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MAGAZINE

YOUR 2014

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with Lori Nordstrom

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS
with Skip Cohen

CHALLENGE YOURSELF
with Kristy Dickerson

part 2 **FINDING SUCCESS**
DOESN'T HAVE TO BE HARD

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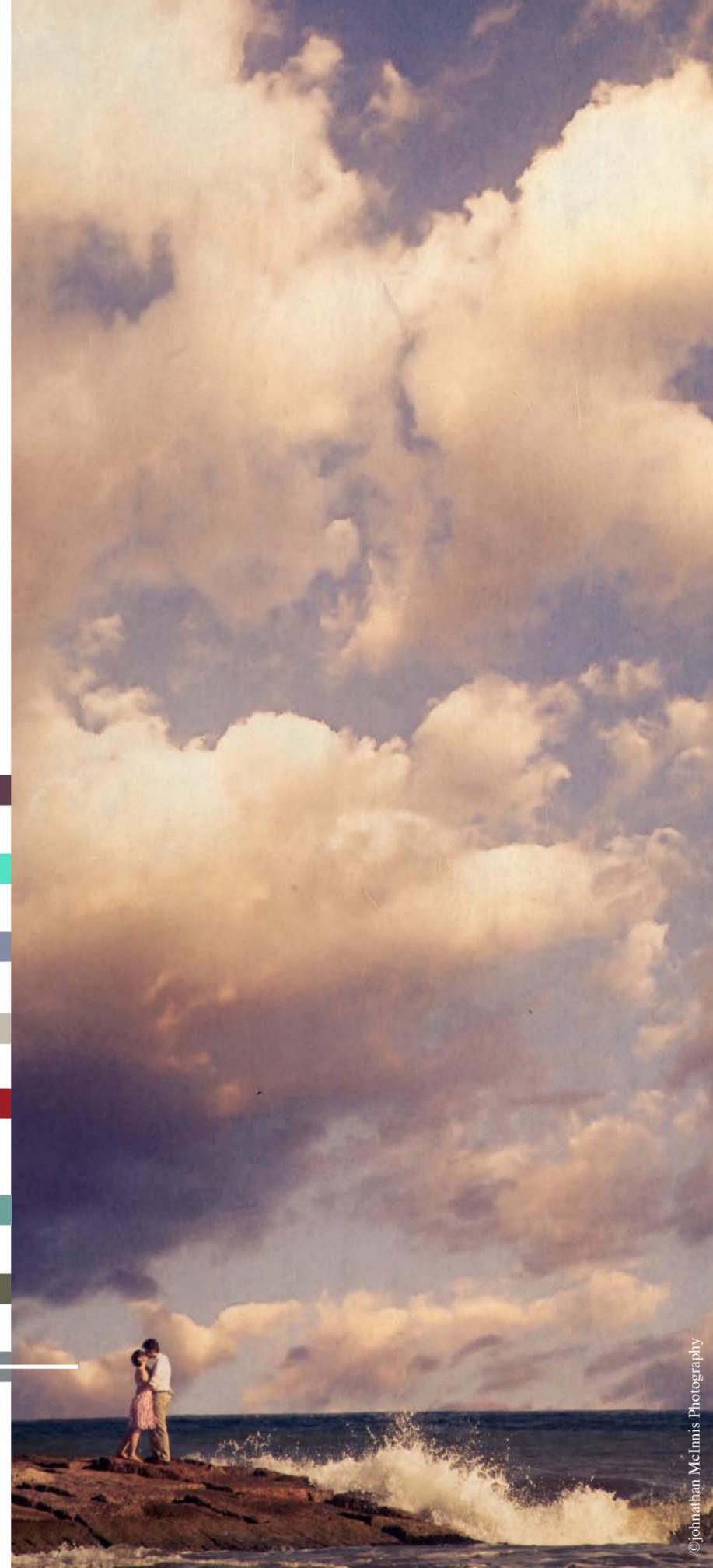
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INSPIRATIONS
From Readers

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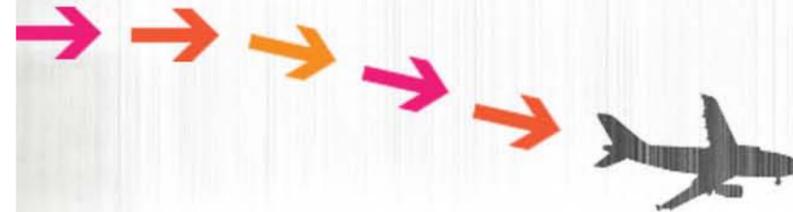
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SETTING GOALS

with Lori Nordstrom





BY Lori Nordstrom

Statistically speaking, setting goals is more important for your business and even personal life than you may think.

A Harvard study found that only 3 percent of Harvard's MBA graduates had clearly written goals. Ten years after graduating, those who had unwritten goals (about 13 percent) were earning about twice as much as those without goals. The 3 percent who had written down their goals were making on average 10 times as much as all other graduates.

Mark Till, author of *The Business Plan*, found in his research that studios with a written business plan gross an average of 50 percent more than those without a plan, so get your plan in place.

When planning and writing out my goals, I focus on each of the following areas: faith, family, friendship, fitness, fun, freedom, fulfillment and financial.

Each means different things to different people, but by setting goals in each one of these areas, we can be sure to reach that balance we all strive for. Tony Robbins said, "Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible." We all have dreams. Those "what-ifs" and "if-onlys." Make those invisible wishes realities by planning them out, writing them down and setting actionable steps to reach them.



Goals give you
a **sense of direction**
and **purpose.**

To achieve your goals,

you have to do something!

If we first set life goals—those things that are important to us personally—it makes setting business goals much easier. It makes our business goals make sense by giving them the “why” of our life goals. For example, if one of my personal goals is to take my family on a cruise in 2014, I can research the costs of taking seven people on a cruise, and then plan my business goals in order to reach this personal goal. Setting the goal of “making more money in 2014” doesn’t make a lot of sense. But the goal “I want to make an additional \$20,000 in income in 2014, \$10,000 of which will be for a Caribbean cruise” gives it a purpose, and helps me do whatever it takes to reach that goal. Research tells us that I’m also much more likely to reach my goal if I commit it to someone else, so tell someone about the goals you’ve set. Make a commitment and ask someone to hold you accountable.

Goals give you a sense of direction and purpose. To achieve your goals, you have to do something! Think big and dream a little, but also set bite-size goals. Break them up into daily tasks so that checking things off your list becomes something that is exciting on a daily basis—seeing progress toward the big picture.

Last month, we talked about setting your income projections for 2014. Once you’ve decided what you need to bring in each month and week of the new year, you can set goals for marketing, new clients, networking partnerships and more. Break it all down so that it’s actionable and you can see results and progress.

We’ve all heard the old saying “If you don’t know where you are going, how will you get there?” No one plans a trip without making a decision about which direction he or she is headed and the plan for getting there. We usually look at the best route and direction based on the safest and quickest way to get where we’re going. Why not use this same strategy in your business? How will you get where you want to go without a road map?

Write It Down, Make It Happen is the name of a great book that is full of statistics about people who “wrote it down” and then saw it happen. When I read it a few years ago, I’d been meeting monthly with a group of photographers. It was just a bunch of girls who got together for dinner and talked and shared. We didn’t always talk about photography—sometimes we just talked about our families, our lives, the things girls talk about when they get together. But after reading this book, I was inspired to share it. The next time we got together, I said to everyone, “I want us all to sit down and write out what our dream studio looks like. I believe that if we write it down, we will make it happen!”

So we took half an hour, played some music and just wrote and shared. When we were done, everyone folded up their papers, put them in envelopes and sealed them. I gathered them up and said, “OK, I’m a big believer in ‘write it down and make it happen,’ so a year from now, we are going to get these out and see what has happened!”

GOALS

Three or four months later, one of the girls called me before our get-together and said, “Will you bring those envelopes to our meeting tomorrow night? I want to get mine out and share it with everyone.” When we got together, she took out what she had written just a few months earlier and shared how she was living what she had dreamed on paper! We all celebrated, cried and talked about it. All the other girls started opening up their papers, sharing what they had written and where they were at at that moment. I was just listening and not really participating until one of the girls said, “Well, Lori, aren’t you going to read yours?” In that moment, I realized that what I had written out for my dream studio (I was in a home studio at the time) was my dream for when the kids were out of the house, after this and that, and all of the things I wasn’t even capable of at that time in my life. It was a huge lesson for me as I shared with the girls over tears and realized that I had to look for the very best circumstances I could create for where I am at right now. In this moment I am living in right now, what is the best situation I can make for myself with the circumstances I am given?

It’s not that we can’t work to make our circumstances better, but the point is, “This is where I am today: I want to be home at a certain time for my kids. I only want to work on these days of the week. I want to make this much money....” Whatever your circumstances are, ask yourself, “How can I live today, in this moment, to make the most of the circumstances I’ve been given, and where I am right now?”

That’s the way that I have lived and dreamed and planned ever since. I’ve gotten rid of the “If only this” and “When this happens.” I’ve quit having the “Oh, in five years when I have everything together” mentality. Instead I live by “What are my circumstance now?” and “What is the very best scenario I can come up with in this circumstance?” That’s what I work toward every day.

All this may sound easy, but the truth is, it is even easier to make excuses for why you can’t succeed. I frequently have to talk a consulting client of mine down from the “four walls” fixation. She currently is in a home studio, which is the very best situation for her right now, yet I have to continually outline the situation for her and tell her all the reasons the home studio is the best solution for her right now, because in her mind, if only she had a retail location, if only she had those four walls, she would be a “real photographer.”



SETTING GOALS

Of course, those kinds of things are all in our head. Four walls have nothing to do with whether or not you are a real photographer. It has nothing to do with being profitable, running a business or taking care of people. It's in our mind. Yes, a retail situation is the best situation for some people. Being a home studio is the best for some people, and being all on location is the best situation for other photographers. We have to look at what the best situation is for us, and not fall into the trap of saying, "This photographer has this and if only I had that I could be a success too."

We spend a large part of our life working. Hopefully you chose photography because you had a passion for it, but understand that building a strong business is essential to keeping the joy you started out with as a new photographer. ■

Download Lori's Business Plan Workbook here:
<https://tinyurl.com/LNBizPlan>.

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WITH MICHAEL CORSENTINO



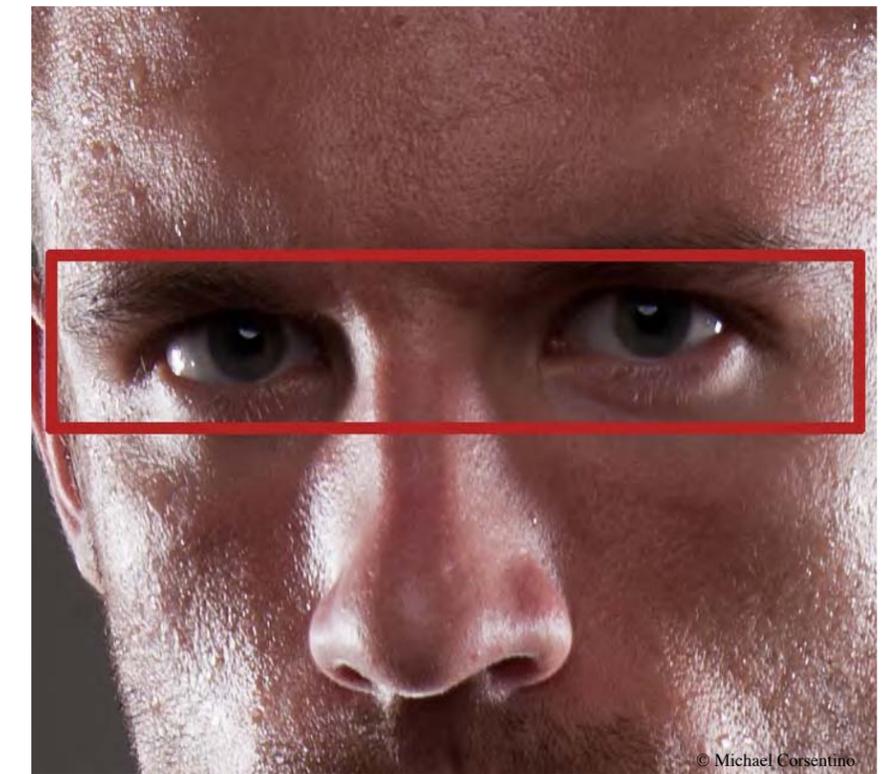
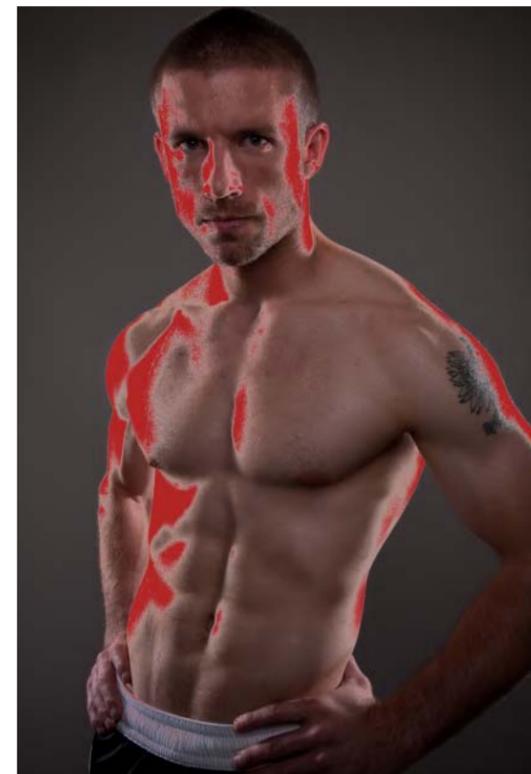
[SETUP]

Here, I'm using two small square grids mounted on two 2-foot-square softboxes. These are positioned to the left and right and behind the subject, who is in the middle. Each is angled slightly toward the camera, enough to create edge light on each side of the subject without unwanted lens flare.

