NEWSLETTER

MICHAEL CLARK
PHOTOGRAPHY

WINTER 2016

contents

Cover Image: The Alps rising steeply above the alpine village of Chamonix, France. Shown in this image are the Glacier du Plan, the Aiguille de Blaitiere and the Dent du Caiman. Opposite Page: Michael Clark navigating a narrow path in Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument near Cochiti, New Mexico. Newsletter edited by Katherine Mast.

Big Decisions, Lots of Travel

Rolling into a marvelous new year and working with a top-end camera system

Last fall and this spring have been incredibly busy, which is why, yet again, this issue of the Newsletter is a bit late. As I write this, I am still recovering from over six weeks of travel to Patagonia, Hawaii and a recent backcountry ski assignment in Colorado. 2015 wrapped up as one of the most consistently busy years I have ever had. Last fall there were literally a few months where I spent more time in airports than I did in my own bed.

2016 might end up being one of the best years I have ever had in terms of travel as well. With the Patagonia Ice Cap and Hawaii already under my belt, and other exotic trips including the Lofoten Islands yet to come this year, 2016 has kicked off with a bang. My first assignment with Vertical Shot Expeditions on the ice cap was a huge success and there are some very exciting assignments in the works for this summer and fall.

In between all of this travel, I also managed to test out two medium format camera systems and made a major decision to step up and purchase a Hasselblad H5D 50c WiFi medium format digital camera system. I tried out both the Hasselblad and the Phase One XF camera systems last fall before making my decision. At this point I have shot a fair bit with the Hasselblad, but I am still building my lens kit and will have a full report in a later issue of the Newsletter. This purchase was a huge decision because the cost alone was enormous. At some point I will also lay out the reasoning for this decision, alongside a good number of new images created with the new camera.

I am amped up to create new and exciting work this year on a level I have never really contemplated before. The new Hasselblad system has me inspired in a way I haven't ever been before and I plan to put that camera to good use on a wide variety of subjects. As you can tell by the tone of this editorial, I am full of positive energy and I am very much looking forward to a great year.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the Newsletter, and I look forward to sharing many more stories from my upcoming travels and assignments with you in future issues of the Newsletter and on my blog.

Opposite Page: Parkour action at the Elinchrom booth at the ProFusion Expo in Toronto, Canada. This image was created while doing a demo shoot with Elinchrom Hi-Sync flash technology.

Recent Clients: Apple, Nikon, Red Bull, Elinchrom, Mac Group US, X-Rite, Vistek, National Geographic, Outdoor Photographer, Popular Photography, Velo Press and New Mexico Magazine.

Traversing the Patagonia Ice Cap

Perfect weather, lenticular clouds and a mountain cathedral

Earlier this year, as part of a Vertical Shot Expedition, I helped lead a team of photographers as we traversed the Patagonia Ice Cap near El Chalten, Argentina. This epic adventure was a long-time dream of mine to explore this area in much more detail. This trip was actually an extreme version of a photography trek, since myself and four participants, along with two excellent guides hiked and photographed our way around the Cerro Torre massif. We were lucky enough to have near perfect weather, which is very rare down there. We were also served up spectacular views of the incredible mountains. For a partial report on the trip check out the blog post I put up after we got back. I will have an in-depth report in an upcoming issue of the Newsletter. Stay tuned!

Behind the Scenes Video on Elinchromus.com

An In-Depth BTS video detailing a recent BMX Assignment for Elinchrom USA

Just recently, Elinchrom USA released a behind-the-scenes video of an assignment I shot for them last fall. This assignment had me working with BMX riders at a local set of dirt jumps here in my home town of Santa Fe, New Mexico. The entire point of this assignment, and the behind the scenes video for that matter, was to show how I would use Elinchrom's products to take my images to the next level with their venerable lighting gear.

To light the athletes, I used Elinchrom ELB 400 battery-powered strobes along with the new HS (Hi-Sync) flash heads and the Skyport Plus HS transmitters. The video shows how I set up each image, the gear involved, where the lights were placed and what light modifiers were used. The intent was to show how easy it is to get amazing images using this new lighting gear. For a full report on this assignment check out the feature article, entitled "Hi-Sync BMX," starting on page 16 in this Newsletter.

My thanks to Elinchrom and Mac Group USA, the US distributor for Elinchrom LTD, for this assignment and for the behind the scenes video. Also, a huge debt of thanks goes out to Bill Stengel and the crew who filmed the behind the scenes footage. Check out the full-length behind the scenes video on the Elinchrom USA website or on YouTube.

