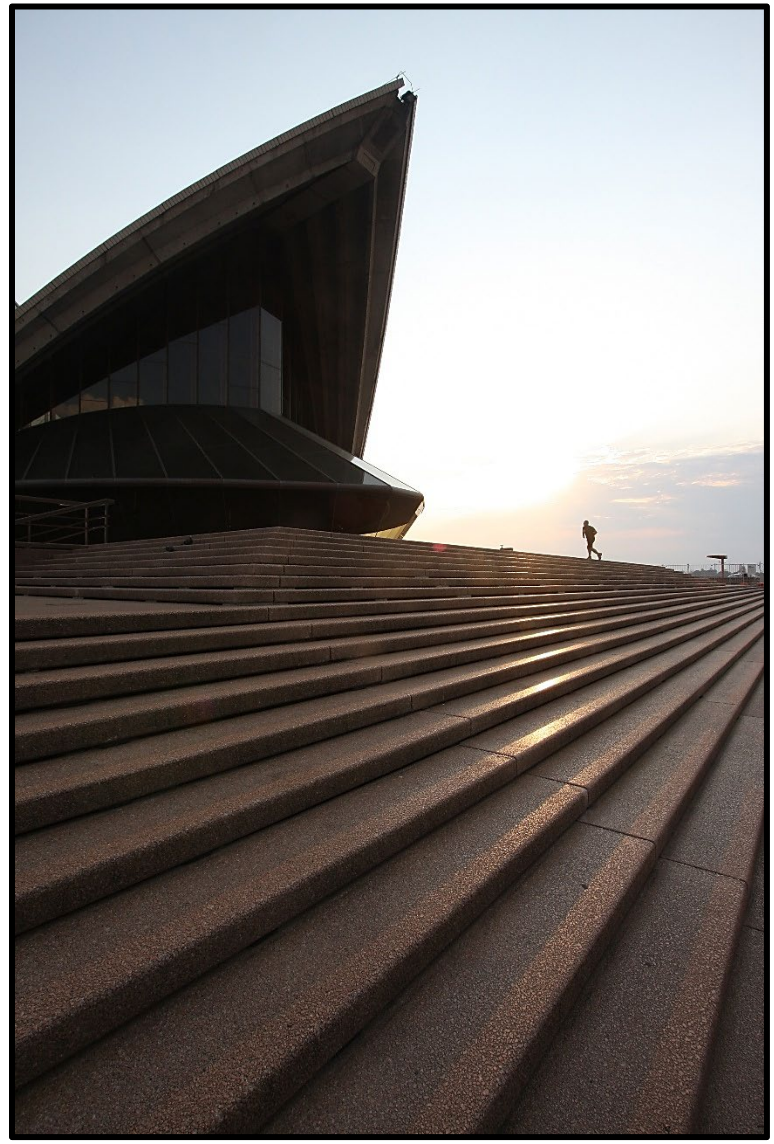
THIS BEAUTIFUL WORLD

AN ALBUM

Courtney White

THIS BEAUTIFUL WORLD

Pont du Gard, southern France 2010

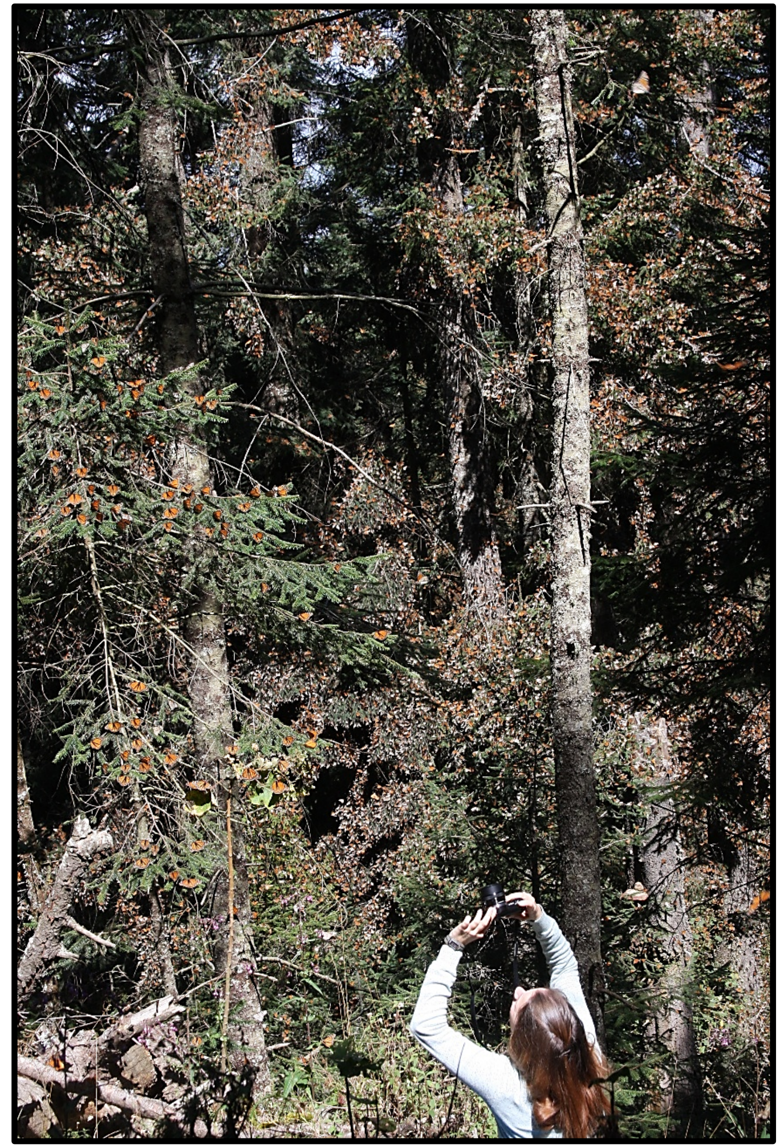


Opera House, Sydney, Australia 2011

Wedding, northern Arkansas 2009

Wishing Well, San Gimignano, Italy 2008

Buckingham Palace, London   2014



Monarch Butterfly Preserve, Mexico   2015

WWI Dead Memorial, London, England 2014

Sun Dance Festival, Santa Fe, New Mexico 2010

Wiñay Wayna, Inca Trail, Peru 2025

Eltz Castle, southern Germany 2024

Chickens, Lee, New Hampshire 2011

Wild African Dogs, Okavango, Botswana 2025

Tom Sidwell, JX Ranch, eastern New Mexico   2010

In 2004, Tom and Mimi Sidwell bought the 7,000-acre JX Ranch south of Tucumcari, New Mexico, and set about doing what they know best: earning a profit by restoring the land to health and stewarding it sustainably.

As with many ranches in the arid Southwest, the JX had been hard used for decades. Poor land and water management caused the grass cover to diminish, exposing soil to the erosive effects of wind and rain. Eroded gullies formed across the ranch, small at first, but growing larger with each thundershower, cutting down through the soft soil, biting into the land deeper, eating away at its vitality. Water tables fell correspondingly, starving plants and animals alike of precious nutrients, forage, and energy. Profits fell too for the ranch's previous owners. They followed a typical business plan: stretch the land's ecological capacity to the breaking point, add more cattle when the economic