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the business behind the shutter | OCTOBER 2014

SHUTTER

MAGAZINE



THE
PORTRAIT
EDITION



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**PORTRAIT
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- + **Childrens Portraits That Sell**
with Lori Nordstrom
- + **Marketing Your Portraiture**
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Family Portraits and the Economy**
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THE
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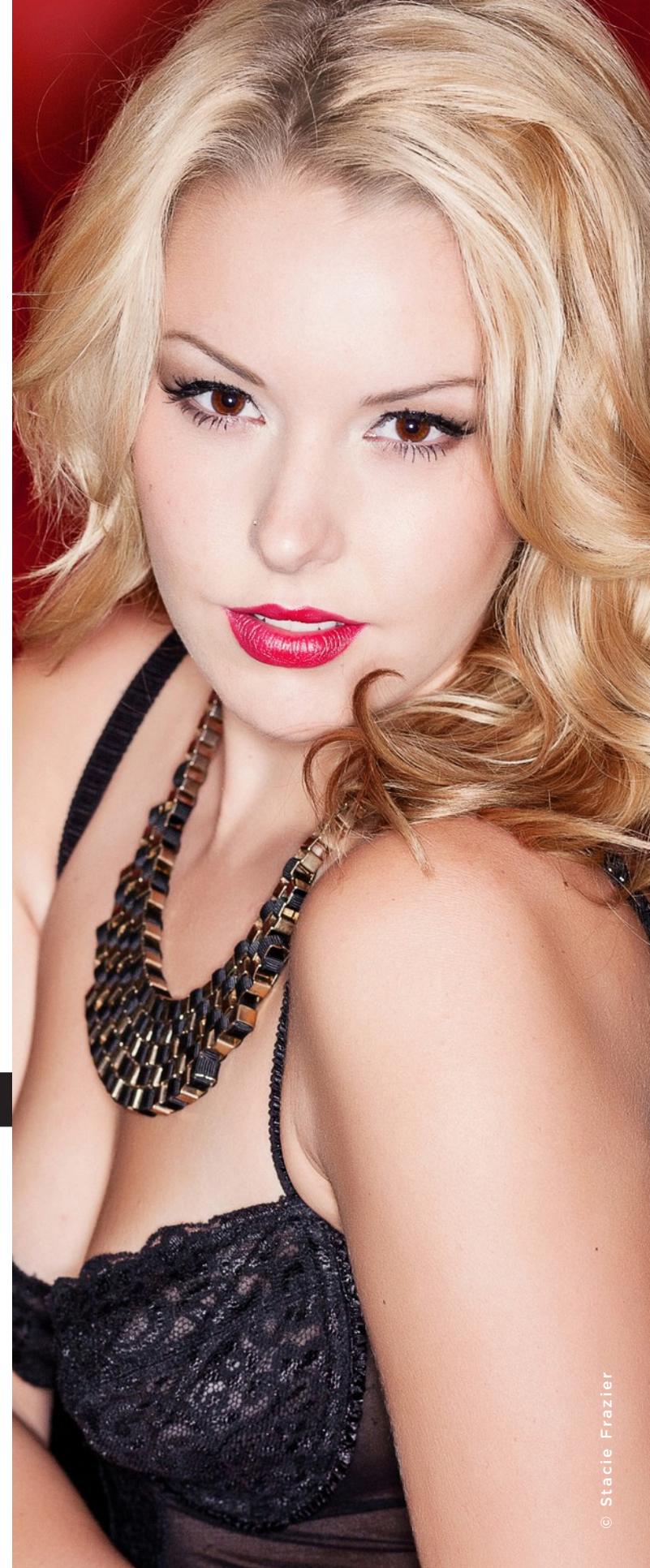
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BEHIND THE SHUTTER

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Shutter Magazine is about photography education. Our goal is to provide current, insightful, and in-depth educational content for today's professional wedding and portrait photographer. *Shutter Magazine* uses the latest technologies to deliver information in a way that is relevant to our audience. Our experienced contributors help us create a sense of community and establish the magazine as one of the leading photography publications in the world.

Shutter Magazine: By photographers, for photographers.

SHUTTER

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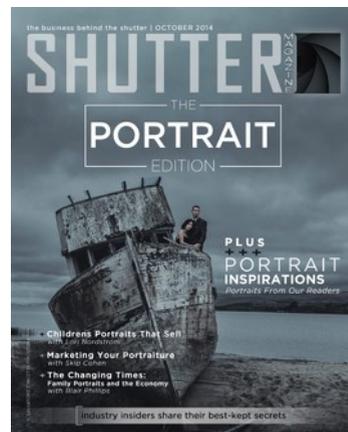
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THE COVER

PHOTOGRAPHER: SAL CINCOTTA | salcincotta.com

CAMERA: PhaseOne IQ250

LENS: Schneider 55mm

EXPOSURE: ISO 200, f/10, 1/160

LOCATION: Tomales Bay, California

ABOUT THE IMAGE: This image was taken in a small town outside of San Francisco the day after the wedding of photographers Lenny and Melissa Volturo, August 20, 2014.

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QUESTIONS

- + Getting your clients to see the value in your services.
- + When does it make sense to lower your prices.
- + Tips to funding your own marketing.
- + How to close sales.
- + Tips on self-education and how much time to dedicate to it.
- + Getting families to book sessions.
- + Advice on internal management systems for your studio.
- + Marketing ideas to get clients in your studio.
- + Packaging structure tips for high school seniors.



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WITH
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The Why



1 - The Iconic Bridal Portrait



2 - Shooting the Wedding Dress



3 - The Girls Getting Ready



4 - The Bridal Details



5 - The Guys Getting Ready



6 - The Processional



7 - The First Kiss



8 - Shooting Family Photos Quickly



9 - Shooting the Reception Details



10 - Iconic Bridal Party



11 - Capturing Reception Uplighting

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12 - The Cake Shot



13 - The First Dance



Coming September 15

14 - The Flower Girl



Coming October 6

15 - Capturing Emotional Moments



Coming October 20

16 - The Cake Cutting



Coming November 3

17 - The Hora



Coming November 17

18 - The Night Shot



Coming December 1

19 - The Nighttime Portrait



Coming December 15

20 - The Sparkler Exit



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As a photographer, presenting our clients with a professional and easy to use gallery and ordering system is paramount to a positive experience with our studio. One feature we use most in our studio is the “favorites” folder. This allows us to collaborate with clients on their favorite images in a seamless way. We use this for special edits and for selecting album pictures - ensuring nothing is lost in translation.

Another key feature is their photo storage. Talk about “CYA”. This allows you to have cloud storage tied to a system integrated with your business and with your clients. And finally, they have the ability to create an unlimited number of mobile apps for their clients - something every client wants these days. With plenty of plans and options for every studio and every budget, there is literally no reason not to incorporate ShootProof into your business. Check them out and give them a try - I promise, you will be impressed. ■

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PRODUCT REVIEW



5 WAYS TO BRING IN
NEW BUSINESS

WITH VANESSA JOY

“The best way to make sure you have a consistent flow of inquiries is to make sure that you’re combining both short- and long-term marketing plans.”



BY **VANESSA JOY**

Marketing any type of business always has one essential goal: to bring in new clients. It can be daunting since it’s a never-ending process. Our efforts sometimes don’t pay off immediately, but instead give us a more long-term yield. That can be disheartening when you need clients now. I’ve found the best way to make sure you have a consistent flow of inquiries is to make sure you’re combining both short- and long-term marketing plans. Here are five ideas to help you formulate your new client campaign.





© Vanessa Joy

LONG-TERM

Creating and sticking to long-term marketing efforts can be time-consuming and a bit tedious at first. However, they're crucial to establishing a credible brand presence with your audience, and they will yield results over time. (For more on other long-term ventures that yield amazing results, check out my last two articles on the "compound effect.")

— SOCIAL MEDIA: GIVE INSPIRATION AND IDEAS

It's no secret that social media is the leading form of advertising today. Every company, from Anthropologie to Coca-Cola, embraces Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram. The trick lies in consistent activity, which has a compound effect in both creating an established brand and bringing in inquiries. Because of my marketing efforts with Same Day Edits that lead into my social media plan

— (more on that at www.vanessajoy.com/sde), I continually receive referrals from social media, and so should you. It's easy for photographers to post in social media because we already have beautiful images to share that are inspiring and thought-provoking. Most companies need to plan photo shoots for these images, but we already have them. No matter where you post, consider your imagery as a source of inspiration for your clients. If your clients are moms with newborns, for example, write a blog post with the title "6 Ways to Care for Your Newborn" featuring a beautiful newborn image. Always aim for your social media viewers to end up on your website or blog, because that's your digital storefront.

A great app for scheduling and posting to social media can be found at www.everypost.me. It's a time saver that'll help you consistently market via social media and bring in new clients.

LONG-TERM

— NEWSLETTERS: BE AN INCREDIBLE SOURCE

A regular email newsletter is a fantastic way to keep in contact with your clients, especially for photographers who want repeat business from them. Consistently (but not annoyingly) staying in touch with a monthly or biweekly newsletter can help keep you fresh in your clients' minds. I use MadMimi.com for my newsletter at LearnPhotoVideo.com. Other services, like Mail Chimp and Constant Contact, are also great.

What you put in your newsletter is key. You have to do more than just send an email to those on your newsletter list when you're having a sale or trying to create new business. It'll only be viewed as spam, and your readers will ignore, delete or unsubscribe from your list.

But if you create a newsletter that's useful to your clients, they won't want to miss a single email. Link your blog post "6 Ways to Care for Your Newborn" to the newsletter. Insert helpful advice or links to new and interesting products that relate to your clients, and your readers will keep opening your newsletters and trusting that something valuable is inside. Think of the email newsletters that you're subscribed to. Which ones do you open and which ones do you delete? Emulate the ones that you read.

Building this type of repertoire and credibility with your current clients will lead to new business when you do have that sale or are trying to book your Christmas portrait sessions, because then you can insert those snippets into the newsletter as needed and you'll have a higher response rate. First build trust; then give, give, give; and then ask.

SHORT-TERM

Short-term marketing ventures are much more successful if you're doing the long-term ones as well because, again, you'll have established a trustworthy brand presence with your audience instead of only contacting them when you want money.

— MARATHON MADNESS

Mini-session marathons are a great one-off way to bring in new business. I schedule 20-minute sessions every 30 minutes for a discounted session price, and just shoot the day away one session after another. Afterward, I follow the same after-session sales process. You make your money on the back-end. Some photographers like to use deal services like Groupon or Living Social during a normally slow time of the year to reach out to potential customers they probably wouldn't have had access to otherwise. It's a great way to create an influx of business quickly when you need it, and will hopefully add new clients to your repertoire, social media following and newsletter list.

A mini-session marathon is also a great time to take advantage of Facebook advertising.



SHORT-TERM

— DIRECT MAIL

While direct mail may not be your best bet for wedding clients, it can be effective for portrait clients. If you're looking to bring in new business, consider buying a mailing list that targets your demographic. You can find numerous services for this online (DirectMail.com, InfoUSA.com, ValPak.com, USPS.com, new movers packets, etc.), and participate in some sort of event that targets the same (like a Babies R Us baby show) and see if you can purchase a mailing list from them. Sometimes you can purchase the list from them with or without actually participating in the event.

Implementing a direct-mail campaign is beneficial during key times of the year like the holidays, senior-session season and perhaps for current clients' birthdays. Having a call to action that has both a monetary benefit for new clients as well as a deadline is key in direct-mail advertising. Additionally, you'll want your mailer to be beautifully designed and eye-catching so it stands out and gets a second glance in a pile of mail.

Ideally, you'll want to use direct mail to reach new clients, not existing ones, for repeat business. It will cost a good deal of money for printing and mailing to these new prospects. Hopefully, through social media and your email newsletter, you already have a way of connecting with your current clients and will only occasionally mail them things like birthday-card coupons. ■

Check out this video (opposite page) for my newest long-term marketing tool to see how I use it in my business.



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*Pro Tip from Sal
"mobile marketing apps"*

CHECK OUT
Sal's review of StickyAlbums 2.0



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**STOP
THE
MADNESS**

WITH
SAL CINCOTTA

“ YOU HAVE TO
THINK AND ACT
LIKE A
BUSINESS,
NOT A
STARVING
ARTIST. ”



BY SAL CINCOTTA

We live in a digital world, there is no argument there. How we, as photographers, adapt to this changing world is a subject of heated debate.

