MICHAEL CLARK PHOTOGRAPHY





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Cover Image: Luke Aikins flying his experimental plane with Max Manow and Marco Fürst above the Little Colorado River Canyon during the Endless Skydive project on the Navajo Nation in northern Arizona. Opposite Page: Max Manow (wingsuit) and Luke Aikins (pilot) attempting to connect on their first practice run on the Endless Skydive project on the Navajo Nation.



editorial



Flying High

The thrill of photographing out of an open door in the sky

am certainly spoiled. Red Bull and a few other clients have arranged for me to photograph from helicopters, experimental planes, paragliders, gliders, sea planes and even V-22 Ospreys on dozens of assignments. I have flown with some of the best helicopter pilots on this planet. I have even done back-flips in a helicopter with Aaron Fitzgerald—a true legend in the aerobatic helicopter world. Aaron's BO 105 C (the full name of this helicopter is the Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blohm Bo 105) has become the helicopter by which I judge all other helicopters. It is a phenomenal machine (as shown on the following page) and with Aaron's skills as a pilot it is the best platform I have ever worked from for aerial photography. He knows what will look amazing and has an uncanny ability to put you in just the right spot to get incredible images. I have had several assignments with Red Bull where they have set it up so that I have a helicopter just for me to work out of—most of the time that is with Aaron. It is always an honor and a privilege to work with pilots and photograph from the air out of an open door.

Last fall, on another wild assignment with Red Bull I was in the Navajo Nation in the Little Colorado River area working on the Endless Skydive project featured in this issue of the Newsletter. That was a week long assignment documenting the project and afterwards we had a few days to photograph Aaron doing his aerobatic routine in (and above) the canyon. To photograph Aaron Red Bull hired Mitch Kelldorf of H5 Helicopters, another exceptional pilot, so that I had a helicopter just for me to work out of. In my experience that is incredibly rare that a still photographer has a dedicated helicopter, but it just goes to show the length that clients like Red Bull will go to get the images.

I don't mean to make this editorial sound like a "flex" or some arrogant rant. I just get excited to fly with exceptional pilots, especially flying in a helicopter with the door open when the pilot is not holding back. It is always a collaboration and a lot of fun. Sometimes you freeze your ass off as well, depending on the time of year and the altitude, but that is just part of the experience. In a future issue I will show more of the images I have created of Aaron Fitzgerald. Thanks again for checking out the Newsletter. Here's hoping you enjoy this issue and it offers up an escape for an hour or two. Until next time....

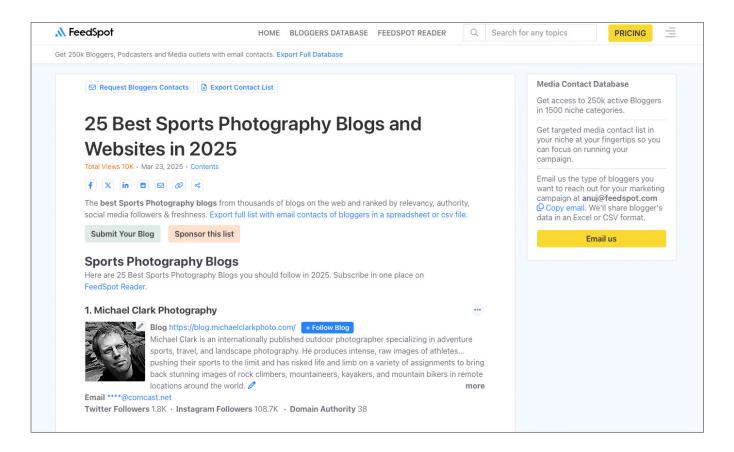
Opposite Page: Aaron Fitzgerald doing back-flips in his aerobatic helicopter above the Little Colorado River in the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

Recent Clients: Red Bull, The Golf Channel, New Mexico Tourism, Geo Magazine, 5280 Magazine, Nobechi Creative, and the Southern Ute Indian Tribe.



Blog ranked as #1 Sports Photography Blog

Feedspot gives the Michael Clark Photography Blog top honors



ecently, my blog was cited as the best Sports Photography blog online by FeedSpot. This notification came out of the blue and I was quite shocked honestly, but regardless it was nice to see. I was quite surprised to see my blog rank above my good friend Dave Black's amazing blog as well as Brad Mangin's blog. I suppose there are not many active photography blogs still going these days with all or most of the content moving over to social media.

Of course, if you are reading this Newsletter you are aware of how verbose I can be on all things photography. Even though I am not a mainstream sports photographer, I definitely cover how I document adventure sports in great detail on my blog and in this Newsletter. I haven't been posting as often as I would like on the blog but this will give me some impetus to post on the blog more often. My thanks to Feedspot for finding my blog and recognizing it in this list.

Fujifilm launches the GFX100RF

A brand-new, lightweight 102 MP medium format X100VI-style camera



ast month Fujifilm launched the new GFX100RF fixed-lens medium format 102 MP camera. The GFX100RF is essentially a svelte medium format version of the best-selling FUJIFILM X100VI APS-C camera. As you can see above the new GFX100RF is quite a gorgeous camera. I found myself lusting after it as soon as I saw it. The small, lightweight, and elegant shape of this camera really appealed to me even though it is not a camera that I would rely on for my professional work—where I typically need a wide variety of interchangeable lenses and faster frame rates. Regardless, I still wanted it. It is the closest camera that I have seen in the digital space to one of my favorite film cameras of yore—the Mamiya 7 II. At only 735 grams, the new 100RF is quite a bit lighter than the old Mamiya 7 II as well.

I was not a part of the launch for this GFX camera (as I have been for many of the 102 MP cameras in the last six years) but I have known about the camera for some time. Kudos to Fujifilm for coming out with a beautiful camera that isn't just anther iteration of everything else on the market. I won't run through the specs as there are many, many blog posts and YouTube videos detailing all of the camera's specifications—and in particular I would steer any that are interested to Jonas Rask's excellent review of the camera. I myself have never seen or touched the camera but I can well appreciate the image quality it produces since I own three other GFX 102 MP cameras with the same sensor.

