

Tony Hertz

THAT WHICH IS FELT, NOT SEEN

BY LYNNE EODICE

Tony Hertz has a long history with black-and-white imaging, beginning as a child with a box camera. “I grew up with *LIFE*, *National Geographic* and books of photographs,” he remembers. He took his first photo class at San Bernardino Valley College in 1971 and knew he was hooked. He became the instructor’s assistant, had access to the photo lab on campus “and just really shot a lot.”

Later, Hertz went to work in the circulation department at the *San Bernardino Sun*, where he admired the work of the newspaper’s photojournalists. Seeking funds to continue his education, he was awarded a grant to attend California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo. He majored in journalism with a concentration in photojournalism, and served as photo editor of the school newspaper, *The Mustang Daily*. “I gained skills in editing images and communicating with editors and photographers on story ideas,” he says. The *Daily* was named the best college daily newspaper in the state by the California Intercollegiate Press Association during his tenure as photo editor. Hertz was honored with the “Photojournalist of the Year” award by the Cal Poly



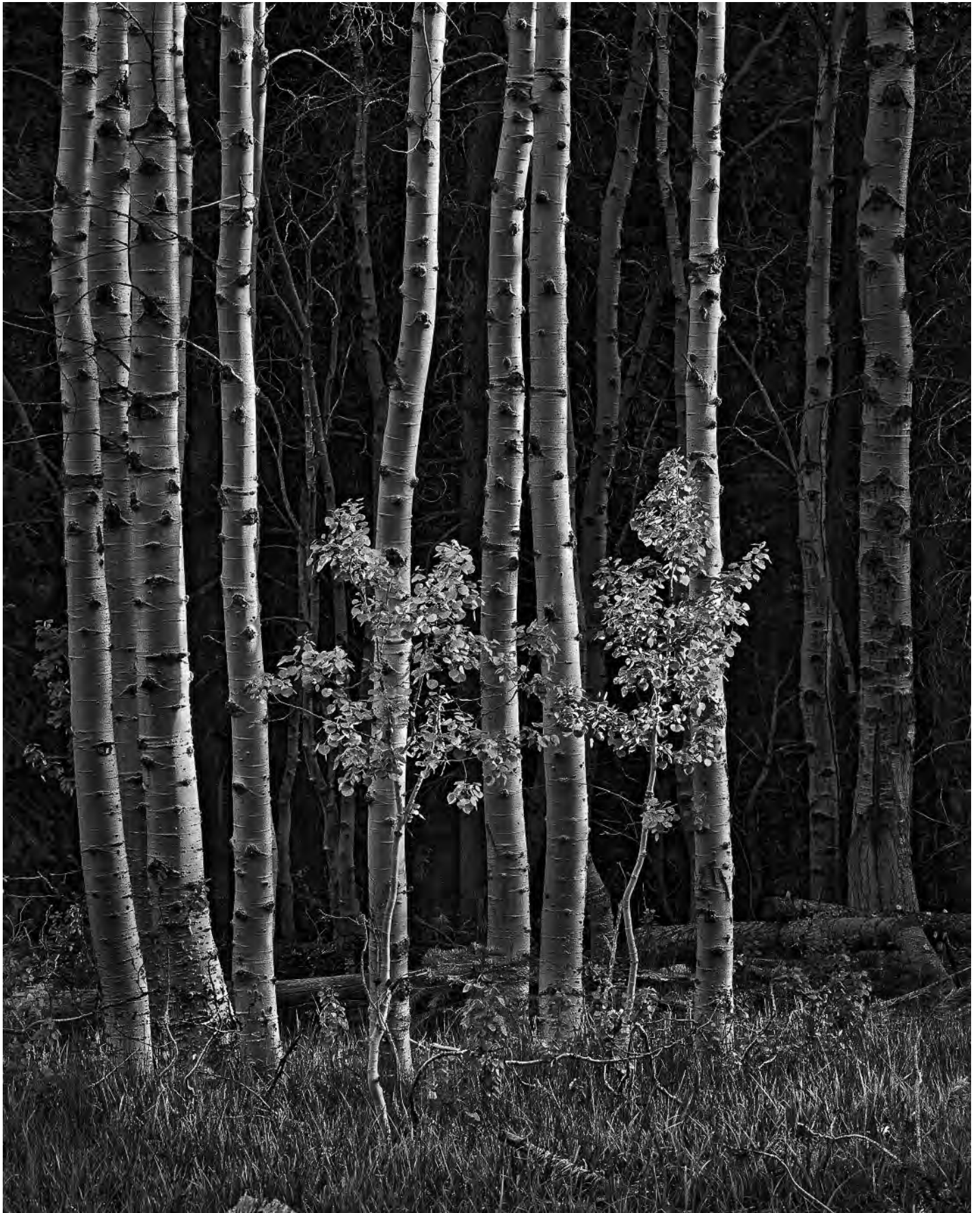
© STEVE SILBERSTEIN

journalism department in 1977.

After graduation, he became a full-time staff photographer at the *San Luis Obispo Tribune*. “I shot news stories and sports, and was really happy,” he recalls. During his 10 years there, he won top awards from the National Press Photographer’s Association, the California Press Photographer’s Association and the Associated Press News Executives Council for California

and Nevada. Hertz photographed presidents, the queen of England, Pope Paul VI, celebrities, musicians and sports figures, as well as major news and community events.

However, the day came when he decided to move on. “I left the *Tribune* in 1988 to pursue new challenges and become an independent photographer.” Hertz kept in touch with people he met while working for the newspaper, and built relationships with many major newspapers and magazines. He’s been honored by the Sony World Photography Awards, International Photography Awards, PX3 (France), Camera USA and the Black and White Spider Awards, among others. His images have appeared in publications such as *Outdoor Photographer*, *Silvershotz* and *Black and*



© TONY HERTZ

Two Aspens, California Eastern Sierras

**“Photography is a subtractive medium.
You need to set aside the sentimental
aspects of a photo and look at it objectively.”**

— Tony Hertz

White. His work has also been published in *TIME*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Chicago Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *National Geographic WORLD*, *Sunset* and *Christian Science Monitor*.

