

# Manhattan Beach Pier

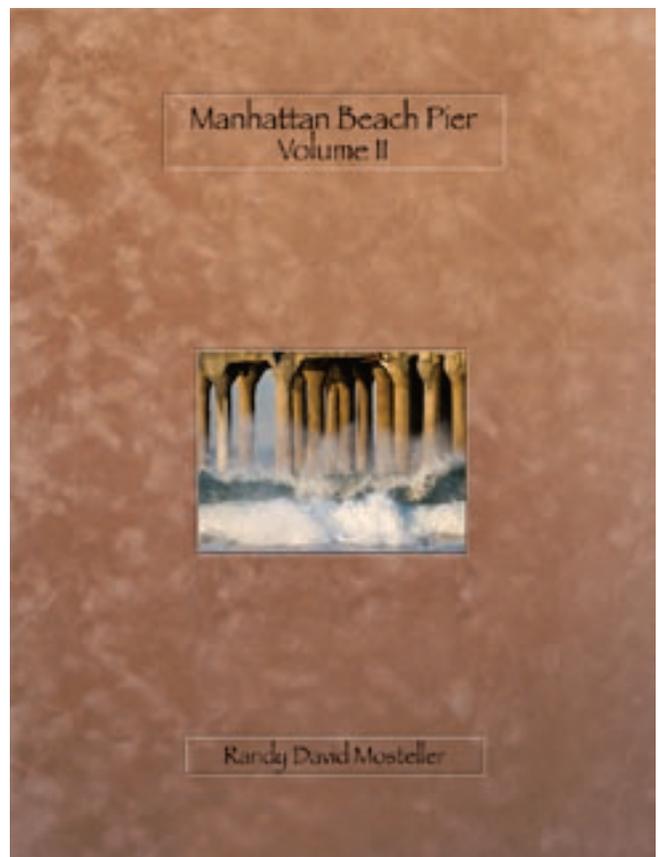
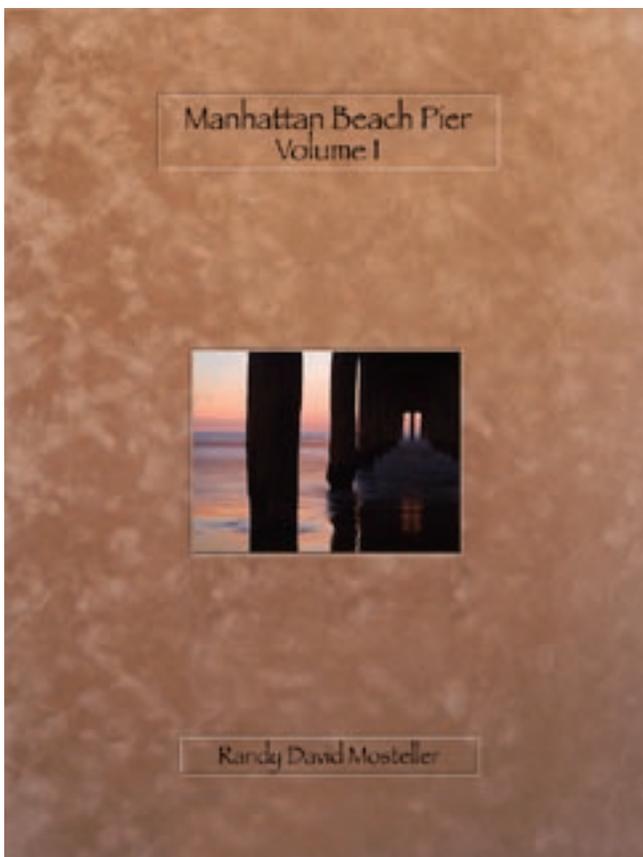
Volumes I & II

May 4th, 2006

**Artist Statement**

**Volume I**

**Volume II**



Randy David Mosteller

# Artist Statement

## Manhattan Beach Pier Volume I & II

These 32 images of the Manhattan Beach Pier represent the conclusion of a three year project from over 10,000 images and several hundred visits. What had started as an occasional sunset had become an obsession to capture the pier as it is often seen but rarely photographed.

Built in 1920 as a solid replacement of the previous wooden structures, the pier with its roundhouse is the icon of our city. This portfolio is my personal view of the variety both sublime and dramatic of our pier. Most of the images were taken in or near the winter solstice, the shortest day of our year. This is when the sun rises on the most south-eastern edge of the city almost coming up over Palos Verdes and sets very quickly several degrees south of the pier. It rises very slowly and gently and most importantly gives many minutes of photographic opportunity in that "golden hour".

The winter also offers more dramatic skies and clouds to add interest and variety to the landscape as well as offering many northern Pacific swells to generate larger than average wave heights.

