

THE OBAN PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKSHOP • SEPTEMBER 2004

# FIRSTLIGHT



# FIRSTLIGHT OBAN



COVER: Bagpiper Ian Campbell plays on the western shore of Scotland near The Bridge Over the Atlantic. "One of my clicks precisely caught the rising sun on the piper's face and gave me a photo that speaks volumes about Scotland, its people and its heritage," says photographer Leeta McDougald. • PHOTOGRAPH BY LEETA MCDUGALD



# DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKSHOP

Fishing boats make their way out of the harbor as morning dawns and the town of Oban comes to life. "The combination of some sunshine and lingering dark storm clouds provided some nice drama for the sky," says photographer Don Pogany. • PHOTOGRAPH BY DON POGANY









**T**he place: Oban, Scotland.

The mission: capture the essence of the Western Highlands during six short days in September 2004.

The weather: wicked storms kicked off by Florida hurricanes.

Mission impossible?

Not for the 11 participants of the FirstLight/Oban Workshop who pulled on their wellies and their macks, hoisted their weatherproof Olympus digital cameras and sallied out into the gale.

“When you travel, you don’t have the luxury of waiting a week for the weather to improve. This is how it is,” says Jay Dickman, founder of the FirstLight Workshops. “We said, ‘Let’s see something beautiful in the rain.’”

And indeed, they did. The photographs they returned with, as this magazine attests, are nothing short of spectacular. The light from overcast skies lends a softness to subjects. People, animals, buildings seen through rain-splattered windshields take on magical qualities. Brooding storm clouds frame verdant moors. The green of the long grass, the red of a rowboat pop against the storm-dark sky. And in those moments when a ray of sun splits the mantle of gray like a spotlight, the effect is stunning.

“When you think of Scotland, you do think of rain and mist,” says Dickman. “If it’s bad weather, people just make the most of it.”

Scottish Highlanders are famously intrepid -- 2nd Century Romans learned this the hard way. They are not given to shirking their duties, even in the face of gale-force winds and horizontal rain. Jamie Mellor, the first lieutenant to the Duke of Argyll, and one of Oban’s largest landowners, took workshop participants along on his trek across the moors to tend his sheep. The resulting photograph of Mellor in a rain-soaked slicker with rivulets of water pouring off his face tells of the rancher’s dedication in the way that a picture taken on a sunny day could not.



LEFT: Jamie Mellor, the first lieutenant to the Duke of Argyll and one of Oban’s largest landowners, hikes with his dog over the rain-swept moors to tend his sheep, as his family has done for generations. PHOTOGRAPH BY WALT HUBIS

TOP: “Sitting in that booth in the middle of the room, she looked almost as though she were on exhibit,” says Pogany of the woman who makes change at a video arcade in Oban. • PHOTOGRAPH BY DON POGANY

ABOVE: The Inn at Kilmartin about 30 miles south of Oban is framed by low-hanging storm clouds and the stone fence of a cemetery across the road. PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL McDUGALD



A lone tree bent by the wind finds root in the fertile soil on the Isle of Luing. In the 18th and 19th Centuries, slate was quarried from the hills of Luing. Today, with the quarries long closed, the 200 or so remaining islanders raise cattle and fish for a living. • PHOTOGRAPH BY WALT HUBIS







The lighthouse at Crinan stands sentry at the head of a waterway between Argyll, Scotland and England. •  
PHOTOGRAPH BY  
LEEANN HERINGER

A lobsterman readies his cages near the pier in Tobermory on the Isle of Mull.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY  
JOAN HARRISON





**N**inety-five miles north of Glasgow, Oban or “Little Bay” in the native Gaelic, nestles beside a natural harbor on the Argyll Peninsula.

Old stone buildings line the pier and houses march up the hillside to McCaig’s Tower, an eccentric 19th Century banker’s reproduction of the Roman Colosseum. As the “Gateway to the Isles,” Oban also is a busy terminus for ferry and rail traffic between the mainland and western islands of Mull, Seil, Luing and Lismore.

The surrounding Western Highlands rise up in steep banks of green and plunge down into impossibly deep lochs. South of Oban, Kilmartin Glen, [cq] arguably one of the prettiest and most historic glens in the country, is famous for its ancient standing stones, burial cairns and carvings. At night, workshop participants gathered in the common room of their hotel, the elegant, four-star Knipoch Inn [cq] on the bank of the Loch Feochan, [cq] to discuss their pictures and savor spirits from the local distilleries.

