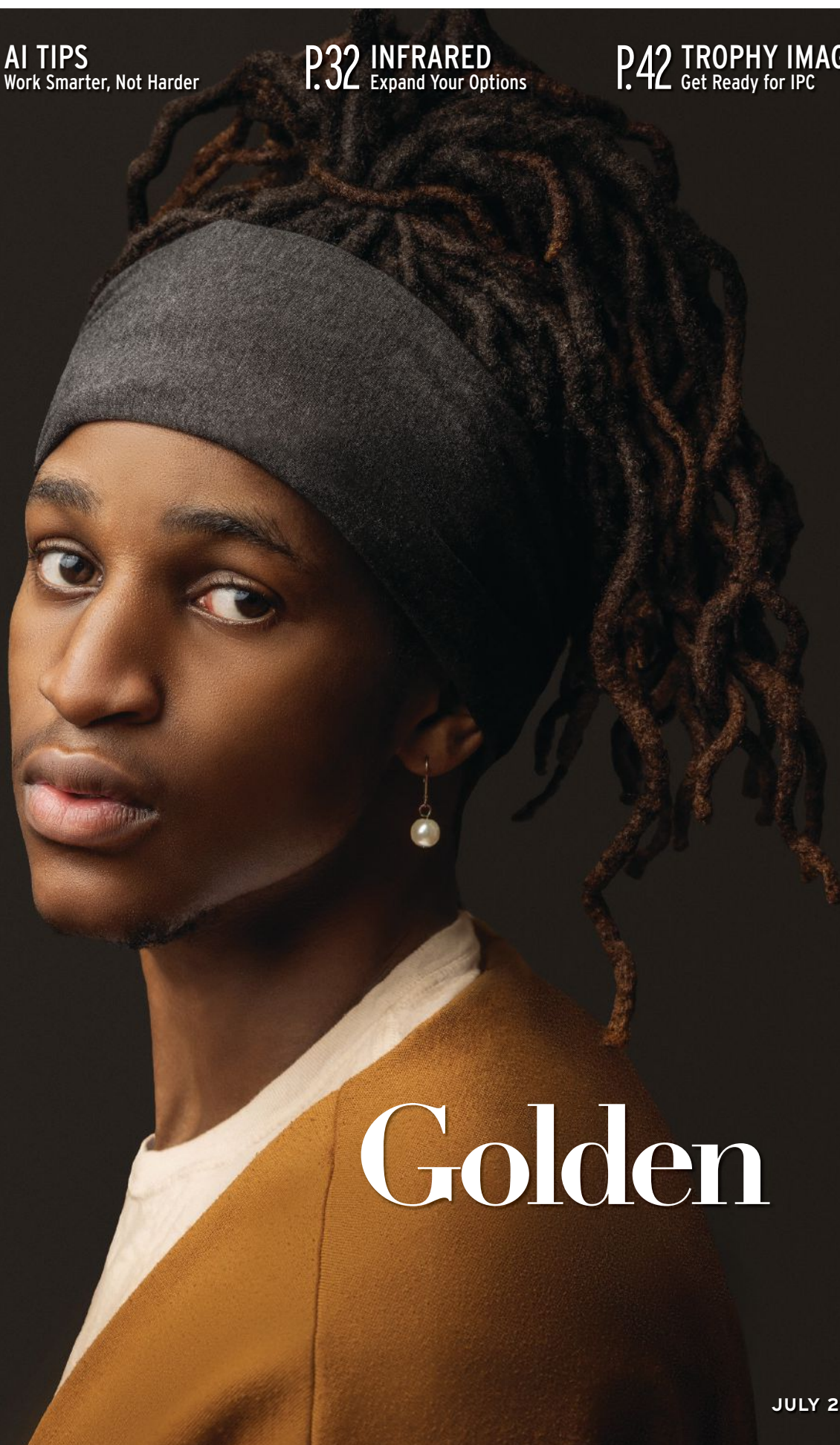


PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

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Work Smarter, Not Harder

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Expand Your Options

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Get Ready for IPC



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Professional Photographer, official journal of Professional Photographers of America Inc., is the oldest exclusively professional photographic publication in the Western Hemisphere (founded 1907 by Charles Abel, Hon.M.Photog.), incorporating *Abel's Photographic Weekly*, *St. Louis & Canadian Photographer*, *The Commercial Photographer*, *The National Photographer*, and *Professional Photographer Storytellers*.

Opinions expressed by *Professional Photographer* or any of its authors do not necessarily reflect positions of Professional Photographers of America Inc. Acceptance of advertising does not carry with it endorsement by the publisher.

Professional Photographer (ISSN 1528-5286) is published monthly by PPA Publications and Events Inc., 229 Peachtree Street, NE, Ste. 2300, Atlanta, GA 30303-1608. Periodicals postage paid at Atlanta, Ga., and additional mailing offices.

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Widen Your Circle

MAKE SURE THOSE WITHIN ARE YOUR CHAMPIONS

If you're not already listening to the "Professional Photographer" podcast (see links below) you are missing out. Soon after the podcast launched in July 2024, I started listening to episodes and creating articles from them for the magazine's Success department, which covers the business/entrepreneurial side of photography. This month, Jamar James explains to the incomparable host Pat Miller how crucial it is to surround yourself with the right people: those who support you and can help you move forward in life and career versus those who drain your battery or misalign with your values ("Good Company," page 29). Your associates are a reflection of *you*, whether you intend for that or not, and not just when we are teens and our parents don't like our friends (not that any of *us* experienced that, right?).

James' book and concept, "Change Your Circle, Change Your Life," sounds simple, but it can take serious thought and time to execute. For example, if you're an event photographer who wants to get into photojournalism, how do you know what "circles" you need to be in and how do you get into them? Whom do you already know and how many people can they introduce you to? Perhaps you've photographed events for a media company or learned from a couple at a client's corporate holiday party that one spouse is a reporter. If you can't work your current contacts, you can email your local newspaper editor, approach the photographer covering a city council meeting, or message the person behind your neighborhood Instagram account and ask them questions over coffee. Your job is to widen your circle so that each step within it takes you closer to your goal.

I was struck by James' message that, "You've got to be yourself and as authentic as possible. ... The things that make you unique, your gifts, the things that make you different, those are the things that you want to really put out there into the forefront, even when you're entering these new circles." Too often, we think we must conform or erase part of ourselves to succeed or fit in. It is inspiring to hear someone say so definitively that that's the opposite of the way to thrive. So, embrace your uniqueness, amplify what makes you *and* your photography special, and seek out people who not only appreciate you, but who support your work. That includes both your paid clients and your personal ambassadors. James tells his clients to ask themselves: Where do you want to go? What kind of people do you want to be around? What's going to get you from where you are today to the next level? Being an entrepreneur means understanding that your relationships enhance or deflect from your brand, and you can control the people you bring into your circle. Seems our parents may have been onto something back then. •

Melanie Lasoff Levs

Melanie Lasoff Levs
Director of Publications

ppa.com/photovision/podcast
youtube.com/@ourPPA/podcasts

He spoke directly
to my heart!
Loved this.

~ Glynn 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.



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FOREGROUND

By Amanda Arnold

Dog's World

GIVING BACK AND LIVING THE DREAM

VIGO



IMAGES ©THE DOG BREATH FOUNDATION / dogbreathfoundation.org

Even Kaylee Greer can't believe this is her full-time job. The well-known commercial dog photographer and star of the 2018 Nat Geo show "Pupparazzi" spends six months a year traveling the country in an RV photographing shelter dogs for her nonprofit The Dog Breath Foundation. The foundation is a spinoff from her Boston studio Dog Breath Photography, which she opened in 2010. "It feels a little bit like a dream I haven't quite woken up from," she says, "like I stepped behind the cover of a storybook, just for a curious peek, and somehow wound up getting to stay forever inside its pages."

Greer works with a team of seven for the nonprofit. She and her partner, Sam, travel in a

SCUBA STEVE

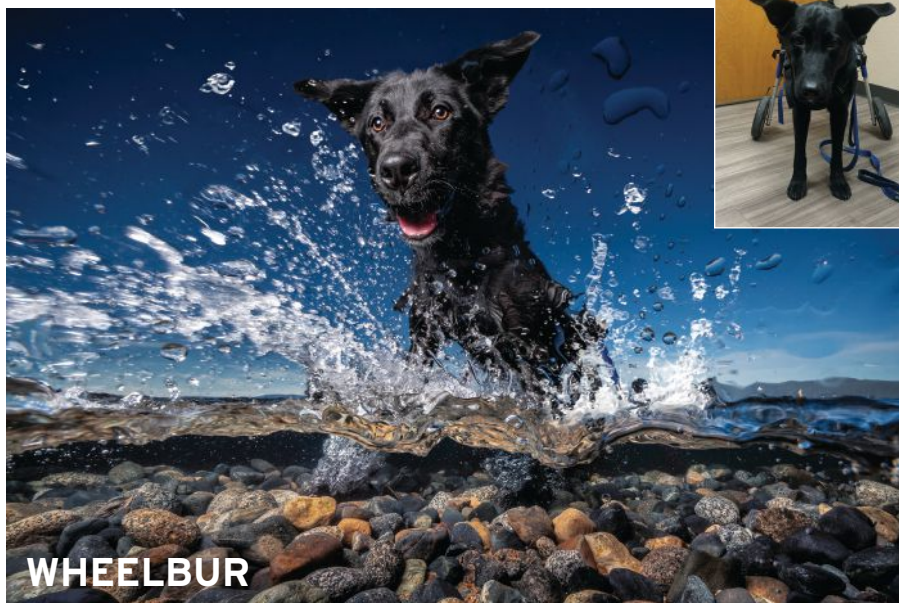




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"IT'S ALL ABOUT THE WIND IN THEIR FUR, THE SUN
ON THEIR BACKS, AND BEING IMMERSED IN THE
WORLD THAT DOGS' WILD HEARTS WERE MADE FOR."



34-foot RV and handle photography, while two other teammates travel in a 25-foot Airstream and handle videography. Three others work remotely: a video editor, an audio editor, and a project manager who oversees logistics, scheduling, and communications with shelters. Brands like Freshpet, Frame.io, Pro Prints, Kuma Outdoor Gear, and Camp Bow Wow, among others, help fund the nonprofit's work.

The foundation's objective is simple: take shelter dogs out for three-day epic adventures, create photos and videos of them in nature around America, and promote that content to the world. In addition, they provide a workshop for shelter employees on how to make better, more soulful photographs of the animals in their care. Canon, one of the nonprofit's partners, also gifts each shelter a mirrorless camera and a lens: either a Canon R10 with the RF-S18-45mm lens or a Canon RP with the RF50mm lens, according to Greer.

Choosing the 14 shelters to visit each year is difficult, Greer admits. The foundation receives so many applications annually that it "slams us in the heart," she says. The team reviews each to determine which shelters would benefit most. "Some shelters barely have websites, let alone decent—or any—photos of their adoptable dogs," Greer explains.

Though their circumstances may be sad, the shelter dog subjects enjoy experiences planned around their greatest joys. "If they love water, then we are going to the most beautiful lake or river to swim in. If they love fetch, we are going to explore a wide-open field with plenty of tennis balls," Greer adds. "It's all about the wind in their fur, the sun on their backs, and being immersed in the world that dogs' wild hearts were made for." •

Service over Sales

HOST AN EVENT THAT SHOWS YOUR BUSINESS CARES



Cultivating community is an excellent way to grow your business, says Lake Country, Wisconsin-based maternity, newborn, and family portrait photographer Julie Collins. For the last five years, she's collaborated with two local business owners who also serve mothers and families to host Love Your Belly, an annual event for expectant and postpartum mothers. The event is held at Collins' studio in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. About 30 vendors typically participate, she explains, from doulas and lactation specialists to ultrasound providers and prenatal chiropractors.

"The purpose is connection," says Collins, who adds that attendees get free mini massages during the event and the first 50 guests receive swag bags. She chose her partners—a pediatric and prenatal chiropractor, and the owner of a local resource for family-friendly events—because they share a similar philosophy. "We believe mothers deserve strong support systems, trusted information, and meaningful connection during pregnancy and early motherhood," Collins says. "Each of us brings a different area of expertise,



Photographer Julie Collins, right, works with two partners to produce the Love Your Belly annual event for expectant and new mothers.

IMAGES © JULIE COLLINS / juliecollinsphoto.com



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about branding
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Maternity, newborn, and family portrait photographer Julie Collins staffs her table at a Love Your Belly event.

which allows the event to feel well rounded.”

Hosting the event has strengthened her business, Collins says. “It’s positioned my studio as a place that genuinely supports families, not just photographs them. Because the event is rooted in service rather than promotion, relationships form naturally,” she explains. “Many attendees later return for maternity and newborn portraits, and many vendors become long-term referral partners.”

She provides tips for setting up a similar event in your area:

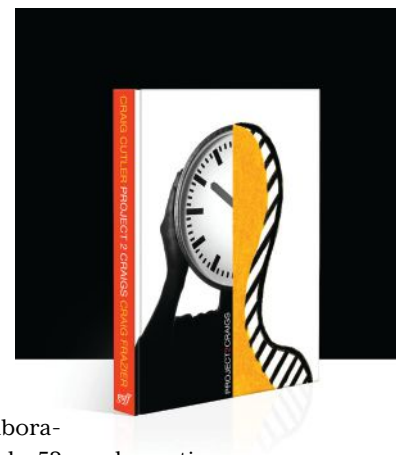
Focus on service, not sales. “If the goal is to generate bookings, people will feel that immediately,” she says.

Choose partners who share your values. That gives the event a trustworthy, consistent feeling.

Be intentional about growing the event. “It is tempting to grow quickly, but thoughtful curation matters,” she advises. Only allow vendors who truly support the attendees you’re trying to attract. •

Two Interpretations

A PHOTOGRAPHER-ILLUSTRATOR ALLIANCE



Two creative brains, same first name.

