

In what has become a way of life for Taos photographer GERAINT SMITH, being in the right place at the right time is never left to chance.



by the light of the
MOON

Smith says that while he was photographing this incandescent scene in the twilight near the old Fina gas station in northern Taos, he witnessed a triangle-shaped object streak across the sky. At the same time, a friend of his captured a similar phenomenon on video about 20 miles south in the village of Pilar along the Río Grande. Makes you wonder.



While shooting the moon rising over the snowcapped, 12,643-foot Vallecito Mountain from a field in Arroyo Seco just northwest of Taos, Smith says he had an unexpected but productive encounter. "I was photographing the moon and he just presented himself," Smith says of a neighbor's horse that nonchalantly walked into his camera's field of view.

Smith routinely drives around the Taos area with his camera on his passenger seat. He noticed this wooden kiva ladder propped against the side of El Taoseño restaurant. The light wasn't right at the time of his observation, so he returned later at night to capture this evocative, distinctly New Mexican scene.

JUDGING FROM THE BOUNTY OF HIS STUNNING LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHS, there's no doubt that a detailed lunar calendar has become as much a part of Geraint Smith's toolkit as his camera.

"I always plan to go out on full moons," says Geraint (pronounced geh-RINT). "The moon is always where it should be and always on the same scale." Sharing a trick of the trade, he says that when it's too dark, he sometimes takes two exposures of the same setting—one for the landscape and the other for the moon. "Sometimes I go out on specific days when the moon is rising and the sun is setting and there's no need for two exposures."

The 54-year-old photographer, who was raised in South Wales, then later in Yorkshire, England, says he's gotten to know the area around Taos pretty intimately since he moved there in 1988. He visualizes images in specific locations where he "knows things will happen," then returns when he suspects the light will be special or the moon will be in its full splendor.

"When the moon comes up, there's that moment of anticipation, there's always that moment of awe," Geraint says. "It's a natural wonder that never ceases to amaze me!"





Above: The moon was rising over these rock outcroppings on top of the Río Grande Gorge south of Pilar in late afternoon. Smith says he used a 500mm lens to make the moon large in the image and that the scene, which he had witnessed before, inspired him to write a poem. Facing page: A friend's horse pasture provided the setting for one of Smith's photographs at sunset near the Orilla Verde Recreation Area south of Taos.

Smith says he first came to New Mexico with some friends in November 1984, and the light especially appealed to his visual senses. The distinct smell of burning cedar and piñon wood continually wafting through the cool air seduced him further.

"I was smitten," says Smith, who was working as a public relations photographer in California. "I was certainly in awe of the place—the light, the smells—like nothing else on Earth!"

The photographer returned to New Mexico more than a dozen times before moving here permanently.

"The summer of '88 was so hot in L.A., I moved!" Geraint laughs, recalling that he moved into a little adobe in Taos with a girlfriend who had showed him a picture of the house on a little postcard produced by the photographer Bernard Plossu. "I think it was meant to be!"

Smith, the father of a 17-year-old son and a 15-year-old daughter, says he still can't believe that he lives here.

Recently, "I was driving home from Hopi, Arizona, and I'm thinking, 'I'm almost home.' And then I thought, 'Wow! Did I just say home?'" ❖

—Arnold Vigil

Geraint Smith conducts personalized photo tours, classes, and workshops. To see more of his work and learn more about his tutorials, visit www.geraintsmith.com.

