

BLACK & WHITE MAGAZINE FOR COLLECTORS OF FINE PHOTOGRAPHY

# B&W

JEAN-PASCAL IMSAND

SPECIAL 16-PAGE TRIBUTE

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MASTER OF THE ENIGMATIC

PLUS

THE MACRO IMAGES OF

DAVID JOHNDROW



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# DAVID JOHNDROW

**M**any things grow in the garden that were never sown there.—Thomas Fuller, *Gnomologia*, 1732.

After a long day of printing, immersed in all the necessary chemicals and fumes, illuminated by the faint amber glow of the safelight and bent over a focusing magnifier and developing trays, it is good to have something to counterbalance the sometimes debilitating environment of the darkroom. Photographer David Johndrow has found his respite in his backyard garden. For the past four years, this fine art printer has found artistic inspiration, and regeneration, by photographing the natural microcosm he's cultivated behind his suburban home in Austin, Texas.

"I opened my own photo lab in 1996, doing custom printing for other photographers," Johndrow says. "I was spending all day in the darkroom, sometimes printing 8 to 10 hours a day. For therapy, I would come home and work in my garden, because that is another of my obsessions. But I never thought to put the two together. In retrospect, I think I wanted to keep the two things separate, and I didn't want to go down that well-traveled road of taking your typical pretty photographs of flowers and butterflies."

But Johndrow kept his eyes open, and eventually he started noticing small, fleeting moments in his garden that he found to be quite interesting. He thought if he could capture these diminutive nature scenes that he saw—not



as still lifes, or in a studio, nor as specimen shots, but rather as impressionist portraits of his experience—he might have a rewarding, long-term photographic project to work on.

"Gardening has become a form of communion for me," Johndrow says. "It's a form of meditation. When I'm working in my garden, my eyes are opened to these amazing things. It's almost like things are revealed to me, like something is being presented to me when I commune with nature. If I capture these very fleeting moments on film, it's like

a miracle. It's often so serendipitous that I have to ask myself, 'Did that really just happen?'

"My picture of the stink bug is a good example of how things often occur. I was working in my garden and actually got under this plant, looked up, and there was this stinkbug sitting quietly under a leaf. I grabbed my camera and captured this looming quality I saw when I focused my lens on the stinkbug. This is an example of one of those little miracles that happen all the time, and it's why I really love taking pictures of nature."

Johndrow always gardens with his cameras close at hand. He leaves a close-up extension mounted on his medium-format camera, ready to expose whenever providence supplies a subject. There is a photographic adage that states you should shoot what you know, and Johndrow's passion for his garden, and the natural oasis he has created in his backyard, supplies myriad photographic possibilities.

"It's when I'm looking through the lens," he explains, "that the images are revealed to me. I have an extremely shallow depth of field, and the subject sort of emerges from this mist of focus. Sometimes I actually shoot the mist—and like the effect. I think the impressionistic quality is in some ways more like reality. I don't put a lot of stock in what would be called straight realism, because I think that's really a reduction of what we actually see in life. When we look at things up close, and really focus on them, the rest of the world becomes kind of a mys-

tery. Your mind expands to fill in the gaps.

"I've thought of something else when taking these pictures that I think is interesting. Nature is all about communication: the patterns, the shapes, the way things move—that is the way nature communicates. So when I take a picture of a flower that's really beautiful, I'm attracted to the flower because the flower is actually designed to be attractive.

"When I put that picture in a show, there will often be a ring of people hovering around my photographs, kind of like bees, attracted to this thing. But what I have done is really just translated the communication that's already there. It first attracted me, and now it is attracting other viewers who are given the impetus to explore this inherent beauty. In a way you can claim that the plants are in charge, and that I, like the insects, am really working for them."—David Best

#### ■ PRINT INFORMATION

*Toned gelatin silver prints, printed by the photographer, are available in signed limited editions. Sizes include 18x18 inches (starting at \$1,000) and 28x28 inches (starting at \$1,500).*

#### ■ CONTACT INFORMATION

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STINKBUG - 2004



PRIDE OF BARBADOS - 2004



DRAGONFLY - 2004



BEETLE IN ONION FLOWER - 2006