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Photography & Design



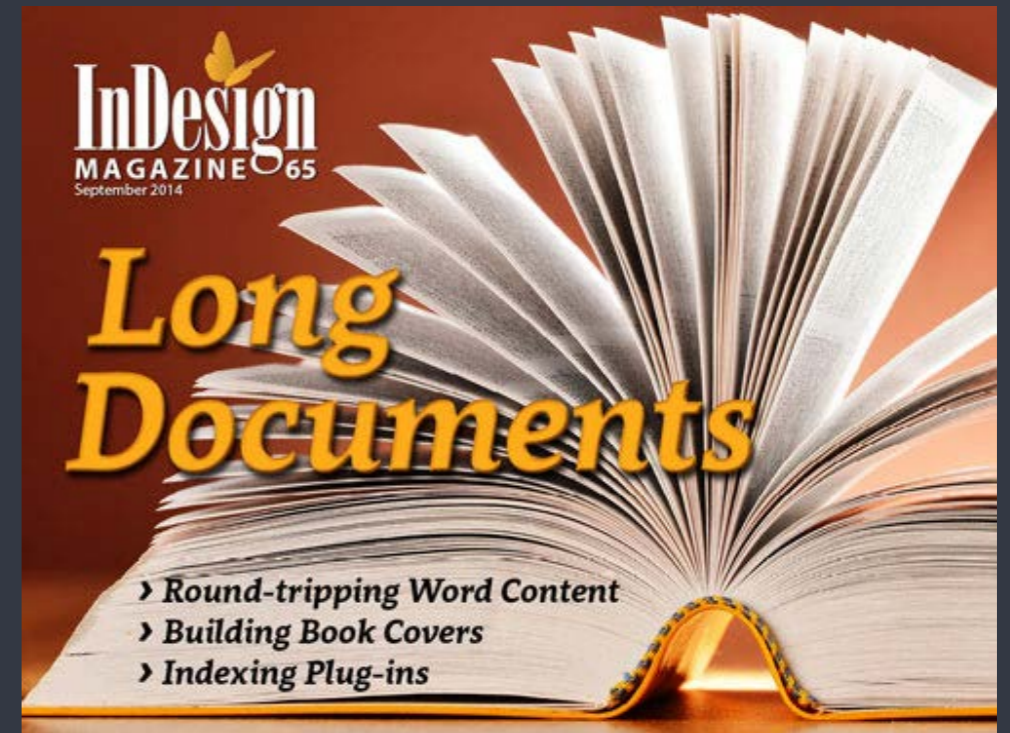
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Manual Exposure

Eye-Opening Self-Published Photography Books

By Conrad Chavez

When you hear the word “book,” what often comes to mind is a bound volume of text. But for the vast majority of us, we experience our world visually—as pictures, not words. This may be why we are so innately receptive to photography books, where images tell the story. Open a photography book and your emotional response to what you see will be immediate, long before you can put your reaction into words.

The digital press has made book publishing more accessible and affordable than ever, even for full-color books. It has certainly been a blessing that anyone can now create a photo book through their web browser using online templates, but the result is often a sameness and predictable uniformity in look and feel, from design to paper stock. Instead, many photographers are inspired to push the design of photography books in different

directions, creating distinctive volumes that you couldn’t create by pushing buttons on a website. The books that these photographers and designers create are often collectible works of art in themselves.

We wanted to find out what role Adobe InDesign has played in the design of self-published photography books. When we started looking around, nearly all of the books we encountered were produced using InDesign. Taking a closer look, we found that the design of each book expresses the photographer’s intentions in fascinating and highly personal ways.

Each photographer featured in this article not only thought about imagery, layout, and typography, but also asked the question: Is the conventional form of the book the best way to tell the story? Ultimately they found ways to enhance their narratives through thoughtful and sometimes unorthodox design choices, and by close collaboration with book designers and writers.

