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PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

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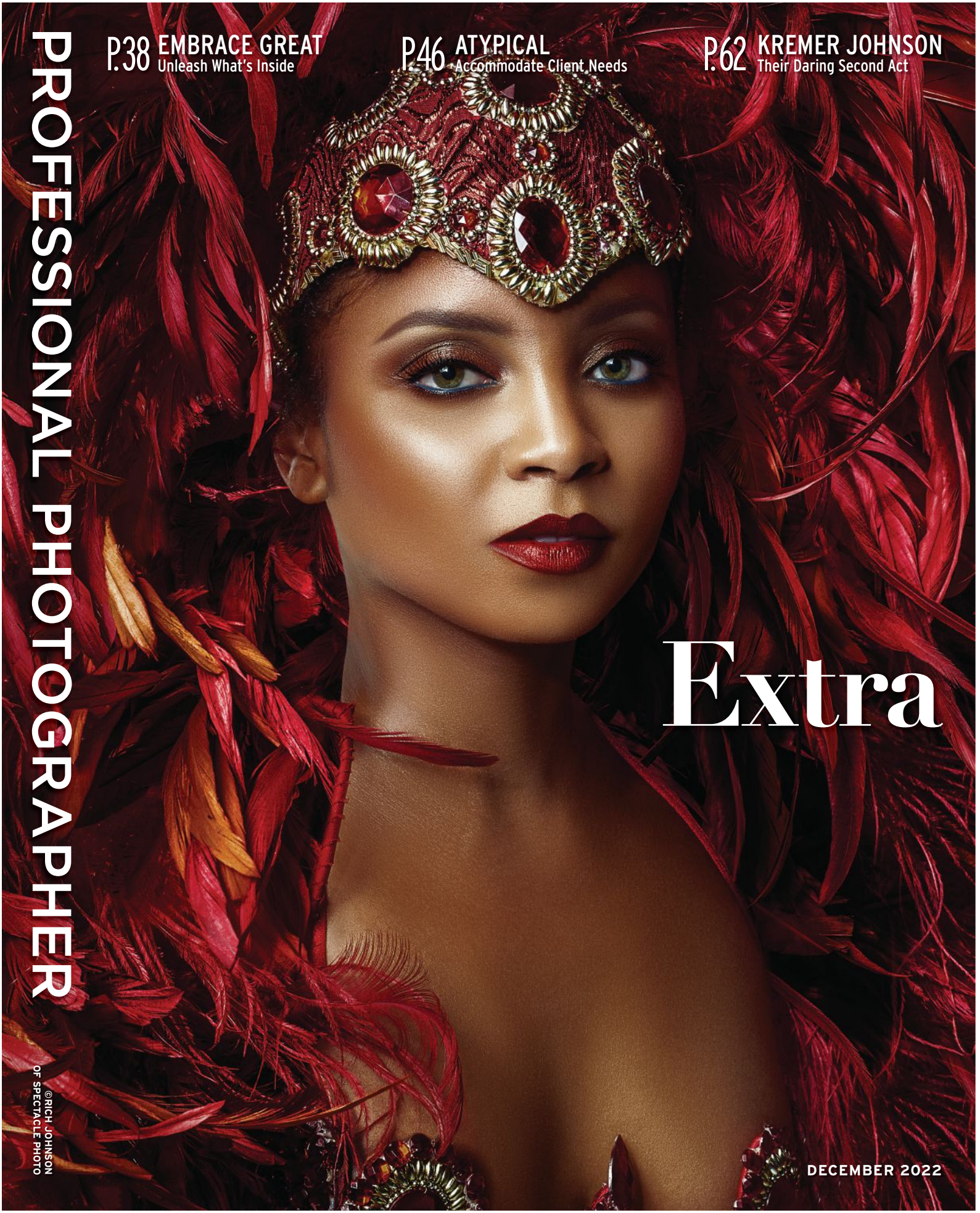
Unleash What's Inside

P.46 ATYPICAL
Accommodate Client Needs

P.62 KREMER JOHNSON
Their Daring Second Act



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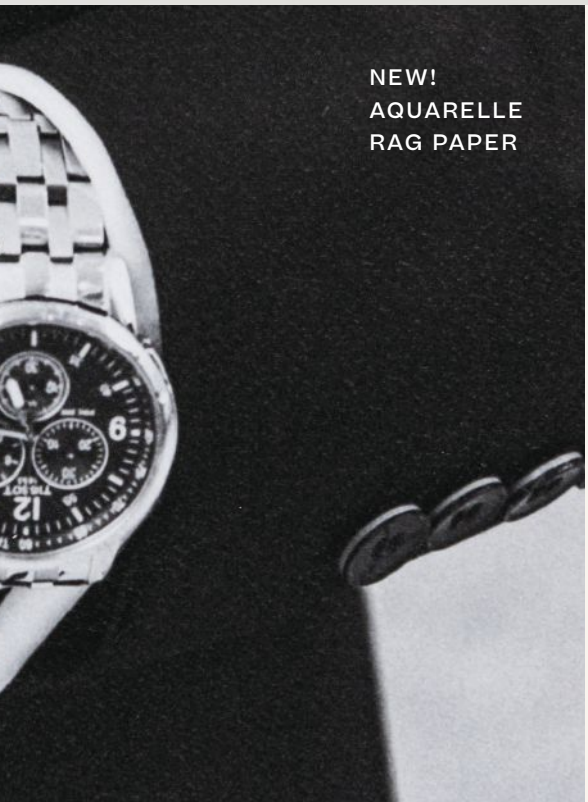

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Senior Editor Joan Sherwood, jsherwood@ppa.com
Senior Editor Amanda Arnold, aarnold@ppa.com
Art Director / Production Manager Debbie Todd, dtodd@ppa.com
Editor-at-Large Jeff Kent, jkent@ppa.com
Contributing Editor Ellis Vener

Director of Sales & Strategic Alliances Kalia Bonner, kbonner@ppa.com, (404) 522-8600 x248
Western Region Sales Brian Sisco, bsisco@ppa.com, (404) 522-8600 x230
Eastern & Central Region Sales Francine Osora, fosora@ppa.com, (404) 522-8600 x211
Advertising Sales Specialist Curistan Neal, cneal@ppa.com, (404) 522-8600 x223

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PPA MEMBER SERVICES

Professional Photographers of America, csc@ppa.com, ppa.com, (800) 786-6277

EDITORIAL OFFICES

Professional Photographer, 229 Peachtree Street NE, Suite 2300, Atlanta, GA 30303-1608 U.S.A., (404) 522-8600

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Your Best Adventure

RUNNING TOWARD FEAR

Tight spaces, judgment, public speaking, rejection, failure—what are your greatest fears? I'm so afraid of heights that I can't climb more than halfway up a six-foot ladder before the back of my neck breaks out in electric prickles. It's a physical reaction I can't control no matter how much I've tried. Oddly, that fear never dampened my fascination with skydiving and my desire to drop out of an airplane at least once. Eighteen years ago, circumstances aligned in such a way that I was faced with a now-or-never decision: Skydive pronto or forget living that dream. It was good that I was forced to make the choice on a tight timeline. Without that prompt I would have continued to relegate my vision of falling through the air to the theoretical "someday."

> "Whatever you're most scared of, that's the thing that's the most fun."

Everything about that day remains vivid in my memory. As the small airplane climbed in ever higher spirals, I was surprised that I felt no trepidation, although I was sitting just feet away from its open door. It wasn't until I was kneeling on the edge of that doorway and looking at the ground so very far away that the back of my neck signaled danger. I was ready to balk. But out I tumbled (with an experienced skydiver strapped to my back who would do all the work for us—I'm no dummy). Falling at 120 mph, I was literally breathless. It was difficult to inhale the air that was pushing at me so hard. Freefall didn't feel like falling. It felt like floating, like being held aloft on a column of air. With the ground 14,000 feet below me, there was no visual feedback that I was getting closer to it. Suddenly, the parachute opened, and there was no sound, just a beautiful view of fall's colors below me and the tiny dots representing other skydivers around me. The experience was all I'd dreamed of and more.

During the short flight that took us to altitude, I had chatted with a nearby companion who was an experienced skydiver. He was also a spelunker and rock climber, I learned. "What do you get the most excitement from doing?" I asked him. "Whatever you're most scared of, that's the thing that's most fun," he said. Granted, he may have been an adrenaline junkie, but I've always remembered him for sharing that bit of wisdom. It hadn't occurred to me that fear could germinate excitement and growth.

In this issue, Jeff Kent interviews PeriSean Hall ("The Possibility in Unpredictability," page 38.) "Your greatest opportunities are out on a limb," she says. What a great way to visualize stretching ourselves in order to attain our goals. If we don't try things we haven't tried before, if we don't feel our fears and push into them, we cannot change our circumstances. If we're going to reach the sky, we have to let go of what's holding us down. •

Jane Gaboury
Director of Publications

CORRECTION
The information published in the October issue regarding cover photographer David Carr's equipment was incorrect. Carr used a Nikon Z 7 camera with a Nikkor 500mm f/5.6 lens. Our apologies for the mistake.

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FOREGROUND

By Amanda Arnold

Wide Open Spaces

COWBOY LIFE

Wagonhound, a 300,000-acre historic working cattle ranch in Wyoming, is the subject of photographer Anouk Krantz's new book, "Ranchland: Wagonhound" (The Images Publishing Group). Krantz's collection of dramatic black-and-white images convey daily life on the ranch, including the changing of the seasons and the work of cowboys and cowgirls.

Krantz, who was born in France and has resided in New York City since the 1990s, has published two other photobooks documenting the American West. "Back home in New York I feel empowered, woven into the fabric of a mighty civilization that has conquered the elements and triumphed," she writes in the book's introduction. "However, to stand here at Wagonhound, among breathtaking beauty while exposed to the elements and the grand scale of the American West is to be humbled and reminded of our vulnerability, and survival skills quickly kick in. These instincts are part of everyday life here on the frontier." •

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5 Photoshop Techniques

STREAMLINE AND EXPERIMENT

Adobe Photoshop can seem huge and overwhelming, but don't be intimidated to try new things with the program as you're editing, says Shannon Squires-Toews, M.Photog.M.Artist.Cr., CPP.

FOCUS ON LEARNING THE TOOL RATHER THAN LEARNING A PROCESS.
"So often, we want to watch one instructor and learn how they do something specific, focusing on the step-by-step," says Squires-Toews. "Stop doing that. Instead, focus on the function of the tools they are using. This way, when you run into a challenge in Photoshop, you know many ways to address the challenge because you know what the tools can do for you."

DON'T NEGLECT BLENDING MODES.
Found both in the layer setting and the brush setting, they're powerful features, says Squires-Toews. Her go-to blending modes are Multiply, Screen, Soft Light, and Overlay.

Hear Shannon Squires-Toews at Imaging USA
imagingusa.com/speakers

CUSTOMIZE YOUR WORKSPACE.
Hiding features and tools that don't apply to your style makes it easy to access the tools and features that are most important to you. For example, Squires-Toews never uses the pen tool, so she hides it. To customize your tool bar, navigate to the bottom of it, right click, then click Edit Toolbar. The same applies to any window you want open while you work. To edit windows, navigate to the window tab at the top of Photoshop, click the dropdown window, and add a checkmark to each window you'd like visible in your workspace.

NAME YOUR LAYERS AND CREATE LAYER GROUPS.
"I will be the first to admit that sometimes I get carried away in my art and I forget this step. However, when you are 112-plus layers into a composite, it sure is a time saver."

HAVE FUN.
Don't be afraid to play and make mistakes. "You might just stumble onto a process that makes your work stand out among the masses," she says. •

Let the Creativity Flow

STOKE THE IMAGINATION

Sometimes we get into a rut and need to infuse our work with new creativity, says Kevin Dooley, M.Photog. Dooley will deliver the educational session "Loving and Living Life Through Creativity," at Imaging USA in Nashville next month. Here, he offers tips on how to keep creativity alive in your work and in your life.

