

On Photographers  
and  
Large Format  
Landscape Photography Books

by

Alain Briot

*Some of my favorite  
landscape photography books*

# *On Photographers and Large Format Landscape Photography Books*

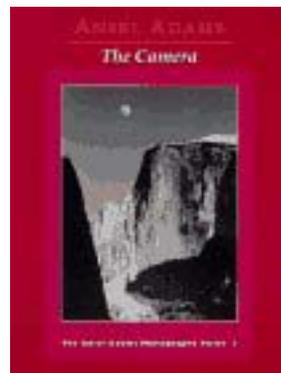
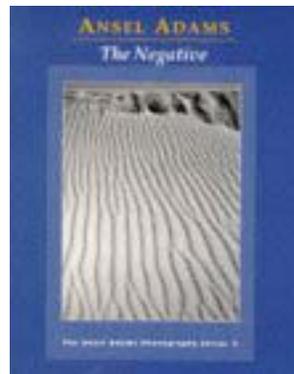
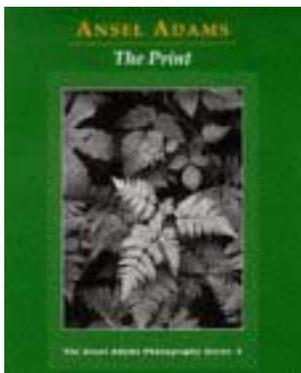
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Alain Briot

I am always surprised when talking to landscape photographers to learn how few read or collect books featuring the work of other landscape photographers. Certainly it took me some time to start a collection of landscape photography books. I remember being confronted by rows of coffee table books, quite a few years ago, at a National Park bookstore and wondering what I was doing considering purchasing some of them. I had come this far to take photographs, not to buy books of photographs.

It took me some time to change my thinking but today I own an extensive collection of photography books the majority of them featuring the work of landscape photographers working with large format equipment and consider this collection a very important aspect of my growth as a photographer. I would like to share a list of my favorite books on landscape photography as a way to get others started into tapping a resource which I consider extremely valuable. Photography books are difficult and expensive to produce and thus their publication is the result of coordinated efforts on the part of photographers, publishers and printers. These books represent many years of efforts and from them one can learn an immense amount about photography.

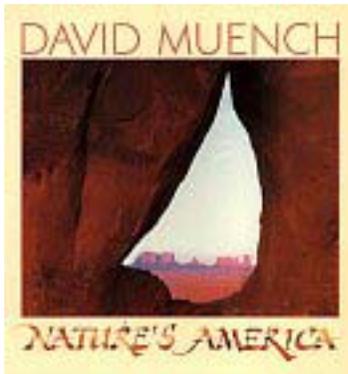
Ansel Adams' Yosemite and the Range of Light (1981) was perhaps the first book of landscape photographs to make a lasting impression on me. When I first saw it, in a Paris bookstore solely devoted to photography, I experienced somewhat of a shock. I already owned *The Camera* (1980), *The Negative* (1981) and *The Print* (1983), Adams' trilogy on the technical aspects of photography, but Yosemite and the Range of Light represented a completely different approach. Here was technique not merely explained in technical terms but demonstrated in a masterful manner. The luminosity of each



image, the apparently whites and blacks, and the dominating compositions stunned me. I left the bookstore empty handed, images floating in my head, carrying with me a very different concept of what could be achieved with photography. Examples, *The Making of 40 Photographs* (1983), a wonderful book revealing not only how Adams created some of his most stunning images but also what he thought while he created them, would later help me understand some of the wonders contained in Yosemite and the Range of Light. Examples remains one of the few photography books intended to reveal the Master's skills and craftsmanship. I wish that a similar publishing endeavor was pursued by contemporary landscape photographers.

