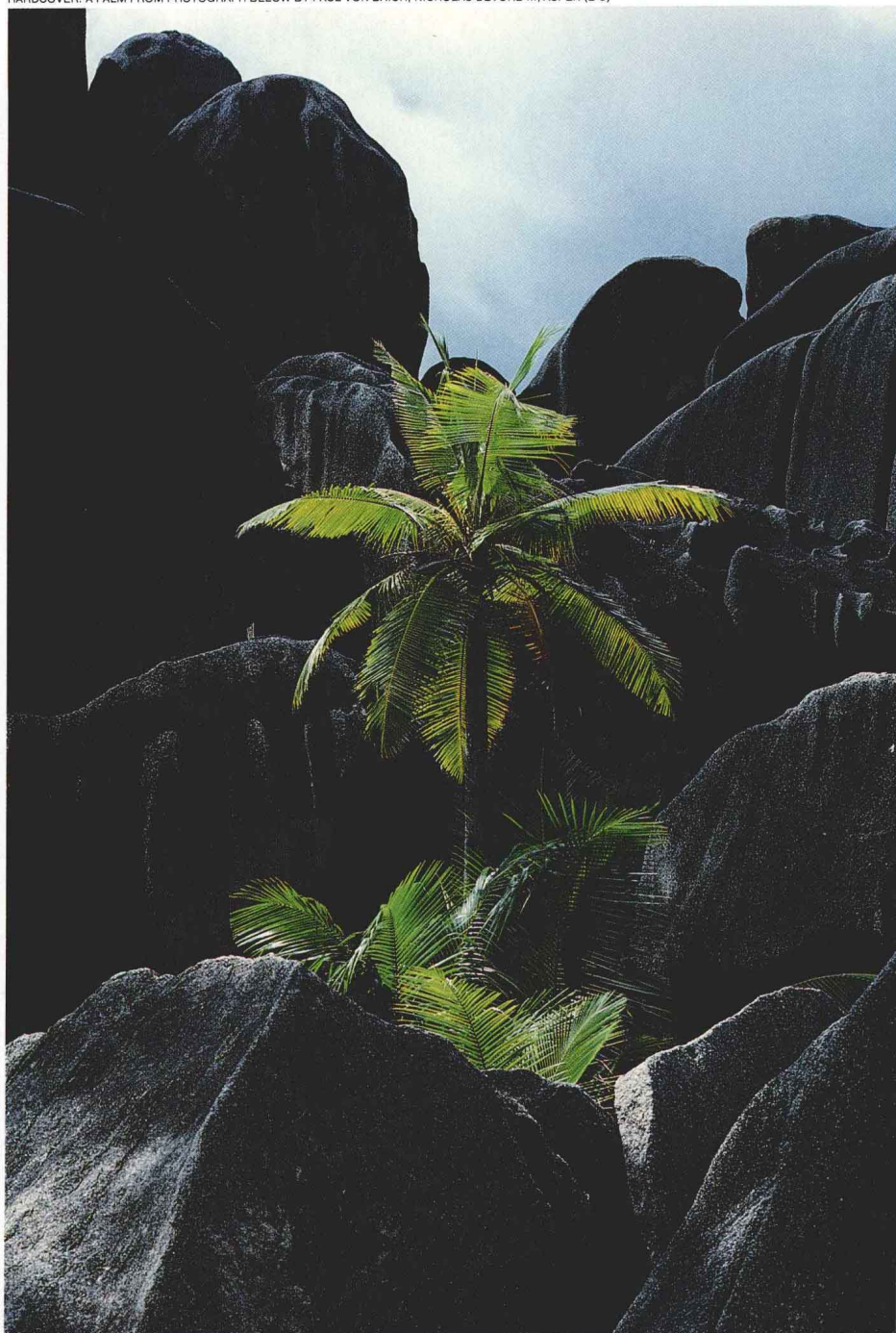


MAJESTIC ISLAND WORLDS

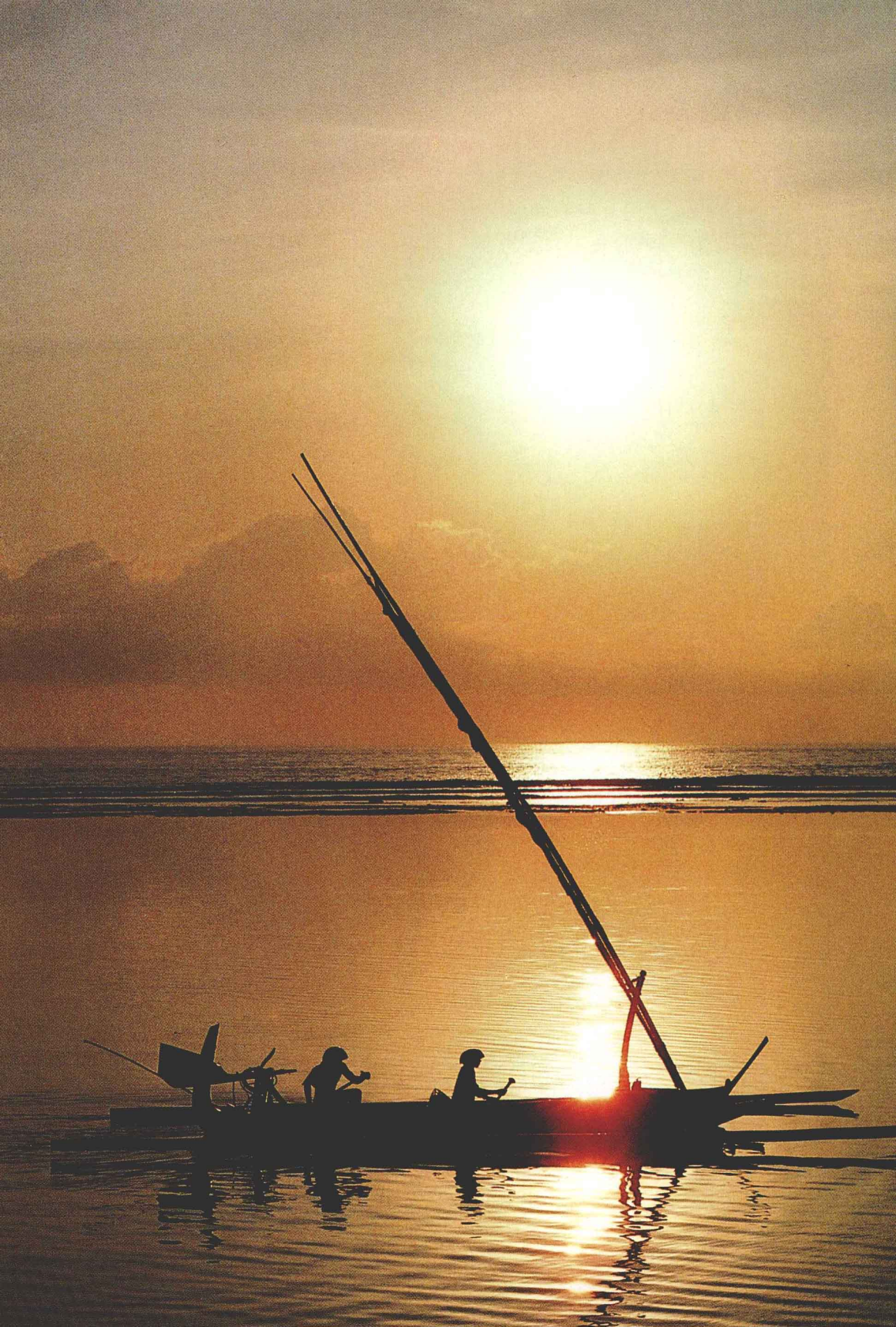


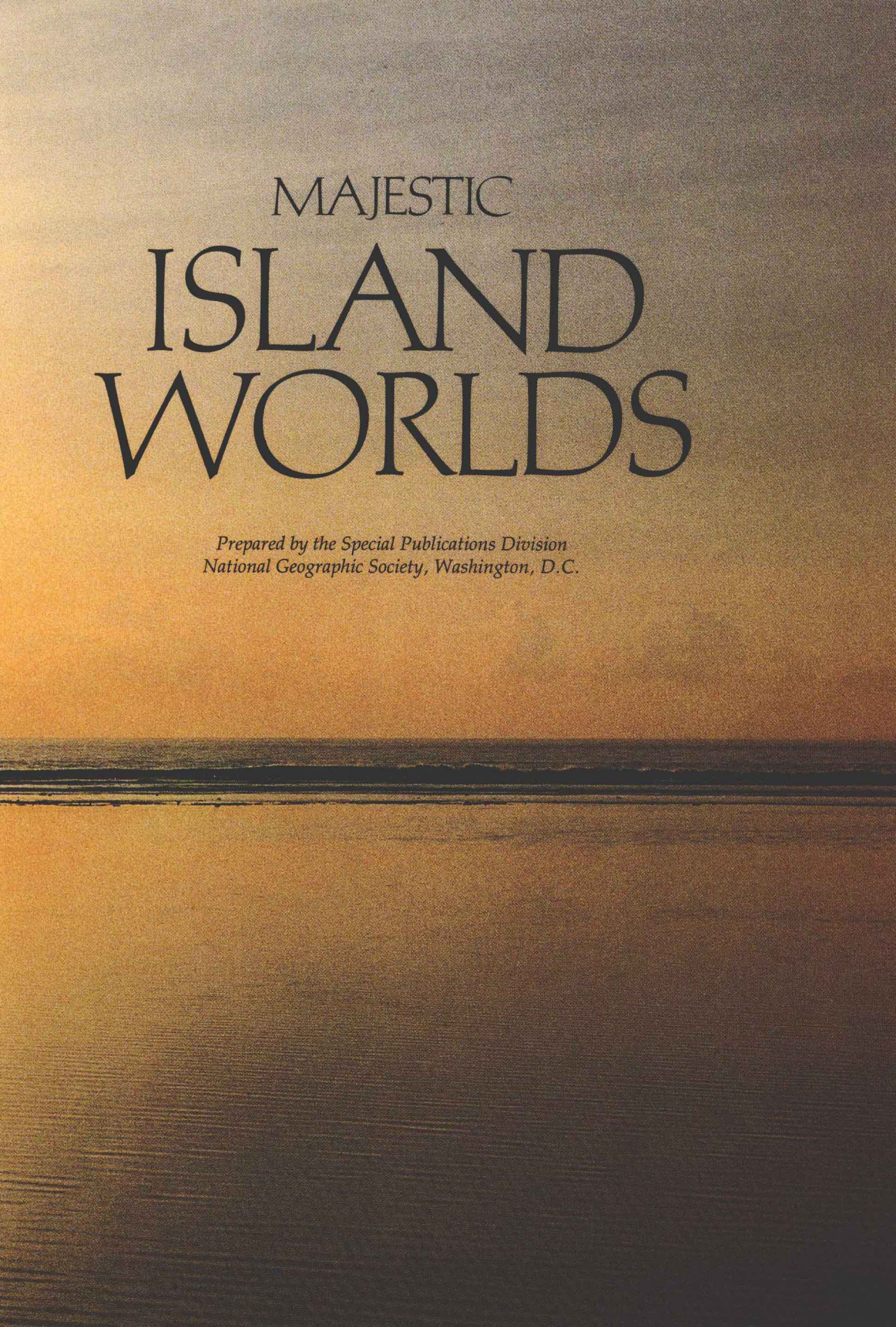
HARDCOVER: A PALM FROM PHOTOGRAPH BELOW BY PAUL VON BAICH; NICHOLAS DEVORE III/ASPEN (2-3)



Granite boulders shelter coconut palms on La Digue, one of the isles of the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean.

FOLLOWING PAGES: An Indonesian sunset lights the way home for Balinese fishermen paddling a jukung.





MAJESTIC ISLAND WORLDS

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MAJESTIC ISLAND WORLDS

Contributing Authors: LESLIE ALLEN, RON FISHER,
CHRISTINE ECKSTROM LEE, TOM MELHAM,
THOMAS O'NEILL, CYNTHIA RUSS RAMSAY

Contributing Photographers: SAM ABELL, PAUL VON BAICH,
PAUL CHESLEY, BILL CURTSINGER, NICHOLAS DeVORE III,
SCOTT RUTHERFORD, MICHAEL S. YAMASHITA