Clear negative ideas from your mind to create space for happy thoughts. Happy thoughts make you a more creative person.

While listening to music, close your eyes and meditate on images you'd like to create and how you're going to create them.

Go on walks in nature, looking for shapes, patterns, textures, and types of lighting you could mimic in your work.

Eat brain foods like berries, salmon, and oats, and exercise regularly.

Do positive things for other people, which raises the endorphins in your body, making you happier and more creative. "I have heard that if you compliment 10 to 15 people a day, it increases your lifespan that many years," Dooley says. •

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Making a Senior Team Work

ORGANIC MARKETING LETS CLIENTS DO THE TALKING FOR YOU

As a high school senior portrait photographer, Jenn Lewis, Cr.Photog., CPP, considers her influencer team of clients to be the foundation of her business. It provides organic marketing that ensures her images and behind-the-scenes videos will wind up on TikTok, where her target market lives. It's also a great way to build relationships with teens and their parents, says Lewis, who will teach a pre-conference class, "The Business of High School Seniors," at Imaging USA 2023.

Her team includes freshman through senior teens from several high schools in and around Winston-Salem, North Carolina. One of the perks they get are themed photo sessions several times a year. Themes she's used include local fair, New Year's Eve, black lights, prom, and sunflowers. After each session, she shares a handful of group and individual images with each team member, which they post on social media, tagging Lewis in the credit.

"When they join the team, they are committing to be a senior client with me when the times comes, so the team helps with not only marketing but filling my calendar," she says. •

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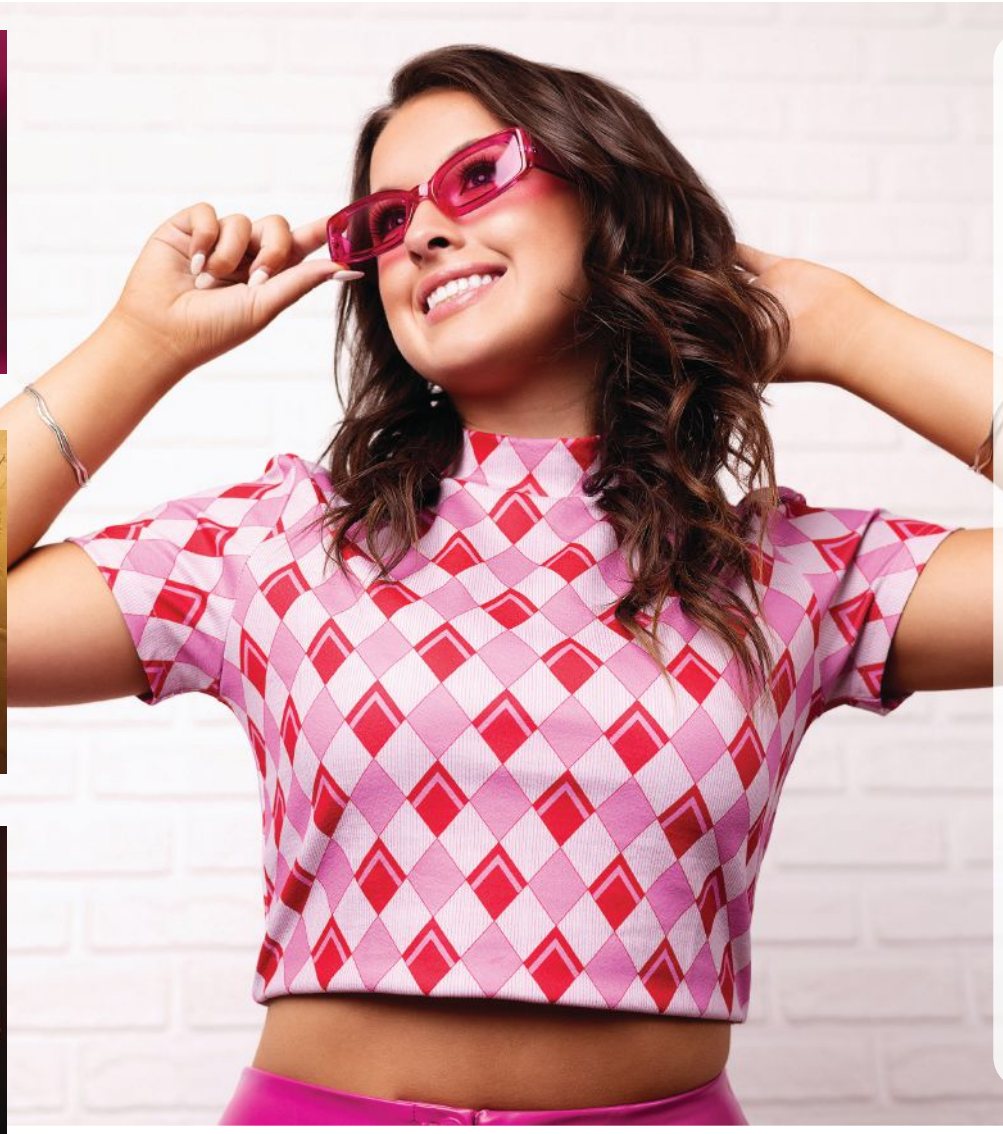

MAXIMIZE YOUR SENIOR TEAM

- **Charge a fee to be on the team.** No one values what they get for free.
- **Use the team sessions as opportunities to try new things.** Gen Z teens love to collaborate on new ideas.
- **Offer a bring-a-friend session.** Once a year, give team members' friends an opportunity to meet you and see if they'd also like to join.
- **Make it fun.** "If we're shooting in my studio, I order pizzas, and the fridge is always stocked with sodas and water. They play music, we talk, and there's often a dance party." She lets teammates pose each other and help one another with hair, jewelry, and outfits. "And we make cool photos."

Learn from Jenn Lewis
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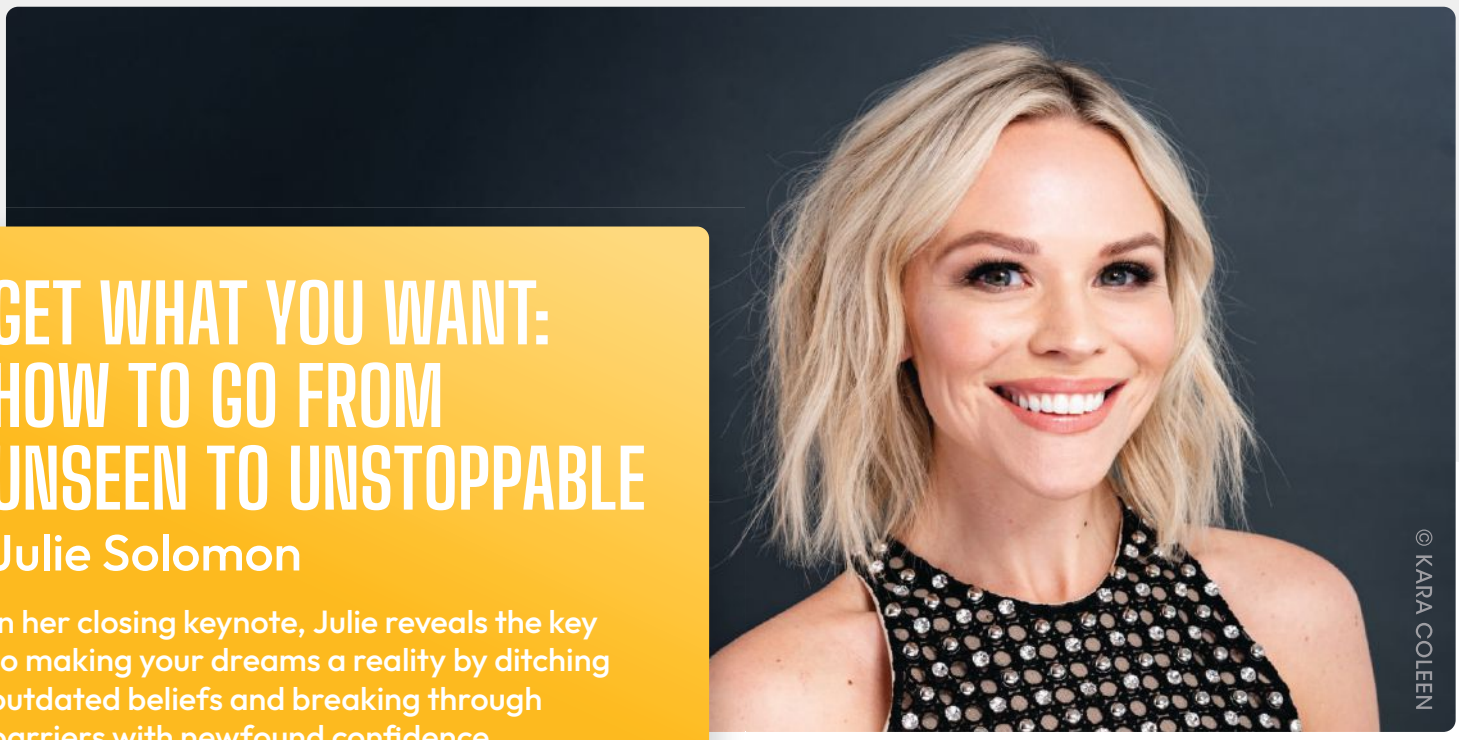

GET WHAT YOU WANT: HOW TO GO FROM UNSEEN TO UNSTOPPABLE

Julie Solomon

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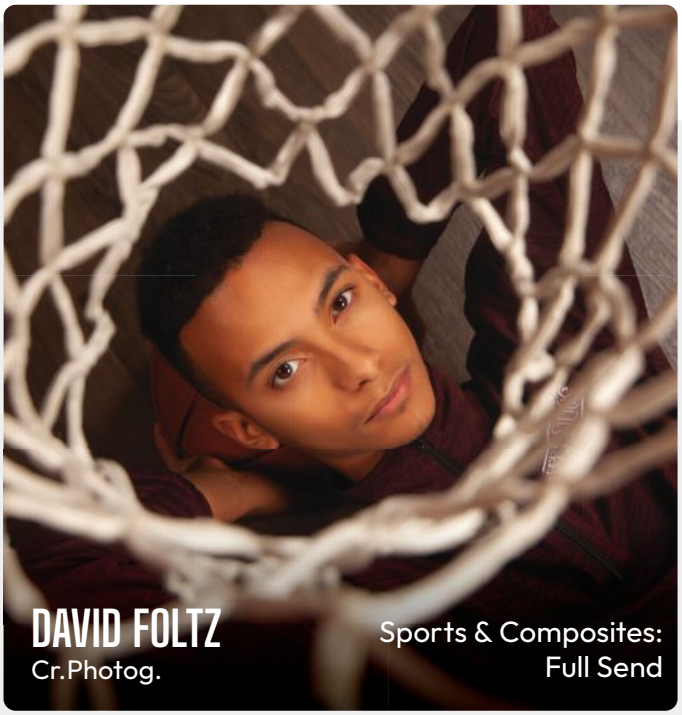

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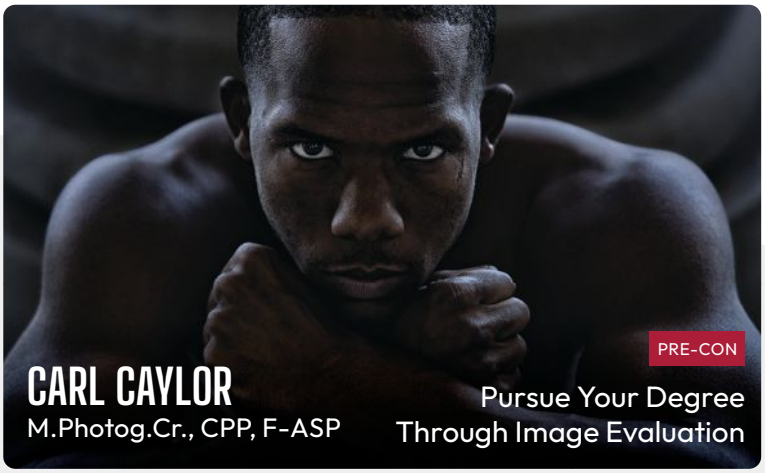

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Is Busy Always Best?

