

By Lou Jacobs Jr.

Peter Treiber's self-published book *Inside Bethlehem Steel: The Final Quarter Century* is an astounding account of nearly three decades documenting the company's nationwide mills, operations and client projects from 1977 to 2000.

For five years Peter—who still lives in Bethlehem, PA, where the company's principal mill was located—was on the staff in the advertising department, but later became a contract photographer for the company and its ad agency. The book is a trove of steel-making images, complete with dramatic photographs and a text by Elizabeth “Bette” Kovach, a former Bethlehem promotion department colleague.

Peter began his photography career shooting for his high school yearbook, and he gained further experience from a summer job as an assistant to Hobart Baker, the inventor of the front projection system. He started night art classes at State University of New York (SUNY) and later switched to advertising design before transferring to Art Center School (now Art Center College of Design) in Pasadena, CA. After graduation, Peter headed for New York, where he found a few jobs at Krantzen Gould Studios shooting catalog images for clients like Sears and Montgomery Ward.

His next move was to an advertising studio at a chrome duping and retouching lab where he worked on major magazine covers. He recalls, “Finally, in New York, I was chief photographer and communication services manager for International Nickel (INCO). When the company started moving departments to Toronto, with the help of David Eisendrath and my Art Center credentials, I landed a position at Bethlehem Steel (BSC).

“Their photo department occupied about 14,000 square feet of studio and labs. A staff of 26 shot and made prints for all corporate needs, including ads and annual reports. Each photographer did his own black-and-white processing. I shot with Hasselblads on a tripod most of the time, with fill light when necessary.



STEEL RESOLVE

P E T E R T R E I B E R

Peter B. Treiber

Flame cutting-press forge



Gashed rotor-machine shop

By 1983 Beth-Steel dissolved our photo department, and I began freelancing. I shot 99% transparencies with extensive lighting setups and other equipment to maintain accurate color. After going digital in 1999, [I] happily sold all the filters, meters and Polaroid backs.”

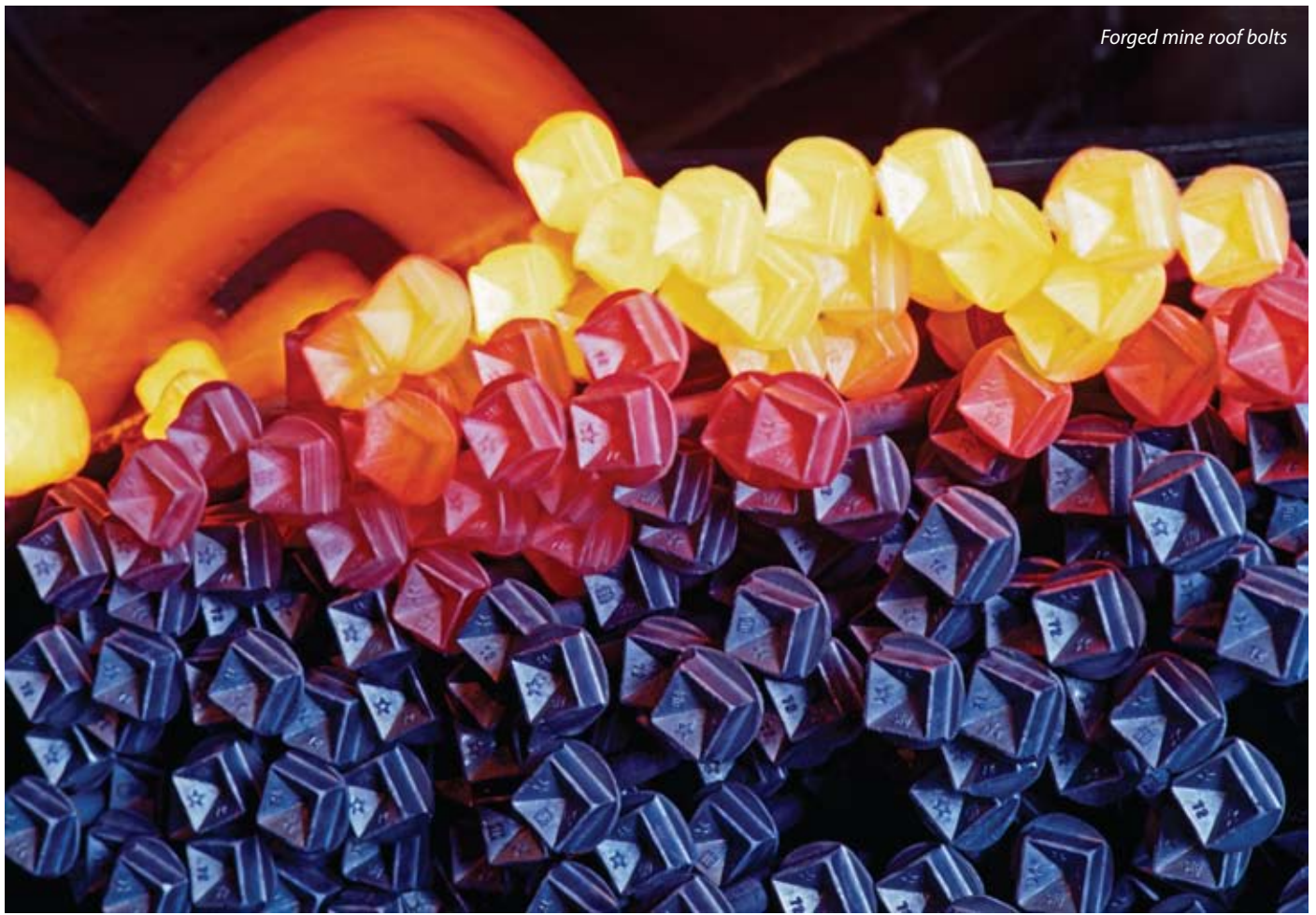
Peter initially sought corporate and industrial clients with his BSC portfolio, but

soon switched to showing his portfolio of New York commercial work. For the next 15 years, working through ad agencies and directly, he shot for clients such as Crayola, Koh-i-Noor (drawing instruments and Mont Blanc pens), Mack Trucks, Ingersoll Rand and various food companies such as Fleischmann’s Yeast. When Bethlehem Steel closed its in-house advertising de-

partment, an ad agency picked up the company as a client and Peter was shooting again for his old employer.

