

NEWSLETTER

# MICHAEL CLARK

PHOTOGRAPHY



SUMMER 2017



# contents

SUMMER 2017 NEWSLETTER

## 4 editorial

Over the Edge. An introduction to this issue of the Newsletter along with a list of recent clients.

## 6 news

Recent news including a quick synopsis of my recent CreativeLIVE class entitled Advanced Lighting for Adventure Photography.

## 8 workshops

Detailed information on upcoming photography workshops and seminars I'll be teaching at the Exodus Aveiro Photo Festival in Aveiro, Portugal and a note about my recent CreativeLIVE class.

## 12 equipment review

A preview of the Elinchrom ELB 1200 battery-powered strobe, which I have been testing over the last year while shooting various projects for Elinchrom and Mac Group.

## 20 on assignment

Lighting the Spirit: A recent assignment for Elinchrom and Red Bull Photography, where I spent three days using the new Elinchrom ELB 1200 to create images of Red Bull kayaker Rafa Ortiz dropping Spirit Falls on the Little White Salmon river in Washington State.

## 38 portfolio

An image of Kai Lightner climbing Chain Reaction (5.12c) at Smith Rock State Park near Redmond, Oregon, which was created during the CreativeLIVE pre-shoot.

## 40 recap

An article detailing the experience of teaching my recent CreativeLIVE class for Red Bull Photography.

## 50 perspective

Misconceptions. An editorial on the ups and downs of a freelance lifestyle.

## 51 parting shot

Michael Clark hanging next to Spirit Falls as Rafa Ortiz kayaks over the falls during the Lighting the Spirit assignment. Image by Jorge Henao.

## copyright notice:

This Newsletter was created by Michael Clark for the promotion of Michael Clark Photography. No reproduction of any part of this Newsletter is allowed without written permission. All images Copyright © 2017 Michael Clark Photography. All Rights Reserved. Contact me at [info@michaelclarkphoto.com](mailto:info@michaelclarkphoto.com). To see more of my work view my website at [www.michaelclarkphoto.com](http://www.michaelclarkphoto.com).

*Cover Image: Rafa Ortiz dropping over Spirit Falls while whitewater kayaking on the Little White Salmon river near White Salmon, Washington. Opposite Page: Portrait of Rafa Ortiz taking a break in an alcove across from Spirit Falls while whitewater kayaking on the Little White Salmon river near White Salmon, Washington. Newsletter edited by Katherine Mast.*









## Over the Edge

*A busy summer creating some of the best images of my career*

**T**he last few months have been some of the most productive in my entire career. In the freelance world, it always seems like the fire hose is either on full blast or completely off. This summer it has been on full blast. In a feast or famine economy, it is always nice to be busy. Thankfully though, I have had a little break this month before it ramps up once again, which has allowed me to get this issue of the Newsletter out. As you will see in this Newsletter, I have been working on quite a few big projects.

For a few years now, I have been working with the Swiss flash manufacturer Elinchrom testing out prototypes of their new battery-powered ELB 1200 strobe kit and talking with them about possible photo shoots to show off its capabilities. The Lighting the Spirit article goes into the genesis of that project, the process, and the final results. It was a grueling assignment physically for everyone involved but the resulting images I think speak for themselves. I don't often feel a resounding sense of pride about the images I create on assignments, but for this one I couldn't be prouder of our team and the results.

Also in this issue is a preview of the Elinchrom ELB 1200 strobe kit. As I haven't yet used a full production sample, just prototypes, I can't offer up a definitive review but I do have some solid experience with the latest batch of

near-final prototypes we used on the Lighting the Spirit projects and several other assignments over the last few months.

Finally, I have also included a recap of sorts talking about the backstory and process of building my recent CreativeLIVE class. This was yet another career highlight (and there were a few this summer). The team at Creativelive.com and Red Bull Photography really came together to make that class something special. It has been such a huge honor to work with so many world-class athletes this summer, not only for the Lighting the Spirit project but also on this CreativeLIVE shoot and a few other assignments. It has been a very fulfilling summer so far. This is officially the longest Newsletter, I have ever published. I hope you find it interesting and informative. Thanks for checking it out.

*Opposite Page: Rush Sturges running the rapid known as Chaos just below Spirit Falls while whitewater kayaking on the Little White Salmon river near White Salmon, Washington.*

**Recent Clients:** Red Bull, Elinchrom, Sekonic, Mac Group US, CreativeLIVE, Men's Fitness, Angel Fire Resort, New Mexico Magazine, Santa Fe Institute, B&H Photo & Video, Getty Images and FMS Global Media.







### CreativeLIVE Class

*A new course on Advanced Lighting for Adventure Photography*

Last month, I was extremely excited to teach a CreativeLIVE course on [Advanced Lighting for Adventure Photography](#). This course was sponsored by [Red Bull Photography](#). In this course, we dived into the very exciting, and relatively new lighting techniques like Hi-Sync (HS), as well as many other advanced lighting techniques, which can be used for a wide variety of applications. We covered a few different adventure sports including rock climbing, cyclocross and trail running with top Red Bull Athletes. This course was Live on July 17th and 18th, 2017 and is now available for purchase for those that missed the free live broadcast. To purchase this class go to [creativelive.com](#). The full price for the class is normally \$79 USD, but CreativeLIVE often has sales and discounts so you might be able to get it for less than that price.

I must say it was a huge thrill for me to teach a class for CreativeLIVE. They have created a futuristic teaching model that many universities and corporations are just now trying to replicate. My class went out live to over 4,000 people around the world and as of right now 4,800 people have watched the class already. When the class was live, people were watching the broadcast from all over the world. Never before have I had such a reach while teaching. CreativeLIVE offers such a huge opportunity for learning at a very affordable cost. If you haven't

