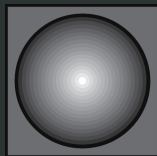


Including the LensWork Special Editions Print Collection Catalog

No. 25 • May - Jul 1999



LENSWORK

Photography and the Creative Process • Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

QUARTERLY



Essays

Bill Jay • J. D. Marston

Interview

Chip Hooper

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All manifestations of art are but landmarks in the progress of the human spirit toward a thing but as yet sensed and far from being possessed. The man who has honesty, integrity, the love of inquiry, the desire to see beyond, is ready to appreciate good art. He needs no one to give him an art education; he is already qualified.

Robert Henri



Raised in Chicago, Hooper discovered his attraction to photography before he hit his teens. Seldom seen without his camera, he was immediately drawn to the lakes and rivers in the area.

Much later, his interest in music and his efforts to build a business as a talent agent in the music industry required his complete focus for several years. In the meantime, his love of photography was alive through appreciation of books and photographic artwork. His photographic education was fueled by his love of the craft.

Eventually moving to Minneapolis for four years, it wasn't until he later moved near the Big Sur coastline in California that he was reunited with his passion for photography. There, he felt the influence of the great masters - Adams, Weston, Bullock - and was re-inspired to seek his own vision within the West Coast tradition of photography.

When not absorbed by the intensity of the music industry, Hooper enjoys a sense of solitude on the Big Sur coastline. He lives in Carmel Valley with his wife and children.

Chip Hooper is represented by the following galleries: Robert Klein Gallery (Boston), The Ansel Adams Gallery (Pebble Beach, Yosemite National Park), Alinder Gallery (Gualala, California), Edward Carter Gallery (New York), and Photographic Image Gallery (Portland, Oregon). His work is also available on the web at <http://www.hooperphoto.com>.

INTERVIEW WITH CHIP HOOPER

Brooks Jensen: It's been my observation that a lot of people assume that artists live a life that's different from everyday people. But, in fact, you still have to mow the grass, go to work in the morning, pay the bills and do all that stuff. Is it fair to say that the difference isn't in the *everyday* things that we *all* do, but is in the way one integrates everyday life and the life of a photographic artist?

Chip Hooper: That's right. I have two kids and a wife and a job and all that.

BJ: What do you do for a living?

CH: I'm a booking agent for bands – mostly rock-n-roll bands – a lot of well-known groups.

BJ: So, you're semi-retired or independently wealthy?

CH: (laughing) Not even close!

BJ: So, you're at the office early in the morning and there late at night, doing business, paying your taxes, managing staff, – and there comes a time when you say *time out, I gotta walk away from this*, and you grab your camera and head down the coast?

CH: Right.

- BJ: How often do you get a chance to do that?
- CH: All the time. I keep my camera, tripod and a bunch of film holders always in my car. When I'm driving home from work I can get a peek to see what it's looking like out there, and if it looks like an opportunity for some great light, then I just call my wife and say that I'll be home in an hour or two and I go down the coast. I'm so familiar with that area that I'll just pick a place in my mind, go there, and see what happens. I get out there all the time.
- BJ: How far is Big Sur from where you live and work?
- CH: I live twelve miles inland in Carmel Valley, and work in Monterey, which is basically on the water. From where I work to where I make most of my coastal photographs is probably 15 or 20 minutes.
- BJ: So, you've strategically chosen a subject matter that you have easy access to.
- CH: Absolutely.
- BJ: We published a book by David Hurn and Bill Jay (*On Being A Photographer*), and that was one of their *big* contentions – that the critical mistake that a lot of photographers make is choosing something to photograph that is difficult to get access to. They often can travel to these locations only every five years or so — and then they wonder why they don't get decent photographs.
- CH: They never get enough time there ...
- BJ: David and Bill contend that the key if you want to be a photographer of accomplishment and have a body of work is to have access to subject matter that you can get to in lots of different weather, at different times of day, during different moods, and through different growth experiences in your life. It sounds like you've done that.
- CH: As a kid I always photographed around Lake Michigan because I grew up in the Chicago area. I was always photographing around lakes and rivers – photographing water. When I first got into the music business I got side-tracked and my photography got put on hold for a number of years. But eleven years ago we moved here, and it was like arriving home. But it was even better than where I had been – because here was the Pacific Ocean — here was the Big Sur

