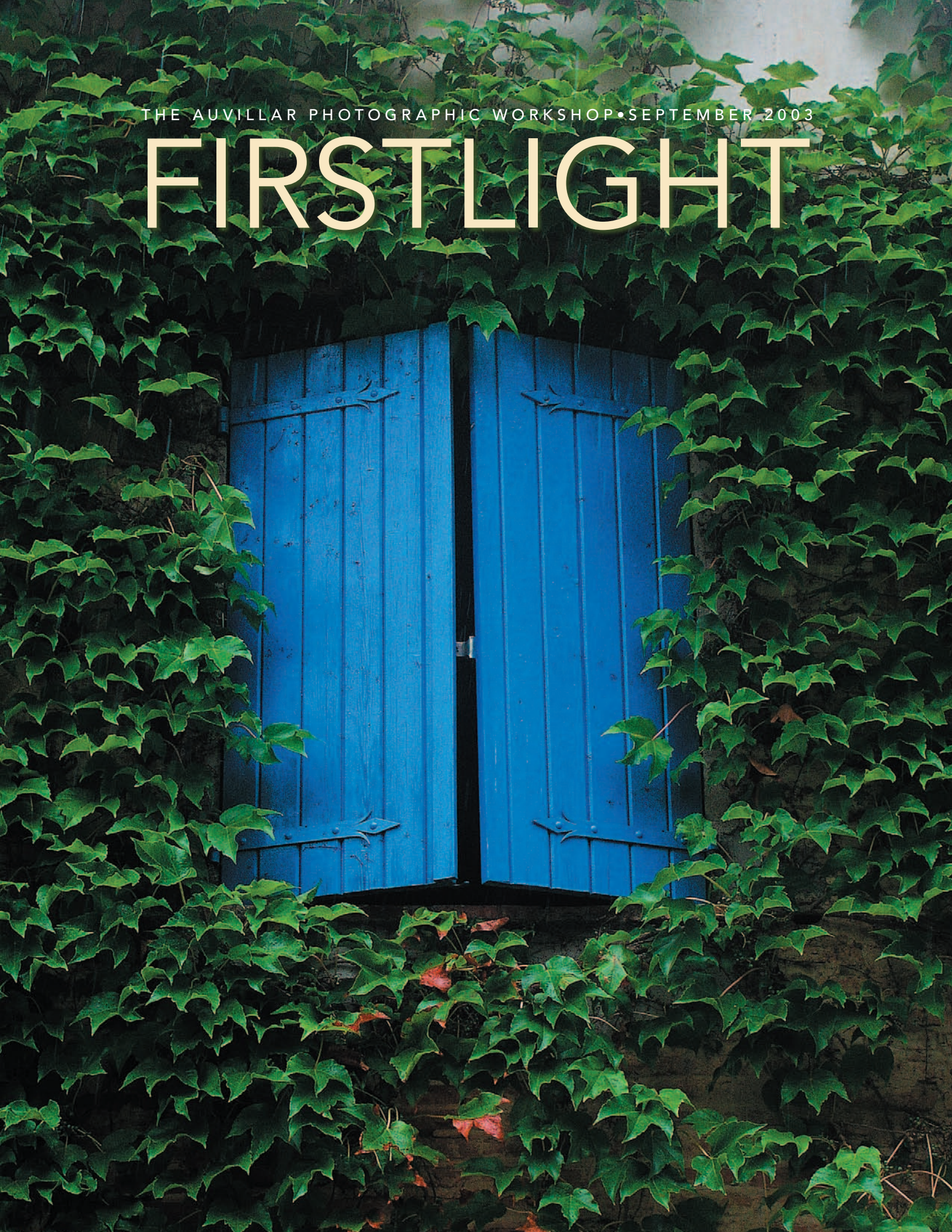


THE AUVILLAR PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKSHOP • SEPTEMBER 2003

FIRSTLIGHT



FIRSTLIGHT



At the center of a triangular plaza, the circular market place, La Halle, is home to a Sunday farmer's market and numerous cultural events • PHOTOGRAPH BY WALT HUBIS

For four days in early September 2003, 17 photographers from the United States, Canada and the Netherlands, lived and worked in Auvillar, documenting life in the tiny French village on the Garonne River.

Their mission at the FirstLight Workshop: Find what makes Auvillar look like Auvillar and capture it with a digital camera.

