

## FINE WINE



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# ALTERNATIVE CAPTURE THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF KEVIN JUDD

by Pekka Nuikki

**T**he vines in the morning landscape are still lightly veiled in dew. A brisk wind blows up dust from the dry soil between the rows. The blue sky curves over the vineyard, and some wispy clouds creep in from the left. A passing lorry raises a swirl of dust through which the lights of cars shine. A photographer puts his tripod in place and cocks his camera.

*Why does he see an image here, why is this scene photographic?*

The scene divides into several zones: the deep-blue three-dimensional clouds, the distant mountaintops visible over the swirl of dust, the morning haze dotted by the lights, the endless rows of vines, the sunburned grass in the foreground...

*Is this the moment and the place he is looking for? Not yet!*

He walks slowly along the edge of the vineyard, moving left, which brings the vines curving to the right into a perfect formation in the middle of the section swathed in gold. He is aiming for the perfect image...

*But what is the perfect image—the right composition and framing?*

Still it isn't right. There should be more sunlight, forming large, solid surfaces and creating more detail to deepen the landscape. The sun is rising fast, the landscape acquires more depth as the shadows shorten, surfaces are being exposed—this is the moment. In one sixtieth of a second, the moment is captured and immortalized. The photographer, Kevin Judd, flashes a satisfied smile, picks up his tripod, and moves on.

#### **Kevin, what is the “secret” of landscape photography?**

Research your location, find out where the sun will rise, get up early, use a tripod, learn the hyperfocal distance rule, shut down the aperture as much as you can, be patient—but most importantly *be there*. In terms of content and composition, the vineyard presents a multitude of options. The linear nature of the man-made landscape provides great perspective and foregrounds that have texture, form, and contrast—all of which are ideal ingredients for a good landscape image.

#### **Do you think your photographs affect others?**

Some people think about photographs, consider composition, juxtaposition, and subject material, look in the fine print to see who shot the image, and then tell you that they knew it was one of yours. Others just gloss over the images without digesting a great deal except the basic contents of the picture. But I get satisfaction from knowing that my images convey the spectacular beauty of New Zealand's wine regions to the world.

Sunset over Cloudy Bay Vineyard, Marlborough, NZ

**Describe your family background in England and its impact on your work.**

I lived in Totton near Southampton, on the edge of the New Forest, with my parents and two brothers until I was nine, when my family emigrated to Australia on the “£10 tourist scheme.” My father was a draftsman, and a keen photographer in his spare time. He had a darkroom in the garage and used to photograph our family and weddings. As far as any impact on my work goes, I guess the only really relevant thing is the introduction to photography.

**How did you become a winemaker?**

Well, I have to admit that I studied winemaking because it sounded like an interesting and varied profession that combined my interest in chemistry with a desire to work in a rural environment. I graduated from Roseworthy Agricultural College in Australia in 1979, and my first job was at Château Reynella, where I worked for three years with Geoff Merrill. In 1982 Kimberley and I were married, and in the same year Hardys purchased Château Reynella. My role was about to undergo serious restructuring, none of which I liked the sound of, so I looked around for another winemaking position and ended up at Selaks in New Zealand. The original plan was to go there for a three-year stint and then return to Australia, but in 1984 I met David Hohnen and he offered me the job of making wine in Marlborough. This was the start of Cloudy Bay, though at the time there was no land, no winery, and no name.

**And how did you become a wine photographer?**

Initially I was taking photographs at Cloudy Bay so that the Cape Mentelle team in Western Australia could see the progress that was happening in New Zealand. I also shot the images that were used by a graphic designer to create the Cloudy Bay label. In 1990, I met Mick Rock of Cephas Picture Library. He had come to Cloudy Bay to shoot for Oz Clarke’s book *New Classic Wines*. I showed him some of my vineyard photographs, and he invited me to submit images to his stock library. That was a real turning point, and once I started to see some of my work published, I became inspired to create more images in a wider range of styles. The stunning Marlborough landscape provided me with a subject into which I could escape with the camera whenever the urge took me.

**Why did you work in color at a time when black-and-white defined art photography?**

Initially I concentrated on landscape photography, primarily for books and magazines, so from a commercial perspective, color photography seemed like a better option. And I never really considered myself as an art photographer anyway.

**Did you have a mentor as you were getting started?**

Absolutely. As I’ve already mentioned, in 1990 I met Mick Rock. I knew his name from looking at many of his images in wine magazines and was very interested in his work. I had for many years admired the composition and quality of his vineyard landscapes in particular. After he invited me to contribute to his library, I started to send him 35mm images of Marlborough vineyards, many of which came back to me with detailed suggestions on how to improve on them. He encouraged me to

move to a medium-format camera, and via constant communication he taught me the basic principles of finding the right light, getting sharp images, and maximizing depth of field.

**What led to your decision to do books?**

Craig Potton Publishing [a small publishing house in Nelson specializing in photographic books based on the landscape work of Craig Potton] used one of my images in a book of theirs in the mid-’90s, so I approached them with the idea of doing a Marlborough vineyard book. They had a look at my work and said they were interested, but also that I’d need a lot more images and a lot more variety before a book could be considered. So about five years later we put it together. I thought there was room for a book focusing on photographic images of Marlborough Vineyards, and now I am working on a similar project incorporating all of New Zealand’s wine regions.

**What is the historical importance of your images?**

Something I have thought about from time to time. Something that I need to consider in my will, because there is a huge body of historical information in my filing cabinets!

