

architectural & construction PHOTOGRAPHY

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY | DENNIS GUICHARD

Unilever Indosa Factory
Elphick Proome Architects (Durban, South Africa)
ISO 100, f8, 30 seconds

01

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Moses Mabhida Stadium
Ibhola Lethu consortium of architects (Durban, South Africa)
ISO 100, 1/4, 5, 1/4 second

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“

Subject matter aside, photography in any form is essentially about capturing beautiful and interesting light. The key in architecture is perhaps the added need for a passionate and endless obsession with buildings, their form and function, and the opportunities they provide for attractive imagery.

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Stripped to its very basic form photography is simply about capturing light. Beautiful high-impact imagery simply requires just two essential elements: an interesting subject and beautiful light. Bring those two basic elements together and you have the basis for something magical to start happening.

Surrounded, as we are, by a labyrinth of fabulous and interesting architectural structures both locally and worldwide,

capturing beautiful architectural imagery is easily within the remit of anybody with the desire and passion to chase the light.

BASIC SKILLS

The basic skills required for success in architectural photography are probably three-fold: firstly is the elementary need for a desire to hunt out suitable opportunities along with a passion and appreciation for architectural design and detail and the complexities embodied in putting buildings together. Secondly, a simple understanding of composition, exposure settings, and how your camera equipment sees, records and responds in any given situation is required, and

thirdly it is important to appreciate that truly great photography in any genre is emotionally driven; there is a passion-driven desire to seek out the unusual, master the complexities of natural light and a never-ending drive in the hopeless pursuit of perfection.

To create really beautiful imagery of buildings you certainly need to have a passion for architecture, photography and finding beautiful light. If you do not have the patience, passion or time to understand its qualities, its character and its erratic behaviour you'll quickly fall victim to its whims.

You have to have persistence and the will to tirelessly traverse construction sites and urban landscapes looking for interesting angles and captivating shots.

There's certainly nothing secretive about

creating beautiful imagery; as long as you have the desire and are prepared to put the time and effort into developing your style and ability, the results are within the grasp of anyone. The only way that you keep getting better, is to keep trying harder.

EQUIPMENT

The current trend in professional photography is to shoot with digital SLR camera's. An exponential growth in image quality in recent years has resulted in the reduction of any need for the use of medium format camera equipment in most cases. With careful consideration towards image capture and post-processing most DSLR's are quite capable of producing images suitable for double-page spreads in magazines and company brochures.

In many instances the current trend is starting to move away from bulky and expensive DSLR's in favour of smaller, lighter & cheaper mirrorless cameras like the FUJI X-Pro 1 which has a 16 mega-

pixel sensor and is capable of producing some amazing imagery.

In conjunction with any DSLR a professional quality selection of lenses with a superior glass standard is also essential and might include for a macro lens, a wide-angle lens and a tilt & shift lens as a starting point.

It is certainly also a good idea when shooting commercially to consider professional insurance cover for your equipment and the costs attributable to wear-and-tear, depreciation, and servicing for digital sensor cleaning (dust is a real enemy for these).

POST-PROCESSING

An ideal way of ensuring optimal image capture is to shoot in RAW (if your camera is able to) and convert this to a 16-bit TIFF file during the RAW conversion process.

This becomes important because a 16-bit depth image contains 256x more colour & light data than a traditional 8-bit JPEG image.

A RAW file processed at 16-bit translates into an image file of up to some 200Mb per image, with a 300 image shoot therefore demanding some 60Gb of hard-disk

space (which would fill up fourteen DVD disks). Coping with this volume of data demands a computer with superior processing power, the ideal being eight-core Pentium Xeon processors with up to 32Mb of main memory (as on the current Mac Towers).

Essential in the digital workflow process

is also a colour-accurate monitor producing some 96% RGB colour gamut without which the colour accuracy of image processing simply remains a guessing game. Commercial image library standards demand a minimum 50Mb processed file size, the production of which dictates full attention to a holistic approach to image capture

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The Shard, London, England
Renzo Piano architect (Italy)
ISO 200, f8, 1/30th second

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Hilton Hotel, Durban, South Africa
FGG architects
ISO 800, f8, 1/60th second



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and processing at every level. Even if estimating that the download, conversion and full digital post-processing of any single image might only total some 15 minutes, this adds up to a whole day's work to produce just

32 images excluding the time invested to get to the location, assess the site for potential and waiting for the 'right light' which may or may not even materialise. Architectural photography is a time-consuming process!

a clear need for a dedicated colour-accurate printer and an understanding of the use of varying printer and paper-specific ICC profiles for ensuring accurate final output.

A vital part of the workflow process is also

Creating high-quality high-impact imagery is a time-consuming task at every level of the process from the constraints imposed waiting for ideal natural lighting conditions to the length of time it takes to download and convert RAW image files into a useable format. Ansel Adams, the famous landscape photographer was

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reportedly content to capture just 12 beautiful images per year!

Sunset silhouettes as an example occur very rapidly only providing around four minutes of ideal lighting to capture an image, meaning one evenings sunset equals one image. It can take many days and weeks therefore to build up a suitable portfolio of images on any project.