DON'T NEGLECT YOUR BOUNDARIES

By Jeffrey Dachowski, M.Photog.Cr., CPP

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December can be a busy month. In fact, our studio is busy from June to year-end, so by the time December rolls around, we've been full throttle for many months. American culture tends to consider busy something we should strive for, as if it alone is a measure of success. As I travel around the country meeting members at their association events, I'm certainly guilty of asking, "How are things? Are you busy?" As I take stock and reflect on the balance of my studio time versus family time, I wonder if that's the right question. Asking if someone is busy gauges whether they're satisfied with the amount of work they have, but it doesn't reflect profitability or career fulfillment.

This notion that busyness is the goal is prevalent among entrepreneurs. But a more helpful measurement might be whether we're good at establishing boundaries. Many photographers, including myself, would have to say no. Major issues arise when we don't establish boundaries, when we make busy the objective.

Here are three examples of what busy looks like for a studio and suggestions for setting boundaries.

1. Busy: We are available seven days a week, 12 hours a day to photograph, sell, take calls, and answer emails and texts no matter what we have going on in our studio or at home.

Setting boundaries: Set an optimum schedule and do everything you can to keep it. We changed our studio hours to appointment only, Tuesday through Friday and one Saturday a month. This has been a great template for a work schedule, but I'll admit I've broken these rules for a variety of what I thought were compelling reasons. I'll open my schedule if there are extenuating circumstances: A client wants a multi-generational portrait, and one person is available on military leave for two days only? OK, I can move things around for that and make an exception. It's an exception, though, and not the rule. Since I'm the author of my own business, I can weigh the circumstance and make it happen for the client rather than open my CRM software for seven days a week.

2. Busy: When a client asks about discounts we cave in and offer something just because the client asked. Or we offer specials during the busiest part of the year.

Setting boundaries: Become confident in the sales room. Your prices are a boundary of sorts. Sadly, entrepreneurs in the photographic profession are well known for breaking that boundary and offering discounts and incentives when they're not strategic. If you feel compelled to work seven days a week so you can complete all your holiday sessions, a discount should not be in your business plan. I've always wondered why so many photographers offer discounts around the holidays. If you offer 10% off, you're likely giving away most of your profit. Essentially, you're working hard to be busy, not profitable. Bills cannot be paid with busy.

3. Busy: We burn out when we fill the best hours of our day with menial tasks, leaving no time for creative or strategic thinking.

Setting boundaries: Set time aside for creative education and strategic business planning each month. You don't have to take an exotic safari (although you could) to stir your creative juices. How about an interesting personal project that challenges your skills? Every technique you add to your repertoire has the potential to improve your client work. And don't ignore spans of time when you can do some strategic planning and creative thinking about your business.

In the end, the boundaries you set are a more reliable measure of your happiness and success than how busy you are. Being busy isn't necessarily a virtue, especially if it comes at the expense of healthy profitability and a fulfilling personal life. •

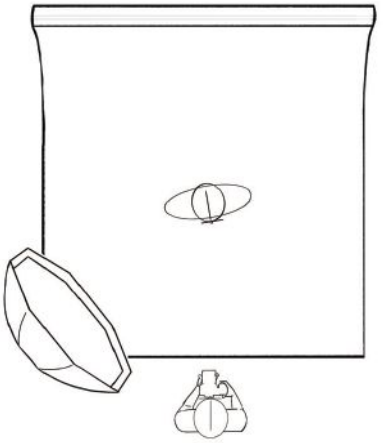
Jeffrey Dachowski operates a photography studio in Bedford, New Hampshire, with his wife, Carolle.

ON THE COVER

Carnival

Rich Johnson, CPP
Spectacle Photo
Orlando, Florida

CAMERA & LENS: Nikon D810, AF-S Nikkor 50mm f/1.8G lens
EXPOSURE: 1/160 second at f/14, ISO 100
LIGHTING: A Flashpoint Xplor 600 HSS diffused with a Glow 48-inch EZ Lock Octa was camera left.
POST-CAPTURE: Rich Johnson used Adobe Lightroom for basic color correction and Adobe Photoshop for frequency separation, retouching, and cloning.



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Ralph Gartner

Valatie, New York

CAMERA & LENS: Samsung Galaxy S10
EXPOSURE: 1/128 second at f/2.4, ISO 50
LIGHTING: Natural light
POST-CAPTURE: In Adobe Photoshop Ralph Gartner cropped and rotated the image, dodged and burned, adjusted brightness and contrast, and used the oil paint filter.

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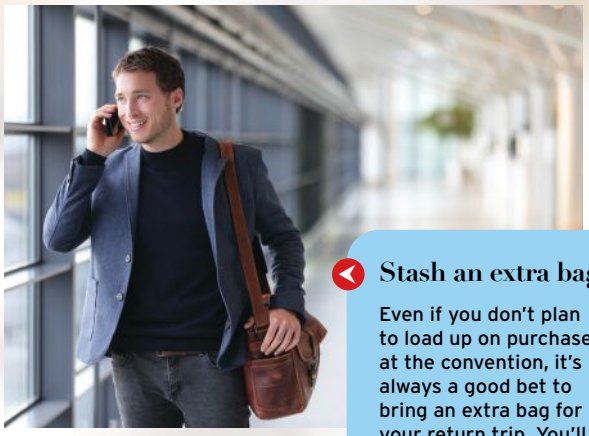
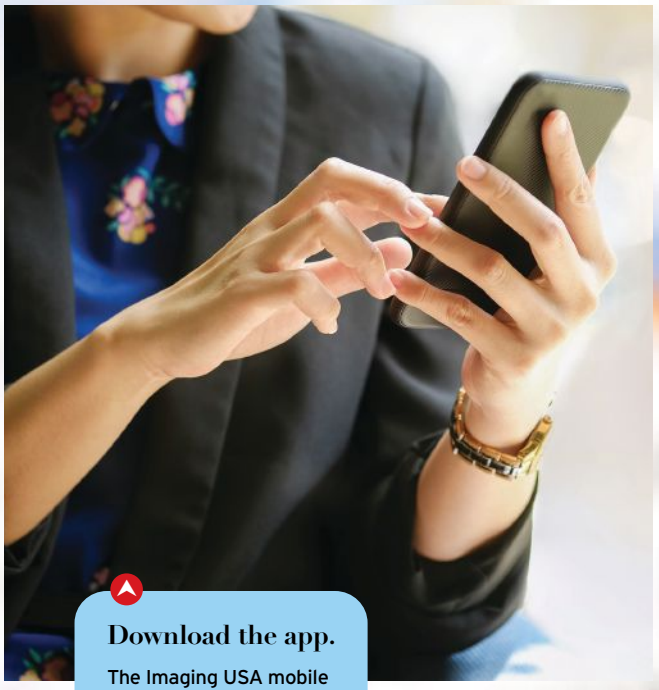


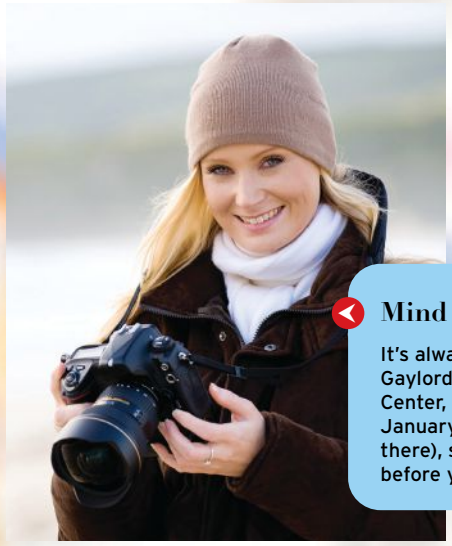
Stash an extra bag.

Even if you don't plan to load up on purchases at the convention, it's always a good bet to bring an extra bag for your return trip. You'll be picking up plenty of reading material, samples, and swag. (There's also an outlet mall close to convention central.)



Download the app.

The Imaging USA mobile app is a must-have. It's your guide to educational sessions, your map to Imaging Expo goodies, your party planner, and your event organizer. Download it from your app store or go to imagingusa.com/app.



Mind the weather.

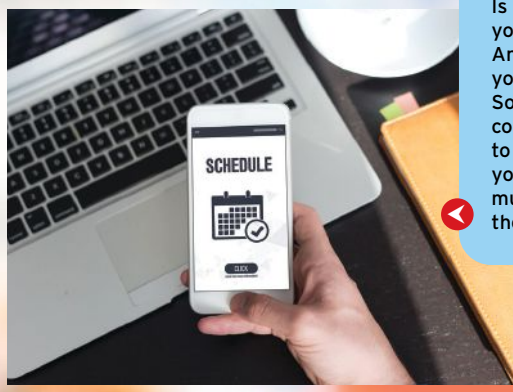
It's always a temperate 71 degrees in the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center, but Nashville can be chilly in January (it's even been known to snow there), so check the weather forecast before you pack.

©ALEX THE PHOTO GUY

Take advantage of discounts.

It's tempting to put photo gear on your holiday wish list, but you might want to hold off. The Imaging Expo is famous for its discounts. It's also the spot to test out gear in real life and to get an earful of education from top-ranked speakers.

COURTESY OF GAYLORD OPRYLAND RESORT & CONVENTION CENTER



Plan your days.

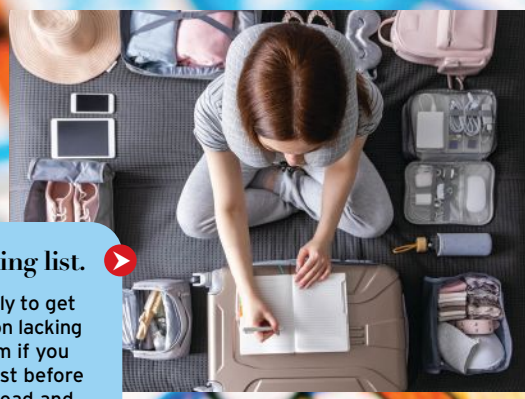
Is there a speaker you just can't miss? An award recipient you have to meet? Some long-unseen colleagues you need to hug? Schedule your must-sees and must-dos before the big show.

Share a room and save a buck.

Many attendees find that going in on a hotel room with a colleague is an easy way to stretch their dollars and make a budget go further. PPA's member network theLoop (theloop.ppa.com) is the perfect place to find a roommate.

Red shirts are a resource.

The Gaylord Opryland Hotel & Convention Center is expansive, and Imaging USA is busy. If you're turned around or in need of an answer, PPA staff and volunteers are your best bet to get an answer. They're easy to find in their red shirts.



Make a packing list.

You'll be less likely to get to the convention lacking an essential item if you create a checklist before you pack. Go ahead and jot down every little thing you want to bring. It's so satisfying to cross them off as you pack them up.

Baked-in Sales Success

A SIMPLE RECIPE FOR MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL SALES

By Jeff Kent

Hear Roger Grannis at Imaging USA
imagingusa.com/speakers

One of Roger Grannis' most poignant childhood memories is of an encounter his mother had with a woman outside a grocery store. The woman appeared to be destitute, and rather than pass by her, like many other people were doing, Grannis' mother stopped to speak with her. The woman's husband had recently died, she had lost almost everything, and she was teetering on the brink of homelessness. Grannis' mother asked her to share some pleasant memories, and the woman talked about her husband's favorite dessert, a yellow cake made from an old family recipe. Grannis' mom brought the woman into the store, where she purchased ingredients for the cake, and invited the woman to her house so they could bake it together. The next day, Grannis' father drove the woman to the bus station so she could be reunited with her son, who lived in another state.