times turned tough and pray for rain when dry times arrived. The result was the same – a downward spiral as the ranch crossed ecological thresholds. In the case of the JX, the water, nutrient, mineral, and energy cycles unraveled across the ranch, causing the land to disassemble and eventually fall apart.

Enter the Sidwells. They saw the deteriorated condition of the JX not as a liability but as an opportunity. Tom began by dividing the entire ranch into sixteen pastures, up from the original five, using solar-powered electric fencing. After installing a water system for the pastures, he chose cattle that did well in dry country, grouped them into one herd and set about rotating them through the pastures, never grazing a single pasture for more than ten days in order to give the land plenty of recovery time. Next, he began clearing out the juniper and mesquite trees on the ranch with a bulldozer, which allowed native grasses to return.

Tom lengthened the period of rest between pulses of cattle grazing in each pasture from 60 days to 105 days. More rest meant more grass, which meant Tom could graze more cattle. In fact, Tom increased the overall livestock capacity of the JX by 25% in six years, significantly impacting the ranch's bottom line. Ultimately, Tom hopes to have the ranch divided into twenty-three pastures. The reason for his optimism is simple: the native grasses are coming back, even in dry years. Over the past ten years, the JX has seen an increase in diversity of grass species and a decrease in the amount of bare soil across the ranch.

