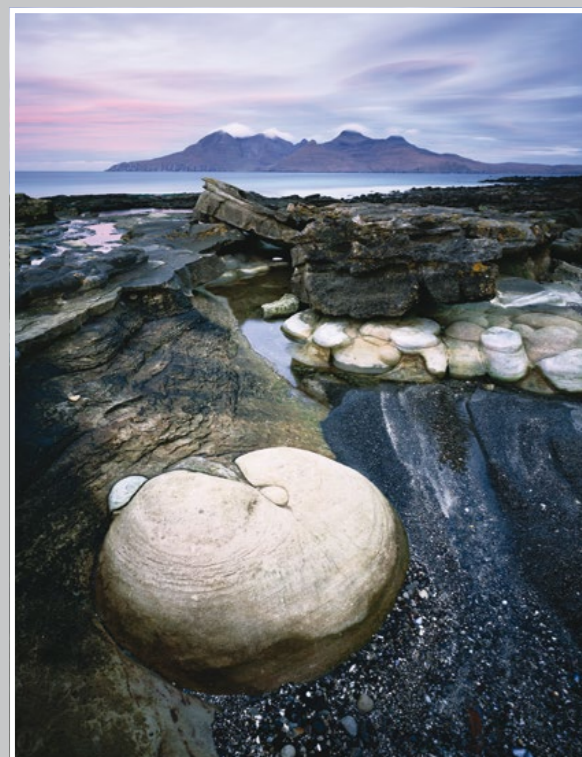




IN LOVE
WITH THE LAND

WORDS TERRY HOPE PICTURES PAUL WAKEFIELD

A SUMPTUOUS NEW HARDBACK BOOK FROM LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHER PAUL WAKEFIELD CELEBRATES HIS LOVE FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE NATURAL WORLD AROUND HIM, AND IT PROVES THE POINT THAT EVEN IN THIS DIGITAL AGE THERE'S STILL VERY MUCH A PLACE FOR FILM CAMERAS AND THE PRINTED PAGE



Perusing the latest large-format book from Paul Wakefield, simply titled *The Landscape*, is akin to handling an original piece of artwork. The quality of reproduction is out of this world and the level of detail contained in each of the 77 plates is phenomenal. It's a testament to the rising standard of traditional offset litho printing that this level of finish is possible. The copy price of £48.50 for this initial print run of just 850 books is also mildly eyebrow-raising, since art books this well produced were once renowned for carrying a hefty premium.

What is particularly interesting is the fact that the images to be found inside were produced using a traditional large-format camera and sheet film, so satisfyingly this particular package relies in fairly equal measure on ancient and modern technologies. It's a sign of how astute operators can mix and blend what they need from whatever quarter they choose to create a hybrid product that perfectly reflects their philosophy and their message.

The book is clearly a labour of love for Paul and it's a reflection of his obsession with the natural world around him, and a testament to his affinity for the extraordinary vistas and details that can be found in every corner of this beautiful planet. The relationship dates back to Paul's earliest days when he was growing up in Hong Kong and spending most weekends with his family either walking in the New Territories or visiting various beaches.

"It was idyllic," he says. "So I was very interested in nature from an early age, and had a couple of spectacular failures using the cameras that my father always had around him, not getting on film what I was sure I saw through the lens. But I became fascinated with looking at photographs, particularly in *National Geographic* and *Life* magazines, and after realising that a life in scientific research was not for me, I made an about-turn and enrolled in art college to study photography."

Getting sidetracked

Rather than move smoothly into landscape photography straight out of college Paul instead found himself being diverted into a studio-based surreal form of photography that was delivered to publishers, design groups and record companies. A few years later, however, the landscape bug did start to seriously bite, and much of his spare time in the 1980s was spent out and about shooting pictures for a series of four books that were published by Aurum Press, while the commercial work carried on alongside.

Eventually Paul decided that he no longer wanted to take on the studio shoots, and he decided to pay a call on influential art director Alan Waldie to seek advice on how to change direction. "I took along my portfolio, which was mostly published studio work, to show him," he recalls, "but I also took with me a selection of 5x4in landscapes. He went rapidly through the published work with barely any interest, but stopped and looked very closely at the landscapes. His advice was to throw out all the proofs, get an agent and only show the landscapes, and to back up his argument he showed me proofs of ads I could be doing.

"I did quite a lot of work with Alan, and learned a huge amount from him. The approach he recommended ultimately led me to work for international ad agencies on accounts such as Audi, BMW, VW, Peugeot, Lexus, Absolut Vodka, Glenfiddich and Aigle. I learn something new on almost every advertising job, and I've been very



TOP LEFT
Mountains of Mounne, County Down, Ireland, September 1999.