“Every one of your senses is maxed out,” says Dickman, whose mother was born in Scotland. “You can smell the brackish loch and feel the coolness of the area. You shake some farmer’s hand and he has old wool gloves on. You hear the sound of the waves slapping against the shore.”

To help photographers capture this feast for the senses, Jay and Becky Dickman scouted sites and arranged for photographers to spend time with locals. The biggest problem: sensory overload.

“We wanted people to understand that you don’t rush in and get the image and rush out,” says Dickman. “You meet the person and let them get comfortable until, after a while, you become part of the wallpaper and that person goes back to doing what was interesting in the first place.”



The village of Kilmartin is seen through the gate of a church cemetery.

**PHOTOGRAPH BY AL HARRISON**

**RIGHT:** Even on a rainy day, the colors can be intense. Here, the bright blue raincoats of two women walking against the wind punctuate a pallet of leaden sky, slate-blue loch, green pastures, and weathered brown stones.

**PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH PARKER**













Fishing boats head to port for the night in the Oban harbor. Lights on the hill illuminate McCaig's Tower, an 1890s replica of the Roman Colosseum built by a wealthy banker.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM BOTTS





TOP LEFT: Newlyweds wait for the ferry to the Isle of Easdale. In kilt and shawl “they looked like they were out of Masterpiece Theater,” says Joan Harrison.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOAN HARRISON

