

OUR PICKS

MISTRAL: THE LEGENDARY WIND OF PROVENCE

By Rachel Cobb

Introduction by Bill Buford

192 pages, 90 photos

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LEFT: A mistral noir brings rain and clouds, usually cumulonimbus clouds. Rachel Cobb captures the influence of the mistral, which she calls "a gremlin wreaking havoc on our lives."

clouds into unusual formations and sends the spray from crashing waves so high into the sky that, according to meteorologists, it interferes with atmospheric visibility. Cobb's images make all these phenomena look both alluring and mysterious.

Cobb punctuates pages of photos with quotes from Emile Zola, Friederich Nietzsche, Paul Auster, the Provençal poet Frederic Mistral (yes, that was really his name) and other writers who described the effect of the wind on the psyche—and the taste of the local wines. The book, designed by Yolanda Cuomo, includes long image captions full of interesting details about history, agriculture, meteorology, myth and etymology. The mistral's influence is expressed in numerous vernacular phrases and place names. The mountain pass through which the wind blows, Cobb notes, is called Col des Tempêtes, or "stormy pass." The wind slams into the mountain that's known outside the region as Mont Ventoux but referred to by locals as "Mont Ventour," meaning "windy mountain." According to Cobb, "It is, in fact, one of the windiest places on earth."

—HOLLY STUART HUGHES



BOOK

THE WIND OF PROVENCE

It's not easy to photograph wind, but that's the challenge Rachel Cobb set herself while she was first visiting and then living in southern France. *Mistral: The Legendary Wind of Provence* is a collection of colorful, evocative images documenting the effects of the northerly wind that, she writes, "funnels down the Rhône Valley between the Alps and the Massif Central, gaining speed as it reaches the Mediterranean." The

mistral influences every aspect of life in Provence, Cobb writes: "The mistral is a gremlin wreaking havoc on our lives."

A photojournalist who has shot assignments in Iraq, Bosnia and Guatemala, Cobb captured many moments when the mistral's impact became visible. The cover image, for example, shows a blur of blossoms shaken by the wind. Other images show a bride's veil wafted

upwards and horses squinting as the wind blows past them. Writer Bill Buford, a neighbor of Cobb's for five years when they both lived in a Provençal village, writes in the book's introduction about seeing Cobb out on the hunt for images on windy days. But Cobb explains in her essay that she began noticing the mistral's influence everywhere. Old stone houses were built without windows on their northwest side. Spiders spin tiny webs to make them less vulnerable to wind. The mistral's might causes evergreen trees to grow branches only on one side, whips the