

A CASE OF TUNNEL VISION

FOR HIS LATEST LANDSCAPE JAN STALLER GOES UNDER THE ENGLISH CHANNEL

The often uninspired ways that man changes his environment are the inspiration for Jan Staller's ethereal images. The New York photographer's attraction to those altered landscapes—construction sites, industrial projects, and the like—has taken him from New Jersey roadbeds to abandoned nuclear testing sites in the Nevada desert. One recent stop on Staller's offbeat itinerary was the tunnel that now worms its way beneath the English Channel, connecting Dover, England, and Calais, France.

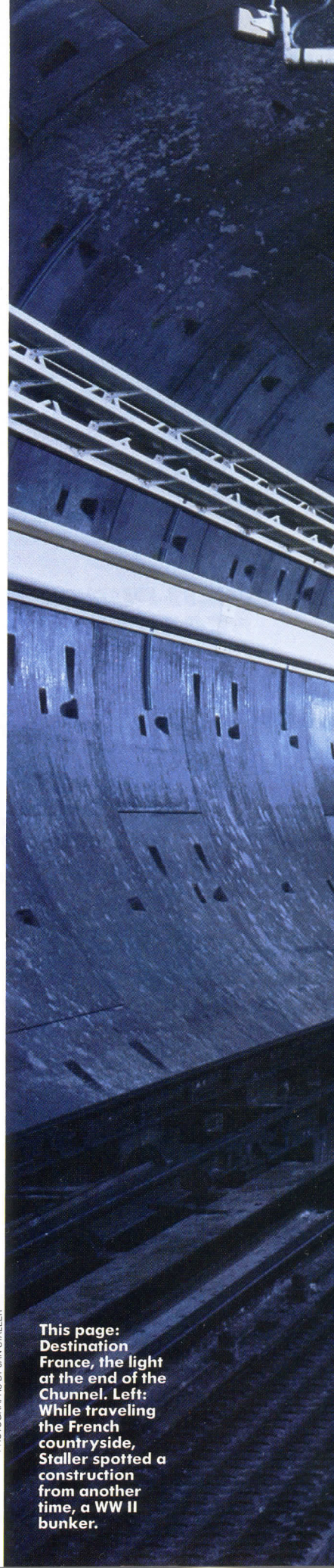
Staller's pictures show the Chunnel in all its high-tech glory. But the photographer was concerned that the ongoing project's monumental nature

might overwhelm the surreal delicacy that is the signature of his work. "That was my main anxiety in going there," he says. "I was wondering if the tunnel would offer up something more than tunnelness."

Staller says his intent is always to give a subject "a presence quite apart from what it's meant to be," and he achieved that goal. His method was to shoot at dusk so that he could blend the fading daylight with the varied artificial sources that illuminate such sites at night. Staller often adds his own battery-powered light, creating a palette that exploits color film's inability to record accurately more than one light source at a time. Sometimes filtration richens the mixture: "When I'm working with metal halide or fluorescent light—which is what they use in the Chunnel—I often add magenta," he says. "That minimizes the artificial light's green cast, but it turns the sky pink."

Yet Staller is loath to ascribe his skill to a technical formula. "There's a complicated interaction," he says, "between the light, the time of day, the arrangement of objects, the length of the exposure—and often, a wonderful accident. When it works, that interaction evokes a sense of mystery."

Staller is putting together a book called *Peculiar Places*, featuring his favorite sites, the Chunnel included. The collection reflects his refusal to let his work lapse into documentation. "I want to get away from description," he says. "I feel as if I can do more than just put a frame around something that exists out there." —RUSSELL HART



This page: Destination France, the light at the end of the Chunnel. Left: While traveling the French countryside, Staller spotted a construction from another time, a WW II bunker.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAN STALLER

