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LANDSCAPES

RAFN SIGURBJÖRNSSON

AN INTERVIEW
WITH ICELANDIC
PHOTOGRAPHER
& TOUR GUIDE



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Rafn Sig, a well known freelance Icelandic photographer, has been hiking in the Icelandic highlands and lowlands all his life and knows the nature and the hidden spots like a true native. Rafn has worked as a freelance photographer for more than thirty years. His images got published all over the world, in magazines, as on the internet, and we are very proud to have an interview with such a talented photographer from such the dreamy Iceland.

Hello Rafn, Please introduce yourself to our readers,
It's all about LOVING IT

I'm a freelance Icelandic photographer who have focused on the raw nature and landscape since I was a young boy. I have been hiking in the Icelandic highlands and low lands all my life and I know the Icelandic nature and the hidden spots like a true native.

I'm a self-educated photographer and have worked as a freelance photographer for more than thirty years. I've got my photos published all over the world, in magazines, books, postcards as well on the internet

I've published 8 photographic books about Iceland called "WILD ICELAND the untouched nature"
Each book focuses on the collection of the best of the sensational nature of the individual parts of Iceland; these eight books contain photographs of the south, southwest, west and Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland north, east, westfjords and the highlands

I live my passion of photography by teaching, traveling, and exploring the nature of Iceland
Along with running the stock photography website www.IceStockPhotos.com I have worked on various

photography projects, I offer private photo tours and workshops in Iceland with max 3 photographers each time as you can see if you visit my travel web: www.discoverwildiceland.com

You describe yourself as a self taught photographer, and actually, most of the known photographers in the world are autodidacts, Looking back, don't you feel there was a need of official studing of the technical issues ?

It actually all started when I was standing out in the cold painting the landscape in front of me. I thought "Why don't I take a photo of the object and paint it at home, it's much warmer". I bought my self a camera and took my first photo for that purpose. Wow it was a bad one ha ha ha ha. Well I painted the landscape from that photo and slowly I learned through my paintings what kind of light, composition, framing, angel etc. I was looking for. By doing it this way I wanted to find my own style and I think I have found it. Yes it was a struggle and much more struggle than I thought but I learned all that was needed the hard way and on that path I learned much more about the camera then people usually do as I had to read all the manuals from A to Z and test everything while I was reading it to get what I was looking for.

Actually my official study is on the internet as you can find all the best photographers, good lectures and you can study it all when your time is right to do it.

By browsing the internet I also have found out that the more I learn, the less I know.

Iceland is one of the dreamy spots in the world for photographers and you are one of the fortune people who made the tours and the photography as a profession.

Tell us, how it all started?

Yes Iceland is an Ideal place geographically for a photographers and I consider myself very lucky. In the summertime we have endless soft light with late sunsets and early sunrises witch are amongst the unique features and makes it the most magical place for photographers and landscape lovers. The light in the wintertime is something you have to witness because it's impossible to write about. We have ice-caves, frozen waterfalls, Northern lights (Aurora Borealis) shimmering in the sky, great glacier views and the contrast in the landscape is far beyond your imagination.

Well yes, how it all started. Hmm. . . We didn't have many tourists or photographers coming to Iceland when I started. There were couple from Spain whom contacted me and the husband was a serious photographer. They wanted to take one tour around



Icicle in Sauðárgil – Iceland
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Iceland and combine photography and tourism together. Well we travelled one ring around Iceland for 10 days and on their last day the husband told me that this was not the way to do it. We had to take it part by part. So they came again and again and again . . . and I was the one who decided where to go each time. From that point there was no return. Today I have clients who have been traveling with me for more than 10 years and we are always seeing something new. They are coming in different time of the year and even we go to the same places, it's still new. The light is different, the clouds are different, the snow is different and actually all things are different.

Tell us about one of the special hidden spot in Iceland where you take your tour groups.

Well my friend it wouldn't be hidden if I told you about it, would it ha ha ha ha ha

What kind of gear do you use for this kind of photography field?

Today I'm using Canon EOS 5D MK III along with my wide angle lens from Canon 16 – 35mm 1:2,8 L II USM. Tamron SP 24 – 70 1:2,8 USD and Canon 70 – 300 1:2,8 L IS II USM

What is, in your opinion, makes a great Landscape Photograph?

It all depends on what you are shooting at and what you want to get out of the shot. I have two things popping up in my mind when you ask this question.

Time is one of the most important things in this matter. You can spend the whole day at the same place to capture the right light so the mood is right. You also have to give your self-time to look around for a good angel, find the right foreground that will lead you into the subject and make the 3Dimensional effect for the two dimensional photo. Is the shadow right on this side or do I have to wait for a while for it to be right. Is the reflection right on the lake or is it better if I go in this corner. . and so on

The other thing is the rule that I made for myself. "Be the object you are shooting, seen from the ground you are on." that is "how would the spot you are on see the object you are shooting at".



Aurora (Northern Lights) Explosion – Iceland
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What is your favorite location in Iceland for landscape shooting?

Iceland has many beautiful locations and it's hard to pick one out. They are all different with different beauty.

