

# PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

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# PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS OF AMERICA

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©CODY HAMMER

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# Dive Into That Lemonade

ADAPTABILITY WILL TAKE YOU FAR

Everyone is familiar with the phrase “making lemonade out of lemons.” We typically understand it to mean making the best out of a challenging situation or moving forward through setbacks. I thought of this phrase when I read about wedding photographer Meredith Ryncarz, Cr.Photog., currently based in Savannah, Georgia (“Have Camera, Will Travel,” page 40). Editor-at-large Jeff Kent writes that as an Army wife, Ryncarz is used to picking up and restarting her business every few years, depending on where military orders send her family. From Alabama to Virginia to Georgia, time after time, she’s hung out her shingle, built new clientele, and grown her photography business.

Ryncarz uses her lemonade-making skills at individual weddings as well, where she’s had to adapt to—among other issues—torrential downpours, hungry wild animals, and power outages. “The best you can do is try to be ready, not panic, and find a way to keep things moving,” she says.

This is a powerful life lesson as well as a business one. It can be difficult enough to start, maintain, and grow a business at one location, let alone in multiple places. What I admire about Ryncarz is that she doesn’t seem to see frequent relocation as a lemon at all. In fact, she embraces it. She recognizes that her career journey makes her unique, that she has learned invaluable lessons from her restarts about pricing, marketing, logistical management, and other crucial factors that drive business. She is a content contributor to PhotoVision at ppa.com, and created her own brand around her experiences to help other photographers and small business owners: The Restart Specialist.

I have a friend whose father worked as a physician in the Army. Her family was sent all over the world, including Korea, where she spent her early childhood and some elementary school. As she got older, she recalls initially dreading moves. But somehow, within a few weeks, she suddenly had friends and activities. I asked what she remembers about those early days in a new place, what she did to meet people and learn her new surroundings. “I really do not know,” she answered, then smiled. “I just went with it, I guess.” That formative experience has led to an inner confidence and envious level of adaptability. She has no problem entering a room where she knows no one, subconsciously taking stock of who’s who and what’s what, and diving into that lemonade.

Indra Nooyi, chair and CEO of PepsiCo from 2006 to 2018, once said, “Turbulence is the beginning of a fruitful process of transformation.” That, too, works for both business and life. You might not be looking to reinvent your photography business or be in the midst of a drastic life change, but it never hurts to consider how to best handle obstacles and how to work them to your advantage. It doesn’t hurt if you actually *like* lemons, too. •

*Melanie Lasoff Levs*

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# FOREGROUND

By Amanda Arnold

## Photos That Live On

IMPROVISED MOTION



IMAGES ©CODY HAMMER / codyhammer.darkroom.com



Oklahoma-based portrait photographer Cody Hammer stumbled into photography in 2017 by happenstance: After funding cuts at the Osage Nation Boys and Girls Club, the organization shifted Hammer from a previous position into the communications department, where a coworker asked if he could take a photo for a story she was writing. “I threw that Canon Rebel T6i on auto and headed out,” he says. “It was a simple photo of a building, but once that shutter fired, it triggered something in my brain and [I thought], *Man, that felt good.*”

Today the self-taught photographer and filmmaker, who is a Cherokee Nation citizen and now works as cinematographer manager at Cherokee Film, uses portraiture to convey his



community's stories. "I see it as a tool that helps me be creative and tell stories the way I want you to see them," Hammer says. "Also, to be able to give people photos that they will always have and that will live on past them."

For his photo of Simon W. (above, right), he used a Sony Alpha 7 IV with a Sony FE 50mm F1.4 GM lens and an Elinchrom strobe for off-camera flash. He wanted to convey movement in the photo, but since his camera didn't have high-speed sync, "I had him pose for the photo as if he was moving," he explains. The photo was made at

1/200 second at f/1.4, ISO 125.

In post-production, Hammer used his own preset in Adobe Lightroom for color enhancement and then used layers to shape the light. Then he moved the photo into Adobe Photoshop, where he created the illusion of movement by adding motion blur to the whole image and then brushing away the layer to reveal what he wanted in focus.

"What I like most about it is the emotion that it brings out," he says. "It instantly makes you look twice and dive into it." •



Learn more about portrait photography on **PhotoVision**.

# At Home

## SHOWCASING MIDWEST DESIGN

Design media tends to focus on the coasts, says Ryan Hainey, who's been photographing interiors and architecture in the Midwest since 2013. "The Midwest is underrepresented," he adds. Hoping to fill that void, Hainey turned to his own portfolio to put together his recently released book, "Midwest Home." "Over the past seven years, I photographed a wide range of projects through client commissions," he says. "From that archive, I selected 20 homes based on diversity—architectural style, material

use, geography, lifestyle. The goal wasn't to showcase a single aesthetic but to reflect the range and depth of design happening across the Midwest."

What makes an effective architecture and design photo? Hainey weighs in:

**It goes beyond documentation.** The image communicates the intent of the project and what it feels like to experience the space.

**Its creator examines the environment to decide what to emphasize.** "Composition, light, and timing all

support that," he says.

**It feels graphic and structured but also has moments of tension and irregularity,** "what you might describe as a wabi-sabi sensibility," Hainey explains. "Not perfection, but balance. Not staging for effect but allowing the space to retain a sense of life."

**It reflects the underlying idea of the project,** and, he adds, "captures the essence of the design rather than just its appearance." •



IMAGES ©RYAN HAINHEY / ryanhainey.com



“NOT PERFECTION,  
BUT BALANCE. NOT  
STAGING FOR EFFECT  
BUT ALLOWING THE  
SPACE TO RETAIN A  
SENSE OF LIFE.”



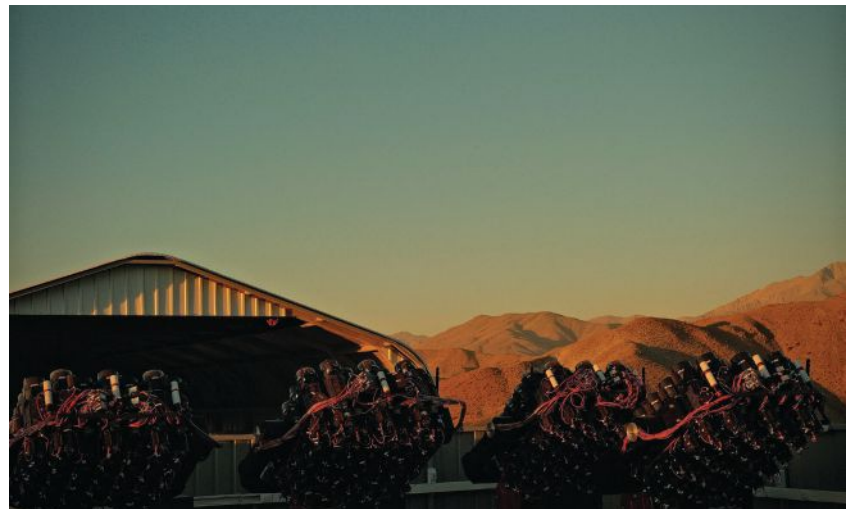
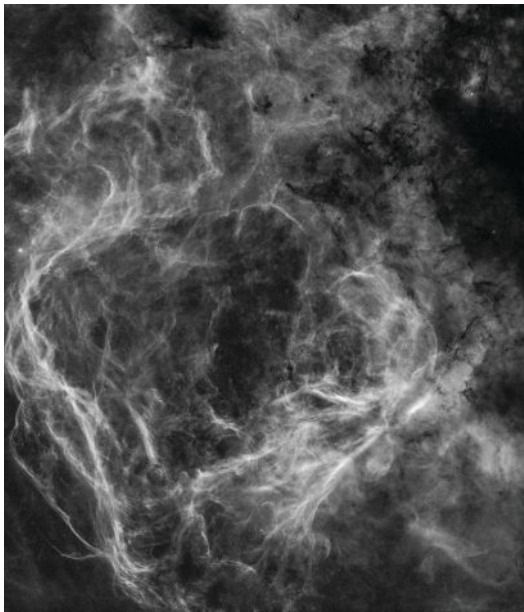
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# Out There

CANON GOES FULL GALAXY



How many lenses does it take to see the faint hydrogen gas that connects galaxies across the universe?

The answer is 1,140 Canon 400mm f/2.8 telephoto lenses.

Dragonfly, a Focused Research Organization, is building this massive array of Canon lenses, dubbed Mothra, to act as a telescope capable of revealing the hidden gases of the cosmic web that traditional instruments can't see. Mothra is being built at the Obstech El Sauce Observatory in Northern Chile, known for its clear, dark skies and dry stable air, ideal conditions for galaxy gazing. By combining images from 1,140 lenses, Mothra acts like a giant 4.7-meter diameter lens. It's expected to be fully operational by the end of 2026. •

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Photo: Tracy Bosworth Page

# Live Your Truth

MAKE DECISIONS FOR YOURSELF, NOT FOR OTHERS

By Makayla Harris, Cr.Photog., CPP



©PHANEENDRA GUDAPATI

We made a decision that, to most people, looked completely irresponsible.

At the time, we were living in a small Boston condo, building a photography business while raising a 2-year-old and a 5-year-old. Every weekend felt like a logistical puzzle we were barely solving. We'd shoot weddings for 10 to 12 hours, then drive three to six more just to meet my family halfway and hand off the kids.

It wasn't sustainable. And I knew it.

At the same time, our space felt tighter by the day, housing prices in Boston were out of control, and finding consistent childcare on weekends felt impossible. Everything was working ... but nothing felt right.

So, we made a decision that didn't make sense to anyone else.

We moved our entire life and business to Saratoga Springs, New York. New town. New house. No guaranteed business. And just to make it more interesting, we decided my husband would leave his stable career in finance to join me full-time in the photography business.

From the outside, it looked reckless, and if I'm being honest, I didn't have some perfectly calculated master plan to back it up either. What I did have was a clear vision.

I wasn't making this decision because everything was lined up. I was making it because I was at a breaking point. I was stretched too thin, trying to grow a business while being the kind of mom I wanted to be. I couldn't keep doing both at that level without something giving. And I knew if we wanted to build something bigger, something had to change.

I wanted freedom. Not two weeks of vacation a year. I wanted random afternoons with my family. I wanted to build something meaningful with my husband, not just pass each other in the chaos of schedules. I wanted support, a sounding board, a teammate. I wanted a life that felt intentional, not reactive.

And I knew one thing with absolute certainty. I would do whatever it took to make that vision real. Somehow, my husband trusted that too. So, we went all in. No backup plan. No safety net. Just a decision to bet on ourselves.

That season taught me something I still carry with me. Other people will always have opinions about your choices, especially when those choices don't fit inside their version of what feels "safe" or "smart." And a lot of those opinions will come from people you love.

That part stings.

But here's what I realized. Their opinion is based on their risk tolerance, their experiences, their fears. Not your vision. Not your capacity. Not your willingness to figure it out. So their opinion can't be what guides your decisions. If you build your life around what makes other people comfortable, you'll almost always end up in a place that feels limiting to you.

That move changed everything for us, not because it was easy, but because it forced us to step up. When your back is against the wall, you stop negotiating with yourself. You get resourceful. You get focused. You follow through.

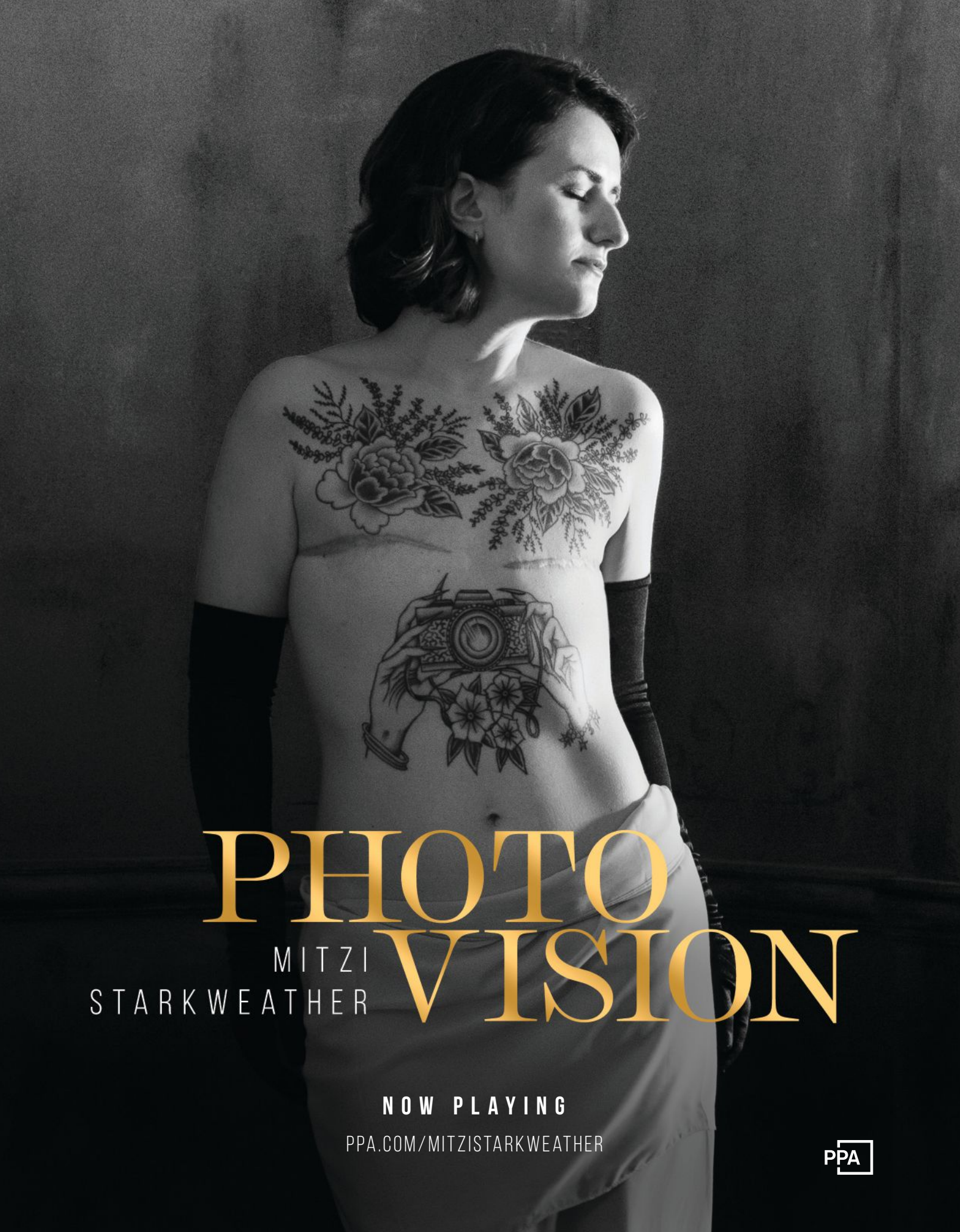
I don't believe in luck. I believe in ownership. I believe in keeping the promises you make to yourself, especially when it is easier not to.

