

# PHOTOGRAPHING CHINA

## with Art Wolfe

by Denis Glennon



*Modern China. Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, 70mm, 1/100 second @ f5, ISO 200*

All photographers dream of spending time, alongside their choice of top photographer to photograph subjects of their particular interest, preferably in an exotic location.

If your passion is wildlife photography, Andy Biggs, Andy Rouse, Jonathon Scott, or Art Wolfe would be in your list and if you are bird a photographer, then who better than Art Morris?

For landscape photographers the list might include: Frans Lanting, David, Muench, Jack Dykinga, Ken Duncan, Yann Arthus-Bertrand, David Norton, Jim Brandenburg, Charlie Waite, or Art Wolfe.

Similar "top photographer" lists could be compiled for every

genre. However, if your interest is the world of nature, cultures and landscapes in the more remote parts of our planet, Art Wolfe consistently appears at the top of all lists.

### Art Wolfe

For over 30 years, Art Wolfe has photographed on every continent and in hundreds of locations and has produced over sixty-five books. His images interpret and document the planet's disappearing wildlife, ecosystems and native cultures, and are an inspiration to those who seek to preserve them. His photographs are recognised everywhere for their mastery of colour, composition, perspective and artistic expression.

His wildlife advocacy is testimony of his dedication to his work. His distinctive approach to photography is influenced by his early education (degrees in fine arts and art education) and his love of the outdoors and the environment.

Using a blend of artistic and journalistic styles, Wolfe's photography both documents his subjects and educates the viewer. He has transformed nature photography into an art form. His close-ups of animals are remarkable; he seems to captivate them and his eyes and lens seem to seek their soul. Looking at his photographs you can feel the connection he made when he pressed the shutter.

A member of Canon's elite "Explorers of Light", magazines over the western world publish his photographs and stories. His video "The Living Wild", documents his work in several locations. He is at ease in the world of television production; see: "On Location with Art Wolfe," "Techniques of the Masters," "American Photo's Safari" and his 13-episode series, "Travels to the Edge with Art Wolfe" is a stunning production.

He was at the top of my "Dreamtime List". He had photographed in China many times before and on hearing he was



*Shanghai Reflections. Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, 168mm, 1/800 second @ f5.6, ISO 200*

taking a small group of photographers to his personal choice of locations in remote China I signed up. In just two weeks with Art Wolfe in March 2011, I discovered I was in the presence of a master of photography; a doyen in his field.

## Shanghai – City of Contrasts

Shanghai is all glass and steel with remarkable modern skyscrapers, while the back streets and markets remain unchanged from centuries past.

Located at the heart of the Yangtze River Delta it is China's most populous city and the world's busiest container port. It was established more than 700 years ago; its population today is over 24 million; a growth of 40% since 2000 and it is still growing. Its population density is 10,000 people per km<sup>2</sup>. (Mumbai's population density is 30,000 people per km<sup>2</sup>).

Australians used to wide open spaces will have their senses assaulted on a downtown walk. Shanghai has the world's longest underground rail network, the most extensive bus system (nearly 1000 bus lines) and its two airports handle 70 million passengers annually! It's a busy place!

A visit to The Bund is a must for all photographers, especially at sunset and night. Located on the bank of the Huangpu River it is an easy walk from downtown hotels. It featured in Ballard's novel "Empire of the Sun" which Spielberg made into the film of the same name.

As you photograph the never ending flotilla of boats, ships, Chinese junks and ocean liners passing beneath one of the most modern financial centres on the planet, you will appreciate the meaning of the two Chinese characters in the city's name - they literally mean 'Upper Sea'. A tripod is essential as the opportunities for panoramic photographs are quite spectacular, as is the night-time photography.

Whilst photographing alongside Art Wolfe it became evident to me there is a rare synthesis between his livelihood, his passion for photography and his willingness to educate. The significance of this synthesis came through from the very first shoot in Shanghai. My appetite was whetted.

## China's Trains – A World of Contrasts

China is building more high speed trains than any other nation and their standard of service is similar to airline business class. But, to photograph the more rural areas, a train journey of a different kind is a must; you need to step back in history. In my case, having a first class ticket pre-booked for an overnight journey to Tunxi/Mt. Huangshan, my dream of an "Orient Express" experience was about to come true.