If I have to choose one location I would say the Highlands. The reason is "Less is more".

The global warming is a strong and important issue in the last years, do you see a real change in that matter (comparing to 20 years ago?)

Yes I really do, especially in the glaciers of how far they have retreat. Now I have to walk up to 20 - 30 minutes to the edge of some of them with I only needed to step outside my Super Jeep before. I really think it's about time for us humans to take some action. I don't think we can wait any longer.

Many of your photography projects are air shooting, When did you start taking those kind of photos and what kind of gear do you use for these images (Lenses etc.) ?

It all started in 2013 when a good friend of mine and an old classmate was starting his Helicopter service called "Norðurflug". He needed aerial photos for his advertisement campaign and asked me if I could do the job. I was thrilled to be able to see the landscape from above and in a totally new perspective so I said yes. I can't say I'm sorry for that as I got totally

new vision of my beautiful island. I had to think differently due to the speed of the helicopter and I could not use my ground rules as I was high above them, not standing on them.

Below are some of the things I think about when I'm shooting from a Helicopter

- *Never shoot through the glass.*
- *Don't have your hood on your lens as it will fly off*
- *Watch the blade in your wide shots*
- *Bring two cameras with you so you don't have to change lenses*
- *Communicate with the pilot so you will get the right angle of the subject*
- *Use camera exposures 1/1250s or greater. This will insure that your shots are free of motion blur.*
- *Adjust the rest of your settings (ISO 200 - 6400 / Aperture f4 - f8) to get the proper exposure around that shutter speed.*
- *Dress warmly*
- *Use a safety harness*

I'm using the same gear but my favorite lenses are my wide angle lens from Canon 16 - 35mm 1:2,8 L II USM and the Tamron SP 24 - 70 1:2,8 USD

Was there any dangerous situation during shooting time?

Yes I have had many difficult and dangerous

situations on my shooting tours.

I remember one time when I was shooting the Volcanic eruption at "Fimmvörðuháls" in the Volcano "Eyjafjallajökull" 2010.

I found myself a really nice spot where the glowing lava was flooding down on my left side and the Volcano was in the front. I put up my tripod, found the right lens and I remember I said to myself "This will be a million dollar shot". When I was about to shoot the first shot in this beautiful twilight a crack opened up on my right side. I panicked "a little bit", I couldn't run down as the lava was flowing on my left side so I grabbed my bag and tripod and started to run like hell. The crack got bigger, so I ran faster and faster until I thought I was safe.

I was shaking when I walked to my Super Jeep and I was not thinking straight. Luckily I managed to get down from the mountain in one piece where I took a rest for the night. The next day when I came up again, there was this beautiful new crater where I was standing the day before. It was a beautiful new Volcano

Among your works, which one is your favorite? Why?

I can't take one out from another as I love my work. I always feel that my last work is my favorite. When I'm on a Photo workshop tour and I see some progress from my students I feel happy, I get warm inside and I feel my time well spent. My aim is to make my students better than me. I really try to give everything I got as photography should be for all. It's a really good hobby.

Do you use any Post Processing program? What kind of tools do you use for post processing? Explain your work flow.

Yes I'm using Lightroom and Photoshop to process my photos.

It's actually very basic process.

I use Lightroom for base editing such as changing exposure, white balance, highlight and shadow levels and some base sharpening. After these changes I export them to Photoshop as a TIFs if I need to do something more.

In Photoshop I do the final processing if that is necessary and save them as PSD files.

After completing my edits in Photoshop and Lightroom I export them from Lightroom using JPEG and Convert to sRGB to the internet

