

FEATURE

All images
© David Magee

TIME AND TIDE

A love of the sea and an influential photography teacher set **David Magee** on a lifelong path of fine art photography in which meticulous attention to detail and a strong sense of self-expression play essential roles. Elizabeth McClair-Roberts reports.

This story begins last spring, when I was invited by a friend to celebrate his birthday at Rathfinny Estate, a vineyard in the south of England. On the slopes of the downland, the vines grow in parallel lines in sight of the sea. It's

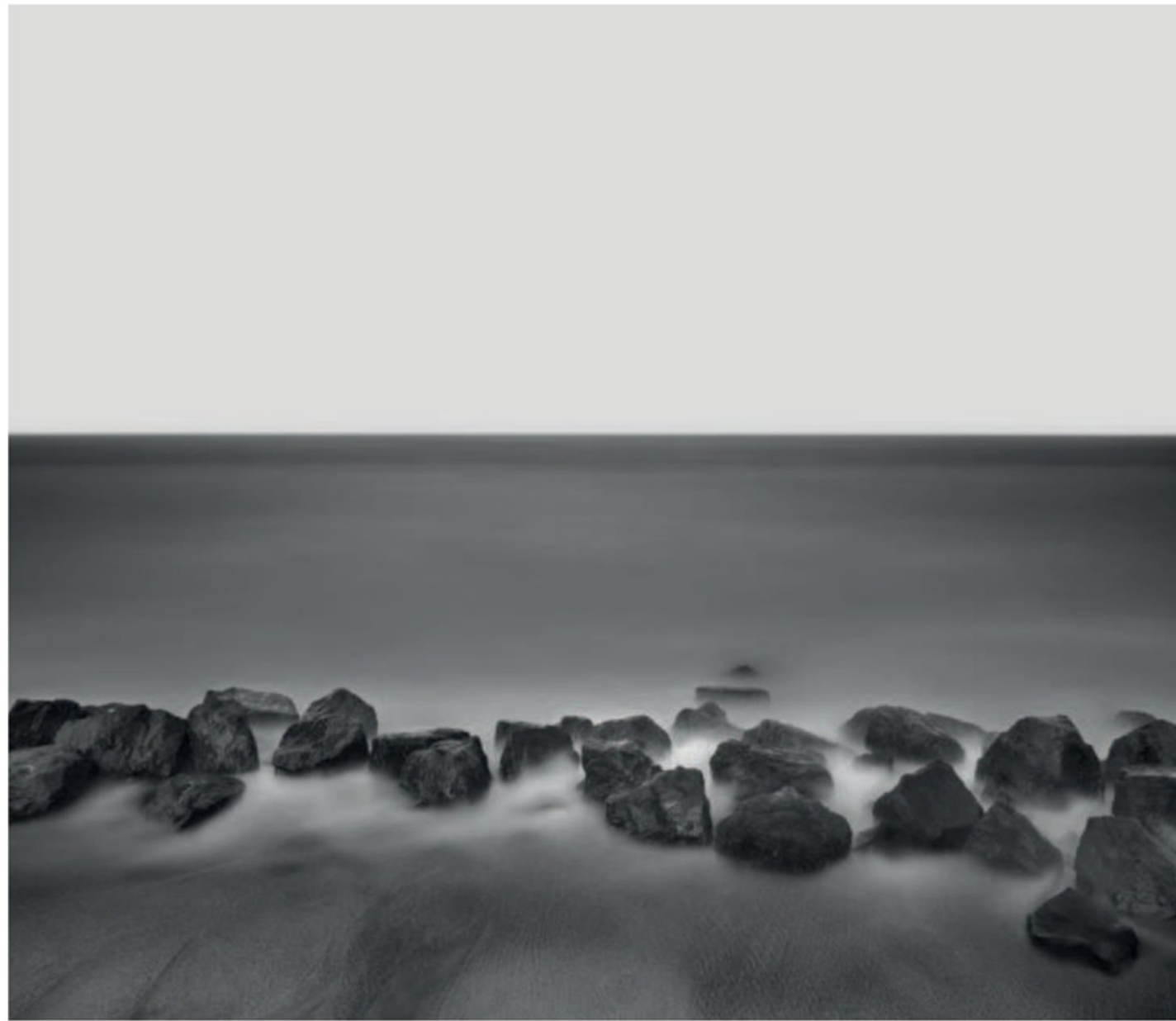
a beautiful place to be on a spring evening and the restaurant serves exquisite food. But as we arrived in the reception area, I became completely distracted by a large and imposing image hanging on the wall. It was a black & white photograph of the Seven Sisters – a nearby location, but probably one of the most photographed landscapes in the UK. However, there was something about this majestic image that compelled me because there was something about it that stood out from the many photographs of the place I have seen over the years. Eventually, my companions had to call me away into the dining room, but there I discovered another similar seascape image, equally imposing. Throughout the meal, I found myself glancing over my shoulder to take another look. I won't say it spoilt my meal or the enjoyment of the conversations, but it was certainly a distraction.

