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Paul Nicklen on Photography as Conservation
Ted Orland Looks at Landscapes
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Developing Style with Erin Babnik



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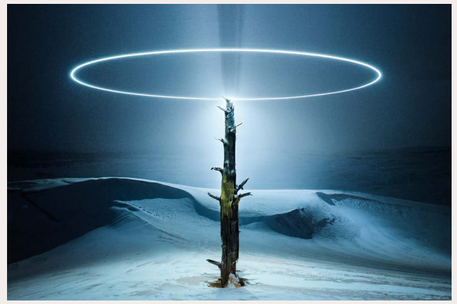
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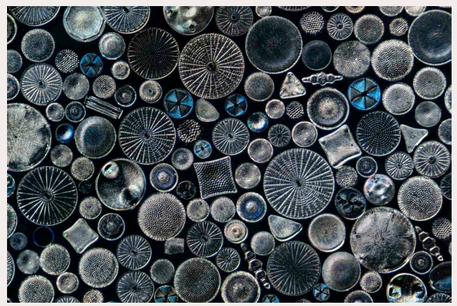


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BEHIND THE COVER
Words and Image by Paul Nicklen

"Soursop," a sperm whale matriarch, rests near the surface with a pair of tentacles draped delicately around her head, the remnants of her latest meal. Sperm whales are expert divers capable of reaching over a mile deep in search of squid while using echolocation to sound out their way through the pitch-black depths. By producing ear-splitting clicks over 200 decibels, they can detect their prey from vast distances and are even known to tangle with the famous colossal squid, an elusive animal to humans but an apparent staple in the diet of certain sperm whale populations.

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Publisher's Message



WELCOME TO THE INAUGURAL ISSUE OF *WILD EYE* MAGAZINE. I've been a nature and underwater photographer for over 25 years, and I feel blessed for a career that's allowed me to travel the world, photograph wildlife, scuba dive and explore underwater landscapes and reefs.

Prior to that, I worked in marine mammal conservation in California for close to a decade, rescuing, rehabilitating, and releasing different species of seals and sea lions, with occasional whale rescues. My life has been dedicated to finding the beauty in the world's wild places, nurturing its wild things, and this magazine is the culmination of that work.

Leading up to the release of issue 1, a lot has happened and a lot continues to happen. The story of how this came to be has many layers and details, but the short version is this: there was a void in the photographic community. A team of talented contributors quickly gathered around the idea of *Wild Eye*, bringing with them the passion and commitment needed to bring it to life.

As a result, *Wild Eye* feels less like my creation and more a collaborative, community-based endeavor celebrating the art of photographing wild things. To some degree, it feels like it's taken on a life of its own, and I'm more a passive witness to its unfolding. This admittedly might sound a bit woo-woo, but it's happening as I speak nevertheless. What's most exciting is the talent we continue to attract and the momentum *Wild Eye* is already building. It truly feels like a community.

What is *Wild Eye*? We are a lens on the untamed world; a magazine that focuses on the best of the world's nature, landscape, wildlife, and underwater photography, with a strong and unyielding emphasis on conservation.

Conservation is not just a buzzword for us—it is the driving force behind this publication. We outdoor photographers have the unique opportunity to explore our planet documenting the immense diversity and complexity of its ecosystems, and capturing moments that tell powerful stories. In doing so, we hope to inspire you, our audience, to deepen your own connection to the web of life that surrounds us all.

Thank you for being a part of our beginnings and for helping to build the foundation of the *Wild Eye* community. We are excited to work with you in creating something meaningful, and we hope you will continue to support this wild idea by staying engaged with our community.

With sincerity and a promise of much more to come,

JASON BRADLEY PUBLISHER

Photography by: John Weatherby



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Editor's Note



GREETINGS TO THE NEW *WILD EYE* COMMUNITY! While things may look a little familiar around here, they're also distinctly different. For starters, you might recognize a few names in this issue, including mine, from a long-running outdoor photography magazine that went through some turmoil a few years ago. And while *Wild Eye* has been dubbed, in some circles, the "spiritual successor" to that venerable publication, what we are doing here is truly unique.

Launched by photographers for photographers of all levels, *Wild Eye* is an independent magazine that puts photo publishing into the hands of the creators. Of course, some may say this very notion is foolhardy—what do photographers know about the magazine publishing business anyways?—we feel it's what sets us apart. There's no private equity group or media conglomerate looming over us along with a stable of unrelated consumer brands. We are our readership and our readership is us—people who believe in the power of photography.

So, what exactly is *Wild Eye*? We're a magazine, website and educational resource showcasing the beauty of nature, wildlife and underwater photography. The centerpiece is our quarterly magazine, which features images and articles from the world's best-known outdoor and conservation photographers. The magazine will start off as virtual publication—the downloadable PDF you are looking at right now—but we will eventually go to print. *Wild Eye* will also offer premium web-only content including online tutorials, workshops and live events led by working pros.

But let's talk about this first issue, which we're really excited about! Our cover photographer is **Paul Nicklen**, a man who, as the saying goes, needs no introduction. A fine art photographer, marine biologist and conservationist, Nicklen has dedicated his life to protecting wildlife. In our profile of Nicklen (page 36), he discusses his pursuit not only of good photographs but photographs that *do* good.

Other highlights—and there are too many to list in this space—include **Erin Babnick**'s tips (page 88) on how to develop style in outdoor photography; **Ted Orland**'s discussion (page 62) of Ansel Adam's enduring influence on landscapes; and **Reuben Wu** (page 74) on how shooting with an iPhone opened new doors of creativity. And, of course, there are our regular columnists—**Amy Gulick** who gives us The Big Picture (page 18) and **David duChemin** who leads us into A Deeper Frame (page 24).

Go wild, get inspired!

DAN HAVLIK EDITOR IN CHIEF

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What's In

Anupam Thombre's Camera Bag

IMAGES BY **ANUPAM THOMBRE**





Owl in Flight My speedy Sony A9 III and Sony 400mm f/2.8 G Master lens came in handy while photographing this owl in flight.

Tiger Encounter I captured this image of an approaching tiger with the Sony A1 and Sony 400mm f/2.8 G Master.

Rhesus Macaque family huddled up to combat winter chills at Keoladeo Ghana National Park. Shot with the Sony A1 and Sony 400mm f/2.8 G Master at 1/400th sec., f/8, ISO 500.



ANUPAM THOMBRE is a passionate wildlife photographer from India and he's always ready to get the shot, which is why he packs some of the fastest shooting camera gear around in his bag.

"I started with the revolutionary Sony Alpha 9 II with its 20 fps shutter burst, and the Sony 400mm f/2.8 G Master and, since then, there was no looking back," Thombre says. Recently he added the Sony A9 III and two Sony A1s to his kit along with some additional Sony G Master and G lenses.

"Along with my personal projects, I teach wildlife photography to enthusiasts," he notes. "With on-field expeditions all across India and international destinations, I also teach photo post-processing to beginner, intermediate and advanced level wildlife photographers. For me, venturing into the wilderness is nothing less than entering into a peaceful meditative state and going on a super thrilling adrenaline pumping roller-coaster ride, all bundled into one."

Thombre's Camera Bag Breakdown

- **A** Sony A9 III
- **B** Sony A1
- **C** Sony 400mm f/2.8 G Master
- **D** Sony 70-200mm f/2.8 G Master II
- **E** Sony 90mm f/2.8 Marco G
- **F** Sony Tough CFExpress Type A Memory Cards
- **G** Benro C3780TN with Manfrotto MVH500AH
- **H** Manfrotto XPRO Aluminium Video Monopod with Manfrotto MVH500AH
- **I** Peak Design Strap
- **J** Cotton Carrier G3 Harness
- **K** Nitecore BB2 Electric Blower
- **L** Cleaning Kit
- **M** Atmos Ninja V
- **N** Godox V860III TTL Li-Ion Flash

*See more of **Anupam Thombre's** work on Instagram: @anupamthombre. We first learned about Thombre on Sony Alpha Universe: alphauniverse.com*

The Journey

Lessons learned from a fish

WORDS AND IMAGES BY **AMY GULICK**



BURIED IN WINTER NESTS of gravel in clear cool streams, fertilized salmon eggs are ready to hatch. Wiggling embryos release an enzyme, which causes the egg membrane to break. The newborns, called alevins, are about the size of a thumbnail. Alevins retain the egg's yolk sac as a nutrient-rich lunch bag that provides the developing fish with food.

Vulnerable to predators, alevins hide in the gravel for a month or two. As the baby salmon grow, the yolk sac is absorbed and the time comes to emerge from the gravel. A time that coincides with the arrival of spring, warmer water, and food in the form of plankton and insects. And the journey begins.

All Pacific salmon start their lives in freshwater. The fish migrate to the ocean and depending on the species, spend anywhere from one to seven years at sea traveling thousands of miles to find food. If all goes well, they return to their freshwater birth streams as adults to spawn the next generation. And then they die. In between the beginning and end of their lives, a lot can happen. And at the end of their lives, they pass something on to the next generation.



P18-19: Alevin A newly hatched salmon is called an alevin.

↑ **Salmon** are a life force nourishing bears, birds, marine mammals, people, insects, and even trees.



Pacific salmon return to their birth streams to spawn and die.