So if you're standing at a crossroads, feeling pulled toward something bigger but held back by what other people might think, hear this: Don't make life decisions based on someone else's comfort. Make them based on your vision. Because at the end of the day, you're the one who has to live it. •

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



See more from Makayla Harris, Cr.Photog., CPP, on **PhotoVision** at **ppa.com**.



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Mitzi Starkweather is a portrait photographer, educator, and speaker based in Southwest Missouri.

A breast cancer survivor, she brings a deeply human approach to her work, creating space for clients to feel seen, accepted, and comfortable being themselves.

“The biggest word that comes up in my Google reviews is *comfortable*. ‘She made me feel comfortable.’ So, what do I put in my marketing? I make people feel comfortable.”

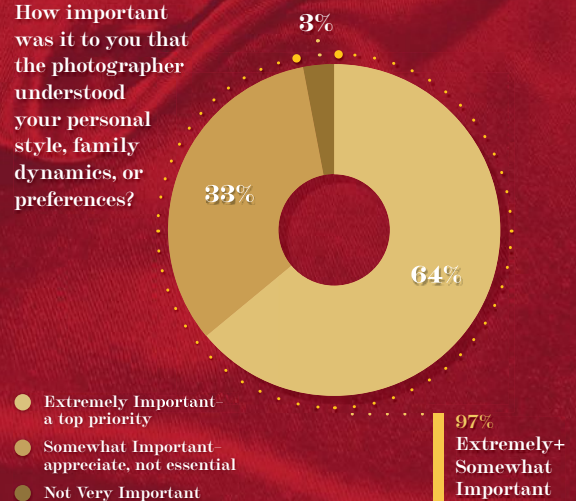
# Feeling Understood Drives Booking

Clients don't just choose images. They choose someone who understands them.

Among those who hired a photographer, nearly all say it's important to feel understood. When clients feel seen and understood, trust builds and booking follows.

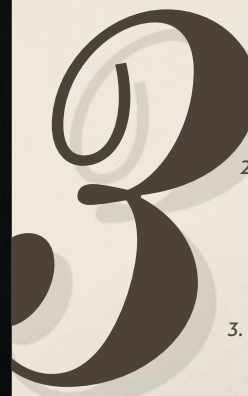
[PPA.com/Research](http://PPA.com/Research)

How important was it to you that the photographer understood your personal style, family dynamics, or preferences?



From PPA's Behind the Buying Decision Research Report

## WAYS TO BUILD A BRAND PEOPLE TRUST



### 1. Lead with how you make people feel

Clients may be drawn to your style, but they will remember the experience. The words that show up in reviews are often your strongest marketing message.

### 2. Show the person behind the brand

Clients aren't just hiring you for your work—they're hiring you for the person behind the camera. Sharing your voice, values, and personality builds connection before they ever inquire.

### 3. Ask better questions

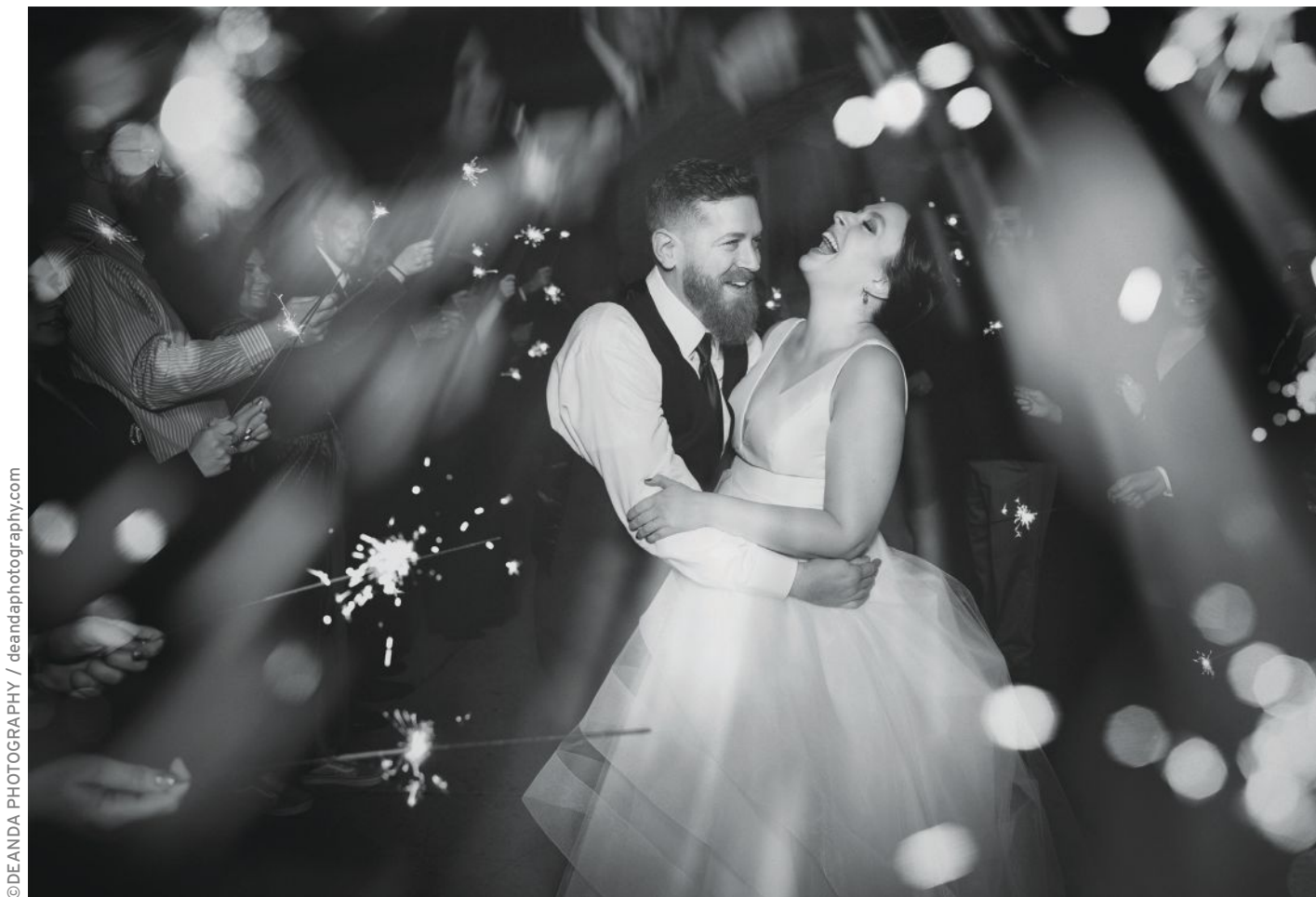
Start with emotion, not logistics. Ask clients why the session is important to them, then build the experience around their answer.



Explore Mitzi's approach to honest marketing, personal brand building, and client connection—plus practical ways to help clients feel comfortable before the camera ever clicks.

[PPA.com/MitziStarkweatherTips](http://PPA.com/MitziStarkweatherTips)





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## Elation

Carol DeAnda, M.Photog.M.Wed.Photog.Cr., CPP

DeAnda Photography

Algonquin, Illinois

**PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE:** "A slower shutter speed was used to allow the ambient sparkler light to register, while a zoom burst technique (zooming the lens during exposure) created the dynamic, energetic feel you see in the final image."

**CAMERA & LENS:** Nikon Z 6II, Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S lens

**EXPOSURE:** 1/40 second at f/2.8, ISO 320

**LIGHTING:** A Godox AD200 in a Magsphere on a Cheetah Stand, held by an assistant. "The flash froze motion while the slower shutter speed allowed ambient sparkler light to register."

**POST-CAPTURE:** The image was processed for exposure, color grading, and tone adjustments in Adobe Lightroom, and retouching was done in Adobe Photoshop.



**OUR COVERS:** *Professional Photographer* staff chooses each month's cover image from the top 32 images across each category in the International Photographic Competition. Learn more about the International Photographic Competition on **PhotoVision** at [ppa.com](http://ppa.com).

# The Face of Australia

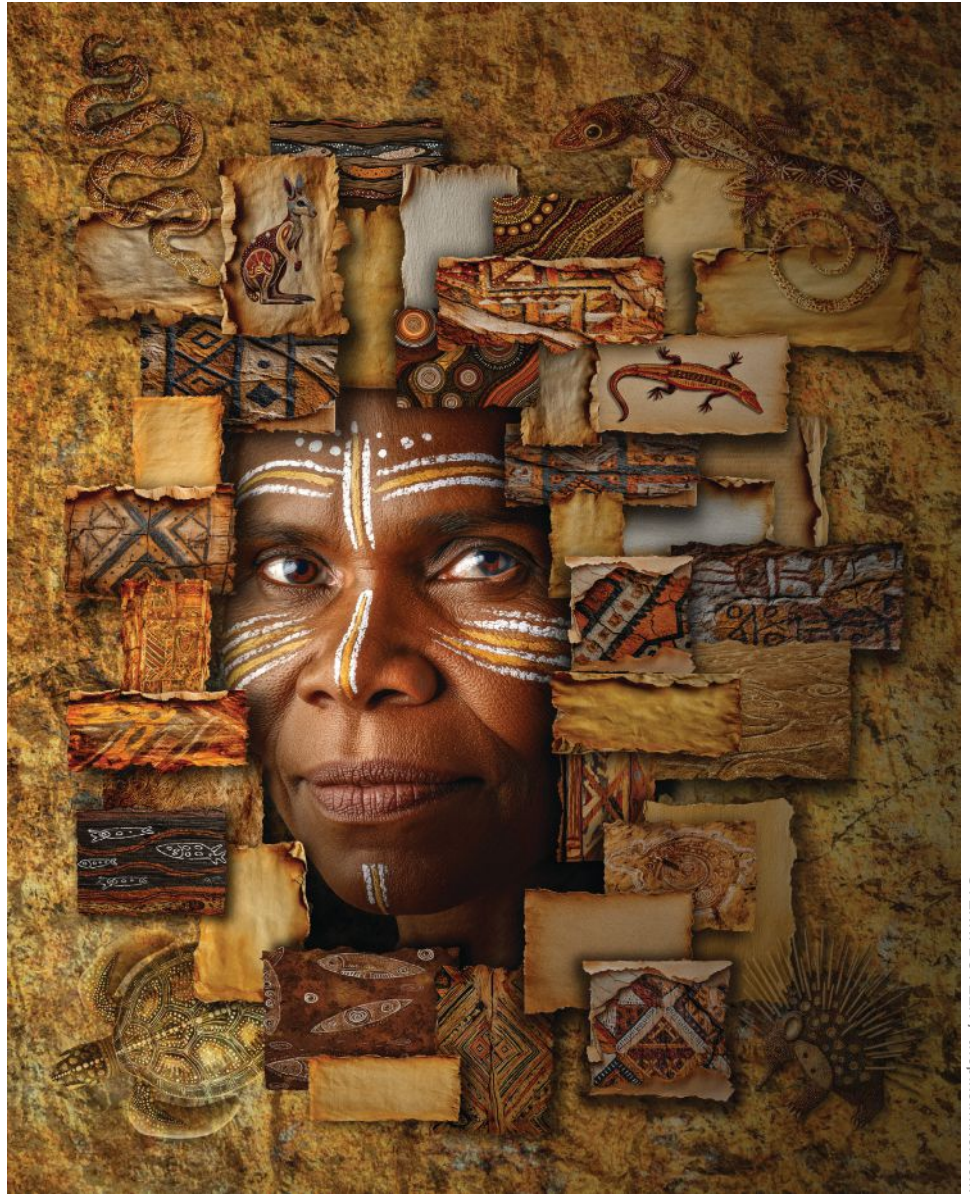
Terri Butler,  
M.Photog.M.Artist.Cr.