I did not intend the portfolio to be documentary but rather an opportunity to present a variety of beautiful, painterly images. Some of these photos remind me of my visits through the Musee D'Orsay in their impressionistic qualities but also there is a vibrancy of color and shape seen in many of the expressionist and minimalist pieces.

Getting from 10,000 to 32 took some time. I wanted to show a variety of photos and more importantly a variety of color. Crimson, indigo, and magenta balance the pastel pinks, cyans and softer yellows.

Contrary to some landscape schools, a few of these photos show a human presence a la Henri Cartier-Bresson and the 'decisive moment'. Sandpipers and plovers and the omni-present gulls are represented as well. But most important, the architectural view of the pier itself with its concrete pilings, eight-sided round house and 922-foot iron lighted deckwork dominate these compositions.

I created two complementary volumes that together form this portfolio yet each stands on its own merits as a singular unique representation of the pier. As a photographer and artist this portfolio represents a monograph of my work. Nothing less than the highest quality printing on the highest quality papers would enable you to experience these views as I have seen them.

## Artist Statement

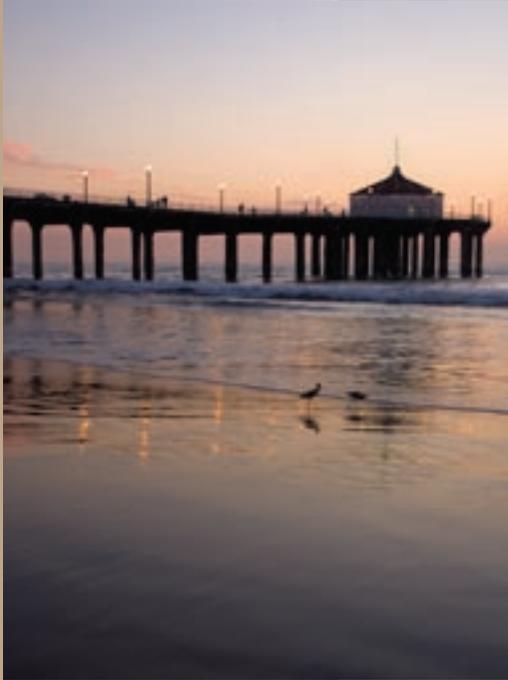
My influences and inspirations are many but my vision is that often found of the painter - to create images that are transcendent, beautiful and luminous. The best compliment I can receive is when my images are referred to as 'painterly'.

Enjoy

Randy Mosteller

04 May 2006

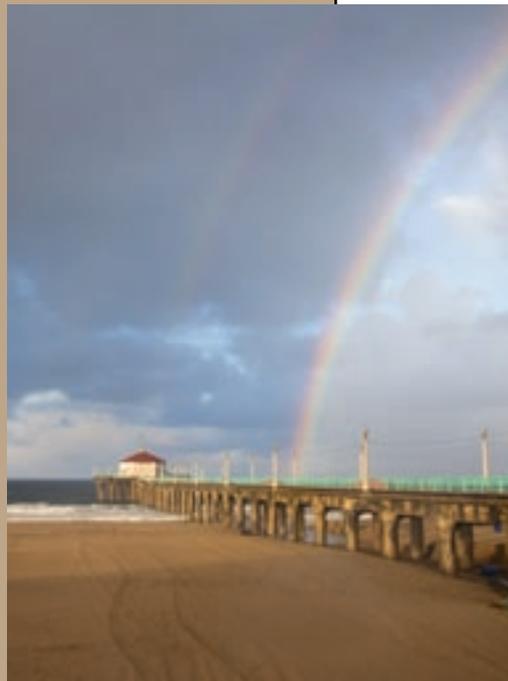
# Volume I



LOW TIDE, December 22nd, 2004

Low tides offer many unique opportunities for photography. Our beach has a long, flat shelf that gets exposed when the tide is at its lowest. The extremes of a low tides fluctuates many times during a year so a good predictive tide table is a must to coordinate an extreme low with a sunset to capture great reflected light. Coupled with a calm sea this tranquil image has violet tones with a hint of magenta tinged clouds on the edge leading towards the reflected pier lighting on the water.

A slow shutter speed gives the sandpipers an ethereal quality that adds to the serenity of this image.



