

PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

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The Players for Your Business

P.34 COMFORT
Ease in Front of the Lens

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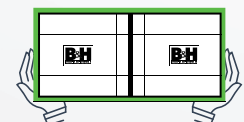


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THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS OF AMERICA

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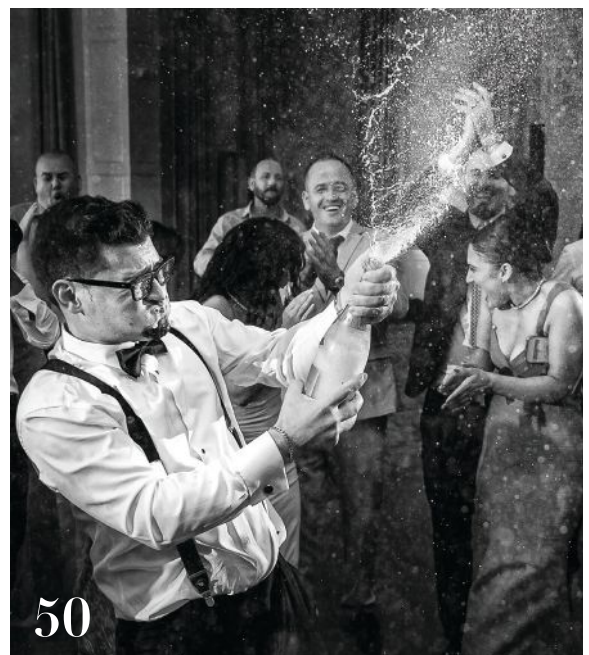
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Joyful Immersion

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE BEING AROUND YOUR PEOPLE

The closest I've ever come to attending a trade show were the years I spent at the Decatur Book Festival outside Atlanta. The first year of this whirlwind event—which included author talks, cooking demonstrations, a parade, and a street fair—was Labor Day weekend 2006. I was 9 months pregnant with my first child. It was disgustingly hot and humid. I barely felt my discomfort because I was immersed in my version of heaven: books everywhere; voracious readers, writers, and authors chatting each other up; constant refrains of, “Have you read...?” and “Ooooh, I loved this one!” I spent all that Saturday and Sunday in downtown Decatur, Georgia, clutching the print program in my sweaty hands to determine which speaker I would go hear next and which booth I could shuffle to on my swollen ankles. I joined the chorus of attendees and speakers discussing our favorite genres and authors, what we were reading, and what was next in our TBR (to-be-read, for the uninitiated) pile. I was so inspired and joyful. These folks were *my people*. I knew that first year that I would never miss a festival if I could help it.

And I didn't.

I went into labor that Labor Day (which I still find amusing). Labor Day weekend also happens to be my wedding anniversary, so my family was always busy. But I made a point to visit the festival every year, and brought my son (and subsequent kids) too. After a few years, I started volunteering. My oldest joined me one year for a shift. My husband was even a featured speaker when his own book was published. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Decatur Book Festival has gotten much smaller and is no longer over Labor Day weekend. But the memories of my 13 years as an attendee and a volunteer are precious. I was in my element, surrounded by people with similar interests, learning and growing, and having fun.

I witness this same kind of joyful immersion, over and over, at Imaging USA.

In January in Nashville, Tennessee, I experienced my second show. I understand it even more now—that Imaging USA has that annual “family reunion” vibe. It's that bringing-together of community, education, creativity, aspiration, and beautiful photography. It's being among other photographers who “get” where you are and what you do. At the Decatur Book Festival, I proudly wore my volunteer T-shirt, my Book Nerd baseball cap, tiny book earrings, and socks embroidered with—you guessed it—books. At Imaging USA, attendees proudly display their ribbons and pins, and dive into conversations with others who quickly understand their shared vocabulary. It is so gratifying and humbling to be a part of it all. After Imaging USA, I return to PPA headquarters renewed, eager to infuse the show's energy into the magazine all year. I hope that even if you weren't at Imaging USA this year, you will find inspiration and celebration within these pages. And maybe for next year's show, I'll find some tiny *camera* earrings to wear in solidarity.

Melanie Lasoff Levs

Melanie Lasoff Levs
Director of Publications



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FOREGROUND

By Amanda Arnold



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Sunset Dance

COLOR THAT TELLS A STORY

Like any athlete, a dancer's career is fleeting, something portrait photographer Alexis Cuarezma wanted to convey in this photo he made while working on a project with Christine Shevchenko, principal ballerina at the American Ballet Theatre in New York. "I wanted to capture Christine at a moment that embodied both strength and vulnerability, using the warm and cool tones of a sunset to symbolize that transition," he explains. "The light represents the shift from day to night, much like a dancer's journey from the height of their physical peak into deeper artistic expression."

Lighting: He used two Profoto B1 strobes with Magnum reflectors. One was gelled and overcorrected with CTO/CTS to create an orange sunset glow. The other had no gels but provided the blue light due to the WB set to 2,500K. He used a fog machine to reveal the beams and create separation between subject and background.

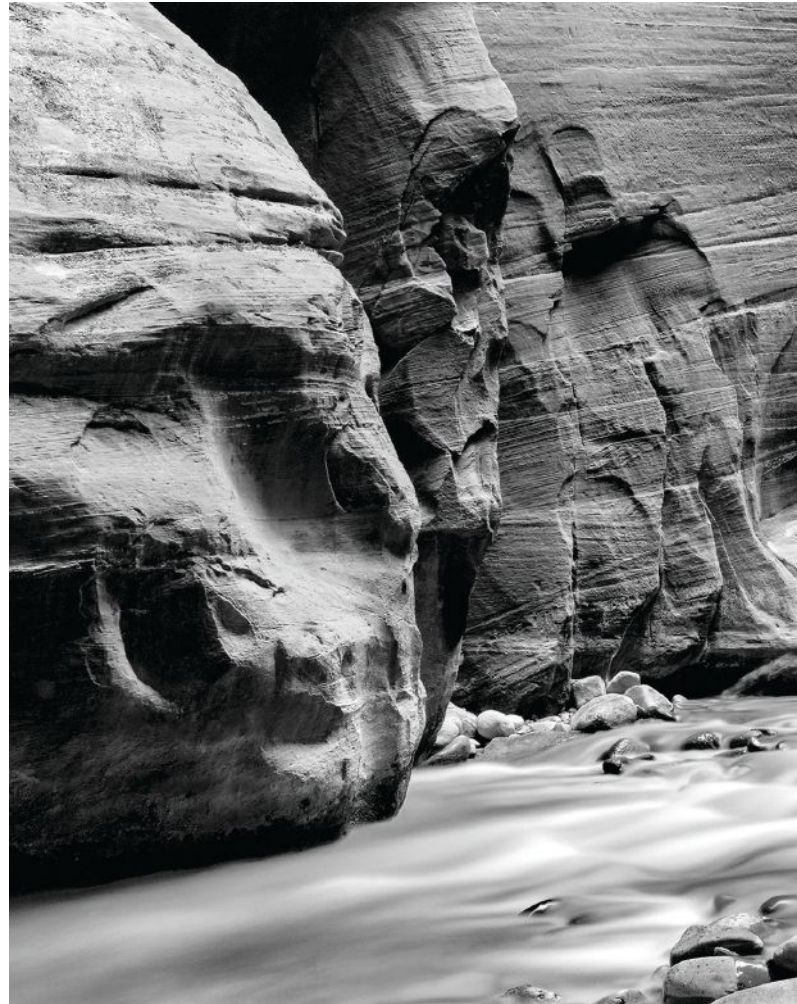
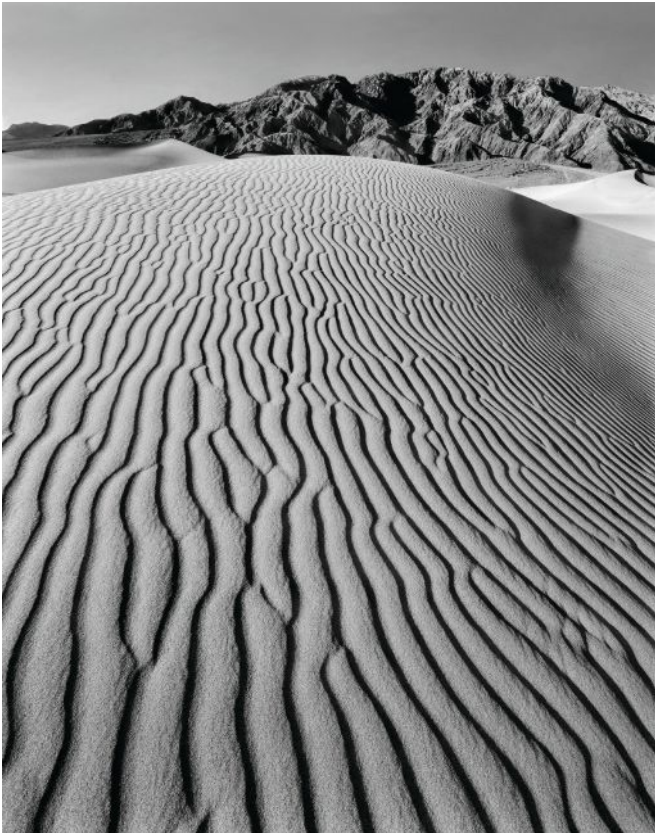
Camera and lens: Canon EOS 5DS, Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS II USM lens

Exposure: 1/160 second at f/11, ISO 100. The white balance was set to 2,500K in camera. •

The Beautiful Wild

NATURE IN BLACK AND WHITE

IMAGES © JON ORTNER / ortnerphoto.com



Two hundred of commercial and fine art photographer Jon Ortner's black-and-white large-format nature photos have been collected into a new book, "Visions of Paradise: American Wilderness" (Images Published Group). Whether photographing winding canyons or expansive dune fields across the United States, "Ortner possesses an extraordinary knack for transforming the elemental essence of nature into captivating abstractions," writes Canadian street photographer Michael Ernest Sweet in the book's forward.

Ortner explains that he uses digital photography for his commercial work and reserves film photography for his fine



art books and gallery prints. For the images in “Visions of Paradise,” his eighth book, he used the Fujifilm GX617 panorama camera with four different Fujinon lenses, and the Pentax 67II medium format camera with 14 Pentax lenses. He used Kodak T-Max 100, 120mm black-and-white film because it has “the finest grain and most pleasing contrast of any black-and-white film I have ever used,” he says. •



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FILM FORWARD

A HOT 2026 WEDDING TREND

Film photography has been gaining popularity among wedding clients, and the trend will build in 2026, according to the websites The Knot and The Wed. Couples like the authenticity of film images as well as their depth and texture, and gauzy, romantic look. "From 35mm to medium format, couples are choosing to opt out of vintage filters and hiring photographers with a true background in film instead," wedding photographer Mo Davis of New Orleans-based Mo Davis Photography told The Knot.



GO BIG

WHAT IS YOUR BRAND'S PERSONALITY?

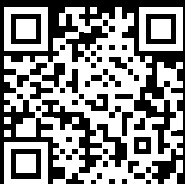
When it comes to brand personality, consumers think bigger is better, according to *Startups* magazine. A study by Adzooma found that 57.5% of consumers polled said they buy from brands with strong personalities, and 51.2% said they have purchased from a brand because of the brand's online messaging. About 35% said they prefer brands that communicate in a friendly and conversational way; 13.1% prefer a professional tone; 13.1% prefer a fun or quirky tone; 2.4% prefer a sarcastic tone; and 21.4% prefer a mixture of communication styles.



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Quiet Landscapes

SNOWY SCENES IN JAPAN



"I love trees," answers visual artist Elizabeth Sanjuan when asked what inspired her to photograph Japan's northernmost island, Hokkaido, over four frigid winters. Her new book, "Silent Snow" (Daylight) is a collection of her nearly whited-out landscapes featuring skeletal winter trees.

"The depth of winter" in Hokkaido, with its arctic winds and continuous snowstorms, is both fascinating and challenging, Sanjuan says. "The primary challenge for me is keeping my hands and feet warm in temperatures that can easily drop to single digits. It is a challenge to deal with multiple layers of clothing, taking on and off clamps and snowshoes, all while carrying two bodies and lenses," she says, adding that she went through several hand and foot warmers a day. "Truly it is mind over matter." But when she began to see the potential of the images she created with her Sony Alpha 1 and a7R V, the cold became irrelevant, she says. •

The Upside of an Upside-Down Season

YOUR HARDEST MOMENTS BUILD YOUR FOUNDATION

By Makayla Harris, Cr.Photog., CPP

©PHANEENDRA GUDAPATI



I didn't grow up dreaming of being a photographer. Before photography, I was a business consultant, which was a nice title for "field inspector" for Subway restaurants. I was 22, barely 5 feet tall, maybe 100 pounds soaking wet, walking into businesses run mostly by men twice my age to tell them everything they were doing wrong.

You can imagine how well that went.

But that job gave me something I didn't recognize at the time: a sharp eye for opportunity. I learned how to walk into a business and immediately see what was impacting sales, what was broken, and what could be better. More importantly, I learned how *not* to deliver feedback, and eventually, how to deliver it in a way people would actually hear.

That would later become one of the most important skills of my career.

Not long after starting that job, my husband and I got married, welcomed our first baby, and purchased our first condo in Boston. We were excited, but like many young couples, we couldn't afford a professional photographer to document any of it.

So, my husband bought me a Nikon D7000. I started a blog to document our life and share updates with family. Then reality hit.

I was traveling constantly for work, breastfeeding, pumping in my car between meetings, and doing the math (over and over) trying to justify why I was working when childcare cost nearly more than I was making. Eventually, my performance suffered.