Coast! – which was something I *instantly* responded to, and was *instantly* drawn to. There is a wealth of great photography around here, too – old and new – and everywhere you look there are Ansel Adams prints and Edward Weston prints, and Brett Weston prints – and all this great inspiration. This area of the coast is unbelievably inspiring to me.

BJ: To a certain degree, the Big Sur coast is cliché material. Everybody who seriously takes up a camera eventually goes to the coast and photographs. Most people don't do a very exciting job of it, and if they do they end up with the cliché sunset-and-rocks calendar photo. It's an interesting challenge, photographing a cliché. You've photographed extensively in this area, but the images you get are not cliché. They're actually quite visionary in some regards. So, how do you approach cliché subject matter?

CH: I lived in Minneapolis for four years before I moved out here and I had a lot of photographic posters around my house out there. One of them was a Morley Baer poster of Garrapata Beach. Back when I bought that poster in Minneapolis I had no idea who Morley Baer was,

and I had no idea where that coastal picture was made. I was just buying posters to put up in my place, and that was one of them.

I just came out here and started experiencing the coast and was really inspired to photograph. I think what's happened with me is that I *live* in a place where I have access. I'm intimately familiar with the subject matter because I spend so much time there. I have a really high level of passion for that subject matter. It may be that my level of passion for the subject matter is so intense that I worked past the clichés quickly. I know I made a lot of trite images at first, and I think I still make some. You can't help it if you're out there. Every time you set up the camera you're not going to get a great photograph!

BJ: But when you came to Garrapata Beach and saw that Morley Baer image in front of you, you had to look it and say *no wonder he photographed it – it's there, right there – it's an obvious thing to do*. So, when you drive to Yosemite and get to Wowona Point and look out across the valley you think *of course Ansel did Clearing Winter Storm from here – it's the logical photograph!*

CH: (chuckling) Exactly...

BJ: So the question now becomes: how do you photograph Yosemite with a different vision? Or how do you photograph the Big Sur Coast with a different vision?

CH: This is sort of where – for lack of a better term – the *magic* comes into it. When I go to Yosemite, I have a really hard time photographing. It's as if everywhere I look there's a picture that has been taken that I really love. So I don't take my camera along because I don't see pictures as often as I do at the coast — pictures that I really get excited about under the context of being *my* pictures.

BJ: Well, Ansel Adams *lived* there.

CH: Exactly. And I live here on the coast. The way I make what I consider to be my own photographs is that I spend a lot of time at the coast. That combines with my passion into my own vision.

BJ: I think one of the key ideas here might be the concept of the *relationship*. One of the problems with photography is that you *can* go into an area that you have no relationship with and you make photo-

graphs. You can just snap away, and something will show up on the film. Whether it's good or bad might be a little bit of luck, but it's not likely that it will result in a deeply felt photograph because the relationship to the subject matter is relatively shallow. So if you want to make significant photographs, to a certain degree one of the keys is to have a relationship with the subject material that is in itself deep...

CH: I completely agree..

BJ: How long have you been photographing the Big Sur coast?

CH: I made my first significant image there in 1993; that's when I dove back into photography.

BJ: And how many times would you estimate — off the top of your head — that you've been there with camera in hand since then?