For many, the digital technology was a new and daunting frontier. Olympus, a major sponsor of the workshop, provided C-5050, E-20N and E-1 digital cameras for the participants to use. Workshop instructors, fresh off the project "America 24/7" where they had used the Olympus C-5050 cameras, provided the technical know-how. But mastering the tools was only the beginning for the FirstLight participants.

"We wanted the photographers to immerse themselves in the life of the village, to capture those moments and to provide a great documentary," says Jay Dickman, a Denver-based freelance photographer who conceived of and organized the FirstLight workshop. "To do that, you have to spend time with people until the oddity of your being there becomes boring and the subject goes back to doing what he was doing."

The Auvillalais made the job easy. With fewer than 800 residents, the town is an intimate place where there are no strangers. In summer months, hikers making the religious pilgrimage of St. Jacques de Compostelle from Vezelay, France, to Santiago de Compostello, Spain, stream across a bridge over the Garonne River into the town where they know they will find free lodging in the "ville de pap."

Similarly, villagers invited the FirstLight photographers to share champagne at kitchen tables and tramp through damp forests in search of rare mushrooms. Farmers waited patiently while pigs posed. A wood-carver, grape-pickers and vegetable vendors showed off their wares and their work – all making for great photo opportunities.

With its Roman ruins, Louis XIV clock tower and medieval town plaza, Auvillar is a visual feast. Sweet chasellas grapes, local foie gras, souffles and Vin de Brulahois provide the culinary feast. The two combined were enough for sensory overload, as more than one photographer found.

A town like Auvillar "really requires you to get in touch with being human – to slow yourself down and see," says Mark Greenberg, a freelance photographer who organized the workshop with Dickman. "It was the perfect place to be."

AUVILLAR

COVER: "I was struck by this vivid blue shutter, a counterpoint to the light brown buildings all around town," says photographer Barbara Bent of this picture taken in Auvillar
PHOTOGRAPH BY
BARBARA BENT

RIGHT: All dressed up for their grandmother's 80th birthday celebration, three boys steal a moment to ride a bicycle outside Hôtel de l'Horloge
PHOTOGRAPH BY
DANA E. WHITAKER





Four generations of a French farm family, including the 70-year-old patriarch, crowd around the Sunday brunch table. Everyone was so unabashedly happy to be together, photographer Steve Bent recalls, that even the presence of American strangers didn't distract from the occasion. "I wanted to capture that feeling but was hard pressed to gain a vantage permitting me to take it all in," Bent says. "I literally had to teeter on a fireplace mantle ... I remember being surprised that no one took notice of my crawling halfway up the wall."

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVE BENT







LEFT: "I asked my translator to ask the farmer's wife if she would mind showing me the rabbits... She flung open the cage door where the frenzied rabbit tried to escape... Smiling proudly, she held out the extended bunny at full length," says photographer Natasha Meens."

RIGHT: The Garonne River rises in the Pyrénées and winds past Auvillar on its way to the Bay of Biscay

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NATASHIA MEENS

For almost a decade the Auvillaris have hosted cultural exchanges at Moulin à Nef, a studio and workshop for artists established by Lucy and Alain Delsol.

The Delsols, who live in suburban Denver, have a summer house in Auvillar, near Alain's boyhood home in Valence. When an old building in Auvillar came up for sale, the Delsols bought it with the help of an American foundation. They named their workshop "Moulin à Nef," which means "floating mill," in recognition of Auvillar's history as a port on the Garonne River where paddle-wheel boats long ago ground grain into flour.

"We've tried to focus on one-on-one relationships in terms of cultural exchanges," says Lucy Delsol. "It's not the big production of a Chinese opera. It's the relationship between one person and another person, each from two different cultures."

That sort of grassroots exchange sounded perfect to Jay and Becky Dickman, who are friends of the Delsols. Dickman had been nursing the idea of a photo workshop for some time. His vision: To bring stellar professionals together with experienced photographers in a beautiful location. Building the workshop around digital photography also eliminated the need for a darkroom and pushed the entire concept into the 21st Century.

