

**HIGH TIDE** **A SURF ODYSSEY**  
— PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS BURKARD

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*Your body of work is impressive, and yet you're not even 30 years old. How did this occur?*

Traveling is all I've ever wanted to do. I didn't set out to run a photography business—I wanted to see the world. That was all I cared about, getting out of this small town that I felt stuck in. I started going to these places that were really unique, but they weren't fulfilling. We were going to the tropics, living that status quo, visiting places that were normally associated with surfing, but I felt suffocated. I had a draw to go to some off-the-beaten-path places, which ultimately led me to places like Iceland and Norway, getting further from my comfort zone. Those trips eventually became more like an internal journey than anything. To see how far we could go to push ourselves and to experience something new.

*What do you try to capture?*

Photographs are one-dimensional, right? They're just flat, especially when you're looking at them on a computer screen. Years ago I'd studied a little bit of two- and three-dimensional art, and one of the things I learned was how to use color as a way to make an image stand out and look three-dimensional using warm tones and cool tones to my advantage, pushing and pulling them to make an image feel deep. Lighting has always played a huge role in my work.

As far as my lenses, I tend to go a bit wider. Most of my surf work has been shot using 70-200mm or below. Those are the types of photos I'm the most known for, at least. For my landscape work and such, I love shooting super wide and getting close rather than trying to just zoom into subjects—I like to actually walk up and approach them. It's a more intimate experience and that's what I like about it—the opportunity to be close. All the moments I'm shooting are usually something that I'm personally involved in myself.

*How has recently bringing two sons into this world affected your career?*

I'm not as reckless as I used to be. When I used to travel, I wouldn't care about the length of time I would be gone, but nowadays I'm trying to be smart about booking my trips. I've found that, in having a family, communication is the most important thing—it's everything. It's made for a lot of expensive phone bills, but it's been worth it because I've been able to talk to my wife while on the road and make sure the kids are safe—that's the role of being a dad who's trying to travel for a living. There's no way for me to stop seeing the world. That's just what I do, so I need to figure out how I can make them feel safe and I can feel comfortable leaving them for periods of time.

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**There's no way for me to stop seeing the world. That's just what I do.**  
”

*What in your career so far have you wished that you could've done differently?*

That's a tough one. I think I would have traveled sooner to places that had initially inspired me. I was always so afraid to invest my own time and money into places I really wanted to visit. I chose to travel to places that my editors thought to be good, or to places that I knew the magazine could use. I was just playing it safe. As soon as I stopped worrying and caring about all of that, I started to go to places where my work started to mean something to me. Suddenly it became fulfilling and not just a job.

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"  
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"

*What have been your most prominent ups and downs?*

Probably the lowest point was in Russia, when you saw me getting walked out of customs in the Vladivostok airport and put into jail. (laughs) That sucked. It was a low point but also an eye-opener because being so young and suddenly realizing that, at 21 years old, you're not invincible. You're human and subject to the same treatment that everyone else is.

Besides my kids being born, one of the highest points was the opportunity I had to see the waves in Alaska. That trip to the Aleutian Islands was the best of my life. We were so far off the grid and so remote that we realized there was nobody but ourselves there to rely on. That type of self-sufficiency makes you feel alive. It's really gratifying.

*How do you stay inspired?*

It used to be just by looking at photos, but nowadays I find inspiration in a lot of different places—through art, music, architecture—and also just by travel. I try to look in unorthodox places to find it.

*What does photography mean to you?*

It's been a tool and a vehicle for me to see the world, and it's been a way to inspire people as well as myself. Photography is a job and a business, which is great, but I've never been a good writer, I've never done journals or taken notes.

All I do is take pictures of my experiences and, at the end of the day, at the end of my career, of my life, I'm not going to give a crap about how much money photography made for me; I'm going to care about the ability to share a lot of these experiences with my kids. A way of remembering (hopefully) a life well-lived.

*What makes a good picture stand out from the average?*

A good photograph is something that inspires people, that moves them, that makes them want to get up and go do something. That should be most important. It should have good light, great contrast, an emotional trigger. The real beauty of a good photograph is there are no real rules. You can look at something in a bunch of different ways and still make a beautiful image, because it's really about the content.