“I have corporate, industrial and agricultural clients, including Chevron USA, Dupont, BASF, The Gas Company, Clark Construction and the Edison Company,” Hertz says. He markets his agricultural, industrial and lifestyle stock images through Design Pics and Alamy, and sells images from his own extensive photo library directly to clients. The Susan Spiritus Gallery in Newport Beach, California represents his fine art images.

Black-and-white has long been his preferred way of portraying the world. Hertz comments, “Years ago, I just started looking at things in black-and-white, which made it easier for me to home in on form and composition. That’s the big difference between black-and-white and color. Color is just more information.” He stresses the importance of getting detail in the shadows of a black-and-white image. “The old masters concentrated on that. It’s very important for a photo to have luminance in the details and tonal range throughout.” He points out that color images of flowers and other scenes in nature are very commonplace, but there are also a lot of great nature images in black-and-white. “The photographer concentrates more on form and texture, which gives a picture a simplified look,” he notes.

He enjoys capturing landscape and nature subjects in his black-and-white fine art photography, and counts Imogen Cunningham, Minor White and Edward Weston as strong influences. “I also admire Wynn Bullock,” he says. “He’s not someone who comes to mind when you think of black-and-white photography, but he thought outside the box and was very innovative.” Hertz looks up to Ansel Adams as well. “I love the quality of his photos and all the detail he captured.” He views black-and-white imagery as more interpretive and believable, and says that it helps him make order out of chaos in nature. “I try to create an energetic harmony,” he states.

Hertz shoots all of his images as RAW files. “It’s always easier to throw out pixels than it is to shoot a smaller file and try to make it larger,” he says. He currently shoots with the 36-megapixel

Dogwood Blossoms on Tenaya Creek, Yosemite National Park



© TONY HERTZ





© TONY HERTZ

Fog Lines, *Gualala, Mendocino Coast, California*



© TONY HERTZ

Seaside Monument, *Trinidad, California*

He enjoys capturing landscape and nature subjects in his black-and-white fine art photography.

Nikon D800 and nearly always uses a tripod. “A tripod helps slow me down so that I can become immersed in the scene.” In post-production, he starts out with Adobe Lightroom and then imports his images into Photoshop. After that, he uses Silver Efex Pro to make a variety of other tweaks. “Google has purchased Silver Efex Pro and all NIK filters, and they’re now a free download,” he says. “The software has a lot of different controls, and it takes a while to get used to it. It’s best to play around and then make some prints to compare.”