The reason I've chosen small softboxes has to do with the quality of light they create. There is a direct relationship between the size of the source—in this case, the surface area of the softboxes—and the quality of light it creates. The smaller the source, the harder the light, meaning the transitions from shadow to highlight are less gradual. Conversely, a large source creates a softer light. Knowing why and when to choose the right tool for the job helps you predictably create the results you're after, removing any guesswork.

In addition to the size of the light source, placement in relationship to subject is vital. Just as with size, the distance of the source affects the hardness or softness of the light. Placing the light farther away from the subject, as I've done here, helps create a harder quality of light.

The key light, modified with a beauty dish, is placed directly over the camera lens, and can vary in height above the lens from a few inches to a few feet. Point it slightly downward, making sure to create a catchlight in the subject's eyes. Wrap the diffusion sock around the front of the beauty dish to soften its effect. This is optional, and depends solely on taste and intent. If you want something even more edgy and specular, just remove the sock.



(Left) Small square softboxes with egg-crate grids on either side provide the symmetrical edge lighting (highlighted in red). (Right) Keylight height, a key factor in catchlight creation, will vary depending on subject height.



BY Michael Corsentino

You see it everywhere, and it's supercool. It's used in ads for all kinds of products, from cars to sports drinks. It works for pretty much anything that screams for a cool, modern look. That includes high school senior shoots. Use it in your senior sessions, and watch the kids and their parents snap up image after image in your sales room. In this month's lighting column, I pull back the curtain and show you exactly how to get that edgy sports look.

[GEAR]

Simplicity wins the day with this lighting pattern, but you will need a few studio essentials to pull it off. First and foremost, you'll need a beauty dish. Here, I used a Profoto Softlight Reflector covered with a diffusion "sock" wrapped around the front. For those of you who read this column regularly, you know I love the quality of light that can be created using a beauty dish. They're extremely versatile tools that create light that's anything from snappy and spectacular to soft and beautiful. If you haven't invested in one, do it! You can thank me later.

Next—and also a studio must-have—are egg-crate grids. You'll need two. In previous features, I've highlighted ridged disc-shaped grids that fit into the reflectors used on strobes. Egg-crate grids are their cloth cousins, sewn together into a pattern of cells that vary in tightness depending on their specified degrees (40-degree, 30-degree, etc.). They're used on softboxes, octabanks, stripbanks, etc. to channel the light by confining spill and controlling where illumination begins and ends.

[ADJUSTMENTS&RATIOS]

We now have two lighting zones: one for the key light and one for the two side (kicker) lights. This pattern uses a 1:2 ratio that you can season to taste. You may prefer a little more key light or a little less kicker light.

These are just starting points. Shape your zones according to subject matter and taste. If you don't have a light meter or prefer to work more intuitively, don't worry. Let the 1:2 ratio be your guide, knowing that the kicker lights are twice as bright as the key. A ratio simply describes the output relationships between zones and the lights that comprise them.

[APERTURE&STROBE]

Aperture and strobe power settings vary depending on the power rating of your lights and camera settings, but the simple rule to remember is that the first reading you take is your key light. The key light is king: Its meter reading is your baseline for all subsequent zone readings. So if the key light meters at f:11, with a 1:2 ratio, it follows that the kicker lights should be set to f:16, twice as bright as the key. Likewise, if the key metered at f:8, the kicker lights should meter f:11—a full stop, or twice as much light, than the key light is contributing—and so on.

Don't let the math intimidate you. Just think about it terms of light output—twice as much light, half as much light, etc. That's all f-stops and ratios are.

[DON'T SWEAT IT]

As with most photo shoots, props (wardrobe, location, accessories, etc.) are an important part of completing the overall concept. For athletic portraits, one of those props is often glistening sweat. How is it achieved? Should you demand your subjects jump down and give you 50 on the spot every few minutes? That's never worked for me. Instead, I use the next best thing: a mixture of glycerin and water in a handy spray bottle. Spray it on your subjects, and violà—they're instantly transformed into powerful athletes. (Now if only that worked for me in the gym!)



EDGY SPORTS LOOK

[POST PROCESSING]

In post processing, I typically opt for a desaturated look with lots of edgy detail. This can easily be accomplished in either Lightroom or PhotoShop. My preferred tool for any involved editing is PhotoShop. If you're a Lightroom user, just use a negative value for the Saturation slider and a high value for the Clarity slider, and season to taste with the Sharpness slider.

For male subjects, more sharpness is always more edgy, but not so much with the ladies. In PhotoShop, I create this look in a number of ways, but the simplest is to use Nik Color Efex Pro's Bleach Bypass filter on a duplicate layer, and dial in the opacity to create just the right amount of desaturation. Then I make a layer stamp copy, creating a new layer incorporating everything done previously, and run the High Pass filter on it at an amount that creates the desired effect. Once the filter is finished, just switch the layer blending mode to Softlight or Overlay, and bam! Welcome to Edgyville!

[*A FINAL WORD ON GEAR]

Don't get overly hung up on the gear. You can easily substitute equipment that you may already have. Standard reflectors with disc grids work (you'll probably need to flag these off from the camera position to avoid flare), or you can use stripbanks, rectangular softboxes, etc.

The main idea is a key light and two sidelights of equal power confined to a tight spread. How you get there is up to you. Before I had strip boxes, I used black construction paper and gaffer's tape to mask off my softboxes, turning them into makeshift stripbanks.

Have fun, experiment, and give this edgy sports lighting a try. See you next month. ■



Final Image: Desaturated color, boosted contrast and lots of edge detail complete the look.

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CHALLENGE YOURSELF

with Kristy Dickerson



BY KRISTY DICKERSON



One of the biggest things that can hold you back is . . . *yourself*. I've come to this realization over the past year, and have vowed to change my ways.

Here's my motto for 2014:

If you're not nervous about something you're working on, you're not pushing yourself forward.

Doubt, fear of disappointment and fear of failure can leave us dead in our tracks. Being busy can prevent you from keeping your sights on the bigger picture. You can't see beyond your office doors. Fear can easily kick in because there's so much riding on your reputation.

All these things are looming over our heads at all times. But what if we had no fear? What if we did everything with boldness and confidence? Where would our business be, and, for that matter, where would our lives be? I've found that the bolder I am, the more successful I feel I have the potential to be.

So how to start off 2014 on the right track? Start by getting a mentor/coach. For the purposes of this article, I am going to call this person a coach. I grew up playing organized sports, and that experience is rife with business analogies.

- Individuals playing a team sport help their team win—you guessed it—when they play as a team. Period, end of story.
- A strong team needs a strong coach with a plan to lead it.
- Whatever your goals are for 2014, you have to practice—learning off-camera light, nailing manual exposure, etc. You cannot get better if you don't put yourself out there and practice.
- Make a plan. Come up with goals and strategies for 2014. What are your goals? What is your strategy to get there? In basketball, your immediate goal is to win the game, but your broader goal is to win the league, while your strategy is to practice plays.



If you're not nervous
about something
you're working on,

you're not
**pushing yourself
FORWARD**

Here are a few things I want to challenge you to do to make 2014 look vastly different!

GET A COACH

It can be a friend, someone in your family or another photographer. That person may or may not come with a cost. Remember that a coach's view and strategy are only going to be as big as he can see. So make sure it is someone who takes the time to know you and how you operate, and truly listens to your end goals. It's also beneficial to find someone who knows your industry. And, of course, find someone who is doing something better than you. Let your coach help you come up with a plan or push you when there is doubt or fear.

FORM A TEAM

I can be a control freak, and handing over power can be hard for perfectionists. It's not that I don't want to give up responsibilities; it's just that once you get used to a certain way of working, it's hard to change habits. A photographer's team consists of a coach and people who share similar business goals, whether it be in postproduction, accounting, second shooting, etc. I don't edit my own weddings, for example. The time I usually would spend editing my weddings, I am instead focused on marketing or hanging out with my kids. So for 2014, scope out other players for your team, and give up some responsibility and control!

MAKE A PLAN

Even if you have a team and a coach, you can't just go out on the court and flail around. You need a plan to win. What are your goals, and how are you going to get there? This should be something that your team and coach are involved in. What are your financial goals? How many shoots/weddings do you want to do, and how will you get to those goals? Plug in real, measurable numbers, and strategies to achieve them.

PRACTICE

Didn't your mama always tell you that practice makes perfect? OK, I don't believe in perfect, and I am a perfectionist. I believe in doing the best that you can do. If you leave it all on the table, in my eyes, that is close to perfect. The only way to leave it all on the table is to make sure you are prepared—both in life and business. Practice shooting, practice speaking, practice client consultations, practice off-camera lighting—the more you practice, the more confidence you will gain.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Now it is time to stop making excuses. Stop doubting yourself. Being nervous just reminds me that I am moving forward, and without moving forward, we just get stuck. I get nervous easily, but being nervous also gets me excited! It is a new year! I love this time of the year because it is a fresh, clean slate.

For 2014, one of my goals is to help others find happiness, whether that be through having a successful business, being a mom or just being happy with your day-to-day life. When you are a parent, I think your definition of success is very different. ■

The one thing I will say not to do is look at other people to measure your success.

Look only
at yourself.



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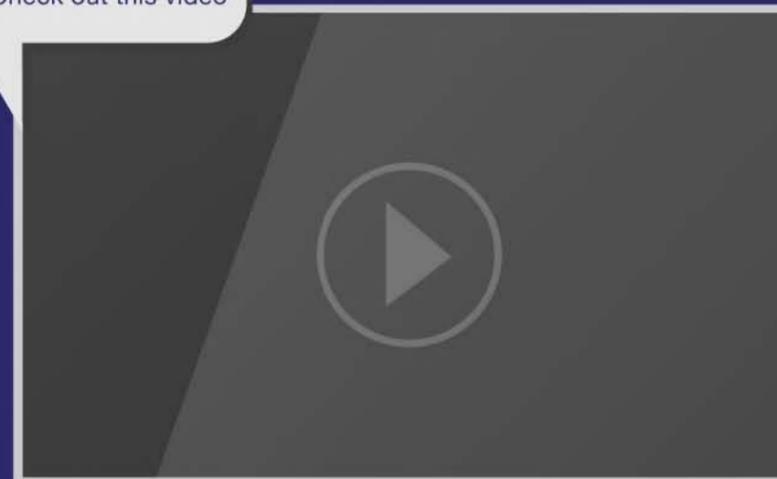
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- + Tips on staying organized in your business to keep your head above water.
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STOP PROCRASTINATING, DO SOME SERIOUS CLEANUP & START BUILDING FOR THE YEAR AHEAD.

BY SKIP COHEN



Building a house starts with pouring the footers of a solid foundation. Without a solid foundation, your house won't last any longer than the hovels of the Three Little Pigs. The Big Bad Wolf is the economy, whatever you're missing in your skill set, social media and your competitors.

This month I want to give you five solid "sure thing" bricks for your 2014 house. These are solid tried-and-true methods you can use to move you to the thrive side of the equation for the new year.