This month, we produced an episode of *Shutter Network* on this very subject, but there still seems to be massive confusion on how and where to incorporate this into your business.

Let's have a reality check on the digital state of the industry. Yes, we are living in a digital world and yes, our clients want the digital files. So what? If they want your car keys, will you hand those over too? You are running a business. You are trying to pay your bills. You are trying to reinvest into your business. Where is this money coming from? You have to think and act like a business and not like a starving artist.

If the thought of being a starving artist is an exciting thought, then go for it. But if you want to be able to retire someday, put your kids through school, go on vacation or even invest back into your business, then it's time to start changing the way you think and, more importantly, changing the way you run your business.

I hate to break it to everyone, but shooting and handing over digital files is not a business model. It's a copout. To anyone trying to convince you otherwise, I would say this: Either you are not a full-time professional photographer and don't know what you're talking about, or you're being misleading for some nefarious reason—dare I say personal profit at others' expense?

I can back it up with this assertion. I have challenged many promoters and profiteers to a face-to-face debate, and while few have accepted the challenge, those who have accepted didn't have much intelligent to say. Let me be clear: You don't have to agree with me, but if you are going to have an intelligent debate, then "intelligent" has to be key in the discussion. And it rarely is.

Let's do the math.

It's a math equation, people. Nothing more. Don't overcomplicate it. You can only sell a CD, thumb drive, or whatever digital delivery mechanism you are using, for so much. There is a ceiling, because there truly is no value-add. In fact, you are completely diminishing your value as an artist and reducing yourself to a guy/gal with a camera. You are not and never will be perceived as an artist.

If you plan on hiring 50 photographers and doing 300 weddings per year, then this works, but only for the low end of the market. For most of us, that's not the plan. Most photographers operate as sole proprietors because we are, in fact, individual artists. Artists cannot scale and operate in a business model of competing on price. It's impossible.

This is where the math comes into play. This usually shuts down every single person who wants to stand up and argue with me. In a shoot-and-burn model, how much can you sell just the digital files for? A thousand dollars? Two thousand? You think you can get \$3,000? (Good luck.) Let's work with the \$2,000 number. To gross \$100,000, you would have to shoot 50 weddings a year. (For this example, let's assume that for portraits, you would be doing well if you could grab \$1,000 every session.)

SHOOT
AND BURN
IS NOT A
BUSINESS
MODEL.

With me so far? Great. So, how many of you think grossing \$100,000 is solid? Well, I hate to break it to you, but it's not. It's crap. Not only is this number so completely unrealistic mathematically—because you would have to kill yourself just to get there—but it's not enough to run a successful business. By the time you paid for taxes, insurance, rent, marketing, advertising, web development, healthcare, training, new equipment, computers and just the inherent risk of being an entrepreneur, you would be better off working for someone else.

Do I finally have your attention? As a sole proprietor, you need to be at the \$200,000 to \$250,000 gross range for it to be worth it. That doesn't mean it happens overnight. I am not suggesting that at all. I started my business in my basement, but I knew where I had to be in order to make a living and grow as an artist and business owner. Now you do the math. Tell me how you get there by shooting and burning or sharing or whatever the latest craze is. You can't. You're going to shoot 100-plus weddings per year? Every year?

If you are a weekend warrior and that's where you want to remain, then don't change a thing. Extra cash on the weekends to support your hobby, God bless. Nothing wrong with that at all. Shoot and burn is great for hobbyists, but a successful business model it is not.



**YOUR
CLIENTS
WANT
MORE.**

Now, all that being said, I am in no way implying that I don't deliver digital assets to my clients. Of course I do. They want it. Hell, they demand it. What they are doing with it is not my concern. They use it for social media, they use it for thank-you cards, they use it for their phone wallpaper.

But they always want more. And either you are going to give it to them or someone else will. Shutterfly had gross sales of over \$700 million last year. Guess what they are printing? Your digital files that you are handing over to them, as is every other lab out there. People want products. Handing over just the digital files, no matter what you charge, ensures that everyone is making money but you. Now, does that seem fair since you are the creator of this beautiful artwork? I say no.

I don't want to get into what exactly they want. Suffice it to say, they want more than digital files that will sit nowhere. They want albums, acrylics, prints and a host of other options that exist for printing and displaying images in their home. Why am I so sure of this? Because I, like you and like my clients, want more. I have digital files from the past 10 years of my life, and we print and display images in our home, my desk at the office, gifts for my family, etc. In fact, I even print some of my iPhone photos. So why is it so absurd to think our clients want more?

Clients want product, they just don't know what product they want. You have to show them the options for displaying their beautiful images. In our studio, we offer albums, Facebook postings, custom phone apps from Sticky Albums, save-the-date and thank-you cards with our logo on them, etc. We offer high-end products for our clients, products and quality they can't get anywhere else.

And that leads me to my final point. Competition is literally everywhere. That is never going to change. If you don't find a way to differentiate your business, you will fail or, worse yet, you will never have a real business. You will forever be a hobbyist. If you want to grow your business, you have to change your mindset and offer your clients something different. You have to find a way to stand out from the crowd.

As a business owner, I am unwilling to just shoot and hand over images. At the end of the day, it's an incomplete service. There is no debate here. You are tapping out in the middle of the process. You are saying, "Hey, I am done, here you go, figure out how to design and print your own wedding album." Fill in the blank with whatever product they are buying.

Instead, I offer my clients a complete service. That's how we compete and stand out from the crowd. If you don't, you will forever compete on price, and that is disastrous for any business, especially one that cannot scale. That means you can only shoot so many portrait sessions or weddings. Stop competing on price and stop competing on digitals. Offer your clients more.



**COMPETITION
IS
EVERYWHERE.**

MAKE AN INFORMED AND THOUGHTFUL DECISION.

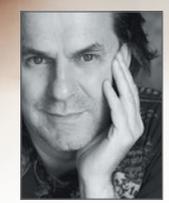
Whatever you do, just be sure you are making an informed and thoughtful decision. Running a business is no easy task. Sometimes you just need someone to break it down for you. The decisions you make today will impact you and your business for as long as you are in business. ■

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CHANGING PHOTOGRAPHY **G**



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— William Innes, Hybrid Photographer and LUMIX Luminary



William Innes. Changing Photography with 4K Video.

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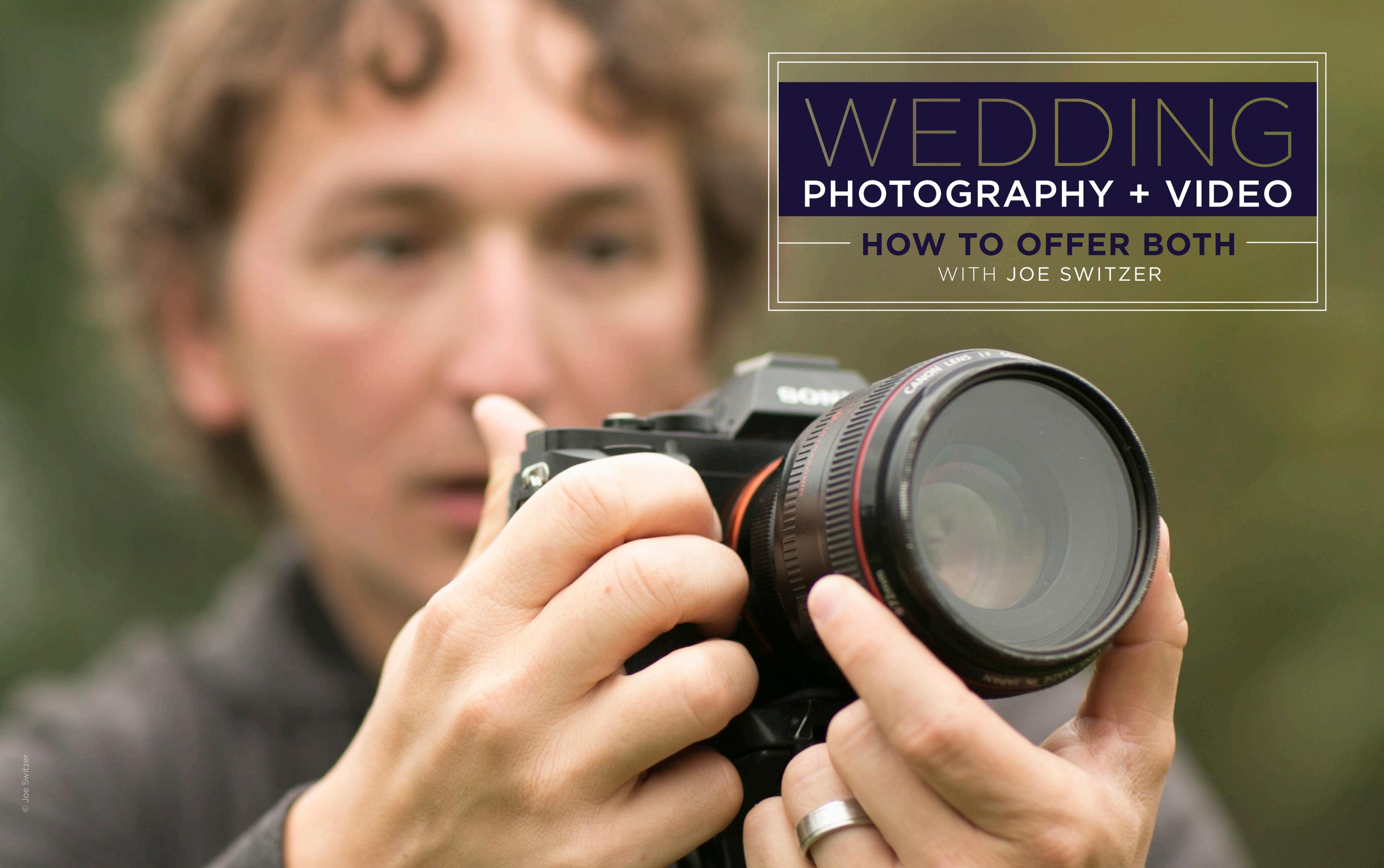
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WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY + VIDEO

— HOW TO OFFER BOTH —

WITH JOE SWITZER



by **Joe Switzer**

Of the hundreds of photographers and filmmakers I know, only four offer both. Why? Isn't it easier than ever these days to find affordable equipment and become a professional wedding photographer or filmmaker? Yes. Is the education easy to find? Yes. Are you already using a camera that allows you to take professional video and photos? Yes. So why isn't every photographer offering both?

Let's look at the top excuses.



EXCUSES YOU MAY COME UP WITH

EXCUSE #1

"I don't know how to be a photographer" or "I don't know how to become a filmmaker."

Surely all you filmmakers feel it must be nearly impossible to take photos like a pro. Most of you reading this article are photographers, and many of you are scared to hit the Record button. How many of you video people have been to weddings where you feel like you know more about lighting and composition than the photographer? Hell, half the weddings we attend, we know more about music and sound than the deejay. Just to be fair, there's a ton of new filmmakers out there who know nothing about communication, lighting or posing. You might think you don't know how to do one or the other, but everyone starts somewhere. Brides and grooms are not comparing you to the greatest photographer or filmmaker in the world. If you just try it by throwing yourself in the fire, you will be just fine. Not knowing how to do everything is what makes photo/video jobs so fun.

EXCUSE #2

"I'm overwhelmed and can't keep up with what I have. Between family, social life, shooting, editing and learning, I'm stressed out and running at full throttle. Adding another service will degrade my quality of work and possibly harm my business."

Join the club. I personally struggle with this, and understand how you feel. We don't all have enough time for what we want to do. My advice is to do what we did at Switzerfilm. We added team members and stopped trying to be involved in every part of the process. In the past, I've had to let go of video editing for the most part (even though I still edit once a month), and I don't sell weddings anymore. It wasn't easy to let go of, but when you're overwhelmed, something has got to give if you want to grow the business. The team and I have been able to grow and advance in our careers by letting go and relying on each other.

“We were **sick and tired of not having control** on a wedding day.”



EXCUSE #3

“I can’t find a good photographer or filmmaker to work with.”

Young people are practicing shooting photos and video on their iPhones every day, all day long. They are eager to learn, and would do anything to be a part of a photo/video team. The next generation has been taking photos with iPods, iPads and iPhones since age two. Call a college in your town and start an internship program. The students are likely required to have an internship, but have trouble finding someone to take them under their wing. We have had dozens of overqualified/uber-talented interns over the years. This is how you can find “the chosen one” to join your company. With all the weddings you are filming and photographing, surely you have run into some serious talent, someone you really had a connection with. Set up a meeting about joining forces. This is how Switzerfilm found our photographer. She was second-shooting for an incredible photographer, and we felt a connection.

