



INTRO *jective*
magazine

Tria Gionescu
THROUGH *the* LENS

TRIA GIOVAN FIRST PICKED

up a camera at age eight. While growing up on the island of St. Thomas, where her parents owned and operated an ice cream

manufacturing business, her mother arranged a photography class for her as part of her home schooling curriculum. "She hired a real professional," says Giovan. "I learned about shutter speeds and f-stops, the works." The unique tutorial paid off: For more than 20 years, Giovan has been a sought-after commercial and editorial photographer, working extensively on behalf of such magazines as *Travel & Leisure*, *Veranda*, *House Beautiful*, *Vogue* and *German Architectural Digest*, to name a few.

"I've shot houses from Malibu to Bermuda, and many places in between," says Giovan. Along the way, Giovan has also engaged in personal, documentary style work, which has been exhibited in New York City, Athens and Havana, and is included in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Jewish Museum, and the New York Public Library. Giovan divides her time between New York City and Sag Harbor, New York. Of her constant shift between two homes and multiple assignments, Giovan confesses: "I'm forever packing, unpacking, packing and unpacking. Don't get me wrong — this is not a complaint."

A house on the beach in East Hampton, which Tria Giovan, previous page, shot for *Hamptons Cottages & Gardens*.





How does having grown up in the US Virgin Islands inform your work?

It has definitely affected my color sensibility. I am so drawn to the blues and greens of the Caribbean. It's as though it has been imprinted onto my DNA.

Is there a photographer who inspired you in your early days?

There are several. I studied with Jerome Liebling at Hampshire College in Massachusetts. As a documentarian, his unflinching eye, elegance and dedication to the medium had an enormous influence on the way I approach individual subjects, as well as long-term projects. I moved to New York in 1985 and assisted Adam Bartos, who at the time was shooting interiors for magazines like *House & Garden*. As a friend, mentor and colleague, Bartos has continued to inspire me, both with his series of fine-art photography books and his personal vision. I also worked with Deborah Feingold, the wonderful portrait photographer, shooting celebrities and musicians like Sophia Loren, Carol Burnett and Billy Preston. It was great fun, and I learned a lot about the business side of photography, as she ran a big studio.

Giovan on location in St. Barths.



A young southern lady with a silver mint julep cup collection, as captured by Giovan in Beaufort, SC.

No matter how busy you get, you always find time to dedicate to your personal work. You spent six years going back and forth to Cuba on month-long trips in order to compile images for your book, *Cuba: The Elusive Island* (Harry N. Abrams). What compelled you to make such a unique journey not even knowing whether you'd have a publisher for it?