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JANE R. MCCAULEY, THOMAS O'NEILL,
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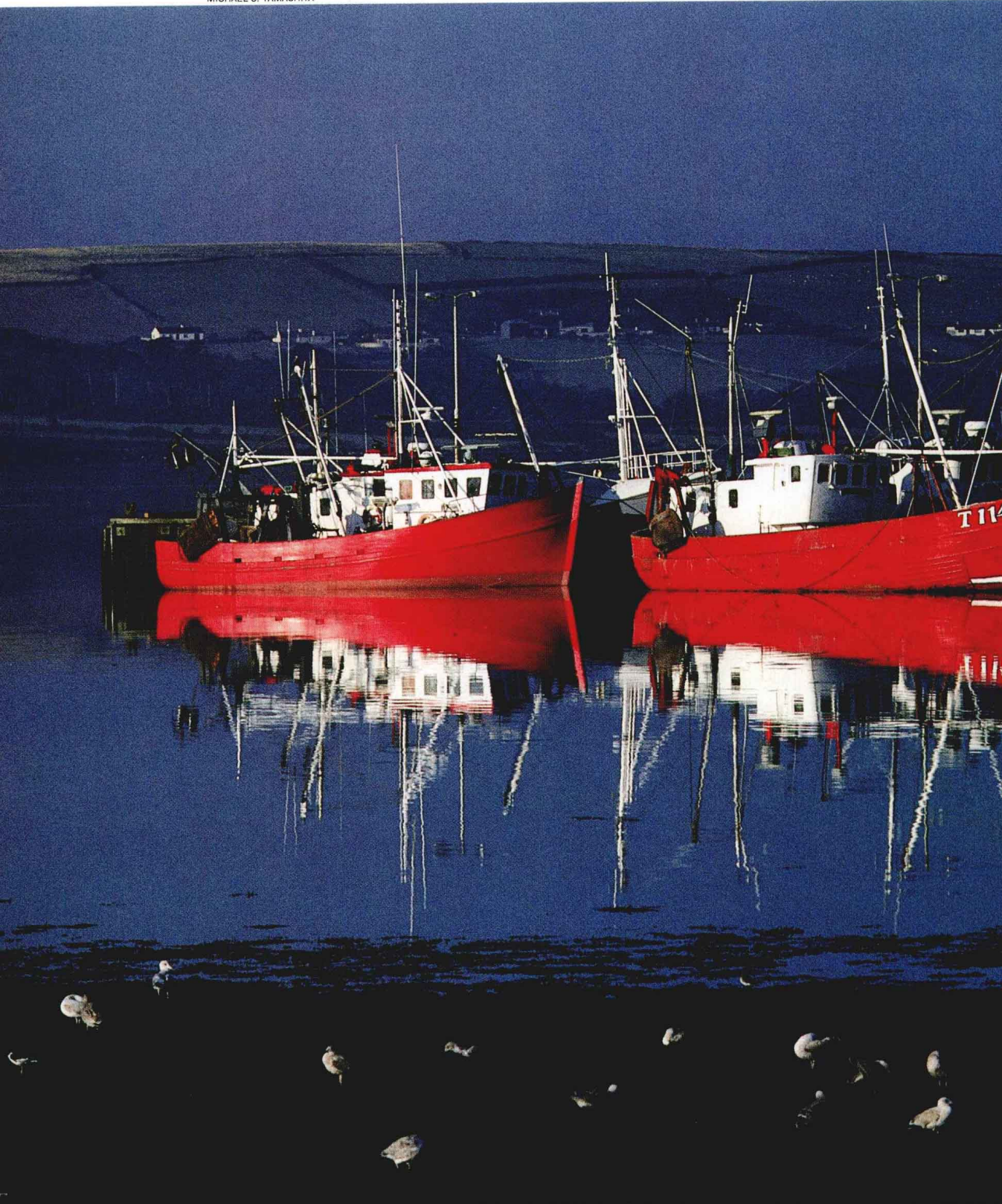
*Snowbound splendor of New Zealand's
Tasman Glacier envelops a skier in the
Southern Alps. Lovers of the outdoors
thrill to this island nation's high peaks
and fast-running rivers.*



PAUL CHESLEY/ASPEN



MICHAEL S. YAMASHITA





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Trawlers ride the morning calm of low tide in Dingle Harbour on Ireland's westernmost peninsula. The boats carry crews fishing for herring and species of whitefish off the island's rugged coast.



INTRODUCTION

Lands Surrounded by the Sea



Eroding and subsiding, Moorea will eventually slip beneath the waters of the South Pacific. It will leave behind its azure lagoon ringed by wave-washed coral, an island known as an atoll.

Come island-hopping with me. . . . On Tenerife, in the Canary Islands, I'm standing at a roadside and gazing at a shoreline far below, where Atlantic surf breaks on lava boulders. In an apricot tree immediately before me, three small gray birds with yellowish breasts alight and start singing. They are—what else?—canaries.

But don't be misled. The islands were named not for the birds but for large native dogs once found here: *Canis* became Canaria became Canary, and the birds inherited the name. Oddities like this are part of the fun of islands, part of the individuality that can make even a small island a world in its own right.