In salmon we see ourselves. Their journey is our journey. It turns out that what's good for the fish is good for us…

For close to two decades, I've had the honor of witnessing and documenting the lives and ecosystems of wild Pacific salmon. I've also had the honor of spending time with people who live in deep relationship with salmon and have shared their stories of the lessons learned from the fish.

One woman said, "The moment that salmon eggs hatch, the fight to survive and thrive is on. The fish make their way to the ocean and face limitless perils. They stay gone until they're called home. They don't quit swimming in the middle of their return home simply because they face obstacles. They keep moving forward. Tirelessly, devoted, inspiring. Just like us."

Salmon are most visible to us near the end of their lives, swimming by the millions into their birth streams to spawn in the same stretch of water where they started their lives. Fighting the current, dodging predators, pushing upstream for hundreds of miles—all without eating. It's a hero's journey, fraught with danger and uncertainty. Most salmon die before spawning. But at every stage of their lives, salmon are a life force nourishing bears, birds, marine mammals, people, insects, and even trees.

Sitting on the bank of a spawning stream as salmon race to the finish line of their lives, it's impossible not to reflect on our own journeys. An Indigenous woman whose culture revolves around salmon told me, "When I was young, I started asking fundamental questions like, 'What's the meaning of life and why are we here?' There are certain events that mark our lives and at the end, that's it. But there's the hope that we're passing something on too. You look at salmon and how much they pass on—not only to their offspring but to the whole system that they're a part of and benefit. I think a human who has lived life well does that too."

In salmon we see ourselves. Their journey is our journey. It turns out that what's good for the fish is good for us—clean and free-flowing rivers, a thriving ocean, and a livable climate. What's the greatest lesson that salmon have taught me? Life's short. Be a life force with the time you're given. And give it everything you've got.

---

*See more of **Amy Gulick**'s work at amygulick.com.*

Beyond the Surface

A guide to going deeper with your images

WORDS AND IMAGES BY **DAVID DUCHEMIN**



HE MOMENT YOU PRESS THE SHUTTER and make a photograph, you flatten a world of three dimensions into two. But, incredibly, the feeling of depth—maybe more accurately, the illusion of depth—doesn't always disappear. That feeling of being there, within the world of the image, isn't something we necessarily lose the moment we make a photograph. But it is something we can control, manipulate, and amplify. And if we ignore it, or are unintentional about it, we can find it missing entirely from our photographs.

Russian short-story writer Anton Chekhov once advised his students with these words, "don't tell me the moon is shining, show me the glint of light on broken glass." He was saying, "make me feel it." We have in the photography world a similar maxim: shoot what it feels like. And yet so much photography ends up being merely a record of what things look like: visual but not visceral.

P24-25: Churchill, Manitoba, 2021 Lighting the foreground with a simple flashlight can give us both greater foreground interest and a greater sense of visual depth. Using a wider focal length, in this case 16mm, helps too, but only if you can see that foreground.

← Chilcotin, British Columbia, 2023 A wide lens (15mm) placed low and close gives this bear a much larger head and smaller flanks—effective foreshortening that makes the image deeper than a longer lens could. Sony A6600 at 15mm. Exposure: 1/1000 sec., f/5.6, ISO 1000.



P28-29: Chilcotin, British Columbia, 2022 The sense of depth in this image comes from a background cleanly set apart from the foreground, the leading lines of the bears reflection, and the light feather off from shadowed to brighter rim light. Sony A1 at 840mm. Exposure: 1/2000 sec., f/5.6, ISO 1000.

↑ Maasai Mara, Kenya, 2022 Shot with a longer lens (336mm), this image still has a sense of depth created by the sub-framing, also known as frame-within-a-frame. Sony A1 at 336mm. Exposure: 1/1000 sec., f/5.6, ISO 3200

The word I return to is "experience," and it comes up most of all as a question: How do people experience the photographs we make?

I am after photographs that stir an emotion or a feeling, something in my photographs that goes beyond the need to know what the world looks like. The word I return to is "experience," and it comes up most of all as a question: How do people experience the photographs we make?

There are three important ways we can begin re-introducing the feeling of depth to an image: the lenses we choose, where we place the camera, and how we use the light.

Focal Length

When I first started making photographs, I had three lenses: a standard 55mm, a 28mm wide angle, and a 200mm telephoto. The 55mm stayed on the camera most of the time. It was, I was told, the most accurate in terms of how humans see. The 28mm was used when I couldn't cram all the elements in the scene into the frame in other ways, and the 200mm was what I used when I wanted to make the duck bigger, and I couldn't get closer. Not the worst way of choosing a focal length, but not particularly nuanced.

Specific focal lengths all behave differently. They magnify, of course, but they also have different angles of view. Use a 16mm lens nice and close to a subject and it will look different than using a 50mm lens from a little further back. The main element in the frame might end up roughly the same size, but the relationship of elements to each other, the energy of lines, and the relative size of the background elements would all change.

This matters because wide angle lenses used close to foreground elements tend to create images with the appearance of greater spatial depth than longer lenses. Wider focal lengths used close to our subjects exaggerate foreshortening, which is an effect of perspective. Stand really close to me and my head will look huge compared to the head of someone 12 feet behind me. A shorter focal length exaggerates this, and we interpret it as dimension. We feel that foreshortening as depth.

Wider lenses, too, will exaggerate the energy of diagonal lines, and when those lines lead into the frame, we feel the depth they imply. I love my longer lenses. My 600mm f/4 is a favorite. Does that mean all my photographs made with a longer lens are flat? Not necessarily. There are other ways to introduce depth. A “deeper” image is not, necessarily, a better image. But if you want to make deeper images, you could do worse than thinking of your wide lenses as feeling deeper, more inclusive, when used closer to your foregrounds.

Point of View

I love deeper-feeling images. And yes, if I can put my camera low on the ground with a 16-35mm lens and photograph rhinos and bears, I will. It’s not only that we use shorter focal lengths to give us depth, but how we use them. Lower, closer, and wider will result in images that feel deeper.

If there were one sermon I could preach every day and not get tired of, it would be the one about moving the camera. Get it low! Get it high! Get it somewhere interesting! If you want to change my perspective as a viewer, you've got to take me there by putting the camera very intentionally where it’ll create the right feeling. Where depth is concerned, it's got to be closer when using wider lenses.

But it’s not always possible to get meaningfully close to our subjects, and most of us are looking for some variety in our photography to give rhythm to our portfolios and bodies of work. So how to create a sense of depth with longer lenses?

My favorite technique is creating depth with the feeling you get from of an out of focus foreground. This is one argument for faster lenses with wider maximum apertures: the ability to create pleasing out of focus areas in our images, and stronger separation.

Light

In the Renaissance, painters finally figured out perspective. Paintings from the early 1400s began to exhibit greater depth because someone discovered foreshortening and vanishing points. Around the same time, painters also figured out how to use light to create paintings with more depth, by which I mean they figured out how to paint that light.

Photographers can use the same knowledge. Recognizing the effect of light on the elements in your scene and knowing which of them will enhance the feeling of depth, and which ones will not, will give you another tool for manipulating that depth. Color too, as a function of light, can be used to create a sense of depth. We even call the contrast between two complimentary colors, color depth.

A cool cyan background with a warm orange foreground element will have a greater feeling of separation, and therefore depth. Years ago, on the Racetrack Playa in Death Valley, I was working a scene I really liked. It had some depth, created by the long line of one of the famous sailing rocks receding to a vanishing point in the background. But I wanted more depth, and, on a whim, I lit the rock with a flashlight wrapped in a warm lighting gel. Warm foreground, cool background. It just felt deeper.

Why do some images feel more mysterious than others? Why do some feel happier? Why do some make us laugh? And why do some make us feel like we’re really there? The clues are in the images themselves. Start your own exploration of images that feel like you’re really there and find a way to go deeper.

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*See more of **David duChemin**’s work at davidduchemin.com.*

