

PORTFOLIO

Doug Beasley

VISION QUEST



Purification Waterbasin, Zen Temple. Kamakura, Japan

My interest in photographing Sacred Sites and Sacred places started with a McKnight Photography Fellowship I received in 1991. The grant was to photograph the Sacred Sites of the Lakota Indians in the Black Hills and Badlands of South Dakota. I was also looking for a project that didn't involve people since I was then making my living as a fashion photog-

rapher. I wanted a personal project that was more reflective of my internal state rather than the superficial and artificial world of fashion and models. As exciting as it often was to be paid for shooting beautiful women all day my artistic spirit still longed for something deeper and more meaningful.

My interest in Lakota Sacred Sites was not in cataloging sites but in trying

to show what these places felt like rather than simply what they looked like. To help get the feel I was looking for I used Type 55 Polaroid film in a 4x5 wooden view camera. I made fiber prints from the washed negatives and then sepia toned these prints.

On my next grant I photographed various sacred places around the world such as Stonehenge, England,

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Oceanside Offerings, Innoshima. Japan

Barobodour, Java, Tikal, Guatemala, and Balanese Temples. When it came time to print these I had a very difficult time wrestling with size and scope. In the end I decided to print very small, about 3"x3". With everyone else's prints getting larger and larger it seemed odd going so small at first. After all, these are very grand and powerful places and I struggled with

depicting their immensity. While I could not make a print large enough to make the viewer feel the power of these sites I found that the small print size gave them back some of the intimacy that a larger print lacked.

Ultimately I realized that these places, amazing construction feats that they are, are structures built by the blood and sweat of many, often slaves,

over many years and I was looking for a more intimate and immediate connection to my subject. It was then that I had the opportunity to return to Guatemala to teach photo workshops for Art Workshops in Guatemala. It was there that I learned the value of returning to the same place for a closer look. Each time I returned I felt I could see a little deeper into my own stereo-



Stone Marker Outside Shinto Shrine, Kamakura, Japan.

types.

I also began my practice of traveling with only one camera body, one lens and one film (Hasselblad, 80mm lens, Tri-X). This combination lets me react to a photographic situation instead of trying to make choices on which lens, which film, etc. to use. This approach is not for everybody but I see it for myself as a great visual exercise that keeps my photo instincts tuned up and makes me rely on my eye and my abil-

ity to move into a situation and engage the subject rather than relying on the equipment to put me there. It also keeps the camera bag a lot lighter! I have also applied this approach to recent trips to Cuba and Peru.

These photographs were all taken on my first trip to Japan, for three weeks in late March and early April of 1998. Seeking a stronger connection to my heritage and being drawn to Japanese design, gardens and architec-

ture I received a Jerome Foundation Travel Study Grant to photograph how the sacred is incorporated into everyday life. Although I have traveled and photographed all over the world on assignment and teaching photography workshops I had never been to my Mother's homeland. It was like returning to a place I had never been; the sights, sounds and smells were unique, exotic and new, yet comfortable and oddly familiar.



Torii Gate at Shrine Island, Miya Jima, Japan.

With a pair of borrowed Makina Plaubel 6x7 rangefinder cameras (I usually use Hasselblad but decided I wanted a rectangular format rather than the familiar square) and Tri X 120mm film we set out. After a few days in wild and wonderful Tokyo my partner, Dani, and I ate our way South following the coast by Japan's fast and efficient trains, all the way to Kyushu. Stopping in Kamakura, we walked the ancient route between Temples and

Shrines, visited the Gardens of Kyoto, the Peace Memorial at Hiroshima and the respite of Miya Jima (Shrine Island). We also visited and stayed with relatives in Osaka and my Mother's home island of Innoshima, all of whom I had never met before. In Innoshima I visited a cemetery where my ancestors go back for centuries. In Kyushu we were the guests of relatives in a restored 18th century Samurai mansion with extensive Japanese gar-

dens.

Japan is a place where the sacred is intertwined into everyday life, often seamlessly; it is the intersection of these two that I find visually most interesting. But well meaning relatives acting as tour guides often had their own ideas of what was photo worthy. Because of the language barrier we would often get in a vehicle and have absolutely no idea where we were being taken; sometimes it was an



Taro and His Grandfather, Innoshima, Japan.

ancient castle, sometimes a Karoke bar.

