

NEWSLETTER

MICHAEL CLARK

PHOTOGRAPHY



SUMMER 2021



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Cover Image: Kirby Chambliss flying above the Flying Z Ranch at the Red Bull Air Force Training Camp in Los Alamos, California on April 5, 2021. Image captured using a GoPro Hero 9 mounted on the wing of the airplane. Opposite Page: The wild desert landscape in the Valley of Fire State Park as seen from Highway 169 just north of Las Vegas, Nevada.





Upside Down

Vaccinated and hanging out with Skydivers on several recent Assignments

This spring, was decently busy as the vaccines started rolling out here in the USA. I had quite a few fun assignments but because all of the images were under embargo I could not share them and had very little to support a Spring issue of the Newsletter. Hence, a lot of those images are appearing here in this Summer issue. As can be seen on the cover and the opposite page, as well as in the feature story of this issue, I have been spending a lot of time with sky divers and pilots this year—notably the Red Bull Air Force, whom I have worked with on at least a dozen or more assignments over the last ten years. Over the years, I have created some iconic images with them and this year was no different.

During my assignment working with the team for their 2021 Training Camp, world-renown helicopter pilot Aaron Fitzgerald told me to come up and sit left seat in his aerobatic helicopter after I had been flying with him for a few days. He wanted to take me up to do his entire aerobatic show, which lasted about six minutes and involves several 360 upside down maneuvers—in a helicopter! There are only a few helicopters in the World capable of going upside down and even fewer pilots skilled enough to pull off this maneuver. Helicopters technically are not supposed to go upside down.

On page 33 you can see a fisheye image of us inverted

(note the horizon). I kept my camera firmly on my lap—so as not to injure myself or cause any mayhem in the cabin—and shot series of images during each maneuver. In all we did at least a dozen or more inverted stunts and with Aaron calling them out I was able keep the horizon locked in and hold onto my lunch.

In addition to working with the Red Bull Air Force, I have also taught a few workshops this year, worked with the Highlight Sky Diving Team (an all female sky diving team) and also worked with the Red Bull Air Force again at the Indy 500 (see the portfolio spread). This summer has been a little slower than usual, probably because everyone hit the road and took a vacation after a year of being couped up but hopefully things will ramp up again this fall if the Covid Delta Variant doesn't cause too much of a spike in cases. 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 buzzing a hot air balloon during the Red Bull Air Force Training Camp in Los Alamos, California on April 6, 2021.

Recent Clients: Red Bull, New Mexico Tourism, Colorado Tourism, Highlight Skydiving Team, Red Bulletin, Digital Photography Review, Yeti and Talweg Creative.



Super Resolution

Michael's Super Resolution Blog Post appears on DPReview and PetaPixel

On March 10, 2021, Adobe dropped its latest software updates via the Creative Cloud and among those updates was a new feature in Adobe Camera Raw (ACR) called "Super Resolution." This new feature has also since been introduced in Lightroom Classic as well. The same day this new feature was announced I played around with it thinking that it could really open up the possibility of making larger prints from low resolution digital images, like those created with my old 12 megapixel Nikon D700 over a decade ago. After some testing I was blown away by how well the new feature worked and wrote a [blog post](#) that was subsequently picked up by both [PetaPixel](#) and [DPReview](#). Below are a few of the opening paragraphs from the original blog post:

You can mark this day down as a major shift in the photo industry. I have seen a bit of reporting out there on this topic from the likes of PetaPixel and F-stoppers, but other than that the ramifications of this new feature in ACR have not been widely promoted from what I can see. The new Super Resolution feature in ACR essentially upsizes the image by a factor of four using machine learning, i.e. Artificial Intelligence (AI). From the PetaPixel article on this new feature they interviewed Eric Chan from Adobe, who was quoted as saying:

"Super Resolution builds on a technology Adobe launched

two years ago called Enhance Details, which uses machine learning to interpolate RAW files with a high degree of fidelity, which resulted in images with crisp details and fewer artifacts. The term 'Super Resolution' refers to the process of improving the quality of a photo by boosting its apparent resolution," Chan explains. "Enlarging a photo often produces blurry details, but Super Resolution has an ace up its sleeve: an advanced machine learning model trained on millions of photos. Backed by this vast training set, Super Resolution can intelligently enlarge photos while maintaining clean edges and preserving important details."

What does this mean practically? Well, I immediately tested this out and was pretty shocked by the results. Though it might be hard to make out in the screenshot (see the following page), I took this surfing image, which was captured a decade ago with a Nikon D700 — a 12 MP camera, and ran the Super Resolution tool on it and the end result is a 48.2 MP image that looks to be every bit as sharp (if not sharper) than the original image file. This means that I can now print that old 12 MP image at significantly larger sizes than I ever could before.

For more information on this stellar new feature in Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom Classic check out my [Super Resolution](#) blog post. Thank you Adobe!



workshops

Photography Workshops

An overview of workshops and online classes with Michael Clark

Each 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 workshops I will be teaching in 2021. With Covid still ravaging the World, my workshops are a mix of in-person and online sessions depending on the workshop, the location and the current state of the Pandemic. Hopefully by the end of the summer here in the USA most folks will have received the vaccine and no other strains of the virus have mutated. 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 VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS

Online via Skype or Zoom

Email info@michaelclarkphoto.com to Schedule

With the Covid-19 virus running freely here in the USA, I am doing quite a few online tutorials and 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 \$85/hour and discounts apply for multiple hour sessions.

