

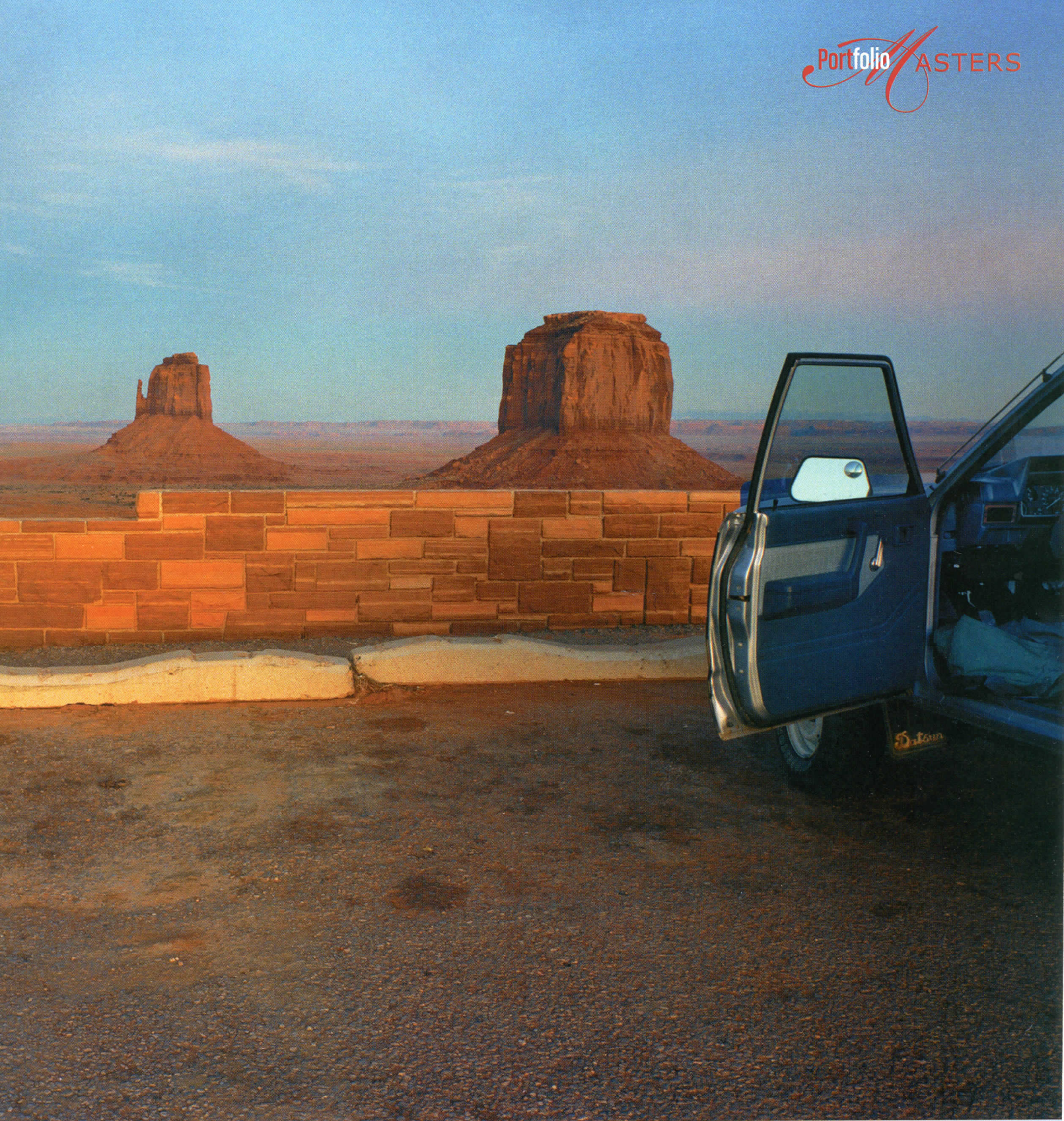
Photography has its share of artistic tag teams, from the Starn Twins to McDermott & McGough to Kahn & Selesnick. While these duos create distinctive images, it's impossible to parse each individual's contribution—to draw a dividing line through their work. Not so with Diane Cook and Len Jenshel. For 20 years, they've had things both ways. This husband-and-wife team has created highly regarded photographs under their shared byline, yet they've continued to produce their own, individual bodies of work. In fact, Cook and Jenshel have even convinced curators and editors to mix and match their images—Cook's an austere, cool-toned black-and-white; Jenshel's a descriptive but ironic color.