Photographer Craig Cutler and illustrator Craig Frazier met while working on an assignment with a winery client and quickly realized

they enjoyed the collaboration. So, they launched a 52-week creative personal project they dubbed 2Craigs.

"The idea was pretty simple," says Cutler. "We each came up with 52 words, we threw them into a bowl, a third party picked the word, and we had one week to create an image that represented the word," with Cutler using camera, lens, and light and Frazier using pencil, pen, brush, and paper. Neither of them was allowed to see the other's creation until the end of each week.

The dueling works they created during that year were so compelling they collected them into a book, "Project 2Craigs" (Goff Books). At the beginning of 2026, the duo launched a follow-up project in a call-and-response style that "we like to think of as 2.0," says Cutler. It feels like a tennis match between two artists. Cutler began the match with a photo of a spiraled wood shaving and Frazier hit back with an illustration of a person's profile made of paper with a curling tear down the center. The "conversation" has continued from there.

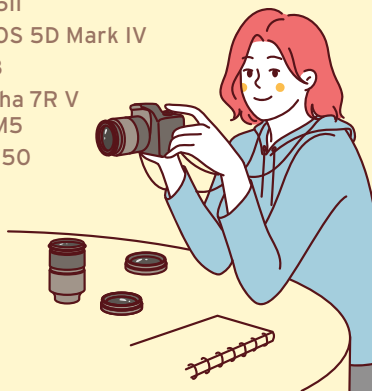
What both Craigs say they enjoy most about the project is the ideating. "Creating ideas woke me up to what is important—pure thinking and rediscovering how to concept without any tools or crutches," says Cutler. Frazier agrees. "It has reminded me that the satisfaction of executing a good idea is reward unto itself," he says, "and that simple is always best." •

TRIED AND TRUE

TOP 10 WORKHORSE CAMERAS

There are the hottest new cameras, and then there are the reliable workhorses that photographers use most. According to Aftershoot workflow-based data analysis, the following camera bodies are the top 10 most used by professional photographers for paid sessions. This is what they have in common: dependable autofocus in mixed conditions, good performance in low light, and compatibility with a broad array of lenses.

- Canon EOS R6 Mark II
- Sony Alpha 7 IV ILCE-7M4
- Canon EOS R6
- Sony Alpha 7 III ILCE-7M3
- Canon EOS R5
- Nikon Z 6II
- Canon EOS 5D Mark IV
- Nikon Z8
- Sony Alpha 7R V ILCE-7RM5
- Nikon D750



AGREE WITH THEM

A SALES TIP

It seems counterintuitive, but it works: When a client says your product costs too much, simply agree with them, advises portrait photographer Allison Tyler Jones on PhotoVision at ppa.com, who says she learned this tip from the book, "Sell or Be Sold" by Grant Cardone. "When they say it's too much money, say, 'I know. A fortune. Totally. It's awesome. You're going to love it.' And then, 'Sign right here.'" You don't need to make an argument or defend why your photography costs a lot, she explains, as it's discretionary income that the client either has or doesn't have. "Charge what you're worth," she adds, "and just step into that."



Allison Tyler Jones
on Mastering Client
Consultations and
Sales at ppa.com



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Show Up

HOW TO GAIN TRUST IN A NEW MARKET

By Makayla Harris, Cr.Photog., CPP

©PHANEENDRA GUDAPATI



We knew we were moving to Saratoga Springs, New York, long before we got there. But knowing you're making a big change and actually living through it are two very different things. In Boston, we had access to a large metro market: more weddings, bigger budgets, and more demand for the high-end photography experience we'd built. Saratoga Springs is a beautiful destination town at the base of the Adirondacks, and it attracted high-end weddings. But the market was smaller, and there was already a tight-knit group of elite professionals serving those clients. I knew the only way in was through relationships. So, for over a year, we invested everything into building genuine connections with the people already serving the clients we wanted to reach. We met with every event planner, venue coordinator, florist, and caterer we could find. We went to every networking event on the calendar.

And I hated it.

I'm a homebody. I get awkward making small talk. I'd rather have one deep conversation than work a room full of strangers. But what was required of me in that season wasn't comfort. It was growth. So, I showed up anyway.

We did something we were told to never do. We worked for free. We did headshots for wedding planners. We made behind-the-scenes videos for their websites. We created content for venues, styled shoots, and even made videos for other photographers. We bartered, traded, and gave away our time with no guarantee of return, because we understood the fastest way to earn trust is to lead with generosity. You only get what you give.

When it came time for our first bridal show, we bought a triple booth. My brother helped build actual walls. My dad helped load everything in. We rented U-Hauls, brought our own carpeting, lighting, real furniture, oversized framed prints, and major sample albums. It was months of planning, recruiting

every family member we had. It was honestly a little insane. But it worked. Every vendor turned their heads. Every couple stopped. We didn't just participate; we made a statement. And then we made sure we could back it up.

We knew we couldn't be all show and no substance. If we wanted to compete with top-tier brands, we had to match what top-tier brands in other industries were doing at every single touchpoint. We got a studio in the heart of downtown Saratoga and put our logo on the windows. We invited prospective clients in for consultations with complimentary drinks and slideshows, an experience that felt undeniably high-end. Our response time, our language, the way we guided people from first inquiry to final delivery, all of it was intentional. We weren't just selling photography. We were building something made to last, something designed to outlive even the couple.

I made the mistake too many times of wondering where my next lead would come from instead of taking ownership of my own success. You can't wait for the algorithm to find you. The most effective strategy I've ever used (and the most rewarding) is to go back to basics: boots on the ground, genuine relationships, regular touchpoints, and then backing up every impression with a standard that proves you belong.

Growth doesn't come from staying comfortable. It comes from being willing to do what the moment requires, even when every part of you would rather stay home. Show up anyway. •

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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3

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Boy With a Pearl Earring

Emmalee Rathsam, M.Photos., CPP

Emmalee Rathsam Photography

Kansas City, Missouri



©EMMALEE RATHSAM / emmaleerathsam.com

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: Emmalee Rathsam was out for cocktails with her husband when she noticed their server. "He was wearing one pearl earring, and I loved the way his hair was styled," she says, so she asked if he was a model and if he would be interested in being photographed. The answer to both was yes. "'Boy With a Pearl Earring' draws inspiration from the timeless painting, 'Girl with a Pearl Earring' by Johannes Vermeer," she explains. "Much like Vermeer's painting, the composition relies on simplicity: a dark, minimal background, soft directional light, and a single luminous earring that anchors the image. The headwrap replaces the turban, and the everyday clothes shift the narrative into a present-day context while still echoing the elegance of the 17th century masterpiece."

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS R5, Canon RF70-200mm F4 L IS USM lens with polarizing filter

EXPOSURE: 1/200 second at f/6.3, ISO 100

LIGHTING: She used a Godox SK400II-V Studio Flash and a Godox 70-inch umbrella.

POST-CAPTURE: Rathsam used Adobe Lightroom for minor adjustments and Photoshop for retouching.



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Walk Off Celebration

Patrick James Mulligan

Studio Create
Tucson, Arizona

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: "This image was captured at the bottom of the ninth inning," explains Patrick Mulligan. Even though he was hired to photograph for Oklahoma State University, he knew the University of Arizona (UA) players would storm the field when one of its players, Maddox Mihalakis, hit the game-winning run, "so I quickly switched to capturing the game's story. It was a great choice because the UA players ended up tossing water on Maddox, which made the image and moment that much more impactful."

CAMERA & LENS: Sony Alpha 9 III, Sony FE 300mm F2.8 GM OSS lens

EXPOSURE: 1/3000 second at f/2.8, ISO 250

LIGHTING: Available light

POST-CAPTURE: He made basic digital exposure changes in Adobe Lightroom.



ABOUT THE IMAGING EXCELLENCE COLLECTION: The Imaging Excellence Collection comprises photographs chosen by trained jurors as being the best of the best in PPA's Merit Image Review. The Imaging Excellence distinction is awarded to compositions that successfully address the 12 elements of a merit image. **NOTE:** Lighting diagrams shown here are not to scale. ppa.com/mir
Watch "Inside the Image" Merit Image Reviews on **PhotoVision** at ppa.com.



Fashionista

Glenda Ritchick, M.Photog.M.Artist.Cr., CPP

Glenda Ritchick Photography Studio
Portage, Pennsylvania

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: "While on vacation at a working cattle ranch in Texas, I couldn't resist photographing an alpaca who quickly became a favorite part of the trip," says Glenda Ritchick. "He was the rancher's beloved pet, and he made daily visits to our cabin for a treat of a banana or two."

CAMERA & LENS: iPhone

EXPOSURE: 1/125 second at f/2.8, ISO 32

LIGHTING: Natural light

POST-CAPTURE: Ritchick used Topaz for enhancement and Adobe Photoshop to paint with a variety of mixer brushes.

INTERNATIONAL PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION



©Thea Martin



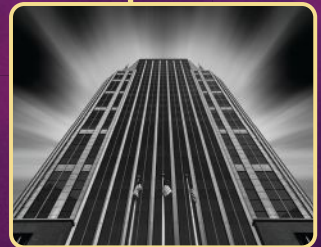
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Afternoon Nectar Delight

Lisa Hill, M.Photog., CPP

Lisa Hill Photography
Atlanta, Georgia

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, Sigma 105mm F2.8 DG DN Macro lens

EXPOSURE: 1/640 second at f/5.6, ISO 1250

LIGHTING: Natural light

POST-CAPTURE: Lisa Hill used Adobe Camera Raw to adjust shadows and highlights, Topaz DeNoise, and Photoshop to clean up blemishes on the petals, and to paint the image using a Wacom Intuos Pro Tablet.

Conversation Starters

14 QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN NETWORKING

If you're more comfortable photographing events or people than *attending* events or *talking* to people, you may be looking for ways to get conversations going. Here are some questions you can ask to break the ice, practice networking, and maybe even make a friend or business contact.

What brings you to this event?

Where did you last travel to?

I love your outfit. Where do you like to shop?

What is your favorite time of year?

What books/movies/shows/podcasts do you recommend?

What led you to move here?

Where did you grow up?

Have you ever met a celebrity?

Do you have any restaurant recommendations?

Are you a Mac or PC person? An Apple or an Android user?

What is your favorite dessert?

What pop culture moment have you been interested in lately?

Has this been a busy week for you?

What's your favorite life/schedule hack?



Working Smarter in the Age of AI

LEVERAGE ITS TOOLS TO BE MORE EFFICIENT

By Jeff Kent



It seems everyone is talking about AI. Listening to tech pundits, you'd think you were in the Dark Ages if you haven't already created a personalized AI agent to manage your business operations, write your legal documents, read bedtime stories to your kids ...

OK, we may be getting ahead of ourselves, but the AI Age is here. What does that really mean? Is AI a threat or a benefit?

Honestly, it may be some of both. More than anything, it's a tool. The photographers who embrace it can work smarter, not harder, and find new levels of efficiency in their businesses. To learn how photographers can leverage these tools, we compiled advice from three guests on different episodes of the "Professional Photographer" podcast. These photographers and tech experts are using AI without diminishing creativity or sacrificing authentic connections with clients.

CUSTOMIZE CHATGPT

In "How Photographers Should Really Use ChatGPT in Business," Tallahassee, Florida-based portrait and headshot photographer and AI consultant Kira Derryberry, M.Photog.Hon.M.Photog.Cr., CPP, shares how to customize interactions with ChatGPT. "It's an amazing tool for people who don't have employees or who are wearing all the hats," she says.

1 Provide context for more complete answers. Instead of asking for a quick result, educate the AI about your specific goal. Start with the end in mind by explaining what you want to achieve. For example, state, "I want to book 10 headshot sessions from new clients as part of a new promotion

that I am running to business owners in a specific area." Then ask ChatGPT for a plan. Pro tip: Also ask the AI chat, "What else do you need to know from me to get the best results?"

2 Use custom instructions for consistency. Save time by setting up global custom instructions in your ChatGPT settings (Settings > Personalization > Custom Instructions). This allows you to define your personality type, voice, and specific preferences, so you don't have to repeat these requirements in every new chat. You can also use these settings to give context to future conversations.

3 Organize with project folders and file libraries. "These are a game changer," says Derryberry. In the left-hand sidebar, under Projects, click the +New project button to create a new project folder. Then use folders to create dedicated workspaces for different parts of your business. Within these folders, you can upload up to 20 reference files, such as your pricing guides, brand

"IT'S AN AMAZING TOOL FOR PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE EMPLOYEES OR WHO ARE WEARING ALL THE HATS."

— KIRA DERRYBERRY



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PHOTOGRAPHY

brand story, and email templates, so the AI can pull from them during future chats. This saves you the time of re-uploading that information or reminding the AI about the specifics of your business.

4 Leverage Agent Mode for task execution. Available on ChatGPT Plus plans and up, Agent Mode can perform tasks on different online platforms. Agent Mode allows the AI to log into cloud-based platforms to do things like organize your Gmail, set up Zoom meetings, or even automatically draft reminder emails.

5 Crunch your numbers. Use the Data Analysis tool to upload sales and marketing data to identify trends, see which products are underperforming, and plan where to allocate resources. To upload a file, click the + in the chat message box, upload your file, and then ask for the analysis you want.

6 Talk to your AI. To stay productive on the go, use the ChatGPT voice mode to have a back-and-forth conversation. On a mobile device, click the head-phone icon in the bottom right corner. On a desktop, click the microphone icon in the message box. This is useful for brainstorming marketing ideas or project concepts while driving or doing other tasks, and the transcript remains available later.

7 Use AI to write social media posts. Stuck on how to caption your images for social media? Ask the AI to write you a caption for a picture using hashtags that are best for organic reach to get better engagement on a particular platform (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.). You can do this in batches if you connect your Dropbox or Google Drive with well-organized social media images labeled appropriately.

USE AI FOR EFFICIENCY

In the episode, “How AI Can Transform Your Photography Business,” St. Louis-based portrait and commercial photographer, filmmaker, and AI expert Garon Cooper explains how AI can help with administrative and strategic tasks.