CH: (chuckling) Countless... I try to get out there every week, but then I may not get out there for a month because I'm just really busy in the darkroom. We usually close our office for two weeks in December and I might get out there three to five times a week during that time

- of year. I probably average forty times a year.
- BJ: So, it's reasonable to say that you've been out there two to three hundred times with camera in hand...
- CH: Absolutely...
- BJ: And you have, say, twenty "keeper" photographs, of which we're publishing a good portion in this issue. My point is that there is a lot more time being spent there than one would necessarily know unless you understand the photographic process.
- CH: Exactly. It's like a relationship — when you're willing to devote yourself to it, there can be bigger rewards than expected. Sometimes I'll go there not even remotely thinking that the light is going to happen, and it does happen. Or I'll go out there thinking that the light is going to happen, and it doesn't. It's just that I like being out there so much. If you spend enough time in a particular place and really get to *know* it you acquire, on a practical level, the knowledge that you need to at least increase your odds of being in the right place at the right time. I've found that certain places may be really interesting at a high tide or low tide, a cloudy day or whatever. Certain conditions may lend itself to making great pictures, so you increase your odds by knowing the place intimately. But the *really, really*, special pictures — the ones that we all are remembered by — not the hundreds in the drawer that no one will ever see — are the ones that came from taking the time to know the *place*.
- BJ: And it's likely to meet you on *your* terms rather sparingly...
- CH: Totally, absolutely...
- BJ: In addition to the Big Sur coastal photographs published in this issue, we're simultaneously publishing a presentation in the *LensWork MultiMedia Library* with your work from the Anasazi Ruins. Now, this is obviously a place that you *don't* live close to, and that you can't get to every week. So when you go to a remote location like that and you know that your access is limited, how do you approach that differently than Big Sur where you live?
- CH: Well, first, I have to approach it with more patience. I can't expect the Anasazi work to develop at the same rate, with the same level of quality, as the Big Sur work.

I simply can't put the time into it since I don't live there. But, when a friend first showed me the ruins I had an immediate response to them.

There's another difference between the Anasazi work and my coastal work. On the coast, I feel strongly that I'm attempting to make successful, individual images. What I'm doing in the ruins is definitely a series. I hope that they stand on their own individually — and they should, otherwise they're not successful photographs — but what I'm doing is more on a documentary level. What I'm doing is making creative/documentary photographs. I'm hoping to say something about the people who lived there, although it will take *years* to be able to do that.

BJ: Two times now you've said the same thing: You said that when you got to the Big Sur coast you had this *immediate* affinity for it, and when you got to the Anasazi Ruins you had this *immediate* affinity for it. You knew that you had to photograph in both of these places...

CH: No question...

BJ: It's a wonderful thing to have that feeling; it's a great gift. But, not everyone gets that feeling. Or maybe they don't know *how* to sense it. In a practical sense, *how* do you know you have that feeling?

CH: That's hard to put into words. For me it's immediate. How do I describe that feeling? All I can say is that the first couple of times that I spent any amount of time out at the Big Sur coast I was *visually* really excited, and there wasn't a question of whether I was going to take pictures — it was a question of *get the camera and get started*. I guess I had a sense of *urgency*.

BJ: Was it the place that spoke to you or did you find in this place that you could speak?

CH: I'm not sure what you mean.

BJ: Let me ask it a different way — is this a place that you looked at and said *I love this place and therefore I am going to photograph it?* Or, was it that you looked at the place and said *there's something in me that needs to come out, and this is the place where I can make it come out?*