The pictures stayed vividly in my mind and wouldn't go away, so the next weekend I returned to Rathfinny to find out more about them. I discovered they were the work of an Irish photographer named David Magee. I asked myself what it was about them that intrigued me, and the only answer I could come up with was that they conveyed a sense of emotion, as though I was seeing the place through the eyes, and feelings, of the photographer. >

SEVEN SISTERS STUDY



ESPRIT DE CORPS



THE END

◀ I began my research and discovered that he grew up in West Cork (where he still has a house) and had a love of the sea – and that his work was meticulously carried out. Eventually, I made contact with David and we arranged to meet up for an interview.

Meeting someone for the first time is always an interesting experience – the pre-conceived idea rarely matches the reality. And so it was with meeting David Magee. I had expected a rather introverted, solitary character, not the delightful and humorous man I actually met. And yet, as we talked, it became clear that while being a lively and sociable person, he is also someone who likes his own company and is at his happiest spending hours alone in the landscape, waiting for the right composition and light to take the picture that he has envisaged. 'It's where I make sense of things,' he tells me, 'For as long as I can remember, I have felt most at peace outside, by the sea. The sea is quite simply a part of me and consequently a major focus of my work.'

David's love of the sea began in early childhood, when he spent weekends with his father fishing in West Cork. 'Photography and fishing are my two life passions,' he says. You can see that both occupations are (generally) solitary experiences in the natural world. His love of fishing is often shared these days with his own children and close friends, but his photography is spent alone.

Having spent many years using film, he now works digitally but has not changed his approach – that of capturing exactly what he has visualised in-camera. 'I have no interest in post-production. For me, the excitement and achievement has always been to visualise and create while in the landscape.'

To achieve this involves a great deal of watching and waiting. And sometimes not taking a picture if the elements are not right, even if he has planned the shoot and travelled some distance to get there. This is the aspect of perfectionism that comes through in his work. He does not set out to document a specific time or place, instead he sets out to capture the intrinsic qualities of the landscape – a serenity and quietude that he knew as a child on the Atlantic coast. >



FALLEN GUARDIAN



FLAT CALM



MECOX STUDY



KILBRITTAIN



TIDELINE

David studied fine art and graphic design at Glasgow School of Art where, in 1982, he encountered Thomas Joshua Cooper, who ran the fine art photography department and who was to be the trigger that set him on a lifelong photographic path. 'He planted the seed in my becoming totally absorbed in the world of photography as an art form,' he explains. But David's work is essentially about self-expression: 'I first and foremost make the work for me,' he says.

While fine art photography has been his passion for the past 25 years, David has combined this with running an award-winning graphic design studio in London. He has also travelled extensively – in India, Sri Lanka, Greece, Japan, England, USA and, of course, Ireland – making his distinctive, long-exposure images whose commonality exists in their essence rather than their specific content. An image from Japan, for instance, can sit comfortably beside a shot taken in India or USA. But in recent years he feels that maybe what he is looking for lies closer to home, in Ireland: 'Despite having travelled the globe in search of "that elusive image", I have come to realise that the work I am happiest with, and the environment that I like photographing in most, was within easy reach all along.'



David Magee has published two books of his work. The first, *Outside*, was released in 2017 and contains work created 1995–2017, and the second, *Outside II*, has work created 2015–2020. They are designed by David Magee and published by Concentric Editions in limited editions of 450 copies, and collectors' editions of 50 copies in a clamshell box with print. The finest papers and production values are used throughout to achieve a sumptuous publication. To find out more, visit concentriceditions.com or davidmageephoto.com.



TRANSCENDENT