**Who influenced your artistic vision?**

Mick Rock, obviously, in terms of vineyard landscapes. Craig Potton’s New Zealand wilderness images, and Ken Duncan’s amazing Australian panoramic landscapes. John Sexton and Eliot Porter in the US have produced many images, especially close-ups, that have inspired me. Robin Morrison from New Zealand was—before he died far too young—a brilliant portrait photographer, and if I ever got close to what he did, I’d be pleased with myself.

**What issue rings your bell today?**

Digital versus film. If digital can cut the mustard, then it is all well and good as far as I am concerned. I hate hearing all this crap about digital photographers “cheating,” while film and darkrooms are the “real thing.” The best black-and-white photographers use darkroom techniques to fine-tune their images. Fine-tuning in some cases means serious manipulation in terms of dodging and burning et cetera. If these sorts of controls can be applied using digital, then all well and good. I am no fan of gross digital retouching or image manipulation to the point of creating something that never existed, but tonal control and the sort of things you might do with filters or in a darkroom are all fair game as far as I am concerned.

**What is the best thing about being winemaker and photographer at the same time?**

Winemaking is an industry that provides huge variation in terms of disciplines. We grow the raw material, convert it into a high-quality product, market the product, export it around the world, and then sit down with a glass at dinner. It is a seasonal business that provides great diversity in the annual cycle; it is a team effort and I thoroughly enjoy it. The understanding of the industry and being part of it in a winemaking sense has been a great asset from a photographic perspective and opened many doors (and vineyard gates) with great ease. The only trouble is finding the time.

*Clockwise from top left:* Misty sunrise over vineyard, Coonawarra, South Australia; Motukawa Vineyard and Richmond Ranges, Marlborough, NZ; Auntsfield Vineyard, Marlborough, NZ; Morton Estate’s Riverview Vineyard by the Ngaruroro River near Hastings, Hawkes Bay, NZ; Catena Zapata’s Adrianna Vineyard at Gultallary, Tupungato, Mendoza, Argentina; autumnal vineyards and the Richmond Ranges, Marlborough, NZ  
*Overleaf:* Shafts of sunlight above Renwick, Marlborough, NZ

All photography courtesy of Kevin Judd







Clockwise from top left: Lone eucalyptus and the Richmond Ranges, Marlborough, NZ; Pinot Noir leaf; sunset over the Richmond Ranges, Marlborough, NZ; second-set Pinot Noir

## NUIKKI ON JUDD

### The image behind the images

The journey into the photographic art of New Zealand's most famous winemaker and photographer has been made easy, marked by several books and exhibitions along the way. And at first sight, Kevin Judd's images themselves are almost too easy. His straightforward, traditional technique does not demand attention. It also means that most of the images are fairly static, though they are contemplative rather than lifeless.

Look more closely, however, and you notice an echo of the ever more distant dialogue between man and nature. Alienation from the natural world is a leitmotif in the landscape meditations of many modern photographers. But Judd's development of the theme is particularly poignant, in that he lives and works in the images—in the vineyards themselves. So insightful, so revealing are his images, that you start to feel uncomfortably like a voyeur.

### Landscape photography as a form of painting

Despite the myriad themes found in modern art, landscapes have been considered rather unexciting, due largely to the oppressive weight of the 19th-century tradition. But recently there has been a growing appreciation of the way in which photography can go beyond painting, addressing many of the same themes but in a more modern way. Through photography, the landscape can still be seen as both the source and the subject of imagination, though it is no longer merely a metaphor for faraway places or a romantic refuge. At the same time, it broadens the concept of photography, taking it into territory traditionally occupied by fine art. The ideal of landscape persists, if only at some subconscious level.

The human element is always included in Judd's images, but often only as the viewer. If the image depicts people, they are there as parts of the scenery, small specks on the horizon. It is typical of his landscapes that there is no principal subject; all the elements of the image are equal. Along the lines of traditional landscape



Lenticular clouds, Motukawa Vineyard, Marlborough, NZ

painting, Judd seems to want to show as much as possible, but this never leads to any crowding or overloading. Rather, it introduces dimensionality and a richly layered texture.

If landscape once defined a form, a genre, of painting, in modern art it should be understood more as a concept. Landscape is now a means of interpretation rather than of representation. In *The Colour of Wine*, Judd experiments with abstract expression based on strong color and light, using exposure and other traditional photographic techniques to explore the possibilities of the new media space. But above all, the images are about identifying and giving meaning to the place—metaphorical studies of the agricultural landscape and its seasonal variations.

### The appearance of nature

Looking at Judd's images, you may well fail to recognize them as constructed landscapes, so natural and timeless do they seem. They are a new kind of landscape, somewhere in the gray space

between nature and culture, places that man adapts for his own purposes while trying to preserve some of their original atmosphere. Alongside the ideal and traditional images of landscape, a new set of images has emerged in which Judd captures nature in close-up, in its most minute particulars.

### Worth more than a thousand words

In front of Judd's art, I cannot help thinking about how a photographer of culturally and historically important images is himself becoming part of photographic history. And yet I do not believe that his art needs that defense of its significance; his art says more than the thousands of words already used to describe it. It is equally precious as a reminder of the constant but constantly changing relationship between man and nature, of which wine is also the beneficent product and symbol. ■

For further information and images, visit [www.kevinjudd.co.nz](http://www.kevinjudd.co.nz)