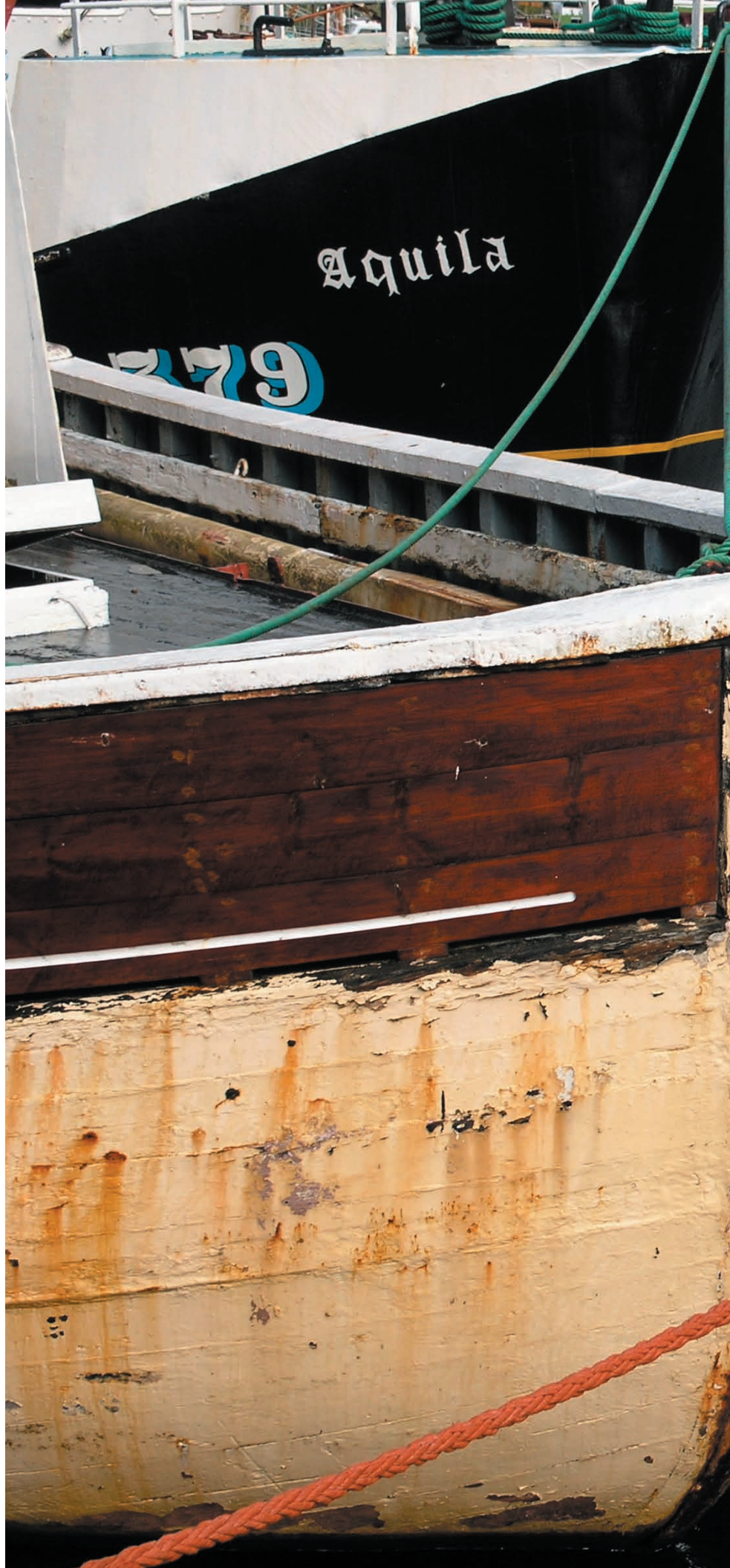


BOTTOM LEFT: After showing his sheep at a local livestock auction, this man passes the time with fellow ranchers outside the arena.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH PARKER

RIGHT: The geometry and color of hulls and lines of these boats at anchor near Crinan caught the photographer’s eye.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOAN HARRISON















THE  
Oban Fish &  
Chip Shop  
and Restaurant

A young boy gets a trim at this Oban barber shop crammed with sports memorabilia. Pogany was so taken by the scene that he ruefully admits, he “blew it as a journalist” and forgot to ask his subject’s name.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY DON POGANY

At the Oban Fish & Chips Shop, a workman climbs a ladder to clean the gutters. “Anywhere else, this would seem like a very ordinary event, but the quaintness of Oban... and the sense of purpose on the men’s faces seemed to make it more special,” says Pogany.







FAR LEFT: For a photographer trudging through rain-drenched moors, the rainbow is the pot of gold at the end of a long, wet day. Here a white house near Oban seems infinitesimally small against the majestic sky.

ABOVE: This border collie has the moves to herd the sheep so that they can be tagged for auction.

LEFT: Rancher Jamie Mellor tags his sheep for auction.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY WALT HUBIS





Highland ranchers bring their sheep to Oban for auction. Photographer Walt Hubis waded into the pens, worried at first that he might be gored by the horns on the rams. Instead, he found the animals to be very gentle.

**LEFT:** The backs of the sheep are sprayed with bright paint to identify their owners.

**PHOTOGRAPH BY WALT HUBIS**

**RIGHT:** Ranchers watch the auction through a fence.

**PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH PARKER**

**BOTTOM:** A sheep enters the auction ring. Says Parker, "It felt like it could be in the 1930s . . . I knew I was in Scotland."

**PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH PARKER**















LEFT: “The best part of Scotland was when you’d get broken sky with intense shafts of light . . . and you’d pile in the car and go literally chase it,” says LeeAnn Heringer, who took this photograph of the Kilmartin cemetery and the fields beyond during one such moment.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LEEANN HERINGER



TOP: A graveyard seen through a fence beside an old church in Kilmartin Glen.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM BOTTS

ABOVE: Henry Tarbet makes musical instruments, including violins, along with wheel barrows, long bows and sailboat parts, in his shop on the Isle of Easdale.

PHOTOGRAPH BY WALT HUBIS

"The one theme the instructors kept coming back to . . . was patience. Patience with the light, patience in setting up a scene, patience in moving around a subject to find the right angle," says LeeAnn Heringer. Here, a passing pedestrian completes the picture of the buildings of Oban reflected in a window. PHOTOGRAPH BY LEEANN HERINGER













**D**ickmxz'an, a Pulitzer-prize winner, Olympus Visionary and National Geographic photographer, has worked closely with Olympus for several years. This year, as at the Auvillar, [cq] France, workshop, Olympus loaned FirstLight several E-1 and C-8080 digital cameras, as well as a selection of lenses. John Knaur, senior marketing manager for SLRs at Olympus, also joined the workshop to help the participants and to use the digital cameras himself.

"If I were pushing anything, it would be the ability of the cameras to withstand the gales and rain, which were basically a constant," says Knaur.

The body of the E-1 has 64 separate seals and gaskets around all the openings to prevent moisture from penetrating the camera under reasonable conditions. The cameras are not designed to be submerged, but even Knaur was pleasantly surprised by how well they performed in drenching downpours.

Additionally, the digital-specific lenses used with the E-1 produced sharp images even under low-light and overcast conditions.

