



Top right: Kirt Witte, photograph by Michael Cabrera. Left: Tybee Island Light House. Above: Ossabaw Island at first light.

Kirt Witte and *The Other Savannah*

By Kelly Rittenhouse

Recently, he spent the afternoon hanging over the rails of the Tybee Lighthouse. He's also spent hours leaning out the side of an airplane, standing on top of Savannah's tallest buildings, and kayaking down some angry rivers and in the Atlantic Ocean. Just another day in the life of Kirt Witte. Is he a daring stunt man, risking his life for the sport of it? No, he's a photographer in love with getting that perfect shot.

Life wasn't always so exciting. Born in England, Witte spent his childhood moving around Europe (England, Italy, and Germany) before ending up in Dallas, Texas. From his childhood, he remembers the boring postcard photos and hundreds of posed shots his father took of him standing in front of landmarks in each place they'd travel. "Dad was just trying to fill the photo album, but it was the same photo, same pose every time he aimed the camera," remembers Witte.

As a junior in high school, Witte signed up for his first photography class before becoming a part of the yearbook staff. After earning his Bachelor of Science degree in college, Witte got his first real job as a photographer for Carnival Cruise Lines. "I saw this ad in the school newspaper that read, *Be a photographer – see the world!*" says Witte, laughing as he remembers the good ole' days. "That's the hardest job I've ever had." Taking hundreds and hundreds of photos a day of thousands of passengers, Witte barely had time to enjoy the beautiful places the cruise line traveled.

Moving from the Caribbean to Europe, Witte realized it was going to be difficult to make a living as a photographer. While in the Caribbean, a friend from the states called Witte to tell him about some new software that had just hit the market – Photoshop. After thinking about it for a couple of years, Witte flew back to the states, did some soul searching, and decided that digital photography was the way

to go. Following the technology craze, he worked in video games, advertising, and the Internet. "I went to a 3D trade show in Los Angeles," says Witte, "and walked by a SCAD booth. I interviewed for a job, and, four months later, I was living in Savannah and starting my new career."

Three years ago, shortly after moving to the Hostess City of the South, Witte and his wife, Heather (whom he met in a Dallas photo lab), were taking a walk downtown when they came across an oak tree with a woman's shoe nailed to the side of it. *Only in Savannah* they both thought. "That is what triggered *The Other Savannah* project," he notes. "I dusted off the camera and decided to take photos of Savannah from a unique point of view." Tired of seeing the same photos of Savannah everywhere he went, Witte realized that when you see something every day, you don't appreciate it. "You have to stop and smell the roses," he says. "You have to look up and look down, not just straight ahead."

Nearly 8,000 images of Savannah later, Witte contends that his list is nowhere near complete. "There are lots of photos that I still want to take," admits Witte. Right now, the daring stunt man in him is trying to get the okay to take photos from the top of the Talmadge Bridge.

"What's been awesome about this project is that, for the first time in ten years, I've been doing art for me," says Witte with a smile. "I'm doing it just for the fun of it, and I hope it shows through when people look at my work." When asked to pick his favorite subject, Witte defers to the Tybee Lighthouse. The shadow shot that had him hanging over the rails is his favorite, but he also fondly remembers waiting fourteen months to get a night shot of the lighthouse with its beams radiating through the fog.

Another project that Witte is working on is building a 3D battleship. After working on it for over a year, it is now 95% complete. "This project is a culmination of my entire 3D career. All my skills in photography, texturing, and photo manipulation are coming together in this one project," says Witte. "It's something that makes me really proud." Of course, Witte has a lot for which to be proud. This one-time cruise line photographer has held three photo exhibitions and has a book set to debut in 2006.

So when you see a crazy man hanging from a lighthouse or teetering atop the Talmadge Bridge, it's probably Kirt Witte, once again, going for that perfect shot.

To see Witte's amazing photographs titled *The Other Savannah*, visit his website www.theothersavannah.com.