Photography Workshops

An overview of workshops and seminars with Michael Clark

Each year I teach several 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 2016. For the full description of these workshops and to find out how to register, go to the Workshops page on my website or blog.

Adventure Photography

Santa Fe, New Mexico - May 9-13, 2016

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.

Designed for intermediate to experienced photographers, this workshop concentrates on creating unique images of rock climbing, whitewater kayaking, mountain biking and trail running. Working with elite athletes and northern New Mexico's incredible landscape as our backdrop, we explore innovative ways to capture the essence of each sport and location. Topics covered during the week include research and preparation, composition and camera angles, equipment selection and use, using natural light, fill flash, and battery-powered strobes, and autofocus techniques.

Classroom time includes daily editing and critiquing sessions and one-on-one meetings with Michael. In addition, Michael shares his insights and experiences in the adventure marketplace, including career development, portfolios, and how to shoot for stock, editorial, and commercial clients. For a detailed itinerary and much more information on this workshop visit the Santa Fe Workshops website.

Cost: $1,250 plus $65 Model Fee

Photography Sailing Expedition in Arctic Norway

Lofoten islands, Norway - August 20 – 27, 2016

Now in its third edition, our sailing and photography expedition to the Norwegian Arctic islands of Lofoten is a rare chance to photograph pristine coastal locations which are inaccessible to others. To us, sailing rather than driving is the most logical way to fully experience and explore these stunning islands.

This small-group expedition (with a maximum of six participants) will use a very comfortable 47ft (14m) yacht built in 2012. The group will be guided by the renowned

A landscape image from the Lofoten Islands in northern Norway. This image, provided by Vertical Shot Expeditions, gives an idea of the stunning landscapes we can encounter on the Sailing expedition this August. For more information on this workshop read the detailed description below.

outdoor photographers Michael Clark and Vlad Donkov. The adventure starts in Svolvaer, the capital of the Lofoten Islands, and follows the coastline of the awe-inspiring mountainous islands, wild fjords and passages.

This sailing adventure is suitable for people without any previous sailing experience. However, participants should be adventurous by nature and ready to endure long days. This expedition is about chasing great light and experiencing places that most people never get to see!

Sailing presents us with plenty of opportunities to take photographs from unusual viewpoints and to reach locations only accessible by sea. In addition to the yacht, we will use an inflatable boat with an outboard engine. This will enable us to land at wild beaches and explore our surroundings on foot. There will be good chances of observing various whales and orca, as well as dolphins and seals. White-tailed eagles hunting for puffins and fish will also frequently keep us company.

For a detailed itinerary and much more information on this exciting workshop visit the Vertical Shot Expedition website.

Workshop fee: $4,500 [Please Note that this expedition is being run by Vertical Shot Expeditions, which is a European company so payments will be sent to Europe.]

Mentor Series Photo Trek: South Dakota

August 10-14, 2016

A sacred land of abounding beauty, the Badlands and Black Hills of South Dakota are distinguished by a landscape of sharply eroded buttes, pinnacles and spires that define the region. Join the Mentor Series and Nikon professional photographers Michael Clark & Reed Hoffmann in South Dakota to hone your photo skills at Badlands National Park, Mount Rushmore and Custer State Park.

At Badlands National Park, capture the vast prairies and grasslands amidst the extraordinary badland formations that were carved by wind and water over time. Mount Rushmore and the Needles of the Black Hills provide a vivid contrast to the badlands with their impressive granite pillars and towers.

At Black Hills Wild Horse Sanctuary, where more than 600 wild mustangs run free, we will photograph the wild horses close-up against the backdrop of the Black Hills and the Cheyenne River. Custer State Park will provide additional opportunities for improving your photo and lighting skills, including the stunning reflections across the beautiful Sylvan Lake.

For more information on this workshop visit the Mentor Series website. Workshop Fee: $1,525 [Includes transportation to each shooting location, park permit and entrance fees, in-field instruction, presentations, and digital review sessions.]

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 four 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, Spring 2015

"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 really enjoyed the surfing [photography] workshop! It was great on every level. I really can't thank you enough and I hope to take another of your workshops in the near future." - Ben Reed, 2013 Surfing Photo Workshop

"Just wanted you know how much fun I had during the workshop last weekend! I learned a lot a look forward to doing other workshops with you." – Jason Quevedo, Philadelphia Mentor Series Trek, Fall 2009

"Your workshop at Santa Fe was too good. The level of expertise that shared was top-notch and I hope to repeat this experience again. Thanks for such a great workshop!" - Participant in the 2008 Balloon Fiesta workshop taught by Andy Biggs and myself.