I am fairly certain that the 100RF will become a cult classic like the smaller X100 series cameras. At \$4,899 USD it certainly is not an inexpensive camera but it will still be popular. I'd highly suggest getting your order in right away if you haven't already as I am sure Fujifilm is already swamped with orders for this beauty. A huge congratulations to the entire Fujifilm design and manufacturing team on this incredible new camera. Well done!

workshops

Photography Workshops

An overview of workshops and online classes with Michael Clark

ach year I teach a few workshops on a variety of topics including adventure sports photography, digital workflow and artificial lighting. Below is a listing of the in-person and online workshops I will be teaching in 2025. For more information on these workshops, and to find out how to register, go to the Workshops page on my blog or click on the links in the descriptions below.

ONE-ON-ONE WORKSHOPS

In-Person or Online via Skype or Zoom Email info@michaelclarkphoto.com to Schedule

In addition to my in-person group workshops listed here I also teach one-on-one workshops both in-person or virtually via Zoom. In the past photographers have come to Santa Fe, New Mexico for one-on one workshops custom designed for exactly what they want to learn—these have been one day to three day private workshops. Alternatively, I have also done one-on-one private workshops in other locations as well—chosen by the photographer to meet their needs. These custom workshops are a great way to dial in your photography because we can cover way more ground specific to your needs and in a shorter time-frame than we can in a group workshop. Prices start at \$800/half day and \$1,200 per full day. Half days are five hours or less and full days are eight to ten hours. A 15% discount applies to three-day private workshops.

If you would like to set up a one-on-one Skype or Zoom session to discuss any photography related topics please contact me. From portfolio reviews to digital workflow, lighting techniques and career development and anything in between we can set up a session and cover whatever you want. If you have any questions about these sessions please don't hesitate to reach out. I have found that we can cover a wide variety of topics in these one-on-one sessions and well, like many of my peers, at the moment I have a lot more time to give than normal. Pricing for online sessions starts at \$150/hour and discounts apply for multiple hour sessions.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE: DIVING INTO ADVEN-TURE PHOTOGRAPHY

A Zoom seminar — Los Angeles Center of Photography May 10, 2025 — 10 to 11:30 AM PT

Adventure photography can be an adventure in itself, involving breathtaking locations, extreme conditions, and working with elite athletes in risky situations. It requires a host of skills, including technical excellence with the camera, familiarity with a sport, and the ability to always be mindful of your goals and your safety. In this 90-minute online webinar, Michael shares his experiences working in the adventure marketplace and photographing for editorial and commercial clients. He will pull the curtain



back and show what it is like to photograph a variety of different adventures and how he captures cutting-edge images of world-class athletes pushing their sports forward.

COST: \$55 Non-Member rate, \$45 LACP Member Rate

For more information and to register for this online seminar visit the LACP website.

THE WESTERN PORTRAIT

Santa Fe Workshops — Santa Fe, New Mexico June 30 - July 4, 2025 and also July 28 - August 1, 2025

New Mexico, and the Santa Fe region in particular, is steeped in Western history and culture. This was once the land of Blood and Thunder, named and described by famed Santa Fe-based writer, Hampton Sides. To this day, there are still vast working ranches, active western movie sets, and wide-open landscapes filled with livestock and wildlife surrounding the historic town of Santa Fe.

In this workshop, led by photographer and longtime resident Michael Clark, we explore the creative fundamentals of portraiture by diving headfirst into a world of cowboys, ranch hands, cowgirls, and other classic characters of the iconic West. We create a variety of environmental



This fall I will again be teaching for the Maine Media Workshops up in Rockport, Maine. We have set up a very exciting workshop exploring Cutting-Edge Lighting

portraits, documenting the culture on local ranches and crafting narrative scenes at the famed Eaves Movie Ranch. This engaging week provides an opportunity to work with real subjects and models alike, harnessing fiction and reality as elements of the storytelling process. Topics we cover in this workshop include composition and framing, perspective and camera angles, equipment selection, the use of natural light and fill flash, plus the best ways of working with our portrait subjects to put them at ease and then collaborate with them to tell a story. Daily location visits allow for ample time to experiment and have fun exploring the Western culture in and around Santa Fe with our cameras. Classroom time includes daily editing, group image reviews, and one-onone meetings with Michael. In addition, Michael dives into digital workflow and demonstrates various techniques for processing your portraits (including color grading, black and white, sepia, etc.) to help you come away with the best portraits possible.

A complementary blend of technique, artistry, and storytelling, Michael's workshop helps you elevate your portraiture to new levels while chasing the myth and reality of the American West.

