

# Gunther Deichmann

## *Color My World*



**B**ORN IN GERMANY, citizen of Australia, resident of the Philippines. Studied paleontology, fell in love with the Australian Outback, captured its beauty on film. Then photography captured him, and never let go.

That, in a nutshell is the story of Gunther Deichmann, native of the world. With many international awards under his belt, scores of magazine covers and pictorials across the globe, travels to over 25 exotic countries usually in unfavorable weather—Gunther remains as passionate about photography as ever.

As a testament to the consistency of his work from the time he turned to photography until today, one of the first photographs of his career, which landed on book covers and won awards, has again been used for the cover of a book, thirty years later! This picture of the Olgas, a land formation miles from Ayers Rock, was believed the first ever taken with a rainbow overhead.

Gunther's eleven-page pictorial on the killing of Australian wild horses for *Stern*, the German magazine, was covered worldwide, including CNN, and helped put a stop to the inhumane practice.





**So, are you or aren't you a travel photographer?**

I don't really consider myself a travel photographer, although that's how people know me. My photography is known for its rich colors and focus on "travel" things not usually photographed.

**You are known for your preference for strong colors. Who were your early influences?**

Two photographers who influenced my style are Ernst Haas and Pete Turner. Haas was way ahead of his time. He saw color the way no other photographer did, and photographed detail like no one did. Pete Turner is well known for his color-saturated images, [which he achieved by duplicating slides on Kodachrome 25, and merging two or more slides using his pin-registration technique and slide duplicator.—I-MAG]

**What can we learn from the great photographers?**

Working habits, for one. I was with the Australian Institute of Professional Photography in 1986 when Pete Turner was invited to Australia. Here's a tip I can give to photographers, even experienced ones. When you are in the presence of a well known, top-flight photographer, you will do well not to spend your time shooting side by side with him and basically trying to prove yourself to a famous photographer. You will learn more by sitting back and observing a consummate artist than by firing your cameras.

In the first four or five days I was with Pete, assigned as his guide and assistant, I never took my camera out of my bag. One day we drove around Ayers Rock around twenty times, round and round. Pete was looking at the Rock from all angles, memorizing the lay of the land. Afterwards he knew exactly where he wanted to shoot the Rock and at what time of the day. Photographers today don't do that. They come into a place they've never seen before and start blasting away.

When I get to my destination, I spend one or two days just observing. I'm in an outdoor cafe, just looking and observing. I take in the place, the ambience, the weather, the customs, everything. Two days in and out of a place is never enough, the way many photographers and travelers do it.



**You've traveled to many places on the globe. What place would you like to revisit and photograph again?**

Australia. I would love to photograph the Australian Outback again, after so many years. It was where I began as a photographer, and going back will bring me full circle.

**You're also known for underwater photography, aren't you?**

I've taken some underwater shots, but they're not my best work. There are only two photographers in the world who do great work both above- and underwater. Most great underwater photographers aren't as good above water. It's just not the same kind of photography. I have no intention of trying to be a good underwater photographer, because I know that I'm ten times better above water.

**Any advice for would-be travel photographers?**

When photographers visit a place, they

take their photographs and they're gone. They take and never give back, not even postcards or some pictures they've taken. I always give something back to my guides and to the people who helped me get the shots I wanted. I sent my guide in Tibet a copy of the book made out of my visit, and it took almost two months getting there, but I made an eternal friend. He had tears in his eyes when he saw the photographs in the book.

Another time I went back to Cambodia for an Apple Aperture conference, and had a copy of my book to give to the guide who helped me get around. What I didn't know was that he had gotten wind of my coming and was at the airport to meet me. On seeing me and the book he hugged me like I was a long-lost friend he hadn't seen in years.

**How often do you travel? How long do you stay in a place?**

I try to get out and travel to places at least two or three times a year. I never





spend less than two weeks in a place. Less than that and I'm wasting my time. I don't wait for assignments. A place comes into my head that I really want to shoot, and I'm off—to Tibet, Greece, Laos, Burma, Cambodia, wherever. When I work this way—shoot for myself without an assignment, I find that I can work with more passion and drive. In the back of my head, there are no editors, no deadlines, no shot specifications. That's what photographers should do regularly, shoot for themselves and not for a client, even if you have to spend good money on a trip. Then you can approach editors and advertising agencies and offer photographs they never thought of. Or you can post the images on the Internet, where a lot of pictures are being bought and sold.

**How do you prepare for a trip?**

I read up on my destination before I leave. It's gotten easier with the Internet and Google. A couple of days on the Net and I've got my background material

**You just go on your own, not as a tourist.**

I never travel as a tourist. I stay in small hotels, not in the big international chains. Of course comfortable, airconditioned lodgings will be very desirable after a day or few days out in the mountains. If I can

get an airconditioned room, fine; if not, it's fine too.