Next, Dickman invited four nationally recognized photographers to join him. Dickman, who has won a Pulitzer prize and shoots regularly for National Geographic, teamed up with Greenberg, a New Jersey freelance photographer and fellow Olympus Visionary. They signed on Larry C. Price, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner who heads the Denver Post photo operation, Jeffrey Aaronson, an Aspen-based freelance photographer and Bert Fox, a National Geographic photo editor.

In May, Greenberg and Dickman went to Auvillar to meet the people who would help with the workshop and to scout out assignments for the students.

The legwork paid off. When the photographers arrived four months later, they found the villagers eager partners in their venture.

Early in her shoot, Natasha Meens knocked at random on a front door. The woman of the house invited her inside without question and went about preparing her noon meal. "I tried to imagine a stranger knocking on my door and wondered if I could have been so humble and gracious in the same situation," says Meens "That was my special moment in Auvillar."

A grove of cultivated trees seems to float in the early morning mist near Auvillar

PHOTOGRAPH BY NATASHIA MEENS







PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD WIESE



PHOTOGRAPH BY DON POGANY



PHOTOGRAPH BY BARBARA BENT

People come from all over the Midi-Pyrénées region for the grape-picking contest in Donzac where dancers in traditional garb and grape juice fresh squeezed from the vine are just a few of the attractions. Prizes go to those who can pluck the most grapes from the vine in timed sprints, but the real winners are the villagers who celebrate past midnight. Grape-growers work long hours in September, gathering the final harvest (lower left). “The grapes seemed to flow into the cart in a liquid stream,” says photographer Barbara Bent.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DON POGANY







Autumn fields, forests and a crucifix in the village cemetery reflect the gentle sunlight after a rain. "Walking among the highly-decorated sarcophagi, I came to an outlook I'd been looking for since my arrival at the workshop," says Dana Whitaker. "There in the distance were trees covered in their fall coats of red, yellow, brown and final vestiges of green. In the foreground was a sarcophagus with a crucifix holding Christ whose arms opened to the distant vista."

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANA E. WHITAKER





“Grappes de chasella” means table grapes. Grown within a 25-mile radius of Auvillar, these sweet raisins de table are sold on Sundays in the town market and can be found on literally every luncheon buffet in town.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NANCY WHEELER



“Suddenly, everyone stopped and arranged themselves in a line, facing two alpha males, who, I could tell, were choosing up sides. The moment for the photo came when, as I could see, the alphas were getting down to the bottom of their choices,” photographer Steve Bent says of this picture taken on a school yard in Auvillar.

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVE BENT



The son of Serge Francois, chef de cuisine du Restaurant de l'Horloge, holds a cèpe outside the restaurant. Also known as porcini mushrooms by the Italians, cèpes grow wild in the forests and are highly prized for their buttery flavor.

PHOTOGRAPH BY WALT HUBIS



"I was standing in the slop near the pig pen (trying to hold my breath for 45 minutes) when that moment happened," says Don Pogany. "The pigs had a lot of personality and moved around quite a bit. But two finally settled into that almost posed position."

PHOTOGRAPH BY DON POGANY





ABOVE: Many people in Auvillar travel about on their daily errands by foot or bicycle. This two-wheeler awaits its rider.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NEIL HOFFMAN

RIGHT: A happy denizen of the French countryside, this billy goat mugs for the camera.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBIN BISHA

TOP RIGHT: A road mirror reflects a lone car on a rainy town street.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DON POGANY

FAR RIGHT: Photographer Don Pogany works his subject.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARY TONON







PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVE BENT



PHOTOGRAPH BY NANCY WHEELER

"When you're in a school, find what makes this look like a French school, not a school in the Kansas City suburbs," instructor Mark Greenberg tells his photographers. At the l'Ecole d'Auvillar, Nancy Wheeler is struck by the contrast of the rectangular sponges and oval mirror in the children's restroom. "The lavatory was located directly next to and in front of the school dining room. The children had to go through the lavatory to get to the dining room, and of course, under the watchful eye of the cooks, wash their hands before entering for lunch," says Wheeler.









Auvillar sits on the bank of the Garonne River in the Midi-Pyrénées region of southern France.



Ostrich eggs in an old a wicker basket are a study in light and contrast.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GARY TACON

LEFT: “I could hear the chickens in the next pen, so when I left the pigs, I looked in there,” says Don Pogany. “The light and dust in the air had created a very rustic, almost painterly quality.”