I was laid off.

We had a new mortgage, a new baby, no paycheck, and no safety net.

I was humiliated but I realized I wasn't devastated about losing my job. I was devastated by the idea of going back into a corporate world that required me to pay someone else to raise my child. So, I made a decision that felt more like survival than strategy at the time. I started doing \$50 photo sessions for anyone who would pay me.

My husband would come home from his job in finance and take our son while I headed to a photo assignment or stayed up late editing. YouTube tutorials weren't really a thing yet. My education came from books like "Nikon for Dummies," photo workshops, and making every mistake imaginable.

And I made them all.

What I didn't realize then, but see clearly now, is that every "worst-case scenario" was quietly building the foundation for my future.

The consulting job taught me how to see opportunity.

Rejection taught me how to communicate.

Motherhood taught me efficiency.

Being broke taught me grit.

Being scared taught me courage.

That terrified new mom just trying to book the next \$50 session never imagined she'd one day be writing to nearly 35,000 PPA members as your president.

That's the point of this story.

Not that I became a photographer.

Not that I built a business.

Not that I landed here.

The point is that the moments your life feels like it's falling apart are often the moments your life is being built.

If this has been a hard season (financially, creatively, and/or personally) I want you to know this: Your resilience, your tenacity, your refusal to quit, even when it looks like self-preservation, is legacy-building work.

You don't have to have it all figured out. You just have to keep going. So, embrace the hard. Hug the hurt. And get after it.

If there's one thing my story has taught me, it's that sometimes the worst situations create the most rewarding results. And you might be closer to that reward than you think. •

Bonita Springs, Florida-based Makayla Harris is co-founder of The Harris Company, and founder/CEO of ASET: Album & Art Sales and the Printographers Society.

FROM VANESSA JOY

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Fuel for Photographers

SELL PRINTS WITH CONFIDENCE

from Vanessa Joy

Vanessa Joy is an internationally recognized wedding photographer, educator, and business mentor.

Known for her practical, open-book teaching style, Vanessa has spoken at nearly every major industry conference and platform, where photographers value her expertise and business insight.

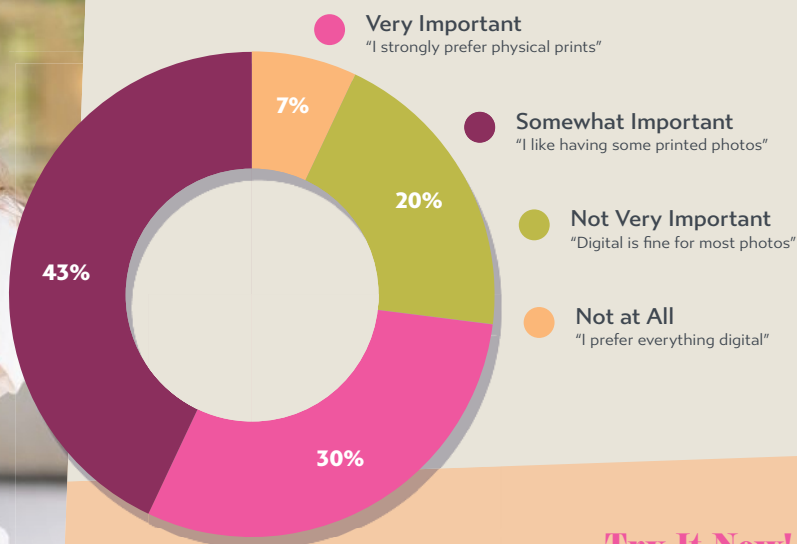
“I really think it’s part of our responsibility as storytellers to give our clients their memories—not just as a digital product, but in a tangible form.”

Clients want to preserve their memories in the form of physical prints they can hold, display, and share proudly.

73% find it very important or somewhat important to have physical prints from their session.

PPA.com/Research

From PPA’s Behind the Buying Decision Research Report



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- 1. Pick the product you love the most**—it could be canvas, acrylic, matted and framed photos, or just a box of proofs!
- 2. Offer it as a limited time promotion to all past clients.** Follow up and share your new offering, with an incentive that inspires urgency to purchase.
- 3. Work it into your existing workflow.** From first consultation to booking, educate your clients on your products. Take photos and videos to share to your website and social media and talk about that product every chance you get. Make them fall in love!

Put Vanessa’s print strategies to work and explore her insights into wedding photography, client experience, efficiency tools, and more.

PPA.com/VanessaJoyTips



Cherry Blossoms and Kimono

Masashi Nagira

Nash Arts

Tottori, Japan

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, Canon EF 85mm f/1.2L II USM lens

EXPOSURE: 1/4,000 second at f/1.2, ISO 50

LIGHTING: A Godox AD600 in front of the bride

POST-CAPTURE: Masashi Nagira used Adobe Photoshop to adjust tones, highlights, shadows, and contrast.

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Stories Become Dreams

Sonia Ahmad, M.Photog.Cr., CPP

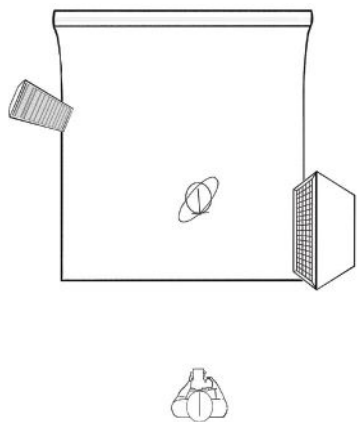
Enjoy the Moment Portraits
Cypress, Texas

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, Canon EF 70-200mm f/2.8L IS USM lens

EXPOSURE: 1/160 second at f/8, ISO 200

LIGHTING: The main light was a Flashpoint 600Ws Rapid set to 1/16 power with an egg crate grid, angled down at 45 degrees and positioned about 3 feet from the subject. The rim light was also a Flashpoint 600Ws Rapid set to 1/16 power with an egg crate grid, placed about 6 feet from the subject.

POST-CAPTURE: Using Capture One, Sonia Ahmad adjusted highlights and shadows. Using Photoshop, she added texture to the background and changed the dress color with selective color and color balance.



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©DEBORAH MACIOLEK, DEBOGRAPHY / debographyphoto.com

Uncomfortably Close

Deborah Maciolek, CPP

Debography

Macomb, Michigan

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: The photo was taken in Sitka, Alaska, at a wild bear rescue. Smoky, the subject, is a resident bear who was orphaned with her two siblings in 2013 when her mother was shot and killed.

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS R5, Canon 70-200mm f/2.8L IS II USM lens, and Hoya UV filter

EXPOSURE: 1/1,000 second at f/6.3, ISO 1600

LIGHTING: Natural light

POST-CAPTURE: In Adobe Photoshop, Deborah Maciolek zoomed in and cropped the photo for dramatic effect, sharpened the eyes, worked on the fur to maintain texture, cleaned up fur details, and raised the highlights.

Ocean Motion Sunrise

Robert Formentelli, CPP

Formentelli Photography

Columbus, Ohio



©ROBERT FORMENTELLI / [instagram.com/formentelliphoto](https://www.instagram.com/formentelliphoto)

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: "I was up early to capture images of the sunrise beachside," says Robert Formentelli. "The sun and clouds were not giving me what I was envisioning. Before I packed it in, I thought I would try an ICM [intentional camera movement] shot of the beach, ocean, and sky. This was the image I created that day when I thought all was lost."

CAMERA & LENS: Nikon D850, AF-S Nikkor 24-70mm f/2.8E ED VR lens with a Haida Neutral Density Filter

EXPOSURE: 6 seconds at f/16, ISO 64

LIGHTING: Natural light

POST-CAPTURE: Adobe Lightroom was used for basic adjustments, color balance, and cropping, and final cleanup was handled in Photoshop.

Be of Help

LANGUAGE THAT RESOLVES

It's stressful to deal with an unhappy client. But if you keep a placid demeanor, speak in a calm voice, listen intently, offer empathy, and use positive language, you may come out on top.

Some dos and don'ts:



SAY THIS

"I can see how that would be upsetting."
"Thank you for bringing this to our attention."
"I will find out for you."
"Let me see what we can do to help."
"I understand your frustration."

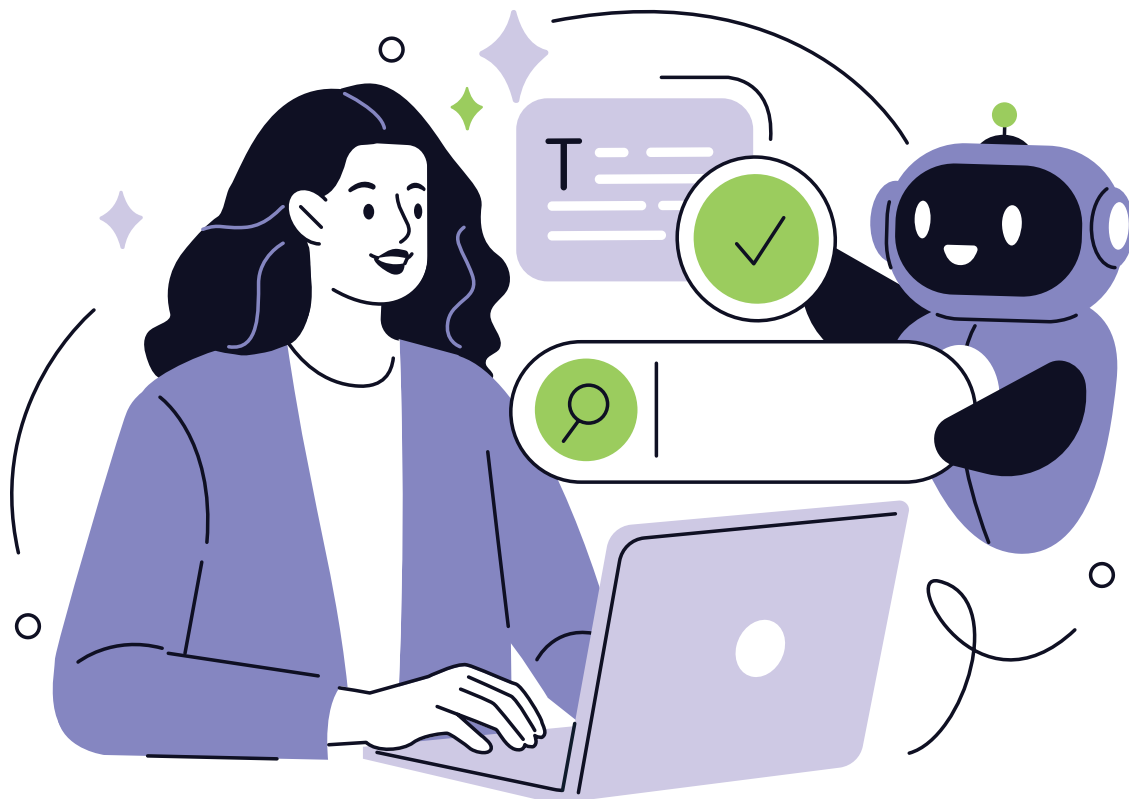
NOT THIS

Interrupt your client and defend your position.
"We cannot do that."
"I do not know."
"That is not possible."
"That is not our policy."

Help AI Find You

SHIFT YOUR APPROACH TO SEO TO SHOW UP IN AI SEARCH

By Jeff Kent



Search engine optimization (SEO) is a rapidly changing game. However, in recent years, the advent of AI—specifically large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Perplexity, Claude, or Google's Gemini—have fundamentally shifted how people search for and consume information online.

Not only are things changing, but the pace of change is accelerating. In December 2024, ChatGPT reported about 1 billion daily queries. By the end of 2025, that number had more than doubled to around 2.5 billion queries per day. Of Google's roughly 14 billion daily search queries, about 20% now get an AI-generated summary as an answer, in addition to the normal

list of links. That percentage is closer to 50% for “who, when, why” queries or queries phrased in complete sentences. All told, that's multiple billions of daily queries feeding through AI machine learning systems that present answers in a different way than traditional online search results.

Online search has entered a new reality. In this new reality, photographers who want to be found online need to understand how AI affects search, and how it works with traditional SEO.

Let's first understand the difference between traditional SEO and AI search optimization, commonly referred to as Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) or Generative Engine Optimization (GEO).

- SEO focuses on improving your website's visibility to search engines (like Google) using techniques like keyword optimization, technical SEO, content quality, and web page authority building. The goal is to show up near the top of a list of suggested links on a search engine results page.
- AEO/GEO refers to tailoring your website content and digital assets to how AI-driven platforms deliver answers. Instead of ranking on search engine results pages, AEO/GEO is about positioning your website so it can be referenced, recommended, and/or cited in conversational AI answers.

The good news is that if you've been focusing on your SEO over the years, then you're in good shape. AEO/GEO doesn't represent a wholesale departure from traditional SEO. In fact, traditional SEO forms an excellent foundation for AI models. With a few tweaks to how you present key pieces of content, you can position your website for success in both traditional and AI-generated search results.

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR VISIBILITY IN AI SEARCH

Understand the differences between traditional search engines and LLMs.

Traditional search engines rely on crawling, indexing, and ranking pages based on factors such as backlinks, keyword match, and site structure.

AI search tools work differently. They are trained on vast amounts of text and use pattern recognition to generate and retrieve answers. Instead of scanning for exact keyword matches, LLMs evaluate context and semantic relevance. The shift means that creating content that's rich in concept clarity, structure, and conversational intent is more valuable than ever.

Recognize how AI search tools are changing user behavior. ChatGPT and similar LLM-based tools aren't just smart browsers; they're new interfaces for knowledge. When users ask questions, they don't get a page of blue website links. Instead, they get an instant, synthesized answer. So, rather than clicking links to do deeper research, web users are relying on AI answer summaries as the full response to their question.