Today, Peter says his best clients are “charter jet aircraft companies, some food accounts and architectural firms.” He adds, “The business is now project-oriented rather than ad campaign-oriented. Photographers bid on projects, but there’s almost no agency loyalty from year to year. The switch to digital gave my business a boost for a few years, but it’s, again, a super competitive market where many former clients now shoot their own photos with prosumer digital cameras. Art directors and printers complain, but the practice continues. My favorite and most challenging work remains what I did for Bethlehem Steel and my aircraft clients.”

In his first four years at BSC, Peter was very busy and traveled extensively. During his fifth year he brought his own enlarger and paper into the company darkroom and made hundreds of color prints for his portfolio. “Twenty-some years later,” he relates, “when I started my book, those prints proved very valuable because company photo files had been broken up and many negatives destroyed. I did my last assignment for BSC in 2000 with a LightPhase digital back. Even then there was no talk of company failure.



Forged mine roof bolts



Hot saw grey mill

“During my first 10 years as a freelancer I had routine permission to publish work from my Bethlehem staff days. In 1999, when I was asked to put up an exhibition, I found that almost all of the negatives of my work in BSC files were gone. I knew because I had kept a log of my assignments.”

A few years ago Peter decided to enter the fine art market with some floral images, and Dan Hugos, owner of the Dakota Ridge Gallery in Jim Thorpe, PA, began showing Peter’s work and asked to see his BSC photographs. The result was another show of large steel-making prints in June 2007. A year earlier, as he was reviewing his images, a university group had announced an effort to preserve the history of BSC, but their efforts didn’t include photography. Peter realized he had abundant material for a Bethlehem Steel book.

“I immediately thought of Bette Kovach, the last company PR director, as a possible writer, and she agreed to do a brief history and extended captions. We had worked together on many projects over the years and decided to follow the steel-making process from raw materials through finished products. Available pages, printing costs and selling price dictated the size and number of photos. Other self-published

photographers I talked to made it clear I would have trouble finding a publisher to produce the quality I wanted for an expected small market. I decided the amount of work would be almost the same no matter who published, and I knew enough to hire a designer with great taste, Kathleen Forsythe.

“To control the color, I did my own separations and made my own set of proofs. The printer’s proofs were based on mine, and everyone has been pleased with the outcome. The U.S. print broker I used paid for my trip to China to oversee printing that came off with few corrections. I am distributing the book myself to local stores, and I was pleased when a distributor came to me after several successful signing events at Barnes and Noble. The book is also distributed to various out of town outlets. Visit www.insidebethlehemsteel.com for more information.

“About six months before the book was printed, with the first few chapters written, Bette and I solicited and received good reviews for jacket copy from selected industry professionals. Three months



Tapping a heat blast furnace



Wide flange beams cooling

before bound books were delivered, we started visiting stores with advanced copies, and were promised orders. After publication we've done many signing events, and Bette has tapped into her media contacts for radio, TV and press interviews. We have focused on Bethlehem, Harrisburg and Baltimore, and later will try several other cities in the Pennsylvania, New York, Illinois and Indiana areas."

The BSC site in Bethlehem, PA, is being redeveloped into a casino, hotel, entertainment, industrial museum and retail complex worth about a billion dollars, which should help extend the timeliness of *Inside Bethlehem Steel: The Final Quarter Century*. The success of the book has led to two more exhibits and boosted print sales. In June 2008, Peter was invited to show his BSC work at Review Santa Fe, where it got a great reception.

Peter's research indicated that the average photo book sells about 750 copies, but he dismissed that figure because he has a larger target audience of steel people. He says, "I made the self-publishing decision

based on what I could afford from savings, the book's selling price, the costs of production and shipping, and the decline of costs with additional copies. The magic number for me was printing 2000 copies, with an estimated break-even point at 1200 copies. To date we have sold over 900 copies, but few sales to libraries. We've had a break selling more copies, off the Web site with the book's name, at retail (\$49.95) than I estimated, though promotion costs were higher."

When he is down to 400 copies, Peter will make a reprint decision. By then he hopes to have cracked the library market. He adds, "Self publishing a book by photographers can be a valuable way to promote assignment work, but it takes a lot of careful financial thought and market research before making decisions. If you can find a conventional book publisher and work out a suitable royalty rate, risks are only those necessary to create the book. You will have income and you can start a new book if you have a new theme. The few successful self-publishing photographers choose

very popular subjects, and many have well known names. A recent example, *Pools* by Kelly Klein was first published about 15 years ago and recently re-released."

Learn more about Peter and his work at his Web site www.ptphoto.com. He can also be reached by email at peter@ptphoto.com.



Lou Jacobs Jr. is the author of 30 how-to photography books, the latest of which is How to Start and Operate a Digital Portrait Photography Studio (Amherst Media). He has taught at UCLA and Brooks, is a former president of ASMP national, and has also written and illustrated numerous books for children. He enjoys shooting stock during his travels in the U.S. and abroad.