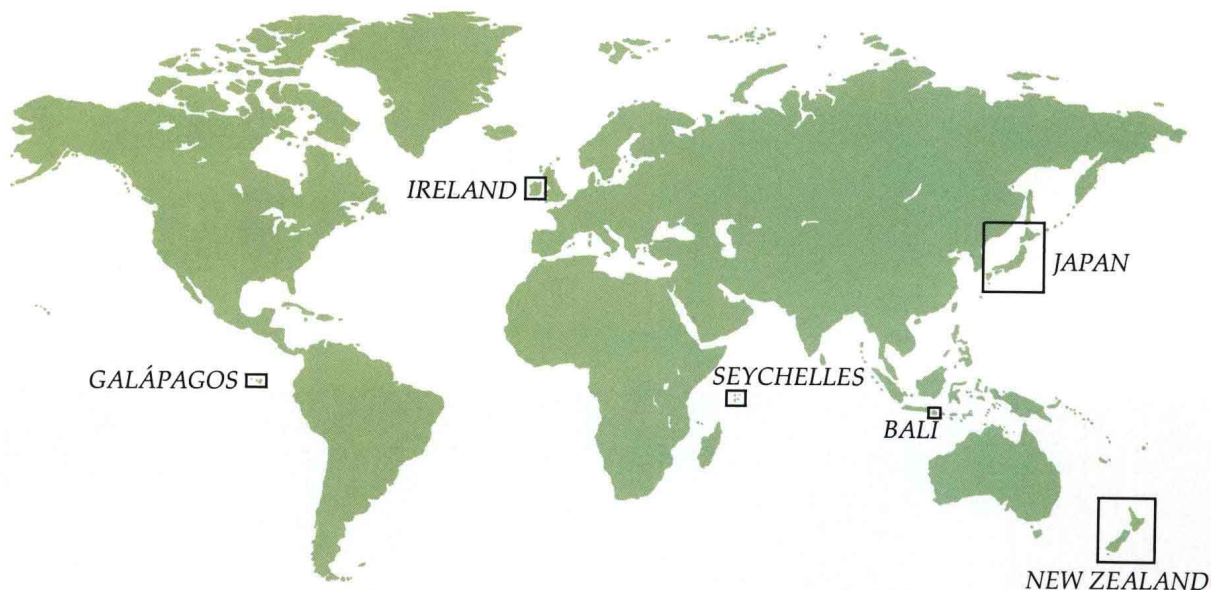
Over the years, I've been lucky enough to visit quite a few islands. I've explored the Hawaiian group. I've exchanged moody stares with the stone statues of Easter Island, remnants of the sort of puzzling island culture that can develop when generations pass without contact from overseas. I've been dripped on in the rain forests of the Queen Charlotte Islands off the west coast of Canada, where aged, moss-covered totems still brood. I've trod the crusty lava flows of Iceland, where even the sunsets seem cold and distant, and I've dozed against coconut palms in Tahiti, where the sun seems to set in your lap and the clouds threaten to burst into flame. I've sweltered in the scurry and bustle of Hong Kong, island of commerce. And I've heard the clang of a cell door slamming shut on the prison island of Alcatraz: Isolation is no guarantee of paradise.

An island, geographers say, is any area of land surrounded by water. Then what about Australia? No. It's so big it's considered an island continent. Greenland at 840,000 square miles ranks as the world's largest island, while islets shade off into rocks at the other end of the scale.

Some experts sort the world's uncountable islands into two broad categories: oceanic and continental. Oceanic islands are usually born of volcanic eruption, far from major landmasses. Such is Bouvet, uninhabited and alone in the South Atlantic: perhaps the most isolated of all, with no land for a thousand miles in any direction. Continental islands have become separated from—naturally—continents, and therefore can boast of an ancient and varied geologic history. Their island identity, however, may begin with the recent Ice Age: As the ice sheets melted, the sea level rose and flooded low-lying coasts, marooning such high ground as the British Isles, Sri Lanka, Newfoundland, and Manhattan.

In fact, islands originate in many ways. Often their formation stems from the workings of plate tectonics: the ponderous movement of tremendous plates of rock in the earth's crust, floating upon a denser, hotter subterranean layer. It's their pulling apart and pushing together that reshape landmasses. Forces generated by this titanic movement break off majestic islands like Madagascar from continental rims and uplift others, like Japan, along the edges of the plates.

When an oceanic plate moves over a "hot spot" in the underlying layer, molten rock may build up one volcanic island after another in a linear chain—the Hawaiian group and the Galápagos are good examples. Other volcanic islands, such as Iceland, form along great rifts in the ocean floor where plates are pulling apart and releasing molten rock from far below.