*Weather conditions can be critical for a successful picture.*

*How do you handle these unpredictable forces?*

Finding unpredictable weather is one of the best things someone can do. I used to live for those bluebird days, when it's sunny and offshore, and those are killers, but they get old after a while. It's so much more unique when you're chasing storms and when you find yourself immersed in an actual storm, you realize that the weather and the light and the whole emotion of the situation is a lot more dramatic. That's what I live for now. I'd rather be in a clearing storm than a sunny bluebird day any time. I've learned to embrace every situation. There's no such thing as bad weather—there are just soft people and poor clothing.

*What are your big future goals?*

To be as good a father as I am a photographer.  
(laughs) I'm actually making a children's book that's launching next month—that has always been a goal of mine. And this TED Talk has been another goal of mine for what seems like forever. It's a huge, huge thing that I've been wanting to do because it's a way of leaving a legacy behind, some of the things I've learned and gained from traveling, to have a global stage and present some of my greatest work is a really amazing opportunity. I feel super lucky.

*Any wish-list locations you'd like to visit?*

There are a lot. I still want to go to so many places in Canada and Norway and Iceland; these places are still just as inspiring as the first time I visited them. That's the beauty of them. I'm a lifelong traveler—it's not just something I've done for a career but because I love it.

*Ultimately, with this photographic path you've chosen, what have you learned about life and the world?*

In life, there are no shortcuts to joy, and for us to truly embrace anything that's worthwhile, we have to be willing to shiver just a little bit. I've definitely done my fair share of shivering and it's taught me a couple of things. For my entire life I've been seeking these distant shores—as a little kid I was daydreaming about them—and then when I started traveling to them and I realized that you're never going to get there by daydreaming or by flipping through pages in a magazine. You have to go and seek out your distant shore. It's not enough to just dip our toes into what inspires us; we have to immerse ourselves.

— I CLEARLY RECALL the moment I first met Chris Burkard. It was with a cheerful handshake in August 2006, beside the tidy desk of then-photo editor Peter Taras, inside the offices of the now-defunct *Transworld Surf* magazine in Oceanside, California. Burkard was Taras's summer intern, commuting weekly 420 kilometers each way from Arroyo Grande and sleeping in his truck while absorbing the nuances of surf photography and photo editing. He was a few months away from his first-ever international trip (to Oman), but his was an obvious talent just beginning to simmer. Nearly a decade on, I caught up with Burkard at home for a current glimpse into an artist mind that is now at a full rolling boil.