“IT’S KIND OF LIKE
HAVING A MINI
BUSINESS COACH
IN YOUR POCKET.”

— GARON COOPER

1 Use AI as a pocket business coach. Use AI chat as a sounding board for your business strategy. Because these systems have access to global information, they can help identify blind spots, brainstorm ideas, and even suggest appropriate pricing. “It’s kind of like having a mini business coach in your pocket,” says Cooper.

2 Conduct in-depth market research. Use the Deep Research feature (left-hand menu, under ... More) to analyze new markets. For example, this tool can compile data on wedding trends, venue pricing, and what local clients are paying, which saves you hours of manual Google searching.

3 Implement an AI receptionist. Missing phone calls often means missing leads. Cooper recommends using human-like AI voice assistants to answer FAQs and book consultations directly on your calendar when you are unavailable. “The company that answers the phone first is generally the one that’s going to get the sale, or at least has the first chance at it,” says Cooper. There are multiple voice chat services available, including NextPhone, Dialzara, Smith.ai, Goodcall, and Chat-Hawk, which Cooper founded.

4 Streamline shopping and gear comparisons. Use AI chats to research products and equipment, make comparisons, and find the best camera for specific needs. Ask the chat a question like, “What is the best camera for shooting a nighttime outdoor wedding reception, which is also compatible with Godox flash units?”

5 Pre-qualify leads. Use AI to conduct initial conversations with potential clients and only pass on leads that answer within certain parameters. For example, an AI chatbot can ask a potential client what their budget is for wedding photography and, if their amount aligns with your prices, can pass their contact information to you for a human follow-up.

SUPERCHARGE IMAGE EDITING

In the episode, “Photoshop AI Tips Every Photographer Should Know,” Julieanne Kost, principal digital imaging evangelist at Adobe Systems, shares features, tips, and tricks for streamlining image editing.

1 Implement AI-powered image culling. One of the most significant time-savers is the assisted culling feature in Adobe Lightroom. It uses AI models to identify technical flaws across thousands of images like closed eyes or out-of-focus photos. Use this as an assistant rather than a replacement for a human editor, says Kost. The tool deletes the obviously unusable images so you can focus on working with the best ones. “I think it’s going to save people a lot of time, especially wedding, portrait, and event photographers,” she says.

“WITH ONE CLICK
I’VE GOT ALL THE
MASKS FOR ALL EIGHT
DIFFERENT CATEGORIES
OF LANDSCAPE.”

– JULIEANNE KOST

2 Accelerate local adjustments with AI-powered masking. With this action, you can instantly detect and isolate elements like sky, people, backgrounds, or landscape features. You can create a preset that generates these masks without applying actual adjustments, which provides a ready-to-edit file without the tedious manual selection work. “I made a preset that says, ‘Look at this image and show me all of the masks that could be applied,’” says Kost. “With one click I’ve got all the masks for all eight different categories of landscape.”

3 Harmonize composites non-destructively. When combining images in Photoshop, the HARMONIZE feature uses AI to match the lighting, tone, and color of a subject to its new environment. It creates non-destructive

changes on a separate layer, adjusting scene lighting and generating elements like contact shadows and drop shadows.

4 Leverage Generative Fill for clean-up and composition. Generative Fill is highly effective for removing unwanted people (like at a crowded tourist spot) or expanding a canvas when an image was framed too tightly, according to Kost. “This allows you to shoot when the light is perfect, regardless of distractions, because you can pop them out later using AI,” she explains.

5 Use Generative AI as a sketchbook. Use tools like Adobe Firefly to test ideas or generate objects (like wings or clothing) that would otherwise take hours to source and extract. “It lowers decision fatigue,” Kost says, “and keeps you in a creative flow by allowing you to try multiple variations in seconds.”

6 Optimize workflow with Raw Defaults. Set your AI-based presets to apply automatically upon import using Raw Defaults. This ensures that lens corrections, chromatic aberration removal, and your preferred profiles are ready the moment you open a file.

Rather than fear or resist AI, small business owners like photographers should embrace the parts that can truly help them succeed, or risk being left behind, explains Cooper. “It surprises me how little people are really leveraging AI in their businesses for their productivity,” he tells podcast host Pat Miller. “They’re leaving money and efficiency on the table that they could be capturing with the right AI tools and software that they’re just not thinking of.” •



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Good Company

YOUR NETWORK AND YOUR AUTHENTICITY HELP BUILD YOUR BUSINESS

By *Melanie Lasoff Levs*

Who is in your circle? Do they help you move forward or do they hold you back?

Jamar Jones, who runs branding and media organization Foureva Media and wrote the book, “Change Your Circle, Change Your Life,” helps his entrepreneur clients monetize their brands and build their businesses. Part of his process is having clients ask themselves questions such as:

Who are the people in my life?

How am I connected to them?

How much time do I spend with them?

Are they aligned with my goals or at least champions of them, or are they “vampires” who drain my energy?

These questions build crucial self-awareness, Jones tells “Professional Photographer” podcast host Pat Miller on the episode “Build the Circle that Books You: Networking with Photographers.” “... Oftentimes we go through our life, we’re trying to figure out, ‘How did we get here?’” he says, and part of that discovery means evaluating our current circle. “We allow these people into our life. Besides your family, you allow these people into your life and you’re wondering why you’re stuck or why you’re at the point you are in your life,” he continues. “And a lot of times, it deals with your current circle. And we’re also trying to figure out how to get into new ones.”

James then has clients consider what kinds of “circles” would help them move their goals forward. “The essence of ‘Change Your Circle, Change Your Life’ is being on purpose and by design, chang-



JAMAR JONES

©LINDA SMALLPAGE

ing your circle with intentionality but also constantly evaluating your current circle to figure out who needs to be there, who needs to kind of have some separation and who needs to get the boot,” he says. “It’s a beautiful process and

framework that I live every single day.”

Your network is part of your personal brand, and the stronger that network is, the sooner you can close what Jones calls the credibility gap: the amount of time

between when someone is introduced to you and when you two connect, such as them becoming a client or you purchasing something from their company. “The gap is trust and actually ... positioning around who you are,” Jones explains. “And the faster that you can shorten that gap, the quicker people are going to be able to present opportunities to you.”

BRING YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF

Every piece of what you put out into the world—for example a social media post, an email, a phone call—is part of your brand, according to Jones. He cites Disney World as an example of a strong, positive,

well-planned brand experience. How does that concept transfer into the “amusement park” of *you*? He brings Miller into the example. “So, think about yourself like, ‘Hey, I invited somebody to Pat’s amusement park. What’s the experience like?’” Jones says, adding that top-quality brands are confident in their identities and consistently present themselves. “What do you want them to learn first about you? What do you want them to know and where do you want them to go to get to building more trust with you?”

In the “noise” of social media and other marketing, many entrepreneurs focus more on keeping up with their competition than they do on what sets them apart, James says. “We’re looking too far outward at what everybody else is doing and trying to copy it instead of looking at the greatness that we already have within us and saying, ‘How do I display that more?’” Change your thought process and you can change your brand strategy, he adds. And if you are stuck or discouraged or think no one is interested in what makes you unique, mentors can be key. “Sometimes, people just need to hear it,” that they should feel confident sharing what they have to offer, he explains. For example, James says, with his help, a client realized that he had reached over 35,000 people through his work “and he had never realized it up until that moment. And he was like,

‘Wow, I am kind of like, I’m a big deal.’ ... It took that time and space for us to pull that out of him, right? And give him that time and space to really think about the things that he’s done.”

This is the power of the right people in your circle, James says, as long as you are true to yourself. “You’ve got to be yourself and as authentic as possible. ... I’m more talking about the things that make you unique, your gifts, the things that make you different, those are the things that you want to really put out in there into the forefront, even when you’re entering these new circles,” he explains. For example, James recalls being told that if he wanted to gain more corporate clients, he should lose the “hip-hop vibe” of baseball caps and hoodies. “I was miserable. I kept putting on this façade, this persona out there,” he tells Miller. “I had the collared shirt and, you know, I had all the button-up website and everything. I tried it for a couple years and then one day I’m like, ‘This is not me.’ And the funny part of it is that once I switched back to what I know, that I’m comfortable in, the way that I want to present myself, more business came through the door.”

That works for photographers as well, he says: Stay true to yourself, surround yourself with people who will move you forward, and you and your business can thrive. “More photographers have to understand that clients are hiring you for your art style, for the uniqueness,” James says. “They’re making the decision to pay you because of how you do something. ... We’re missing [bringing to the forefront] the thing that makes us different, why they’re going to choose *you*.” •



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Photo: Tracy Bosworth Page

Midday Magic

INFRARED EXPANDS YOUR CAPTURE OPTIONS

By Bob Coates, *M.Photog.M.Artist.Cr., CPP*



Deciduous leaves render white with a luminous model against high-contrast flowing water.



Find Bob Coates' instructional videos on **PhotoVision**.

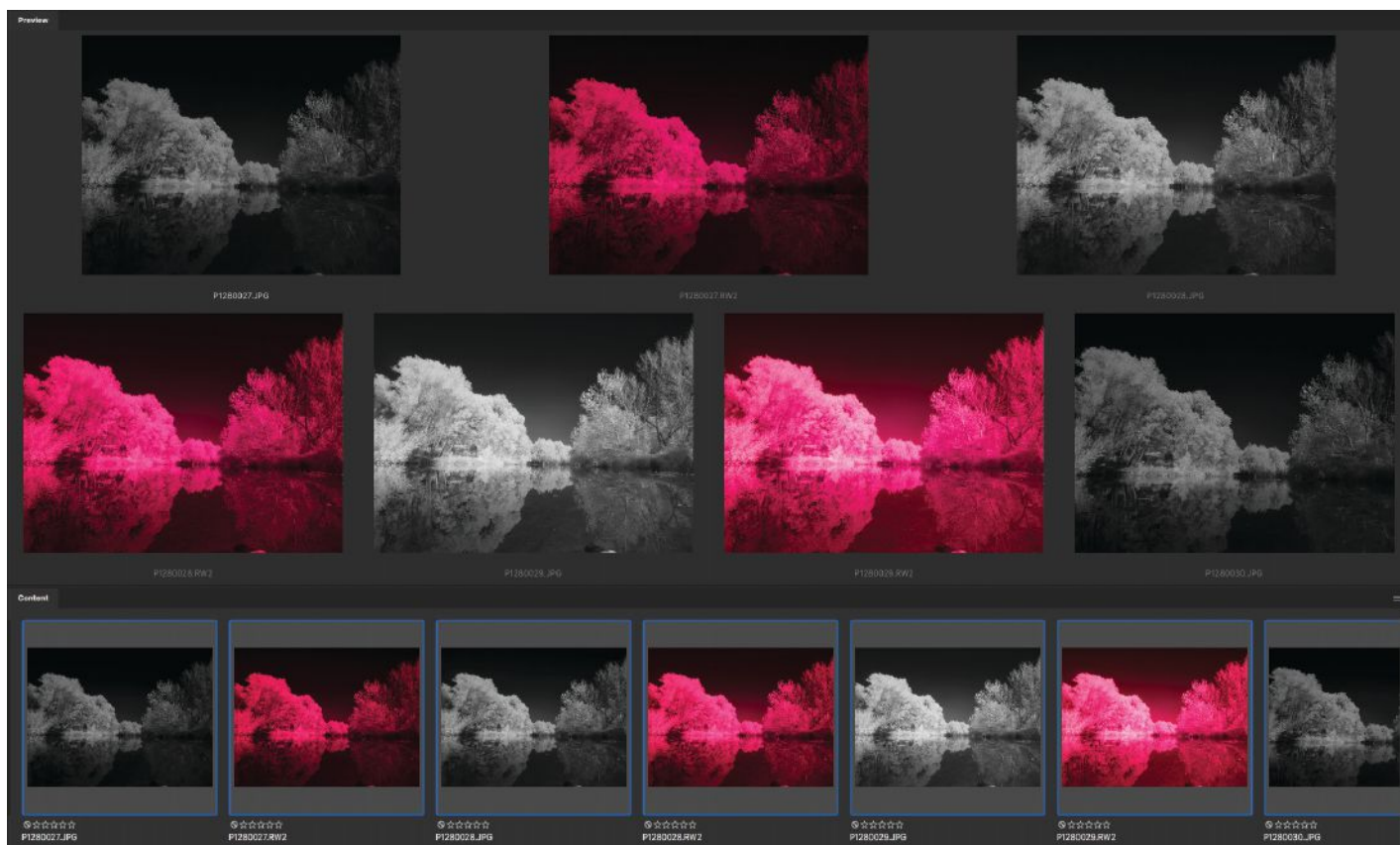
The golden hour is that lovely time in the morning and evening when soft directional light is perfect for photography. But what about when the sun is high in the sky? Experienced photographers can work with high contrast, but usually we put our cameras away during that time. Enter infrared. Infrared shines when the light is bright. It captures glowing white foliage and deep dark skies that make puffy white clouds look magical. Infrared capture opens a world of creativity where contrast sings.



Palm leaves render a false color white as they reflect the IR light and blue skies go black.

CAMERA CONVERSION

You have a couple options for photographing in infrared (IR). You can use an IR filter over the lens, but that adds difficulty with focus due to the filter density, plane of focus, and longer exposure times. Or you can have a digital camera converted to infrared capture, and the capture process is easier. Focus is a breeze and you can make sharp exposures handheld with no problem.



Before processing, the raw images are magenta while the JPEGs are black and white due to the monochrome setting chosen on the camera.

If you have an older digital camera languishing on the shelf, you can give it new life by converting it to IR. Many options are available with distinct filters offering different wavelengths of light. Images in this article were made with a Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH4 with the traditional 720nm (nanometer) IR filter that converts the image to black and white. Color filters offer different creative results. Life Pixel and Kolari Vision are two companies that convert cameras to infrared, and you can learn about which filters give what results along with other great information on getting started in IR on their websites, lifepixel.com and

kolarivision.com. Camera conversions can run from \$199 to \$350 depending on the camera model and filter choice. These companies also sell cameras that have already been converted.