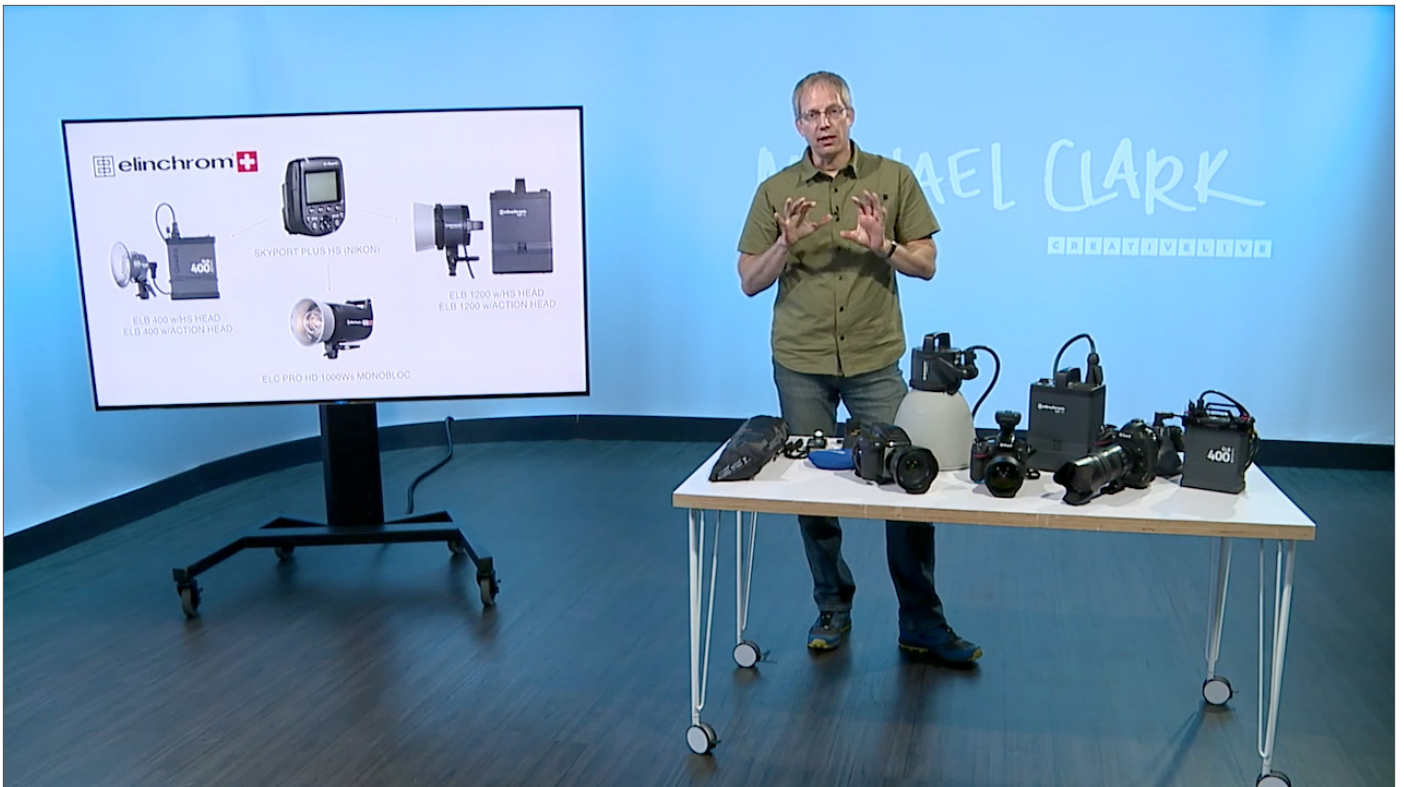
checked them out I highly recommend going to their website right now.

My advanced lighting class mainly covered using Hyper-sync, Hi-Sync and High Speed Sync (with medium format Leaf Shutters) to capture adventure sports images but the same techniques could be applied to a wide variety of photography genres. We also shot portraits using both Hi-Sync (from Elinchrom) and High Speed Sync with leaf shutters (Hasselblad). I also had the brand new [Elinchrom ELB 1200](#) packs and heads for both the pre-shoot in Bend, Oregon and also in the studio during the live broadcast. If you are looking for a way to set yourself and your photography apart from the pack, this class offers some great insight into how to do that.

Red Bull Photography made this class possible—and sought to help their own photographers by creating this class. I know of few companies that go to such great lengths to help their own photographers improve their skills and become better photographers. My thanks to Red Bull for this opportunity, and to CreativeLIVE for the platform and the amazing experience.

For more on this class, and my experience on the pre-shoot and the live broadcast, turn to page 40 for a full re-cap of my experience.







## workshops

---

# Photography Workshops

*An overview of workshops and photo treks with Michael Clark*

**E**ach year I teach a few workshops on a variety of topics including adventure sports photography, big-wave surfing photography, and artificial lighting. Below is a listing of the workshops I will be teaching in 2017. For more information on these workshops, and to find out how to register, go to the [Workshops](#) page on my blog.

### **Advanced Lighting for Adventure Photography**

*CreativeLIVE* ([www.creativelive.com](http://www.creativelive.com))

I recently taught a two day live class on advanced lighting techniques for CreativeLIVE and Red Bull Photography, which was broadcast live on July 17th and 18th, 2017. This class is available for download on [www.creativelive.com](http://www.creativelive.com). While this isn't an in-person workshop, like the others listed here, it is a resource that is available online and can be downloaded and watched anytime. Here is the info:

How do you freeze action, create motion blur and showcase the strength and style of athletes? When you introduce artificial light into your adventure photography, the opportunities are endless! It's easier than it looks, and once you master the technical aspects, lighting on location can unlock tremendous opportunity for capturing portraits and action.

Red Bull Photographer, Michael Clark, joins CreativeLive

to break down the barriers that are keeping you from letting your photography stand out. In this course, he'll cover the basics of gear, incorporating flash, finding unique perspectives and so much more.

Through demonstrations in the field, Michael will work with incredible athletes in a variety of lighting scenarios to show how to capture the heart of a sport and the spirit of an athlete. If you're looking to make your mark in the world of action or sports photography, this course is a necessity in making your work compete with the best in the industry.

What follows are a sampling of the topics Michael covers in this class:

- Location Scouting
- Packing and gear tips for various locations
- Scouting the best point of view to capture action
- Safety and considerations for working with athletes
- Strobes vs. Speedlights
- When to use High Speed Sync, Hi-Sync (HS) or Leaf Shutters with your flash
- Learning how to balance Hi-Sync strobes with ambient light
- Getting into the business of adventure photography
- Creating tension in your photos





*An image created during the CreativeLIVE class entitled "Advanced Lighting for Adventure Photography." In this image, Ian Caldwell is climbing Rude Boys (5.13c) at Smith Rock State Park near Redmond, Oregon and is lit by a single Elinchrom ELB 1200 strobe. For more information see the description on the previous page.*

Michael will be worked with professional athletes on this shoot including ultra runner Dylan Bowman, top cyclist Tim Johnson, and rock climber Kai Lightner to give you a rare, one-of-a-kind look into the world of adventure photography. This course also includes an image critique by Chase Jarvis and Michael Clark.

Cost: \$79 USD - CreativeLIVE often run sales so the class might be discounted below this price.

### **Adventure Sports Photography: A Masterclass**

*Exodus Aveiro Festival - Aveiro, Portugal*

*December 3, 2017*

This 3-hour seminar is part of the [Exodus Aveiro Photo Festival](#) in Aveiro, Portugal. 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 be mindful of your goals and your safety at all times.

In this 3-hour Masterclass, Michael shares his experiences working in the adventure marketplace, and photographing for stock, editorial, and commercial clients. Topics covered in this seminar include research and preparation, composition and camera angles, equipment selection, use of natural light, fill flash, and battery-powered strobes, advanced lighting techniques, and autofocus techniques. In addition, Michael will cover some of the basic aspects of running a photography business including career development, marketing yourself and your work, and dealing with the ups and downs of the freelance lifestyle. Participants will leave this Masterclass with solid information and insights into the adrenaline-pumping and potentially lucrative world of adventure photography.

For more information and to register for this three-hour seminar go to the [Exodus Aveiro Fest website](#).

## Workshop Testimonials

"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 4 years of college and several careers getting less candid advice and encouragement than I got in 4 days with you. For what it is worth, thank you for that." - Brandon McMahon, Adventure Photography 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, Summer 2010

"I just finished Michael Clark's Adventure Photography Workshop at the Santa Fe Workshops in April 2013. I had a terrific time with the group of people - one from China, another from Seattle, another from Wyoming, me from Michigan - you get the picture that we came from everywhere. We came because of the Santa Fe Workshop's reputation of presenting an intense learning experience guided by fantastic instructors. We got both. Michael Clark really knows his stuff and has a lot of excess energy, which he focused on us, and he can also teach. He read our skills and weaknesses quickly and went to work to improve each of us technically. He sorted out our individual goals, even when we couldn't really articulate them. Then he gave us plenty of time to address those goals and ask question after question after question. The rough environments in which we photographed were great fun to explore. Couldn't be better." - Tania Evans

"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, Summer 2010

For more information on my upcoming workshops, or to read more testimonials, please visit the [Workshops](#) page on my blog. Hope to see you at a workshop here soon!



