

## MEETINGHOUSES Continued from D1

The meetinghouses are beautiful and the textures – the lines, the old wood, are wonderful. It also spoke to me because of my own spirituality. I am a church member and have been my whole life, and so these buildings, that served as places for town business and also for worship, resonated with me.

**You spent a lot of time inside and outside of these old buildings. Can a building have a soul?**

I think they do. These are buildings built by those no longer here, but the buildings are here. Their spirits are embodied in the building. I think soul is an okay word to use. These photographs are not just about the buildings, but the lives of people no longer here.

**In his foreword to your book, Brent Glass of the Smithsonian Institution likens Flight 93 – the Sept. 11 flight that crashed into the farmland in Pennsylvania after passengers voted to try to take back the plane – to a modern-day meetinghouse: “a form of town meeting took place on Flight 93, a brief but poignant tribute to traditions that are deeply embedded in Americans from a variety of backgrounds. The setting aboard that plane was vastly different from the meetinghouses pictured in this book. Nevertheless, . . . its story illustrates that the ideals that flourished in these simple buildings of faith and community have endured over the centuries and have shaped our national character.” What was your reaction?**

I was blown away when I read that. He found a way to make these meetinghouses relevant, to explain that they are essential. No matter what form they take, there will always be meetinghouses. We will always need meetinghouses.

**In your bio you talked about being a very shy kid and how photography helped you to fit in a little bit better – but the thing is, if you look at the work of most photographers, they are almost never in their own pictures. Even though photography helped, did the shyness and the camera still keep you at a certain distance?**

I think so. I wasn't on the sports teams, but I took the team photo. I wasn't in the drama club. I was looking in on life through a window. Which is what I continue to do. Look at some aspect of life through windows.

**You have always been a photographer, but you have**



**only devoted your passion and time to it after leaving a career in physics. Has that background been a help, or given you a particular viewpoint about the art and history you are creating now?**

In a literal way, it's probably helped with the more science and technological aspects of photography, from understanding the chemistry of the darkroom to understanding the F-stops on the camera, which a lot of people have trouble with. In experimental physics, you are interested in the natural world and documenting it. That's a curiosity I have, and that curiosity extends to photography.

**Do you have a favorite image in the book?**

I do. I do. It's on page 65 and it speaks to my own spirituality – the view looking down on the box pews in the Rocky Hill Meetinghouse in Amesbury, Mass. I was working up in the balcony and I leaned over the railing to ask the person who'd let me in a question. I looked down and thought, “My goodness. There's a cross.” The lines of the box formed a cross.



Paul Wainwright photos

**Top:** “Box Pews, Looking Down, Rocky Hill Meeting House (1785), Amesbury, Mass.,” 2004. **Above:** Roof Beams, Old Ship Meetinghouse (1681), Hingham, Mass.,” 2008.

I had to engineer a rigging to support me enough to be able to lean out over the railing and get that. I went back five months later. But all the while, I saw it in my mind.

More of Wainwright's work can be found at [paulwainwrightphotography.com](http://paulwainwrightphotography.com).

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