CAMERA SETTINGS

Getting the most out of your IR captures means adjusting a few settings on your camera. Choose a monochrome picture mode setting in your camera menu. This will allow you to see the image in black and white on the back of your camera, which will be closer to the final look. Set the capture format to raw. You lose the ability to get the infrared look with JPEGs.

Raw capture gives you all the information presented to the camera for further processing. The IR file from your camera will be magenta. If you want a black-and-white version, you will need to shoot in raw+JPEG. I recommend that to begin your IR capture journey.

Finally, bracket your exposures: three exposures; one stop over, one on, and one under. You can choose the one that works best or blend two or three images together to tame all the tones in the scene.

PROCESSING

Adobe Photoshop is my go-to for processing IR files. It's possible to automatically



Storm clouds moving into this desert scene are enhanced by the IR capture. Skies render dark to black allowing clouds to pop. The sands take on a glow.

convert the magenta files to black-and-white upon import in Adobe Lightroom using a profile setting, which can be handy. You can also use a plug-in like Nik Silver Efex Pro black-and-white converter. Once you've decided how you want to convert to black and white, you can start experimenting to find your own style. If you like the halation effect of infrared photography—the glow that appears around white foliage in infrared film photography—you'll have to simulate it in digital. Sometimes I tweak exposure, add some glow, add a bit of noise, dodge and burn, and the image is ready to go. To add the glow, I copy the layer and convert it to a Smart object for a non-destructive workflow. From the Filter Menu I choose Filter Gallery > Distort > Diffuse Glow. I change the blend mode of the layer to screen and lower the opacity to taste. Nik also has a filter in Color Efex called Glamour Glow that you can use. There are more involved processing options such as swapping the Red and Blue Channels, but that's more advanced.



I felt that an IR capture would enhance the look of this “Day of the Dead” couple. This is one instance in which the way infrared shows human eyes as hollow will work for the subjects.



Cyan and sepia tones as possibilities for artistic toning.

SHOW AND SELL IR IMAGES

There are several ways to turn your IR images into dollars. Dip a toe into the fine art market to sell images online or in a gallery. Try adding color tinges to create unique looks. It's your art, so play and create. Figure photography gets interesting with infrared. The human body reflects a high amount of near-IR light in the 800nm-1,000nm range, resulting in a smooth ethereal look and even exposing veins beneath the skin. Eyes can appear

hollow and dark, so I suggest subjects look away from the camera.

Wedding photographers can add a different look to pre-wedding bridal portraits and landscapes at scenic venues. If you're planning to photograph a wedding during a time when the sun is high, scout the venue for locations that might be particularly dramatic in IR.

Portrait photographers can offer an additional unique look to clients. Seek out forested landscapes or other verdant set-

tings. A sky with white puffy clouds is especially attractive. Get creative with posing to hide the eyes. Think of couples walking away from the camera, holding hands, a child frozen in play, or an elegant profile with a hand poised to sweep back hair.

Give infrared imaging a try and see where it takes you. •

Bob Coates is a Sedona, Arizona-based photographer who hosts Milky Way and night sky workshops.

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Imaging USA 2026 Attendee



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Superior Design

PROFOTO B20 AND B30 MONOLIGHTS

By Ellis Vener

The new Profoto B20 and B30 flashes are designed essentially the same, differing only in maximum and minimum output. The B20 power range covers 250 watt-seconds to 0.25 watt-seconds; the B30 is a 500-0.5Ws flash. These power-range differences also affect flash duration and recycle times between flashes. Both use the same removable Profoto Li-ion 4S1P battery. The maximum number of full-power flashes, size, weight, and price also differ.

I appreciate Profoto lights for their excellent light quality, especially for portraits, and their user-friendly design. Their approach follows the tenets of modern design: clean lines; intentional, clutter-free use of space; and a clear, minimalist layout of information and controls. With Profoto, form follows function in every detail. The way light modifiers attach, the battery latch, the controls, and the tilting stand/umbrella mount all embody intuitive design that assures fast, safe, and robust use.

Let's first look at the detachable OCF Stand Adapter, to show the thought Profoto engineers have put into making a superior product. Unlike every other flash manufacturer I know, the bolt that locks the mount to a standard 5/8-inch baby pin has an end-stop that prevents it from separating from the mount. If you have ever found yourself digging through a case looking for that missing bolt, you will be relieved to know it can't go missing with the B20 and B30.

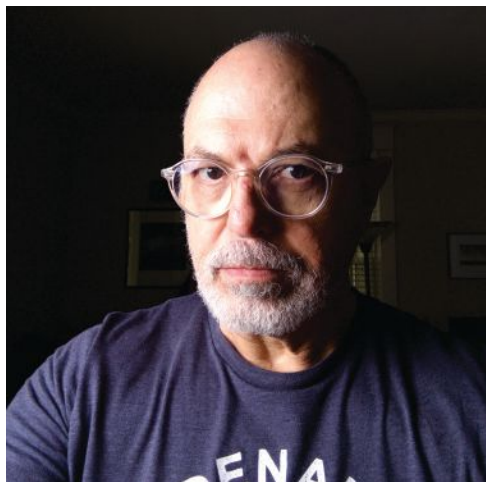
The tilt pivot has three stages: fully locked, fully loose, and an intermediate stage. The low-profile gearing in the joint engages right before it is fully locked. This gearing makes head angling more



Scan the QR code for a table noting the Profoto B20 and B30 differences.



Using a Miops Splash Pro kit to sync the camera with the droplets, I froze the splash with the Profoto in freeze mode at power level 5 and t/0.1 flash duration of 1/6,800 second. It was fitted with a 50-degree Magnum reflector placed behind a sheet of 1/4" white plexiglass, which I used as the background. I lit the olive with the Profoto B30 fitted with a Profoto Zoom reflector and 7" 3-degree grid and a Balcar angle-reducing ring. I used a small flag to keep this light off the top edge and splash pattern. The B30 was also set to freeze mode and to an appropriate power level.



For this self-portrait, I fitted the Profoto B20 with a Plume Wafer 75 soft box and used the Profoto Control app to sync the flash to an iPhone 14 Pro front camera on a tripod.

precise and lets you know by feel that it is not quite fully locked and could still slip. One last detail for the stand mount: the long umbrella shaft tube. Short of those integrated into a flash's body, this is the longest umbrella tube I've seen on a light stand mount.

The back of the Profoto B20 and B30 is mostly occupied by a large, easy-to-read LCD display, with two multifunction knobs and an on/off button below the display. When using flash only, the information panel features a white-on-black alphanumeric display, which is easy to read even in bright sunlight. Beneath that are two knobs and the on/off switch. The smaller knob on the left controls the 40-watt bi-color LED. Push it to turn it on or off, rotate it to set the brightness, or press-hold and rotate to set the color temperature over its 2,800K-7,000K range. These values are indicated on bar graphs. The middle knob is larger and rotating its outer portion controls flash output in 1/10-stop increments over the 500Ws to 0.5Ws range. Press and rotate the outer portion to change output in full-stop increments. Tap and release the center knob to



SARAH HARRISON

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Being a member of PPA helps me build trust with potential clients by showing my affiliation with a reputable organization—and it reinforces that trust with the lifelong clients I already serve. I joined because I believe in PPA's mission to support photographers, and I wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself.

Looking ahead, my goal is to be 100% self-supporting and in a position to give—whether by mentoring apprentices, supporting people in transition who are learning photography as a new skill, or helping small photography business owners grow. At the heart of it all, I became a portraitist to help others tell their personal stories through meaningful imagery.

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I lit this portrait of entrepreneur and musician D'Angelo (aka DLO) with a Profoto B30 fitted with a 45" white umbrella as the key light and a bare Profoto B20 from camera right for fill. We were moving very quickly, so I trusted the Profoto lights in TTL mode. The B30 with an umbrella was mounted on an iFootage Cobra 3 monopod used as an improvised handheld boom.

make the eight-item function menu appear. The menu options for each of these items are shallow and clearly described.

There's one more trick to the information display for those who hang a light from a boom or a ceiling track. As far as I know, Profoto is the only company to offer a display that can flip so it reads correctly when upside down. To access this, scroll down to the General options menu and choose Display Orientation. Press the center button once more to choose Auto, Normal, or Reversed.

The cylindrical shape of the B20 and B30 is designed to work with both Profoto OFC and standard Profoto light shapers and soft box speedrings/adapters. Compared to Bowens-S and Broncolor bayonets, or the Balcar/Bufs sprung finger-type mounts, the design and mechanics of the Profoto mounts make them the platinum standard for security

and versatility in attaching rigid metal and parabolic light reflectors, beauty dishes, and soft boxes to a light.

The B20 and B30 have three flash modes: Eco, Boost, and Freeze. Eco mode delivers consistent color from top to bottom across the power range and a short flash duration. Boost provides the same color consistency with a slight increase in output at all but full power. This is somewhat analogous to pushing a computer processor beyond its rated speed and, according to Profoto, comes at the cost of shortening component lifespan. In my experience, the Boost setting did not provide a noticeable benefit. Freeze mode shortens flash duration. Use Freeze mode when you need even shorter flash duration at all settings below full. However, by restricting the flash duration to the leading part of the power release curve, the color temperature becomes bluer as

power decreases, rising from 6,000K at full power to 9,000K at minimum power.

The B20 and B30, like other recent Profoto lights, use the AirX wireless control system. Other compatible lights include the A10 Speedlight, D30, Pro D3, B10, B10X Plus, and four new LED models: three CoB lights for full-size Profoto modifiers (600-watt RGBWW L600C, 600-watt 5,600K L600D, and 1600-watt 5,600K L1,600D) and the RGBWW 2,000-watt ProPanel 3X2. For this review, I used the Nikon model of the Connect Pro trigger. The Connect Pro offers 100 channels, six groups per channel, 2.4GHz frequency, and a 330-foot range (ideal conditions). It worked flawlessly for me, both indoors and out.

With my Nikon Z cameras, TTL and manual control of the B20 and B30 via the Connect Pro, whether used together or separately, was consistent and accurate in varying conditions. Profoto also has two Bluetooth-connected apps for Android and Apple: Profoto Control and Profoto Camera.

The Profoto Control app lets you remotely control all settings on individual AirX system lights and take over the controls of Profoto Connect Pro remotes when the camera is not in your hands.

For hybrid shooters and content creators, the Profoto Camera app enables flash use with your phone's camera. If the workflow fits your needs and your clients' expectations, this approach offers significant potential for specific applications.

Profoto continues its legacy of thoughtful, quality design for working photographers with the B20 and B30, priced at \$1,995 and \$2,395 respectively, but likely available for less. It's among the more expensive brands, but once you use Profoto lights, you'll see why many top photographers remain loyal customers. •

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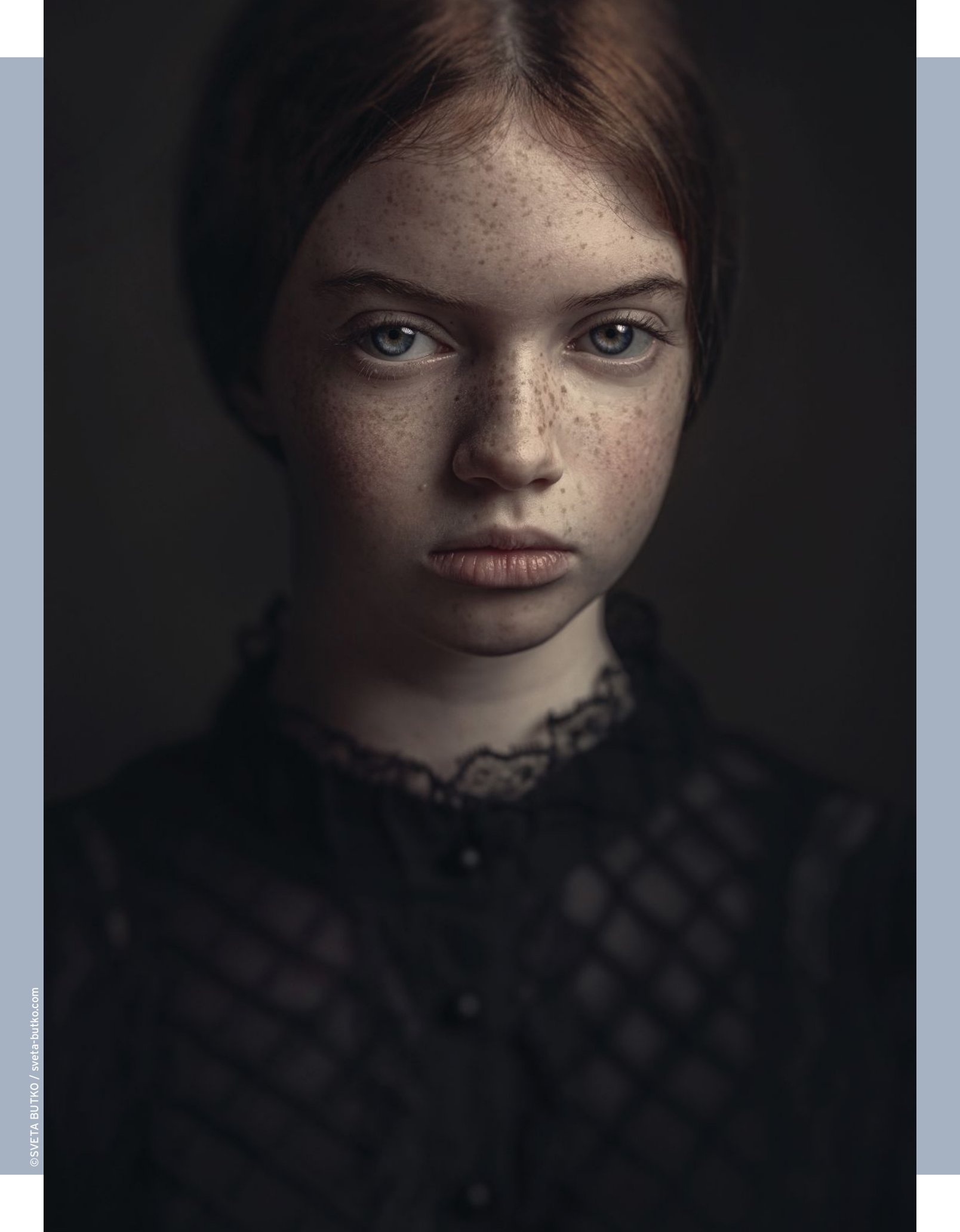
SVETA BUTKO

The 2026 Grand Imaging Award winner and finalists share the stories behind their superlative images

EXCITEMENT FOR next year's International Photographic Competition (IPC) is already ramping up. Registration for PPA's IPC opened June 30, 2026 and ends Sept. 17. The results of the first round of judging will be released Nov. 3. Live judging of the top 32 images in each category will take place at Imaging USA 2027 in Charlotte, North Carolina, Jan. 30, 2027, and Feb. 1, 2027.

