



Air

By Vincent Laforet

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Featured on CBS SUNDAY MORNING. *AIR* by Pulitzer Prize winning photographer Vincent Laforet is an exquisite museum-quality book of breathtaking high-altitude nighttime aerial photos taken over 10 of the world's most iconic cities including New York, Miami, Chicago, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sydney, London, Barcelona, and Berlin.

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Editorial Review

Review

CBS SUNDAY MORNING : One photographer is reaching new heights every time he reaches for his camera. With Lee Cowan, we'll watch him at work: This is something you've never seen before. At first glance his images look like circuit boards -- nerve centers surging with energy. But while these are hubs of activity, they're not the kind in our computers. These are the world's great cities, photographed the way the heavens see them, sparkling spectacles below. Photographer Vincent Laforet takes in the view from above, comparing the avenues to arteries -- the blood flow of the city. You literally perceive the depth, and the three dimensionality of the Earth in a different way, and you see distances in a different manner, he said. They look much smaller, much more within reach. Laforet has taken aerial photography to new heights. His images have transformed the spaghetti bowls of L.A.'s freeways, the glittering Strip of Sin City, and made London's Big Ben look more like a big jewel. It was almost an out-of-body experience, because it's just beautiful from up there, he said. They're just a few of his god-like glimpses that he's publishing in a new book, fittingly called *Air*. Since I was 13 years old, like everyone else I look out the windows of a commercial aircraft, and I'm fascinated by it, he said. I see every little intersection, the police cars, the stadiums, and you wonder what's going on down there. You see this incredible diorama of activity. Laforet spends a lot of time in helicopters, but not the way you might expect. He doesn't just hover a few hundred feet above, like most choppers. Vince asks his pilots to take him up 9,000, 10,000, 11,000 feet and higher -- altitudes helicopters rarely fly. Some veteran helicopter pilots actually refuse to go up there, they're just not comfortable, Laforet said. The first time I went up, it was scary, because I've never been that high [with] an open window or door, in a harness leaning out. And you see planes going right underneath you -- your heart skips a beat. So when he asked Cowan to join him on his recent flight over the city of Miami, well, how could he resist? Cowan asked, Are you going through the shots in your head? No. I'm completely relaxed right now. Yeah, it's the moment I take off and I see the first image, that's when the wheels start turning. We took off just before sunset, and headed East toward Miami Beach, with a brief stop hovering over a couple in a pool. I'm looking down there and I'm trying to make order out of chaos, looking for patterns, geometry, color, and light, he said. Laforet leaned out, and let it all unfold below him. Cowan asked, "What's it like when you're literally hanging out over the edge of the chopper" "You forget about it after a while -- you're so focused on getting that image." Do you ever think about the fall? The only time I ever thought about it was at high altitude over New York, he said. That was when a physicist explained a fall from that high up could last a terrifying 41 seconds. I was like, "Thanks for telling me. Now I know" -- that's way too long! Once it got dark, he started going higher. Helicopters can be like flying blenders; they vibrate wildly, and Laforet has to try to hold the camera steady while shooting at very low shutter speeds, often as the chopper goes into steep, banking turns. On the money, coming in -- perfect. Beautiful! Ah, that almost made me sick! The hot Florida air got cool and crisp as they climbed even more, until they were at 8,000 feet -- with nothing between them and downtown Miami except air. As a photographer, as a visual communicator, you try to find images no one has seen before. That's your goal, --CBS News Sunday Morning

CBS THIS MORNING : Pulitzer-prize winning photographer Vincent Laforet is no stranger to heights. He spent the last year capturing high-altitude aerial photos of cities around the world while harnessed in a helicopter. Laforet joins CBS This Morning to discuss his new book, *Air*. (Author was featured live on-air for a 5 minute interview with Charlie Rose, Gayle King, and Norah O'Donnell.) --CBS News This Morning