Pixel Mixer Art  
San Antonio, Texas

**PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE:**

The image is a composite put together in Adobe Photoshop and is made up of 49 stock or AI-assisted elements, explains Terri Butler.

**COMPOSITION:** The image was built in Photoshop using images of paper fragments, tribal patterns, graphics, and colors, Butler explains. She layered the fragments on top of texture around the face, and toned, color matched, shadowed, and lit the scene. Finishes were added to bring the piece together as a cohesive image.



©TERRI BUTLER / thepixelmixer.com



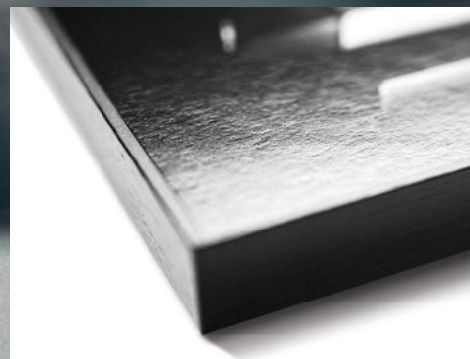
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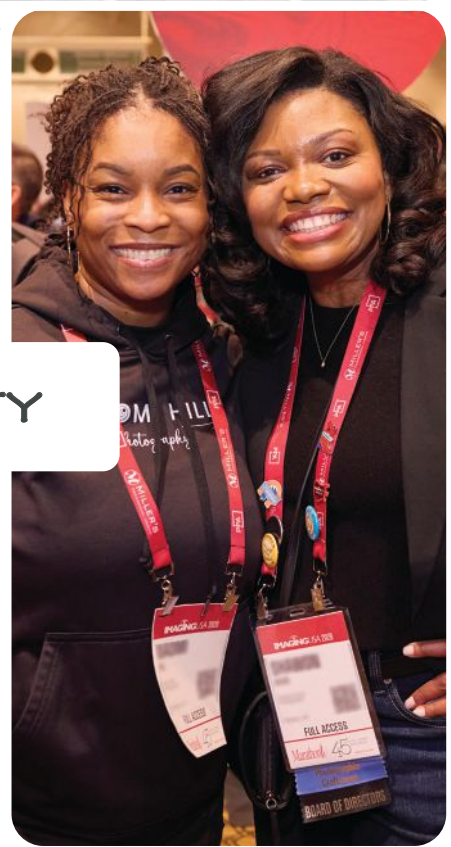
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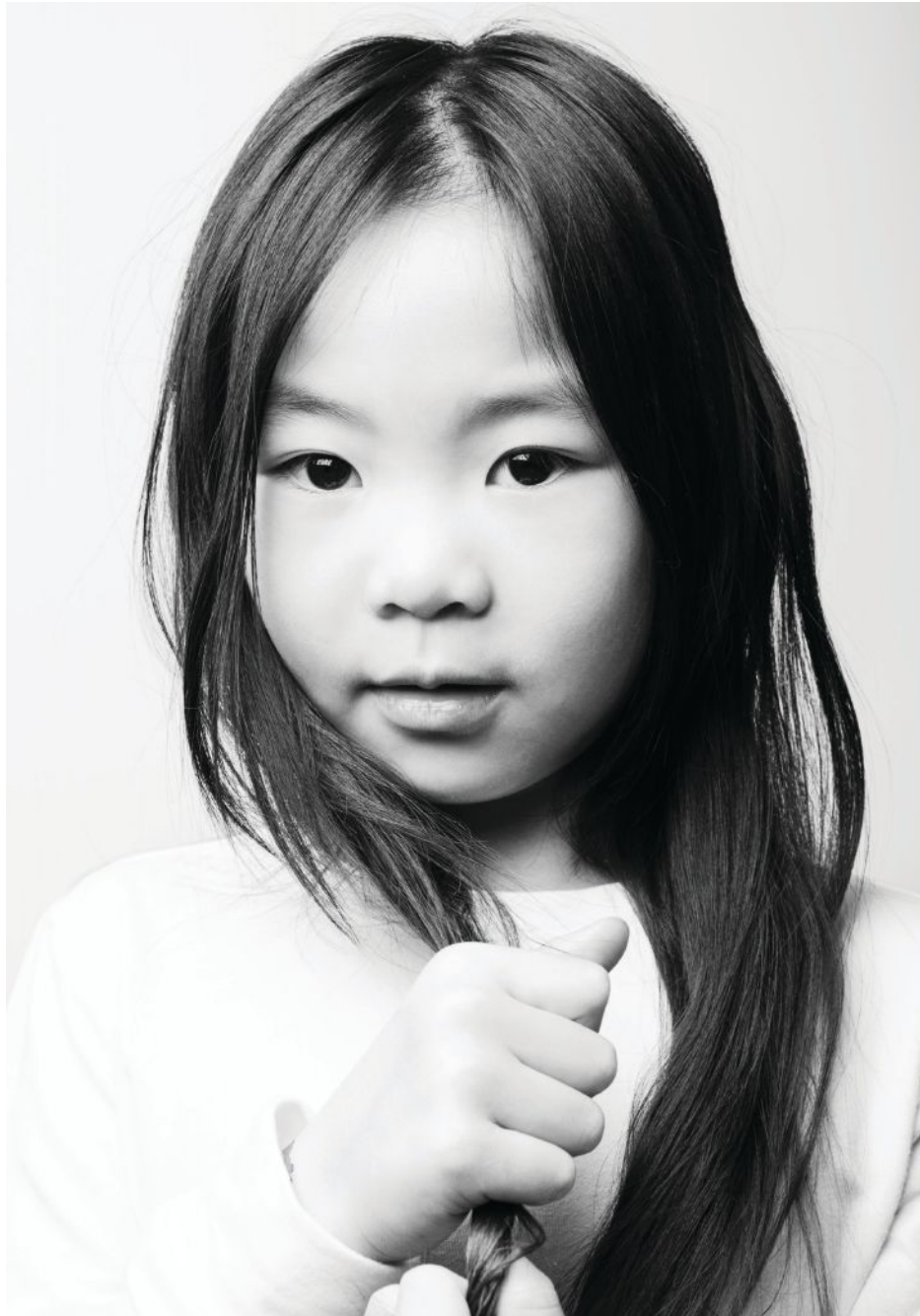
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# Leveling Up

CHILD PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY AT SCALE

By *Amanda Arnold*



IMAGES © LITTLE ICONS / littleicons.com

One day in May 2016, Ashley Mason realized she had an empty picture frame on the gallery wall in her dining room. She decided to fill it with a family photo. She set up one light on a white wall and created a black-and-white image of her 2-year-old daughter, who happened to be wearing a white T-shirt. Until then, Mason had been a commercial and editorial photographer primarily interested in the music industry, and had never photographed children professionally. But gazing at the image, she felt like she hit on something. “I think because my work was more editorial, [the photo] felt like a really adult style for a portrait of a child,” she recalls. “It just kind of struck me as being unique and cool.”

Soon after, Mason set up a day of mini sessions with friends’ kids to learn what it was like to photograph children and see if she could replicate the style. After that success, she partnered with local children’s and women’s clothing stores for child portraiture pop-ups, setting up her one light and small white backdrop. Her new business, Little Icons, was officially in motion.

## RIPPING OFF THE BAND-AID

For many photographers, that would be the end of the origin story of their business. For Mason, it was the beginning. As she’d started Little Icons, she and her husband were also making plans to move from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, to the U.S., namely Nashville, Tennessee. Initially, Mason planned to focus on her music photography. But with a toddler, she says, she realized she didn’t want to engage in the hustle of pursuing bands and musicians for commercial work. “I had just started Little Icons in Edmonton, so we thought, *Well, let’s do this in Nashville,*” she says. For the next two-and-a-half years,

Mason and her family traveled between Nashville and Edmonton to run Little Icons in both locales.

When COVID-19 struck in 2020, Mason was in Canada and unable to travel to Nashville to serve her clients there. Family members had already been encouraging her to scale up the business, and the pandemic was the final push she needed. In 2021, she reached out to a Nashville photographer who had wanted to work with Little Icons. Mason felt she could trust her to maintain the quality of the brand. “I kind of ripped the Band-Aid off,” she recalls, “and decided to train her as our Nashville photographer.”

That photographer would be the first to join Little Icons, now a decade old, as a paid contractor. Though not a franchise, Mason says Little Icons works using a franchise model. Today, she employs three full-time in-house staff, two contract photographers who also do part-time in-house work, and a team of contract photographers in various cities around the world including Nashville; Birmingham, Alabama; Austin, Texas; and Miami in the United States; and Toronto; Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta; Vancouver and Kelowna, B.C., in Canada and, as of this spring, London and Bath in the United Kingdom.

### THE BUSINESS COMPONENTS

Mason, who had no investors, expanded Little Icons gradually. She hired three contract photographers in the first year: one in Nashville and two in Canada. And while she says business was going well, she was careful to reinvest that money back into the company, primarily into photographer training so they can consistently deliver the style of portraiture and high standard of customer service that define the brand.

**The team:** Around the world, Little





Learn more about child portrait photography on **PhotoVision**.

Icons photographers make portraits in the Little Icons style, and cull images and curate galleries based on their training. Mason's full-time staff at Little Icons Edmonton are two editors and an operations manager. The editors do final edits of all photos and the production manager ensures quality control, trains photographers on culling and galleries, and handles customer service. A Calgary contract photographer, who also does in-house contract work, handles the final check of images before sending them to the clients.

**Hiring:** Mason's team finds photographers, and photographers also reach out to Little Icons with interest in the business, she says. "So far, we've picked a city we're kind of interested in, and then look for photographers in that area," she explains. What does she look for? More than technique and portfolio, Mason says she's most interested in an alignment of values. "We're looking for people who are emotionally intelligent," she says.

**Pop-up model:** Just as in its early days, Little Icons sessions take place at pop-ups at local stores. When a new contract photographer in a new locale joins the brand, Little Icons staff initially handles networking and scheduling until the photographer is trained in the process and gains confidence.

**Training:** Training contract photographers is the most important component of the business, Mason says, as it's the primary way to ensure consistency across the brand. Mason hosts a three-day workshop every year in Edmonton. She pays the photographers a stipend to assist with travel and lodging, and provides meals, but requires photographers to contribute some of their own funds as well, "so, it's an investment from both sides," she says. Though the annual workshop isn't



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Little Icons consists of more than a dozen contracted photographers in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K.



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ASHLEY MASON

## LESSONS LEARNED

Scaling your photography business is challenging, and Ashley Mason, owner of children's portrait company Little Icons, offers tips from her own experiences:

**Don't compromise on what you offer and make what you offer repeatable.** "We say no a lot—family photos, pets, color," she says. Having a clear offering allows it to be repeatable.

**Learn how to lead.** Put thought and care into the people you work with. Leading doesn't mean you have all the answers. It's better not to. It opens doors to ideas and input that will uplift the whole team.

**Find aligned people.** You need different minds and perspectives but overlapping values. "If your team is as obsessed with what you're creating as you are, that's everything," she says.

**Reinvest early and generously.** Get comfortable reinvesting money, resources, and time. Training and setting up systems will require more than you realize.

**Grow at a pace that protects quality.** "Maintaining the quality of your work, to me, is more important than how fast you scale," Mason says. "That's the biggest risk in this, is to put something out there that misrepresents your brand."



mandatory (training is), everyone has attended each year, and she feels meeting in person is important. "There are just some things that are hard to communicate without showing it with your hands," she says.

Mason has had to analyze her photography technique and process to create the training. "One of the most exciting and excruciating parts of that was to dissect myself," she says. "I worked very instinctively. I wasn't thinking about what my visual rules were. I even had to start thinking about how I talk with people." The workshop covers the specific techniques photographers use to create

the Little Icons style of portraiture, as well as how to cull images and create galleries. She also teaches client relations and how company values can help guide client interactions. Certain challenges seem to crop up more frequently, Mason explains, so she teaches the photographers how to handle those scenarios. For example, parents are sometimes anxious about how the session will unfold and how their children behave. "Something we train photographers to do is to speak

to [the parents'] fears in a positive way, giving them reassurance," Mason says.

During those three days in Edmonton for the entire Little Icons team, they learn not just from their leader but from each other. Mason says through fostering Little Icons, she has elevated her own skills, both photographically and as a businessperson. "Once this ball got rolling, it became bigger than me. It's not all mine anymore. And it is really amazing when the team shows up, and they help each other, and they learn together," she says. "I think that's massive. I think one of the coolest things about it being a team is that we genuinely level each other up." •

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**PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER**

# From Start to Finish

CLIENTS APPRECIATE THIS SAME-DAY SALES EXPERIENCE

*By Melanie Lasoff Levs*



IMAGES ©ADAM MUELLER / muellerphotography.net

Being a high-performing portrait/wedding photographer, according to PPA's Financial Benchmark Survey, means your business grosses at least \$25,000 in sales annually. La Crosse, Wisconsin-based family, senior, and wedding photographer Adam Mueller fits that description in large part because of his streamlined same-day in-person sales process, which he shares in a "Professional Photographer" podcast episode recorded in January at Imaging USA 2026 in Nashville, Tennessee.