As in the past, this year's live International Photographic Competition judging at Imaging USA 2026 in Nashville, Tennessee, was a nail-biter. During the event, emceed by Booray Perry, M.Photog.M.Wed. Photog.Cr., CPP, the top 16 images from each category were pitted against one other in a bracket-style tournament. Five trained jurors decided which of two images would advance, thus narrowing a pool of 16 down to eight, then four, then two, then one Grand Imaging Award winner. To ratchet up the excitement, the audience used an app to cast their votes on which images should move forward. That vote was tallied on the screen alongside those of the jurors. The winners in each of the 16 categories were awarded Diamond Photographer status, a trophy, and \$1,000. The Grand Imaging Award winner received a trophy and \$10,000.

Sveta Butko took that top prize this year for her striking portrait, titled "Michal," which competed in the children and teens category. She created the image while teaching a workshop in Israel and immediately knew her subject Michal was something special. "Her eyes," Butko says, when asked what she thinks makes the image so compelling. •



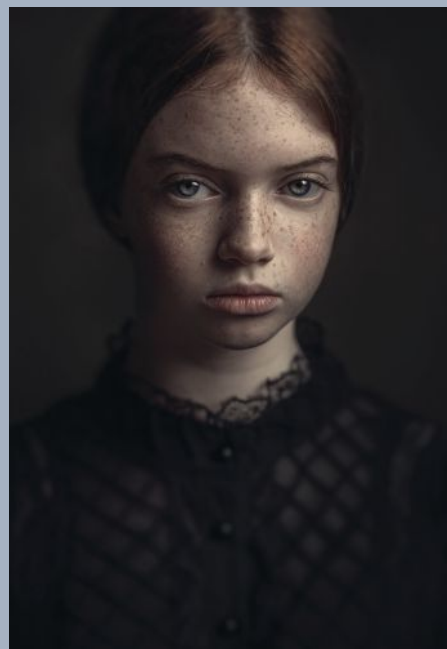
SVETA BUTKO, ON HER IMAGE AND HER WIN

■ GRAND IMAGING AWARD

WHEN COPPELL, TEXAS-BASED fine art portrait and family photographer Sveta Butko learned she'd won the Grand Imaging Award in PPA's 2026 International Photographic Competition (IPC), she was stunned. Butko grew up in Russia and only moved to the United States in July 2025, after living in Israel for 18 years. She entered her image "Michal" into IPC to gain visibility for her work in the U.S. But when live judging commenced in the Nashville, Tennessee, ballroom at Imaging USA in January, Butko got more than she'd dreamed of: "Michal" took the top prize.

A photographer friend who was watching the live judging notified Butko of her win, since she was not there. "He sent me a message and said, 'Congratulations,'" she recalls. "I was like, 'Oh, thank you,'" she says, assuming he was congratulating her on being a finalist. When he clarified that she was the Grand Imaging Award winner, she couldn't believe it. "My heart was pumping so fast, and it was the evening, you know, and I couldn't sleep," she laughs. "It was really surprising." While she was pleased to receive the cash prize, she says what meant the most to her was knowing her image impacted the IPC jurors. "For me, it was about the fact that my image made them feel something, that it changed something in them," she says.

Butko, who has led photography workshops around the world and whose portraits grace the covers of dozens of international book covers, shares how she created her award-winning image. "The lighting setup is very simple," she explains, describing it as two continuous light sources. What makes the portrait striking is the rapport she cultivated with her young subject, whom she describes as beautiful and special. "It's more about empathy and more about the connection between the photographer and the model," Butko says. The subject's eyes, a "wonderful glance that is not so unusual for her," and the bond the two shared lend the image its power, she contends. "It's more about what you feel." •



©SVETA BUTKO / sveta-butko.com

MICHAL

Sveta Butko
Sveta Butko Fine Art Portraiture
Coppell, Texas

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: In preparation for a children's portraiture workshop at her studio in Israel, Sveta Butko posted a model call. "Quite unexpectedly, this girl's mother sent me a photo of her daughter," she explains. "The moment I saw it, I knew she was exactly the type I had been looking for. She had a very expressive look, with striking eyes and a unique presence that immediately caught my attention."

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS R5, Canon RF85mm F1.2 L USM lens with a UV filter

EXPOSURE: 1/200 second at f/2.8, ISO 250

LIGHTING: Two Godox FV150s, one from the right to create a Rembrandt lighting pattern, and the second on the background from the left.

POST-CAPTURE: Butko used Adobe Photoshop for color corrections and skin retouching.

DIAMOND AWARD WINNERS



©RICHARD F. COX / richardfox.smugmug.com

■ REPORTAGE/PHOTOJOURNALISM

JUDGEMENT DAY

Rich Cox, M.Photo., CPP
Rich Cox Photo
West Norriton, Pennsylvania

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: While visiting Philadelphia, "I came across a man lying on the sidewalk in the late afternoon," explains Rich Cox. The man was unconscious and unresponsive but breathing normally. "I positioned myself low on the sidewalk behind his head and took a series of images from this position, deliberately waiting for passersby."

CAMERA & LENS: Olympus OM-D E-M1 Mark II, Panasonic Lumix G X Vario 12-35mm F2.8 lens

EXPOSURE: 1/60 second at f/8, ISO 1250

LIGHTING: Available light

POST-CAPTURE: Contrast adjustments, cropping, and dodging and burning were done in Adobe Photoshop and Camera Raw.



■ LANDSCAPE SPIRITUAL SUNRISE

Kimberly S. Olker,
M.Photog.M.Wed.Photog.Cr., CPP
Olker Photography
Rocklin, California

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: Kimberly S. Olker made this photo of the iconic St. Thomas Church in Slovenia while traveling with a group of photographers. They rose before sunrise to head to the remote spot, guided by two travel photography experts. "As the sun crested the mountains, the church emerged from the shifting fog, beautifully illuminated by the morning sunlight."

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS R5, Canon RF70-200mm F2.8 L IS USM lens

EXPOSURE: 1/15 second at f/20, ISO 100

LIGHTING: Natural light

POST-CAPTURE: Using Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop, Olker merged three images into a panoramic composition. She made standard adjustments for exposure, highlights, shadows, and sharpening, and performed minor retouching to remove sensor spots and small distractions.



■ NEWBORN AND MATERNITY BETTER TOGETHER

Lisa Cory
Lisa Cory Photography
Findlay, Ohio

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS R5,
Canon RF35mm F1.8 Macro
IS STM lens

EXPOSURE: 1/200 second at
f/2.8, ISO 200

LIGHTING: The main light was a Profoto B10 with a Westcott 7-foot umbrella with double diffusion for softer light. It was positioned camera right, above the babies, and feathered slightly toward them to fill the scene.

POST-CAPTURE: Adobe

Lightroom and Photoshop were used for global color corrections and balancing. Retouching was done to remove background distractions such as clips, the babies' heart monitor wires, a pacifier, and the parent's hand.



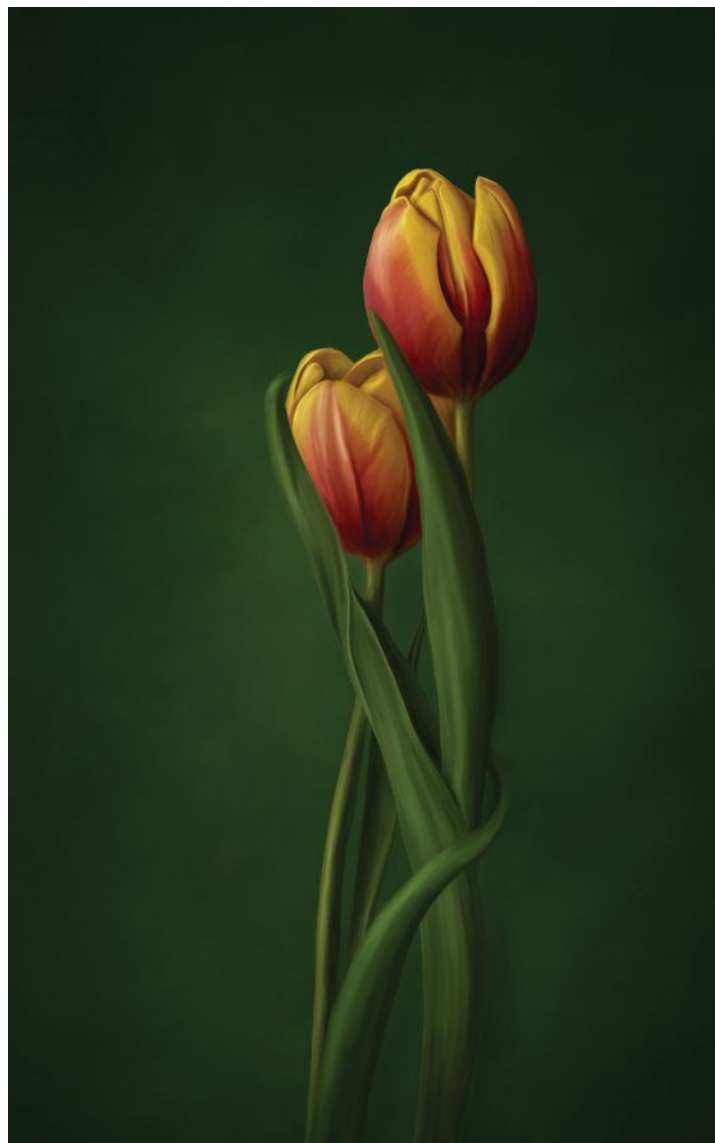
"AS THE SUN
CRESTED THE
MOUNTAINS, THE
CHURCH EMERGED
FROM THE SHIFTING
FOG, BEAUTIFULLY
ILLUMINATED BY
THE MORNING
SUNLIGHT."

— KIMBERLY S. OLKER

■ ILLUSTRATIVE/DIGITAL

EMBRACE

Cindy Strupp,
M.Photog.M.Wed.Photog.M.Artist.Cr., CPP
Revelation Photography
Carlisle, Pennsylvania



©CINDY STRUPP / revelationphotostudio.com

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: Cindy Strupp bought a bouquet of tulips and photographed them as singles and in groups so that she could paint the images. "This image of the two tulips leaning on each other drew my attention because as I placed them in the vase ... the leaves were slightly intertwined to look like they were embracing," she says. As she painted the image, she wrapped the leaves a bit more to enhance that look.

CAMERA & LENS: Nikon D70, Nikkor Z 50mm f/1.4 lens

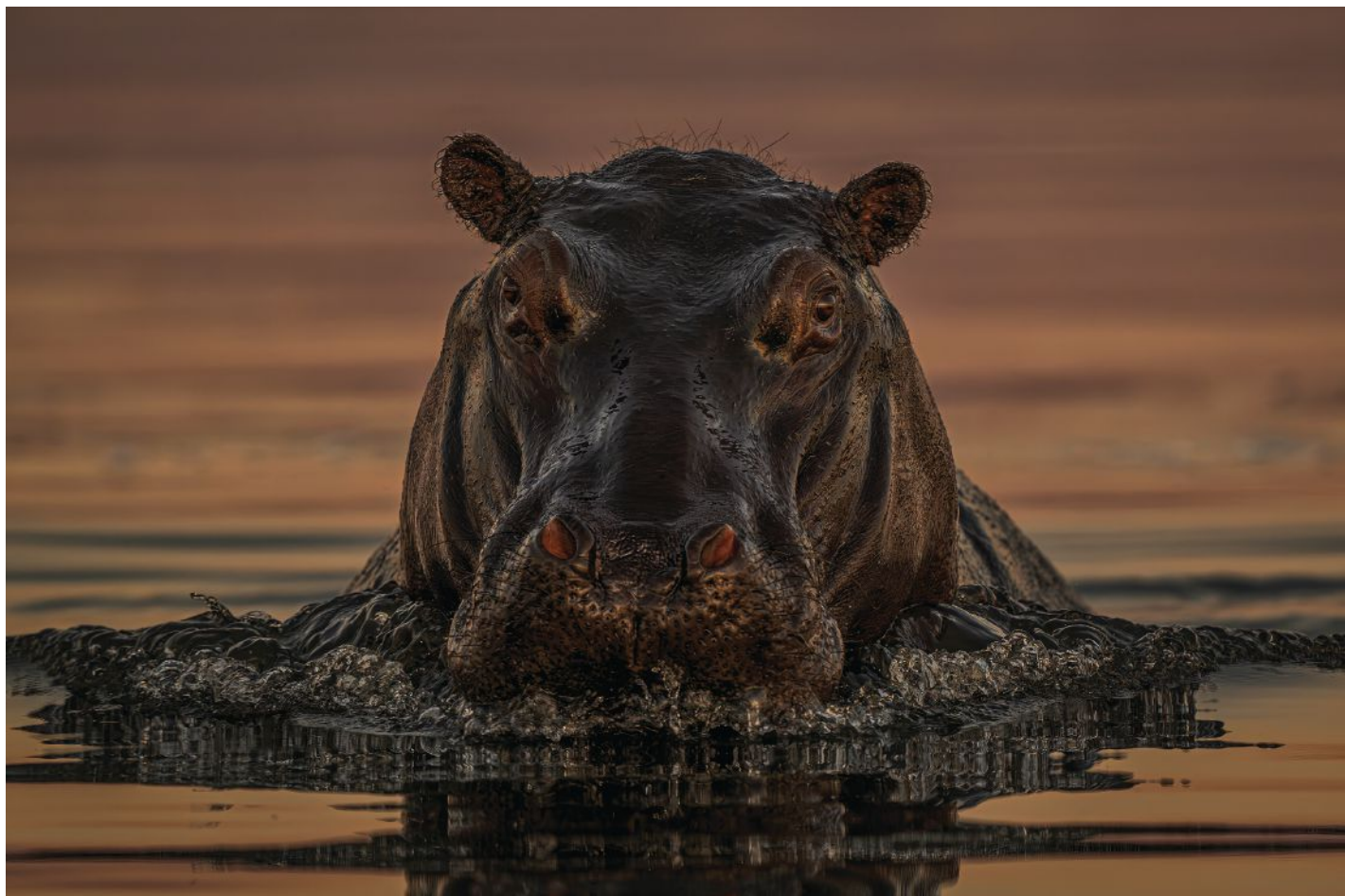
EXPOSURE: 0.5 second at f/16, ISO 100

LIGHTING: Natural light

POST-CAPTURE: Strupp did basic edits in Adobe Lightroom and digital painting in Photoshop.

