

[1979?]
Dear Laura:

I thought you might be interested in this, from Audubon magazine. I remember so well the discussion you and Eliot Porter had about the relative merits and effects of black-and-white vs. color, and its demand on photographer & camera.

Had a wonderful visit with Virginia in Easton and we talked a lot about you. I told her how wonderful your book is.
Much love,

Maurie

Why Black-and-White?

It should be surprisingly apparent by now that this issue of Audubon lacks the sparkling color photography and printing that have brought this magazine a modicum of fame over the past three years. The absence of color is both planned and purposeful. For only in this way could we give full accent to a photographic medium that has been too often ignored by both editors and photographers.

That the black-and-white photograph has survived only on a minimum diet is both unfortunate and understandable. Understandable because, in the world of publishing, color sells far more effectively, because color brings a greater remuneration to the photographer, because—except for a very few perfectionists—automatic, impersonal, mass-production processing of film and prints eliminates the need for individual darkroom technique.

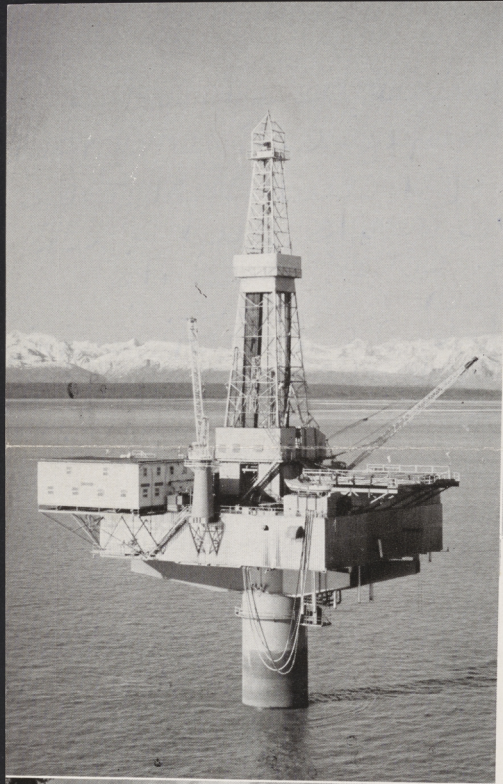
In truth, black-and-white is a wholly different and tremendously exciting dimension. It requires different thinking. It requires good technique, for a lucky accident in a spectacular blaze of color cannot help it. It is, in itself, an abstraction—for one must learn to “unsee” color. It has a strength, a truth of its own. Good black-and-white can be as difficult or more difficult than good color. And for these reasons few photographers—amateurs, photojournalists, professionals—care to shoot black-and-white, or to take the time to explore the creative aspects of the darkroom. And few publications are willing or able to provide the high quality of reproduction that justifies the work that a fine print requires.

This wholly black-and-white issue of Audubon was conceived last autumn when we received a set of truly magnificent photographs of trees by Andreas Feininger. We knew that the printing of the more routine pages of Audubon was not up to the task of reproducing Feininger's work. So it was a happy coincidence that the mail, a few days later, brought samples of a new technique in lithographic craftsmanship, called “Stonetone,” which had been developed by a modestly small New York City firm, Rapoport Printing Corporation.

The decision then was to feature, in each Audubon, an essay of superlative black-and-white photography, to complement our color. Feininger's “The Winter Tree” in January was the first, and Molly Adams followed with the Great Swamp of New Jersey. The staff was told to seek out, to encourage the submission of fine black-and-white pictures as well as the finest color. And, when enough material was on hand, we would devote one entire issue to black-and-white. It is, and we have.

The first great photographic interpretations of the American landscape were, of course, the expositions of Ansel Adams and the late Edward Weston, and they were in black-and-white. The photography we present here is both creative and documentary—the tide pools of Maine, the beauty of flight, the awesomeness of mountains, the mating dance of a prairie grouse. Color, we believe, is not missed.

THE EDITORS



WHITTLING ALASKA DOWN TO SIZE

by GEORGE LAYCOCK