"We took a step back and we just said, 'How can we serve our clients better and how can we design an experience that they will love from start to finish?'" Mueller tells host Pat Miller.

## ONE STEP AT A TIME

That customer experience is key to why the process works, he explains: customers know what to expect. Mondays through Thursdays, Mueller works two family and/or senior portrait sessions per day. Fridays through Sundays are devoted to photographing and managing weddings. Mueller Photography portrait clients come either first thing in the morning or in the early afternoon for about four hours, which includes the photo session (typically off-site) and in-studio sales presentation. To ensure a smooth session, Mueller communicates how it will run before the clients even enter the studio, and they know that before they leave, they will have stunning portraits from the

day to treasure for a lifetime.

"That client experience is really the foundation of why we did it," Mueller says, as photographers frequently deal with hurdles such as clients calling to reschedule their sales appointments or only one spouse can make the appointment and must decide for a whole family. "So, we kind of took all of this and said, 'Is there a way that we can do it better? Even if it means we have to think a little outside the box, or it's a little bit harder on our end to pull that off?'"

If it is harder, clients cannot tell. When they arrive at the downtown La Crosse, Wisconsin studio, Mueller sits down with them to talk about the session and discuss where on location they will

capture the images, such as a nearby park or greenspace. Then, they head out with Mueller for the main event. "I get to go create all their portraits," he tells Miller. "It's a really fun experience. I'm fast-paced with the photography. We're creating lots of high energy images." When the session is finished after an hour or so, everyone goes back to the studio. During a 15-30-minute break there, the beverage station has been stocked with soft drinks, coffee and the like, and the clients are ushered into the private presentation room, with its soft couches and 85-inch TV, to view their images.

"I THINK CLIENTS  
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AND THAT'S WHAT  
WE'RE DESIGNING."

"Within a few hours after arriving to our studio, they're already done," Mueller says. "And then, a few weeks later, they have their printed wall portraits and their albums in their home."

Having everything occur in one day works, he adds. "I think clients make the best decisions when emotion and clarity come together at the same time. And that's what we're designing," he explains. "We're designing an experience where the emotion is at its highest point. We just created these images. ... And then they're





Watch Adam Mueller's episode of the "Professional Photographer" podcast, as well as other episodes, on **PhotoVision**.



on that emotional high of, 'I'm really excited to see what was just created.'

### BITE-SIZED DECISIONS

While the same-day strategy beefs up in-person sales, Mueller is sensitive to overwhelming his photo subjects. During the slideshow of images, the clients do A-B comparisons versus viewing the hundreds that might have been taken en masse. This typically takes them down to 80-150 images that they particularly like. Those get reduced to about 50.

During what Mueller calls the "dream walk" through the studio, the clients see the displays of various products and examples of wall art finishes, such as acrylic, metal, and canvas. There are also different sizes of frames to choose from, the largest being 40x60 inches. "The way we're guiding our clients, both with the poses and the photography, but also the decision-making process afterwards, it becomes fairly effortless on their part to

know what feels right for them," he says. "You'll see with how we guide our clients in the actual sales presentation, how we walk them through our studio ... how we have them make bite-size chunks of decisions so that they're not making all the decisions at one point."

Mueller says the "dream walk" allows them to imagine "the dream scenario of what they would want displayed in their home. They're not making actual decisions at this point. They're just giving preferences: 'In a perfect world, I would love this in my living room. I'd like this in my family room or down the hallway, wherever it's being displayed in these finishes, in these sizes.'"

The studio prices out everything the client has identified and works with the clients to adjust. "They're either going to stay at that [price] point or we're going to give them easy ways to change finishes, reduce sizes, take something off to get them to a point where they're like, 'I feel good about that,'" he says.

### FRESH ON THE MIND

How does Mueller work quickly enough for same-day in-person sales? In short, he does no editing. "Some people will say, 'Well, I always edit all my images before I show them.' If that's the case, you can always edit one image and let a client know," he explains. "But say, 'Everything I'm showing you today because I'm doing same-day presentations, they're not edited, but this is how it will be edited.' That's enough for them. They would rather have the experience on the same day than waiting a month for you to edit every image you're going to show them."

Mueller uses Adobe Lightroom to go through and select images he shows the clients. Since the photo session is fresh on his mind, it doesn't take long to select



winning photos. “Exporting those, that’s obviously the bulk of the work. But maybe it takes 10 minutes for me to go through 300, 400, 500 images, quickly select those images, export them, and then it just takes another minute or two to import those into ProSelect,” he says.

In the years since Mueller Photography implemented this process, sales have increased year over year, according to Mueller. But he prefers to focus on client experience rather than numbers, he adds, because that is how to build business. “It is really much more that experience. I want that client to go home and when their friend asks, ‘Who do you use for photography?’ I want them to be able to say, ‘Here’s who we use. They’re amazing. They do this same-day presentation. They’re great with kids. They’re great with our high school senior.’”

To create that streamlined best client experience, Mueller advises taking time to perfect what he calls “back-end stuff” like studio processes and culling images, and consider how everything will look and feel. “You’re designing an experience that will look great in the client’s eyes as long as it doesn’t look like you’re fumbling through it,” he says. “It just takes a lot of preparation and planning, but once you start doing it, it becomes second nature.” •



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# A Huge Step Forward

SONY A7 V REVIEW

By Tyler Rickenbach



Historically, I've respected Sony cameras more than

I've enjoyed using them. They are often ahead of the curve in autofocus, sensor technology, and video features, but using them sometimes felt clinical. Powerful, yes. Intuitive?

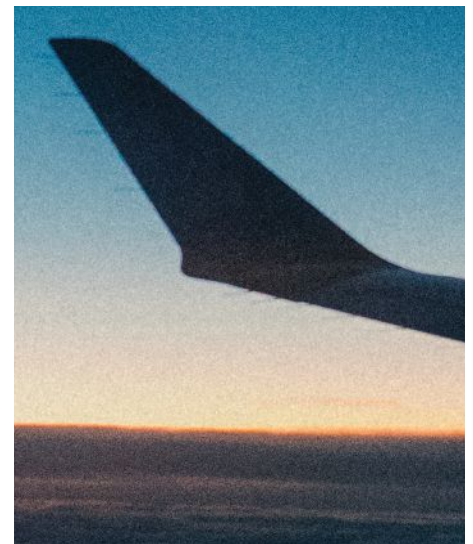
Not always.

I found other reviewers who have felt similarly. Popular YouTube tech enthusiast Gerald Undone cites the Sony a7 V's biggest strengths as its 33-megapixel sensor, improved rolling shutter performance from the a7 IV, full-frame oversampled 4K60p, stronger battery life, and a more capable photography feature set that now includes 30fps

bursts and improved pre-capture mode. He also highlighted the updated screen, stronger stabilization modes, and Sony's newer AI-assisted autofocus and processing features. He remains critical of Sony for lingering annoyances like no open gate, no 30p in H.265, HDMI quirks, and missing tools like shutter angle and false color. But his conclusion is clear: The a7 V is one of the strongest full-frame hybrid cameras in its class.

I agree. With the Sony a7 V, you're getting many of the benefits of Sony's higher-end bodies, with the same body as the Sony a1 II, which has strong weather sealing, reliable build quality, excellent autofocus, and long battery life, but without stepping into flagship territory.

Where the camera really starts to make sense is in hybrid work. Because I practice both photography and videography, one of the first things I evaluate in a camera is



A detail (above) of the image at left, which was taken at ISO 6400, shows how the Sony a7 V resolves noise in low light at a high ISO.

how easy it is to move between those two modes. It's not just about what a camera can do; it's about how quickly it lets you react when the scene changes. For example, on a recent flight, I was sitting in the window seat as the sun began to set over Colorado and Utah. The light was incredible—soft, directional, and constantly changing as the plane moved across the landscape. I wanted to capture both still images and video before the moment disappeared.

Those situations reveal a lot about a camera.

Like many photographers, I tend to shoot still images in aperture priority. It allows me to adjust exposure quickly using exposure compensation while keeping my attention on the scene rather than the camera. But when switching to video, I generally prefer full manual control.

On the a7 V, moving between those two approaches requires two steps: switching the mode dial from photo to video and then adjusting the exposure mode from aperture priority to manual. In practice, it only takes a second. Most people would argue it's not a big deal. But moments like that sunset (left) remind me how precious a second can feel when trying to capture something fleeting.

That's the reality of hybrid shooting. You're constantly balancing speed, control, and intuition. And while the a7 V still requires that small shift in workflow, it's clear Sony has put significant effort into making the overall experience more streamlined and practical.

## THE DETAILS MATTER

One of the first things I did after picking up the Sony a7 V was jump into the menu system. The first Sony camera menus were clunky. With the a7 V, the menu system is clean, organized, and perhaps





most important, it makes sense.

One detail that immediately stood out was how Sony handled S-Log. In previous Sony cameras, enabling S-Log meant navigating into picture profiles and remembering which profile corresponded to which log curve. Was it PP8 or PP9? Was that S-Log2 or S-Log3? With the a7 V, Sony simplifies that process. S-Log is now clearly labeled and accessible within the menu system. You can immediately see which log profile you're selecting without relying on memory or digging through picture profile settings. It sounds like a small change, but it solves a real friction point. In the past, if you had been shooting in S-Log and then moved to still photography, you often had to jump back into the menu and disable the picture profile to get a clean, natural image straight out of camera. That extra step is now gone, so you can move seamlessly between video and stills.

#### STABILIZATION, LOW LIGHT, AND REAL-WORLD TRADE-OFFS

One feature I noticed while using the a7 V was its image stabilization. Sony rates the camera at over 7 stops of stabilization. While numbers on a spec sheet tell part of the story, the advantage of that number is obvious when you're out photographing. Most of the time, for example when you're out in the evening when the light starts to fall, you won't have a tripod with you. Blue hour is one of my favorite times to capture a moment, but it's also when shutter speeds get slower and sharp images become harder to maintain handheld. With the stabilization built into the a7 V, I was able to keep capturing images. That kind of flexibility allows you to stay nimble, react quickly, and keep working as the light changes.

Of course, stabilization only solves

part of the problem. In low light, ISO is just as important as shutter speed. With its 33-megapixel sensor, the a7 V isn't designed to be a low-light specialist like the a7S III, nor should it be expected to perform the same way. Higher resolution sensors naturally show more noise at elevated ISOs, and that's the trade-off for the extra detail the camera provides. The a7 V does use dual base ISO values at ISO 800 and ISO 8000, which helps maintain dynamic range when working in darker conditions. In simple terms, those two base points allow the sensor to treat the signal one way when there is a lot of light and a different way when there is less light. Staying near those values tends to produce the best results, especially when you know you'll need to push the files in post.

I found that noise becomes noticeable sooner with the a7 V than it does on cameras designed specifically for low-light work. At ISO 3200 and ISO 6400, there is more visible noise, which looks very much like film grain in images from the a7 V, than some users might expect, particularly when compared to lower-resolution bodies. The files are still usable, and modern noise reduction tools can clean them up, but the difference is there.

Like many aspects of photography, noise level comes down to personal preference. Some photographers are comfortable pushing files much further than others. What mattered to me wasn't whether the image was perfectly clean, but whether it held enough detail and dynamic range to work with later. In that respect, the Sony a7 V performs well, even if it doesn't match the specialized low-light bodies in Sony's lineup.

Taken together, the stabilization, dual base ISO, and overall sensor performance make the a7 V a capable camera



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in changing light. It may not be the best choice if low-light performance is your only priority, but for a hybrid camera that balances resolution, speed, and versatility, it handles real-world conditions better than I expected.

### THE ONE

I often get asked, if you were buying a Sony camera today, which one would you get? Unless someone has a specific professional need, my answer is this camera. The a7 V is well balanced in Sony's lineup. If you need the absolute speed and performance of the a9 III, you already know why. If you need the highest resolution and flagship-level build and features of the a1 II, that decision is just as clear. But for most photographers, filmmakers, and hybrid creators who want one affordable camera that can do it all well, at \$2,499.99 MSRP, the a7 V makes sense.

It may not be the best low-light performer in Sony's lineup like the a7S III, but it's more than capable. It may not carry the full flagship feature set of the a1, but it shares much of the durability, weather sealing, autofocus performance, and overall reliability that professionals expect. And for most users, those are the features that matter day to day. What makes the a7 V compelling is that it checks nearly every box. It's fast enough for action. It has more than enough resolution for professional still work. Its autofocus is excellent. Its video features are strong enough for serious hybrid use.

For most of my career, Sony hasn't been the system I naturally reached for. But with the a7 V, it feels like Sony has removed much of the friction that used to come with their cameras. •

*Tyler Rickenbach is a filmmaker and photographer based in Idaho.*



# One-Lens Challenge

SIGMA 35MM F1.4 DG II ART LENS

By *Mark Edward Harris*

IMAGES ©MARK EDWARD HARRIS / markedwardharris.com



Until I tested Sigma's latest 35mm during a trip to Hot Springs, Arkansas, I felt that if I could only work with one lens and it had to be a fixed focal length, it would be a 28mm. Working with the new Sigma 35mm F1.4 DG II Art lens has made me rethink that position, especially since my assignment involved creating vertical environmental portraits to tell the story of this historic town.