The best part of a new year for most photographers is the down time that kicks off the first quarter. It's the perfect time to stop procrastinating, do some serious cleanup and start building for the year ahead.

[1] YOUR WEBSITE

Your website is the equivalent of a brick-and-mortar storefront. It's your business, but so many of you treat it like an afterthought. You knew you needed a website, so you got one. The thing is, if you were building a new studio, you'd be paying attention to every detail—so let's do the same with your website.

+GALLERIES

Clean them up! Get rid of images that look like they were captured by Uncle Harry. Don't show any image that isn't one of your best. Boil down the categories of galleries. I've seen websites where photographers broke out a wedding into 10 galleries or more! We all know how a wedding flows—just let your images tell the story.

+SHOWING DIVERSITY

Diversity is important, but don't stray too far from your core business. If your core business is children and family, then a gallery of commercial work isn't the best call. The problem is the two specialties appeal to totally different target audiences. A rep from an agency looking for a photographer to do some commercial work is going to be turned off by family or wedding images. In the same respect, a bride looking for a wedding photographer has no interest in commercial work, and will move on to another site.

Instead, put your unrelated specialties on a different site or set up a landing page that allows visitors to your site to go to the general topics they're most interested in.

+“ABOUT” PAGE

I keep writing about this, but there are so many of you who still don't get it. Your clients don't care how you got started. They don't care what you shoot with or what awards you've won. They care only about one thing: Can you be trusted to see the world the way they do? Will you capture images that tell their unique story? Use your about page to open your heart. Do it in first person and sign it as if it was an artist's statement, because it is! Share why you love being a photographer. That's what they want to read about.

+TABS

Your galleries should be first, followed by your about page. Then you can move them anywhere you want. The idea is simple: If a picture's worth a thousand words, then hook them on your images first. Then they'll want to read about you.

Many of you have informational pages that read like IRS documents. Save policy statements for your contract discussion once they contact you. We all have bouts where we manage by the exception. Putting refund and payment policies as one of the first things a potential client reads about, because you got burned years ago, isn't going to build the relationship.

And, on your contact page, give them a phone number and email address. I know a lot of photographers work out of their homes and may not want to show their address, but give people a way to contact you! Answer all your calls and return calls and emails promptly. The faster you respond, the more sincere you're going to come across.

Your website is about your business, your inventory of products and services. Your blog is about opening up your heart, but there are a couple of fundamental ingredients for it all to work. I'm convinced that a good blog is a critical building block of a successful business today.

+CONSISTENCY

If you're only going to blog on random days when you feel like it, then shut your blog down *now*. It's actually hurting you more than it's helping. You need consistency. Post a minimum of twice a week.

+RELEVANT TOPICS

Stay in tune with what your target audience wants to read about. Remember to see the world through their eyes, and don't get into personal issues that are irrelevant to your readers.

+BUILDING A STASH

Your blog posts don't have to be real-time images you just captured of a client last weekend. Build a stash of relevant posts, keeping your target audience in mind.

"But Skip, I don't have anything to write about!"

Okay, here's a mini-list.

How about a series of picture-taking tips? All of you have enough experience to write a dozen posts on how to get a decent shot of your family, kids and events.

What about a list of great places to shoot in your community? Write about locations you love to photograph, and why.

How about a series of profiles of businesses in your community? These would be short posts about establishments and individuals you support, and can include everyone from your favorite bank teller to a pizza chef.

Every community has events that are of interest to your audience. Start a calendar of events that are fun to photograph, and tie them all back to tips on taking pictures at each one.

Guest posts are perfect for building traffic to your blog. Invite other photographers and business owners with the same target audience to write a guest post. It gives your readers a chance to read something a little different, while staying on point with what interests them. For example, a few guest posts from a florist that include images of their flower arrangements taken by you gives you an added opportunity to show off your skill set.

+BLOG LENGTH

General opinions from the experts pretty much support 200 to 500 words maximum for a blog. *Always* include at least one image. If you can't write or just hate it, then find somebody to either write for you or to proof your work. Even a kid who likes to write from this year's senior class might be the perfect person to lend a hand, and you can pay them by the post.

Nothing can build your reputation more than being involved in your community—with or without a camera in your hands. Obviously it's great to have opportunities to show off your artistic talents, but this is about being involved and giving back.

It's a real easy philosophy: You're looking for your community to be good to you, so you've got to be good to your community. From a business standpoint, it's called cause-related marketing. From a personal standpoint, it will simply make you feel good.

So often I've heard photographers complain about there being so little going on in their community. Not everything you do is going to put you in the running for the Nobel Prize. Look for opportunities to just give back. There's no such thing as a project that's too small.

For example, every school is short on funds. The arts, the yearbook and the school paper are always the first to suffer. So, offer your services to help the camera club. Locate the teacher who's responsible for the yearbook or the school paper, and offer your services. Teach a class on photography, or even an adult education class.

Good publicity doesn't happen by accident. This topic has enough material for its own article, but here are some basics to make sure you don't miss opportunities.

- Every week there's something newsworthy going on in your life, but you're too close to your own work to realize it. That means you've got to take charge: Recognize the opportunities and get the information out there.
- What's there to talk about? Maybe you bought a new printer and now offer instant fulfillment on engagement prints, business head shots, rush jobs for your clients. How about a workshop you're going to attend to expand your skill set? What about the monthly meeting you attend of the local PPA chapter or photography guild? What are you doing that's getting you involved in the community? How about the new gear you just bought to expand your expertise in different areas of photography, or the assistant you just hired? It's an embarrassing pun to use, but "got the picture?"
- Publicity isn't just about getting things published in the local paper. Build a database of past clients and virtually every business in the community, and start doing email blasts. Include the local chamber of commerce and various service organizations, like Kiwanis, Exchange Club and Rotary.
- Send something out twice a month for at least the first three months. If you start this now, it's perfect—the first quarter is slow time anyway!

If you're still stuck on what to do here, email me (skip@mei500.com), and I'll do my best to better define what you need to be doing.

You can't live in a vacuum. So often, photographers get trapped in a bubble. Don't let yourself get so caught up in the day-in, day-out challenges that you forget about expanding your own skill set. Push yourself out of your comfort zone with workshops, webinars, books and videos that take you into new areas of expertise.

The technology landscape in photography is constantly changing. If you don't believe me, check out all the new hardware from Panasonic, Fujifilm, Samsung and Sony. You've got more creative tools than at any previous time in the history of photography, but if you snooze you lose.

Allocate the time and the money to attend every workshop you possibly can. Take time to be at every convention, including your own state or regional professional photographer's association. Network and build your database beyond just your clients, friends and family.

You've got to learn the rules first before you can break them! But the first rule is understanding photography. Capture images that are solid right out of the can, and use your computer to enhance them, not create them. Don't get in the rut of spending all your time on your mouse cleaning up messes.

Nobody can market yourself like you, but you won't aid your marketing efforts if you're spending all your time at the computer! ■



SHUTTER

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PART TWO

FINDING SUCCESS

DOESN'T HAVE TO

BE HARD

WITH SAL CINCOTTA



BY Sal Cincotta

In last month's article, we showcased four studios—all at various levels of experience and points in their careers—that implemented what they have learned from our teachings, and their results have been nothing short of amazing.

This month, I want to close out by featuring another four photographers who have turned their careers around. We all have a story of the path to success, which often is not an easy one. The reason I have chosen to highlight these studios is to draw attention to the path each of them followed and the principals they employed to turn it all around.

No matter where you are in your career, you can do this! Work hard and stay disciplined, and, whatever you do, never take your eye off the prize.

Here are their stories, as told to the Shutter staff.



LEONARDO
VOLTURO
PHOTOGRAPHY

www.LEONARDOVOLTURO.com

What can I say about Lenny and Melissa? It's a relationship that started back in September of 2012. I met them in my Miami workshop. The fun part for me was watching them interact as a couple. Like most couples working together in our industry, and I am sure any other, there is always that friction involving difference of ideas, creativity, vision, etc. Most couples struggle working together. In my opinion, it's because they make everything so personal. I get it. How can it not be personal, right?

But here is the reality: It's not personal. It's business. Not only that, the goal and vision should be the same: success. Based on that, I am sure we can agree most couples want success. It's the path to success that they struggle with, along with how to manage each other without offending each other.

The first thing that stood out to me was their level of understanding and knowledge of the industry and market they were going after. They are an amazing team and couple. Because of their talent, heart and now, a plan, I predict they'll find great success.

What's new for 2014?

Prior to the first workshop we attended [in September 2012], the photography part of our business was averaging just over 30 bookings and an average of \$1,250 per wedding. Gross sales were around \$40k, and we had no sales averages because we rarely did engagement sessions. When we did, we just handed over the CD of images. It is actually painful to talk about this and look back on everything after having you mentor us for the past 14 months. So many mistakes and lost opportunities.

Today it's like another world for us. It's actually pretty funny. Our new starting price is double what our average wedding was last year. Our average photography package is \$3,500, and our average engagement sale is around \$1,000. And we already have 22 weddings booked for 2014. Since Sal's workshops, we have maintained our number of weddings booked but we've more than tripled our photography income. We are offering an experience, products and service that no one is really seeing in our market, and our clients love us for it. We have put more effort into our bridal shows and our branding. We are now establishing our business as a boutique studio. We are moving into a new and bigger studio space, and couldn't be more excited for 2014. We are focusing on becoming a brand and getting our name out there. We purchased a new professional logo through Visual Lure. We are building a new website, leveraging social media and are now ready to add to our team. In January we will launch our new brand, Leonardo Volturo Photography.



What are some of the things you took away from training with Sal?

We took everything your team taught us to heart, and implemented it. It came down to deciding who we wanted to be in this industry, what type of clients we wanted and how to get in front of them. Working with you guys provided us the knowledge and the tools to set and achieve goals we never even thought of.

What was the biggest challenge you had to overcome?

Fear and confidence. We can't just raise our prices. What happens when the phone stops ringing and we can't pay our bills? Are we good enough to be at this price point? Oh, and of course, the fear of not giving away the digital negatives. Out of fear, we implemented the changes slowly. While we were ready to just dive in, we could not see past the risk of raising our pricing and changing our business model. Because we did it slowly, we've had to learn from those mistakes, and we should have just jumped right in.

Anything else?

For those of you out there who are lost, afraid and don't know what your next move is or should be—whether you're just starting out, are a growing studio or a veteran scared to change—you need to get out of your own way. Once we stopped making excuses and put Sal's system fully into practice, everything almost instantly changed for the better. We are now able to be more selective with who we take on as clients. We can now determine when a bride is “not our bride” and let her go. We choose brides who are “our bride,” which means our work speaks to them and our personalities click. They value us, and we value them. Our clients now become friends, and they have trust in us. It's a completely different feel than before.

Before, we had to take on clients solely because we needed the money. All of you out there going back and forth in your mind and afraid to make that change... You need to make it happen. We wish we would have never made all of our mistakes—or at least made them much sooner, learned from them and made the adjustments. But we all have one advantage. Sal has gone through everything we have and ever will, learned from it and made the adjustments. And the best part is Sal and his team are here to share all of that information with us. Without meeting Sal and Taylor, who knows where we would be in our business, or if we would even be in business? But we do know that we would not be here. And we will be forever grateful.

Sal and Taylor have also helped us in regards to running a studio as a couple. Our personalities are very similar to theirs, and so we've learned to work to our strengths. After our second workshop with them, they recommended that we take personality tests. Seeing each of our strengths and weaknesses in black and white really helped us identify what each of us should be focused on and in charge of. It also helped us to not expect something from an area that the other is weak in.



For those of you out there who are lost,
afraid and don't know what your next move is...
**you need to
get out of your own way.**

JONATHAN'S  PORTRAITS

www.JONATHANSPORTRAITS.com

Jonathan and Wendy are one of my favorite case studies because of the massive struggles and huge relearning curve they faced. I have found it very difficult to work with studios that have been around for seven years or more. The reason is simple. They know it all. And no matter how desperate they are, they are usually unwilling to change. They can't get out of their own way. The challenge was on.

I will never forget my first Skype call with them. Of course, as with most technology, there is always a glitch. Well, this one started with a frozen screen for like five minutes, with me making some awful face. If you have ever done video chat, you know what I am talking about. Not the first impression I was looking for. We figured it out, and Wendy will forever have blackmail material on me.

I was surprised when they turned out to be 100 percent open to my ideas, concepts and business changes. They were willing to let go of everything they knew. I was blown away. Their fast success is nothing short of brilliant. An amazing comeback story.

What's new for 2014?