Islands of the world fall into two broad classes, say scientists. Continental isles, such as Ireland, are those that have been separated from a continent. Oceanic islands, such as the Galápagos, are those usually born of fire far from land.

And in the tropics, a volcanic island may erode while colonies of coral build upon its debris in the shallows; they grow toward the sunlight, forming a fringing reef. Eventually the cone wears away, leaving the coral around a central lagoon. Often these coral atolls are the loveliest of islands, jewel-like specks of sun-bright surf in a dark immensity of sea.

Biologically, islands are populated by a process called distribution. Even Bouvet has penguins and seals. Elsewhere, plants and land animals arrive on winds and tides or on rafts of vegetation swept out to sea by floods and storms. In time, descendants of these survivors may lose their potential for dispersal. Thus a species of cormorant in the Galápagos, without natural predators there, has lost the need and therefore the ability to fly.

People, too, are molded by islands—by “happy isles” of natural abundance as well as by storm-pummeled outposts in the high latitudes. Archaeologist Jacquetta Hawkes has written: “An island always has a potent effect on its inhabitants. Its frontiers are immutable, divinely determined rather than due to mere human vicissitudes. Strangers cannot easily cross them unnoticed or unopposed. This sense of being sea-protected, ‘the envy of less happier lands,’ gives island people a sharp awareness of their identity and of their difference from everyone else. . . . An island home . . . greatly enhances that belief in belonging to a chosen race. . . .”

For this book, we selected a diverse handful: Japan, a combination of subtle Oriental beauty and energetic trade; Ireland, realm of misty days and haunting charm; Bali, a place where life is a ceremony from cradle to cremation; New Zealand, an outdoorsman’s dreamland; the Seychelles, a tropical paradise flavored by African, Asian, and European cultures.

But to begin, we go to a group of islands where the mysterious origin of species challenged the imagination and changed human thought and history. It’s a Pacific archipelago on the Equator, a place, according to Herman Melville, where “no voice, no low, no howl is heard; the chief sound of life here is a hiss.” The Galápagos.

*H*idden fires of creation send steam
and smoke billowing from New
Zealand's White Island, in the Bay of
Plenty. The island erupts almost

PAUL CHESLEY/ASPEN



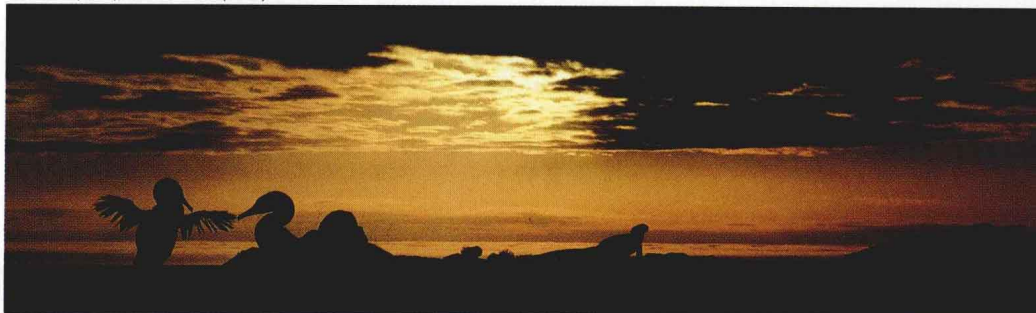
constantly, a showcase of an earth-building process. Fountains of heat help create oceanic islands as lava, flowing from vents in the ocean floor, cools and

gradually builds toward the surface. Some lava isles vanish in cataclysmic eruption; others endure, their slopes home to bountiful varieties of life.





SAM ABELL (BOTH); FRANS LANTING (16-17)





End-of-the-world islands feature 100-foot-tall palms, tool-using finches, seagoing lizards, and many other living oddities found nowhere else on the planet. Opposite: Flightless cormorants and a marine iguana share the sunset on one of the Galápagos Islands (above). The researches of naturalist Charles Darwin brought fame to this volcanic archipelago in the Pacific.

FOLLOWING PAGES: On the island of Madagascar, off the southeast coast of Africa, a grove of baobabs bristles in the fading light of day. A continental isle, Madagascar has drifted eastward, carrying with it six species of baobab; the mainland counts only one. The trunks of these barrel trees can store thousands of gallons of water, occasionally tapped in the dry season by islanders.