ADVERTISEMENT

## **A Professional Photographer's Workflow.**

# A PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER'S WORKFLOW

USING ADOBE LIGHTROOM & PHOTOSHOP



**MICHAEL CLARK**

## **Reality Check. Make Your Images Shine.**

**PURCHASE & DOWNLOAD THIS E-BOOK AT [WWW.MICHAELCLARKPHOTO.COM](http://WWW.MICHAELCLARKPHOTO.COM)**

## equipment review

---

### The Elinchrom ELB 1200

*A preview of this brand-new, state of the art high-output battery-powered strobe*



**Disclaimer:** *I am sponsored by Elinchrom and work closely with them on some products. I have been testing iterations of the ELB 1200 over the last year and have spent several months working with this kit. Since the Elinchrom ELB 1200 is still yet to be released, this is a preliminary review. I will save the full review for when I get the full production version of this strobe. The versions I have worked with over the last few months are very near to the full production version, which is*

*why I felt confident enough to write up a preliminary review here.*

**T**he Elinchrom ELB 1200 is Elinchrom's brand new, yet to be released, 1,200 Watt-second (Ws) battery-powered strobe. Over the past two years I have had the honor of testing out a few different iterations of this incredible strobe kit. All of the ELB 1200s I have worked





*Previous Page: As can be seen here, the ELB 1200 is quite weather resistant. While shooting next to a small waterfall, I left the flash head plugged in and diverted a huge amount of water onto the top of the pack. Even while wet the pack kept working just fine. Above: The ELB 1200 flash heads are even more robust than the old Ranger flash heads. They also have a much nicer all metal light stand mount that works perfectly on C-Stands and other professional level light stands. The ELB 1200 flash heads also have a 250 Watt LED modeling lamp built in as well, which uses very little battery power and works incredibly well as a video light.*

with have been prototypes, though in the last few months I have been working with a very-near-production version of the ELB 1200 for the Lighting the Spirit assignment for Elinchrom and Red Bull Photography, as detailed in the following article. As I haven't worked with a full production version of this strobe, I won't get critical here about any aspect of the kit as some things might have changed in the full production version.

I know many photographers have been waiting for this strobe for a long time and are desperate for any information they can get about it hence this preview. I have been using the Elinchrom Rangers for over a decade now and they have served me well, but after using the ELB 1200 it is hard to even pull my Rangers out of the bag. The ELB

1200 weighs in at 4.3 Kg (roughly 9.5 lbs), which is about half the weight of the old Rangers. The flash heads weigh 2.2 Kg (4.6 lbs). That makes for a 6.5 Kg (14.3 lbs) kit, with one flash head, which means the ELB 1200 is now the lightest 1,200 Ws battery-powered strobe on the market.

Aside from being so light, it is also tough as nails, and damn-near waterproof from my testing. In the last two months, I have worked these units over the coals. I have tortured them in a myriad of ways with water, dust, and sand. We even dropped them a few times accidentally. Elinchrom was aware that my crew and I were going to be hard on them intentionally to see how they held up. This was one of the final stages of the prototype testing to see





*Above is an image of Chris Sheehan mountain biking under golden aspens on the Alamos Vista trail in the Sangre de Cristo mountains above Santa Fe, New Mexico. To create this image I used one Elinchrom ELB 1200 and one ELB 400. Both had the Action flash heads on them and were set up as a light trap, meaning the lights were pointed at each other and I waited until Chris was in just the right spot to trigger my Hasselblad HSD 50c WiFi camera.*

just how tough they are. I was surprised they at how well they held up—in fact I am surprised a few of them are still working at all. I figure in two months time, I put at least a year's worth of wear and tear on the three ELB 1200 units Elinchrom sent me. They were scratched up, beat up, and well broken in when I returned them a few weeks ago. In fact, my old Rangers after a decade or more of hard use don't look as beat up as these ELB 1200s did after two months of hard abuse. We even put the ELB 1200 into a running waterfall (as shown on the first page of this

review), and even with a flash head plugged in, the ELB 1200 wasn't phased by any amount of water we poured over it. From what I can tell, the only way to kill one of these pack would be to violently drop it or submerge it in water.

Aside from the lightweight nature of the ELB 1200 and the build quality, the pack overall is very easy to use and houses some of the most advanced technology of any battery-powered strobe on the market. I love that





*Above is a shot of Aaron Miller fighting to stay on a tough 5.12c at the Cave at Diablo Canyon just outside of Santa Fe, New Mexico. This image was created using one ELB 1200 pack and the HS flash head. The flash head was around sixty feet away from the climber and shows just how powerful the Hi-Sync technology is for lighting a far away subject.*

Elinchrom still offers multiple flash head options for the ELB 1200, including the Action head, the Pro head, and the HS (Hi-Sync) flash head. For me, the Action and the HS flash heads are the main ones I use for my work. If I am shooting at or below the flash sync speeds of my cameras, I am using the Action flash head. If I need to work at shutter speeds above the flash sync of my camera I use the HS flash head. This ability to use different flash heads with different flash durations is what, in my mind at least, makes the ELB 1200 the most versatile flash on the market. With the HS flash heads, I found I could overpower daylight from 60-feet (18 meters) away, which is incredible.

The ELB 1200 has two different batteries available. The standard “Battery Air” that comes with the ELB 1200 gets 215 full power pops. The larger “Battery HD” allows for 400 full power flashes. Sadly, the larger capacity HD battery is over the limit (in terms of the amount of Lithium contained in the battery) for checked baggage so you will not be able to fly with that battery. But for local shoots or ones where you don’t have to fly, having the extra capacity is a huge benefit, especially since it is only 0.9 lbs (0.4 Kg) heavier than the Air battery.

The way the battery attaches to the ELB 1200 is also quite innovative. To detach it you simply slide the two



*The 250 Watt daylight balanced LED modeling light built into all of the ELB 1200 flash heads is an incredible constant light source for video applications. We were pretty shocked at how bright it was at full power, and because it is fully dimmable the lighting can be adjusted as need on the fly. On the opposite page we have lashed an ELB 1200 and its flash head to a tree. With the built in handle it is easy to girth hitch it to a stand or anything else with webbing. Note that we put a plastic bag over the flash head because there was a huge amount of spray coming off the waterfall that was hitting the flash tube. Image by Jorge Henao.*

Elinchrom logos down to the open position and then pull the two adjacent pieces apart to release the battery. Attaching a battery is as simple as setting the pack over the battery and pushing down. It snaps into place easily and to lock it you move those same Elinchrom logo pieces upwards into the locked position.

In terms of performance and light quality, the ELB 1200 is on par with any other battery-powered strobe kit I have seen. Like the ELB 400, the Hi-Sync technology, when using the HS flash head, has been refined to a level that no other strobe manufacturer can match. With the HS flash head, you can choose any power setting on the pack. This means that can literally choose any camera settings and adjust the power on the pack to get the right exposure if

your subject is relatively close—as when shooting portraits. I cannot understate how important this is when shooting in Hi-Sync mode. Additionally, I have seen very little if any gradation when shooting in HS mode.

