

A COLOURFUL PAST

Rob Leonard

The 1960s were coming to an end—I'd (thankfully) left school, found employment, a second-hand car and, best of all, a steady girlfriend. But, something was missing—yes, a camera! The choice of this would have to be dictated by my available funds, well strained at best. So it was I found myself at the Northlands Shopping Centre heading to Herbert Small's Camera Store one Saturday morning.



Pic. 1. The humble Agfa Silette—well made & nothing to go wrong.

A bewildering array of expensive instruments; what should I buy—more to the point—what could I afford? A helpful salesman, sensing my youthful predicament, suggested a second-hand 'as new' 35 mm model would be ideal and within my modest budget. I drove home with a neat little Agfa Silette with the Apotar 45 mm 3-element lens, front-cell focus and not even a rangefinder to complicate the issue. Oh yes, and a roll of Agfacolor slide film (Pic. 1). The choice was vindicated by a good set of slides right from the start—I was on my way, David Bailey watch out!

Driving my Austin A60 one afternoon in 1968, I came across a raging house fire in Gower Street, Preston. There being no fire engines yet on scene, I jumped out to see if I could render assistance, at the same time grabbing the Silette which had become my constant companion. The house was unoccupied, had once been a railway employees' place near the suburban station. The heat and NOISE cannot be conveyed by the photographs, just use your imagination (Pics 2 and 3).

Around 1970 there was a photo contest run by the Mercedes-Benz company magazine *In Aller Welt*, which prompted me to enter with a shot of my old M-B 220S. It may have been 11 years old, but, like a Hasselblad, a timeless beauty. Regrettably, the previous night someone had ripped the three-pointed



Pic. 2. Tongues of flame, you can almost feel the heat.



Pic. 3. Sad to think someone once lived here.



Pic. 4. Sugarloaf Reservoir & TWO beautiful models!

star off my radiator grille—but what a lovely model—the car also! (Pic. 4.)

A few years passed and before you know, I was married and had managed to secure a delightful old house in tranquil Ivanhoe, a hilly northern suburb of Melbourne. I really cherish those early years there, and having a large garage was a bonus. By then I had restored a little 1937 Morris Eight roadster as a weekend hobby car. Memories flood back when I see how it all was (Pic. 5).

There were many leisurely weekends of domestic bliss, and one Sunday

morning, on a whim, I took the Silette and scrambled up to the very top of our high peaked roof for an 'aerial' view of Ivanhoe. The conservative neighbours must have been puzzled! (Pic. 6.)

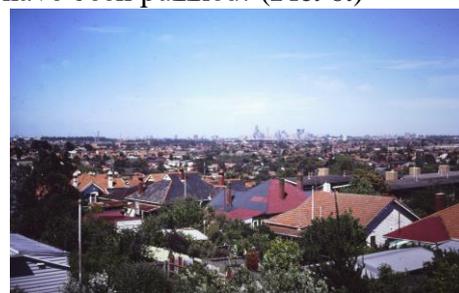
My wife and I were able to embark on the first of several overseas holidays around 1976, and once again the reliable Agfa Silette was still in use. So much to see and photograph, but sometimes a special photo opportunity. In Tijuana, Mexico, we came across an interesting hotel.

It appealed to me visually, and gaining a higher vantage point, I directed Judy into the shot (Pic. 7).

I used to love driving through the quiet back roads of the hill country just North of Melbourne, and one morning not long after sunrise I felt compelled to park my classic Jaguar 2.4 and record the beauty of the countryside and the elegance of the car. Ah, the smell of eucalypts (gum trees) and the chortling of magpies rejoicing a new day (Pic. 8).



Pic. 5. NOT England 1939—Ivanhoe, Melbourne, Australia 1976.



Pic. 6. Atop the highest peak of my roof, Melbourne city in distance. How it's all changed since 1976.



Pic. 7. 'The Coronas may be only 50 cents and the rooms just \$2.50, I'm NOT staying here!' The Hotel Vista al Rio, Tijuana, Mexico.



Pic. 8. Lovely Mk. 2 Jaguar 2.4, sunrise near a little Australian town called (aptly) Break O' Day in 1977.