CH: The first; I loved the *place*. My reaction was an immediate

- relationship with subject material first and foremost...
- BJ: Then you may not be a very successful magazine photographer if you were given an assignment to go photograph something by an editor. If you don't have a passion for it you would find that a difficult thing to do?
- CH: I would totally find that a difficult thing to do. It's the last thing I would ever want to do. I would have a really hard time doing *assignment* photography.
- BJ: You know, of course, that this philosophy is fraught with risk. You may go for a long period of time without finding that subject material that really speaks to you. What happens when you don't have that creative inspiration from the subject matter that is in front of you?
- CH: I just keep looking. Eventually I see something and my camera is *always* in my car. So, if I'm driving somewhere and I see something I'll stop — unless it's going to make me outrageously late — and I'll make a picture. That happens frequently.
- BJ: So, for you one of the key strategies is to have the camera in the car — as opposed to the individual who says *OK, I'm going to go on vacation for a week to Hawaii and that's when I'm going to do photography* — and the rest of the time they *don't* take the camera.
- CH: That's true in terms of *my* process. I don't do photography like some guys play golf, or do other hobbies. It's not something that I *schedule* a time to do. It doesn't have to be scheduled because it's a part of my life — just like my family and my work are a part of my life. I've integrated photography *into* my life. I'm always looking for a picture. *Always*.
- BJ: So the idea of somehow stepping out of your life and becoming a *full-time* photographer — you know, the great fantasy of every photographer who has a day job — is sort of *non sequitur* for you, because you've already *done* that by making photography a part of your everyday life!
- CH: *Literally*. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't do *something* photographic. At the very least I'm *looking* for pictures. When I wake up in the morning I'm looking for a picture, when I drive to work I'm

- looking for a picture, when I drive home — I'm always looking for at least an idea; it's part of my consciousness. In my car I have a cropping device so if I see something I can pull off the road and view it, size it up, and do it.
- BJ: Well, you haven't mentioned anything about getting in the darkroom every week...
- CH: To me there are two creative parts to photography: the seeing part and the printing part. To me everything else is just grunt work — figuring out the exposure, matting and mounting the prints, spotting the prints, and all of that.
- BJ: So, whether you're seeing in *nature* or seeing in the *darkroom* — it's still *seeing*. I've talked with other photographers and asked *What would you do if photography were suddenly non-existent, or never been invented, or somehow — poof! — it's gone from your life. What would you do instead of photography?* And some guys say that instead of tinkering around with cameras they might tinker around with cars. And I suspect that wouldn't be your answer...
- CH: No, I'm not a tinkerer. I'd be someone who expresses themselves visually — painting, etching, drawing.
- BJ: So you've seen the subject out in the world, you've exposed a piece of film, you've worked long and hard in the darkroom, and you have the finished print. Where in this process do you find your reward?
- CH: There are two rewards for me. The most important reward for me is when I can put it up in the gallery in my house, and a few weeks or a few months later I still have the same feeling I had about the photograph when I made it. That's the biggest thing that I need. But, for me, the cycle is really completed when somebody *else* comes in and gets a charge out of it and really responds to it. It's most rewarding when someone looks and has a strong, positive response. It's important for me to have people look at the pictures and like them. I'd be lying if I said it wasn't.



BIG SUR
and the
CALIFORNIA COAST

by

Chip Hooper

Chip Hooper

*We are also publishing a portfolio of Chip's work in the Anasazi ruins in the LensWork MultiMedia Library
as well as several prints in the LensWork Special Editions Print Collection.*

For me, the process of creating photographs is a contemplative one. The best images seem to happen when what I am *feeling* becomes one with what I am *seeing*. It is those images that give me a strong feeling of spirit, solitude, and a sense of passing time.

Occasionally I'll photograph with other people, but have found that this element of company can prevent me from finding the sought-after inspiration. It's not until I am on my own that I can settle into the place and begin to appreciate what is waiting to be seen that day; only then do I begin to develop a feeling for my surroundings, and the sense of light. And only when I am willing to take the time to settle into the place, and accept all that this incredible place has to offer, do the best photographs happen.

I have always enjoyed sharing these private moments of solitude, through my photography, with others. It seems to me the ultimate way of completing the process.



Crashing waves and splash, 1994



Three and a half birds on a rock, 1994



Pfeiffer Beach, 1993



Dawn, Big Sur, 1998



Doud Creek, 1997



Dusk, Soberanes Beach, 1998



Garrapata Beach, Winter, 1995



The Tunnel, 1996



Radiating Rock, 1997



Sea Palms and Surf, 1993



Receding Tide, Garrapata Beach, 1996



Lone Rock, Pacific Coast, 1997



Sea & Sky, Big Sur, 1998