While the 28mm can be a great lens for horizontal environmental portraits, it tends to show too much distortion when applied to verticals. In Hot Springs I used the lens, which is available in Sigma L-mount and Sony E-mount versions, to take environmental portraits of the people and places that lend the town its unique character.

The Sigma 35mm F1.4 DG II Art lens is compact, weighs 18.5 ounces, and has a 67mm filter size. I photographed the people behind an eclectic mix of





Hot Springs food and beverage businesses, including Matt Bell of Origami Sake (bottom left), and Saddiq Mir at J&S Italian Villa (bottom center). Apertures between  $f/4$  and  $f/5.6$  gave enough depth of field to feel the subjects' environments without being so sharp that it would pull the viewer's focus to the background. I applied the same approach to the more reportage-style environmental portrait of a fully laden server at The Pancake Shop (bottom right).

The Sigma lens is equipped with an AFL button in two locations, which can be assigned to several functions via the menu on select cameras. In addition to the aperture ring, the lens has an aperture ring lock switch. If engaged in position A, the aperture ring will be locked in that position and the camera will control aperture. Engaged in a position other than A, it will transfer control of the full aperture range of the lens, from  $f/1.4$  to  $f/16$ , to the aperture ring.

Bathhouses are what put Hot Springs on the map more than a century ago. I used the Sigma 35mm F1.4 DG II to document the broad façade of the Quapaw Baths (top left)



## JAKE SCHNEIDER

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I became a PPA member because of the benefits! The insurance gives me peace of mind while working, and the contract templates have decreased my time spent on paperwork and helped my clients!

In five years, I hope to be a full-time photojournalist. I'm inspired by many photojournalists including Larry Burrows, Jim Marshall, Robert Capa, and many more. What I like most about *Professional Photographer* is seeing other photographers' work! I'm always intrigued to see how others see, and I try to make it a learning experience that adds to what I do!

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when the afternoon sun illuminated the facades of the buildings that line Bathhouse Row. At the Superior Bathhouse Brewery and Distillery, I did an environmental portrait of Rose Schweikhart (above, left) in the converted space where she and her team use thermal spring water to create beers.

Hot Springs was a popular vacation destination for some of America's most notorious criminals of the Roaring Twenties into the mid-20th century. Their stories are told at The Gangster Museum of America through displays including the death mask of John Dillinger (above, center). The 35mm f/1.4, with its fast and quiet autofocus and fast aperture, made it ideal to document lowlifes in low light both in the museum and on the street. A likeness of Al Capone (above, right) in front of the nearby



Ohio Club showed off the lens' low light capabilities, including the rendering of a beautiful bokeh.

In bright sunlight at Avant Mining on Fisher Mountain, I also took advantage of the lens' ability to go shallow to document a visitor's newly unearthed crystal cluster (page 39, left). I wanted the viewer to focus on this magnificent find without being distracted by other elements in the frame. The dust- and splash-resistant barrel and water- and oil-repellent coated lens aides in its use in harsh outdoor environments. The newly developed AAC (Advanced Amorphous Coating) has also been added, dramatically reducing reflections responsible for ghosting and flare. Even with that, however, I use the supplied petal-type hood with a locking mechanism. Colors can be muted by extraneous light even when it's not being



hit by a light source that would create a full out lens flare.

The lens features an 11-blade rounded diaphragm that maintains a round shape even when stopping down from maximum aperture. A kayak ride around Lake Hamilton (page 39, top right) from the Lookout Point Lakeside Inn gave me the opportunity to test this aspect of the lens at f/16 to get both the bow of the kayak and the resort in the background in sharp focus.

I put the lens' minimum focusing distance of 11.1 inches to the test at the 210-acre Garvan Woodland Gardens in the Ouachita Mountains, where my shots included a frame filled with an abstract detail of a peacock's feathers (page 39, bottom right). Incorporating new glass materials that were previously difficult to process into the lens, togeth-



er with four high-precision aspherical elements and two SLD glass elements, corrects axial chromatic aberration, which suppresses color fringing not only in the in-focus plane but also in out-of-focus areas, producing an elegant natural bokeh.

Using just the one 35mm f/1.4 lens in Hot Springs meant I could focus on documenting the experience, liberated from my usual bag full of lenses. •

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





IMAGES ©MEREDITH RYNCARZ / meredithryncarz.com

# Have Camera, Will Travel

BY JEFF KENT

**MEREDITH RYNCARZ**, Cr.Photog., has moved a lot. With a husband in the military, she's used to picking up and restarting her life, and her business, every few years when new military orders send the family to the next location. From Alabama to Virginia to Georgia, she's taken her photography business with her, each time starting over from scratch to build a new network, new clientele, and a new business presence.

Well, not exactly from scratch. Over the years and successive moves, Ryncarz has honed her organizational practices to become an expert in starting over. Her current iteration of the business is a successful boutique wedding and boudoir portrait studio in Savannah, Georgia, with connections and clients calling her from

all over. From one spot to the next, she's developed and transported her logistics management and business development systems while continually elevating her photography to appeal to an increasingly affluent audience.



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MEREDITH RYNCARZ

**Meredith Ryncarz**  
creates success  
by starting  
over, over  
and over  
again



### CHANGING SPECIALTIES, GAINING FOCUS

Ryncarz started out as a portrait photographer. She spent several years developing skills and best practices around portrait photography, ushering her business through various iterations and locations while steadily growing her profile. But when she had the opportunity to try her hand at wedding photography, she found the next level of inspiration. At the urging of a colleague, she decided to go all in on weddings. As an established portrait photographer, she figured her expertise would translate seamlessly. Instead, she had to shift her thinking.

“You don’t realize what you don’t know until you realize you don’t know it,” says Ryncarz. “Attacking weddings from a portrait perspective, there is a lot of potential for missteps.” She points to pricing, time management, understanding how to track cost of goods, and effectively gauging the competition as areas of concern. “But if I were to look back on it now, 13 years later, I would say

that not understanding logistics and asset management were the biggest problems I faced,” she continues. “Because a wedding is a production. You have one day to get it right, and there are no re-dos.”

When planning a wedding job, it’s critical to map out not only the timeline, but how the photographer and second photographer approach different phases of the work to ensure the most creative coverage. “A lot of times, wedding photography teams move as one,” observes Ryncarz. “They don’t think of individual assets in terms of the different skills of people on the team.” For example, one photographer may excel at portraits and another at photojournalistic, storytelling photography. Planning where these photographers should be stationed and when during the event leads to more creative coverage and better-quality images, she explains. “When you don’t manage your assets correctly, you lose creativity because you’re allowing chaos and stress to sweep in.”







### REPURPOSING PORTRAIT SKILLS

The key to success in the wedding field is recognizing the purpose of the images, says Ryncarz. “You’re looking to tell a story, not just take a beautiful portrait of a couple. Can you take these two people, put them together, and make them look beautiful? Can you also tell their story in an intriguing way?” The best images combine the skillsets of portraiture and photojournalism, she adds. Ryncarz suggests asking yourself, “How do I inform the story from a portrait standpoint and tell it in that one frame—and then do it again and again and again to string together a cohesive narrative?”

Ryncarz appreciates the uniqueness of each wedding even as some of its elements, such as parts of the ceremony, may stay the same. “Every single wedding is different,” she says. “Every single couple is different. They want different images, different approaches. That gives a creative challenge as we consider how to do very similar things differently, creatively, so the images are as unique as the people.”

### ADAPTING TO THE UNEXPECTED

Ryncarz has experienced everything from a groomsman having both hips pop out of their sockets to a hungry racoon invading the catering tent to a torrential downpour that flooded the entire outdoor reception site—and that was all at the same wedding. She has learned that wedding photographers must prepare for the unexpected, and when you’re not prepared, improvise. She even carries an emergency kit with everything from crochet hooks to razor blades, and “a whole bunch of other stuff you’d never think you’d need,” she says. “Sure, at some level, we’re in it to take pretty pictures, but managing logistics allows us to take those pictures.”

Ryncarz remembers one event when strong winds knocked out power at the wedding site. The bride’s hair was half-done, the groomsmen were stuck in a windowless room with no light to get dressed, and the venue’s backup generator was out of fuel. Ryncarz’s assistant backed her Jeep up to a window, and they threaded an extension cord through the window to provide power to the wedding party (and at least finish the bride’s hair). “The best you can do is try to be ready, not panic, and find a way to keep things moving,” Ryncarz says.

### SHARING THE KNOWLEDGE

Ryncarz has been sharing insights from these crazy wedding mishaps, as well as plenty of lessons from everyday business management, in an online educational venture called “The Restart Specialist” and on PPA’s content website PhotoVision. She was inspired to start educating photographers after attending a wedding photography workshop shortly after one of her relocations. Ryncarz says the instructor told her that because she moves too frequently, she would not succeed in the wedding industry and was actually taking away business from other photographers. This feedback only hardened Ryncarz’s resolve to succeed. In fact, she says, she realized that her strength was her ability to generate new business in each new place. And along the way, she learned invaluable lessons about pricing, marketing, logistical management, and other crucial factors that drive business.

Those elements are sometimes overlooked by photographers who lack business backgrounds and focus only on the art. “Photographers want the pretty. I do, too. I love to create, but money allows me to stay in business and create more,” she explains. “So, I want to help others with ... all



Watch Meredith Ryncarz's videos on **PhotoVision**.





“You’re looking to tell a story, not just take a beautiful portrait of a couple. Can you take these two people, put them together, and make them look beautiful? Can you also tell their story in an intriguing way?”

those things that most creatives shy away from. I want to help people get to that point of having a successful business as quickly as possible, versus going down a rabbit hole and losing two, three, four years trying to find a system that works. Most of all, I see potential in people, and I want them to use it. They have a God-given talent for a reason, and I want them to see their full potential.”

#### **ATTACHING MOTIVATION TO DILIGENCE**

For photographers struggling to grasp the important business topics, Ryncarz recommends tying them to what you value and what motivates you. Is it freedom? Is it family? Is it the joy of creating art? Then think about how better business practices can feed your motivation. If freedom is what motivates you, then a strong financial plan allows the freedom to choose what to photograph and when. With that baseline, the next step is to adjust your business expenses. It may mean adding

more offerings to generate more revenue or changing your sales techniques, “because the money is there, you’re just not asking for it,” Ryncarz says. “We need to get past that fear, move beyond that feeling that asking for money for our art is somehow sleazy. That’s the biggest issue I see with photographers, that reluctance to actually sell their art. Photographers need to understand that we are providing a service. People come to you because they have a need, and you can meet that need. Don’t think of it as sales; think of it as serving your client.”

This is why photographers must be deeply familiar with their client base, why you’re serving them, and how you can serve them better. “This process allows us to start charging more, because we understand the psychology that feeds into the business,” says Ryncarz. “We need to step outside of ourselves, get out of our own way, and by doing so, we can better serve our clients for many years to come.” •

## Erika Thiele builds trust to capture her clients' truth

It's one of her most cherished photos, says

Erika Thiele, CPP. It's Christmas morning and she's just shy of 2 years old, beaming with delight holding her new toy camera, with her dad grinning in the background. She carried that camera everywhere, she recalls.

"I giggle every time I see [the photo]," she says. "When my uncle sent it to me, he told me it was so obvious that being a photographer was my destiny."

Throughout her childhood and young adulthood, Thiele was rarely without a camera. Her friends were her perpetual subjects, often joking that her camera was an extension of her body. But through their forbearance, Thiele learned the magic of how a simple photograph could turn an everyday moment into something astounding. Fleeting facial expressions and gestures provide subtle hints of a subject's true personality, and when frozen at just the right moment, speak volumes about who they are.

Realizing the power that a camera could wield was pivotal for Thiele.

In her high school journalism class, Thiele photographed events for the local newspaper. She went on to major in photography in college. "I spent hours in the darkroom," she says. "Oddly, I actually miss the smell of it."

Today, Thiele runs Erika Thiele Photography in Kearney, Nebraska, specializing in maternity and newborn photography. She also offers boudoir, senior, and family portraits. Just as she discovered with her tween and teenaged friends, Thiele believes that the unguarded moments she captures tell a deeper story.

"I love my posed photos, but there's something so much more magical that happens when [the subject doesn't] look at the camera," she explains. "When you look—truly look—at your husband or child, that's where the love comes through. Those are the pictures that last because they're more meaningful."



ERIKA THIELE



# Emotionale Verankerung

By Stephanie  
Boozek



Through her camera lens, Thiele aims to gently disarm her subjects so they feel safe, confident, and comfortable revealing their authentic selves. Capturing kids acting like kids, moms rubbing their bellies or talking to their new babies—those moments are golden.

### RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS

Aside from the rare person who naturally comes alive in front of the camera, those moments of authenticity typically don't happen organically. Thiele has learned over the years that a photo session is about reciprocity: Photographers must be authentic for their clients to be the same. That's why Thiele takes time to build genuine relationships with her subjects by asking the right questions to help make them feel seen. She asks her clients how they want to feel when they look at their images, not just how they want to look. She wants to know what emotional value these images will bear, find out what her clients are self-conscious about, which features they love about themselves, and which they don't, she says.