Today, people are using AI systems as research assistants, not just as a simple

search engine. Queries on AI systems tend to be longer, more conversational, and they have a higher intent for a particular action. For example, a more traditional Google search might look something like this: "portrait photographers near me." An AI query is more specific and has more intent: "If I want to have a family portrait taken in a scenic park with Lake Michigan in the background, how do I find the best portrait photographer in the Chicagoland area who specializes in that kind of photography?"

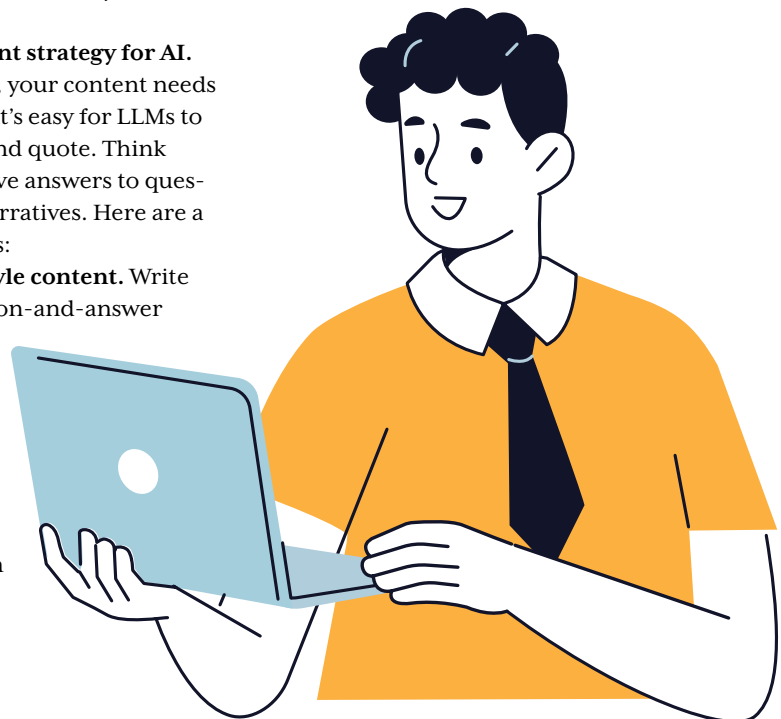
With AI search, users place more trust in the output, not the source—unless that source is cited explicitly. By summarizing the search into a concise answer, AI bots are spoon-feeding people the answers they want without requiring additional research. If you can be part of that spoon-fed answer (either through a quotation or a citation), then you're instantly verified.

Shift your content strategy for AI.

To appeal to AI bots, your content needs to be structured so it's easy for LLMs to find, understand, and quote. Think concise, authoritative answers to questions versus long narratives. Here are a few useful strategies:

- **Present Q&A-style content.** Write in a clear, question-and-answer format that mirrors how AI delivers information. Include descriptive, question-based headings to align with user intent.

TODAY, PEOPLE ARE
USING AI SYSTEMS AS
RESEARCH ASSISTANTS,
NOT JUST AS A SIMPLE
SEARCH ENGINE.



In other words, think about how your clients would pose questions, and use those as the headings for blog posts and sections on your website. Then concisely answer those questions.

- **Provide self-contained answers.** Write content that can stand alone without requiring external context. Also, focus on clarity and read-

ability over keyword stuffing or complex storytelling.

- **Offer evidence.** Include quotations or data from trustworthy sources to improve your authority.
- **Provide visuals.** Add images, infographics, screenshots, or examples that demonstrate your point and add to your authority.
- **Think about context.** Create

content AI can understand, trust, and use, not just crawl. Ironically, this means writing in a more conversational style so the “robots” can understand your content better.

- **Update your website content formats.** FAQ sections are great for AI. So are comparison tables that explain your process and criteria, as they provide context. How-tos are also useful.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT IF YOU’VE BEEN FOCUSING ON YOUR SEO OVER THE YEARS, THEN YOU’RE IN GOOD SHAPE. ... WITH A FEW TWEAKS TO HOW YOU PRESENT KEY PIECES OF CONTENT, YOU CAN POSITION YOUR WEBSITE FOR SUCCESS IN BOTH TRADITIONAL AND AI-GENERATED SEARCH RESULTS.

Consider other online platforms.

AI doesn’t just pull info from websites. It derives answers from across social media posts, listing sites, and user-generated content platforms. In addition to posting on your website, think about other platforms where you can share your expertise and expand your digital footprint. For example, you could try posting LinkedIn articles, participating in “best-of” articles or expert interviews with industry publications, answering relevant questions on Reddit or Quora, or posting articles on Medium and Substack.

Keep up the SEO fundamentals. SEO isn’t dying; it’s evolving. Google has repeatedly said that all existing SEO fundamentals continue to be worthwhile for both traditional online search and AI-generated search. But as AI increasingly changes how your clients are searching for service providers, it’s important to adapt to the new rules of engagement.

The photographers who make this change now, and stay flexible through this time of rapid evolution, will be best positioned for long-term success in a bold, new, machine-learning future. •



Build Your Money Team

THE PLAYERS FOR EACH STAGE OF A BUSINESS

By *Melanie Lasoff Levs*

Tricia M. Taitt calls herself a “Wall Street refugee turned fractional CFO with Broadway credits.” Her MBA from Duke University, her devotion to spreadsheets, and her professional dance experience each play major roles in her finance business, her book, her appearance on the “Professional Photographer” podcast, and her Imaging USA 2026 class. Her diverse background reflects her many interests and her intent to use as much of her brain capacity as possible, she says. “There’s more space for everyone to do more.”

For business owners, including photographers, that “more” means tapping additional professionals to focus on the finances of your business, she explains. In her book, “Dancing with Numbers: Grow a Financially Healthy Business and Choreograph the Life You Want” (New Degree Press), Taitt explains five stages in the lifecycle of a business and the “money team” necessary for each stage. The stages are:

1. **Existence**
2. **Survival**
3. **Success**
4. **Growth**
5. **Maturity**

“In these five stages,” she says on the podcast, “there’s a different financial strategy of focus.”

At the minimum, particularly in the first two stages, you need a certified public accountant (CPA) or enrolled agent (EA) to ensure you are complying with all federal and state tax laws, Taitt advises. “As your business becomes more



complicated, there’s a lot more transactions, there’s a lot more money coming in, money going out,” she says, such as paying for equipment, perhaps hiring employees and running payroll, and maybe taking on a loan, credit card, or investor capital. “Somebody needs to be organizing all of those transactions into an accounting system under the accounting principles, so that you can look at a financial report and start to make decisions about your business.”

This Success stage is where you may want to consider a new player on your money team: a bookkeeper. Sometimes, a CPA can be a bookkeeper, but Taitt advises separating the two positions because the bookkeeper would handle the day-to-day and monthly tasks. “The CPA provides a check and balance

around tax time to make sure the numbers make sense,” she explains, “but the bookkeeper is with you more on a regular basis.”

When a business hits stages four and five, and is profitable (around \$1 million to \$2 million, according to Taitt) and ready to scale and grow, consider a fractional chief financial officer (CFO). This strategic professional will take your ideas and help you move forward, she says. “Instead of just moving on intuition and gut, it’s better that you have someone put some numbers around those ideas to help you figure out which direction makes most



TRICIA M. TAITT

sense to go in, which one is going to be the most profitable direction.” A CFO also helps if you are looking for lenders or investors in your business and you need certain financial information at the



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ready, she explains, since numbers are typically not a photographer's specialty. "You want somebody to help you communicate your narrative to other finance people because finance is a completely different language, like learning Spanish or French," Taitt says. "Sometimes, it's easier when a finance person is talking to

the world of business does not realize that," she says during the podcast, "and a finance person needs accounting to be right in order for us to do our job." She compares the process to Lego bricks: "You cannot build the house unless you have the right pieces. Accounting are the pieces," she adds. "Everything you do, from

ment?' ... And then from that starting point, if we're thinking for the future, finance people typically come up with assumptions. ... If you want to grow to X number or X profit in three years, what are some of the revenue assumptions we need to make? What are some expense assumptions? How are we going to leverage debt to finance from a cash flow perspective if there's no profit? So, a finance person takes the numbers that you have in your hand and leverages their imagination."

Finances can be scary for business owners, and entrepreneurship is hard, Taitt acknowledges, so she sometimes asks clients to consider their earliest childhood memories around money. Though not a therapist, Taitt says she speaks often about shifting your mindset about finances from anxiety to empowerment. In fact, that is what her company and her book are about. "My whole motto is, I want business owners to have a fun, engaging, exciting, empowering relationship with their numbers so they can dance with their numbers. How do you feel when you dance?" she asks. "You might feel hesitant at first, but eventually it feels good, especially when you practice over and over." •

"... I BELIEVE THAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO WORK ON STRENGTHENING THEIR FINANCIAL CORE ... YOU NEED A STRONG FINANCIAL CORE TO BE AT PEAK PERFORMANCE."

another finance person. They understand how to communicate with each other."

As your business flows through various stages, it's important to identify your money team before you have questions or problems, such as cash flow issues or a suspicion of fraud, "because by then," Taitt says, "it's more expensive for you to fix the problem and get things in order." She calls having finances and financial systems in order a business's "financial core," and named her 10-year-old fractional CFO and accounting company Fincore to reflect that philosophy. "I think that a lot of people get held back from growth or experience constrained performance because of their lack of awareness around their numbers and lack of comfort around their numbers," she says. "... I believe that everyone needs to work on strengthening their financial core ... because we believe that you need a strong financial core to be at peak performance, in the same way that dancers and athletes need a strong physical core to be at peak performance."

That is another reason business owners should separate accounting from finance, which she says are two separate functions. "The average person who is not in

buying a pencil to paying a credit card to paying yourself as the business owner, everything shows up on the financial statements. Accounting is responsible for putting every action into a bucket according to these principles and standards."

Finance professionals, Taitt explains, are "more imaginative and creative." They will ask questions that help business owners dive deep into their systems. "We will take those financial reports and we'll say, 'What are these numbers telling us about this business? Where is it strong? Where is it weak? Where are there areas of improve-



Worth Their Weight

LOW-COST HIGH-VALUE ACCESSORIES

By *Mark Edward Harris*



Lubbock, nicknamed “Hub City” for its role as an economic, educational, and healthcare center for the South Plains of Texas, is also home to a fascinating variety of photo ops, from prairie dogs and musical performances to world class wineries and museums. These require an equally wide range of photo equipment. Working solo on travel/documentary assignments, however, means a constant equipment balancing act. My pre-departure packing mantra is, “If I don’t have it, I can’t use it, but too much equipment slows me down.” So, putting small low-cost/high-production-value accessories to work is essential to success on the road.

My camera bag, in part, helps me decide what to bring. If a piece of equipment doesn’t fit in it, it stays home. For this assignment in Lubbock, I entrusted my equipment to a Think Tank Walker Pro Rolling Backpack since I anticipated photographing in both on- and off-road locations. My usual kit includes Nikon Z 8 and Z 9 camera bodies, Delkin Black cards, and Nikkor Z 14-24mm f/2.8, Z 24-70mm f/2.8 and Z 70-200mm lenses. I added a JJC Silicone Lens Hood, a Westcott 20” Collapsible 5-in-1 reflector, and an amaran Ace 25x Bi-Color LED Light Panel. The total cost of these three accessories is around \$125, and because of their size, they are ideal for photographers like me who double as their own assistants (or occasionally ask someone on site to hold a reflector or a light).

On my first day on assignment, I photographed the late musician Buddy Holly's iconic glasses (opposite page), which were inside a glass display case at the Buddy Holly Center. The collapsible lens hood earned its keep that day, as it eliminated the reflections through the glass. To position the lens hood, remove the lens from

the camera body and pull it up the lens from the mount to just above the focusing ring. The JJC Silicone Lens Hood fits on 73mm to 88mm lens body diameters.

I used the silicone lens hood again with the addition of the amaran Ace 25x Bi-Color LED Light Panel to photograph a pair of historic stirrups (below) at the

National Ranching Heritage Center, a museum and historical park established to preserve and interpret ranching and frontier history.

Since food is an integral part of any travel story, I documented pies through a glass display case (some of which I of course later sampled) at the Cast Iron



Grill, using the JJC LH-ARLII and light panel (bottom left). I also put the light to work on an environmental portrait of pitmaster Amis Robins in the smokehouse (page 31) at Evie Mae's BBQ.

The amaran Ace 25x Bi-Color LED Light Panel's ability to fine tune color temperatures to match the ambient light was vital to the success of the image. The light has a color temperature range of 2,300-to-6,500K and achieves a high color accuracy of 95 in both CRI and TLCI ratings. The included lock-to-cold shoe adapter makes the light mountable on any camera with a shoe mount, and a 1/4"-20 thread on the bottom of the fixture allows mounting on most light stands. In this case, I opted to hold it off to my left and slightly low to avoid the shadow cast from Robins' cap. The light's magnetic front accessory mount accepts modifiers such as the included dome diffuser, which I keep on as my default setup. A back magnetic silicone pad allows the light to be mounted on any magnetic surface. For those taking video, especially for cinematic projects, there are nine preprogrammed lighting effects: paparazzi, fireworks, lightning, faulty bulb, TV, pulsing, strobe, explosion, and fire.

Another small—albeit more expensive—final addition to my kit was a Nikkor Z Teleconverter TC-1.4x, which gave me the extra reach I needed for a photo session with Lubbock's prairie dogs (right). I captured them on a plot of land called Prairie Dog Town, created by Lubbock business owner K.N. Clapp in 1935 in an early act of animal conservation. If this were a trip devoted to wildlife or sports, I would have gone to a bigger



Think Thank bag to bring my Z 400mm f/2.8 lens and a monopod.

