

# Travelling Photographer Lights Up The West Coast

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Ron Smid at work in Ucluelet, recently. (Erin McMullen Photo)

**By Erin McMullen UCLUELET — Packing up his gear on Ucluelet’s Whiskey Dock, Ron Smid is interrupted by a commercial fisherman asking about his vintage large-format camera.**

This drawing of strangers into conversation about his art has become a recurring signature moment, as Smid, a 37-year-old Kitchener, Ont. native, has chased the light across Canada during the past 17 years.

Inspired by classic North American landscape photographers, Smid uses an 8x10 Deardorff Woodfield based on 1930s technology. Smid’s large-scale Cibachrome fine-art prints, which seem almost “luminescent,” are created in collaboration with Ansel Adam’s master printer, Michael Wilder, and signed by both.

“I’m looking for those equivocal kind of photographs that signify, this is Canada, this is British Columbia, this is the west coast, this is the Prairies,” said Smid.

“It’s taken me a long time, but when you put all those images together on a light box or a screen, you can see there’s my Lake Louise, there’s my Georgian Bay, there’s my red maple. These are images that will stand for me the rest of my life that I can’t really improve on. Just continue on trying to find the next one.

“The country’s so large you can’t really quite say there’s the ultimate Canadian photograph.”

Smid seeks “a visual proof of those moments” that “transcend photography into the painterly realm and the mysterious” and connect people together, culturally through art.

“If it’s a beach on the west coast, it might not be the exact spot where they were, but there’s something they’re familiarized with.

“Like this beach last night, that was my third attempt. I’m still not finished working with it. I think there’s more potential in that scene,” adding that he’s anxious to return to Sunset Point.

Using those working images as a “sketch,” he will lock his camera into an “exact spot,” fine-tune and wait for the magic to happen. A challenging feat with a heavy camera to lug and long, patient exposures from eight to 12 minutes.

This year, Smid plans to focus on his own backyard, trying to capture a west coast series of images in colour and black and white.

“I’ve been working on a Vancouver Island book ever since I arrived here. It’s so diverse I’m trying to get alpine to coastal landscapes and the seasons and the spring foliage, the waterfalls, lakes, rivers, mountains...”

He will journey to Bamfield and to Brady’s Beach, which “has some classic images to work with like sea stacks.”

He hopes it’s not too late in the season to capture the Island’s alpine views, especially with his meditative and deliberate process.

“Once on the road it can take me a few days to begin really seeing,” said Smid.

Seldom revisiting sites of finished prints, Smid has considered re-exploring Florencia Bay, first captured in Pacific Sunrise (1996) in a new way through black and photography.

Far from film disappearing in this digital age, Smid suggested that instead there is a resurgence of interest for both commercial and fine art.



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