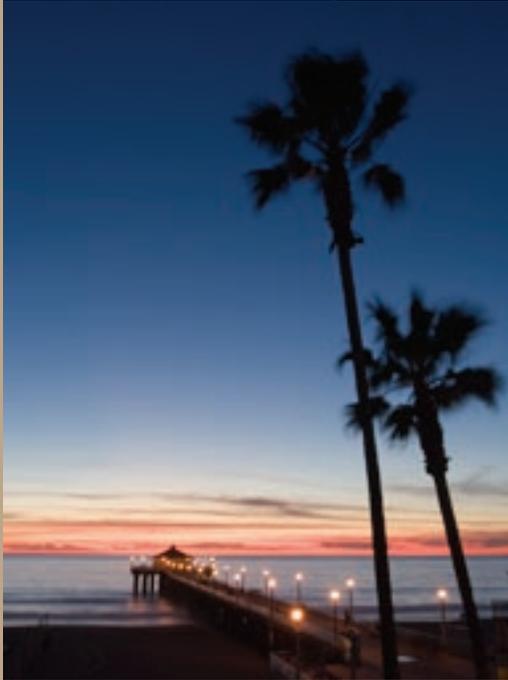
RAINBOW, December 29th, 2004

Eventually we discover that rainbows show up in front of us when the sun is at our backs. Projected onto an on-coming shower photographing rainbows are simply luck when they show up. Yet you can increase your odds if you go out every time it threatens to rain in the early morning.

Luckily, this rainbow doubled itself onto the pier with direct morning light onto the roundhouse. I had to run very fast to get into location and position this rainbow -- usually you are only offered a few minutes and they show up quickly and fade away just as fast.

In the three years of this project I saw two rainbows. This one in front of me and another behind.

# Volume I



TWILIGHT, January 17th, 2005

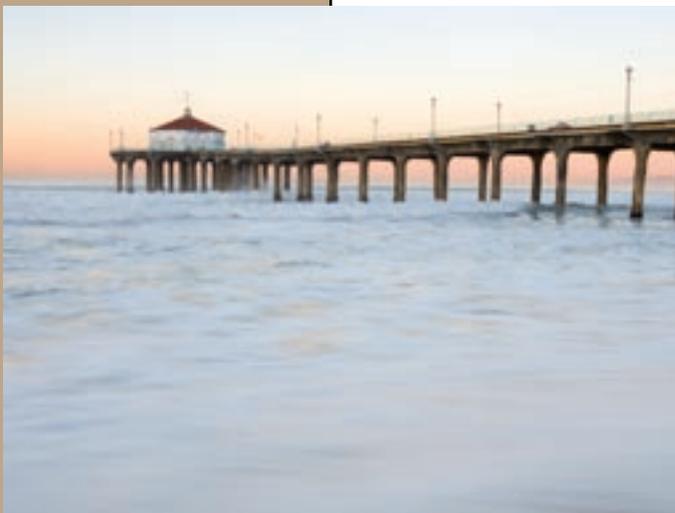
The vantage from this view point is the parking lot above the strand on the south side.

This position is the incidental photographer's spot. Pull up your car, open your door, and knock down a few megapixels for the friends still back east.

Yet this was a cold day, a very cold day for that matter, and windy too. When the seas are calm more color from the sky overhead will be reflected in the water. Here the waters are wind-lifted and the overhead color intensity is lightened so as to not detract from the twilight sky.

Also the sun is well set lending to the very deep inky color. Yet enough of the distant clouds create a contrasting horizontal orange to the dark vertical nature of the palms.

This was an unplanned opportunistic shot that just works despite my desire to avoid postcard images. This is truly a time when patience pays off.



SUNRISE, December 24th, 2005

Inspired by my childhood memories of snow blanketed fields, this picture gives me the opportunity to see a white winter wonderland here in Manhattan Beach.

Again the wind plays a pivotal role in whipping up enough movement in the seas all the way to the horizon to create this effect. The pastel pink and peaches of the distant atmosphere provide a fantastic backdrop for this early morning pier photograph.

# Volume I



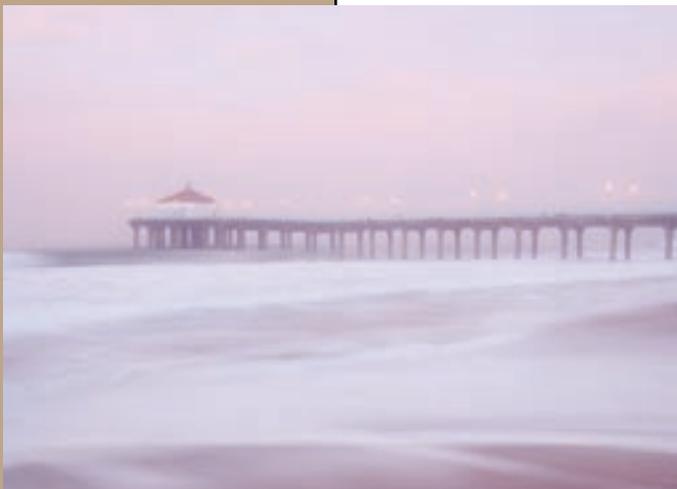
DUSK, December 22nd, 2004

I have selected this image as the title piece for this volume. Shooting under the pier has become old hat and for that matter I had tended to avoid it. Yet it is undeniable how alluring it can be when there is wonderful color in both the sky and the water.