PHOTOGRAPH BY DON POGANY





With a concept and a locale for the initial FirstLight workshop established, Dickman and Greenberg turned to Olympus in search of sponsorship. Greenberg has been actively involved with Olympus for more than five years, testing first-generation equipment, providing his photographs to the company and working with their trade shows. He also was a senior advisor to the massive “America 24/7” book project and digital coordinator for the “Day-in-the-Life of Africa” project where he trained 60 photographers – most of whom had never used digital cameras – on the Olympus E-20N.

“Mark was very, very valuable with his contacts and experience with Olympus,” says Dickman.

Both men felt instinctively that the FirstLight workshop would be a perfect fit for Olympus, which is aggressively marketing its digital cameras to the consumer and professional markets.

John D. Knaur, senior marketing manager for digital SLR cameras at Olympus, agreed.

“Digital is so new that there are a number of people with the mind set that you can’t take a good picture with digital,” says Knaur. “We think projects (such as the FirstLight workshop) are a way for us to go out and say digital is here and you can take great pictures with digital and here are the results.”

As a major sponsor, Olympus underwrote the advertising for FirstLight and supplied C-5050, E-20N and E-1 digital cameras and printers for the participants and instructors to use.

Olympus bills its E-1, introduced in the fall of 2003, as “the world’s first 100 percent all-digital interchangeable lens SLR system.” Photographers at the FirstLight workshop found the camera a delight to work with, praising its clarity and speed.

The C-5050 is a top performer in Olympus’s prosumer line, designed for both professional photographers and consumers with 5 Megapixel chip and a fast f 1.8 aspherical lens. The E-20N, which photographers first used during David Cohen’s “Day-in-the-Life of Africa” project, also has earned high marks for its versatility.

“We would watch people take the pictures and then we would look at the back of the camera and say, ‘Does this picture reflect what you were seeing?’” Greenberg said. “We were able to give them enough information to be able to use the camera as an interpretive tool and not get lost in the technology.”

An old iron bedstead finds its final resting place on a side street outside a house in Auvillar.

PHOTOGRAPH BY WALT HUBIS



With roots dating to Roman times and buildings from the 16th century still standing, Auvillar is an ancient town with a long memory. It commemorates its dead – who far outnumber its living residents – in picturesque plots and cemeteries. Here a crucifix and roses mark a 20th century grave.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RANDALL BERNSOHN



Calligrapher Bruno Riboulet writes on wood and stone. Says a friend, "Art in any way is all that counts for him. He does not leave his house unless it is to visit an exposition from a colleague." While the photographer watched, Riboulet took time out from his craft to show a young boy how to carve in stone.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIC STEENWIJK



Laurence Ricaut, a farmer from Mauroux who raises ducks for pate de foie gras, readies a cart of garlic for market.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIC STEENWIJK



ABOVE: An elderly couple cleans garlic fresh from the field before taking it to market for sale. "They created the scene for this picture by pulling up the chairs and taking out a crate of garlic from many which were stacked in the narrow hallway of their home," say Nancy Wheeler.

RIGHT: "The day before one of our mentor photographer/editors talked about standing directly over something to take a photo, which I had never done," says Nancy Wheeler. "So this was one of my first experiments with that technique."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NANCY WHEELER









Even in a year of famously strained Franco-American relations, photographers at the FirstLight workshop found themselves embraced by the residents of Auvillar.

"I felt like I was part of a moment of deep significance in French-American relations as a FirstLight student in Auvillar," says Robin Bisha, a photo instructor from Texas who hopes to return to France next year with her students. "I had some of the best days of my life, photographic or otherwise, in the field with FirstLight friends."

Says Natasha Meens, who was moved by the elegant simplicity of life in Auvillar, "We Westerners could really learn a few things from the lifestyle of the French and Europeans in general."

Gary Tacon, an amateur photographer from New York, found the workshop "simply a joy to be part of." Nancy Wheeler was "impressed with the compelling photography of the instructors/mentors and with their patience in dealing with novices like me."

Walt Hubis, a photographer from Colorado, found himself working to reach a new level.

"I was able to accept that I was learning, where it's usually necessary to do some amount of deconstruction to form a new base from which greater growth can occur," Hubis says.

