

## INTERFACE

# LAURENT BOUVET, EXTERIOR DAY

Text : Paul Molga  
Photos : Quechua

He describes himself as a child, curious to explore the planet and the people that live on it. At 38, the boss of Rapsodia has created his studio in the Mont Blanc countryside that forms the photogenic backdrop of most of Quechua's advertising campaigns.

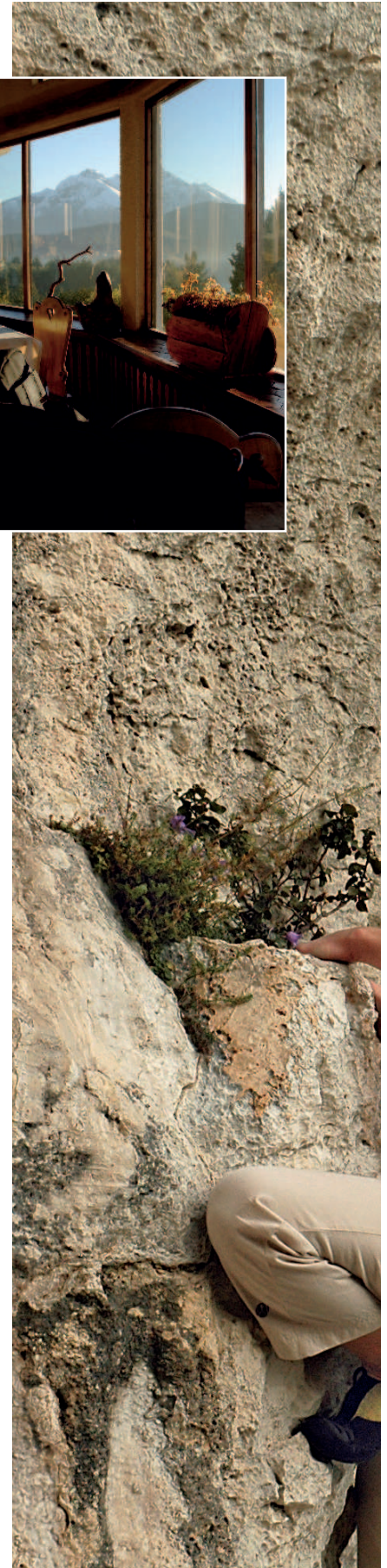
**D**espite being a product of the anti-establishment era, photographer Laurent Bouvet has not inherited any of the rebelliousness failings of the barricades. "I'm more of chameleon type," he says. "I change my skin so that I can blend in with the landscape and capture its subtle shades more effectively." Initially a high-street photographer, he developed his technical skills and discreet methods through his work in social photography. "Wedding photography and covering industrial events is no more forgiving of amateurism than sports reportage. You have to get right in the middle of things, make yourself invisible and shoot accurately."

Having learned the rules, he took off with his lenses for his homeland mountains around Annecy. The fashion for adventure photographers was over, but with signature photography all the rage a new era had begun for the specialised press. A keen

paraglider, Laurent Bouvet grabbed the opportunity to publish his first pictures in the specialised press during the crazy years. "I quickly felt restricted in this field and I was dying to make my photography accessible to a wider readership, not just people who were into outdoor activities."

### AN EXTENSIVE PHOTO LIBRARY

So it was that in 1998, together with his brother Nicolas who had a background in IT, he founded the company in his image, Rapsodia, so that he could sell his adventure pictures more widely than in resort news stands and bring together other photographers with the same ambition. Anticipating the advent of the digital era, he straightaway made his photo library available online, a first. "Gradually I broke away from this area, which was a bit too restricting for my taste, to discover other creative horizons and take on new and more ambitious markets," he explained. The message went down well: nine years



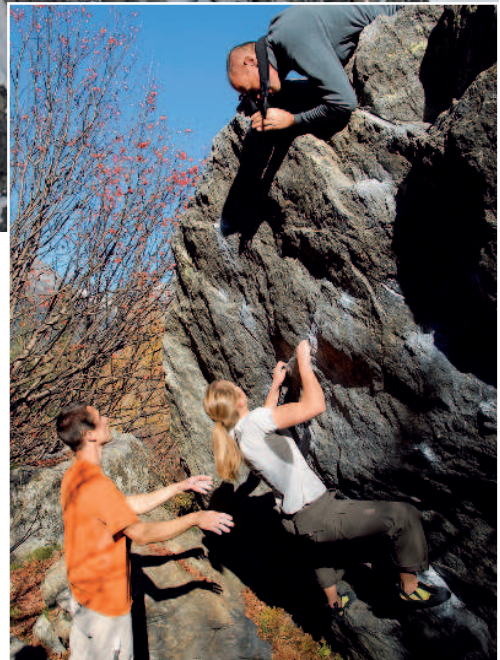


Never seen in the shot, the adventure photographer is however an integral part of what is happening.

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**He is Quechua's eyes out there on the ground, the person best able to express the brand's style and values.**



after it was started, the collective has managed to get 25 freelance photographers on board, many of whom are specialists in their discipline, providing an extensive photo library of great outdoors and extreme sports pictures (winter sports, gravity sports, mountain sports, outdoor activities, fitness, tourism, nature and adventure). "From the summit of Mont Blanc to the huge American National Parks and including the volcanoes of Iceland and Israel's only ski resort, our playground covers the whole vast and amazing globe. This diversity of style

*- action, outdoor leisure, landscape and lifestyle photography - means that we can provide what the international general press, the sports industry and advertising agencies want."*

### **PHOTOGRAPHER TRANSLATOR**

His clients include Le Figaro, VSD, L'Express, L'Equipe Magazine, Desnivel, Aigle, Allibert, Les Grands Montets and also Quechua, like him based in the Mont Blanc region. For nine years, Laurent Bouvet has been Quechua's official photographer. He illustrates the catalogues, shoots

the products, designs the in-store decor pictures and follows the testing teams during field tests. "My style is reportage," he explains. "I need things to move quickly. I set a fast shutter speed and then I just work instinctively, keeping pace with the speed of the subject: a kayak in a stretch of white water, a rowing boat on a lake... The same applies to the human side of photography. I try to understand without judging because a photo session should be a pleasure that is shared. I get into the frame of mind of the subject and become part of the situation." To the point sometimes of ignoring his own



**Among the countless photographs he has taken over his career, Laurent Bouvet has his favourites, including this one of Nicolas Lesage taken on the island of Kalymnos in Greece.**

© LAURENT BOUVET

sensibilities. *"My personality disappears, dominated by the subject, while continuing to direct the session very carefully in the background. My strength is the versatility that this provides."*

One has only to leaf through his portfolio to get an idea of his extent of his collection: Spitzbergen in an ice-breaker on the trail of polar bears; exploring the moulins in the Mer de Glace (deep cracks with meltwater rushing down them); a first-time artificial climb on a big wall in Yosemite; a parachutist landing on a nuclear submarine in the middle of the ocean (*"only one shot was possible, totally*

*caught up in the vast scale of what was happening"*), and recording the exploits of the mountaineer Patrick Bérhault, for whom he was the photographer for many years. *"In every case I try to become part of what is happening. In photography I reach the same sensory state that people achieve in the martial arts: absorbing the energy being given off by the situation so that I can take a full part in it and be ready to react in any way. It's fulfilling and powerful."* Laurent finds that this is the best way to, *"capture the essential and make my work accessible to as many people as possible."* 