

# incredible infrared



Kent Weakley's Photographs Transform the  
Everyday into the Extraordinary

BY DEAN BLINKHORN

Local photographer Kent Weakley sees a world that few of us witness. A simple pasture of horses, fences, and trees (a tableaux offered daily thousands of times in Marion County) becomes — in Kent's skilled hands — a magical world of luminous beauty.

His lens transforms the everyday into the extraordinary.

Infrared photography is not new. In fact, the infrared spectrum was first discovered in 1800 by Sir Frederick William Herschel, the founder of modern astronomy who later discovered the planet Uranus. But it wasn't until the late '60s and early '70s that photographers really began to investigate the world of infrared photography, most notably in the works of Abigail Perlmutter and Minor White.

"Such images reveal the relative temperature or heat loss of objects," states Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002, "which can aid in technical analysis or be used to artistic effect."

Kent's growing body of work in infrared seems to have taken those last words to heart. Much like a kaleidoscope or a 3-D movie, infrared photography is a way of seeing the world around us. But without employing skillful technique, an infrared picture can become as blurry as watching a 3-D movie without the required glasses.

Through Kent's talented eye, Ocala has never been more brilliantly captured. Our everyday scenes of pastoral beauty radiate with an ethereal quality that seems to transcend time itself. Trees glow, animals appear in stark contrast to their surroundings, and technology is conspicuously absent from most of Kent's best work.

One gets the feeling that these images will be just as striking decades and centuries from now as they are today.

**KENT WAS DRAWN IMMEDIATELY** to the world of infrared photography. He used the recent *Paint the Town* and *24 Hours in the Life of Ocala* exhibits as the impetus to perfect his craft.

Since early this summer, he has literally shot thousands of images. Only the very best will make the final cut, though.

"I enjoy the contrast of the image in infrared," he explains. "Like any photographer, I love the hunt of trying to find a really interesting image. I love the fact that it's taking what we see as normal reality and, with a dramatic change, makes the image into something with an 'awe factor.' Infrared light changes everything — it makes the ordinary much more dramatic."

He chooses to limit his work so far to elements of nature that appear timeless.

"I gravitate towards things that are more earthy and natural," he offers, "and I love the trees."

It's a recent obsession that Kent admits is almost a hazard to the rest of his family.

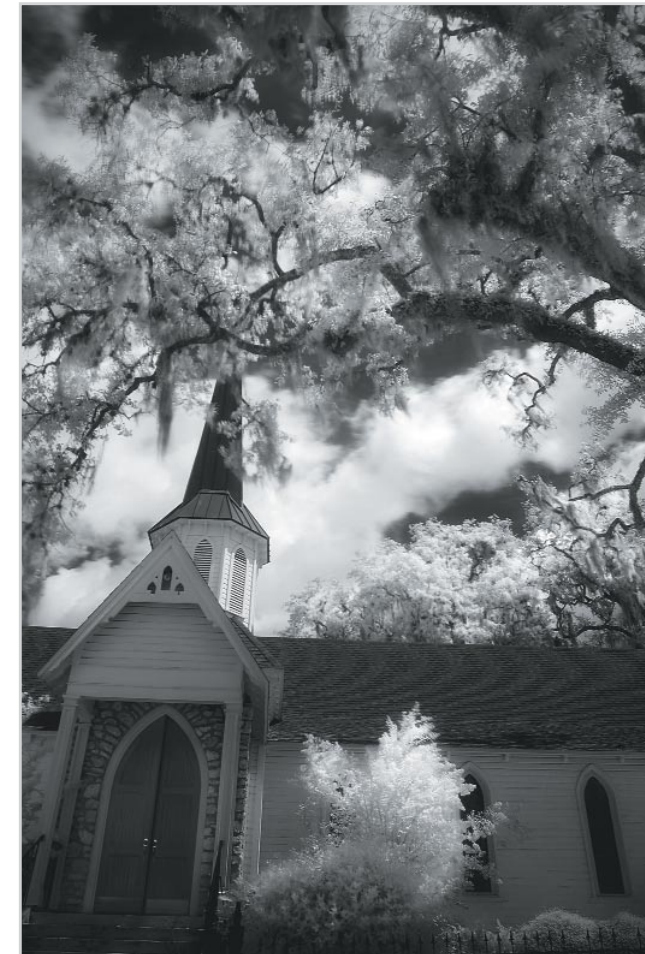
"There are times when it's almost unsafe to be in a car with me," he laughs, "because I'm looking around at all the trees — where they're positioned, their shape, the way the light's hitting them. If you're not *really* looking, you can easily drive around the whole county and not see the beauty of the trees around here."