Yet when the two photographers create a single image as a team, which they ordinarily do in color, it's the subject of a dialogue to which each brings different strengths from start to finish. "Len is more methodical and I'm more intuitive," says Cook. This is surprising, given her previous career as a picture editor. "I'm also the researcher, finding the places to photograph. We discuss what will work best for locations, then Len steps in with his ability to sweet-talk people to get us the access we need."

What further distinguishes Cook and Jenshel from their two-person, fine-art counterparts is the success with which they've applied their team approach to editorial photography. Almost by accident, Jenshel found himself on the leading edge of the magazine world's early-1980s' discovery that art photography's ideas could also serve the purposes of editorial illustration. And the change could not have happened if it had not been for art photography's greater comfort with color (the magazine world's norm) and its postmodern inclination toward irony and deadpan description.



Master Of DOUBLING UP



Diane Cook and Len Jenschel merge their photographic talents into a singular vision that serves both art and commerce

By Russell Hart >>Photography By Diane Cook & Len Jenschel



Still, the phenomenon took Jenshel by surprise. In 1983, he received a call out of the blue from Nina Subin, picture editor of *The Sophisticated Traveler*, a *New York Times Magazine* supplement. The visionary Subin was ahead of her time. She asked Jenshel to create photographs in the footsteps of the magazine's food writer who was exploring one great restaurant after another in Venice, Portofino and other Italian cities. Somehow Subin had learned that Cook and Jenshel planned to honeymoon in Italy.

"I couldn't figure out how she even knew who I was, let alone how she found out where we were going on our honeymoon," Jenshel recalls. "I said, 'Well, this is my first trip to Europe, and it's my honeymoon, so while I'm very flattered you thought of me, I'm going to have to decline.'" Subin cajoled Jenshel, telling him she loved his work, that the story "needed his sensibility," that she wanted him to take his kind of pictures, and that he should

discuss it with Diane and sleep on it.

When Cook came home that day from her job as a picture editor at Time Inc., he told her about the junket he had just turned down. Jenshel remembers, "Diane blurted out, 'Are you crazy? You turned down a plum assignment like that?'" The next day, Jenshel called Subin back and said, "I do," and the jobs have kept coming ever since.

Cook left her Time Inc. job in 1991, and she and Jenshel have been collaborating ever since. While garnering the fine-art world's top prizes, Guggenheim and NEA fellowships, one-couple shows at New York's International Center of Photography and Chicago's Art Institute, and several fine-art monographs (duographs?), including *Aquarium* (Aperture, 2003) and *Hot Spots: America's Volcanic Landscapes* (Bulfinch Press, 1996), they have done editorial photography for some of the magazine world's most esteemed publications. These include *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*

The husband-and-wife photography team of Diane Cook and Len Jenshel work together to conceptualize images and to come up with an approach to a subject, yet in the end, they each produce bodies of work that are starkly different. Cook's distinct and austere black-and-white images contrast with Jenshel's color and visual irony. OPENING SPREAD: The Mittens, Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park, Ariz. ABOVE: Great Basin National Park, Nev. NEXT PAGE: Best Western Mammoth Hot Springs, Gardiner, Mont.



Magazine, *Harper's*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Audubon*, and current regulars *Conde Nast Traveler* and *National Geographic*.

That's not to say it's easy to shoot on command, or to deal with the deadlines and other strictures of editorial work. "I love doing these assignments," says Cook, "but there's a tremendous amount of stress to them, especially with a travel story." One particularly stressful story was for *Conde Nast Traveler*, about winter in Yosemite National Park. "When we arrived, there wasn't a trace of snow in the valley," Cook recalls. "It was 70 degrees, and the hikers were wearing shorts." A call to photography director Kathleen Klech bought the couple another few days, and on their last day at the park, they were saved by a dusting of snow. "You have to come home with a story," says Cook. Indeed, that's one key difference between editorial and fine-art

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work. If you're shooting for art's sake and don't get what you want, it's considered part of the process—"learning to love failure," as Jenshel puts it. In the editorial world, says Jenshel, "You're only as good as your last story."

Getting editorially useful results is even more incumbent upon Cook and Jenshel when they themselves pitch a story to a magazine, which they often do to get to places they want to shoot but might not otherwise be able to afford. They were looking for a way to return to Greenland, for example, to continue their well-known study of icebergs and glaciers, at a time when *Travel + Leisure Golf* had been sending them out on golf-related stories. They pitched the magazine a story on the first World Championship Ice Golf Tournament—to be held above the Arctic Circle in

Greenland. "We said, 'Imagine golfers playing in parkas at 20 below in a surreal white landscape of frozen ocean, using pink golf balls, with 300-foot icebergs as hazards,'" Cook recalls. "We thought we had a snowball's chance in hell of getting the story, particularly given how expensive the trip would be. But they went for it."

