



KOTZ' WORK IN ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY HAS TAKEN HIM FROM KIVA-STYLE TO MAN-OR HOME. CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: NEW MEXICO RESIDENCE FROM ???; DETAIL OF THE STROMQUIST HOUSE, FROM FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT: THE MASTERWORKS, 1993; A NOTABLE FEDERALIST-STYLE HOME, FROM HALLOWED GROUND: PRESERVING AMERICA'S HERITAGE, 1996; THE CLARKE HOUSE, FROM GREEK REVIVAL AMERICA, 1989.



The idea was a book about his grandmother's life and environs. For 20 years, what was to become *Ms. Booth's Garden* occupied Kotz' mind. An escape from commercial work, far away from snippy art directors with melancholy lives, it was the wellspring of the artistic vision seen in his work today.

rapher for his book series *Rediscovering America*, which concerned itself with American regional architecture (it later became a television series on Discovery Channel).

Perhaps Kennedy and Kotz' best collaboration was on the book *Greek Revival America*. It was Kotz's big break. "It put me on the map," he recalls. "They were Roger's books but they were a great opportunity for me to travel, make great photos and get them published."

Although his equipment was humble and his compensation modest, Kotz' early reputation was made with architectural images. "Shooting in cramped spaces, with poor lighting and sub-standard equipment, was a major challenge," Kotz remembers, "but I was able to do it ... It was fun."

The *Greek Revival* experience also helped the young photographer refine his vision. It was also proof that getting in the door is only half the battle. What you do once inside is up to you. Kotz might have been lucky, but he was good at making the most of his luck.

#### THE BIG TEX FANTASY

In 1991, Kotz moved to Santa Fe. In 1997, he married MaryAnn. The intervening years saw him laboring for regional home style, resort travel, fine dining and home design publications. An occasional advertising client came and went, not many of them especially memorable. But the editorial work was ample, including the *Smithsonian*, *Southwest Art*, *Midwest Home & Garden*, *Su Casa* and the *Santa Fean*.

Developers and architects also were drawn to Kotz' sense of place, even to the point of wanting him to produce it for sometimes-soulless creations (strictly author's opinion; Kotz disputes this) by the likes of Sun Desert Homes (Santa Fe), Conger Fuller Architects (Aspen) and Vista Clara Ranch (Galisteo, N.M.). One job followed another. Haul out the lighting, set up. Shoot the fabulous deck. The 40-foot lobby and master suite with heated floor. Kotz filled the pages of style and design mags.

He comments, "It was good work; sometimes fun. But how many times can you shoot Big Tex Oil's \$10 million fantasy of the lodge-pole Dream Lodge? How many 100-point elk chandeliers can you take?"

Still, it paid the rent and built him a solid reputation. Mean-



KOTZ' LIFELONG INTEREST IN ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY HAS LED A VARIETY OF COMMERCIAL CLIENTS HIS WAY. ABOVE, THIS PAGE: NEW MEXICO RESIDENCES. FACING PAGE, TOP ROW: KOTZ COLLABORATED WITH ILLUSTRATOR JOEL NAKAMURA AND CISNEROS DESIGN ON *HARRY'S ROADHOUSE COOKBOOK* IN 2006 ("IT TOOK ME SIX MARGARITAS BEFORE I GOT THIS POUR SHOT RIGHT," HE SAYS). BELOW, A HOME SHOT FOR A RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECT. THE LIGHTS OF ALBUQUERQUE ARE SEEN IN THE DISTANCE (FROM *SU CASA* MAGAZINE, 1999).



THIS PAGE: PERSONAL WORK. TOP: "NAPILI BEACH IS ON THE WEST COAST OF MAUI," KOTZ SAYS. "I FIND BEACHES GREAT PLACES WHERE CULTURES MEET ON COMMON GROUND." BELOW: FLORIDA, 1997 ("I HAVE SPENT 10 YEARS PHOTOGRAPHING THIS BRIDGE CONNECTING SANIBEL AND CAPTIVA ISLANDS," HE NOTES); BIKER GRAVES, NEW MEXICO, 1991 ("IT TELLS THE SAD BALLAD OF THE UNTIMELY END OF MARTIN AND THE WOMAN WHO LOVED HIM," HE SAYS); LANDSCAPES, ???.





MORE PERSONAL WORK. TOP: TITLED MAUNA KEA SURF, THIS SHOT DOCUMENTS SNOW SPORTS ON THE HAWAIIAN VOLCANO. MIDDLE ROW: KITE (“I USE PERSONAL IMAGERY LIKE THIS ONE TO SELL COMMERCIAL JOBS AND VICE VERSA,” KOTZ REMARKS. “IN THIS SHOT I WAS MESMERIZED BY HOW THE KITE TAIL MIMICKED THE LINE OF THE MOUNTAINS BEHIND IT AND HOW HUMANS INTERACT WITH THE NATURAL WORLD IN WAYS THEY CANNOT FATHOM”) AND LEAPING IN. BOTTOM ROW: TWO MOONS AND HURRICANE RIDGE. KOTZ’ WIDE-FORMAT PHOTOS, MANY OF WHICH ARE SHOT WITH A FUJI PANORAMIC CAMERA, ARE SOLD IN GALLERIES IN PRINTS UP TO 95 IN. WIDE.

while, his book credits included *Frank Lloyd Wright: The Masterworks* and *The Missions* (also by Kennedy). He collaborated with illustrator Joel Nakamura and designer Fred Cisneros on a book about a beloved, out-of-the-way, local restaurant—*Harry’s Roadhouse Cookbook*.