Through trial and error and by using digital technology exclusively, Kent has accelerated the learning curve tremendously. He carefully monitors his camera's settings at each shoot, making adjustments of aperture and shutter speed until he gets an image that

fully "captures" the natural essence of that particular location.

"The reason I've been able to move so quickly with infrared is because of the advances in digital camera technology," Kent readily admits, "and although infrared photography was trendy in the '60s and '70s, it's really coming of age due to the digital technology. Now, you can play and tinker with the image. In the course of five minutes, you can see what's going to work right away."

The resulting image defies technology and settings, however. In fact, it's actually quite ironic that cutting-edge



(Opposite page) *Ghost Herd #2*— "After shooting *Ghost Pasture*, the horses became curious and the way they gathered around the tree sparked my interest. The long exposure of the infrared photos caused several of the horses to blur, giving them an eerie appearance."





the flag is in color. I love it. Kent has a great future.”

When I later tell Kent about the mayor’s quotes, he seems genuinely touched by the compliment. He pauses for just a moment and then reveals even bigger goals: upcoming shoots in Savannah, Oak Alley in Louisiana, Hawaii, and Joshua Tree National Park. Each successive location will add a new entry to his growing portfolio of cool and interesting trees.

“I’d love for my images to be popular, but I’m just enjoying taking them. Infrared photography is the culmination of everything I’ve done so far.”

On this particular day, Kent was busy matting and framing some of his selected prints for October’s local art show. He realizes that even as a relative newcomer to Marion County he’s seen the area much more intimately than many life-long residents.

When I bring it up, Kent readily concedes this last point. With a mischievous grin, he adds: “I’ve been trespassing a lot lately.” ❁

photography translates so well to images of timeless grace.

“Infrared takes it to this whole mystic level. It appears different than what you see with your eye.”

**BUT FOR KENT, TAKING THE PICTURES** is really just the beginning of the process of transforming the everyday into the extraordinary. Once he transfers the digital files off the camera into his state-of-the-art Macintosh home design studio, Kent will spend countless hours manipulating the image onscreen until it is a work of art.

It is a tedious process that requires a keen eye and a patient family, two things clearly in Kent’s favor.

His studio is tucked into a tidy corner of both he and his wife Maggie’s spacious ranch home in southwest Ocala that overlooks a private paddock. An artist in her own right (she draws for national greeting card companies and designed two of the Horse Fever horses), Maggie is used to supporting her husband’s creative whimsy. Their two sons, Max and Lucas, often get into the act as well.

While getting a full tour of the interior, Kent showed me a TV commercial for Petland, one of his national accounts, that was filmed *entirely* at the couple’s home in Ocala and uses their sons as actors. He also previewed recent graphic work for a variety of clients like AMF Bowling Lanes, the Appleton Museum of Art, and several area horse farms. Locally, Kent is probably best known for his work on the entire Horse Fever campaign, including the well-received coffee table book.

In the five years the Weakleys have lived in Ocala, they’ve

made quite an impact. They regularly volunteer with local organizations and are tireless advocates of the arts.

“Kent’s so giving,” says Paula King, Chairman of the Board of Directors for Marion Cultural Alliance, “and he’s done so much for MCA. But just when you think you understand his work, he comes up with something new, like the infrared photography. I can easily see him moving into other areas.”

**FOR THE PRESENT,** Kent’s content to explore the realms of infrared photography. He has already picked up several key admirers along the way, including Ocala Mayor Gerald Egle who proudly displays *Historic Luminance* behind the desk of his downtown office.

“I met Kent during the Horse Fever project,” Mayor Egle relates, “and he’s very talented. The work that he did for the project was amazing.”

He says he was just “drawn” to the photo and that it was “beautiful and very dramatic.”

Everyone that comes in his office notices the distinctive image right away and Mayor Egle is proud to discuss it at every opportunity.

“There are so many different textures: the trees are one look, the gazebo is a perfect black and white, and then

**(Above) *Historic Luminance***– “What makes it interesting from a design standpoint is that you have all this texture that’s organic and then all of a sudden you have this structured, rigid object that jumps out at you. The contrast makes it work.”

**(Below) *Ocala Drive***– Used in the recent *24 Hours in the Life of Ocala* exhibit at Brick City Center for the Arts. Says Kent, “This is a different camera angle from *Pasture Solar*.”



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