LEFT Isle of Rhum from Isle of Eigg, Scotland, October 2009.

ABOVE
Lyn Ogwen, Gwynedd, Wales, January 1989.

PREVIOUS PAGE
Loch Scavaig, Isle of Skye, Highlands, May 2006.

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fortunate to work on some great campaigns for some very creative agencies.”

While commercial landscape-orientated work became the new thrust of Paul's business, the personal work took a bit of a back seat since the demands of the book series had taken away some of the motivation. Instead Paul started shooting documentary images in India, and soon fell in love with the country, returning annually for 14 years. After a two-year gap from personal landscapes it was inevitable he'd return to his first love, and ultimately he started shooting again, working with his favoured large-format kit.

"I started using a 5x4in camera in college, and my Ebony is still my primary choice, especially for landscape," he says. "I also use a 6x17cm panoramic camera, but only when the landscape I'm looking at demands that format, so very sparingly. I also use a Fuji 6x9cm and a Leica M6 for documentary work, particularly for a long-term project that I was working on in India. A lot of the film stock I've used over the years has been colour negative: I used Fuji Velvia for a while until I found that it was too saturated for my liking, and with the 5x4in I now exclusively use Fuji PRO 160NS. It's a more delicate, subtle emulsion →



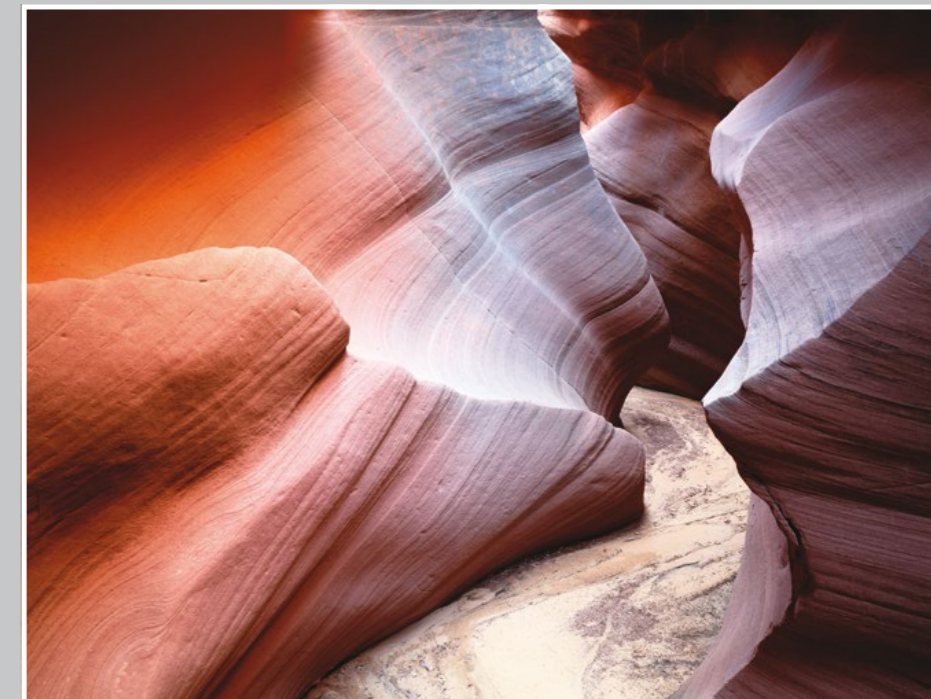
ABOVE Even the most arid of surroundings can yield amazing landscapes. Shot in Sahara el Beyda, Western Desert, Egypt, November 2011.

BELOW Paul Wakefield at work with his trusty Ebony 5x4in. Despite the encroachment of digital cameras he still chooses to work with film.



“Often when people look at a landscape photograph the first reaction is to ask where it is. I wanted to create a narrative about landscape generally”

RIGHT Paul’s search for landscapes took him all around the world. This was shot in Waterholes Canyon, Arizona, USA, October 1993.



than transparency, and records more how I see. The two lenses that I use the most are a 120mm and a 90mm. I don’t use long lenses, as they tend to flatten perspective. I prefer to change my viewpoint instead, since this keeps me in touch with the subject.”

Film suits Paul for many reasons: he enjoys the uncertainty it offers and these days doesn’t even shoot a Polaroid in case it takes away the surprise. “I don’t need that affirmation,” he says. “I normally expose either one or two sheets of film on a subject, more if it significantly changes as I’m looking at it. I like to make my decision at the time I’m photographing, not later looking through a lot of film or digital files. Also a 5x4in camera has all the movements I need to achieve the depth-of-field I want at the time of photographing. I do use digital cameras on some jobs, but I’m still getting requests to use film, and often from younger art directors who like the quality it offers.”