Over a glass of wine crafted from 100% Texas-grown grapes at the family-owned Adelphos Cellars, I reflected on my images and life on the road. Since I spend more time with the equipment I work with

than with family members and friends, it's vital that each item is not only compatible with each other, but with my photographing style. •

Mark Edward Harris is an award-winning photographer and writer based in Los Angeles.

Comfort On Camera

FINDING EASE IN FRONT OF THE LENS

By Paul Daniel

IMAGES COURTESY OF VIEW FINDERS



When Paul Daniel (right) first started his journey on View Finders, he was not used to being on camera and tended to overthink everything. Here, he and Chris Greer discuss their compositions on camera at a location in Iceland.

Editor's note: *Having a genuine video presence has become important for the success of small businesses, especially photographers who need to form fast relationships with clients. The ability to show your authentic personality on video to potential clients is invaluable in your social and marketing outreach. We asked "View Finders" cohost and photographer Paul Daniel to show how he learned to be comfortable in front of the lens.*

When I first joined "View Finders," our nationally broadcast photography show on PBS, I knew it would be an incredible adventure. Traveling to stunning locations, exploring the art of photography, and sharing those experiences with a wide audience—all of it was a dream come true.

But there was one part of the job I wasn't prepared for: being on camera.

Like many photographers, I had spent my career *behind* the camera. That was where I felt most at home, shaping light and composition, capturing moments while staying invisible. Suddenly, I was asked not only to take photographs but to speak, to explain

my process, interact naturally, and even look straight into a lens that felt like it was studying me.

I'll never forget those first photography sessions with Chris Greer, our executive producer and my cohost on the show. Chris had a natural ease in front of the camera, while I was still overthinking every move: how my voice sounded, where my hands were, whether I looked stiff. He encouraged me to relax, reminded me that my perspective as a photographer was valuable, and gave me space to grow into the role. Over time, with practice and patience, I became not just comfortable, but confident on camera.

Here are the five biggest lessons that helped me make that transition.

1 Embrace authenticity instead of performance. At first, I thought I needed to “act” like a television host. I tried to polish my tone, make every sentence perfect, and present myself as more formal than I really am. But the harder I tried to perform, the more awkward I became.

The turning point came when I realized viewers didn’t want an actor. They wanted *me*. They wanted the same enthusiasm I show when explaining aperture to a beginner or when chasing the right light at sunset. When I let myself talk the way I would to a friend, I stopped worrying so much about how I looked and focused more on what I shared.

Authenticity is powerful. People connect with honesty, not rehearsed lines. Once I allowed myself to just be Paul, I started to feel at ease.

2 Practice presence, not perfection. Those early photo sessions were full of overthinking. I’d replay lines in my head, second-guess how I stood, or question whether I was looking in the right direction. That perfectionist mindset froze me.

Chris often reminded me: “Just be present. Share what you know. Don’t chase perfect.”

When I shifted my focus to presence—on telling the story of the location or explaining why this image mattered—I relaxed. Some takes still included stumbles or awkward pauses, but instead of panicking, I learned to move forward. The audience isn’t watching for flawless delivery; they’re watching for connection.

Presence—not perfection—is what keeps people engaged.



Being present is more important than perfection. In this take, Paul is learning about protecting endangered lemurs from a conservationist on Necker Island.



The crew films Paul and Chris interviewing Sir Richard Branson.



Chris and Paul film a segment on St. Simon's Island with videographer Nathan Burnett.

3 Use preparation as a confidence anchor. Confidence doesn't appear out of thin air; it grows from preparation. Before each filming day, I map out the key points I want to cover. I don't write full scripts, but I do create mental bullet points so I know my story arc.

- What am I trying to teach here?
- What's the main takeaway for viewers?
- How can I keep this conversational?

That simple roadmap gives me freedom. If I forget a line, I can always pivot back to my bullet points. Much like knowing your camera settings before a shoot, preparation provides a steady foundation for whatever happens in front of the lens.

4 Practice off-camera to build on-camera comfort. The biggest improvements came during times no one else was watching. I started filming myself on my phone, talking through a topic like I would on the show. Then I'd play it back.

It wasn't always pretty. Sometimes I cringed at how I looked or sounded. But watching myself gave me valuable feedback. I could spot where I needed to slow down, where a natural smile worked better, or how my hand movements came across.

Just like photography, practice makes progress. The more I recorded myself, the less foreign it felt. Eventually, the camera stopped feeling like a spotlight and became more like a familiar companion.

5 Remember the world we live in. This last lesson came with a shift in perspective. At first, I felt self-conscious speaking into a camera in public. I worried what people around me were thinking as I stood in a park or a busy street, explaining f-stops to a

lens. But then I reminded myself that this is normal now.

If you were born after 1995, chances are you've grown up recording videos, having phone conversations over video, and sharing yourself on social media. For that generation, talking to a camera is as natural as picking up the phone was for earlier generations. And most of the rest of us have adjusted. People are used to seeing it and half of them are doing it themselves. Once I accepted that, the pressure melted away. Sure, someone may glance at you for a second, but by the time they turn the corner, their mind is somewhere else. And when you embrace that reality, it becomes much easier to stay in the flow of filming.

My journey to camera comfort wasn't overnight. It took patience, practice, and encouragement, especially from Chris, who set the tone for how to be natural and engaging in front of an audience.

Now, I see being in front of the lens as just another way of storytelling. Behind the camera, I capture the beauty of a scene. In front of it, I share the meaning of that beauty with others. Both roles matter. Both invite people into the story.

If you're new to stepping in front of the camera, just remember these tips:

- Be authentic.
- Stay present.
- Prepare enough to feel confident.
- Practice often.
- Connecting with others on camera is normal now.

In the end, what matters most isn't how you look or sound. It's the story you're sharing and the passion behind it that people will remember. •

Paul Daniel is a cohost for "View Finders" on PBS. Producer and cohost Chris Greer contributed to this story.

BRENDAN BAKER

San Diego, CA | PPA Member Since 2022
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PPA has been instrumental in supporting my business by providing essential resources such as contracts, general liability insurance certificates, and equipment insurance. These tools not only streamline my work with clients but also distinguish me as a professional photographer and a responsible business owner.

I'm inspired by the individuality of each client I work with. Everyone brings their own personality, style, and story, and I love finding ways to reflect that through my photography. What I like most about *Professional Photographer* is how it consistently provides practical insights and inspiration. From showcasing innovative techniques and industry trends to offering business advice, it's a great resource for staying motivated and informed.

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Luxury BY AMANDA ARNOLD Earned

FRANK SALAS IS THE WEDDING
EXPERT CLIENTS NEED

Contrary to what some may say, there are no “bridezillas,” according to Orange County, California-based wedding photographer Frank Salas, M.Photog.M.Wed.Photog.Cr. Also, he adds, “that is not very nice.”

If a photographer is complaining about a bride, chances are it's because that photographer didn't properly communicate with her before the event, he says, which led to confusion and unmet expectations. Salas' decades of experience “making mistakes” means he is qualified to make that observation, he says. “These are words of wisdom coming from a veteran.”

AN EARLY START

Salas' photography journey began his junior year of high school, when his parents wanted him to get a part-time job. Since he was enjoying a photography class at school, they connected him with a cousin who was director of photography at a wedding studio with about 20 photographers. “He trained everybody,” he says. Salas relished his weekends and summers photographing weddings, and the training and on-the-job practice sharpened his skills. “It just kind of clicked at the time,” he says. “But I had no idea that it was going to be anything else.”



It was. After high school, Salas worked for four different studios before launching his own wedding photography business 37 years ago. “I’ve had no other occupation,” besides wedding photography, says Salas. “When people say, ‘When are you going to get a real job?’ or even during COVID, ‘What else can you do?’” he chuckles, the answer is always, “I just take pictures.” And, after all these years, he still loves weddings. As a parent and a family man, Salas says he relishes the universal joy he witnesses when extended families come together, sometimes after many years. “You hear people say, ‘It takes a funeral,’” for families to reunite. “Well, it’s the same with weddings,” he says. “It’s taken a wedding to gather everybody.” And he’s honored each time he gets to capture those moments.

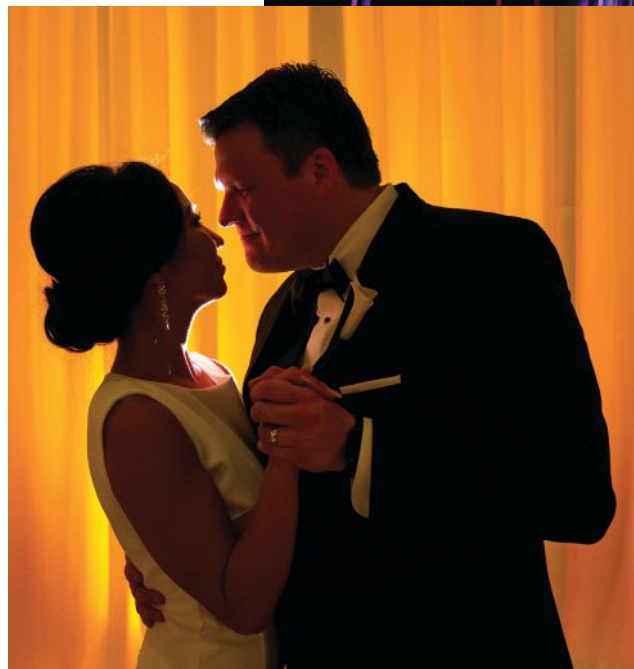


FRANK SALAS

BRING THEM INTO YOUR WORLD

Over his almost four decades of experience, Salas knows that a key to a smooth, low-stress, and beautifully photographed wedding is plenty of straightforward advance communication. Most wedding clients have no idea how their day will unfold, much less the logistics. Even if they hire a coordinator or planner, their schedules often don’t match up with the photographer’s needs, Salas explains. So, when he receives the wedding day timeline from the planner (typically several weeks prior to the event), he reaches out to the couple for an in-depth conversation. This is when he explains how much time he will need to capture images and how the typical timeline is set. For example, he asks when the bride will be dressed and ready instead of just asking when the hair and makeup artist is due to arrive—and advises if there truly is enough time to make the necessary photos.

Salas uses this back-and-forth with the couple to explain how he works and how much time he needs for each piece of his process. He also will share his thoughts and advice. “I think what separates the true veteran photographer from a really good wedding photographer,” he says, “is that you’re allowing them to come into your world, allowing them to understand







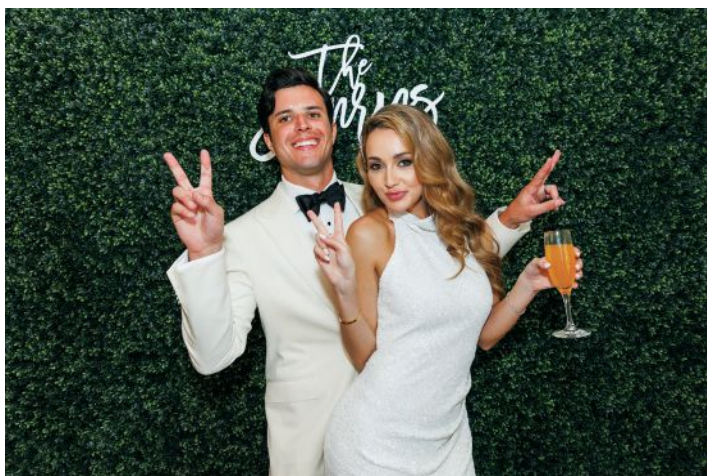
what you're doing that day, step by step. Then they're all in with you." Having a detailed, transparent conversation with the client also protects the photographer, he says. "You're covered because you've already communicated to these couples that, 'Look, your coordinator wants me to be here at 2 p.m. but I've got this long list of photos. It's not going to take me 20 minutes to do this.'"

That said, he emphasizes that this conversation is not a list of demands but a gentle gathering of information. "Take notes, ask questions, and listen to them," Salas advises, "because then you'll succeed and make them happy. ... You hit a home run because now you know, and that's how you get five-star reviews."

HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED

When Salas started his career, 99% of the time he would meet with couples in person before the wedding. Today, he says, he meets about 20% to 30% of them in person, with the rest often preferring to communicate via social media apps like Instagram or Facebook. Salas often schedules engagement photo sessions with couples to get to know them and directs them to email when he sends important documents. One of those documents is a wedding party form. Here is where the couple lists family members from each side, names of the wedding party, and vendors. They note important family dynamics Salas should know about such as divorces, remarriages, and who should not be photographed with whom. Salas memorizes these names and details prior to the wedding day.

In addition, he asks about any specific, important images they would be upset to be missed and adds those to his photo "wish list." "It's our duty to make this stress-free for the bride," says Salas, of wedding photographers, "so that the day of the wedding, she doesn't have to think about any of this. She shouldn't have to worry about, 'Did you get a picture of her grandma?' That's already been discussed."





