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The natural

Photographer Alan Maltz loves the wildlife and unique landscapes of Southwest Florida. Some of the images that he made through his lens will grace the new airport terminal.

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Roseate spoonbills and white ibis stalk mud flats and take flight against the backdrop of a blazing-orange sunrise.

A pair of loggerhead turtle hatchlings dig trails in the sand as they paddle toward the Gulf of Mexico.

A massive alligator surveys its territory in Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

These are some of the first images of Southwest Florida that visitors will spot after they land at the new midfield terminal at Southwest Florida International Airport. Sixty oversized, color-saturated canvas prints of local wildlife and landscapes will hang in bays along the terminal.

Alan Maltz, a commercial and fine-art photographer who lives in Sugarloaf Key, shot the photographs around Southwest Florida last year.

"I love the area," he said during a recent trip to Captiva. "It has a lot to offer that people don't see too much anymore."

Meaning nature, something that's near and dear to his heart.

"It's just who I am," he said. "It's part of my nature."

So Maltz roamed beaches, islands, parks, ranches and preserves four days a week for six months to capture the region's natural attractions at their postcard-perfect best. He traipsed over mud flats at Lovers Key State Park, sneaked up on feathered fauna at J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel and spied on alligators at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Naples with a 35mm Nikon.

Many a shutterbug would give up a lens cap to capture some of the moments he did.

The composition is textbook perfect. (He rarely crops, preferring to compose the frame in his mind before he shoots, he said.)

The lighting is heavenly. (He uses natural light, sometimes augmented with flash and occasionally enhanced by computer, he said.)

The colors are so vivid they're surreal. (He sometimes uses polarizing filters and tweaks hues digitally in the studio to duplicate his memory of the moment, he said.)

These are idealized images of the environment — with no apologies, this being commercial art photography. So what if his wild dolphins and manatees swim in teal water, and cobalt waves wash up on his beaches?

"I bring out the best of what's there," Maltz said. "Each piece is a



"Guiding Light"

Shot at sunrise with natural light in Estero Bay at Lovers Key State Park — the first day of shooting From the road, Maltz spotted the spoonbills in the mud flats, parked his car and pulled on rubber boots to hike through two football-field lengths of mud. His boots stuck but he went on without them.

"I felt I was being guided into this light," Maltz said. *Photos special to news-press.com*



ALAN MALTZ



"Paradise Isle"

Shot at sunrise on a Captiva Island beach

Maltz wanted to capture the essence of the island. It was a

work of art. I try to capture that feeling I felt combined with what's on the slide."

But what's his secret to getting the shot without spooking his subject?

It's all very zen.

"I'm in tune with nature," he said. "You have to be sensitive to their surroundings. Step lightly and carry a big lens."

Maltz started with a plan — a shot list from the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau, which paid for the \$200,000 commission. Then he let chance add spontaneity to the mix. Most of his shots are reactions to what was at hand, he said.

"I put myself into a situation where I know the lighting will be right and see what I can capture," he said. "It's 'catch of the day.'"

Maltz has been shooting professionally for 20 years, and his gallery images cost \$800 to \$5,250 plus shipping. (See www.alanmaltz.com for more details.) His work has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Robb Report* and *Publishers Weekly*. It's also on display at the Carter Center and Presidential Library in Atlanta and in the corporate collections of Hallmark, American Airlines and Carnival Cruise Lines.

Maltz also the official photographer of Visit Florida, the state tourism agency, which caught the attention of VCB executive director D.T. Minich.

"We felt that would carry some weight," Minich said. "We also like the large-scale canvases, which don't have to be protected behind glass."

Naturally, the tourism bureau thinks the images will create a good first impression for visitors.

"For people that have never been here before, we want to give a sense of the destination as soon as they get off the plane," he said.

The Lee County Port Authority is thrilled with the results, said spokeswoman Susan Sanders, though the images haven't been hung yet as final touches are put on the terminal.

"They promote the destination and add to the ambience of the terminal," she said.

The airport won't be the only place to see his Southwest Florida pictures. They'll be published in a book called "Visions of Beauty" due next year.

Toting a camera bag wasn't always in the career picture for Brooklyn, N.Y., native Maltz. He bought his first camera — a Miranda Sorex — after graduating with a psychology degree from Long Island University.

It was a metaphysical revelation.

"I felt a strong message to pick up a camera," he said.

After reading the manual and shooting pictures during a three-month European tour, he processed his first photographs. The results were so good he decided to dedicate himself to photography.

"I've always looked at the mystical side of life," he said. "I feel I have a pure gift that works through me. I was destined to do this."

calm day. He shot quickly to capture the clouds in different formations in the landscape. "Very unchallenging compared to (shooting) wildlife."



"Creature of Habitat"

Shot at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, Naples, using a fisheye lens

Maltz was preparing to leave the park after shooting for several hours when he eyed a big alligator from the boardwalk. He shot four or five rolls of 36-exposure film with the gator about 3 feet away. "I saw the gator being alone in his habitat. It's what the alligator's seeing."



"Kindred Spirits"

Shot on a mangrove island off North Captiva

Maltz spied the nest by boat. He shot 10 rolls of 36-exposure film from 20 to 30 feet away. This is one a series of four shots of the snowy egrets.

"I was trying to capture the different personalities of the birds."