#### MS. BOOTH’S GARDEN

The idea was a book about his grandmother’s life and environs. For 20 years, what was to become *Ms. Booth’s Garden* occupied Kotz’ mind. An escape from commercial work, far away from snippy art directors with melancholy lives, it was the wellspring of the artistic vision seen in his work today.

“I’d been working on this thing for two decades, but I couldn’t seem to get it done,” Kotz says. “In 2002 my grandmother’s health began to fail I wanted to get this book done before she died. I wanted to prove to her that all those years of me prodding and poking around her life, following her around town, all had a point. I had saved enough to take some time off so I did it.”

Kotz poured himself into the project. He selected and produced final prints, and pursued publishers warily.

“Ten years of *no’s* can deflate a man. I’d send these great color comps to editors, and they didn’t get it or me,” he says. “I remember this one asshole telling me, ‘It’s just too personal.’ I thought, ‘Too personal!?’ Jesus! It’s about my grandmother’s life and her small Mississippi town. It’s about my values and my visual sensitivity, about the way I feel about place and reality. Of course it’s personal, dumbass!”

The Mississippi Museum of Art agreed to publish the book. The University Press of Mississippi stepped in as distributor. Kotz marketed and promoted it himself, organizing a one-man exhibition at the Mississippi Museum of Art and media events to garner attention. Family friend Jim Leher, of PBS’ *News Hour*, blurbed the book jacket. NPR essayist and southern humorist Bailey White wrote the forward.

Longtime friend Joel Nakamura spoke to me about Kotz’ decision to produce his dream work: “We all dream about quitting the rat race and pursuing our ‘art.’ Well, he did. He stepped outside the ‘normal’ and took a great leap into the unknown. There were some dark days during this process, but I think it should inspire anyone who calls him- or herself a creative professional.”

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Ms. Booth never saw the final book, but Kotz did share final layouts with her in the hospital. Finally, she understood what all his pestering was about. Shortly after his final visit, she died.

#### OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

Kotz’ single-minded pursuit of his book did not come without collateral damage. A year off from earning can affect more than just your bank account—it can be a career-killer. Says Kotz, “Art directors and editors moved on ... while I was out following my muse. They weren’t interested in my work anymore.”

He adds, “A long time ago I decided, for better or worse, that it is best if you handle the entire process, from scouting, to shooting, to processing, to retouching and printmaking. Control the football and stay in the game. I invested big in technology, so I could control my work. Trouble is, it ain’t cheap. And when you turn away from your clients, and they in turn get used to guys who can do it cheaper and faster, they don’t miss you very much.”

Sitting down beside his Epson 4000, Kotz showed me how he can produce ink-base prints in large format that give him even greater creative flexibility. “To many, this prepress crap drives them nuts. The Epson 4000 prints 17 inches wide, and as long as you can make an image. I buy paper in 100-foot rolls, and usually print on Epson stock. So I do my own color corrections and prints. I’m a bit of a dweeb.”

Kotz can produce colossal prints. His 44-in.-long panoramas sell for about \$2000. He has one on the wall at Gerald Peters Gallery—one of the most prestigious in Santa Fe—that is an eye-popping 95 in. long (asking \$4000). With the help of photography curator Catherine Whitney of Gerald Peters, Kotz’ work is alongside some of the biggest names in Santa Fe’s art scene. And there are plenty of big names in Santa Fe.

#### MAKING FRIENDS

In the end, says Kotz, “The idea of pounding the pavement in mid-career has never appealed to me. I’m liberated ... the universe [is] telling me to put up more of my own work. But the camera can be a horrible thing. If you know what you are doing, nothing has to look the way it really does. You can undo the natural. I have had to unlearn some of my own training and habits. I have had to make serendipity my friend again. The digital camera has really helped me in this respect. You can be so fast, so spontaneous and shoot so wide, that entire new possibilities arise.” **S**

#### POSTSCRIPT: MEMO TO SELF

- Get the book done before you die.
- Make the personal your strength.
- Make serendipity your friend.
- Spend allergy season in Hawaii.



KOTZ SPENT TWO DECADES COMPILING IMAGES FOR A BOOK ABOUT HIS GRANDMOTHER'S HOME COMMUNITY IN RURAL MATHISTON, MISS. THE RESULT WAS **MS. BOOTH'S GARDEN**, PUBLISHED BY MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM OF ART IN 2002. FACING PAGE: "IN EARLY 1991, I JUST STARTED PLAYING WITH A PANORAMIC CAMERA," KOTZ RECALLS. "THIS SHOT OF GERLEAN, A WOMAN WHO COOKED FOR MY GRANDMOTHER, DEMONSTRATES HOW A PANORAMIC CAN STILL BE INTIMATE. GERLEAN IS PICKING SUMMER SQUASH FOR SUPPER WHILE A VAST RURAL LANDSCAPE UNFOLDS BEHIND HER." THIS PAGE, AT LEFT: KOTZ' GRANDMOTHER ON HER PROPERTY; THIS SHOT, TITLED **IN THE WOODS**, BECAME THE BOOK'S COVER. "TO ME, SHE WAS A TREE IN HER OWN WAY," HE SAYS OF MS. BOOTH. THE PHOTO WAS TAKEN WITH AN AGED CROWN GRAPHIC 4X5. KOTZ' GRANDMOTHER DIDN'T LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO SEE THE FINISHED BOOK, BUT HE WAS ABLE TO SHARE PAGE PROOFS FROM IT WITH HER WHEN SHE WAS HOSPITALIZED. MORE FROM **MS. BOOTH'S GARDEN**, TOP TO BOTTOM: **UNCLE SID'S MANTLE**, **CHRISTMAS** AND **RICKY'S HORSE**.