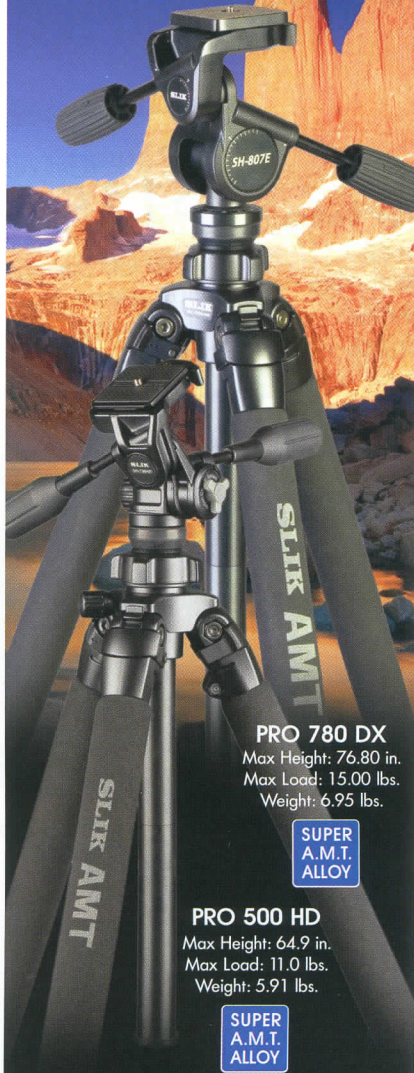
National Geographic has come to expect such pitches from the couple, taking them up on surveys of Utah's Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and the Na Pali coast of Hawaii's Kauai. Both of those stories were shot for photo editor Elizabeth Krist, who also asked them to photograph the High Line, Manhattan's regreened elevated park, a retreat much closer to the couple's New York City home. *National Geographic* photo editor (and former contributing