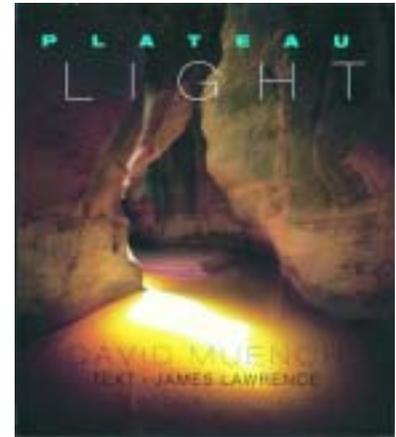
I started to photograph landscapes in color when I moved to the Southwest (my early work was essentially black and white), an approach which originated in my discovery of David Muench's work whose

ubiquitous publishing efforts had made it overseas long before my first visit to the United States. I remember seeing David Muench images at the Journées Internationales de la Photographie in Arles, France in 1981, one of them being taken in Antelope Canyon, a location I would become intimately familiar with but which was unknown to me at the time.

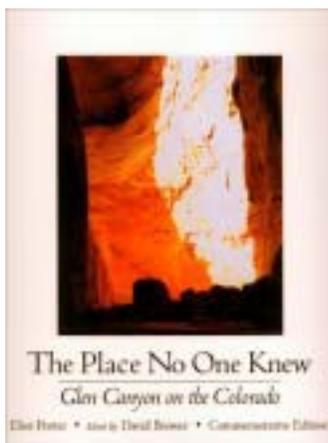


Certainly David Muench has affected an entire generation of Landscape photographers. I remember purchasing Nature America (1984) at the Island in the Sky Ranger Station, Canyonlands, Utah, in 1986 and getting a sinking feeling when I opened it and realized how far I had to go to create images similar to those in front of me.

Ancient America (1995) continues on the path started by Nature America, namely to provide a collection of landscapes from National Parks, National Monuments, State Parks, Wilderness Areas and other protected places all over North America. The scope of the project is staggering when one considers the time and resources involved. The result is certainly worthy of attention for much can be learned about how to carry a personal style across such widely varied landscapes. Other recent books displaying Muench's seemingly never-ending publishing efforts include David Muench's Arizona (1997), Plateau Light (1998), Images in Stone (1995) which focuses solely on Native American Rock Art and Primal Forces (2000) which includes a wonderfully informative text by Michelle Gilders about how natural forces shape the landscape. This last volume was co-photographed with David's son, Mark who continues the Muench dynasty started by David father, Josef Muench.

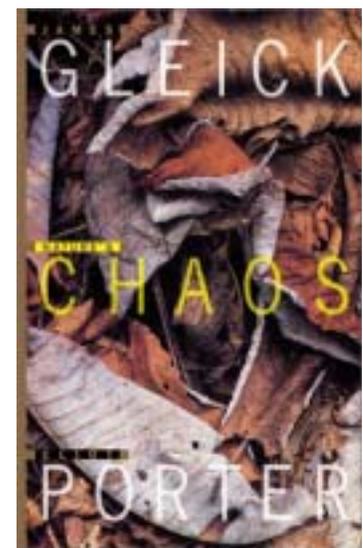


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Eliot Porter's work preceded that of David Muench. I came in contact with Porter's work through his book on Glen Canyon (now Lake Powell) before Glen Canyon Dam was built: The Place No One Knew (1963). Porter's work focuses solely on large format color landscape photography. His landscapes are often intimate, showing pieces of the whole rather than the whole itself. The Place No One Knew offers but one general view of Glen Canyon and that is the first photograph in the book. All the other images are of intimate locations: slot

canyons, alcoves, reflections of golden canyon walls in rivulets of water, grasses along the river banks. One gets a feeling for what Glen Canyon was from compiling all these places together in one's mind.



Porter excelled at organizing disparate natural elements into coherent images. He called this process “order from chaos,” chaos being the state in which nature “arranges” the natural elements, an arrangement which does not necessarily lend itself to photographic composition. In this he was close to Ansel Adams, one of his tutors, who said that “the world does not come in 4x5 format,” meaning that elements had to be removed from the frame, cropping had to be done at times, and a visual reorganization was necessary in order to create a composition which brought the viewer into the image without attracting attention to itself. Nature’s Chaos is part of my collection and has taught me volumes about composition.

