



MOONSCAPE – A wide panorama of the blue Bentonite Hills of central Utah.

Fine art photographer Kane Scheidegger creates luminous, large-format panoramic images that capture Earth’s mysterious beauty and the massive scale of backcountry skiing in the San Juans.

Seemingly unfazed by cold, heights, solitude and all kinds of precipitation, he goes to what some would consider fanatical extremes to get the perfect shot.

Take, for example, a photograph he calls “Pandora’s Treasure” that currently graces his Ridgway gallery. He shot it from Telluride’s cliff-clinging Via Ferrata route, aiming his lens toward Telluride on the far horizon.

“I visited the spot 30 times before I got that photograph, the light in the sky and the color,” he said. “We had just started to lean into the fall color season. I knew the composition would be nice, but I had to wait for conditions to line up and work in my favor.”

Kane’s World

BY SAMANTHA TISDEL WRIGHT

His persistence paid off. The photograph, printed on a wall-sized canvas that is 9.5 ft. x 5 ft., is at once majestic, moody and mesmerizing.

In the foreground, the cliffs of lower Ajax Mountain glow with secrets above the toy-sized tram towers and weathered waste rock piles of the Pandora Mine, and a segment of Black Bear Pass elbows its way through still-green aspen glades toward the straight white ribbon of Bridal

Veil Falls. The eye is eventually pulled down-valley toward a distant Telluride, all its human drama reduced to a mere fleck, squashed beneath a brooding cauldron of gold-and-ghost-grey sky.

EXPOSURE

Born and raised in Ridgway, Scheidegger has developed an outsized reputation over the past decade not only for his fine art landscapes but also for his breathtaking ski photography. It’s not your typical ski porn, but rather skiers engulfed within the sprawling majesty of the San Juan Mountains.

Scheidegger himself, a Ridgway native, started skiing well before he ever picked up a camera or could even say “schuss”. His uncle Kurt Kircher wrote the book — literally — about cross country skiing in the San Juans. And his father Otto Scheidegger was captain of the Ouray Mountain Rescue Team in the late 80s and early 90s.

Back then, OMRT was a different animal than it is today. “We would go on avalanche trainings up in Ironton Park and they would bury my brother and me and come and find us,” Scheidegger recalled.

When they weren’t helping OMRT with training missions, weekends in the winter were all about going skiing. Scheidegger and his friend Jordan Batchelder would hitch rides to Telluride with their older brothers or go backcountry skiing on Red Mountain Pass whenever they got the chance.

They attended the Silverton Avalanche School together at the tender age of 13. “We were building booters off the side of the road, and Dad said, ‘You need to get trained,’” he laughed.

TIME LAPSE

When Scheidegger graduated from Ridgway High School in 2000, he couldn’t

wait to escape rural small-town Colorado; he headed to Florida, to study graphic arts at the Art Institute of Ft. Lauderdale.

Once he got there, he found that he could not live without the mountains.

“I would come back for summer and Christmas and I would just be in the mountains the whole time,” he said. “I missed it so much. I knew I’d move back.”

And he did, starting a graphic arts business in Ridgway with his brother Travis right after he graduated from college. They went their separate ways after a couple years, but Scheidegger kept his side of the business going. And whenever he wasn’t working, he’d spend time alone in the San Juans, often bringing a camera along for company.

“I was up there before the sun rose and would come down after the sun set,” he said. “The mountains really speak to you if you let them. You can bring your mind a certain degree of clarity being up there by yourself. Time slows down, and you

tend to not think about the tribulations of everyday life.”

Scheidegger became fascinated with how to evoke that grandiose, majestic feeling of the mountains around him within the two-dimensional surface of a photograph. Over time, he began to figure it out, and developed an affinity for shooting panoramic images.

To do these photos justice, he found that he needed to produce them a little larger than the typical format. So he started investing in different printers, and began producing his images in larger and larger sizes that could sometimes sprawl across a whole wall.

Scheidegger’s work was a hit. He had stumbled upon a niche market for filling spaces in people’s homes with fantastic images from nature. “They have large walls, and my work gives them the ability to bring the outside in, in a sense — bring nature into the house,” he said.



PANDORA'S TREASURE – A tangerine sunset looms over Telluride after a wet summer rain.



TASTE OF HEAVEN – Fall casts its luminous spell over Telluride.

By 2008, Scheidegger's photography was paying the bills, and he began to consider himself to be a real photographer. "It was a wonderful realization," he said. "I had to pinch myself and go, 'I can head out and hike and ski all day and make a living at it? Really? This is too good.' It was a wonderful step to take, to really do something you love and are extremely passionate about."