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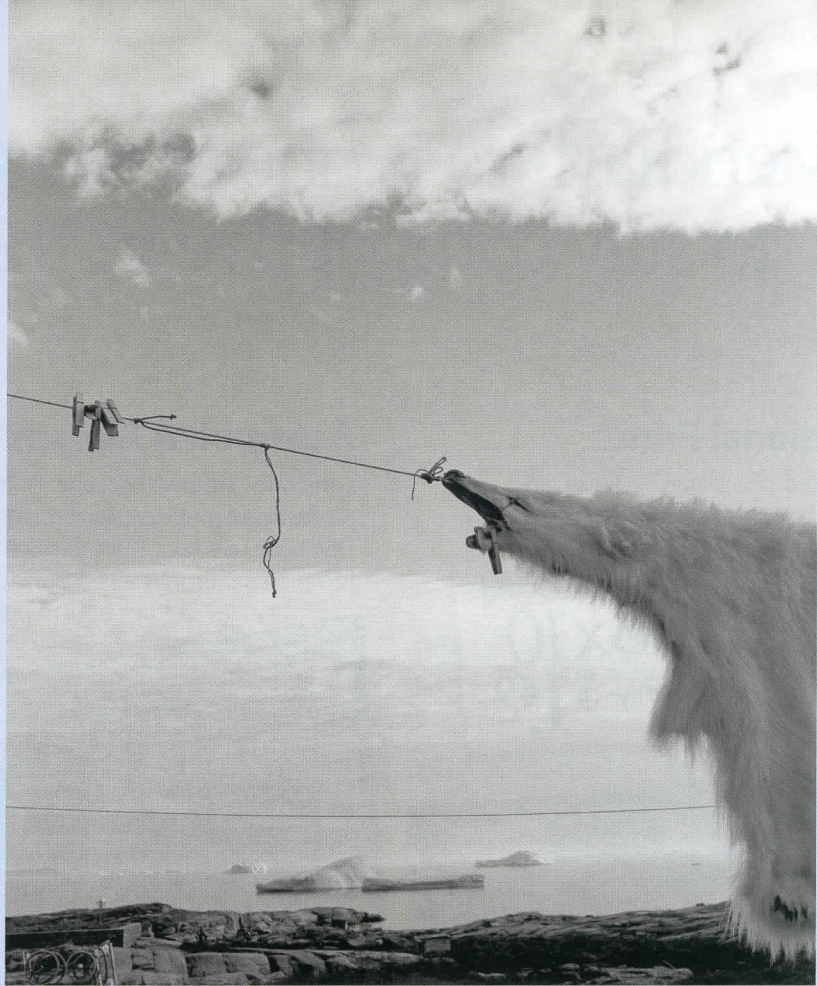
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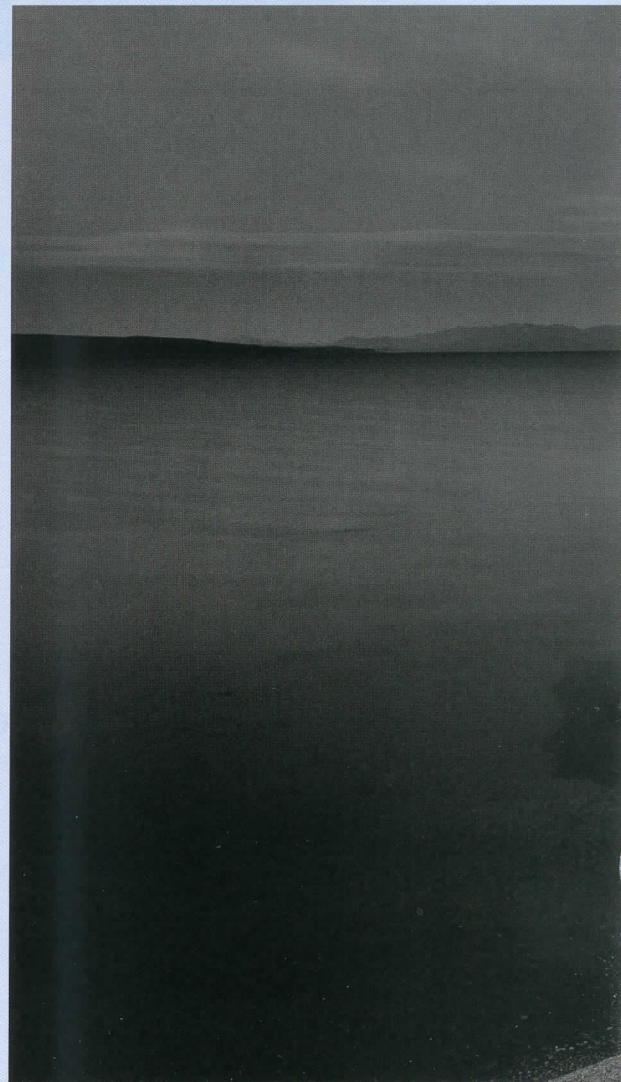
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For those occasions when Cook & Jenshel create a single image as a team, they typically work in color and they collaborate closely through the whole process. The duo have carved out a unique space in the pantheon of artists, editorial and commercial photographers. They seize the opportunities that come from an assignment to produce compelling photographs in each milieu. ABOVE: Qqaatsut, Greenland. RIGHT: Fishing Cone, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming.



photographer) Sarah Leen has asked them to shoot stories on everything from “green roofs” to the border wall between Mexico and the U.S.

The border story was a perfect fit with the couple’s fine-art work, which has long addressed the issue of boundaries, both physical and psychological. That idea has made its way into other assignments. Jenshel took it on in his landscape with a cattle grid, the hoof-trapping metal grate that’s placed in a roadbed to keep livestock from crossing, and also in his interior with a mounted elk’s head across from a tiny window that looks out onto a wild landscape, the wall (and death) separating creature from the place where he really belongs. Shot on assignment for *Travel + Leisure*, those two images went on to become Jenshel’s two best-selling prints in the art world. “I had a feeling that the elk picture would work for my own portfolio,” says Jenshel. “But I had no idea that the cattle grid, which the magazine ran across two pages to

open the story, would do so well.”

So is there more to editorial photography than money and glory? Is art photography compromised by paid work? “Yes and no,” says Jenshel. “One informs the other. Editorial work is very much about problem solving, for example, and this skill has certainly carried over into our fine-art work.”

“Assignment deadlines have taught us to be more efficient in all aspects of our photography,” Cook concurs. And, of course, the artist’s sensibility at the core of their photography makes their editorial work much more than pretty, factual pictures. In the end, it’s a thin line.

“There’s little or no difference between what we do in the fine-art world and the editorial world,” says Cook. “We work hard in both arenas, and always try to integrate the two.” DPP

You can see more of Diane Cook and Len Jenshel’s photography at www.cookjenshel.com.



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