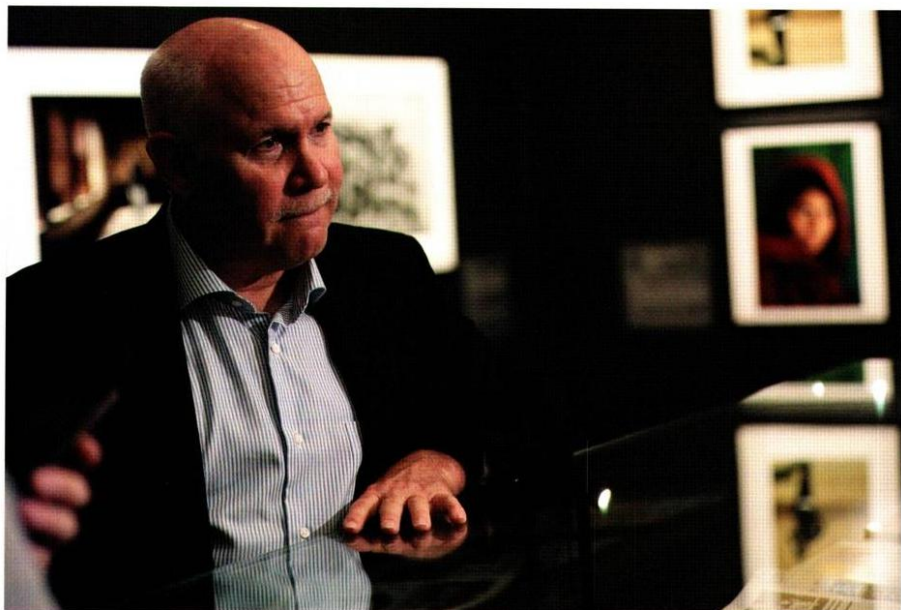


# IT JUST CLICKS

Famed American photographer Steve McCurry discusses his first impressions of Asia, shooting images on his phone and his travel wish list. Some of his most celebrated images from the region are on display in the *Picturing Asia: Double Take* exhibition at the Asia Society in Hong Kong until January 7, 2017 by *China Daily*



**You initially studied filmmaking in university, but ultimately became a photographer. Did anyone nurture or shape your photographic talent at the start of your career?**

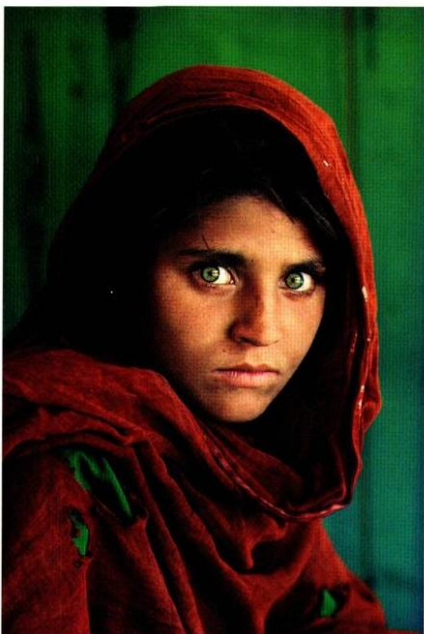
I think my professors were influential in my career. They sort of set me on the course.

**the world, what do you recall about your first impressions?**

It was in India – I remember there were a lot of people on the street, and there was kind of pungent odour of curry or something. It was very crowded and a bit of shock. It was a new experience, a new world and a new adventure.

**How about your experiences in China?**

The first time I went there, I was going to shoot a monsoon. I went back again four years later to do a story on Shanghai for *Life* magazine, I think in 1989. Now, it's like no other place in the world – it has just exploded. Most people rode their bicycles then; there weren't so many cars. Everything was very simple. But it changed so fast. The change was so unbelievable and astonishing. It has transformed overnight. It's just amazing – and maybe it's just the beginning. I wish I had worked more there, because it was so fascinating. It's so different from the way it is now.



