

Sea & Water

Photographer: Steve Turner

For some of Australia's leading professionals, photography is an unrestrainable passion. Hired guns for most of the week, these photographers use every spare moment to shoot personal projects. In many ways, it's an addiction. But a necessary addiction if they are to achieve the quality and depth shown in their personal portfolios.

Better Photography asked one of these professionals, advertising photographer Steve Turner, to describe how he captured some of his favourite images.

Insight

Steve Turner was introduced to photography by his father, himself a photographer in World War II at Tobruk (some of his images reside in the Australian War Museum). After school, Steve went to National Art School where he remembers learning about composition, a big asset for a photographer. However, initially Steve worked in the graphic arts field and as a musician at night, but eventually the photography bug became too strong.

Turning full time professional in 1992, today he shoots a cross-section of advertising and catalogue work and has been working digitally since 1996. The only film camera he still uses is a Hasselblad Xpan, but this comprises a very small percentage of his work.

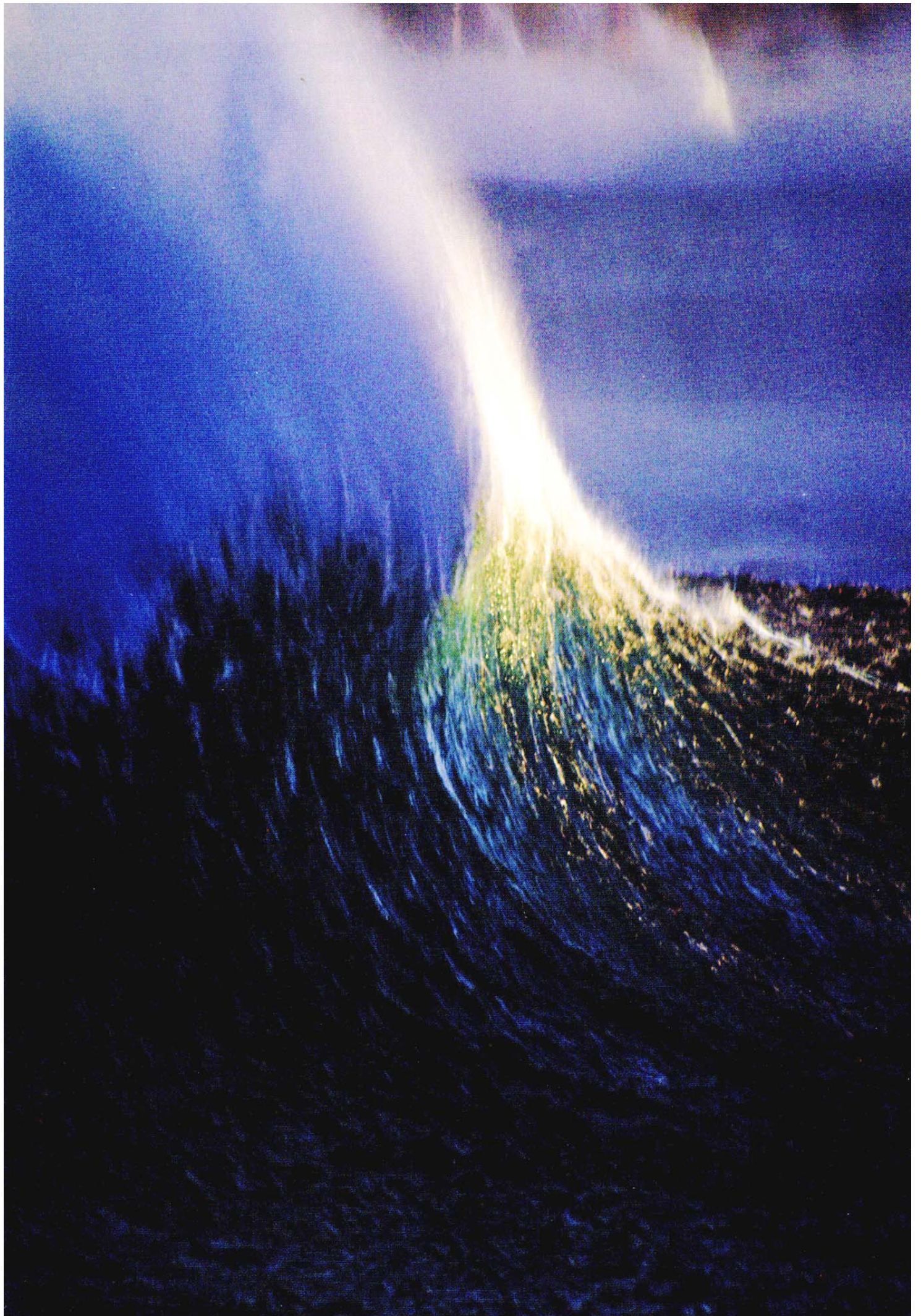
And Steve surfs. He has a close association with the ocean, being brought up in Manly, Sydney and living near the coast all his life. Much of his personal work has some nexus with the sea and water. And even though he works professionally, he still shoots personally. "I shoot because that's what I want to do, not because I want to sell it. Most of the work in my personal portfolios was shot for the pure pleasure of photography."