Weaving a World

The Marshes

By Josh Lustig & Samuel Wright

Designed by Daisy Lumley

Tartaruga Press, 2013

104 pages, 165 × 240mm



Just outside London is a collection of protected commons known as the Hackney Marshes. Some parts are nature preserves, but none are untouched wilderness, because the sprawling vegetation partially



hides the decaying brick-and-iron remains of Industrial Revolution infrastructure such as old factories, mills, and aqueducts, as well as dumps of debris from London

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buildings bombed during World War II. The marshes are now protected natural areas and a place for recreation, including trails and many sports fields. Development pressures constantly threaten these marshes; for example, significant areas were lost to projects related to the 2012 London Olympics. Photographer Josh Lustig shot a series of moody photographs documenting the Hackney Marshes, conveying misty isolation and wild vegetation overtaking abandoned structures. Working with Lustig, award-winning writer Samuel Wright developed fictional stories and characters based on the history of the area as well as the atmosphere of mystery that Lustig's photographs depict (Figure 1).

Lustig, Wright, and book designer Daisy Lumley worked together to make the design of *The Marshes* an added dimension of the stories Lustig and Wright were telling with photographs and text. Bound among the 52 pages printed on 120gsm (grams per square meter) weight paper stock are 52 pages of

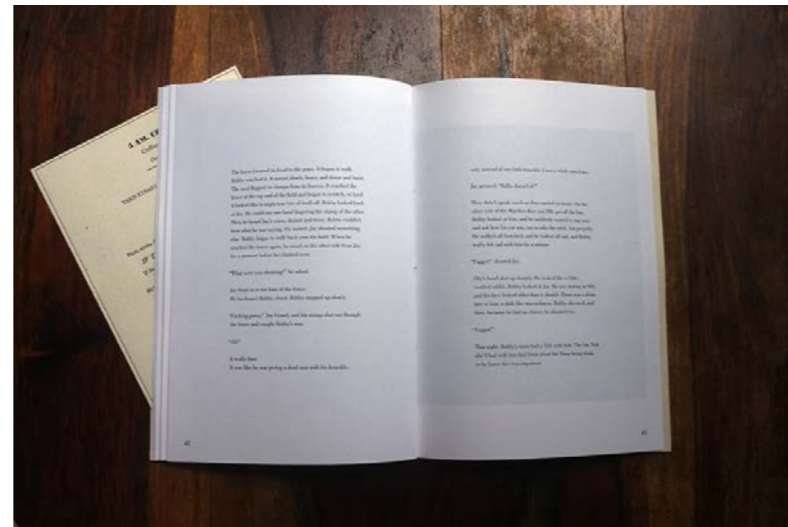


Figure 1: Samuel Wright wrote the stories for *The Marshes*.

smaller signatures printed on lightweight 60gsm stock (Figure 2). In addition to the mixed paper types, a loose-leaf sheet of Victorian-style letterpress text is bound into the book (Figure 3). This interweaving of page sizes, printing processes, and typography is an intentional decision to echo and reinforce the weaving of the documentary images with the fictional text. Lumley recalls, "Josh initially came to me with the general idea for the book: the... central visual/written narrative should be interwoven with smaller stories, to reflect the various personas/characters that spend



Figure 2: On one spread in *The Marshes*, photography and text tell a story that uses a different paper stock and smaller page size.



Figure 3: In addition to photo spreads, *The Marshes* features a loose sheet of letterpress-printed type.

time on the Hackney Marshes. Josh and Samuel had already established this concept as part of their collaboration."

Composing the text, photographs, and signature sizes involved a period of iteration that explored “ways of telling the stories, and ‘weaving’ the stories together, before deciding on the chosen format. There were lots of sketches and discussions to establish the best option,” Lumley said, including “mapping out the entire narrative” with Lustig. The members of the team were not always in the same city, so they used Skype to collaborate online. Many ideas and sketches for sequencing of text and images were refined and simplified over time during these online meetings. They met in person to lock down the final sequence of pages.

Lumley has used InDesign since her training in book design. She set up the different components of the book as multiple InDesign files. During the production of *The Marshes*, Lumley particularly appreciated specific InDesign features such as “printing thumbnails, and also as a booklet, to create small working copies along the way.” Lumley is comfortable

working with InDesign, so production went relatively smoothly.

