



The Limelight is the Sweet Light Canada by Mike Grandmaison

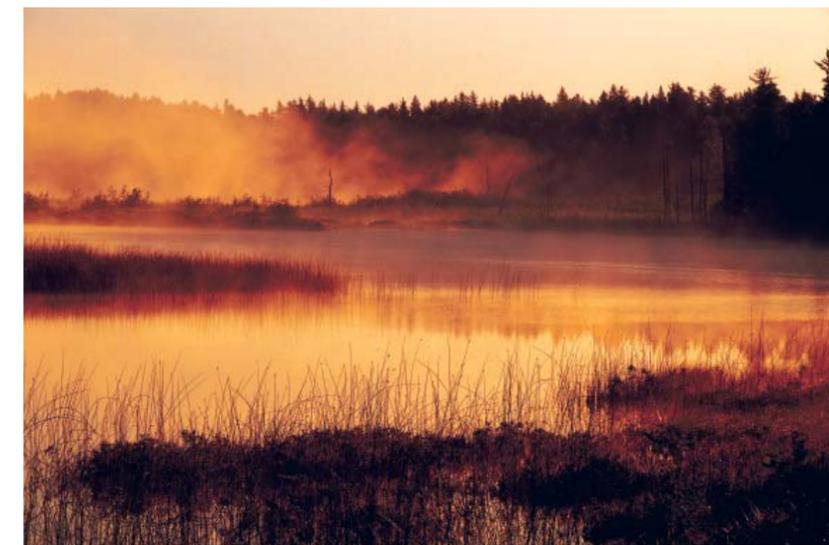
Kelly Waterhouse

above: On the edge of the Banff town site is a very popular series of three lakes called Vermillion Lakes. I have photographed here on many occasions, and one of my favourite times occurred in winter when lenticular clouds above Mount Rundle reflected in the partly frozen lake a few minutes before sunset.

right top: Lighthouse, Cap-des-Rosiers, Québec.

right middle: Arctic Fox, Churchill, Manitoba.

right below: Fog on Vermilion River at sunrise near Capreol, Ontario.



It took Mike Grandmaison twenty years in Canada's forest industry to finally walk out of the woods and follow his passion for photography, which inevitably led him right back into the woods and straight across the country, up, down and all around. It's a good thing too, because Mike's dedication to photography is equalled to his love for this country. Canada is his portfolio. Primarily working on assignment or producing stock photography, in areas such as architecture, agriculture and tourism, it is his stunning landscape and nature shots that have launched Mike Grandmaison into the limelight. With the release of his sixth photography book, simply entitled "Canada," his images, together with Shelagh Roger's words, has risen to the top of the Indigo-Chapters best-sellers list in his home province of Manitoba. That's no small feat. It's not luck either. It's a subtle combination of patience, hard work and pure talent. It's about being ready when the moment happens. Hours spent waiting for the 'sweet light' has put this photographer right in the middle of it.

right: One of my most incredible experiences in the wilderness was entering the northern section of the Carmanah-Walbran temperate rainforest. After a long, slow, dusty drive down a logging road through clear-cut after clear-cut, my family and I finally reached the edge of the forest. After walking over a large tree that serves as a natural bridge over Carmanah Creek, we entered the rainforest and I was struck by the incredible beauty, lushness, greenness, humidity, and aroma!

It was kismet. Grandmaison had created a professional portfolio of landscape images from most regions of the country, partly for his stock photography work, and partly to express his own creative vision. It was always in Mike's sights to compile his images into a book about this country. Then one day he got a call from Michael Moulard, Senior Editor of Key Porter Books, who had discovered Grandmaison's work while researching photography on the Internet. "I don't think Michael (Moulard) had heard of me before he found me on the Internet. That, I think, says a lot about the power of the Internet, in that anyone has the same chance and, hopefully, the person with the best images that speak best to the researcher ultimately takes it. The playing field is levelled so that the famous and the unknown are given the same chance."

Moulard's publishing company was looking for a photographer who could capture this nation's diversity. Grandmaison had the entire package in his stock portfolio. Thus, the concept for the photographic book, "Canada" was born.

That was five years ago. No one could have predicted the impact of 9/11, or SARS. The project was put on a backburner until the chaos settled. It wasn't until May 2004 that Grandmaison's dream was back on the docket. There was no better time to move forward with a book that celebrated our nationhood.