In 2010, a spring near their house came back to life. For years, it had flowed at a miserly rate of ¼ gallon per minute, but after clearing out the juniper trees above the spring and managing the cattle for increased grass cover, the well began to pump 1.5 gallons a minute. In fact, the water cycle improved all over the ranch, a consequence of water infiltrating down into the grass-covered soil, rather than sheeting off erosively as it had before. Through careful monitoring, Tom could chart the health of his land and the effects of his decision-making.

The keys to the Sidwells' success are goal-setting and planning. Tom considers not only the needs of the livestock, but also the physiological needs of the vegetation and wildlife. He views soil health as fundamental to the ranch's environmental health, so he *plans* to leave standing vegetation on the soil surface to decrease the impact of raindrops on bare soil, slow runoff to allow water infiltration, provide cover for wildlife, and feed the microorganisms in the soil. Tom also plans for drought by adjusting his livestock numbers *before* the drought starts, instead of waiting to act after it has set in.

In 2011, the Sidwells' skills were tested when less than three inches of rain fell on the JX (the average is sixteen inches). In response, Tom sold nearly the entire cattle herd to give his grass a rest. It was a gamble, but it paid off in 2012 when it began raining again. "It was enough to make a little grass," he told me. "We had some mortality on our grass and more bare ground than before the drought, but I think the roots are strong and healthy and recovery will be quick." The Sidwells purchased additional cattle. In contrast, their neighbors kept cattle on their land through 2011 and then had to destock due to a lack of grass.

"Grazing and drought planning are a godsend," said Tom, "and we go forward with a smile and confidence because we know we can survive this drought." ~~