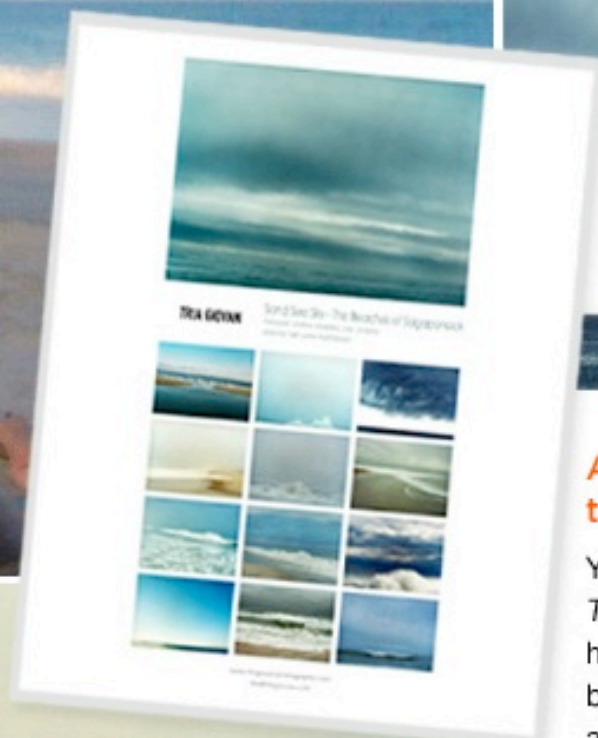
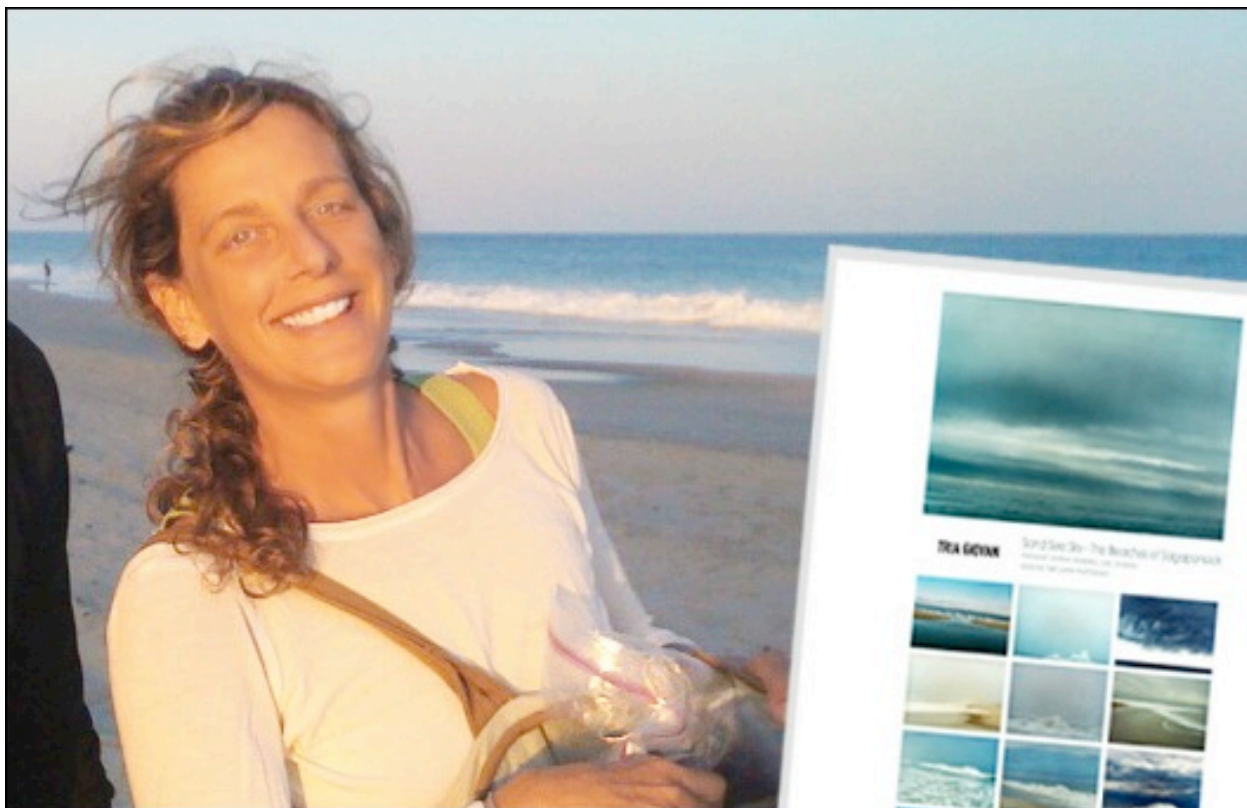
Growing up in the Caribbean, where development was rampant, I wanted to document a place that hadn't been homogenized like so much of the rest of the world. Due to its isolation, Cuba — with its elegant complexity — is such a rare place. The diverse architecture of sultry Havana, the enigmatic landscapes of the countryside and the people's warmth all inspired me to pursue my mission to document this place before it caught up with the rest of the world.

Three Men, Remedios, Cuba, one of the many colorful images that appears in Giovan's book *Cuba: The Elusive Island*, published in 1996.