As shown above, the ELB 1200 is also a revelation for video lighting. The 250 Watt LED modeling lamp will stay on for up to two hours depending on the battery used and it generates no heat. We were able to use any and all of the Elinchrom light modifiers while recording interviews. The modeling lamp is dimmable and daylight-balanced. The modeling lamp allowed us to get the best lighting I have ever seen while recording interviews. Bill Stengel, the cinematographer that I work with fairly often, was amazed at how great the LED modeling lamp worked for







the interviews in our behind the scenes video. We were also both amazed at how bright the LED was at full power. In fact, even with the Elinchrom Deep Octa softbox on the flash head, with diffusion, we had to dim the LED for the interview we recorded in my office. That LED is a major benefit. I don't see the need to bring along 1x1 LED lighting for video work anymore. And with the Elinchrom modifiers, the light quality of that built-in LED in the ELB 1200 flash heads is better than any 1x1 LED panel I have ever seen.

The OLED display panel on the top of the pack is both simple and intuitive, but it also has deep menus allowing one to customize the pack to their needs. When the Action or Pro flash heads are attached to the pack, the OLED shows the exact flash duration for each power setting, which is quite handy. When the HS flash head is attached the flash duration is not shown because it is a consistent 1/550th second flash duration at all power settings. As usual with Elinchrom strobes, the power settings are changeable in one-tenth f-stops allowing you to dial in the lighting extremely accurately.

Elinchrom has listened to their photographers very closely in the last few years. When the ELB 400 came out three years ago, they sought input from the photographers who work with them closely. I sent them three pages of notes on what I would like to see in the new updated Ranger kit—and the ELB 1200 incorporates about 90% of that feedback. Apparently quite a few of us had similar feedback and requests. I have never seen a company take in so much feedback and put so much of it into a product. Kudos to Elinchrom for all of their hard work on this product. It has been a long wait but I think those that upgrade to the ELB 1200 will find it above and

beyond their expectations. And with the \$1,000 USD trade-in offer, that helps quite a bit when upgrading from the older Rangers to the new ELB 1200. I will be trading in my old Rangers as soon as possible for the ELB 1200.

Of note for those who currently own the Elinchrom Ranger packs: the ELB 1200 is very similar in size, so it should fit into the same bags you currently own. This was a big deal, and something I specifically asked for when Elinchrom first sought out feedback as I have a small fortune in Lightware and Pelican cases to carry my Rangers.

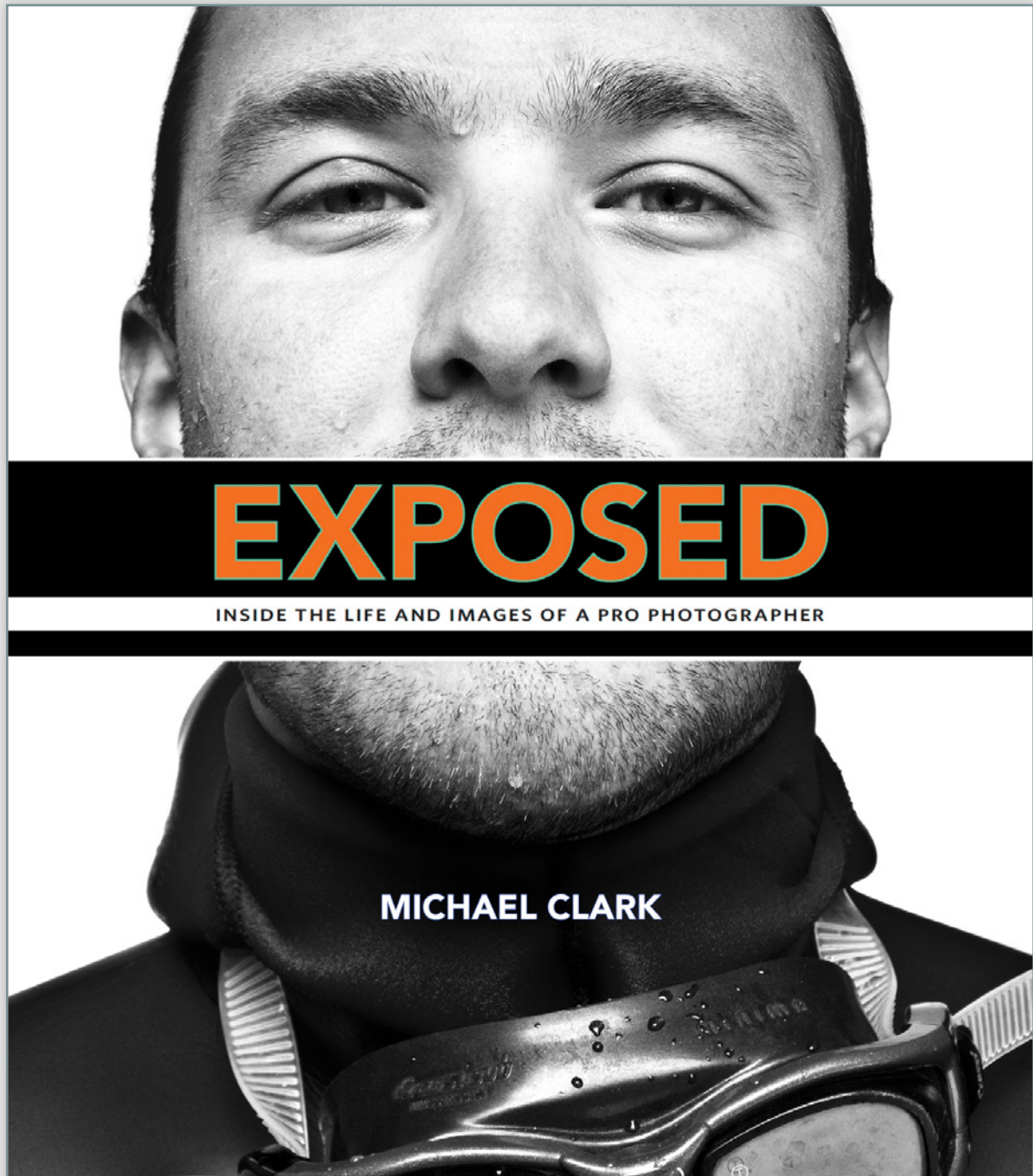
For the location photographer needing a tough, lightweight, and versatile 1,200 Ws battery-powered pack, the ELB 1200 is a top-notch offering. If you are looking to push the envelope of what is possible, especially with Elinchrom Hi-Sync technology, then look no further. This is the strobe kit we have all been waiting for. As you can see in this issue of the Newsletter, there are numerous images that were created with the ELB 1200 and I have literally built an entirely new portfolio of images while testing out this new strobe kit. No matter what I say here in this review, I think the images speak for themselves.

The ELB 1200s will start shipping in late August. The ELB 1200 is hands-down the most advanced 1,200 Ws battery-powered strobe. It is ultra-dependable, insanely durable, super easy to use and the Hi-Sync functionality is unsurpassed by any other strobe on the market. In short, the ELB 1200 blows the doors off my old Rangers. My thanks to Elinchrom for allowing me to be a part of the testing process and for designing such a stellar product. For more info on the ELB 1200 check out the [Elinchrom website](#). To see how I have put the ELB 1200 to use, check out the other articles here in this issue of the Newsletter.



