

my place: nature's valley

# Obie Oberholzer

Photographer,  
travel writer  
and oddball

I am ... visual.

**When and where were you born?** August 26 1947, on the farm "Arizona" — so called because my parents met and fell in love in Tuscon, Arizona. I grew up on Arizona until I was about 15 and then we moved to Pretoria.

**Where do you live now?** Nature's Valley, where I've lived since retiring from Rhodes University in 2002 as professor of photography.

**Who do you share your house with?** My wife, Lynn. We celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary on October 24.

**How did you get into your occupation?** My mother gave me a little Kodak camera, and I realised I had some sort of talent when we went to Pisa and I shot the Leaning Tower upright and made all the other buildings fall over. Later, I started to dream about finding out what lies beyond the horizon. And now I know the answer. Do you know? Another horizon. It's a Jack Kerouac-ish way of saying, "I don't give a sh\*\*."

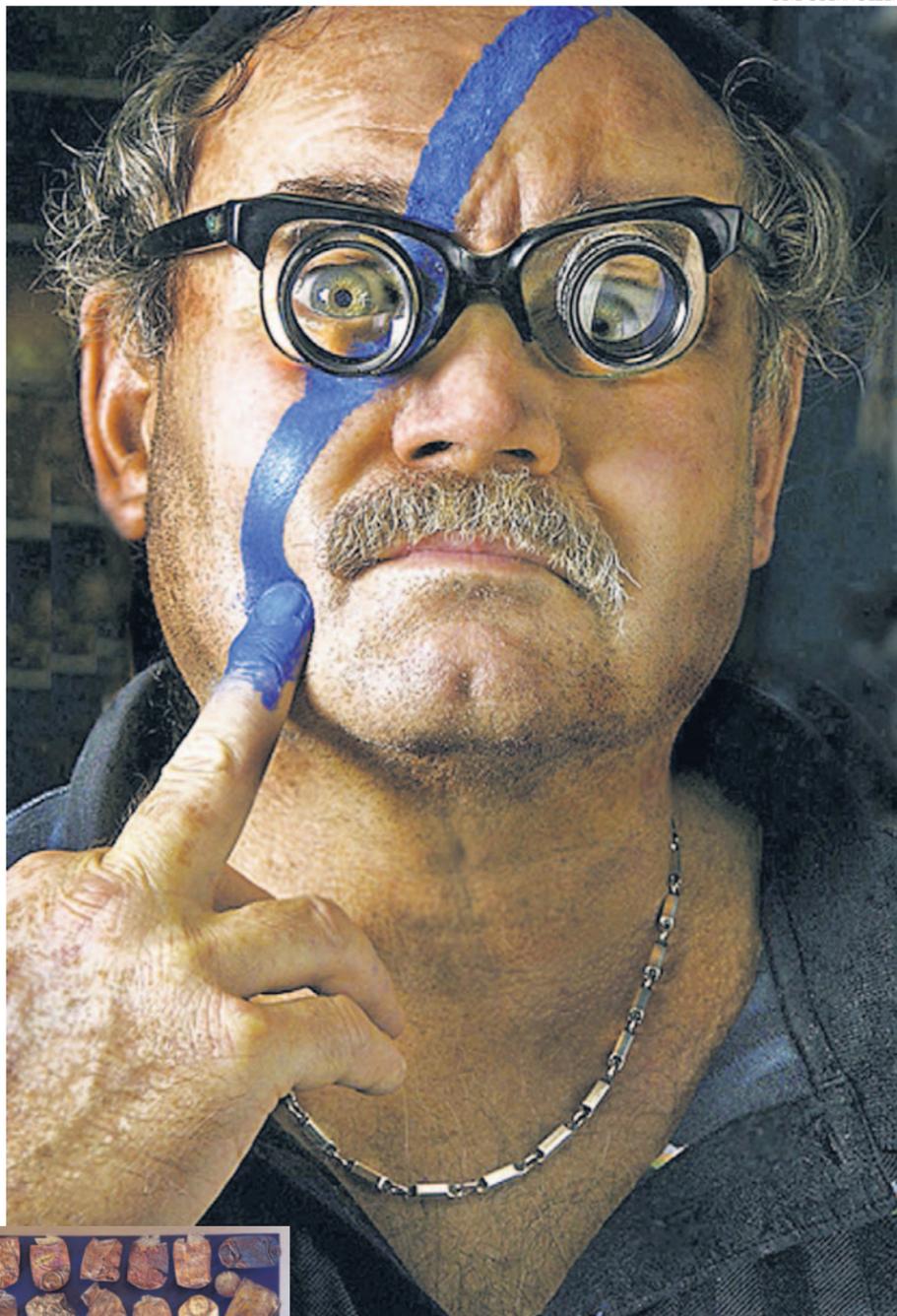
**How do you get around?** I used to have a Fiat. I cut out the seats so I could sleep in it. Now I drive a double-cab 4x4, which also has enough room for a bed.