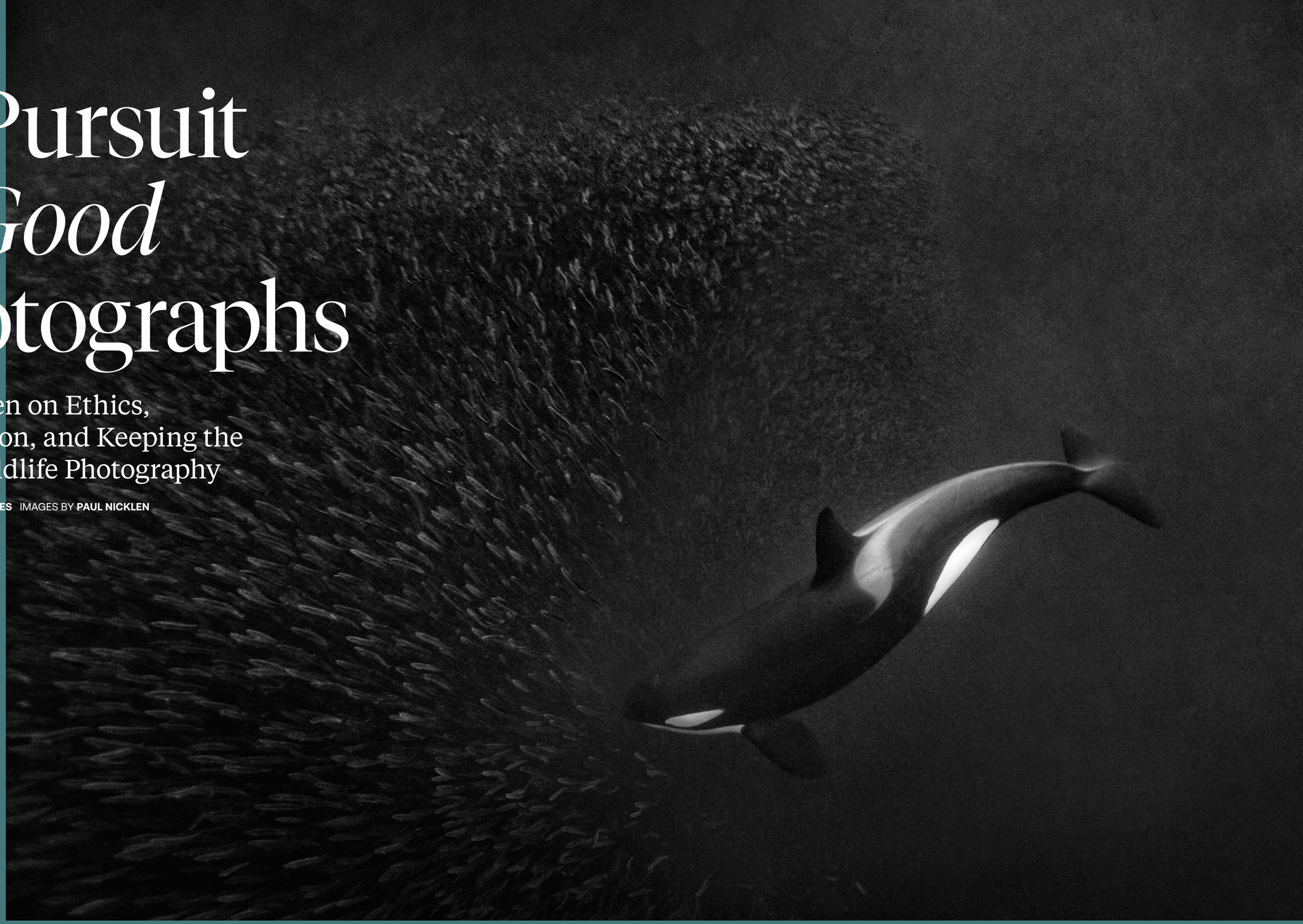
P32-33: Samburu, Kenya, 2022 I used a 600mm lens for this but by including both an implied foreground, a sharp mid-ground (the giraffe) and an identifiable background, I’ve given the clues needed to read depth into the image. Sony A1 at 600mm. Exposure: 1/1000 sec., f/4, ISO 5000..

→ **Death Valley, 2011** This sailing rock at the Racetrack Playa was lit with a flashlight and a CTO gel. The color contrast between the warm rock and the cool background creates greater visual depth than the images I made without it. Nikon D3S at 24mm. Exposure: 1 second, f/4.5, ISO 200.

In Pursuit of *Good* Photographs

Paul Nicklen on Ethics, Conservation, and Keeping the Wild in Wildlife Photography

WORDS BY **CYNTHIA HAYNES** IMAGES BY **PAUL NICKLEN**





OR OVER 30 YEARS, PAUL NICKLEN, award-winning *National Geographic* and fine art photographer, marine biologist, conservationist, and co-founder of SeaLegacy, has dedicated his life—and his photographs—to protecting wildlife and their habitats. Since setting out in 1988 to make his first underwater shot with a brand-new Nikonos V that promptly flooded, he's worked tirelessly to raise awareness to effect change through the power of photography. "It's our job as photographers to tell stories, but we have to put the health and well-being of the animals first," he says. So, in pursuing good photographs, how do you make photographs that do good?

Among other things, Paul Nicklen is known as the "that guy the leopard seal tried to feed penguins to," but his impressive résumé goes far beyond that. Driven by heart and backed by science, Nicklen has seen corners of the Earth that most of us will only dream of. But thanks to his persistent determination to share—and fight for—this planet, his photographs transport us to the Arctic, Antarctica, the ocean depths, and beyond.

P36-37: Orca Ballet An orca corrals a school of herring underneath the surface of an icy fjord off the coast of northern Norway.

← Ascension We have a bad habit of diminishing nature's most spectacular creatures just in what we decide to name them. The common dolphin, for example, is one of the most intelligent species on the planet, with a brain similar to ours in size.

"The planet is desperate for photographers who are willing to get dirty, roll up their sleeves, and tell those hard stories in emotional, beautiful, haunting, and often heartbreaking moments."

Raised on Baffin Island in Canada's Arctic, cold and ice are in his blood. Nicklen's lifelong love affair with the polar regions led to his dedication to conserving those areas, resulting in an inspiring body of work showcased in his fine art book, *Born To Ice*, an intimate look at the animals and landscapes threatened by climate change. He's earned more than 30 of the highest awards available in his field, including being the youngest inductee into the International Photography Hall of Fame in 2019. He was also appointed to the Order of Canada that same year.

With such an impressive list of achievements, it's hard to imagine where Nicklen goes from here, but he's hungry for more. "I'm grateful to be acknowledged for the work I'm doing; it lets me know my message is landing somewhere, and that's meaningful. But if I'm honest with myself, I'm not motivated by accolades or awards or recognition. At some point, I looked at awards like little validators to tell me I was on the right path. It's never been about winning or ego—what matters most to me is engaging people in the conversation because that's where change happens," Nicklen admits.

"What we don't need are more overnight Instagram successes, cute pictures, or pictures of a polar bear. What we need are pictures that really start a conversation."

According to Nicklen, what the photography world needs most right now are more people skilled in telling visual stories to bring attention to vital issues and inspire change. "The planet is desperate for photographers who are willing to get dirty, roll up their sleeves, and tell those hard stories in emotional, beautiful, haunting, and often heartbreaking moments. The world is craving those people."

On Getting Started

With so many platforms available for sharing stories, initiating discussions among the masses seems like it should be easier than ever before. When Nicklen's career began, there were no immediate submissions, no social media, no video, and far fewer publications to contribute to. But he knew the conversations were out there because the message was embedded in the image—and that hasn't changed. Nor has his work ethic; he's one of the hardest-working photographers today, camera in hand every chance he gets. "I've always wanted to be out there, shooting," he says, recalling how, in his early twenties, he so wanted to photograph bowhead whales and walrus that he camped on the shoreline for three months waiting for the ice to break and, with no money for groceries, survived by eating a raw walrus flipper given to him by local hunters. "But my persistence paid off, and I eventually got the powerful, publishable images I wanted. To this day, it remains one of the greatest experiences of my life."

The traditional model of capturing a photograph and selling it for licensing has changed since then, and as a



Ariel II We tend to create boundaries between ourselves and wildlife, viewing them as separate and distant from our lives. However, on the day I met Ariel the sperm whale, the young calf seemed happy to barrel through those lines, revealing how much we share with our wild kin.



“Any photographic device has incredible power over the subjects we photograph, so it’s up to us to use those devices responsibly.”

result, Nicklen advises emerging photographers to diversify their skills beyond just using a camera. “Learn how to edit, shoot video, conduct an interview, write, and understand the full scope of social media because there are opportunities out there for you to work with scientists and add value to any project. The best scientists doing crucial conservation work often struggle with effective communication. So, if you could be their communication branch, the possibilities are endless for you. Three of my former assistants now work for the BBC, sharing their passion for conservation and storytelling as part of a well-regarded team. It’s true what they say, there is strength in numbers.”

On Ethics

If wildlife photographers viewed themselves as more of a team, Nicklen believes change could be much more likely. “We need to do better,” he says. “There’s a responsibility to protect our subjects, but in the rampant desire to ‘get the shot,’ we’re harming animals and their habitats. The stories are important, but not at such great cost.

“Everyone has a drone now, and it stresses me out to see a bear hiding under the ice or trying to escape a drone—so imagine how that bear feels.” Nicklen’s voice rises, emphasizing his discontent. “Drones have become such a crucial and critical tool for the work we do; they allow us to find incredible situations, look at the conditions and weather, find passageways with boats and ice, and get unique aerial perspectives. But in the desire to get closer, you can do great harm to wildlife with a simple flick of your thumb. Nobody hesitates to chase animals from the air with a drone or two.

“I see drone shots of polar bears and grizzly bears and wolves, and it breaks my heart; these poor animals haven’t evolved to deal with this intrusion. The drone range now is up to seven kilometers, so imagine a terrified mother bear and her cubs running from this thing, causing them to burn the valuable energy they need to survive. Maybe she loses her cub during the chase; maybe the animals fall over a cliff or are otherwise injured.

“We wouldn’t do that to humans, so why do we give ourselves permission to do it to animals? The ethics of wildlife photography mean that we shouldn’t interfere in the animals’ lives in any way. These are living, breathing beings, and humans are the biggest threat to their survival. Any photographic device has incredible power over the subjects we photograph, so it’s up to us to use those devices responsibly.

