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IN THE SHOT

RAY MARTIN

Interview by **Bruce Usher**

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"Being reasonably bolshie as a 15-year-old kid," Ray recalls, "I said 'Can we go to the rifle range?' The sergeant said, 'No, you're doing KP duty'. I replied, 'Stick it up your bum'. He said, 'You can do KP duty for the whole week'. So I said, 'I'm out of here'. And the only way to do that was either art or music. I couldn't do music, so it was art... a mate, about 12 girls and me. I did oils and watercolours while my mates were all out slogging around on the parade ground. I did art all the way through high school and, from that, I think I developed a good eye when it came to photography."

Silk Ties

After leaving school, Ray was planning to teach so he studied English history at Sydney University followed by an honours year. Already curious about current affairs, he found his perfect fit in 1965, working as a cadet journalist for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in Sydney. In 1969 he was appointed the ABC's North America correspondent based in New York.

Shortly after arriving, and while in Newport, Rhode Island, covering the America's Cup, Ray met the New Zealand-born photographer George Silk who happened to be on the chase boat Ray had organised for his ABC radio reports. Ray knew about George's "glorious reputation" and, after that first meeting, he did some more research which put him "...in awe of his record, apart from his talents."

George Silk (who died in 2004) learned photography while working in an Auckland camera store where he tried out all the new compact cameras of the day – the Rolleiflex, the Leica and the Contax. He arrived in Australia around 1939 with the idea of becoming a war photographer. He caught a train to Canberra to see the Prime Minister, but only got as far as his secretary. Nevertheless, the PM was shown his portfolio which he duly showed to the Cabinet, and George got the nod. Hired as a combat photographer for the Australian Ministry of Information, he was soon on a boat to the Middle East where his boss was Damien Parer. In 1943 he began working for *Life* magazine.

"He was wonderful, talking about his exploits in North Africa

and Papua New Guinea," Ray recalls, "But he had to be asked. Like the diggers themselves, he didn't volunteer too much. He talked a lot about shooting for *Life* and for *Sports Illustrated*, which were obviously a labour of love. He was easily the best photographer I saw among the army of them at Newport, and his pictures reflected his special talents. *Time* and *Sports Illustrated* used them sparingly because the America's Cup wasn't like baseball or football, but he sold quite a few prints in the Newport galleries and they were standouts.

"I used to sit at the feet of the great man and ask him lots of questions about cameras. He was generous in listening to my youthful opinions and looking at my snaps. He often suggested how to improve them. I knew from the outset that he was a legend and treated him accordingly. He was free of airs, graces or bullshit. He was also very dapper, always colour co-ordinated in his dress and distinguished looking with his sweptback grey hair. He looked more like a surgeon or perhaps a corporate lawyer.

"Once he took my cheap Konica camera and snapped half a roll off with it just to show that it wasn't all about 'having expensive gear'. He proved his point unquestionably. I don't know where those photos are now, probably somewhere in one of my boxes. After the Konica, I went up to a Contax – and I chose that over the Leica – then I started to take a lot of pictures. I used to soak up all the things I could get from him.

"My last contact with George was probably in 1983 when Australia won the America's Cup, but that was only very brief. The last time I spent any time with him was during the 1977 America's Cup when he came up from Connecticut for days at a time. I visited him at his home in Stonington and he showed me the photographs he had in the house, but unfortunately not his vast collection. I remember he had some wonderful scenes of fishing boats and village streets, and war pictures from Europe... all black and white, and all outstanding. But I guess my strongest memory is of his energy and love of life."