Now let’s look at the Top 5 reasons you should offer both.

REASONS YOU SHOULD BE DOING BOTH

CREATIVE CONTROL

Are you that photographer who has all the good ideas but never enough time to make them happen? The photographer always takes all the time and leaves you with nothing, right? If you’re a photographer, I’m sure you can relate to that video crew always being in your way on the wedding day. Working with random photographers and filmmakers is annoying and limiting for your creativity. At Switzerfilm, we always wanted creative control of our videos. This meant we had to add photography to keep our sanity and enthusiasm for weddings. We were sick and tired of not having control on wedding day, so we took matters into our own hands. Think about it. How were we supposed to make a compelling video when the photographer ran the show and gave us five minutes with the couple? Providing both services changed our company forever. We were able spend as much time with the couple and hand-pick any location we wanted. Creative control for your artistic sanity!

MARKETING

Holy cow, did Switzerfilm go gangbusters when we started providing both services. Eighty percent of our business comes from referrals and Facebook. Simply posting videos or stills is not the same as having both. Your fans these days want to experience it all when they see you online. Photos and video speak to people differently, and they connect everyone in a different way. With very little effort (just posting a photo of the wedding with the couple’s video below it), you will have thousands of FB fans and followers in just a year or so.

DOUBLE YOUR INCOME

This comes down to having two revenue streams now. It's simple math. We get the same money for video as we do for photo, instead of doing 50 video-only weddings at \$2,000 (what we used to do). Today we do only about 25 weddings and average \$13,000 per wedding (\$6,500 per service). Couples are comfortable paying the same amount for each service.

TEAM

Working together with the same people every week makes doing what we do so wonderful. They are my family, and every shoot is more and more fun with the team. We know where to stand and when to help each other out, and we almost never miss shots because all of us have each other's back. When you have a united photo/video team, your jobs become twice as easy and fun.

BETTER EXPERIENCE

At the end of the day, this is what matters most to your company: The better experiences you offer equates to future clients lining up to hire you. A bride and groom do not want to go out and find two separate companies that may or may not play nicely. Photo and video teams should have camaraderie and be in sync. Its shows, and you are able to provide a better experience. A team of four artists all united is better than one.

YOUR GAME PLAN

Just go out and do it. Get that first wedding, and just start doing both photo and video today. You will learn more and more every wedding, and will continue to grow as the artist you were born to be. Remember that if this were easy, everyone would do it. We are going into our sixth year as a united photo and video team.

After you get your photo and video team assembled, the marketing will be easier than ever, and you will get the creative control you've always wanted while making more money and providing a better experience for clients. ■



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CHILDREN'S
PORTRAITS
— THAT SELL —

WITH LORI NORDSTROM

“ The reasons that moms buy
are **all about**
the **experience**
that **we create**
for their kids. ”



by **Lori Nordstrom**

These days, most moms have a nice camera, and many moms take photos of their kids daily. So why would someone choose a pro in 2014? And if they do choose a pro, what are the images that will sell? Recently I had a group of photographers ask me for a “shot list.” When I asked what exactly they were looking for, one of them replied, “You know, a list of poses that sell!”

The truth is that once upon a time, I probably thought the same way as I went into a session. What list of poses could I create over and over that would be the best-sellers? But as time went by, I began to realize there really was no “money shot.” Sure, there might be some things that I do each and every time because of a reaction that I might get. There are games I play with different ages of kids to get certain looks or to keep their attention. But I learned that without a reason to buy, the photo isn’t going to sell, and the reasons moms buy are all about the experience we create for their kids. It’s about the way we interpret a child’s personality and interests—visually with the camera and verbally as we communicate with Mom about what we see with our camera.

MEMORIES

How many of your childhood memories revolve around a photo? Images are so powerful, and there are many childhood memories that we have because of a photo that was taken—on vacation, on the backyard swing, with our first bike, a first lost tooth or a new outfit from Grandma. Photos tell stories. When you think about it in this way, you realize how important the stories we create around a child’s portrait session will be. These stories not only get repeated in minds and hearts, but to others as the images are viewed.



Part of this storytelling starts during the initial phone call and then continues into the consultation call as we get to know more about our subjects. I ask moms lots of questions, and really try to get her talking about what's going on in her child's life right now. I'll use all of these answers about what's special to her child and what's new in her child's life throughout the session, and even the sale.

[3-YEAR-OLDS]

For example, if I'm photographing a 3-year-old, I'll ask questions about the latest funny things he has said. Toddlers are always saying one word meaning another, or coming up with cute words or phrases for their favorite things. I'll ask about his favorite games to play and songs to sing and dance to. Sometimes just a few questions will lead to really great stories, and when moms start talking about their kids and you are listening, laughing and commenting, I promise they are loving you more and more! Let's face it: We all like to talk about our kids. It's a great way to continue to build a relationship as well as learn more about what makes that 3-year-old tick! During the session, I'll play the child's favorite song, or play a silly game if Mom has told me about a game they like to play. A favorite is red light/green light. The child gets to walk or run or hop when you say "green light," and he must stop when you say "red light." It's a great game for outdoor sessions, because even though they are constantly on the go at this age, when you yell "red light," they will play the game and stop! This is when you'll photograph and get some great looks. Kids at this age can also make all kinds of faces, so I'll start with, "Show me your crazy face" or, "Stick out your tongue and put your thumbs in your ears." (I'll show them and they'll crack up!) Just remember that at this age, everything is short-lived. Little kids get tired of any game within four or five minutes, so work fast.

[5- AND 6-YEAR-OLDS]

Five- to 6-year-olds may have lost a tooth, they've started school and can tell you a story about their pet or best friend. I'll ask little boys if they have a girlfriend, and get all kinds of fun faces and stories! One of the questions I'll ask Mom on the phone is what they are working on right now in school, and try to make a game of it. I'll talk about their favorite action figure, princess or Disney show that their mom has told me they love.



“ Little kids get tired
of any game
within 4-5 minutes, so
work fast. ”

[7- AND 8-YEAR-OLDS]

Another fun age is 7- and 8-year-olds. At this age, most kids are very opinionated and feel like “big kids.” They don’t get as excited about playing games, but they like being treated like little adults and really enjoy helping. If they don’t have a sibling to help with, I’ll ask them to help me with moving posing blocks or a stool, or getting a background straight. Don’t forget to tell them what great helpers they are and how they must be really helpful at home! This will also lead to stories about their jobs at home, like how they help Dad wash the car.

[ENGAGE WITH THEM]

The point of all of this is not just the interaction and keeping the attention of the kids, but to engage them in activities and conversation that makes them happy and will be memorable. When you have the attention and heart of a child, you will win over Mom, guaranteed. Moms always tell me how much they liked the session and how much fun their son or daughter had. These are things that she’ll tell her friends about, too. All of these things will be remembered as Mom is viewing her portraits and making selections for her home. She’s going to remember that this time in her child’s life is only going to happen once. Never again will she have these exact days and moments again, and she’ll think about it because we talk about it. If we talk about it, it’s going to be engrained in her mind as she views those portraits and then has them hanging in her home to enjoy every day, and we’ve just added so much value. You can’t put a price on memories and moments, but they sure do sell!

THESE ARE SOME OF THE QUESTIONS THAT I ASK THE MOMS I WORK WITH:

- Does your child have any food allergies?
- Are you OK with your child having food/snacks/drinks during or after their session?
- What is your child's favorite animal?
- Do you have pets at home?
- What is your child's favorite color?
- What is your child's favorite outdoor activity?
- What is your child's favorite movie or TV show?
- What is your child's favorite cartoon character, superhero, etc.?
- What is your child's favorite song?
- What is your child's favorite game?
- What is something new that your child is doing or that has happened recently?
- What is the color and theme of your child's bedroom?
- Is there anything that makes you nervous about having your child photographed?

— [GET TO KNOW THEM] —

I ask this last question because moms tell me something that happened the last time her child was photographed, or she'll tell me about a behavior or something her child does when she's being photographed. Wouldn't you like to know before the session if a child says "cheese" every time a camera is pointed at her?

You can also learn about traits, like a child being very shy or rambunctious. I want to talk about these things as well, in a positive way. If I'm told that a child is very shy, I'll start with asking if she'd like to hear a story. If I'm telling a story, she doesn't have to talk at first and I'm not asking her to do anything, not even to participate. I might also ask Mom to have her bring along a favorite doll or stuffed animal to "watch." I want Mom to say the doll will be watching her get photographed so that we don't end up with a doll in every photo, but sometimes something from home will make her more comfortable. I sit on the floor when they come in and talk to her about her doll's name, and beautiful hair or outfit, or guess how old the doll is. Moms really love when you take the time to meet kids on their level.

Of course, with a more outgoing or aggressive child, Mom might say, "You are really going to have your hands full!" This gives me the opportunity to tell Mom that I love kids with lots of personality and that we'll have a great time. I also want to reassure moms before the session that I've seen it all and there is nothing their child can do wrong during the session. I let them know that it's my job to get the images that I need, and she won't have to worry about a thing.

— [GIVE A GREAT EXPERIENCE] —

All of these things are great to discuss before the session, not during. Be prepared and give the kids a great experience, and that experience will be so tied to the images that Mom will have to have them! Remember, it's not just the photos you take, but the entire experience and how you make each mom feel about her kids and family that will sell those photos. ■



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CREATIVE EDITING

ADDING GRIT TO YOUR

URBAN
PORTRAITS

WITH
DUSTIN LUCAS



“THE ARCHITECTURE CAN
OVERPOWER
YOUR POSED SUBJECT,
ESPECIALLY WHEN
SHOOTING WIDER SHOTS.”



BY DUSTIN LUCAS

When shooting portraits in urban spaces, composing the subject and architecture can seem daunting because the architecture can overpower your posed subject, especially when shooting wider shots. This common issue can be solved with proper post-production editing to give back the emphasis to your subject. Editing the image is as important as capturing it. Paying close attention to the details in the image and removing the distractions is the first step. Adding grit to your photos allows those unique vertical shots to stay in your portfolio and become a marketable piece for your client.

After all, these are portraits and not just documents of urban spaces. That's where sizing, cropping and sharpening the image will give it that polished look. Let's open your RAW image in Photoshop and get started.

1 REMOVING THE DISTRACTIONS

I want to begin by cleaning up the distracting elements in the image. You'll notice in the original, unedited image that there is a huge glare and blown-out section of windows on the building. Also, the streetlamp has some odd elements and a shadow that I want to remove. You have many options to remove and replace pixels here (Fig. 1).



fig. 1

© Dustin Lucas

2 LAYER MASKING, TRANSFORM, AND CLONE STAMPING

Starting with the windows, I decided to duplicate the background layer and position this duplicated layer above in the Layers panel. The windows to the right seem like a perfect replacement for these blown-out ones. I double-click the duplicated layer and then rename it “Window Glare.” With the Window Glare layer selected, I turn the opacity down to 50% or so to view it and the underneath layer at the same time. Next, I use the Skew Transform tool to match the perspective of the more centered windows. After the windows are aligned, I put the Window Glare layer back to 100% opacity, make a layer mask, invert it to black and use a paintbrush with white selected as the foreground color to bring in the desired window on the bottom layer. This can also be done with the Clone Stamp tool on a new “blank” layer. Before choosing a section to clone, you must set the tool bar at the top to Sample: Current and Below or All Layers so it affects your other image layers (Fig. 2).

