

RANGEFINDER



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The
Pictures
of the Year



BY BILL HURTER

Every single month the choosing of a cover is an ordeal. The cover is the magazine's statement of intent. It must be stylish and reflect the content of the issue as well as the personality of the publication. Since *Rangefinder* is not a newsstand publication, we do not have to deal with cover blurbs—which, artistically, are the bane of every art director. Our covers need only identify the theme or major content of the issue, thereby allowing the photos greater impact and integrity as compared to cover images on many other magazines. Because the selected photograph is so important to our covers, great care is taken to choose images that work well in many capacities. It's a process that may take as long as two weeks, and one that is rewarding when we finally do arrive at a decision.

Here's how the cover-selection process works at *Rangefinder*. After the editors have finished reviewing the layouts of all the stories in the issues, I sit down with art director Carl Lozada and we review the top picks for covers. Carl usually assembles around

conversion from RGB to CMYK.

One might think we only consider vertical images for covers, but in the last year or so, we have used many horizontals, cropping out a vertical image from the originals.

To a large degree, the elements that make a good photograph also make a good cover image. Design aspects such as tension/balance, vanishing point, lead-in lines—the graphic qualities that move the eye around and through the image—all contribute to the success of the cover. Still, by far the single most important ingredient is impact. Some call it the “wow factor.”

Once Carl and I have whittled down the covers to a workable number, we involve other staffers: George Varanakis, Skip Cohen, and the rest of the editors and art directors. The covers are reviewed on a large monitor, and some initial selections are made based on taste and opinion. We usually end up with eight to 10 covers, from which we put together a montage and examine them from all angles, near and far, to determine initial and overall im-

the ones that GOT AWAY: a look at some recent ALMOST COVERS

100 cover mock-ups. At this point we are looking for images that are not only exemplary from a technical point of view, but also those with impact—the ones that pop and keep you staring at them long after your eyes and mind have digested the information in the photograph.

Most of the images we review for covers will have been used in that issue's articles, and often the strongest ones have already been chosen as lead photos in their respective articles.

Cover photos have to work well with type. The three main typographic elements of a *Rangefinder* cover are the logo, the price and issue date line just below the logo, and a single blurb announcing the contents or theme of the issue. A good cover photo has lots of negative space, and the top 15% of the image area must be suitable for overlaying the logo and tag line.

Like all printed materials, our covers are subject to the limitations of offset printing. For instance, cover images usually get between five and 10% darker than their originals because of what's known in the trade as dot gain. And even though our systems and the printers' systems are identically profiled, we still occasionally get unusual color shifts—usually due to the

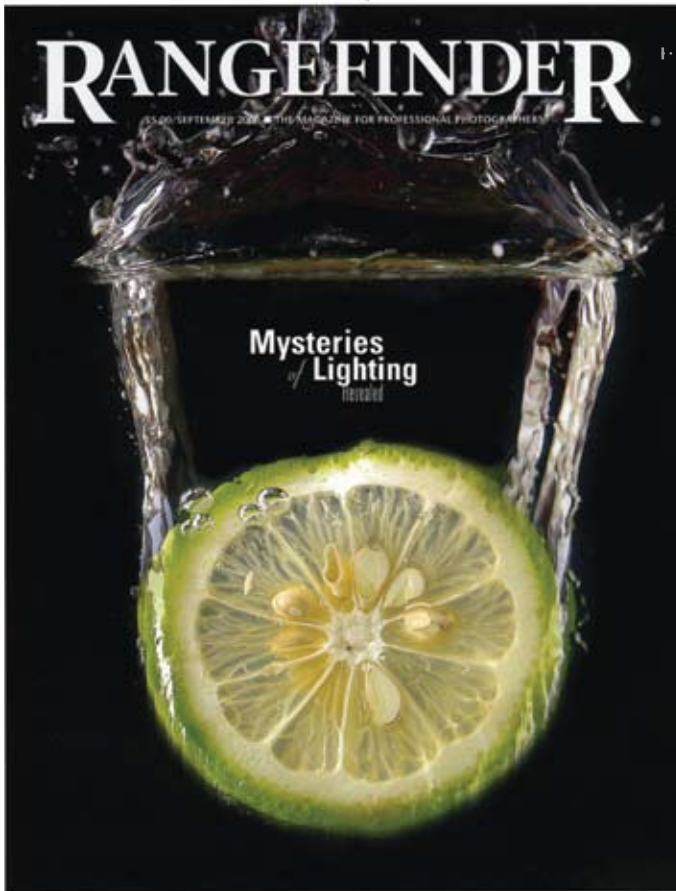
fact. We then print each one out on an Epson Stylus Pro 3800, also profiled to our printer's system, and pass them around the office, allowing them to resonate and sink in. By the end of the second or third day, we usually have a consensus and can make a final choice. The covers are then reviewed by Steve Sheanin, and voilà, we have a selection.