ADVERTISEMENT

**Exposed. The Life of a Pro Photographer.**



**Revealed. The Secrets Behind the Images.**

ORDER THE BOOK ONLINE AT [PEACHPIT](#), [AMAZON](#) OR [BARNES AND NOBLES](#)





*an assignment:*

# LIGHTING SPIRIT







**Preface:** *If you haven't seen the behind the scenes video for this shoot [check it out on YouTube](#). Also, this article was originally published as a post on my blog and has been modified here to fit the Newsletter—and additional images have been added here that were not published along with the original blog post.*

Even though there have been numerous articles posted about the “Lighting the Spirit” whitewater kayaking shoot for [Elinchrom](#) and [Red Bull Photography](#), I thought I would include an article here in my Newsletter detailing some of the aspects that have not been covered in the other articles that have appeared on [Redbull.com](#), [F-Stoppers](#), and elsewhere. First off, my thanks to Elinchrom and Red Bull Photography for making this happen. This shoot was a long-time coming. I originally discussed a possible ELB 1200 shoot with Elinchrom and Red Bull over two years ago after seeing one of the first ELB 1200 prototypes. This assignment, and the idea for this shoot, was a long process which included a fair amount of debate and thinking. Once we decided on the sport of whitewater kayaking, Red Bull introduced me to Rafa Ortiz, one of the world's best whitewater kayakers—especially when it comes to dropping big waterfalls.

In discussions with Rafa, we decided on Spirit Falls, which is on the Little White Salmon river near White Salmon, Washington. I was a bit apprehensive about shooting at Spirit Falls because it has been photographed so many times and by many of my peers in the adventure sports photography world. Nevertheless, we needed a waterfall that was somewhat easy to access and one that Rafa and the crew could run over and over. In the end, Spirit Falls was one of the few places that really could work for this project. To round out the crew of athletes, Rafa brought in

Rush Sturges and Liamm Field, both of whom are world-class kayakers in their own right.

As with any successful photo shoot, a lot of pre-planning and thought went into this assignment. Throughout the development of the Elinchrom ELB 1200, I had been working with various prototypes so I knew what they were capable of. My experience, starting with Hypersync years ago and with the Hi-Sync features of the ELB 400 more recently, really helped me imagine what was possible with a decent sized waterfall and a world-class athlete. In particular, the series of ice climbing shoots I did back in [2014](#) and [2015](#) really gave me a sense of how I could approach this whitewater kayaking shoot. But that was only the beginning of my thinking. Spirit Falls drops into a basin, and as such, this allowed me to move nearly 270 degrees around the waterfall to gain various camera angles and also stage my lights wherever I needed them, which gave us a lot of options when setting up the shots.

For months before the assignment, I had been talking with Elinchrom about different possibilities, including rappelling behind the waterfall. I was really psyched on getting behind the curtain as the possibilities there seemed wildly different than an average portrait. Once we got to White Salmon and went to check out the waterfall, we realized there was no gap between the falls, as there usually is, where we could rappel behind the waterfall. Usually Spirit Falls is a smaller, narrow waterfall with a gap between it and the other side of the falls, not a huge curtain of water as seen in the images here. But because the entire western US had an epic winter, there was so much snowmelt this year that we had to wait until late May for water levels to get down to a runnable level. That epic winter made for epic amounts of runoff, which also





Above: Rafa Ortiz rolling up while whitewater kayaking on the Little White Salmon river near White Salmon, Washington. Right: A behind the scenes shot of me in a full wetsuit in the water with Rafa capturing the above image. For this shot we had the ELB 1200 and an Action flash head on a huge 12-foot long Kupo Big Boom arm. My Nikon D810 and Skyport Plus HS trigger were inside a Ewa-Marine bag to keep them dry and also give me access to all the controls on the camera and on the flash trigger.



meant that the waterfall was a solid hundred foot wide curtain of water when we arrived in late May.

This was a four-day assignment with one scout day and three shoot days. The scout day involved a full day of bushwhacking around different sections of the river to check out other possible shoot locations. This being the Northwest, there was plenty of poison oak to deal with. We were careful, but even with care, I still came home with poison oak in several places. The scout day was a bit brutal. The incredibly hot weather and dense forest approaches didn't help. Even so, we did manage to find a few other sections of the river that would work for additional action and lifestyle images.

After the scout day, we laid out our plan for the shoot. Before shooting any action, we wanted to get a wide variety of portrait and lifestyle images in the bag. We wanted to finish those before we started shooting the action; if anyone got hurt, that could end the entire shoot. Hence, getting a wide variety of non-action images seemed prudent. We spent the entire first day shooting portrait and lifestyle images near Spirit Falls and also at other spots on the river. We started with underwater shots, having Rafa doing barrel rolls while being lit from above using a Kupo Big Boom, which is a beefy 12-foot boom arm.

To get that underwater image, as seen on the previous page, I put my Nikon D810 into a Ewa-Marine bag with the Skyport Plus HS on top and used a 24mm lens. The reason I used a Ewa-Marine bag instead of a surf housing, like my CMT surf housing, is that I needed to be able to adjust settings both on the camera and on the transmitter. It took a little trial and error to dial in the settings but once we got there, we were able to get some pretty cool

underwater shots and control the lighting very accurately. Afterwards, we moved on to a location that was very close to Spirit Falls, just on the opposite side of the gorge from the actual waterfall. This small waterfall was a perfect place to shoot a series of portraits and freeze the falling water, as shown on page three of this Newsletter.

For the portraits with Rafa in the waterfall, I shot with both a Nikon D810 and with a Hasselblad H5D 50c WiFi. As you might imagine, this spot was quite wet. I wrapped the Hasselblad in a plastic cover to keep it from getting too wet. When shooting with the Nikon, I just left it naked as I have tons of experience shooting with a wide variety of Nikons in full-on rain and have not had any issues. The portraits are definitely more staged than any of the other images we captured, but as with all of my assignments, it isn't always about the action. Creating a wide variety of images to show the entire experience is critical for most clients. These portraits also show just how versatile the ELB 1200 is for a wide variety of scenarios. We used the Action heads when shooting with the Hasselblad (because it has a leaf shutter and requires fast flash durations) and we used the Hi-Sync heads when shooting with the Nikon to stop the motion of the falling water.

As a side note here, I was intentionally trying to kill one of the three ELB 1200 packs we had with us on this shoot. I wanted not only to create cool images for Elinchrom's marketing, but also see just how tough these packs are in the wild. After we were done shooting the portraits, I borrowed Rafa's paddle and diverted a serious amount of the waterfall onto the top of the ELB 1200, which had a flash head still plugged into the top of the pack. Afterwards, we shook it off and tested it out. It still worked fine. I was pretty surprised as there was a lot of water hitting the







pack for several seconds. With a flash head plugged into the top of the power pack there was a potentially serious failure point where water could enter the pack. Apparently Elinchrom has considered this possibility, which explains why the cables fit snugly into the top of the pack, creating a water-tight seal. After this experiment, I realized the only way to really kill the pack would be to toss it into the river, but as I wouldn't do that with my own gear that seemed a little over the line in terms of trying to kill a pack. Note that the flash heads have slits in the back of them to cool the flash head so I did not put those naked into the waterfall.

While scouting, we found that there was a small hole just next to Spirit Falls where we could rappel behind the curtain of the waterfall. On the second day of shooting, we set up the rope and used it to rappel behind the waterfall. I have to say that this was one of the coolest things I have done in quite a few years as an adventure photographer. Dropping through a three-by-three foot opening to get behind the curtain of the waterfall was exhilarating. It felt like we landed on another planet. My enthusiasm, and Rafa's as well, is apparent in the behind the scenes video. Tom Bear, my assistant and a stellar pro photographer in his own right, rappelled into the cave with Rafa and myself. He held the light and we worked out a few different shooting positions and lighting angles.

