

SANDY SORLIEN

All prints are toned gelatin silver, numbered in editions of 30 and signed on the reverse.

Prices: \$450.00 matted; frames \$70.00

1. Manayunk, Pennsylvania 1991

This row of homes is a few blocks from my house. Hilly Manayunk is technically a neighborhood of Philadelphia, but it juts out like a thumb waiting to hitchhike elsewhere, surrounded by Fairmount Park, the Wissahickon Creek, and the Schuylkill River.

I stood in the middle of the street to take this picture and the owner of the nearest house immediately came out to talk.

"Will my house be in the picture?" he asked. When I said yes, he asked if he could have a print of it. "Sure!" I said, preening slightly - ah, he's interested in my work, how nice.

"Because I'm putting in all new replacement windows," he explained, "and I want a 'before' picture."

2. Dalhart, Texas 1990

This place is in the Panhandle, up near Oklahoma. When I knocked on the door, a young woman answered holding a broom. She spoke only Spanish. I asked if it was her house, she said no. I pointed to my camera, she nodded OK. Then I was thinking she must be the housekeeper, but much later I looked at the picture and thought how strange that would be, a housekeeper for such a tiny house. maybe she meant that she rented it, that she lived there but it wasn't "her" house. This got me wondering how, or why, we feel that a house is our own. Usually some bank owns more of it that we do. Does it have to do with how long we lived there? Or what we lived through, while we were there? Or how much we needed to call a place our own.

Sometimes I spend less than thirty minutes at a house, but because I've taken a certain kind of picture of it, I begin to think of it as my house. Not to live in, but to look at whenever I want.

3. Sequim, Washington 1988

This place has a FOR SALE sign on it and was clearly deserted. It was yellow and glowed in concert with the golden grasses in the pasture. (I toned the picture brown to recall that impression.) i wanted to buy it and retire there to the view of the Strait of Juan de Fuca across a temperate valley below the snow-capped Olympic Mountains. Back home, a worker in a copy shop saw a rough Xerox of this photograph and sighed, "Now there's a place you could live for the rest of your life".

4. New London, Ohio 1992

5. Middleburgh, New York 1990/92

6. Mackinac Island, Michigan 1992

I took my bike over on the ferry to Mackinac. I hear that in summer the two by three mile island gets pretty crowded, but on the day before Thanksgiving I was the only tourist there. I couldn't believe this place. It was house heaven - no cars, no visible electric wires, no trash lying around - it was immaculate, except for the horse droppings. And all these delightful Northern summer homes with balconies and sunrooms and turrets and shingles.

The break in the trees on the right side of the picture is where I rode my bike through after circling the island on a narrow paved road. You can see the Straits of Mackinac and Lake Huron through it.

7. Scottville, North Carolina 1989

This house was 100 years old when I took the picture. According to its owner, a retired schoolteacher, it's one of the two oldest houses in Allegheny County. She wasn't home when I first saw the house and photographed it, but I returned three years later to give her a print. As I introduced myself, my rapid northern speech was too much for her - "I cain't understand a word you're sayin'!" she cried. "You must be from overseas!" She offered me a Yoo-Hoo and we talked. Slower.

8. Eureka, Kansas 1990

9. Hodges, South Carolina 1989

10. Mobile, Alabama 1991

11. Thibodaux, Louisiana 1991

Hurricane Andrew probably flooded this place badly. When I was there in November 1991, the owner said that a couple weeks before, their big lawn has been under two feet of water, just from rains flooding the bayou out back. "There were turtles and alligators swimming all over the yard," she said in a Cajun accent. "And my husband fished for gar fish off the porch. My son paddled in a pirogue from here out to the road to get the school bus. It was like that for two weeks."

The house is only four years old, its symmetrical curved staircases copied from Evergreen, one of the Mississippi Delta's famous antebellum plantations. (Speaking of symmetrical, I've discovered from photographing houses that they rarely are. Look closely at this one and you'll see it's rather out of whack.)

12. Catasauqua, PA 1991

13. Manayunk, PA (Hermitage Street), 1992

These houses are in my neighborhood and I had my eye on them for a long time, but there were always cars parked in front. Sometimes I feel bold enough to ask people to move their cars and sometimes I don't. I kept going back there hoping to catch the street empty but never did, until a huge pothole developed right in front of the houses and a barricade was put up, so no one could park on that part of the block.

I was to photograph a Christmas scene for Philadelphia Magazine, whatever I wanted. I would have liked a snowy scene because that's how I remember my childhood Christmases, but it hardly ever snows here anymore. I shot this in February, and for once I was glad that Manayunkers keep their holiday decorations up until the next holiday, so the snowflakes were still there.