ADVENTURE PHOTOGRAPHY

Summit Photography Workshops

Jackson, Wyoming

September 8 - 11, 2021

Set out on a photography journey in the Grand Tetons with our faculty of adventure photographers and editors from National Geographic, Red Bull, The North Face, and more. Work with the expert photographers and learn the shooting and scouting techniques that they use to land their images in top publications, meet the editors behind some of the world's most daring photography expeditions and learn how they hire photographers, and even spend a night camping with the faculty as you network with them throughout the workshop.

In this workshop, you'll be exposed to every aspect of adventure photography, from adventure and outdoor sports photography to product and outdoor commercial photography. The Adventure Workshop is for photographers



The Grand Teton rising above Jackson, Wyoming during a previous Summit Adventure Photography Workshop. As part of the workshop we photograph a variety of different adventure sports during the workshop working with incredible athletes. If you are into adventure photography then this is the workshop for you.

of all ages and skill levels, and although some hiking is required, there is no recommended minimum level of fitness.

Topics covered in this workshop include: The Business of Adventure Photography, How to Shoot Trail Running, Climbing, Kayaking, Lifestyle, and more! We will also discuss the following: How to Light Outdoor Action and Adventure Sports. How to Pitch an Adventure/Expedition Shoot to an Editor. How to Effectively Shoot Outdoor Product Photography. Film making Techniques. How to Solve Real Life Problems On-Lo-

cation. Freelance Photography and How to Sell Your Photos.

*** Covid Note: Some classroom activities such as lectures and portfolio reviews may be held in person or remotely before/ after the workshop via Zoom, depending on Covid restrictions that might be in place at the time of the workshop. For the time being these activities have been left off of the schedule and we will keep everyone updated as the summer progresses.*

Workshop Instructors: Ryan Taylor, Jen Edney, Savannah

Cummins, Ted Hesser, Elise Streck, and Michael Clark.

Cost: \$1,795.00

Notes: You do not need to be a climber, hiker, kayaker, or adventure athlete to participate in this workshop. However, expect to hike, move across steep terrain, get wet, get rained on, and probably snowed on.

For more information and to register for this workshop visit the [Summit Photography Workshops](#).

JAPAN: THE ART OF MOTION

Nobechi Creative - Multiple Locations in Japan

May 2022

Instructors: Michael Clark and George Nobechi

Not just a travel photo tour, not just a lighting workshop, but a unique opportunity to photograph Japan in Motion: Martial artists, theatre performers, bullet trains and festivals to create a strong, dynamic body of work that will have your friends and colleagues in awe of your photography, while learning invaluable lighting techniques courtesy of Michael, and diving deeply into the beautiful Japanese culture through George.

Japan is a country constantly on the move. With the fastest bullet trains in the world, and sports old and new, there are ample opportunities to create ambitious images of both the modern and ancient Japanese culture in motion. In this photography workshop with Michael Clark and George Nobechi we will push ourselves to create dynamic images that impart motion into the world of still photography. Using advanced lighting techniques*** with both strobes and continuous lights (not to worry if you

are new to lights—Michael and George will be there to help you), incorporating motion blur, and featuring incredible athletes and martial artists we will set up a wide variety of scenarios to produce stunning images.

Michael has spent the entirety of his career capturing images of athletes in motion in remote locations for some of the most prestigious clients in the World including Apple, Nike, Nikon, Fujifilm, Red Bull, Nokia, National Geographic, Sports Illustrated and many more. In Japan we will adapt his techniques to a wide variety of traditional sports, performances, culture and events in stunning locations. The aim of this workshop is to craft images that are dramatic, unusual and out of the norm—images that stand out and grab the viewer's attention but are unmistakably Japanese.

We will start with a few days in Tokyo, where we have access to some phenomenal athletes and performing artists in a variety of venues. For the second part of the workshop we will head out into the beautiful Japanese countryside and work with martial artists, dancers and traditional performers. In addition we will have the opportunity to photograph an exhilarating festival, where we will be able to take the techniques we have learned and use them in an uncontrolled environment. Throughout the workshop we will have plenty of time to really get creative and explore the possibilities in each location.

Of course, throughout the workshop, Michael will also share his extensive knowledge of digital workflow and show participants how he works up his images to a very high level. Each day will find us on location capturing powerful images in addition to image critiques, discussions on various techniques, and thinking through the



Image from the Fushimi Inari Taisha near Kyoto, Japan. Even though we won't be going to the Fushimi Inari Taisha, Japan offers some incredible photographic opportunities and in Japan: The Art of Motion workshop we will explore the possibilities of capturing athletes, martial artists and actors performing in the landscape.

types of images we hope to create that day. Michael first visited Japan in May of 2019 and enjoyed the country so much he immediately hatched the idea to coordinate with George on creating this unique workshop. George, with his extensive knowledge of Japan, and its culture, will be our guide to help us stay true to the traditions and also dial in our experience so that we not only come away with incredible images but also get to experience a side of Japan that is rarely seen by tourists. George will also instruct you in filling out your Japan portfolio with carefully crafted landscapes, environmental portraits and still-life shooting around the main workshop photography led and taught by Michael.