Capturing and post-processing high-quality high-impact architectural photographs is a dedicated task demanding the freedom and flexibility to be able to chase good light at a

moments notice as and when it appears. It also requires a dedication to the duty of craftfully post-processing images to reveal their maximum potential and quality. Professional architectural photography despite being a time-intensive vocation is certainly very satisfying and rewarding.

FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY

Fine art photography, despite being the most challenging, is probably also the most rewarding as it demands the highest levels of creativity, vision and imagination.

Whilst a conventional style of imagery certainly forms the mainstay of any architectural photography business 'Limited Edition' fine art imagery proves the most attractive to investors and collectors. A 'collection' of any given image would constitute a small and exclusive set limited to perhaps twenty-five prints selling typically for



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Las Vegas, Durban, South Africa
Issey Benjamin architect
ISO 400, f8, 1/250th second

The Quarterdeck
CHT Architects (Durban, South Africa)
ISO 100, fig. 1/60th second





15-29
4400HD
K119 DC/99/05

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Harbour Tunnel, Durban, South Africa
for GOBA Hatch Engineers
ISO 100, f8, 1.6 seconds

anything from around £1,200 each internationally and the master 'original' Artist Proof photograph easily selling to an investment buyer for around £4,000 to £15,000. The famous auction house, Sotheby's, regularly sell collectable photographs at up to £70,000 at their bi-annual auction in both London and New York.

Peter Lik, the famous Australian landscape photographer (based in the USA) regularly sells his images at up to US\$1m each - there's certainly money in photography it would seem!

Fine art prints are printed to the highest standard on museum-quality archival cotton rag papers, stamped and signed by the photographer, and would usually also be accompanied with an official certificate of authentication.

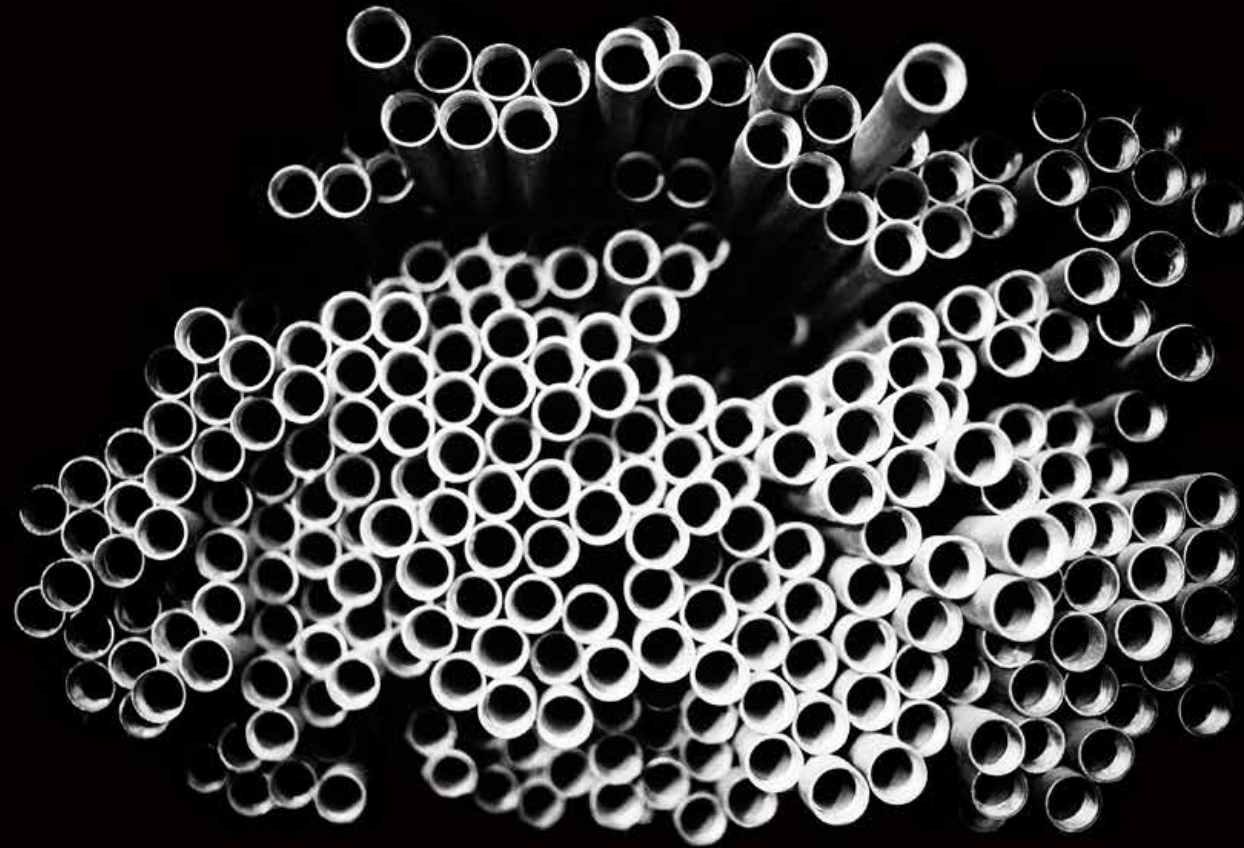
Usually favouring black-and-white imagery, fine art photography could constitute anything abstract and is perhaps best described as '*anything that someone might like to hang on their wall*'. It's certainly a difficult category to define and identifying what might best

appeal to a collector is sometimes not much more than an educated guessing game.