"Some people feel invisible or insecure. They don't always feel safe, seen, heard, or appreciated for who they are," says Thiele. "As a photographer, you can be that for them. There's so much that's fake in the world; people don't know who to trust. If you can be that safe space, that comfort and security, they're more likely to come back and have you document their whole lives."

Knowing their concerns and what they're hoping to see of themselves provides her a structure from which to build a story, Thiele explains.

"When you're pregnant, you just don't feel like yourself, and it can be hard to look at yourself in the mirror," she says. "You see the big belly, or your hair isn't the same, and your skin isn't the same. Maybe they've spent the last few months vomiting or every part of



*"Some people feel invisible or insecure. They don't always feel safe, seen, heard, or appreciated for who they are. As a photographer, you can be that for them."*



their body aches. So, the goal is to sit them down and ask how they want to feel about these photos. I let their vision guide me. And sometimes, they just say they want to feel beautiful. And that's OK. We can do that."

To that end, Thiele offers hair and makeup, and a full wardrobe of gowns and children's clothing so moms can feel pampered. Taking wardrobe and styling off her clients' plates makes it easier for them to show up calm for the session, ready to enjoy the experience. Even so, Thiele says, some of her subjects still freeze up in front of the camera, if the little insecurities about their bodies or a general feeling of awkwardness creep in. During those moments, Thiele will sometimes offer them a peek at the back of the camera for reassurance.

"I've found that if I do that at the beginning of a session, it helps to get them hyped because they can see what I see," she says. "I always focus

on building them up, pointing out their beauty."

With couples, she finds that one person is typically more comfortable than the other. That's when she asks if she can help them pose, and then gently guides hands and arms into more comfortable, relaxed positions. She'll talk about their chemistry, how cute their baby is, or have Dad whisper something into Mom's ear that might make her blush.

"That's when they let down their guard and you can create beautiful photos," she says. "You have to set up a safe environment where they can just relax into themselves."

### MAKING IT EASY

After the session, Thiele continues her client-focused approach by showing them only a carefully curated selection of photos. She's learned that clients don't want or need to choose from 500 maternity or family photos. She likens it to standing in front of a giant wall of paint chips, where every possibility is up on that wall and it can be paralyzing and overwhelming to commit to a single hue, let alone a color family.

"As the photographer, you have to have enough security and confidence in your work to say, 'Let me help you narrow these



down,” she says, adding that she used to offer 170 newborn photos with the same poses duplicated in color and black and white. Her clients didn’t know what to do with so many options. “Now,” she says, “I really pare it down ahead of time and then tell them to focus on what they actually want to see every day. What brings out the most emotion, what makes them feel the most beautiful? It’s about guiding them, but it takes a lot of practice.”

Thiele says confidence and trust are part of every aspect of her business, not just while the subjects are in the studio. Her clients are baring their







vulnerabilities, and sometimes their bodies, in front of Thiele's camera, so it's important to make sure they always feel supported and cared for, she explains. "If you're not confident, it bleeds through and your clients won't have confidence in you either," she says. "If you're feeling really insecure, they'll feel it too. I'm here to make my clients feel calm and beautiful and confident because they feed off of my energy. I try to be that solid rock for them, so they know that everything will be perfect in the end."

The biggest revelation Thiele has had in running a business is to follow her heart and instincts. Her heart leads her to pursue symbiotic, honest relationships with her clients, and it's been her instinct to build up their confidence. Her clients, in turn, reward her with candor in front of the camera, so both parties walk away fulfilled.

"I have clients that I've been photographing since they were little bitty, and now they're getting married. That is the most precious part of my job. I absolutely adore being invited back into these people's lives over and over again to capture all of these events from birth, even into death," she says, adding that she has photographed some funerals. "That's the most amazing part of this job, having clients treat you like family. I guess it means I'm doing my job right." •

*Stephanie Boozer is a writer in Charleston, South Carolina.*





# *Beauty in the Details*

CHRIS J. EVANS SHARES HIS  
WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY SECRETS

The apple didn't fall far from the tree for globetrotting Ventura, California-based lensman Chris J. Evans. The renowned luxury wedding photographer was born into a family of artists. His mother, D.N. Evans, was a jewelry designer and couture wedding dress and fashion designer, and his father, Michael, was a sculptor, painter, and philosopher. Raised in an environment that nurtured creativity, Evans recognized that art could not only be a career but a way to contribute beauty to the world. His interview has been edited for length and clarity.

*By Mark Edward Harris*

**Mark Edward Harris: When did photography enter your life?**

**Chris J. Evans:** My mom's best friend, Roberta, gave me my first camera, a Canon AE-1 with a 50mm f/1.8, when I was 14. Growing up in Laguna, I was a surfer and a skateboarder and always had this camera with me taking pictures of my lifestyle, my friends, and other cool things. I got signed to a big modeling contract when I was 18 and that's how I fell into fashion photography. Being photographed by some of the top photographers in the world, including Mario Testino, John Russo, and Patrick Demarchelier, informed my eye. I started photographing fashion, and then a girlfriend asked me to photograph her wedding in 2010. The bride was a model and it was in Hawaii, so I had a destination wedding with a model bride for my first time out of the gate. There are no reshoots on a wedding. But I got to be a product photographer when I photographed her shoes and the flat lay; and I got to be a photo-journalist, doing a documentary style; and I got to be a fashion photographer, photographing her in her dress. I was like, *A wedding is actually everything I love about photography in one incredible day.* I was hooked.

**MEH: You mention the "Vogue moment" in one of your PhotoVision videos. What exactly is that?**

**CJE:** It's a moment where the bride or groom feels celebrated for their beauty and for just being themselves. Most of them are

not models and have never been photographed for so many hours straight. That's really the biggest thing, when they feel safe enough to let down their guard. When I show them that image, which is a version of themselves they've never seen, and they think, *Whoa, I look so amazing*, that's the *Vogue* moment. I learned that from my time in front of the camera. I worked with photographers who made me feel amazing and others who made me feel terrible. So, I know how much power we have as photographers when we point a camera at someone.

**MEH: How do you get Vogue energy out of non-models?**

**CJE:** It's vibration, it's how you enter a space, it's how you hold yourself, it's the tone and speed of your voice. In the morning when I first walk into the room, the bride's still getting her hair and makeup done. It's high stress, high anxiety. If you enter that space and you're part of this chaos, that energy reverberates. When I enter, it's the opposite. I walk in very calm, in a finely tailored suit, very professional, no cameras. "Susan, how are you? So nice to see you. You look amazing. I couldn't wait for this special day. I'm gonna go set up in the corner. Enjoy the hair and makeup process. Can I get you a water or anything?" I set up a dynamic that I'm there to serve them at the highest level. Most of the time I get a sigh of relief that everything's going to be all right, just from that initial energy. That





When I show them that image, which is a version of themselves they've never seen, and they think, *Whoa, I look so amazing*, that's the *Vogue* moment."



kickstarts the entire chain of events leading up to that *Vogue* moment.

**MEH:** What is “flat lay” in the wedding photography lexicon?

**CJE:** Basically, the flat lay is that overhead view of the invitation laid out very graphically to create an artistic opening to the couple’s story. It’s evolved from precise, perfect lines where every corner lines up to something looser. Gen Z clients want a slightly different aesthetic than the flat lays of the past. Now I’m photographing them to look mucked up a bit stylistically. That’s

also how I photograph the shoes and the perfume to tell the story of the details in an artistic way.

**MEH:** Your PhotoVision videos provide great tips on the subtleties of styling, including for the reception. For example, what is your rule about salt and pepper shakers?

**CJE:** Unless they’re bespoke, one-of-a-kind salt and pepper shakers, they will ruin good décor. I’m servicing the highest-end, top 1% of clients, so every single item on that table should be there by design.

You want to capture that scene pristine. For example, the minute ice water goes into glasses, you get condensation, which will result in water drops on the tablecloth, and that’s going to change up the entire vibe. It’s not just a pretty table, it’s a work of art. It’s all about aesthetics. For a wide, establishing photo of the table, I’ll open up to f/2 or f/2.8, and if it’s a super dark ballroom, I hit the whole room with a strobe. So, I might stop down to f/4 or f/5.6. Either way, I want the picture to look like the doors just swung open and you’re taking that first



Watch Chris J. Evans' videos on **PhotoVision**.







step in. If everything is tack sharp, ultra-bright, in your face, you lose the sense of wonder that shallower depths of field create.

**MEH: I was surprised that the 50mm lens is your go-to focal length.**

**CJE:** I've built my whole career on that lens. For me, it's the perfect lens because it puts you into the story. If you want a tighter shot, you have to come in closer, so it really makes you a part of the experience. It's the truest representation of the dream aesthetic of a wedding, especially when opened up to f/1.2. A lot of my friends in the industry love the 35mm, but I make a lot of vertical images, especially for social media, and the 35mm focal length distorts too much for me and it's not as magical.

**MEH: How do you design your clients' wedding albums?**

**CJE:** I tend to go chronologically. When my team produces the videos, we like to go a little more Tarantino: We open with peak action, dance

floor, crazy montage, and then soften it, and then open it back up again. But for the still albums, I like to move chronologically and create that visual anticipation and arc of the day. For albums, the clients get to pick their favorite 50 to 75 images, and then I design around those. If I feel other images will enhance the storytelling, I add them. I use this amazing company out of Portugal called Floricolor. Their albums are so beautiful. It's like an eggshell paper, but with this very soft sheen. I don't do leather products; I'm a vegetarian.

**MEH: Is video automatically part of your wedding package?**

**CJE:** It's an upgrade. It started during COVID-19, when I began to work again. All my cameras did video and clients wanted a minimal crew. I would create stills and switch to video. I'm a musician as well, so linear music editing was already in my brain. Linear video editing is similar, but with moving pictures. So, I taught myself how to do that. Now I have a full video team, but it's

my vision and I direct the final edits. Typically three- to five-minute editorial, fashion-forward videos are the main deliverable. But we can also do an extended documentary-type film if the client wants speeches and dances.

**MEH: What equipment do you bring on location?**

**CJE:** I believe in less is more to the highest order. I used to travel the world with one Pelican case but now it's a Tenba case. I go with two Canon EOS R5 Mark IIs, my 50mm, which never comes off camera A, a 24-70mm, and a 14-24mm from Sigma, a beautiful piece of glass for dance party stuff. I also have a vintage toy camera lens for a film look, very dreamy. For lighting I travel with a Godox AD100Pro, an AD200Pro, and a V100 speed light. I also have a drone and two fold-up stands that fit into the Tenba case.

**MEH: You go with strobes rather than continuous light?**

**CJE:** Yes, because if I'm going to do some drag-the-shutter work, I can



freeze the action and get cool lighting and blur. I also sometimes use strobes for blue-hour fashion-driven portraits.

**MEH: What is one of the most amazing wedding experiences on location you've ever had?**

**CJE:** Last year, I did a wedding in Malta in a church that was an 18th century masterpiece. I wanted it to feel as if you were there, so I just locked in my white balance. Cameras are so amazing now. I might have been at ISO 2000 and was still getting a perfect image, especially with AI denoise in Lightroom later. I've shot images at 14,000 ISO and with AI denoise it's still primo.

**MEH: What's your post-production process?**

**CJE:** I cross-reference to make sure the 3,000 photos on the card are the 3,000 photos in the file on the hard drive. Once everything is accounted for, we bring it into Adobe Lightroom, and then I'll do my highlight selection for the client, about 50 to 100 images. I send the rest to my post-production team in the Philippines. They know how I want my white balance and color. They match them and send back 1,000 or 1,500 of the best ones. I still give those a final run-through, but by outsourcing, I've taken 60 hours of post-production work down to about two hours. We typically deliver them to the client in about two to four weeks.

**MEH: Did you study photography formally?**

**CJE:** I started studying photography in 8th grade,

learning how to develop black-and-white film. In high school, I was always in photo classes. I had a great photography teacher, Peter Tiner, who inspired me. I then went to music school, chased the band dream, released a bunch of records, and had a few songs on the radio. I had the modeling thing as well. I've lived so many crazy lives and then settled into photography at 32 when I did my first wedding. Now it's 15 years and 500 weddings later. That's the gift of getting older: You have so many chapters of your life to inform your opinion, your worldview, and your eye.

**MEH: What experience did that time in a darkroom give you?**

**CJE:** You realize the true magic of photography when you put the paper into the developer and an image appears. I don't have the time, bandwidth, or patience to experience that again, but doing it then made me fall in love with the craft and artistry of photography. To this day I will sometimes select an image based on vibe rather than perfection. There are merits to a 100% technically perfect image. But there are also merits to beautiful imagery that is not perfect. I've started to articulate this idea in my talks: replacing the idea of perfection with excellence. When you know you gave your everything to that image, that client, that experience, that photo, that's what it's all about. •

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



He spoke directly  
to my heart!  
Loved this.