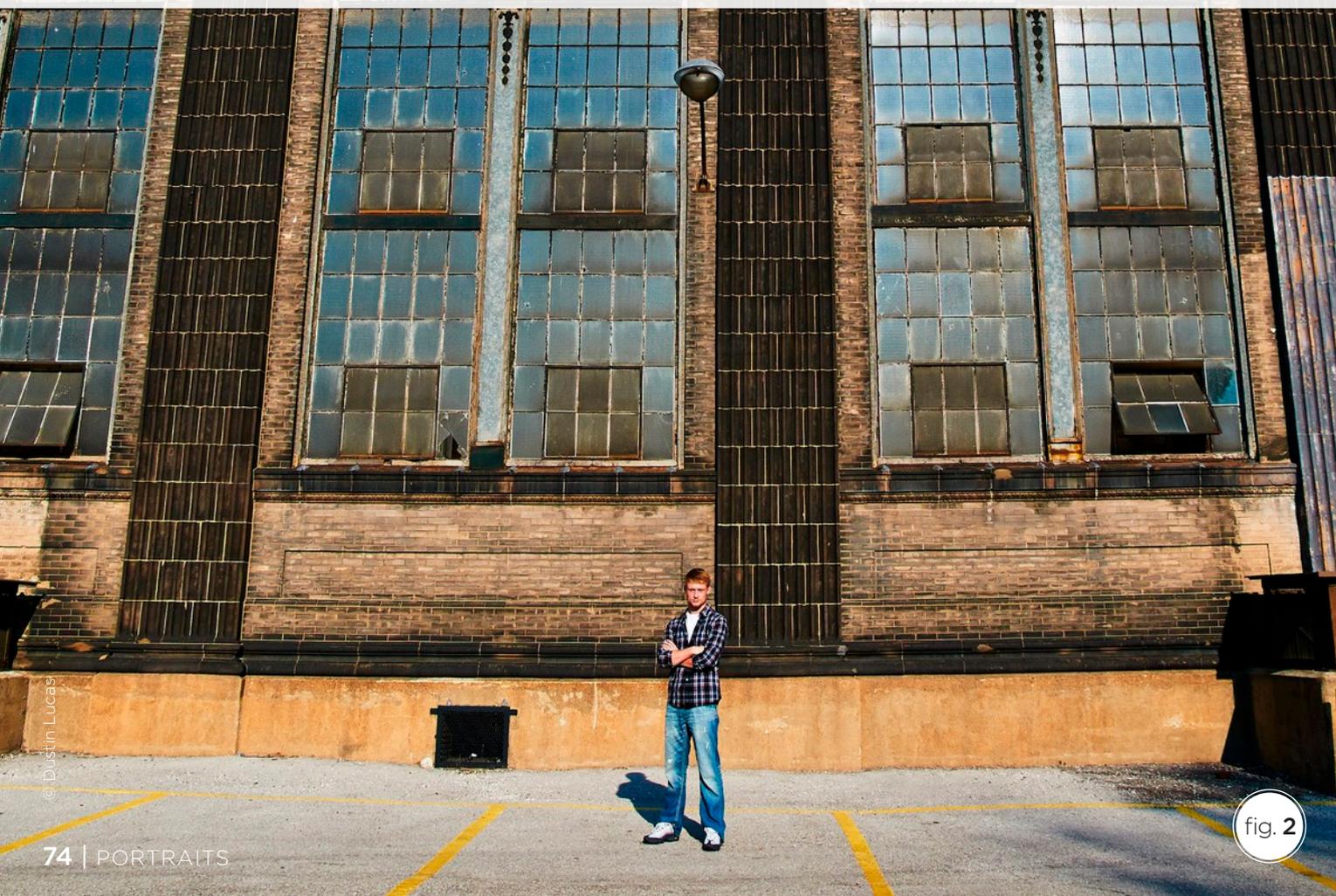


fig. 2

3 TONING THE ARCHITECTURE

Now we’re getting into the process of toning the image as a whole. I will create multiple adjustment layers that affect my image by gradually getting darker and increasing the contrast. I begin by making a black-and-white adjustment layer and setting the blending mode to luminosity. This blending mode allows the adjustment layer to affect mostly the contrast but not the color (Fig. 3). To simplify adjustments, I use Auto as a starting point and adjust the image to my taste.

I then create a brightness/contrast layer and set the contrast to 15–30. Next, I add a vignette by making a levels layer and setting the black point value to 56, gray to .50, and leaving the white at 255. The output level stays at 0 for black and moves to 245 for white to dull the highlights. I then make a layer mask and use the paintbrush with black as the foreground color to remove the darkened effect (Fig. 4).

Now, let’s work on emphasizing the subject more and darkening the scene. Select the background layer, choose the Lasso tool, set feather to 150px and draw around the subject. After the selection is made, invert it and select a curves adjustment layer. Once it opens, click in the middle of the graphed line and drag it to the bottom right corner to begin darkening everything surrounding the subject. This is a quick way to put the spotlight back on them. If you want more out of your architecture, I will show you how.

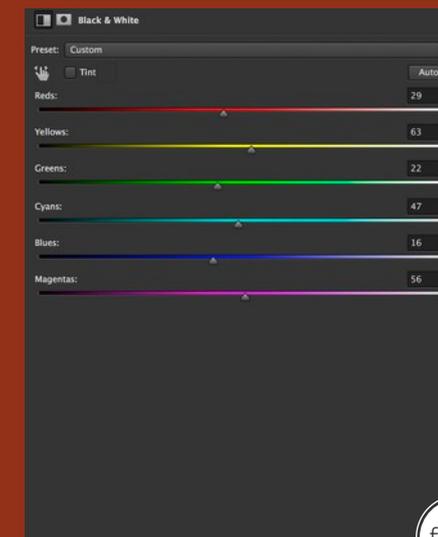


fig. 3

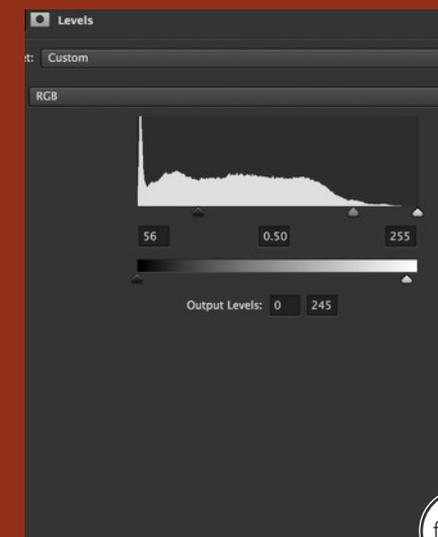


fig. 4

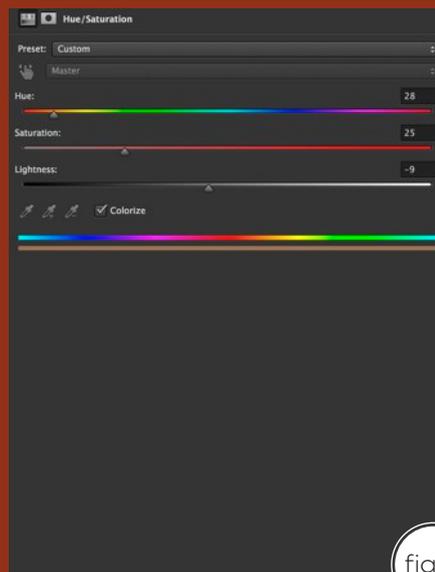


fig. 5

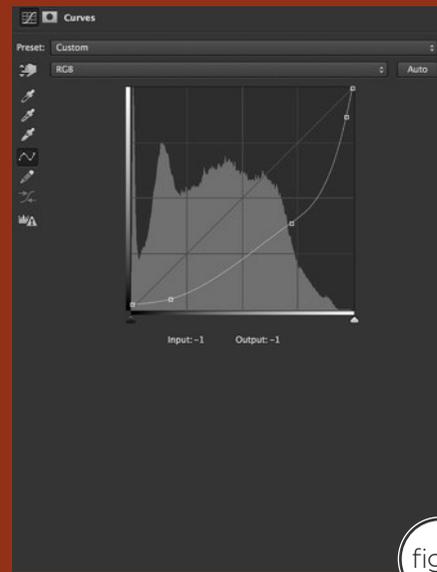


fig. 6

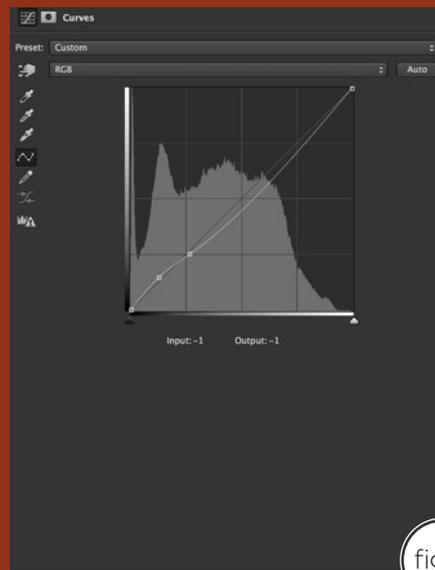


fig. 7



fig. 8

Select the group layer again and make a curves layer. Select three points in the curves adjustment window. Click at the midpoint and make two more selections, like I have done in the sample image (Fig. 6) If you drag the middle point downward, you will see a similar effect from the previously made curves layer. Now adjust the other two points to darken the highlights and shadows. Feel free to play around with the points and curves to fit the tonality you want (Fig. 7). Make one more curves layer in this group, make two points in the bottom section and raise the lower point to open up the shadows a bit. Lastly, you will create a levels layer, moving the gray point to .50–.60 and the output black to 1. You will notice that my subject seems a bit detached now that everything is so dark around it (Fig. 8). You can use the Brush tool on the layer masks at a low opacity and white as the foreground color to blend some of the darkening effects onto the subject to blend them better. Use this at your discretion to determine if your subject needs to be brighter or darker in comparison to your affected environment (Fig. 9).

5

CROPPING AND SHARPENING

Output is very important and depends on what you are doing with this image. My workflow for this is to flatten the image and Save As, adding Print or Web to designate what it's for. Image size will be determined, and at this point I need to sharpen my image for input/presharpen and output. These steps are lengthy and I have made actions to complete the sharpening process. In short, it's the Unsharpened Mask and High Pass Filter method with multiple-layer blending adjustments. I have chosen to straighten and crop this image to a 1:2 ratio. This is purely a subjective decision; I feel it gives more compositional weight to the subject and the verticality of the urban space.

4

ADDING GRIT TO THE IMAGE

Creating a mood is very important for these next steps. For this image, I want to pull down the color to give a bit more emphasis to the subject at the bottom of the frame. Create a new group layer and name it "Dark Tone." Select the previous curves adjustment layer, specifically the layer mask. Hold the option/alt key, drag the layer mask to the new group layer you made and release it. Choose to replace the current layer mask if asked. With the Dark Tone layer selected, make a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer and check Colorize. This function removes color from the image and overlays it with a single hue and saturation affecting mostly the midtones. For this image, a sepia-toned look is the style I want (Fig. 5).

