



ALL PHOTOS © DAVID BOWMAN

PICTURE STORY

Recessionscapes

EDGAR ALLEN BEEM

Bowman took to the Mall of America for *TIME* to show how the credit crunch is affecting retailers.

Above: An early morning photo of The Mall's parking facilities, which typically accommodate up to 12,550 vehicles.

Opposite page, top and middle: Bowman's long exposures tend to blur people, giving them a ghosting effect.

Bottom: A nearly empty matinee at the Cineplex, which houses 14 screens.

THE OCTOBER 23 ISSUE OF *TIME* FEATURED A PHOTO SPREAD ON the Mall of America, the country's largest indoor retail facility, by Minneapolis photographer David Bowman. Bowman's mall-scapes, now online at <http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1852939,00.html>, accompanied a feature article on the faltering U.S. economy titled "Living in a World with Less Credit."

The opening photograph was a five-column color image of a father and two young sons window-shopping in front of a Best Buy electronics store. That was followed by a glowing red scene of a multiplex screening room empty but for two moviegoers and a panorama of shoppers riding a mall escalator. Coupled with a table of contents image of two lonely mall-walkers striding through the empty parking lot in front the vast Mall of America, Bowman's photographs spoke eloquently of wishful consumerism, vacancy and an economy going nowhere.

Bowman shot the story on a moment's notice. On Friday, October 17, after having spent the week showing his portfolio around New York, Bowman was engrossed in the photo book

store at the International Center for Photography when his cell phone rang. It was *TIME* deputy picture editor Dietmar Liz-Lepiorz wanting to know if Bowman could photograph the Mall of America, which is in Bloomington, Minnesota.

Liz-Lepiorz had just seen Bowman's portfolio of large-format color photographs of the Minnesota State Fair and a layout of his photographs of lakes in *Minnesota Monthly* and he

thought Bowman would be perfect for a story on how the credit crunch was impacting retailers.

"From his State Fair photographs and his lake series," says Liz-Lepiorz, "David showed me that he is able to capture mood, which is difficult, and that this specific mood might not have been apparent to all photographers. I liked David's modern, more avant-garde approach to a common subject and I was confident he could



"Dad always said to aim higher."



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capture the subtlety of an idea, in this case shopping/consumerism. The economy is one of, if not the biggest stories of the year and we are always looking for a fresh approach."

David Bowman, 40, first came to the attention of *TIME* in February when he sent an e-mail blast of images to art directors and photo editors all over the country. Hillary Raskin, a *TIME* picture editor who hails from Minnesota, liked Bowman's work and gave him an assignment to shoot breweries in Denver. It was Raskin who arranged the portfolio review that ended up landing Bowman the Mall of America assignment.

"I showed big prints, my fine-art thing, the state fair prints," says Bowman. "They loved them. If you go to New York and people like what you're showing, it's a shock."

Assignment in hand, Bowman flew home that Friday night and the following morning was at the Mall of America with his large-format camera, a Sinar P2 4 x 5 with a digital back, ready to spend Saturday and Sunday taking photographs.

"I've shot at the mall before and got chased away," says Bowman, pleased that *TIME* called ahead for permission for him to photograph the sprawling mall complex. Over the next two days, unassisted, he made 20 pictures from which *TIME* could choose.

"They told me to shoot the Mall of America the same way I shot the state fair. They were adamant that I not over-think it."

Though the mall was quite crowded on the days Bowman was shooting ("The mall floor actually bounces under the weight of the masses, requiring a cool head and a steady hand to get good exposures at 15 seconds."), his photographs suggest that shoppers are staying away. Bowman attributes that air of desertion to his timing and methods.

"I had to shoot the exteriors early in the morning before the mall opened," he explains. "I only had two days and I didn't want to be shooting outside while the mall was open."

In the mall's overflow parking lot, he got his favorite image—a lone car marooned outside a seven-story parking garage. Had he photographed in that location two hours later, it would have been full of cars, Bowman says.

The emptiness inside the mall, meanwhile, was simply a result of exposure time.

"The way I shoot—long exposures—people tend to blur out or not be there," Bowman says, noting that he'd used the same technique in the Minnesota State Fair images. "They [*TIME* editors] were interested in the flow of people ghosting through the photograph."

On Monday, October 20, Bowman sent *TIME* 20 images from which Liz-Lepiorz chose four to publish in that week's issue. Bowman says most of the real editing happens before he even takes a picture. (Because he's working with a large-format camera, he might ordinarily take an entire day to shoot one photograph.)

"I just go in there, look around, and start the process of thinking through what might work. By the time I set the camera up, I've done so much editing that I know the photograph is going to work," he explains.

In a neat example of "what goes around, comes around," *Minnesota Monthly*, the client which Bowman had shown to *TIME* to land the mall assignment, saw Bowman's mallscapes in *TIME* and handed him his next assignment—a photo essay on healthy corporate workplaces in Minnesota.

"I love shooting Minnesota in a way that speaks about America," says Bowman, his Mall of America series for *TIME* being the apotheosis of thinking nationally and shooting locally.



In addition to Bloomingdale's, the Mall also contains a Nordstrom, Sears and Macy's.