Savannah's
Island Living

The Magazine of
Wilmington, Whitemarsh,
and Talahi Islands

Holiday Issue 2004

Get to know your neighbors, ONE AT A TIME...

Kirt Witte

We caught up with local photographer Kirt Witte, pronounced Witty, and asked him about his soon to be published collection of photos, "The Other Savannah", and his interesting style, among other things. Kirt was the only photographer accepted into 2003 Telfair Art Fair. Over 70 artists from around the country were accepted, but Kirt was the ONLY photographer!

Where do you live?

We live on Wilmington Island. We tried Georgetown... then downtown in the Historic District, and finally settled down on Wilmington Island.

And you are originally from where?

Dallas, Texas.

Are you a professional photographer by trade?

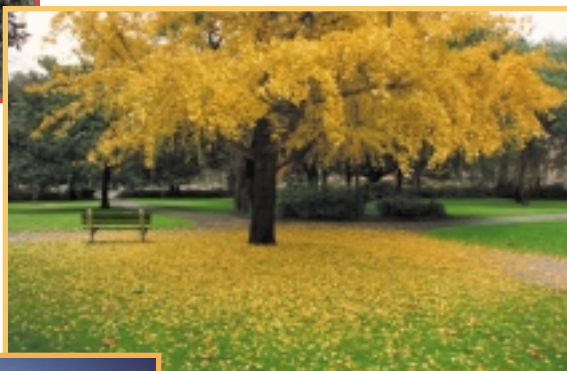Well that depends on your definition of Professional I suppose....

I have a BS in photography.... However, after graduation, I become fascinated with digitally retouching photos on the computer using (version 2.0!) of Adobe Photoshop... one thing led to another, learned other graphics programs, and eventually tried out a 3D one where I was hooked! Then taught myself Unix, high end 3D animation, and Quicktime

VR.... I have always been fascinated with the latest, greatest cutting edge technologies. Currently I am into "High Dynamic Range Imaging" and also "Normal Mapping"... *(do a Google search on those!)*

What possessed you to create your website, http://theothersavannah.com ?

After barely touching a camera for 10 years, I moved to Savannah and was so inspired I started shooting again. My wife, who is also a photographer, and I walked around for our first 6 months here saying "wow! That'd make a good picture. And that would make a good picture." After six months, I dusted off my old manual, mechanical, Canon F1 and started shooting again.... I haven't stopped yet and that was a little over two years ago.

I just started shooting for the fun of it... and for the love of it as well. I didn't realize how much I missed it till I started shooting again. It's really been a breath of fresh air and a lot of fun. I have had more fun in the last 2 years in Savannah, than I have the previous 10 years or so sitting behind a computer desk all day every day.

Now I actually get to meet people, smell the fresh air, go kayaking, explore nature,

fly in airplanes... etc. What a concept!

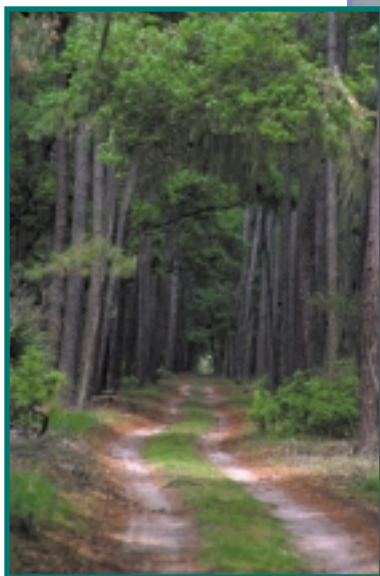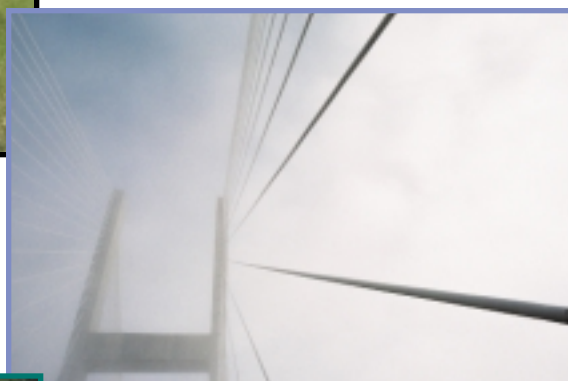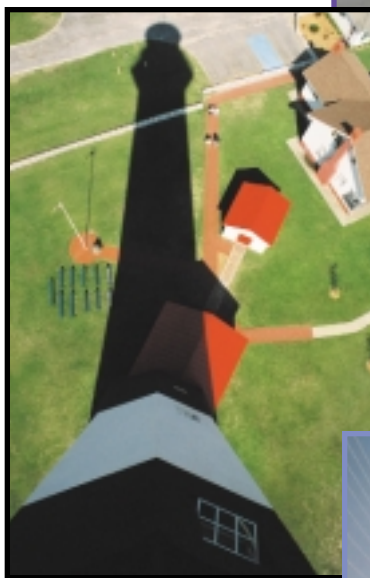For the first time in my life I feel I have come "full circle" and I am really enjoying it.