Alphorn players, Prague, Czech Republic 2019

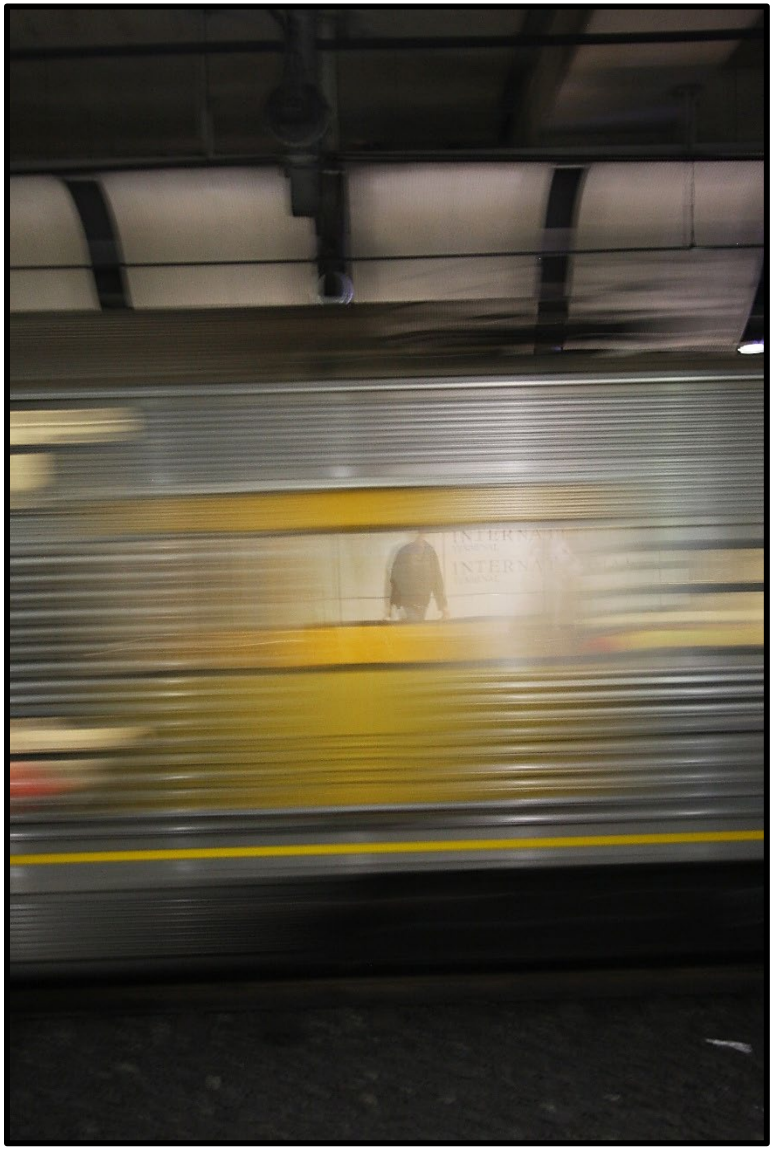
Maasai, Masai Mara, Kenya   2015

Coffee and Water, Mo'orea, Tahiti   2025

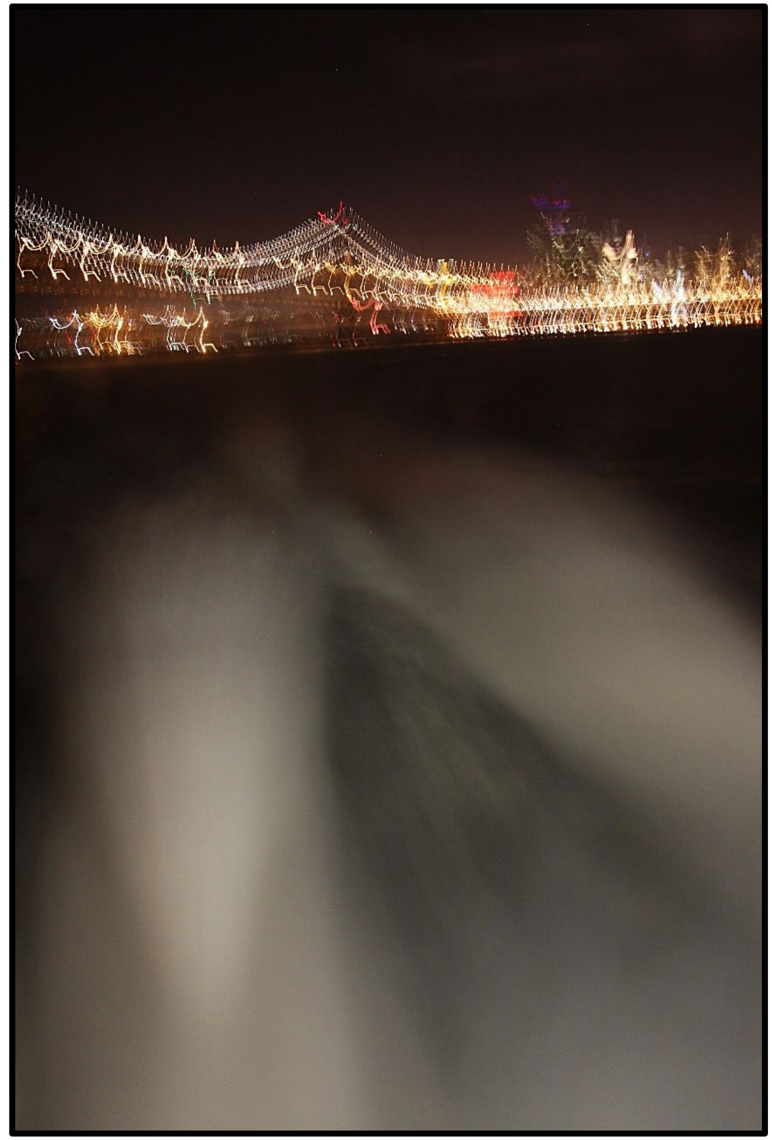
Coffee and Eggs, Salzburg, Austria   2013

Boots, Stockholm, Sweden   2024

Boots, Herculaneum, Italy   2024



Subway, Sydney, Australia 2011



Ferry, San Francisco, California 2011

Restaurant menu, Beijing, China 2013

Restaurant menu, Istanbul, Turkey 2025

Nutcrackers, Salzburg, Austria 2025

Turkish Delight, Istanbul, Turkey 2025

People's Climate March, New York City 2014

Crossing the Street, Nairobi, Kenya 2015

Ecological Restoration, New Mexico   2007

Forbidden Palace, Beijing, China   2013

Fiesta de San Isidro, Madrid, Spain   2026

Dragon Dancers, Zhengzhou, China   2013

Horse Progress Days, Mt. Hope, Ohio   July 4, 2008

On a weekend when a gallon of gasoline cost $4.10 and a barrel of oil hovered at $140, both records, I found myself among thousands of Amish farmers in Mt. Hope, Ohio, watching a parade of horse-drawn manure spreaders, combines, and hay-balers. The occasion was the Fifteenth Annual Horse Progress Days, a celebration of one of the world's oldest energy sources: animal power.