For more information on my upcoming workshops, or to read more testimonials, please visit the Workshops page on my website. Hope to see you at a workshop here soon! If you have any questions about any of my workshops please don't hesitate to call or email me.

The G-Tech G-Dock ev System

A hot-swappable hard drive system for photographers on the go

A few years ago when I updated my computer system, I also updated all of my backup storage to Thunderbolt RAID devices, which I detailed in my Winter 2015 Newsletter a year ago. When I upgraded all of my storage I also purchased the G-Technology G-Dock ev system, which consists of a docking station for portable 1 TB and 2 TB hard drives. As can be seen above, this small docking station allows you to insert up to two portable hard drives at a time and the hard drives are hot-swappable, which means you can insert and remove the hard drives without having to shut down the portable dock or your computer. You can simply eject a hard drive on your computer and then pull it out and replace it. The G-Tech G-Dock ev makes it very convenient to pop in portable hard drives and then transfer the data on those drives to your main back up arrays.

The big question is: Why would you want this hard drive dock when you can just plug various hard drives into your computer via a cable? The answer is speed and

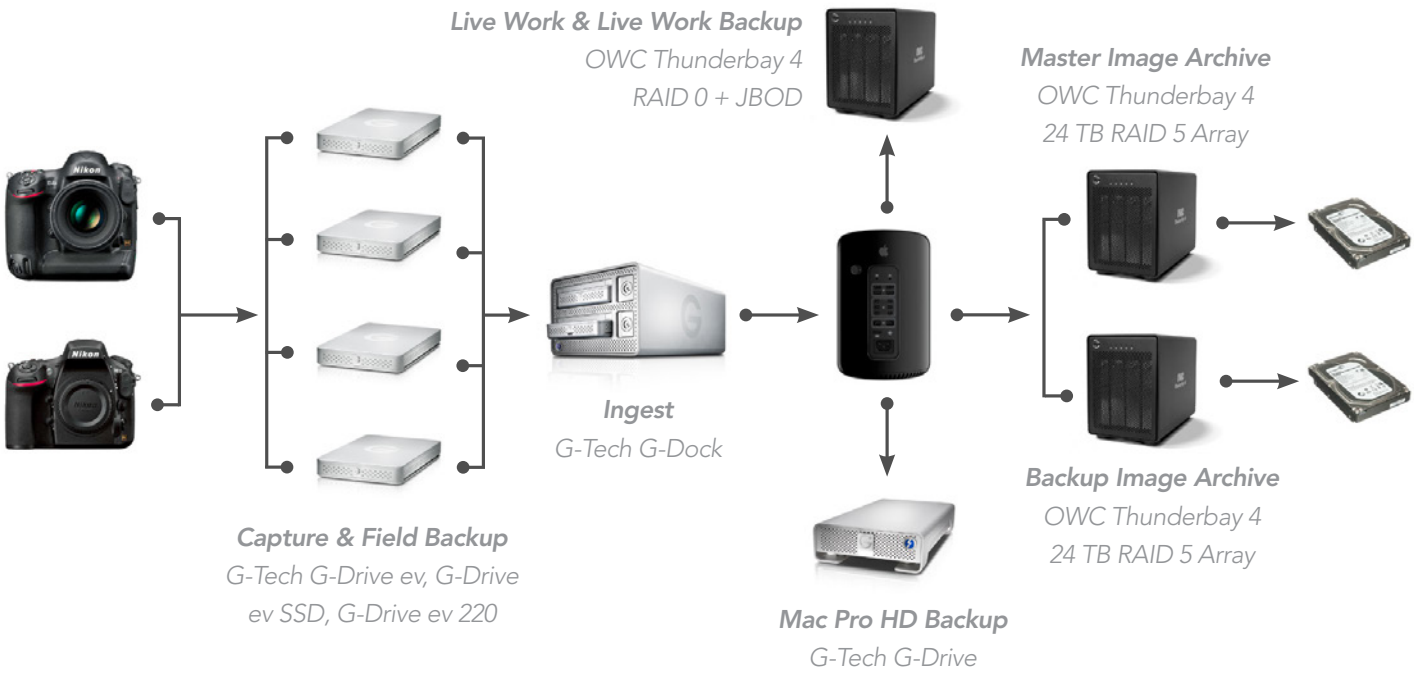
For those times when you need extra protection for your portable hard drives G-Tech has you covered. On the left is the G-Drive ATC, which is a 1 TB hard drive enclosed in a hardshell plastic case and is waterproof up to 1 foot deep for 30 seconds and also shockproof up to 2 m. On the right is the G-Drive ev RaW setup with the RaW rubber bumper cover. This cover allows the hard drive to survive a 1.5 m drop. Both the covers and the hard drives are available separately as well.