Class size: 6 people (Minimum 5 people required for the class to proceed -- Note that this workshop has already met its minimum.) In terms of Covid-19 and this in-person workshop we will be making that call in Spring 2022.

***All lighting equipment will be provided by Elinchrom and Michael Clark will be there to help fine tune and set up the lighting for all participants.

Cost: TBD

For more information and to register for this workshop visit the [Nobechi Creative 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! Thank you Michael! It was a great pleasure being part of this workshop with so many other amazing photographers and a great pleasure to meet you. 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

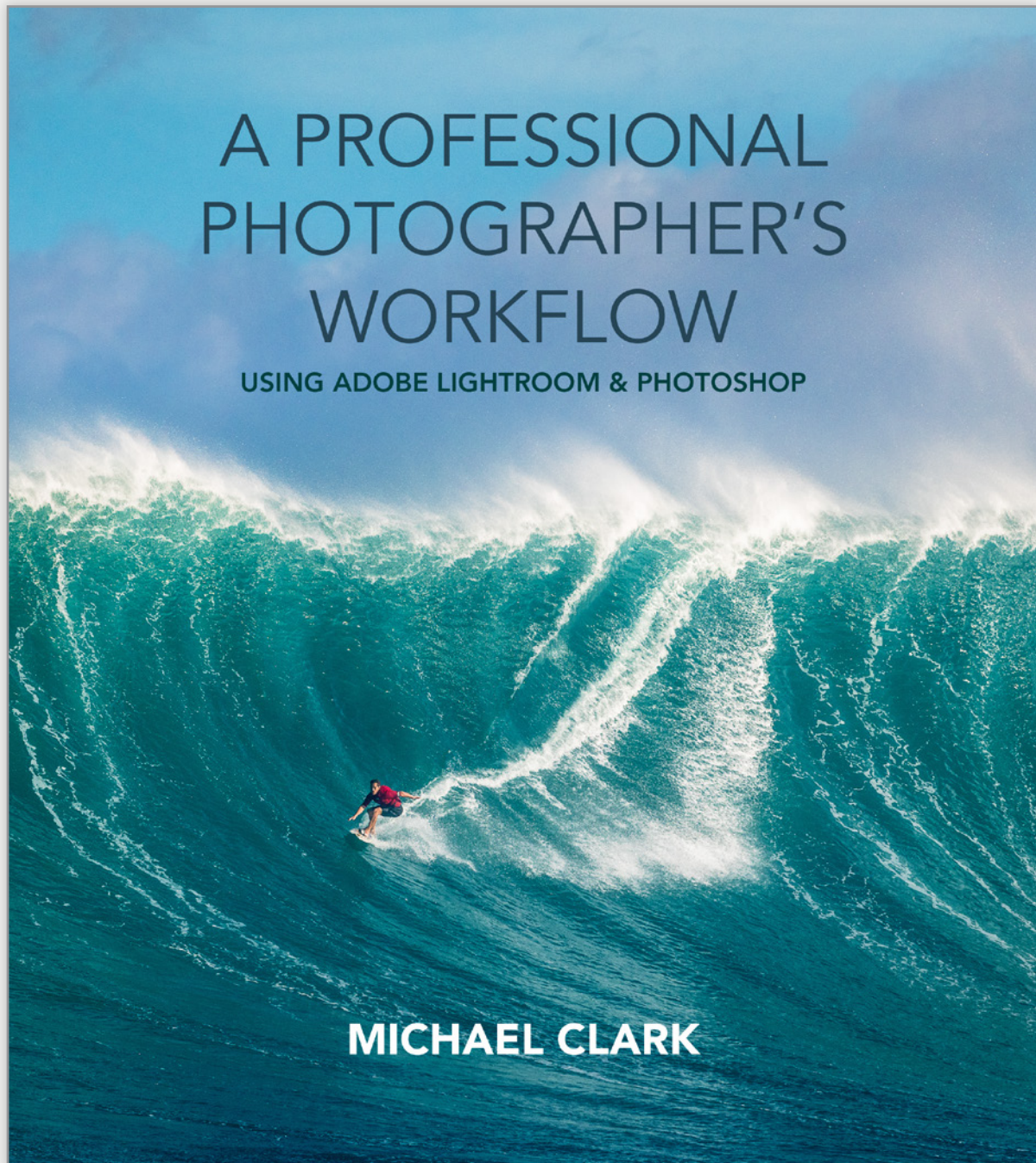
"Priceless chance to learn from the absolute best. Every photographer should take this class!" - Jill Sanders, The Professional Photographer's Digital Workflow available on CreativeLIVE

"Michael is a true professional and readily explains all of the nitty gritty issues of a photographer's digital workflow, including important things like Color Management, Lightroom workflows, Printing, and more. He has a thorough knowledge and passion that he loves to share. He can get way deep into the subject, which I found fascinating. You can tell Michael has great experience in teaching and also likes to learn from his students. He is very authentic, honest, and direct. I highly recommend this class, and look forward to another one of Michael's courses in the future!" - Kristen, The Professional Photographer's Digital Workflow on CreativeLIVE

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!

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equipment preview

FUJIFILM GF80mm F/1.7 R WR Lens

The fastest aperture lens ever created for medium format cameras



Disclaimer: While I am not one of Fujifilm's X-Photographers, I was paid to work with the FUJIFILM GFX 100S on a recent assignment as part of the launch for that camera. I was also provided the GF80mm f/1.7 R WR lens to use on the assignment. I want my readers to be aware of this up front. With that in mind, also know that the older GFX 100 has been my main kit for the last two years and the GFX 100S will be a

welcome addition. As such, I am certainly biased. I am always looking for the best image quality and the best cameras and lenses for my needs.