The Marshes was the first title published by Tartaruga Press, as a limited edition of 300 numbered copies, and it has garnered numerous positive reviews. Tartaruga Press is a small press run by its founders, Josh Lustig and Max Bondi. Daisy Lumley is a visual designer who works across digital, service, and brand design, working between London and Berlin.



Figure 4: The cover of Julia Borissova’s *DOM (Document Object Model)* represents a Soviet Khrushchyovka apartment building.

Open Houses

DOM (Document Object Model)

By Julia Borissova

Self-published, 2014

48 pages, 15 × 20cm



In her book *DOM (Document Object Model)*, Julia Borissova embarks on an exploration of the concept of “home.” According to Borissova, *DOM* means “a house, home, a building or a household in the Russian language.” But the title of her book also incorporates the English meaning of *DOM* as an acronym for Document Object Model, a structure for data in formats such as HTML or XML. That interpretation of the word *DOM* is expressed in the book, which is part document, part object, and features a model of a home in its photographs.

The cover photography ([Figure 4](#)) depicts a Khrushchyovka modernist apartment block—the kind that was

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replicated all over the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev era in the middle of the twentieth century to address a shortage of housing. Khrushchyovka designers pioneered production techniques such as prefabrication so that the apartments could be built quickly in large numbers and at low cost, which is one reason the architecture is plain and uninspiring. And yet for the many who grew up in those buildings, Khrushchyovka represent a real memory of home.

As soon the book opens, you notice that the cover and the pages you turn aren't typical single-sheet pages, but gatefold spreads. On the outside of these spreads you see full-bleed images of a three-dimensional paper model that Borissova constructed from the apartment-block image on the cover. She created photographs of the model appearing in different environments such as snow, desert, and water, suggesting how the idea of home

can be transplanted to different places and change over time (Figure 5).

Opening each gatefold unveils a layout of manipulated images depicting memories, interior scenes, and artifacts of home (Figure 6). The expanded gatefolds also reveal narrow vertical inset pages of text that describe personal reflections of home that Borissova collected from different people (Figure 7). In addition to all of that, the book also contains a separate 20-page booklet.



Figure 5: On the outside of the gatefold spreads of *DOM* are full-bleed photographs of Borissova's paper apartment model, placed in various outdoor environments.



Figure 6: Within the gatefold spreads of *DOM*, photo collages depict domestic interiors that represent memories of home.



Figure 7: Inside the expanded gatefolds and alongside Borissova's photographs are short passages of text in which various people reflect on their own sense of home.

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Borissova created these components in three InDesign documents. When she encountered a design or production obstacle in InDesign, “It was only because I simply didn’t know all the details about the program, but after reading some tutorials I could solve all the problems.”

The graphic and text elements of the book suggest a concept of home that is open to shifts and reinterpretation. Some of the interior “memory” images are dreamlike collages that mix family photographs with house interiors that Borissova built out of paper to invoke a theatrical quality, as if they were stage sets. The smaller inset pages form their own kind of collage, in the way they combine different views and memories of home. Several of those views express the notion that “home” can be independent of place, deriving more from family history and tradition than a physical structure.

Trees appear on the cover and in the landscape collages throughout the book and in some of the interior scenes of homes.

These trees evoke a sense of growth and change, the metaphor of a family tree, and the fact that the structure of a Document Object Model is in the form of a tree.

Borissova conceived of *DOM* as a photography project that was later expressed as a book. She first designed the photographs and created the objects that would appear in the exterior and interior views of home. “I imagined this book as some kind of exhibition, as an object which can be transformed quickly and show the images in different ways.”

When it was time to print and bind the book, Borissova said the unconventional design did hit a few snags. She had to find a digital book printer that could handle the large gatefold sizes. The mix of wide gatefolds and narrow vertical insets

also posed a problem. As Borissova explains, “because the pages have different sizes no one wanted to sew my book in the printing house,” so she decided to bind the books herself, by hand.

Julia Borissova is an award-winning photographer in St. Petersburg, Russia who has frequently exhibited her photography throughout Europe in both group and solo shows, and has self-published several books of her work. Borissova self-published *DOM* as a limited edition of 100 signed and numbered copies. *DOM* won first place in The Baltic Photo Biennale in the Fine Art category and has been represented in several solo and group shows and international exhibitions. Borissova sees *DOM* as a work that can continue to be developed.