THE HERO SHOT

Camera and lens: Canon EOS R5 Mark II, Canon RF15-35mm F2.8 L US USM lens

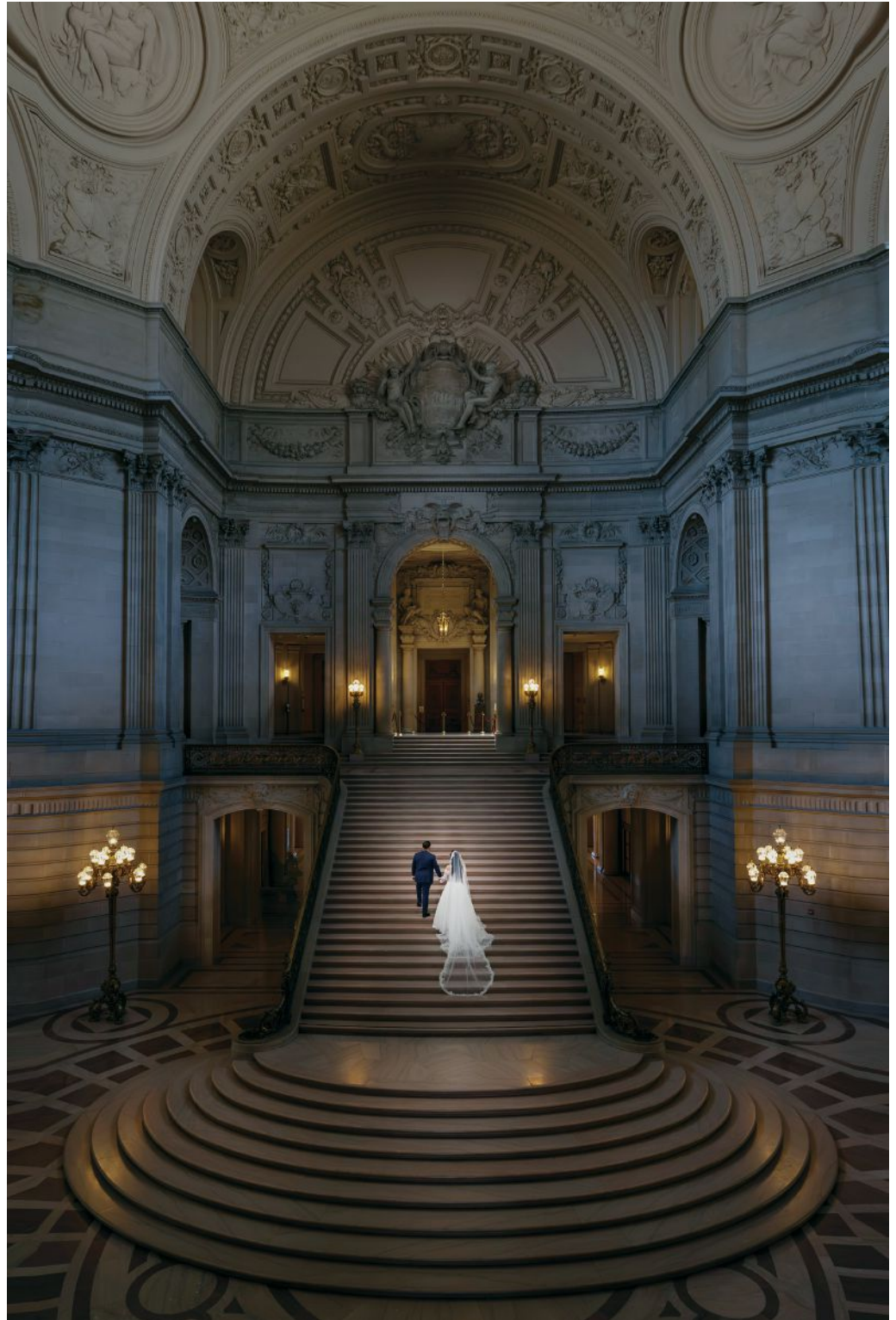
Exposure: 1/160 second at f/50, ISO 4000

Lighting: A Profoto A2 and Profoto Connect Pro

Photographer's note:

The image was captured at San Francisco City Hall, a majestic location that Orange County-based wedding photographer Frank Salas, in business some 37 years, has always wanted to photograph. "There is this grand staircase, and everybody sees it and says, 'My God, can we get married there?' At the very base of that was where the ceremony was. For this particular photo, I already had a vision in mind. I wanted to make sure they got something that showed the location off as best as possible. Most of my work shows that—plenty of closeups and plenty of traditional—but I'm always trying to select that one hero shot.

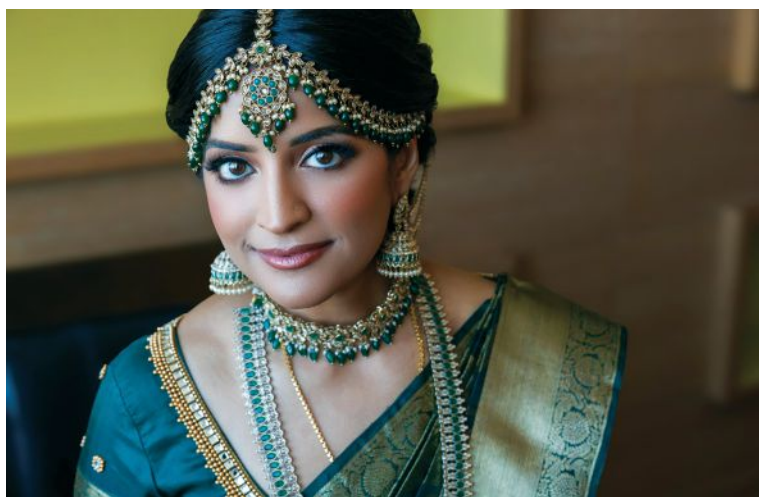
"I was there for the rehearsal the night before ... so I was able to walk the property. I knew exactly where I had to stand and where to position them. I had an assistant photographer, and I was kind of far away. He helped communicate with them, so they wouldn't just be staring into space. I think I probably shot there for less than two minutes, and then we had to move out for the next wedding. So, that's why I had to do all the planning beforehand."





Some photographers cap the number of weddings they work each year, but not Salas, whose passion for wedding photography and his stamina mean he books as many as he can. “I think the most I’ve done myself in a year is 60 or 65,” he says. In recent years, he’s averaged 40 to 45 weddings per year, in addition to other events. “If I can average three to four per month,” he adds, “that’s a good thing for me, at a minimum.”

In his whirlwind schedule, Salas takes time to read through responses from his clients to his post-wedding client survey, where he asks for feedback across many areas, including asking, “If there is something you could have changed, what would that have been?” He keeps these replies in mind as he speaks to current and future clients, and learns how he himself can improve. It can be hard to hear criticism, Salas notes, but it is necessary to strengthen and grow, both as a business owner and a photographer.





He also works to elevate his photography by participating in PPA's Merit Image Review (MIR) and International Photographic Competition (IPC). "Most photographers never get better because they never get their work critiqued," he says, "especially critiqued by [trained] judges." Salas' images have been finalists in PPA's IPC for the last three years. He also worked toward and received his PPA master of wedding photography degree.

A LUXURY BRAND

Frank Salas Photography is "Orange County's premier luxury photography studio," according to his website. That is not just a phrase; it takes many years of hard work and lessons learned to cater to that luxury client base, he explains. First and foremost, Salas takes care that his images reflect the level of quality that marks a luxury brand. His social media also continuously portrays those images. He also has spent years cultivating relationships and attending events within high-society and high-end social circles. "You could be the best photographer,

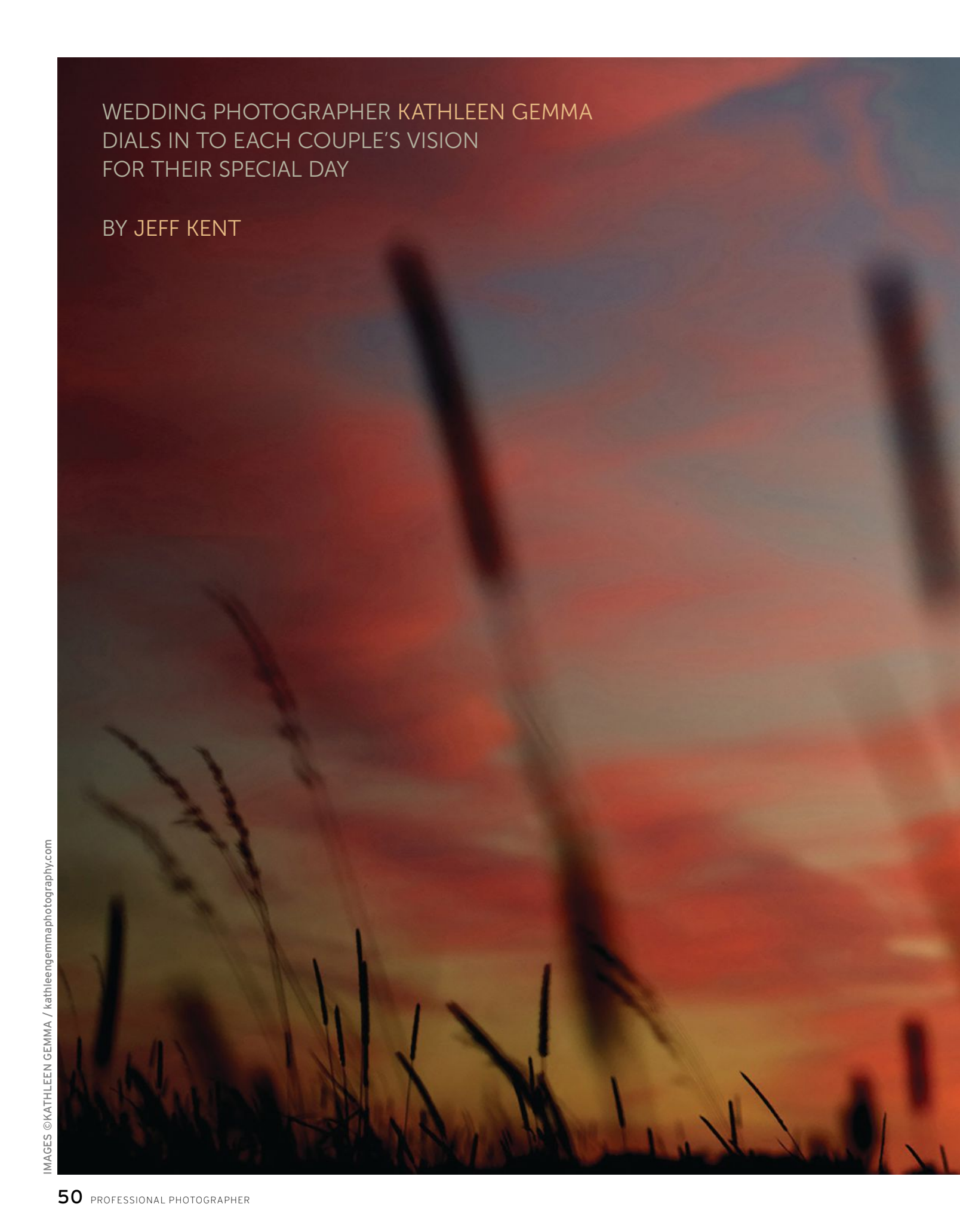


but if your social skills are not good, you won't get referred by people," Salas says, adding that many of his referrals come from luxury venues, where Frank Salas Photography is on their preferred photographers list.

To capture the luxury client, branding should reflect the luxury standard. For example, look at logos and marketing materials for luxury brands, both in photography and in other industries. Note their designs, styles and colors, and use them as your guide when you create a brand or revamp a current one. Another consideration when attracting luxury clients is how you as the photographer present yourself, Salas says. Think about what you wear on the job and how you behave. Do you show up on time? Does your wardrobe blend with the clientele and the environment? When a company or venue adds you to their preferred vendor list, you become an extension of their brand, Salas says, so they need to know you are going to deliver.

Lastly, he explains, maintaining a luxury brand means responding to clients as quickly as possible. With this many years in business, Salas says, it's natural to him. "I am a fanatic. I mean, I am a rare breed. I will get back to these people 24/7," he adds. "Even event planners will tell you that if I'm still up at 1 in the morning, I will respond." To streamline his processes, Salas has created about 15 different template email responses to ensure his clients and potential clients receive timely replies. He likens a client contacting a wedding photographer to someone contacting a plumber when they have a leak. If you reply even 24 hours later, it's too late. "You've got to be the winner," Salas says, with almost 40 years in business as evidence. "You've got to get back in seconds." •





WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER KATHLEEN GEMMA
DIALS IN TO EACH COUPLE'S VISION
FOR THEIR SPECIAL DAY

BY JEFF KENT

Full-focus Empathy







From a young age,



KATHLEEN GEMMA

Kathleen Gemma loved art. She was always drawing, and often carried a simple camera for personal snaps. At age 21, she received her first “real” camera: a Canon EOS Rebel XT, which sparked a deeper interest in photography. While hanging around a local camera store, she met a professional photographer who invited her to attend events hosted by PPA Community Network Hudson Valley PPS of NY (HVPPS NY). She began connecting with other photographers, learning more about the trade, and building her confidence. Soon she was second photographer at weddings—for free at first, to gain experience, and then as a paid professional.

Gemma developed her own style, grew her reputation and soon won an award in HVPPS NY’s photographic competition, in the illustrative category. Inquiries for her wedding photography soon followed, and she built a client base by focusing on client relationships, detailed preparation, and an emphasis on understanding each couple’s vision for their wedding day.

Today, Gemma runs a busy wedding and portrait studio in upstate New York that draws clients from across the Hudson Valley and beyond. Her work has garnered numerous awards, and clients flock to her for her focus on creating authentic images that capture the underlying feeling of a wedding. “It’s important to remember that, no matter how many weddings you’ve photographed, the one you’re

doing that day is special to those people,” says Gemma. “They deserve your full focus, and your best effort to understand their vision. So I listen to my couples. I share in their enthusiasm. I allow them to express their vision for the day while still staying true to my style as a photographer.”