After working in Silver Efex Pro, Hertz may take an image back to Photoshop to make levels and curves adjustments, as well as dodging and burning. “Sometimes I create a layer to do that and use a brush.” He says a little extra work can make a big difference. “I’ll zoom in to dodge and burn small areas, then open a second window to see the entire picture. The small details make a big difference in black-and-white.” He sometimes creates a contrast layer on top of the image to work with mid-tone grays.

When shooting his fine-art images, Hertz sets the image aspect ratio at 4x5, which approximates the image quality of the view cameras used by the old masters. “This ratio can be doubled to 8x10, and then to 16x20.” He says that up until 2015, he shot most of his images using a Nikkor 105mm f/2.8 lens with macro capability. “One of the reasons I used this lens was to capture more intimate nature scenes,” he explains. While many landscape photographers use wide-angle lenses to encompass an entire scene, including the sky, Hertz prefers to shoot smaller portions of a scene — for example, the lines and design of sand dunes, or parts of aspen trees. “Eliot Porter also did intimate nature shots,” he points out, “using textures and close ups to pull something out of nature and derive a feeling from it.”

He discusses the difference between shooting with prime vs. zoom lenses. “The best compositions are achieved by using your feet,” says Hertz. “With fixed-focal-length lenses, you must move around to find the best compositions, instead of standing in one place and zooming the lens in and out. You can get great images with a 50mm lens, depending on how close you want to get to your subject.” He says that lenses in the 100 to 105mm range yield natural results and are the preferred focal lengths of portrait photographers. Today Hertz shoots with a Nikkor 80-200mm f/4 zoom, yet finds that he still tends to stick around the 105mm setting. Nonetheless, he enjoys the leeway that this zoom lens gives him. Occasionally he uses a Nikkor 16-35mm wide-angle zoom

and a Nikkor 50mm f/1.8 prime lens.

Hertz has a sturdy Gitzo tripod with a Really Right Stuff ball head. “This is one of the better investments I’ve made,” he says. He can adjust it to over seven feet high and as low as nine inches. It’s equipped with spikes on the legs rather than rubber tips, which enables him to further stabilize the tripod by inserting its legs into the ground. He rarely uses flash, but sometimes lights parts of scenes with a flashlight at twilight or at night. “Sometimes I use very long exposures which allow me to walk through the scene and paint it with light.”

We discussed several of his images, among them a dramatic close-up of a wave breaking on a beach (“Gnarled Wave”). Hertz shot this photo with a 20mm lens at 1/4000 second and an ISO setting of 3200. He wanted as much depth of field as possible, so he used an aperture setting of f/11. An underwater housing protected his camera. This scene gives viewers the sense that the wave is breaking right in front of their eyes. “Unusual patterns come out of waves as they break,” Hertz observes. “I had this photo in mind for several years before I actually shot it.”

Another image, “Shadows of Oaks,” features beautifully backlit oak leaves captured during an early morning shoot near Bradley, California. “I exposed for the highlights and worked to keep detail in the shadows,” he emphasizes. Similarly, “Two Aspens” spotlights small aspens illuminated at sunrise amid larger ones at June Lake, California. “That image took a lot of dodging and burning.” Hertz says that he’ll often make a print, study it and then make adjustments from there. “I kept going back to this image and worked on it until I was happy with the detail.”

Hertz shot “Sea Cave Splash Drip” at a beach cave where water would splash against the walls and drip down. He used a tripod, a 300mm lens and a slow shutter speed of about ¼ second to capture backlighting behind the dripping water. Post-production included dodging and burning in Lightroom, as well as some work in Silver Efex Pro.

These days, he stays busy as an adjunct professor at Cuesta College in San Luis Obispo, California, where he teaches both film and digital photography courses. In the film class, students develop their own film and print pictures in a darkroom — “the old way.” They also work with 35mm and 2¼ medium-format cameras. He describes this class as “very energetic and fun. You can get into a zone in the darkroom.” He adds, “Students like the feeling of being in the darkroom with the safe light on and unloading



Gnarled Wave, *Pismo Beach, California*

**“I make images instinctively and want to share what I see in the world.
My intention is to photograph what is felt and not often seen.” — Tony Hertz**



**“Be confident, and be willing to take risks.
Creativity lies in taking risks and breaking rules.” —Tony Hertz**

film in the dark. When they create a print, it's one of a kind — it's handmade.”