Here again, for the shoot behind the waterfall, I put my Nikon D810 and the Skyport Transmitter into a Ewa-Marine bag to protect it. We put the ELB 1200 into a padded LowePro case and then put that into a dry bag, with the flash head cable running out of the dry bag. The flash head was protected with a heavy-duty clear plastic bag and we used gaffer's tape to seal the plastic bag. Up top,

I put a fully-charged battery onto the pack but somehow while rappelling into the cave it bounced off a few rocks, and the battery had shifted slightly. Hence, I had to take the ELB 1200 out of the dry bag and re-attach the battery while getting nailed by the spray that was a constant issue. In doing so, the entire pack got wet, including the top of the exposed battery and the bottom of the power pack. We didn't really have any choice in the matter so we just carried on, hoping the unit would fire normally—and it worked perfectly.

Behind the waterfall was one of the most challenging locations I have ever worked in. There was a consistent high-velocity spray that seemed to shoot into my ears non-stop. It was hard to even look through the camera because my eyes would get nailed by an occasional jet of spray forcing me to rub them out and clear my vision. Additionally, the Ewa-Marine bag was soaked and any attempt to clear the front lens element just smeared the water in an unnatural way. Honestly, I am shocked we got any usable images down there at all. The double page spread that follows is a two-shot panorama that is also my favorite image from behind Spirit Falls.

After our adventure behind Spirit Falls, we set to work on creating the action images. With one light above the waterfall and another on the opposite side of the gorge over 100 feet away, which acted as a fill light, I set to work to find the shooting angles. My first choice was to get as close as possible to the action and shoot while hanging from a rope right in front of the waterfall. This resulted in some pretty amazing images as shown on the cover of this Newsletter. To get this image, Rafa and the crew ran the same line multiple times so I could dial in my timing and catch them at just the right spot.



*Liam Fields dropping over Spirit Falls while whitewater kayaking on the Little White Salmon river near White Salmon, Washington.*





*Rafa Ortiz taking a break in the cave behind Spirit Falls while whitewater kayaking on the Little White Salmon river near White Salmon, Washington.*













Rafa Ortiz dropping over Spirit Falls while  
whitewater kayaking on the Little White Salmon  
river near White Salmon, Washington.









Rafa Ortiz standing by as a safety precaution at Spirit Falls while whitewater kayaking on the Little White Salmon river near White Salmon, Washington.







Page 25: Rush Sturges standing by as a safety precaution as Liam Field drops over Spirit Falls while whitewater kayaking on the Little White Salmon river near White Salmon, Washington. Page 27: Liam Field dropping over Spirit Falls while whitewater kayaking on the Little White Salmon river near White Salmon, Washington. Above: A behind the scenes image taken by Marv Watson of me chilling out between drops. Right: A behind the scenes shot taken by Jorge Henao of myself and Rafa working on a portrait. Note that the Elinchrom ELB 1200 was completely in its element in this wet environment.





Right: A behind the scenes shot taken by Jorge Henao of the main light setup just above the waterfall. For all of the action images, we had the HS flash heads attached to the Elinchrom ELB 1200. Below: A behind the scenes image taken by Marv Watson of Bill Stengel, our behind the scenes cameraman, interviewing Rafa Ortiz for the behind the scenes video.





All of the action images were created using Elinchrom's Hi-Sync technology that allows the flash to sync at any shutter speed. For most of the action images, we shot with shutter speeds ranging from 1/2,500th second up to 1/4,000th second to freeze the action. When shooting whitewater kayaking, it has been my experience that if you want to freeze the motion of the kayaker you need to use a shutter speed of at least 1/1,500th second or higher. Elinchrom's Hi-Sync technology allowed us to freeze the motion in a way that would otherwise be quite difficult to pull off with flashes.

Before the shoot, I didn't realize that Liam and Rush were game to run the falls more than a few times. Luckily for me, they both dropped Spirit almost as many times as Rafa did, which allowed me to get my timing dialed in and also gave us quite a few extra images. After shooting a few rounds right in front of the waterfall, I climbed back up and changed my shooting position. I was very conscious of how many times the kayakers were dropping over Spirit Falls, and we made sure we were ready for each descent since we only got one image per drop. The image I had in mind before the shoot was to replicate the ice climbing images I mentioned at the beginning of this article. To get those shots, I moved over to the far side of the gorge so that I was straight-on with the waterfall curtain and used a 70-200mm lens to frame up a wider shot, as shown in the images on the previous double page spread and in the opening spread of this article. I also zoomed in a bit to get a tighter shot once I got the timing down. These images from a little farther away show the entire waterfall and give a better sense of the height of the waterfall and the kayaker's position on it.

At the end of the second day, it felt like I had gone caving.

I was soaked from head to toe and coated in mud as shown in the behind the scenes image on Page 34 captured by Marv Watson. Amazingly, my Nikon was just fine. The camera and the 14-24mm lens I was using while hanging only a few feet away from the waterfall were soaked repeatedly but never seemed to flinch. I must have wiped the lens off a hundred times or more while hanging right in front of the waterfall.

One thing I haven't noted here yet is the approach to Spirit Falls. It isn't that long or hard of a hike to get down to Spirit Falls, though it is quite steep in a few sections, but when you carry in a fully loaded 90-pound (40-Kg) backpack, that simple approach becomes a whole lot more interesting. On all three days that we shot down at Spirit Falls, Tom and I carried in huge packs with the cameras and lighting gear. While going down the 1,000 feet to Spirit Falls wasn't so challenging, hiking back out each day was a lesson in pure suffering. Thank God the ELB 1200s are as light as they are. It wasn't just the lighting gear that weighed us down; we also had quite a bit of climbing gear as well as full dry suits to use behind the waterfall.

The third and final day of the shoot was planned as a backup—or pick up day. I didn't know how many times the kayakers would physically be able to run the Spirit. On the morning of the third day Rush admitted he was quite sore. All three kayakers were absorbing a serious impact every time they ran Spirit. In fact, they told me they had never run it that many times in a single day before. Appreciative of their efforts, I asked if we could go back and do just a few more runs so I could dial in a tighter shot. I also wanted to shoot a few images with Rush or Liam standing on a rock below Spirit Falls, showing the



role of the safety boater and giving us a wider range of images.

Spread out in this article and in this issue of the Newsletter are a few images shot on the third and final day of the assignment. We also shot all three kayakers running a rapid known as Chaos, which is actually the most dangerous rapid on the entire four-mile stretch of the Little White Salmon. For the image of Rush Sturges (on page 5) we used two strobes, one on Spirit Falls and another from above lighting up Chaos. In the image on Page 25, we had Rush Sturges stand below the falls on a rock with the swirling cauldron of water below him. Liam is dropping over Spirit Falls while Rush holds a safety rope. When we created this image, it opened up a whole new set of images I hadn't thought of before the shoot. After showing the images to Rafa and crew, it was obvious we needed to shoot some other versions of this so Rafa opted to run Spirit one more time to access this rock below the falls. We finished off the shoot by capturing a series of images of Rafa standing on the rock below Spirit Falls.

This last shot of Rafa on the rock, shown on Pages 32-33, might be the best image from the entire shoot. It is certainly the best lifestyle-type image from the shoot in my opinion. We created so many stellar images that it is very difficult to edit them. The first image—the spread opening up this article—is another of my favorites, as is the one from behind the waterfall. I have several favorite action images of Rafa, many of which are shown here, but I can't actually decide which one is the best of the best.