The strength of this piece is the calm eddy that has formed around the nearest pier piling that in and of itself has tremendous tranquility. Yet it foreshadows the delicate “twin tower” opening at the end of the pier with a delicate balance of

reflection in the surf.

This is a powerful piece in both color and form and could only be accomplished with the exact balance of overheard marine layer creating foreground color as well as the distant horizon atmospherics.



DAWN FOG, December 28th, 2005

Fog and marine layers are excellent opportunities for photographs yet we remember them often as grey lifeless days.

The pink color of this dawn was fleeting and soon slipped into a day long rain that chased me off the beach. But here the day is early enough to still have the lights on the pier somehow beckoning the arrival of the sun. There is a hint of cyan in the top of the frame suggesting that a clearing of the skies could be imminent. But it was not to come.

I slowed the shutter down to several seconds to recreate the feeling of motion I had as I watched the dawn form.

# Volume I

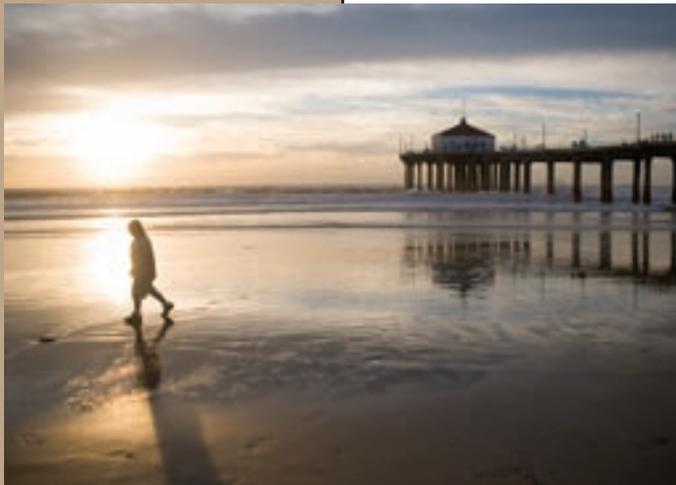


LAST LIGHT, December 29th, 2004

Low tide reflections are one of my favorite times at the beach. They have that Rorschach quality or mirror imagery that makes everyone stop and take a look.

Having watched countless sunsets, I have learned to see the greying of the clouds as the sun slips further and further beyond the horizon. It is typical for the furthest east clouds to grey while the last of the color remains right near the western horizon.

In this photo, we have rare, highly structured clouds very near the surface. When the sun was far past set, these remaining edges caught the last glimpse of light before evening came in.



LOW TIDE, December 30th, 2005

It is not very often that I would include a human element in my landscape. But having recently read a biography on the late Henri Cartier-Bresson he would wait for hours until someone had moved just correctly into the position of the frame he had envisioned. As part of my recognition of his “decisive moment”, I placed this person in the very high contrast reflection of the sun. As the eye is naturally drawn towards the area of highest contrast of an image, the pier here becomes secondary in the composition.

Yet there is also a very interesting darkening of the skies at the top of the frame that mirrors the dark sand at the bottom to create additional drama and balance for the subject and the relation to the pier.

## Volume I



UNDER the PIER, March 10th, 2005

The eye readily goes to the green moss on the piling but quickly gets pulled offshore to the end of the pier. Compositionally this is a common technique called a 'leading line' to pull you through the image and give it more interest.

This is exactly how I discovered this scene myself. I was quite attracted to the vibrant green of this moss which I rarely see. First, it is a low tide as evidenced by the height of the mussels. But it was right after a large storm and the surf was muddied and wet. As I gazed towards the

end of the pier I was reminded of the east coast. Damp, grey, cold, foggy and brown.

It is quite the opposite of a postcard one would send back east. But a comforting reminder of back there and the green grass of what was home.



SUNSET, November 9th, 2005

This photo is shot fairly early in the winter season placing the sun slightly north of the pier. I have noticed that I have a preference for the south of the pier in winter which for the most part is the side that gets illuminated. In this position I had the opportunity to shoot on the north side.

The colors in this photograph are amazing. Why this particular sunset is on the violet side of the color spectrum is a mystery to me. It could be the level of the clouds or the density of the moisture. But I for one am not to argue with nature. This color only appears once or twice a winter season. I grabbed my widest lens and framed the volleyball nets in a similar perspective as I would if it were the pier.

Shooting directly into a bright sun will almost always produce the ball-like flare spots that add to the overall uniqueness of this image.

