



GOING SOUTH

From Argentina to South Africa via one of the loneliest, coldest and most beautiful places on earth, Antarctica.

A fresh perspective on a timeless location from Thijs Heslenfeld. IMAGES | THIJS HESLENFELD WORDS | MIKE VON JOEL



Above: Top of the foremast: Deckhands Michiel van Tol & Mike Stewart Next page: Adrift in Paradise Bay Previous page: Europa in Paradise Bay

COLD IS A book of pictures. The Dutch photographer, Thijs Heslenfeld, set himself a challenge to visit the South Atlantic and Antarctica and to create an original photo-essay

- well aware of the clichés that had to be avoided with such a location and subject matter. Heslenfeld declined to join the obvious, scientific expeditions that regularly attend the area, and naturally eschewed the tourist cruisers that offer a 'taste' of the icy wastelands from the comfort of a heated observation lounge. Heslenfeld decided to sign up for the *Europa*, a three masted barque, which from November to March each year sails to the Antarctic Peninsula and South Georgia. Formerly a light-vessel on the Elbe in Germany, and built in 1911, the *Europa* had a refit in 1994 and since then has earned its keep travelling the Oceans of the World. The basic crew of 14 has an added complement of 48 'guests' who sign on for the voyage. But this is no retirement cruise. All hands are involved with the running and sailing of the vessel and are actively encouraged to - literally - learn the ropes. The result is an authentic experience that harks back to 18th and 19th century maritime history, reinforced by the architecture and historic interior of the *Europa* herself. This provided an ideal travelling 'studio' for Heslenfeld's two adventures (2005 and 2007). Thijs Heslenfeld's own interest is in the natural world and the human spirit - Life - alongside the shadows of death which make existence so precious. Elements which are ever present in the harsh and decidedly

unromantic environs of the polar region. 'Everybody knows The Great Wall is great and the Grand Canyon is grand. No point in repeating that', Heslenfeld says. His motivation, despite being one of Europe's most accomplished travel photographers, is to engage with the life forces he finds around

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him - be they human or otherwise. 'I go into a little store just to get some shaving cream and I walk out with the complete life story of the woman who owns the store... that's travelling. That's what I do. And that's what I want to show in my work!' he tells his audience.

Cold is a triumph. It is, of course, about the familiar wastelands of ice and empty sea. There are penguins, and hardy inhabitants eking out a living in spite of the elements. There is also decay, death and destruction amidst the natural forces at work in the last great wilderness on the planet. But Heslenfeld has recorded something else. His images have a subtle wonder, an element of danger, that almost mystical element, which is present in the early photographs of Polar exploration, exemplified by Frank Hurley, official photographer on Shackleton's ill-fated 1914 Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition. Hurley produced

many pioneering colour images using the Paget process of colour photography. Heslenfeld's on board studies of the *Europa* at sea and anchored amidst the ice; bring to mind the *Endurance* and its valiant crew. 'Time' seems to be measured in millennia, not days and months in Antarctica.

The text is provided as extracts from the log by *Europa's* Captain, Klaas Gaastra, and bound in as pages from a diary. It is an effective design concept and an integral part of the narrative without interfering with the full page, colour reproductions. Gaastra's weather observations only serve to remind the reader that - satellite communications notwithstanding - if something major goes wrong, the immediate situation is little different to Shackleton's era.

Thijs has published the book under his own imprint and it has already been a remarkable - and well deserved - success in Holland. It can be obtained direct from the author via his website. Warmly (or perhaps coldly) recommended.

COLD - SAILING TO ANTARCTICA
Photographs Thijs Heslenfeld Text Klaas Gaastra
OOST WEST THIJS BEST 184pps, Hb
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Above: Salisbury Plain, South Georgia Below: The Europa, built in Holland, 1911 (rebuilt 1986-94) Next page: Fur seal in the wreck of the Brutus, Prince Olav Harbour

