



William Albert Allard

Chicago, Illinois

"A few years ago I heard myself referred to as a photographer who specializes in America, and at first it set me back," says William Albert Allard. "I'd never really thought of myself that way, because I've shot in a bunch of different countries." But Allard, who has worked for *National Geographic* for most of his four-decade career, admits that he's never been the globetrotter that some of his colleagues are. "I'm not interested in going every place in the world," he says. "And there's something wonderful about working in America. I keep falling in love with our country."

That love comes through powerfully in *Portraits of America* (National Geographic Insight, \$50), Allard's fifth book and the one he

considers his best. Retrospective in nature, it's divided into nine sections on some of Allard's best American subjects, from recent rodeo pictures to an extended 1964 essay on the Amish, the photographer's first assignment for *National Geographic* and one that broke new ground for the magazine in the intimacy with which it portrayed its camera-shy subjects. Each section opens with a long essay on the subject by the always articulate Allard. "I think what gives the book its roundedness and personality is the combination of the words and the pictures," he says.

Allard sees parallels between writing and photography. "What you exclude is every bit as important as what you include," he says. "You

have to cut away the extraneous." That's the photographer's main message when he teaches workshops. "I often see students coming in who've shot everything with a 28mm or 24mm wide-angle," he says. "They're getting everything in the picture, but they're not really getting anything. Nothing's tied together. They haven't made order out of chaos." One of the first things Allard does to remedy that problem

Allard shot this interior of Chicago's Smokedaddy blues club for a 1997 *National Geographic* article called "Traveling the Blues Highway." He used a Leica M6 rangefinder with a Leica 21mm f/2.8 Elmarit-M lens, exposing Kodachrome 200 for 1/2 second at f/2.8. It was the only time that Allard used a tripod, he says, during the entire ten-week assignment.

is make those students "narrow down their vision" and shoot with a 35mm or 50mm lens. Allard also stresses the importance of point of view—an interesting formal streak for a man who considers himself a "people photographer."

"You can change a picture from being very nice to being really special with a shift in position of inches," he says. "Even just bending your knees or taking a step to the right can do it, cutting something out or joining one thing with another." Whether you're shooting abroad or at home, in America, that visual fine-tuning is essential to successful photography. "The more you're surrounded with rich material," says Allard, "the more selective you have to be."

—RUSSELL HART