How do I summarize 32 years and two generations of business history into a very short article? I will try!

After having a million-dollar family-owned second-generation photography business fall into an all-time low of \$200,000 of sales after a family member destroyed the family name, we decided to move from Milwaukee to Chicago to rebuild our personal and business lives, in 2006. Seven years later and never getting past the \$140,000 mark, we decided that we missed family and Milwaukee too much to stay in Illinois.

March of 2013, we made a goal to move back to Wisconsin just in time to have a display at the state fair starting August 1. We wanted to do a massive overhaul of our image, pricelist and offerings, and had a strategy that would get us up and running fast. So we hired Sal after watching one of his classes on creativeLIVE.

Looking toward 2014, we have a clear marketing plan and are ahead on bookings for this time of year. Our sales average is up 5 percent already from 2013. Our new website, VisualLure.com, is getting close to launch, and we have a very good feeling that we'll finally reach our goals. We have both become better photographers, business owners and business partners.



I am going to give you two baselines, one for 2012, the other for January through July 2013. All the numbers from August 2013 forward are direct results of Sal's coaching.

2012:

Worked out of home studio in Vernon Hills, Illinois
 Total sales: \$102,710
 Total sessions: 145
 Average overall sale: \$708

January through July 2013:

Worked out of small home studio in Vernon Hills
 Total sales: \$58,197
 Total sessions: 74
 Average overall sale: \$786

We were pretty much on track for equaling 2012. In August of that year, we had an expo booth at the Wisconsin State Fair, which attracts an estimated 100,000 people each day. We collected 395 names and emails for marketing purposes, and booked 53 sessions. We also did a one-day wedding show in October, where we collected 741 names and emails, and booked a \$3,000 wedding.

Where we are now:

All sessions on location (no studio yet)
 Total sales: \$41,590
 Total sessions: 45
 Average overall sale: \$924

Breakdown:

Average overall \$924;
 family groups having the highest average at \$1,245
 Weddings: one photographed at \$2,500,
 one booked at \$3,000
 High school seniors: 12 at average sale \$667

2014 will definitely bring an increase in number of sessions, especially high school seniors and glamour and weddings. We will implement a new pricing structure and benefit from a more flexible price list that has more upsell

potential. We forecast to have an average overall sale at \$1,200, and to book a minimum of eight sessions per week.

What was the biggest thing you took away from training with Sal?

Jon: Be bold. Don't set a ceiling in a goal, because you will reach it. It's OK to overshoot and let the client experience the pain of the "take away" when choosing not to order the poses. It's OK to change long-time team members, such as accountants, when they are no longer serving the greater good of the business.

Wendy: It's OK to overshoot. Tight, middle, wide. Photograph architecture and scenery, and put a person in it to increase your sale. Cloud-based appointment scheduling. It's always about marketing and getting the name out. Say yes, you can do it. Then go home and figure out how! Be bold. Do it and then ask for forgiveness if you need to.

What was the biggest challenge you had to overcome?

Jon: Being committed to our success. Be the pig, not the hen.

Wendy: Fear of not being good enough. I still struggle with this. Letting go of comparing myself to other photogs. Getting comfortable with the new price list.

Anything else?

Jon: Let the naysayers do their thing while you leave them in the dust! Accept that the bad things are really good things in disguise.

Wendy: Never be too proud or insecure to ask for help. If you really want it, never give up. Or else come clean with yourself in that you really don't want it bad enough to do what it takes!

Be Bold.

Don't set a ceiling in a goal,

because you will reach it.

TONY CALARCO

- P H O T O G R A P H Y -

www.JUMPVISUAL.com

When I met Tony, he was well established as a full-time photographer in the field of architectural and real estate photography. He's also half owner of Jump Visual, a visual marketing company for real estate and other industries. He was looking to add some additional personal revenue, around \$30k, to his bottom line.

Tony was trying to figure out whether to go after seniors or weddings. He knew he wanted to expand the business, but wasn't quite sure how.

What I love about Tony is that he gets it. And by "gets it," I mean he is a very logical thinker. That's a very important business trait to have. All too often, people make emotional decisions. Trust me, you cannot run your business on emotion. It rarely works.

The other thing that lends to Tony's success is his ability to understand complex concepts. As a student, he's willing to challenge me and ask questions, which keeps me on my toes.

Tony didn't end up going after seniors or weddings, but our time together was well spent. He took that business knowledge and applied it to his current ventures.

What's new for 2014?

After exploring and experimenting with different genres of photography for about a year, I had honed in on what I wanted to do and how to approach my photography career moving forward. I was not happy attempting to shoot seniors, weddings or pretty much anything on the noncommercial side, but did like photographing people and details from events. My challenge was to encapsulate all of this without looking like too much of a jack-of-all-trades.

I decided to fix what I was currently doing, and added culinary photography to my expertise. Two-plus years later, I feel like I have the game plan down, and will be tweaking it and working on the mistakes and weak points for many years to come. I usually tell people I shoot architecture, food and the people who work in those industries. Most importantly, I am a happier photographer/businessman, and have a great team behind me.

My company, Jump Visual, has had great growth this year, with sales and number of photo shoots up significantly. My total gross sales are up over \$45k since I met Sal, and projections for next year are even better.

I am also proud to announce my first major published photography project: *Small Bites Big Flavor*, by chef Eric LeVine. Eric is a Food Network Chopped Champion and a good friend. We also plan to launch a new sister company called the Culinary Design and Development Group (CDDG for short).

What was the biggest thing you took away from training with Sal?

The branding overhaul I did both for my business site and my personal portfolio site sent me on a path (ups and downs, revisions and more) that helped get me to this point. The wealth of information that he gave me also helped me decide what I liked about photography and, more importantly, what I did not like.

What was the biggest challenge you had to overcome?

My biggest challenge to this day is handling the business side and having a positive attitude with it. I want to be a photographer, and staring at a spreadsheet is not my idea of fun! I still battle procrastination and nonexcitement when it comes to that, but I make lists of what I want to accomplish, and try not to overcomplicate the business work.

Anything else?

Try to analyze what you are doing, what you like about it and what you want to change. Keep your business and photography life streamlined, and constantly work on what is important to you. I try not to overcomplicate my personal or professional life as much as possible. It doesn't always work out, but I think I handle the chaos a bit better when my baseline is near normal. I also try to apply this to my photography. I only use equipment that I really like. I have sold off a lot of unnecessary equipment to other gear hounds.



© Tony Calarco

Keep your business
and photography life streamlined,
and constantly work on what is
important to you.

The logo for Robbie Canter Media (RCM) is displayed in a decorative, L-shaped frame. The letters 'RCM' are written in a large, elegant, cursive script. Below the script, the words 'RC MEDIA' are written in a clean, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the frame, the website address 'www.ROBBIECANTERMEDIA.com' is provided.

RC MEDIA

www.ROBBIECANTERMEDIA.com

What can I say about my boy Robbie? The first thing I noticed about him is that he does not follow direction real well. See, we gave him a list of questions to answer to fit with the Q&A format of this article. Robbie decided to do his own thing, and that's why I have nothing but love for him. He marches to his own beat. Being a successful entrepreneur requires the audacity to challenge everything and blaze your own trail.

Robbie is young, brash, cocky, talented, goal-oriented and, best of all, a dreamer. Hmmm . . . kinda reminds me of someone else I know. It's no wonder I've got nothing but love for this young up-and-comer. Below is his story in his own words.

Hi! My name is Robbie Canter, of RcMEDIA. This is my story of getting "Sal Cincotta'd."

Almost two years ago, after a four-year break from the photo world, one of my fellow photog friends told me about this little thing called creativeLIVE. I went to the site and came across this loud, crazy and super-outgoing Yankee named . . . drum roll, please . . . Sal Cincotta. After watching a rebroadcast that night, I spent hours online searching out more of his videos, even the ones of him sitting on the chair in the river. . . .

Back then, my business was shit. I was working a full-time job like most of us starting out. I was one of those "shoot and burners" on the side. *Ew*. That's painful to say out loud. I was charging \$100 for a one- to two-hour session and giving my customers (good God, this is embarrassing) over 100 fully edited images on a DVD with freakin' "pics" written on it with a damn Sharpie! What the hell was I thinking? And my package system? What package system? Everything was the same price! \$100! I was doing maybe six shoots a month, taking any job that came my way. Six hundred extra dollars a month was great! Right?

I knew I had to absorb everything they were dishing out. It was a metric crap-ton. After the first day of the workshop, I had a million new ideas running through my head about how to push my business to the next level, and how to be a real professional photographer. I was scared. Lindsay was terrified.

On day two of the workshop, Lindsay was sitting next to Taylor off set looking for small studio spaces for us while we were on air. We needed a place to meet clients and sell artwork. A month later, we signed the lease on a 200-square-foot room. On November 1, we took over the whole building. We grew from a meeting room to a true studio in a matter of months. It's possible, people.

One of the first things I implemented was the SEO strategies Sal taught us. I renamed images on my website and used keywords so Google could actually find my site. It paid off. We are now in the second spot on page one of Google for "gig harbor wedding photographer." It takes time, and you can't give up on it. It's too important! It is so rad to have clients come in and say, "I found you on Google."

The next big thing was branding and pricing. I know what you're saying: "What do you mean, 'What's my brand?'" I could never charge \$20, \$30, or \$50 for an 8-by-10! This guy is drunk!" Stop right there. Yes you can. Value your business and yourself, build a brand you *love*, and your clients will value you so much more. They will refer others who will do the same. Your brand becomes familiar to your clients, and they feel good about doing business with you. Today our logo is very well known around town. People see our shirts and say, "You guys shot so-and-so's wedding!" Give your business an identity.

Sal and creativeLIVE also brought us down to San Fran a few months later for the second installment of Sal's business course. Only to add to the flame he started for us in Seattle.



© Robbie Canter Media

I shot one wedding that first year with Lindsay, who is now co-owner of RcMEDIA, for 12 hundred bucks. Split. For a 12-hour day. Afterward we handed over the 800 edited photos on a disc, which had taken 40 hours to edit. I knew then that it was no way to run a business, let alone a successful one. I just didn't know how to turn it around.

I kept watching those videos, and it all slowly started to make sense. I also realized how absolutely insane Sal is. He is like a tiger: hungry, fierce and never lets anything slow him down. I knew this is what I was missing. That drive. That swift kick in the ass. I was *damn* sure I wasn't going to paint cars the rest of my life.

It was in that moment that I decided to go for it. No more DVDs for portrait sessions. I was going to sell prints only. I started using an online gallery and ordering website. It put me on the right path of selling prints, but was nowhere near ideal. I knew it needed to be done in person, but not at my house, and not at Starbucks.

A couple weeks later, I saw Sal was coming back to Seattle in April to host another creativeLIVE workshop. I decided to submit a video to try to get on air with him. A few beers later, I uploaded a funny video to the channel. Two days later, I got an email from the man himself. Was I really going to be on air with Sal and Taylor Cincotta? Holy crap!



+ ROBBIE CANTER CONTINUED

We all struggle with pricing. Listen to Sal and those of us who have learned from him firsthand. He taught us his pricing theory and all about the psychology behind the sale. I was never a salesman and never wanted to be, but if you set it up right, the products, backed by a strong pricing structure, do the talking. The rest falls into place. “Honey, for only \$200 more we get a \$400 canvas, too!” (That kind of stuff.) Use the best print labs and sell only top-notch products. Offer an experience that goes above your clients’ expectations.

We worked 18-hour days hammering it all out. Website. Facebook. Branding. Pricing. Products. Sales. Marketing. Now we are living our dream. (Still 18 hours a day.) It’s working. No more \$100 DVDs. Ever.

My advice to you is:

- Stop giving out digital images! Seriously.
- Go for it! Figure out where you want to be one year from now, and go balls to the wall. Do not let anything stop you.
- Learn from people who are where you want to be. Sal has been pivotal in our success. We found the drive, he gave us a map and a swift kick in the ass.

In our first year, we barely made \$8k. Mainly due to \$100 DVDs . In 2014, we are projected well over the \$100k mark. Our portrait sales have increased tenfold. We now average \$1,000 in sales per portrait session, and we are shooting *a lot* more than the six per month. Our weddings have seen the most improvement: from one in 2012 at \$1,200 to 17 in 2013 at a \$2,500 average. Our 2014 goal is 25 at an average of \$4,500. Our amazing growth is a direct result of what Sal and his amazing team—Taylor, Alissa and Laurin—have taught us. We could never send enough wine to thank them.