Picture Driven

After George Silk, Ray found himself gravitating towards the

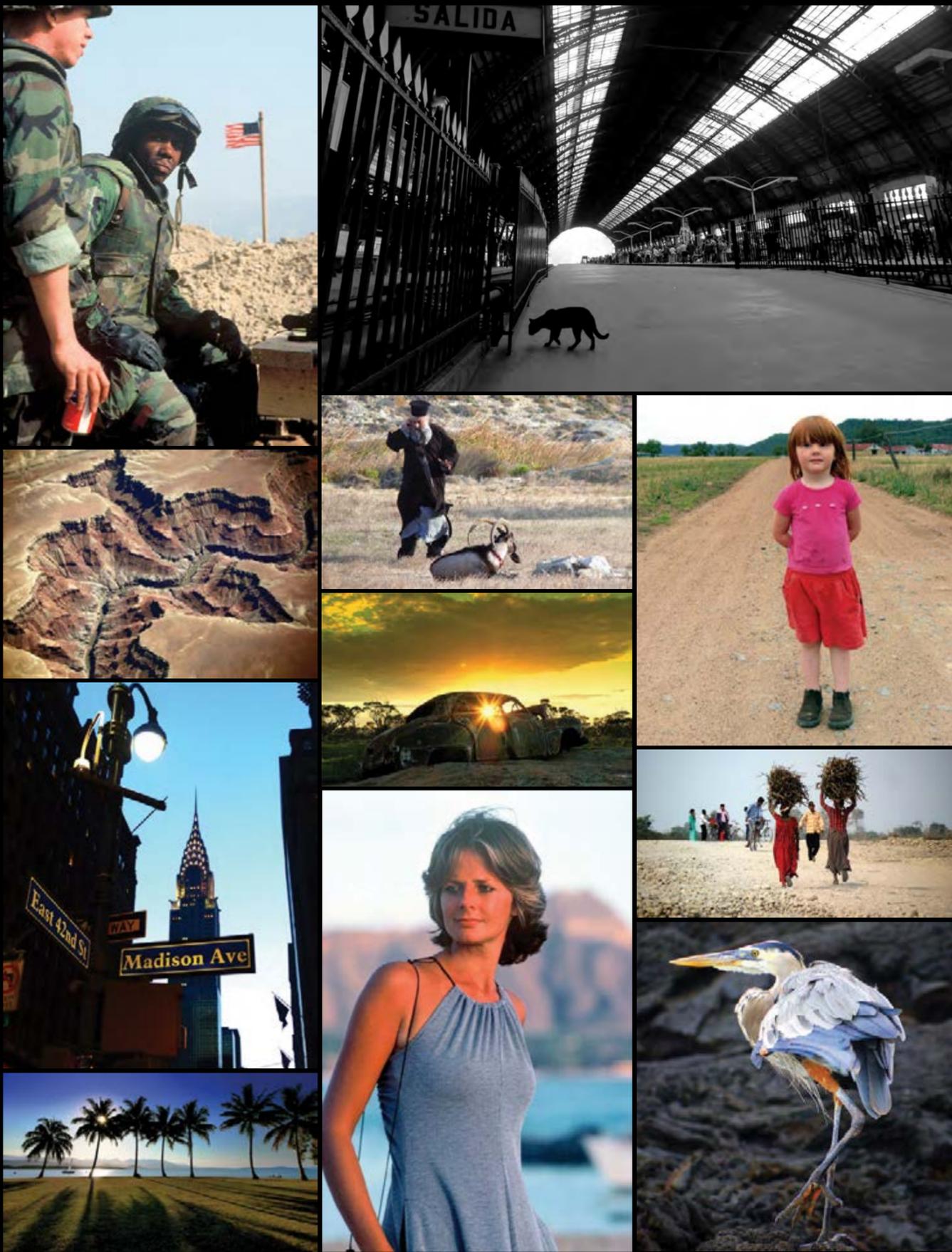


TV broadcaster and journalist Ray Martin has always been an enthusiastic photographer, but his keen eye has also influenced the imagery that's accompanied his many stories filed for programs such as *Four Corners* and *60 Minutes*.

Ray Martin has bought every UK photography magazine for the last ten years, supplemented by the occasional issue of *American Photo*. It's doubtful they have had much influence on his vision – it's likely that was finely honed decades ago – but he may have picked up a few technical tips.

I interviewed TV journalist and presenter Ray Martin in late 2012. It's not widely known – beyond an exclusive group of cameramen who have worked with him from his time on the ABC's *4 Corners* and Channel 9's *60 Minutes* – that Ray is not only an enthusiastic photographer, but a talented one.

As a teenager, he was in the air force cadets and, on a cadet camp, ended up on kitchen patrol, scraping potatoes along with a couple of his mates when all the others were out on the rifle range.



All photographs by Ray Martin, copyright 2015.

cinematographers he knew who were also good photographers, among them Dickie Malone and Andy Taylor.