The Fujifilm GF80mm f/1.7 R WR lens, equivalent to a 63mm lens in full-frame (i.e. 35mm), is the fastest aperture medium format lens ever produced.



This image (above) of Joey Cohn on the route “Keep Your Powder Dry” (5.12b) at The Trophy Wall in Red Rocks just outside of Las Vegas, Nevada was created with the FUJIFILM GF 80mm f/1.7 lens. The narrow f/2.8 aperture helped separate him from the background. Tech Specs: f/2.8 at 1/1,600th second, ISO 100.

With a maximum aperture of f/1.7, equal to an approximate aperture of f/1.35 in 35mm, this 80mm lens creates incredible background blur. It also happens to be the sharpest lens I have ever used. The images are astoundingly sharp—especially when using the FUJIFILM GFX 100 or the new GFX 100S. I am not sure if it is just the copy of this lens that I have or if it is slightly sharper than the venerable GF110mm f/2, but either way, the image

quality offered by this optic is shockingly good. Ok, there you have it, end of review....just kidding.

I have known about this lens for quite a long time—both having worked with Fujifilm and also reading the rumors online. When I first got it in my hands last fall, while working with the GFX 100S for the launch of that camera, I was quite surprised at how small and light this lens is.

As can be seen on the following page, without the lens hood (which makes it look quite a bit bigger), the lens seems smaller than some full-frame 85mm f/1.4 equivalents. It is definitely smaller than the Sigma ART 85mm f/1.4 lens and about the same size and weight as my old Nikkor AF-S 85mm f/1.4. With the larger image circle that the GF80mm lens needs to cover this is quite the feat. It balances quite well on the new GFX 100S and especially well on the larger GFX 100 body as well.

There are definitely times while shooting in low light where I have wished for a super fast medium format lens like this. I think fast primes really help to round out a system and make it more versatile for working in tough lighting conditions (as in the MARSOC assignment I had a few years ago where we shot everything at night). I shot some on that assignment with the 110mm f/2 lens but most of it was shot using full frame Nikon Z cameras because I needed a 24mm f/1.4 lens, which doesn't exist in the GFX system—or in any medium format system for that matter. I would love to see Fujifilm release a GF30mm f/1.7 or something along those lines in the future, even though it would be massive and super expensive.

While working with the Downhill Skateboarders last fall for the launch of the GFX 100S, I did snap a few portraits with the GF80mm lens as shown on pages 18 and 19. At the time, I was quite impressed with how snappy the autofocus was and how it nailed focus on the eyes using the Eye AF mode. When I got back to the hotel and downloaded the images, I was blown away at how razor sharp the images were as well.

I did notice that wide open at f/1.7 there is a hint of Chromatic Aberration (CA), but only the slightest amount and

you would really have to go looking for it to see anything. It probably stood out to me because I have rarely if ever seen any CA with any of the other GFX lenses. Compared to fast lenses in the full-frame world (like an 85mm f/1.4) this lens doesn't really have enough CA to even mention, and compared to the Hasselblad HC100mm f/2.2 lens—which had the worst CA I have ever seen in a lens—the GF80mm is remarkable in this respect, i.e. in its lack of CA.

Having worked with my own copy of the lens now for the last six months, I have photographed much more than just portraits as can be seen in this article. The rock climbing image on page 15 was created while working with DPReview. Action photography, as many like to remind me, isn't necessarily what the GFX cameras are made for—and the GF80mm lens is not intended to be an action lens of any sort—but in a situation like this where the object is moving up the wall and not really changing their distance from the camera it worked quite well. The GF80mm has slightly slower autofocus than any of the GFX zooms or the faster primes (like the GF23mm and GF250mm), but that is not unusual. Pretty much all of the fast primes for any sensor size have larger bits of glass in them and tend to focus slower than the zooms or slower prime lenses—no matter what system you look at. As an example, my old F-mount Nikkor 85mm f/1.4G wasn't exactly slow to focus but it isn't nearly as fast in terms of its AF tracking capabilities as the recent Nikkor 70-200mm f/2.8G lens.

The GF80mm f/1.7 makes a little noise when it autofocuses, but not all the time. This fast prime is moving a sizable chunk of glass inside the lens. I would definitely not say the AF is slow, it seems pretty snappy to me. And

The new FUJIFILM GF80mm f/1.7 R WR lens is another masterpiece by the engineers at Fujifilm. It is one of the sharpest lenses I have used in the GFX lineup and rivals the 110mm f/2.0 and the GF45mm f/2.8, which is to say it rivals or exceeds the very best Fujifilm lenses. Image provided by Jonas Rask/FUJIFILM.





For this portrait of Joshua Newman I used the new GF80mm f/1.7 R WR lens and captured this image wide open at f/1.7. At 100% the image is tack sharp right on the eyes and the GFX 100S did a great job finding the eye and focusing on that, not the eyebrow. On the next page is a 100% crop of the eye—wicked sharp!

with the faster autofocus on the GFX 100 and GFX 100S, it seems quite accurate as mentioned above. In the image rock climbing image, I chose an f/2.8 aperture to create some background blur but not too much. I want the viewer to be able to place the climb and see some detail in the background, but also not have it be super sharp so the

climber stands out in the frame.

