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Zuercher's Paris photos award-winning

Photos on display at Arts Center, book featured at Buckeye Book Fair

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WOOSTER — Gary Zuercher says his love of Paris began in a Mexican airport.

Actually, it began with a woman in a Mexican airport.

Zuercher, a Wooster native, was already a successful businessman back in October of 1979, when his travel landed him on a stopover in Cancun, where he was struck by a French beauty who was traveling with a female friend.

They met. They had dinner later in Mexico City.

"When we parted," he said, "I said, 'What are you doing Nov. 17?'"

She said she'd be back at home in Paris.

"I'll be in Paris and we'll have dinner," Zuercher told the woman, who later became his wife.

"That's how Paris came into my life."

But Zuercher still had work in Ohio, so the couple split their time on two continents. And when his business dealings no longer required his presence in the state, the Zuerchers bought a place in Washington, D.C., but lived most of their lives abroad.

On both sides on the Atlantic, Zuercher keeps a darkroom. He'd started experimenting with a camera as a child and picked the



Submitted photo

Wooster native Gary Zuercher, whose photos of the bridges over the River Seine in Paris are on display at the Wayne Center for the Arts and will be offered in book and calendar form at the Buckeye Book Fair on Nov. 5 at Fisher Auditorium in Wooster.

skill back up as an adult, at first to take photos of his own company's products and eventually to do some agency work.

That work was mostly in color, though Zuercher knew the power of a black and white image.

And so it was, that he was out in Paris one night, camera in hand, when he stopped by the city's Alexander III bridge. "It's one of the most beautiful bridges in Paris," Zuercher said, "if not in the world."

He snapped his shutter and then realized his mistake: he'd greatly overexposed the shot.



Gary Zuercher photo

The Pont Royal is the third oldest bridge crossing Paris' River Seine.

Back in the darkroom, Zuercher tried to compensate by underdeveloping the negative. "What resulted from that mistake created an image," he said, "that just took my breath away."

The print was luminous, so striking that Zuercher decided to try it again ... and again ... with all of the city's 35 bridges over the Seine.

He figured it'd take a year.

It took five.

But the result is a book, "The Glow of Paris: The Bridges of Paris at Night."

It will be available for sale in both English and French at the Buckeye Book Fair, which also will offer a 2017 calendar featuring Zuercher's images.

And for those who want to study the images up close, an exhibit of 55 of Zuercher's 85 photos is running through Dec. 3 in both the Gault and Looney galleries at the Wayne Center for the Arts. For 10 of those images, visitors can make use of an audio guide accessible via cell phone. One of the narrations is

voiced by Zuercher; the other nine by long-time Wooster resident and voice personality Chuck Craig.

The over-expose, under-develop concept is not new, said Zuercher, and was outlined by iconic photographer Ansel Adams in his book, "The Negative."

Getting the images was a painstaking task. During warm weather months, Paris doesn't get dark until almost 11 p.m. and the city turns the lights on the bridges out at midnight. So, 90 percent of

Zuercher's shots were taken during January and February, when there was more light and fewer tourists. "I'd have dinner and not more than one glass of red wine," before driving to the night's location about 8 p.m., bundled up and wearing chemical foot warmers.

First there was the matter of setting up the shot, metering the light, then taking two shots each at multiple exposures. "Each scene,"

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Gary Zuercher photo

The Pont des Invalides is the lowest of the 35 bridges that cross the River Seine in Paris.

Paris

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Zuercher said, "could take two or three hours." All that time spent in the cold occasionally wore on Zuercher. "But the more you get out there and you're alone and you're down by the river and you feel the serenity, it's a magical moment," he said.

And that was before he as much as set foot in the darkroom, where getting an acceptable print would take another six to seven hours. "The best moment is seeing that print emerge from the chemical bath," Zuercher said. "You think you've got it. The negative looked good. But the proof is the print."

And getting that quality reproduced in book form was the next step. Zuercher, who freely admitted he knew nothing about publishing, found that many of the top-quality coffee table books are printed in China, where both the price and quality are good.

But Zuercher wanted to be involved in the process. And he didn't want to go to China.

Instead, he went north and contracted with Friesens Corp., a century-

old book publisher in Manitoba, Canada. He stayed in an apartment nearby and went daily to keep an eye on the process.

It paid off.

"The Glow of Paris" has received a gold medal from the Independent Book Publishers Award competition (the IPPYs), received an honorable mention at the Amsterdam, London and San Francisco book festivals, second place at the Paris and Los Angeles book festivals and a Certificate of Merit in the Premier Print Awards. In addition it has been the subject of stories and favorable reviews in publications ranging from Publishers Weekly to the Midwest Book Review and Vanity Fair.

As for Zuercher, he said, "I thought it looked pretty nice. I got a warm and fuzzy feeling."

Georgetown University art curator LuLen Walker has purchased a few of Zuercher's prints for the school's permanent collection and another two have been gifted by request to the Library of Congress.

There was no pay for that, said Zuercher, laughing. "What are you going to do?" he said. "It's the Library of Congress, for gosh sakes."