"IT WAS GETTING DARK, AND AS WE WERE LEAVING AN AREA WITH HIPPOS, ONE LUNGED TOWARD US, THREATENING THE BOAT. I TOOK 20 FRAMES PER SECOND WHILE HE LUNGED."

— JOHN BUMGARDNER



©JOHN BUMGARDNER

■ WILDLIFE AMBUSH

John Bumgardner, M.PhotoG.
Golden, Colorado

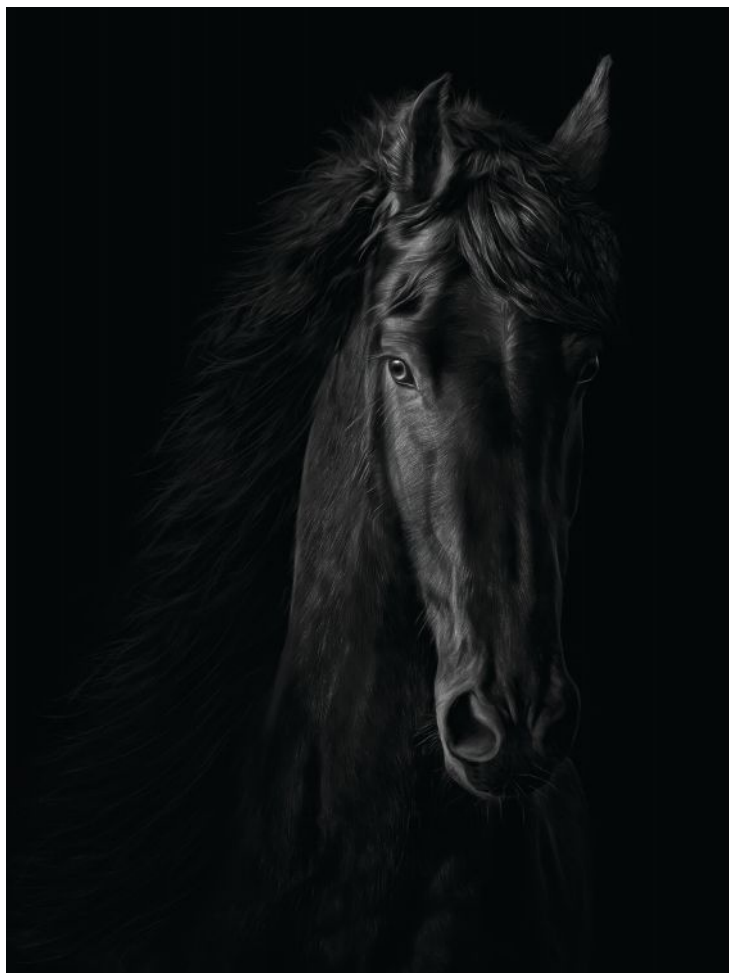
PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: "We were on a boat with gimbals on the Chobe River" in Botswana, says John Bumgardner. "It was getting dark, and as we were leaving an area with hippos, one lunged toward us, threatening the boat. I took 20 frames per second while he lunged."

CAMERA & LENS: Nikon Z 9, Nikkor Z 400mm f/2.8 TC VR-S lens

EXPOSURE: 1/1,000 second at f/2.8, ISO 1100

LIGHTING: Natural light

POST-CAPTURE: Using Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop, he cropped and sharpened the image, used Denoise, changed the white balance, and dodged and burned the image.



■ PETS AND DOMESTICATED ANIMALS

SHADOW DANCER BENEATH THE MOON

Judy Reinford,
M.Photog.M.Artist.Cr., CPP
Judy Reinford Photographic Artist
Bath, Pennsylvania

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: The portrait features Hendrika, a Friesian mare Judy Reinford photographed at the Renaissance Friesians farm in Nashville, Tennessee. "Even in the bright afternoon light, there was a quiet drama about her that translated beautifully through the lens," says Reinford.

CAMERA & LENS: Sony Alpha 1, Sony FE 70-200mm F2.8 GM OSS lens

EXPOSURE: 1/2,000 second at f/6.3, ISO 3200

LIGHTING: Natural light

POST-CAPTURE: In Adobe Photoshop, Reinford removed the background, cropped in around the horse's face, and then added in a black background. She created the lighting she wanted with the history brush and then digitally painted the image with a combination of the mixer brush and regular Photoshop brushes.



■ PORTRAIT GROUPS/FAMILIES

FUELING OUR IMAGINATION

Dana Rose,
M.Photog.M.Artist.
Rose Designs Fine Art
Portraiture
Alvord, Iowa

CAMERA & LENS: Nikon Z 7, Nikkor Z 85mm f/1.8 S lens

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

LIGHTING: Godox AD300 with a 48-inch octabox as the main light, camera right, and an AlienBees 800 with a

large strip box behind the subject, camera right

POST-CAPTURE: In Adobe Photoshop, Dana Rose composited together multiple images, hand-drew some elements, such as the waves and the water, and then painted everything to blend the image.

■ BOUDOIR CHAMELEON

Andrew Hiorth
Fable Studios
Vaughan, Ontario

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: Andrew Hiorth's initial intent was to have the subject's body paint be at a 1:1 scale with the backdrop so the subject would blend in perfectly. But through collaboration with the hair and makeup team, "We did a smaller scale with the body paint, being very meticulous in the lines and the sections of the black and white, to give us better quality and to have the subject stand out from the backdrop rather than be a part of it. The results were incredible in camera, and the image became something that gave us goosebumps."

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS R5, Canon RF24-70mm F2.8 L IS USM lens

EXPOSURE: 1/200 second at f/4, ISO 2000

LIGHTING: One Aputure 600d at full power through an 8x8-inch scrim placed at the head of the subject and two Profoto B10Xs with a 1x3-foot strip box with grids placed on either side of the subject

POST-CAPTURE: Using Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop, Hiorth did skin retouching and removed the legs of the ladder he was standing on to capture the image from overhead, looking down onto the subject.



©ANDREW HIORTH - FABLE STUDIOS / fablestudios.ca

■ COMMERCIAL DARK KNIGHT REBORN

Duane Miller, M.PhotoG.
Duane Miller Photography
Mt. Juliet, Tennessee

CAMERA & LENS: Nikon D850, AF-S Nikkor 28-300mm f/3.5-5.6G ED VR lens

EXPOSURE: 1/30 second at f/8, ISO 80

LIGHTING: Available light

POST-CAPTURE: In Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop, Duane Miller converted the image to black and white and did a lot of masking to isolate and tone individual parts of the building. The clouds were composited in from another image in which a path blur had been applied to the sky.



©DUANE MILLER / duanemillerphotography.com

"I LOVED THE IDEA OF CREATING A DRESS OUT OF THE PIANO KEYS."

— MEGAN DRANE

©FIREFLY NIGHTS PHOTOGRAPHY / fireflynightphotography.com



■ HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

KEYS TO HER SOUL

Megan Drane,
M.Photos.M.Artist.
Firefly Nights Photography
Naperville, Illinois

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: "She was a pianist who was going to a prestigious music college to major in piano and songwriting," says Megan Drane of her subject. "I knew I wanted to create a special picture to capture that aspect of her. I loved the idea of creating a dress out of the piano keys. I made the scarf by folding sheets of music in half and then taping them together."

CAMERA & LENS: Sony Alpha 7 IV, Sony FE 24-70mm F2.8 GM lens

EXPOSURE: 1/200 second at f/7.1, ISO 320

LIGHTING: Drane positioned one Paul C. Buff Einstein flash unit with a 36-inch octabox camera left, feathered across the subject. She also photographed her own piano and its keys to use to composite the dress together.

POST-CAPTURE: "There was a lot of digital creation here to create the dress," says Drane, who used Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop for post processing. She used her images of the piano keys, some of them depressed, to composite the pieces of the dress. She finalized the image with some color balancing and shading.



©STEPHEN STOOKEY / stephen-stookey.pixels.com

■ SPORTS LOOK OUT!

Stephen Stookey, M.PhotoG.Cr.
Stephen Stookey Photography
Fort Worth, Texas

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: "This rank bull exploded from the gate with eyes wide open, snot and spit flying, and dispatched the rider in a few seconds," explains Stephen Stookey, who captured the photo at a rodeo in Abilene, Texas. "The range of emotions from the rodeo officials behind the gate conveys the drama. The real heroes in the image are the two bull fighters who quickly stepped between the bull and the downed rider."

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS R5 Mark II, Canon EF70-200mm f/2.8L IS II USM lens, and a Canon Control Ring Mount Adapter EF-EOS R

EXPOSURE: 1/1,000 second at f/3.5, ISO 12,800

LIGHTING: Available light

POST-CAPTURE: Stookey used Adobe Lightroom for the raw file conversion and basic adjustments, Nik Color Efex to convert the image to black and white, and Photoshop to dodge and burn and crop the image.

"OCCASIONALLY,
A BALD EAGLE
WILL FLY OVER THE
ROOSTING SNOW
GEESE, CAUSING
THEM TO ALL TAKE
OFF AT ONCE."

— JOSEPH GERARD GIITTER

©JOSEPH GERARD GIITTER / bohemianphotoworks.com





■ ILLUSTRATIVE PORTRAIT UNFINISHED

Emmalee Rathsam, M.Photos., CPP
Emmalee Rathsam Photography
Kansas City, Missouri

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: "This image was inspired by the unfinished paintings and sketches by Picasso, Jacques-Louis David, and Leonardo da Vinci," explains Emmalee Rathsam, "all of which I saw at the Louvre and the Picasso Museum during my trip to Paris."

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, Canon EF 35mm f/1.4L II USM lens

EXPOSURE: 1/160 second at f/14, ISO 100

LIGHTING: Rathsam used a Godox strobe, a Larson 4x6-foot soft box, a Phottix Ares II Flash Trigger Receiver, and a white v-flat for the portrait.

POST-CAPTURE: She used Adobe Lightroom for minor adjustments and Photoshop for the artwork. She used a Wacom tablet to "paint in" the image using a layer mask and wet media brushes, giving it a watercolor effect. She then sketched over the image with a fine black pencil brush to give it pen lines and added ink marks with splatter brushes. To add texture, Rathsam photographed watercolor paper and overlaid that onto the image.



■ YEARLY THEME: WILD BIRDS WALL TO WALL CHAOS

Joseph Gerard Giitter, M.Photos.Cr., CPP
Bohemian Photoworks
Omaha, Nebraska

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: "Every spring and fall, large flocks of migrating snow geese make the Loess Bluffs National Wildlife Refuge their temporary home," says Joseph Gerard Giitter. "Occasionally, a bald eagle will fly over the roosting snow geese, causing them to all take off at once." He notes that the key to capturing the geese in motion was to use a very fast shutter speed along with a narrow aperture to ensure the geese were sharp.

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS R5, Canon RF100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM lens with an RF2x extender

EXPOSURE: 1/2,500 second at f/13, ISO 640

LIGHTING: Natural light

POST-CAPTURE: In Photoshop, he cropped the image for the desired aspect ratio.

"AT EVERY WEDDING I CHALLENGE MYSELF TO CAPTURE
ONE EPIC SHOT THAT DELIVERS BEYOND WHAT'S EXPECTED,
AND THIS WAS IT FOR THIS COUPLE."