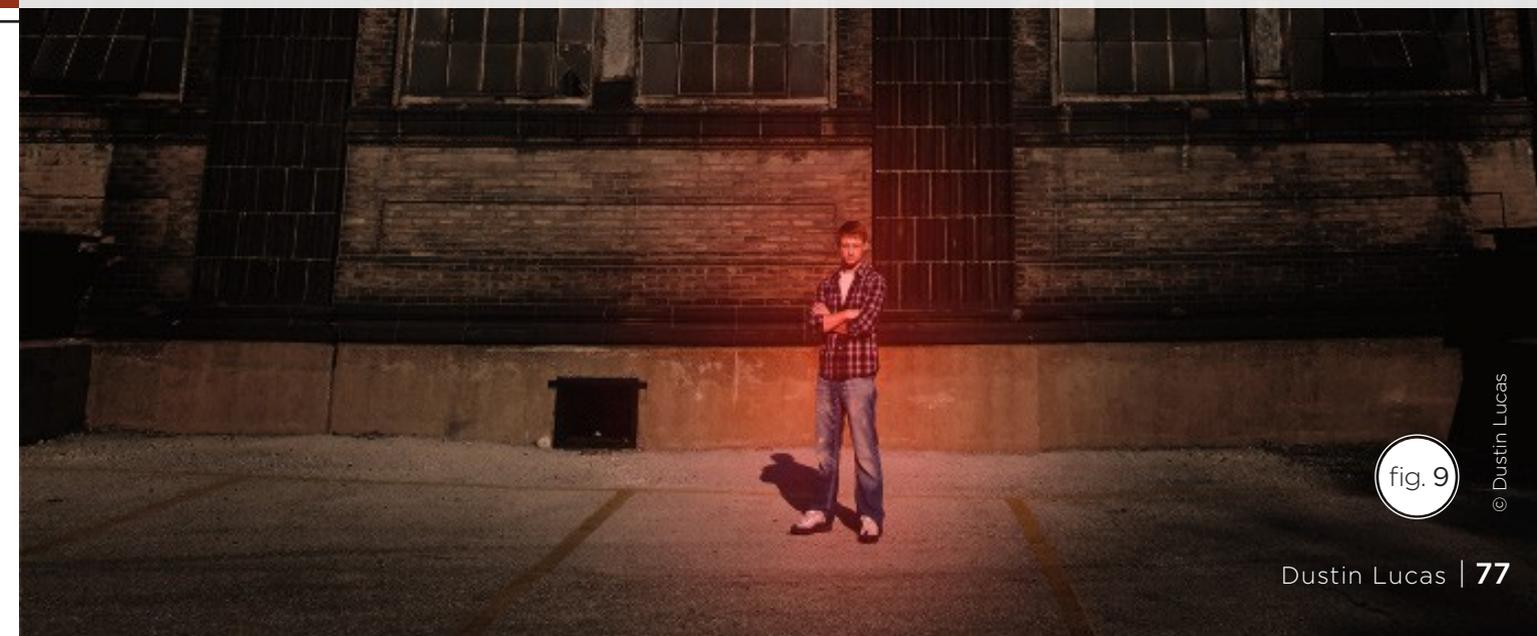
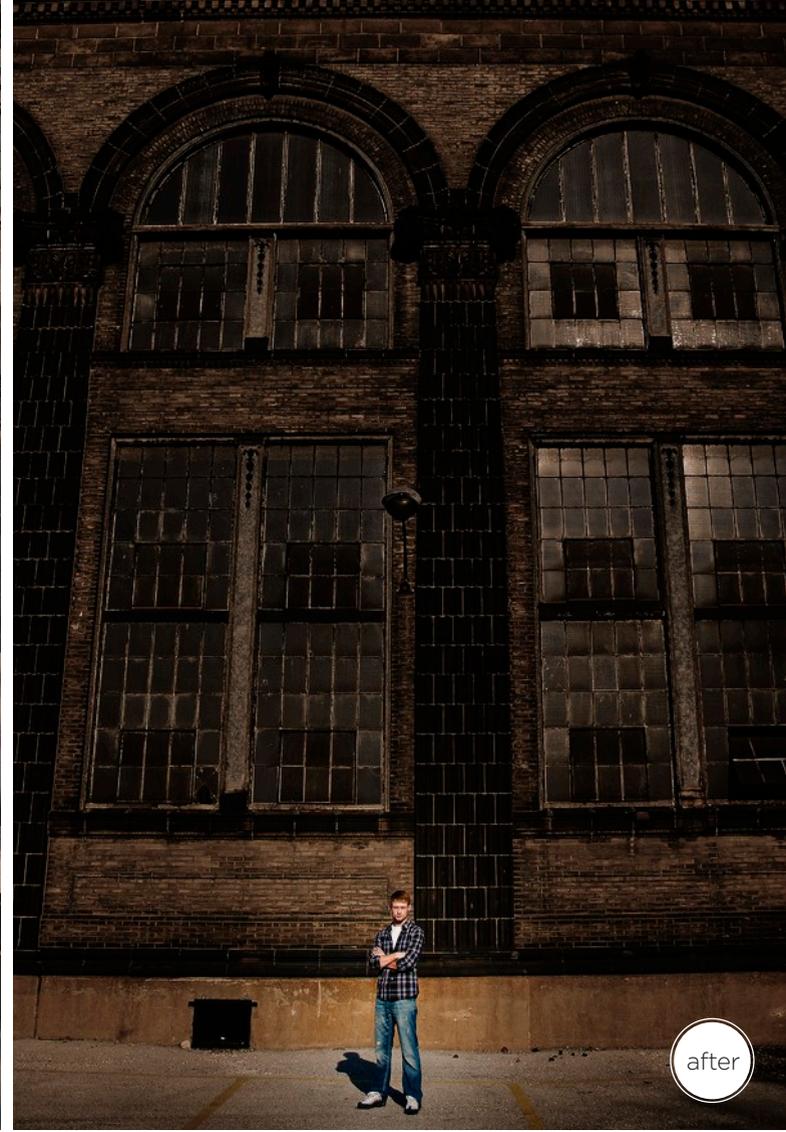


fig. 9



© Dustin Lucas

This image has now transformed from an overpowering urban space to a dynamic portrait for a senior. Adding the dramatic toning and lighting to the image gives it an edge that the as-shot image lacked. Try these techniques on an image you've shot that doesn't quite fit with the others from the shoot. You might surprise yourself with how editing your image through these methods can keep the viewer's eye on the subject. For your next session, take wider shots to create some unique portraits, and use this article to push out some creative edits. ■



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MARKETING
YOUR
PORTRAITURE

WITH SKIP COHEN

“**Find out** what everybody else is doing and then **offer something different!**”



BY SKIP COHEN

Just a few weeks ago, I got a call from a photographer friend who was thoroughly frustrated with business challenges. He was on overload, and called me for a pep talk. Thirty minutes later, he was out of the slump, and had some solid reminders of his potential.

“Find out what everybody else is doing and then offer something different.”

That’s a quote from a good buddy, long-time photographer Terry Clark. It was the perfect starting point for pep talk.

A GREAT PORTRAITURE

Great portraiture can make your work stand out, and it starts with your skill set. You need to understand lighting and posing. Just learning a couple of basics and then practicing relentlessly is a great way to start.

The key is to create/capture images that flatter your subject. In a society where “good enough” is too often acceptable, here’s an opportunity to be different from the competition. With a little practice, “good enough” can become stunning and habit-forming, and exceed client expectations.

BACK TO YOUR SKILL SET

Again, we’re back to your skill set. And whether you’re shooting children, adults, brides or pets, great portraiture is about showing your subject in the best light—literally.

It might seem tacky for me to use my own headshot as the example here, but when your portrait was done by Gregory Heisler, one of the finest contemporary portrait artists in the world, you tend to be pretty proud of it. He’s done over 80 covers for Time magazine alone.

Gregory and I were working together for three weeks solid doing portfolio review at Hallmark Institute. One night we were about to head out for dinner. It was my birthday, and he offered to do my portrait before we left. He didn’t need to twist my arm.

NARROW DEPTH OF FIELD

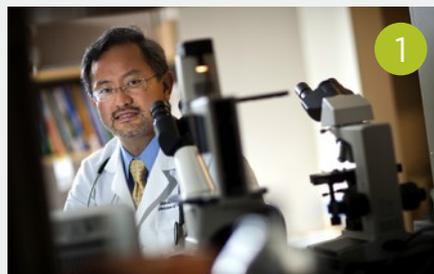
One of Gregory’s signatures is a narrow depth of field. He had me on a posing stool with one narrow vertical softbox about 10 inches from the left side of my face. He had the camera 15 to 20 inches away from my face. An assistant held an opaque card between the camera and the softbox on my left to cut out any flair.

That was it, and all with just the modeling light. We were done and headed to dinner 10 minutes later. He presented me with a 16 x 20-inch signed print a week later. Gregory’s other signature is that he never compromises the quality of any image, any client relationship or, for that matter, his friends.

ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAITURE AND YOUR BLOG

Environmental portraits bring in elements that tell the story of who your subject is. They're typically shot with a wide-angle lens and include enough of the subject's environment to emphasize exactly what this person is interested in, does for a living, etc. (IMG 2) Here's why it's fun showcasing environmental portraiture on your blog. Businesspeople are always looking for a way to get more notoriety in the community. Well, how about doing profiles of every business owner, starting with those you're closest to? No matter where you live, you've got a favorite pizza place, pharmacist, doctor, bank teller, dry cleaner, etc.

Once a week, post a "Community Profile" with an environmental portrait of somebody you appreciate. On the day you post it, print a hard copy of the page and put it in one of those inexpensive freestanding Lucite frames. At the top, print "As seen on Joe Photog's Blog."



Let's use a great pizza place as an example. If you're like our family, you're picking up a pizza a couple times a month. Get a shot of the guys in the kitchen making a pizza. Write a 50- to 100-word piece about what you love about the place, and include the name of the subjects. That's it— instant blog post and a way for the community to get to know what you do for a living. Build up a stash of at least four to six profiles before you announce it as a new blog feature. That gives you enough in the pipeline so you don't have to be chasing content every week.

Here's the real value of this idea. First, it gives you a chance to practice portrait techniques on your time instead of a paying client's. Second, every subject is going to become an ambassador for you simply because they're flattered you asked them to be the subject one of your blog posts. Third, as more readers start to follow you, you're establishing yourself as the photography expert in the community.

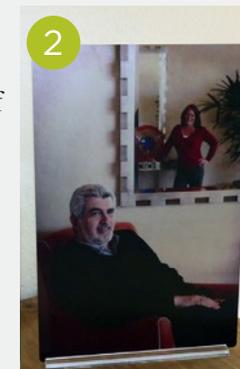
TELLING THE STORY AND KNOWING YOUR SUBJECTS

Portraits that tell a story about the subject help you stand out from the competition. I'll use another portrait of me as a great example.

Elena Hernandez is an incredible artist out of Dallas. The only thing more impressive than her skill set is her passion for the craft. At a convention a few years back, she was working on portraits of people in the industry, and asked me if I'd take the time for a sitting. You never say no to Elena.

Anybody can do a portrait, but she wanted it to be different. Having spent time with me and my wife, Sheila, she knew what a significant part of my life she is, and chose to bring her into the image.

This portrait (IMG 2) was done in less than five minutes in the doorway of the hotel. No fancy setup, no backdrop, just Elena's vision. In the entryway there was a mirror, which was perfect for an environmental portrait of me with Sheila out of focus in the background. Plus, she asked me to look at Sheila. Elena printed the image on metal and, once again, it became something different. It's one of my most cherished gifts. And because of the way it's printed, it's always noticed in our home.



Let's go back to where we started: You've got to make yourself stand out. It takes a simple call to your lab to find out what's new. Textured prints, prints on new materials, new sizes, multiple image composites—technology is changing everything in photography, not just with your gear or software. A good professional lab will have a never-ending list of ideas to help you make your portraits stand out.

RESOURCES FOR HELP

ShutterFest, which is just a few months away, presents the most obvious opportunity for you to expand your skill set. It's an opportunity for you to not only learn from the very best, but also practice with your peers while building your network.

ShutterFest isn't until April. In the mean time, you've got programs on CreativeLive, Roberto Valenzuela's new book on posing, Michael Corsentino's expertise shared in numerous places, and Profoto's videos with Gregory Heisler, Matthew Jordan Smith and more of the finest portrait artists today. There's help for you to raise the bar on your skill set in so many different places, including following many of the artists writing for Shutter.

Back to the Beginning (One Last Time)

I know I'm simplifying today's challenges, but that's only because this is a magazine article, not a workshop. There's only so much I can help you with in a few hundred words, but here's the point.

Understanding how to create a great portrait is a great way to make you stand out in your community, but remember that it's a process. There are too many people out there who don't understand great photography. You've got to work to get them to understand it's not a portrait, but a soon-to-be family heirloom. ■



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The screenshot shows the Phototools.com website interface. At the top, there's a navigation menu with links for HOME, PHOTO, VIDEO, LIGHTING, CINEMA, RENTALS, BLOG, and ALL BRANDS. Below that is the site logo and a search bar. The main content area features a breadcrumb trail: HOME > NIKON > PHOTOGRAPHY > CAMERAS > DIGITAL SLRS. The product being showcased is the Nikon D810 Digital SLR Camera Body (Part #: 1542). The listing includes a 'Pin it' button, social media sharing options (Like, +1, Tweet), and a price of \$3,296.95. It highlights a 4% reward upon purchase and includes a 'FREE Shipping' badge. A prominent 'Photo Tool Box' is featured, which is free with purchase. Below the camera image, there are dropdown menus for 'Select Protection Plan' and 'Select Accessories', along with a quantity selector and an 'ORDER NOW' button. The availability is listed as 'In Stock'. At the bottom of the product listing, there are several gear icons representing specifications: 36, 51200, CF/SD, 3.2", 6, and 1080. To the right of the main product, there's a sidebar for 'Essential Accessories' featuring SanDisk memory cards.