Since the Orient Express made its first journey, it has captured the imagination of all. The train has been home to royalty, spies, aristocrats, film stars and writers – and a fictional Belgian detective. I had visions of stepping aboard, back into an elegant, unhurried



*Le Para Pluis de Chine.* Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 100mm, 1.3 second @ f22, ISO 100

and gracious age, into the original 1920's carriages, with their marquetry panels restored to their original grandeur and the service in keeping with the setting. I would settle into my private compartment surrounded by polished brass and inlaid wood, and watch China's ever changing landscapes, sashay by.

Meals on board would be unforgettable, preceded by a visit to the Bar Car, famous for its cocktails. Then, on to one of three dining cars, the muted lighting enhancing the oriental mood, the silverware and crystal laid out on fine linen - all alluring parts of the experience and a beguiling evocation of the golden age of travel. Luxury is timeless in any part of the world!

We boarded the train and the dream shattered. No private compartment; no dining car; no bar; no flushing toilets (straight "overboard") and squatting only; no drinking water; four passengers to a compartment in bunk beds; no food unless your favourite meal is rice noodles flavoured with hot water; great way to quickly get to know your fellow travellers; encourages long discussions with other passionate photographers in passageways and increases the anticipation of arrival. The night passed uneventfully, if fitfully, and as dawn approached we arrived in eastern China, home to some of the most



*Face of Wisdom.* Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 200mm, 1/200 second @ f2.8, ISO 1600



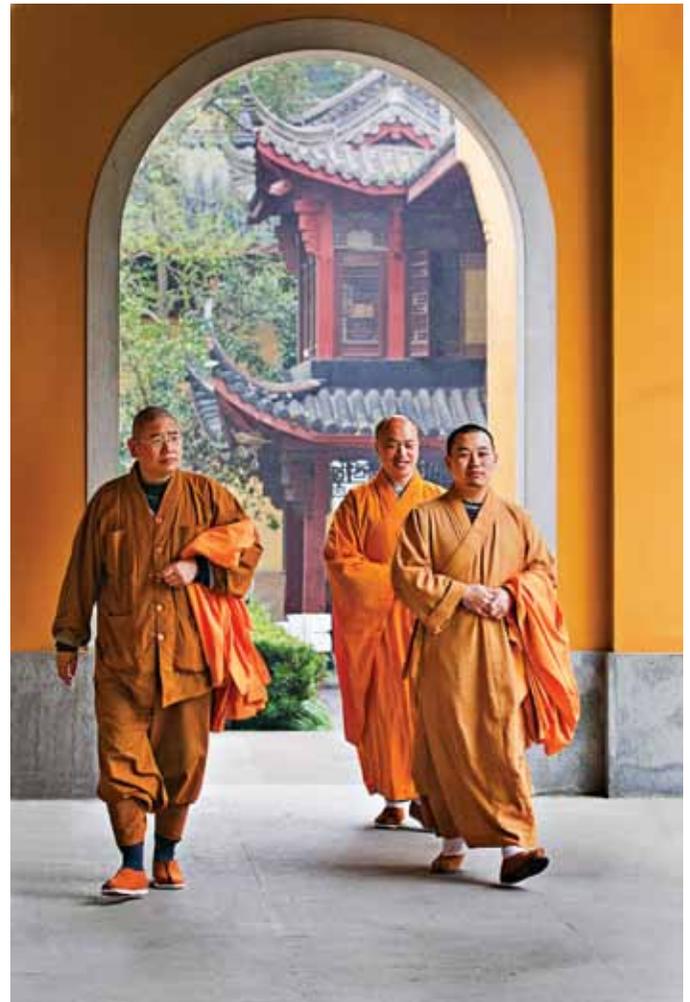
*A Decisive Moment.* Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 110mm, 1/200 second @ f3.5, ISO 200

amazing mountain scenery anywhere. It was a train journey of surprise but not at all an unpleasant introduction to China's great diversities.

Another surprising aspect of Art Wolfe emerged on the train journey. It is his concentration on being a positive person and the way he promotes this frame of mind constantly on tour; it makes for a "happy" atmosphere when travelling in a group. It is uplifting to be around him. His passion generates its own energy. We were eager to start photographing with him.

