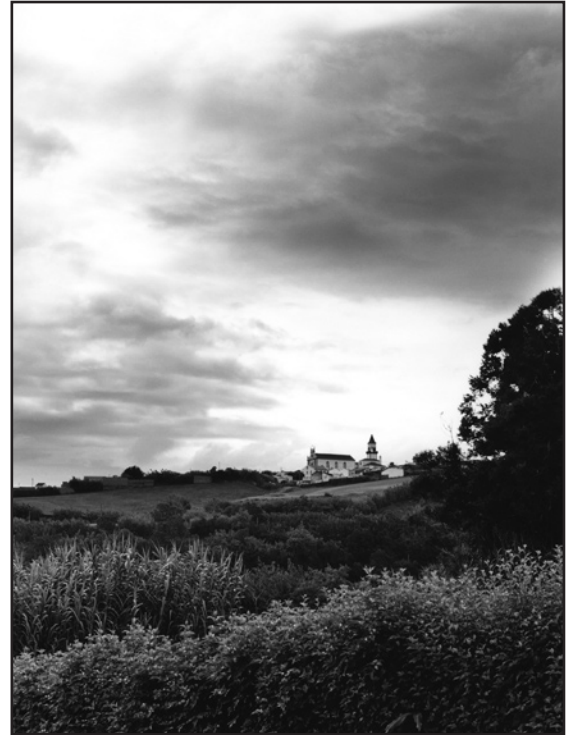


Interview

Theresa Wilson

Simplicity Revisited

With his recent work *The Sao Miguel Series* emerging as a success, Theresa Wilson recently met with photographer Henry Krauzyk and spoke to him about Portugal, his methods, and his plans for the future.



The Church at Salga, Sao Miguel, Azores, Portugal by Henry Krauzyk

What was your first experience or memory of photography?

It was my sister's first communion. I guess I was 7 or 8. My mom had given me an instamatic camera to take photos with. I remember thinking that it would be nice to get a photo of her through her veil. So as her procession came by she was dressed like a little bride. I timed it so that I would snap a photo of her profile through her veil. I did and my father yelled at me and said I missed the picture and that I was messing up the photos and took the camera away. I was really sad and disappointed about it. When the prints were made, my mom loved the shot. It was the best one. I hope she still has it.

Have you had any formal photographic training?

I was lucky enough to go to BMC Durfee High School in Fall River, Massachusetts which was a brand new high school at the time. It was large enough and had enough of a budget to offer photography as an elective course. It was a technical course mostly dealing with the mechanics and processes of photography

but not the creative aspects. Later on in college, I had to take a similar course.

Do you have a preference for digital or conventional photography?

It depends on what I am shooting really. With portraiture I prefer digital because it offers more control and I get to instantly see what I am doing and make adjustments. With situations like the São Miguel series I don't want the flexibility. I don't want to craft photographs I want to capture them. I want the honesty. I've been using Photoshop since version one, and before that I had experience on Scitex. With all that experience in post camera imaging I can tell you one truth:



Henry Krauzyk

Nothing beats a great original photograph. If you can get the perfect shot with the camera alone you're home. Any photographer who tells you otherwise is lying.

How do you "see" a photograph? What prompts you to chose a particular object or view to shoot?

This is something I ask myself all the time. I've never come up with a concrete answer. In my mind I think that if I can

isolate the "why" of the process, I could be more productive and get a larger number of good shots. The truth is I can't isolate it, there are too many variables. You tend to just "see" something for some known reasons and many more unknown ones.

Is it a natural thing - something you've always been able to do - or did you teach yourself to see the world as photographs?

Hmmm, it's a natural thing and I think it is something I've always been able to do. I never really see something as a photograph, but rather just see something interesting. I had an illustration professor in college who said it right. "Illustration shouldn't be called illustration it should be called "seeing" because that is what it is all about." I agree, it's just a matter of seeing things. I didn't learn it, I always had it or developed it without ever realizing it. I think it can be learned though. It's just a manner of seeing things in a fundamental and interesting way. What makes a photo interesting? Most photos are just a capture of something that exists always, what makes it interesting is the way the photographer sees it and then shows it to you. Millions of people take photos of the Grand Canyon, few can make you SEE and FEEL it. It's just a manner of seeing.