## Volume I



SUNSET, December 18th, 2004

For many photographers sunsets are irresistible. At first they are incidental in that you look out the window see a great sunset and race down to the beach.

Later I began predicting them by watching the cloud formations during the day and being in position as it emerges.

Eventually I started differentiating sunsets by colors and mood and planning for them to occur at specific dates to coincide with tide positions.

This particular sunset is special. There is obvious horizontal symmetry from the reflection in the low tide. But there is also a vertical symmetry as your eye moves from left to right from the brilliant reds and salmon mirror the dark perspective of the pier. And at the intersection of these two symmetries is a very delicate column of cloud that appears to be emerging from the roundhouse as if smoke from a chimney.

The lighting on the pier and the wet-like reflections also play a supporting role to draw your eye near the end of the pier at which you see a diaphanous figure.

The time of this sunset is critical. Too early and the brightness of the near set sun would burn out the horizon in white and yellows. Too late and the eastward skies would be dark and grey.

Even so, all of this would be moot were it not for the amazing colors of magentas, purples, mauves, cyans, indigos, yellows, reds, oranges and pinks.

## Volume I



SUNSET, November 26th, 2005

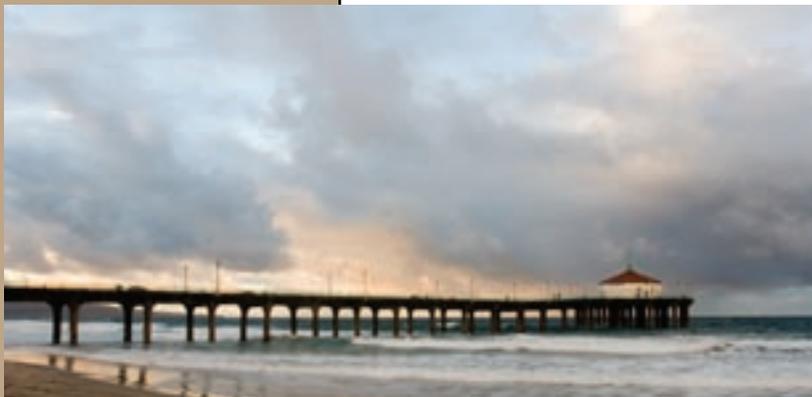
This is a photograph that requires study. It is a pier archetype which means it is so recognizable that the brain soon switches gears to something else.

Compared to the previous photograph, *SUNSET, December 18th, 2004* which keeps you locked in and holds your gaze, this archetypical view does not. And it is that contrast that I find so compelling.

The sun has not yet set, but by positioning the lens so that I can just see a corner of it under the pier a wonderful star pattern emerges. Incidentally for the photographers it is eight pointed because my lens has an eight sided diaphragm and the effect is most pronounced when the lens is stopped down.

The tops of close set waves at their peak right before falling are backlit giving them some linear definition to their height. Enough of a high tropospheric cloud adds a soft interest to the negative space in the upper right of the frame.

Lastly you can see a small figure watching the sunset. Again an archetypical human view as in Da Vinci's Vitruvian man.



SUNRISE STORM, December 29th, 2004

For good reason I placed the pier very low in the frame as if to create a base for these wonderfully lit storm clouds.

The angle of the fast moving clouds and the tonal qualities reminds me of the luminous painters of the Hudson River School. There is a very nice glow to the roundhouse from some sunlit clouds behind me that help it stand out to the contrasting dark rain that was falling in the distance.

## Volume I



NEW YEAR MORNING, January 1st, 2005

Sandpipers are revered as much as gulls can be despised. They are delicate and unassuming.

Shortly after sunrise when there are no clouds in the sky the brightness on the pier is so strong to give a prominent golden reflection of several of the pier's columns.

Though not quite asleep these sandpipers have an eye open to world and I carefully moved my position to place them coincident with the pier reflections. To me they represent an animate form in color and shape to the structure in the background solidly holding ground between sand and surf.



EARTH SHADOW, January 23rd, 2006

An earth shadow is a special phenomenon that occurs 10 to 15 minutes before sunrise when the sun hits the upper atmosphere and creates a pink glow. The shadow of the earth below that is a cooler blue. This effect is most prominent in the winter as the sun rises more slowly at a lower angle and only lasts a few minutes.

This photo is a good example of an earth shadow where the blue band at the water's horizon is clearly visible and not too discolored by the Los Angeles "dust".

But while I was waiting for this shadow to peak, the gulls began to go crazy and circle the pier. Later I saw a man in the surf who for a lark jumped off the end of the pier. Sure enough if you look closely you can see his head in the water on the rising wave.