## Mt Huangshan

Huangshan is a World Heritage site of granite peaks in eastern China. The area is renowned for its scenery, sunsets, peculiarly-shaped peaks, pine trees, and spectacular views of the clouds from above. It did not disappoint. These mountains have featured in Chinese paintings for centuries: exquisite black-ink depictions of rock formations, twisted pine trees floating like an empire of islands in the clouds. It has been a photographic destination for Chinese photographers for the past couple of decades, offering matchless opportunities to photograph stunning landscapes at literally every turn. Walking is mainly on the stone steps carved into the sides of mountains, of which there are more than 60,000, spread over 50 kilometres; reported to be over 1,500 years old.



*Amanfayun Monks.* Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, 70mm, 1/125 second @ f5, ISO 1600

To photograph the better locations meant early starts and post-sunset finishes on demanding treks lasting several hours, at altitudes of around 1,700 metres. The steps are narrow and, when wet, are dangerous to navigate especially when carrying tripods, camera gear and backpacks. There was ice and snow on the steps when I was there.

Preparation by Art Wolfe ensured we were in the best locations at the best times. His strength of resolve not to compromise on photography or standards of behaviour on the mountain gave everybody a sense of confidence we were in the hands of someone who wanted the very best for his clients. His quiet teaching was infectious as he moved around the group ensuring that all had the best opportunity to capture the best images possible. His own photography is constantly evolving and I believe his success has come because he is always trying to improve his work and he works really hard. On the sometimes treacherous descents, the less athletic in the group found Art quietly by their side offering a "helping hand" or to carry a piece of gear. A gracious leader.

I used lenses of focal lengths ranging from 16mm to 200mm (35mm equivalent). As we were undertaking seriously extensive trekking carrying only what was absolutely necessary was paramount. A tripod was essential for photographing at sunrise and sunset. Most carried equipment in weatherproof bag(s); brought a torch for hiking before sunrise and after sunset and a cover to protect gear from fog, snow and rain when photographing.



*Yellow Mountain Evensong. Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 200mm, 1/2 second @ f32, ISO 100*

Weather on top of the mountain is notoriously unpredictable and it was essential to be familiar with the local weather patterns. As we were departing Yellow Mountain the local tour guide said to me: "Denis, no need to see any other mountains after Yellow Mountain!" He had a point.

## Yuanyang – Largest Rice Terraces in the World

Yuanyang is located in a mountainous region at altitudes of around 1,650 metres. To get there was a 7-hour bus ride from Yunnan's capital, Kunming.

Yuanyang's rice terraces claim to be the world's largest and most spectacular. The terraces have been crafted by the Hani people over one thousand years ago and are still in use. These early rice farmers practised ecosystem management and land preservation, centuries before those concepts were accepted as they are today. Because of their knowledge of drainage, farming methods and hard work maintaining the terrace walls and irrigation systems, the precious top soil has not washed down to the rivers below.

The terraces are a self-sustaining ecosystem. During winter to early spring, the entire field is irrigated with clean water from the forest above, rejuvenating the soil. The water evaporates from the

rice terrace to form clouds, the rain is "collected" by the forest on the mountains, the clean water flows down to the rice terraces and the cycle repeats itself perpetually. The farmers have repeated this for centuries – a perfect example of symbiosis with nature.

The location is a magnet for photographers. The landscape changes colourfully through the year. The flooded paddies during December to April create magnificent reflection effects – a photographer's dream. In summer, the terraces are luxuriantly green with rice stalks. After the harvest, the paddies become naked bare earth again.

Photographers and Chinese tourists arrive in droves for the sunrises and sunsets that turn the terraces into pools of gold, red and silver. Even in poor weather they can be breathtaking. Fog rolling into the terraced valleys leaves hill-top villages and tree tops the only things visible, like islands floating in the clouds. The spectacle that unfolds is breathtaking.

The thick clouds will sometimes be moved aside by some invisible hand, thus granting a view over the slopes of the hills. At first, you are not quite certain where to look: all the rice terraces have different shapes; all are filled to the brim with water; the perfectly still pools mirror the brightening light of the skies in so many different ways. You stand there, captivated, as the scene



*Floating Rice Paddies. Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 200mm, 1/500 second @ f6.3, ISO 160*

below constantly changes. For a short time there is a clear view over the terraced fields, some with reflections of the trees. Suddenly you will be surprised to discern the reflection of a single farmer – a completely new perspective is given. The next moment, the invisible hand draws the curtain again; clouds roll back over the entire landscape, covering the fields and obstructing your view.