— DAN MCCLANAHAN



©DAN MCCLANAHAN, MCCLANAHAN STUDIO / mcclanahanstudio.net, danmcclanahan.com

■ DAY OF WEDDING THE GUESTS CAN WAIT

Dan McClanahan,
M.Photoq.M.Artist.Cr.
McClanahan Studio
Ames, Iowa

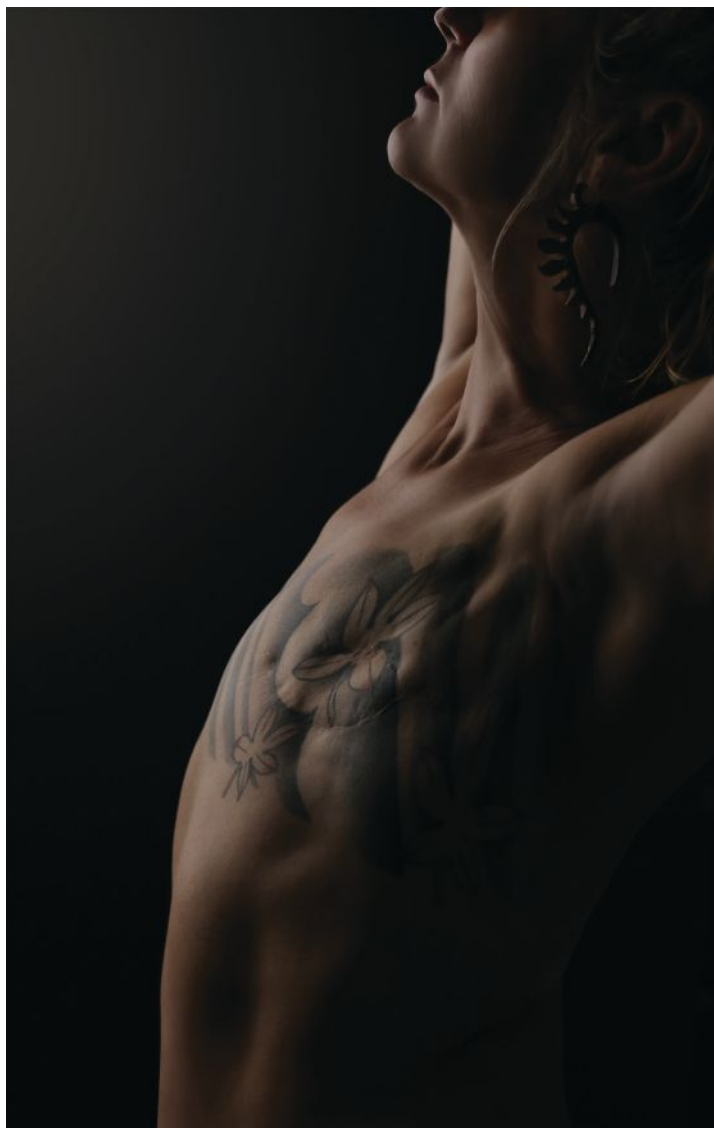
PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: "At every wedding I challenge myself to capture one epic shot that delivers beyond what's expected, and this was it for this couple," says Dan McClanahan. The guests were having cocktails on the balcony in the background, and the stormy clouds made the scene moodier than expected, so he exposed for the sky and used a flash through an octabox placed camera right to light the couple, brighter than the highlights behind them. His assistant tossed the veil.

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS 5DS R, Canon EF 24-70mm f/2.8L II lens

EXPOSURE: 1/50 second at f/5.6, ISO 1600

LIGHTING: He used a Profoto B1 through a 36-inch Westcott Rapid Box Switch Octa.

POST-CAPTURE: In Adobe Lightroom he processed the raw image to pull back the detail in the shadows and highlights. He stacked exposures in Adobe Photoshop to remove his light and his assistant from the image and applied dodge and burn and color grading to complete the image.



■ NATURAL PORTRAIT RADICAL SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Michelle Caudle
Silver Moon Photography
Tampa, Florida

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: In 2023, Michelle Caudle was approached by a gallery owner in search of a portrait photographer to create works for a show featuring imagery of cancer survivors during Breast Cancer Awareness Month. "Enter Jeza, one of three stunning models for the show who was willing to be part of something so personal and intimate," says Caudle. "She arrived to the session ready to bare her soul with vulnerability and humility, and in doing so, this image touched the hearts of so many others."

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS R5, Canon RF24-105mm F4 L IS USM lens

EXPOSURE: 1/320 second at f/4, ISO 1600

LIGHTING: A Godox AD200 Pro with a Glow 48-inch EZ Lock Octa Quick Softbox on a 12-foot Cheetah Stand

POST-CAPTURE: In Adobe Photoshop, Caudle did light color correction, contrast and saturation adjustments, and skin retouching.

JUDGING CRITERIA

Images submitted to PPA's International Photographic Competition are judged on four criteria:

IMPACT: Viewing an image for the first time always evokes a feeling. An image can make someone sad, happy, or angry, or it can force us to look inward. That's impact, and the more powerful the image, the more powerful the emotional response of the viewer.

TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE: This is the image quality presented for viewing. Many aspects speak to the quality of the image, including retouching, manipulation, sharpness, exposure, and color correction.

COMPOSITION: When all the visual elements come together to express intent, that's when the magic of composition happens. Good composition captures a viewer's attention and directs it where you, the artist, want it. Depending on your intent, you can create something that pleases the viewer or disturbs them.

STYLE: There are many ways to apply this element to your work. Maybe you use light in a unique way on a subject, or make a certain technical decision. When subject matter and style come together appropriately, the effects on an image can be spectacular.

See pages 56-57 to follow the trajectory of each of the winning photos through final judging.





A PHOTOGRAPHIC TOURNEY

At the Grand Imaging Awards (GIA) event at Imaging USA 2026, the top 16 images from each photographic category were narrowed down to one overall GIA winner via a live bracket-style judging process. Competing images were presented side-by-side on a giant screen. The audience watched as jurors cast their votes on which image should advance in the brackets toward the final prize. Meanwhile, audience members also cast their own votes via an app.



PRIZES AND AWARDS:

The top winner in each category of the IPC is named a Diamond photographer and awarded \$1,000 and a trophy. The overall Grand Imaging Award winner is awarded \$10,000 and a trophy.



View galleries of International Photographic Competition entries on **PhotoVision**.





NEXT LEVEL

Brad Toms is on a mission to make better and better images

BY ROBERT KIENER

“Stunned ... absolutely stunned!”
That’s how Brad Toms

describes his reaction when he learned his landscape image “Cypress Haze” (below) was one of the top four images in the landscape category of PPA’s International Photographic Competition (IPC), which was judged in January at Imaging USA 2026 in Nashville, Tennessee.

“Actually, you could have knocked me over with a feather,” says Toms with a smile. “I’m basically self-taught and never thought I’d have a chance in such a prestigious photography competition. Without a doubt, this has been the biggest thrill of my photography career.” His image “A Dance of Light” was also included in the top 32 images in the wild birds category (page 69).

Before buying his first camera, a Canon EOS 7D, in 2014, Toms served 30 years as a law enforcement officer in the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Office’s homicide, SWAT, major narcotics, and public affairs divisions. “My wife and I and our three children loved jumping into our RV and travelling, hiking, and exploring,” says Toms, who is based in Yucaipa, California. “I’d always admired landscape and nature photography, so I thought that would be a good hobby I could explore and hopefully develop on our travels.”

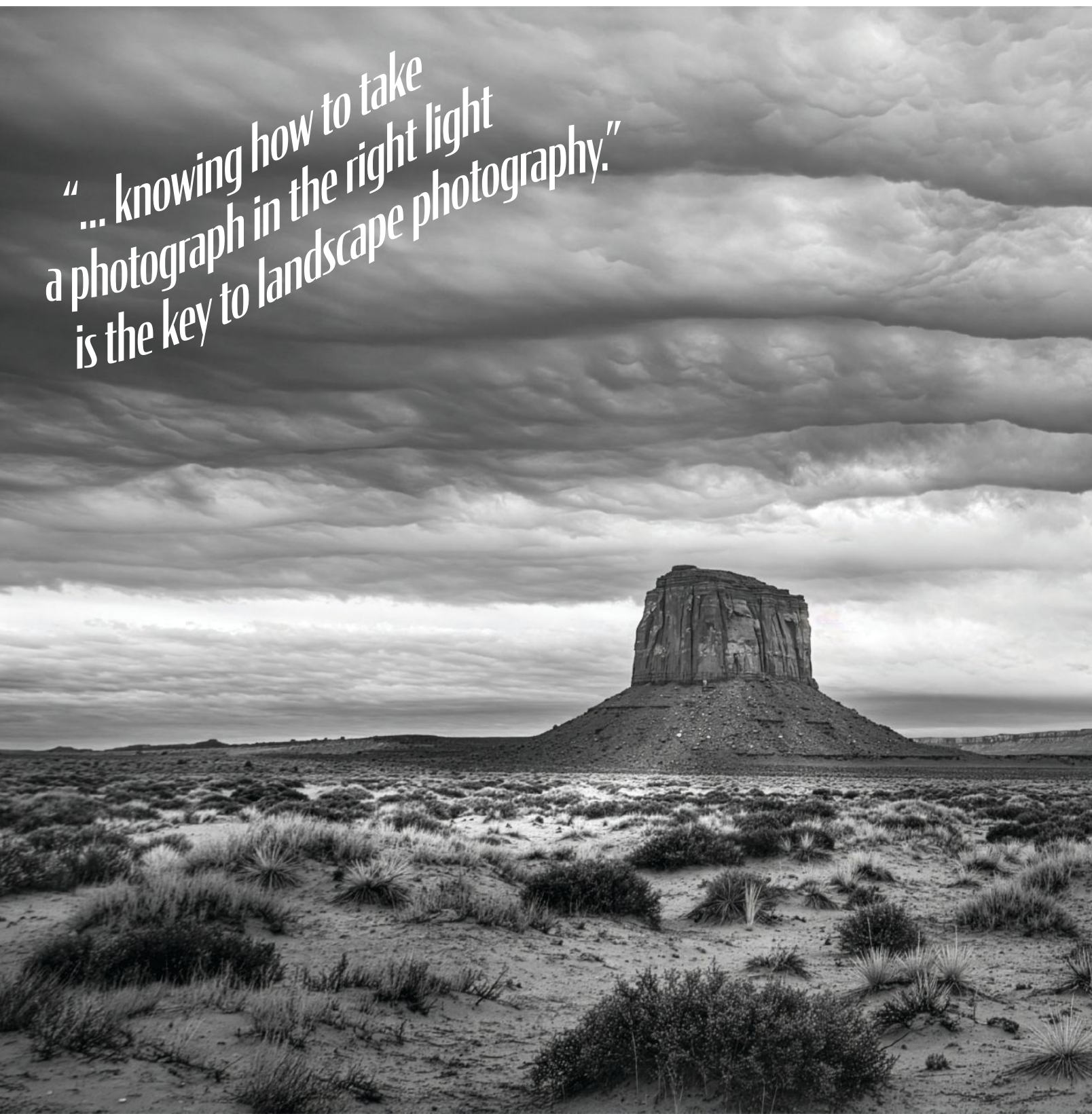
He retired as a captain in 2019 and has devoted much of his time since then to travel and photography.



BRAD TOMS







*"... knowing how to take
a photograph in the right light
is the key to landscape photography."*





This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Robert Kiener: It's 2014 and you just bought your first camera. What was your learning process?

Brad Toms: Canon was not only the first camera I bought; it was the first camera I'd ever picked up. Days after I bought the camera I signed up for a photography and Photoshop class at Crafton Hills College here in Yucaipa. All the students in my class had full-frame cameras. I quickly realized my 7D wasn't going to work. I returned it and bought a full-frame Canon EOS 5D Mark III.

RK: Did you begin with landscape images?

BT: I'd always liked getting out in nature—hiking, walking, motorcycling, and traveling

in our RV. So, landscape photography was a natural choice. Over the years I've developed additional interests, but landscape and nature have continued to engage me.

I often thought, *Maybe I can become good at this and sell some photographs and make a little bit of money out of it.* Today I look back and laugh because it's not easy to sell landscape photography. However, selling was never the primary goal. Photography was a way to enjoy the fresh air and wind down from the high stress of my law enforcement job. And our family was traveling a lot, so it was the perfect fit.

I realized I needed to keep learning. After Crafton College, I joined a regional group, the Inland Empire Professional Photographers and Videographers (IEPPV), which offered seminars and workshops. I've been a member





since 2017 and have learned so much from the IEPPV.

RK: How does competition help you learn?

BT: If you listen to what these judges say about your photo and other entries, you pick up tips. You learn things like what time of day has the best light, how to fix dust spots, how to get your horizon line correct, so many technical things you need to pay attention to. One of the great benefits of entering these contests is that you get that helpful feedback. So, even if you're not winning anything, you're learning something.

RK: Are there any aspects of police work that helped you be a good photographer?

BT: In law enforcement you have to be technical. You have to understand the law. You need to know what you can and cannot do. Do you need to have a search warrant? How do you conduct an interview of a suspect? Correlating that to photography, I think of things like, *Do I want to*

make everything perfectly still or make the water look like it is moving? How can I catch droplets flying off a wave? What shutter speed do I need? What aperture do I need?

Law enforcement is very black and white. It's not super creative. When I look at artists who are very creative, I'm just in awe of how they come up with ideas. When I see how portrait photographers light and pose their subjects, I think, *Boy, I wish I had that creativity.*

RK: What advice do you have for other landscape photographers?

BT: My No. 1 tip: Get out. Get away from your desk, from YouTube, from your computer. Get out and utilize your camera. You're going to take thousands of mediocre photos before you get one that really shines.

Another tip: Be out at the right time of day, either in the morning before sunrise or in the late afternoon when the sun is setting—the golden hours. If you're not out at those times of day, you might be lucky and get something excellent, but knowing





how to take a photograph in the right light is the key to landscape photography.