My family and I had stopped at Mt. Hope the previous summer to visit David Kline, farmer, author, publisher, and Amish minister. What I saw and heard during our stay deeply impressed me. I saw a vibrant agrarian community on a human scale that was wholly alien to me as a child of the suburbs. I saw draft animals at work, manure on the roads, and family-scale farms. When I asked David for a summation of the Amish experience at the end of our visit, he said something profoundly radical for our times: "It's all right to live with less."

The previous evening, I witnessed this philosophy in action. Standing on a hotel balcony, I watched an Amish family bale and load cut hay in an adjacent field. The family patriarch, wearing the standard uniform of straw hat, plain shirt, suspenders, black pants, and a beard, stood in a red hay baler that was so old it looked like it belonged in a museum. Pulling the red baler was a team of handsome black draft horses. They spiraled steadily toward the center of the field, the baler excreting a green bale every thirty seconds. Another team of horses followed, guided by a young Amish man who stood on a flatbed wagon. On the ground were three young women, in plain dresses and white bonnets, who loaded the bales into the wagon. I heard laughter. In less than an hour, they were done.

The two-day celebration took place on Mt. Hope's muddy fairgrounds. Arriving early, I noticed that the cars were outnumbered by horse-drawn buggies, whose tethered horses dozed dreamily. Entering the fairgrounds, I saw people milling about purposefully. Some clustered around the harness and tack vendors; some strolled through the small village of horse-drawn equipment manufacturers; some lined up at the food tents, seeking homemade pies and fresh coffee as a brace against the damp air. Others lingered at the logging demonstration site, while others stopped at the farm animal petting zoo or rode in carriages pulled by miniature horses through the mud.

BBQ-laden smoke hung in the air like an aromatic blanket. I could hear the amplified voice of a horse expert in a tent instructing a crowd how to gentle a colt. I heard the happy sound of children, the insistent buzz of a woodcutter's chainsaw, and the clop-clop of passing horses – huge horses. The biggest I've ever seen. Teams of black Percherons, tawny Belgians, and bay Shires, four abreast, in full harness, reins in the hands of Amish boys.

The whole scene felt medieval, but in a good way. There was a humanness, a rightness to the scale, the relationships, the smells, and the laughter. This wasn't a party, however. There was serious business going on, as I discovered when I attended a demonstration of the latest manure spreaders. Rows of Amish men and women stood thoughtfully on either side of a freshly plowed strip of soil, watching a slow parade of horse-drawn manure spreaders. Manure flew high and low as each spreader ran a gauntlet of discerning eyes.

In midafternoon, the sun broke out, bathing the fairgrounds in bright, sticky light. It reminded me that I had forgotten to bring a hat. By now, I could distinguish fairgoers by their headgear. Bare heads and ball caps indicated non-Amish, of which there was a decent number by lunchtime. Among the Amish themselves, there seemed to be important, though obscure (to me), patterns and variations among the straw hats and white bonnets. David Kline told me later there were even significant variations in the choice of suspenders they wore, though he might have been pulling my leg.

By late afternoon, my eyes, ears, and mind were full. Calling it quits for the day, I climbed into my rental car. As I drove to my hotel, I switched on the radio. I immediately regretted the decision. It was a presidential election year, and the chatter of conservative pundits suddenly filled the car with talk of "energy independence on this Independence Day." Our addiction to foreign oil was shameful, they opined, though not as shameful as the opposition to increased domestic drilling by Democrats, including a certain presidential aspirant from Illinois. I switched the radio off. I couldn't wait to see the horses again tomorrow. ~~

Berlin Wall, Berlin, Germany   2019

Roman mural, Lugo, Spain   2026

Family, Arches National Park, Utah   2014

Worshippers, Salisbury Circle, England   2025

MORE TO COME…..