**Where did you get your first camera?**

What did you shoot? It was a birthday gift – a Kodak Brownie. I was shooting stuff like my travels, friends and family.

**You quit your job at the age of 27 and became a freelance photographer. What was it like to be a photographer in the 1970s?**

It was great. I was striking out on my own, doing my own thing and not having to do assignments – I was just free. But it was very competitive.

**You created many celebrated works and had a lot of inspiration in Asia. When you first came to this part of**

**Travel plays a very important part in your life. You've been to many places and have taken countless calculated risks. But unexpected situations do arise – all the time. Have you ever been especially nervous about any of your trips?**

Mostly in places like Afghanistan... some parts of India and Iraq. But the main one I always worried about was Afghanistan. Every day there were some problems – security problems. People were being kidnapped, killed. It was a constant worry.

**Have you ever considered going back?** I was there in March. I'm doing a book about Afghanistan: culture, landscapes,

portraits – my impressions of Afghanistan. So I might go back there and add some more pictures.

**I heard that in Kuwait, you almost lost your life.**

Actually, I think the time I was most scared was in Slovenia. I was doing aerial photography in a plane and the pilot crashed into the lake – he made a mistake and flew the plane too close to the water. I survived, but it was scary being upside down, underwater. I was pretty lucky.

**Where do you most want to travel these days?**

I want to go to China again – it hangs on my list of places I'd like to travel. I also want to travel around the US, because I haven't done as much of that. Those are two things on my list. There are a lot of interesting places in China. But it changes a lot – a lot of charm is going to be lost. The architecture used to be very unique, but they tear the buildings down and put up something new, usually not that great-looking. But this happens everywhere else – New York is the same. Practically nothing is left the way it was 100 years ago.

**What's your typical kit these days?**

I use a 24-70 f2.8 – that's my main lens. When I wander down the street, I just have the camera and bag I'm travelling with. When I'm working, I just have the camera – no extra lenses. I like to keep it very minimal. But I have other cameras; I have my digital Hasselblad and my phone.

**Do you take a lot of photos with your mobile phone?**

Yes, all the time. Sometimes, if the quality is okay, I publish them. But they're not big – just eight-by-tens or something.

**What subjects interest you? How do you make them comfortable?**

You decide the subjects based on how you respond to people. Some of them have interesting faces. You have to recognise something that's really special. I use a bit of humour to help them defuse the awkwardness and self-consciousness. I think humour can be a great ally in a photo shoot.

**What if people say no when you want to take their photo?**

That happens. If they say no, you just move on. You only have a 90% success rate, if you're lucky.

**To get a great picture, sometimes you have to wait a long time. How do you know that perfect moment?**

Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. It depends on a lot of factors. It's about experience and you have to wait to find the right moment. You improve yourself as you practice – practice is everything.

**What's the worst part about your job?**

Airport security isn't fun – the whole airport experience isn't fun. It's the worst aspect of travel.

**The world is undergoing tremendous changes now. What impressed people in the past might become passé today. Do you worry that people might get bored of Steve McCurry's way of interpreting the world?**

No – I think I have a good sense of observation. I'm curious. I know a good picture when I see one. If I find something extraordinary, other people will feel the same way. I'm not too concerned about fashion and style.

**When I joined the media tour of your Asia Society exhibition and we were introduced to your photo *Golden Rock*, the guide made a remark about the "reality of the photograph". Some people argue that there's no such thing as reality in photography. What do you think?**

I think if you're shooting for newspaper or something, then there are certain rules. If you're making art, it's a different thing. It depends on what you're doing.

**After all these years, what's your main goal as a photographer today?**

I try to do worthwhile things and create some interesting work, and be involved in places where I can learn things and explore. I have a rewarding, rich and fulfilling life. Life is short – so we need to make the most out of it and live in the best possible way. For me, that's my work: exploring the park across the street from my apartment or exploring another country. That's my true pleasure – to photograph and observe things. 📷

