

# Rangefinder Magazine

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Jake Rajs' by Peter Kotsinadelis  
*These United States—The Definitive American Landscape*



Arizona, "The Wave," Paria Canyon  
 Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. That being the case, one could say the images in Jake Rajs' new book, *These United States*, speak volumes. The book is the most recent from the New York-based photographer and took nearly four years to compile from 30 years worth of archived images. Additionally, there is a wonderful introduction by veteran newsman Walter Cronkite, whom Jake remembers seeing on television when he was eight and had just moved to the United States.

*These United States* (Rizzoli, 2003) is a photo book that illustrates the magnificence of the country and is divided into six sections: "Land," "Coast," "Freedom," "Trails," "Country," and "City." As you review these sections, the images convey a story—a journey from vast open land to beautiful coasts, national monuments, open trails, cities and country places.

While looking at Jake's eighth book in a dozen years, I was most curious to learn how these ideas came to him. Jake explains, "They just pop into my head. I treat each image as a paragraph in a story and go through my library of more than 150,000 images. As the concept develops I look for what else I may need to tell the story and begin shooting to complete the book.



San Francisco, California, Alamo Square

"As I edit the images, I try not to become too attached to one photograph, even though it may have taken me 6000 miles to get to. Another photograph, which may have happened in 30 seconds could better tell the story. The public only sees the end product, so once the photograph is taken, you ask yourself if there's life in the photograph. How long it took you to take it and how difficult it was to take are things the public will not see in your image."

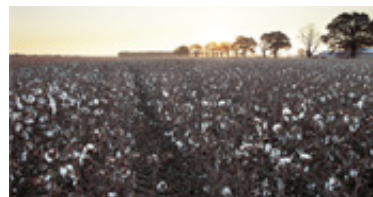
Born in Poland, Jake's family immigrated to Israel when he was five, and a few years later to the United States. A graduate of Rutgers College with a B.A. in Studio Art, one does not wonder how he was drawn into photography.



Winifred, Montana, abandoned one-room schoolhouse



Wareham, Massachusetts, cranberry harvest



Sikeston, Missouri, cotton field

"Originally I thought I would be a sculptor or painter since Michelangelo, Matisse and Picasso were huge influences on me, but I have always been interested in the arts. So one time in college when I was writing poetry I decided to use photography as a means to illustrate my work. What I soon learned was that my photography was a lot better than my poetry, so I decided I had to go with what I was better at."

Jake's photography has led him from working on national ad campaigns for American Express, AT&T, Ford and the U.S. Army to traveling to places like Istanbul and Turkey, while doing feature stories for *Travel & Leisure* magazine. Currently his clients include Nike, Citicorp, CBS Records, Donald Trump, GM's Chevrolet division, and Marriott, just to name a few.

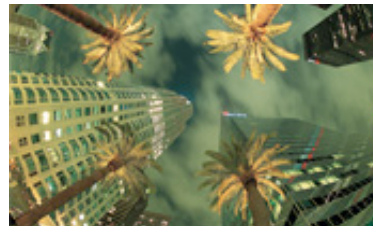




South Charleston, Ohio, sunflowers on farm



Pomeroy, Washington, wheat field



Downtown Los Angeles, California

His photography work speaks for itself, “Good work comes from passion. You reveal yourself. You need to be honest. You cannot lie to yourself, or it will be like diving into a pool with no water in it.”



New York, Paul Manship Statue in Rockefeller Center and St. Patrick's Cathedral, the largest decorated Gothic-style Catholic cathedral in the United States

Jake's cameras are all film, and include a Fujifilm GX-617 medium format panorama camera with 105mm lens and a Center Neutral Density filter to remove vignetting, a Pentax 67 with various lenses, and a Sinar 4x5. He does use a Nikon F5 and F100 35mm SLRs as well, but prefers medium or large format for his work.

“Sometimes if I arrive at a destination and the light is leaving too quickly for me to set up my medium format gear, I grab my F5 or F100 and shoot. It's always better to get the image even on a smaller format than to miss it entirely.”

His film of choice is Fujichrome Velvia 50 for almost all his work. “As a painter I liked colors and was influenced by pop artists like Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and James Rosenquist. I tried newer films including Velvia 100F, but Velvia 50 gives me the image I want with great color.”

As you go from book to book and review each of the images, one can't help but wonder what Jake Rajs is thinking as he creates each one. “When I photograph a landscape, I try to capture the miracle that there is nothing more beautiful and perfect than what is created by nature. It has a calming, soothing and inspiring influence on our spirits reminding us to appreciate each day. Watching a sunrise or sunset, we seem to repossess our souls and believe in life; we open

ourselves up to celebrate the beauty that nature creates, knowing it will never repeat itself like this again.”

Success is something that Jake believes is part talent, part luck. For struggling photographers, he offers this advice: “Stick with your passion. Shoot everyday, and be creative with what you see. Photography is really an adventure you create. One of my favorite quotes is from Michelangelo ‘The greater danger for most of us is not that we aim too high and miss but that we aim too low and reach it.’”



Colorado, Lowry Pueblo Ruins National Historic Landmark, built by the Anasazi, ca. A.D. 1050–1150;



Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia, established in 1864, the cemetery honors the dead of every military conflict since the American Civil War.

These days Jake Rajs finds himself doing more fine art photography and also some special projects of his own.

He has recently donated many of his books that were then sold to raise funds for the building of a new children's school in Indonesia. This will provide him an opportunity to visit and photograph parts of that country from many unique perspectives and perhaps provide the necessary images for a new book. As Jake points out, “Without people there can be no book. You meet incredible people on the journey, and if enough people buy your book, you get to do another book.”

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