MICHAEL KEW, Oregon Coast,  
February 2015

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# Into Aleutian Wilds

## THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS, ALASKA

Words by BEN WEILAND

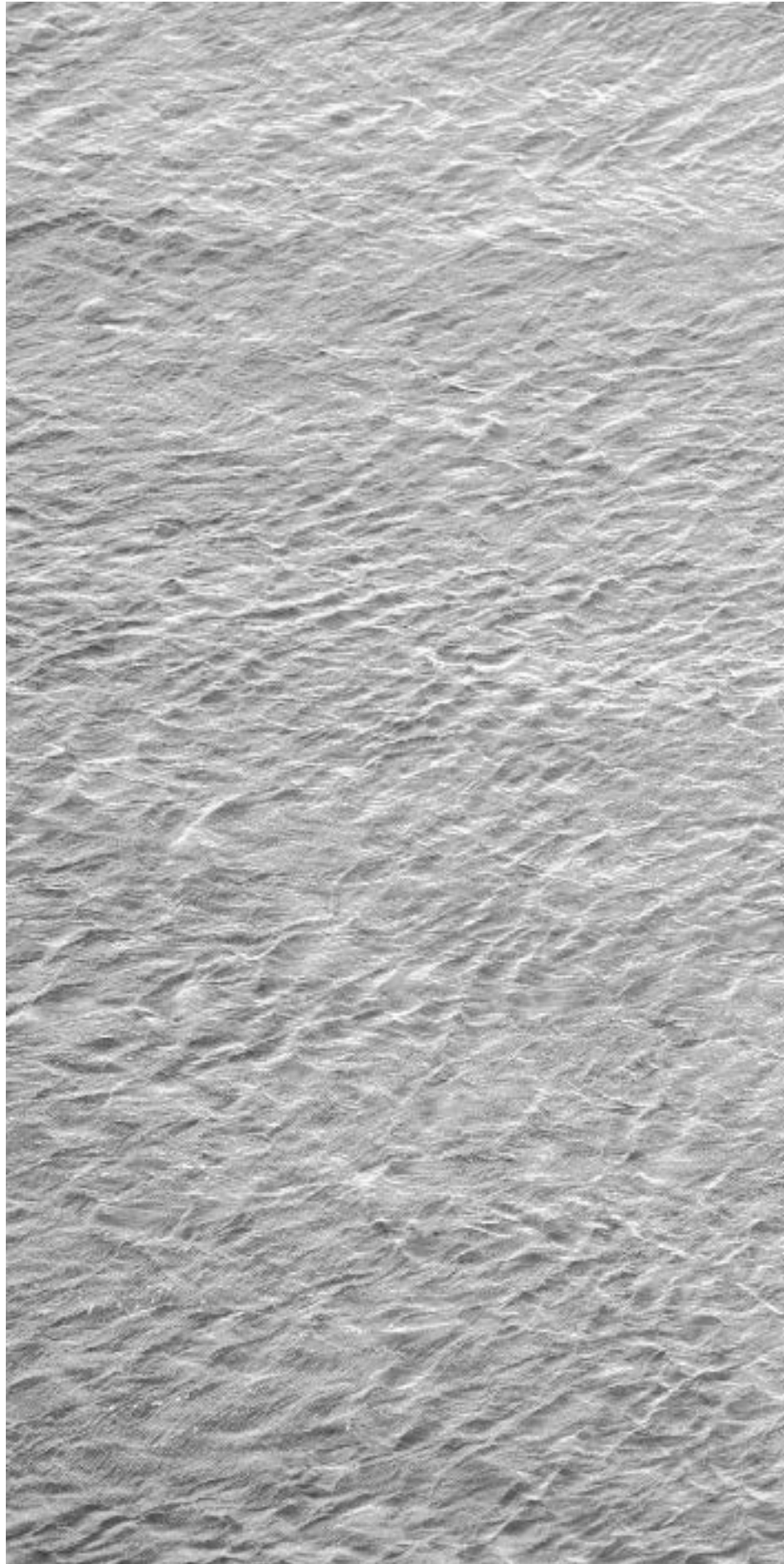
The Aleutians have been called “The Cradle of Storms” and “Birthplace of the Winds”, although during winter many simply think of them as a rugged hellhole. Comprised of a string of more than 167 islands dividing the North Pacific from and Bering Sea, and spanning the entire gap between Alaska and Russia, they’re remote, even by Alaskan standards.

— **THE WILD CLIMATE** in the Aleutian Islands produces some of the most severe storms on Earth. A clash of arctic and tropical air known as the Aleutian Low pushes cyclones to maximum intensity. The fabled swells that thunder out of the region deliver monumental waves to places like the North Shore and Mavericks, more than 2,000 miles away. Alex Gray, Pete Devries, and Josh Mulcoy headed to a remote isle in the archipelago.

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# An Island Addiction

## **BARBUDA, EAST CARIBBEAN**

Words by ZANDER MORTON

It's a small blip on the map amongst a large sea of more than 7,000 islands that comprise the West Indies. And where we'd been, it hasn't mattered one bit what's been happening to the rest of the world. The entire globe—aside from one deserted, untouched beach on a small islet—disappeared into the background of our minds. The empty, spitting, overhead tubes each day consumed our psyche.

— **THE WORLDS RAREST** waves are often the most high-quality, teasing surfers with fleeting glimpses of perfection. Not to miss out on a special opportunity, Ben Bourgeois, Paul Fisher, Zander Morton, Dylan Graves, and two of the Gudauskas brothers dropped everything for a taste of sweet Caribbean fruit.

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