THE NEW YORK TIMES : Vincent Laforet remembers the moment he realized that digital cameras had surpassed the human eye. It was late in 2009, and Mr. Laforet, a photographer who worked for The New York Times for many years, was shooting in Los Angeles with the EOS 1D Mark IV, a Canon camera that

he had gotten as an early prototype. It was at night, and I remember pointing this camera into a dark bush. It was pitch black my eyes saw just pure black, he said. But on the LCD screen of the camera, I saw green leaves and little red cherries. The moment was a revelation, he said. I was seeing stuff that I could not see with my eye, and I knew that we were entering a new age of photography. Since then, Mr. Laforet has watched as digital photography has steadily improved to be able to achieve something he long considered impossible: photographing the world in the dark. Mr. Laforet says that sometime in the last two years, photography crossed a threshold. The sensors in high-end digital cameras can now capture light extremely efficiently, and the software in the cameras, as well as in postproduction software such as Adobe Lightroom, are now very good at reducing the grainy image quality associated with pictures taken in low light. As a result, night photography without the aid of a flash isn't just possible it's spectacular. To prove it, for an hour and a half one evening last month, Mr. Laforet took me up in a helicopter high over San Francisco. Using several cameras and lenses, he shot images including a vision of San Francisco as an orange-and-blue microchip shot entirely in the dark, with only minimal adjustments for color and reduction of noise, or digital dots on the image, in postproduction software. These images are part of a series that Mr. Laforet has been touring the world to produce. He shot the first set last year in New York on assignment for Men s Health magazine. They were meant to accompany an article about psychology, and Mr. Laforet thought that the grid of the city, and the pulsing lights of cars shuttling about it, resembled the synaptic wiring of our brains. But when the photos ran in Men s Health, Mr. Laforet was disappointed by the muted response. So, on a lark, he put the photos up on Storehouse, an app that lets you turn a set of photos into a beautiful online story page. Storehouse attracts a large community of photographers who immediately understood the significance of Mr. Laforet s night images. His Storehouse page of the New York pictures went viral, and Mr. Laforet decided that he had to do more. He has since traveled to a half-dozen cities, and has posted images from three. In addition to New York, he s done Las Vegas, and is posting pictures from San Francisco. Notwithstanding improvements in image sensors and software, photographing a city from a helicopter at night isn t a trivial thing. When he s up in a chopper, leaning out the door, with his body and his camera secured by straps, Mr. Laforet is fighting two opposing forces. To capture the most light, he wants to keep the camera s shutter open for as long as possible. That would be easy if he were sitting on a placid, stationary object. But helicopters aren t placid. They re moving in all directions at all times. Even when a chopper is hovering, it vibrates maniacally, which can be murder on photos taken in low light. Mr. Laforet combats this problem in two ways. He sets the camera on a gyroscopic mount, a rig that he holds in two hands and that uses spinning discs to dampen rotor vibrations. The other thing he does is take a lot of pictures, several thousand an hour, according to an exacting process. Before the flight, he decides on a few main shots he d like to capture. That allows the pilots to draw a rough flight plan and get any clearances they need..... --The New York Times

About the Author

Vincent Laforet is among the most influential pioneers working in contemporary photography and film today. His unique commercials for such well-known brands as Apple, Nike, General Electric, CNN, and Canon, and his groundbreaking photography for magazines such as National Geographic, Vanity Fair, and Sports Illustrated, to name just a few, cover a broad spectrum of subjects and narratives. Yet a common thread runs through his work: It always features cutting-edge technologies that make the photographs and films inventive, iconic and unforgettable.

As a visual thought leader, Laforet is deliberate and direct in how he talks about his work and teaches his craft, whether speaking to millions on national news networks, like CBS Sunday Morning, or working one-on-one with directors and photographers in film or photo workshops. He's also a popular speaker at media, photo and film conventions, and is a highly sought-after advisor to start-up Silicon Valley companies. When engaging with an audience, whether it's a large public gathering or a small group of investors or influencers, he enthusiastically shares his experiences, from winning a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage in The New York Times of post-9/11 events in the Middle East to creating his commercial films, which won him three awards

at the Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival in 2010. His success in traditional media has also made him one of the most recognizable photographers in the world of social media: More than 40 million people online have seen and shared his mesmerizing, high-altitude, nocturnal, aerial photos of cities around the world, which have been collected and published in his photography book, Air.

Laforet resides between New York City and Los Angeles, and is the proud father of two children.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Nannie Hand:

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