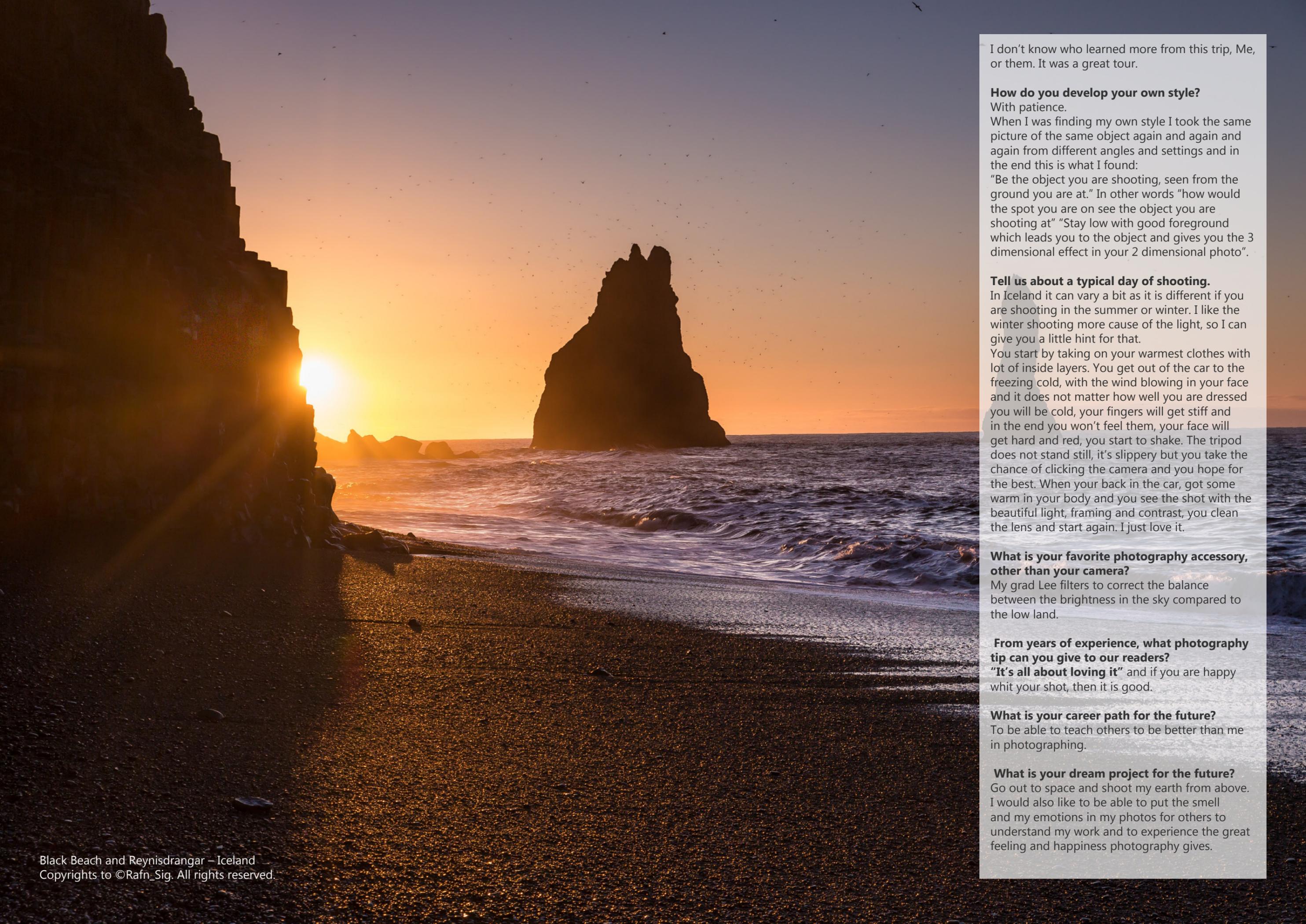
Tell us about your last work/project

My last work was an 11 day workshop tour to the "Forgotten Paradis of Iceland - Westfjords" with couple from the USA.

They are both highly skilled photographers and I enjoyed working with them as they never stopped shooting and the zest they had was unbelievable. For the whole 11 days we had great light, new visions and new tasks to cope with, landscape, birds (puffins), waterfalls, deserted farms, black beaches, volcanos, sunsets, sunrises etc. We were newer in a hurry and didn't leave a seen until we were fully satisfied with what we got.



Frozen stairway at Seljalandsfoss – Iceland
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I don't know who learned more from this trip, Me, or them. It was a great tour.

How do you develop your own style?

With patience.

When I was finding my own style I took the same picture of the same object again and again and again from different angles and settings and in the end this is what I found:

"Be the object you are shooting, seen from the ground you are at." In other words "how would the spot you are on see the object you are shooting at" "Stay low with good foreground which leads you to the object and gives you the 3 dimensional effect in your 2 dimensional photo".

Tell us about a typical day of shooting.

In Iceland it can vary a bit as it is different if you are shooting in the summer or winter. I like the winter shooting more cause of the light, so I can give you a little hint for that.

You start by taking on your warmest clothes with lot of inside layers. You get out of the car to the freezing cold, with the wind blowing in your face and it does not matter how well you are dressed you will be cold, your fingers will get stiff and in the end you won't feel them, your face will get hard and red, you start to shake. The tripod does not stand still, it's slippery but you take the chance of clicking the camera and you hope for the best. When your back in the car, got some warm in your body and you see the shot with the beautiful light, framing and contrast, you clean the lens and start again. I just love it.

What is your favorite photography accessory, other than your camera?

My grad Lee filters to correct the balance between the brightness in the sky compared to the low land.

From years of experience, what photography tip can you give to our readers?

"It's all about loving it" and if you are happy whit your shot, then it is good.

What is your career path for the future?

To be able to teach others to be better than me in photographing.

What is your dream project for the future?

Go out to space and shoot my earth from above. I would also like to be able to put the smell and my emotions in my photos for others to understand my work and to experience the great feeling and happiness photography gives.



Inside Ice Cave – Iceland
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Langjökull Glacier in the twilight - Iceland
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Mountain with autumn colors in the twilight - Iceland
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Volcanic eruption at Holuhraun Highlands - Iceland
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RAFNI SIGURBJORNSSON ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Riverbed in the highlands of Vatnajökull Glacier - Iceland
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Website

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Pattern in Núpsvötn river - Iceland
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Nyröri-Eldborg Volcano in the Highlands - Iceland
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