versatility. If I have a few 1 TB hard drives with images on them and the client needs the final worked up images right away, I can insert the portable hard drives into the dock and keep on working without having to immediately transfer the images over to my main working hard drives. In the field, if I have the dock with me, I can set it up so that the top and bottom drives are configured in a RAID 1 setup, meaning that whatever I copy to the top drive is automatically mirrored on the bottom drive. This system is automatic and saves a lot of time when it comes to backing up in the field. Of course, this last scenario only works if I have access to power so I don't always take the G-Dock ev with me on every assignment.

One of the best selling features of the G-Dock ev is that there are a wide variety of hard drive types and sizes that fit into the dock. Of course, all of the G-Drive ev drives that are designed for the G-Dock are made by G-Technology specifically for this system. There are both 1 TB and 2 TB hard disk drive options and also a 1 TB SSD option as well. At this point, I have 7 TB of hard drives that will fit into the G-Dock ev, which includes at least one of every style of portable hard drives they make for the dock. My favorite of the G-Dock portable hard drives is the 1 TB G-Drive ev RAW SSD because it has crazy fast transfer speeds up to 425 MB/s. At $899 for the 1 TB SSD drive, it is likely out of a lot of people's price range, but G-Tech also has a lot more affordable options like the G-Drive ev 1 TB HDD and the G-Drive ev 220 2 TB HDD, which respectively sell for $139.95 and $279.95 on B&H. These lower priced options are not quite as fast at the state of the art solid state drive mentioned above but they are plenty fast and very reliable hard drives.

One of the other reasons I went with the G-Dock as the ingest station for my portable hard drives is that G-Technology makes some of the most reliable hard drives on the market. G-Technology is owned by Hitachi, who in my research offers the best and most reliable hard drives on the market. For proof of that, check out this in-depth study that Backblaze did with thousands of hard drives in their backup facility.

Not only are the G-Technology products reliable, they are also beautifully made. You can see by the image on the previous page that the G-Dock is made of aluminum and



Above is a diagram of my backup workflow so you can see how the G-Dock ev and the various G-Drives fit into my workflow. I generally take three to four of the G-Drives into the field with me depending on the needs of the assignment. When I get back into the office or the hotel (if I am shooting in a city) then I can simply pop in the G-Drives and continue working or transfer that data to my main working hard drives.

is designed on the same level as most Apple products, which is to say that it is a beautifully crafted piece of hardware. Also, if you need a little extra protection for your on-the-go hard drives G-Tech has you covered with the G-Drive ATC and RaW options. As shown at the top of the previous page, the ATC enclosure fully encloses your G-Drive and protects it if you drop it up to 2 meters above the ground or if it goes for a swim. The ATC enclosure also allows you to just plug the drive directly into a computer via Thunderbolt or USB 3.0 without having to take the hard drive out of the enclosure. The RaW cover, which is basically a rubber bumper, protects the G-Drive inside if it falls up to 1.5 meters.

As I have laid out here, the G-Tech G-Dock ev system is quite versatile and offers a lot of options for the photographer on the go. If you have a small image collection and don't need that many terabytes to back up your images, this might be all you would need to back up your image collection. For those photographers and cinematographers who have much larger data storage needs, then the G-Dock ev system is a great option for in the field storage and transport. Also, the prices on the dock itself have come way down from the initial price of $699 when it was first introduced years ago. The G-Dock ev with two 1 TB G-Drives goes for only $449.95 on B&H these days. You can also get the G-Dock on its own for just $299.95. For more information on the G-Tech G-Dock ev system visit the G-Technology website at www.g-technology.com.

Daniel Coriz off the wall at the Santa Fe dirt jumps just off highway 599 in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

on assignment:

HI-SYNC BMX

ON ASSIGNMENT WITH ELINCRHOM'S ELB400 STROBES AND THEIR HI-SYNC FLASH TECHNOLOGY

I realize there have been a gauntlet of articles over the last year both here in the Newsletter and on my blog about Elinchrom's lighting technology. All of those articles combined might seem like a broken record, but I have been working very closely with Elinchrom to help promote several of their key products, namely the ELB 400 battery-powered strobe and the new Skyport Plus HS transmitter. There is no other company I have worked with that has helped push lighting technology as far as Elinchrom has in the last year. Because of this new technology, I have been able to create some rather unique images, which is extremely exciting.