I have to thank the entire team that worked so hard on this assignment. [Bill Stengel](#), our one man band behind the scenes video guru, who lugged a full RED Epic kit

down to Spirit Falls and captured some amazing behind the scenes footage; [Tom Bear](#), my assistant and co-colaborator; and Marv Watson and Jorge Henao from Red Bull Photography, who shot the behind the scenes stills and also carried down a few extra items for us each day. Without your help gentlemen, and that of our illustrious athletes, this shoot just would not have been possible. Lastly, my thanks again to Elinchrom and Red Bull Photography for making this happen. If you would like to see more behind the scenes stills, jump on over to the [Red Bull Photography website](#) and check out the article they posted from this shoot. It includes quite a few additional still images, and also Marv and Jorge's behind the scenes still images.

This really was one of the best shoots of my entire career. I have set for myself a very high watermark that will be hard to surpass in the future. I am very proud of what we have created here both because it wasn't a given, and we all had to work insanely hard to pull it off. Thank you to everyone who has posted on social media with feedback. It has been very encouraging to get such amazing feedback and see the reaction to this set of images.

The reason for this assignment was to promote the Elinchrom ELB 1200 and show what it is capable of. The ELB 1200 is without a doubt the premier battery-powered strobe for adventure photographers not only because it is the lightest 1,200 Ws battery-powered strobe on the market, but also because it is weatherproofed so well that it can stand up to just about any punishment a photographer can dish out. The Hi-Sync technology also makes it the most versatile strobe kit anywhere. If you are interested in the Elinchrom ELB 1200 please check out their products at [www.elinchrom.com](http://www.elinchrom.com).




portfolio











C	R	E	A
T	I	V	E
L	I	V	E

RECAP







For years now, one of my goals has been to teach a class on [CreativeLIVE.com](http://CreativeLIVE.com). When CreativeLIVE came along in 2010, they created a whole new way of educating a huge number of people and doing so in a rather affordable way for the consumer. It was such a radical new educational model that Chase Jarvis, its founder, met with President Barack Obama to discuss the format. CreativeLIVE threw open the doors that allowed many photographers, artists, cinematographers, and freelancers around the world to further their skills. They found the top creatives in their respective fields and had them teach a class relating to their specialty. They offer the class for free to the entire world while it is streamed live on the internet. After the live stream ends, they play it for a day or two so that folks in other time zones can tune in and not have to stay up all night to watch the class. Once the live stream is over, if you want access to that class then you have to purchase it—albeit for a very reasonable rate given the caliber of the instructors. Over the last seven years, I have purchased three or four classes from CreativeLIVE and have also watched a few others live. It has been an incredible resource for many.

To give you some background, I have been teaching a few workshops each year since way back in 2006. At first it was a way to diversify my income, but more than that, it was a way to share what I had learned as a professional photographer—and especially as one who had taken great pains to learn the art of digital photography. Since 2006, I have taught at just about every major

photography workshop institution in the United States. But those workshops were all private, face-to-face type workshops that were not inexpensive.

Earlier this year while talking with [Red Bull Photography](#), one of my long time clients, we somehow got onto the subject of photography workshops and they mentioned a relationship with CreativeLIVE that was formed in 2016. I casually said that I would love to teach a class on CreativeLIVE for Red Bull. A few months later, Red Bull got back to me and offered up an opportunity—and also asked for ideas and topics that I'd be interested in teach-

ing. My first inclination was to do a class on what I considered to be cutting edge lighting techniques—namely, the Hypersync, Hi-Sync, and High Speed Sync lighting techniques that I and several of my peers were playing with to create wild new images. Thus the idea for my recent class entitled [Advanced Lighting for Adventure Photography](#) was born. Here in this recap, I thought I would talk about the process of creating this class and also discuss working with three world-class athletes.

Putting together a CreativeLIVE class is a long and involved process. We, including the CreativeLIVE crew, Red Bull Photography and myself, spent months on this class before it ever went live. The process involved dozens of conference calls, numerous discussions about locations and logistics, two days of scouting in and around Bend, Oregon, four days on the pre-shoot and finally two days in the studio for the live class. Because there were so







*Previous Spread: A motion blur image of Tim Johnson riding cyclocross on the Lower Storm King trail near Bend, Oregon. Above: Portrait of Kai Lightner coiling a rope at Smith Rocks State Park near Redmond, Oregon. Right: An image shot by Niranh Chanthabouasy, a.k.a. Lil' Rock, of Michael Clark hanging on the top of Chain Reaction (5.12c) in Smith Rock State Park. Here in this image I am positioning myself to shoot straight down the arete visible just below.*





*Kai Lightner climbing Rude Boys (5.13c) at Smith  
Rock State Park near Redmond, Oregon.*











Above: Portrait of Kai Lightner coiling a rope at Smith Rocks State Park near Redmond, Oregon. To capture this portrait of Kai, we used one Elinchrom ELB 1200 strobe and a Hasselblad medium format camera. We used a Deep Octa soft box to modify the light on Kai. Right: Dylan Bowman trail running on the Storm King trail near Bend, Oregon. For this lighting setup we used a light trap, which is a two light setup where the lights are positioned in a straight line and pointed at each other. Hence, timing is critical in getting the shot as the two light setup is focused on one position.





Right: Portrait of Tim Johnson after riding on the Lower Storm King trail near Bend, Oregon. This portrait was created using a standard three light set up and also using Elinchrom's Hi-Sync technology, which allowed us to sync at a fast shutter speed and blur the busy background. Below: Kai Lightner climbing Chain Reaction (5.12c) at Smith Rock State Park near Redmond, Oregon. Here again, we were able to light the entire climb with one battery-powered flash set up about sixty-feet away from the climb.





many people involved, including three amazing athletes (two of whom are Red Bull athletes), and our local support crew in Bend, we had to dot every “i” and cross every “t” before the pre-shoot so we could cover everything we needed for the live presentation.

Red Bull Photography actively works to both promote their photographers and also improve their photographers skills. Their collaboration with CreativeLIVE was an effort to do both. I know of no other company that works to further the skills of their content creators like Red Bull does. To that end, Red Bull brought in five established Red Bull photographers to participate in the pre-shoot. It was great fun working with the CreativeLIVE crew, hanging out with the Red Bull Photography crew and also getting to know these five photographers from all over the USA. It was also pretty stressful trying to keep track of what I was supposed to be talking about, making sure the Red Bull photographers were getting something out of the pre-shoot, making sure Red Bull Photography was happy with how it was going, and also making sure I got at least a few decent images in the limited time we had. Thankfully the CreativeLIVE crew were so good at their jobs it made the whole pre-shoot a lot easier for me. In particular, Kathy Ramos, the producer of this class, was a god-send in keeping me on task and managing a lot of the logistics in the background.

In all honesty, I try to get stellar images while teaching, and I definitely got a few of Kai Lightner that will go into my portfolio, but it is hard both to teach and concentrate on the image-making process. While shooting with Kai Lightner and Ian Caldwell out in Smith Rock, it all came together. I chose the route Chain Reaction, which was the main climb we photographed Kai on in Smith Rock,

because it was a striking arete and it would be easy to light and create a stunning composition. At the end of the day we even set up a two-light setup (as seen on the following page) where I shot from above. This is the first time I have photographed a climber from above with a two-light setup. The images from above are so different than any rock climbing images I have ever seen that I am not sure I like them. As you can tell, even when teaching I am experimenting. If you get nothing else from the course, hopefully you see that lighting is all one big experiment.