PERSONAL APPROACH

Gemma collaborates with her clients first via a series of pre-wedding Zoom meetings. During these meetings, she learns their engagement story, their tastes, their family history, and other details that help her understand who the couple is and what they care about. She discusses the wedding day timeline and gives

them plenty of opportunities to ask questions. “People like that personal approach,” she says. “It shows that I’m invested in them and their day. I’m genuinely trying. I’m not just here to make a buck.”

To keep all the particulars straight, and to make sure she’s offering as customized a service as possible, Gemma takes detailed notes on everything from her client’s background info to the photo list she creates for each wedding. She refers to these notes throughout the wedding day. “I write down *everything*,” she says. “You have to write down every little detail. It helps prevent all those different couples and different events from mushing together

in your mind. I bring the notes with me. I keep them on my phone, along with the timeline. That helps keep me focused on what the couple wants.”

At the reception, Gemma establishes an off-camera lighting setup near the dance floor or the main action, creating a window of pleasing light to photograph candid images of the guests as they pass through. She sets up two flashes on light stands diagonally from each other, and then positions herself so she forms the third point of a triangle. Then she moves around within that window of light. She dances alongside the guests, she wanders in and out of the crowd, and when she sees a compelling scene framed in that good light,







KATHLEEN GEMMA'S GO-TO WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY GEAR BAG

Cameras: Two Nikon Z6II camera bodies

Lenses: Nikkor 85mm f/1.8, 50mm f/1.2, 24-70mm f/2.8, 105mm f/2.8, 70-200mm f/2.8

Lights: Three Flashpoint flashes, one Light & Motion Stella Pro 8000 RF, one Light & Motion Stella Pro Reflex

Stands and Grips: Cheetah light stands and MagMod MagGrips





she captures it. She carries two cameras: one with an on-camera flash synced with the two lights on stands, and another with a remote trigger for the other lights. The camera she uses depends on the effect she's trying to achieve, she explains. For example, for a more dramatic look, she'll use the camera without the flash, usually with an 85mm lens. For a brighter, more filled-in look, she pulls up the camera with the flash (usually with a 24-70mm lens) to add extra pop.

The candid imagery she produces with this approach is one of the most recognizable elements of Gemma's work, she says. She credits her results to being well prepared, observant, and empathetic, in that she takes time to understand the story behind the story, and what images will help tell that story. "This is where I apply all that background, my notes, the conversations I've had with my clients," she says. "I try to understand what it's like to be them in that moment, the struggles, the

joys. I'm waiting for certain things to happen, and when they do, I'm there and I'm ready."

GRAND FINALE

At every wedding, Gemma stages what she calls a "grand finale shot." It's a special photograph that she sets up to be the marquis image from the event. Typically, it's either a golden hour portrait or nighttime image. She sets it up in advance, arranges her lighting based on the setting, and lets the couple know to be prepared



to be pulled away when the time comes. Clients seem to enjoy creating this defining image, and many of the photographs have won awards, Gemma says.

Post-wedding, it used to take Gemma eight hours or more to cull and edit images, she says. However, with better preparation, a more strategic approach to photographing, and some high-tech tools, she's cut that time to a couple of hours. "I used to take a lot of photos, but not anymore, because I ask myself, 'Why am I giving myself so much more

work? Is this couple ever going to use this photo? Are they going to print it? Are they going to post it?" she says, "If the answer to those questions is no, then I don't even take it."

Using Imagen and Evoto, Gemma pares down the images to a best-of-the-best list. She leans on AI tools within the applications to speed up editing and get images ready for display and delivery in two to three weeks. That timeframe is a critical last step, Gemma notes: If clients have to wait months to view professional photographs from one of the

most important days of their lives, their enthusiasm begins to wane and frustration may sour their perceptions of their photographer. Better to move through the post-wedding editing process efficiently and quickly, deliver their images while they're still excited, and carry that excitement into the ordering session, she explains. Plus, by delivering the images while the wedding is still a recent memory, Gemma adds, the couple is more likely to talk about their wedding photographer to others, and she is more likely to earn referrals.



"I try to understand what it's like to be them in that moment, the struggles, the joys."



Wedding photography itself is changing, Gemma says, as she fields requests from clients about videography and even drone photography. Photographers should not feel they have to fulfill every request or provide a service that isn't within their area of expertise, she explains, but it's important to stay up to date on new developments in image capture and presentation. Offering flexibility in your services—whether through partnerships with other providers or by learning new techniques or technology—can help keep you top of mind when people are reviewing wedding photographer options.

Most of all, Gemma says, the key to good client service is understanding your clients and delivering on their vision for their wedding day. "Learn the technology, figure out AI tools," she adds, "but at the end of the day, it's your ability to work with people who are experiencing this crazy, hectic, exciting time of their lives that will make the most difference." •

Design Serenity

KENNY RICHARD PHOTOGRAPHS SPACES WITH PURPOSE

— by Stephanie Boozer —

Known colloquially as “Cowtown,” Fort Worth, Texas got its start as a stop along the Chisholm Trail, used in the post-Civil War era to drive cattle to stockyards and rail stops in Kansas, where they could be sold and shipped east. Today, the city balances its cattle-driving history with modernity, hosting rodeos at the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo as well as modern art exhibitions at the Kimbell Art Museum. It is a city straddling two distinct personalities, and where photographer Kenny Richard, M.Photog.Cr., CPP, is proud to hang his hat.

Much like his city, Richard engages in a kind of duality, delving into both real estate photography and interior/architectural design photography. Outwardly, the two niches may seem the same, but the approach to each is entirely different. Photographing a space that’s for sale or for short term rental requires a different creative lens than capturing the emotion and vibe of a carefully curated interior. The former is an inviting skeleton awaiting the viewer’s narrative, while the latter simply *is* the story.

“It’s hard for me to narrow down which genre I prefer, real estate or interior design,” says Richard. “One is selling the space and its possibilities, and the other is selling art, furniture, and emotion. They’re related, but not at all the same.”







KENNY RICHARD



SELLING A SPACE

Whether the client is marketing a home for rent or for sale, the end goal is to ensure viewers can visualize themselves in the space. Light, bright, airy rooms with minimal distractions invite viewers in. While a real estate photography assignment may seem like a quick and easy in-and-out job, there's much more to it than wide-angle lenses and bright lighting, Richard notes.

Richard has spent years photographing spaces for Airbnb, which is where he got his start as a side gig before pursuing photography full time. His primary goal for photographing an Airbnb rental is to create images that feel inviting and warm, with just enough detail to evoke a sense of comfort. Similarly, with a house listing, it's all about creating enough of a story for a viewer to build on and visualize themselves in the space, he says.

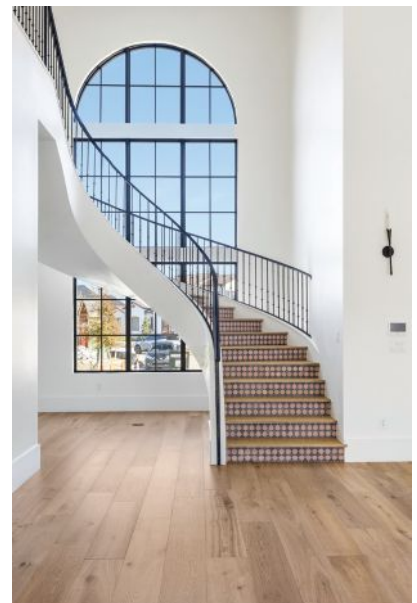
The first thing Richard does at a property is set his camera

gear by the front door and walk through the space with the client. In many cases, he adds, they've already attempted to stage the home but haven't considered how that staging translates into photographs. So, he'll suggest moving furniture and décor, and explain along the way why and how it will improve the final images. What might seem decorative and inviting to the client may read as cluttered and chaotic to the viewer, he explains.

"I make it feel chatty and light as we walk through, and what that promotes to the client is that I know what I'm doing and I'm paying attention to the details," he says. "My clients know I want the space to look the best that it can so they get more bookings or make the sale."

Richard uses the bracketing technique to capture images for real estate listings. He captures an initial image, then two incrementally overexposed







and two more incrementally underexposed images. Part of this is for precision, and part of it is for equipment simplicity, as he typically brings just a tripod, camera, and circular polarizer filter with him to these jobs.

“Most of my clients would not be willing to have me bring in a ton of gear and spend 15 minutes capturing one shot when I can connect five bracketed exposures later,” he explains. “It’s just a choice I’ve made that allows me to create time for more jobs and create great results for my clients.”

When photographing larger commercial buildings, though, Richard keeps an added goal in mind. “Commercial buildings are usually immaculate and dramatic because the goal is to capture people’s attention immediately when they walk in,” he says. “So, I’m always on the lookout for something I can use for competition. I also share that with my client, which helps them know I will spend the extra time shooting and that it will benefit us both.”

That instinct has paid off. In both genres, Richard has earned many accolades, including images that earned Imaging Excellence in PPA’s

Merit Image Review. Richard also has advanced in the International Photographic Competition to the top 32 ranking and higher, including a Diamond award, as well as won an award from Texas Professional Photographers Association for best architecture image.

SELLING A MOOD

Richard takes a different approach when he works with interior designers. Capturing a designed room is about the emotion the designer wants to evoke, whether that is connected to a design element such as a sofa or lamp, or as part of an overall sense of styling, he explains. These images are about eliciting desire within the viewer, an emotional need to recreate the mood of the image in their own home.

Often, capturing that mood means working with dark color schemes and dramatic lighting, according to Richard. For example, in a recent session, he was photographing a room with deep green walls and moldings, a dark green and gold wallpapered ceiling, and richly toned furniture with a dark cherry finish (right). His job was to capture the emotional essence of





the space without skewing the color and lighting. Given the darkness of the room, it would have been easy to blow out the windows or lighting with long exposures, he explains.

“The intended impression was that this is a room where people can sit and be in their own thoughts, or be reading by the fire,” says Richard. “We had to be very strategic to ensure there was no light spill from the windows that would contaminate what the client envisioned.” To combat the intrusive daylight, Richard covered the windows with a black backdrop and took long exposures to ensure he wasn’t losing any details in the shadows. True to his bracketing process, he captured five images of each setup, noting where light spilled from adjacent rooms.

In tricky setups, Richard says he verifies the actual paint colors with his clients and secures the RGB info, so he can select the exact color in the palette in Adobe Photoshop and paint the appropriate areas to ensure they read correctly. He also uses Lightroom.

“I want that color to be spot-on,” he says. “A lot of designers are working with whites and earth tones, which are of course much easier to shoot. But there’s been a trend toward dark, moodier rooms in new builds and staged houses with deep blues, charcoals, even black walls.”

To correct light spill and remove glare, he uses a flash or strobe. He pops the flash into a window to create what

he calls a “flambient exposure.” Recessed lighting can also pose lighting challenges by changing the color of the surrounding ceiling or creating glare. Like with the dark walls and trim, Richard will ask for the paint color of the ceiling, so he can correct it if needed later in editing.

SELLING YOURSELF

Creating meaningful and lasting client connections is Richard’s iron-clad marketing tool. “The novelty of customer service has really gone by the wayside,” he says. “I establish a relationship with everyone I come into contact with and follow up regularly. My clients know they are more to me than a dollar sign. It’s not transactional; it’s relational.”

Richard seeks opportunities to have authentic conversations with his clients and reinforces his connection by checking in on them in a non-salesy manner. It’s important to him that his clients *know* he will take care of them, he says. Building that relationship and following up with solid work that meets—and hopefully exceeds—a client’s expectations is what keeps him front of mind and high on their recommendation list, he adds.

“If I haven’t done the relationship right, it almost doesn’t matter what the images do,” he says. “It becomes a lost job down the road, lost word of mouth, a lost tag on social media.” •

Stephanie Boozer is a writer in Charleston, South Carolina.





BUSINESS-BUILDING WISDOM

Besides establishing a genuine client relationship, Kenny Richard offers this advice for building a strong business and reputation.

Don't try to be all things to all people. While Richard understands the allure of saying yes to every job, he's also learned what it feels like to be pulled in too many different directions. Narrowing his focus to real estate and interior design created an identity and brand to build around.

Be a good steward of the equipment you have. Richard is proof that you can do a lot with a little. His real estate photography kit is light and nimble, and gets the job done. "A lot of people think they have to have the latest and greatest, most expensive gear," he says. "Pace yourself. It's not about what you spend, but what you do with the gear you currently have."

Richard started his career with an amateur Canon T2i, but by maximizing its capabilities, he soon earned the work to bankroll the professional upgrades. It also gave him time to carefully consider what he needed versus what he thought he needed.

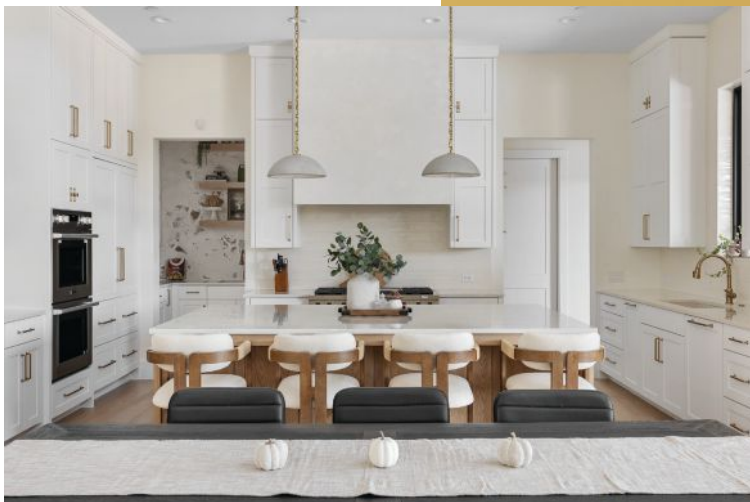
Pay attention to the right details. In residences and buildings, conflicting light sources are always interacting. Your own home can be a valuable laboratory—try shooting a light fixture, for example.

