

NEWSLETTER

MICHAEL CLARK

PHOTOGRAPHY



WINTER 2024



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Cover Image: A double-exposure image of Jeff Provenzano sky diving during the annular eclipse as seen in Santa Fe, New Mexico on October 14, 2023. Opposite Page: Murozaki Tadahiko practicing laido at Chosi Falls near Takayama, Japan.





editorial

Ready, Set, Go

Time to up the ante yet again

Last year wrapped up with a magical photography workshop I led with my good friend George Nobuchi in central Japan. It was the first travel-style workshop I have done in a long time but exploring the central mountains of Japan was a beautiful experience. [See the Parting Shot image for a taste of the central alps of Japan.] Also, as part of that trip to Japan, I was able to tour the Fujifilm Factory in Taiwa, Japan. This issue of the newsletter has a recap of that factory tour starting on page 16. On the opposite page you can see me all suited up and ready to go into the clean room where they were making the medium format GFX lenses.

The feature article for this issue of the newsletter details a self-assignment working with elite Red Bull skydiver Jeff Provenzano. Jeff came to me with the idea to do a sky dive during the Annular Eclipse. I was able to photograph the eclipse and create double exposure images with Jeff sky diving. Read all about it starting on page 24.

This issue of the Newsletter ends with an editorial discussing the effect that Ai image generators are having on the photography industry. Ai imaging is here to stay and the photography industry will never be the same. In my nearly thirty years in this industry, there has been nothing but constant change. This isn't one of those changes we photographers adapt to (at least not in my genre), it is

something we work around—and hopefully it just pushes us to get even more creative with our craft.

2024 already has some very exciting adventures on the calendar. I am very excited to head back down to Patagonia and co-lead a workshop with Justin Black of Visionary Wild this spring. There are also several exciting assignments brewing at the moment over the next few months, which I can talk about right now. Stay tuned for the update on those. The photography industry seems to be in serious turmoil at the moment. Hence, I am grateful that assignments are still coming my direction. 2024 will be my twenty-ninth year as a working professional in this field. That astounds me. Every year brings a new start, but this year feels like one to push hard and once again up the ante on my own photography. Ready, Set, Go. 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: A portrait of myself all dressed up in clean room apparel during a tour of the Fujifilm Taiwa Factory last fall in Taiwa, Japan.

Recent Clients: Fujifilm, Red Bull, New Mexico Tourism, New Mexico Department of Transportation, cFIRE, Nobuchi Creative, and Summit Workshops.



2023: Year in Review

Michael's best of the best images reviewed on the Blog

As usual, at the end of each year I create a blog post showing what I feel are the best of the best images for that year. At the end of December, I posted my [2023: Year in Review](#) blog post detailing the highlights of the year. From working with clients like Red Bull and Fujifilm, this year's list shows off my best images and also shares some personal highlights like seeing U2 on opening night at The Sphere in Las Vegas. It was a wild year that started off with a skiing and ice climbing trip in a full on blizzard and ended with a magical trip to Japan.

2023 was the busiest year yet since the pandemic began in 2020. With that said there were still some blank spaces on the assignment calendar but the first half of the year was very close to normal in terms of travel and assignments. Regardless, I was still able to create some wild images. I can't say that it was an epic year of creativity but it certainly had its moments—and some of those moments really got me excited to push harder in the future. One of those epic creative moments shown in the blog post is expanded upon here in this issue of the Newsletter in the feature article detailing how I created the Annular Eclipse sky diving images.

Last year also brought with it some amazing experiences like working with the Red Bull Air Force again as well as shooting for the launch of the FUJIFILM GFX100 II

medium format camera. As can be seen in that blog post, 2023 was all over the map in terms of photographic genres and clients. It was also the first year I traveled internationally since the pandemic began, which was very exciting. Trips to Japan and Sweden were just what was needed to help propel my creativity into 2024.

On the following page are just two of the images shown and discussed in the blog post. The top image of Miles Daisher wingsuit flying past my position was created while hanging off the side of a hot air balloon basket while he buzzed us. It is a pretty wild perspective not often seen in this sport. The bottom image on the following page is from the FUJIFILM GFX100 II launch assignment. J.T. Hartman is shown here descending Lower Mesa Falls in Idaho.