Several of Steve's images have won awards in the Fuji ACMP Australian Photographers Collection, but he acknowledges that if you try too hard to win awards, often it doesn't work. "I don't think you can say you're going to walk out the door and shoot fantastic award-winning images. It just doesn't happen that way."

The Wave

A few years back, Sydney experienced some extremely wild weather with gale force winds. "Most people think it's not worth taking your camera out in conditions like this", began Steve. "The wind was well over 90 kph and everyone appeared to be indoors. The beaches were deserted and certainly there was no one out surfing at Maroubra Beach that afternoon."

Steve had driven from his studio to the beach just before sunset and, in spite of the strong offshore winds, the surf had come up with large waves peaking and feathering off the rocks. However, sand was being blown along the shore like millions of small missiles, so Steve changed into his wetsuit for protection and





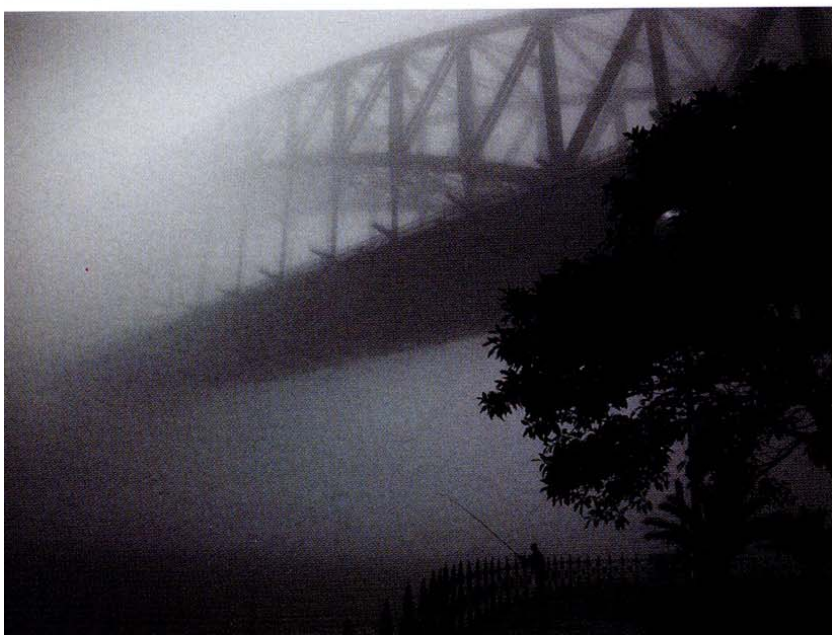
Foggy Crossing

fitted a Tokina 80-300mm zoom to his Nikon D100 DSLR. "It's only a small lens, but it works quite well for surfing shots.

"When I got out of the car, the wind was so strong I thought I'd be blinded by the sand, so I strapped on a pair of Bolle sunglasses and crawled around the edge of the rocks. Maroubra is a good beach to photograph at sunset because it has one of the lowest western horizons, allowing the sun to drop unobstructed almost to the point of sunset. I sat on the rocks and watched the ocean. It felt like sitting in front of a sandblaster.

"As I watched, a huge wave began to break and at the same time, the wind strengthened to well over 100 kph, blowing a plume of spray over 20 metres into the air. It looked simply amazing."

There was just the one wave lit by the setting sun, producing a perfect frame. With so many people taking pictures these days, photographers often need to go to extraordinary lengths to get images with impact. Certainly few people would risk their equipment in these circumstances and Steve



The Fisherman

confesses that when he took his Tokina lens in for repair afterwards, he was told not to bother because it had been so badly damaged by the sand and salt. His Nikon D100 survived.

"The image was captured as a JPEG. I would have preferred to capture it as a RAW file, but I just couldn't see the camera properly to really know what settings I had! Still, it shows that if you get the right exposure with a JPEG, the image will work out just fine.

"The photo was shot at f5.6 and 1/60 second. The light was very weak and I had to hand hold the camera because there wasn't time to set up a tripod – not that a tripod would have been any use in such strong winds."

Foggy Crossing

Steve's studio used to be located in North Sydney and every morning he'd leave home early to beat the traffic, crossing the Sydney Harbour Bridge. "Before going to the studio, I'd usually drive down to the bottom of Blues Point Road on the harbour's edge to see what was happening and maybe take a photograph. I did this over a period of four years and I'd often see Phil Quirk down there as well.