To say that this process doesn't always go that smoothly is an understatement. People get passionate about their choices (myself included), and sometimes agreement takes time. In the process, a good number of great covers get passed over for one reason or another. One hears comments like, “It doesn't really look like a *Rangefinder* cover,” or “We're going to get letters!” or “It's too edgy,” or “It's not edgy enough!” Chaos and disharmony abound, albeit on a pretty friendly level (usually).

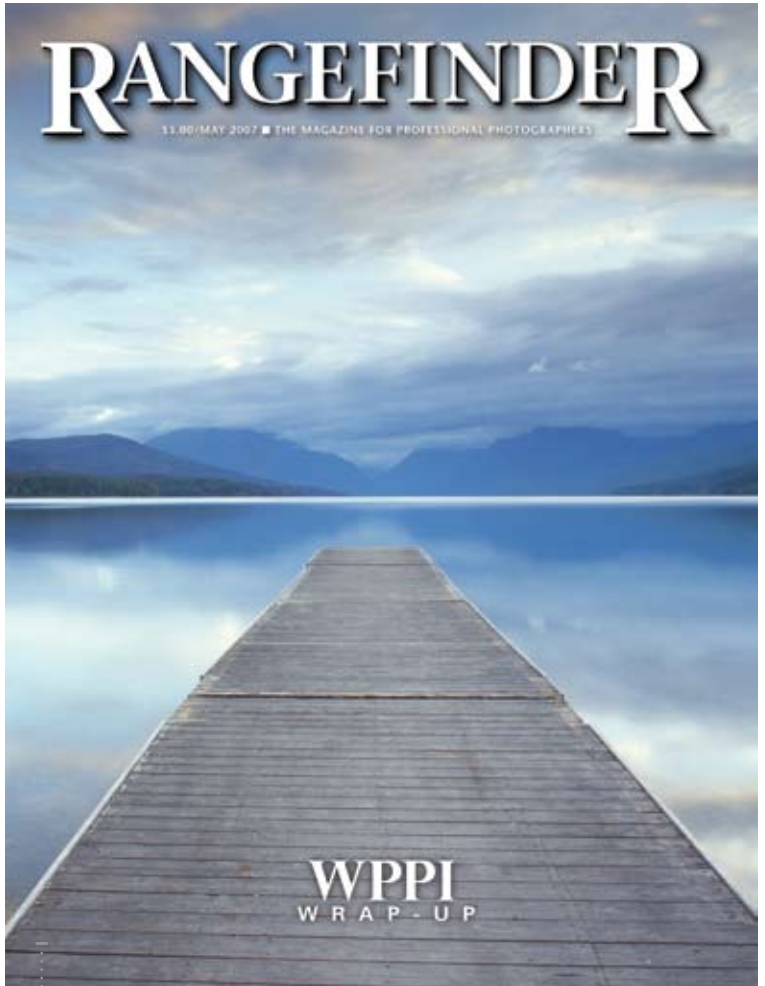
Covers that weren't chosen, but were intriguing for one reason or another, usually make it to my bulletin board. One day we decided it might make a good end-of-the-year article to show some of those covers that had at one point been in serious consideration but just didn't make it. So here you have it: some of the best covers that never made it to print.

This image by Bob Martin for Sports Illustrated is of the 200m freestyle heat at the Paralympic Games in Athens in September 2004. The image is of Spanish swimmer Xavi Torres, whose limbs had been amputated. He went on to come in sixth in the 200m finals. This image was almost selected for the December 2005 Pictures of the Year issue, both for its amazing sense of irony and extraordinary visual dynamics.