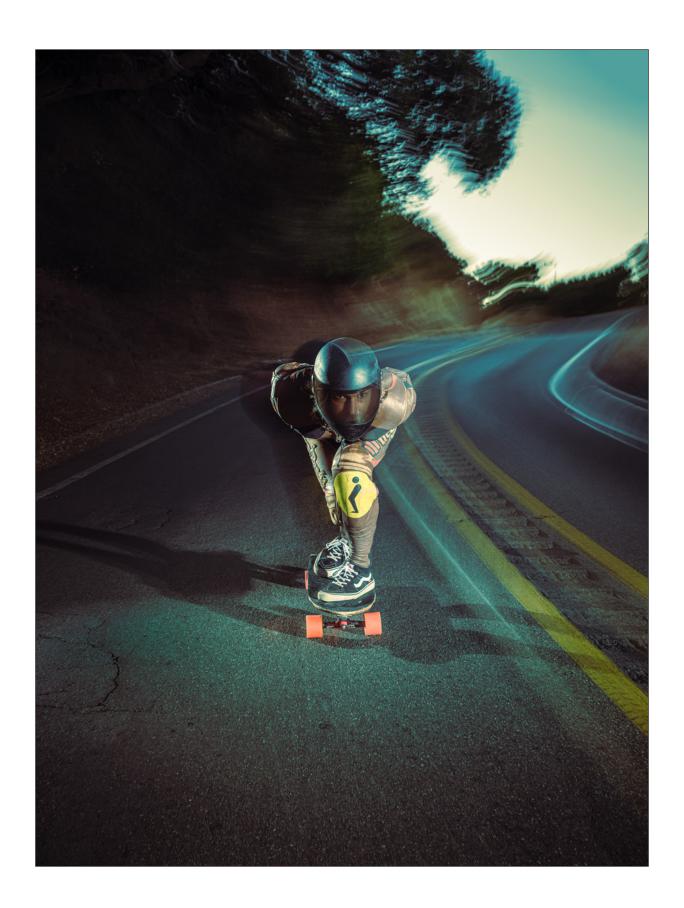
TUITION: \$2.610 (Model and Location Fees included)

For more information and to register for this workshop visit the Santa Fe Workshops website.

CUTTING-EDGE LIGHTING TECHNIQUES

Maine Media Workshops — Rockport, Maine October 13 - 17, 2025

How do you separate your work from the pack? Do you want to break down the barriers that are keeping your photography from standing out? In the last several years, flash manufacturers have added some incredible technology to their strobes. Michael has been working with these



new flash technologies for over fifteen years and has even helped a few companies perfect the technology. High-Speed Sync and Hi-Sync (HS) allow us to freeze action like never before, light subjects from ridiculous distances, and easily create lit portraits with incredibly shallow depth of field. In short, we can create images that were never possible before.

Designed for intermediate to experienced photographers, this 5-day workshop concentrates on creating unique images using cutting-edge lighting technology. Working with elite athletes, dancers, and models both in the studio and out on location, we aim to create images that are not easy to duplicate. Topics covered during the week include high-speed sync flash techniques, multiple exposure flash techniques, freezing motion, stroboscopic lighting, advanced portrait lighting, motion blur and rear curtain strobe techniques, and mixing continuous lighting with strobes.

Classroom time includes daily editing, group critiques, and one-on-one meetings with Michael. In addition, Michael shares his insights and experiences in the photo industry, including career development, portfolios, and how to shoot for editorial and commercial clients.

Workshop Fee: \$1,950

For more information and to register for this workshop visit the Maine Media Workshops website.

BHUTAN AND NEPAL: THE HIMALAYAN KINGDOMS

Andy Biggs Safaris and Custom Travel January 27 - February 8, 2026 Join us on a unique Himalayan journey, as we spend time in Nepal and Bhutan, two mountain destinations with unique and distinct cultures. We will begin our trip in Nepal, home to Mount Everest, and end in the Kingdom of Bhutan, known for its monasteries, fortresses (or dzongs) and dramatic landscapes. Come along with Andy Biggs and co-guide Michael Clark as we explore and photograph our way through the Himalayas.

Andy and I have taught several workshops together over the years and they have all been amazing adventures. We both have an incredible depth of knowledge about photography (and printing images) and come from different photography genres, which gives a wide berth of knowledge on our workshops. Andy has been leading some of the highest-end workshops available anywhere on the planet for many years now and this one will be quite an adventure—not to be missed. We will start in Nepal and then finish up the workshop in Bhutan.

Nepal has its soaring ice-topped mountains that shimmer with rainbows of prayer flags and Bhutan has its rich history and untouched culture. Both are considered to be a hiker's paradise. This is going to be an absolutely incredible voyage exploring areas of Nepal and Bhutan that don't see a ton of traffic. For the full detailed itinerary please visit <u>Andy Biggs website</u> where he has a detailed itinerary and description of each day of the workshop.

The cost of this all-inclusive safari is \$17,900 USD per person. This fee includes all in-country ground and air transportation as well as hotel accommodation (double occupancy) and all meals.

Due to the limited number of spaces available, if a solo



In January 2026, I am once again teaming up with my good friend Andy Biggs to lead a photography workshop in Nepal and Bhutan. We start in Kathmandu and have an incredible depth of knowledge on photography and of course in Nepal and Bhutan we will have plenty of amazing scenes to photograph.

guest is willing to share a room and we can match with another guest of the same gender, we will do so. If a solo guest is unwilling to share, then a single supplement of \$3,800 USD will be charged.

This group will be super small so space is limited. If this exciting trip has your name on it; if you're excited by the thought of becoming a member of this trip, then now is the time to register. Remember, there will be limited space available for this workshop. When they're spoken for, that's it. If you have any questions before registering, send us an e-mail with any inquiries to hello@andybiggs. com.

For more information and to register for this incredible photography workshop visit Andy Biggs website.

Workshop Testimonials

"Michael certainly knows his stuff. From Capture to Print: The Complete Digital Photographer's Workflow is delivered in an easy to follow and comprehensive manner that covers many things that you may not expect - such as how to choose proper lighting to view and evaluate your prints or what color shirt to wear when you're correcting images. I really appreciated that this is a pro workflow course delivered by a pro photographer. Michael is also a

superb teacher, a superb communicator, who is welcoming and inviting of questions from all his participants. I took this workshop in June of 2020, using Zoom software. I was really amazed by how Michael made it seem like he's been doing these workshops forever this way! It was a great pleasure being part of this workshop with so many other amazing photographers. I learned much which is valuable to me and enjoyed doing so at the same time. And just to reiterate, as to the workshop: I'm impressed." – Stephen Starkman, Toronto

"Michael is the best instructor I have taken a workshop from." - Participant, Cutting-Edge Lighting Workshop