The temptation is just to stand, be mesmerised by this harmonious relationship between man and nature's beauty and absorb Art Wolfe's continued dialogue as he points out images that only he has thought about. As I listened to him, I recognised the real task in photography is not so much to see what no one else has seen, but to think what nobody else has thought about that which everybody sees – another valuable lesson from a master photographer. He sees potential photographs in places most people will walk past and it is a rare privilege to "look over the shoulder" of a master photographer as he generously shares this gift he has.

## Yangshuo

Even if you have never heard of Yangshuo you will have seen the photos of the spectacular limestone mountains (karsts). The

special geology of the karsts gives it breathtaking beauty while over 1,400 years of history bestow on it a deep traditional culture. The diverse ethnic minority groups enrich it with special folk cultures seen in their various festivals.

The Li River brings its own beautiful scenery. Along the extremely clean river, hundreds of hills stand in different poses. They provide the natural "theatre" for the spectacular Chinese opera 'Impression Sanjie Liu'.

This gigantic natural theatre uses the waters of the Li River as its stage, with twelve mist shrouded karsts as its backdrop. Mist, rain, moonlight, stars, the karsts and their reflections in the river all fuse into an ever-changing natural setting. Its auditorium is housed on the natural islands of the river.

This concept of opera using nature as an integral part of its performance perhaps helps explain why the performance is referred to as "A Human Masterpiece in Cooperation with God". The music is modern and classical, played by musicians of China. There are in excess of 700 performers, all of whom are local people of the Li River.

The inclusion of this "non-photographic" experience into the tour was a masterstroke. Everyone emerged the richer from attending an unexpected and extraordinarily creative spectacle.



# How To Win Photo Competitions

An eBook by Peter Eastway

G.M. Photog., Hon. FAIPP, Hon FNZIPP, FAIPP



I have judged many photography competitions and there are lots of little things that entrants

forget to do. If only I could let them know before entering the competition, they would do so much better!

Well, as a judge I'm not allowed to ring up and help entrants, but I can write a book that distills what I have learnt over the last twenty years that will give you a great head start.

Of course, no one can give you an iron-clad guarantee that you will read my book and then win the next photo competition you enter – and I explain why in the book. However, what I can guarantee you is that if you read my book, you will improve the quality of your photography.

You see, whether you're aiming to win a photography competition or just take a better photograph, the advice is very similar. And I know that the tech-

niques and approaches I've developed over the years will help you capture and produce better photographs.

My book is called **How To Win Photo Competitions**.

It begins with a little about me. After all, it's easy enough to write a book about winning photography competitions, but it's better if you have a little bit of experience. Fortunately for me, I've been lucky enough to win quite a few competitions, plus I have a lot of experience as a judge. I can talk to you about both sides of the competition.

Add in the fact I've been a magazine editor for 30 years and I hope I'm able to communicate my message pretty well. So, in just a couple of pages (I don't want to bore you), I explain why I know what I'm talking about (even though my Dad told me not to boast).

We then look at competitions and how they work, how you should

approach them, and how to use the results to assess your own photography. It's important to set the scene before we get into creating photos that win competitions.

The next two sections are the nitty gritty. We begin by talking about taking a great photograph in the first place. Competition winners begin with the camera and so we talk about camera technique, colour, composition, framing and so on - little tricks and hints that will make a world of difference to your photographs.

From here we step into post-production – using the computer to improve the images our camera has captured. Most readers will have dabbled with Photoshop, Elements or Lightroom and this is all you need to enhance your images so they are in the running for a competition win. These days, no matter how good your camera is, you simply must do a little post-production to finesse your entry.

I finish the book with some useful background information about how competitions work (generally speaking), and then I analyse some of the images that have won awards for me, pointing out the aspects that the judges responded to in a positive way.

The book has lots of photographs and illustrations to explain exactly what I'm talking about.

And it is an eBook. It is easy to read on a computer, laptop or iPad, and you need Adobe Reader (Acrobat) to view the book. There is no paper version of this book, although you can print out the Acrobat Reader file if you wish.

I have created a sample eBook for you to look at on the Better Photography website, so please visit and have a read. If you like what you see, I hope you'll purchase a copy.

And for your next photo competition - good luck!

– Peter Eastway

For more information and a read of the free sample, please visit:

[www.betterphotography.com](http://www.betterphotography.com)



**Ancient Chinese Fishing.** Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 200mm, 1/10 second @ f11, ISO 500. Opposite: **Cormorant Fisherman on Li River, China.** Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III, 35mm, 1/8 second @ f8, ISO 400.

