



TRUNK SHOW

Why we sent 12 of our favorite
photographers to shoot some of
America's most significant and
endangered trees **By Russell Hart**



PRETTY IN THE CITY

THE TREES: Japanese flowering cherries at Newark, NJ's Branch Brook Park

THE THREAT: urban development and poor maintenance

PHOTOGRAPHER: Yong Hee Kim

New York-based Kim has exhibited his work in galleries from Poland to Seoul, South Korea, where he was born. He teaches part-time at the International Center of Photography and Baruch College.

Any student of science will tell you that life is untenable without the fresh air furnished by leafy trees. One mature tree is said to dispense enough oxygen during its growing season to keep 10 people breathing. Even the least scientific human enjoys the more obvious contributions of trees, from wood to fruit to shade from the sun. And while there may be few living entities as ecologically important, photographers clearly believe that there are also few as magnificent.

That belief is expressed not just in the innumerable images of trees photographers have created, but also in the fact that a tree's scale and visual complexity—along with human intrusions into its space—make it a challenging subject. It compelled 19th-century photographer Carleton Watkins to set up his mammoth-plate camera whenever he saw a noble specimen, and more recently led *National Geographic* photographer Jim Balog to hoist himself up giant redwoods in order to shoot them digitally section by section for stitched vertical panoramas.

Still, the magnificence of trees hasn't deterred us from cutting down roughly 12 billion of them each year for fuel, farming, building materials and other less necessary purposes. Even trees we take for granted in our own communities are endangered by development, disease, climate change and other threats. To focus our collective attention on great trees in our own midst that may need protecting, *American Photo* and The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) have partnered to create a traveling exhibition featuring photographs of such specimens. As part of its annual "Landslide" initiative, the foundation chose 12 trees from more than 100 nominees that were solicited from landscape architects, horticulturists and the readers of *Bonnier's Garden Design* magazine, one of the project's sponsors along with *AP* and TCLF. The exhibition, which will be supplemented with TCLF's educational signboards for a special opening next spring, is called *Every Tree Tells a Story*.

We chose the photographers not just for their geographic connections but also for the sympathy toward the natural world displayed in their work. Just as important, though, was the work's aesthetic excellence, because we wanted these artists to interpret the trees rather than simply record them. View a more complete portfolio at *AmericanPhotoMag.com*, where you'll also find a touring schedule for the exhibition. And visit the site of The Cultural Landscape Foundation, tclf.org/landslide, to learn more about this remarkable project.

WISE ELDER

THE TREE: a historic tulip poplar at Washington, DC's Tudor Place Historic House and Garden

THE THREAT: the tree's age, which makes it more vulnerable to weather and environmental changes

PHOTOGRAPHER:

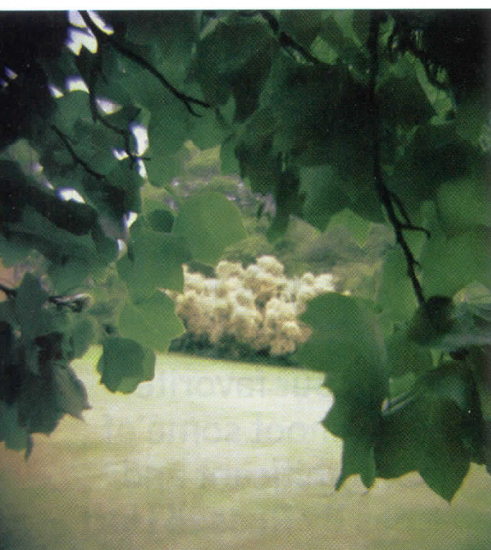
Amy Bedik • amybedik.com

New York--based Bedik has prints in the collections of London's Victoria and Albert Museum and the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Nestled in a five-and-a-half-acre sanctuary in Washington, DC's Georgetown neighborhood is a tree that has witnessed much of America's history. The tulip poplar, which stands over 100 feet, has seen the burning of the capital by the British in 1814, the turmoil of the Civil War—all from its peaceful setting on the grounds of what is now the Tudor Place Historic House and Garden.

Amy Bedik has photographed formal gardens for many years with a Diana plastic camera, which contributes a pictorial quality that softens the manicured nature of her subjects. Rather than shoot the Tudor Place tulip poplar in its entirety, Bedik isolated representative details—leaves, limbs and massive trunk. "Its breadth formed a shelter from the hot sun that day," she says. "So I explored the idea of shelter through the photographs."

The tree's garden confines would seem, in turn, to shelter it from the ravages of urban development. Yet its advanced age puts it at greater risk from environmental contagions and the changing, destructive weather patterns of the past few years. One big storm could fell it, silencing its many stories.