I don't want to make this a lengthy review as this lens is so good there isn't much else to say. It is razor sharp and fairly small considering what it is. It is also lightweight and fits into a camera bag very easily for such a fast prime

Here is a 100% crop of the image on the previous page. Note that the eye and eyelashes are tack sharp even at f/1.7 and the falloff in terms of focus is incredibly smooth.



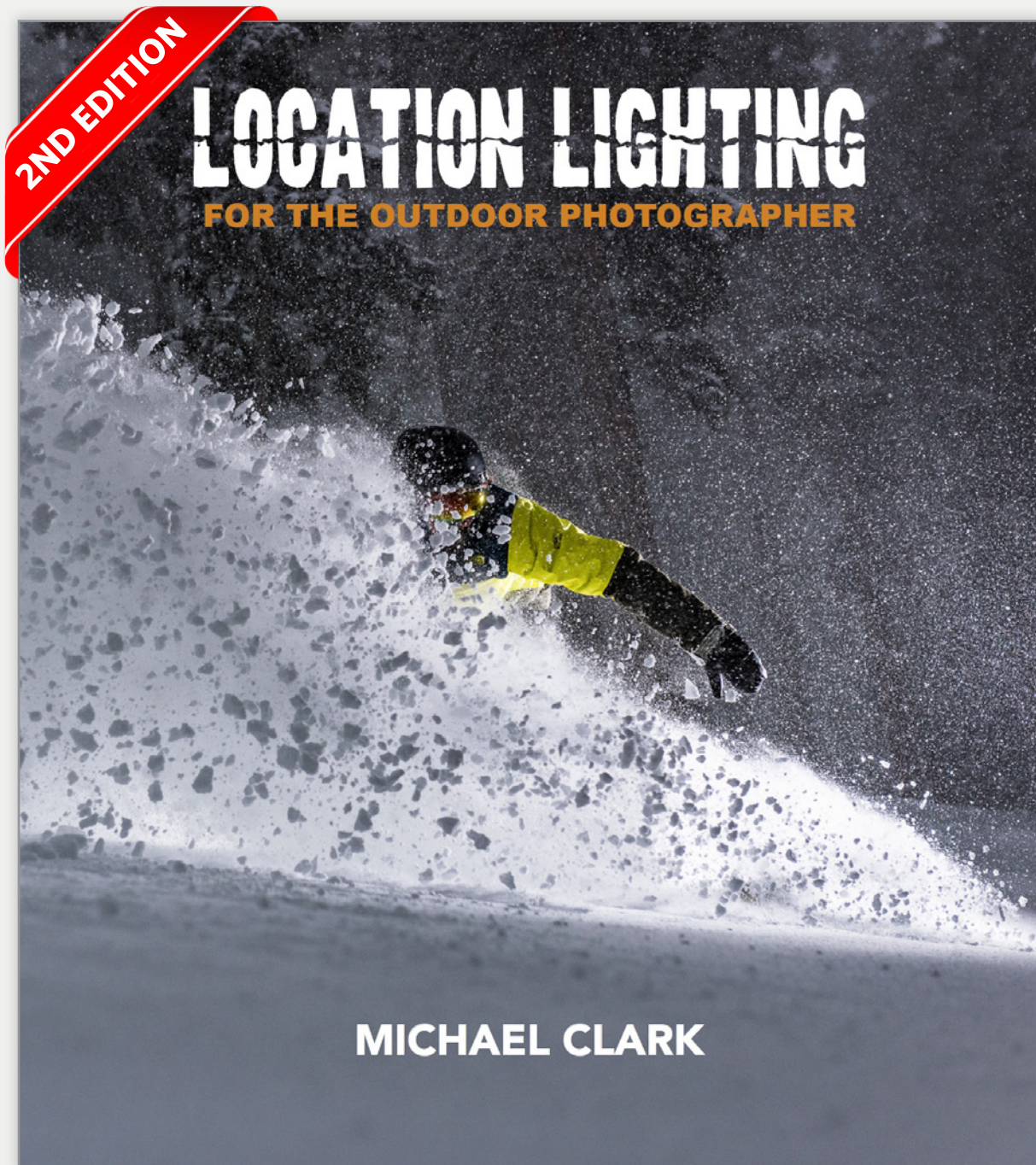


lens. 80mm lenses in the medium format world have never really been my favorite focal length, but because this one ends up at around a 63mm full-frame equivalent (because the sensor size is slightly smaller than the old 645 film cameras) I really dig the perspective it offers. The biggest issue with this lens is choosing between it and the GF110 f/2 when I pack up to go out on a shoot. Lately, because of the smaller size of the GF80mm f/1.7, I have been going with the 80mm lens instead of the GF110. The 80mm lens can focus a little closer than the 110, hence you can get fairly similar perspectives with both lenses just by taking a step closer to your subject. The other reason is that I typically always take the GF32-64 and the GF100-200 wherever I go and the GF80 fits in perfectly right between those two, making for a great lightweight medium format three-lens kit.