I’ll end with this: Focus on yourself. Do not focus on your competition. Are there other photographers in town? Yeah, a few, but I won’t let them distract me. Set goals and go get them! Much love and good luck. ■



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 - 9 | Cyclone Battery Packs
 - 10 | Canon 600 Speedlites
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 - 13 | Flashlight
 - 14 | Memory Case
 - 15 | Canon 24mm 1.4
 - 16 | Canon 85mm 1.2
 - 17 | Canon 100mm Macro 2.8
 - 18 | Canon 16-35mm 2.8
 - 19 | Schneider 80mm 2.8
 - 20 | Schneider 28mm 4.5
- *not shown: canon 50mm 1.2, schneider 55mm 2.8*



MYTH #342

MEDIUM FORMAT CAMERAS DON'T SHOOT IN LOW LIGHT



PHASE ONE IQ160 • ISO 800 • f/2.8 | 1/640



100% CROP



STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD WITH DIGITAL MEDIUM FORMAT

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PHOTOSHOP +++ADDING TEXTURES



WITH DAMIAN BATTINELLI



BY DAMIAN BATTINELLI

Rusty metal, cracked paint, and smoke used as texture overlays can add an artistic feel to images. I'll show you how with a few simple steps in PhotoShop, you can take an image from zero to hero with the right texture. I'll also walk you through a trick that allows you to keep the texture off your subject's skin without erasing it.

I photograph different textures when I stumble upon them around my home, neighborhood, and while on vacation, and save them for later use. I have a ton, and have so much fun using them. Sometimes I even set out on texture-seeking excursions. I keep a folder labeled Texture and break it down into subfolders: Cracks, Wood, Rust, etc.

COLOR TONES

One of the most important things to keep in mind while using texture overlays is that they usually have plenty of color tones. If you're using a shot of a green cracked wall, for example, the green affects the color of your image. You need to decide if that will help or hurt your image, but this can be decided in PhotoShop.

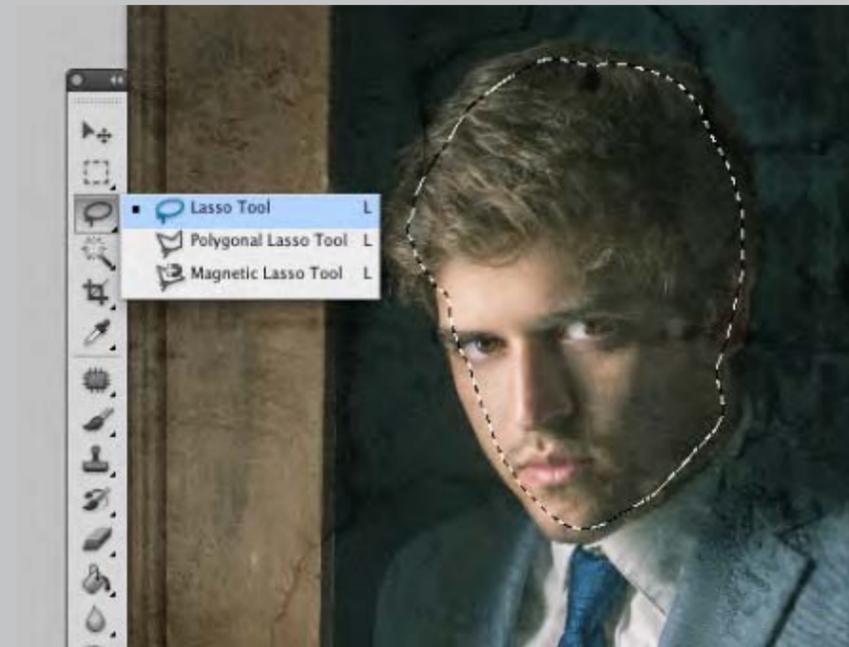
Sometimes the color from the textured image adds an appealing look after it's applied. On the other hand, if you're looking only for the actual texture without any color effect, you need to convert the texture to black and white. I keep the original color versions in my library, and convert them as needed.



NOW FOR THE FUN PART!

With your texture layer selected, play with your blending modes (Fig. 1). These are found within the drop-down menu in the Layers panel. You can also use the shortcut option to shuffle through the modes by holding down Shift + Option or Alt, and pressing the plus (+) or minus (-) keys. Make sure the texture layer and the Move tool are selected beforehand. Play with these modes until you've found the desired effect. I typically use Screen, Overlay or Soft Light, but you're the artist, so be creative.

This is also when you need to decide whether keeping the color tone in your texture helps or hinders your image. If it's affecting your image in a way you don't like, simply press Cmd or Ctrl + Shift + U to desaturate the texture. This removes the color tones so that only the actual texture shows.



PRO TIP:

REMOVE TEXTURE WITHOUT ERASING

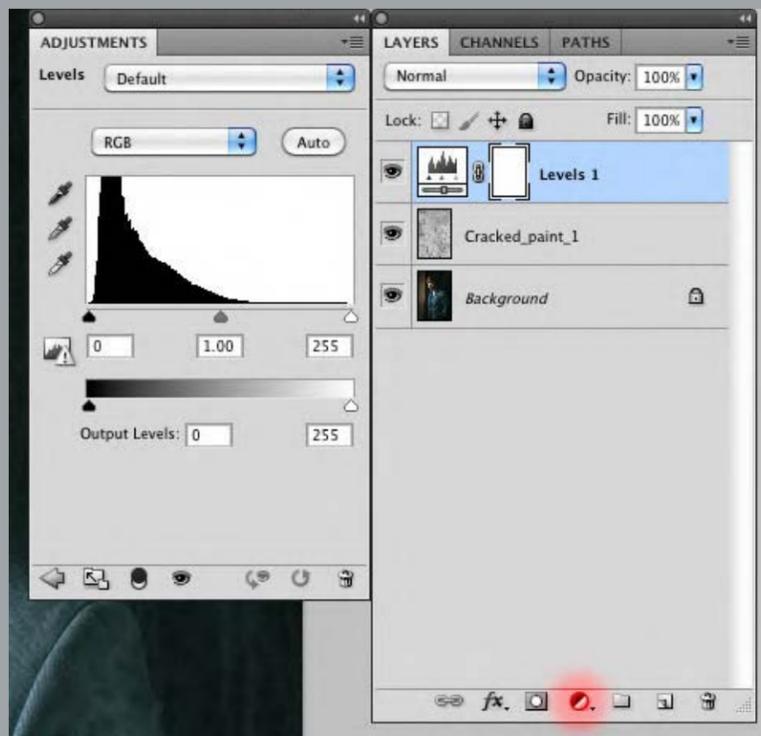
Speaking of blur, here's a great tip for removing the texture from a subject without using the Eraser tool. You'll notice that using blending modes with your texture layer affects the tonal values of your image, making it quite a bit darker or lighter.

When you erase the texture, it often doesn't quite match the look of the rest of the image's tonal values—which may be the look you're after. But if you want it to look uniform, use the Lasso tool to select the area just inside the edges of your subject.

Soften the selection by going to Select > Refine Edge. Drag the Feather slider to the right to soften the edge, and press OK.

With the area still selected, go to Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur; drag the slider all the way to the right; and press OK.

You'll notice the selected area is now free of texture and the tonal values haven't been affected! I've found this to be a much better option for most of my work. ■

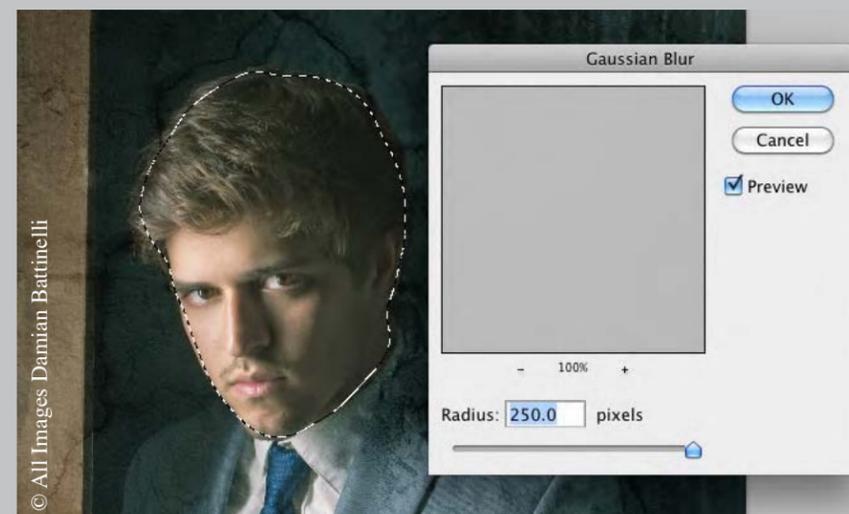


FINE-TUNING

Once you've chosen the mode you like, you can start to fine-tune the look. Again, there's no one correct way. Let your creativity guide your choices.

There are a few things you can do to change the look of the texture and remove it where you don't want it to show. Try adjusting the levels by selecting the texture and adding an adjustment layer (located at the bottom of your Layers panel). Play with the sliders to adjust the tonal range, which reacts differently depending on the mode you've chosen.

You can also invert the texture by going to Image > Adjustments > Invert (or, for the shortcut, press Cmd or Alt + I). Your blacks become white and whites become black. Once again, you can go back to your Levels adjustment layer and play with the tonal values. You can also blur the texture by going to Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur, and then moving your slider to the right, which increases the amount of blur to lessen the detail in the texture





Here's an example of adding textures using the steps we just reviewed.



SHUTTER

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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!*