BELOW: © AMY BEDIK (3); OPPOSITE: © JAY DICKMAN (2)



FOREST CATHEDRAL

THE TREES: the old-growth forest of the abandoned Arborland Tree Farm, Milliken, CO

THE THREAT: urban development, habitat destruction

PHOTOGRAPHER: Jay Dickman • jaydickman.net

A Pulitzer Prize winner, Dickman has shot many stories for *National Geographic*; his work also has appeared in *Time*, *Life* and *Sports Illustrated*. He now runs the successful FirstLight Workshop series.

Photojournalist Jay Dickman is inordinately skilled at bringing visual order to chaotic subject matter. The proof of that talent has ranged from his photographs of the civil war in El Salvador to coverage of national political conventions—the former winning him 1983's Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography. Yet when Dickman arrived at the abandoned Arborland tree farm in Milliken, Colorado, he found hundreds of old-growth trees standing row upon row, as if they were expecting him. The photographer knew that light was the key to capturing what he calls the "cathedral effect" of this unlikely forest, so he shot at dusk and early in the morning, when sunlight could stream down the grand corridors formed by the trees.

Situated in grasslands near the Rockies, the grove in its maturity has greatly benefited local wildlife, offering refuge to birds, deer and wild turkey. But it stands in the way of urban development north of metro Denver, where Dickman himself lives. The grove's owner has sought a buyer who will develop the site without harming the forest. That's a tough sell, of course. So the fate of Arborland remains uncertain—unless a tree-loving benefactor comes to its rescue.





© QUADRANT/BOB HOWER (2)



CITY OF TREES

THE TREES: Louisville, KY's Olmsted-designed parks and parkways

THE THREAT: highway building and severe weather

THE PHOTOGRAPHER:

Bob Hower • qphoto.com

Recipient of an NEA fellowship, Hower has prints in the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, among others.

Bob Hower's favorite subject is the industrial landscape of the so-called Rust Belt, which makes him seem an unlikely choice to photograph trees. Then, several years ago, he was commissioned to do photography for Louisville's City of Parks initiative, a plan to set aside thousands of acres of land around a nearby watershed. So Hower's strategy was pure photography: "Nothing to do but go walk in the woods and keep your eyes open," as he puts it.

Hower did just that when we asked him to document Louisville's first park system. A network of three large parks connected by six parkways, it was designed at the end of the 19th century by the great Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. Then came the expansion of the interstate highway system and a series of severe storms, forces that toppled many of the mature hardwoods that provide the shady canopy that is the parks' hallmark. Hower's images capture that ongoing double threat, but they also conjure the dazzling things that big trees do to light—which is, after all, the favorite substance of photographers.



ANCIENT MARKS

THE TREES: the boxed pines of Weymouth Heights, in NC
THE THREAT: development, fire suppression
PHOTOGRAPHER: Frank Hunter • thomasdeans.com

A professor at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, Hunter is recognized as a master of platinum/palladium printing. His work is in the collection of Atlanta's High Museum of Art.

If they look closely, visitors to Weymouth Heights, a subdivision in the North Carolina town of Southern Pines, will find strange carvings on many of the long-leaf pines that populate the area. The V-shaped gashes and hollow chambers date to the second half of the 19th century, when former slaves made them to drain the trees of their viscous sap. The sap would accumulate in a "box" cut into the tree and then be used to make turpentine and pitch.

These age-old marks transcend their utilitarian origins, according to Frank Hunter. "One that I photographed reminded me of a human torso," he recalls. "Others were reminiscent of African masks, mummies or faces." In fact, the remaining stumps and shafts of boxed pines are known as totems. Like the intact boxed pines, they are not protected by any local ordinances.

Hunter challenged himself to shoot in color rather than his usual black and white. And though he brought a view camera on his trip south, he ended up thoroughly exploring the trees with a digital SLR. "I often return to a subject when the light is better," says Hunter. "Using the DSLR meant I didn't have to haul my view camera back in 100-degree heat!"



AMAZING GRACE

THE TREES: the American elms of East Hampton, NY

THE THREAT: Dutch elm disease

PHOTOGRAPHER: Garie Waltzer • gariewaltzer.com

Formerly the chair of the photography department at Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland-based Waltzer has earned grants from the Ohio Arts Council and National Endowment for the Arts.

Garie Waltzer describes her black-and-white photographs of civic spaces—parks, pools, city streets—as “Baroque.” She means they are packed with active detail, both human and natural. So when Waltzer arrived in East Hampton, New York, to photograph the arching elm trees that line the streets of eastern Long Island’s famous summer resort destination, she was faced with a “decidedly quieter” kind of subject matter.