Looking back on that episode years later, Grannis realized that, in addition to be being a touching tale of human compassion, the story incorporated the three essential elements of a good sales process. Though she wasn't trying to sell anything, Grannis' mother gave a master class in how to form a relationship with someone by:

1. Making a true connection
2. Understanding the other person
3. Presenting an opportunity based on what she'd learned

And so, when Grannis, a nationally recognized speaker and sales communications expert, was pondering a name for his sales training program, "The Yellow Cake Principle" emerged as an obvious choice.

In his process, Grannis lays out a simple recipe for sales based on genuine connection and sincere dialog that leads to better results for both parties. The fundamental ingredients in this recipe fit neatly into a CUP: connect, understand, present.

CONNECT

Make a true connection with your client. Find something you have in common and interact on a personal level. What you want your client to feel, says Grannis, is "This person is just like me. We have common interests and concerns. We think alike on some things."

"Forming a connection is really all about having a conversation and showing interest," says Grannis. In a sales context this process can sometimes get squeezed, so he recommends icebreakers to help build bonds quicker:

- Pay the person a genuine compliment. This isn't empty flattery. Be sincere and insightful.
- Use their name two or three times throughout your conversation.
- Talk about something you have in common.
- State a problem and how you'd resolve it. Photographers can do this by pointing out common issues clients may have had with other photographers, then explaining how you'd approach the situation differently.

• Offer something of value. This is where you tease your value proposition by offering something the client will find useful, such as a small gift or a leave-behind that provides professional guidance to help the client think through the photo shoot and prepare for a top-notch experience.

UNDERSTAND

To be successful at sales, you need to understand your client's vision, tastes, and communication style. During this stage, you're determining what's important to your client so you can propose something customized for their needs.

Ask questions. Casual chitchat fits under the connect part of the process, which is all about establishing rapport. To understand, you need to go deeper. This is where you make clients feel heard and where you gather valuable information about how best to serve them. This is also where you can help clients enter a dream state in which they imagine the eventual photography experience and how it will make them feel.

Grannis recommends starting this stage with what he calls a "conversational header" so clients understand you're shifting from casual, introductory talk to more detailed questions about the project. For example, "I really want to make sure we're a good match, and to serve you better, I'd like to ask a few questions about your vision for the photography session. Is that OK?"

Next, Grannis suggests asking specific questions that will help you formulate a clearer picture of what to offer, such as:

• Tell me about your vision for these images.

• When it comes to this portrait experience, what's important to you?

• If it's five years from now, how do you want these images to make you feel?

This is also the time to mention a potential solution and ask your client's impression of that solution. Doing this demonstrates your professional experience and gives you

SALES MISTAKES TO AVOID

Sharing too much information. Clients can be easily overwhelmed by too much detail. Stick to the high points and don't get into the weeds until later conversations.

Presenting the same information in the same way to everyone. It's important to flex the communication style for each individual to present a customized experience. Think about mirroring their style and word choices.

Not asking enough questions. If you don't ask enough questions to understand clients, you'll find it more difficult to close sales.

insight into the client's feelings about your ideas. It also helps you customize your eventual photography package to fit their needs specifically.

"Don't rush into close-ended questions, such as How many people? What time? What's your budget?" says Grannis. "Don't skip that dream state and get into the specifics too quickly." Instead, bring the client along with you on an imagined journey about their photography, then get into the nitty-gritty when it feels appropriate.

PRESENT

After you've connected and understood, it's time to present an opportunity based on all the information you've learned. Express what you've heard and relate it back to the client: "What I've heard you say is .... Now I'd like to create a customized option for you." Give yourself a break to think and come up with tailored options that will make it easy for the client to say yes.

"The CUP process makes selling easy, approachable, and reduces fear," says Grannis. This is particularly important for photographers, who often need to overcome a fear of selling in order to make a living. But when you can operate with a verified plan, it helps guide your interactions and provide a framework for next steps.

Throughout the process, it's important to understand how your clients are viewing their purchase decision. "People buy with emotion and justify their decisions with logic," explains Grannis. Sales is about engaging clients' emotions, taking away their anxieties, and making the entire experience superlative. To do this, the process needs to be built on sincerity and making a true connection. Then follow up.

"One of the keys is building momentum and excitement," says Grannis. You're fanning the flames as you're going. The longer you wait from the time you bring them to the zenith of excitement until you try to close the deal, the more the fire cools down. So, if you can get people to agree at the time of your sales presentation, that's best. If not, have an established schedule for follow-up so you're not playing phone tag, emailing, and hoping they'll respond in a timely fashion. Also, continue your follow-up in the client's communication style, and keep linking back to the dream, to that thing they were most excited about, so you're tapping into the excitement you worked so hard to generate.

Always remember that you're a talented professional; don't undervalue yourself or what you have to offer. The experience, talent, and professionalism you apply to a project has value. You're doing your clients a service by providing your expertise and artistry; you're helping them represent their memories in the best light. Approaching a sale with this mindset is critical because it takes you away from a mindset of landing a sale into a mindset of giving.

"And," says Grannis, "if you come in with a spirit of giving, providing the right service in a way they want to receive it, everyone wins." •

Roger Grannis online
grannisgroup.com

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The CPP exam prompted me to fill in the gaps in my technical knowledge.
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The Possibility in Unpredictability

EMBRACE FEAR TO AWAKEN THE GREATNESS INSIDE YOU

By Jeff Kent

Learn from PeriSean Hall
imagingusa.com/speakers

Life is full of uncertainties and unanticipated challenges. But that's OK. To achieve a better version of ourselves, it's necessary to accept the uncertainty and step into the great unknown—and then embrace all the possibilities found within.

"There is greater possibility in unpredictability," says author and speaker PeriSean Hall, who focuses on helping people reach their full potential by awakening their greatness. Hall points out that we all like to be comfortable in what we know. However, there's more potential available to us when we're willing to go beyond our comfort zone. "Your greatest opportunities are out on a limb," she adds. "You have to try things you haven't tried before. You have to be unconventional. You have to feel fear."

Hall knows about fear firsthand. Once upon a time, she, too, was stuck in a rut, unsatisfied in her work and plagued by a feeling that she was meant for something more. People told her she had talent, people told her she should be up on stage sharing her message, but she didn't believe it. She let self-doubt obscure her path forward, and she found herself swirling in dead-end jobs until one day an unexpected layoff left her nearly homeless and stranded thousands of miles from home. At that point, she resolved to start betting on herself. And that's when her circumstances started to change.

Now a well-regarded speaker, coach, author, and singer, Hall reflects on her journey as a learning experience. It's a journey that's helped her crystalize advice for other people attempting to break out of a life routine that doesn't fit them.

Before anyone can start a self-improvement journey, they need to accept the fear that comes with that journey, she notes. "If you're waiting for the fear to go away, you won't ever move," says Hall. "You have to learn to move *with* the fear. When we are comfortable, we're in a stupor, walking through life on autopilot. Everything is predictable and repeatable. We need to step out of that comfort zone to learn our true capabilities."

The more you step out of what you know and learn what you don't know, the more confident you become. That confidence replicates. It's a growing awareness that "if I can do this one thing, then I can do the next thing, and the next thing," Hall says. Soon, what you thought was impossible becomes possible.

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More from PeriSean Hall
perisean.com

You may fail. That's not a problem. With each failure you learn, and you can take another step forward. The more you're willing to try, the faster you'll go. "It all comes down to how important your dream is to you," says Hall. "Does it keep you awake at night? Is it something that's burning within you? If it is, then you need to do everything you can to make it happen."

THE 5 P'S

Becoming a better version of yourself is a process, one that Hall has broken down into five elements that can guide your progress.

1. Promise. Make yourself a promise to stick to the process regardless of the bumps and bruises you suffer along the way. Consider who else is involved in your promise. Are you making a promise to your family? Are you promising to create a legacy? Consider how your promise affects other people and how you can bring better things to their lives if you see it through.

2. Purpose. You have to know your why. Why are you going through this process? What motivates you? Create a vision statement and commit to seeing that vision become a reality.

3. Persistence. Keep striving toward your goals until you reach them. Good things will happen as long as you don't give up.

4. Pursuit. You have to pursue your dream relentlessly. It's not going to fall into your lap. Keep chasing it until you achieve it.

5. Perseverance. There is going to be opposition on your journey. You have to stick with it through the difficult times and not let setbacks discourage you.

DON'T GIVE UP

Perseverance may be the most important element of the five P's, or at least the one that causes the most problems for people. We sometimes see opposition as a signal that we're on the wrong path and give up. "However, just because you're experiencing opposition, that doesn't mean you're not doing what you're supposed to be doing," says Hall. You have to keep going.

It may help to think of the process like a game of football. When you're on offense, you may only advance a couple of yards at time. Or you may get a penalty and be pushed back. Don't let that stop you from trying to move forward. If you get a first down, that gives you the confidence to get another one. And if you score one touchdown, that means you can score another. Everything doesn't need to be a Hail Mary, long-bomb pass. Incremental improvement works just fine. Keep moving forward, taking your setbacks as part of the game, and continue the progress.

It helps to have a specific goal in mind. If you have an objective, you can focus your efforts rather than just try to improve things in a general way with no clear method to measure progress.

SELF-EVALUATE

Self-evaluation is required for this process to be successful. Look inward at what you're doing well and what you're doing wrong. Be honest in your assessment but don't be too hard on yourself. While it's important to learn from your mistakes, you don't want to knock yourself out of the game.

DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

Though we call this a journey of self-improvement, it's still important to separate our personal and business identities. That separation is always difficult for entrepreneurs such as photographers because they invest so much of themselves in the work. Rejection can feel very personal.

But it shouldn't. Someone's rejection of your proposal or their decision to work with another photographer isn't an indictment of you as a person. To make the distinction, try to get into the mindset of the client. Understand that they're not trying to hurt you. They may have something specific in mind, and you don't fit that preconceived notion. Or maybe you just don't specialize in what they want. You're not going to be the right fit for everyone, and that's OK.

Your job isn't to be here for everyone; it's to be here for the people who need you. Those are the people on whom you should focus your energy. •

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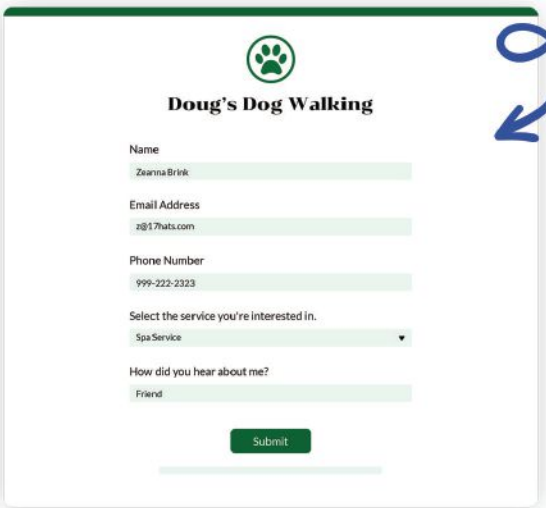

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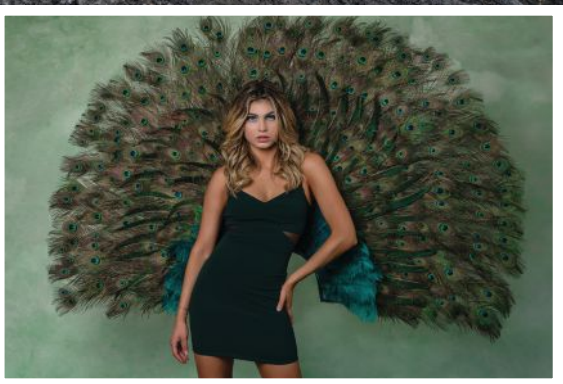
THE GOODS

Alight Lavishly

While they're not exactly light as a feather, the prop wings from Kayla Douglas Artistry are a mere five pounds or less thanks to a patented base that's both lightweight and durable. The wings feature a corset back, allowing the width to be adjusted to subjects of all sizes.

