

## ARTS &amp; THEATRE

# Old St. Ed's School subject of old-school photographer

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Once upon a time, before digital cameras and the era of "point and shoot," taking a photo involved bulky equipment, careful calculations and arcane formulae.

In Vero Beach, one man has eschewed the ease of modern picture-taking. Charles Caito favors photography from the age of the buggy whip and button hook – the kind that involves a view camera on a tripod, with a black cloth draped over the camera and the photographer's head.

Caito feels that modern technology erases the time-intensive, painstaking photographic craft from the minds of the public.

"I think the world is getting lazy, and digital prints are getting so fabulous, that the average person can't tell the difference," says Caito.

The view camera consists of a bellows stretched between two wooden standards. The front standard holds a lens; the rear standard is fitted with a piece of ground glass.

Caito loads his sheet film by hand into a carrier that slides into the camera back, in front of the ground glass, for exposure.

The lens throws an upside-down image onto the ground glass; to focus the image, one fiddles with knobs at the front of the camera. In bright sunlight, the image is faint. To see it clearly, the photographer creates a dark viewing space by draping a large square of black cloth over the camera and his head.

Huddled under his viewing cloth, Caito is a magnet for passersby who see a Facebook-ready photo op. As he struggles under the darkcloth to adjust his camera, people whip out their phones for a quick shot.



Photographer Charles Caito is a non-silver photo printmaker.

PHOTO BY BENJAMIN HAGER

Caito is not flattered by the attention. "Everybody invariably thinks that the best picture of me is under the hood," he complains.

He admits to feeling vulnerable when he so busy with the image before him that he doesn't know what is going on around him – or who might walk up behind him. When he photographed the Wabasso Tackle Shop one evening, Caito's wife, Susan, served as his lookout as he ducked under his hood at the busy intersection.

He photographs in the early morning or late afternoon light, often on

Sundays when there are fewer cars around. A view-camera photographer's life can be a lonely one, with half of his time spent setting up his equipment and the other half spent waiting for the right light.

His subject matter has been the pastoral landscape of England, where he and Susan lived for 10 years; the city of Cleveland, which they call home; their winter residence of Vero Beach; and rural North Carolina, where the couple enjoy spending time.

Caito taught himself photography when Susan's job with British Petroleum took them to England in 1996. Unable to get a work permit, Caito bought a camera that accepted 5 by 7 sheet film and began to teach himself photography.

England is a country of walkers, and Caito soon found himself with his camera in the English countryside.

"I used to walk for six miles with it in the rucksack, and carry the tripod, and have 10 pounds of film holders with me," he recalls.

The nice thing about England was the lack of trespassing laws. "I used to get permission to shoot a lot of the estates."

Back in the U.S., where "Keep Out" and "No Trespassing" signs seem to adorn every fence-post, Caito misses the freedom to ramble. But life in Florida has its perks in the form of friendly

neighbors who have opened some of those off-limit places to Caito.

"This is a picture of cypress trees just up north of Okeechobee," Caito says, displaying an 8 by 10 contact print. The negative for the picture was printed by laying it directly against a sheet of photo paper in a glass printing frame and exposing it to light.

The primeval scene shows a stand of cypress rising from obsidian-hued water. Their ghostly trunks are reflected on the water's glassy surface.

"I call it my Clyde Butcher picture," jokes Caito, referring to the Florida photographer who has spent more than 30 years photographing the swamps and hammocks of the Everglades with a large format camera.

Caito's photo was taken during a break on a 300-mile car trip with Joe Stalls, a citrus grader who invited Caito to join him one day on his route. Caito feels an affinity for Stalls.

Stalls carried a digital camera with him on his route. "He showed me tons of beautiful wildlife photos," says Caito.

Large format photography, however, is not nimble enough to catch anything as fleeting as a bounding deer or a soaring eagle.

When they stopped for Caito to photograph the stand of cypress, Stalls "couldn't believe it took me 40 minutes to set up," Caito says.



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“I tease him and say, ‘Hey, aren’t you going to take me out again this year?’ And he won’t take me.”

One Florida couple that befriended Caito was Richard “Dick” Jones and his wife Mary, who lived on Jungle Trail, on old grove property that had been in their family for more than 100 years. Dick Jones died in 2011; his wife died in 2009.

Caito struck up an acquaintance with Jones when the Caitos were building their house in nearby Palm Island Plantation.

The friendship was based on good-natured joshing and ribbing. “I was a dumb Yankee and he was a Florida

Cracker,” says Caito. The couple allowed Caito to photograph to his heart’s content on their property.

He shot a view of the Jones’s pier in 8 x 10 format and contact printed it in platinum for its subtlety of tone, which is also evident in Caito’s photo of Dick and Mary Jones standing in their front yard as a 1938 Chevrolet Modern Classic rolls down Jungle Trail.

Caito says that he “coaxed” the car’s owner, Vero Beach resident Dick Manthey, to bring it to the Jones property for photographs.

The photograph winds the clock back to an era when life was slower and friendlier, when technology was

epitomized not by the latest iPod, but by a shiny new American-made car.

Caito stopped time again when he got permission last fall to photograph St. Edward’s Lower School before its demolition.

The historic core of the building was the dining room of the old Riomar Country Club, Caito says. He and a friend, Boris Robinson, photographed the building inside and out. Robinson shot digital photos; Caito used his 8 x 10 view camera.

“We had a horrible time with the light,” says Caito, noting that he and

Robinson photographed the exterior of the school around 6:30 a.m.

The early sun lit up the building. As the sun rose, the trees in front of the school threw shadows across the structure that obscured its details. “So we had about 20 minutes to work,” says Caito.

No furnishings remained inside the school. Its emptiness disturbed Caito, who brought a dining room chair from home to use as a prop in his photos. In one of the prints, the chair breaks the monotony of a vacant downstairs hallway where student chatter once echoed. ■

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