

Suburban Life

Loraine McClish editor / 477-5450



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RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Monte Nagler's living room displays only a small portion of his vast collection of photos.

Artist-in-residence

Photographer takes the sister cities' highest arts honors

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

MONTE NAGLER has been named Artist-in-Residence for 1987.

The photographer was chosen for the honor by the Farmington Area Arts Commission. The honor is given to recognize the work and the talents of an artist who is a resident here. The recipient is selected from nominees who have distinguished themselves in any of the art disciplines.

Nagler gives credit to Ansel Adams, the photographer known for his picture studies of Death Valley and Yosemite, for making photography an accepted art form.

"He brought the art of photography up to the level it is today," Nagler said. "He made us aware of the value of photography as an art. His spectacular scenes were truly photographic art."

The only formal training Nagler

ever had in photography came from Adams.

Nagler graduated from the University of Michigan as an engineer, worked for Ford Motor for a while and then opened a couple of Midas Muffler shops, one in downtown Farmington.

All the while, "the only camera we ever had in the house was an Instamatic we used to take pictures of the children's birthday parties," he said.

It wasn't until a trip to Hawaii, with that same Instamatic, that Nagler became intrigued with scenes and shapes that could be captured on film.

He described the experience as "exciting."

WITHIN A FEW days after that vacation, Nagler owned a simple how-to book on the use of a camera. Within a few weeks he was a subscriber to a photographic magazine and a member of a camera club.

Within three years he had won himself a couple of ribbons for his work and was president of the Greater Detroit Camera Club Council.

In 1979, Nagler took the Grand Prize in competition sponsored by the Detroit News for a photo called "Feelings."

In 1980 he was out of the muffler business.

"MAKING A career change in your 40s is scary. That's risky, but I've done a lot of risky things, and now I'm doing what I like best to be doing and I'm up every morning to be down here at 6:30 a.m. doing it," Nagler said, speaking from the combination darkroom-studio-office that consumes 90 percent of the basement in his Farmington Hills home.

Another risky venture was Nagler's trip to Baffin Island on the northeast coast of Canada, just this side of the North Pole. "The goal was to bring back pho-

tographs of one of the last unexplored frontiers. I wanted pictures of a remote area that not many had even heard of, much less visited, and I accomplished just that," he said.

But to do that, Nagler was in grave physical danger on several instances during the trip. There were two close escapes from boulder slides. There were crossings over the main river, on a narrow rope bridge with a 70-pound backpack under high gales each time, there and back.

"But I'd do it again. I'd do it all over again. I have no regrets," he said.

WALKING THROUGH Nagler's house is much like taking a lesson in the history of photography.

The walls of every room are lined with photographs, his own work intermixed with the works of such well-known names as Karsh, Steiglitz, Edgerton, Weston, Adams. Many are signed by the artist. And he has made it a point to meet many

of the later-day artists.

As in most collections, some of the prints are very costly. Some were found in flea markets. One of the favorites was purchased for 50 cents.

The collection — and the history — stems back to one photo taken in 1840, still in its original velvet frame, through the works of inventors and innovators of the technology. It extends to a library of books on photographers and their work, the vast majority autographed.

A visitor cannot but notice that the collection is all in black and white.

"Black and white says more than color," Nagler said. "Color takes care of itself. The photographer takes the control over the tones

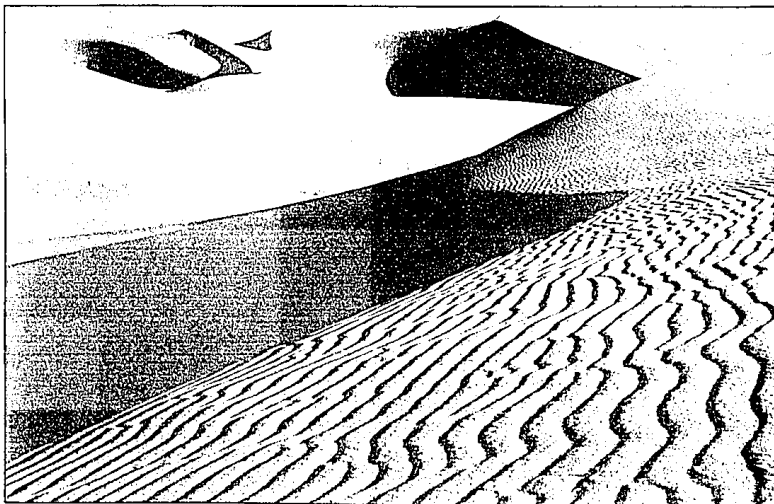
when he's shooting in black and white.

"Every time I take a picture, I pre-visualize what I'm seeing in color or to see what it will look like in black and white. I psych myself into seeing it finished. I already know how I am going to process it to have what I want when it is finished."

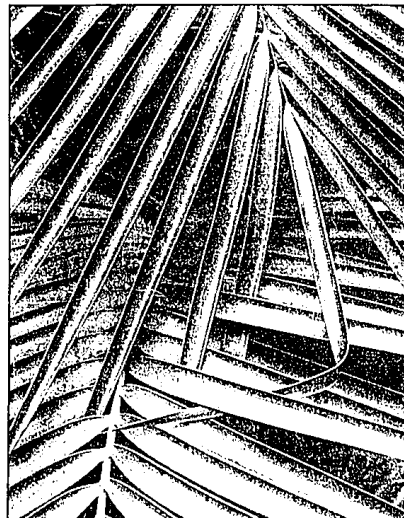
"This is where the artistry comes in. Cameras don't make pictures. People do."

NAGLER'S WORK will be on display during a reception for the Artist-in-Residence hosted by the Farmington Area Arts Commission from

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Nagler walked a mile in the Death Valley sands, at 6 a.m. when it was 100 degrees, to capture the shadows and forms of the California desert.



To the eye, the Mexican cycad plant appears to be a single, solid green. Using black and white film, the photographer was able to depict the plant's wide tonal range. The photo was taken in University of Michigan's Matthaei Botanical Gardens, a favorite spot for Nagler to lead his students in workshops and seminars. The photo will be used on the cover of Meteor Photo's 1987-88 catalog.