The handmade wings are constructed of cruelty-free sourced feathers from ostriches, roosters, or peacocks, depending on the design. Ostrich feather designs are available in 42 colors. For transport, the wings can be easily folded in half and fourths, fitting into a Kayla Douglas Artistry dress bag, which also serves as safe storage.

A variety of designs are available, with short and floor-length options. Child-size wings are $750; adult-size offerings are $650 to $1,700. •



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Atypical

6 TIPS FOR WORKING WITH NEURODIVERGENT AND DISABLED CLIENTS

By Tosha Gaines

IMAGES ©TOSHA GAINES / toshagaines.com

"Don't assume I want to hide my disability."

–Actual client feedback

Learn from Tosha Gaines at Imaging USA
imagingusa.org/speakers

The world is a diverse place, yet most photographers' portfolios do not reflect that. While there is comfort in sticking with what's familiar to you, stepping out of your comfort zone brings understanding, empathy, and appreciation of diversity in countless ways. Many photographers struggle to answer the question: How do I approach a disabled client?

Photographers often worry about how to interact with people with disabilities during a session. While most photographers are competent when it comes to creating images, working with individuals with disabilities—whether those disabilities are visible or invisible—takes specific skills and good communication. I have been fortunate to know how it feels from both sides, being autistic (an invisible disability) and a photographer.

I've also been an occupational therapist for more than 17 years, and I've noticed how photographers are afraid to talk about this subject. Additionally, many photographers lean into portraying disabled subjects as inspirational; however, we just wanted to be normalized.

We live our lives like typical people but doing it in an adaptive way. We want to be seen as normal and treated the same way as anyone else would. Here are some tips I've developed that you can use when you're hired to work with a subject who as a visible or invisible disability.

1. Direct eye contact isn't required. You can make a beautiful portrait that doesn't include eye contact. As photographers, our job is to convey a story no matter if there is eye contact or not. Our eyes tell a story and provoke emotions. But be mindful that there are some disabilities—including autism and visual impairments—that make eye contact difficult or uncomfortable.

2. Be patient. Patience is important when you're photographing atypical subjects. Allow them space and time to adjust to transitions. Some clients need longer to process the information from prompts and instruction you provide. Many photographers like to work at a fast pace with little time allowed for clients to prepare themselves for transitions. Transitions can be difficult for some people due to sensory overload. Plan time for a client to take a break during the session for any number of reasons including limited mobility or anxiety. If you feel the first hint that you are getting upset because an atypical client is not doing what you want them to do, immediately step back and let it go. During planning, ask your subject if they anticipate they'll need additional time or a quiet space for breaks. Is there is a certain music or food they would like to have during the session to feel more comfortable? Be kind. Allow them to adjust and to transition.

3. Learn the language. Learn and understand what person-first language vs. identity-first language is and how to use it in conversations with your atypical client. Ask what their preference is during your first meeting.

4. Be open. Have an open conversation to increase your awareness of their disability and ask questions. I've found that it's best to be face-to-face or voice-to-voice for this conversation. Calls or video chats work great. Invest time in personal communication, and you'll earn clients' trust

"As someone with chronic pain issues, be patient with me if I move slowly."

—Actual client feedback

"Build time into the session should I need to stop for multiple bathroom breaks."

—Actual client feedback

"Be patient and understanding. Ask questions—respectfully—to make sure you're doing the best for me."

—Actual client feedback

"Don't be offended if I ask you to speak slower and repeat yourself (probably more than once)."

—Actual client feedback

from the start. Build a rapport with clients to understand their disabilities. Never go into a session without having this connection.

5. Have an empathetic ear. Photo sessions can be considered therapeutic to an atypical subject. Be ready to listen to their story. Generally, the client will open up about their disability, their feelings, and things that have happened to them when they're in a space where they feel safe and heard. This also sets the tone of your session to convey their story. You do not have to be a therapist during the session, just a person who listens empathetically.

6. Be aware of the environment and clients' sensory needs. Atypical subjects can be sensitive to smells, lighting, and moving air. Be aware that bright sunlight or fluorescent light might hurt their eyes, certain textures might bother them, and smells can be perceived much stronger and more irritating to some. Try to reduce or eliminate potential irritants as best as you can. Be careful even with continuous lighting and strobes because they might be a trigger for your client or create a distraction. I frequently use the StellaPro Reflex S because its small, portable size causes minimal distraction. The most important thing is to listen to your client. If the client complains or makes a remark about something, don't just brush it off. Make sure you can accommodate their needs. You may have to move to a different area, swap out a textile in the set or clothing, or simply wait for a different time altogether.

THAT'S A WRAP

Remember that atypical clients represent a broad range of abilities. We, as professional photographers, have the remarkable opportunity to tailor every photo experience to each client's needs. •

Tosha Gaines is a photographer in Birmingham, Alabama.

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Fluid-damped, with a Twist

REVIEW: MANFROTTO NITROTECH 608

By Ellis Vener

As a professional photographer, you need to consider the value proposition before spending money on gear or software: Will it make my job easier, my business more profitable, or my images better? When it comes to spending hundreds or thousands of hard-earned dollars on a tool, you want to know it will do the job as well as or better than similar products in the same price range. And you want reliability and durability. Glittering promises are one thing, hard reality is another.

Tripods, heads, and grip equipment are not the glamour pieces of our profession. Nobody—except other photographers—will look at a photo and wonder what tripod, tripod head, colorimeter, or light stand was used. But we care because inadequately designed, shoddily manufactured tools are infuriating to use.

When I evaluate a tripod head, I want it to support the advertised load. I want the tilts and pans to be smooth. I want it to be rugged enough to stand up to the wear and tear of frequent location work. I do not want it to be overly complicated to use or maintain.

For heads designed for videography, the panning and tilting movements need to be perfectly smooth, especially when starting and stopping. It needs to be compatible with products not necessarily made by the same manufacturer. And it should be functional for still photography work as well as motion.

NITROTECH TRIPOD HEADS

That brings me to the second generation of Manfrotto Nitrotech tripod heads, the 608 and the 612. Both are nearly the same size and weight, and they're identical in design. Both have the same tilt range of +90 to -70 degrees. Both have flat bases and mount on 3/8"-16 threaded bolts. Both use the near-ubiquitous Manfrotto 501-style quick-release plate, and both have a bullseye-type level illuminated by a tiny battery-powered light.

Where they differ is the load range. The 612 supports more counter-balanced weight, up to 26.4 pounds, and has a safety payload rating of 39.68 pounds. The 608's maximum counter-balanced weight rating tops out at 17.6 pounds, and the safety payload is 30.86 pounds. While it may sound like the 612 is the better head (and for heavier camera packages, it is), the other end of the scale is important as well. The 612 minimum counter-balanced payload is pretty high at 8.82 pounds, while the 608's minimum counter-balanced load is zero. For most photographers and small studios, that makes the 608 the better option since it can support cameras down to smartphones and action cameras. This means its carrying capacity can handle anything from a phone to a fully rigged camera with an external video monitor/recorder, microphone, etc., or a

heavy, large aperture super-telephoto lens.

The 608 sells for $525.99; the 612 is $731.99. That's not pocket change, but even after months of use and some abuse, the 608 model continues to perform with the level of smoothness I have experienced only in much more expensive fluid-damped heads.

That smoothness results from the fluid-damped design along with the use of a nitrogen-filled cylinder directly under the head's tilt axis. After balancing the camera package on the head and setting the drag on the primary tilt to zero, tilt the head and adjust the pressure in the cylinder until it holds the tilt angle without having to lock the head angle. As a result, moving the camera smoothly from a stopped position saves time and money while filming and saves more time plus aggravation while editing. In addition, smooth starts and stops give your productions a more genuinely cinematic feel. Be aware that the weight distribution inside a heavy telescoping zoom lens may shift as the focal length changes, throwing off the balance point.

I like to use fluid-damped heads to support long, heavy super-telephoto lenses like the earlier reviewed Sigma 150-600mm f/5.6-6.3 DG DN ("Super-telephoto for Mirrorless," April 2022). The results don't look as finessed as a gimbal head, but a fluid-damped head is not a one-trick pony like a gimbal is.

Of the various fluid heads I've owned or used, those whose performance I liked as much as the Manfrotto Nitrotech heads are the Sachtler Activ8 ($2,090), the Vinten Vision blue3 ($1,501), and the Cartoni Focus 10 ($1,016). Above that, there are additional models from those companies as well as the Really Right Stuff FH-7240 ($5,800 - $6,025). Prices like that put them out of reach for all but a few photographers. The Nitrotech 608 and 612 pricing is down to earth, and these tools deliver comparable smoothness and load capabilities. •

ORIGINS: A DISNEY STORY

In the late 1940s, a mechanical engineer for a Los Angeles area utility company nurtured a passion for steam-powered locomotive engines. His name was Chadwell O'Connor.

By the late 1940s steam engines were being replaced by locomotives with more efficient electric motors. Before they disappeared completely, O'Connor began filming them with a small Bell & Howell 16mm home movie camera. He was dissatisfied with the rough tilting and panning action of the tripods available, so he designed and built a tripod head with smoother movement.

What he did was ingenious and simple: Instead of metal-against-metal gearing, he made a sealed cartridge containing a silicone lubricant and two or more metal plates. By changing the width of the gap between the plates, hydrostatic pressure is applied or released. The result was a small, easy-to-transport tripod head capable of smooth, jitter-free tilts and pans. At the time, big Hollywood films used massive, difficult-to-operate Worrall geared heads for smooth pans and tilts.

In 1949, a fellow steam locomotive buff saw O'Connor filming at a train station. He asked O'Connor to make one of the heads for him. The man owned a small film studio and had begun producing feature-length nature documentaries, but he'd seen that the cameras were picking up jittery movement. The resulting 1953 film, "The Living Desert," won the man—Walt Disney—an Academy Award for documentary feature.

Disney ordered more heads, and O'Connor set up a part-time business in his garage making the heads and refining the design. The business was successful, but it wasn't until 1969 that he left his day job with the utility and moved full-time to O'Connor Engineering, which continues to produce fluid-damped tripod heads today.

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Q&A

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ELIZABETH PRATT, FELLOW, EDUCATION, FIELD, & SALES SUPPORT
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Full Plate

CHRISTINA PETERS SATISFIES AD AGENCY APPETITES

BY AMANDA ARNOLD

It's clear from Christina Peters' deliciously bright, immaculately presented, cuisine-focused website that her niche is food photography. But that wasn't the case for the first 10 years of her career. Like many beginning photographers, "I shot everything," she says. "I was a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none," and her website reflected that. It had 12 galleries of images—from pet portraits to chef portraits, from food products to florals. "You name it, it was on there," she laughs.

When photographers are starting out, they think, "If I have everything, every potential type of photography that is known to man [on my website], I'll get all the clients I can get. Thousands and thousands of clients," she says. But all you're really doing is confusing people. "They're going to

IMAGES ©CHRISTINA PETERS / christinapeters.com

bounce off your site." Peters also found that having too many specialties was a marketing nightmare, as she needed different lists and marketing strategies for each target group.

After a decade of photographing a little of everything and working with small, local brands in Los Angeles, she decided to pick a focus. "I really love food," she says, so she dumped all unrelated online photography, reshot her portfolio, and launched a new website. The response was immediate, and her marketing was much easier to manage since she was targeting only food-related clients.

The best way to get a foothold in commercial photography is to attract and impress the ad agencies that handle campaigns for the brands you're interested in photographing, she notes. This is a topic she'll discuss at her session "How to Get Consistent Work with Ad Agency Clients" at Imaging USA 2023. Following are some of her tasty tidbits of advice.

