. Experiences from an entire country were resigned to a small portion of each ad. Some countries didn't even make the cut. The ad above appeared in *Life* on 3/5/56 and *Saturday Evening Post* on 3/17/56.

Here's Mr. Rockwell's story of the trip from his autobiography, *My Adventures as an Illustrator* as told to Tom Rockwell:

"And then there's advertising. and my most disappointing fiasco. A few years back Wally Elton, a vice-president at the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, asked me if I would like to go around the world for Pan American Airways. I would visit all the major cities at which the Pan American clippers landed and make sketches. When I returned the sketches would be published as advertisements for Pan American. He explained that he'd thought up the trip because it was so difficult to advertise an airline. Practically all the airlines use the same planes; they all serve about the same food, have pretty stewardesses who give the customers the same courteous service and attention. How, then, are you going to persuade the public to travel by this airline in preference to all the others?"

I accepted enthusiastically. The fly showed up in the gravy in London. The first night there I returned to the hotel and showed my sketchbook to Wally. He leafed through the drawings of people feeding pigeons in Trafalgar Square, a railroad station, et cetera. "They're swell," he said, "but they won't sell tickets. You can feed pigeons in St. Louis. Drawings of railroad stations don't sell airplane tickets." "All right," I said, assuming that he wanted me to sketch the people I saw and the strange sights, sort of get the flavor of the cities we passed through. And that's what I did. In Paris, Barcelona, Rome, Istanbul, Beirut, Karachi, Calcutta, Benares, Rangoon, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Hawaii. People from bullfighters and priests, to snake charmers, monkey tamers, Arabs, and Geisha girls. Scenes from a fountain in Rome to a camel-elephant-water buffalo-bicycle-and-beggar-thronged street in Karachi.

But when I returned home and submitted my sketchbook it was rejected. Oh, I did a few ads. Nothing to justify the time and money which had been spent, though. Because the agency and Pan American did not want pictures of the strange lands and people. "Those would only frighten tourists," they said; "we want pictures of smart-looking tourists sunning on smart beaches in front of smart hotels." But that's not the kind of picture I can do. So I did nothing.

I can't understand their attitude really. If tourists want only to sit on beaches, why do they go abroad? Florida's full of fashionable hotels and smooth white sand. And you certainly wouldn't go all the way to Hong Kong or Rangoon to get a tan. But I dare say I'm wrong. Selling tickets for airplane rides is not exactly my strong point after all. And of course I might not have been able to do the kind of ads I wanted to. I'm better in my own back yard, painting my neighbors. Still, it's a shame to waste a trip around the world. It gives me a guilty feeling whenever I think about it. Maybe I'll do something with the sketches sometime.

I'd better. Everywhere I went people asked me, "What are you sketching for?" "For advertisements to appear in all the magazines," I said. Which pleased my questioners no end. "We'll be looking for our pictures," they said. So . . . now I avoid London, Paris, Barcelona, Rome, Istanbul, Beirut, Karachi, Calcutta, Benares, Rangoon, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Hawaii. If I have any more wide-ranging fiascos like that one I'll have to go live in a closet. That's the story of my flops. There are more but, as I say, I'm very forgetful." (pp. 352 & 355.)

But all was not a total loss. I have a picture signed by Norman Rockwell that says, "My best, to the greatest traveling companion, Bill House." Once the boss left, my dad was the only J. Walter rep. left. His Libra instincts took over and made the best of the situation. As you shall see from the following photographs a wonderful time was had by all getting to know the locals and setting up scenes for Blackie to shoot and Norman to sketch. What I didn't realize before I started this article was how much Norman Rockwell used photographs. As he tells it:

"I challenge anybody to show me when I started to use photographs. I've always been known as The Kid with the camera eye"

"I love to tell stories in pictures, for me, the story is the first thing and the last thing." Norman Rockwell

If a picture is worth a thousands words, then Norman Rockwell's pictures are worth 10,000 words. Literally. Not only were his renderings far more informative than any photograph, he would also take several photographs and combine them into one picture, weaving them into a story that had much more texture and nuances than the original ever had. As you shall see from the following black and white photos, the stage was set for a marvelous ad campaign. But due to the limited imagination of Pan Am and J. Walter execs, the richness and detailed story telling did not make its way to the ads. We are left with miniature, and for Rockwell, sometimes bland scenes. They're great ads for what they are, full two-page layouts, but hardly worth the cost.



I have a copy of a bill (at the end of the article) from Mr. Rockwell for \$3,500 for the portrait of the Pan Am pilot above, Captain Mattis. Figure in the other ads and the total cost of the trip and divide by four. Well, I shudder to think what each ad costs, not to mention what the dollar was worth back then. I think gas was 25 cents. P.S. Look at that Norman Rockwell face of the pilot, if every pilot oozed such character from every pore, there'd be no mishaps, no drunk piloting and undoubtedly he'd personally take care of every terrorist himself.

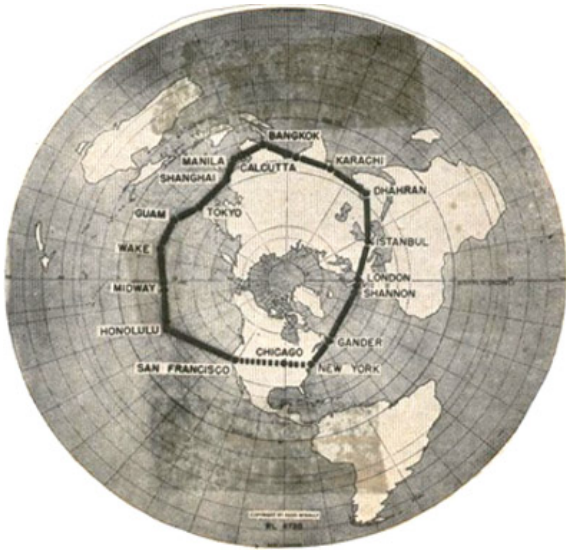
Fortunately, my dad kept many pictures from the trip. The vast majority are slides. I've used only the 8X10s and 5X7s that I have, and of course, the original ads. You'll be able to see how Mr. Rockwell set up shots. Some staged pictures were really quite comical. I'm thinking of some surfing scenes in Hawaii that never made it to print. My dad planned to do an article on his experiences. He never was able to finish it. He did write about 24 pages however. I've included just about all of it. Norman Rockwell added his own experiences to the story as well. Undoubtedly, one of the best parts of the trip had to be watching Norman Rockwell interact with people, getting the scene just right.



The Trio: Norman Rockwell, Blackie Kronfeld and Bill House
(Don't know who the other guy is in the picture to the left.)



The around-the-world team flew on Pan Am's Boeing 377 "Stratocruiser" which was introduced in 1949. This four engine prop plane had two decks. The lower deck, where there was a lounge, had a smaller diameter than the upper deck. It offered seating for over 100 passengers, or sleeping berths for up to 28 and five seated passengers. The Stratocruiser was a luxurious long-range postwar airliner up until 1958 when it was replaced by a jet: the Boeing 707. [More on the Stratocruiser.](#)



In 1947, Pan Am launched "Round the World" service with a Constellation departing New York and flying to San Francisco via points in Europe, The Middle East, India & Asia. The route of the first flight is shown above. (From [Everything Pan Am](#))



Here's one of Rockwell's most famous paintings just to give you an idea of how he used photographs. He purposely made the background simpler to convey a greater distance traveled. The small red hobo-sack speaks volumes. The two profiles and body positioning of the two main characters is just precious.

Next Part: [Europe](#)
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