



Fifty Houses: Images from the American Road (The Road and American Culture)

Ms. Sandy Sorlien

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" *Fifty Houses* is a kind of dream book, not just in the otherworldly atmosphere that Sorlien summons up through her apparitional effects with infrared film or through the total exclusion of the humans who dwell within these houses, but also in the way certain of the pictures reach beyond to strike some chord of archetypal resonance... The cool and controlled art behind the photographs draws upon the deep and abiding power of dreams -- not simply those of sleep but also those of our deepest longings." -- from the Foreword by William Least Heat-Moon

In 1988, photographer Sandy Sorlien set out on a series of journeys to document the rich architectural heritage that America is losing to the cheap and banal design aesthetic of tract housing, strip malls, and big-box stores. Her eight-year odyssey took her over ninety thousand miles of back roads to every state in the Union in search of homes that reflect and define the region in which they stand. After making over a thousand "house portraits," Sorlien has chosen one representative image from each state and collected them in *Fifty Houses*.

Shot with black-and-white infrared film, the homes captured through Sorlien's lens range from the grand to the humble, from the historic to the commonplace. Included here are a classic saltbox in Newtown, Connecticut; the House on the Rocks in Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay; a mobile home in Bushnell, Florida; a Stick-style folk Victorian in Biloxi, Mississippi; a limestone cottage in Fredericksburg, Texas; a false-front house in Rollins, Montana; a log cabin in Dubois, Wyoming; an adobe dwelling in Sante Fe, New Mexico; and a platform tent in Healy, Alaska. Each image is accompanied by a vignette from Sorlien's road journal, offering details of the house depicted, its owners and history, other houses in the region, or her travel experiences in the state.

At a time when America's architectural landscape is being homogenized by suburban sprawl, when the outskirts of Anchorage and Oklahoma City look no different from those of Tucson, Jacksonville, and Salt Lake City, *Fifty Houses* provides a remarkable visual record of regional domestic architecture and an elegiac meditation on the changing American landscape.

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