My thanks to *Red Bull, Fujifilm, National Geographic, New Mexico Tourism, Teton Ridge, Nobechi Creative* and all of my other clients with whom I worked last year. Check out the [blog post](#) and feel free to tell me which one you think is the best of the best from last year. Here's hoping your 2024 is filled with adventurous travels and amazing experiences! After twenty-nine years in this business I am so thankful for all of the amazing assignments that come my way. 2024 already has some very exciting adventures lined up. Stay tuned.



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 2024. 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.

PATAGONIA CLASSIC

Visionary Wild - Argentina and Chile

Instructors: Justin Black and Michael Clark

April 2-17, 2024

Note: This will be my first workshop with the incredible folks at Visionary Wild and I am very excited to head back to one of my favorite places in the world. I have done workshops in Patagonia before but Visionary Wild has it dialed to an incredibly high level. If the weather cooperates, participants will certainly come back with stunning images.

Patagonia: the word is synonymous with awe-inspiring landscapes, and Torres del Paine National Park, Perito Moreno Glacier, and the peaks of the Fitz Roy region are the crown jewels. This hybrid program – part expedition, part workshop, led by acclaimed adventure photographer Michael Clark and Justin Black of Visionary Wild is designed to maximize opportunities to execute well-crafted

and compelling photographs that capture the spirit of this incredible place. Participants will have ample time to get to know this sublime region during its colorful autumn splendor, and your photography there will benefit from the opportunity to revisit fruitful situations to apply lessons learned and to take advantage of changing weather and light. Assuming the weather cooperates, moonless nights during our itinerary will mean excellent opportunities to incorporate the Milky Way in nocturnal landscapes. The goal is for each participant to come away from this trip with a strong body of work, a new body of knowledge, new friendships, rejuvenation, and priceless memories.

Torres del Paine National Park and Biosphere Reserve is the centerpiece of Patagonia – the ultimate distillation of the region's most inspiring qualities. It's one of those rare places that routinely exceeds the grandest dreams of even the most experienced photographers. Peaks and spires thrust abruptly upward above turquoise lakes, forcing moisture-laden winds off the ocean to form soaring lenticular clouds that catch the fiery sunrise and sunset alpenglow. Glaciers spill down from the Patagonian ice cap, depositing cobalt blue icebergs on the shores of Lago Grey. Endemic lenga tree forests glow in hues of gold and copper in the southern autumn. Rivers tumble over cascading waterfalls as condors ride thermals on the



The Cerro Torre and Cerro Fitz Roy Massifs as seen from the road coming into El Chalten, Argentina. Patagonia is one of my favorite areas in the World to explore. There are epic landscapes just about everywhere you go, but Cerro Fitz Roy and Cerro Torre are perhaps the most famous mountains in the region.

flanks of the Cordillera del Paine mountains. Guanacos and foxes range over the golden pampas, and flamingos wade the lagoons. At this time of year, the days are a manageable length with extended periods of dawn and dusk, and the sun never rises more than 35 degrees above the horizon. The quality of light is spectacular.

Our trip begins in Punta Arenas, Chile, where our local guide team and driver – good friends of ours who are regarded as some of the very best in Patagonia – will meet you at the airport and transfer you to Hotel Cabo de Hornos, a recently remodeled boutique hotel on the town's main square. We'll all gather there and go out as a group

for a welcome dinner at one of our favorite restaurants nearby to get to know everyone. The next day we proceed to Torres del Paine National Park (with lunch at a restaurant along the way) where we'll check into Hotel Lago Grey, the first of three excellent lodges in the park that will serve as our base camps for the next seven days and nights – the others are the spectacularly located Hostería Pehoe, and recently upgraded Hotel Las Torres.

After Torres, we cross the border into Argentina, for a four-hour drive to El Calafate on the shores of Lago Argentino (a.k.a. Lago General Carrera on the Chilean side of the border). Our "basecamp" for two nights will be the

beautiful four-star Alto Calafate Hotel, from which we will make excursions by van to the expansive Perito Moreno Glacier framed in autumn color, as well as other scenic highlights.