Stay true to your heart, shoot what you love in your own style and your own way,

and let the audience that loves what you do come to you. Shoot imagery that is honest to who it is that you are and how you see the world through your eyes, and a unique style that is bespoke to you alone will soon start to develop.

Locally in the South African market fine art prints are favoured as boardroom artwork by many corporate businesses and architectural practices and commissions of up to R75,000 or more are frequently available for bulk collections.



this is | Qatar

We've spent the first 6-months of 2013 shooting an extensive image stock library for the **Qatar Financial Centre Authority** in Doha helping showcase the country through an extensive PR program that we have been driving through the world's leading financial magazines. In the 6-months to date we have published 73 images in editorials worldwide and driven a 314% return on investment for our client.



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In truth professional photography is a very competitive business and to stay at the top of your game it's essential that you consistently produce the very best quality imagery that you can. The very nature of the process demands that the photographer take full control back from the camera and invariably shoot in a RAW capture format which enables maximum data capture and flexibility during post-processing.

Just like in the fashion or high-end wedding photography markets, architectural imagery requires a subtle and delicate

approach to post-processing to squeeze maximum impact from every shot. From simple dust spot removal, to levels and contrast adjustment, colour correction and final image sharpening, 'Photoshop skills' are a central function of the wider business of architectural photography.

It's certainly a truth that every single image in this editorial has in some way been post-processed through Photoshop, the skill to perhaps master is the ability to make those adjustments subtle but effective enough that clients automatically assume they are all

'straight out of the camera' - perhaps sometimes a compliment in itself?

Whether your preference lays with panoramic type images, distorted wide angles, close-up macro details with a shallow depth of field, sunset silhouettes, abstract funky lens blur, or the refined world of fine art, it is all embodied in the exciting field of architectural photography.

Whether you're shooting on a cell phone, a compact digital, or a full sensor digital SLR, get out there and explore the streets

of the city you live in - there's beautiful imagery all around just waiting to be captured.



Dennis Guichard

July 2013



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West Bay skyline, Doha, Qatar
for The Qatar Financial Centre Authority
ISO 100, f14, 2 seconds

“ In the Middle East projects typically run 24-hours a day providing the most wonderful opportunity for shooting high-contrast black & white imagery ”



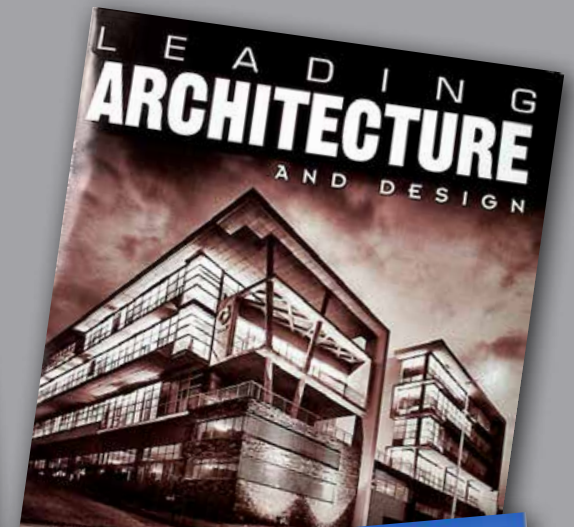
“It is perhaps comforting that even amidst the apparent chaos of a construction site beauty can prevail for anyone choosing to chase the light”

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National Museum of Qatar, Doha, Qatar
ARUP + Jean Nouvel architect (France)
ISO 100, f22, 30 seconds

Some published work...



“ Photographers are hired for their vision, they compose just like musicians and poets, they are commissioned for their ability to see and for their creative aptitude and they earn their reputation accordingly ”

(Gerry O'Leary)

Some South African clients include:

Elphick Proome architects
Kevin Lloyd architect
Gavin Houldin architect
Evolution architects
GOBA Hatch engineers
ARUP engineers
Ibuya Consulting engineers
KwaZulu Natal Institute for Architecture
Simbithi Eco-Estate
Brettenwood Coastal Estate
Adendorff architects (Port Elizabeth)
Climate Smart Cape Town (City of Cape Town)
Safintra Roofing (nationwide)



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Some International clients include:

Broadway Malyan architects (UK)
Laing O'Rourke construction (UK)
Aldar Properties (Abu Dhabi, UAE)
Ferrari Middle East (Abu Dhabi, UAE)
Yas Hotel (Abu Dhabi, UAE)
Qatar Financial Centre Authority
Qatar Museums Authority
ARUP UAE (Dubai, UAE)
ARUP Qatar (Doha, Qatar)
ARUP Australia (Sydney, Australia)
ARUP United Kingdom (London, UK)
FIFA (Zurich, Switzerland)
Fundamental Media (Dubai, UAE)