When a photographer travels as a tourist, with a travel group, you will never get unique photographs. Maybe you get lucky and shoot a real nice photograph of a place or landmark, but it will still be one of hundreds of photographs of a well known landmark. Which is why I tell my guide to take me in the opposite direction where the tour groups will be going. They go visit the landmarks, I go into the alleyways and nooks of the city. I go inside private homes and go into the places never photographed by tourists or for travel brochures.

One time I came upon this group of tourists who were all photographing with long bazooka lenses a boy who was collecting entrance tickets to a temple. There they were, firing away at close range, and the boy was looking this way and that, intimidated by all the attention. What the tourists saw was admittedly a photogenic boy in native costume, but firing away with telephoto lenses, at close range, and all together, I knew they were just going to end up with trash. I waited until they were done and gone, and then I chatted up the boy and got him comfortable. I noticed good light coming at an angle from behind him in the temple, and I was able to get a wonderful shot of him with this backdrop.

In this temple, tourists usually go in one entrance and out the opposite side. With my guide, I was able to go into the side corridors and see things never seen by tourists.

**Do you always get a guide?**

Many photographers rely on luck and instinct when they get to their destination. I don't. I always get a guide and a driver. Remember you're in a strange place where you don't know anybody, can't speak the local language, and don't know the local ways. A local guide or driver will not only help you get around efficiently, but help you communicate with the natives. He can communicate with a market woman or a temple priest, and get you inside places a tourist would never be allowed into.

**What time of the year do you travel?**

I also prefer to go to a place in the off-season, which is usually when the weather is bad or about to go bad.



Aside from being free of hordes of tourists, I find the quality of light in the days before the bad weather absolutely fantastic. The colors are rich, the light is not too contrasty and not too dull. Don't get me wrong. Blue skies and fair weather photographs are great, and I do a lot of this kind of photographs myself. But there is nothing like shooting in the wrong weather.

Santorini, in Greece, is one example. This is the vacation place of the rich and famous. The rest of the year you see famous faces and wealthy tycoons all over the place, not exactly a conducive time for the kind of pictures I like to take. So I went there in the middle of winter, when the streets were quiet and all the crowds were gone. Pete Turner had some great words about the photos I took of Santorini. They were just not the typical tourist shots you see in books.

And I never photograph with flash, or with a tripod. Flash is, to me, too harsh,

too unnatural. And tripods just slow me down. They're not my style. I keep my eyes peeled for opportunities all around me, and when I turn around this way or that way I take my shot. By the time I get my tripod out and my camera on it, the shot I saw would be gone.

**How do you secure your equipment when you're traveling?**

At all hours when I'm in the hotel or out in the field, I'm never separated from my equipment. They're always with me on my body or within reach and in sight. In all my years traveling to exotic places I've never lost a piece of equipment.

**How has digital affected or improved your work?**

The digital age is something many photographers just don't get. To them, it's all about megapixels and white balance and editing in Photoshop. They don't see that digital photography has opened new doors and allows us to work and market

our photographs in a way totally removed from the days of film.

Digital cameras and new advanced features are not something I am obsessed with. I use my digital cameras the same way I did my film cameras. Sure, I don't need to bring my E-6 chemicals anymore. Aside from that, a digital camera is no different from a film camera. I don't keep checking the LCD preview when I shoot. I do my reviewing at the end of the day, when I'm moving my shots to portable storage media.

One other thing that's improved is that I don't hold up a flight anymore, like I used to do when I insisted that all 500 of my film rolls be hand-checked rather than X-rayed. Today my cameras and drives go in the machines—zip, zip—and it's done.

**How much memory do bring on a trip? How do you manage your data on the road?**

I bring around twelve to fourteen



manufacturers, which are slow, expensive, and eat up a lot of power. On those expensive overrated media it would take hours to move images from my cards, but only a few minutes with my unbranded storage media. I've offloaded fifty gigabytes to these drives on one set of AA lithium batteries! Just try getting spare Lithium-Ion batteries or AC wall sockets in the mountains.

gigabytes of compact flash cards, and two portable storage media, each a hundred gigabytes. I move my shots to both portable drives, so I always end up with two copies of my shots on the road. I keep each drive in separate bags. These drives are not the slick ones with LCD viewers from famous