Hertz advises his photo students to walk around a subject and study it from all angles in “a bob and weave move.” He says, “By changing your position, you can make a great deal of difference in your compositions.” He strives to get the right amount of information in an image without including too much. “Photography is a subtractive medium,” he observes. “You need to set aside the sentimental aspects of a photo and look at it objectively.”

When asked about current projects, Hertz responds, “I'm going through my old work and coming up with some abstract images from the past.” He also recently shot a series of abstracts at Yosemite National Park. He says he's always looking for new ways to portray subjects, and that he creates abstracts in different ways. “Sometimes I shoot multiple exposures. I use very slow shutter speeds to get motion blur, or I shoot reflections. I also pan with waves or running water in a river.” He says there's a lot of trial and error to find the right shutter speed for the speed of water. “I'm trying new techniques that haven't been explored much.”

Hertz describes his latest project, *Dune Anatomy*, as a new way of seeing nature. Shooting at Oceano Dunes Natural Preserve, just south of Pismo Beach, California, he focuses on form, lines and composition, and less on sky. “The dunes are always changing with the wind,” he observes. “Most photographers capture the overall scene — the sky and the entire dunes. But I wanted a more intimate theme.” He sought softer lighting effects than most landscape photographers, who tend to look for more defined shadows. “Softer light helps me capture the look of anatomy that I'm tuning into.”

He has undoubtedly captured these dunes differently from Edward Weston and Ansel Adams, who photographed them extensively. (Weston also photographed fine-art nudes of his wife there.) Hertz sums up, “It's very quiet at Oceano Dunes — an eerie, though peaceful, space. Trekking through the dunes is a good workout, especially carrying a photo backpack and heavy-duty tripod through the soft sand.” He says he might do a little lightening or darkening of these images in his digital darkroom, but not much more.

In his artist's statement, Hertz says, “I make images instinctively and want to share what I see in the world. My intention is to photograph what is felt and not often seen.” He points out that there are a lot of beautiful images on the Internet, but he strives to create a “wow” look. “I'm very particular about what I put up

on my portfolio and website.” Hertz says that he's trying to dig deeper and expand his vision and perception of the world. “I read that Edward Weston and Ansel Adams were chided by many documentary and street photographers for shooting the beauty of nature when the world was falling apart during the Great Depression and World War II,” he says. “But we need to step back and home in on what's important. It begins with ourselves and being at peace with the world.”

He describes the photo “zone,” where a photographer is completely tuned into nature and becomes totally immersed in a scene. “I get out of my comfort zone, particularly when I'm traveling. We all need to strive to be more creative and express ourselves,” he says. Hertz plays up the importance of loving what one does, and says that it's icing on the cake if you can make a living at it. “I teach, I've worked at a newspaper, and I continue to freelance,” Hertz says. “It's important to do the best with what you have.”

When asked about advice for emerging professional photographers, he says, “It's a tough road, but you can get there if you work hard.” He adds that budding pros should stay focused on photography and not become distracted. “A lot of photographers can get diverted with alternative activities, which dilutes their artistic energy,” he says. “Then they end up deviating from photo projects.” Hertz emphasizes the importance of being dedicated and serious about your goals. He says that it's important to find out what type of photography you want to specialize in, which takes a lot of experimentation. He stresses the importance of becoming an expert at image editing and a good businessperson — yet he points out that success can't always be measured by money. “It's more about how you feel about your own work. You only have yourself to rely on.”

He concludes, “Photographers will always be around, and there will always be a need for them. Be confident, and be willing to take risks. Creativity lies in taking risks and breaking rules.”

To see more of Tony Hertz's photography, visit www.tony-hertz.com. ▲

Lynne Eodice is a freelance photographer and writer based in Altadena, California. Her work has appeared in Petersen's PHOTOgraphic, Rangefinder, California Tour & Travel and Digital Photographer, among other publications. Lynne is the author of the how-to book, Photos That Inspire: Photo Workshop, and has taught photography courses online and in the traditional classroom.

Opposite: Lithia Creek, Ashland, Oregon