To sum up the many different articles that I have written for Elinchrom over the last year, here are links to four key articles that I have put together, and which form the base of knowledge used for this Hi-Sync BMX assignment:

1) A review of the Elinchrom ELB 400: An in-depth review of the ELB 400, which was posted on my blog in March 2015.
2) The Elinchrom ELB 400 vs. The Profoto B1 (and B2): This blog post, put up in March 2015, is still one of the most popular blog posts I have ever written.
3) HS vs. HSS: What's the Difference: This is a key article that explains how all this flash technology works. If you have any questions about how these images were created, this article explains Hi-Sync technology.
4) Elinchrom Hi-Sync: How to get the Best Results: A recent blog post detailing how to setup the Skyport Plus HS transmitter to get the best results with Hi-Sync.

Now that I have given some background, let's get back to the assignment at hand. The idea behind this assignment was to create an educational behind-the-scenes video, and to show exactly how I am using the new Hi-Sync technology. Of course as a still photographer, I felt extreme pressure to create some decent images as well. To make it easy on myself and for the video crew, we set up this assignment at an area known as the "Dirt Jumps" right here in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where I live. It has relatively easy access and is a destination for quite a few cyclists and BMX riders because of the variety and size of the dirt jumps. In terms of talent, we brought in local riders Daniel Coriz, Arturo Miramontes and Anthony Ober, all of whom know the dirt jumps very well since it is their home turf.

Having shot at the dirt jumps several times over the last twelve years or more, I knew what to expect. I had several shots in mind, but it is never a slam dunk out here. Creating something unique and different is always a challenge. For most of the shoot I was testing out the lighting and finding different angles that could give me something new and exciting. I didn't feel like I got anything of interest until we created the shot shown on the previous spread of Daniel popping off the fifteen-foot wall at the end of the series of dirt jumps.

For this shoot, I used two Elinchrom ELB 400 strobes, which are 400 Watt/Second battery-powered strobes, two Quadra HS flash heads and a variety of light modifiers. To control the lighting, I used the Skyport Plus HS transmitter on my Nikon cameras. For the action, I used the standard reflector that comes with the flash heads as well as a high-performance 48 degree reflector, which helped us throw the light a bit farther. For the portraits, I used both reflectors and an Elinchrom Deep Octa 100cm softbox, as well as a ring flash. In the video, which can be seen here on the Elinchrom USA website or on YouTube,

Daniel Coriz throwing down at the Santa Fe dirt jumps just off highway 599 in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

there is a complete listing of the equipment used for this assignment and for each shot specifically. We also had a drone pilot come out and film the entire shoot from above so there are quite a few different perspectives in the video showing how the images were captured.

What is really quite exciting is that all of the images shown here in this article were created with two small, five-pound portable strobes—the ELB 400s. In the past, I would have had to lug out my twenty-pound Elinchrom Rangers to overpower the sun. With the new Hi-Sync technology from Elinchrom, which allows me to shoot at any shutter speed up to 1/8000th second, I can take much lighter gear and accomplish the same task, which really opens up the possibilities not only for action photography but also for dramatic portraits.

As with my other shoots using the ELB 400 and the HS flash heads, I found that I could overpower the sun with my strobes placed at a distance of 20-feet or so from the subject. This gave me plenty of power to work with and allowed for some creative lighting setups. Have this flexibility also allowed me to use both wide-angle and telephoto lenses without having the lights themselves show up in the images—unless I wanted them to as in the image on the next page.

One of the revelations I figured out last fall during a lighting demo with the HS technology was that I could essentially choose any shutter speed and any aperture, and could adjust the lights to get a well exposed image. For the action images, this was less the case because I needed full power on the packs to overpower the sun. But for the portraits, where the lighting is quite a bit closer to the subject, I could choose any exposure option and make it work even outside on a sunny day. This fact alone allows for incredible control of the final image.