The crowning moment for most, though, came the final night of the workshop when villagers shared wine and cheese with FirstLight photographers at an open-air show of the week's work. The round walls of La Halle were hung with 8x10 color photographs shot by FirstLight photographers. And then, as a full moon rose over La Halle and the city lights dimmed, FirstLight photographs were projected onto a 20-by-40 foot screen hung from a wall of city hall.

Walking out of a restaurant, just in time for the slide show, Dickman looked into the sky over La Halle and gasped. The moon, so lush and full, suspended in that exact moment of time and space, seemed a serendipitous gift of nature sent to punctuate to the show.

"I stopped and I stared," Dickman says, "It was just a magical moment. And I thought I hope everyone sees how amazing this is."

Chances are everyone did.

Locals gather in a cafe for a leisurely lunch on a rainy Sunday in Auvillar. A dog waits patiently for his master and perhaps a tasty tidbit.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DON POGANY



Students and staff from the Firstlight Auvillar Workshop pose outside Moulin À Nef. Pictured in the top windows, from left to right, are Don Pogany and Becky Dickman and Barbara Bent and Richard Wiese. From left to right, in the lower window are Gary Tacon, John Pamer, Nancy E. Wheeler, and Randall Bernsohn. Below, standing from left to right are Walt Hubis, Francoise BelHouget, Valerie Hartig, Eric Steenwijk, John Isaacs, Mark Greenberg, Jeffrey Aaronson, Robert Losson, Kim Swezey, Natashaia Meens (with the umbrella), Gail Zimmerman, Stephen Bent, Robin Bisha, Mary Tonon and Dana E. Whitaker. Front row, left to right are Jean Claude Delgal, Jay Dickman, Nicolas Reynard, Larry C. Price and Bert Fox.

2003 Auvillar FirstLight Workshop Faculty



Jeffrey Aaronson - Olympus Visionary

Jeffrey Aaronson is an internationally recognized photographer who is best known for his extraordinary use of color, his talent for creating visual metaphors and his ability to work on location anywhere in the world....over 40 countries (often multiple times) on every continent for publications including: TIME, National Geographic, Newsweek, Fortune, Forbes, Conde Nast Travler, etc.



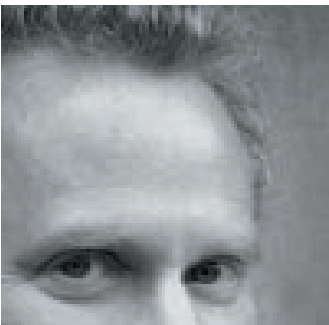
Jay Dickman - Olympus Visionary

A Pulitzer-Prize winning photographer, and a regular contributor to National Geographic Magazine, Jay's work has appeared in 15 of the high profile A Day in the Life of... series. His work also has won several awards in the World Press International Competition, including the 'Golden Eye' award, and the Sigma Delta Chi Award for Distinguished Service in Journalism.



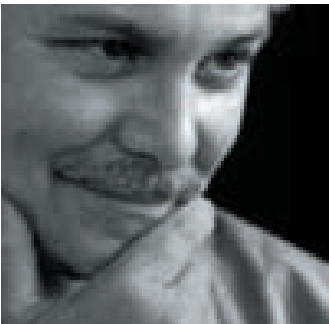
Bert Fox - National Geographic Photo Editor

Bert Fox joined National Geographic Magazine in August 1996 as an Illustrations Editor. He recently completed editing the visual content for a 70-page National Geographic Magazine May issue cover story celebrating 50 years of mountaineering on Mt. Everest. His honors include being named "Magazine Picture Editor of the Year" five times by the University of Missouri, in their annual Pictures of the Year (POY) competition.



Mark Greenberg - Olympus Visionary

Mark Greenberg is a former assignment-editor at the Associated Press and ran his own news-feature picture agency, Visions for 15-years. Mark has traveled the world as a magazine photographer and won World Press Photo awards. He was most recently senior digital advisor for A Day In the Life of Africa and America 24-7. Mark is Director of Development for WorldPictureNews photo agency.



Larry C. Price - Olympus Visionary

A two-time Pulitzer-Prize winning photographer, Larry's work has also been honored by the Overseas Press Club, World Press Photo Awards, the Pan American Press Association and the National Press Photographers Association. Price is currently assistant managing editor/photography for the Denver Post. Larry worked on the acclaimed A Day in the Life of Africa as well as eleven other Day in the Life... projects.



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