Is there such a thing as the perfect shot? Do you know when you click the shutter that it will be good?



"Roof Tiles," an image from Krauzyk's Sao Miguel Series, illustrates the photographer's more abstract leanings.

I can tell you that I know when I am taking a good shot. With the São Miguel series I remember each good shot and thinking, "Yup, this is going to be good." One photograph in particular from São Miguel stands out in particular. It was my last day or so there and I was walking through the yard of one of the aunties I was staying at and I saw these two stones against a wall. The shot was wonderfully divided with the wall of the house and the ground. I looked and thought "WOW! This is perfect." I knew the shot was going to be very nice and in my opinion it is. Since, I've thought about the person that may have put them there. I think it was the auntie and I think that she was exercising some esthetic desire, it was too perfect. In a way her skill and instinct supersede my own, I just recorded her work.

You are also a painter - why this sudden focus on photography?

There's really no "sudden focus" on my part. I just think it may seem so because I've created a series that is selling well and therefore more exposed in general. I haven't stopped painting and when I paint I don't stop taking photos. I also don't stop designing and constructing other things. The photography is just more obvious at the moment because my approach is new and exciting to me. I just look at myself as an artist and an artist just needs to create. The medium doesn't matter.

What are your favorite subjects to photograph? Do you prefer photographing landscapes/objects or people? Why?

This is a really good question because it instantly makes me reflect on what I am NOT taking photographs of! I guess to narrow it down I just look for interesting things. I don't limit myself or look for specific images. Certain things just stand out. I think you'll see that in any series I do. São Miguel wasn't limited to landscapes and seascapes; I shot what caught my eye so you'll see some fairly abstract images in there as well. Portraiture tends to be different; people strike me in different ways...

What do you enjoy about portraiture? What attracts you to a person as a portraiture subject?

Great question! I'm not a big fan of the contemporary definition of beauty. I like to photograph people who just strike me in a certain way. It's actually exciting when I see these people you know? There no guessing or wondering, I just know I can get something from them. The other thing is that what I want to capture is some facet of them that is not immediately obvious. Something contradictory but truthful. The woe in the strong, the strength in the quiet, things like that. Never in a negative way though. These things are in everyone and interest me because they are hard to get.

What motivated you to travel to São Miguel in particular?

My paternal grandmother was Portuguese and her family emigrated to the U.S. from São Miguel. I also live in an area steeped in the Azorean culture. You can't throw a stone and not hit something influenced by the Portuguese and Azorean cultures. Growing up that way you can do one of two things, reject it or embrace it. If you reject it you're just turning your back on where you've come from and that's not noble or righteous. If you embrace it you can revel in the differences and nuances of it. I've embraced it and in doing so your curiosity gets piqued. I got a gracious invitation from some friends to visit and stay with their family and I went. It was pretty profound because it not only answered questions about my ancestors that I harbored, but it also answered and made sense of many of the things I grew up around and took for granted but never really understood.

Did you have a set idea in mind about what you would photograph in São Miguel?

No, as I've said I never really know what I am going to find that's interesting. Even when I know a place, I never really know what's going to strike me, let alone in unfamiliar territory. I went with an open mind and no set expectations. I think that helped me. Some places are easy and the Azores is one of them. There's so much texture and character.

A theme in this series seems to be either sweeping dramatic landscapes or very close up geometric shapes. Was that deliberate?

It's only deliberate in the fact that I look for striking imagery. So it would be more accurate to say the theme of this series is interesting and striking things in São Miguel. It's successful because people are connecting with even the most abstract of images. I'm beginning to get a good deal of E-mail from people who have been or whose families are from the island and they are connecting with all the images, I think this happens because even in the most abstract of images they are seeing the Azores. This makes me feel successful in what I was doing.

Will there be more series like São Miguel and where will you shoot next?