“Advancing technologies allow us to be completely unethical and cause great harm to wildlife, to the point that when we see something completely offside, we must hold ourselves and each other accountable and report it. We have no other choice. It’s just too easy to harass animals now.”

As passionate as he is about ethics, Nicklen admits it’s a learned behavior. As a scientist-turned-photographer, he went from drugging bears and taking samples to feeling pressured to make “good” photographs. And it wasn’t without missteps. “I probably did



P42-43: Arctic Fox Blending seamlessly into its snowy environment in Nunavut, Canada, an Arctic fox sniffs the ground to assess its surroundings.

↑ Ice Climber A massive male polar bear hauls his approximately 800-pound body out of the sea and climbs an iceberg off Svalbard, Norway.





← Bear's Lair A polar bear's tracks are all that remain as they lead off into the face of a glacier.

↑ Sublime It was by pure good fortune that I discovered this sweeping arm of ice one morning while exploring in the Zodiac. To me, it provided an almost irresistible path towards the ominous, towering pillar jutting from the dark water.

“I don’t want people to just look at my photographs; I want them to feel them. And to do that, those images have to be intimate.”

harass some animals in the beginning, but I quickly found that it made me feel sick and sad; it was never worth it. I found that the animals know your intentions and your body language, and the only way you will have those intimate moments that translate to impactful photographs is if you treat the animals with respect.

“If you truly are an ethical photographer, those animals will let you in, and you will not only have a completely different and life-changing experience, but a chance at photographs that express that.

“I’m at a fortunate point in my career that if I see an animal a mile away and it doesn’t want anything to do with me, I don’t even try. I think, ‘Good on you, bear. Go and enjoy your day.’ But if that bear decides to walk up to me on a river and sit beside my tripod, it’s a gift from nature. I quickly discovered how awful shortcuts feel in wildlife and nature photography; they left me feeling empty-hearted, like I had exploited that animal and robbed it of its right to a peaceful existence. The most important skill you can have, beyond anything else, is to care. You must. It shows in your photographs if you don’t.”

On Caring

That sense of connection comes across in Nicklen’s photographs and makes us care—because he cares so deeply. “When I see a spirit bear and the emotions are pouring through me, I want to share that feeling. If I want to elicit a response of caring from people who look at my photographs, they need to feel what I’m feeling when I’m shooting, to be immersed in the moment as well. I need them to look into that spirit bear’s eye.

“That’s one of the reasons I love underwater photography; the animals are curious and dictate the encounter, so you can get up close. When a sea lion or leopard seal is chewing on the dome of your wide-angle lens, you can’t get any closer. And with that sense of intimacy, people experience that photograph differently.

“I don’t want people to just look at my photographs; I want them to feel them. And to do that, those images have to be intimate.”

Famed photographer Robert Capa said, “If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough,” an adage that Nicklen fully (but cautiously) embraces. “Getting close is such a tricky thing with wildlife because it often results in harassment. And this is why no photograph or moment is ever worth harassing an animal.” It’s purely an investment in time to earn the animal’s trust, he says, an exercise in the three P’s of patience, passion, and purpose. “I’m obsessed with spending time in nature, so I will have a very different encounter than someone who just shows up for a day or two, hoping to snap a shot of a bear.

“I’ll sit there for weeks to months. And when that animal is so comfortable with my being there, then that’s when I get those rare moments. I’ve lived my entire photographic life by ‘f/8 and be there,’ but my best advice is to



Elephant Seal Elephant seals like this one are not named for their size but instead for the trunk-like noses males develop in adulthood, which are used to resonate vocalizations to intimidate rival males.



Emperor Penguins Thousands of emperor penguins gather near the floe edge of Antarctica's frozen Ross Sea, a vital ecosystem for marine life within the Southern Ocean.

commit to putting in the time out in the field. Dedicated time and patience will produce better photographs than any piece of gear."

On Conservation

What distinguishes wildlife photography from conservation photography? In his experience, Nicklen sees wildlife photography as the "pretty picture phase" of the journey. "Being a wildlife and conservation photographer means going beyond just a single image. It entails creating a series of images that tell a story that serves that ecosystem and those wildlife populations that need protection."

Nicklen maintains that to create change, you need both the pretty picture and the fact-based image. As a photojournalist, Nicklen would shoot two to four "home runs," which could be a beautiful portrait of a bear or a scenic shot of an animal in the landscape that grabs a viewer's attention. "After that," he says, "I've earned the right to show some less visceral, evocative images and flesh out the story of what I want people to learn, understand, and care about."

"Wildlife conservation photography uses the power of photography to galvanize a global audience on a major issue. It's the difference between waking up as a wildlife photographer and thinking, 'How do I take a great picture of an animal today?' vs. a conservation photographer, whose first thought is, 'How do I shoot a picture that will affect change?'

The focus for conservation photographers shifts to how the image can be used to make a meaningful impact. "As a conservation photographer, once you shoot a powerful image, the next thought is, 'How does this image now go to work in service? Where will it get the most eyes on it?'"

On Gear

For as deeply as he cares about the photographs he makes, gear is perhaps what he's least interested in. "My advice is that if you have limited resources, invest in one body and a 24-105mm and 100-400mm. Bigger, longer, or more expensive lenses don't necessarily make you a better photographer; that only comes from doing the work. Place the importance on your journey ahead and the body of work that's going to allow you to achieve your goals, and then work backward in the gear you need.

"My mentors, Joel Sartore and Flip Nicklin, never talked about gear; we talked about purpose and the story that needs to be told. If you're looking to make an investment in anything, I encourage you to buy yourself time in the field to shoot a story that you're passionate about—something that will serve as a stepping stone to your next project. Start by asking yourself, 'What story do I want to tell? Where can I make a difference? What's it really going to elevate?'"

Although he doesn't place much emphasis on gear, Nicklen credits the constraints of his early equipment with helping to make him a better photographer; without a digital camera, he relied solely on his emotions and diligence to create impactful work. With a digital camera, he says it's easy to get caught up in the technical aspects of the craft, to look at your LCD screen and think that a photo is good simply because it is in focus and has proper exposure. "I'm very right-brained and need to feel that I got the shot, so film was great for me because it denied me that. I may have nailed the image in the first five minutes, but I would continue to shoot for eight hours. I went through this significant emotional journey where I'd become disconnected from the camera and everything else around me and end

“By consciously pushing yourself further… envisioning and then diligently pursuing the images you want to make, that’s often where the happiest surprises happen.”

up with 25 shot rolls in my bag. Those are the moments that I crave, the moments I live for. And that’s why now, even though I have a digital camera, I rarely look at the back.

“Because no matter how good you think you have shot a situation, you can always do better.”

Rather than focusing purely on the technical aspects of making images that are sharp, focused, and well-exposed, Nicklen prefers to tune in more to his emotions when he’s photographing. “I’ve found that if you’re only ticking off the checklist of sharp-focused-exposed, it’ll lead you down a path of mediocrity,” he cautions. “You may get lucky, but there’s no substitute for being intentional. By consciously pushing yourself further, being the first one up in the morning, the last one to bed, envisioning and then diligently pursuing the images you want to make, that’s often where the happiest surprises happen. Because when you’re committed to pursuing your vision, something will finally roll over for you, like a mother wolf coming out to drop the whole pack of pups off for you to babysit while she goes off to feed. That experience will blow your mind, but it took an entire month of sitting in a blind; it’s where patience, passion, and purpose line up to deliver something extraordinary. It’s where your hard work pays off. When you deeply care about the story you’re telling, the stronger your photographs will be, and the more people you’ll draw into the conversation.”

On Creating Change

With over seven million followers on Instagram, Nicklen certainly has a platform to start those conversations. In 2017, the SeaLegacy team filmed an emaciated polar bear, which went from their Instagram feed to the most viral video in the history of *National Geographic*. It got people talking, which is exactly what Nicklen wanted.

“My hope is always to show people that this is the result of what we’re doing to this planet. If they can see it, they can feel it, and that emotional connection is what initiates change. Let people decide for themselves if they think this is acceptable.”

On the heels of the polar bear video, SeaLegacy partnered with three other organizations in 2018 to show how driftnets impact marine life in California off the coast of Los Angeles, where mile-long nets drift throughout the night. “To catch swordfish, they’re killing mola, dolphins, whales, turtles, sea lions, and sharks, among other species. With a bycatch ratio of 9:1, nine animals are killed for one single swordfish. Conservation groups have been working on this for over 30 years, and when they asked me to be part of it, I jumped at the chance.

“After only two dives, we had enough material to add to footage from the other teams to assemble our campaign. Within a few months, I was in front of the U.S. and California Senates; we got the nets banned at the state level, but it took until 2022 to



P52-53: Kluane Aerials over the Kluane ice fields.

↑ Path of the Grizzly Grizzly Bears and other wildlife along the Fishing Branch River in the Yukon.

↓ Monodon Monoceros It took ten years of working with Inuit guides and scouring the frozen coastline from my ultralight plane before finding this narwal pod way offshore in the drifting pack ice. Carl Linnaeus gave them the name Monodon monoceros, meaning "one-toothed one horn."

→ Ivory Brigade A blessing of narwhals in a place where there is no hunting. The whales are pushing under the ice to feed on cod. They come up in seal holes and rotten ice in order to catch a breath.







