

ELUSIVE TAOS

You can visit the historic plaza, watch the Turtle Dancers at the pueblo, gaze into the great rift of the Río Grande and never understand Taos. But this longtime Taoseño and gifted photographer really gets it

BY BILL CURRY

I arrived in Taos for San Geronimo Feast Day at the pueblo. It was the fall of 1992. At first I found Northern New Mexico dry and inhospitable, despite the beautiful gorge, great hot springs, and stunning mountains. On my second day in Taos a friend took me to that ancient site, Tuah-Tah or The Place of the Red Willows, continuously inhabited for almost 1,000 years. It was like time travel. My heart sang. The magical light, the thick-walled adobe of the pueblo, its beautiful people, ancient songs and dance, and the sacred mountain behind it spoke to my heart in the most powerful way.

The sacred Taos Mountain grabs your imagination and heart. It pulls you into the land of enchantment, compelling you to stay until its intensity sends some packing, fleeing from the brightly polished mirror of self-reflection that is its surface, back onto the journey of life somewhere else. But if you stay, you may never leave.

One huge reason I stayed is the light, the glorious pure light that is unlike anywhere else in the world. The sublime colors, surreal sky, exceptionally long views, clear nights. The snowfall in winter melting off before noon and the intense summer sun with its blue-sky days bringing ephemeral light and dark cool shadows. July's triple rainbows and the rolling reverberations of Thunder Beings breaking across fairy-tale summer clouds.

The Grammy Award-winning, pueblo-born musician Robert Mirabal once said that all roads lead through Taos. I believe he meant the pueblo, which has been a trade center for many North American tribes. The Río Pueblo's crystalline waters, with its source at Blue Lake, runs through the pueblo separating the north and south sides. For me it is always an honor to walk over the bridge, going to see friends I have made through the years and attending dances open to the public.

Around 1900 artists Bert Phillips and Ernest Blumenschein passed through and decided to stay when their wagon broke down. Author and art patroness Mabel

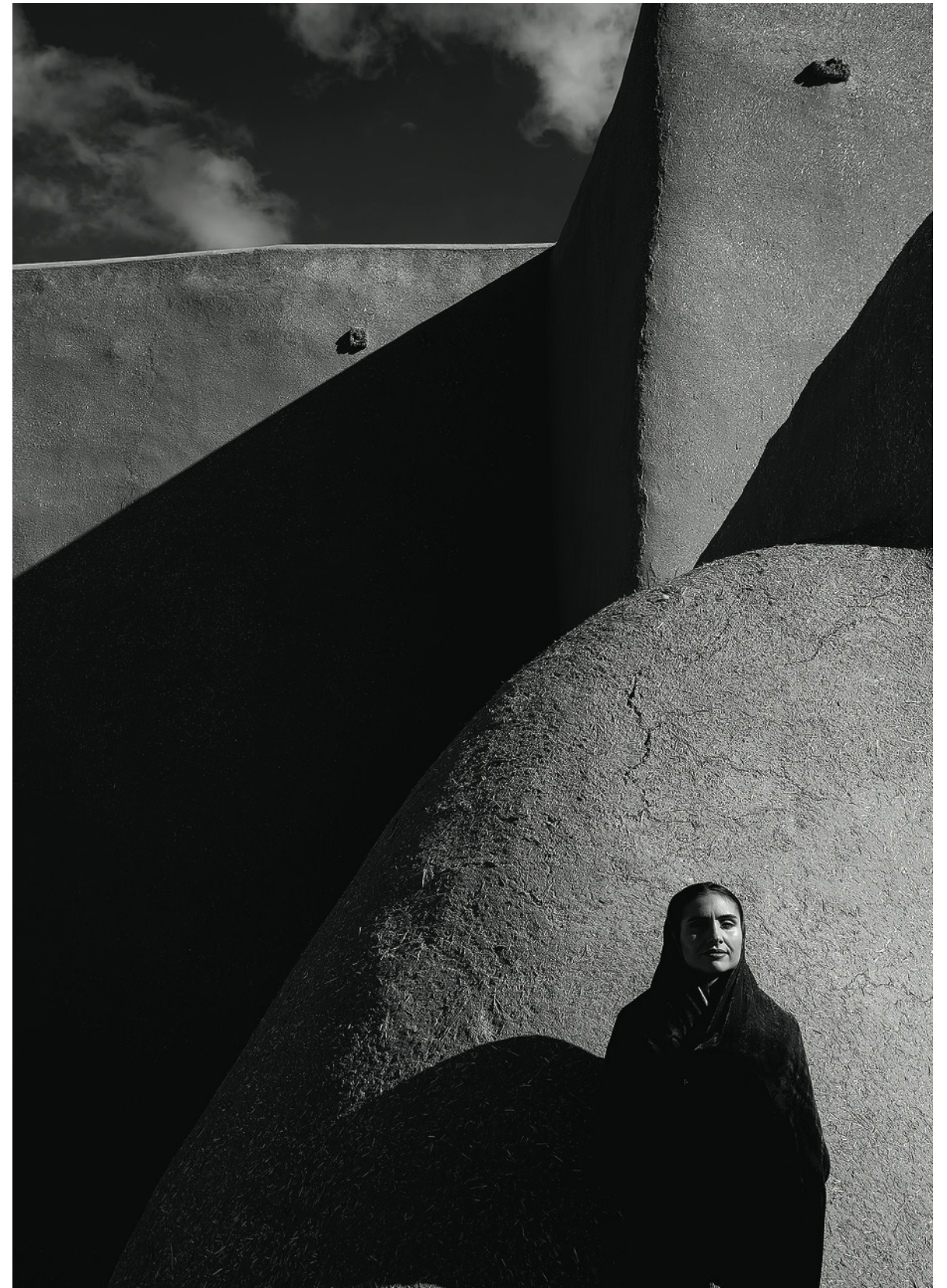
Dodge Luhan brought luminaries like D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Ansel Adams to Taos. Then came the hippies, gurus, writers, poets, musicians, and artists of every stripe who just land in Taos and find themselves in awe of the magical light, the rawness, the pure inspiration of this remote place at 7,000 feet above sea level. The human diversity is extraordinary.