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Sao Miguel Series

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Yes, São Miguel was great because it was an exercise in simplicity. One camera, one lens and the island. I didn't want to travel with a lot of gear. This caused some limitations and difficulties of course but the payoff is obvious. I used a fixed focal length lens so I often had to seriously consider where I was shooting from and how I was framing. The lens also had a very limited depth of field which I find a blessing because I got to use selective focus on some images which gave them an old-fashioned feel. Limiting myself in that way was advantageous. These things combined to give the series a kind of old-style gritty feel. I know I can take that look and translate it to other locales and series. I want to transfer the technical framework and simplicity of the São Miguel series and take it to several areas. I have plans to return to the Azores as well as do similar series in Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard and Hawaii.

What do you hope to capture when you return to the Azores?

On my first trip, it was all new to me and I was travelling with other people. I was interested in seeing much and my host graciously accommodated me. Next time, I'd travel slower and probably shoot ten to twenty times more film. I'd also bring my big 4x5 camera for some images. I'd hope to capture the other 80% of things that interested me, yet weather conditions or time restraints prohibited me from doing so.

You say you don't like being laden down with a lot of gear while traveling. What about with areas closer to home? Will you make use of more equipment?

If it doesn't spoil my goal. The São Miguel Series is what it is because I limited myself. Had I brought more equipment I would have over-crafted very sharp and clear images. What I love about some of the images from São Miguel are the imperfections combined with the imagery it makes them so timeless and artful.

Do you have an idea in your head already about how you will photograph Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard? Also will it be black and white or are you tempted to capture the fall colors?

I will photograph them identically to the way I did São Miguel. They are different islands however and that is the unknown interesting aspect. I know I will find things there, but what things I don't really know. The light is also different there - brighter than São Miguel. São Miguel was often about stone, the islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard might well be about grass and wood.

If you could choose anywhere in the world - where would you go?

For something like the São Miguel series I'd like to go to Hawaii next. I've been many times but never in the context of shooting it like São Miguel. The islands are very similar but also very different. Especially in an artistic context. To me, São Miguel is all about texture and Hawaii is all about rhythm. I could shoot rolls and rolls there.

It was your first visit to São Miguel but you have been to Hawaii many times. Can you go there with that same open-mindedness? Do you have some idea of what you want to capture already?

As far as open-mindedness yes. What makes places like São Miguel and Hawaii work for me is perspective. It's a new vision. I am seeing these places differently than someone who lives there. Every corner reveals something of wonder or beauty. Every street something new and different. Even though I have been to Hawaii many times I still have that wonder and perspective. I don't really have an idea of what I'd capture other than I imagine it is going to have something to do with rhythm and possible more people. Hawaii is also interesting because it does not have the permanence that São Miguel does.

Does shooting a city series appeal?

Yes, depending on the city. I spend a lot of time in Montréal and I've already started a series on it. Montréal like São Miguel is a very textural kind of place. With cities though I think I'd find myself looking in mostly abstract terms for subject matter. The tall buildings and shadowy confines tend to make for some nice lighting as well. Cityscapes don't seem to appeal to me.

Who, if anybody, do you admire in the world of photography and why?

Hmmm...admire? No one really comes to mind, but that is all about my ignorance regarding famous photographers rather than any high-mindedness. Grasping, I'd offer Ansel Adams of course. He shot grand things in a grand way. Again, millions of people take photos of the Grand Canyon but few photographers are able to make you SEE it. Believe it or not, I think painters influence me more.

What painters? In what way do they influence your photography?

Picasso right off. Whether you like him or not, Picasso cannot be ignored for his accomplishment of setting us all free to what the definition of art is. In that aspect we now are all free to pursue something that although unconventional must at least be considered before it can be praised or panned. Edward Hopper influences me photographically but not in painterly terms. I like his composition.

What do you get from photography?

It's just another creative extension of what I do. It's just a facet of my vision and how I express myself. It's an outlet. If I didn't paint, photograph, design, play guitar, etc. I'd melt down. ●

For more information on Henry Krauzyk's work please visit his web site:
www.krauzyk.com

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