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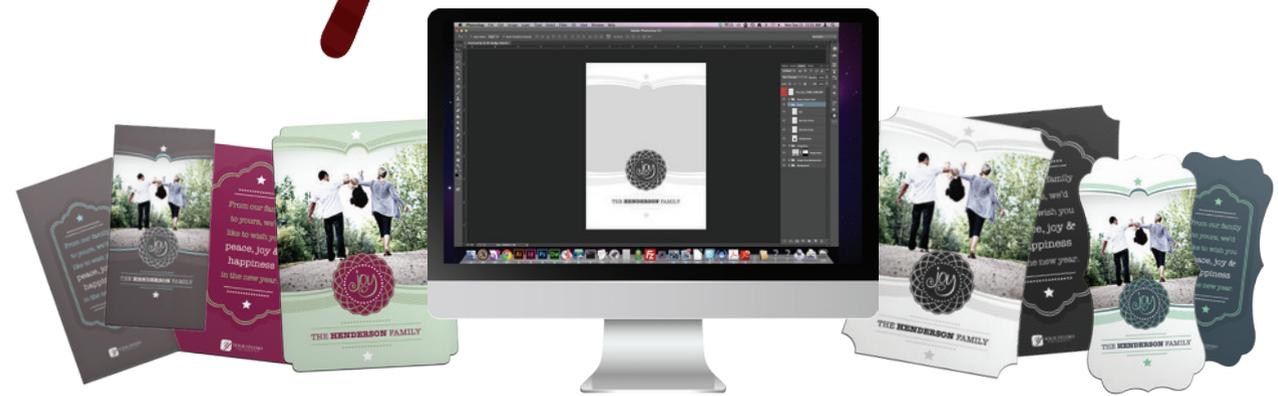
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— *the art* —
OF
BOUDOIR
PORTRAITS
WITH
Stacie Frazier



“The boudoir portrait
can be one of the
most powerful images
from your client’s session with you.”

— BY **STACIE FRAZIER**

In most portraits, clients want to capture an image of themselves at a particular moment in time, usually smiling and projecting what they wish to share with others, such as professionalism, happiness or serenity. Clients who want to share a more intimate side of themselves book a boudoir portrait.

Boudoir clients are encouraged to express private, powerful emotions in intimate settings. Clothing is minimal. We use lighting that accentuates the curves, outfits that cling and graze, and atmosphere that sets a sexy mood.

The boudoir portrait can be one of the most powerful images from your client’s sessions with you. It should be something she will want to show the world. This portrait should define who she is right now, and be something she would be proud to be remembered by. Even though the boudoir portrait showcases her more sensual nature, it often also captures her soul by stripping away the normal ways she defines herself—starting with her clothing.



inspiration

I am always looking for portrait inspiration, and you never know where it may strike. Of course, I look to the modern greats in the photography world, but also to the old masters of fine art painting. I love to study the emotion of art, as well as poses and lighting. I'm a forever student this way.

I've found most of my inspiration comes from clients themselves. Getting to know who they are and what they enjoy is my favorite way to get the creativity flowing. My clients give me some insight into their personality, likes and dislikes on a pre-session questionnaire. This has been extremely helpful during and after the shoot in post-production. Here are a few sample questions: How would you like to be remembered? If your photographs could tell a story, what would that story be? What three emotions would you like your photos to portray?

wardrobe

Since an actual portrait has a more narrow focus and is usually concentrated on your subject's head and shoulders, wardrobe is more important than the background. Tasteful nudity or implied nudes work perfectly in boudoir portraits, as does a carefully curated piece of lingerie. Depending on your client's personality, using sensual fabrics—like silk, lace or mohair for softness, or black leather for more edge—can help tell her story.

Her beauty and sensuality is the subject of the image, so simplicity usually works best. A more daring client might like something a little more bold and over-the-top, with a fashion flair that speaks to her interests and sensibilities. Sometimes boudoir calls for a more editorial approach; in that case, consider meaningful props and attire.

backdrops

Again, simplicity normally rules here, too, unless it is a themed portrait geared toward her personality. I carry black muslin with me to location shoots for this very reason. I do not want my gorgeous client competing with decor and furnishings.



“Laughter always makes for a beautiful portrait expression. It instantly takes away any tension in the lips.”



expressions

I'm going to let you in on my little secrets for capturing the sexiest expressions from my clients, techniques that bring out their confident femme fatale as well as their saucy, flirtatious side. One of my secret weapons is “spy eyes.” Watch the video at the end of this article to see it demonstrated. In my first year of business as a boudoir photographer, I learned that sometimes I needed to give my clients a role to play during their shoots, giving them the freedom and permission to let their hair down and allow that sexy, confident goddess to come pouring out for the camera. Boudoir clients often come to us anxiety-ridden, full of self-doubt and unsure if they are looking their best.

I use my questionnaire to help set the mood long before the session. I instruct them to select an alter ego (like an actress or model) to emulate. This gives them a role to play during their shoot. I find it's also necessary to bring in some sexy silliness by telling them to pretend they are a spy with sexy secrets. This often brings on a quizzical look, if not full-blown laughter! I follow this by demonstrating my “spy eyes” and having the client do the same. Spy eyes is similar to a slight squint, or, as Peter Hurley likes to call it, the “squinch.” My version, combined with the sexy scenario, is a little more flirtatious, adding a major sparkle in their eyes.

Our clients have a tendency to hold much of their tension in their mouth. I counter this by having them audibly exhale through parted lips. For clients who have a harder time relaxing, I employ the vowels technique, whereby I have them sensually whisper the vowels A, E, I, O and U. If you can't get a sexy expression with that, at least you'll get laughter. Laughter always makes for a beautiful portrait expression—it instantly takes away any tension from the lips.

posing

Posing techniques and your ability to coach your client can make or break a boudoir portrait. Showcase sensual areas such as the neck (clavicle, back and sides), ears, wrists, lips and fingers.

I always look for ways to add energy to a pose. Energy is the No. 1 element I see lacking in boudoir photography, and is what will help elevate your portraits to the next level. Adding more energy to a pose is simple: Coach your subject to push her shoulders forward and to run her hands through her hair, to caress her garments and to trace along her skin with one finger. Breathing can create energy as well: Instruct her to audibly inhale and exhale, and see the results.

lighting

What mood do you want to convey with your portrait that coincides with your client's personality? The majority of my portraits are shot with a diffused beauty dish, as I prefer the soft, gorgeous light it produces for enhancing my clients' true beauty. For an edgier client, I often bring out my ring flash. (This lighting effect looks smoking hot with glossy red lips, by the way.)

© Stacie Frazier



eyeline

Another thing to consider is whether her portrait would be better shot from above her eyeline (for a more demure look) or from below (for an instant confidence boost).

The boudoir portrait is a beautiful image that can really empower your client. It shows her off in a way that normal portraits don't, capturing her inner glow with no distractions. It is a showcase of femininity, sensuality and a quiet confidence that comes out only when the clothes come off. 



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THE CHANGING TIMES

FAMILY PORTRAITS
AND THE ECONOMY

WITH
BLAIR PHILLIPS

“ It is so important to continue to
update family portraits.

The **experience** is just as important
as the images.”



by **Blair Phillips**

Family portraits are among the most prized possessions in most people's homes. I've heard countless people say that their family pictures would be one of the first things they would grab if their house were on fire. With the ubiquity of camera phones, family portraits seem less important. It is my mission to continue to remind everyone why it is so important to continue to update their family portraits.

For today's client, the experience is just as important as the images. One of the biggest things I do to continue to grow the family category of my business is to give myself extra time to chat. I generally allow two hours for each family session. This allows me time to really get to know my client by making small talk. Most business exchanges these days are all about collecting money and moving to the next transaction. You want to make sure you are making it known that your clients mean the world to you. Customer service has never been more important.

We need to create an environment that makes their spending feel justified.

Generally, I treat my family sessions like a job interview. I never know who in the group may become my next client. You have to remember that everyone in the group may not be very outgoing. Some people's shyness can easily be mistaken for stand-offishness. The more you push these types, the worse you can make their experience. Approach your family sessions with the idea of matching each person's personality. When you deal with a shy person, lower your tone of voice and be a little shy yourself. If a client you meet is very confident, match her confidence. You may find yourself wearing several different personalities when you are working with each family member during a session. Keeping this suggestion in mind will help curb those awkward moments during a session.





There is something about a classic, traditional family portrait that keeps families always coming back. It's easy to get caught up in trying to create something really different, so that we overlook the classic, rock-solid family portrait. Things are changing in this world, especially what it takes to really get someone's attention.

I photograph family sessions with three key factors in mind. I generally begin with a few traditional poses that Grandmother will cherish forever. These are rather comfortable and easy for a family that may be a little nervous. Second, I move to something a little more creative and unexpected for them. This helps to loosen them up a little. Third, I take them somewhere or pose them in a way that is very unexpected and creative. The last poses are the ones they will tell everyone about. There can be several different perspectives of the three styles I mentioned, so this would be where you really let your brand and style shine through. If you are not a traditional photographer, do your version of traditional.

“ Limited editions or mini sessions have been a great way to keep the family portrait side of our business growing each year. ”

Everyone’s on social media now. For this reason, you should be posting tons of pictures of yourself working. Every session you photograph, post a documentary picture to show people that you are working. You want people to see you working every day. The more they see you, the less time they will have to forget about you. People stop me all the time to talk about how unbelievably busy I am. We always obtain a model release from clients to make sure they are willing to appear on social media. My clients love to be tagged so they can share with their friends. Sometimes it may spark a reminder that it is time to update their family’s session.

Limited editions and mini sessions have been a great way to keep the family portrait side of our business growing each year. One of the toughest hurdles with booking family sessions is work and school schedules. This can often keep people from booking a family session. Five years ago we started doing a limited-edition day that we call Field Day, which has constantly been gaining momentum. We open up one Saturday per year and book appointments from sun up to sun down. These appointments are for the families that just simply would not be able to make it during the week. The appointments are 15 minutes long, so we’re able to discount them. We set up shop in the middle of a huge field with lots of tall grass and huge oak trees. We build a set with furniture and other creative and brand reflective props. I am relying on a huge volume of people, so it does not hurt me to adjust prices accordingly. This day creates such a great experience for the busy family and generates a healthy profit margin for my studio.

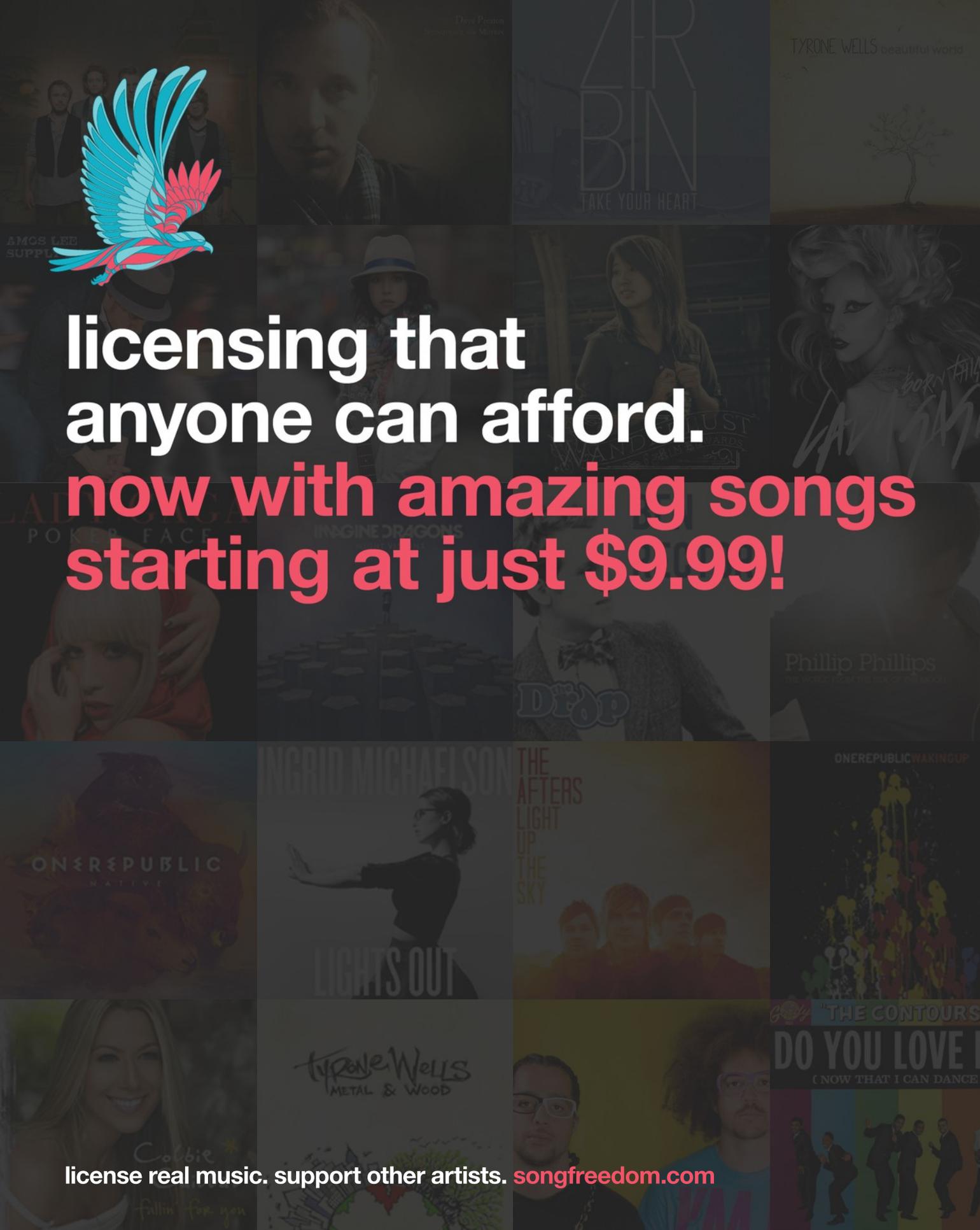




© Blair Phillips

Just as we forget about clothing that we give away, we are quickly reminded when clothes come back into style. Family portraits will forever be a vital part of most people's households. With the constant change in society and the growing hustle in our lives, we may all have to work a little harder to educate people on the importance of preserving our family's image on our wall.

