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- Paul Wainwright talks about his favorite black-and-white photograph he made for his book, *A Space for Faith: The Colonial Meetinghouses of New England*. Tim Jean



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Atkinson photographer captures region's meetinghouses

By Bryan Deyermond bdeyermond@eagletribune.com

ATKINSON — Photographer Paul Wainwright, 60, doesn't take shots or snap photos.

"A shot is, at best, a quick reflex or, at worst, a violent action," Wainwright said. "I make or I create."

Wainwright's latest creation was the culmination of five years of photographing more than 30 of New England's storied Colonial meetinghouses. His recently released first book, "A Space for Faith," features those photographs.

"Every building has a story of some sort," Wainwright said. "There's a lot of rich American history in these places."

Inspired by a technique originating with Ansel Adams called pre-visualization, Wainwright used natural lighting and a 4x5 large format camera to capture some of New England's oldest meetinghouses in black and white.

"It's slow paced," Wainwright said of the technique. "I do better work if I really think about what I want the photo to look like."

Wainwright called "A Space for Faith" "a process" of discovery that began in 2004. He said he has always been fascinated with the architecture of Colonial meetinghouses because of their feel and classic design.

"If there's obvious electric light in one of these places, it loses its ambiance for me," he said.

While traveling, Wainwright noticed the Fremont Meetinghouse, built in 1800.

"I said to myself, 'Wow, I've got to come back here with my camera,'" he said.

From there, Wainwright captured images from meetinghouses in Sandown, Danville and Amesbury. When visiting Sandown, Wainwright met Eleanor Bassett. After a while, Bassett said, she just gave Wainwright the key to Sandown's meetinghouse.

"He'd be there all day some days," she said. "He's very, very dedicated, and he's done some wonderful work."

Wainwright posted the pictures from his journeys to local meetinghouses on his website. In 2006, he noticed a pattern from people visiting his website that would jump start his book.

"I was noticing the number of visits to the meetinghouse photograph page," he said. "People were getting to that page without going in the front door. I typed in Colonial meetinghouses on Google and my site was number one."

Over the next three years, Wainwright visited meetinghouses as far away as Connecticut and Maine, taking single photographs that illustrated a stark attention to detail. Wainwright would use ladders, the hood of his car and other methods to ensure he got the best shot possible from each location.

"It was really fun work," he said.

Wainwright said his photography hobby started when he got his first darkroom at age 12. During his high-school years, Wainwright would photograph sporting events and even bring his camera to school dances — as his date.

"I was a geek before being a geek was popular," he said.

But as he grew older, Wainwright found another love: physics. He graduated from Yale University with his doctorate and worked for Bell Laboratories for more than 20 years. But his passion was always photography.

"Photography was my expressive outlet," he said.

Wainwright's expressiveness was viewed firsthand by Diane Heer, director of Kimball Library in Atkinson, which hosted an exhibit of his photographs in 2009.

"He's a wonderful photographer," Heer said. "Everyone enjoyed the exhibit. They had positive comments. His eye for architecture is beautiful."

Wainwright isn't sure what his next project will be. He admitted he's always in the market for a good spiral staircase, and his passion for old buildings will always linger. But photography has been more of a passion than a job for Wainwright.

"The way this last project went, I'll be two years into the next one before I even realize it," he said.

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Meet the photographer

Where: Rocky Hill Meetinghouse, 4 Elm St., Amesbury

When: Saturday from 1 to 3 p.m.

What: Wainwright will be on hand to sign copies of "A Space for Faith" during an open house for the meetinghouse.

Source:

<http://www.eagletribune.com/newhampshire/x1996913423/Atkinson-photographer-captures-regions-meetinghouses>