~ Glynnis Thomas - Imaging USA 2026 Attendee

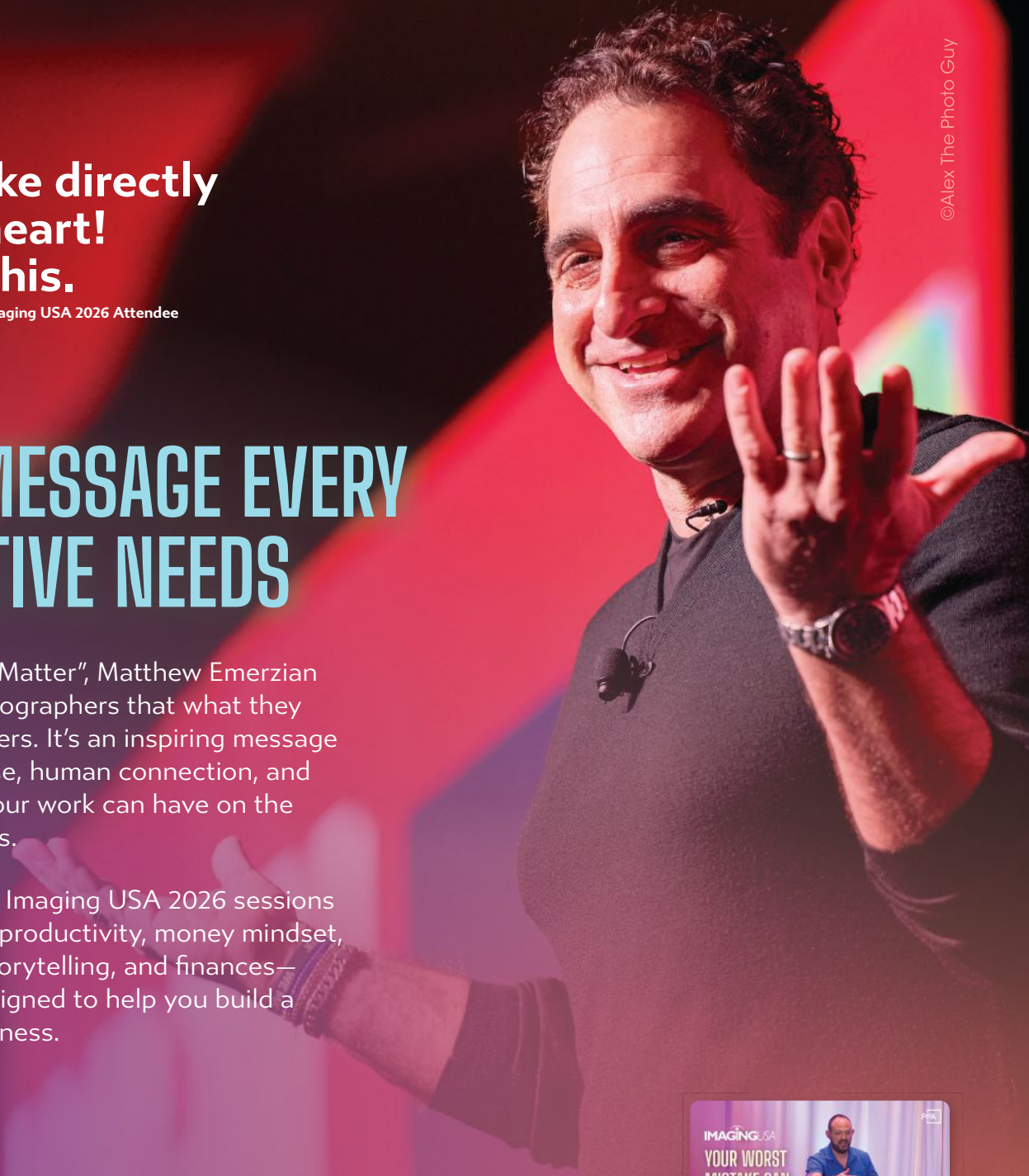
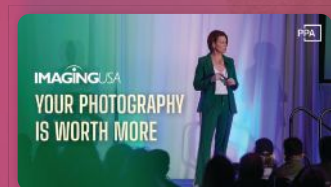
# THE MESSAGE EVERY CREATIVE NEEDS

In "Why You Matter", Matthew Emerzian reminds photographers that what they do truly matters. It's an inspiring message about purpose, human connection, and the impact your work can have on the lives of others.

Explore more Imaging USA 2026 sessions on branding, productivity, money mindset, marketing, storytelling, and finances—each one designed to help you build a stronger business.



Watch them all:  
[PPA.com/YouMatter](https://PPA.com/YouMatter)



# Ready to Serve

PPA WELCOMES NEW CFO JENNIFER WILSON

Jennifer Wilson, CPA, who became PPA's new CFO on May 1, says she is better at expressing things in a spreadsheet than in an interview. So, she created this example.

	Has Down Pat	Needs Improvement	You really shouldn't expect this from her
Accounting Skills	X		
Tells Jokes		X	
Bakes Great Cookies			X

Having her accounting skills “down pat” is an understatement. With an MBA from University of Georgia's Terry College of Business, six years as a senior auditor at a CPA/business advisory firm, and almost 20 years as CFO of a national retail chain, Wilson says finance is integral to the daily life of every company. “I love the quiet space of accounting that lets me plod along in the background keeping records and maintaining the organization's pace,” she adds. “I thrive on creating teams and processes to make life better for the people that cross my path. ‘Better’ might be making daily tasks easier or providing needed data for decision making or creating new challenges that foster growth in people. CFO is the perfect combination for me.”

PPA itself felt like the perfect place, as well. Last year, a friend told her about the upcoming retirement of the



Jennifer Wilson

association's longtime COO and CFO, Scott Kurkian, Hon.Cr.Photog. She was intrigued. “I was drawn to PPA's strong history and the long-standing leadership team,” Wilson says, as well as the opportunity to impact financial/

business education for its members. “For the past 20 years, I've mentored many individuals—including entrepreneurs—to develop good financial habits. To have this included as part of my job was something I couldn't pass up.”

Angela Kurkian, M.Photog.Cr., CPP, PPA's CEO, saw Wilson's value immediately. “She was a perfect fit,” she says about Wilson, citing her extensive experience as well as her drive and demeanor. “They say the person you marry is 90% your happiness or misery. I think the same is true of those you work with. We are extremely protective of the culture we've built on staff, and I'm most excited about not only the experience Jennifer brings, but the person she is and how she'll add to that staff culture.”

Wilson may not bring home-baked cookies to PPA, but she says she will incorporate what she learned during her long career at The Fudgery. “Every person who crosses my path has something they will teach me,” she says, “and I've learned to slow down and listen to their lesson.” Among those lessons: Ask questions and listen for information rather than listen to respond. “When you're leading a group of people, allow time and space for people to get on board with you,” she adds. “People won't always admit it, but they love structure and organization when it's not stifling creativity. A good leader can keep this balance while moving an organization forward.”

As CFO, Wilson calls herself “second-chair leader,” taking cues from Kurkian and the board, and adapting her leadership style to fit the goals, people, and resources within what-



©PPA

PPA CEO Angela Kurkian, M.Photog.Cr., CPP, left, calls new CFO Jennifer Wilson a “perfect fit” for the job.

ever situation. She says a card her mother gave her years ago with the definition of “Jennifer” on it is, in fact, an accurate description of herself. It reads: “She is a well-rounded person with a stubborn nature. She is only truly happy when fighting for an ideal world of peace and justice. But she is also a realist and understands that change comes slowly. Efficiency is the hallmark of everything she undertakes. Without hesitation, she puts all her energy into life.”

When not at work, Wilson, her husband and two young-adult daughters are often road-tripping, and she has

visited 49 U.S. states. She also enjoys running, reading, and sewing. And what is Wilson most looking forward to as her tenure starts at PPA? Being part of helping photographers succeed, thrive, and bring their important work to the world, she replies. “PPA is made up of some amazing artists who are full of passion for capturing all the moments in life and holding them forever, to be shared and reexperienced every time someone views an image,” she says. “There is a reality to photography and I’m so honored to have a tiny role in such a big part of this world.” •

“EVERY PERSON WHO CROSSES MY PATH HAS SOMETHING THEY WILL TEACH ME, AND I’VE LEARNED TO SLOW DOWN AND LISTEN TO THEIR LESSON.”



COURTESY CHARLOTTE REGIONAL VISITORS AUTHORITY

Charlotte Convention Center

## IMAGING USA IN THE QUEEN CITY

### CHARLOTTE GETS ITS CLOSE-UP

For the first time, PPA’s annual conference, Imaging USA, will take place in Charlotte, North Carolina, Jan. 31-Feb. 2, 2027. Clean, compact, and welcoming, Charlotte is an easy city to navigate, offering both convenience and creative energy. It’s a destination where skyline views, public art, green spaces, modern architecture, and colorful neighborhoods are all nearby for roving photographers.

The Charlotte Convention Center, where the conference will take place, is within walking distance of multiple hotels, restaurants, and attractions. So, there will be many opportunities to explore between Imaging USA classes and events, whether that means grabbing coffee before heading out with your camera, discovering a mural-lined street, or settling in for a rooftop dinner after a full day walking the expo floor.

Charlotte’s dining scene includes a wide range of cuisine, from Southern staples to globally inspired menus, found at food halls, breweries, brunch spots, and late-night joints. The Queen City also has museums and live entertainment, all within an easy-to-navigate layout.

As we look ahead to Imaging USA 2027, Charlotte feels like a fitting backdrop: friendly, vibrant, fresh, and ready to welcome photographers from across the country. •

[imagingusa.com](http://imagingusa.com)

# Meet the Board

JOHN GRESS PLAYS THE LONG GAME OF BUSINESS



©PPA

JOHN GRESS

*Starting March 1, 2026, four new members joined the PPA board of directors. Chicago-based John Gress, M.Photog.Cr., CPP, an award-winning commercial photographer and educator, is one of them.*

## How did you become a professional photographer?

I borrowed my mom's camera when I went to summer camp as a teenager and quickly realized it was a great way to start conversations. I also loved anything that was technically difficult, so learning photography hooked me immediately. After several years working professionally, I thought of myself mainly as a technician, but later in life, when I began teaching portrait photography workshops, I realized I was also an artist. Helping others learn the craft became just as rewarding as making the images themselves.

## Why did you want to serve on the PPA board and how did you go about making it happen?

After more than 25 years as a full-time photographer, serving on the board felt like a meaningful way to give back to a community I love. My career has taken me from photojournalism to commercial photography and eventually to teaching. That journey has given me the opportunity to work with many different types of photographers, and I felt that perspective could be useful in helping support and strengthen the PPA community.

## How do you start your workday?

Two double-shot Americanos and a protein bar while I go through email and start checking off my to-do list.

## What's the most important lesson you've learned as an entrepreneur running a photography business?

Don't worry so much about every potential setback. This business is a long game. If you work hard, keep improving your skills, and show up consistently, things tend to come together over time. Tenacity matters just as much as talent, and a little bit of luck never hurts either.

## What PPA benefit has been most helpful to you?

The community. I didn't know much about PPA until I was invited to speak at Imaging USA in 2019. Once I started attending the conference and meeting people, I realized how valuable it is to be in a room full of photographers who understand the same challenges and opportunities. Many of the photographers I met through PPA and Imaging USA have become close friends whom I talk with regularly, and those relationships have been incredibly valuable both personally and professionally.

## What are your favorite icebreaker questions when you meet other photographers?

Can I give you my least favorite question? "What kind of camera do you use?" I would much rather get to know the person and what motivates them than their choice of hammer.

## If you were not a photographer, what profession would you choose and why?

I sometimes joke that if I ever went blind, I would become an attorney, although after becoming close friends with one I am not so sure that is still the plan. I could easily have seen myself pursuing a career as a naval officer or a pilot because I have always enjoyed structure, leadership, and tackling difficult challenges.

## What piece of photography equipment can you not do your job without?

Lighting. Without it most of my photographs would be severely underexposed.

## Where would you travel to if you had unlimited funds and time, and what would you do there?

I would buy my own Boeing 787 Dreamliner so I could travel anywhere in the world whenever I wanted. It would basically be a flying house filled with all my friends.

## How would you describe yourself in one sentence?

I'm an extrovert who genuinely loves people.

## What do you do with your free time outside of photography?

I enjoy traveling, working out, and cooking, especially anything that involves putting meat on a smoker. I also spend a lot of time watching YouTube videos and learning about history. •

# *The job isn't to photograph the home. It's to visit on someone's behalf.*



**BY JONATHAN LEE**

M.PHOTOGRAPHER, CPP & GIRAFFE360  
BRAND AMBASSADOR

*It's the home where they carry their new wife over the threshold. Where their kids take their first steps. Where they gather with the people they care about most.*

There's a moment I think about a lot.

A family is sitting hundreds, sometimes thousands of miles away. Orders have come through. A move is happening whether they're ready or not. They're scrolling listings on a laptop, trying to decide where they're going to live next. They don't get to visit. They don't get to walk through the front door. They don't get a second look. What they get is whatever we give them. That's the job. Not just composition, lighting, or sharpness. You're building trust at a distance. You're helping someone make a life decision without ever stepping foot inside the property. If your work can't carry that weight, it's not doing its job.

**Precision matters more when no one can double check you.**

I'm retired Navy, with 21 years in military and government work as a jet engine mechanic and drill instructor. There's no room for "close enough" in that world. That mindset followed me into photography. When your audience can't physically verify what they're seeing, accuracy is the baseline. Straight lines matter. Spatial understanding matters. The way light moves through a property matters. But more than anything, clarity matters. People should never feel unsure about what they're looking at.

