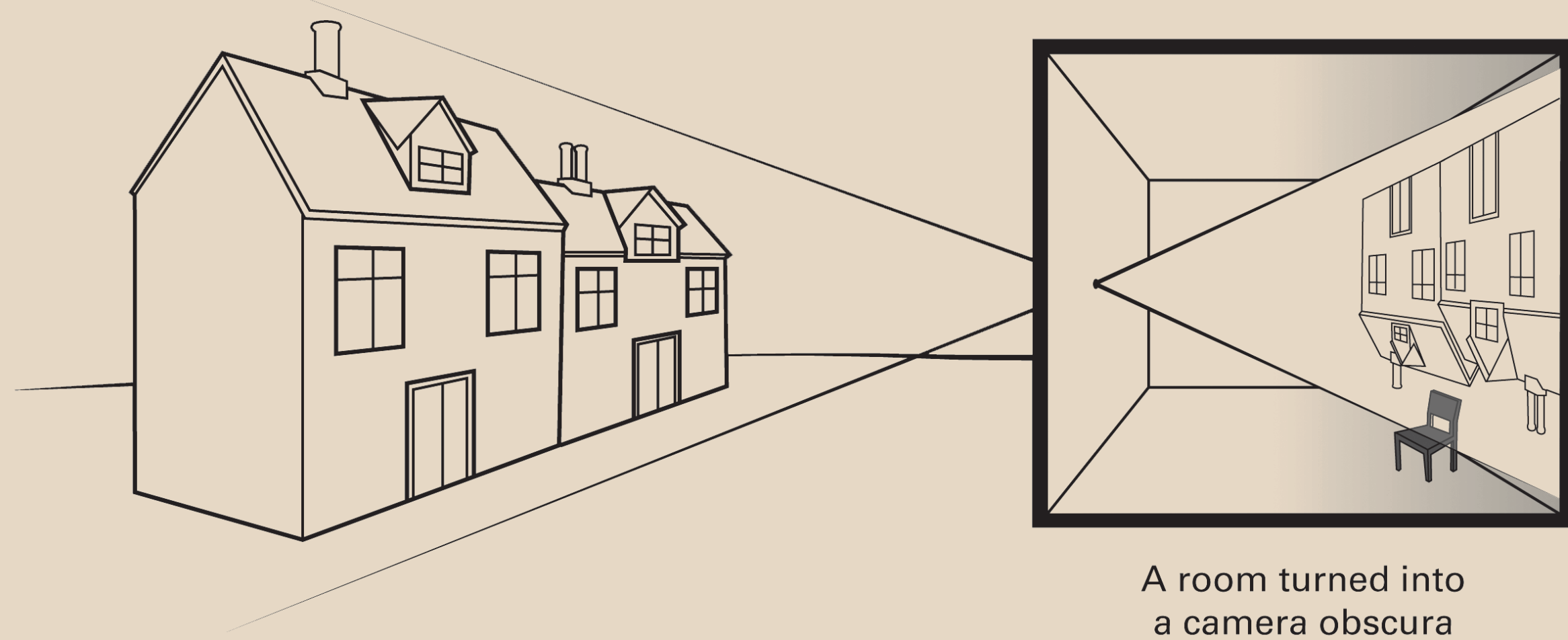


From a Child's Perspective

Morell's early photographic influences were Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Frank, Garry Winogrand, and Diane Arbus, who all traversed city streets with handheld cameras. When his first child, Brady, was born in 1986, however Morell shifted his work radically as he found novel subject matter in the domestic interior. He switched from a lightweight 35mm camera to a more cumbersome large-format view camera, which necessitated a deliberate approach and elicited a wealth of tactile detail. "I started making photographs as if I were a child myself," Morell later wrote. "This strategy got me to look at things around me more closely, more slowly, and from vantage points I hadn't considered before."

Camera Obscura Images in Black and White



A room turned into
a camera obscura

The camera obscura (Latin for “dark chamber”), a device that led to the invention of the camera, has been around since antiquity. Whether an entire room or a small handheld box, a camera obscura is an enclosure equipped with an aperture through which light from an external source enters to form an inverted image on a surface inside the enclosure.

Morell used the camera obscura in his teaching, amazing students with the vivid demonstration of photography’s basic principles. In 1991, while on sabbatical, he attempted to photograph the strange juxtapositions that occurred when the outside world was projected onto a domestic interior. He covered the windows with black plastic, poked a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch hole in the material, and recorded the view streaming into the room with his camera. While Morell’s first camera obscura images were made in the intimate space of his own home, he quickly expanded to photograph New York and significant cultural landmarks in the United States and around the world.

When composing his pictures, Morell thinks carefully about the relationship between the objects in the room and the image of the outside world projected on the walls. He regularly rearranges furnishings in a given scene to create his thoughtfully orchestrated compositions.

Experimental Approaches

Morell has found inspiration in the basic properties of photography, probing and pushing his materials not out of nostalgia for vanishing technological forms but as a way to exploit their potential to create something novel. He explored how water in a glass can serve as a lens and how light itself might be captured as a subject of photography, how camera-less images on sheet film can conjure strange landscapes, and how stop-motion constructions play with our perceptions of time and space. Morell's creative visual experimentation with the environment around him in turn inspires wonder, awe, and amusement over the creative possibilities of our everyday world.

Symbolic Paper

Morell is keenly attentive to the material qualities of what he calls “symbolic paper”—things such as maps, money, and books. In 1995 he accepted a position as artist-in-residence at the Boston Athenæum, a library and museum where he began to photograph volumes in the institution’s collection. He was drawn to these objects because they now seem to be on the verge of obsolescence. As with photographs, books once existed only as pieces of paper but are now being digitized and stored in virtual collections. Morell’s extensive series represents the books both as conveyors of information and as palpable, multisensory objects. In an increasingly digital age, Morell’s pictures in this vein remind us of the physicality that abstract knowledge and information have taken for centuries.

Camera Obscura Images in Color

In 2005 Morell turned to producing camera obscura works in color. He eventually incorporated technical refinements that made his photographs less raw and more explicitly constructed than those he had created in black and white. Instead of using just a pinhole, he began to employ a diopter lens, an optical tool that significantly reduces exposure time and increases the brightness and sharpness of an image. Eventually, Morell began photographing with a digital camera, which reduced exposure time even further—from hours to minutes—and allowed him to capture the phases of light at specific times of day. For some pictures, Morell used a prism to change the orientation of his projections from upside down to right side up.

Tent Camera Images

In 2010, following the example of nineteenth-century photographers such as Carleton E. Watkins and William Henry Jackson, Morell set out to capture the grandeur of the American wilderness. At Big Bend National Park in Texas, he began experimenting with a portable tent camera with a periscope lens on top, which projected a scene of the landscape outside onto the ground within the structure. As with his camera obscura series, Morell used a second camera to photograph the visual juxtaposition within the tent. Morell found it appealing that what was overlooked because it was underfoot—something so common and shared—formed the backdrop for his vistas. He also used this technique to depict urban landmarks as well as natural landscapes beyond the United States.



A tent camera