Our busy culture is teaching us to never become sedentary and let grass grow under our feet, but to educate and market our hearts out to keep this industry strong for those who follow in our footsteps. 📺



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SHUTTER

PRESENTS

CRAIG LAMERE

PROFESSIONAL PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHER



by **Craig LaMere**

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR STUDIO.

I'm from the great state of Idaho, and have pretty much lived here my whole life. I have my little girl boxer, Logan, my bulldog, Lincoln, and my two cats, Emit and Martin. In January, I will have been shooting for five years. I was a high school receiver coach for 12 years, and just quit last year due to my crazy schedule. I opened my first studio a year after I started shooting, and moved into my second one this past February. I really have loved every second of it. Being from a small market, I shoot almost every genre at my studio, with the only exception being babies, which I most definitely do not shoot, because they poop and pee everywhere, and I have a firm rule at my studio that I'm the only one who is allowed to poop and pee all over!





**“ I left insurance
to pursue photography,
and I have
never looked back.”**

HOW DID YOU GET INTO PHOTOGRAPHY?

When I was younger, to say I had very little direction would be like saying the ocean has some water in it. I really had no idea what I wanted to do with my life, but I always knew I would find that “something.” I’ve had a huge entrepreneurial spirit my whole life. I’ve always tried to start this or that, but never found anything that really grabbed me 100 percent.

I had a million shitty jobs in my twenties that led nowhere. I was a CNA for a day till I had to change a poop bed, I sold fake perfume on the streets, I picked the “too” brown pieces of hash browns off a conveyer belt at a food processor plant and even cleaned out radioactive waste ponds, to name a few.

I met a girl and followed her to college so she would not dump me. She ended up dumping me. One of my best friends was a graphic artist for the college who told me there was an opening in the department and that I should apply. I told him I didn’t know anything about graphics, and he said not to worry, I’d get the job. I applied, got an interview and, when it came time to take the practical test, my friend took it for me and, sure as shit, I got the job! I ended up being a graphic artist at the college for three years.

I loved graphics so much, but when I got out of school, I ended up in the insurance industry as a commercial insurance agent. I was an agent for about 10 years, and hated it. There came a point when I knew I had to find something else to do with my life because insurance was so unrewarding, other than the money.

The big turning point came when Costco opened in my town. I bought a Canon Rebel kit for about \$1,000 and started shooting as a hobby and a creative outlet. I loved it so much and became totally obsessed with everything having to do with shooting and editing. It sounds totally cliché, but when I picked up that camera, I knew I was meant to be a photographer. About a year after shooting my first image, I left insurance to pursue photography, and I have never looked back. Honestly, best decision of my life. It really has been a crazy, cool ride so far. It has not been easy in the least, but it has been megafun. To be very honest, if I had not been a coach and not had access to my football players for their senior images, and had not got some incredibly lucky breaks in the beginning of my career, you would not be reading this little story right now.

IF NOT PHOTOGRAPHY, WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING?

I'm sure I would be doing one of three things. I would either be a rocket scientist, a brain surgeon or the guy asking you, "Would like to supersize your fries?" Not sure which one.

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR WORK AND STYLE.

I come from a small market, and I really think it has been a huge benefit to me as a shooter. If I was in a big market, I could specialize and do one or two things and make a living. That's not the case here in Idaho. I have to be able to shoot a lot of different genres and in a lot of different ways in order to make it as a full-time shooter. It really is out of necessity that my work has evolved at the pace it has. My goal is to be the most versatile shooter I can possibly be and keep it all at a consistently high level, regardless of genre, light source, location or anything else. I really think my versatility is what makes my work unique. I guess if I had to label my work, I would use a single word: badass. When people look at my images, whether boudoir, seniors, fashion, family, portraits or anything else I shoot, I want one thought in their heads: "That's badass!"

WHAT ADVICE CAN YOU OFFER PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO ARE NEW TO THE INDUSTRY OR WHO WANT TO TAKE THEIR WORK TO THE NEXT LEVEL?

My advice to new shooters is to constantly shoot and edit. Photography is a trade, and you never can be great at a trade unless you are a constant practitioner of it. If the only time you practice your trade is when someone books a session, then you are going to have pretty crappy images and you may not be around very long. The greatest benefit of constant shooting and editing is that you will find out very quickly what you really hate to shoot and find your particular work flow. If you can find out fast what you don't like to shoot and the best way to get your images to where you want them, you are halfway home. Once you have those two things in place, then it is a matter of marketing. My last advice to the new shooter who wants to get to the next level is to have an unwavering and unshakable belief in yourself, your work and your dream. You have to 100 percent believe in you, your art and your brand, or no one else will.





TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR COURSES AT SHUTTERFEST.

One course will be a senior fashion course. Every senior girl today wants to be a model. I will show you how we help them become a fashion model for a day. Another course will be on lighting for any and all portraits. My last course will be boudoir and how I light, pose and shoot my clients for album spreads.

I'm a pretty hyper guy who takes what I do very seriously, but I don't really take myself too seriously. I love what I do and believe I have the best career on the planet! I believe we as shooters are incredibly privileged and that we should have a good time doing what we do. If you come to one of my courses, plan on seeing a fast-paced, way-fun, no-nonsense nuts-and-bolts approach to photography. You will learn the how, what, why and with what I do what I do!

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INSPIRATIONS

Inspiration comes to us in many shapes & sizes

Put 10 photographers in a room and ask them to shoot a paperclip, and there's no telling what will happen. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why I love being a photographer. We all see the world in our own special way. Ultimately, though, nothing is truly new or unique. Everything is inspired by something that came before. In that spirit, this month we asked you, our readers, to submit some work you thought would inspire your peers. What you gave us blew away the staff here. *Enjoy!*





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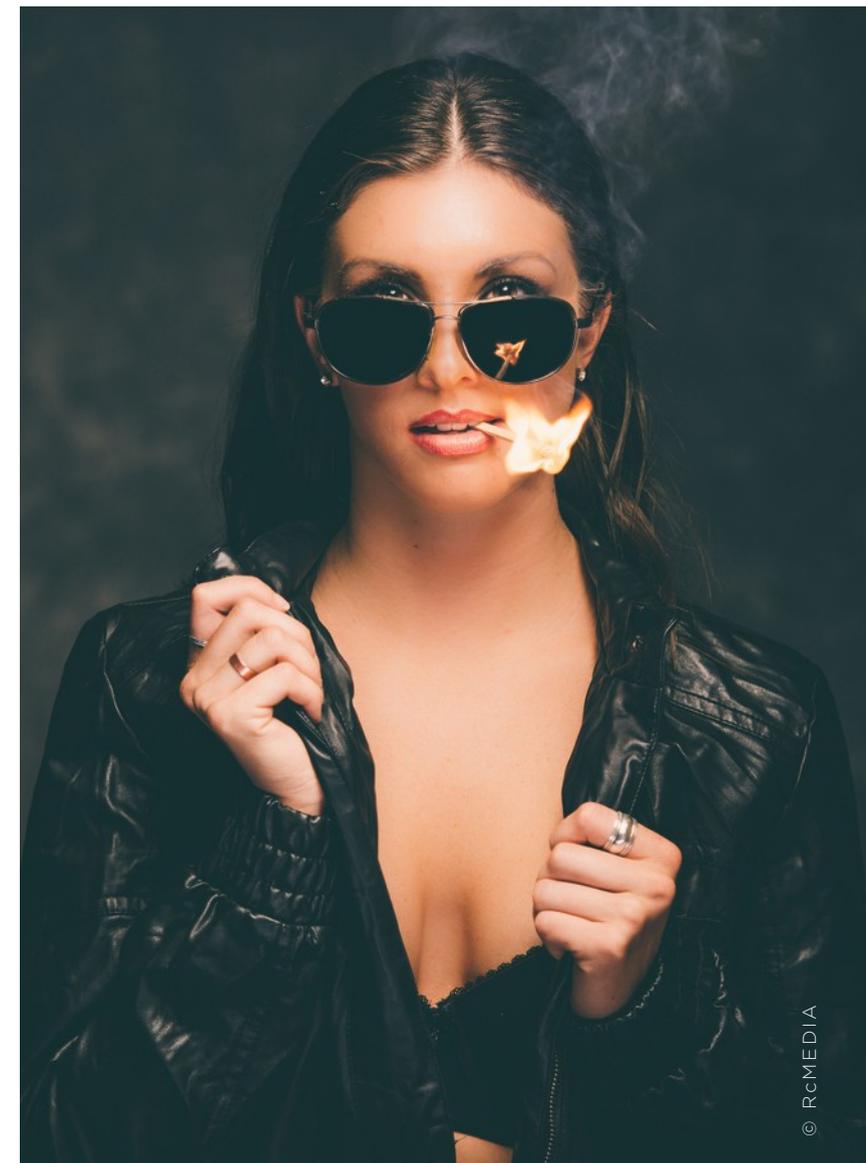
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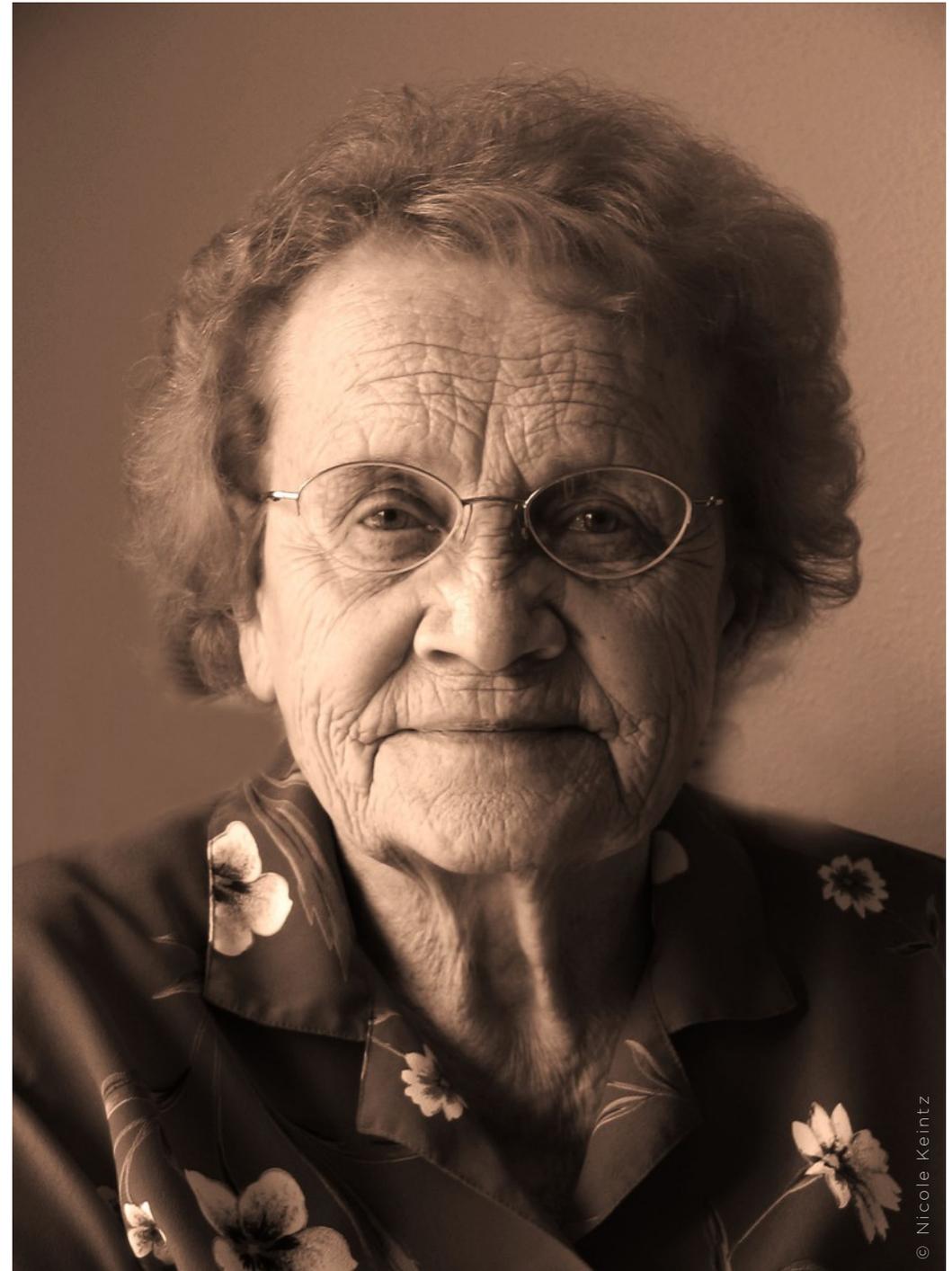
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PART TWO:

