





The Man Behind The Lens

A visit to the London digs of Henry Dallal, international photographer and voyager extraordinaire

Story by Suzy Dorr • Photographs courtesy of Henry Dallal

Magical Memories

As we retired each evening to our colorful tents, I often lay listening to the singing of thousands of night birds, and the odd neighing of our horses nearby. The memory of another wonderful day would play over my mind: the feeling of sand warmed by the camp fire slipping through my bare toes and fingers as we sat around listening to Bonnie's (aka Kanwar Raghuvendra Singh Dundlod) stories or the wonderful memory of a magical lakeside camp after a full day's riding in open country.—From "Travels on a Marwari Horse in Rajasthan," by Henry Dallal, published in Ireland's Equestrian magazine.

The Rajasthan desert's a far cry from Henry Dallal's London digs—a colorfully cluttered home in the Pont Street Mews, a picturesque grouping of private residences surrounding a cobbled courtyard. Converted from original stables constructed in 1879, this mews stands not far from the back door of that "little London store," as he puts it. It's Harrods, of course, to everyone else but Dallal, who when speaking has a way with words that minimize yet somehow magnify



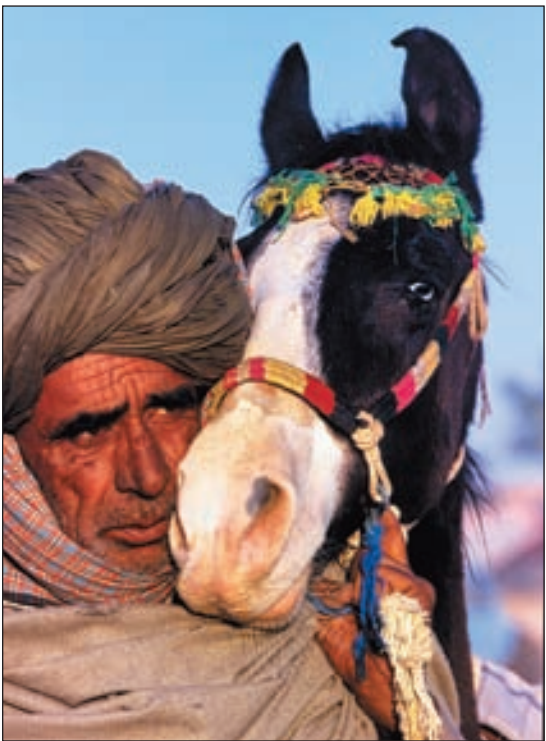
Henry Dallal, pictured here in Rajasthan with his Marwari horse Patch.

Top of spread, from left: Still life, Goa; decorating the hand with Hanna, Kashmir; forest dwellers around the kitchen stove in Kashmir; nomadic tribal woman with her horse in Kashmir; Lake Dal, Kashmir; nomadic tribal woman with her horse caravan in Kashmir; Ethiopian shepherd going home; at left, the braided mane of an Arab stallion before a royal race in Bahrain.



how he views the world. In contrast, his written words often tend toward the lyrical or even downright rhapsodic when describing how he retraced Lawrence of Arabia's route on horseback in Jordan and General Napier's path across most of Ethiopia during the battle of Magdala.

I first met Dallal in early 2005 at the Naples Museum of Art, where he presented a captivating lecture and unique slide show with music and sound effects. Called *Pageantry & Performance: The Household Cavalry in a Celebration of Pictures* (his gorgeous coffee-table book has the same name), the exhibit made it difficult to believe that the projected photographs were actually stills, so moving were the pictures. Too, the Phil's two west galleries were filled with his brilliant photography, and an extended digital loop of images was on view in a specially constructed, enclosed gallery within the westernmost gallery. Of note: A number of these same images had also been projected on the walls of Windsor Castle in a *son et lumière* spectacle.



In chatting with him after the performance, I learned that he was originally from Iran and that his mother, Loris, a talented ikebana master who conducts popular workshops at the von Liebig, and father, Naim, live in Naples, so his presence here was a natural. As I too had lived briefly in Iran in the last days of the shah, I quickly pocketed his card after he suggested I call him when next in London. An extended stay in Notting Hill this past summer provided the opportunity to catch up with him.

An assignment to write about him for *Coastal Elegance* wasn't exactly onerous, given Henry's athletic good looks, engaging demeanor and the invitation to share a lovely dry rosé he'd hand-carried from Provence. (During the second appointment, we segued to a great red!) His home somehow reminded me of a downstairs loft, in that one enters at ground level and then descends to the living area. His striking photographs are everywhere you look—hung on walls, leaning on furniture, stacked in corners. His expansive computer table seems to be the center of operations. Phones and doorbells kept ringing at irregular intervals, but he still made time to answer my queries, so these were certainly not voice-recorder-in-hand, formulaic interviews. Relatives and friends dropped by, as did a young photographer with portfolio, apparently with an interest in employment.



There's a large screen that drops down from the ceiling upon which Dallal projects his fascinating audio-visual travel experiences for visitors during salons/soirées, and a tiny, walled back garden where one can pop out for a smoke. The bike upon which he whips around his Knightsbridge neighborhood—coincidentally also home of the Household Cavalry, the object of his lens in that self-published tome *Pageantry and Performance*—and farther afield, in central London, camera always at the ready, stands safely in wait inside the indoor entryway. Alas, I wasn't able to visit the Cavalry stables as the royal horsemen and their charges were off to the beach for their summer hols beside the North Sea.