"Because they're still sharp wide open, these lenses give you nice crisp clear images even at the largest aperture setting," says Knaur.

For example, the photograph by Walt Hubis on page 19 of rancher Mellor tagging his sheep was shot with available light in a dark barn illuminated only by the sunlight slanting through the slatted walls.

About a third of the workshop participants were proficient with digital photography; the rest, Dickman notes, were relatively unfamiliar with the new technology. And photo-shopping the images once they were downloaded from the cameras into the computers was, for most, a new frontier.

To help with the technical aspects, Dickman hired Jay Kinghorn, an Adobe Photoshop Certified Expert. Kinghorn was joined on staff by National Geographic illustrations editor Kurt Mutchler and Aspen photographer and Olympus Visionary Jeffrey Aaronson.

"The combination of photographers, an editor and a technical expert involved in magazine production provided a range of insights," says Josh Parker, a Montana newspaper photographer. "The staff helped me understand what goes into making picture stories better and more complete."

Legend holds that a horse pulling a cart load of hay was sent across "The Bridge over the Atlantic" to test its strength upon its completion in 1792. Forty ton trucks cross it today with no worries, traveling between the mainland of Scotland and the Isle of Seil. White houses and a finger of the Atlantic Ocean are seen here from the famed bridge.

**PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL MOSHER**

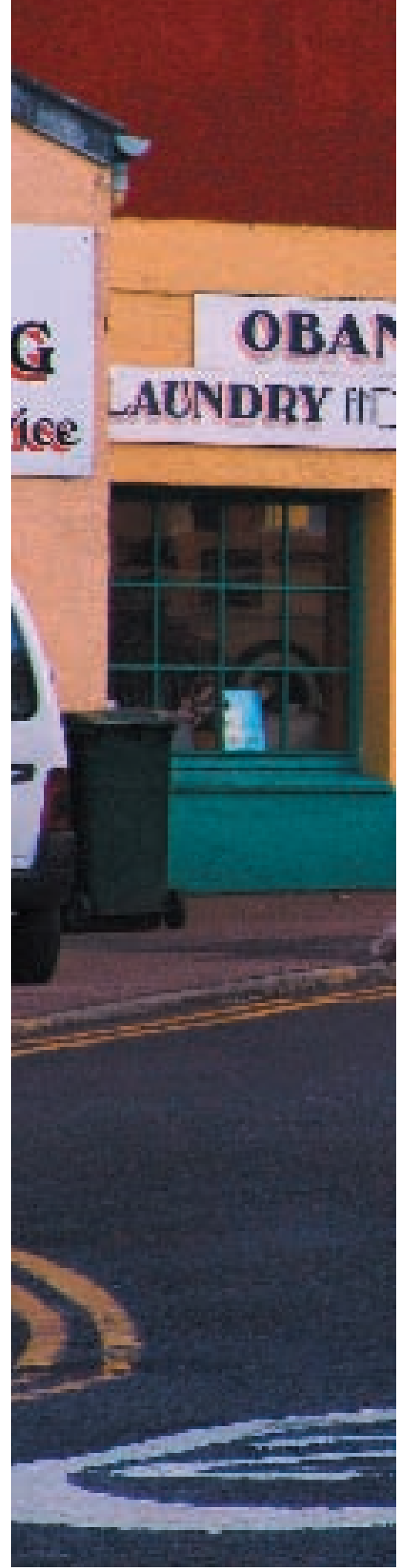


ABOVE: A woman finishes her meal at the Crinan Hotel restaurant.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY JULIE BOTTS



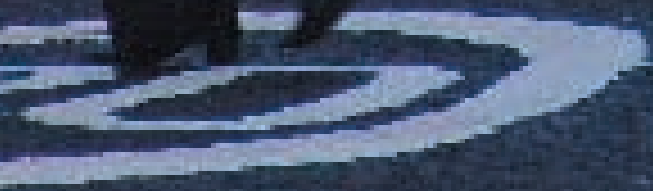
ABOVE: "There appear to be two pictures in one," says Bill Mosher of this image of a dog seen through a rain-streaked car windshield in Tobermory. • PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL MOSHER

RIGHT: "Part of the charm of Oban is the routine and how serious everyone is about his or her profession or role," says Pogany. Here, the bright colors of the crossing guard's uniform and the guard's professional manner make the picture. • PHOTOGRAPH BY DON POGANY





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**F**rom the beginning, the goal of the FirstLight Workshops has been to meld digital technology with the fundamentals of great photography. Part of that process involves assigning a small group of photographers to work with each instructor.