**What are you working on now?** I'm busy with the last chapter in my latest book, *Diesel and Dust*. "Diesel and dust" is not what you think — it's a philosophy. The smell of diesel and dust early in the morning gives me the feeling that I'm far away, and this book is about that — interesting people and places; about wanderings and passing through.

**What's the fastest you've ever driven?** There's this one picture, where I draw a blue line across my face, which is to do with the "Blue Horizon Hardliners", a reference to the thin, pale blue line of sky on the horizon. In my madder days, I used to go to these great, empty pans, tie a bandana over my eyes and then drive as fast as I could towards the horizon. My record was six and a half minutes. It's the weirdest experience I've ever had without drugs. All sorts of images flickered past. A strange landscape in Turkey, friends of the past, a beach in Greece, running Comrades.

**Digital photography is ...** incredible. I had my own colour lab in Grahamstown, but one day I lost the key to the door and just buried the dinosaur. Luckily it was my 60th birthday and friends surprised me with a digital camera.

**You know you're from Nature's Valley when ...** you can walk on the beach for hours, see nobody, and then come back for breakfast.



OBIE OBERHOLZER



You're a little happier, a little quieter, in your psyche here. And you hate going to the Plett supermarket. Plett has this oily, touristy gloss. People from Joburg come here and think it's Joburg. They're the fast laners. They never relax because it's not in their being.

**If I were mayor of Plett for a day, I would ...** make all those ryk gatte, whose houses

stand empty for 11 months of the year, go on a township tour so they can see how lopsided their society is.

**Everything in moderation, but ...** see how many exceptions you can make.

**What's your favourite view in Nature's Valley?** We have a 3km beach and a bay called Sinker Bay with some rocks. From there you can see the Tsitsikamma range and the waves coming in.

**I collect ...** flat cans and I've stolen signs from every place I've lived, such as "Schleiss Heimer Strasse" in Munich. This German and



## loves&hates

**Julia Roberts's lips:** They are so extended and beautiful and sexy. I don't really care much for the rest of her, but that smile ...

**The smell of khakibos:** Take some khakibos seeds and rub them in your hands — they have a pungent wildness to them.

**Drinking too much with friends:** When you do this, you don't have to impress. You can just relax. And every five minutes somebody will go, "Hmmm."

**Camp fires:** I'm a bit of a pyromaniac. I love making a fire, just sitting there and reaching down and picking up some African earth, which smells of wisdom and decay.

**Flying:** It gives me a different perspective. I look down, and it immediately opens up a whole new world of graphic elements.

**Going to the toilet on a long flight:** I'd rather starve than use one of those toilets.

**'Grey' people:** People who don't have any passion. If your sails aren't filled with passion, your ship will never leave port.

**Traffic jams:** Everybody has this hateful look on their face and there's no humour.

**Standing in the queue at Woolworths:** This is worse than Checkers, because at Checkers there are people I find interesting. At Woolies, they're all upmarket. I find the food they buy and the expressions they have irritating.

**Robert Mugabe:** He should probably top my hate list. I loved his country once. Then he just f\*\*\*\*\* it up. I sent my publisher in the Netherlands Z\$3-million the other day. He thought it was very funny.

his dachshunds walked past while I was doing it and asked: "Was machst du da?" (What are you doing there?). And I said, "Du wirst es nicht glauben, aber ich klau dieses schild" (You're not going to believe it, but I'm stealing this sign). And he said, "Oe. Ja." And then he walked on.

**What books have influenced your life the most?** Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*.

**How would you like to die?** Blindfolded, hitting some object. — Tiara Walters

## LITTLE BLACK BOOK

**Ristorante Enrico's, Plettenberg Bay**  
044 535 9818

Situated on the rocks at Keurbooms River. Here the architecture is less voluptuous and kitsch than in the rest of Plett. People smell like the ocean and braaivleis smoke, not perfume and aftersun. It's so lekker sitting here that I've even done it in a drizzle.

**The Village Bookshop, Plettenberg Bay**  
044 533 1450

If you like your sunburnt nose in a book, the Village Bookshop is just the place — and you must push your nose into the shop's small office, were you will find Marie, who knows her books inside out.

**Nature's Valley Trading Store,  
Tsitsikamma National Park**  
044 531 6835

I come here because it doesn't remind me of Woolworths. Tish, the manager, will help you find the most beautiful walks to the Grootrivier Lagoon, Sinker Bay and the Gully.

**The Robberg Nature Reserve, Plettenberg Bay**  
0861 227 362 8873

Take a four-hour, visually erect walk around the Robberg Peninsula. On the side facing away from Plett, there is a smaller peninsula where huge Indian Ocean waves crash over the rocks. This is an ideal place to stand if you are suicidal, a silly photographer or a stupid fisherman without a licence.

**Dr Peter Berning**  
044 533 0933

After all this adventure, you will feel weak and sickly and you may want to visit Dr Berning, whose exploits as a North Pole explorer are legendary. He has cured me many a time of injuries received while being over-exuberant, silly and stupid.