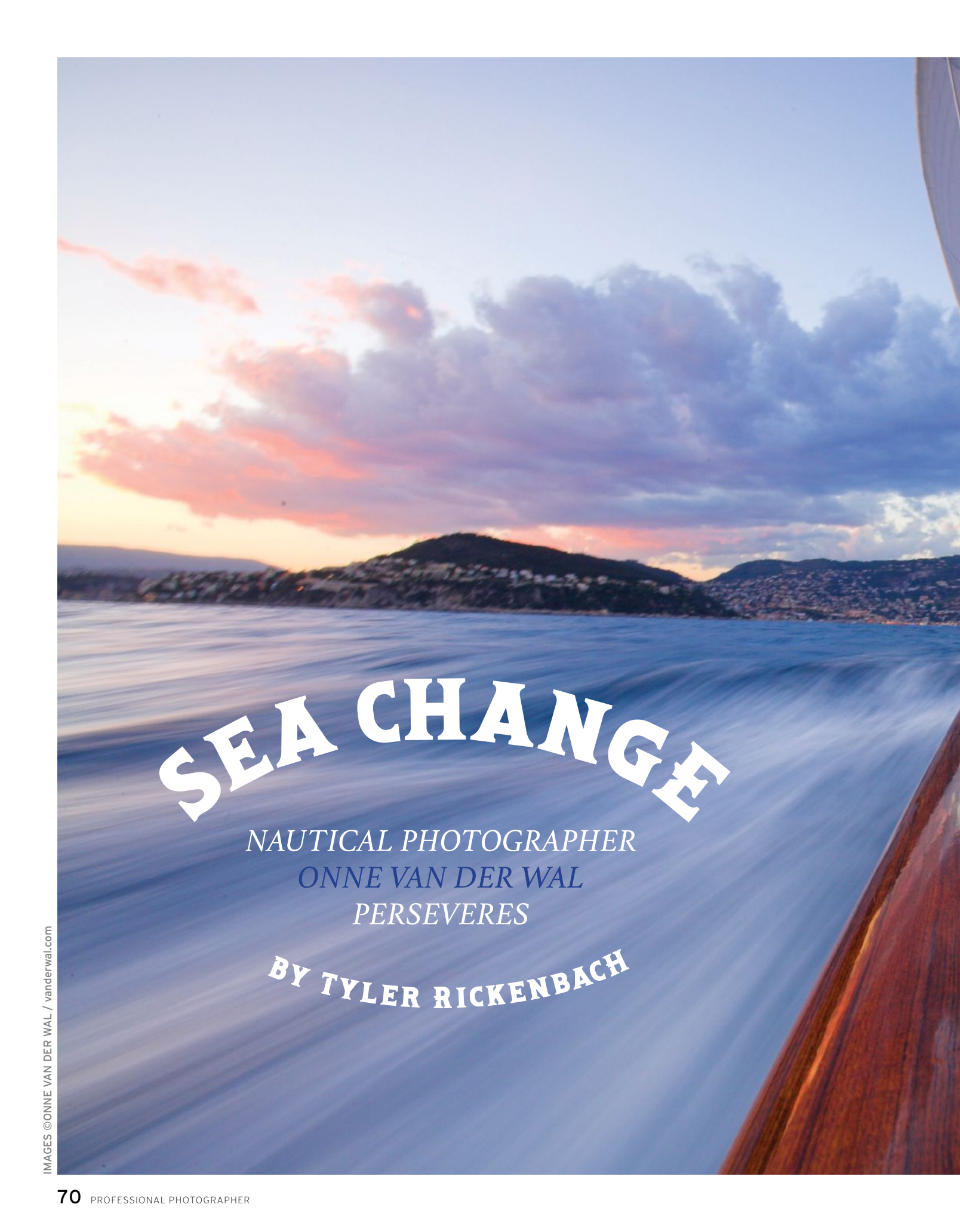
"Our eye doesn't see that light as overexposed, but a camera will," he says. "By underexposing, you'll get all the details, crystals, emblems, and shapes of sconces, chandeliers, pendants, etc. Learn how to blend the high and the low exposures and how that affects the overall exposure of the room."

Seek out a community and a mentor in the genre. Richard credits his involvement in a like-minded photography community with helping him further his goals and hold him accountable.

"Don't be afraid to get help and seek advice," he says. "Having an accountability partner is what encouraged me to sign up for PPA One Days, get my Craftsman degree, and start speaking."

But don't shy away from hearing the hard things, which he says are amazing opportunities to do better, adding, "It puts you in a position to go to levels you weren't expecting."





SEA CHANGE

NAUTICAL PHOTOGRAPHER
ONNE VAN DER WAL
PERSEVERES

BY TYLER RICKENBACH







SOMETIMES IN LIFE YOU EXPERIENCE A SEA CHANGE.

For Jamestown, Rhode Island-based photographer Onne van der Wal, it was literal. What started as an extension of professional sailing became a thriving career in nautical photography. During this interview, which has been edited for length and clarity, van der Wal revealed he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer three years ago. “Most people don’t last six months,” he says. Open-water swimming, his boats, his photography, and a coffee table book he is working on keep him going.



ONNE VAN DER WAL

Tyler Rickenbach: You came into photography through sailing. How did that begin?

Onne van der Wal: It really did start by accident. I had been sailing professionally for about three years when I was selected as one of the final 16 crew members for *Flyer II*, which was built to race the 1981–82 Whitbread Round the World Race. During crew training, we sailed from the Netherlands across the Atlantic to Newport and then up to Marblehead, Massachusetts. One day, the boat was sitting on a mooring and everyone else was ashore. I was on board doing mechanical work when I heard a knock. I looked over the side and there were three guys in suits in a little rowing boat, which immediately struck me as funny.

They turned out to be from *Sail* magazine: the publisher, the editor, and another staffer. They



wanted a tour of the boat. At the end, I said to the editor, "I've been taking some pictures. Would you like to see them?" I brought up my slides and he held them up to the light on deck. He looked at them and said, "This is really good. Can I take these with me?" The next day, I got word that they wanted me to shoot for *Sail* magazine during the Whitbread Race. I went to the owner of the boat and he said, "That's fantastic, and while you're at it, why don't you just become our official photographer? I'll even supply the camera gear." That's how it started.

TR: You were still a working crew member at that time. What role were you playing on the boat?

OvdW: I was the engineer and also the bowman, which means I worked forward of the



most handling sails. It's the wettest, bumpiest, most chaotic part of the boat. When sail changes happen, you're in charge and you're getting hammered by water the whole time. Photography didn't replace my job. It was layered on top of it.

During the 1981-82 Whitbread Around the World Race, van der Wal was given 20 rolls of Kodachrome film per each of the four legs of the race, 80 total rolls.

— Leg 1 was Portsmouth, England to Cape Town, South Africa.

— Leg 2 was Cape Town to Auckland, New Zealand, passing south of Australia.

— Leg 3 was Auckland to Mar del Plata,

Argentina by way of Cape Horn.

— Leg 4 was from Mar del Plata back to Portsmouth on the southern coast of England.

The undeveloped film was sent by DHL from the various stopover ports to the Sail magazine office in Boston and then on to Kodak in Rochester, New York. When the magazine received his images, Onne van der Wal recalled, "They said, 'Amazing work. Blown away. You've got the February cover.'"

The Flyer II won both the timed race and on handicap.

TR: How did the transition to full-time photography happen?

OvdW: After the race, I went back to the Netherlands, worked in a boatyard,

kept sailing, kept racing. I was young and single, and people kept calling me with offers to race all over the world. Photography was still secondary. Then *Sailing* magazine ran a feature on me called "Sailor with a Camera." That's when people started asking, "Why are you still sailing?" By 1987, I was tired of living on boats. At 29, I hung up my sea boots and became a professional photographer.

TR: What gear were you using in those early years?

OvdW: My first camera was an Olympus OM-1. I bought it with a \$1,000 paycheck from a captaincy job. Everything was manual focus, but the lenses were





fantastic. After the Whitbread Race, Olympus sponsored me. From about 1987 to 1990, I shot entirely with Olympus—Kodachrome and Ektachrome. Then a friend in the U.K. showed me the Canon EOS-1 with autofocus. I pointed it at a duck on a pond and watched it snap into focus. I thought, *This will change my life on the water*. I sold all my Olympus gear and switched to Canon in 1990.

While shooting with Olympus, van der Wal had every lens he could have wanted. Canon's autofocus inspired him to change systems, and he purchased a body and three lenses: the Canon 24-70mm, 70-200mm, and a 300mm f/2.8. He still has the 1990 receipt.

TR: That switch eventually led to you becoming a Canon Explorer of Light. How did that relationship develop?

OvdW: Very slowly. I went to Photo Expo in New York every year for 10 years and tried to talk to Canon's marketing director. Nothing happened. Then on year 10 he said, "We want to show how tough our cameras are, but not in a war zone. What about you shooting on the ocean?" For about 15 years I worked closely with Canon: lecturing, advising, testing gear, talking with engineers in Japan about mirrorless long before it arrived. It was a great time. Eventually Canon shifted more toward video and younger creators for social media, and I thought, *That's not really where I want to go*, and I quietly bowed out.

TR: How do you protect your cameras from salt water and spray?

OvdW: I can't think of a worse environment to have a camera than on the ocean because not only do you have water, but it's salty and you can't control it. If you want to get the picture, you're going to get wet because the guys are sailing when it's windy, and that's when it's most beautiful. I didn't care if the cameras got wet, but I had to keep the front element dry. ... When I'd stay in hotels, I'd always look for the oldest face cloths that were well-washed and absorbent. That's what I would keep in my pocket, and I would just constantly wipe down the front element.



PACK AND GO

When Onne van der Wal traveled in the past by airplane, he never checked his gear. He used a Think Tank wheelie, which he kept in the plane's overhead bin. He packed his clothes in a cooler, and that was his checked luggage. In his words, "it was bomb-proof." When he arrived at the hotel, he would take his clothing from the cooler, remove his camera gear from the wheelie, and with towels from the hotel, pack his camera gear inside the cooler.



Read an extended version of this interview and see more images from Onne van der Wal. ppa.com/sea-change

TR: How do you manage multiple cameras while shooting at sea?

OvdW: Ideally three bodies with three lenses: a wide, a 70–200mm, and a 200–400mm with a built-in extender. On my chase boat I used a large, insulated cooler. One camera stayed out, the other stayed protected in the cooler. I never used a tripod. Everything was handheld—even long lenses—because both the subject and the platform were moving.

Up until this point in Onne van der Wal's career, he had been photographing sailing around the world, doing commercial work. A turning point in his career happened because of financier Rob Johnson. Johnson and van der Wal, along with a few others, would take far-flung trips on Johnson's yacht. "You lived on the boat, you went ashore, you

hiked, you [captured images], you came back, you eat, you sleep, and you do the same thing, all over the world," van der Wal recalls, adding that despite Johnson paying him \$350 per day, these expeditions became van der Wal's passion. "On my commercial assignments I could earn \$2,500 a day," he says. But his work with Johnson paid off in other ways, in that van der Wal owned all the rights to his images and could sell them to entities including retailer Patagonia and to sailing magazines.

TR: Recently you added the Leica Q3 with a fixed 28mm f/1.7 lens to your gear. What drew you to it?

OvdW: For the last 10 years, I'd been looking for a small compact camera on par with the Canon R5's image quality but smaller, or maybe a touch better image quality. With the Leica Q3, I had

never seen colors or dynamic range like this before. My original goal was to have an amazing compact single-lens travel camera, and I found that. I loved the image quality so much, I started pulling it into my commercial world. Now I use it for boat portraits, interiors, long exposures, and even ad work unless I need long glass. I'm now eyeing the Q3 43 for a little more reach and may add that to my arsenal next to the regular Q3.