COME IN UNDER BUDGET

Some commercial photographers, when they give an estimate to an ad agency for the work they'll do, present two numbers: One is their fee and the other is expenses, which they don't explain or break out. In the end, if the photographer spends less on production than they estimated, they typically keep the remaining "expenses" for themselves.

Peters has a different tactic. Her estimate is very detailed: There's a prep fee, a shooting fee, a post-production fee, and licensing fees based on how the images will be used. In addition to overhead expenses, she estimates the production expenses but tells the client that any budget that isn't used for production expenses will not be charged. She itemizes production expenditures and presents receipts when requested after the job is complete to back up what was spent.

"The fee is paying for my time, but the [production] expenses—that is not my money," she reasons. "That is the client's money." When she does come in under budget—and she almost always does—that money stays in the client's pocket. "Usually, they are shocked by that," she says. It's a great way to establish a positive relationship. It's also a simple matter of treating clients the way she'd want to be treated: "Ad work has a generous budget, and I am respectful of that."

Hear Christina Peters at Imaging USA
imagingusa.com/speakers

HAVE A WELL-ROUNDED MARKETING PLAN

It's not enough to use social media as your marketing go-to. A well-rounded marketing plan will incorporate social media direct messages, emails, postcards, and in-person meetings to pitch your work. Since you never know which mode of communication your recipient is most likely to check, it's best to cast a wide net. Peters recommends one email, postcard, phone call, etc., per month. Any more can be a bother to the recipient, and any fewer is not enough to worm your way into their brain. They might not need what you provide right now, but if they see your emails or postcards at a regular clip over the course of a year, they'll remember you when the need arises.

• **Leverage postcards.** Many photographers see direct mail marketing as outdated. And that's exactly why it's so effective. People don't receive as many marketing materials in the mail as they once did, so postcards stand out. Also, while people will scroll right past an email in their inbox, they rarely trash their snail mail without checking each item first, Peters points out.

• **Carefully craft your emails.** An ad agency friend once told Peters that she receives 1,000 emails a day from photographers—so many that the agency hired assistants to cull through them. With so much competition, it's important to get your email right.

First and foremost, Peters recommends following the seven rules of the CAN-SPAM Act to make sure your emails clear spam filters. For example, the subject should make it clear it's an advertisement for a service. Take one of Peters' go-to subject lines: "What's for lunch? Food photography by Christina Peters." The question gets the recipient's attention, and "Food photography by Christina Peters" makes it clear the email is an advertisement. Per that act, your emails should also include a business address; if you work from home, consider getting a post office box so you don't have to share your home address.

If you have the money, Peters recommends using a platform such as Agency Access for customizable email templates that are sure to hit the inboxes of the proper ad agency professionals. Keep subject lines short, clever, and to the point, she advises, as long ones will be truncated. Emails themselves should be no more than about 100 words, with text broken into paragraphs for easy reading. Never send images or your signature as an attachment. That's a surefire way to get trapped in the spam folder.

• **Get on the phone.** Many of the photographers Peters coaches are extremely reluctant to call in a pitch. But simply leaving a follow-up voicemail after an email is a great way to set yourself apart from other photographers.

• **Set up in-person meetings to share your portfolio.** Every so often, Peters plans what she calls a city tour. In the six months leading up to the tour, she markets her work to ad agencies in that city. About two weeks prior to her trip, she reaches out by email or telephone to let the agencies know she'll be in town for a few days and would love to meet with them and show her portfolio. It gives them a sense of urgency to set up a meeting with her while she's in town, she says. Those meetings are also an excellent way to forge lasting relationships.

YOUR PORTFOLIO MUST REFLECT YOUR PITCH

If you're interested in pitching your work to a brand, the images in your portfolio must directly reflect that brand. For example, if you're pitching Omaha Steaks, but you don't have any steak photos in your portfolio, you won't get the job. "You need to have at least 10 photos of the exact product the client is selling because if you don't, they literally don't know whether you can photograph it or not," says Peters. They don't have the vision to look at your body of work and assume that because you were able to photograph strawberries, you'll be able to photograph tacos. "It doesn't work like that," Peters says. "We have to show them the image they want to hire us for. We have to have it in our book over and over."

When prospecting, Peters uses social media to study up on brands she'd like to photograph and then looks at her own portfolio to see if her style matches up with theirs. If it does, the agency will see her as a natural fit. She knows she's targeted and pitched well when the client points at one of her photos and says, We'd like that photo but with X product in it. •

Yin & Yang

A DARING SECOND ACT FOR NEIL KREMER AND CORY JOHNSON

BY ERIC MINTON

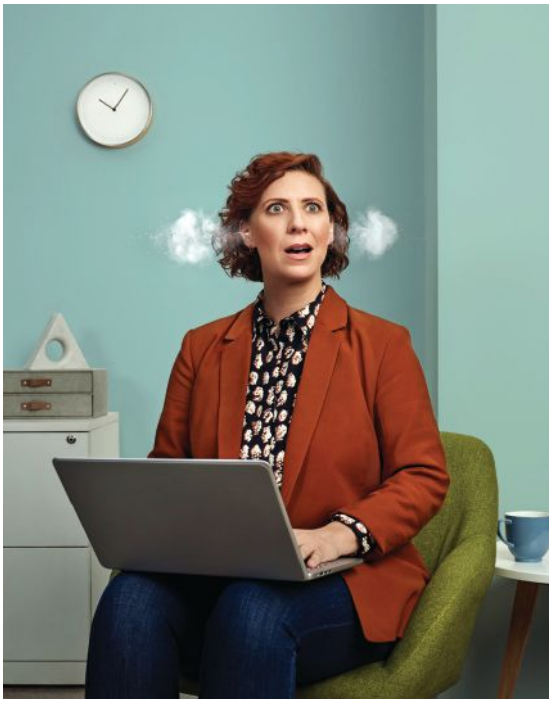
IMAGES ©KREMER JOHNSON / kremerjohnson.com

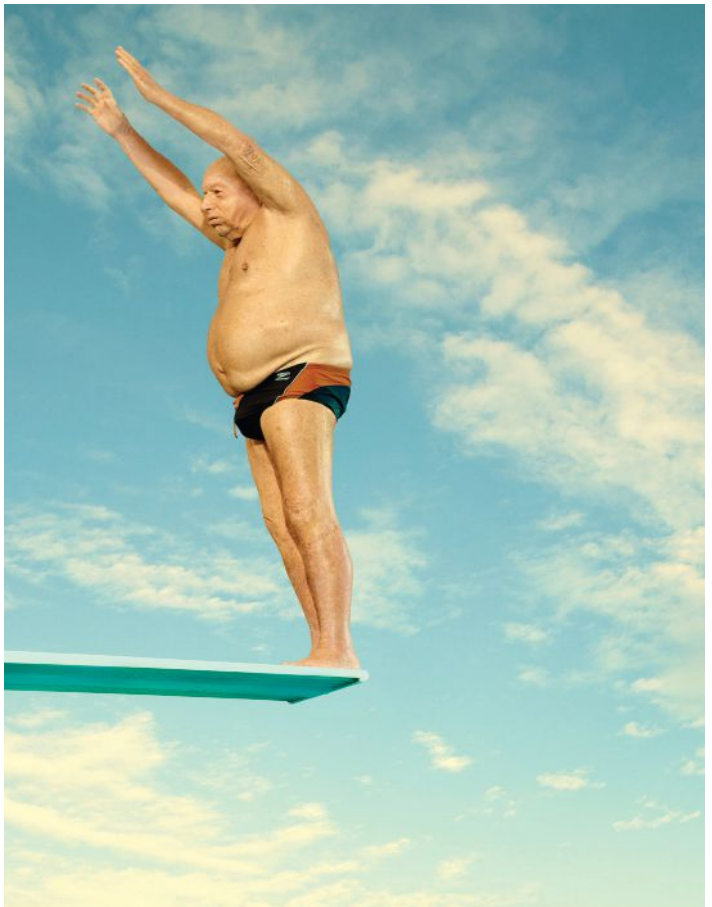
Cory Johnson (left) and Neil Kremer

Forty-ish. That's when Neil Kremer took up photography, he says. Growing up in Rochester, New York, he was intrigued by photojournalism after seeing his uncle's collection of fine art photography. But it wasn't until 2011, when he was living in Los Angeles and his successful sales job with a sporting goods manufacturer tanked, that Kremer bought his first camera. "I saw a bunch of letters—M, S, P—on the dial, and I had no idea," he says. "I had to read the manual two or three times just to understand how to use the camera."

Kremer loaned his camera to his barstool buddy, Cory Johnson. A native of Keokuk, Iowa, Johnson had built a business in film production, but the circumstances surrounding his most recent film had left his company bankrupt. On the set of that movie, Johnson hung out with the stills photographer and saw her capture in one frame the entire scene they'd been spending all day filming. "That whole process just clicked with me," he says. After three days playing with Kremer's camera, Johnson purchased his own.

HAWAII





BARFLIES TO BUSINESS PARTNERS

Eleven years later, Kremer Johnson Photography, the duo's Los Angeles-based commercial photography business, has a who's who client list across a wide spectrum of industries: popular name brands Visa, Chevrolet, and Ford; entertainment giants CBS, DirectTV, and Hulu; food producers Hormel, Gnarly Head, and Bulletproof Coffee; pharmaceuticals Neurocrine Biosciences, Applied Therapeutics, and Proctor & Gamble; home products Braun, Kong Co., and Joybird; attractions Monterey Bay Aquarium, Terranea Resort, and Las Vegas; public entities the Almond Board of California, the Southern Nevada Water Authority, and the University of Southern California. Their work has won 30 major photography awards and been exhibited at the International Center of Photography.

Like many manifestations of midlife crises, theirs sound random. The genesis of their friendship is banal. "We had a friend in common and we were just always out at bars together, and that was it, and ..." Johnson pauses, then shrugs. "That's really it." They didn't launch a new business so much as amble into it. "We both found ourselves suddenly without companies at the same time," he says. "And a similar interest," Kremer adds. Johnson continues, "It was just a business born out of a lick of boredom and a lot of interest."

They applied the 10,000-hour rule to master photography, according to Johnson: "always shooting and learning and developing. Running around shooting overpasses on the freeway, piers, and random stuff like the typical photo student, but we were 40." They "nerded out on lights" as they practiced creating portraits, narrative images, and conceptual humor.

Kremer posted their images on social media, and *Inflight* magazine assigned the pair to re-create the album cover of the Eagles' "Hotel California." A week later, on a scissor lift 40 feet above Sunset Boulevard with the sun setting behind a pristine hotel, Johnson says, "We looked at each other and said, 'I guess this is a job. Do you want to try to make this our job?'"

STRATEGIC BUSINESS SENSE

To call their collaborative success random, however, ignores the years of business experience that guided them into their second-career craftsmanship. "Coming at it as a 40-year-old who understands business and understands how to follow the money is very different from a kid just getting out of college who has no idea how to run a business," Kremer says.

They reached out to photographers to learn about commercial photography, agencies, representation, and how to produce a photo shoot. "One thing we were told from the beginning, and it took us a while to believe it, is you have to specialize," Kremer says. "You have to have an elevator pitch. You have to be able to get that down to one sentence. You not only have to be able to say it, the work has to show it. At the end of the day, it really comes down to the work. We were able to put together work that is both current and fills the need of advertisers."

Even developing their signature style was more mercenary than artistic. "It was a very, very focused effort," Johnson says. "These 20-year-old kids out of college have the opportunity to photograph what they want and find their way creatively. We didn't have 20 years to do

that. We looked at the market, we looked at people we liked, we saw a niche that resonates with us creatively, and saw a spot we could fill."

At first glance, their portfolio seems dominated by quirky subject matter in Loony Tunes-quality lighting. That includes their own portrait on their website's About page, featuring Kremer and Johnson in heroic poses wearing California pastels, confidently gazing into the distance against the backdrop of an aged brick warehouse. The more you browse their portfolio, the more variety you'll find in subject matter and palettes. The common thread is narrative quality. Like a single-panel cartoon without a caption, each image tells a story in one frame. "Character, expression, and color story are three things we always try to carry through all our images, no matter what the tone of them are," Johnson says. "And that is something creative ad agencies recognize and value."

