

*There's nothing flash about Thijs Heslenfeld, he doesn't even own a flash, preferring instead to record the world just as it is. Belinda Archer meets a Dutchman who spends half of each year touring the globe to capture his favourite subject — real life*

# thijs life

Thijs Heslenfeld is just back from spending two months driving almost 10,000km of dirt roads, mud and gravel in a four-wheel drive right through the heart of Australia. He has been taking shots for his forthcoming book *Hot - Life in the Australian Outback* to be published in November. Heslenfeld, you see, is an inveterate traveller. He spends up to six months every year touring the globe, visiting and snapping such far-flung locations as Antarctica, Patagonia, Cuba and Skye in Scotland. He's been everywhere, from the Wadi Rum desert in Jordan to the Great Ocean Road in Victoria, Australia. He's taken shots up masts of ships and up close to penguins and elephant seals and has another book out - *Cold*, about a two-month sailing trip to Antarctica on board a Dutch tall ship. This supremely talented Dutch travel photographer, who has been full-time for just five years, has his own take on

what makes a great travel shot. "In the end I think portraits are the best way to really show what a country is all about. A good portrait for me is the most difficult and the most challenging," he says. This is not to say his work purely features people. There are breathtaking images of landscapes and nature too - it's just that this humble 44-year-old believes others "do that much better". Heslenfeld, a former commercial copywriter, became a travel photographer because, quite simply, he loved travelling. His work is classic rather than experimental, portraying an ability not just to record what he sees but to capture its essence too. For instance, he never uses flash (he doesn't even own a flash), preferring instead "to show the world as it really is and people as they really are". "Travel photography is about trying to capture the essence of a person, a place or a thing. I think my work is in the end

about the beauty of our planet, and the beauty of life," he says. But Heslenfeld is also commercial enough to have thoughts on how his photography might work in a more applied environment. "I think that images of real people and real life sometimes send a much stronger message than images that clearly have been organised by art directors and marketing managers," he says. "Toyota, for example, can communicate the quality of their cars with flashy studio images of the latest models. But during my travels I've seen thousands of old Toyota four-wheel-drives that are still doing the job in some of the harshest conditions you can find on earth. I am convinced that a calendar, book or commercial using images of these cars (and their owners) could be very effective in proving (and not just stating) that Toyota's are indeed tough." Over to you, Toyota.

#### THE WORK OF THIJS HESLENFELD

- page 6: King penguin's feet, South Georgia. (detail)  
 page 28: pilgrim with prayer wheel, Lhasa, Tibet  
 page 30: life and death on Salisbury Plain, South Georgia  
 page 31: a Norwegian whaler's grave, Prince Olav Harbour, South Georgia  
 page 32: Diesel Dick (so named for his habit of rubbing diesel oil on his hands) working at Home Valley Station, Western Australia  
 page 33: sheepshearer Tom Bruce, South Australia. Tom was a former Wyoming cowboy and featured as a Marlboro man in TV spots.  
 page 34: Clown from Chin, Chin Circus, Lima, Peru