"Photos like *Foggy Crossing* happen when all the elements come together. It was a misty morning and an old, de-commissioned ferry came through the fog. Although the image looks like it's a black and white, it's actually photographed on Fujifilm Provia 100 colour transparency film. I used a Nikon F5 with a 24-120mm lens, set at 24mm. The only colour in the image is the touch of yellow in the ferry and a light on the mast." (The image has since been reproduced as a black and white.)

"I was going through a phase when I really enjoyed the work of Casneaux and Dupain, trying perhaps to keep their style and work alive. Casneaux used to carry a large Graflex and take photos on the way to work along the dockyards. In these days of digital cameras, it's worth remembering older photographers had to do it the hard way. I know Casneaux even processed in his bath tub!

"Of course, it doesn't really matter how difficult or easy it is to physically take a photograph. The most important thing in photography is the composition, the light and the subject matter. I also like photographs that tell a story in some way, but without being artificial. It's easy enough today to manipulate images and drop elements in, but I still like to get it all in one shot."

With many years of experience, much of Steve's technique and approach to his subject is 'automatic'. He says the old master painters such as Rubens influence his approach to lighting, but there is one particular book that is very close to his heart. "It's the 1948 edition of the *Australian Photography Yearbook*. It features many of Australia's greatest photographers such as Laurie Le Guay, Casneaux and Dupain. I think this is where much of my



inspiration for composition and subject matter comes from. The book even includes a photograph that was taken right outside my studio door!”

The Fisherman was photographed on another misty morning, around two years after the ferry in *Foggy Crossing*. “When it’s foggy, you have to work quickly and ask yourself what is going to make the light work. It’s all very well to have a foggy harbour and the bridge, but you need something else in the photo to make it work.

“In this case it was the fisherman and what attracted me was the way his rod curved to mimic the curve of the Harbour Bridge.

“When you shoot in fog or mist, you can’t really see with the naked eye how the shot will turn out. There’s something in the way the light is reflected through the fog which can produce a glow in the photograph that might not be observable when you’re there. So, if there’s fog around, get out there and shoot because you just don’t know what you’re going to get.”

The Blue Bow

One of Steve’s favourite and most successful images is *The Blue Bow*. It was photographed with the first roll of Velvia Steve ever used back in 1991. At the

time he was studying at the Australian Centre for Photography and his class was each given a roll of the new film to try.

“I went up to The Entrance for the weekend and booked into a motel. Nearby was a boatshed and a number of old boats. It seemed to me that every frame I shot on that roll was great – it was an amazing film.

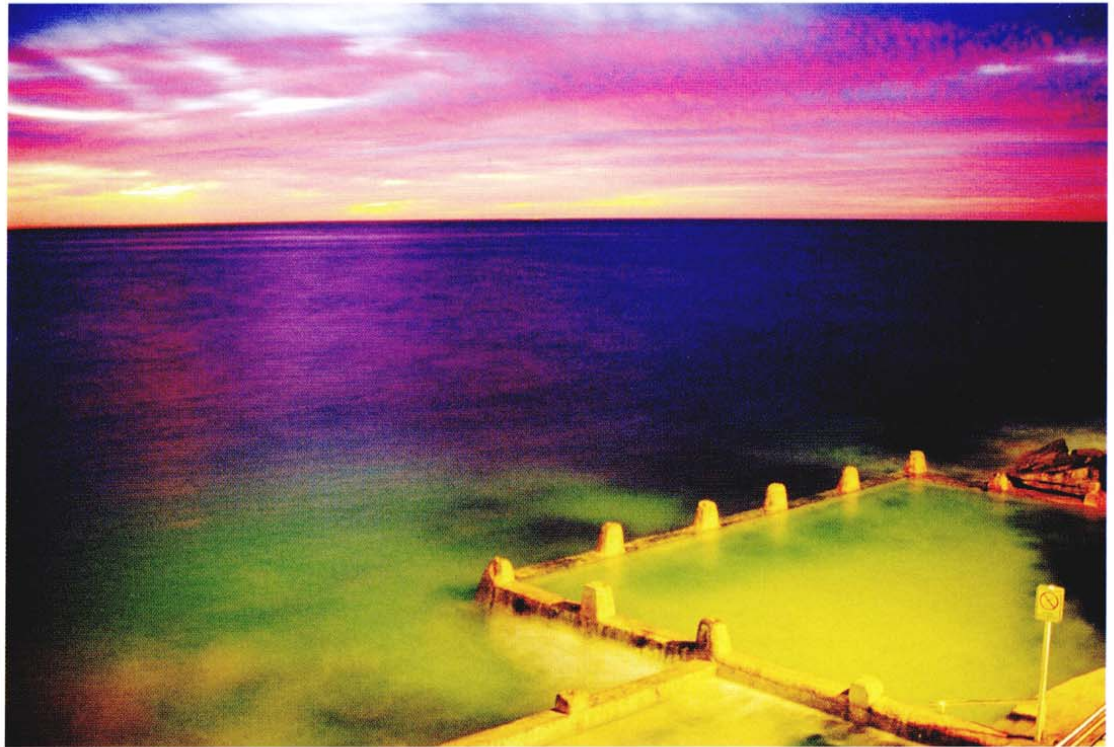
“I found this old dingy and thought the texture and shape was just incredible. I took two shots, a detail of the hull (shown here) and an overview, planning to come back the following weekend with my Hasselblad.” To capture all the fine detail, Steve felt medium format film would produce a superior result – his plan was sensible at the time since he had yet to see how good Velvia could be on 35mm film. And thank heavens it is...