Exemplary is their "Angelinos" gallery. Kremer set out to create dynamic outdoor portraits using one octabox and the sun as a rim light, so he drove around Los Angeles looking for interesting people to photograph. After he posted his images, Root Insurance asked for 10 such portraits —stills and video—with a 10-day deadline for a national ad campaign. This was one month into the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. Kremer and Johnson hit the streets and approached the few pedestrians who were out and about, offering to make their portraits for a user's fee. The 49 one-click-of-the shutter, in-the-moment portraits at 49 different uncrowded locations tell 49 individual one-frame stories, each image displaying remarkable depths of personality and expression.

"There has to be a yin and yang; there has to be give and take and compromise because anyone who thinks they're right all the time is wrong."

See more images with this story
ppa.com/kremer-johnson

Or hover your phone camera over the code

PERSONAL PROJECTS WITH PURPOSE

Many professional photographers undertake personal projects to expand their skills or enjoy artistic freedom they don't get in their commercial work. Kremer and Johnson see personal projects as reinvesting in their business. "We do make personal work that we want to see, but it's not cheap to make personal work," Kremer says. "So, half the equation is what will be accepted in the advertising community." Personal projects also add more intrinsic value to their portfolio than work they've done for clients. "Creatives see the personal work, and it resonates on a deeper level than other commercial projects do," Johnson says. "That's 100 percent us; it's nobody else's color or wardrobe. That's our heart on the page, and that's why they call us."

This strategy applies to their participation in competitions, too. "It feels weird to chase awards; it seems so disingenuous, and it's all subjective," Johnson says. "It's also validating when you get them. But it's not like we set out with *We're going to win this thing this year.*" "With that said," adds Kremer, "we spend a lot of money to enter all of those." That gets their work in front of high-level advertising executives. "For us, it's 100 percent marketing," Johnson says.

One of their personal projects, "Craigslist Encounters," was exhibited at the International Center of Photography in New York. Having photographed many beautiful people in manufactured settings for commercial clients, Kremer wanted to photograph typical people in their real environments. He placed a "characters wanted" ad on Craigslist offering $20 for subjects to pose. They photographed the first responses, put the images on social media, and within months received hundreds more responses. Many subjects offered their own concepts and produced the settings themselves. "It was such an easy thing to do," Kremer says. After nine months they had photographed almost 100 people. Of those, only three accepted the $20. The rest just wanted their portraits taken in Kremer Johnson's unique way.

Both men contribute ideas for personal projects. Some are spur-of-the-moment concepts when working together, some come from a long list of ideas they keep, Johnson says. "We'll occasionally sit down and say, *Hey, dude, here's five ideas I wrote, what do you think?*" Some are rejected or accepted outright. Often the response is, Yes, but what if we added this or changed that? "That's typically when we do our best work," Johnson says as Kremer nods.

From their previous content-creation careers, both appreciate how collaboration can attain outcomes beyond individual expectations. "There has to be a yin and yang; there has to be give and take and compromise because anyone who thinks they're right all the time is wrong," says Kremer. They are like-minded businessmen. But artistically? "There's a fair share of bickering that happens," Johnson says, "which also gets us to where we need to be. We're each very outspoken about our feelings, and the other one doesn't take it personally and is able to meld that into something positive and move forward. That is something I think is core for us as businesspeople and as artists."

"The truth is, if we agreed on everything, our work would be terrible," Kremer adds as Johnson nods. •

Eric Minton is a writer and editor in Washington, D.C.

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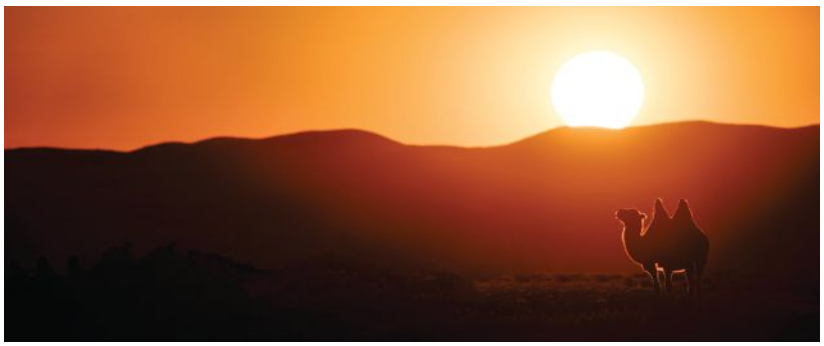

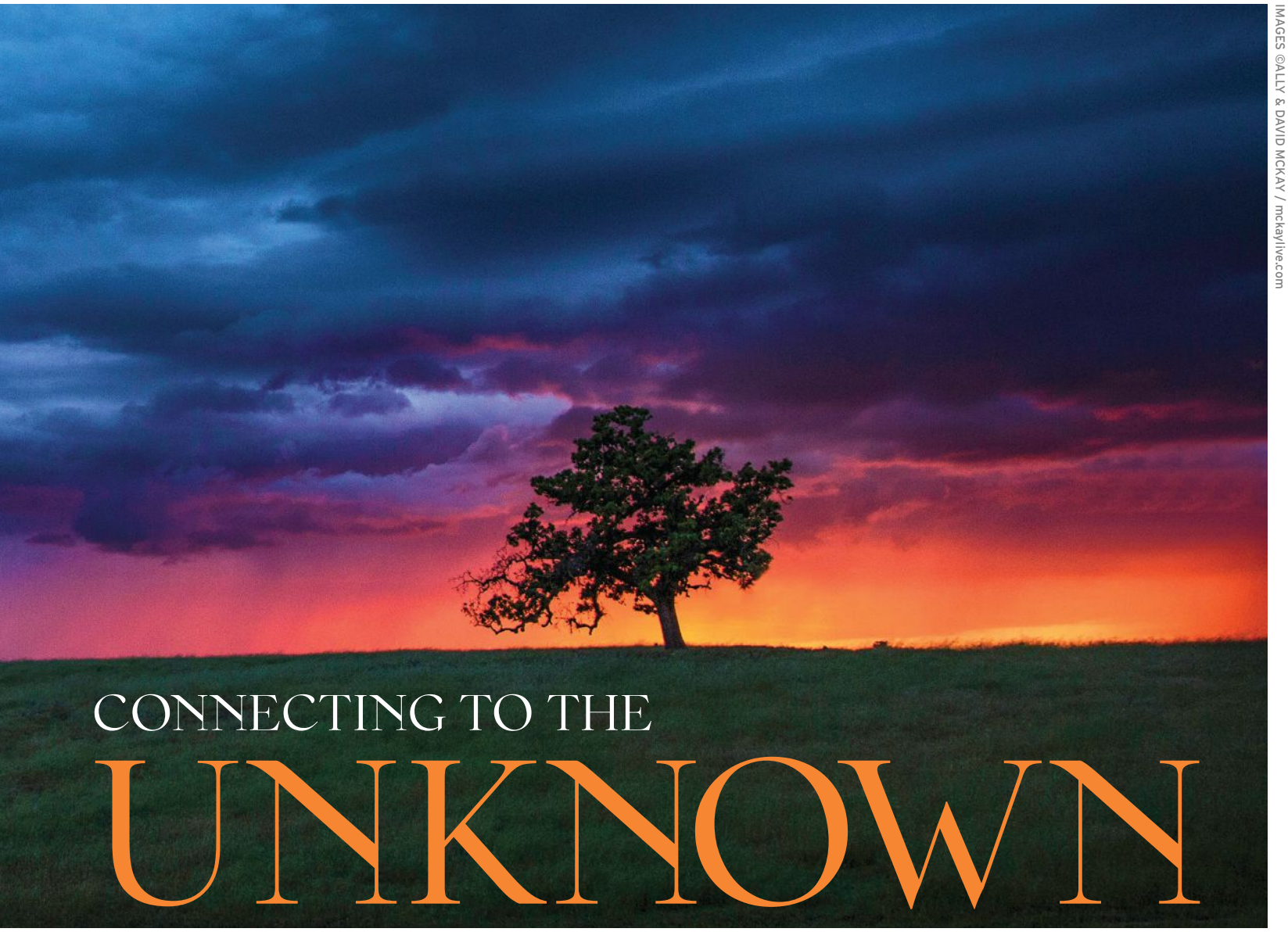

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CONNECTING TO THE UNKNOWN

ALLY AND DAVID McKAY SHARE LESSONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHING UNFAMILIAR PLACES

BY JEFF KENT

Ally and David McKay

Attend the McKays' session at Imaging USA
imagingusa.com/speakers

Ally McKay, M.Photog.Cr., and husband David McKay, M.Photog.Cr., can pinpoint the exact time in 2007 when their business took a turn. The McKays had been making high-end portraiture and doing well at it, but a financial crisis was beginning to grip the country, and people were taking a hard look at their discretionary spending. Then literally overnight, the phone stopped ringing.

To adapt, Ally and David made several changes to their business, including a shift to marketing portraiture. But what ultimately reshaped their business was the introduction of photography classes. The first couple of classes were a success, and the couple began to build a sizable contact list of shutterbugs interested in educational photography experiences. Within a few years, they began to work on plans for more immersive workshops and trips. After teaching classes for several years, they found they had a database full of people who wanted to go farther afield to practice their photography. They planned their first workshop in Italy in 2012, kicking off a new direction that would eventually consume the entire business. Within a few years, they'd transitioned to leading photography tours full time. They've since taken more than 2,500 photographers on adventures around the world.

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

The McKays base their tours on four ingredients, each in equal measure: photography, travel, friendship, and adventure. "When you ask our clients what keeps bringing them back, it's rarely just the photography," says David. "It's always about how something touched their life. Photography is the glue that keeps everything together, the common bond, but at the end of the day, what makes these experiences special is the personal connection, the perspective of sitting around talking about the life-changing experience. When you're doing travel photography, if

PHOTOGRAPHING THE UNFAMILIAR

Travel photography helps photographers adapt quickly to unfamiliar environments so they can practice creating profound imagery regardless of the circumstances. "Having been a wedding photographer, I enjoy the challenge of showing up somewhere you've never been, looking around, and figuring out how to do things," says Ally McKay. "There's a freshness in photographing a place you've never been before that can open up a lot of things creatively."

With that in mind, Ally and David McKay offer insights on photographing unfamiliar environments.

TAKE IN THE WHOLE AREA. Understand the area and what it has to offer. What are the challenges? What are the opportunities? Consider options beyond the specific scene you believe you're supposed to photograph.

ADOPT A 360-DEGREE PERSPECTIVE. Look up, down, and around. Consider different backgrounds, different angles. You may be focused on one view, but something amazing could be happening behind you. Be aware of what's going on all around.

CONSIDER THE LIGHT. How does the light work in this new location? How is that different from the light you're accustomed to using? Do your research on light conditions in the area. Know when the sun rises and sets. Figure out if conditions are likely to be clear and bright or cloudy. Determine the best time to shoot and from what perspective.

CONTROL THE LIGHT. After you've considered the light in a new location, figure out how to shape, adapt, and control it. If you can't schedule your photography during the ideal time of day, then how can you approach the light in that location when it's less than ideal?

EMBRACE YOUR CREATIVITY. Your senses come alive in a new environment, so listen to them. If a scene inspires new ideas, indulge them. Make the most of the moment, and let your creative impulses lead the way.

RESEARCH THE AREA. See what others have done before you. This isn't an exercise of trying to imitate someone else's work. Rather, get a baseline of knowledge you can build on. Consider what's been done before and how you can put your own spin on a scene.

LOOK FOR THE ANGLE. Think differently from the crowd. Don't be a tourist. Be an artist who brings a new perspective to a location. You have a unique worldview to share.