Phillip Hyde’s work is also very important. Working in both color and black and white Hyde continues the tradition of the majestic landscape started by Adams while introducing a personal touch with his selection of details and his choice of lighting. Unlike most contemporary landscape photographers Hyde favors midday light and is able to create stunning landscapes at a time of the day when most of us are either taking naps or scouting for sunset or sunrise locations.

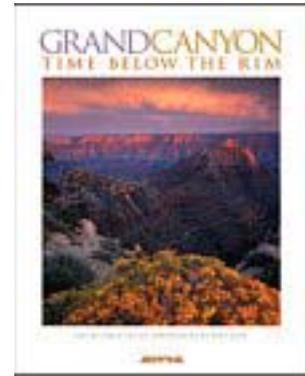
I met Phillip Hyde at Sondog Ranch, California, in 1999 during a photographer’s gathering organized by Al Weber. With his inimitable sense of humor Phillip narrated a meeting he had with Ansel Adams during which he showed his color work to Adams who, after looking at Hyde’s stack of photographs, told him he hoped Hyde “would not give up his black and white work.” Interestingly Hyde’s most popular image is, by his own acceptance, a black and white photograph of grasses floating upon a pond, the long, light grey stems of the grasses blown by the wind in different directions creating an enticing pattern upon the dark water of the pond. An autographed copy of *The Range of Light* (1992), Hyde’s most recent book on the Sierra Nevada, is in my collection.

More recently Jack Dykinga has made his imprint upon landscape photography. Coming to large format landscape photography from journalism photography, for which he received a Pulitzer prize, Dykinga brings a novel approach to composition using the foreground-background approach championed by David Muench but off-centering his compositions to avoid the symmetry Muench favors. *Deserts* (1999) and *Stone Canyons* (1998) show Dykinga’s approach well. Dykinga favors a soft, enveloping light which colors the landscape in enticing hues.

Soft light is also a trademark of John Sexton’s work. Adam’s last darkroom assistant, Sexton built a career of his own through a very personal style while continuing the black and white landscape tradition started by Adams. I saw his “Mr. Zone” license plate on his van in Canyon de Chelly in 1996 and subsequently photographed Spiderrock after sunset, bathed in the soft light of dusk, with him. *Quiet Light* (1990), Sexton’s first book, summarizes this approach to light. The images in this book are almost exclusively created before sunrise, after sunset or on overcast days. *Listen to the Trees* (1998) and *Places of Power* (2001), Sexton’s second and third books, capitalize and expand on this concept.

There is more: William Neill’s *Landscapes of the Spirit* (1997) is a delightful collection of powerful landscapes in which Neill’s compositions compete with a stunning quality of light. Joseph Holmes *Natural Light* (1990), which showcases how color and the Cibachrome process, when added to masterful composition skills and light quality, can become of primordial importance. Gary Ladd’s *Grand Canyon, Time Below the Rim* (1999) is an enviable collection of photographs taken within Grand Canyon National Park, an area so immense and so difficult of access that the completion of such a project represents a photographic milestone. Compiled over 20 years and innumerable journeys through the Grand

Canyon Ladd's may be the most complete collection of photographs of the Grand Canyon to date. Gary Ladd's style, which emphasizes color, light and texture, is quieter than Neill or Muench's. While Ladd's compositions are masterful they are never over-dominant, allowing the natural elements, rather than the composition, to do the talking.



There is still more but let's stop here for now. I invite you to continue this list via email to [mreichman@home.com](mailto:mreichman@home.com) and to share your favorite photography books with us. I want to close with the most recent addition to my library, *Ansel Adams at 100* (2001), which I pre-ordered this spring and just received today. A retrospective of Adam's work from his photographic beginnings to his most famous pieces this book presents an Ansel Adams who has entered photographic history. Although I currently work almost exclusively in color Adams' work continues to fascinate and enchant me.