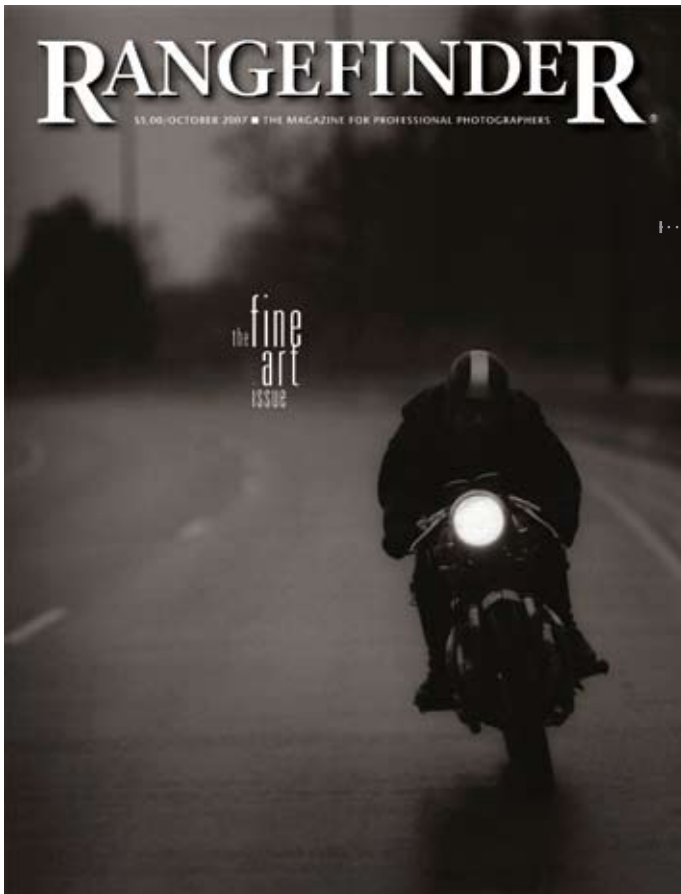


This image is from the September 2006 issue on lighting. It was made by Anton Heiberg, a South African photographer, as part of a high-speed photography article called "Lime Splash." The image was perceived as delightful and brimming with impact, but was not selected because we had used a similar splash image a few months before this one.