"Michael set an incredibly high bar for his workshop. He gave 110%, covered a broad range of topics and did an outstanding job." - Chris Council, Adventure Photography Workshop

"Within the short time I've been studying and practicing photography, I have had teachers who are good educators, but not great photographers, and vice versa, but few who are both. Count yourself in these narrow ranks. I went through four years of college and several careers getting less candid advice and encouragement than I got in four days with you. For what it is worth, thank you for that." – Brandon McMahon, Adventure Photography Workshop

"Thanks for running such a great workshop. I couldn't have chosen better photo shoot locations, and the post-shoot critiques were invaluable. It's the first time I've had my work reviewed, and I learned a ton from each session. While I didn't go into the workshop expecting to pick-up too many marketing and business tips, I've come out of

last week inspired to set-up my photo website in earnest." – Jeff Hylok, Adventure Photography Workshop

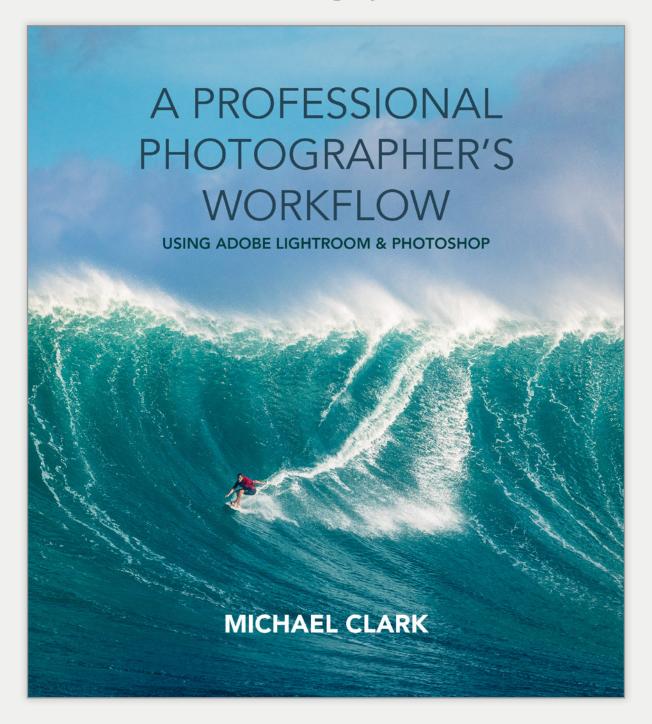
"My mind is still spinning and I can't help but smile every time I think of the wonderful experience garnered from our workshop. Between what I learned from the two of you, as well as from my talented classmates – this was a great experience, and I would do it again." – Participant in the 2008 Balloon Fiesta workshop taught by Andy Biggs and I.

"The Adobe Lightroom Intensive Workshop in Seattle was excellent. The two-day format was perfect-just enough time to cover all the important features but not so much time as to be draining or get in the way of work. Michael Clark was an outstanding instructor. Not only was he clear, concise, and comprehensive, but his manner was friendly and equable. The fact that he is also a working professional photographer made the instruction all the more relevant. I have used previous versions of Lightroom, but it had been a while and I had recently upgraded. I was able to review some things I knew, learn about new features, and change my perspective on some workflow steps. An absolutely great workshop that I recommend wholeheartedly." – Karen Huntt, Lightroom Workshop, Spring 2011

"Priceless chance to learn from the absolute best. Every photographer should take this class!" - Jill Sanders, The Professional Photographer's Digital Workflow available on CreativeLIVE

For more information on my upcoming workshops please visit the <u>Workshops</u> page on my blog. For any questions regarding my upcoming workshops please <u>email</u> me.

A Professional Photographer's Workflow.



Reality Check. Make Your Images Shine.

Apple Mac Studio M4 Max

My thoughts on the new Mac Studio options for photographers

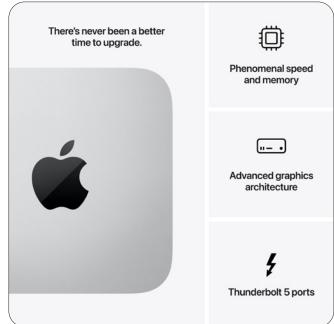


his might be the least visually exciting equipment review I have brought forth in some time. A new computer isn't always an exciting upgrade but I needed this very badly. I just purchased the new Apple Mac Studio M4 Max to replace an aging MacBook Pro from mid 2020, and the difference in performance for processing my ultra high-resolution images is night and day. In mid 2020, in the heart of the lockdown during the pandemic my Apple MacBook Pro died on me and I needed an new computer right away. I knew at that point that the new Apple M-series chips were about to be announced (and indeed they were announced only two months later) but

I couldn't wait. My backup computer at the time was quite old so I ordered a souped up Intel MacBook Pro that cost around \$4,000 USD at the time. And then a year later I ordered a new M1 MacBook Pro, which was considerably cheaper and much faster than the Intel MacBook Pro from the year prior.

The older Intel MacBook Pro has been my desktop computer (that never leaves the office) and the newer M1 MacBook Pro was and still is my on the road computer. As a side note here, I have been using Apple laptops as my main working computers for nearly 20 years





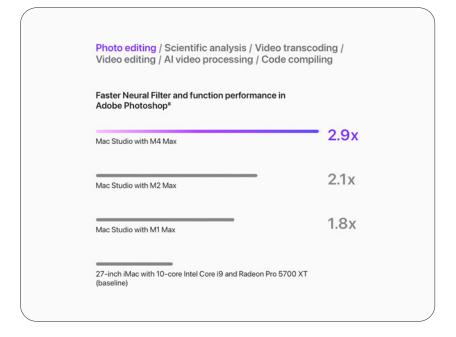
now—ever since they stopped making affordable towers that were superior to their laptops. Once Apple stopped upgrading the towers in the late 2000s their laptops seemed like the best option, especially since here in the office I use an external Eizo CG319X monitor with the laptops. The Eizo monitor is far superior to any of Apple's monitors and far more color accurate as well. For a full review of my Eizo ColorEdge monitor click here.