FIND A LOCAL GUIDE. Collaborate with someone who understands the culture and knows the places the typical visitor doesn't go. Finding a guide isn't as simple as going to a website and choosing one. It takes research, advance communication, a relationship, and working together to come up with a plan. Then it becomes a true partnership that can yield exemplary results.

GO WITH THE UNEXPECTED. When you're going to a place you've never been, let yourself veer off your plan, explore, be spontaneous, and follow your creative instincts. That's when all of your training, all of your technique, comes together to help you create something special.

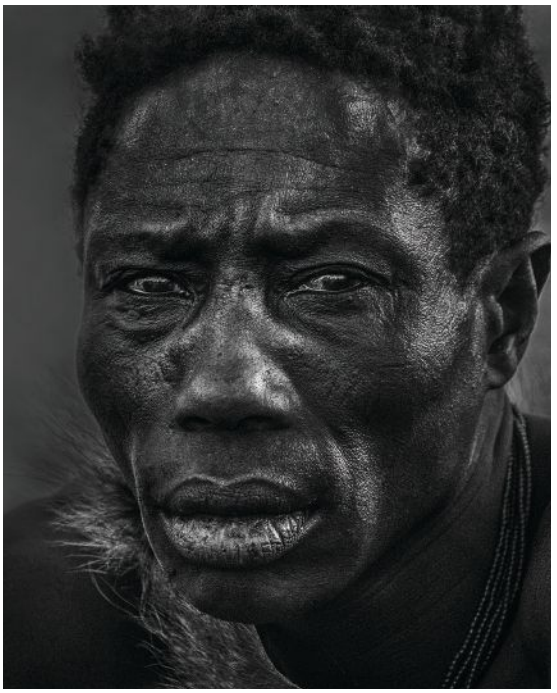
COLLABORATING ACROSS CULTURES

In a prime example of embracing the unexpected, Ally and David McKay have been working on a photographic collaboration with a group of Mongolian photographers that will include exhibitions at various embassies, as well as the United Nations in New York.

The collaboration kicked off when David met the ambassador from Mongolia in Washington, D.C., during a travel convention. The ambassador had heard about the McKays' work and was interested in using photography to help more people experience the beauty of Mongolia.

The ambassador put the McKays in touch with a few members of the Mongolian Landscape Photography Society, which turned into an invitation collaborate on a series of exhibitions that would travel to different embassies, starting with the Mongolian embassy in D.C. The exhibition features large prints from American and Mongolian photographers depicting images of travel, people, and elements of the Mongolian culture.

Eventually, when the Mongolian photographers travel to the United States, the McKays will help facilitate trips to American landmarks with some of the top American photographers. These tours will ultimately yield photographs for a new exhibition that will travel throughout Mongolia. "It's just a lovely relationship that came out of nowhere, and photography made it all possible," says David.



you're missing that friendship and adventure side, then you're missing so much of what photography has to offer. And as a result, the work can be flat. It's missing a vital connection. But if you can incorporate those elements, that is where your photography starts to come alive."

For the McKays, this is where the art of travel photography emerges. The emotional connection to the work is critical, and it comes from opening up your vision to the full experience. "A photographer who is technically proficient can go out and photograph a landscape or a culture, and they can do that well," says David. "But if their heart is not into what's actually taking place in front of them, then it's just an object. You're left with technically proficient photographs, and that's it."

Especially today, when cameras are loaded with so many options, photographers can obsess over settings and effects to the point of missing what's happening around them. On the other hand, if you open up your perspective to the complete experience, then your emotions will translate a unique perspective into the photographs. You start to see things differently. The scene comes alive. And that's when the magic happens. We're all different. We don't need to robotically photograph the same scene the same way. Instead, say Ally and David, bring in your own emotions, your unique perceptions, and photograph through that metaphorical lens.

"My No. 1 rule is put down your camera," says David. "Take it in, feel it. Once you're feeling it and experiencing it truly, then pick your camera back up and start photographing. When you see those images later, they are more profound. Maybe something was emotional and you were able to connect to it and capture it."

Photographers can learn to embrace this connection in all types of work, including client work. In portrait photography, for example, the most important element is how the images make people feel. That feeling comes from the connection you form with your clients and the experience you provide, says Ally. "People want to be taken care of. They want a special experience. They want a connection that feels like something deeper, like family. Photography can do this. Photography can bring you together." •

"My No. 1 rule is put down your camera. Take it in, feel it. Once you're feeling it and experiencing it truly, then pick your camera back up and start photographing.

—DAVID McKAY

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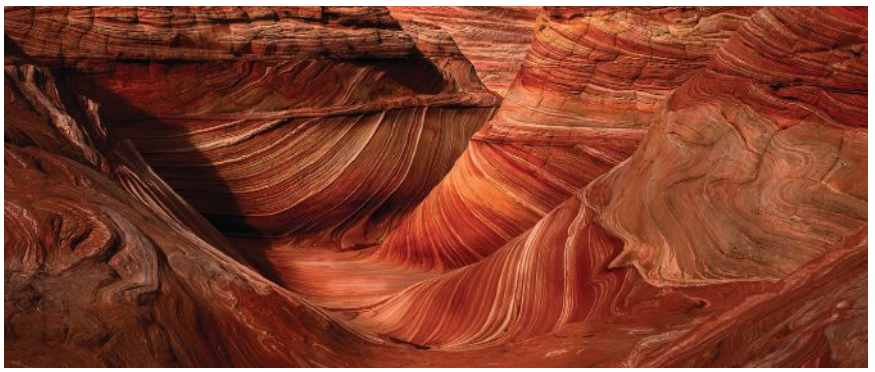

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Photographers seeking to earn a PPA degree will find it easier than ever to submit images for merit review under a new program called Merit Image Review.

PPA's merit system and International Photographic Competition were introduced in 1936 to help professional photographers hone their image-making skills. Although there have been many changes to IPC in the intervening decades, the overall process has remained largely the same, with photographers submitting a case of four images once a year for evaluation. While the process was labeled a competition, images were never evaluated against each other but against PPA's 12 Elements of a Merit Image.

A new process opens this month to replace IPC. Called Merit Image Review, it allows members to submit their work for evaluation throughout the year. Each month, one to four images can be submitted per degree (master of photography, master of wedding photography, and master artist). A maximum of eight merits per degree can be earned each year. Review panels will evaluate images each month (except December and January) against the 12 Elements of a Merit Image.

PPA CEO David Trust notes that while the original process was innovative for its time, it doesn't fit people's lives today. "People are busier than ever, and a once-a-year opportunity to submit images just doesn't work anymore," he says. Merit Image Review will allow people to work on images as their time permits and submit them for review whenever they're ready. Image critiques will still be made available, allowing photographers to get video feedback on their images from jurors.

In an Oct. 1 Facebook Live presentation announcing the new evaluation system, PPA President Jeff Dachowski, M.Photog.Cr., CPP, addressed the reason for changing the name from the longstanding International Photographic Competition. "The word competition poorly explains what we do," he says. "We're evaluating images to be able to award degrees and other accolades to our members. We're not competing. An image isn't held up to other images to determine if it merits."

For members who are sorry to see the end of PPA's International Photographic Competition, CEO Trust promises the forthcoming announcement of a "bigger, better" photographic competition in February 2023.

Merit Image Review submissions open Dec. 13. • **ppa.com/mir**

NEW CREDENTIALING DEPARTMENT

Rich Newell

With the creation of the new Merit Image Review comes the creation of the new credentialing department at PPA, which will oversee Merit Image Review, certification, and the as-yet-unveiled new photographic competition. Rich Newell, M.Photog.Cr., heads the department.

The process of earning a credential not only improves a photographer's skills, it also improves the photography industry as a whole, notes Newell. "As we update PPA credentialing, we're hopeful to see increased participation among members," he says.

Honoring a Legend

ERIC MEOLA WINS PPA'S LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Eric Meola is the 2023 recipient of PPA's Lifetime Achievement Award, which he'll receive at Imaging USA in Nashville next month. Meola has five decades' worth of image-making to his credit.

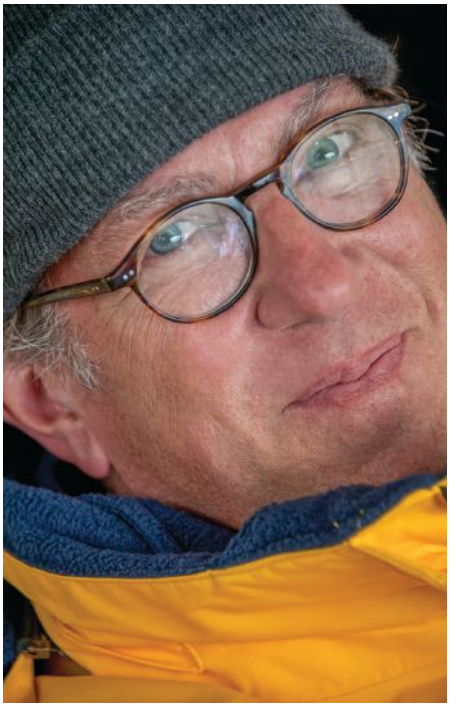
Meola's 1971 *Time* magazine cover portrait of opera singer Beverly Sills is in the permanent collection of the National Portrait Gallery. A trip to Haiti in 1972 for *Time* magazine resulted in one of his most famous images, "Coca Kid," which was included in *Life* magazine's special 1997 issue "100 Magnificent Images." In 1975 he photographed the cover for Bruce Springsteen's breakthrough album, "Born to Run."

He received the Advertising Photographer of the Year award in 1986 from the American Society of Media Photographers. In 1989 he was the only photographer named to *Adweek* magazine's national Creative All-Star Team, and that same year he received a Clio Award for a series of images he made in Scotland for Timberland.

In 2004, Graphis Editions published his first book, "Last Places on Earth," which was sponsored by Eastman Kodak. In 2014, he received the George Eastman Power of the Image Award. A 2019 book of Meola's photographs of tornadic storms, "Fierce Beauty: Storms of the Great Plains," was named one of the 10 best travel books of the year by *Smithsonian* magazine.

Meola's photographs are held in private and public collections, including the International Center of Photography, the National Portrait Gallery, and the George Eastman Museum.

Meola has lectured extensively at his alma mater, Syracuse University, as well as the Rochester Institute of Technology, the Art Center College of Design at Pasadena, and the George Eastman Museum. He encourages young photographers to step outside their comfort zones, have heroes, and stop looking down at a phone. "Look up with a sense of wonder at the mystical, spiritual, magical world that surrounds us," he says.



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Eric Meola

2023 PPA HONOREES

These award winners will be honored at a ceremony during Imaging USA 2023. **imagingusa.com/schedule**

BUSINESS EDUCATION AWARD
Clark Marten, M.Photog.Cr., CPP, and Rachel Marten, Cr.Photog.

DIRECTOR'S AWARD
Ralph Romaguera Sr., M.Photog.Hon.M.Photog.Cr., CPP, F-ASP, API

HUMANITARIAN AWARD
Deanna Duncan, M.Photog.Cr., CPP

INTERNATIONAL SERVICE AWARD
Erich Caparas, M.Photog.M.Artist.

JURORS MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARD
Carl Caylor, M.Photog.Cr., CPP, F-ASP

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
Eric Meola

PPA EDUCATION AWARD
Gregory Daniel, M.Photog.Hon.M.Photog.Cr., CPP, F-ASP, and Lesa Daniel, Cr.Photog.

TECHNOLOGY IMPACT AWARD
Michael Mowbray, M.Photog.,Cr.

VANGUARD AWARD
Richard Sturdevant, M.Photog.M.Artist.Cr.

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD
Alison Miniter, M.Photog.M.Artist.Cr., CPP

Tight Crop

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- Earn merits towards your PPA degree by attending or speaking at a PPA Approved Education Workshop
- Get recognized, build credibility, and set yourself apart
- Give back to your photographic community
- And much more!

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