Then it's on to El Chalten in Los Glaciares National Park, the gateway to the spectacularly soaring granite spires of the peaks Fitz Roy and Cerro Torre, renowned among alpinists as world-class climbs (Justin's mentor Galen Rowell made an ascent of Fitz Roy in 1985). For four nights, we will stay at Posada Lunajuim Hotel, an excellent three-star accommodation. We will make use of this towering sublime mountain backdrop by making excursions to various vista points, rivers, lake shores, autumn forests, and more to find compelling foregrounds for our compositions. As our trip draws to a close, we will return to Calafate for another night at Alto Calafate Hotel before catching departing flights to Buenos Aires and home.

Michael Clark and Justin Black will lead the small group on field sessions adapted to make the most of the prevailing conditions each day. Emphasis will be on photography and hands-on mentoring in the field. We'll photograph when the conditions are good, and we'll gather in the lodge for presentations on light, composition, visualization, technique, and digital workflow at times when light or weather aren't as conducive for photography (during harsh mid-day light, if a rain storm passes through, etc.). We will also hold constructive critiques of participant photographs, and then head back out into the field to apply what we've learned.

Excursions will include a trip by ferry to visit the face of Glacier Grey and, in our comfortable group vehicles, spectacular locations that we have scouted in detail on

prior visits. Some locations involve short hikes, but nothing particularly strenuous.

After dusk each day, we will gather for a nice dinner and some good Chilean and Argentine wine. Then it's off to bed to rest, as most mornings we'll be out around 6:00am to take advantage of the incredible pre-dawn light. Breakfasts and lunches will be handled in relation to our photographic activities, served either at our lodges or in the field as a gourmet picnic.

The full itinerary and details on costs are outlined on Visionary Wild's website along with very detailed information on what to expect, the highlights of the trip, what's included and what's not included, and details on accommodations. Also, there is a large gallery of images on their website showing what you can expect to photograph as well. This is going to be an epic adventure.

Cost: from \$13,995 to \$15,995 USD

For more information and to register for this fantastic workshop visit [Visionary Wild](#).

SUMMIT ADVENTURE WORKSHOP

Summit Workshops - Santa Fe, New Mexico

May 1-4, 2024

Join Summit in Santa Fe, New Mexico for an adventure you won't forget! Adventure sports photography requires a host of skills, including technical excellence with the camera, knowing your equipment, the sport and your goals inside and out. This workshop concentrates on creating (not just taking) unique adventure sports and lifestyle images. The goal of this workshop is to help you



The Summit Adventure Workshop takes place in my hometown and as such we have access to some amazing athletes and locations. As in the image above, we get to work with athletes who are incredibly skilled. Participants come away with spectacular images and learn a lot about the adventure sports industry.

start thinking more creatively in regards to setting up an adventure photo shoot, executing that shoot, and analyzing your images. We will be shooting assignments each day early in the morning or in late in the afternoon and evaluating our images via daily critiques.

Northern New Mexico has incredible locations in which to explore all of these sports and we will be shooting with elite athletes each day. The high desert mountain environment around Santa Fe has it all in terms of adventure sports. From rock climbing on steep basalt cliffs to mountain biking through aspens at 10,000 feet in the Sangre de Cristo mountains right above Santa Fe. In addition to

the adventures, Santa Fe is steeped in culture as the oldest capitol in the United States and there are a wide variety of world-class restaurants in every price range.

What you'll learn: The Business of Adventure Photography. How to Shoot Rock Climbing, Trail Running, Motocross, and more!

We will discuss and work on research and preparation, angles, equipment selection and use, using natural light and fill flash as well as battery powered strobes, understanding and experimenting with autofocus techniques, working with athletes who are putting themselves at risk,

how to capture the intensity of the action as well as how to protect yourself and your photo equipment in harsh conditions. Each day will find us working with athletes in the outdoor environment. What these models can do may shock even the most experienced outdoor photographer.