"These days, they are the exception to the rule," asserts Ray. "Most cinematographers can't take stills. Having spent all my life looking at images for television, I think I have a good eye. I see pictures. With Dicky or Andy, I write the scripts and so I'll say something like, 'I need the Coca Cola sign with the kid sitting under it'... because I want to say something about the power of the multinationals or whatever. I'll say, 'See that old lady with the so and so, I need her. Can you get her?' I think more about the imagery than many producers or journalists. I go looking for pictures, but I also see them all the time. That's why I love cinematographers... as long as they don't feel I'm stepping on their territory, which I'm not. However, some aren't so receptive when you make a suggestion. But, demarcation lines, I can't work with them."

Cameraman Drew Benjamin has known Ray Martin for almost 20 years and has worked with him on stories for *60 Minutes* and *A Current Affair*. In all those years, he says, he has never known Ray not to have a camera with him when they travelled. Drew is convinced that many of the stories they have worked on involved places that Ray wanted to visit so he could take photographs.

"Ray's a great photographer," comments Drew. "But when he says, 'Mate, I just want to show you this one shot', that means take a seat because he's got a hundred to show you! There is a saying in our game that, 'if you didn't get it then it didn't happen... as long as no one else was there to shoot it', but the problem is that, if Ray has got it on his still camera, then we don't have any excuses. It's very friendly rivalry and we both keep each other on our toes by trying to outdo each other, taking a better landscape or portrait shot."

"He does have a great eye, and the beauty about working on 'Ray yarns' is that they will always be picture stories or, in other words, they're always picture-driven. Ray will always be looking for an excuse to add in a sequence that requires a beautiful rolling landscape with big sky and, hopefully, a bird or

some kind of animal in there as well. He will never say that's enough if he thinks he can squeeze in one last quirky or abstract shot — at first, you wonder how it's relevant, but then you see the story and the way he has written it, and it all makes sense. He's a master of the subliminal and he is not literal at all, which is why all Ray's pieces are, I think, very watchable. They don't follow the usual predictable formulas. We all love being assigned a 'Ray yarn', but unfortunately they are quite rare among the stories that we seem to be mostly working on nowadays."

Getting The Shot

Les Seymour has known Ray for over four decades, both at the ABC and at Channel Nine. Nearly 45 years ago, Les was working in the United States with Ray doing a *Four Corners* story for the ABC on the 'Chappaquiddick incident'. This was when a car driven by Senator Edward 'Teddy' Kennedy, crashed off a bridge into a swamp and a young student called Mary Jo Kopechne was killed. Kennedy left the scene of the accident and didn't report it to the police who subsequently came looking for him.

"Ray then was an amateur photographer, but nonetheless he was taking photograph after photograph. Much to my annoyance! Early in the '70s we were filming the US presidential elections in up-state New York. A large crowd was gathering waiting to see the president with hundreds of secret service men milling around the stage. Ray turned to me and said, 'Mate, I think you had better go up onto the stage and get a light reading from the podium'. I looked at him and said, 'What?' He said, 'Yeah, when you get up there, take your light reading and then quickly give the victory sign and I'll get a shot of you'. I was quite young and stupid, so I did it! Could you imagine trying to do that today? But that was how Ray was with his camera. He just had to have those shots!"

"On a recent trip to Nepal for the Fred Hollows Foundation we were filming a festival to celebrate the eye surgeons arriving in the area. Ray was drifting in and out of my filming and the editor mentioned to me afterwards, 'Les, I could hear you saying from behind the camera, "He's in the bloody

shot again.' I'm not surprised Ray is in my shot all the time — he's as keen a stills photographer as I am film cameraman."

At dusk on their first day in Kathmandu, Ray and Les were out wandering the streets. Ray had his little Panasonic Lumix GF1, and then he saw this young girl walk out into the square. She was, potentially, his 'Afghan Girl'.

"She was probably around 18 or 19," Ray explains. "She was wearing peasant clothes which were a bit dirty and she had a brown scarf wrapped around her pretty face. She had lovely blue eyes. Behind her was this carved wooden window... beautiful old Nepalese architecture. I lined her up, but she saw me and turned away. The light was going and it was the moment I wanted. I tried

to take another shot and she still turned away. I asked our interpreter if she would ask her if I could get a photo. 'We're here from Australia,' the interpreter explained, but she still said no. I thought, 'Well, good on you for not doing it!' Then I thought that if I'd offered her more money she might have."

