



Kersals: Krazy Decorated Caps Based on Versals with Francie Bredeson

by Ann Purdy

Versals originated in the medieval times as large decorative letters used by scribes to begin a block of text or paragraph. Versals were composed of thick and thin elements with generally oversized serifs.

Well, throw in a mix of fun, kraziness, loosening up and Francie Bredeson into the formula and voila! – you get Kersals! What an absolute delight it was to have Francie come teach a workshop on her version of Versals. It was so much fun for beginner and intermediate levels alike.

Some of the basic shapes of the Kersals could raise a few eyebrows: foot, almond sliver, orange segment, garlic clove, egg and swash. We started off by practicing drawing these different shapes with pencil on plain paper and then we combined them to make actual letters. Then we added some additional strokes by loosely mirroring the basic shapes, pushing beyond the shape of the letter and softening the curves. We also added a few tiny dots/circles. Then we added some weight to the letters to create depth by accenting some of the sections for contrast/balance. Now it was time to get “gestural”! It didn’t take too long because it was just so exciting to see how these letters were really coming alive with a little practice.

We had plenty of play time as well. We used a fine line Pigma Micron Pen (Size 01) to outline the letters on Arches Text Wove paper. Then we experimented with watercolour pencils by shading in the corners a little darker and a little lighter in the middle with two to three colours. We used a fine brush with a little water to blend the colours. Derwent Inkntense Watercolor Pencils are very bright and colourful – they really hold their colour. We also used watercolour paints (palette or tube) to colour the

letters. Schmincke Dry Gouache Metallic Powders add some pizzazz, too! Ladies, snip a piece of your old pantyhose big enough to cover the top of the Schmincke jar and secure it with an elastic. (Gentlemen, have fun explaining yourselves on this one!) Sprinkle a little into your watercolour tray along with your watercolour paint and blend it together! Ooooh!! The pantyhose simply prevents the powder from spilling all over and making a big mess. Gel pens—especially the sparkly ones—are also fun to use to decorate these letters.

Later in the workshop, Francie showed us how to frame our letters. First we drew our basic letter with our fine line pen, adding decorative strokes and weight, along with the dots and tiny circles to make it sparkle. Then we drew our “waisted” box or diamond over the letter, starting in the corners, with double lines, weight and sparkle. We added colour to the letter so that it would lend to taking precedence over the background box. Next, we outlined the letter with a pointed pen nib and Sumi or Chinese Ink, leaving a river of white space next to the letter. Then we brushed with a watercolour brush to fill in the background. It was incredibly striking!

We also learned how to do Monoline Letters to accompany our Kersals. The Monoline Letters we used were an architectural style with horizontal strokes at a slant. We started off by drawing two horizontal lines with a pencil. Then we printed our word, extending the letters slightly above and below the horizontal lines. We inked our word with our fine line pen. Next we ruled a line across the bottom line in ink, but not across the inner (counter) spaces of any of our letters. After that, we turned our paper upside down to rule the top line in the same fashion. When we were finished, we erased all our pencil lines so we could begin colouring between the lines up against one side of all our letters leading into the first and away from the last letter. The intent is to aim for a balance of white space overall. Planning ahead and then making adjustments helps.



We also had an opportunity to use other materials such as "rainbow" (multi-lead) pencils, chalk and oil pastels, pastel crayons and Krylon markers, and black cardstock, just to name a few. Francie had us drawing letters in a very loose form. It was a learning process for many to simply "let go" and get "down and dirty". After a few practice rounds, it was very liberating and we could start to see the beauty in expressing our art with more freedom. Everyone in class had soooo much fun experimenting with the possibilities this technique offers. Thanks Francie for giving us so much inspiration!

For those of you unable to make it to the workshop, Francie graciously shares her alphabet below. Our only regret is that you can't see her fabulous use of colour.

