

MAIN

contact: STEPHEN AUSTIN WELCH
address: 991 Tyler Street studio 222 Benicia, CA 94510
phone: 707-748-0800 (9am - 5pm PST)
fax: 707-748-0801
email: stephen@SAW-ART.com
urls: SAW-ART.com & SAWville.com

ALTERNATE

contact: NORMAN MASLOV, AGENT INTERNATIONALE
address: 608 York Street San Francisco, CA 94110
phone: 415-641-4376 (9am - 5pm PST)
fax: 415-641-5500
email: maslov@MASLOV.com
urls: MASLOV.com/photographers/saw



photograph © Stephen Austin Welch 2004

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Los Angeles Magazine hires Stephen Austin Welch to photograph the architectural gems hidden deep inside downtown LA.

The creative team at LA Magazine had a whopper of an assignment to award the right photographer. After 2 years of reconnaissance by assistant editor Chris Nichols, they gained access to get inside, underneath and on top of ten unique buildings in downtown LA that have been closed to the public for years. These structures ranged from glorious buildings of the early 20th Century to abandon subway tunnels buried beneath the city.

To shoot the downtown LA profile, LA Mag sought out Stephen Austin Welch (who lives in San Francisco.) When asked why they hired an out of town shooter, they offered up that they had been patiently waiting two years to find the right assignment to give to Welch. The other reason they had for hiring Welch was that they held complete confidence that he could handle whatever came his way. They liked his people stuff as much as his environmental stuff. They knew only some of what was inside the downtown structures and that these buildings were going to be mysteries until the photographer showed up to explore them. Welch's collaborative photographic work with fine artist Matthew Matsuoka helped the magazine envision their potential images. The two had a gallery show earlier this year in San Francisco of giant color photographs made in an old factory. The work was a photographic study of nature reclaiming the abandon Ford assembly plant in Richmond, CA. Seeing the parallels between the projects, the magazine was excited to see what Welch could bring to them from the adventure.

And quite the adventure it was. Shooting in buildings with and without power, from rooftops

story continued on page 2

page: 1 of 2

**story continued: Los Angeles Magazine hires Stephen Austin Welch to photograph
the architectural gems hidden deep inside downtown LA.**

to tunnels, from the buildings once cherished to the now long time neglected, each and every location was different. Welch spent four weeks shooting the project, and needed to keep shuttling up and down between San Francisco and LA to squeeze in his other gigs. It helped logistically that Welch formerly lived in LA when he worked in the film industry.

Welch also handled the post-production digital work, collaborating with the art director Joe Kimberling. Kimberling would email layouts to Welch, then Welch would color correct the files and post them to his FTP server for the magazine to download. They worked like this for a week, always late into the night, to meet the magazine's strict press deadline.

To round out the feature photo essay, LA Magazine also hired Welch to shoot the cover of the magazine. What he calls "the flip side," a lifestyle shoot at The Standard (a hipster hotel located downtown.) Welch says, "It was the perfect counterpoint. It let me get as gritty and moody as I wanted to be with the peculiar downtown buildings because I knew I could contrast it with the upbeat, sleek and mod lifestyle shoot. The two shoots play off each other, in that yin yang sort of way."

"The toughest part of the shoot was not the 16 hour days, but establishing the right tone," explains Welch. "The initial reaction to these spaces is sympathy, either because they are decrepit or under utilized. But I firmly wanted to avoid making shots that would evoke pity from the viewer. The buildings deserved more than that. Instead I wanted to convey what we [his crew] were feeling in these spaces. These were eerie and spooky places. Layered with the stillness of the subjects is all the bustle that these buildings once held. I wanted the photographs to resonate what these buildings witnessed and capture the historicity that they stand for."

As a final perspective, Welch credits the magazine for having trust in him and thinks both jobs were a blast, comprised with hard work, good crew, bizarre places, and fun shots. He offers many thanks to all involved.

So, did the magazine like the photographs Welch made? The senior photo editor Kathleen Clark answers this question directly, "The photo essay is drop-dead gorgeous." The art department even went to the editor of the magazine and campaigned for an extra four pages of the issue to be devoted to the images. The June issue of LA Magazine features Welch's in depth view of the juxtaposition between downtown LA — then and now.

story by Alfred Bier © 2004

to view the photographs go to: SAW-ART.com/photographer/images/urbanscapes

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page: 2 of 2