**Photos alone don't carry enough information anymore.**

There was a point where a strong set of stills was enough. That's changed. Remote buyers need more than a highlight reel. They need context. Flow. A sense of how the space actually works. I didn't want five different tools stitched together into a slow workflow. I needed one capture that could deliver the full story. That's where Giraffe360 came into my process.

*One capture, multiple ways to understand a space.*

changes. What you deliver improves. How you package it improves. Your position in the transaction changes. Tools matter, but only if they support that shift. For me, Giraffe360 removes the friction. It gives me consistency and depth, so I can focus on presenting the home in a way that earns trust.

**The standard has moved and most people haven't caught up yet.**

Remote decisions aren't the exception anymore. For many buyers, they're the norm. That raises the bar. Get it right, and you're not just creating content. You're solving a real problem.



What changed for me wasn't the speed. It was the depth. From a single scan, I'm delivering clean, consistent still imagery, immersive walkthroughs that actually make sense spatially, floor plans that help buyers orient themselves, video content that agents can use immediately. The shift is what that gives the viewer. They can move through the property, understand it, and build confidence in their decision. And when someone doesn't get a second chance to visit, that confidence is everything.

**Your role isn't to shoot. it's to guide the decision.**

This is what I push when I teach. If you see yourself as someone who takes photos, you compete on price. If you help people make better decisions, everything



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# Build Connections, Build Your Business

COMMUNITY NETWORKS MEAN YOU'RE NEVER ALONE

By *Betsy Bird, M.Photog.Cr., CPP*



At Imaging USA 2026 are, from left, Tennessee Community Networks members Josh Williams; Betsy Bird, M.Photog.Cr., CPP; Tennessee Rick Elliott, Cr.Photog., CPP; and Jen Willis, CPP.



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©JESSICA MILLARD PORTRAITS

I initially joined PPA in 2017. For the first couple of years, I was a member in name more than in action. What I didn't realize at the time is that the real value doesn't come from membership alone. It comes from connection.

I found my local Tennessee affiliate while searching for camera clubs in the area. What immediately caught my attention was that the group offered a mentorship program. As a life-long learner and a bit of a nerd, that appealed to me. I reached out and connected with Colby McLemore, M.Photog.Cr., CPP,

and that one action changed the trajectory of my career.

My "local" affiliate is actually in Knoxville, Tennessee, while I live in Chattanooga, about 110 miles away. So, attending meetings meant committing to a drive. I quickly discovered other members making that same trip, and before long it turned into a carpooling adventure. I met people who were not only knowledgeable about photography, but genuinely welcoming and fun. So, I stayed. And the more I showed up, the more involved I became. Today, I am on the board of

directors for Professional Photographers of East Tennessee and the Tennessee Professional Photographers Association (TNPPA), and am a PPA Councilor representing my state. I also belong to Oregon's Community Network (OPPA), which I joined in 2020.

How do these Community Networks fit into the overall structure of PPA? I like to think of it this way: National inspires. Local transforms. State connects and elevates. PPA provides the vision, resources, and standards that guide the industry. Local and state organizations are where that vision comes to life. At the local level are your coworkers. You're meeting regularly, solving real business problems together, and building relationships. At the state level, the connections are built differently. For example, our state organization hosts two three-day education programs each year that are included in the dues. More than anything, though, both local and state involvement became important to me because of the people. Some of my closest friends have come from these communities.

Through PPA, you have access to incredible information and resources. Community Networks, in turn, give you access to *people*. Photography can be a lonely business. Most of us are solopreneurs, and many are introverts. You can learn a lot on your own, but you grow faster when you're surrounded by people who understand what you're doing, whom you can ask questions of, and who will challenge and support you. Community Networks also create opportunities. For example, I'm currently working toward becoming a PPA Approved Juror. Because of my involvement leading image competition committees in Tennessee, I've connected with experienced jurors and observed how they think, ask questions, and build relationships themselves.

In 2020, I took advantage of another opportunity within Community Networks. I

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I MET PEOPLE WHO WERE NOT ONLY KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY, BUT GENUINELY WELCOMING AND FUN.

How can you get started with a Community Network? Start by showing up. Just attend a meeting and introduce yourself. From there, get involved in small ways. Volunteer. Ask questions. Build relationships. And if you show up and feel uncomfortable, ask for a job. That's what I did at my first state event, where I didn't know anyone. Rather than sit around or stand around by myself, I asked the board president to put me to work. Suddenly, I was helping with an auction, checking people in at registration, and helping with the hospitality table. Before you know it, you may find yourself more connected and supported than you ever expected. Thanks to PPA's Community Networks, you don't have to run a photography business alone. •



## COMMUNITY NETWORKS DIRECTORY

When you get together with other photographers in your area, you'll see a world of opportunities open up to you.

One of the best ways photographers hone their craft is through peer interaction. Finding a mentor, meeting with like-minded people in your area, and relying on a network of business friends are keys to your success. Thanks to the Community Networks program, you can easily find and connect with professional photographers near you.

PPA has Community Networks across the United States. No matter where you live, odds are there's a Community Network to welcome you.

[ppa.com/community-networks](http://ppa.com/community-networks)

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# COMMUNITY NETWORK SCHOOLS

## EDUCATION NEAR YOU

Looking to update your photography education and skills? Find inspiration, knowledge, and camaraderie by attending a Community Network School. These schools typically provide photographers with educational opportunities on a statewide or regional basis during one week of the year (and participating is a great way to befriend your fellow photographers).

Many Community Network Schools offer scholarships. As schools differ in tuition and housing arrangements, contact each school directly.

## EAST COAST SCHOOL PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKSHOPS

### NORTH CAROLINA

Contact: Ann Norment  
ann@anormentphotography.com; eastcoastschool.com

## FLORIDA SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY

### FLORIDA

Contact: Kevin Boller  
kevin@kevinboller.com  
thefpp.org/2026-fl-school-of-photography

## GREAT LAKES INSTITUTE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

### MICHIGAN

Contact: Amanda Scott  
fae@laumephotography.com; gliip.org

## KANSAS PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS SCHOOL

### KANSAS

Contact: Kathleen Pearce  
kathleenrockers@hotmail.com; kpps.com

## MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL SCHOOL (MARS)

### DELAWARE

Contact: John Capone  
director@marsschool.com; marsschool.com

## TEXAS SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY

### TEXAS

Contact: Cris Duncan  
cris@texaschool.org; texaschool.org

## WEST COAST SCHOOL

### CALIFORNIA

Contact: Tim Meyer  
tim@meyerphoto.com; westcoastschool.com

## 2026 COMMUNITY NETWORK SCHOOL DATES

### WEST COAST SCHOOL

June 7-11, 2026

Tahquitz Pines Retreat, Idyllwild, California  
westcoastschool.com

### FLORIDA SCHOOL

September 25-28, 2026

Holiday Inn Resort, Orlando, Florida  
thefpp.org



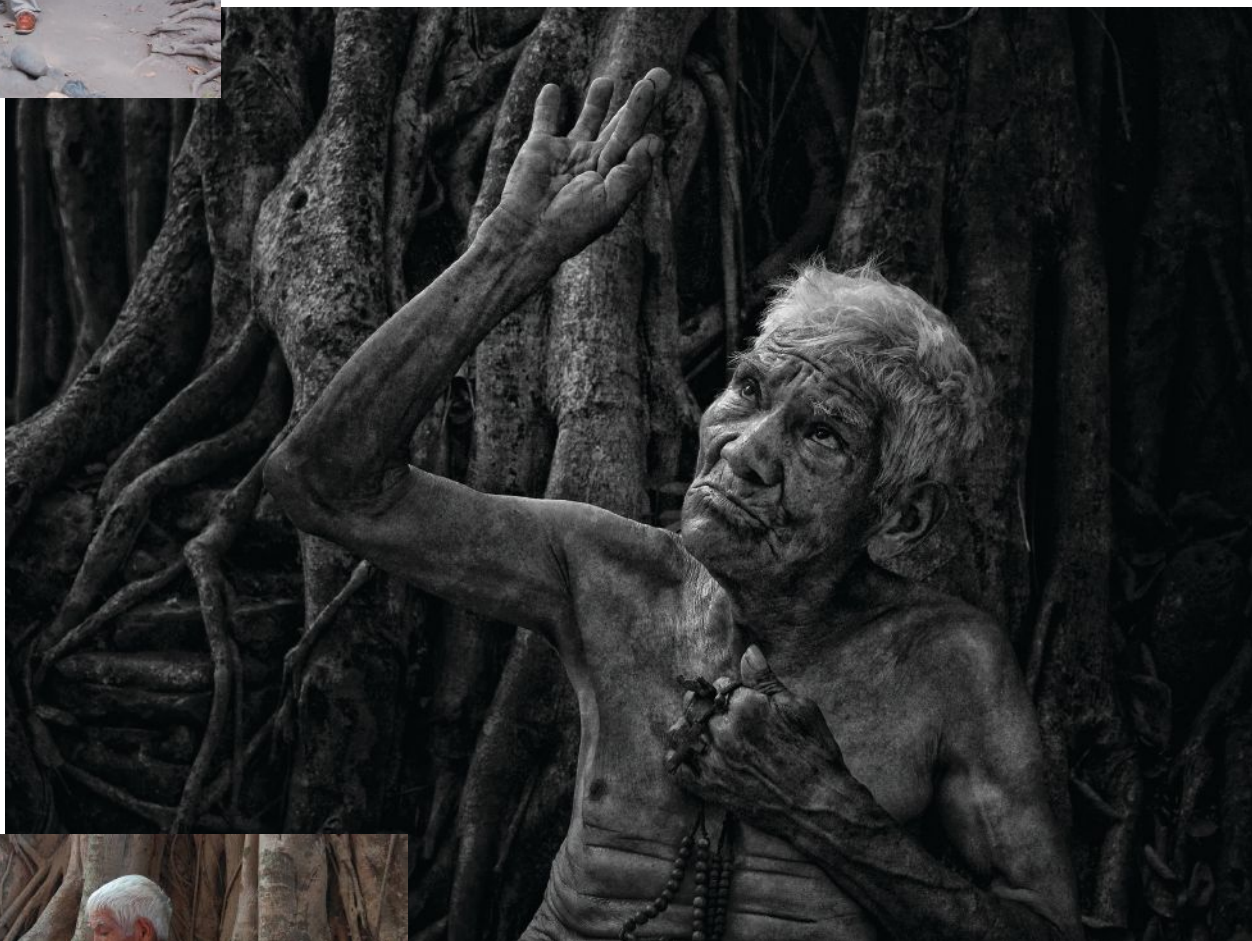
In 2010, Álvaro Balderas, M.Photog.Cr. (left), was attending a photography workshop in La Antigua, Veracruz, where participants could choose from various locales in which to capture images. One place instantly captivated him: the House of Hernán Cortés. "It was an old structure where enormous tree roots emerged from the walls like veins of time. Its atmosphere made me feel that a truly powerful portrait could be created there," Balderas, based in Mexico, recalls.

While the group listened to the instructor, an elderly man who appeared homeless and intoxicated asked the group for some coins.

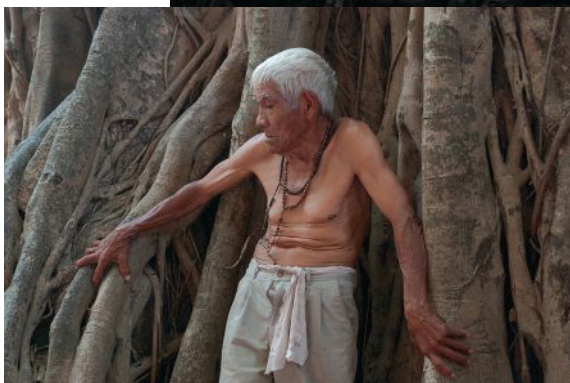
Balderas offered him a beer in exchange for a portrait sitting. The man agreed. "He told me he was a farmer," Balderas says, adding that when the man removed his torn shirt, there was a rosary around his neck. "I asked if he believed in God. He said yes. So, I told him, 'Why don't you say a prayer and ask God to bless us?'"

At that moment, Balderas says, "the man knelt down with such deep devotion that the entire scene transformed."

Balderas used a borrowed basic Nikon with an 18-55mm lens. "Having used Canon all my life," he recalls, "I wondered how I



IMAGES ©ÁLVARO BALDERAS



would manage to capture this moment with precision. So, I made my own silent prayer: 'Please Lord, just one photograph that turns out right.' And so it happened."

"Please Lord, Just One" was one of Team Mexico's entries at the World Photographic Cup in Portugal in 2016. "It still reminds me why I love portraiture," Balderas says. "It is a bridge between the soul of the photographer and the human dignity of those we portray." •

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# INTERNATIONAL PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

## Get Ready for 2027!

### REGISTRATION

Opens: June 30, 2026

Early Deadline: September 10, 2026 — \$49

Late Deadline: September 17, 2026 — \$59

### JUDGING

First Round Results: November 3, 2026

Live Judging: January 30, 2027

Live Judging & Finale: February 1, 2027



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