When asked about whether it can be an issue at times to carry such heavy gear to a location Paul replies, “I’ll walk as far as I have to.” He carries out a lot of research by

looking at maps and consulting the Internet, though he admits to enjoying the experience of finding a location personally, without any previous visual reference, if he has the time.

As well as stamina, patience is another essential attribute the landscape photographer has to cultivate, and interestingly it’s the commercial work that has encouraged that virtue in Paul. “For example, when I was doing a campaign for New Balance running shoes in Oregon, we had an agency approved location overlooking the Pacific Ocean that was perfect, but the weather was uncooperative,” he recalls.

“Raining constantly and windy. We sat in our cars from dawn until nearly sunset without a hint of any useable light. Just when I was thinking we might need to reschedule the whole job, I saw light starting to break on the horizon. I watched it for about ten minutes to check it was coming our way, which it was. The tripod was already in place and just needed the camera to be locked on and the focus checked. Within the space of a few minutes that break had come and gone in spectacular fashion, and I’d shot six

sheets of film, which was just what I’d hoped for. If that had been a personal trip and not a job, I would probably have moved on to somewhere more workable and returned another time, but on a job you simply have to wait it out.”

Producing a book

By about 2008 Paul had a body of landscape work that he wanted to publish, and he arranged a meeting with Eddie Ephraums, the consulting editor at Aurum. “I was looking to produce a book of landscape photographs that weren’t location driven, but more about the essence of landscape as I saw it,” he says. “Often when people look at a landscape photograph the first reaction is to ask where it is. I wanted to create a narrative about landscape generally, and that’s why the image titles are thumbnailed at the back of the book, to keep the images on the page free from any distraction. The thumbnails also allow the viewer to see each section sequence as a whole, and I like the idea of seeing the images at stamp size.”

Ultimately Paul decided to publish his book under the umbrella of Eddie’s company, Envisage Books, to ensure the control he wanted. “Eddie is a very unusual guy to work with,” he says. “He pushes you towards places that you hadn’t initially intended to go, and I mean that in a very positive way. He was always questioning my intent, and was a strong influence on the eventual structure of the book.

“The sequencing of the images is a vital part of the book, and it would have been very difficult without that coaxing. As it was, the sequencing alone took nearly a year, as I was

constantly including, rejecting and making new images.

“The quality and precision of the production was paramount, and another reason why we wanted to retain control. I had no real influence over the printing of my previous books, and quality has improved immensely since then and we wanted to take advantage of that. Eddie’s knowledge of production is invaluable, and he had already worked with the printer, EBS in Verona, which has similarly high standards.

“They produce mostly high-end photographic books, so all round it was a perfect fit. They also encourage the photographer to be on press during the printing, so Eddie and I were there for three days during the whole process. It was a revelation. We were able to make minute changes on press that helped keep the integrity of the images and the book as a whole. So even though the photographs are mine, the book is a real collaboration between me, Eddie, the writers and the printers.”

The book itself is something of a limited edition, with a further series of three collector’s 25-copy editions, each with a choice of original signed and numbered print, priced from £191.50. It’s clear that fine art collectors are going to love this book, and everything has been designed to give them a product to appreciate.

“With so many books beginning to be published electronically now, it’s the high-quality, limited edition book that still seems to be doing well,” says Paul. “The characteristics of that kind of book are so important. The feel of the paper, its weight

and the noise it makes when turning the page. Such a book needs handling physically; it’s a tactile experience.”

It’s gratifying to see such traditional values still having a place in the modern world and it all helps to make this latest book launch something of a role model for others who aspire to likewise present their vision. **PP**



Paul Wakefield’s love of landscape photography is relentless, and he’s

integrated specialist printers and publishers to produce a stunning new book, *The Landscape*, that focuses on the true essence of each landscape. Using a large-format camera and sheet film for personal and commercial work, Paul is patient enough to wait for the perfect moment to arrive.

MORE INFORMATION

www.paulwakefield.co.uk
www.envisagebooks.co.uk



• *The Landscape* by Paul Wakefield, with a foreword by the writer Robert Macfarlane and essays from the curator Andrew Wilton and the painter Anthony Connolly, is published by Envisage Books priced £48.50 in hard cover, 128 pages, 80 coloured illustrations (ISBN 978-0-9564764-9-4). www.envisagebooks.co.uk