At left, from top: Siq traveler in Jordan; Marwari horse and keeper in Rajasthan; the Household Cavalry at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. At right: a horse trader in Rajasthan.







At 50, Dallal continues to yearn for and pursue often extreme adventure as he has since his mother introduced him to riding as a youngster and his father gave him his first camera at nine. He's polyglot—his native Farsi, Arabic, French, English and passable Spanish—and an athlete proficient in equine sports, mountaineering, and tennis. Highly skilled as a photographer, with a near infallible eye even when shooting from the saddle at full gallop, he eschews digital manipulation of his work. His photos are exquisite, be they close-ups, panoramic views or dramatic equine reflections in highly burnished musical instruments or ceremonial regimental armor.

Prior to enrolling at the University of Denver in 1973 and pursuing a business degree, Dallal delved deeply into his growing passion for anything and everything equine and developed his skills as


a freelance photojournalist back in his homeland. Following his collegiate experience, it was quickly evident that a career in real estate simply wasn't for him. "I should have majored in social anthropology," he said with a sigh—not surprising considering his love of history and adventure in some of the world's most remote wildernesses and challenging mountainscapes.

He's amassed not only a staggering number of photos of the Household Cavalry but also of all manner of British royal pageantry, both joyful and somber. He's photographed Her Majesty the Queen on four different occasions at her invitation, including several times accompanied by a royal horse or two. His photographs of the mourners and masses of flowers after Princess Diana's death are included in a book, and he was on hand to photograph the Queen Mother's funeral procession.

Farther afield, other royal commissions have come from HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, daughter of Jordan's late King Hussein and his widow Queen Noor, to photograph her and her husband, HRH General Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid al Maktoun, ruler of Dubai, with "their favorite four-legged friends," as he puts it. HRH the King of Bahrain, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, selected Dallal to contribute equine images of last year's Junior Endurance World Championship races for a forthcoming book. Obviously, his horsemanship and photographic expertise are the perfect entrée for such contacts. Besides, he's equally at ease in either jodhpurs or black tie.

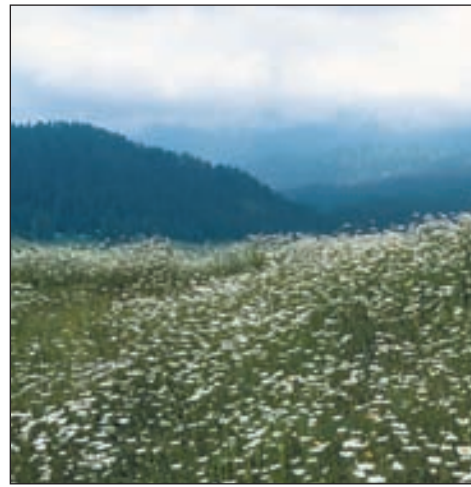
Dallal unquestionably epitomizes the acme of excellence in itinerant photojournalism. His wide-ranging journeys have taken him from the Turkoman steppes to Goa; to peaks in the Hindu Kush and up McKinley and Anapurna; and hunting in deep winter with members of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation in search of wild horses in Washington state as well as riding across Scotland following General Wade's 18th century route from Perthshire to Aberdeen.

Dallal's latest and ongoing project is photographing India's 61st Cavalry, the last remaining active mountain cavalry regiment in the world, an historic amalgamation of units created from diverse princely states and the British Raj. In addition, he's mounting a major expedition to Tibet to follow in the path of Col. Francis Younghusband, dispatched by Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India, to lead a military expedition in 1904. He hopes to produce a second *Celebration of Pictures* volume based on this project.

Not surprisingly, Henry Dallal's enduring dream is of a trip that one day may be possible and that would take him back to his native land. As he puts it, "I'm desperate to go back and to experience the nomadic migrations with the Qashqai, Kurds and Baluchis in Iran." 



Kashmir chronicle, top of spread, from left: rice farmer; snowcapped mountains in summer; forest dwellers; Pir Panchal Mountains; a farmer; mountains in bloom. At left: camel fair in Rajasthan.



Should readers be near Lexington, Kentucky, in 2008, Dallal will be exhibiting a selection of his equestrian photos shot in London and throughout the world, at the Kentucky Horse Park. Further details will appear in future issues of Coastal Elegance and on its Web site, www.ceandw.com.

Photographic note: During my stay in London, I was invited by Vivek Angra, director of INDIATOURISM for the U.K. and Ireland, to attend a special private reception and screening of Dallal's recent views of Kashmir. Although horses did figure in this recent photographic adventure, it was more of a general Kashmiri travelogue that held the select audience of dignitaries in thrall. Fascinating Kashmir, a formerly princely state of Southwest Asia, is encircled in part by India, and is also adjacent to Pakistan, Sinkiang and Tibet. The photographer provided all images that accompany this story. For more information, visit Dalla's Web site at www.henrydallal.com.

Of Bags and Babes

Of special interest to the ladies: A silent auction of legendary and vintage designer handbags called Old Bags for Babies will be held at the new NCH Garden of Hope and Courage to benefit the new pediatric unit at the NCH North Collier Hospital. On auction will be Henry Dallal's recently retired trusted camera bag that he carried on almost all the photo shoots mentioned in this story. He's also including a book and a special surprise gift. The unique al fresco event, scheduled for Dec. 5 from 2 p.m. until 4 p.m., will feature afternoon tea with champagne and sherry. Tickets are \$125 per person. For more information, call Sallie Williams at 239-436-4511.

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