Another image from Giovan's book: *Dancing at the Beach, Isabel de Sagua.*





And you've got two other long-term projects in the works.

Yes, I've spent the last 10 years photographing *Sand Sea Sky* — *The Beaches of Sagaponack*, a 10,000-image project charting the hourly and daily permutations of tide, wind, sand and sky of the beaches of Sagaponack, New York. This project will culminate in a book, to be released in 2012, with a forward by Andrew Sharpless, CEO of Oceana, the world's largest ocean conservancy organization. This past year I began a new series, *My Trees*, inspired by the canopy of trees in my backyard in Sag Harbor. I began a series of abstract landscapes using a broken Soviet-era camera that randomly advances film creating panoramic narratives. Sometimes the winds — and your inspiration — take you to your own backyard.

Clockwise from top left: Giovan on Gibson Beach, photographing for her new book *Sand, Sea, Sky - The Beaches of Sagaponack*; *August Storm*, 2008, and *Sagg Main Fog*, fall 2007, both from the series/book.



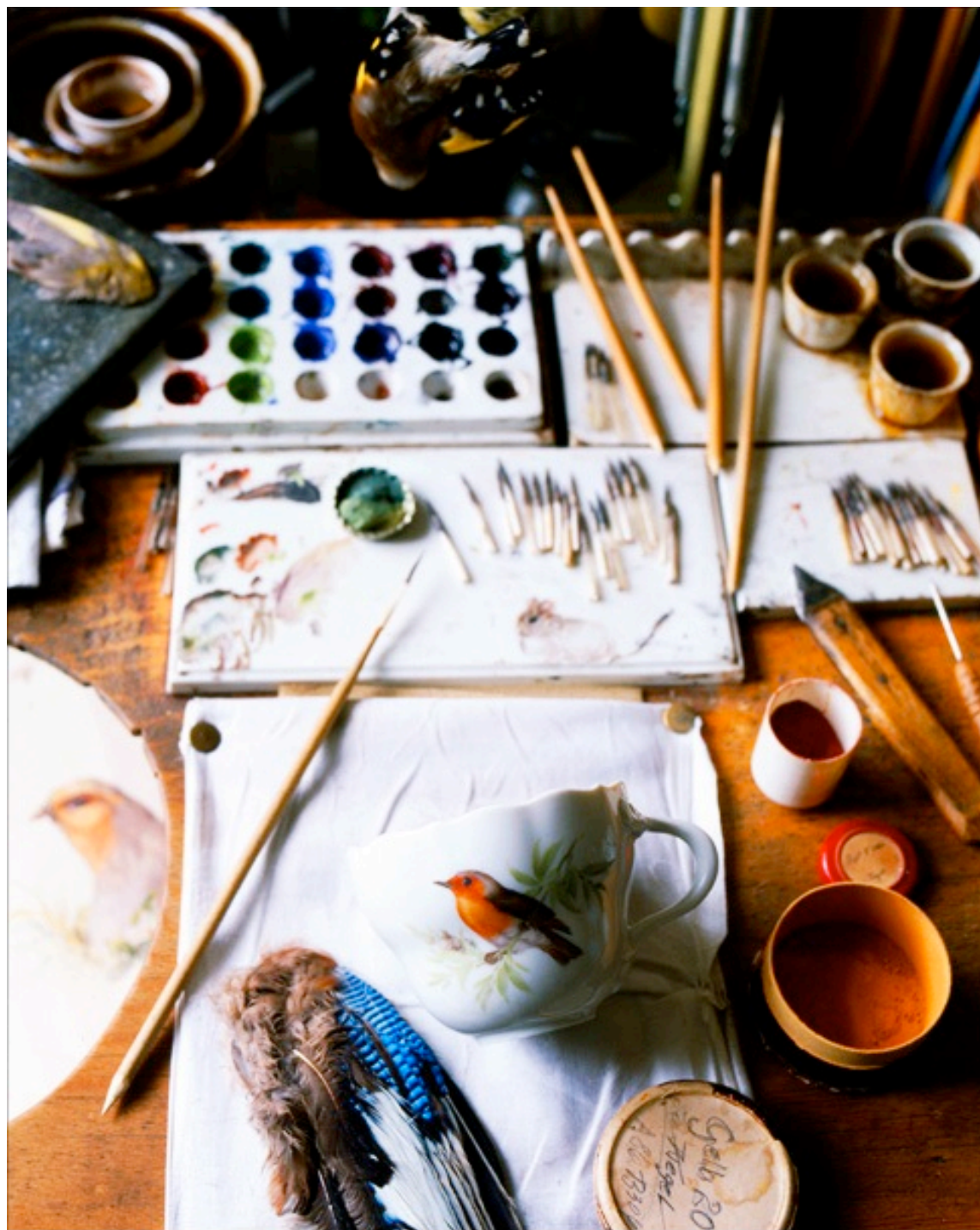
Owned by Marc Blackwell and Eric Renitz, this Fire Island house with views of the bay and the ocean was shot by Giovan for *Coastal Living* magazine.