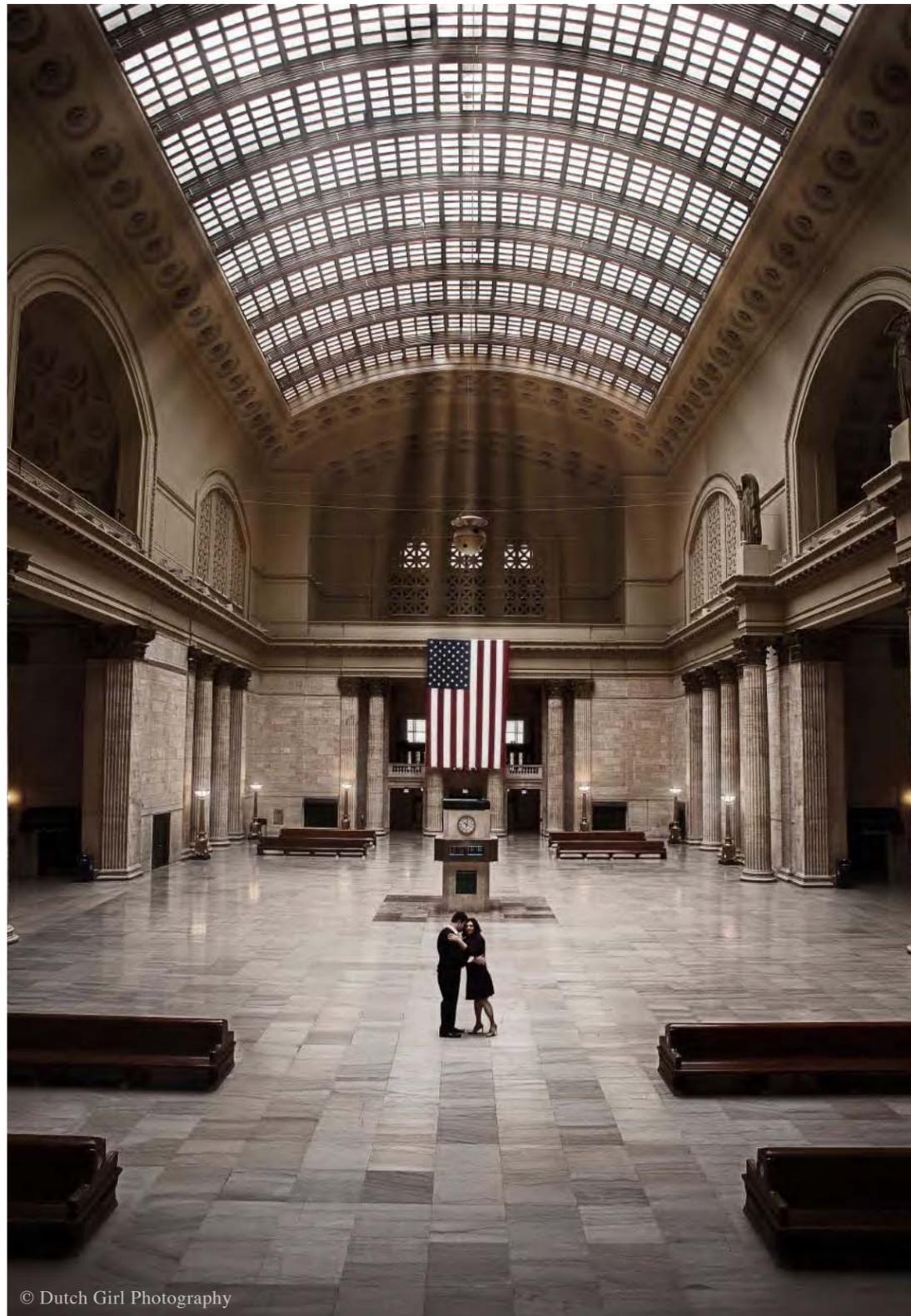
© Alex Logaiski



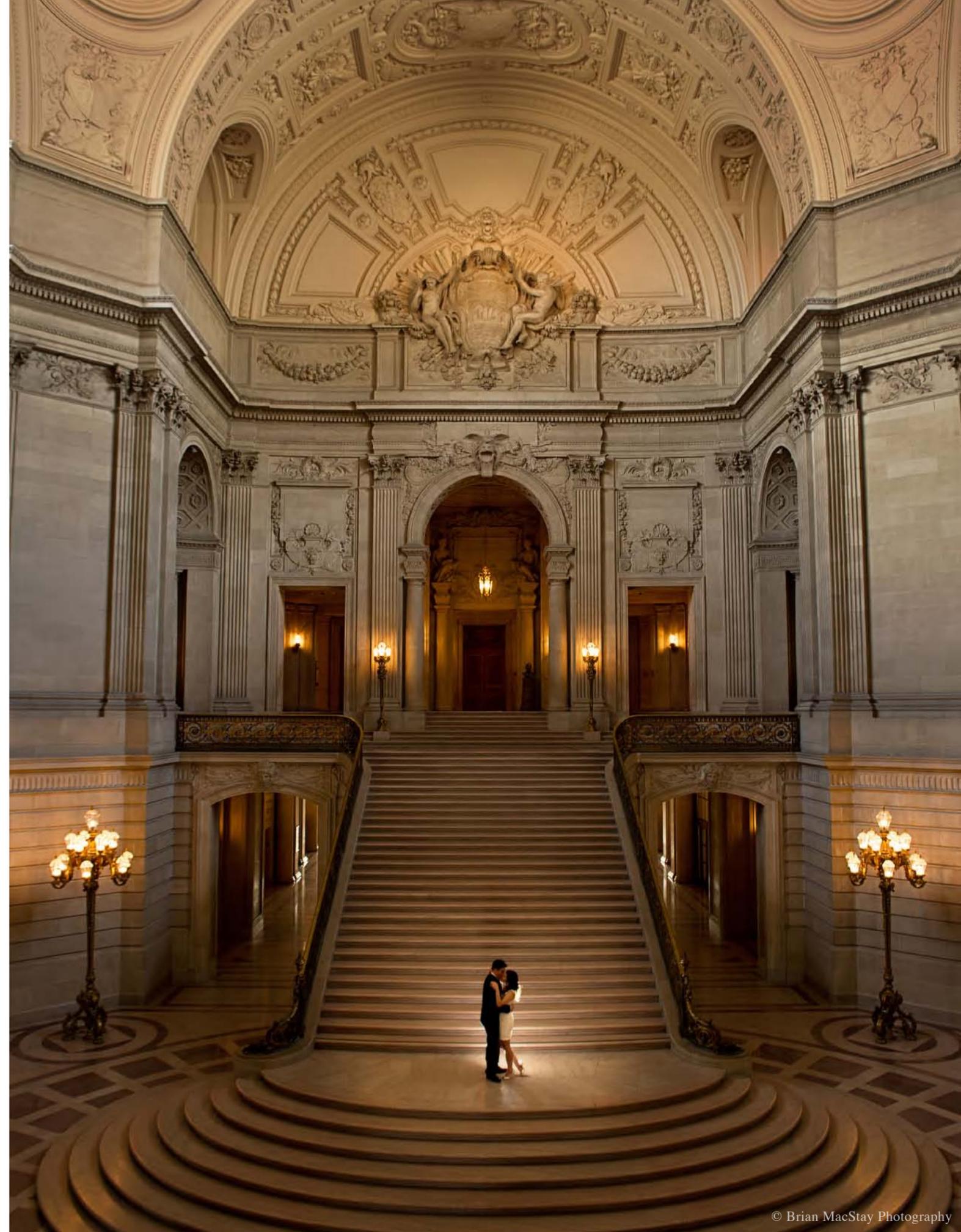
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© Brian MacStay Photography





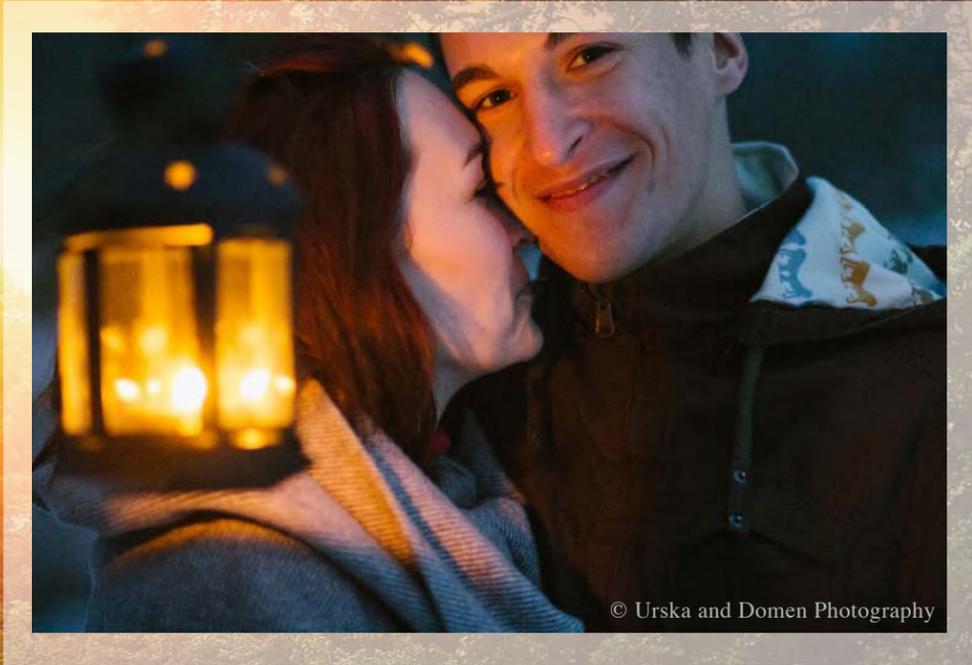
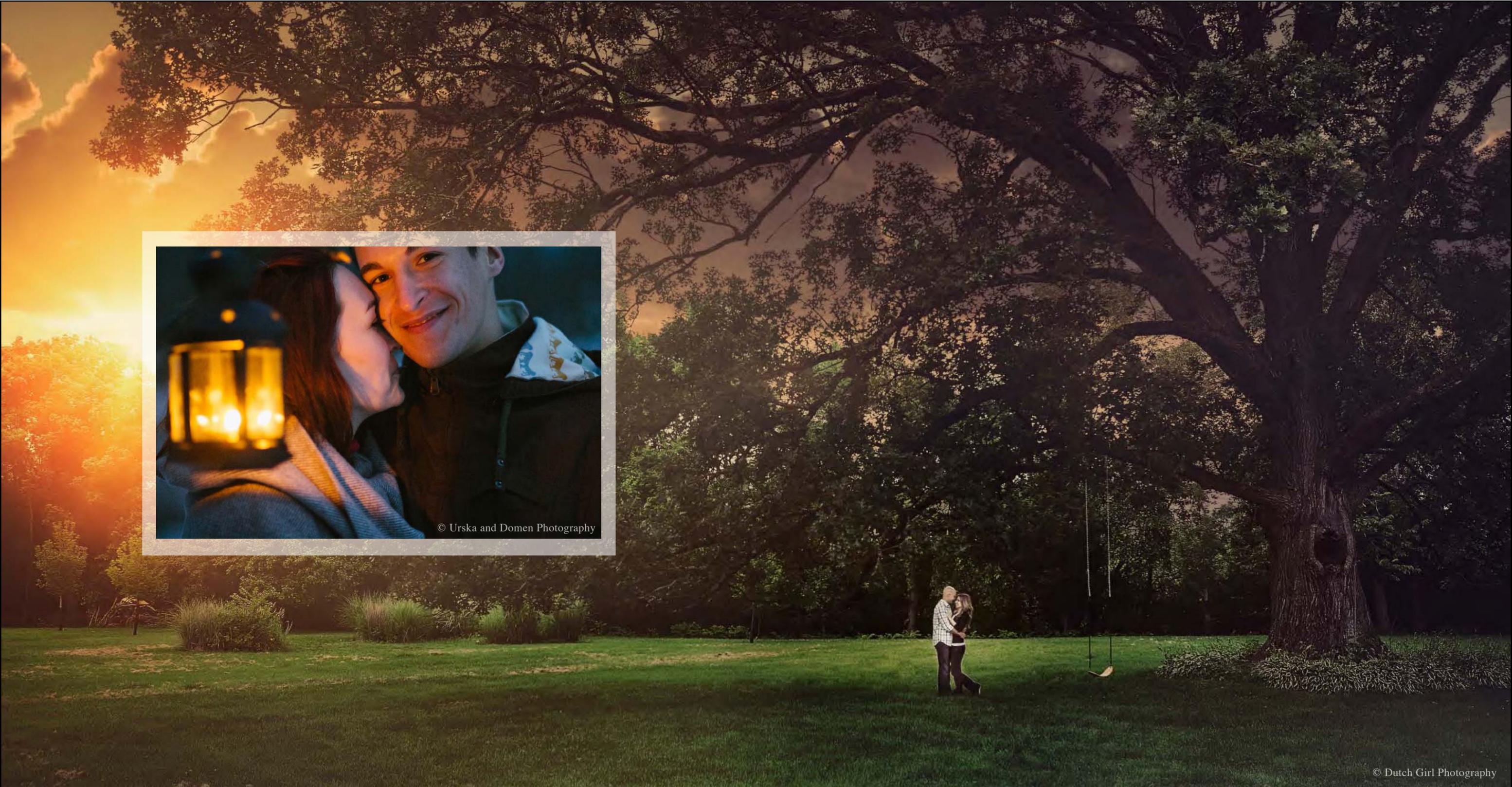
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© Ryan Eda Photography



© Rachelle Erickson



wait for
ENDANT

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2013
Harley Davidson
Street Guide



Thank you to everyone who submitted this month & a special congratulations to Jeff & Jewels Photography whose image we chose for our cover this month!

>>WATCH FACEBOOK.COM/BTSHUTTER FOR OUR CALL TO SUBMIT IMAGES NEXT MONTH!<<

Introducing Frayed Edges co-designed with Sal Cincotta

ANIMOTO PRO'S NEWEST VIDEO STYLE



MAKE YOUR CLIENTS FALL IN LOVE WITH THEIR IMAGES ALL OVER AGAIN

Sal Cincotta has teamed up with Animoto's motion designers to produce Frayed Edges—a brand new Pro-exclusive video style featuring grungy textures coupled with vibrant bursts of light.

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PICTURE PERFECT

CRITIQUE

WITH ROBERTO VALENZUELA





© Jeff & Jewels Photography



© Randall Roberts



© Nate Creamer



© Jaime Davis



© Maplewood Photography



BY ROBERTO VALENZUELA

I have always been an advocate for the invaluable educational opportunity that image critique can bring. **I think it's one of the very best ways to understand your work.** Having your photos critiqued can bring to the surface both weaknesses and strengths you might not even know are there. Equipped with this knowledge, you can work on those aspects that need fine-tuning. Most of the issues with images fall into four main categories: technical, location, background and pose/expression.

Every month, I will critique five images chosen by Shutter from reader entries.

The best part is that I will critique them on video, and use PhotoShop to draw callouts to show you where the issues lie. It'll be as if we were sitting in the same room going over your images together. I love this industry, and I have dedicated many years to pushing my fellow photographer friends to invest in their education and prioritize their skills and mastery of the art. ■

>>WATCH FACEBOOK.COM/BTSHUTTER FOR OUR CALL TO SUBMIT IMAGES NEXT MONTH!<<



A romantic wedding photograph of a couple in a field of tall grass. The groom, in a dark suit, is leaning his head against the bride's forehead. The bride, in a white wedding dress with a long veil, is looking down. The background is a soft-focus green forest. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

5 WARNING SIGNS

THAT YOU NEED A CHANGE

WITH VANESSA JOY



WATCH MY VIDEO FIRST THIS MONTH BEFORE READING MY ARTICLE!