Working with Tim Johnson, a world class cyclocross rider, and Dylan Bowman, a top ultra runner, was another highlight of the pre-shoot. They are both incredible athletes. The location we found on the Lower Storm King trail outside of Bend, Oregon worked for the class but I would love to work with both athletes again in a location with a more scenic background. In both shoots with Tim and Dylan, I feel like I only got the starting point of a good image and didn't have time to experiment and dial it in. That is the hard part about any workshop—it is very difficult to show in a workshop just how hard a professional photographer pushes the envelope to get those incredible images when on an actual assignment.

In the end, the actual live presentation at the CreativeLIVE studios in Seattle, Washington was the easy part. Don't get me wrong, it was exhausting being live and on camera all day for two days straight, but the CreativeLIVE crew are so good at their jobs, they make it easy for us on the live days. My thanks again to CreativeLIVE and Red Bull Photography for this opportunity and to all the athletes who worked so hard for us. If you would like to check out the class, go to [www.creativelive.com](http://www.creativelive.com).





*Kai Lightner, lit by two strobes on opposite sides of the climb, climbing Chain Reaction (5.12c) at Smith Rock State Park near Redmond, Oregon.*



# Misconceptions

by Michael Clark

Working as an adventure photographer isn't as glamorous as most people seem to think it is. For those looking to make a career in photography, the realization that it isn't a constant stream of exciting adventures weeds out a whole lot of people. I wrote a whole book trying to dispel this misconception that I am constantly on the move traveling from one exotic location to another having crazy adventures (that was my book entitled *Exposed: Inside the Life and Images of a Pro Photographer*). Sometimes, like this past summer, I am on the move constantly for a few months, but none of the locations were what I would consider exotic. I do get to some very exotic locations a few times a year but those are not the norm. Still, I realize that my job is not the norm, and that it is quite exciting (at times) compared to the standard 9 to 5 job.

When the dreaded "What do you do?" question comes up at parties or get togethers I always try to play it off as something mundane. I reply, "I am a photographer" and hope they don't explore farther. If they do, the "I am an adventure sports photographer" reply strikes the match on a flurry of questions and fascination, often completely taking over the larger conversation, which I feel bad about. I will admit, my lifestyle is sometimes quite adventurous, not just in terms of going out and having outdoor adventures with world-class athletes, as shown in this

issue of the Newsletter, but also in the mundane things that every freelancer deals with. Most of my time is spent in the office trying to get that next assignment. The actual amount of time I spend shooting images is quite small compared to how much time I spend on keeping the business running. While I do have some serious adventures most of my time is spent dealing with taxes, creating and executing promo campaigns, editing images, setting up the next shoot, and dialing in logistics. These are just a few of the things that happen on a daily basis here in the office.

Being a freelancer also means that your income is all over the map. Luckily, I have gotten to a point in my career where it isn't always so desperate financially, but as the assignment budgets get bigger that just means the cash flow issues are different, and not necessarily less frequent. The stress is intense on the bigger jobs. Failure is not an option. Adventure photography is extremely hard work, and often involves some serious suffering. But when you do come through big-time and surpass expectations, as happened with this latest kayaking shoot, there is a huge high. You can't stay on the mountain top forever, though if I am being honest, it feels like the last few months I have been camped on that mountain top. This career isn't always glorious, but I wouldn't trade my job for any other.



# parting shot

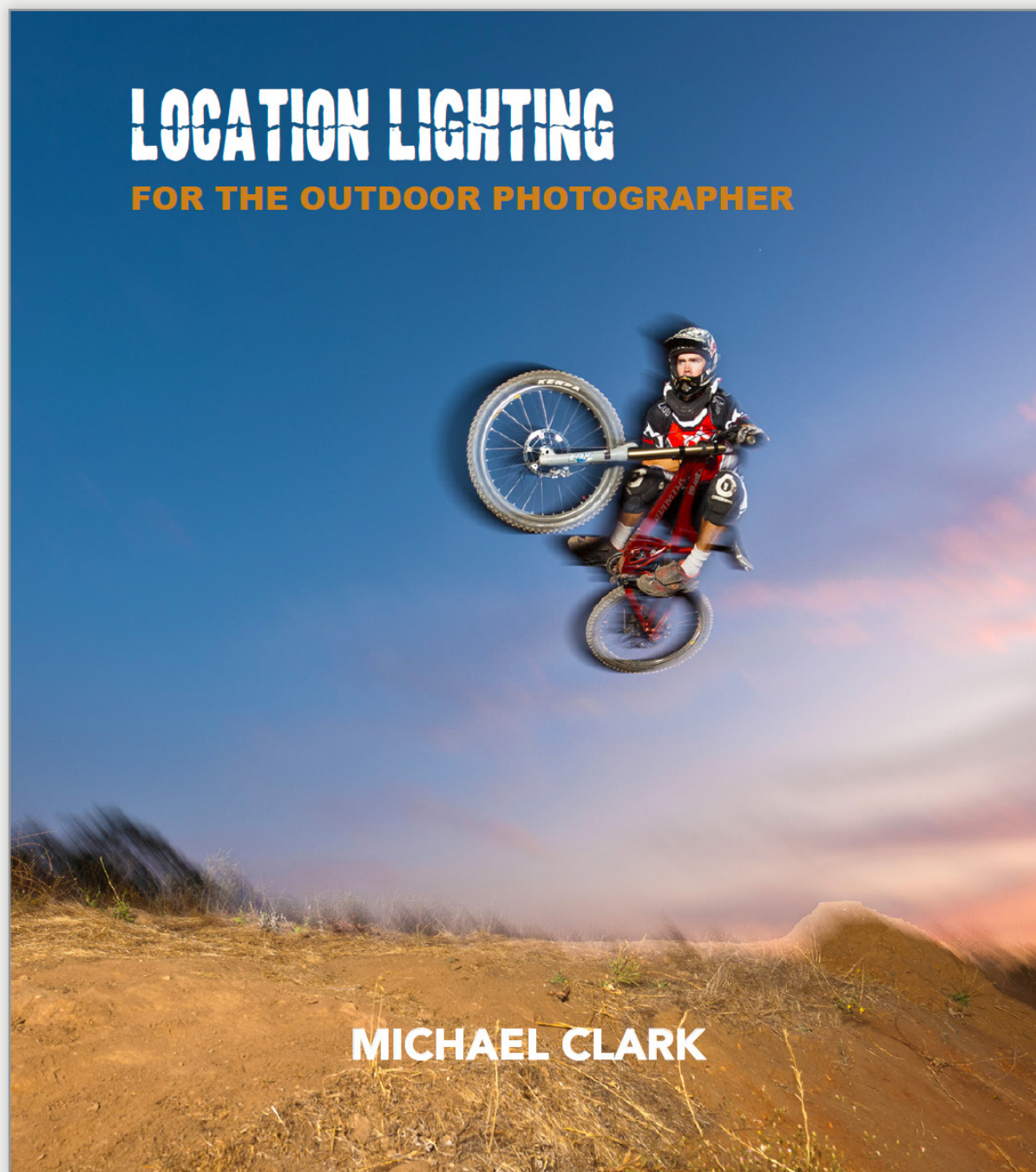


*Michael Clark hanging next to Spirit Falls as Rafa Ortiz kayaks over the falls during the Lighting the Spirit assignment. Image by Jorge Henao.*



ADVERTISEMENT

**Location Lighting. For The Outdoor Photographer.**



**Realized. Shaping your Images with Light.**

**PURCHASE & DOWNLOAD THIS E-BOOK AT [WWW.MICHAELCLARKPHOTO.COM](http://WWW.MICHAELCLARKPHOTO.COM)**