Spiritual seekers of all kinds, disillusioned with the material world and looking for something, come here and find freedom to be authentic—Catholics, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Taoists. Lamas perform Tibetan rites early on Saturday mornings at the Buddhist temple on the West Mesa. Devotees sing the *Hanuman Chalisa* on Sundays at the Hanuman Temple. Here too are the Turtle, Deer, Corn, and Buffalo dances at the pueblo, a Muslim community near Abiquiu, and centuries-old Catholic churches scattered like acorns throughout the town and countryside.

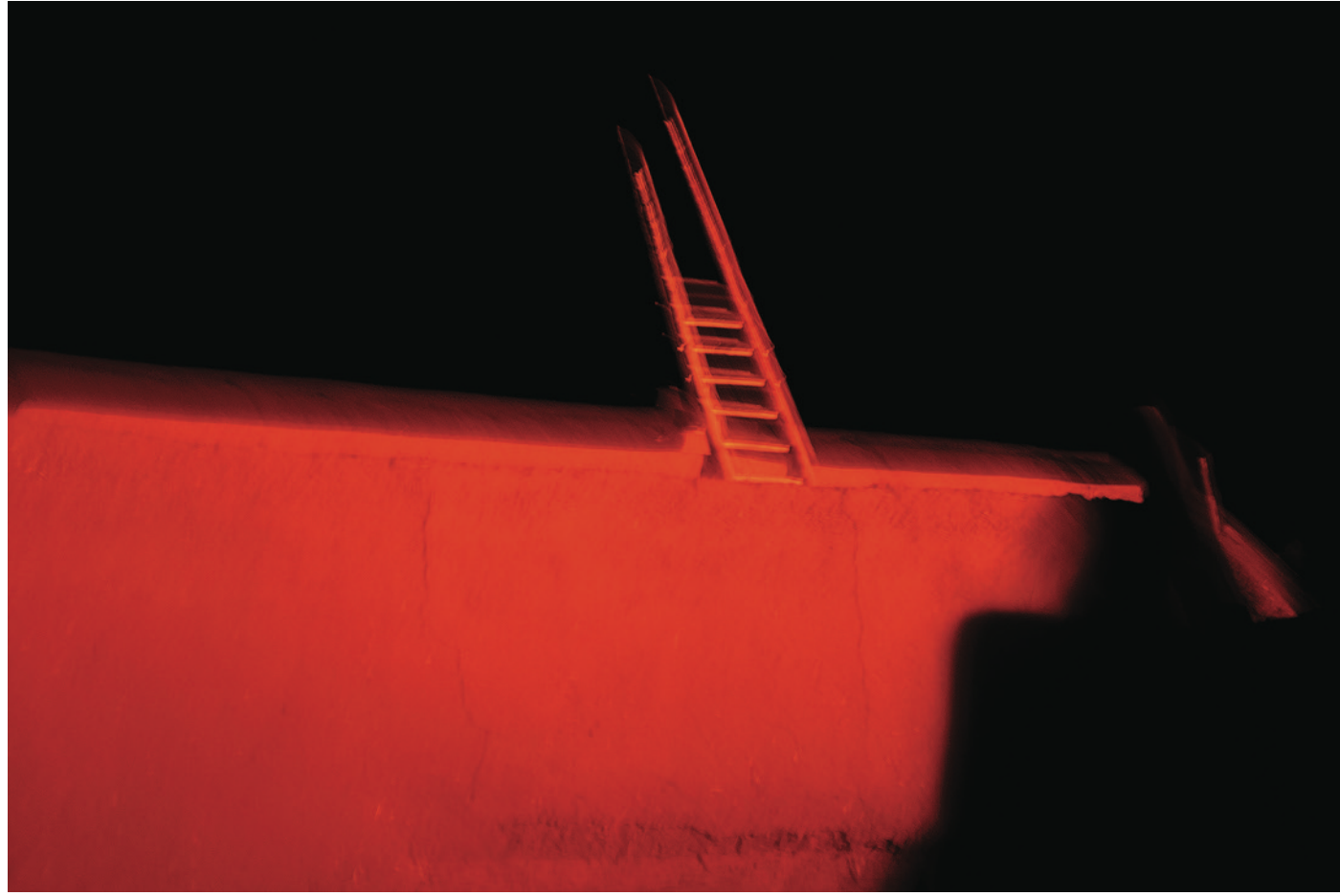
I saw Jesus walking through town in a homespun white robe back in the '90s. I wanted to take his picture and followed him to a local motel. "May I take your photo?" I asked when we were face to face. He replied gently, "Will I need to sign a release form?" He turned out to be a trust-funder from Vermont.