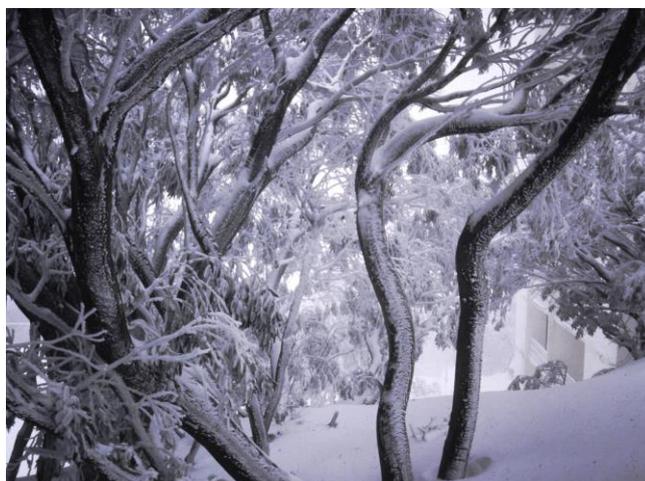


Pic. 9. The Zenit TTL SLR proved sharp and reliable.

About this time, I decided to update the old Agfa Silette and, with a trade discount through my work, came home with a Russian Zenit TTL SLR. WOW! built-in meter, high shutter speeds and best of all, a razor-sharp

Helios 58 mm f: 2 lens.

(Pic. 9). I continued to use Agfacolor slide film, hardly ever using negative colour or black and white for prints. Perhaps I should have...but that's all history now. The new camera recorded a weekend visit to Mt Buller Ski Resort in Victoria's mountain district. Here, when snow falls, the entire lush, green Australian landscape changes dramatically, at times like placing a black and white filter over the lens (Pic. 10). The patterns become almost surreal—yet another inspiring place to photograph.



Pic. 10. Snow scene, Mt. Buller, Victoria. Quite surreal, taken with the Zenit.

By 1984 the Zenit was becoming a well-seasoned traveller. It was ideal in some ways, as if it was accidentally left in your unattended hotel room and a desperate burglar broke in, he would take pity and leave HIS Zenit for you as well! Jokes aside, it always performed faultlessly, recording scenes high atop the Arc de Triomphe and

Eiffel Tower in Paris (**Pics 11, 12 and 13**). Whilst visiting the Palace of Versailles, I was impressed by the elaborate gates and, when setting up the shot, decided to include the elderly gentleman sitting there contemplating—or was he puffing a Gaulois or just flossing? (**Pic. 14.**) I'd like a set of gates such as these—and a house to match!



Pic. 11. The Champs Elysees from atop the Arc de Triomphe—note absence of overhead power wires and ugly signs.



Pic. 12. Another view with the Zenit of Paris in 1984.



Pic. 13. Even higher on the Eiffel Tower—and I managed to hold the Zenit still!



Pic. 14. Palace of Versailles with unofficial gatekeeper.

Over the pond, in London, I went for a stroll one balmy spring evening in Soho—sightseeing of course—the chunky black Zenit at the ready. The built-in exposure meter and the reasonably fast lens recorded a good memory of that evening (**Pic. 15**). Not too bad an effort for an SLR film camera handheld at night. A week later and a visit to Stonehenge was essential. The mysticism of this place is very real, quite spooky. I managed to position myself so the setting sun was about in the right spot and the well-coated Helios lens helped secure the shot. I have added some image manipulation to achieve what I think is a truly psychedelic affect. I think it could be quite effective as a large framed print. (**Pic. 16**).

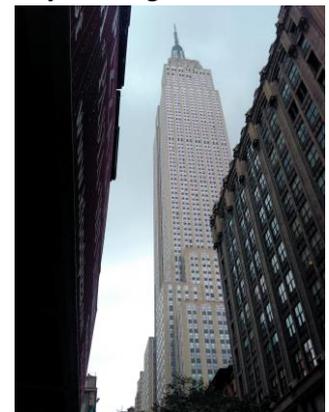


Pic. 15. Soho in London, spring 1984. A reasonable handheld night shot.



Pic. 16. Stonehenge at sunset, the coating of the Helios lens working overtime. My psychedelic take on this eerie place.

It was worthwhile to have all my old Agfacolor slides digitised and on disc: easy to store and convenient to view. It should have been done sooner as many have faded badly (so has my memory!) but any image is better than NO image. The Zenit sat for years until I gave it to John Fleming who immediately ran a test roll. After 10 frames the shutter decided to tear itself to shreds! We both laughed...how lucky I had been! John has kept the excellent Helios M42 lens for use via adaptors on digital, and says it's top class (**Pic. 17**). These days I use my iPhone or iPad for taking photographs, the results are, I think, stunning at times. Whilst in New York during 2013 I saw the Empire State Building close-up. It is amazing. I always thought it looked grimy in photos, but all shiny as-new stone and glittering, flawless, stainless steel spandrels reaching to the sky. Would you believe they also used 10 million bricks and all this took, in 1930–31, just 1 year and 1 month to build (**Pic. 18**).



Pic. 18. Magnificent Empire State Building: New York 2013. Taken on Samsung iPhone.



Pic. 17. The old Zenit Helios 58 mm f: 2 lens is now with John Fleming.