BY VANESSA JOY

We all get in ruts that sap our creativity and motivation. Sometimes these ruts are just passing phases, or they're a result of spending far too much time comparing yourself to other photographers' highlight reels on Facebook. As Theodore Roosevelt said, "Comparison is the thief of joy."

Sometimes these ruts are trying to tell us something, and they shouldn't just be ignored, swept under the rug or hidden with a smile. A rut can turn into a pit if you're not careful.

Different forms of ruts can indicate the need for different kinds of change. Sometimes it's a small change like in your workflow or pricing structure. Other times it's a big change that may affect your career on a larger scale. The key is to identify what kind of rut you're in so you can work backward from there to make a change.

1 YOU'RE NOT GETTING ANY NEW WORK

This can be an indicator of a number of things, but it's most likely because you're not marketing your business well or your work needs improvement. Marketing in this industry can be a tough nut to crack. There are seemingly countless ways to go about it. A marketing plan that works for one business may not be a good fit for another business.

Marketing should be at the top of your to-do list, and you should be reinvesting approximately 10 percent of your profits into marketing. Finding a marketing plan that works for you involves some trial and error, but now's a perfect time to try something new to help you get out of this rut.

If you need to improve your work, keep up the continuing education in mastering your craft. Honing in on your photography skills must be an ongoing effort that never stops. Not only will technology keep changing and force you to adapt or die, but photography is also an art form that needs constant reevaluation and reflection in order to continue improving. If you're not getting new work, it may be because your photography just isn't on par with consumer standards of what constitutes professional photography that's worth paying for. Be brave enough to ask your friends, clients and colleagues a simple question: "What about my photography can be improved?" It may be painful to hear, but you and your photography will grow through it.

2 YOU DON'T HAVE A LIFE

You probably didn't get into photography to work nonstop, miss your son's soccer games, never spend time with your spouse or see your mother. During certain times of the year, that may sound like your life, but if this is the status quo all year round, it's time for a change. You should be running your business, not letting your business run you.

The first thing you probably need to do is outsource some of your work. This may mean hiring a post-production service like Evolve Edits, or taking on an intern to help around with the office work. You're probably thinking you can't afford it. Just figure out what outsourcing something will cost per job, and raise your prices by that much. Outsourcing your post production on your weddings will cost you roughly \$200 per job. Raise all your wedding packages by \$200. It's not even that big of a price increase, but you'll see a huge increase in the quality of your life—and that's worth much more than \$200.

Can't figure out what to outsource? You should outsource things that fall into one of three categories:

- >> Outsource what you hate doing
- >> Outsource what you're not good at
- >> Outsource what slows you down



3 YOU HATE WHAT YOU DO

This one is a biggie because it can be pretty damaging to the quality of your work as well as your life. You should never, ever hate what you do in life. That being said, you may sometimes never want to pick up a camera again because you're overworked, or maybe it's the end of wedding season, or you're not making enough money, or you're constantly dealing with difficult clients. It can be any number of variables, but if the feeling has been sticking around for quite some time (like more than four months), you need to figure out *why* you hate it. There's no use stomping your feet in an "I don't wanna" temper tantrum. That's just a waste of your time. Instead, identify specifically what you hate to do, and use that to start a list of things that you need to change.

If your list of reasons why you hate being a photographer or visual artist gets longer than the Great Wall of China, this may be an indicator that you are ready for a career change. More on that later, but for now, instead of focusing on that long list of "I hate," write a list of "I love" on which you list the things that you do like about your current profession.

4 YOUR CLIENTS ARE MAD AT YOU

We all have the occasional difficult client, but if you're finding that your clients are upset more than 10 percent of the time, it's time to take a step back and look at what you may be doing wrong. Are there things you can change?

For example, if your clients are upset with the turn-around time of your products, how can you speed that up? Perhaps they're not happy with the products you're providing them and it's time to research a new fulfillment lab or album company. How your clients feel about you directly affects your quality of life (assuming you're stressed out by your clients being upset), as well as new business and your overall income. Not sure what needs to change? Try conducting an anonymous survey through Survey Monkey, and ask them what you could do to better their customer experience.

5 YOU CAN'T PAY YOUR BILLS

Whether you're in photography to make a serious profit or to just to keep your business afloat, you have bills. Bills to put food on your table, bills to buy newer photography equipment, bills to buy the albums that your clients ordered.

If you're not paying your bills, or making just enough to scrape by and be stressed about not being able to scrape by next month, you've got a huge problem. Luckily, this problem can be solved with math. Well, math and a little confidence. The solution is very simple: Raise your prices. Maybe you need to go back to the drawing board to reconstruct your pricing using the "1/3 cost of sales" rule, or making sure you have a "pull-through" into your high packages. Or maybe you just need the confidence that your work is worth raising your prices to make ends meet. A great way to do this is to ask some colleagues in your area and with your same target market to review your packages and pricing, and make suggestions that can help both you and your business thrive.



WHAT IF I HAVE MORE THAN ONE WARNING SIGN?

If more than one of these warning signs resonated with you and your business, then you know it's time for a big change to get you, your business and your life back on track. If more than two of these resonated with you, it may indicate a very big change is needed. For example, if you can legitimately say, "I'm not getting any new work, my clients are pissed at me and I hate what I do," then maybe it's time to consider a complete career change. There's simply no need to be unhappy in life. It's to no one's benefit for you to stay that way.

Regardless of whether you're weighing a big or small change here, you'll need to muster the courage to take the first step. I have three routes to achieving this: meditation, sharing and support. Take time to meditate, pray and/or ponder your changes. Think about what you want to change and how you'll do it. Then, share your plans with those who are closest to you, like family, friends and photography peers. Sharing your plans aloud makes them more real, and motivates you to follow through since you'll be accountable for what you've said. Finally, seek support from those same people. Ask them to follow up with you on your changes, and to encourage you along the way. A strong support system is a key motivator.

Making a change requires you to set some goals for yourself and your business in order to successfully see the change through to completion. ■

ALSO:

Check out *Lori Nordstrom's* article on goal setting in this issue for more on setting and achieving goals.

Soul Society Collection

Inspired by Jerry Ghionis



Jerry Ghionis is considered one of the Top Five Wedding Photographers in the World. Designer of the Ice Light and Ice Society founder, Jerry's natural photographic talent is matched only by his business acumen and his ability to teach and inspire others. Jerry and his wife Melissa's most recent passion is their non-profit charitable organization named The Soul Society, created with the specific purpose of caring for poor, homeless and orphaned children.



Inspiration from our amazing customers drives us to keep developing the best possible products we can! Inspired by the exquisite design sense of Jerry Ghionis, we were honored to create the Soul Society Collection line of custom Flash Drives and Packaging for Photographers. As Jerry imagined, this product line has been developed for Photographers to deliver digital images to clients stylishly. We are also pleased to announce that 10% of all purchases will be donated to Jerry & Melissa Ghionis' Soul Society Charitable Organization!

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pexagon



GOING
ABOVE
& BEYOND

WITH BLAIR PHILLIPS



BY BLAIR PHILLIPS

The year seems to have flown by, due partly to the hustle and bustle of our busy lifestyles. I get the feeling I'm not the only one who feels there's hardly any down time anymore. And if *we* feel this way, you can bet our customers do too. As life continues to grow more hectic, professional picture sessions tend to get pushed to the very bottom of the to-do list. This means we have to go above and beyond this year to really leave our mark on clients. It's not solely about creating great images anymore.

→ NEW TOYS!

This is the best time of year to decide on some new equipment. Hopefully you have had a prosperous year and need to expense a little money. Photographers get really comfortable with what they have used in the past. There's nothing wrong with that—as long as you sprinkle in some new ideas and equipment every once in a while.

I just added five new lights and modifiers to my lineup, which has forced me to learn some new techniques. To maintain my competitive edge, I want to create images that have never been seen from my studio, which shows potential clients that I am always evolving. Maybe a new set or backdrop is the inspiration you need to light a fire. Challenge yourself to learn at least three new lighting techniques over the next couple of weeks so you can continue to grow your brand. This makes shooting more fun and inspiring.

GOING ABOVE & BEYOND

→ COFFEE ISN'T JUST COFFEE

One of the best investments we made recently was to add a Keurig coffee maker to the office. When a senior comes in with the family, we always offer up a cup. It's funny the number of people who say no just because they think it will be too much trouble. I physically hold their hand and lead them over to the coffee selections on the counter, and show them how easy it is. This has allowed me the time to slow down, take a minute to break the ice and make clients feel they're not just a number.

Another thing I do to make clients feel great about coming in is a walkthrough. Take a few minutes to walk them through the studio so they will know what to expect, and to get them excited about the upcoming shoot.

→ COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Communication is one of those most basic aspects of social etiquette that seem to be slipping out of favor in business. Clients absolutely love it when you show them you genuinely care about what's going on in their life.

I photograph several sessions in the studio throughout an average day. Doing so leaves me very little time to speak with clients who come in to pick up an order. I am always aware of when a client walks through the door. No matter what I am doing in the studio, I excuse myself to run up front and tell clients hello and sincerely thank them for their order. This simple act of kindness and appreciation reassures my clients that they made the right decision by coming to my studio. Start your new year with better time management that allows you to speak to everyone who comes through your door. No matter how great your staff may be, it's your name behind the images.

→ PRICING VS. PROFIT, MOTIVATION

When the amount of profit you're making doesn't match the effort you're putting in, it's time for some soul searching. You'll quickly lose motivation if you're not getting paid what you're worth. I experienced this several years back. I was shooting tons of sessions, but my bank account did not reflect the amount of effort I was putting in. It took a while for me to notice the effect that had on my life. It not only began to affect my business life, but I carried it home too.

My customer service was beginning to fail due to the lack of motivation I began to let overcome my life. I spent two whole days doing a complete overhaul of my pricing. This was a very scary event in my life, making these huge changes. The very next day, after we started following the new pricing structure, I soon became aware that my business seemed to have turned a new leaf. Suddenly I was very excited to come to work again, because I knew I was going to get what I felt I was worth. This put me in a state of mind that enabled me to give great customer service.





→ CUSTOMER SERVICE CURVEBALL

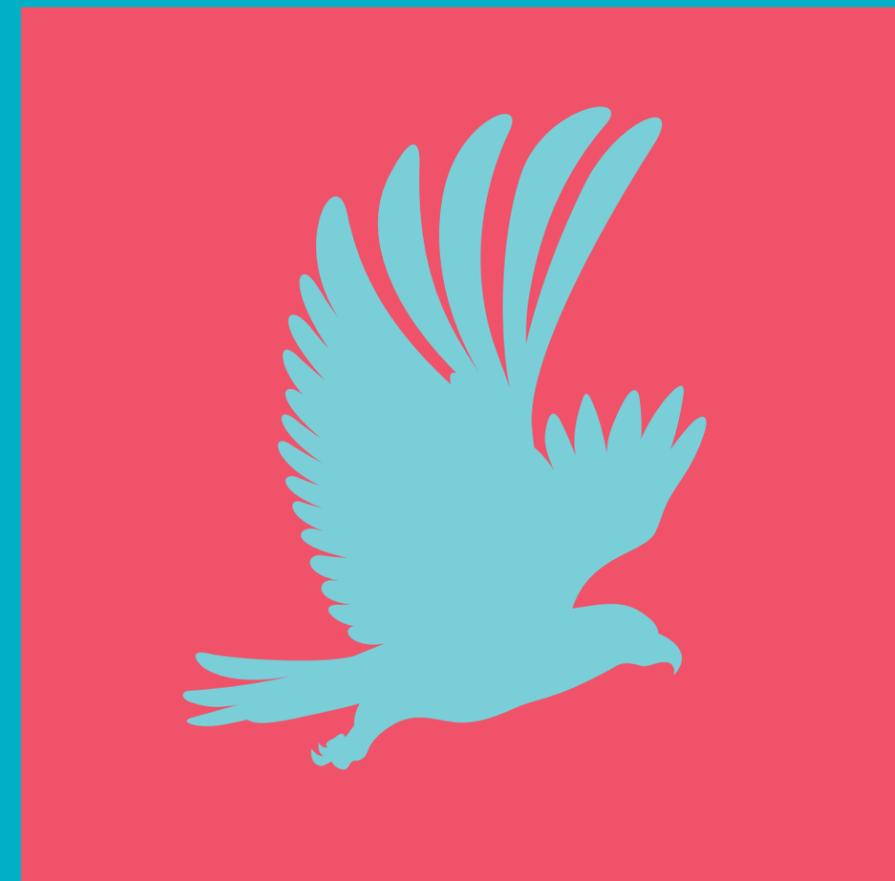
It's easy to get so caught up in wanting to please clients that you allow yourself to be pressured into going against your own basic business instincts. Don't get caught in that trap. What you do for one, you must do for all. Set company policies and stick to them. If you allow certain clients to pressure you into breaking those policies, your business can suffer.