Les Seymour adds, "After 40 years of working with Ray, I consider his skill at capturing the moment as good as any professional I have ever worked with. But Ray has one added advantage — his people skills are second to none. He gets people on board so quickly and confidently; it makes my job shooting a breeze. Of course, these days he is always standing beside me snapping away while I'm filming, and with a wry smile on his face, he says 'Did you



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manage to do better than this?’ as he shows me his images”

It's A Good Camera

When working on TV programs in the past, Ray often travelled across America without a camera.

“When you're doing TV, it used to be a pain in the bum to carry a camera. I used to just carry a notebook and a jacket. If you have a camera, either you put it down and lose it, or it gets in the way and, inevitably, I'd have a cameraman like Dickie saying, 'Put your camera down, it's in the shot'. So it used to be a nuisance, but now it's

different! Probably 20 percent of the shots in the first 60 Minutes book were mine. I felt a bit guilty about having a camera as I was supposed to be there to report, but nevertheless I would take photos of the crew. On a flight from Denver to Los Angeles with Dickie, I took some pics over the Grand Canyon with the GF1 and the 40mm lens. A few days later I was in B&H Camera in New York... I've been going there since 1969 and it's the best camera store in the world. You can talk to salesmen on the floor and they know equipment, but then you get in line to buy. I only

wanted a couple of filters and a viewfinder for my GF1 so I walked up to the counter and waited for my number to be called. Without looking up, the bloke says, 'Next'. I put the camera down on the desk and said, 'I need two filters for this – a daylight and a ND2'. He taps the camera and says, 'It's a good camera'. I said, 'Yes, it's a good camera'. He says, 'Speak to me'. So I told him the story of flying over the Grand Canyon at 35,000 feet and how it was so clear the shots looked like they were taken from a helicopter at 5000. He said, 'Show me'. He flicked through all the images and then said, 'Told you it's a good camera'. That's all I got... a bit like a Woody Allen movie.”

The Energizer Bunny

Landscape photographer Ken Duncan met Ray Martin on *The Midday Show* and the two hit it off. They've been good friends ever since.

“Watching Ray on a recent trip to South America helped me to understand his style of photography,” Ken comments. “Ray asked me if he should get a bigger camera and whether he should he be doing all this technical stuff? I told him, 'Ray you're doing just fantastically. He's like the Energizer bunny... you can't contain him. For Ray it's all about the story and capturing the moment, not this technical crap.”

“We had 16 photographers on the South America trip and their equipment varied from very, very expensive digital medium format cameras to the Canon EOS 5D Mark II. Ray uses a Panasonic Lumix GF1 or GX1 and he gets six lenses from 14mm to 600mm into a little backpack. By the time everybody else had set up for a shot, Ray was finished and was off exploring something else. A lot of people need to shoot like Ray. I believe it comes down to your relationship with the land or people. When it came to Ray with people, he wouldn't worry about the rules he would just take photos... all very spontaneous. His personality and his photography are one.

Ray recalls one experience which happened while he was shooting in South America recently.

“While I was waiting for Ken Duncan, I had a few days spare in Buenos Aires so I went to the railway station. It was built by the Poms in the early 1900 and it's big

and cavernous, like Grand Central in New York. You need a ticket to get on the platform and I don't speak Spanish, but I managed to say to the guy, 'I'm from Australia and I only want one photo'. He said, 'OK' and let me through. There was great light at one end of the platform and then a black cat walks out, but from behind it looks like a shape not a cat. Then it turns. Click! The photo looks timeless and the cat looks like a cougar.”

Playing First Grade

In late 2012, Ray was involved with David Attenborough's tour of Australia. He MC'ed nine live shows and, like David, he still pinches himself at the way his life has turned out.

“David still can't believe that he gets paid to go to fascinating places and meet people, and I'm the same. I have a mate who asked, 'Are you going to try and get a photo of Attenborough for your book'. I said, 'Yeah, I will'. David was unbelievably friendly to work with, and he has had so many cameras pointed at him over the years. I'm fairly brazen, but even I thought it was a bridge too far to get him to sit for me. But I took a couple of snaps and got a nice portrait of his daughter sitting in an empty theatre. He's so iconic he would probably have agreed, but I sort of felt I would be intruding.”

Ray Martin thinks he plays “first grade” photographically, but he only shoots for himself, so he classifies himself as an artist.