At \$2,299, I realize for most folks this is quite an expensive lens. But in context, looking at other medium format lenses of a similar breed, this is a bargain. The Hasselblad XCD 80mm f/1.9 Lens sells for \$4,845! That is more than twice what the Fujifilm GF80mm lens sells for and it isn't even as fast an aperture. Heck, even the Canon RF 85mm f/1.2 lens is \$400 more expensive than the GF80 so kudos to Fujifilm for making this a relatively inexpensive lens. On that note, all of the Fujifilm GFX lenses seem like a bargain when compared to the Hasselblad and Phase One equivalent lenses that cost two-to-three times as much. And even though they cost less, the GFX lenses in my experience are slightly sharper than the Hasselblad equivalents. Nice work on that front Fujifilm! For more information about the FUJIFILM GF80mm f/1.7 lens visit the [Fujifilm-X website](#).

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on assignment:



2021 TRAINING CAMP



Having worked with the [Red Bull Air Force](#) on more than a dozen assignments over the last decade, it is always nice to get the call for another gig with the team. I have gotten to know the crew pretty well over the years and even wearing a mask and a hat they recognized me instantly when I showed up at the 2021 Training Camp in Los Alamos, California earlier this spring. Imagine working with Superman and Superwoman on your next photography assignment and that gives a sense of what it is like working with the Red Bull Air Force.

I have photographed the last two Red Bull Air Force Training camps, which were held near Eloy, Arizona at Kirby Chambliss' Ranch. This year the team wanted to change it up and chose a location closer to the west coast so they could do some of the practice over the ocean and with a totally different landscape below. The team also extended the practice for a full five-days instead of the usual 3-day training camp. In addition to myself, Red Bull also hired the amazing [Jody MacDonald](#) to photograph the last three days of the training camp as well. Hence, we split up the days with me capturing the first few days, both of us overlapping on the third day and Jody covering the remaining two days. She got some crazy cool images as well so be sure to check out her website.

For this assignment, as with most of the training camps I have covered for Red Bull, they have a long list of deliverables including action images, a variety of portraits and those in-between lifestyle moments as well. Because of this, I chose to drive out to Los Alamos, California with a carload of cameras and lighting gear to pull off all of the various images. Flying with 600-pounds of lighting gear is possible but pretty pricey so it is often just a lot easier to make the drive—especially since a lot of my lighting

gear is super specific for [Hi-Sync flash](#) photography and difficult if not impossible to rent. Besides all of the lighting gear, I had three cases of different camera systems including a multitude of GoPros, a full-frame kit and my FUJIFILM GFX medium format system.

The Air Force team—as can be seen in this article—is quite adept at flying and sky diving with cameras mounted on helmets and on planes and helicopters so I made sure to bring extra camera bodies and the GoPros to mount as many remote cameras as possible whenever the action revved up. In fact, Andy Farrington, Luke Aikins and Jon DeVore are some of the best aerial cameramen in the business and often get hired to shoot for feature films around the world. Needless to say, this group knows how to capture some incredible content, be it video or stills.

In addition to the remotely mounted cameras, I am either on the ground, in a helicopter or in a plane photographing the group as they practice various maneuvers. Typically, where I can be and where the best possible shots can be captured is always part of the discussion with the team. In fact, they often dream up radical ideas and then place me in the best spot to get amazing images. At the training camp, they are there to practice new routines that they will perform for a variety of air shows and events—and also to create a ton of new content for Red Bull. They are true professionals who work incredibly hard to make it all happen.

On the equipment side of things, in early 2021 I sold off all of my Nikon DSLR kit including my venerable Nikon D850 camera bodies, which in the past have been my go to high resolution, fast-action cameras. This was the first assignment I would be going into with just mirrorless

Opening Spread: The Red Bull Air Force
skydiving during their 2021 Training Camp
in Los Alamos, California on April 6, 2021.
This Page: Kirby Chambliss going ballistic
while flying over the Pacific Ocean.



cameras. I had the Nikon Z6 and the Z7II along with several Nikkor Z lenses (everything from an 8mm fisheye lens up to 400mm with the Z 2.0 teleconverter). On the medium format front, I had the brand new FUJIFILM GFX 100S and a full bevy of stellar GFX lenses to go along with it. The Nikon Z6 and Z7II cameras are not the fastest cameras out there for capturing sports images but I found them and their autofocus more than capable for this assignment. All of the action images in this article were captured using the Nikon Z cameras. [Note: I am very much looking forward to the Nikon Z9, which should be introduced later this year and is slated to capture 30 fps at 45 MP if the rumors are true.]

I have to give Red Bull serious credit for how they put together this training camp. Since we were there in southern California in early April, Covid was still a major issue to deal with (and still is of course) but this was early days in the vaccine roll out so many of us had not yet been vaccinated. Before the assignment Red Bull had us get tested before showing up and when we did show up at the hotel we were tested right away with rapid tests. Red Bull brought in the same testing crews used for TV and Hollywood productions who had already done a lot of rapid tests and knew how to administer the testing very accurately. We also had a small boutique hotel that we mostly filled up. There were a few other guests but we essentially had the place to ourselves which meant we were free to hang out. At the skydiving ranch, they set up a full camp with a private chef for the entire five days who cooked us breakfast, lunch and dinner. The eating tables were giant eight foot circular tables with only two people per table and were spaced out. We were tested every other day to make sure we were all Covid-free. Essentially, Red Bull created a bubble where everyone was tested

and we wore masks at all times when we were in close proximity. No other client I have worked with in the past year has taken Covid-19 precautions so seriously as Red Bull. So kudos to Red Bull for doing it well!