← **Arterial Shadows** Rising coastal tides stretch inland to create a lacework of delicate patterns of rock and sediment that, viewed from the air, almost literally take my breath away.

↓ **Arctic Journey** An Inuit hunter steers his dog team over Greenland's sea ice towards the floe edge just 600 miles shy of the North Pole.





Killer Tension I love the feeling of anticipation I get from this image. The ocean's glassy surface bends and stretches, conforming to the contours of the orca below just a few thousandths of a second before its blow erupts, filling the sky with a billowing cloud of mist.

"Change won't happen if people don't see the problem because they can't connect to it; they can't feel it. That's where photographers play such an important role in instigating change."

get them banned at the federal level. The change was fueled by the whole system working together: getting the visuals, putting them out to our audience, getting 150,000 signatures, presenting it to the government, and then getting the policy changed.

"Beautiful, commanding pictures are vital for building the base to bring people into the conversation. That's the power of the photograph."

Nicklen loves a good fight but admits it's exhausting—for everyone. He's keenly aware of the fatigue in constantly advocating and petitioning for conservation efforts and recognizes the danger of falling into a state of hopelessness when faced with setbacks. "I like to win," he says, "but when I don't, am I just going to take that defeat by sitting on my couch and being depressed? The only antidote to this eco-anxiety and fear is to take action. And once you do that, you start to feel hope, and you want to do more. I still believe in hope."

On His *Ne Plus Ultra*

As a globally recognized photographer with successful conservation wins on his CV, what is Nicklen's *ne plus ultra* at this stage of his career? Without hesitation, his answer is clear and unwavering: "One image that brings an end to the climate crisis—a powerful and undeniable photograph that will evoke emotion and inspire action. I always think of Nick Ut's iconic image, 'The Terror of War,' of the young girl running naked from a napalm bombing. As horrific as it is, that photograph gave a face to the innocent victims and is credited for prompting an end to the Vietnam War. The image allowed viewers to feel the pain, the atrocity, the inhumanity.

"When things are happening 'over there,' wherever 'there' is, it's easier to ignore. And that's the danger. Change won't happen if people don't see the problem because they can't connect to it; they can't feel it. That's where photographers play such an important role in instigating change."

"For me, nothing feels as good as a conservation win. Good photos are important, yes, but being part of a major win is the greatest high of all. It drives me, pushing me forward in what can too often feel like hopelessness. I want to make a photo that can basically stop a war or start a movement. That's the photograph I'm still chasing."

Paul Nicklen *is a Sony Artisan of Imagery. See more of his work at paulnicklen.com.*



The Photographic Landscape

WORDS AND IMAGES BY **TED ORLAND**

Why Ansel Adams Still Inspires (& Confounds) Today

THE INVENTION OF PHOTOGRAPHY, with its unique ability to record endless detail with optical precision, has had a larger effect on our understanding of the landscape than even classic paintings. In the 1860's, expeditionary photographers revolutionized wilderness photography by creating stunningly detailed large-format views of the American West, while countless itinerant photographers with stereo cameras made tiny three-dimensional views of distant wonders so wildly popular that no well-to-do Victorian household was without its parlor-room stereo card collection.

But even as photography gained acceptance among the general public, the art world remained perversely resistant, generally treating the medium's technical properties as artistic flaws. From the very outset, art critics routinely dismissed photography as a mere chemical process, and the camera as a mechanical tool that mindlessly recorded anything in its path.

A wider recognition of photography as art finally materialized early in the twentieth century when a handful of young West Coast photographers—most notably Ansel Adams and Edward Weston—introduced an entirely new photographic aesthetic. Their straight-arrow approach placed a premium on meticulous technique, natural lighting, sharp focus, wide tonal range, and unaltered compositions—qualities that were, intentionally or otherwise, tailor-made for creating a rich visual description of the landscape.

Indeed, for much of the twentieth century our collective vision of the landscape was perfectly encompassed in the art of one photographer: Ansel Adams. He accomplished this by creating a compelling artistic template for the way a natural landscape—any natural landscape—should look.

A half-century ago, I enrolled as a fledgling beginner in a Yosemite photography workshop led by Ansel Adams himself. That all unfolded back in the Analog Era, when 8x10 cameras still roamed the landscape and digital imaging had yet to be invented. It also made Adams my first photography teacher, with the unsurprising result that large-format black-and-white landscapes quickly became my working definition of art photography.

Following are six of my images that carry on the spirit of Ansel Adams while offering my own unique spin on the photographic landscape.

P62-63: Ansel Adams photographing in Yosemite Valley (1973)



P64-65: Clearing Winter Storm, Yosemite Valley (1970) Consider the artistic blinders needed to "pre-visualize" the world entirely in black and white, even as the world sparkled all around me in glorious color. Or the intellectual disconnect needed to crop out any trace of man's presence so that Yosemite National Park appears as pure wilderness.

It took me years to free myself from those and a hundred other self-imposed constraints. In truth, life was whooshing right past me while I was setting up my tripod. In retrospect, I realize that I had (however naively) traded my vision for Ansel's, and that finding my own voice would require placing a healthy aesthetic distance between my own art and that of my most important teacher.

That said, my own learning process is probably best illustrated by my photographs, annotated with my memory of the circumstances that led me to make them, and the insights I gained in viewing them afterwards.

→ One-and-a-Half Domes, Yosemite National Park (1976) The moment I spotted trash cans in Yosemite National Park mimicking the shape of Half Dome, I knew that somewhere out there a photograph was just waiting to be taken. When I happened upon a grouping that not only paired Half Dome with its mechanical doppelgänger, but also included a tourist sign bearing a drawing of the same landmark, well, who was I to resist the chance to capture a whole one-and-a-half domes in the same frame?

Later, viewing the resulting proof sheet, I realized a finished print could be tailored to display the entire history of landscape photography in Yosemite all rolled into one image. So, starting with a straight gelatin-silver print, I sepia-toned the distant Sierra landscape in warm tones reminiscent of nineteenth-century albumin prints by Watkins or Muybridge, selenium-toned the nearby man-made artifacts in crisp cold tones favored by Adams and his followers, and then hand-colored the tourist sign with oil paints to create a Technicolor Yosemite more vivid than reality.

Viewing the finished print, I recognized it as looking like, uh, like no one else's art. It was, more accurately, my declaration of independence from traditional straight black-and-white photography.





And verily, with suitable under-exposure and a zillion blue pixels creating a day-for-night effect, and fuzzy globs of floating pollen doubling as stars, the metaphorical Eucalyptus Galaxy emerges.

The Eucalyptus Galaxy These days my friends all seem intent on photographing landscapes using the Milky Way as a background. But much as I admire the wonders that magically appear at ISO 50,000, I can never quite escape the claustrophobic feeling that once I've seen one universe, I've seen them all. Nonetheless I decided, just for the challenge of it, to create a Milky Way Landscape of my own.

Fortunately, my daily walk with our doggie follows a trail along a high bluff overlooking the San Lorenzo River, high enough that at one point I'm actually looking down at the trees, with the surrounding river supplanting the sky. And verily, with suitable under-exposure and a zillion blue pixels creating a day-for-night effect, and fuzzy globs of floating pollen doubling as stars, the metaphorical Eucalyptus Galaxy emerges. But was it really like that, you ask? Well, it is now!



↑ **Meteor!** Cartier-Bresson did well to stick with street photography, given that landscape photography is woefully lacking in "decisive moments." Having to wait a million years for a mountain range to form tends to have that effect.

Fortunately, Art steps in where Nature fails. Case in point, the moment I spotted this sign somewhere in the middle of the Arizona desert, I knew instantly that a meteor needed to burst onto the scene. This piece began as a black-and-white silver-gelatin print, which I then hand-colored with oil paints. More specifically, the desert and sky were realistically colored by rubbing transparent oil paint into the print surface using little balls of cotton, while the meteor itself required a thick opaque layer of paint applied via an arcane technical process known to pre-schoolers as "fingerpainting."

Photographs of the landscape are usually less interesting—and certainly less enlightening—than photographs about the landscape.

↓ **Family Portrait** Photographs of the landscape are usually less interesting—and certainly less enlightening—than photographs about the landscape. That truism hit home for me a couple of years ago when wildfires advanced perilously close to our semi-rural community in northern California.

In the end we all survived unscathed, and over the next news cycle or two everything returned to normal. More precisely, it returned to normal for us. A few days later, however, I drove out to survey the fire-ravaged area and came upon a scene that struck me as particularly sad, namely, an entire field of giant sunflowers that had somehow escaped the flames, only to succumb to the accompanying heat and falling ash.

I saw an almost-human pathos in the gesture of that plant, like a mother holding her dying children in her arms. We worry about whether the fires will touch us. Imagine how the Landscape feels.



As framed by my viewfinder the scene was brimming with Adamsonian clarity and detail, and almost Norman Rockwell-like in its compositional simplicity.

Cathedral Spires, Yosemite National Park (2023)
For years (decades, really) I pictured the natural landscape as stable and unchanging—unless, of course, we meddled with it. But even then, I assumed that left to itself, it would slowly return to its pristine original state.