Art Wolfe liberally gives of himself to help people look at art in new ways; to be more open to other forms of art. He is trained as a painter and I think this makes him extra sensitive to elements of design and colour relationships which I think allows him to see so much of what he humbly calls “unintended art”, in the most unexpected ways and places.

His technique of “deconstructing an image” in evening tutorials gives his tour participants courage to continue to improve their photography. Even for Art Wolfe it is not just a case of walking up to a subject, pressing the shutter and coming away with an iconic image. People are encouraged and inspired by him as he reveals the truth about his own creative journey to a final image. It’s a very valuable and effective teaching tool.

## Cormorant Fishermen

Cormorant fishing has taken place in Japan and China from around 960 AD. The fishermen tie a snare near the base of the bird’s throat. This prevents the birds from swallowing larger fish, which are held in their throat, but they can swallow smaller fish. When a cormorant has caught a fish, the fisherman brings

the bird back to the boat and has it ‘spit’ the fish up. Though cormorant fishing once was a successful industry, its primary use today is linked to tourism. It makes for spectacular photography. One of Art Wolfe’s better-known images is of two cormorant fishermen set against a beautiful karst. The setting he chose for our group was perfect and the weather Gods were kind. The care he took to give everybody equal opportunity to photograph was a lesson in diplomacy. He likes teaching people who have a passion and excitement about photography. I suspect he believes teaching is still a noble profession. If he does, I happen to agree with him.

All in the group were anxious to capture a photograph at least as good as Art’s. A big challenge but all were pleased with the results from many hours with these gentle, charming and patient fishermen. It had long been my desire to photograph these cormorant fishermen. I was able to do so only because of Art Wolfe’s proactivity, his research, his investment of time and money in all his earlier visits to China, and his generosity in sharing and re-creating one of his signature photographs. What an enchanting ending to an outstanding and professionally organised tour. The China tour exceeded my expectations. It was more than value for money.

## Final Word

This was my first visit to mainland China. It was a special treat to be introduced to such a rich collection of photographic opportunities by a master photographer, who not only is at the pinnacle of his craft, but is a distinguished and accomplished exponent of fine art photography as well. It was a pleasure witnessing a true professional at work as he quietly went about uplifting the human spirit of those he photographed and those he taught.

### ART WOLFE IN AUSTRALIA IN 2012

*Iconic Images International will be bringing Art Wolfe to Australia in March 2012 to run a series of public seminars and workshops in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. Details of these events may be found at [www.denisglennon.com](http://www.denisglennon.com)*

*Art will also be available to conduct exclusive "One-on-One with Art Wolfe" private sessions. The focus here is for a small number of like-minded photographers to spend a whole day with Art in a private learning environment. The maximum number in these groups will be five – a rare opportunity. Anyone interested should contact Denis at either [denis@denisglennon.com](mailto:denis@denisglennon.com) or on 0418 923 103.*



## ICONIC NAMIBIA PHOTO SAFARI



### EXCLUSIVE SELF-DRIVE PHOTO SAFARI THROUGH NAMIBIA JULY 2012

Nowhere else in southern Africa offers as rich a variety of landscape and wildlife photography as Namibia. We will be captivated by the mystery and magic of the Namib Desert, astounded by the largest dunes on the planet in Sossusvlei, sense a prehistoric Africa in Damaraland and be spellbound by the proliferation of wildlife in Etosha.

This **custom-made small group photo safari** is ideal for Australian photographers and their partners

who enjoy the freedom of **self-drive** whilst being guided to photograph some of the most beautiful and more remote parts of Namibia – parts that are not accessible without using 4WD vehicles. It will also appeal to experienced 4WD enthusiasts who have an interest in photography. It is confined to a maximum of twelve participants, in six 4WD vehicles; **two people per vehicle** – a luxury unheard of on other safaris.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

All-inclusive photo safari. Participants only have to get themselves to/from Johannesburg Airport – everything else is included. It will be led by three professional photographers: Denis Glennon AO, Shem Compion from South Africa and Jay Collier, Canon Australia. To view the daily itinerary, read further and to register please visit [www.denisglennon.com](http://www.denisglennon.com)

Alternatively please call Denis Glennon on 0418 923 103.