There are whisperings of Taos becoming the next Aspen, Jackson Hole, or Telluride. Locals have a challenge finding rentals and there are three-minute traffic jams around the plaza. Airbnbs are now ubiquitous; water rights feuds, same as ever. The blinking light on US Route 64 north of town was taken down back in 1998 though locals still call that intersection "The Old Blinking Light."

Yet I sense that Taos Mountain and the pueblo will keep this place unlike any other on Earth, with its ancient ways, bison herd, sacred Blue Lake, kivas where ancient songs are sung, where prayers are going up each day for our Mother Earth and her people. Perhaps the Tibetan monks and the Tiwa people are holding it all together for us. May it always be so. ✨



Jade Brunel stands near one of the "sculpted" adobe buttersse of San Francisco de Assisi Mission Church. The Taos icon, completed in 1816, is known for its blend of Pueblo and Spanish Colonial architecture.



A wooden ladder gives access to a roof at the 1,000-year-old Taos Pueblo.



Christmas Eve at the Taos Pueblo brings Vespers Mass, a procession with a statue of the Virgin Mary, as bonfires light up the winter sky.



A summer rainstorm near Tres Piedras, northwest of Taos. Top: Beautiful, untouched Río Pueblo originates at Blue Lake and passes through the center of Taos Pueblo before emptying into the Río Grande Gorge.

Clockwise, from top left: Pianist Katya Grineva performs at the Taos Art Museum in the historic Fehin House; cowboy-musician Rod Taylor of The Riffers, a Northern New Mexico acoustic band; musician Joshua Bain and artist-filmmaker Bryn McKay, two new pioneers in Taos.



At the 2016 Taos Pueblo Pow Wow, dancers from the gathered Indian Nations await the grand entry. Cancelled for several years due to the pandemic, the event is scheduled to return this year in early July.

Both Sides Now

HE ARRIVED IN NEW YORK CITY FROM OHIO IN 1977 and pounded the pavement, carrying his modeling portfolio. By chance, fate, or something, he crossed paths with Wilhelmina Cooper, who founded one of the most successful modeling and talent agencies in the world.

Launched, he began traveling to serve as the face of high-fashion brands like Valentino, Armani, and Versace. He was on the cover of *GQ* magazine and countless catalogs and starred in more than 100 television commercials worldwide.

It was the delirious time of Warhol and The Factory in the Big Apple, and Curry played a part.

After studying acting with Sanford Meisner at the Neighborhood Playhouse, he landed roles in the 1986 film *Club Paradise* with Robin Williams and in Kevin Costner's 1990 *Dances with Wolves*.

All the while, Curry observed the lighting techniques of renowned fashion photographers like Arthur Elgort, Jean Pagliuso, Bruce Weber, and Steven Meisel, who all looked at him through the camera lens.

"I was learning on locations around the world with great photographers the importance of light, composition, and being in the moment," Curry said.

Then he found Taos.