Visions Unbound

Calabria Upon Return

By Alessandra Kila

Designed by Laura Braun

Paper Tiger Books, 2015

38 pages, 12.5 × 17cm



To many, the first home they think of is the location where they grew up. In the case of Alessandra Kila, home is Calabria at the southern tip of Italy, the “toe” of the Italian boot, and this provides the basis for her book *Calabria Upon Return* (Figure 8). The rich history of Calabria extends at least 3500 years, before the Greek and Roman empires. Today the region exists outside the more prosperous or tourist-oriented centers of Italy, and in the late 20th century Calabria became a center of organized crime. Calabria’s struggling economy compels many of its people to leave for other parts of Italy or Europe.



Figure 8: *Calabria Upon Return*, by Alessandra Kila, presents photographs of her birthplace: Calabria in the south of Italy.

Kila herself emigrated to London, England. During visits back to Calabria over a period of several years, Kila photographed the land and the people of her birthplace. Kila’s portraits of the people of Calabria range from intimate head shots to small figures composed within the parched landscape of southern Italy (Figures 9 and 10). The earth-toned hue of the book’s cover resonates with the dusty rocks and concrete found in many of the photographs. In some images, that warm color is complemented

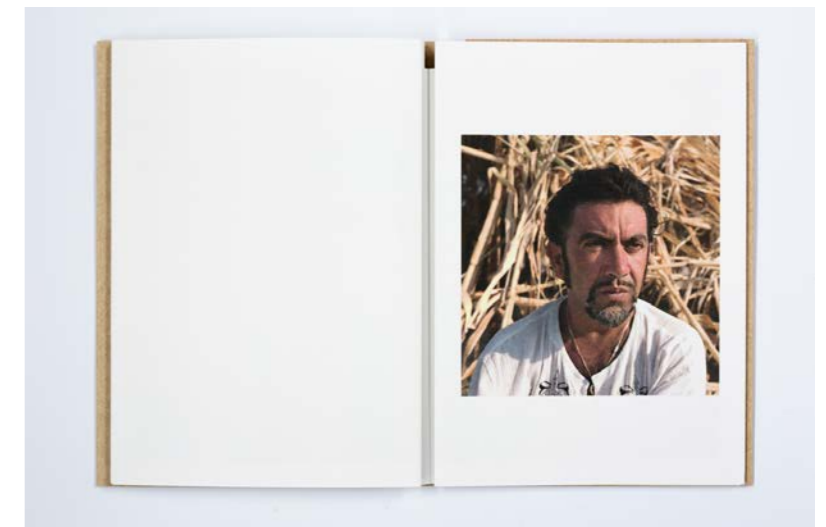


Figure 9: Kila’s book contains several portraits of people in Calabria.



Figure 10: A human figure is almost lost in the landscape of Calabria.

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by the cool blue of the bright Calabrian sky or the waters of the Mediterranean.

Kila worked closely with book designer Laura Braun, who turned to InDesign to produce *Calabria Upon Return*. Inside the book, a poem is printed on a long concertina (accordion fold) insert, a couple of lines per page. Opening the concertina insert reveals folded spreads of images. What is remarkable is that none of the pages of the book are bound. The image spreads are loosely nested within the concertina pages of text, and neither component is attached to the cover (Figure 11). The lack of binding is quite intentional. Braun said that the text and images were created so that “there isn’t one particular image that necessarily goes with one particular bit of text,” so that the pairing of text to image “can be changed by the viewer.” While each reader inevitably reacts to any book in their own way, Kila and Braun take the extra step of letting the reader physically reinterpret Kila’s observations by rearranging the loose

pages of images within the concertina folds, to combine the images with different text. Or to pull out a photograph completely, and view it apart from the rest of the book.

The cover of *Calabria Upon Return*



Figure 11: The loose spreads of *Calabria Upon Return* are evident when seen from the bottom edge of the book.

is letterpress printed. Braun originally intended to print it using wooden type, but she couldn’t find a complete alphabet of the type she wanted to use. Instead, Braun printed it using a magnesium plate. “The magnesium plate is made from a PDF sent to a specialist company that produces all sorts of printing templates on magnesium

and various polymers.” She specifies the material and thickness, and the company sends her the resulting plate.