That 2020 Intel MacBook Pro seemed usable for the most part for a few years but with the introduction of the FUJIFILM GFX100 II—and it's ability to create 102 MP images at 8 frames per second—the old Intel MacBook started to show its age. I am not exactly sure what changed that slowed the computer down but once I got the GFX100 II it became glacially slow to edit images. Perhaps it was the Mac OS software upgrades that were optimized for the new M1 and M2 chips but it got to the point (around the time I started working with the GFX100 II in July 2023) that I could barely edit images on the

older laptop. Hence, I have been hobbling along the last year or so waiting for Apple to update the Mac Studio to the new M4 chip set. When I saw the announcement a few weeks ago I jumped on it.

To say that the new Apple Silicon chips are a massive leap forward is an understatement. When I got my now ancient M1 MacBook Pro it was shockingly fast compared to any other computer I had previously worked with. Even now, that four year old M1 MacBook Pro with relatively pedestrian specs is still a solid, fast computer. I know a huge part of that speed increase is a faster solid state hard drive and better integration of the graphics card all on the same chip, but regardless of how they did it Apple hit a home run with the new Apple Silicon chips.

The new Apple Mac Studio M4 Max is (as you would expect) ridiculously fast. I don't know exactly how much faster it is than my older M1 but it doesn't hesitate with anything I have thrown at it. As shown in Apple's



marketing the new M4 Max is supposedly 2.9X times faster than my old Intel MacBook Pro. It definitely feels much faster than that when processing giant 102 MP images. It can whiz through my Nikon Z9 and FUJIFILM GFX100 II image files in Lightroom like they were lowly 12 MP image files of yore. If I had to guess, I would say it is at least four times faster than my old M1 MacBook Probut I have not done the actual testing to find out. I probably could have upgraded to the M2 Mac Studio last year but having been caught out in 2020 I didn't want to sink a bunch of money into a computer knowing any day it was due for an upgrade—especially since they skipped the M3 upgrade with the Mac Studio (until recently). I tend to hold onto my computers for five to six years before I upgrade. Hence, it pays off to wait a bit.

One of the major issues with the older Intel Apple computers was heat management throttling the computers performance. My old Intel MacBook Pro basically had the fan running all the time unless it was asleep. The new

Mac Studio is so quiet that the first few days I worked with it I thought it was turned off. The fan rarely if ever comes on and even then I can't even hear it unless I put my ear right next to the computer.

I realize this review might sound like an advertisement for Apple, but they do build some pretty amazing computers. I hate spending money on computers. Buying a new computer is all about time management for me. If a new computer can help me get work done in a shorter time then that time savings can be used

for other things, like tracking down the next assignment. In terms of processing images, with the FUJIFILM GFX100 II those 102 MP images can balloon to 1.5 GB or larger once I have worked them up in Photoshop so having a faster computer can massively chop down the time it takes to save those image files much less work them up. In Lightroom, a slow computer also acts as a barrier when trying to adjust these huge image files. Specifically, when trying to adjust white balance or any of the sliders where I need to see the adjustment in the image immediately to know where I need to set that slider, with my older Intel machine the computer would essentially lock up and not show me the changes smoothly as I was moving the slider. That is a key issue in working up images. Hence, the new faster desktop machine was pretty critical for my use case.

On top of working up these ultra high-resolution images the new cameras also present an issue that hasn't really been that bad in the past. That issue is the frame rates. At



most important pieces of equipment I own for dialing in my images and assuring accurate color.

twenty frames per second (fps) with my Nikon Z9 and eight fps with the GFX100 II, I am generating more images than I ever have and filling up hard drives as never before. It isn't that I need to crank the frame rates up to maximum all the time, but when the action is happening so quickly (as with the Endless Skydive article in this Newsletter) having the faster frame rates is the difference between getting the exact moment you are after or missing it completely. This effectively means that on some assignments I don't come back with just a few thousand images but tens of thousands of images. On the Endless Skydive assignment I created over 135,000 images—mostly from remotely mounted GoPros running non-stop at 2 fps. On another Red Bull assignment last month, I created 82,000 images. That large number of images creates another issue in terms of computing power. To go through that many images you first have to build

the previews in Lightroom and then the computer needs to have the ability to go through them quickly as you go from one image to the next. Cutting down the time to build those previews could save hours. On the back end, exporting hundreds or even thousands of large image files also takes a lot of time and a faster computer here again saves a lot of time. That is one of the big reasons to upgrade.

Having used laptops as my desktop computers for the last fifteen years it is very nice to have a dedicated desktop machine again with a plethora of ports built in. As shown in the image above (with my old MacBook Pro in a vertical dock just next to my print viewing box) I have a lot of hard drives attached to my desktop computer around 200 terabytes to be exact. I still use a CalDigit hub with the Mac Studio but it is great to have some

extra Thunderbolt and USB-C ports on the computer itself. My Eizo CG319X monitor uses a DisplayPort connection for the best possible performance and no Apple computer has one of those built-in so I have to use the dock to connect my monitor.

The Mac Studio computers sit in the goldilocks zone of performance, size and price. I opted not to go for the

higher-end M3 Ultra variant as the base price was twice as much for very little in performance gains (at least for my photo centric needs). The M4 Max starts out at \$1,999 USD but with a few upgrades that can balloon quickly. I opted to go for the faster M4 Max chip with 16 CPU cores and 40 GPU cores. I also opted for 64 GB of RAM and bumped the memory up to 2 TB on the computer itself. These upgrades were mostly for

2x USB-C or 2x Thunderbolt 518 1x SDXC 1111 1x HDMI 4x Thunderbolt 5 1x 10Gb Ethernet 1x headphone jack 2x USB-A

future proofing the computer as they cannot be made later on given that everything is incorporated onto the chip itself. Even with all of the upgrades, the Mac Studio M4 Max is nearly \$700 cheaper than my now ancient and glacially slow Intel MacBook Pro that I purchased in 2020. And on top of that it is one of the fastest computers Apple has ever offered.

