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The Landscape Within: Shanghai Photography by Howard French

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Howard French, former Shanghai bureau chief for the New York Times, has recently posted a new collection of black-and-white photographs on his website. The photo gallery, entitled "Disappearing Shanghai Part Two: The Landscape Within," is accompanied by an essay written by French. Below, an excerpt from "The Landscape Within" and a sample of French’s photography to whet your appetite:

As many times as I have tread those asphalt streets, my mission this summer was altogether different from my photographic explorations of the past. It was inspired, in part, by a suggestion from a friend, the photographer Danny Lyon, that sounded innocent-enough but hit me with the force of an explosion.

Danny had been very generous in his comments about my street work, but something was nagging him. "Howard, I want to know more about the lives of these people. Where do they live? I want to see them at home."

In the course of four years of street photography, I had been in the homes of some of the people I have photographed, but it had never occurred to me to make those cramped, often ill-lit spaces the focus of any extended work, especially not given my rapture over the streets.

Inspired by Danny’s insight, though, I revisited my old haunts nearly ever day for two and a half months, forcing myself at first to resist the familiar seductions of the street to go a step beyond into the truly private worlds of hundreds of ordinary people.
French also wrote about his experiences working on this project in a “Letter From China” published last month in the New York Times. Readers of China in 2008 will find an extended essay on “Disappearing Shanghai” and more of French’s photos there as well.

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