The prints resulting from this trip are a departure from my normal work, which is more ethereal. These are more about responding and reacting to where you are; not quite documentary but more an emotional response to visual stimulus. A collection of 33 of these sepia toned black and white prints have been made into a book with a traditional Japanese hand stitched binding. It was printed by

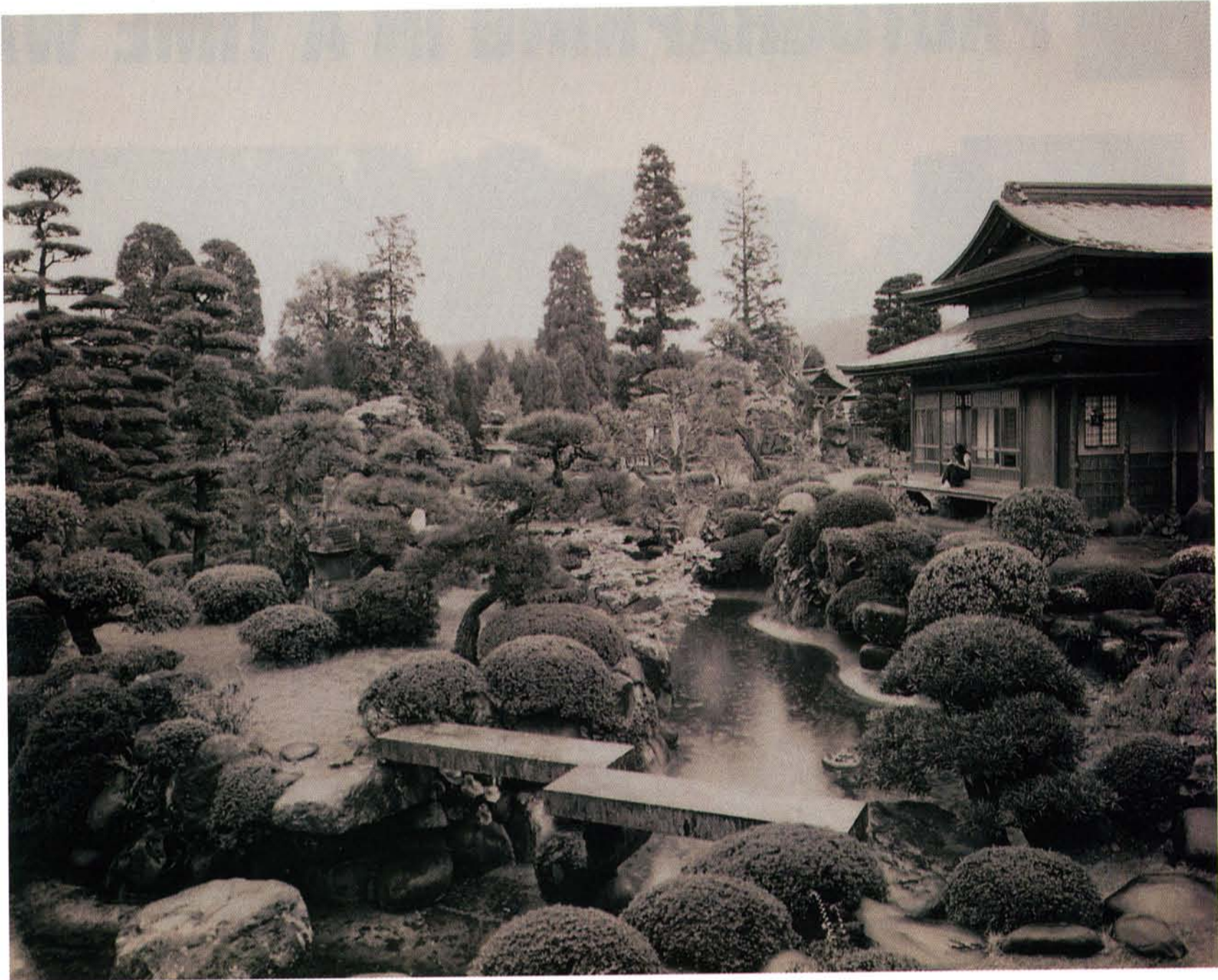
Norman Graphics in Hong Kong.

• *Doug Beasley received a BFA from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he also studied Eastern Religions and Native American culture. He currently photographs throughout the country for various advertising, educational, public service and non-profit clients.*

Doug is the recipient of the McKnight Photography Fellowship and

Jerome Travel Study grant. His first book Japan, A Nisei's First Encounter, is available at Amazon.com or on the Vision Quest web site (below).

Doug is also the founder and director of Vision Quest Photographic Arts Center, which provides photo workshops emphasizing vision and personal expression over camera technique; 651/644-1400; www.VQphoto.com; beasley@bitstream.net.



Doni Reading, Yamaji Family Gardens, Kyushu, Japan.



Temple Bell, Kamakura, Japan.