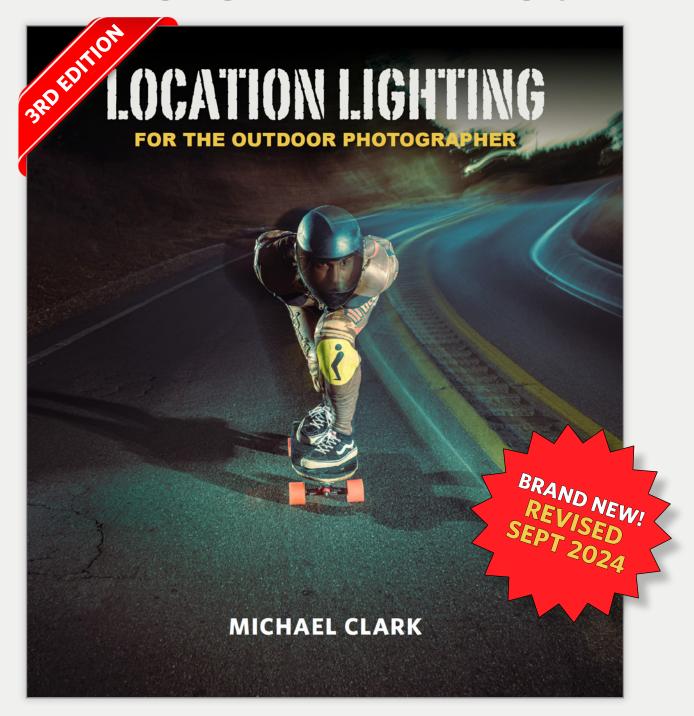
I am hoping that I can get more than five years out of this computer. My cameras are all such high-resolution monsters (either 47 MP or 102 MP) that I don't really see the need for more resolution or a new camera any time soon. With my crazy intense assignments the only computer related items I will have to buy in the next few years are larger hard drives since I seem to create a terabyte or two of images on every assignment now. Luckily hard drives

> are getting larger and larger every few years. Amazingly, you can now buy 24 TB 3.5-inch SATA drives and there are rumors of 32 TB drives coming out later this year.

> For photographers looking to upgrade, I can highly recommend the new M4 Max Mac Studio. It is more than powerful enough for just about any project I can imagine. For those that need more power for video post-processing the M4 Max is likely

all you would need as well. If you work with 8K footage and just want a slightly faster computer then the M3 UItra might be the better option but the price difference (once upgraded) is significant. Kudos to Apple for making a wicked-fast computer that fits the needs of so many creatives these days. Here's hoping I can spend less time staring at my computer as well.

Location Lighting. For The Outdoor Photographer.



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I realize that this Newsletter might seem like the Red Bull archive lately as my last Newsletter featured a story on Red Bull skydivers. Red Bull has become (over the last 16 years) one of my top clients and in 2024 they were one of my biggest clients. I had more Red Bull assignments in 2024 than in any previous year. Hence, I have had a lot of exciting assignments lately working with Red Bull. As the advertising industry has moved more and more towards social media (and Red Bull has a massive social media presence) they are one of the few clients I have that still values rock solid, high-end still photography. While I have many other clients who want and need excellent imagery, Red Bull seems to be one of the few that prioritize still photography above and beyond video on some assignments.

Additionally, I need to make a note here about the images and exactly who should get credit for creating them. Many of the images in this article were created using remote mounted GoPro cameras on the plane itself and also a camera on Marco Fürst's helmet. Luke Aikins flew the plane and Marco flew his wingsuit with Max Manow to get both video and stills footage of the project. As such, I cannot claim these GoPro images as my own. All of these images were created in collaboration with the athletes and pilots. For this project in particular it was one big collaboration among many people to document as much as possible. Of course there are images where I was holding my own camera and photographing from the ground as well.

ast fall, I spent five days on an assignment with Red Bull Germany for the Endless Skydive project in northern Arizona. The idea for this project came from Max Manow, one of Red Bull's elite skydivers and wingsuit pilots, and Luke Aikins, who flies an experimental plane that uses an air brake so that it can skydive with the wingsuit pilots. Max and Luke worked together to build a pole that would hang below the plane and drop down so that he could grab onto it while flying upside down below the plane (as shown in the opening spread and on the next page). The idea was that a wingsuit skydiver could fly with the plane, grab on and get towed back up, then un-hook and do another skydive ad infinitum. Hence, the name "Endless Skydive."

As with many Red Bull projects, most folks reading this would think "Wow, that is pretty out there" and they would not be wrong. Max had to do a lot of training to be able to fly upside down and be accurate and comfortable in that position. Both Luke and Max also had to do a lot of flights together to get comfortable as once Max was under the plane Luke could not see him. It was also a grand experiment to figure out how long Max could hold onto the pole and what type of handle would work best. In the end they built a system where he could literally clip into the bottom of the pole.

To make the visuals even more exciting, the team decided to do this stunt in an offshoot of the Grand Canyon on the Navajo Nation in northern Arizona. The Little Colorado River area, on Navajo Lands sits just to the east of the Grand Canyon National Park and has 1,400 to 2,000-foot deep canyons that are much narrower than the giant expanse of the national park. The area we ended up in is known as Hellhole Bend, which is quite narrow at the bottom of the canyon. Red Bull of course got a permit for this project from the Navajo Nation—and I must say it was a privilege and an honor to explore this part of the Navajo lands. The reception and hospitality we were shown by the Navajo that were working with us was exceptional. It was obvious that they were rightly proud of their







ancestral lands and we were privileged to get some insight into the areas we were working in and also into the Navajo culture as well. [Note: The Antelope Canyon image on pages 40-41 is a result of that hospitality as were given a private tour of several canyons.]