“Only a backyard artist, though, like somebody who paints for himself. There was a time when I used to seek people's approval — now I don't. If I go to places with family or friends I'm almost bad company, as I just want to take photographs. I'm just as likely to mosey off and take photos instead of being a social creature. I'm almost like the man from American Express... I don't go anywhere without my camera.”

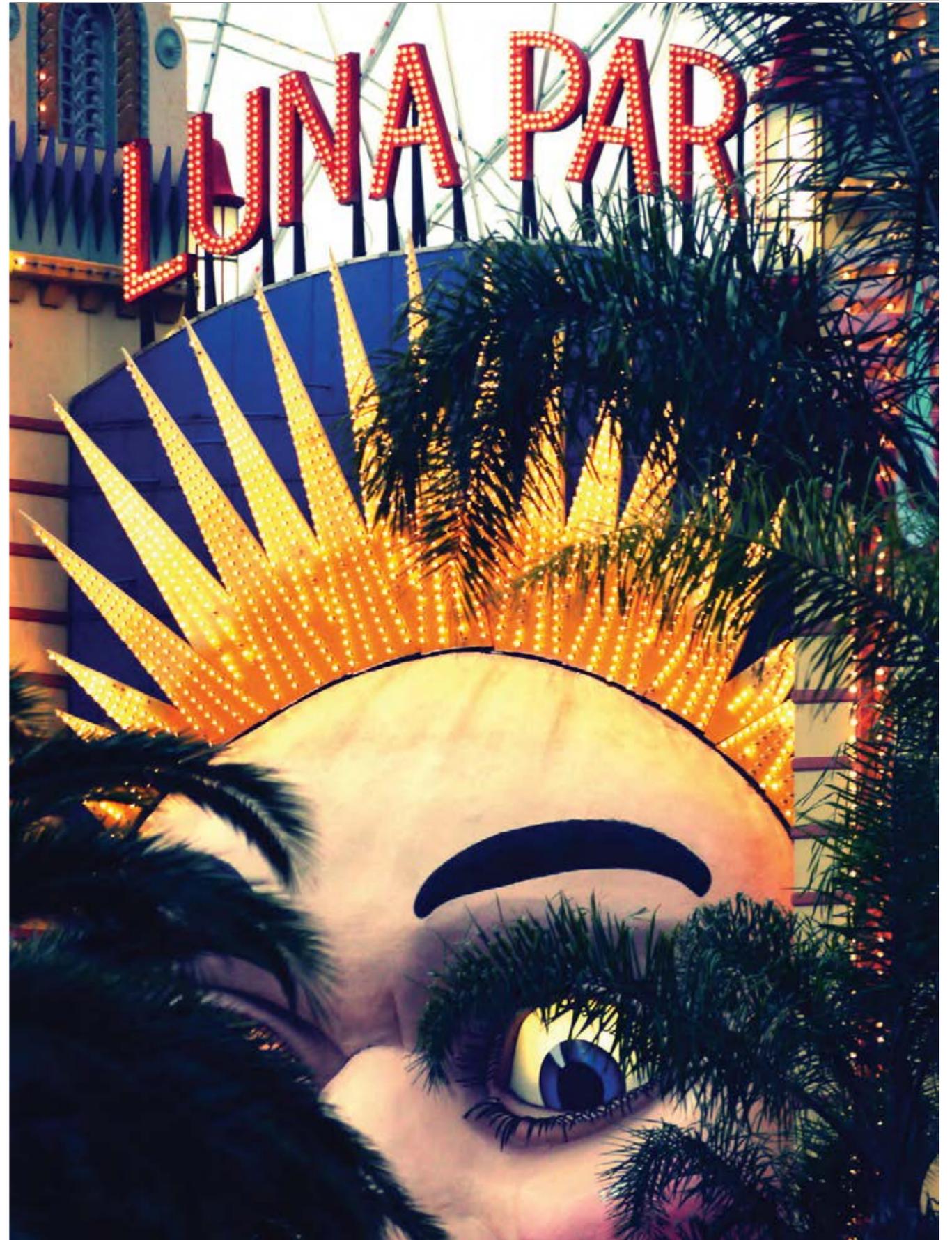


Ray Martin's World is published by Melbourne University Press and is priced at \$45.



HE'S LIKE THE ENERGIZER BUNNY... YOU CAN'T CONTAIN HIM. FOR RAY IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STORY AND CAPTURING THE MOMENT, NOT THIS TECHNICAL CRAP.

— KEN DUNCAN.



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