You may know that Dutch elm disease

has killed millions of American elms. In East Hampton, though, the remaining elms are considered so important to the town’s identity that they are regularly inoculated to prolong their lives. In other places, lack of funding for such programs means that diseased trees are simply cut down.

“I wanted to highlight the trees’ heroic qualities,” says Waltzer, who carried a ladder around town in order to get more elevated views of its sidewalks. “It was important to tell their stories.”



ROAD WARRIORS

THE TREES: three massive bark-cloth ficuses in San Juan, P.R.

THE THREAT: a major highway passing directly under the trees' canopy

PHOTOGRAPHER:

Juan A. Pons • juanpons.org

Based in North Carolina, Pons is cofounder of The Digital Photography Experience, an online digital learning center, and leads workshops through his own Wild Nature Tours. His work has been published in *Sierra* and *Audubon* magazines.

Late in World War II, the United States undertook a national road-building project to allow faster transport of military personnel. One such road cut through the erstwhile Puerto Rican town of Rio Piedras—skirting a handsome stand of mature ficus trees. The canopy formed by three of the remaining trees now arches over several lanes of what has become one of Puerto Rico's busiest highways.

"I was so taken aback by the sheer size of the canopy that I thought I might have to use large banks of lights to selectively illuminate the trees," says Juan Pons, a respected nature photographer who hails from San Juan, which now incorporates Rio Piedras. Instead, Pons shot the trees at dusk with long exposures that both turned speeding cars' taillights into streaks and allowed him to paint the foliage with light.

Pons's experience with these vulnerable trees, the bark of which is harmlessly stripped and beaten into cloth in their native Africa, went beyond solving photographic problems. "Just about everyone walking by asked me what I was doing and proceeded to tell me some personal story about the trees," Pons recalls. "I realized that these trees were a cherished part of the community."



FOR THE AGES

THE TREE: a massive black oak at the Katewood estate, Bratenahl, OH

THE THREAT: age and weather

PHOTOGRAPHER: Barbara Bosworth

A recipient of the coveted Guggenheim fellowship, Bosworth teaches at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston. Her prints have been shown at the Princeton University Art Museum, the Addison Gallery of American Art and the Smithsonian American Art Museum. She is the author of the 2005 monograph *Trees: National Champions* (MIT Press).

Barbara Bosworth grew up in Novelty, Ohio, east of Cleveland and south of the famous Holden Arboretum. “We would go for walks there as a family when I was young,” says the photographer. The tree we asked Bosworth to shoot forms a neat triangle with her hometown and the site of those walks. The massive black oak at Katewood, as the property is known, overlooked Lake Erie a lifetime before the adjacent house was built.

The tree’s horizontal spread was a perfect fit for the panoramas Bosworth usually shoots. Rather than use a panoramic camera, she shoots with an 8x10 view camera, carefully rotating it to construct the image section by section. The result of this technique isn’t seamless, and that’s the way she wants it. Thin black lines divide the frames, and in her Katewood image, branches don’t always align perfectly—as if to echo the way time and the elements have battered the tree.



MALL WALKING

THE TREES: Commonwealth Avenue Mall, Boston, MA

THE THREAT: heavy use and Dutch elm disease

PHOTOGRAPHER: James Sheldon

Sheldon is an associate professor of visual and media arts at Boston's Emerson College. His work is currently on display at the Tate Modern museum in London.

The tree-lined avenue is an urban archetype, and perhaps no city street in America hews to it like Boston's Commonwealth Avenue Mall. For nine blocks running from the famous Boston Public Garden to the Fens (part of the city's Olmsted-designed "Emerald Necklace" of parks) elegant brownstones wall the streets and a wide,





grassy median separates inbound and outbound lanes. Mature trees in the middle and on either side meet to form a canopy through which bits of iconic Boston buildings peek, while the blocks are anchored by statues of notables ranging from Federalist Alexander Hamilton to abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison.

The mall is heavily trafficked by pedestrians and cars alike, and that wear requires constant maintenance. Jim Sheldon has traveled it for decades, but he had never stopped to photograph it in its full expanse until we asked. For that task he turned to an elaborate 360-degree panoramic technique involving

24 separate, overlapped frames—12 across by two high—created by careful rotation of his DSLR on a tripod. Stitched together in the computer in a process that can take Sheldon as long as two days, the results ably capture the immersive experience of walking down the Commonwealth Avenue Mall.