One of the interesting tidbits that isn't shown or discussed in the video is that during this shoot, we had a flash head go down hard. During the portrait shoot, I had a 100 cm Deep Octa softbox with an HS head mounted on it. That set up was on a 14-pound Hollywood Beefy Baby light stand with a 15 pound sand bag on the bottom of the stand. The flash head was positioned ten feet up in the air with the softbox. Just as we were wrapping up, a strong gust of wind blew the whole set up over and the flash head hit the ground hard. And by hard, I mean there was a loud "clunk" as it made impact, with the heavy stand acting as extra weight on the flash head. In this instance, the flash head squarely hit the ground and the softbox did not take any of the blow. Now, I know lots of people, myself included, who consider the plastic Quadra flash heads to be rather fragile and perhaps a bit too lightweight. I was fully expecting to walk over and see a mangled flash head, but when I picked it up there wasn't even a scratch. I turned on the power pack and popped a few flashes and it worked perfectly. I was completely blown away that the flash head was still in one piece much less that it was still working. So, if you had any doubts about the durability of these lightweight flash heads, I hope this story lays those to rest. If this had been a larger, heavier flash head it would not have survived.

My thanks to Elinchrom USA and Mac Group for this assignment. Also, my thanks to Bill Stengel and his crew, who created the video content, as well as Ab Seesay at Mac Group, who edited the video. Check it out online at Elinchromus.com. Last, my thanks to the BMX riders who helped make these images possible.

Above: Daniel Coriz throwing down at the Santa Fe dirt jumps just off highway 599 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. This image shows the lighting setup for this scenario and also for the image shown on page 19. It is a simple two light setup with two ELB 400 battery powered strobes and two of the Hi-Sync (HS) flash heads. Also pictured is my assistant for this shoot Frank Kraus. Right: A screenshot of the behind the scenes video created by Bill Stengel. To check out the behind the scenes video visit the Elinchrom USA blog.

Above: A portrait of BMX rider Daniel Coriz at the Santa Fe dirt jumps just off highway 599 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. This portrait was created using the same Hi-Sync technology as the action images. Exposure Data: 1/8,000th sec at f/2.2 and ISO 100. Right: Here in this image, Frank Kraus is holding the main light while assisting with the lighting at the Santa Fe dirt jumps just off highway 599 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. This image gives an idea of how bright the ambient lighting was during the shoot.

Right: Another shot from the assignment, this time of Arturo Miramontes popping off the wall, at the Santa Fe dirt jumps just off highway 599 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. With three riders it took fifteen to twenty attempts to get just the right action. This was the second best shot of the assignment. Below: Another shot of Daniel Coriz created using the same lighting setup as shown on page 21.


portfolio

Standing Out

by Michael Clark

Every year, between Christmas and New Year's I work up my goals for the next year according to my latest 5-year plan. Those goals are a not only a list of ambitions and dreams, but they are also a working document that helps me focus on where I want to go with my career in the following year. In the big scheme, all of the items on my list of goals are only achieved when I am able to create unique, stunning images that help to propel my career. In this age of Instagram and social media, I am constantly trying to dream up concepts for images that will help my work stand out from the thousands upon thousands of images being created on an hourly basis.

As I work up my new goals for 2016 and beyond, I am aware of the ever-changing challenges we face as professional photographers. The supply and demand curves are not in our favor as pro photographers. Every day it seems there are more photographers trying to make a living with their images. Our ranks are growing exponentially. These days everyone is a photographer and just about anyone with a smartphone can create a fairly competent image. Just producing solid images, being professional and easy to work with isn't enough to make it these days. The big picture idea that is always on my mind is the question, "How do I make my images stand out from the mass of images already out there?"

For myself, I come up with ideas for images that involve a fair amount of setup and are difficult to pull off. Often, just using artificial lighting in a new and interesting way will help an image rise above the rest. Finding a unique area, or a unique angle helps. Working with top outdoor athletes in amazing locations also helps to make the images unique. These are the things I think about on every shoot. But even these simple ideas, which are not revolutionary in any way, are not enough to really stand out. Doing something that has never been done before to create a truly unique image is incredibly difficult, but that is the goal.

Using technology to push the envelope is another great way to stand out. This past year, I was lucky enough to work with Elinchrom on their marketing campaigns and I was one of the first people to be able to shoot with their new Hi-Sync flash technology, which allows photographers working with Nikon or Canon DSLRs to sync a strobe at shutter speeds up to 1/8,000th second. As working pros, we have to be constantly reinventing ourselves to stay ahead of the curve and to create new and exciting images. The ultimate goal for 2016, as it has been for previous years, is to create unique and inspired images that further help me to stand out from the crowd. How will you stand out in 2016?

parting shot

A narrow slot canyon in Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument near Cochiti, New Mexico.