## Volume I



STORM, January 28th, 2005

Many years ago I took a great photo of waves crashing into the pier. I wanted to shoot very wide-angle so that I would not get the flattening of the image from telescopic lenses traditionally shot from the safety of the strand. Wading into the water I captured a multi-set wave crashing st to the base of the roundhouse.

Nowadays when even a marginally large swell is predicted, TV news crews litter the base of the pier and everyone with a cell phone, instant digicam or large format camera rush down to document the event.

This large wave photo is my personal favorite. The peak of the largest waves for the day has subsided. The news crews had left and most folks retired to the warmth of their houses and restaurants. The day had been very dark, wet and cold. You can see the storm passing to the north and the sun off frame to the south emerging underneath that cover. Offshore winds have whipped the waves back onto themselves illuminating the very long line of this particular set.

And yes, a wave photo of mine would not be the same without me getting my feet wet.

## Volume II



MOONSET, January 3rd, 2006

The new moon had occurred four days earlier on December 30th day at 11:22 p.m.. But by the third day of the new year the crescent was in a great position to catch both the inky twilight and last remaining color of the day's sunset.

I am personally connected to this entire portfolio of pictures but this one simply resonates with me. It is indescribable. The transition of the indigo from dark to pastel is sublime. The horizontal band of remaining orange from a distance cloud structure is a stunning complement to the blues. And the pier with its dark silhouette and pin-point lights evokes a timeless image.

This is a meditative picture.

I am often asked which image is my favorite. Not unlike asking which child is your favorite is the usual reply. But admit that as I will, this is my favorite. I don't think the other pictures would feel offended.



SUNRISE, December 22nd, 2004

This picture immediately reminded me of minimalist Frank Stella's *Your lips are blue*.

I centered the two dominant colors evenly on the photo -- the horizon and thin band of sea directly in the middle of the photo. Wherein minimalism thrives on simplicity in content and form the overlay of the freshly groomed serpentine sand leads right into an expressive view of a morning pier replete with surfers and early walkers. It shows how multiple styles have strongly influenced my compositions -- not necessarily carbon copy styles but individual uniqueness as a result.

## Volume II

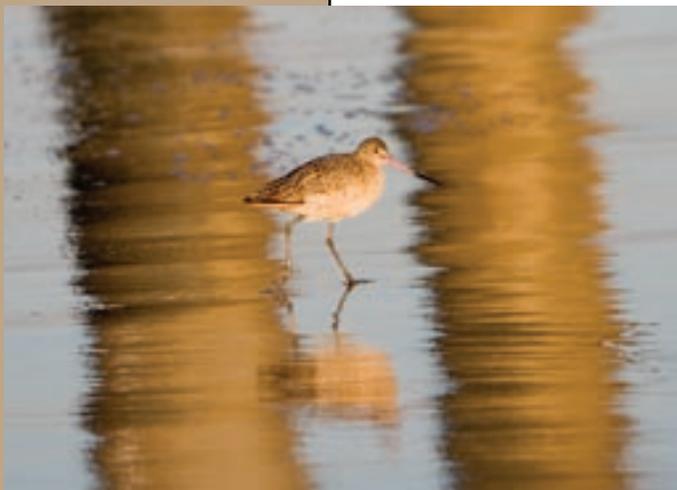


SUNRISE, December 19th, 2004

Those extremely fast moving birds are snowy plovers frantically following the surf line to feed on wet sand invertebrates.

I had moved myself to the north side of the pier to pick up the “golden hour” sunlight underneath it. Everything was very well lit. I saw these three little guys approaching and knowing I had only milliseconds to capture them when they briefly stopped. Surely they did and this photo is just not the same without them.

They show scale to the large and massive pier and mirror their own reflections as does the pier.



DAYBREAK, January 1st, 2005

This is simply a delightful photo. The low tide provided ample time for me to catch this sandpiper as it sauntered across the reflections of the pier pilings.

Again at the “golden hour” a few minutes after sunrise this brilliance of the reflection is greater than I have ever seen. The skies must be crystal clear with no fog or mist.

What strikes me the most about this bird is the similarity in tone to the reflection of the pier. I was struck by the dark edge of the bird's wing with the similar black lines in the sand caused by the distortion of the retreating water. The slate blue background sets off this sandpiper beautifully.

## Volume II



CLOUDS, January 28th, 2005

These white clouds are always a fascination. Reminiscent of childhood musings, they are clearly the focus of this photo.

Having sifted through over 10,000 images I was struck by how often I had selected images from the same day for this portfolio. This image was taken on the same day as *STORM, January 28th, 2005, Vol I* and only 14 minutes apart. But here my interest is what is taking place above the surf.

You can still see that the storm in the previous photo has not yet entered the frame and the breaking sky is dominating the clearing landscape. Yet the wave height in this light does not seem as menacing or powerful but simply grounding the structure in the sky.