Cost: \$1,995.00 USD

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

JAPAN: THE ART OF MOTION

Nobechi Creative - Multiple Locations in Japan

May 16-25, 2023

Not just a travel photo tour, not just a workshop, but a unique opportunity to photograph Japan in Motion: Martial artists, sumo wrestling, traditional performers, bustling cities, bullet trains and more 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 a combination of natural light and artificial lighting techniques (not to worry if you are new

to lights—Michael and George will be there to help you), incorporating motion blur, and featuring both fast-moving and slower-moving action, we will set up a wide variety of scenarios to practice and 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 a dynamic variety of locations planned: everything from bullet trains whooshing by to sumo wrestlers in the ring on a tournament day to motion under the neon signs at night.

For the second part of the workshop we will travel to the beautiful countryside town of Takayama, known for its well-preserved old streets to work with martial artists and traditional performers. Through out the workshop we will have plenty of time to really get creative and explore the possibilities in each location, while also taking most meals together and enjoying the amazing food Japan has to offer.

Michael will also share his extensive knowledge of digital workflow and show participants how he works up his



This photo tour and workshop will find us working with a wide variety of subjects—everything from martial artists to bullet trains. Our goal is to explore how to capture motion and show it in our images. We will also combine motion blur with artificial lighting to really push ourselves creatively.

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 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 come away with incredible images. 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: Limited to 8 participants

Tuition: Cost per person, double occupancy: \$7,995 for bank wire transfer +\$240 for payment by credit card. Cost per person, single occupancy: \$8,895 for bank wire transfer + \$270 for payment by credit card.

For more information and to register for this workshop visit the [Nobeichi 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! It was a great pleasure being part of this workshop with so many other amazing photographers. I learned much which is valuable to me and enjoyed doing so at the same time. And just to reiterate, as to the workshop: I'm impressed." - Stephen Starkman, Toronto

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

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

"Within the short time I've been studying and practicing photography, I have had teachers who are good educators, but not great photographers, and vice versa, but few who are both. Count yourself in these narrow ranks. I went through four years of college and several careers getting less candid advice and encouragement than I got

in four days with you. For what it is worth, thank you for that." - Brandon McMahon, Adventure Photography Workshop

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

"Your workshop at Santa Fe was too good and I came away with a lot of knowledge and renewed energy. The level of expertise that you and Michael 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.