As with every training camp, the team is amped to jump as much as possible the first few days of camp. This time around, it was also the first time the entire team had seen each other in two years so there were some late nights catching up as well after long training days. The team had a bevy of parachutes ready to go so I shot from the ground during the first few jumps, then loaded into the jump plane to shoot out the open door as they exited (see the image on the following page). I also worked with Aaron Fitzgerald, the Red Bull helicopter pilot, to shoot out of an open door in the back seat of the heli for a good portion of the day as well. At the sky diving ranch outside of Los Alamos, California, we had a hanger to work out of and during lunch I set up a mini studio in the back of the hanger out of the way so we could create new portraits of all the team members. Hence, in between jumps I would grab a few folks who had already packed their parachutes and spend five-to-ten minutes on headshots and some hilarious reaction images requested by Red Bull.

For the remotely mounted cameras we stuck to the GoPros (including several GoPro Hero 5 and Hero 9 cameras set to 2 fps timelapse photography mode) that first day as the crew got as many jumps in as possible. In the late afternoon I started mounting full-frame 35mm cameras on helmets. Those cameras were my Nikon Z7 II with a 14-30mm lens on it and Andy Farrington's Sony A7rIII with a 16-35mm lens on it. My Nikon was set to a timelapse mode at 4 fps so it continually shot for the entire jump or until Andy Farrington reached up and turned



The Red Bull Air Force exiting the jump plane during the 2021 Training Camp in Los Alamos, California on April 5, 2021. For this image I was seated just next to the exit door with my Nikon Z7 II and the Z 14-30mm lens. I blasted away as the sky divers flowed past me and out the door.

it off. Considering the last time I covered a training camp, Andy mounted the giant Nikon D4 and a fisheye lens on top of his helmet the diminutive Nikon Z7II and that tiny 14-30mm lens was a lot easier to deal with and created some pretty stunning results as can be seen in the opening spread of this article.

On this assignment, I spent quite a bit of time sitting in the back seat of a helicopter—either the Red Bull Helicopter or the shotover helicopter, which was there to

capture video. Normally, with a shotover helicopter (which has a gyro-stabilized camera mounted under the left front corner of the helicopter) no one else is allowed in the helicopter when they are shooting. But in this case they were open to having me in the back with an open door because the camera operator and cinematographer (one and the same person) sits up front in the left seat. Hence, we had a lot of options for capturing action from the air on this gig—and most of the video was being captured by the athletes themselves using GoPros.

The Red Bull Air Force flying over the Pacific Ocean during the 2021 Training Camp near Los Alamos, California on April 7, 2021.





Capturing images of Kirby Chambliss and Kevin Coleman, the stunt plane pilots, as well as Aaron Fitzgerald, the Red Bull helicopter pilot, is always challenging. Both Kevin and Aaron were new additions to the team so we definitely wanted to capture some great material of them in action. For the stunt planes, the GoPros really work incredibly well and we had GoPros mounted all over the planes for pretty much every flight. Any cameras larger than the GoPros would mess with the aerodynamics of the plane so they are really the only choice. This time around, the best image from the entire assignment (at least in my estimation) was one captured by a GoPro on Kirby's wing. This image (shown on the cover of this issue of the Newsletter) shows a wild reflection of the ground in Kirby's wing. They had just repainted his plane and chose a new color scheme. Little did I know (until I saw the images) just how well it reflected the ground or the sky above it. The image on the cover is interesting not just because of the reflection but because he is actually upside down—and that makes you look at the image a bit longer to figure it out. I have played with various orientations of this image and the way it is oriented on the cover just seems to feel right.

To document Aaron Fitzgerald in the Red Bull helicopter I worked mostly from the shotover helicopter and flew alongside him while strapped in and shooting out an open door. On that first evening we went out at sunset and buzzed a hot air balloon (which we were working with a few days later) and Aaron did back flips in the helicopter right next to the balloon. All I can say is the folks on that balloon ride got one hell of a show!

A few days later, after having spent a considerable amount of time flying back seat with Aaron in the Red

Bull helicopter, he told me to come up and sit left seat after I had been flying with him all afternoon. He wanted to take me up to do his entire aerobatic show, which lasted about six minutes and involves several 360 upside down maneuvers—in a helicopter! My first reaction was, "That sounds great, but I don't want to puke in your helicopter." Aaron assured me it wouldn't be too bad and instructed me how to follow the horizon from the windows above and below the front seats to keep ourselves oriented and our stomachs at bay. I told myself, "Well, if there is ever a time to do this, then this is it—and Aaron is one of the best pilots in the World." I trusted him completely. Once I got strapped in and locked down with the five-point harness I grabbed my Nikon Z7 II and a fisheye lens to document the experience. On page 33 you can see a fisheye image of us inverted (note the horizon). I kept my camera firmly on my lap—so as not to injure myself or cause any mayhem in the cabin—and shot series of images during each maneuver. I knew that if I tried to raise the camera at any point and we shifted our position quickly at the same time I could nail my face with the camera or worse. I had the camera tethered to my harness as well so it couldn't go on walkabout in the cabin and result in a catastrophe. In all we did at least a dozen or more inverted stunts and with Aaron calling them out I was able keep the horizon locked in and hold onto my lunch.