CONTROLLING

NATURAL

LIGHT

with Michael Corsentino





by **Michael Corsentino**

There's always more than one way to solve a lighting problem. Last month we examined how to turn harsh midday sunlight into beautiful portrait light. We created beauty-style portrait lighting using the sun, a diffusion panel and reflectors. We looked at the worst-case scenario, where the sun is directly overhead and there's no open shade available, to help us create the more pleasing even lighting generally required for beauty portraits. We used the sun as a key light and softened its harsh midday rays using a diffusion panel above our model, Ashleigh. Next we filled in any unwanted shadows using a white reflector placed below Ashleigh's waist, creating a classic clamshell lighting pattern with natural light. Lastly, an additional reflector was used to create an accent light over Ashleigh's right shoulder.

But there's more than one way to skin a cat. As with artificial light, natural light is what you make of it. It's all about decisions and intent. It's about how you shape and control the light and which tools you choose to do that with. But with natural light, there are some major differences from artificial light to take into consideration. There are certain constraints that simply don't exist with artificial light. You can't move the sun, repositioning it where you want it, and you can't set its intensity. You have to work with what you've got. Your ability to control the sun comes in the form of modifying its light and making informed decisions about what effects can be created and which techniques to use at different times of the day relative to the sun's position in the sky. The sun's quality of light at different times of day presents different challenges and yields different results, as well as opportunities.



“Placing the sun behind Ashleigh allows it to be used as a backlight. In this photo, I’m using it to create a beautiful accent/rim light on Ashleigh’s hair and shoulders. Doing so leaves her face and body underexposed. Bouncing the sun’s light back toward her with a reflector adds the light necessary to create a balanced exposure.”

© Michael Corsentino

BEFORE



“Feathering the light from the reflector slightly past Ashleigh helps produce a softer, more natural quality of light. Watch the behind-the-scenes video for a full demonstration.”

This month I’ll discuss another great way to control and shape natural light, completely different from what we did last month in both results and techniques. These techniques rely on the sun’s position being lower in the sky. This means that if you start with a shoot at around noon or 1, when you need to tame the harsh midday sun using the techniques described above, by the time you’re finished with the first look, you’ll be ready to create a second look with this next technique. When I say “look,” I mean the effect created by a different quality of light. By 2:30 to 3:30, the sun will have moved to a lower position in the sky, which is exactly where we want it for this second method of natural-light control. The lower the sun’s position in the sky, the softer and more directional it is. This presents a lot more options than when the sun is positioned directly overhead.

AFTER



“This is the result of not featuring the reflector. Note the brighter quality of light. In certain circumstances, this may be desirable. For the finals here, I opted for a softer, more natural-looking approach via feathering. Watch the behind-the-scenes video for a full demonstration.”

© Michael Corsentino

Now that the sun is lower on the horizon, we have options that didn't previously exist. Because of its lower position, we can now use the sun as key light and get a much more pleasing effect than when it's directly overhead. But what if we want even more options? What if we want multiple points of light? What if we want to create more layered lighting using patterns such as axis light and wedge light?

By placing the sun behind Ashleigh, an entirely new set of opportunities becomes available. We're now able to use the sun as a secondary light source, acting either as a backlight, accent light or kicker light. That said, the sun alone placed behind a subject will usually end up fooling the camera's meter and underexposing the subject.

Enter reflectors. Simple tools, again, rule the day. Here we'll employ reflectors in a variety of shapes and sizes to bounce the sun's light back toward our subject, and even throw umbrellas into the mix. While they're typically confined to use with artificial light, umbrellas are reflectors in their own right, and light is light, so why not? Use what you have; even white foamcore, while not versatile, will do the trick in a pinch. Bounce lighting is so simple but so versatile and flexible. Using reflectors allows us to shape, direct and control the quality of the reflected light. Options anywhere from neutral white to contrasty silver to warm gold, and every combination in between, are all available. Don't just stop with one reflector; more can be used to add additional light and contrast. The same is true of subtraction panels, which can be used to take away light.



By experimenting with different positions relative to the sun for both the subject and the reflectors used, you can easily create myriad lighting effects. The beautiful part is that you're turning one light source (the sun) into two. The reflector ends up serving as your key light, providing significantly more flexibility and control than using the sun directly. Throw in the variety of fabrics available for most reflectors, and the sky is truly the limit. ■



© Michael Corsentino

SHUTTER

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- Michael Corsentino



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MINI
SESSIONS

BY
KRISTY DICKERSON



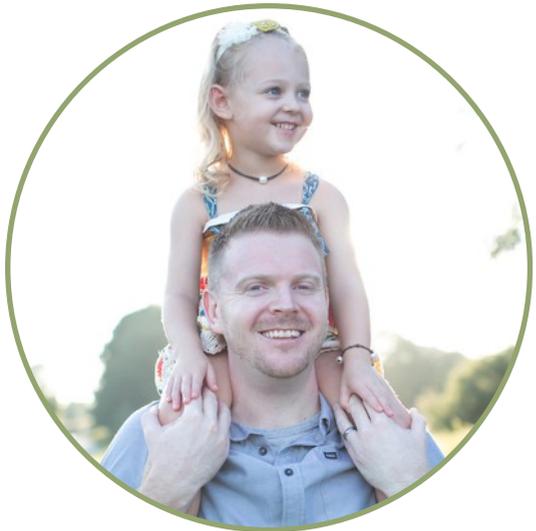
by **Kristy Dickerson**

Mini sessions are relatively new. The idea of a mini session is for the photographer to pick a great location at a good time of day for lighting, and to book back-to-back sessions that are not as long as a normal session. This is great because it's in one location, you will be able to photograph multiple people in a condensed time and—last but definitely not least!—they're a great marketing tool.

Mini sessions can be great for clients because they take a lot of guesswork out of the session. What location do we choose? When will we do it? And, probably the biggest advantage, since the photographer is shooting a lot of sessions in a condensed time, you can get the end product for less than you normally would. For clients with young kids, 20 minutes is often all you need to get those perfect shots.

This biggest issue I am seeing with mini sessions is photographers are not properly pricing them, which means they can't be sold properly. I walked into a hair salon the other day and saw a flyer advertising mini sessions for \$80, including all digital images and a 30-minute session. My first thought was that I felt bad for this photographer. If you are shooting minis for that little, you are devaluing your work. That \$80 has to cover your time shooting and editing. Say goodbye to a third of it for taxes. A portion goes to insurance to cover the year, a portion needs to be set aside for future marketing and equipment, and the list goes on and on.

“ If you want to make a career out of photography, BUILDING A PROPER BRAND IS SO IMPORTANT. ”



We started taking pictures because we loved it, right? I would say most photographers (if not all) fell in love with photography first, and then wanted to start making money at it. So you start taking pictures first, and figure out how to run a business second. I talk to so many photographers who struggle with actually making a living at photography, and it is for all these reasons. Running a business is tough. Everyone starts somewhere. When I started, I shot my first wedding for \$500, and that included my coverage, digital images and renting the gear I needed for the day. I am pretty sure I made nothing that day. I knew I couldn't stay there long, though, because I was spinning my wheels. I was second-shooting like crazy, taking whatever gigs I could. It was in my learning phase, but I also knew that I had to turn this photography “hobby” into a business fast if this was my dream, because I had young kids and a family. I couldn't just keep spinning my wheels and investing so much of me without some sort of return.

I have said it before and I will say it again: If you haven't invested in your brand, that is where you start. If you want to make a career out of photography, building a proper brand is so important. Once you have built a brand, you have to properly price your services. When I first got into photography, I attended countless workshops. Every photographer had a different rhyme or reason for how to price their services. One photographer advised me to take what I wanted to make for the year and divide it by how many shoots I wanted to do, and that's how many shoots I needed to book. To this day, that system boggles me. In theory, that sounds amazing, but it is not that easy. I am a simple business gal, and I am a believer in pricing on supply and demand. Your experience, equipment and network all play a part in demand and in setting your price. Your supply is what you have control over. I built my price up over the year. As the business grew, I raised my prices. I feel like I've reached my ceiling, and I no longer raise my prices like I used to. Will this work for everyone? Probably not, but it is what worked for me.





© Kristy Dickerson

Back in the film days of photography, a session was booked and then clients purchased everything separately. The biggest pricing mistake I see with digital photographers is they give nothing a value anymore. Some photographers don't even sell prints! I think it is imperative that every photographer has an à la carte menu that includes the value of one digital image, of one print, of your session, etc. Even if you have a collection that includes the digital images, you still need an itemized menu. Think about going to a fast-food restaurant. It's cheaper and easier to buy the meal deal than each item individually. If you don't have a value placed on everything you sell, you should.

This is going to vary from business to business, depending on a lot of factors. (If you are curious about my pricing, you can buy my wedding pricing guide at <http://kristydickersonblog.com/store/?catID=2&products>.)

For mini sessions, I charge \$425 for a 20-minute session that includes 15 digital images. That can be considered a lot, but you have to put it into context. A family session is typically \$200, which covers time of shooting and editing, and then everything purchased separately. I have a value of \$65 an image for digital images. So for a client, mini sessions are a great value.

» CLIENT VALUE

You need to make your mini sessions a better value than a normal session. Typical sessions run \$600 to \$2,000. A mini session is \$425, which includes the shoot and the images. If the client doesn't perceive value, she won't book the mini. But again, make sure you are setting value to begin with your regular pricing.

» LOCATION

Pick a location that is really neat. Take into account whether that location is better in the afternoon or morning hours, or both. For a lot of clients, picking a location is sometimes a huge stressor. This takes the guesswork out of nailing down a location, which is great for both photographer and client.

» AVAILABILITY

Limit your availability on mini sessions! Don't devalue them by doing them all the time and booking multiple sessions. I sold out my sessions last year, and felt bad that I allowed a couple clients to book a random one. Set your availability for the minis and stick to it. If you do sell out, add another date so people are booking to your schedule instead of the other way around.

» EXPECTATIONS

It is imperative that you set expectations on timing, what to expect during the session and what to expect after the session before they actually book. I have a pricing guide that walks my clients through all these steps. You always want to set expectations and then meet or exceed them.

» FUN

This sounds a bit silly to mention, but the more energetic you can be on the day of the session, the better. It is all about client experience, and the time with the client is short. So make sure you feel comfortable shooting in condensed times. In that time frame, you have to be able to make this feel normal while getting a variety of images, from posed to natural. This is something that takes time and experience. If you do 20-minute sessions, schedule a 10-minute break between shoots just in case you need the extra time.

» INCLUDE SOME DIGITAL

It's imperative to have a successful mini. My normal sessions don't include the digital images, so this is a huge value. Include some digital, and set it at five, 10 or 15 images so that you know you can meet that number.

“
SPRING AND FALL
are both
great seasons
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”

Mini sessions don't just start with a new pricing structure; they start with your current pricing structure, and take into consideration branding, marketing and everything else that goes into making your business wheels turn. For minis, start planning at least three months in advance, and allow people to book at least six to eight weeks in advance. Spring and fall are both great seasons for minis. I usually require \$100 to hold the mini session date on the day they book and sign the contract, and then the remaining balance is due a week before the mini. ■



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