Alain Briot  
Chinle, Arizona  
July 30th, 2001

Photography books links:  
(Author first, then book title(s) followed by URL on Amazon.com)

Note: some titles are out of print and/or unavailable either as links or as jpeg.

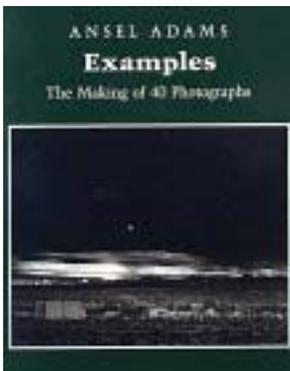
### **Ansel Adams**

*Examples, The making of 40 Photographs*

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*Adams at 100*

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*The Camera*

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*The Negative*

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*The Print*

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**Eliot Porter**

*Nature's Chaos*

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*The place no one knew*

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**David Muench**

*Primal Forces*

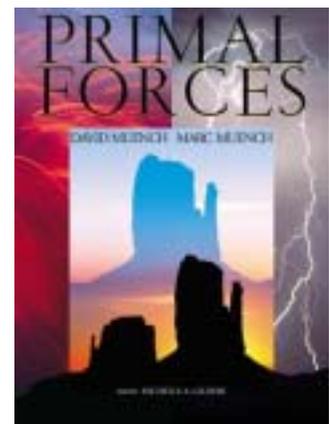
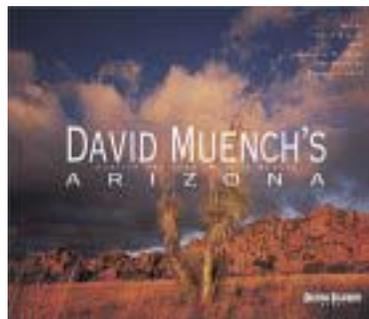
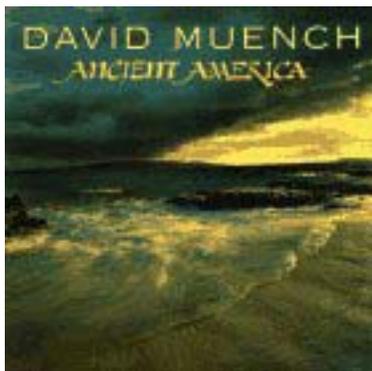
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*Plateau Light*

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*Muench's Arizona*

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*Ancient America*

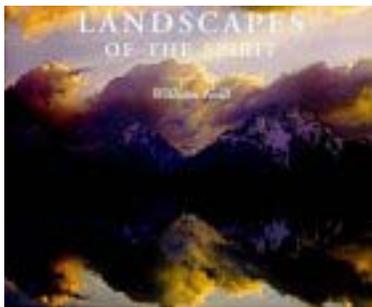
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*Nature's America*

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*Images in Stone*

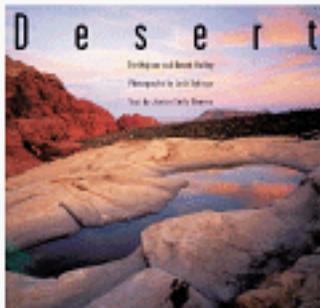
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**William Neill:**

*Landscapes of the Spirit*

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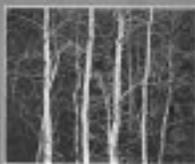


**Jack Dykinga**

*Deserts*

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**LISTEN TO THE TREES**



**John Sexton**

*Listen to the Trees*

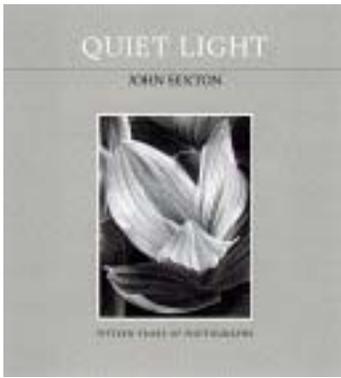
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**PLACES OF POWER**



*Places of Power*

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*Quiet Light*

**Gary Ladd**

*Time Below the Rim*

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