



5B4 | Photography and Books

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John Davies and The British Landscape



John Davies often rewards us with views known only to day hikers after a strenuous workout. We rest for a moment and look out over the land and see how it is parceled up. The cooling towers of the reactor seem to be the focal point, then we pay attention to the soccer game and notice how the field seems perfectly cut into this less than consistent landscape. And what is this in the bottom corner?..a fenced in area with four cars parked (one flipped upside down) and why is that man pointing and where did that white horse come from?

Chris Boot Ltd. has published *The British Landscape* by John Davies. It is a gorgeous book that presenting us with 60 of his images that chronical his progression as an artist from the earliest to most recent images. It is an edit that reveals an amazing consistency in his work over the 26 years this book covers. Each image is accompanied by a short, facing page description of the history of each landscape. The books large trim size is perfect and necessary for these pictures to be seen. The design by Stuart Smith is elegant. Paper choice feels great. The printing by EBS in Italy capture the tonal nuances of his prints. Should I just say it is close to a perfect presentation?

Davies, who is one of Britain's most respected landscape photographers, has been photographing industrial progress and the effect it has on our sightline since 1974. These photographs are not critiques of progress. He seems to look at the landscape and accept that industry happens, it is necessary, for better or worse, and this is

how the land is changed by that fact.

Since the changes often of epic proportions he stands back and gives us images that are epic as well. For those who have the patience, they reveal themselves because the description is so generous. By using large format cameras (5X7?), each bit of the frame has its chance to be center stage. Davies pictures often work like run-on sentences that wind up being poetic *and* grammatically correct.

The sequence of the book starts in territory where we have to search for signs of human presence and as we progress through the book, so does industry and finally we wind up in cityscapes where the industry is more architecturally aestheticized for the public's easier consumption. Through out the work, roads snake in and around the landscape connecting what amount to be disparate parts of land. Those dividing lines are mimicked by cooperative airplane vapor trails in the skies that dominate large expanses of the frames.

In this day of attention deficit and landscape work in color that chooses locations based on the instant gratification of the viewer, I like that he is asking a tall order from his viewers. Patience. He is working quietly in a very loud world.

[Book Available Here](#)



In 1992 the FFFFFFFFotogallery (joke) and Cornerhouse Publications released *Cross Currents* a catalog of Davies photographs taken around Europe. The project was to photograph in the twelve member states of the European Union. This work concentrates less on industry (although of course it is there) but examines difference and similarity among countries grouped together by treaty.

What is interesting is what happens in his photographs as he experiences the different light of each country. The chalky light of Athens renders a much different effect from his images in England. Also, because of flatter topographics, the sweeping vista we are familiar with was apparently not possible in all locations. Thus leaving us at street level and faced with barriers we are used to seeing over.

The catalog of 36 images is nicely produced with an essay by Ian Walker. The constriction of it being a catalog and a small trim size leaves the images less than 6X9 size and too small to really see them properly.