In answer to your question, my full time job is "Professor of 3D Visual Effects" at the Savannah College of Art and Design where I have been teaching for almost 3 years now. Teaching is something I have always enjoyed doing and I really like helping and teaching others.

I am full time husband, and father... I have a 6 year old son who is the real light of my life. Its amazing after 6 years, I still love him more and more every day!

I am also a part time Graduate Student at SCAD... been working full time and going to school part time since my arrival in Savannah. I plan on graduating in May 2005 and I can't wait. It was really hard becoming a student again after more than 10 years out of school, but I am almost there. I am grateful to have this opportunity for more education. I definitely see things differently now... which, in turn, has influenced my photography....

I also do some freelance photography on the side when time permits...

and in all of my SPARE TIME, I am working on a huge project called, "The Other Savannah". Phase 1 is the website. I update my website every few weeks with new content and updating older sections as time permits. My list of things still to pho-

tograph, is still quite long.

Phase 2 was to have my first ever photography exhibition.. I had two of them simultaneously last November, but that is another story...   I had another show in October at the Marshall House. (Readers, you may be able to catch this still!)

Phase 3 is the book version, which I hope will be on store shelves in about one year.

Savannah is a city like no other in the world!

How do you get all those great aerial shots?

My former neighbor is a pilot. We went to the airport twice and rented a little Cessna 172. He has now moved on to a new job in Florida, so if you know any local pilots, please let me know! Flying is another one of my passions.

How many times have you been out on a helicopter?

Never. I was supposed to go flying with the US Coast Guard 5 different times, each time, something came up... like a sinking fishing boat! Then a new "rule" came out about no civilians flying anymore... and that is all she wrote. I almost got to go flying on an Army Chinook, but that got cancelled at the last minute as well. I guess I just don't mix well with helicopters.

Anything else you can think of about "seeing Savannah from a different view".

Just keep checking my website and my book when it comes out!

I think that one of the advantages I have over other local photographers is that I am viewing my stay here

as an "extended vacation" so I am just taking my own style of postcards... that hopefully, most people will agree are not the same old, ordinary stock 20 or 30 photos you see everyday at the local gift shop.

That is also what spurred on my project... I basically got tired of seeing the same old photos of the Mercer House, Forsythe Park, and River Street. I decided I would take my own!

Where do you work? Anything related to career that you want to tell...

Photographically I work anywhere... I have seen many, many parts of Savannah that most people will never see. I love to explore.

When do you work on the website?

A few hours here and there... mostly late at night. I have a really hard time keeping my website caught up with my photography... I could easily add 10 to 15 new sections to my site if I just had the time. Sooner or later it will all be online. Just stay tuned for more.

What is the purpose of the site?

To share with others what a great, beautiful, and truly unique city we have here. It is a city unlike any other in the world. Savannah is the only city I have ever been to that does not evolve as the people come and go. For example, cities like Atlanta and Dallas change and evolve as people come and go. Savannah is different. If you come to live in Savannah, you have to conform to her! Change your ways, not hers. Savannah certainly does change slowly but surely, but on her own timeframe, not yours.

When will your first book be out? Where can one find it?

Fall 2005 is my current target. I have 7 locations already interested in selling my book, so I am very excited about that. However, it will be done when it's done. I have to do it right and not rush it so it can be as good as it should be. I have put my heart and soul into this project and I want it be something I can always be proud of. Even if it doesn't sell, it will all have been worth it because of the enjoyment I had creating it.

"I like to think of "The Other Savannah" as the real Savannah. Savannah has a million stories to tell, but she doesn't like to reveal her secrets to strangers. Approximately 3.5 million visitors come to Savannah per year, but I have heard that the average stay is less than 48 hours. My project "The Other Savannah" aims to show that Savannah is so much more than just the Historic District, and so much more than what people perceive in "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil". When you live here, you get to experience a collection of the little details, not any one building or fountain, it's the iron fence on the corner, it's the woodwork around the window, and of course, it's the people we know that make Savannah a truly unique city.

My goal is to show visitors and Savannahians alike what they may have been missing, what they do not realize right in front of them, or what Savannah looks like using non-traditional photographic methods like 360-degree panoramas, time exposures, and infrared photography." - - Kirt Witte

Kirt Witte has lived most of his life in Dallas, Texas. His artistic influences are Ansel Adams, George Lucas, and National Geographic magazine. He has traveled throughout most of North America, Western Europe, the Caribbean, and the Amazon rainforests of Peru. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in photography from Sam Houston State University. For over 10 years, he has earned his living as a 3D animator and graphic artist, working for clients like The JASON Project, EDS, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, and Lockheed-Martin. He also worked on the Spy Hunter video game for the Sony Playstation 2. Recently, he has done photography work for the Savannah Morning News, Roundhouse Railroad Museum, and Bonaventure Books. Currently, he is a Professor of 3D Visual Effects at the Savannah College of Art and Design, and is working towards completing his M.F.A. in Computer Art.

He is currently pursuing having "The Other Savannah" published as his first book. In this book, Witte will also be focusing more on the people of Savannah where he will interview famous - and not so famous - people, to help tell the human side of the story of Savannah.

For more photos of Savannah, please visit his website at: http://theothersavannah.com or contact Kirt Witte at kirt@theothersavannah.com