The cover and the book’s unbound pages are kept together by an elastic band, woven through eyelets that hold the band and serve as a graphic element on the cover (Figure 12).

Laura Braun is a commercial and



Figure 12: On the back cover of *Calabria Upon Return*, eyelets for the elastic band create an implied line with the logo for Paper Tiger Books.

documentary photographer based in London. *Calabria Upon Return* was published by Paper Tiger Books, which Braun founded

in order to publish photography books by herself, her colleagues, and her friends. The book was offset printed as a limited edition of 300 numbered copies. Braun has also self-published other books such as *Métier*, which documents small businesses in London and the people who run them.

Out of This World

Guilherme Gerais' *Intergalático* is an enigma

Intergalático

By Guilherme Gerais

Illustrations by Arthur Duarte

Text by Rodrigo Grotta

Avalanche, 2014

182 pages, 20 × 30cm



from the moment you first see it. The cover doesn't even show the title; all you see is what looks like a map of outer space with a moon in the middle (Figure 13). When you open the book, you're immersed in a sequence of black-and-white images

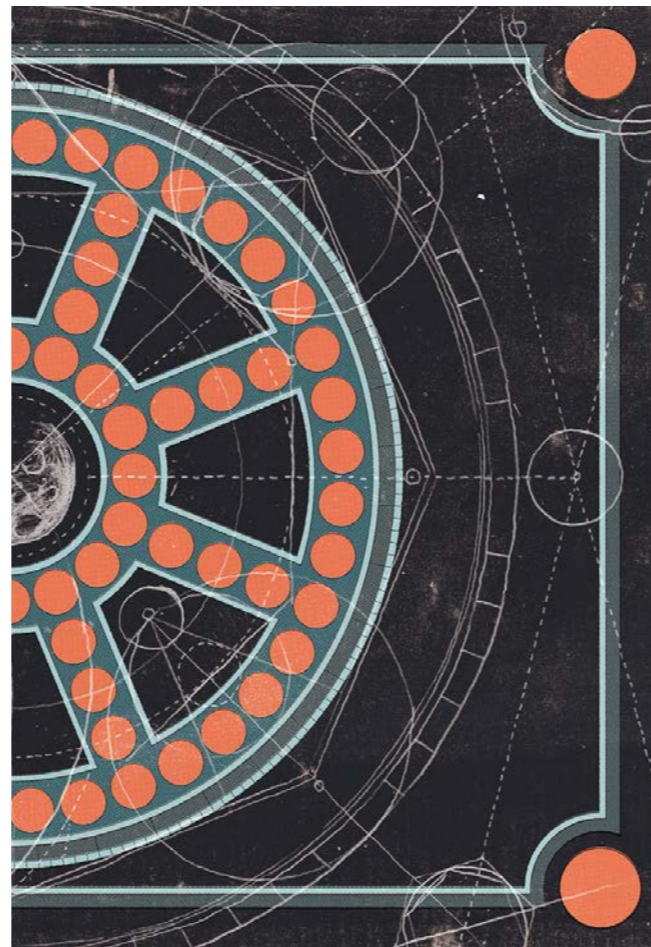


Figure 13: The cover of Guilherme Gerais' *Intergalático* suggests a cross between a star chart and a game board.

without text, as if you've awakened to find yourself moving through an unknown landscape that could be on another planet (Figure 14). It doesn't seem like you're driving this journey, more like you're a passenger on a wild ride through time and