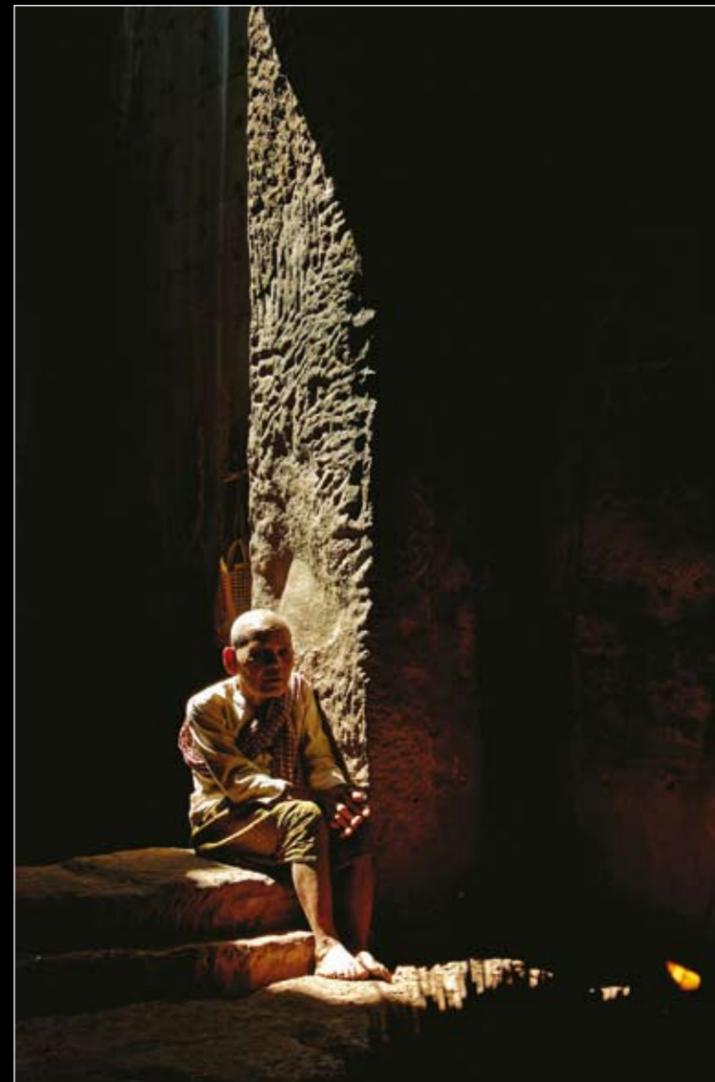
**No laptop?**

I don't usually carry a laptop with me. The portable storage is more than enough. If I did bring a laptop, and there's an Internet connection, I can upload images to my Website and to my FTP site, all labeled and keyworded in Apple Aperture, and can make a sale

to a buyer in France or Japan before I get home. Back home in Manila, I sort and catalog my shots and make three copies, two on separate drives and one on my FTP site. I don't store on DVD's, they're just too limited in capacity. FTP is the way to go, and tape drives.

**Do you work a lot in Photoshop? How do you catalog your huge inventory of images?**

I used to catalog my images in Shoebox. When Apple Aperture came out I switched to it. Aperture is a fantastic piece of work. It had a few kinks in its early version, but it has matured beautifully in version 1.5. I can say I know my way very well around Photoshop—I started when it was still around version 1.2 or something—but Aperture enables me to do many of the essential things quickly and efficiently. I



sort, add keywords, catalog, in Aperture; I upload images to my Website and can prepare presentations without ever leaving the program. Many photographers who don't do any cataloging or have a Web presence are just taking pictures but not selling them. If you're not on the Web nobody sees or buys your work.

**You seem to have made a smooth and quick transition to digital. What was your first digital camera?**

My first digital camera was a Canon G2 that I got at PhotoWorld years ago. I was going on a trip with my family and did not particularly want to load myself with camera luggage. My first digital camera for my professional work was a Nikon D100 that I still have and that still works beautifully. I've since graduated to a D70, then a D2X, and a D200 backup. I never had a problem with the digital age. Back then I saw its potential as a tool of photographers without equal.

I usually carry two camera bodies with me, and three zooms covering superwide to telephoto. It's all I need. I used to work exclusively with fixed lenses, but zooms have come a long way. They're just super and perform just as well as fixed lenses. I don't use fisheyes and rarely bring a 300mm along.

**What won't you shoot?**

The things I'll never shoot are nudes, fashion, and celebrity photographs. There's nothing there that excites me. Let other photographers do that stuff. 



Gunther used to travel with fixed-focal-length lenses (prime lenses), but now travels only with three lenses and two camera bodies. His usual gear consists of a Nikon D2X and D200, a 12–24mm AF-S Nikkor, 24–120mm VR AF-S Nikkor, and a 180mm f/2.8 ED Nikkor. Although he rarely uses it, he brings a Nikon SB-800 Speedlight, two portable hard drives (with no LCD viewer, and runs on AA batteries), CF cards from 2GB to 4GB, two raincoats, plastic bags, note pads, and a small flashlight.