“The next weekend I found the dingy had been freshly painted in white enamel paint, but undaunted, I tracked down the owner and offered him \$2000 to buy it. He refused and I increased my offer to \$2500 and still he refused, so the only photos I had of the dingy were those captured the first time. (Funnily enough, I returned a few weeks later and, according to the marina, the dingy had been swamped and sunk.)

The Blue Bow

Coogee Pool

Coogee Pool is one of Steve's older images, shot in 1997 with Fujifilm Velvia. "People think this is a digital shot and that the colour has been manipulated or the sky dropped in, but this is a straight exposure. There had been three days of spectacular sunrises and I was hoping for a fourth. I arrived at the pool at 5.30 a.m. for a 6.00 a.m. sunrise, knowing that the pool lights would be turned off right on sunrise. The photo includes both the mercury vapour lights and the pre-dawn sunrise. I used an exposure of around eight seconds at f16 on Velvia, rated at ISO 32. Without the lights on the pool, the foreground would have been too dark.



"This is the first image I produced as a limited edition. I was talked into it by a painter friend, framed it in a nice Karri wood, and put it into a shop in Balmain. They loved it and so did their customers because within a couple of days it had been sold. I have replaced it more than 30 times and it is still selling well along with some other boat photos I produce.

"It was this photo that gave me the inspiration to do more fine art photography. I'm not making

a massive profit from it, but I really enjoy selling my work because basically I think this is what photography is all about. If you shoot something and people like it enough to pay for it, you must be doing something right and I like that feeling."

Pink Kingswood

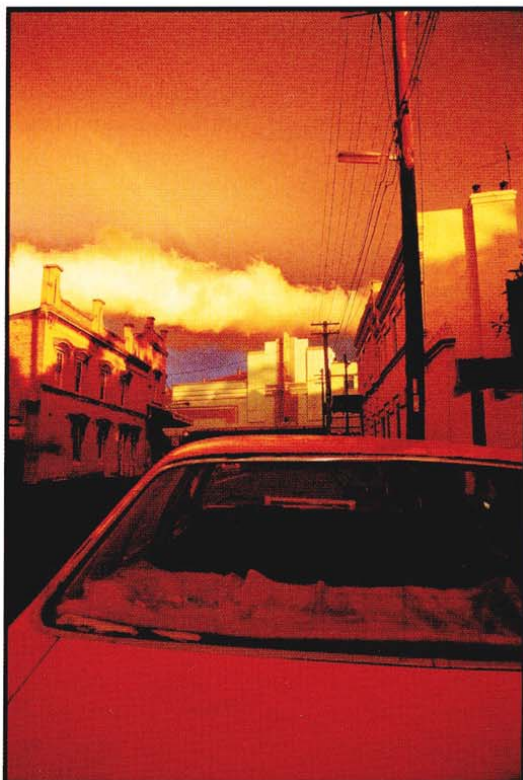
Award events such as the Canon Australian Professional Photography Awards and the Fuji ACMP Australian Photographers Collection can be a great incentive for photographers to produce new work. For the Fuji ACMP Collection 8 (which should be published shortly), Steve had booked a model for a shoot at his studio.

"As I parked the car outside the studio, there was a huge storm brewing with the most incredible sky. I felt I should really be down at the beach, but there wasn't time to get there and so I had to make the most of where I was.

"I jumped out of the car and looked around the street for something of interest. Around 50 metres up the road was a hand-painted, pink Holden Kingswood parked the wrong way. It created a quirky foreground for the brooding sky behind. I also took a few shots with garbage bins – it's all about finding something to turn an average shot into something better."

Steve returned to the studio to photograph his model, and entered both photos into Collection 8, but it was the photo of the Kingswood that was accepted. "You can try really hard to make great photos in the studio, but sometimes the best images are just outside if you're ready to take advantage of them."

To see more of Steve's work, you can visit www.steveturner-photography.com.



Pink Kingswood