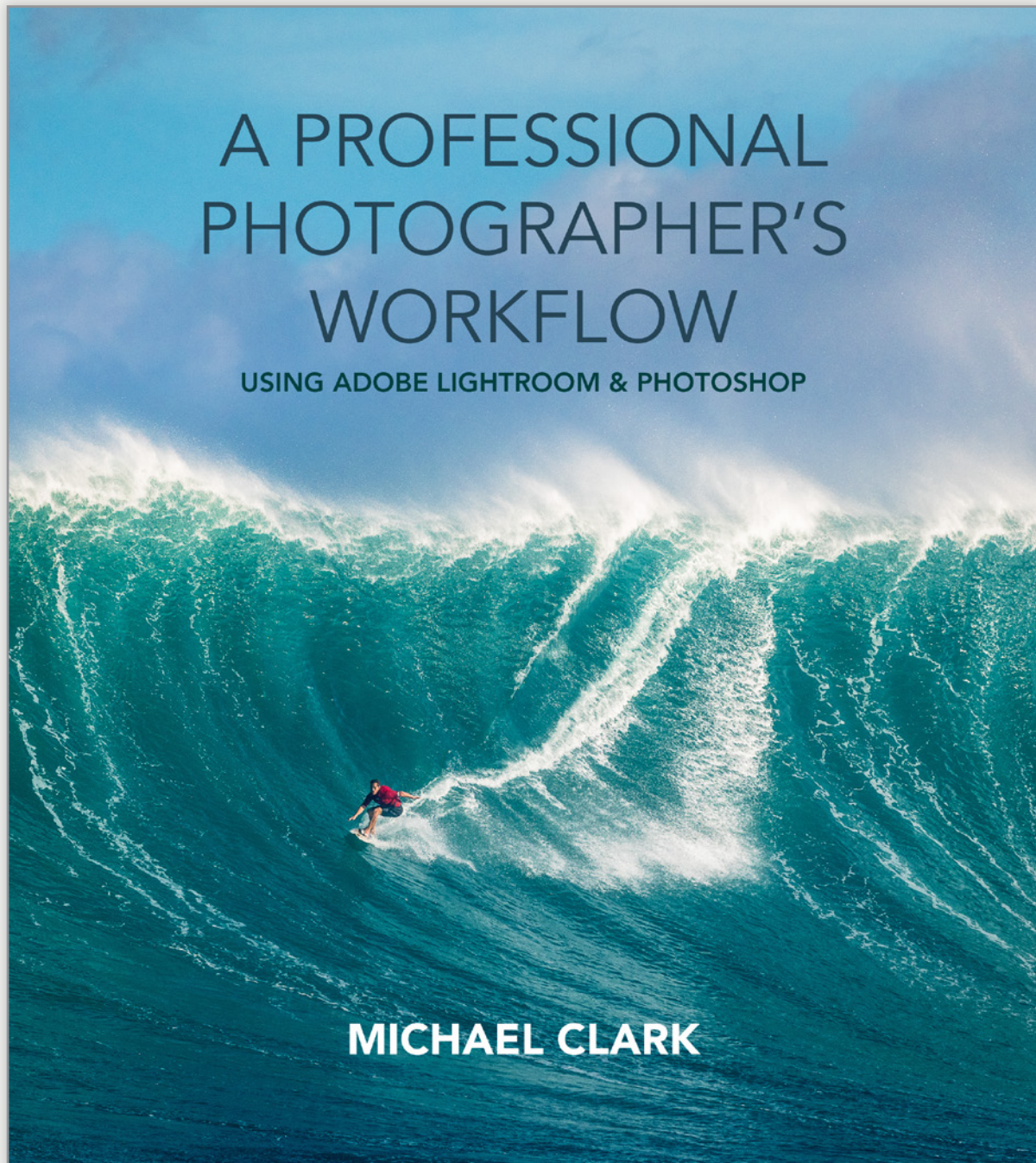
"My mind is still spinning and I can't help but smile every time I think of the wonderful experience garnered from our workshop. Between what I learned from the two of you, as well as from my talented classmates - this was a great experience, and I would do it again." - Participant in the 2008 Balloon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

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

For more information on my upcoming workshops please visit the [Workshops](#) page on my blog.

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Visiting the Fujifilm Taiwa Factory

An inside look at how Fujifilm builds the GFX100 II and their new tilt-shift lenses

On October 19th, 2023, I was able to tour the Fujifilm Taiwa Factory in the Miyagi Prefecture north of Sendai, Japan. This factory is where the GFX cameras and lenses, as well as the X100 and X-Pro line of cameras, are manufactured. Having worked closely with Fujifilm since 2019, it was a huge honor to go see the factory where the incredible GFX medium format cameras are manufactured. In talking with the camera designers, they impressed upon me years ago just how challenging it is to mass produce a camera like the GFX100, 100S and now the 100 II. With my physics background, I had some idea of the challenges but touring the factory those challenges were shown quite clearly.

Of course, we were limited in what they wanted to show us and even more so in what we were allowed to photograph, which is completely understandable. Hence, all of the images you see here in this article are images that we were allowed to take—and I made sure to ask before taking any images where it wasn't clear so that I didn't show anything they didn't want out there in the World.

The Taiwa factory is about three hours north of Tokyo, and 45 minutes north of Sendai. It took a two-plus hour bullet train ride and a 45 minute drive to get to the factory so visiting is not an off the cuff endeavor. I went to the factory along with three other Fujifilm employees (one

from the USA and two from Australia) and also with Toshiya, Taiji, and Tomo from the Fujifilm design team.