TWILIGHT, December 29th, 2004

What first strikes me about the image is the absolute clarity of the reflection. With the tide at its lowest the shallow shelf of sand holds the water quite still.

The tonality of the picture is also unique in the blues of the sky and yellows of the clouds. The pier plays an almost insignificant role simply placing the scene in context and adding additional rhythm across the frame. I had taken several images from this exact location, and one of this woman walking under the pier. All of those im-

ages including this one were pushed onto the back burner.

It was not until a year later when I went back and reviewed my images that this one hit me full force. Something must have changed in me for this image to have its emotional impact. And that is the way it is with art. Perhaps it is the backward almost reflective glance of the person as she moves away from the scene. Perhaps it is the swing coat and scarf. That small visceral additional makes this image stand far apart from the others.

## Volume II



UNDER the PIER, January 1st, 2005

Along with the sandpipers this is another of the New Year's Day images. The brilliance of the early sun is essential in delineating and differentiating the individual columns.

Seemingly a simply composition there is much going on in this constructed image. Unlike some the serendipitous images I have taken this one is very well planned. Uncharacteristically the horizon is set in the middle of the frame. The sky has absolutely no distraction and is that same cool slate blue of the sandpiper images.

The upper half of the frame presents vertical structure and the lower half represent horizontal structure. This construct makes the picture seem quite comfortable as that is how most of our world is presented. Lawns and trees. Streets and buildings.

The foreground waves require the absolute perfect timing of wind and surf to capture that ethereal view of mist creating a soft transition to the vertical columns.

Yet appearing at the top of the frame a piece of rust colored pipe to validate that this structure is not so much an abstract but realistically the pier.

The lighting was impeccable as this image took quite some time to capture. For Volume II this image was chosen as the title for its representation of exacting and well conceived composition.

## Volume II



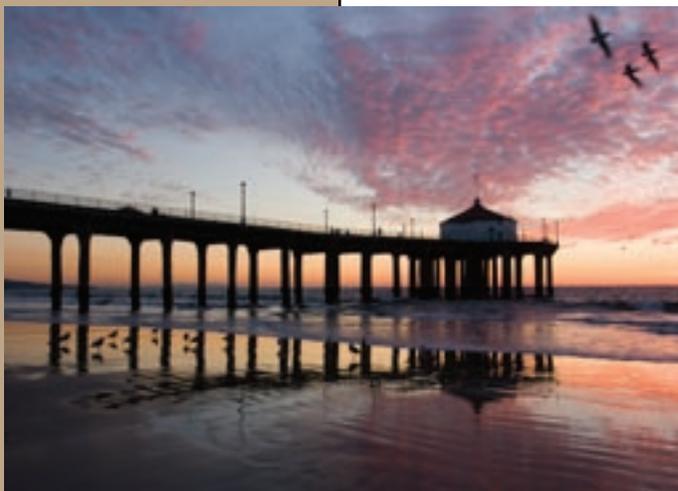
LOW TIDE SUNSET, January 29th, 2006

There are low tides and then there are low tides. I regularly use a tide almanac to make sure that I am there at that time of the year when it is the lowest. This yearly minimum was -1.70 feet at 15:48 PST placing it at sunset right on the new moon.

I had been waiting for this all winter and was hoping for cooperating weather and cloud structure to yield a wonderful sunset.

I could not have been more thrilled at the conditions. It was one of those sunsets that changes every minute until that last of the purple disappear from the sky. I chose this particular timing to highlight those last remaining oranges against its cross-complement blues. The pier is positioned just so as to point out the small piece of brilliant yellow where the sun had previously set. I stepped into the water and as the tide went out past me a small ripple formed creating texture in the foreground with wind created rivulets diffusing the sky above.

Sometimes the scenes are so phenomenal it is hard to remember why you are there.



SUNSET, November 30th, 2004

It was very difficult reducing the number of sunset photos down to a few for this portfolio. There are so many to choose from. I had been working on this simple "rule-of-thirds" composition when I saw the radiating shape form with the sky and its reflection. Look for the blueish butterfly shape with the roundhouse and its reflection as the center.

While composing this a few gulls had landed on the bright reflection under the pier silhouetting their shapes. Haven't taken a few frames I discovered the lovely trio exiting the scene in the upper right hand corner -- a bit of luck in a well planned photo.