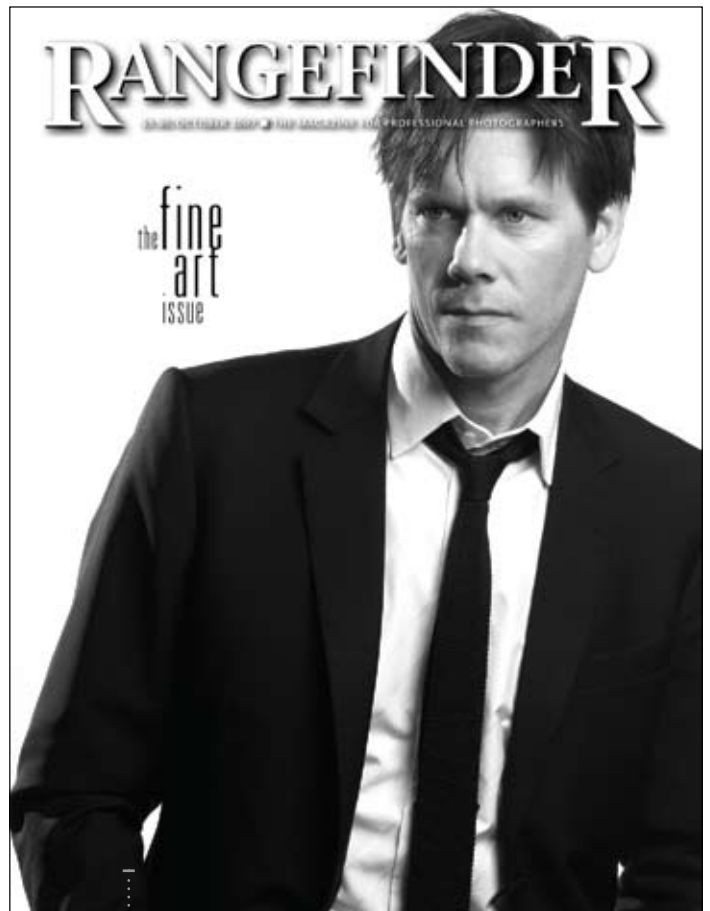


This image almost became the cover for the May 2007 WPPI Wrap-up issue. The photographer, Sean Arbabi, made the image at Lake McDonald, Glacier National Park, MT. This image features a powerful vanishing point and forced perspective. Content-wise, the image conveys a sense of solitude and a feeling of departure.

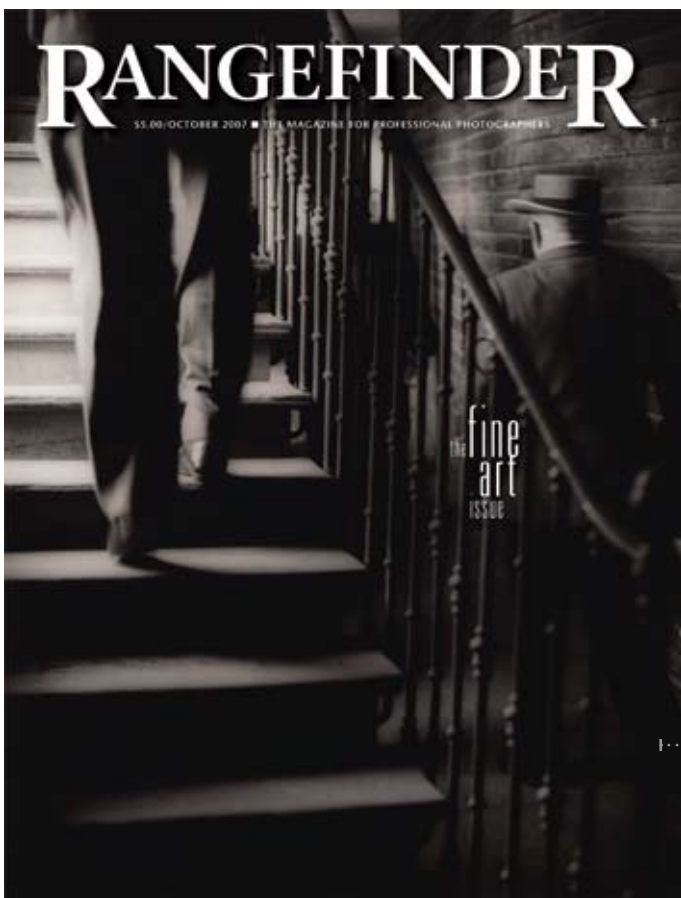
Hollywood photographer Don Norris took this image, which is characteristic of his playful style. We liked the Dr. Seuss-style hat and feathers, and the comic expression. White backgrounds are usually very effective as cover images as they really grab attention. The image ended up running full-page in the article about Don in the July 2007 portrait issue.



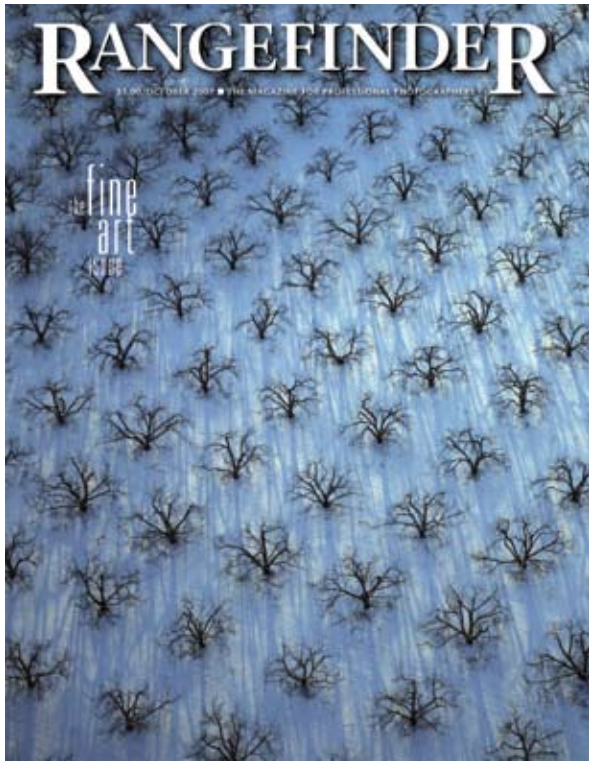
This Michael Crouser shot is deceptively simple. It's reminiscent of the café racers of the early '60s and has a timeless quality to it. It was almost the cover of the October 2007 fine art issue.



