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CAPTURING THE CAPE

New photography book takes on the diverse landscape and light of Cape Cod

By Sue Harrison
 BANNER STAFF

For 18 months photographer Charles Fields has been crisscrossing the Cape, going down country lanes, working his way to the shores of the bay and ocean, all in search of the vista that says, "This is Cape Cod." The resulting 114 photographs culled from thousands of captured images are presented in Fields' latest photo essay book, "Cape Cod and the National Seashore."

To launch the book, Fields is holding a book release party at Fields Gallery, 63 Shank Painter Road, Provincetown from 3 to 6 p.m. this Saturday. He is also holding book signings at locations around the Cape including Wychmere Book & Coffee Store in Harwichport from 5 to 9 p.m. on Dec. 5, Borders Books in Hyannis from 3 to 5 p.m. Dec. 6, and Yellow Umbrella Books in Chatham from 1 to 3 p.m. on Dec. 13.

Like his previous book, "Provincetown and the National Seashore" released in 2002, the images in "Cape Cod" are rich and deep. There are harbors whose waters reflect the colorful hulls of fishing boats, isolated beaches with wind sweeping through the grasses, lighthouses illuminated by the setting sun, woodland parks suffused with the green of spring, dreamy rising moons, sunsets and buoy-encrusted shacks.

"There was a lot of driving and scouting and visits to historical societies," he says, sitting at the computer in his Provincetown gallery where he prepares the digital images for transmission to the printery in Korea. "I meet people, talk to people, get a sense of what's there and how to relate that into a photograph."

The actual photo taking itself was usually relegated to a brief window of perfect conditions, sometimes as little as half an hour in a day. Sometimes the weather closes that narrow time slot but eventually, he gets his shot.

"Usually I shoot in the morning or evening in what photographers call the magic hour," he



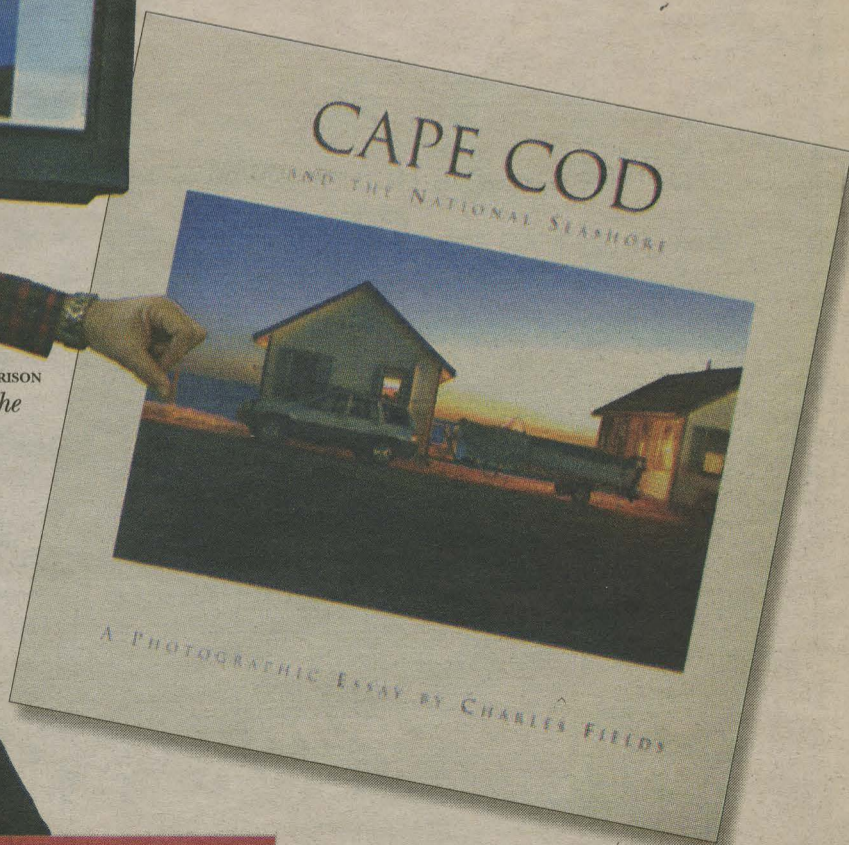
PHOTO CHARLES FIELDS

"Dune Shack, Provincetown" one of the photographs in "Cape Cod and the National Seashore."



PHOTO SUE HARRISON

Charles Fields with the computer he uses to process his digital images.



says. "Early morning [which means right after dawn] is nicer. As the sun gets higher, the light bleaches out. In the evening, as the sun sets, the light bounces off the clouds and that's nice, too."

It's not only the time of day but the season that dictates the shot. In autumn, he says, the grasses

start to go through changes and create interesting combinations of colors and textures. Only the summer, he adds, is difficult with its too bright light.

Getting those shots now means capturing it digitally instead of on film. Fields has a degree in photography and has

worked in the field for more than three decades. In addition to his artistic offerings, Fields has had a successful career in commercial film photography. He made the switch from film to digital when he was working on the "Provincetown" book. He was immediately attracted to the speed factor of

digital, with being able to review photos right after shooting. He also liked the additional control he was able to exercise over the finished product.

When he did film, he printed all his own work and kept a dark-

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room [which he still has]. But with the computer, he was able to do all he did in the darkroom plus a lot of the pre-press work that would normally have to be done by someone else. That way, he says, the prints in the book look like the original prints.

When asked about the downside of going digital, he says there is very little. Whether digital or film, he is a full-frame guy, composing for the finished image in the viewfinder as opposed to doing a lot of cropping and changing. Often, he says, the image right out of the camera is the one that gets printed. Other times, he burns or dodges, bringing out details as if he were printing in a darkroom.

For the techies out there, Fields uses a Nikon D1X digital camera [it takes all his regular Nikon lenses], an Apple computer and Epson printers — the 2000P and 2200 models. He takes advantage of the new special inks Epson puts out and couples that with acid-free matte paper for archival quality prints. Those inks and papers don't react, don't fade and can last for over 100 years, he says, making digital prints as desirable as collectibles as film prints.

"My darkroom has been closed for three years," he says. "Going there is like going back in time. There is no dust, it's

completely sealed. If I ever go back to doing it, it's there. But when digital came along, it's as if I turned and locked the door."

Now his work is produced without tanks and chemicals, safe lights or drying racks. Instead, he turns to the computer but says that photography has always depended on the internal computer.

"The eye does all the computing for you," he says, explaining how we think we see something but what we really see are several images tweaked so they all work together as one picture. "The eye sees through the shadows and into the highlights. The brain is the best computer in the world."

It's all about training the eye, learning to see what's really there and what's not there, learning to take reality and bend it to the image the brain has put together. But even with training, he still gets the occasional surprise.

"I can get back, print a picture and say, 'I didn't see that.' I do get surprises but you experience those less and less. As a professional, you don't want to be surprised too much."

Both books (\$49.95 each) are available as are calendars (\$11.95 each) based on the books. Prints of the book images (\$195-\$320) can be ordered framed or unframed. Contact Fields at his Provincetown Gallery by phone at (866) 487-5901 or online at www.charles-fields.net □