When I first got the call for this project from Red Bull Germany, the biggest questions where how are we going to document this as it is all happening in the air. I knew it was going to be a GoPro heavy project. Having worked with Luke Aikins before, I knew we could put a bunch of GoPros on the plane. And once Marco Fürst came on board to capture video of the project while flying his wingsuit behind Max, that was the final piece of the puzzle to really getting the images Red Bull was after. As can be seen in this article, the GoPro images really provided the best action images of the project.

In all, I created over 135,000 images for this assignment. That is the most I have ever created on any assignment and it was also a total workflow catastrophe to go through everything. Of course, 115,000 of those images were created using the GoPros that were set to time-lapse mode and were all shooting at two frames per second for hours on end. The GoPros on Luke's plane had to be turned on before he took off and then he had a 15-minute flight just to get to the canyon and a 15-minute return flight back afterwards. Hence, there are thousands and thousands of GoPro images of the plane flying over the wild desert terrain in northern Arizona—some of which are pretty amazing all on their own (as shown on Page 39). We had five GoPros running on every attempt and practice session. There were three permanently attached to the plane, one on Marco's helmet and another inside the helicopter that Max and Marco jumped from.

Of course, I was on the ground or in a helicopter a fair bit as well documenting the behind the scenes as well as the action from a variety of vantage points. As shown on the following page, I spent some time down in the bottom of the Hellhole Bend, which would have been extremely difficult (and time consuming) to access without a helicopter. The bottom of the canyon was filled with a lot of deep mud that was a major concern for the skydivers as they had to be very careful where they landed—or they might have literally been stuck in the mud. The bottom of the canyon also provided a fairly stunning location for portraits of Max and Marco as can be seen on page 32.

While I was the only still photographer on the project, I was working alongside several cinematographers capturing video and sound for Red Bull's YouTube page. Andi and Toni Tillmann and their crew did a fantastic job creating a mini-documentary of this project, which can be seen on Red Bull's YouTube channel here. I have to say the video turned out incredibly well. They were relying on GoPros and Insta360 cameras just as much as I was to create the core action sequences. And as you can see here in the images and in the video, Marco Fürst did a fantastic job capturing both stills and video while flying behind and around Max Manow and the plane. As seen on the following spread on pages 30-31, Marco flew circles around Max and the plane to create a wild array of images above and below the action. He also flew close and then backed off as well so that we have tighter action images (as in the opening spread of this article) and also ones where Max and the plane are somewhat smaller with a big landscape in the background. Hence, this is why I have the disclaimer about who created these images at the beginning of this article because Marco created so much of the content that ended up being key images.













Before this assignment, Red Bull sent me out to the location a few months prior with Max, Luke and the production crew to scout the location. At that point it was certainly not a given that the athletes could pull this off. There was a lot of work for Max and Luke to do in the interim to see how they could connect in the sky, and there were a lot of other factors to be worked out as well. On the scout the river below was raging and there were few if any landing zones that would have been ideal. The project was set for mid November so that the river levels would drop and open up possible landing zones—and that is exactly what happened.

After the scout, Luke and Max did a lot of tests to dial in the bar that he would grab onto the pole below the plane. Max also came up with the "fi-fi" hook idea to hook himself up to the plane because holding onto the bar while being towed up was extremely difficult physically. A fi-fi hook is something used in rock climbing. It is basically a metal hook (like a carabiner without a gate) that can be hooked over a piece of rock or in this case a hoop of metal attached to the bottom of the bar that Max grabbed onto. Once Max grabbed the bar, he could pull up a bit and hook the fi-fi hook onto the bar as shown on page 25. Once they got to a higher altitude, Max could pull up again and release himself from the bar and do another skydive or drop in for a landing back at the operating base on the rim of the canyon. All of this is made clear in the video (linked to earlier).

As they talk about in the video, this was a very risky stunt that no one had ever tried before. Part of that is Luke's experimental plane, which has an air brake attached to it and allows him to do a vertical skydive with skydivers or an angled skydive with wingsuit skydivers (at the same glide ratio as the wingsuit). This plane was built for another project a few years ago but has in the last year become a new tool for the Red Bull Air Force skydive team here in the USA—the team skydives with the plane quite a bit now.

To up the ante on this project, of course Red Bull chose an appropriately stunning landscape to try this out. It wasn't that exciting visually to try the stunt at 12,000 feet (3600m) above flat ground. So the plan was hatched to do this inside a giant canyon and hence the level of risk went up orders of magnitude—as did the stunning visual perspective of the stunt. I was with Max when we first looked down into the canyon and that was when it hit him that this was going to be a lot more spicy than even he realized during the conceptual phase. In the short amount of time I have spent with Max, I found him to be incredibly smart and analytical. With every project he takes it step-by-step to eliminate potential safety issues and also solve the problem. Of course, there is no way to remove all of the risk from a project like this but his preparation was methodical and that is a big part of how he and Luke pulled this off.

When Luke and Max first started working on this project in the canyon, they similarly went step-by-step. First, Max (and Marco) watched from the rim as Luke set his line and descended into the canyon. Next they flew into the canyon together to establish the line and get a feel for the size of the canyon as shown on page 3—and Max did not attempt to grab the pole. Once they felt stable and comfortable with that stage of the process Max turned over on his back and tried grabbing the handle on the end of the pole—and they attempted this just above the canyon rim so there was a larger margin for error. On this first







attempt, Max was able to grab the handle but the pole moved around so much that he literally got ejected towards one side of the canyon and had to make a very quick flip and course correction so he didn't hit the canyon wall. Max had to trust Luke completely for this project as he was essentially flying blind into the canyon. Flipped over on his back he was looking at the plane and the sky behind it. He couldn't see the rim of the canyon whiz by until he was already under the rim—and that was only with his peripheral vision as he had to concentrate on his position under the plane. He also had to fly with extreme precision because he wasn't that far from the propeller spinning at the front of the plane.

