



Music TO HIS EYES

PHOTOGRAPHER BOBBY BAKER FINDS
HIS RHYTHM ALONG THE CAPE'S SHORES

Music, as described by Sam Elliot's character Bobby in the 2018 remake of "A Star is Born," is essentially 12 notes between any octave, then the octave repeats. "All any artist can offer," he says, "is how they see those 12 notes."

When it comes to photography, all a photographer can offer is how they see the world before them. It may be the same scene photographed time and time again, but it's depicted each time from the unique perspective of the photographer behind the lens.

For Bobby Baker, his photography is about telling a story—the story of how he sees Cape Cod, of how he feels in any given moment surrounded by the inspiring seascapes he holds dear. As a result, Baker captures the Cape—from Nobska Light to First Encounter Beach—in remarkable fashion. His black-and-white images are iconic, in the same way as noted photographer Ansel Adams' are. While Baker's images are in one sense straightforward in their sense of place, they are also strikingly nuanced, and visceral, depicting both the Cape's delicacy and strength.

"I feel that I'm gifted with an eye that sees things maybe others don't at times. I just lock into that," he says. Baker explains that what he strives for in his work is an emotional connection. "There are so many times, whether it's on the beach or anywhere else, that I'm thinking, this is just amazing, will I be able to create this piece so it translates to somebody else... If they get an inkling of the feeling I have right now, it's something special; if it's something more than that, it's a home run."

Photography has long been a part of Baker's life. He first discovered a passion for the craft in the late '70s. While working as a touring musician—he played bass, keyboard and the trombone for Vegas-style show bands—he took a job as an assistant to an event photographer in Palm Beach, Florida. "He took me under his wing, started teaching me all of the basics of photography," Baker recalls. "I got my first real camera then—an Olympus OM-1n, which I still have. I fell in love with photography—it was film photography then—and I kept getting better and better."

BY HALEY COTE • PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOBBY BAKER

"Rock Harbor Reflections"



"Beginning To End"



But as more opportunities in music came about, Baker says photography had to take a backseat. “I still shot here and there,” he says, “but I spent the next 13 years on the road, touring with a variety of different bands.” Eventually, though, gigs became fewer as the demand in the music industry for 8 to 10-piece bands dwindled, and Baker spent the next 25 years working as an executive in music retail. It was during this time that photography came back to call. “One day somebody I worked with happened to see some of my work from a long time ago and said, ‘You should do something with this,’ and I thought, yeah, maybe I should,” he recalls. “It peaked my interest again and got me going.” Baker and his wife, Dena, were living in New Hampshire at the time, and come every summer—and every



“An Afternoon Walk”



“Dories”

free weekend—they came down to Chatham. “Every time I was down in Chatham I was shooting,” he says. “I realized I was best inspired to create my art on Cape Cod.” After Baker retired, he and Dena decided it was time to move to the Cape—it was time for Baker to pursue his photography full on.

“It seemed like every time I went out on a serious shoot on the Cape, I was excited while I was doing it, because I knew I could feel it—I related to it,” Baker explains. “I’ve always said, whether it’s in business or in a variety of walks of life, to me, when you’re successful you feel some sort of rhythm, you get into a rhythm. I would feel a rhythm while I was out on the beaches here shooting.” For Baker, rhythm is a constant—whether musically speaking in his



“South Cape Beach”

LIFE'S CANVAS

former career, or today in the way lighting and composition come into play in a photograph. “How I look at it is I find my rhythm this way now, in a visual art,” he says.

After nearly three years of searching for the right home on the Cape, Baker and Dena finally found the one in Cataumet and moved there in 2016. The property, on Route 28A, boasts an 1800s-era barn, perfect for Baker to use as an art gallery. The “Art Barn,” as he’s dubbed it, is not your average art gallery. “When you go through those red barn doors, you just feel art,” Baker says, noting the exposed, raw natural wood and paint stains on the floor and the walls, “like maybe an artist was there before,” he imagines.

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Inside the gallery, visitors will find the impressive works of local painters Rachel Avenia and Jeff Rutchik, as well as, of course, Baker's signature, riveting black and white photography, predominantly in 17-by-22-inch prints.

"I have always leaned toward black and white," says Baker. "To me, there's more color in black and white than there is in color. By that I mean more expression, if done well. To do it well, you have to see in black and white, and that's something that I've worked on. I can be walking along and I'll see a setting that I want to capture, and I can sort of render in my mind whether it's going to translate well in monochrome or it needs to be a color scene."

When it comes to finding the right shot, Baker says he never lacks for inspiration. "One of the magical things about the Cape," he says, "is you're not going to go out for a day walking along the coast or the beach and be like, 'Geez, there's nothing to shoot.' You're going to come upon something. That's part of the fun—the surprises along the coast, and when I find those that's what I want to capture." Are there places he keeps being



"Paines Creek Landing"

drawn back to? "Yes, but I won't tell you," he says with a smirk, explaining that he's discovered over the last 20 years a few special secret spots. "Let's just say Chatham has a soft spot for me." Speaking of Chatham, Dena, who often accompanies Baker on shoots as his assistant, adds, "That light that comes into those sandbars and during low tide... If you've never experienced it, you will with his work."

It's that light—a magnificently warm, lush kind of light—on Cape Cod that continues to fascinate Baker. "There have been a couple times when it's just rocked me," he says. "It just stops you, and you'll miss shots just because you're taking it in yourself. It's a special feeling." It's



the same kind of special feeling Baker experiences every time he walks along the Cape's beaches and looks out onto the ocean, every time he pauses to take in all of the unbridled beauty that surrounds him in this place he now calls home.



"Morning Calm"

"Here I just feel this overwhelming sensation," Baker says, "and I think that translates in my work."

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Haley Cote is the associate editor for Cape Cod Life Publications.

To learn more about Bobby Baker, visit BobbyBaker.com, and for more on the Bobby Baker Gallery, visit BobbyBaker.Gallery. Baker's work may also be seen at Steve Lyons Gallery in Chatham.



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