Recently, however, I found reason to question that assumption. I was in Yosemite, meandering cross-country style along the Valley floor, when I spotted Cathedral Spires (a familiar rock formation) visible through the forest canopy. As framed by my viewfinder the scene was brimming with Adamsonian clarity and detail, and almost Norman Rockwell-like in its compositional simplicity. For better or worse, the photograph I made that day displays exactly that reality.

But I make photographs that talk back to me and this one offered some surprisingly dark omens. I've visited Yosemite a hundred times over the past sixty years, and it was instantly apparent to me that the forest you see here only appears "open" because most of its trees have died as victims of "controlled burns," pine beetle infestations, pollution, global warming and more. So, while a casual viewer may see this photograph as just another pretty picture of a National Park, my title for it would be Disaster Masquerading as Perfection.

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*See more of **Ted Orland**'s work at shop.anseladams.com/collections/ted-orland*



Unearthly Light

How Shooting with an iPhone Broadened Reuben Wu's Vision

WORDS BY **BILL SAWALICH** IMAGES BY **REUBEN WU**





EUBEN WU HAS A HABIT of turning personal passions into creative careers. First as a designer, then a musician, and now a photographer, Wu's artistic drive knows no bounds. His hauntingly beautiful photographs juxtapose unnatural light with the natural landscape. He is equipment agnostic, using whatever device best serves his vision, including everything from drones to LED cube lights, fiber optics to medium format digital cameras.

For a recent photo project, Wu stepped out of his comfort zone once again by shooting night landscapes entirely with an iPhone. The experience was both a challenge and an awakening, allowing him to expand his vision while minimizing his camera to just a smartphone.

The project, titled "The Inner Landscape," showcases the photographic capabilities of the iPhone 15 Pro in Wu's skillful hands. Made in southern Utah over the course of a week last summer, the project was shot entirely on the iPhone and culminated in an exhibition of 40 x 60-inch prints. Given the 48-megapixel sensor of the iPhone 15 Pro, big, beautiful prints are no big surprise. But working with a smartphone in lieu of a typical professional camera does present some challenges.

P75: Tree This was taken during powerful snowstorms that swept through Utah. The lone tree was another location I wanted to come back to, but the later we stayed, the heavier the snowfall became. I was shocked that the drone was able to fly so well under such adverse conditions.

← Prints The images were printed 60 inches tall and exhibited at a private event during the launch of the new iPhone. It was a huge thrill to see them in physical form at this scale. In my mind, prints are the ultimate expression of a photographic image.



The Audience I discovered this wonderfully symmetrical composition many years ago in Utah and have always wanted to return with the drone light. It reminded me of an amphitheater of grotesque creatures watching over us.

For "The Inner Landscape," anything was possible in the sense that [Wu's] vision remained uncompromised.

"I wouldn't call it fully manual," Wu says, "but one trick not many people know about is that night mode will actually go for 30 seconds if it's not in motion. If it's locked off on a tripod, the phone will know it's not moving and allow you to move the night mode slider to maximum at 30 seconds, provided it's dark enough. That's just computational photography. The beauty of the native camera app is it's so simple and elegant."

Thinking Different

To paraphrase an old Apple idea, Wu did have to "think different" working with the smartphone. He won't abandon cameras in favor of phones any time soon, but he does think of the iPhone as a new kind of tool that can be easily incorporated into his arsenal.

"If I had my iPhone and I was in an incredible place and I couldn't get my regular camera, I would be okay," he says, "The iPhone's not a replacement for the bigger cameras. It's just different."

For "The Inner Landscape," anything was possible in the sense that his vision remained uncompromised. Wu chose smaller, more intimate compositions than the grand vistas in much of his work, and the results are deliberately disorienting.

"I think that's helped by the fact that it's shot at night where the only thing that's illuminated is the thing you can see and everything in the background is shrouded in shadow," he explains. "With this series I wanted to go more intimate, I wanted to take away the recognizable bits and blur those edges of scale and reality."

Shooting with the iPhone while light painting night landscapes proved to be a time consuming process.

"I usually spend a few hours per image," Wu says. "Maybe I'll do two images in a night, sometimes three if we're really going for it. Especially with the iPhone, there's a lot more trial and error involved. It doesn't work the same way as a traditional camera does."

Being There

For a photographer used to working with bigger and more complex camera systems that allow greater flexibility, was the iPhone frustrating as a capture device?

"No," Wu says, "it was very interesting to just try different things in the field. There was one image where I was running up and down this steep hill, waving this laser wire around under a long exposure and seeing what we were going to get. It's very exploratory and that's kind of what I enjoy about these shoots. When I'm in a certain space and a certain kind of flow state I'm able to work in a way which is quite creative and quite exploratory."



↑ **Charge** This image involved the use of LED lights mounted on a long pole which was hoisted in an arc inside an enclosed area of slick rock. For this image and many of the others, I was interested in the feeling of intimacy rather than the notion of the epic.

→ **Portal** My favorite image from the “Inner Landscape” series, where the light painted circle is partially occluded by the sides of the canyon. Another iPhone 15 Pro Max was about eight feet to the left to capture a full circle because I wasn’t sure which was better at the time.





← Zero I searched the whole day for the right patch of sand with untouched ripples. It was important that the direction of the ripples would cast nice shadows from the light painting, but also be in an orientation where there would be some light in the background from the sun.

↑ Three Sisters The Three Sisters in Goblin Valley is a prominent hoodoo formation I had wanted to photograph for years. A lot of time was spent in trial and error, in both the operation of the camera and the drone. I love how the rings serendipitously align with each other.



↑ **Tension** I experimented with using laser light for this image, rather than lights attached to a drone. I was interested in the idea of linear tension as a lead in from foreground to background. I didn't realize how suggestive the image looked until later.

→ **Rupture** Another laser light painted image, this time using light to accentuate the natural fold in the slick rock in a small cove in Arizona. The camera is looking steeply downhill at this angle, and I was exhausted from running up and down multiple times in the darkness.

With photography, Wu has been able to turn his dreams into reality. It's a theme in his life and work, in fact: the unreal being made real.

It's that exploration, the sense of discovery, that propels Wu to each new project.

"First and foremost," he says, "I'm passionate about exploring new places. And the tool that I use to explore them with and to document them with is the camera. My passion is being there, to hike into these places and to try these different things and get creative."

Wu draws inspiration from a variety of sources, including the cinematic styles of photographer Gregory Crewdson and the filmmakers David Lynch and Steven Spielberg.

"One of the first inspirations for this project was doing Gregory Crewdson in the desert," Wu says, "where you take this unearthly light and put it somewhere it completely doesn't belong. I think that's the beauty of this look, this aesthetic: that it doesn't make sense. I'm also a big fan of David Lynch. I definitely feel that the work is kind of like a combination of David Lynch and Gregory Crewdson. And *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Steven Spielberg was one of my earliest inspirations and it's very similar."

Crossing Over

A genuine multi-disciplinary artist, it was while he was touring the world with his band that Wu realized not only how wonderful it was to explore interesting places with a camera, but that in fact his primary passion might actually be photography. In 2011 he relocated to Chicago and began pursuing photography—both commercial and fine art—full time. Soon thereafter it took over and has been his primary artistic focus for a decade. Just last year Wu formally left Ladytron, the band he cofounded in 1999.

"In 2013 I brought all my negatives over from the UK," Wu says, "and I started thinking about—rather than single standalone images—I'm going to start thinking about bodies of work and series of work, and how to edit my images into a coherent set. That's how I learned to think of my work in a bigger, more cohesive kind of storytelling way."

With photography, Wu has been able to turn his dreams into reality. It's a theme in his life and work, in fact: the unreal being made real. While his next project is yet to be determined, it's certain to include experimentation at its core.

"I definitely want to continue my creative trajectory and experiment with different tools, different techniques and different concepts," Wu says. "The iPhone performs so well as a camera that I'm sure I would enjoy creating more new work with it. I think a lot of people equate all of my work to a certain technique or tool, but a lot of time it's the aesthetic. And any way I can achieve that aesthetic, I'll try a different method."

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*See more of **Reuben Wu**'s work at reubenwu.com.*



The Inner Landscape This image, for me, epitomized the experience of the intimate, as opposed to the epic. The slot canyon was so narrow, it was only possible to enter squeezing sideways and was six feet deep in rainwater in places.

Getting the Look

How to develop style in outdoor photography

WORDS AND IMAGES BY **ERIN BABNIK**





OR THE CASUAL OBSERVER, it may not be obvious how personal style could possibly factor into any outdoor photograph. When nothing in an image is manufactured, staged, posed, or strobed, the totality of a photographer's contributions could be obscure to such viewers. It may even seem generous to say that any photographer can ever claim full responsibility for results that owe so much of their force to nature's whims.

Nonetheless, most appreciators of outdoor photography do eventually recognize stylistic traits among the photographers that they follow. Style can be subtle, but it always has the power to make images especially personal, memorable, and meaningful. Therefore, anyone who looks to nature for their subjects can gain a lot from understanding the full depth of their own stylistic contributions to a photograph and how they can combine to make any image truly their own.

P88-89: Enigma Varied layers of successive mud flows crack and peel after splaying out from a range of badlands in California. Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, EF 11-24mm f/4L USM at 11mm. Exposure: 2 sec., f/13, ISO 100.