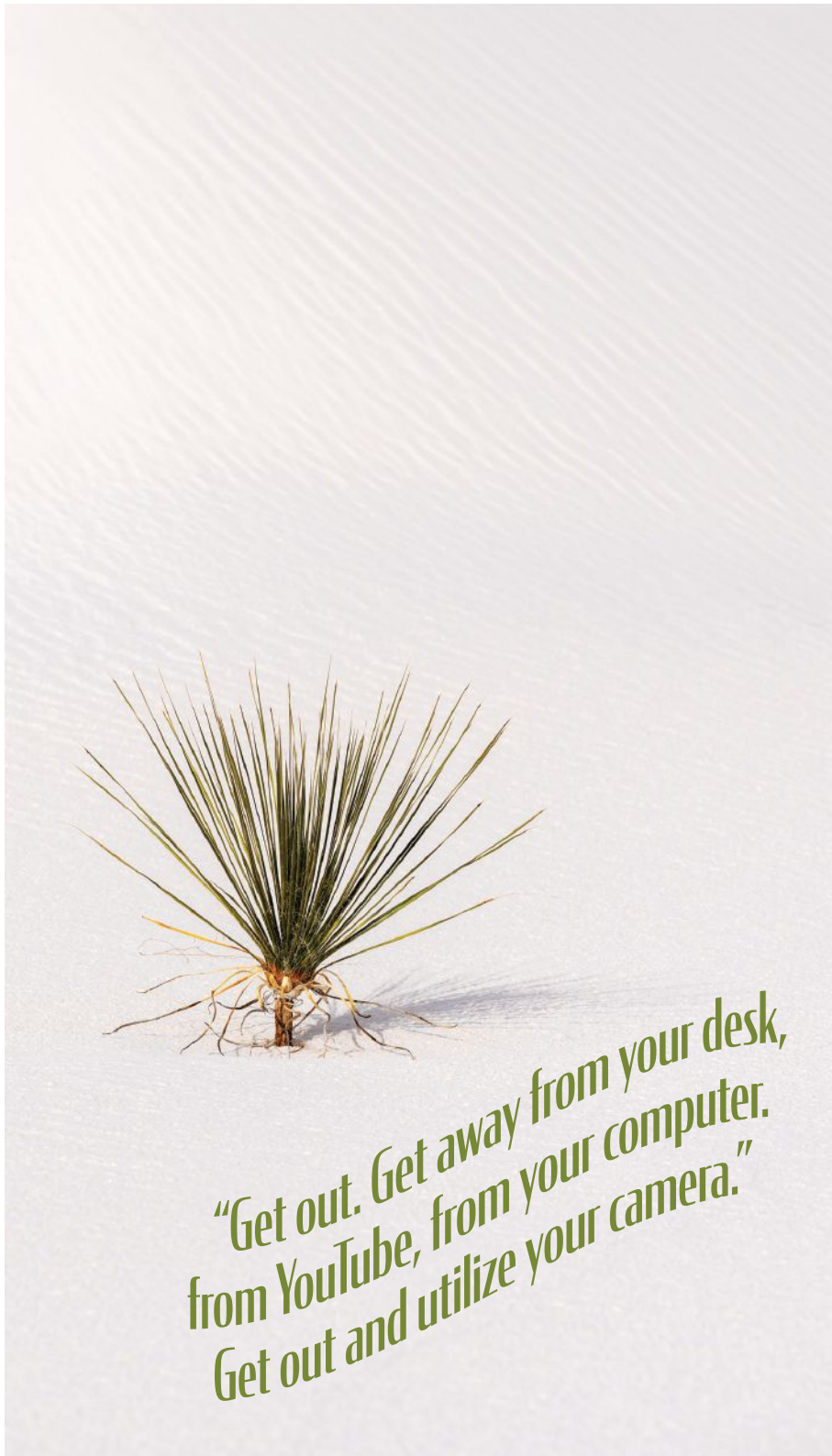
Something I didn't understand when I was starting out is how important it is to envision the image you want take before you take it. You can go to a place and think, *This is absolutely beautiful*. But if you imagine your image in the right light or the right conditions, such as with clouds or thunderstorms, plan around those conditions. Do your research. If you want fall colors, go in the fall. If you want mist on a lake, check the weather forecast.

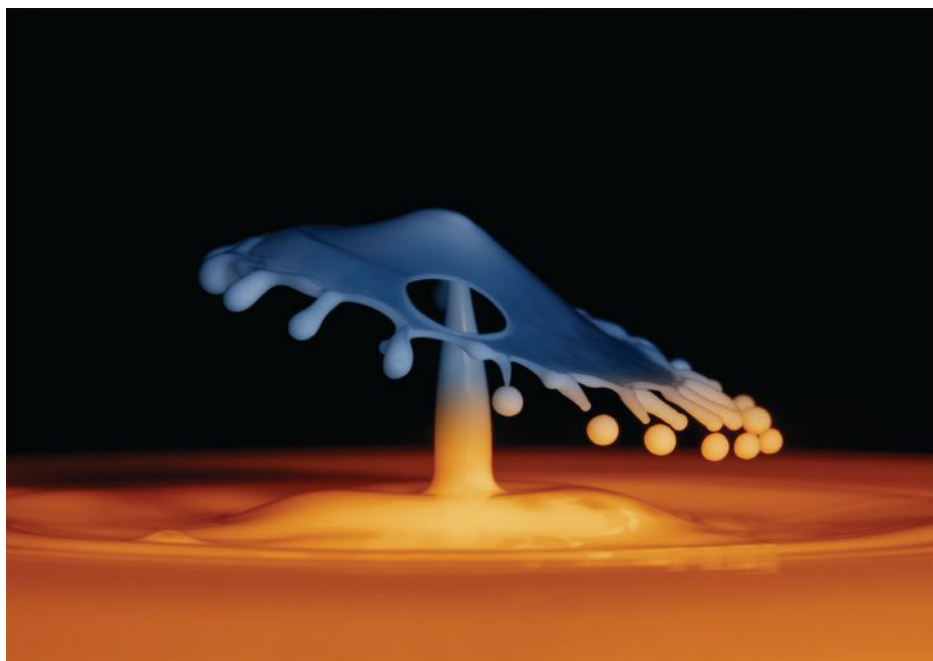
RK: Can you share an example of how you were in the right place at the right time for a successful landscape image?

BT: In 2019, shortly after I retired, I went with photographer and friend Peter Levshin on a 15-day trip to Asia. I took more than 15,000 photographs on that trip and came back with only a few that were good enough to do anything with. But the trip took my photography to a whole other level. I remember often waking up at 4 a.m. to make sure we were in the right place for morning light or having to sleep in a van to get to our next destination at the perfect time. We talked about photography nonstop. It was a nonstop learning experience.

In East Java, Indonesia, we set our sights on Mount Ijen. To make sure we got to the top in time for sunrise, we arrived at the base and started our four-hour, 9,000-foot hike to the top at 1 a.m. When the sun rises, it's a spectacular scene and well worth the long, arduous hike. My image "Dusk to Dawn, Mount Ijen" (page 58) is one of my favorites.

Peter and I also went on a photo trip to capture cypress trees in the George L. Smith State Park near Savannah, Georgia, in 2021. To get the images we wanted—or hoped for—in the morning light, we got there at 4 a.m. It was worth it; watching that scene unfold was incredible. We had the mist on the water. It was just gorgeous. And then all of a sudden the sun came up, and the whole place exploded with light. It was so stunning. That's where I got my image "Cypress Haze."





Learn more about nature, wildlife, and landscape photography on **PhotoVision**.



RK: How did you develop the consumer section of your website?

BT: It's Art Storefront. They have daily seminars to help artists sell their art. They will even help you set up a plan for social media, so you can grow your social media base and ultimately try to sell your art. Their marketing is outstanding.

RK: Can you explain how you capture your droplet images (top left)?

BT: It's a genre called drop photography. I got interested in that from a workshop. It takes about 500 shots to get one usable photo. These are milk droplets in my photos; it's called a drop collision. The color comes from a filter in Photoshop to add that shade. That is how you get that effect.

RK: In what other genres have you experimented?

BT: I've tried a lot—macro, abstract, street photography, nature photography. There are lots of genres in photography that I find interesting. I'll pick one up, tackle it, pursue it, and work at it until I'm proficient in that genre. That keeps my interest going.

I don't want to be a one-trick pony. If someone says, "Hey, can you do this?" I instantly want to learn how to do it and become proficient in it. The one field I haven't yet tackled is portraiture, because the lighting and the people are more complicated. But I need to. It's the continuous learning in photography, including trial and error, that I enjoy. •

Robert Kiener is a writer in Vermont.



Imaging USA Personalized

ATTENDEES SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES AT 2026 CONFERENCE



Liane Almeida (right) and her husband, Vinny Almeida, CPP.

It's not too early to think about registering for Imaging USA 2027 in Charlotte, North Carolina, where—like these attendees from this year's event in Nashville, Tennessee—you can learn new skills, network, and check out and purchase the latest equipment.

Liane Almeida has attended five Imaging USA conferences, but this year was different. Almeida, based in North Charleston, South Carolina, is a Brazil native who speaks Portuguese, Spanish, and English. This year's live-translation sponsor, Interprefy, meant Almeida could understand every word

of the many classes in Spanish.

The Interprefy app was easy to use, and Almeida was able to attend every class without a hitch. She also attended classes taught in Spanish, such as Marco Ríos', where she learned an AI-powered business prompt to streamline her workflow. Almeida also celebrated with her husband, Vinny, who became a CPP. Together, the couple brought home knowledge they apply to their newborn and maternity photography studio and print lab.

In December 2025, Doshea Gordon became a PPA member,

just in time to attend Imaging USA 2026. Gordon says he was initially drawn to photography to document his daughter's budding dance career. In Hempstead, New York, he works full-time as a director of IT client services and in his free time, photographs portraits, dance, and sports.

In Nashville, he spent a lot of time on the expo floor talking to vendors and bumping shoulders with Imaging USA educators he's followed online for years, like PPA members Abdulai "Ab" Sesay and Manuel "Manny" Ortiz. A highlight for Gordon was a class on

marketing in volume photography by PPA president Makayla Harris, Cr. Photog., CPP, as well as winning first place in the Pexels Photo Walk.

A sign of a successful conference: Gordon purchased an additional suitcase to take home all of his purchases from the expo. For first-time attendees, Gordon advises, "Soak up every minute and make it your own."

Visit imagingusa.com to learn more about next year's conference. •

**"SOAK UP EVERY
MINUTE AND MAKE IT
YOUR OWN."**



DOSHEA GORDON

Meet the Board

JENNY EGGERS LOVES MAKING CONNECTIONS



JENNY EGGERS

Starting March 1, 2026, four new members joined the PPA board of directors.

Ocala, Florida-based portrait photographer Jenny Eggers, M.PhotoG., CPP, is one of them.

How did you become a professional photographer?

After 10 years in show business, I went back to school to study photography and graphic design. Photography was where my heart was, but I received more support with my design work. I loved photography and I romanticized the idea of being a photographer. I just didn't see it as a possibility. A few years later, a friend asked me to photograph her one-year-old and it got me thinking, *Can I do this? I think I can*. Shortly thereafter, with more enthusiasm than experience, my business was born.

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

I tend to get involved when I get close to something I believe in, and I'm a big believer in how PPA supports photographers. What has always impressed me most is the spirit of generosity in the community: educators sharing knowledge, volunteer leaders contributing their time, and the incredible staff keeping everything moving forward. A sweet friend nominated me to the board without my knowledge and when I received the email, I asked myself if I was ready. In the end, I decided to go for it.

How do you start your workday?

Two cups of French press coffee. Those early hours are usually quiet admin time for me: emails, checking my CRM, and organizing the day ahead.

What's the most important lesson you've learned running a photography business?

I learned that running a business based on pretty pictures won't get you very far. To be sustainable, I had to plan my financial goals and shape my numbers and marketing around that.

What PPA benefit has been most helpful to you?

Connection and community. I've met so many people that I can reach out to for advice, encouragement, or even to share an experience. It makes my heart so happy! Very close behind is the business education. It's something that I revisit often to tweak and refine as my business evolves. I love that PPA is there to support me.

What are your favorite ice-breaker questions when you meet other photographers?

I usually start by asking where they're from. I immediately start making connections in my head. Photography is a small world and it's amazing how often those connections overlap.

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

I tend to see the rosy side of different professions, so I'm inspired by all kinds of them: shop owner, event planner, coach, barista. I love people, their stories, and helping along the way.

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

My Sekonic L-358 light meter. I learned to use it while working toward my CPP and now I rely on it. It's an older model, but I'm a little afraid of the newer ones with all the bells and whistles.

What would a dream photography assignment be for you?

I've always been fascinated by graffiti on freight trains. How does it get there? Who are the artists? What does it mean? When does it happen? I can imagine traveling the country (by train, of course!) meeting these artists and documenting their stories.

How would you describe yourself in one sentence?

I'm optimistic, easygoing, and a fast friend who's always ready to pitch in.

Who would play you in a movie about your life and why?

Maybe Sandra Bullock, mostly because my husband has had a crush on her forever and I think that would be hilarious. Jennifer Garner would be fun. She seems relatable and down-to-earth.

What is your favorite book and why?

My most recent favorite is "Unreasonable Hospitality" by Will Guidara. I appreciate the reminder that kindness and thoughtfulness matter and that meaningful gestures don't have to be grand to make an impact. •

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

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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.

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When portrait photographer Courtney Ranck-Copher, M.Photog., was battling breast cancer, she says she would dream up concepts for photography competitions “and lose myself in the creative process for a while.” Her image (below), “Dream Whisperer” was part of a series of six portraits that earned her the final points needed for her master’s degree.

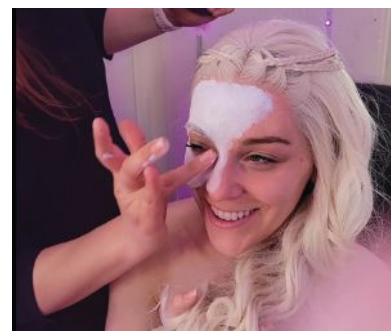
“Everything about the image was designed to feel ethereal and still,” she explains.



IMAGES ©COURTNEY RANCK-COPHER PHOTOGRAPHY / cncphotography.com



Because her Washington state studio is a bedroom in her home, Ranck-Copher sometimes backs herself into the closet (far left) to photograph at a longer focal length. “Sometimes” she adds, “the glamorous final image is created in very unglamorous ways behind the scenes.” •



The candle crown (above, right) was made with hot glue, candles, Styrofoam, and plastic wrap. The image—taken with a Nikon Z 7II and the Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S lens at 70mm—was lit with a single light in a large parabolic umbrella placed camera left. “I used very soft loop lighting to create gentle depth and shadow while maintaining the dreamlike quality of the portrait,” she says, adding that the background was a printed backdrop she later desaturated and brightened in Photoshop. “I used dodging and burning to enhance depth and dimension, along with frequency separation to refine and soften the makeup and skin texture.”

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- ♦ Earn merits towards your PPA degree by attending or speaking at a PPA Merit Program
- ♦ Get recognized, build credibility, and set yourself apart
- ♦ Give back to your photographic community
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