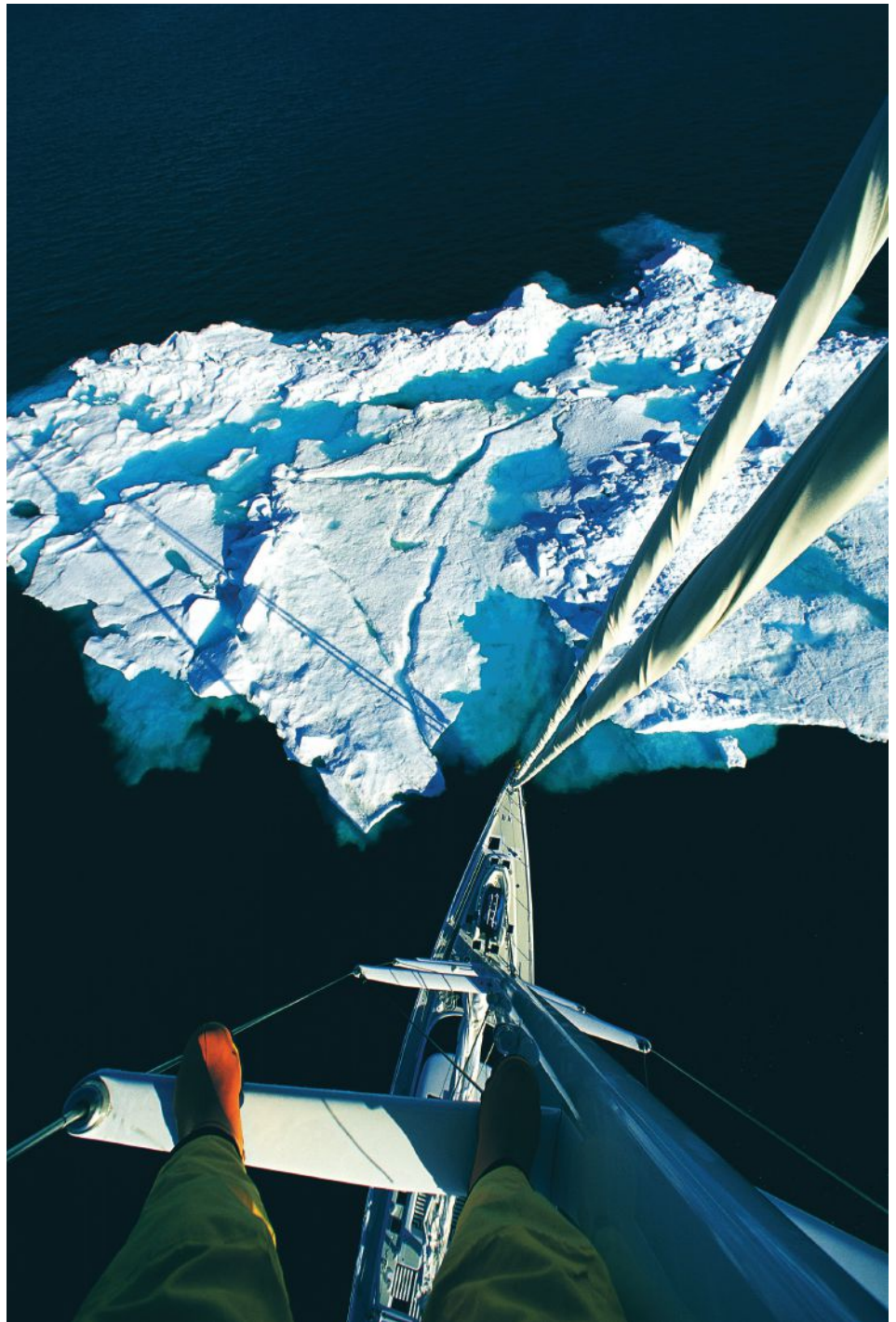
TR: Can you walk us through the iceberg mast photograph (right)?

OvdW: We were sailing through an ice field in Svalbard. It was 80 degrees north latitude, north of Norway, closer to the North Pole. No wind, sunny, beautiful. I said to Mr. Johnson, the owner of the boat, "We must stop here." I wanted to go up the rig, go to the mast, and shoot looking down. They hoisted me up in a boatswain's chair to about 120–130 feet. I was shooting with a Canon EOS 5D Mark III and a 14mm rectilinear lens. I climbed out onto the spreaders and shot looking down. I even took a picture of my boots for Patagonia. That image became a cover. That picture never sold much in the gallery, but it stopped people. They would often question how I got the image, and then they'd buy something else.

TR: After 40 years, what advice do you give younger photographers?

OvdW: If you've got a passion and you figure out what you want to do, just know it's not going to be easy. If it was, everybody would do it. But every once in a while, you'll see little streaks of light coming through ... and you keep going. You persevere. And suddenly, the phone rings and you're given another assignment. •

Tyler Rickenbach is a filmmaker and photographer based in Idaho.



“YOU LIVED ON THE BOAT, YOU WENT ASHORE, YOU HIKED, YOU [CAPTURED IMAGES], YOU CAME BACK, YOU EAT, YOU SLEEP, AND YOU DO THE SAME THING, ALL OVER THE WORLD.”

WORKSHOP SPOTLIGHT

Seeing in Black and White

THE CREATIVITY OF DAVID DOWNS

Twice a year, PPA photo workshops take place in studios across the United States, covering a variety of topics. This spring, David Downs, M.Photog. Cr., CPP, is teaching a workshop he calls “The Art of Black-and-White Photography.” After his last workshop sold out in under an hour and left 15 photographers on a waitlist, his colleagues at the Dallas Professional Photographer’s Association urged him to teach the class a second time.

Downs is a cheerleader for black-and-white photography and likes to point out the creative opportunities this type of photography gives artists. “From a compositional standpoint you’re freed from color theory. Which means you’re left considering light, contrast, and the elements that bring character out of the subject

you’re photographing,” he says.

Black-and-white photography also works well in “less than ideal” circumstances, like the middle of the day, when the sun’s light is the strongest.



DAVID DOWNS

Downs teaches his students to focus on unique responses to light, as well as shapes, textures, and shadows (or lack thereof).

To increase the impact of black-and-white photography, Downs looks

for elements that contrast well with one another. He keeps his eye out for patterns and captures scenes showing the juxtaposition between static objects and objects in motion. He admits

“FROM A COMPOSITIONAL STANDPOINT YOU’RE FREED FROM COLOR THEORY ... YOU’RE LEFT CONSIDERING LIGHT, CONTRAST, AND THE ELEMENTS THAT BRING CHARACTER OUT OF THE SUBJECT YOU’RE PHOTOGRAPHING.”

that not everything works in black and white. “Try taking a picture of a cardinal in black and white,” he says. “You’ll lose something crucial.”

Downs’ “The Gentleman Beggar” (right) illustrates the impact of black-and-white photography. The image was captured on his final day in Rome, shortly before heading to the airport with his wife. While walking to visit a local church, Downs noticed an older man panhandling along the road. Downs placed a €20 note in the man’s hat and took several photographs of him. As he walked away and reviewed his digital images, Downs saw he hadn’t captured what first drew him to the man. Downs retraced his steps to where he had been before he saw the man and asked himself, *When did I think to myself that I needed to take this picture?* He realized it was the man’s side profile that first caught his attention. Downs went in for round two, photographing the panhandler’s profile until he was shooed away. The

EXPLORE COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Looking for a way to connect with fellow photographers in your area? Check out PPA’s Community Networks. These networks are a fantastic way to learn from other photographers and strengthen your local PPA community.

- Visit the Community Network page on the PPA website, found under the About Us drop-down menu at the top of the page.
- Click “Find a Community Network in Your Area” to see what’s available near you.

2026 COMMUNITY NETWORK SCHOOL DATES

TEXAS SCHOOL:

April 26-May 1, 2026
Renaissance Hotel and Conference Center, Addison, Texas, texasschool.org

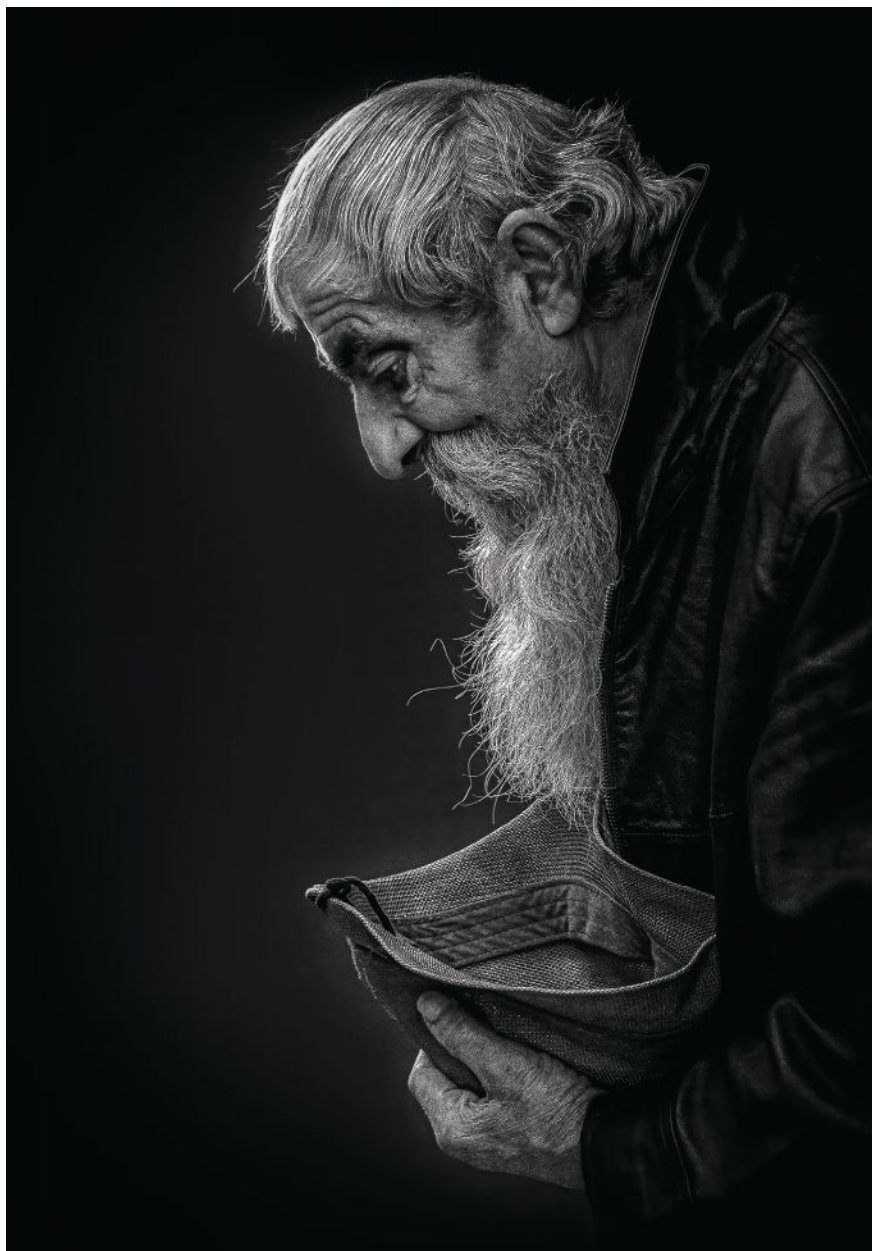
MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL SCHOOL:

Elite Photo Education
May 3-8, 2026
Hyatt Place, Dewey Beach, Delaware, marsschool.com

WEST COAST SCHOOL:

June 7-11, 2026
Tahquitz Pines Retreat, Idyllwild, California, westcoastschool.com •

ppa.com/community-networks



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final image shows the panhandler with his head bowed, hat in his hand, with a regal yet humble countenance.

In 2026, Downs is leading photography workshops in London, Scotland, Vancouver, and across the United States, with courses on waterfalls, landscapes, solar eclipses, and the Milky Way. In the past, he taught a course on how to locate and nurture the artist within. Downs believes that seeing, hearing, and trusting your inner voice to find the more creative

images are skills that can be taught, and he encourages photographers to get out and take pictures of everything. "I've had some success," he says, "because I'm unafraid to try anything."

Spring workshops run May 4-18, and there's still time to register. PPA members who attend workshops can earn one service merit toward a PPA degree, while speakers can earn two speaking merits (up to two workshops per season). • ppa.com/workshops

HELP PPA HELP YOU

PARTICIPATE IN CENSUS MONTH

To shape PPA's benefits and resources to align with our members' needs, PPA encourages members to take part in our annual census survey. Your responses are 100% confidential and help the organization serve you better. To participate, follow these steps:

Log in to your profile page: ppa.com/my-ppa/profile

Check the basics: Select About Me, and make sure your personal information is correct.

Describe your business: Select About My Business and choose the options that best reflect your work.

Tell us about yourself: Select Background and share a bit about your journey and achievements.

Share your interests: Check the boxes in Interests to highlight what matters most to you professionally. • ppa.com/my-ppa

NEW ONLINE SERIES

THE EXCHANGE CALLS

This February, PPA launched a new post-Imaging USA series called "The Exchange Calls," aimed at keeping photographers motivated and new year's resolutions moving forward.

The new series features Imaging USA speakers and other instructors sharing ideas and inspiration, and connecting over life as creatives and business owners. During each live session, a speaker shares for a few minutes on a particular topic and then a moderator fields questions from participants. While these sessions naturally build on Imaging USA education, attendance isn't limited to those who were in the in-person classes; any photographer can join the live calls.

Be a part of the conversation each week in March by tuning in on Tuesdays at 7 p.m. Eastern time, and check the schedule at the link for more in the future. PPA members and PhotoVision subscribers can stream past sessions at any time on PhotoVision. • ppa.com/webinars



Wedding photographer and forensic psychiatrist Dr. Tola Ajibade is based in Atlanta but captured these images as a groomsman at his friend's wedding in Accra, Ghana, in November 2024. "For some reason, the photographers they had hired were unavailable for the reception," he recalls, so he pulled "double duty" and whipped out his camera. "I got the idea for this from a video about a month before the wedding. Several logistical factors made it difficult to re-create the shot as a single image, so I ended up taking two separate images and creating a composite," Ajibade says. He edited the images primarily in Adobe Lightroom with some basic color correction, color grading, local adjustments, noise reduction, and exposure adjustments. The images were then composited in Photoshop to create the illusion of a single shot. •



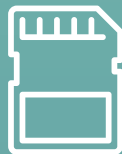
IMAGES ©Omotola Ajibade

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Community Network with PPA

Stronger Together

Join Your Local Association

Photographers helping photographers is what Community Networks are all about. These local creative communities nurture and provide the support and tools to help you grow. As a member of your local Community Network, you will:

- ♦ Connect with peers and mentors
- ♦ Sharpen your skills by competing in your local image competitions
- ♦ Earn merits towards your PPA degree by attending or speaking at a PPA Merit Program
- ♦ Get recognized, build credibility, and set yourself apart
- ♦ Give back to your photographic community
- ♦ And much more!

There's never been a better time to get involved. After all, it's together that we thrive.

Find a Community Network Association near you:

PPA.com/Community-Networks