“I will always remember the workshop for the one-on-one editing of pictures shot each day and the professional advice that was given to improve on each,” says participant Bill Mosher, a long-haul truck driver. “This was an outstanding experience for me.”

Says the National Geographic’s Mutchler, “What brought people together was the language of photography and that was a beautiful thing to see.”

Becky Dickman, who calls herself the concierge of FirstLight – a self-effacing title that doesn’t begin to encompass her varied duties – likens the atmosphere of the FirstLight/Oban workshop to a summer camp.

“There’s such a great conviviality,” she says. “The people who are attracted to these workshops are the adventuresome type who want to experience new things and new people and who also have a shared interest in photography.”

FirstLight participants also found warm and welcoming hosts in the Scottish people who took time out of their daily routines to share their lives and their land with strangers. Along with Mellor, the sheep rancher, photographers spent time with Henry Tarsdale, a violin maker on the Isle of Easdale, veterinarian Max Bonniwell and bagpiper, Ian Campbell.

And then there were the serendipitous moments when photographers and townsfolk struck a common bond.

“The woman whose bench we were loitering on stuck her head out her door and said she was about to make a pot, would we like to come in for coffee. Which surprised us, but we said sure,” says participant LeeAnn Heringer. “Walt (Hubis) took a number of pictures of Wendy while we were talking.”

On the final night of the workshop, as a thank you to their hosts and as a celebration of a job well done, FirstLight hosted a gallery show and cocktail party for the photographers and their subjects. The photographers would know whether they had succeeded by the reaction of the locals. Dickman recalls watching the residents of Oban as they viewed the photographs of themselves and their town.

“They were going up to look at the photographs on the wall and they were going back two and three times to study them,” says Dickman. “And all those people went out with big smiles on their faces. It was really cool to see that.”

“I would find boats in the most unlikely places,” says Hubis who took this photograph of a rowboat marooned on a windswept hill on Luing Island. • **PHOTOGRAPH BY WALT HUBIS**









Pictured left to right, standing, are Knipoch Hotel employee John Ferguson, Jim Botts, Julie Botts, Knipoch employee Kirsty Knox (in black), Mike McDougald, Leeta McDougald, Jay Kinghorn (in rear), Bill Mosher, Walt Hubis, Lee Ann Heringer (in pink), Don Pogany, John Knaur, Joan Harrison (in plaid shawl), Josh Parker, Al Harrison, Kurt Mutchler (in ball cap), Becky Dickman and Knipoch employee Ryan Fullerton. Kneeling in front are Bill Reid and Jay Dickman



## 2004 Oban 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.



### **Kurt Mutchler - National Geographic Picture Editor**

A 10-year veteran picture editor at National Geographic magazine specializing in science, Kurt has produced 14 cover stories for the magazine. From wide-ranging topics such as life beyond earth, the war in Iraq to the mechanics of our Sun, Kurt relishes in the challenge of producing the visual content for the magazine. He currently is an adjunct professor at the Corcoran College of Art + Design teaching photojournalism.



### **Jay Kinghorn - RGB Imaging**

An Adobe Photoshop Certified Expert, Jay Kinghorn draws upon his background as an assignment and fine-art photographer to develop training programs that fulfill the essential needs of photographers. His approachable, comfortable and efficient training style makes Jay one of the most sought after digital imaging specialists.



WHEN YOU SET OUT TO DESIGN THE DIGITAL  
CAMERA OF THE FUTURE, YOU DON'T START  
WITH A LENS FROM 1913.



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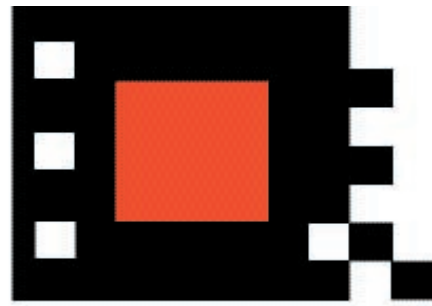




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## **2004 Oban FirstLight Workshop Notes**

### **BACK COVER**

Tied up in the Oban harbor, a small blue motor boat awaits its owner who is perhaps doing business in town or at the brightly-colored post office across from the pier.

**PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL MOSHER**

