



**Ken Straiton / PHOTOGRAPHS '77-'78  
& INTERVIEW**

*Ann Rosenberg and Lois Redman interviewed Ken Straiton at his Kitsilano home/studio in August '79.*

*AR* Did you choose Photography or did Photography choose you?

*KS* It was not a conscious act of choice. My father gave me a Brownie when I was about five . . . but I guess I didn't embark upon Photography until six or so years ago. Looking back, however, I'm aware that I've always taken pictures for the sake of taking photographs and I came from an environment where my father was always taking photographs, making sculpture. At school, art was my best subject and at university I *pursued* Art, Art History and Film courses while studying Psychology; but I trained myself mainly through trial and error.

*AR* When you shoot a picture is the end product what you expected when you snapped the shutter?

*KS* Usually. Most of the time. The extent of the darkroom work is pretty much a craft sort of thing, getting a good print; there is very little of *making the image* in the dark room.

*AR* Do you pursue a particular direction in your current work?

*KS* Well I do and I don't, in as much as I'm constantly questioning what I'm doing, thinking in circles and trying to find out other ways of seeing and expressing them. If I look at what satisfies me ultimately there seems to be a distinctive set of elements that make up the images that please me as, for example, one finds in the work reproduced here in *The Capilano Review*.

It's an almost primitive sense of formality that I sought there. The more I get away from the works you're publishing, the more I see *why* I like them. I love monumental things; for instance, I make a point of visiting Capitol buildings. Formal spaces intrigue me, but I still haven't figured out completely why they do. There is something fascinating about the fact that people like to create totally formal settings. Symmetry is significant and symmetry goes through a lot of things, cross-culturally and through time. All those images you are reproducing have a way of lying there in a comfortable, staid way; the constant reference of the horizon helps hold them together and offers a visual resting place. The mediative aspect of horizons and water also ties into the symbolism — all archetypal. What I'm doing now is more active, although compositionally still tight. I've gotten to the point in my work where doing more of the same would not be telling anyone anything more.

**LR** Formal architectural spaces control response. Are you interested in controlling the viewer's response?

**KS** I'm more interested in producing something that the viewer will respond to than in having power over him. And I suppose that I'm finding the urban environment, especially the most recent urban environment mind-blowingly austere, and the expressway which figures prominently in my recent work is the *ultimate*. If you're driving on it at 60 miles per hour it's one thing; if you're walking there it's a wasteland. And the austerity lends itself to certain visually arresting images that I select out. I have a difficult time, however, resisting the impulse to make aesthetic, ascetic images. Some people think I make cold, awful photographs — those people are getting the message but they are not seeing the point; the more intellectual types say, "*Boy! That's beautiful.*"



