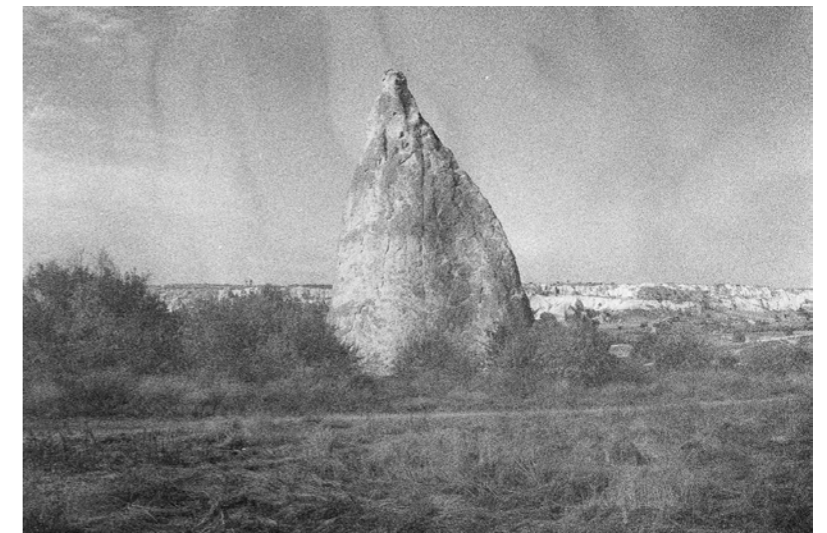


Figure 14: Mysterious landscapes and trails are part of the journey through *Intergalático*.

space. The title page of the book finally appears several pages into this opening sequence.

What Gerais calls a “visual literary essay” continues with recurring themes such as footsteps, pathways and trails, decaying landmarks, signs, and bursts of light. Gerais photographed the images in several countries in Europe as well as in his home country of Brazil. While the cover is color, the pages inside the book are printed in black and white.

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The photographic sequences are punctuated by graphics created by Arthur Duarte. Complementing the photographs, Duarte's cryptic drawings include diagrams, maps, and symbols (Figure 15). A repeating theme of circular charts and drawings suggests larger cosmic machinery at work. Encountering one of Duarte's illustrations after a series of photographs feels a little like reaching a game's next level. The graphic on the book cover (designed by Duarte) also appears inside the book with pieces set on it like a board game, in a photograph that reinforces the way that many of the book's images suggest a game or puzzle.

Gerais describes his productive collaboration with Duarte: "I showed some references, including music, film, photographs, some graphic novels,

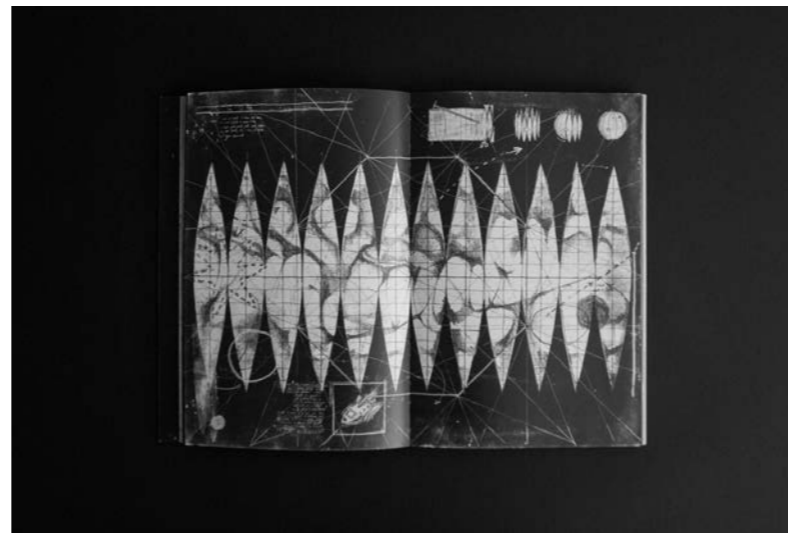


Figure 15: Duarte's enigmatic illustrations and diagrams add context and depth to Gerais' photo story.

everything I thought that could help him understand the whole concept of the book. After this, I gave him a kind of a list of what I needed for the book...He [quickly got] the 'spirit' of the book." Gerais called Duarte's contributions "marvelous...He [started his designs] on paper, with pencil, painting, and later he mixed it in computer software such as Illustrator and Photoshop."