When this happened to me once, a couple of clients got together and talked about their images. I had let one client break the rules, but not the other. This caused a negative chain of events that forced my hand with the other client as well.

The moral of this is to set your policies and stick with them. ■

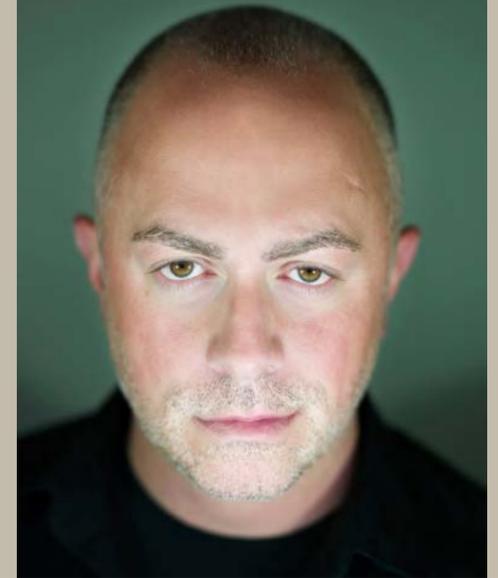


Amazing Songs. Reimagined.



songfreedom.com/covers

songfreedom



SALCINCOTTA

www.SalCincotta.com

LOCATION: O'Fallon, IL

PASSION: Weddings & Seniors

Sal was exposed to photography at a very early age and has been in love with our craft ever since. He can still recall the smell of the chemicals in his aunt's makeshift dark room in the basement. However, a career in photography would elude him for over 20 years.

Graduating from one of the top 25 business schools in the country, Sal pursued a corporate career with his photography becoming more of a hobby. In 2007, he left corporate to pursue his dream of a career in photography and has never looked back.

Today, Sal Cincotta and his wife Taylor own and operate a very successful studio in the St. Louis metro area. Salvatore Cincotta Photography, Salvatore Cincotta Films, and BehindtheShutter.com.

Focused on wedding and senior portraiture, Sal has had the opportunity to shoot for corporate clients like Nordstrom's and the St. Louis Cardinals to elite sports celebrities and the White House, photographing President Obama.

FEATURED ARTICLES

Finding Success Doesn't Have To Be Hard PT 2
Q&A with Sal Cincotta



© Salvatore Cincotta Photography



DAMIANBATTINELLI

www.damianbattinelli.com

LOCATION : Plattsburgh, NY

PASSION : Composites

In 1995, my father bought me a 35mm SLR. We drove down to NYC to pick up the camera and I will never forget walking past the twin towers and looking up. I remember almost falling over trying to look up! They were massive. I would have never, in my wildest dreams, known that those same towers would have such an impact on me one day.

I took photography all through high school in Peru, NY. Developing, enlarging, dodging, and burning. I was smitten. I also attended Champlain Valley Educational Services (CV-TEC) for graphic design in Plattsburgh, NY. This is where I would find another passion, design! I was introduced to Adobe Photoshop. I learned that if I scanned images into a computer, I could manipulate them.

I graduated from Peru in 1999 and entered the military one month later as a graphic designer at the 105thAW, Stewart ANG in Newburgh, NY. I attended Defense Information School (DINFOS) at Ft Meade, MD. Only a few short years later, I met up with those same towers from years earlier, no longer massive but scattered at my feet. I spent 2 weeks at ground zero days after the attacks. Fast forward several years, 13.5 years of service to be exact, I exited the military.

By this time, my knowledge of digital photography, design, and editing were strong. I was able to take my love of art and photography to a new level and launched my business. I am still learning and growing as a photographer/artist and embrace this rebirth with open arms.

I am an Associate and Mentor for Peter Hurley's PH2PRO

FEATURED ARTICLES

Photoshop: Adding Textures





SKIP COHEN

www.SkipsPhotoNetwork.com

LOCATION: Sarasota, Florida

Skip Cohen is President/Founder of Marketing Essentials International, a marketing consulting firm specializing in projects dedicated to photography, primarily photographic education. (www.mei500.com)

He is also the founder of Skip's Summer School (www.mei500.com), the founder of the Akron Photo Series (www.AkronPhotoSeries.com), and the co-founder of GhostRighters (www.GhostRighters.com), a content resource for professional photographers needing help with editorial content, web re-design and marketing. His blogs, SkipsPhotoNetwork.com and PhotoResourceHub.com, is read by thousands of professional and aspiring photographers. On May 21, MEI launched PhotoResourceHub.com a new content site for professional photographers with video, podcasts, blog posts and an ongoing calendar of industry events.

He has been a recipient of ADL's Torch of Liberty Award and Foto Imagen Magazine's Man of the Year Award and in 2001 he received PPA's Legacy Award for his work in support of PPA Charities. His images have been published in a long list of photographic trade magazines, including: Rangefinder, Shutterbug, Foto Imagen, Studio Photography and Design, Petersen's Photographic and The Hasselblad Forum. He's also competed in print completion in both WPPI and PPA's national conventions.

In addition, he has written six books on photography: The Art of Wedding Photography, The Art of the Digital Wedding and The Art of People Photography with Bambi Cantrell: Don Blair's Guide to Posing and Lighting Body Parts: and Wedding Photography from the Heart, co-authored with celebrity wedding photographer Joe Buissink. Book number six, GoingPro, co-authored with Scott Bourne, was released by Random House in October 2011 and remains on the photography book best seller list at Amazon..

FEATURED ARTICLES

5 Foundation Builders for 2014



MICHAEL CORSENTINO

www.CorsentinoPhotography.com

LOCATION: Petaluma, California

PASSION: Lifestyle Photography

Michael Corsentino is an award-winning, contemporary wedding and portrait photographer. He is an American Photo 2013 Top 10 Wedding Photographers nominee, Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Lightroom expert, Capture One Pro Certified Professional, author, contributing writer for Photoshop User Magazine, Shutter Magazine and Resource Magazine, speaker and international workshop leader.

Based in Northern California, Michael has been shooting digitally since 1999. His love affair with the magic and science of photography is more passionate today than ever. Stylish, dramatic, edgy and modern images set Michael's photography apart. His award-winning photojournalism, fashion and editorial styles have made him an in-demand portrait and destination-wedding photographer. Passionate about education, Michael loves to share his lighting and posing secrets, post-processing techniques, time-saving workflow strategies and shooting philosophy at workshops and speaking engagements.

FEATURED ARTICLES

That Edgy Sports Look





KRISTY DICKERSON

www.KristyDickerson.com

LOCATION: Atlanta, Georgia

PASSION: Weddings & Engagements

Kristy Dickerson is the founder and CEO of Fisheye Connect (www.fisheyeconnect.com), professional laundry sorter, CFO of multitasking, wedding photographer, mom of two, and a wife who is never wrong... never. Upon earning her degree in finance and business management, she started her photography business after the birth her first son. As if she didn't already have enough on her plate, in June 2010, Kristy launched Fisheye Connect for other photographers, like herself, looking for quality education. Fisheye Connect allows aspiring photographers to connect with photography industry experts by location, instructor or interest. It is a searchable database for photography workshops/ events, along with services that help instructors manage the marketing and financial aspects of their businesses. Merging Kristy's business sense with her passion, Fisheye Connect has become a thriving community of photographers learning and growing together.

FEATURED ARTICLES

2014: Challenge Yourself





VANESSA JOY
www.VanessaJoy.com

LOCATION: Freehold, New Jersey

PASSION: Weddings

14 Years of photography, eight years of shooting weddings, three years of business ownership (not to mention five college degrees)

Vanessa is a trilingual (English, Spanish and a bit of French), award-winning photographer, living with her husband, Rob Adams, in the great state of New Jersey. She has studied photography since 1998 and has spent most of her life running a successful wedding photography studio that shoots 35 weddings a year (at a premium price). In her first three years of business, Vanessa achieved honors such as: 20+ publications in print magazines (including three cover photos and interviews in *PDN* and *Rangefinder*), a Grand Imaging Award from PPA and a second-place wedding Image Award from WPPI.

Vanessa enjoys speaking across the country at venues such as CreativeLIVE, Clickin Moms, WPPI, Imaging USA, PPA-related conventions and personal workshops. She is recognized for her talent and even more for her business sense. Vanessa's clients love working with her, and industry peers enjoy learning from her generous, informative and open-book style of teaching.

FEATURED ARTICLES
5 Warning Signs That You Need A Change



LORINORDSTROM

www.NordstromPhoto.com

LOCATION: Winterset, Iowa

PASSION:

Babies, Families, Weddings & Seniors

Lori Nordstrom {M.Photog.Cr., CPP, ABI} owns a boutique studio specializing in children and family portraits located in the picturesque town of Winterset, Iowa. Lori is a PPA approved business instructor and marketing consultant for Studio Management Services. Sharing with other photographers and small business owners is one of the things she most enjoys. In 2009 Lori started Photo Talk Forum, an online community of photographers working together to grow their businesses.

Lori has always had a heart for children and believes in giving back. She has run a successful fundraising campaign for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society (LLS) for 10 years. In 2011 Lori began her own non-profit organization, Dando Amor which focuses on helping orphaned children in Ecuador. Lori and Travis Gugleman hit their goal of raising \$100,000 the first year of Dando Amor existence. You can find out more about going to Ecuador or making a donation at www.dandoamor.org

FEATURED ARTICLE

Setting Goals





BLAIR PHILLIPS

www.BlairPhillipsPhotography.com

LOCATION: Landis, North Carolina

PASSION:

Seniors, Babies, Families & Weddings

Blair's team includes four employees plus Blair, who photographs 20 to 30 weddings and 500 studio sessions per year. Blair has a passion to teach photographers how to express themselves in ways they can't find with traditional training. He speaks to and teaches thousands of photographers and digital artists each year at national conventions and expos including WPPI, Imaging USA, SYNC Seniors, and various PPA conventions.

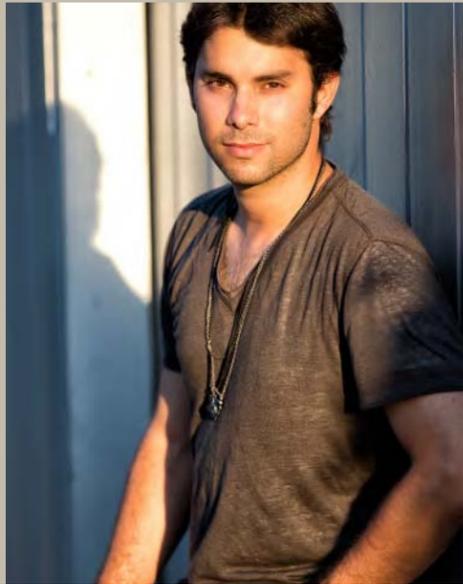
Blair and Suzanne's "eclectic elegance" style and positive energy educate and inspire photographers, while allowing them to stay true to themselves. This young team pushes the envelope daily with creativity and positive inspiration. As a side note, after 10 years of marriage, Blair and Suzanne welcomed Ava Blair Phillips into the world on August 3, 2011.

FEATURED ARTICLE

Going Above and Beyond



CONTRIBUTORS



ROBERTO VALENZUELA

www.robertovalenzuelaphotography.com

LOCATION: Beverly Hills, CA

Roberto Valenzuela is a wedding and fine art photographer based in Beverly Hills, CA. Roberto Valenzuela is a 70-time International award winning photographer and three-time International first place winner. He serves as a photography judge for the 16x20 WPPI (Wedding and Portrait Photographers International), PPA (Professional Photographers of America), and various European photography competitions. Roberto's private photography workshops and speaking engagements are held worldwide. His goal is to encourage and inspire professional photographers to practice their craft when not on the job, as any other artist must do so in order to perform. He is an active teacher and platform speaker at WPPI and has served as the keynote speaker at other International photography conventions.

FEATURED ARTICLES

Picture Perfect Critique



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