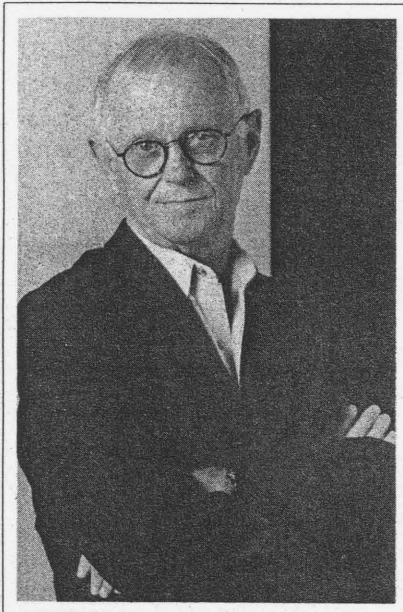


TRUE VIEW

A Customer Profile by Margaret Winchell Miller

For the past 25 years, prestigious architects throughout America, Canada, Mexico, Europe and the Middle East have given Richard Payne a twofold task: to capture the building as the architect envisioned it and then to photograph the building in its context, as it fits into the world. Accomplishing this task is Payne's special gift.



"You have to understand architecture," he explains. "That's why most of us who do this are architects. We understand the process."

Payne has been interested in architecture since college and claims that he never cared about photographing anything else. A registered architect, he received his Bachelor of Architecture degree from Texas Tech. Ten years later, however, he decided that he "loved architecture too much to practice it." In fact, he believes that he is more in touch with architecture now than ever.

If you're an architect, you might work for three or four years on one building. As an architectural photographer, I get to see fifty great buildings every year. I feel closer to the profession when I take pictures of buildings than when I sit at a drawing board."

Drawing boards, however, are becoming obsolete. Computers, digital photography, and the ability to manipulate images have revolutionized both the architectural and the photographic professions. Payne, who believes in the "discovery and presentation" of a building rather than "interpretation and manipulation," opposes such technological tampering because it alters "the truth." In fact, he believes that many young photographers are so enamored with computer technology that they forget why they became photographers in the first place.

"Where do you want to spend your time?" He asks rhetorically. "Sitting in front of the computer trying to be creative? Or walking out in the world, discovering things?"

Because a building is planned and designed as an isolated structure, on the basis of flat drawings and small scale models, Payne says there's no way to predict the tremendous visual impact it will have until it is finished. His work often surprises the architects who have hired him.

"The building has a place, and that place is always beyond the control of the architect. He's forced to put down a building within an environ-

ment over which he has no control."

Depicting the unique design of a building and its elements requires an understanding of architectural principles and the sculptural integrity of the structure at hand. Payne maintains, for instance, that a photograph of the Pennzoil building would be unsuccessful unless it incorporated the distinctive 10-foot-wide slot separating the two towers. He contends that "any picture that doesn't show that misses the essential architectural element."

For some buildings--such as those designed with a great deal of glass--the architectural photographer depends on the sky to carry the day. A cloudless day means the building will resemble a blank wall of no visual interest. The weather is the great joy of this work, according to Payne, because it's so unpredictable.

The most difficult buildings to photograph are "the bad ones," he confesses wryly. Still, Payne believes that a good photographer should be able to make beautiful pictures of anything.

"You still have many elements working for you--the light, the air, the ambiance of the weather, the trees. These are things you can use to make a beautiful picture in every case, even though the building--architecturally--isn't very good."

He approaches each job as if solving a puzzle. "You've got this *thing* you've never seen. The job is to go and piece the puzzle together--the weather, the limitations of the site, the structure. You make photographs that are as truthful as you can about the strengths of the architecture. Great buildings are very, very easy to photograph."

Payne sees printmaking as the phase of photography which allows for creativity but, surprisingly, maintains that the actual taking of a picture is anything but a creative enterprise. "You go out with a camera, you discover something beautiful, and you take a picture of it." Once you accept this, he promises the process becomes much more pleasurable--and anyone can do it. Especially with a good teacher. This fall Richard Payne will teach two courses--"Introduction to the Art of Photography" and "Advanced Fine Art Photography"--at The Houston Center for Photography (529-4755). "Teaching forces me to continually reevaluate what I think," he says. "It forces me to learn along with my students. "It's a joint venture."

In the coming years, Payne intends to do less commercial work and more teaching and fine art photography of his own. It is a plan which will help him practice what he preaches to his students, that "photography is the means by which anyone with energy and interest can participate in art. It is about developing a new vision of the world, the ability to see the simplicity and beauty of common things. It has the potential to become, for each of us, a joyous life force."