On that first day of attempting the project, Max was able

to grab the bar but got spit off each time. This gave him and Luke some things to think about in terms how they could adjust the bar and their approach. The next day was crazy windy and basically shut down the project for that entire day. On the third and final day for this project the pressure was on. On his first attempt Max grabbed the bar but couldn't hold it to clip in his fi-fi. On the second attempt he was able to get clipped in with his fi-fi and towed up by Luke to successfully finish the project. After that successful final run, the rest of the day was spent creating all of the other content needed for the video and for myself as well. We flew down into the canyon to do portraits and interviews with both Max and Marco and then came back up to the rim to celebrate and continued capturing behind the scenes images and more



interviews as can be seen above and on the previous page. It was a huge relief for Luke and Max, and everyone involved, that they had pulled it off and we didn't need to make any more attempts.

Of course, for me (and the rest of the video crew) the successful final flight meant that we would have time to get everything else we needed to help tell the story. For

the portraits above and on page 32, I used an Elinchrom FIVE battery-powered strobe and a deep-octa softbox to light up the athletes (either in the bottom of the canyon as with Max and Marco) or at the landing strip with Luke. For this project I used a variety of cameras to create the images you see here. In addition to the GoPros, I had both my Nikon and Fujifilm cameras. I used a Nikon Z9 and an assortment of lenses, including my 400mm f/4.5 Z



Nikkor, to capture the action. For the portraits, can-inhand images and the many of the lifestyle moments I used a FUJIFILM GFX100 II and a few different GF lenses. Because of the remote location, and living not that far away, I was able to drive over with my Subaru stuffed to the gills with any and all equipment I might need.

It was a massive team that worked on this project. I owe many of these images to that team, especially those at the airfield who managed the GoPros when I wasn't there and turned them on and off for each attempt. Likewise, as I have said a few times already Marco did a fantastic job flying the stills GoPro and getting a wild perspective on the action for us. His video and still footage was critical to help tell the story of this adventure. In addition to camera management, both Aaron Fitzgerald (in the Red Bull helicopter) and Mitch Kelldorf, of H5 helicopters, were both critical for moving all of us around to document the action and assist the athletes. On larger projects like this it is amazing to see all of the pre-production and coordination that has to happen beforehand to make sure it all runs smoothly.



Lastly, a huge thank you to Red Bull Germany and Red Bull USA for bringing me in to be a part of this project. As always, it is an honor to be a small part of something so out there and wild. Red Bull usually cooks up some epic scenarios and this one was no different. I have been lucky to work with the Red Bull Air Force and the Red Bull aerial athletes for the last sixteen years and it has been one of the most rewarding collaborations of my entire career. This project was yet again, another wild ride. Kudos to Max, Luke and Marco—and the entire Red Bull Germany team—for planning this out, putting it together and

pulling it off. In the following days after this project I also photographed Aaron Fitzgerald, shown on Page 5, doing his aerobatic routine in and out of the canyon as well. That resulted in some epic images as well. I will share that story in a future blog post. And as you might have seen from my latest Instagram posts there are other adventures (in the Bahamas no less) that I just returned from with Red Bull's aerial athletes. Stay tuned for that story in a future Newsletter. I have a few more exciting Red Bull projects coming up this year so there are more wild, spicy images to come.





perspective

The Photography Onion

by Michael Clark

ears ago, after the 2008 financial crisis, I gave a series of talks for ASMP (the American Society of Media Photographers) on "Staying Relevant in the Current Economy." As part of that presentation I would reference a graphic I had made (shown below) that talked about how in the future the number of working pro photographers that could make a full-time living would shrink drastically. I went on to explain that this would happen because so many of the markets where still photogra-

phers earn part of their money from would disappear. Note that I gave this talk before social media really had a foothold in the advertising industry as it does today.

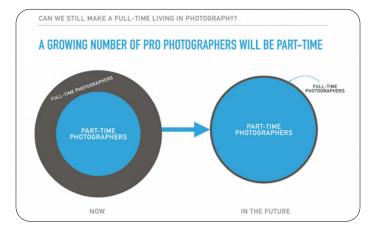
Sadly, my prediction was more accurate than even I knew at the time. I

count myself lucky to still be working in the industry and to still have exciting and adventurous assignments with a variety of clients. But, the upshot is that social media (and the advent of cheap video production) is the real driver of this massive change in how we consume content—be it still images or video. What I didn't say in that series of talks (given to my peers nearly 15 years ago) was that affordable video production would be the real driving force affecting still photography and the photo industry in general. Now, it is fairly obvious that most photographers need to have some element of video production as part of their services. The advertising industry has realized that motion content in general is more effective than still photography at arresting eyeballs while scrolling through thousands of social media posts. This is not always the case but it takes one hell of an image to be more eye-catching than the average video—even if that

> video isn't all that well crafted.

> Toss in the fact that magazines have effectively died off, Al imaging has come onto the scene, and the big stock agencies have driven down pricing massively and you start to get the pic-

ture (literally). These days, to stay alive as a pro photographer you have to be exceptional at your job and have the ability to solve very difficult problems for your clients. My prediction from 2010 has come true—and in a way I never would have imagined. Luckily, still images are powerful in ways that video just isn't. The best still images have staying power and impact. I have to keep reminding myself of that as I chase the next assignment.



parting shot



A Robert Oppenheimer actor in front of the Los Alamos Main Gate in Los Alamos, New Mexico. This image was created as part of an advertising campaign for New Mexico Tourism and Los Alamos County in particular. The gate still looks the same as it did back in 1945, though its function is not the same.

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