← Swept Away A sandstorm wreaks havoc across a dune field, creating a painterly display of airborne particles. Canon EOS 5D Mark III, EF 70-200mm f/4L IS USM at 144mm. Exposure: 1/30 sec., f/18, ISO 400.



↑ **Gold Rush** A fortress of spires rises out of mist catching the sun as it blows across a high alpine plain of the Dolomites. Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, EF 11-24mm f/4L USM at 12mm. Exposure: 1/125 sec., f/11, ISO 100.



→ **Gather Round** A ring of bare trees punctuates a dense Maine forest in autumn. Canon EOS R5, RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1L IS USM at 151mm. Exposure: 1/15 sec., f/7.1, ISO 400.

With regards to photography, the "skin" of an image is comprised of decisions that affected any characteristics of form or light that a scene presents.

What Is Style?

In order to identify the ingredients of style, it is first helpful to understand the difference between style and stylization because they are often conflated. The results of stylization tend to be especially superficial, conspicuous, or contrived, typically departing from naturalism through some treatment that grabs attention easily. Conversely, the realm of style is simply the convergence of decisions in any given case, and those decisions could amount to a very naturalistic presentation.

Whereas stylization might be a feature of a photographer's style, it is not a necessary component of style. Style is not always emphatic or even appealing, so it is a common misconception that only highly recognizable or laudable approaches to image-making will ever result in the development of a personal style.

So, what does style look like and how can we identify it? It is probably impossible to enumerate all elements of style, but they generally cluster together into three functional categories that correlate nicely with the bones, the skin, and the soul of a human.

BONES – Outdoor Locations and Conditions
These are the basic elements that a photographer may seek out that give a photograph its subject and timing. Deciding where to go and when to photograph are fundamental creative decisions that can factor into the habits that constitute a style.

SKIN – Composition and Effects
With regards to photography, the "skin" of an image is comprised of decisions that affected any characteristics of form or light that a scene presents. Composition is paramount in this category, but photographic techniques or post-processing can also affect the appearance of form and light.



Air Apparent A stately peak parts sun rays from its lofty position above an idyllic valley in the French Alps. Canon EOS R5, RF 14-35mm f/4L IS USM at 17mm. Exposure: 1/640 sec., f/11, ISO 100.



SOUL – Mood and stories
Photographs certainly have the power to express a mood or suggest a story. Some photos tend toward exuberance while others express melancholy.

My Own Stylistic Habits

Themes of mystery, romance, exuberance, endurance, revelation, and gravitas are frequently in rotation in my work, often in favored combinations with subject matter. Before I even choose a destination or subject, I probably have a theme or two in mind that I associate with an environment or an aesthetic, something that makes a destination particularly evocative.

For example, a high percentage of my photos feature misty conditions and atmospheric effects. When ephemera obscure or magically emphasize parts of a scene, the result can lend a distinct sense of mystery to even the most familiar places.

Consequently, my compositional habits formed in the service of these interpretive tendencies. I studied composition extensively as an art historian, but mostly through analysis that helped to support the study of meaning in a given work. These two realms are therefore inseparable for me. Because my specialty was ancient sculpture, I am all the more prone to seeing outdoor features as abstract sculptural groups and to seek out compositions that put features “in dialogue” with one another.

After years of photographing in this way, it is now easier to look back and see the threads running through a large range of images: an interest in emphasizing “center stage,” subjects with at least one other strong supporting character, arrangements that heighten a sense of immersive drama, and a reluctance to reveal a lot of context. Human figures and animals almost never appear in my compositions because they instantly become the protagonists when included, thereby sapping the power of whatever narratives the natural features might suggest on their own.

Naturally, my post-processing habits evolved along these same lines. Through an interest in encouraging interpretation on the part of the viewer, my processing style eschews especially straightforward, highly documentary treatments that might appear to be “out of camera.”

Arrow Dynamic Delicate sand verbena blossoms thriving in the harsh environment of a windswept desert basin of the Mojave Desert. Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, EF 11-24mm f/4L USM at 14mm. Exposure: 1.3 sec., f/11, ISO 100.

When ephemera obscure or magically emphasize parts of a scene, the result can lend a distinct sense of mystery to even the most familiar places.

Shifts in color can bring out characters and can subdue extraneous details, and introducing a controlled color palette can help to impart a mood. Favorite colors, such as purple undertones, feature frequently because they support the favorite interpretive themes mentioned above. For these reasons, color work is a fundamental aspect of my style.

Developing Your Own Style

Although my own process usually begins with some theme or story that constitutes the "soul" of an image, the reverse process might be more fruitful for other photographers. There is no reason why your way into developing stylistic habits should not be through the "bones" or the "skin," as summarized previously.

Many photographers take no interest in interpretation but love landmarks, geology, or weather events simply for the sheer spectacles that they offer. However you manage to get absorbed in your work, the key to developing a style is to work your way through that route as frequently as possible. It might seem unhelpful to say that developing a style is nearly inevitable through merely following your own nose, but truly all that it takes is adherence to your own interests.

The surest way to thwart the process of developing your style is to fragment your approach into an endless pursuit of emulation. Replicating the styles of popular images might be instructive in learning composition or post-processing, but ultimately stylistic habits come from pursuing your own interests in a variety of cases.

Two Caveats

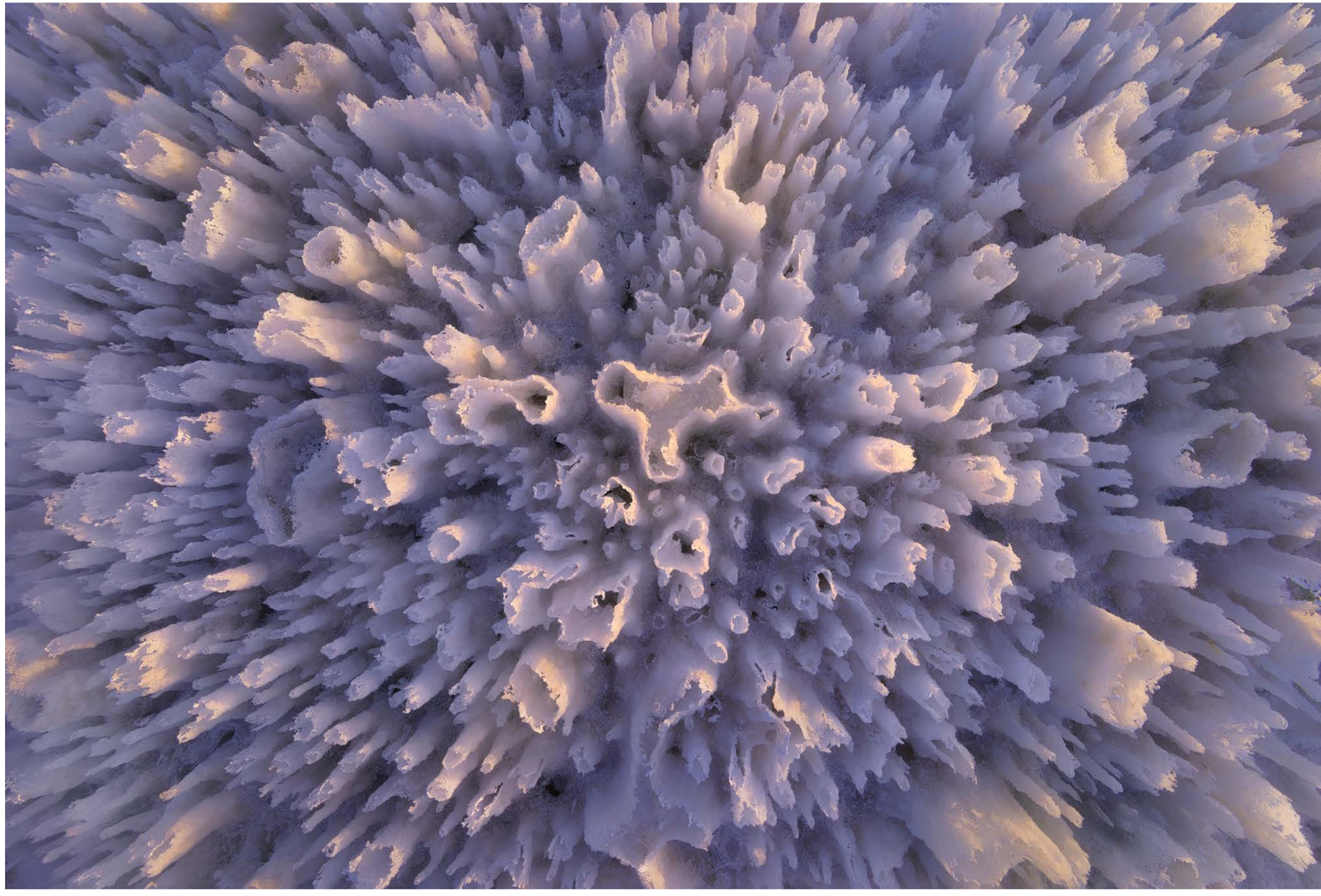
Two caveats are important to keep in mind, however. Firstly, style is dynamic. The history of art is replete with examples of artists whose styles evolved over time. The early work of Picasso, known collectively as his "Blue Period," is a classic example. Essentially, if your style is not evolving, then it is stagnating, and you risk producing work that seems repetitious or formulaic.