DEPTH OF FIELD

Perhaps because he is self-taught, Scheidegger is decidedly not into shooting what you might imagine a "typical" scene to be. "When you drive up to Last Dollar Road on Dallas Divide in the fall and there is a line of photographers shooting the Sneffels Range, I am not in that line," he laughed. Instead, you'll find Scheidegger deep in the field — be that in the San Juans, the desert Southwest or another remote corner of the planet — chasing light and moods of weather, hiking and bushwhacking to obtain new images and perspectives. "One thing that's really nice about landscape photography is taking my time, composing my shot, figuring out the light and shutter speed and aperture, how my focus is going to work," Scheidegger reflected. "I really like that slow methodical part of taking a photo-



THE GUARDIAN – Devin Overton (look closely) goes full throttle down one of Ridgway's most iconic peaks.

graph. It makes me slow down as a person in general." Scheidegger is equally painstaking and methodical when it comes to editing, often spending painstaking hours stitching together and layering images to achieve the final effect. "It all comes down to bringing the viewer something special and unique," Scheidegger said. "When I produce an image I want people to stop and be, 'Wow, what is happening in this image?' I want them to look more in depth and figure out what is going on with it."

WHITE BALANCE

As much as he enjoys the other seasons, Scheidegger still lives for winter — with its epic ski days and photographic escapades among the meringue-whipped peaks that he loves. During the winter, he photographs everything from extreme ski descents to tumbling avalanches to tranquil moments of clearing storms and quiet ski approaches through sastrugi-carved bowls. He's found a kindred spirit in Scott Kennett, a celebrated freeskier and ski coach who also lives in Ridgway. Together, they spend their winters plumbing the San Juan Mountains' big ski lines, with Kennett playing a starring role in most of Scheidegger's ski photography.



ASPEN WONDERLAND – A painterly panorama of aspens dusted with fresh snow.

“He is a really creative guy — he has a nice eye for composition, and he’s always scouting locations, always looking for a shot,” Scheidegger said. One day in late March of 2015, Scheidegger headed out with Kennett and

fellow freeskiers Nick Kenworthy and Devon Overton to capture on camera their ski descent of the infamous Heavens 11’s, a narrow, rocky couloir plunging thousands of feet straight down the face of Wasatch Peak into Bear Creek Canyon.

The line, which can be seen from the top of Telluride Ski Resort’s Lift 9, is the epitome of big mountain skiing in the San Juans. To time the photo perfectly, Scheidegger gave the skiers radios. Then he headed up

to the top of Lift 9 to set up the shot, as the skiers summited Wasatch Peak across the canyon. When Scheidegger gave the word, the skiers plunged into the abyss one by one; Scheidegger took a series of 10 vertical panoramas, with seven shots each, chronicling their descent. The shoot itself lasted maybe 30 minutes. But back in the studio, it took Scheidegger two full months to stitch together the 70 images into a 35-gigabyte computer file. The resulting black and white composite photograph is stunning in its scope and clarity, at once an intimate portrait of the raw, cliffy jowls of Wasatch Peak and a time warp of sorts showing the tiny human speck that is Kennett at once coiled at the top of the Heavens 11’s couloir and slicing through its guts, as a slough of snow he triggered halfway down spills out the bottom of the chute, 200 feet into the valley below. Kenworthy and Overton, meanwhile, can be

seen simultaneously carving different routes down the face. Scheidegger produced a limited edition print of “Heavens 11’s” in both a 60"-by-60" format as well as a giant 100"-by-100" version that seems to swallow the viewer whole. It was well worth the effort: “Heavens 11’s” wowed gallery-goers, and won the prestigious “Photo of the Year” award in 2015 from Colorado Ski Country’s First Frost Image Experience photo contest. Scheidegger recently produced a sister image to “Heavens 11’s”, titled “Wasatch Dream,” which he’ll display this winter.

FINAL FOCUS

No matter what the subject matter may be, there are a number of key ingredients in Scheidegger’s recipe for a fantastic photograph. “It starts with composition,” he said. “Then you have to consider the atmo-

spheric conditions — typically not your blue-sky clear day. I like shooting after it rains because you get more saturated colors. The rock will be wet, so there is beautiful contrast. When there is fresh snow, you have to go when it is still snowing, or right when it stops. I love those moments when it just looks so pristine.” The time of day and quality of light are equally essential considerations. Scheidegger shoots sunrises and sunsets. “A lot of it is really about the light and how the world changes at that time of day, and has a different type of look,” he said. “I am always searching for the perfect moment to take the photograph, that blissful moment of colors freezing in time.” Kane Scheidegger’s photography is on display at the Gold Mountain Gallery in Telluride, at 135 W. Colorado Avenue, and the Kane Gallery at 133 N. Lena Street in Ridgway. Visit his online portfolio at www.kane.gallery.

BAG OF TRICKS

Scheidegger uses a medium-technical camera (Phase One’s A-Series 100 megapixel camera) for his landscape photography, with a manual aperture and shutter speed. “The image clarity is superb,” he said. “And I really like the idea of thinking about what you are photographing. There is something to be said for sitting down and really figuring it out. When you cock the shutter every time you want to take the picture, it’s a much more deliberate process. You really think about what you want to do, and how it’s going to turn out.” Ski photography is a different animal. “You are trying to freeze the action, so I use a medium-format SLR and full-frame SLR for that,” Scheidegger said. “When I’m shooting a landscape with skiers in it, I’ll approach it differently than capturing straight ski photography.” Naturally, both the lenses and camera bodies that Scheidegger uses for his ski-photography are weather resistant. And he doesn’t hesitate to put them through their paces. “They’re all tools, and they’re made to be used,” he said. “If it makes the difference in getting a really fantastic shot, I’m willing to risk my equipment to get it.”



Caption...