

**THE STONE GARDEN GUIDE:  
ARMENIA AND KARABAGH**  
BY MATTHEW KARANIAN AND  
ROBERT KURKJIAN

**INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHORS**

The authors of the Stone Garden Guide to Armenia and Karabagh discuss their work in the following interview, which was conducted by Bedros Safarian in July 2006. Editors are free to use all or part of the interview as a part of any reviews or articles about the book. Attribution is not required.

**BEDROS SAFARIAN:** Thank you for meeting with me today to discuss your work. Let me start by talking about your new book. The Second Edition of the Stone Garden Guide to Armenia and Karabagh will be published in September, 2006. It's unique as the largest and most colorful guidebook available for Armenia. It's got 304 pages, with 135 color photographs, and 27 great, detailed color maps. This is also the only travel book on Armenia that is truly an insider's guide.

**KURKJIAN:** And I would add, just as importantly, it is the only full-color guidebook on Armenia and Karabagh. It's completely photo-based, filled with color photographs from every region of Armenia and Karabagh. And ecology is featured prominently. Conservation and environmental issues are featured in every chapter.

**KARANIAN:** Robert [Kurkjian] and I researched and wrote everything over the course of more than a

decade while each of us was living and working—and traveling—throughout the region. We tell it like it is, the inside scoop.

The text—which is written in a conversational tone that's easy to read—is also comprehensive and filled with material that we researched on-the-ground, first-hand. If something isn't worth traveling to see, we say it. I think it's important for a guidebook to tell readers what not to see, as well as what they should see. And we understand that it's not possible for every visitor to see every site.

We really think this book is essential gear for any traveler to the region. It doesn't matter whether it's to the villages or to the cities. We cover it all. This guide will help travelers make the best choices when deciding where to go, what to see, and where to eat and sleep. Short term visitors who don't speak Armenian will be able to communicate with the assistance of the glossary of phrases. Travelers who have never been to Armenia, and also those who have made a dozen trips, will find the information about the country's historic sites to be equally fascinating and readable.

**SAFARIAN:** Are there many tourists going to Armenia?

**KURKJIAN:** Tourism is starting to take off in Armenia. But the book isn't just for tourists. The beautiful photography and the intriguing background information makes this a book for armchair travelers, too. In addition to being a valuable field

guide for seasoned travelers it is also an ideal introduction to the region with lots of intriguing facts and interesting anecdotes about the land and people. A lot of people use it as a coffee table book—it introduces Armenia to their friends.

**SAFARIAN:** Why do you highlight conservation, ecology?

**KURKJIAN:** The information about ecology and conservation appears throughout the book. But this is not an ecology book, per se. It's a travel book that includes an emphasis on conservation. Armenia is largely unspoiled by tourism. And now that tourism is starting to take off, we want to help to encourage people to tread lightly, and not to trample the countryside. Armenia is a tiny country, but has astounding biodiversity. And, like everywhere else, its resources are limited.

**KARANIAN:** We believe in environmentally-friendly tourism. Tourism that helps the country and its people, rather than hurts it.

**SAFARIAN:** I've never seen any travel books about Armenia. Is yours the only one?

**KARANIAN:** We published our first guidebook to Armenia back in June 2001, and made history in the process. That book, "Edge of Time: Traveling in Armenia and Karabagh," was the first-ever stand-alone book for Armenia. At about the same time in 2001 another publisher issued a book that covered the Caucasus region generally, with about 60 pages for Armenia. But our book was

just about Armenia, and ran more than 160 pages.

**KURKJIAN:** That book, "Edge of Time," sold out after one year. We did a Second Edition in 2002. Then, in 2004, tourism to Armenia had reached the point where we really needed a much bigger book that could cover the countryside in greater depth. There was just so much demand for it. So, we released the Stone Garden Guide which really put Armenia in front of a lot of people, and which was an impressive 304 pages.

**KARANIAN:** And now we've re-issued the Stone Garden Guide as a Second Edition. The book's publication date is September 2006. It's got a completely updated text, and has nearly twice as many photographs. We're no longer the only book for Armenia, but we are still the best, the biggest, and the most comprehensive. Plus, we're the only photography-based guide book for Armenia.

**SAFARIAN:** I'm glad you mentioned that. The first thing that really grabbed me about your book was the photography. It's really awesome. You did it all yourselves?

**KURKJIAN:** Yes, and we think the photographs tell a large part of the story of Armenia. Some of the books that we see others doing about Armenia include photographs that are just dismal. They definitely don't encourage you to want to go there. If you pick up a travel guide to someplace like San Francisco or Washington, DC, you'll see beautiful

color photographs of sites that you will want to go to. That's the concept we used for our Armenia book. We think we've captured some of the beauty of the country.

**SAFARIAN:** You guys did a book of photography before you wrote these books about Armenia, didn't you?

**KARANIAN:** Yes, we got our start in publishing with a coffee table book called "Out of Stone," which we released back in 1999. It was a hugely successful book. It really raised the bar for photographers doing work in Armenia.

**SAFARIAN:** All your own photos?

**KARANIAN:** Yes.

**SAFARIAN:** And what about the Stone Garden Guide?

**KARANIAN:** Again, yes. The photos are all Robert's and mine.

**SAFARIAN:** Who else was involved in producing the travel book?

**KURKJIAN:** It was really mostly just the two of us, but we did rely upon experts in various fields for special text. For example, we had a history scholar and professor from the University of Chicago write the section on Armenia's history, and we had an economist from the International Monetary Fund write a short piece about Armenia's economy. A forestry expert wrote about conservation, and a couple of internationally-known ornithologists wrote about birding. But it was otherwise all of our own writing. We

even designed and created many of the maps ourselves.

**SAFARIAN:** This must have been a huge job.

**KARANIAN:** Yes, an incredible amount of work.

**SAFARIAN:** Why did you do it?

**KURKJIAN:** There was a need for it. We wanted to encourage people to visit Armenia. And we found that after having published "Out of Stone" that we were getting calls from people saying wow, I never realized it was so beautiful there, how do I get there.

**KARANIAN:** I know it sounds unusual. People don't normally write books every time they get asked a lot of questions about a topic. But this wasn't just a topic. It was Armenia. And it means a lot to us.

###