Secondly, style is not absolute. Your style exists in relation to other styles and will overlap with them. We all stand on the shoulders of giants, and nobody owns a stylistic trait. Ultimately, your style is a collection of habits that cohere in a special way for you, like a recipe made from common ingredients that has a distinct flavor.

Erin Babnik *is a Canon Explorer of Light. See more of her work at erinbabnik.com.*

P98-99: Synchronicity Laurel trees echo each other's forms as low clouds envelop their grove on the island of Madeira. Canon EOS R5, RF 14-35mm f/4L IS USM at 24mm. Exposure: 1/125 sec., f/11, ISO 100.

→ High Sodium Tubes of crystals formed by the drying action of a salt lake cluster together like structures in an alien metropolis. Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, EF 11-24mm f/4L USM at 12mm. Exposure: 1/6 sec., f/16, ISO 100.





Monterey, California

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

WORDS AND IMAGES BY **JOE PLATKO**

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

Monterey, California



Location
Located approximately one hour south of San Francisco, the Monterey Bay spans from Santa Cruz down to Monterey with a surface area of approximately 450 square miles. The bay itself is part of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, the largest sanctuary in the United States, and has been dubbed "The Serengeti of the Sea" due to its prolific wildlife of whales, dolphins, fish, seals, sea lions, sea birds and sharks. Much of this life is sustained due to nutrient-rich waters which rise up from upwelling currents from the Monterey Submarine Canyon. This canyon dives down to over 2.5 miles at its deepest, almost twice the depth of the Grand Canyon.

In Monterey, divers are also able to take advantage of these deeper waters being so close to shore. The nutrient-rich waters allow thick kelp forests to grow near shore which both creates wonderful habitat for all manner of organisms as well as acts as a nursery by creating vital cover for young fish. These kelp beds are also the best chances to see larger marine mammals, as they provide hunting grounds for sea otters, harbor seals and California sea lions.

Weather
Weather along the central California coast is typically quite mild. Annual temperatures average from the low 50s to mid-70s degrees Fahrenheit, with water temperatures of 50-55 degrees Fahrenheit. Onshore winds normally pick up between mid-day and early afternoon which can add a considerable chill. Summer here is often quite gray, as its monikers go by "June Gloom," "No Sky July," and "Fog-ust." Surprisingly, summer is often the worst time for diving, as it's the likeliest time for algal blooms to occur in the bay.

Photo Experience
Although you can see wildlife from shore, being in or on the water offers the best chance to capture thrilling action. Whale watching charters usually offer either shorter 3-4 hour trips twice a day, or sometimes offer one full 8-hour day on the water. While the shorter trips are nice if planning other activities, the longer 8-hour trips give the best opportunities to find rarer marine life that live further offshore or are harder to locate, such as blue whales and orcas. During the summer months, weekend charters fill up quickly. If possible, take a weekday trip.

Diving below the surface, you will find towering forests of kelp gently swaying with the rhythmic pulses of the waves while fish and marine mammals dart about. One of the most established dive sites in California is located smack in the middle of Monterey at San Carlos Beach (known as Breakwater due to the large breakwater rock wall that juts out from shore). The wall is a rookery for California sea lions and Brandt's Cormorants, so on any dive you may be greeted by playful sea lion pups. This site is protected from swells, so the kelp forests can be quite thick here.

Should you feel a tug on your fins, don't be alarmed! Turn around slowly and you'll likely be greeted by the cute face of a harbor seal. They love teething on fins and will play hide-and-seek with divers in the shallows. Sea otters also make use of the sheltered waters and can be photographed relaxing in the kelp if you walk out along the rock wall.

Best Times
Experiencing the beauty of the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary can be done at all times of year but can vary greatly depending on what you would like to see. The winter months are the slowest for seeing marine life out in the bay but is the best time to see mating elephant seals at the Ano Nuevo rookery in Santa Cruz. It's also a wonderful time to take seascapes of passing storms and turbulent swells. Humpback whales can be seen in the bay all year, but their peak season typically occurs between August through November as they're making their migrations down to warmer waters.

Summer can be a great time to see large super pods of common and pacific white sided dolphins and is the best opportunity to see blue whales. Spring is my favorite time of year as there is a lot of new life. Kelp is beginning to grow back from the winter storms, gray whales are typically beginning to come back up the coast, and with them come transient orcas. In addition, it's when a lot of marine mammals begin pupping so there's a good chance of seeing newborn sea otters as well as adolescent California sea lions and my favorite, inquisitive harbor seal pups.

Contact: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, montereybay.noaa.gov

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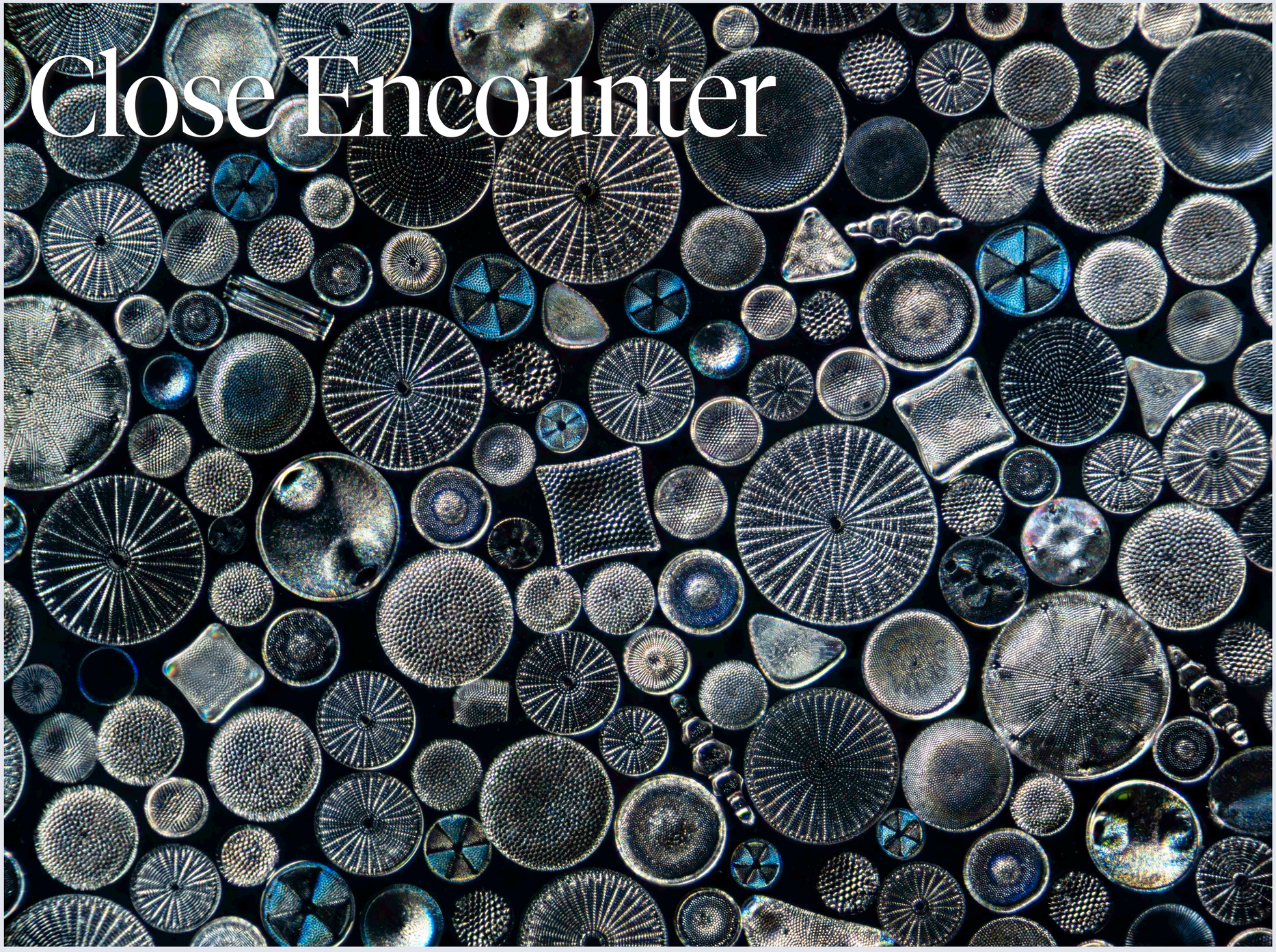
*See more of **Joe Platko**'s work at joeplatkophotography.com.*



P102-103: Ocean View Sony A9, Leica Summitar 50mm f2 lens with Sony E mount adapter, Breakthrough Photography X4 6-stop ND filter. Exposure: 25 sec., f/16, ISO 320.

↑ **Seal in Kelp Bed** Nikon Nikonos V, Nikonos 15mm f2.8 lens. Kodak T-Max 400 pushed to 800. Exposure: 1/250 sec., f/8.

Close Encounter



"Diatoms are single-celled algae and are the only organism on the planet with cell walls composed of transparent, opaline silica — glass. Each one of these magnificent sculptures is smaller than the width of a human hair."

Jon McCormack

*See more of **Jon McCormack**'s work at jonmccormack.com.*

Diatom Cluster 15 image focus stack captured with a Sony A7R V attached to a Zeiss Axioscope 5 microscope

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