In June, Grandmaison photographed Newfoundland. That completed his portfolio. By October of 2005, Moulard, along with Key Porter Book's Art Director, Peter Maher, met with Grandmaison in Winnipeg to determine the theme and select the images. "Originally, I wanted to illustrate Canada by habitats, and Shelagh Rogers (text writer and CBC host) liked this too. The publisher did not. What we didn't want was something done by province. It's been done and it's mundane. So we went this route."

The book was divided by seasons, nature's four distinct moods that are central to our national identity. Together Grandmaison and the Key Porter team had to



right: Pyramid Lake, Jasper National Park, Alberta.



far right: Last light on cliffs, Cape d'Or, Nova Scotia. The cliffs, jutting westward from the Bay of Fundy, offer an excellent sunset photographic opportunity. If you move few feet away and point in the opposite direction, you will have an excellent sunrise opportunity. A lighthouse at the left edge of the image warns boats of rocky hazards during heavy fog, which was the case when I first arrived here. The fog cleared within half an hour and revealed a most beautiful location. I also had a nice meal and slept over at the Lighthouse Kitchen and Guesthouse!





above: The night sky offers all kinds of photo opportunities. With the camera on a sturdy tripod, set for a long exposure and aimed at the North Star polaris, stars are captured on film as trails revolving around Polaris because the earth rotates on its own axis during the long exposure. The longer the exposure, the longer the star trail. To obtain a blue background rather than a black one, start your exposure when there is still some dark blue in the sky. Scouting beforehand for interesting foreground enhances the composition.

below: Ice floes at dusk, Churchill, Manitoba.



narrow the field of photos. "It was hard enough coming down to 1000 photos, and then down to 250," Grandmaison explains.

"I could have made five books on Canada. That's where a good Art Director comes in. Peter was very good at selecting and pairing images so they complimented each other. Sometimes I'm too close to the images, so ultimately, he likes this photo, I like this one, and the end result is I get this fantastic showcase."

Shelagh Roger's rich text was added in January of 2005, putting reflective words together to compliment the images. For his part, Grandmaison added an afterward piece and stories about each photograph for the index. There were edits to both. That month saw the first series of digital colour proofs, to be reviewed and approved.

Round three came in March. Mike headed to Friesens, an internationally respected printing house in Altona, Manitoba. "All my photos, except for about five, were on transparency film which were scanned in Toronto (at Quadratone). The pre-press technician and I reviewed the high res scans and made small adjustments on screen, which isn't typical, but it not only saved



above: Castle Butte, Big Muddy Badlands, Saskatchewan

us a lot of work later, it also gave us an excellent product."

The press machines ran for fifty-seven continuous hours. Sleep came in between the intermittent press approvals. "It was a great experience. I got to see the whole publishing end of it. Usually the Art Director gets to do this, but Peter said this was my book, and my vision, so he let me run with it."

Mike quickly realized that having excellent original transparencies also made it easier to make excellent scans. The better the original, the better the scan and the better the print. With twelve images on one sheet, any modification done to one image ultimately affected the images below it, whether for exposure or colour balance, and that was when difficult decisions sometimes had to be made about the final image quality. "I certainly got to learn about the compromises along the way. That is just the way the business is. Ultimately, we made few adjustments on the press. The folks at Friesens are just such great craftsmen!"

In less than three days of approvals, the book was printed, ready to be bound. Now it was up to the publisher to get the books

distributed and sold.

Despite a lucrative offer to create another Canada book with a publisher from another country, Mike is thrilled with the product that came from his relationship with a major Canadian publisher. "This Canada book has provided me with an excellent portfolio. Not many photographers get a chance to do this."

"Canada," the book, has been somewhat of a surreal experience for Mike Grandmaison. The project could have been as huge and daunting as the Canadian landscape. Instead, he looked at the project as he does the rainforests of British Columbia; "It's about finding order in the chaos. So you try and balance the light, the shadows and the colour – the trees, the branches, with angles everywhere. You're abstracting the bigger picture."

This story is the dream scenario of most photographers. Only dreaming didn't make this happen. Good solid work did. Mike knows it's all about being ready, when the time comes. Camera loaded. Waiting for that sweet light. "As Louis Pasteur once said: "Chance favours the prepared mind." And so it does.