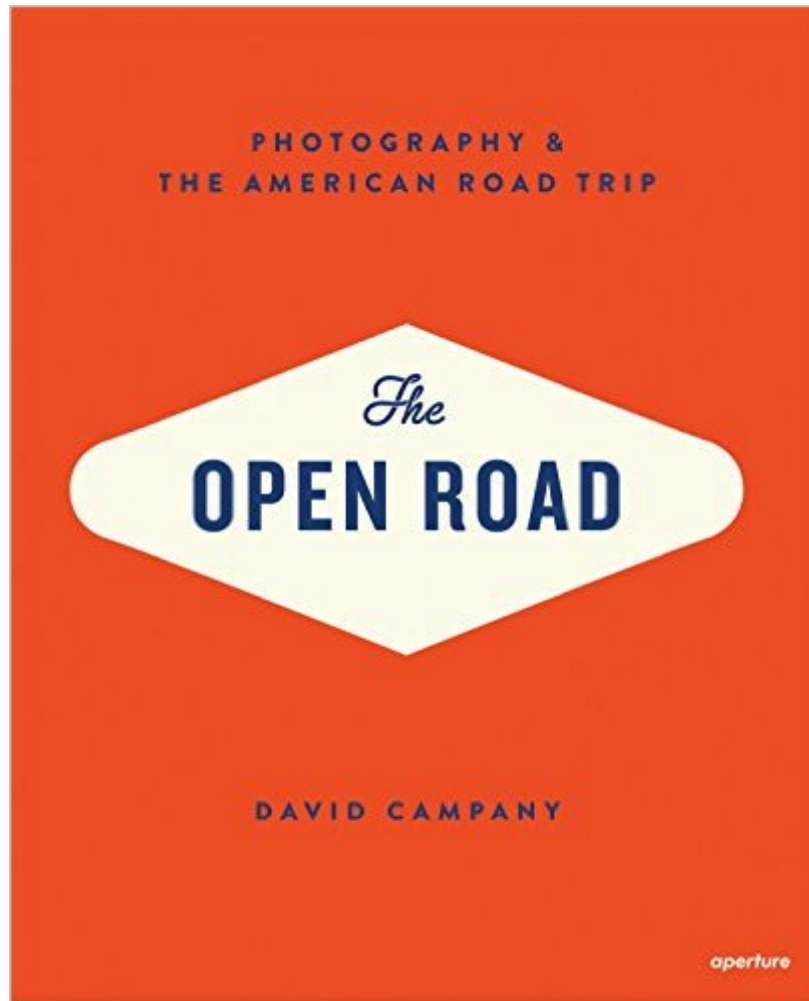


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The Open Road: Photography And The American Roadtrip



Synopsis

After World War II, the American road trip began appearing prominently in literature, music, movies and photography. As Stephen Shore has written, Our country is made for long trips. Since the 1940s, the dream of the road trip, and the sense of possibility and freedom that it represents, has taken its own important place within our culture. Many photographers purposefully embarked on journeys across the U.S. in order to create work, including Robert Frank, whose seminal road trip resulted in *The Americans*. However, he was preceded by Edward Weston, who traveled across the country taking pictures to illustrate Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*; Henri Cartier-Bresson, whose 1947 trip through the American South and into the West was published in the early 1950s in *Harper's Bazaar*; and Ed Ruscha, whose road trips between Los Angeles and Oklahoma formed the basis of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*. Hundreds of photographers have continued the tradition of the photographic road trip on down to the present, from Stephen Shore to Taiyo Onorato, Nico Krebs, Alec Soth and Ryan McGinley. *The Open Road* considers the photographic road trip as a genre in and of itself, and presents the story of photographers for whom the American road is muse. The book features David Company's introduction to the genre and 18 chapters presented chronologically, each exploring one American road trip in depth through a portfolio of images and informative texts. This volume highlights some of the most important bodies of work made on the road, from *The Americans* to the present day.

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Customer Reviews

The road trip is a staple of the photobook business and this title does a decent job in giving an overview of the genre. David Company, in his illustrated front of book essay, traces photo trips way back to the early years of the last century. Page nine reproduces a spread from a fascinating Rand McNally photo-auto guide published in 1910 which used images of every significant corner and building to show the route from New York to Chicago. An oddity of the theme was a series of articles in the Moscow based Ogonek magazine in 1935 by Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, two Russians who used a ten week countrywide tour of America to take photos and write the copy (reprinted in 2006 by the Princeton Architectural Press). Company makes an interesting point that... 'American culture still finds it difficult to shake the idea that its big cities embody the present and its small towns the past'...the open road (certainly not the freeway) leads back to a nostalgic past. The book looks, historically, at the work of nineteen photographers though actually in eighteen chapters because the last one is a combined effort from Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs. Each gets a series of one to a page photos from between five (Victor Burgin) and seventeen (Stephen Shore). I think it's worth say that if you have books from Frank, Winogrand, Eggleston, Meyerowitz, Shore, Sternfeld and Soth you might well have seen their contributions in these pages. This book can be a useful introduction to lesser well known photographers who also have books in print.

Road trips have provided the fodder for many photographers, especially in America. The Open road offers an excellent overview of the genre and places the major names in American road photography in context, both chronological order and with the major art photography world at the time the photos were taken. So, the book works as a history of road trips, yet it is much more. The photos that chosen for the book make for an attractive and compelling photo book on their own. The introductory essays for each photographer offer a nice introduction to their photography and methodology, though I do have to agree that the typography in those essays is awful. The ornamentation (not technically ligatures, which connect two letters) on the letter s is particularly distracting. Fortunately, that distraction pales when we get a look at the photos. Obviously, no one volume can cover all the good photographer who have published compendium of road trip photos. The classic photographers are covered, like Frank, Winograd, Friedlander, Eggleston, Meyerowitz and Shore. The selection of current photographers is necessarily more a reflection David Company's personal tastes. How could it be otherwise? The selection of images representing each photo book that he chose reflects nicely on the original source books, three of which I own. While no short selection of images can convey the breadth of the original road photo books, the ones here do reflect the tone of the originals and give enough of a sense of the photographer's work that we can

choose which to pursue further. The printing is excellent. Colors look true to the films the photographers used. Black and white photos display a good tonal range. All in all, the prints are compelling.

Over the years I have accumulated a fair number of photography books. THE OPEN ROAD is already one of my favorites, and it surely will be one of those that I return to most often. The bulk of the book consists of photographs selected from road trip portfolios or books by eighteen different photographers. Many of the photographs are manifestly "open road" photographs, in the sense that they feature road vistas or scenes; some bear the clear indicia of having been taken from inside an automobile. But whether or not obviously an "open road" photograph, all were taken during an American road trip (some, for example, are motel room interiors). The first of the featured photographers is Robert Frank. The seven photographs of his are from his now classic book of 1959, "The Americans", which sported an introduction by the archetypal "open roader" Jack Kerouac. The last of the eighteen is the dual-headed TONK (the Swiss team of Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs), from their book "The Great Unreal", published in 2009. In between are such famous photographers -- famous in the sense that at least I was familiar with their work -- as Garry Winogrand, William Eggleston, Lee Friedlander, Joel Meyerowitz, and Joel Sternfeld. But some were new to me, and I appreciated being exposed to their work -- in particular, Jacob Holdt, Alec Soth, and Justine Kurland. (I list all eighteen photographers in a comment.) The book begins with a thirty-page, generously illustrated essay by David Company. The purpose of that essay is to explore the cultural context leading up to Robert Frank's book.

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