Of the hundreds of houses you've shot over the years, is there a particularly memorable one?

The one location that does stand out is the de Menil house in Houston, Texas, that I shot for *PaperCity* magazine. With its Philip Johnson architecture, interior design by legendary couturier Charles James and a world-renowned art collection that includes Magritte, Ernst, Chagall and primitive African and Oceanic art, the De Menil house is a perfect storm of austere beauty.

Giovan shot the De Menil house in Houston, Texas, for *PaperCity* magazine. "One of my all-time favorite interiors shoots. Eclectic, austere and eccentric - the epitome of refined elegance," she says.





Tell us about one of your most unusual magazine shoots.

One of my favorites, for *Art & Antiques Magazine*, was to photograph German porcelain. We shot at the Meissen porcelain factory in Dresden. In the dozens of rooms where the porcelain was being hand painted, there were eccentric and divine still lifes everywhere I looked. Art director Chris Lione had to drag me out of there.

Top: Designer Jenny Peters' home in Coconut Grove, photographed for *Southern Accents* magazine. Left: The Bird Room at the Meissen porcelain factory in Dresden, Germany, shot for *Art & Antiques*.



A Palm Beach home photographed for *Southern Accents*.



Have you noticed a trend in where clients send you to shoot?

They seem to run in cycles. From the late eighties to the mid-nineties there were many assignments in Europe. During the nineties, there were wonderful shoots throughout the South, (New Orleans, Savannah, Charleston, Birmingham, Houston and lots of small towns in between). The past few years have brought me back to the Caribbean. I just returned from the Bahamas (Harbour Island and Abaco) for a delightful shoot for *Coastal Living* magazine.

What kind of camera did you use when you first started out?

Both of my parents were avid photographers. My mother worked for a photographer before she married in the early fifties and my father documented our childhood with his Leicas. My mother gave me her beloved Nikkormat and I have since wrangled the now-vintage Leicas from my father.

A Richard Holley project shot for *PaperCity* magazine in Houston, Texas.



How do you feel about the new impact of technology upon photography?

I went kicking and screaming into shooting digital but I have come to realize it is so much easier. There is a patina and tactile quality to film that I miss, but don't miss waiting for the Polaroids or my color temperature meter. Sadly, there will be generations of photographers to come that will have never shot film or printed in a dark-room. They won't even know what they are missing.

If you had not become a photographer?

Perhaps an Afro-Caribbean dancing fiction writer? I studied folkloric and modern dance and do plan to devote more time to fiction writing. That being said, I can always put on some music and dance around the living room.

Right: A pavilion overlooking the Mississippi river photographed for *Travel & Leisure*. Above: Giovan on location in Lyford Cay in the Bahamas, for *Veranda* magazine.



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featuring the work of **TRIA GIOVAN**