Celebrity photographer John Russo made this great shot of actor Kevin Bacon, which was another contender for the October 2007 cover. The photo has great right-to-left direction and a strong diagonal line throughout the composition. It's also a compelling shot of Bacon and one that represents the new breed of celebrity portraiture.



This is another Michael Crouser shot that is very powerful and mysterious, and has an intriguing sense of misdirection. It too was a finalist for the October 2007 fine art issue.



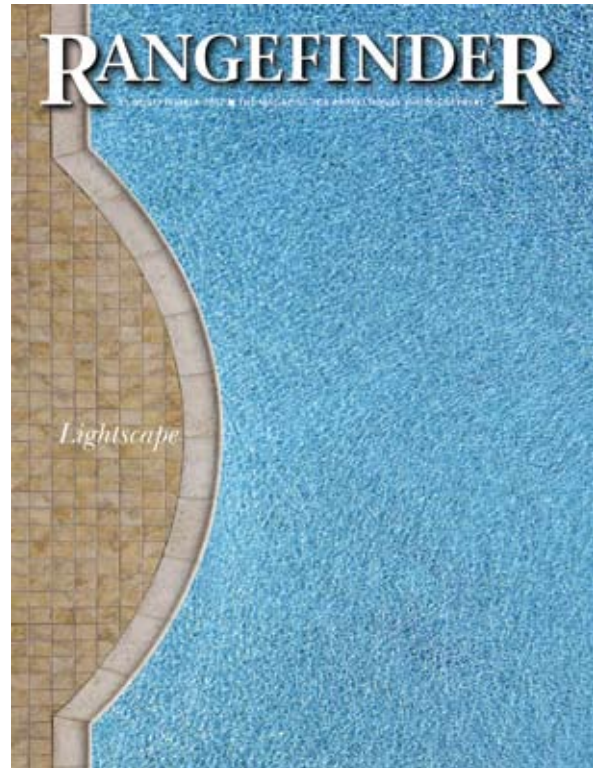
A pattern of fruit trees in winter resembles a quilted bedspread. Images with patterns and no primary center of interest often don't make good covers. However, there is something compelling about the light and shadow, and this unusual angle of the aerial image made by Dale Fisher.



This dynamic image by Jeff Kroeze (pronounced "Kroos") was almost the cover of the September 2007 lighting issue. The light seems to emanate from within the futuristic structure. While everyone here liked it, some felt its abstractness did not say "lighting."



Late one night Jeff Kroeze photographed this scene of silent sentinels, the windmill farms in the desert of Southern California. A very long exposure streaked the stars slightly and blurred the blades of the windmills. We ended up using a similar image of his for the September 2007 lighting issue, but this was a very close second.



This image, also by Jeff Kroeze, was considered for a the September 2007 lighting issue cover. Its starkness and pure design made it a beautiful cover treatment, but again, it was vetoed because it didn't say "lighting." The image would have been ideal for the fine art or commercial issues.



This is a good example of an image designed as a horizontal that was mocked-up vertically as a cover. As you can see, the treatments have an entirely different feeling. However, the power of the geometric shapes and the bold contrast make it a visual feast as either a horizontal or a vertical. Image by Jeff Kroeze.



This cover really said "lighting," as the photographer used the day-for-night technique of underexposing a daylight image while using blue filtration to make it look like a moonlit shot. Image by Jeff Kroeze.



Mark Indig made this image that was a favorite of the entire staff. The bold, hard lines and stark color contrast are in opposition to the delicate cloud floating overhead. It was a cover finalist for the lighting issue, but probably would have worked better as a cover for the fine art issue.