There are only a few helicopters in the World capable of going upside down and even fewer pilots skilled enough to pull off this maneuver. Helicopters technically are not supposed to go upside down. Once we landed, Aaron congratulated me on being on of a very small number (a few dozen) to ever go upside down in a helicopter. That six or seven minutes was definitely a highlight of the

The Red Bull Air Force wingsuit skydiving and practicing a new formation during their 2021 Training Camp in Los Alamos, California on April 5, 2021.







Previous Page: Portraits (from top left in clockwise direction) of Amy Chemlecki, Aaron Fitzgerald, Luke Aikins, and Andy Farrington created during the Red Bull Air Force Training Camp. Above: Aaron Fitzgerald and Michael Clark upside down in the Red Bull helicopter as Aaron practices his helicopter acrobatics show.

assignment for me and gets stacked on many other amazing experiences I have had working with the Red Bull Air Force.

Over the course of three days we managed to get studio

portraits of all the team members (as shown on the previous page) as well as an insane number of action images. In all, I captured over 25,000 still images on this assignment with 68 percent of those images being captured by the GoPro cameras. As you might imagine, this



Above: Miles Daisher Sky-yaking during the Red Bull Air Force Training Camp. Next Page: Kirby Chambliss flying his aerobatic routine during the Red Bull Air Force Training Camp in Los Alamos, California on April 7, 2021. He came in so low in this valley that we couldn't even see him from our vantage point until he pulled up.

creates a major workflow challenge to deal with after the fact. Luckily, Red Bull did not need images right away, which gave me a few weeks to go through everything. For the GoPro images I typically make short timelapse movies to see where the best images might be in the sequence instead of going through them all one by one. The reality with this kind of gig and action happening all over the place is that you have to shoot a lot of images or you will miss something that could easily be the best image of the training camp—or the best image ever of the team. In

all, I worked up well over 200 images, which is a massive number of images to fully work up from any assignment. There were just too many good images to leave untouched and Red Bull paid for all the extra work as well.

On the third day of the camp, my last day with the team, we spent the majority of it on the coast flying over the Pacific Ocean. The team was practicing flying in formation with both Kirby (in his plane) and Aaron (in the Red Bull helicopter) as shown in the spread starting on Page



28. After the team flew together Kirby put on one hell of a show over the ocean and I captured it from the Shovtover helicopter as shown on page 25. The uber-clean background of the Pacific Ocean helped to create some really unique images of the team. Sadly, there isn't space here to show all of the amazing images captured on this assignment. To see more from this assignment check out the [Red Bull gallery](#) on my website.

As usual with the Red Bull Air Force training camps, you come off these on a high. It is always an honor to work with these incredible athletes and every opportunity I get

to photograph them results in stellar images. They keep thanking me for making such cool images of them and I tell them, "It isn't hard to create cool images of them."

About a month after we finished the training camp I got another opportunity to work with the Air Force at the Indianapolis 500, where the team set up a slalom race course in the sky and wingsuited through the pylons to open the race. There is never a dull moment with this crew. Afterwards, we watched the Indy 500 race and the following spread was the result. My thanks to Red Bull for yet another amazing assignment with the Air Force.

portfolio





Finding your Voice

by Michael Clark

Last year, at the beginning of the Covid lock down in the USA, I watched a documentary entitled “Miles Davis: The Birth of Cool” on Netflix. In one part it talked about how Miles spent a few years early on experimenting with a lot of different techniques to find his sound. That part about “finding his sound” hit me and made me think hard if I have found my true sound with my photography. After 26 years as a professional photographer, in some ways I feel like I am still trying to find it.

Obviously if you see my work, or have been following me for any length of time, you would think I have found my voice and my look but as a working pro there is a constant move to adapt new and different technologies, techniques and concepts to keep pushing the work in a new, exciting direction. Of course, over the last 26 years I have incorporated a variety of artificial lighting techniques into my work—and that has revolutionized both my images and my client base.

Interestingly, during this Covid-19 pandemic, because I have been home more than at any other time in my career I have also picked up the guitar again. I used to play two-to-three hours a day back when I lived in Austin, Texas both during and after University. It is great to pick it back up and crank up the amp and the distortion. I have always found it to be a great release. Somehow the sound

of a distorted screaming amp feels like a warm blanket of consolation in these strange and scary times.

I have also spent more money than I care to admit on new guitars, amps, pedals and the like in search of new and exciting sounds to envelope myself in. I am not looking to play in a band again or in public, the music is just for me—an indulgence. Guitarists in general seem to spend enormous amounts of money just to get a certain tone that echoes their guitar heroes—or helps them express themselves. Just as musicians, and especially guitarists, are always seeking a gorgeous tone or sound, it seems a very apropos comparison to photographers finding their look—or their voice. Note that I am specifically using the word “voice” here because not only does it matter what your images look like but what they communicate as well.

Finding your voice with any craft doesn’t happen overnight. It takes years and years of work, dedication and love of the craft. Gear will come and go, your passions and interests may change slightly, but the dedication and experimentation has to continue to keep pushing and perfecting the results. I still take workshops, read vociferously, and continue to push my own images to learn new ways of doing things. There is always something to learn. That is the beauty of a craft like photography, which is innately complex by its nature.

parting shot



Sebastian Johnson whitewater kayaking on the Clark Fork River in downtown Missoula, Montana.

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