Gerais said that *Intergalático* was developed over a period of "around 4 years. So, throughout this time I had an InDesign file open in my computer"

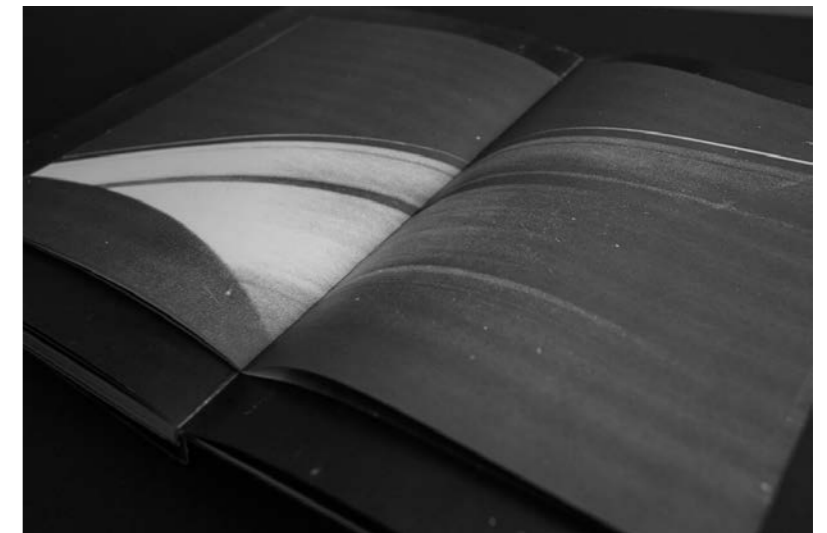


Figure 16: *Intergalático* ends its photographic journey with an inset of smaller pages.

where he would continuously test ideas and refine the sequence of the book. To prepare the photographs, Gerais says "I used Adobe Lightroom to organize all these files, to import them, and to edit the contrast, levels, curves, and so on." But the book also included non-photographic file formats which Lightroom does not import, so to manage the entire project Gerais "used Adobe Bridge to organize and manage all these folders, to visualize them in a faster way."





The final book was produced in several InDesign files, for the book and its cover and for additional elements. There is a signature of smaller inset pages, and also a loose post-card (Figure 16). On the challenges of production, Gerais describes working to make the images appear consistent with each other and finding out the best settings and profiles for soft-proofing. “In the book there are analog photographs and digital photographs, with different resolutions, ranging from an iPhone 4s to the Nikon D80... I had a lot of problems balancing these different textures and the right contrast between them. [Visualizing] the ‘final look’ as it would be in the book was quite hard.”

Guilherme Gerais is a director of photography for films, based in Londrina, Brazil. He intends to continue developing the ideas behind *Intergalático*. “I see myself in the beginning of a personal journey, where there are many things to discover, to experiment, and to see. Personally, I see the photo-book as the perfect medium to work with all

these feelings... I like the idea of being an explorer of the human mind, of our nature, our instincts, our limitations.”

Gerais self-published *Intergalático* through his own Avalanche imprint, as a first edition of 500 copies. The book and some of the photographs in it have been featured in many international exhibitions, and the book has been honored on several lists of the best photo books of 2014.

Staying in Touch with Print

These book designers still see tremendous potential in the experience of print. They investigate that potential through design decisions such as using multiple page sizes and paper stocks in the same book, along with loose inserts, innovative binding, or no binding at all. By extending our interaction with the book beyond the purely visual, they create a tactile dimension that isn’t possible to reproduce on ebooks, which are often viewed on a small screen of a single unchanging size and surface.

As Julia Borissova declares, “DOM is a printed book only. For me it’s important most of all to create a book as an object, because I want my work to have a volume and I can [express] my feelings through tactile sensations.”

Through their unconventional designs for print, these self-published photography books enhance the dialogue between the photographer and the reader, encouraging exploration and reinterpretation. In a publishing world that is increasingly digital, these book designers create open and interactive narratives expressed in a familiar analog medium.

■ Conrad Chavez has provided education and training for digital media and publishing for over 20 years. His work includes the last three editions of the book *Real World Adobe Photoshop for Photographers* and the video *Color Management for Photographers and Designers*. He also contributes articles to publications including *InDesign Magazine*, *CreativePro.com*, and *Peachpit.com*, and is a photographer. To learn more about Conrad, please visit conradchavez.com.