## Volume II



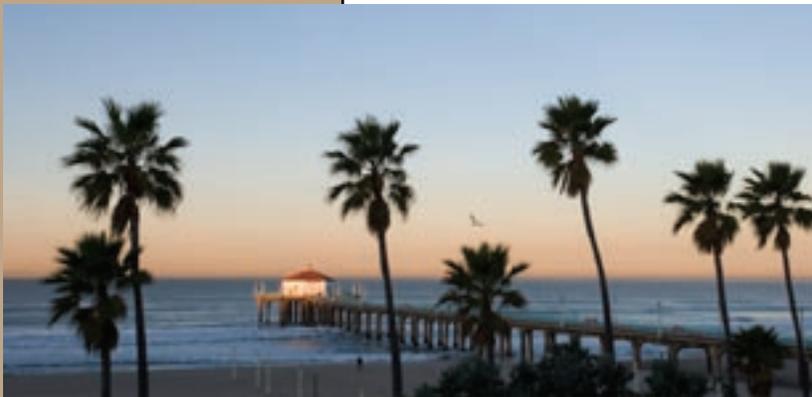
UNDER the PIER, November 23rd, 2005

Shooting under the pier has become quite cliché. Understandably its a fun thing to do. So taking a different approach had always been on the back of my mind.

Subconsciously I had been working on it when I saw this wonderful pink and blue on the horizon. I put on my widest lens and raced under the pier and snapped this photo. It is almost primaeval in its shape.

The reflection is not water but wet sand. The pier is almost black in its stark contrast to the darkening yet still light skies. It is almost unrecognizable if not for the small opening at the end that distinguishes this pier as Manhattan Beach.

This is a very powerful image that stretches the mind through time and brings back a vestigial anxiety of the disappearing sun.



SUNRISE, January 20th, 2006

When the sun rises in the winter the light first strikes the top of the roundhouse at the cupola and gradually works its way to the base of the pier illuminating the entire structure. This process takes about 10 minutes. Three minutes into it just the roundhouse is illuminated and the sun creates a brilliant contrast to the darker parts of the scene.

I wanted to place this effect in context by getting behind the palms on the strand as well as place interest in the negative space of the cloudless morning. At that exact time a single gull turned to present a classic profile above the middle palm adding a bit of playfulness to the overall image.

## Volume II



STORM, December 28th, 2005

This picture, if it weren't for the pier in the background, would not be recognizable as Manhattan Beach. This picture fixed the idea that there is infinite variety to our pier and had become a motivation for me to share this collection. I doubt if anyone save a handful that were near me can recall a scene like this on the beach.

A large storm had passed by and it was an extremely high tide that was eating through the upper portion of the shore. I could see the texture of the sand but the wave sets were far enough apart that I could not get the fjord-like shape to stand out. The solution was simple. Shoot a long enough shutter to catch the wave movement in the crevices. This was a technique I had stumbled upon earlier to soften the foreground waves. The to and fro motion of the waves leaves a white impression on the camera and voila.

The rain and fog had lifted just enough to give me a peek at the pier and frame this shot.



MORNING, December 10th, 2005

This portfolio is not complete without mention of the omnipresent surfers.

At dawn, I have frequently found myself sitting in my car in the south lot. The "old-timer" surfers sitting as well waiting for the light to come up and study the surf.

This photo is a simple dedication to the early surfers who share enough passion for this same spot to be there as often as I in the pre-dawn hours.

## Volume II



DAWN, November 18th, 2005

The dawn pink of this photo is the corollary to the evening blue of the previous photo. This is my favorite time of the year when these pinks are there brightest. You will also notice a bit of the earth's shadow hidden above the smog at the horizon.

Smog is a constant issue despite the glowing reports, but here I use it as an extension of the color of the pier to separate the sky from the sea.

By the height of the mussels you can also tell there is a bit of a low tide creating a long surf-walk by the man carrying the green board to reach to small curl.



MORNING, February 20th, 2005

Storms have a way of sneaking up on us, weathermen have a constant challenge predicting their arrival. But one thing is certain, their departure is easily recognizable.

This is another favorite time of mine when there can be a lot of drama in the skies and the seas. Here I love the dark backdrop of stormy clouds setting a nice contrast to the sunlit white roundhouse. I have let the sun rise a bit until the yellow or golden glow has long gone leaving just brilliant whites on the surf, roundhouse and second layer of clouds. Also noticeable are the close-spaced sets of waves that characterize a passing storm and strollers enjoying the pier indicating that my shooting time is almost up.

## Volume II



EVENING, December 15th, 2004

This photo is one of the earliest images in the portfolio as well as one that requires little introduction.

It is simply beautiful. Of note I can tell that this is a 2004 image because the tree has a star whereas the 2005 images the tree has none. I am curious as to what the tree, if any, would look like next year.

This image, like some of the others in this portfolio, is a 2:1 aspect ratio -- meaning it is twice as wide as it is tall. I absolutely love how the palms and their leaning perspective and rhythm leads towards the roundhouse. That gradation of dark blues to light blues is almost unreal and the remaining sunset plays a nice backdrop to the linear nature of the lighted pier.