

Capture and Release

Kurt Budliger, Scenic Photographer and Environmentalist

by Ricka McNaughton

Some time back, after months of exhilarating scenic shooting in remote Alaskan terrain, photographer Kurt Budliger reviewed his trove of images and found no satisfying treasures. He had not managed to bring home on film what his artistic eye had relished on that particular journey. So, in what he describes as a "slow upward slog," he embarked on a deeper mastery of the tools of his photographic trade. If you pick up a 2011 *Vermont Life* calendar this coming year, you'll see that Budliger's work was chosen for the cover. This tells you something about the success of his "slog," and the allure of his scenic output today.

In the state's art scene, there are heaps of capable photographers in the genre of emblematic Vermont scenery. Budliger doesn't shy totally from iconic images, but some of them can knock a jaded eye into the next room.

You may see in Budliger's more singular work the twin engines of his art: a sure, scientific hand at capturing light, plus a poet's eye for releasing what may lie veiled to the casual observer. "I believe strongly in the power of simplification," Budliger explained. "Sometimes what you exclude from a photo is more important than what you include. The photograph is what's left."

Budliger studied environmental sciences in college, which paired well with his passion for backcountry hiking—later joined with photography. For a time, he taught science to middle-school students in central Vermont. "As an environmental educator," he said, "I saw a lot of power in the use of imagery to inspire others to think about preserving the natural world."

Budliger's photography has drawn national notice, scoring an honorable mention in the prestigious International Conservation Photography Awards exhibit at the Burke Museum in Seattle, Washington. He has also shown at Stowe's Helen Day Art Center and is a frequent contributor to both *Vermont Magazine* and *Vermont Life*.

A former film photographer, Budliger came to embrace the advantages of ad-



The photographer at work: Kurt Budliger. Photo by Mitch Moraski.

vanced digital cameras. He views digital photography as no less a fine art, in an artist's hands. "It's more of an elastic medium than film," he grants, but points out that film shooters have always exercised similar, if less nimble, controls in the camera and the darkroom. "Either way it all comes down to expressing the artist's vision," he concludes.

Budliger, formerly of Montpelier, now resides in Middlesex with wife Katy and their two children. He would like to focus exclusively on fine art photography one day. For now he cobbles together a living, as many artists do. He teaches two levels of digital photography at Community College of Vermont. He offers private and group photogra-

phy workshops and tours and operates a full-service photography business specializing in outdoor and landscape photography in Vermont and New England, as well as creative portraiture and wedding photojournalism. Visit www.kurtbudligerphotography.com for more information.

Budliger contributes 1 percent of his business profits to environmental action groups through the funnel organization 1% for The Planet. Notably, he was the first Vermont business to do so. The corporate office of 1% for The Planet, established by Patagonia outdoor clothing and gear founder and president Yvon Chouinard, is located in Waitsfield, Vermont.

Through the month of September, the Blinking Light Gallery on Main Street in Plainfield Village will present an exhibit of Budliger's work titled *Light on the Land: Autumn Selections*. You can meet and chat with Budliger at a gallery reception for the artist to be held on Saturday, September 11, from 4 to 6 p.m. For more information, visit www.blinkinglightgallery.com or call 454-0141. Plainfield's Old Home Days fall celebration occurs on the same date, with many family-friendly activities around town.

Ricka McNaughton of Plainfield is a freelance writer and member of the board of the Blinking Light Art Gallery.

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