




PHOTOGRAPHER WENDI SCHNEIDER

A Timeless Point of View

By Claire Whitcomb

An opera glove, a silken tassel, a pale flower—such snippets of elegance are irresistible to photographer Wendi Schneider, for they both gladden her home and inspire her fine photographs. Come visit a frequent Victoria contributor for whom collecting and art go hand in glove.





Her cats' names, Kodak and Rossetti (named for Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti), offer a clue that Wendi is as fond of the camera as the paintbrush. Walk into her apartment and you'll see how she marries painting to photography: by handcoloring black-and-white prints so her subjects seem both real and borrowed from a dream—the magnolia blossoms, for instance, in her still life "Overture III," opposite. Below, Wendi has collected so many tassels and trims she organizes them by color in pottery bowls. The elements are at hand—but it's the play of color and shape that lifts them into art.





In an old oak filing cabinet Wendi has a drawerful of flower photos alphabetically arranged, from angel's-trumpet to wonder flower. No matter the species, flowers are a subject she finds herself photographing over and over. "To me, flowers are the embodiment of perfect design. The lines are so sensual and elegant," she says.

But simply photographing a magnolia blossom is not enough for Wendi. She wants to imbue each petal with more emotion than the camera can capture. So she sets her easel by the window and spends hours painstakingly handpainting a calla lily above, or giving the petals of a rose, right, new luminosity. "Traditional handtinting involves applying color and then wiping it off, leaving only a tint. I like to build up layers and layers of color." The latter technique offers little margin for error. "If the brush is too wet, it can pull up all the paint and destroy the image," she explains. But the risk of having to start anew pales in comparison to the opportunity to make an image more personal, to reinvent the colors and make the composition truly one's own.

Wendi's mother and grandmother were Sunday painters—"to me



"My mother took me antiquing as soon as I could walk," says Wendi of a habit she was bappy to inherit. From the moment she first started earning a salary, she began collecting in earnest, scouting out Arts and Crafts and Mission furniture, which was then selling for a song. As a result, her stereo sits in a lace-paneled cabinet and period pillows plump rocking chairs. Her photos, which line the walls, seem straight from the era.

the smell of paint is like fresh-baked bread; it means home," she is fond of saying. As might be expected with such a bloodline, Wendi went to art school in New Orleans, but she never thought she could make a living with her brushes. After graduation, she worked in the hotel business, then as an illustrator in New Orleans for the "Times-Picayune." She ventured into graphic design for the newspaper and took some occasional photo assignments, always considering her fine-art work a purely personal passion during those seven years. Then, in 1989, she mustered her courage and brought her portfolio to New York City.

Wendi's unusual style and keen eye for beauty brought immediate results. She bartered a print of "Overture III" for her rent and settled in to accept assignments for book covers ranging from mass-market novels to Lionel Tiger's "The Pursuit of Pleasure." Her calling card was published in *Victoria* and magazine assignments followed, along with a line of greeting cards for C.R. Gibson.

Now Wendi is combing through her flower files for the most delightful reason of all. "I'm trying to choose blossoms for my wedding bouquet. But I have too many favorites," laughs this bride-to-be. Ready once again for a new life, she's packing her flower files, her cats, and the rest of her treasures and moving to Denver. She's already arranged a sunny studio and has scouted the antiques shops and flower markets that will ensure a steady flow of inspired works.