



A B B E V I L L E P U B L I S H I N G G R O U P

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A Beautifully Illustrated Discovery of the Sea's Unique Treasures

SHELLS

Text by Philippe Bouchet

Photographs by Gilles Mermet

More than just an appreciation of shells, **SHELLS** (\$45, cloth; June 2008) captures all the artistry of the undersea world. Prized since ancient times for their beauty, shells appear in Mexican temple art, on Greek and Roman vases, in Renaissance paintings and architectural sculpture, and in modern jewelry and furniture. The artists themselves are thousands of species of mollusks, which produce shells of infinite shapes and sizes: the polished, the patinated, and the peculiar. From porcelain cones and miters to coleus and whirls, the collector's favorites account for barely five percent of known species (mollusks are the second largest phylum after arthropods), and it is possible we haven't even discovered half of them. They are abundant and widespread, living from the Arctic to the Antarctic, in oceans and in streams, ponds, and lakes on every continent. They have been discovered on high Himalayan peaks, in bleak deserts, and on sandy beaches as well as in shallow lagoons and water as deep as 21,000 feet. The marvelous collection of shells featured here is both a celebration and a scientific investigation.

Philippe Bouchet's writing is rich with the flavors of malacology, bringing in examples of biodiversity, the threats from anthropogenic pressure, and the important scientific and patrimonial role played by natural history museums, which are invaluable conservatories. We

follow the author and his team in their exploration work, sampling and sifting, on board the French Institute for Research and Development vessel, off the coast of New Caledonia.

The author writes that, “most of the time, you may not recognize a shell but it does not mean it’s necessarily a new species.” It can take several years for the small community of international experts to be certain of a new discovery. It is just as difficult to work out which species are rare and which are threatened with extinction, as they defy human jurisdiction. With a true sense of wonderment, he discusses how incredible it is that in the twenty-first century (an age of genetics, nanotechnology, and advanced space exploration), a number of species of plants, animals, and fungi on the surface of the planet (let alone beneath the waves) remain “undiscovered,” unstudied and/or unnamed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND PHOTOGRAPHER:

Philippe Bouchet, a scientific authority of international renown, is the director of the malacology laboratory in the French Natural History Museum and head of the institution’s scientific publications. He is a member of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature based in London and directs the exploration mission of marine fauna in the South Pacific. Bouchet is credited with the discovery of several new species. He is the author of a number of articles and scientific works and *The Land of the Ocean*. **Gilles Mermet**, the photographer, has contributed his work to several books, including *A Close Look at Insects* and *A Portrait of Plants*.

Shells

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