Upon our arrival, the top managers and engineers at the factory greeted us at the front door in true Japanese style bowing as we entered and greeting us warmly. In the lobby, the first thing I saw was one of my images printed fairly large hanging in a glass case next to display cases with various Fujifilm cameras and lenses (see page 18). The image was one of the ones I created for the launch of the GFX100 back in 2019. Apparently this has been hanging there since 2019 when the print was first shown in Tokyo at the 2019 Fujikina event. Needless to say, this was a pretty amazing way to start of the tour and a true honor to see one of my images hanging there in the entrance lobby.

We had a quick introduction and lunch just after our arrival. At some point during lunch I asked Toshiya if he could thank the managers and engineers for having my image out in the lobby. They immediately looked at me and were shocked that the photographer of that image was here with them as they had not known I was connected to that image. They seemed truly amazed that I would come visit the factory and later on (as shown on page 18) we took photos together in front of the print. They even asked for an autograph to put up with the print.



The FUJIFILM GFX100 II being assembled in the Fujifilm Taiwan factory in October 2023. As with every photo shown in this article, I got direct confirmation from the engineers and the Fujifilm design team that it was ok to photograph what we were seeing. As you can imagine there are a lot of proprietary techniques used to build these incredible camera so I was careful not to photograph some of the things they showed us.

I don't say this to brag, I am just trying to convey how amazing it was to see my own image in print and how amazing it is to have a great working relationship with Fujifilm.

After lunch we went into the factory alongside the engineers and they showed us both the facility that produces lenses and camera bodies. First up we walked by the machine that etches the serial number on lenses and

cameras (see page 20). After that we went to the clean room and suited up in Tyvek suits and masks to enter the clean room. Having worked in a clean room environment in physics this was a blast from the past. In the first clean room we looked at the production of the new Tilt-Shift lenses for the GFX system. They were building the new 30mm f/5.6 TS lenses and we got to see how that process worked. This is a new and very exciting lens for many in the GFX system and it is obviously a very complex



The top engineers at the Fujifilm Taiwa factory are standing next to my image, which is in the lobby of the main building at the factory. Seeing my image, one of the very few in the entire factory, when we first walked in was a big surprise. Apparently it has been hanging here in the lobby since 2019, shortly after it was created for the launch of the original FUJIFILM GFX100. Next to the image is a display showing all of Fujifilm's current camera offerings.

build. We weren't allowed to photograph anything in this facility, but suffice it to say that we were shown just how difficult and time consuming it is to fine-tune the optics in this new Tilt-Shift lens. I can see why it costs \$3,999 USD and honestly I am amazed it is that cheap considering how complex it is to manufacture. I hope to get the 30mm Tilt-Shift lens at some point. Stay tuned for that.

On the following page is an image of Toshiya explaining

to us the process of aligning lens elements and how difficult that can be. As you would imagine each step in building complex lenses like this is very specialized. Seeing the lens manufacturing facility really gave me insight into just how hard it is to design and build the phenomenal lenses that Fujifilm manufactures. Though I can't discuss some of the stuff we saw here in this article, what really surprised me was just how much time it takes to really calibrate and hand-tune these lenses before they can be



In this frame, Toshiya is explaining to us the complex process of aligning lens elements in the GFX lenses and how difficult that can be. We were not allowed to photograph the process but I snapped this image when we stepped away from the equipment used to align lenses.

boxed up and shipped out. The level of care and attention to detail was truly astounding.

After touring the lens facility we went back over to the camera production building where they were building the GFX100 II camera bodies. The internal components of any digital camera and especially with a camera like the GFX100 II are extremely complex. At one point we walked by a placard showing sensor surface defects and the images shown were created using a high-power electron

microscope. I recognized the images right away for what they were and asked about them since this was pretty similar to what I worked on in my physics days back in the 90s, but with an STM (Scanning Tunneling Microscope) which electronically images individual atoms on the surface of a chip. That placard was showing just how hard it is to create flawless image sensors with perfectly flat surfaces.

As we walked through the camera production facility, we



In this image, one of the engineers is showing us how the serial numbers are etched onto cameras and lenses. This is one of the final steps in the manufacturing process at the factory. This factory creates the GFX cameras and lenses as well as the X-Pro line and X100 cameras—everything else is made in other factories.

saw the build process of the new GFX100 II camera bodies in various stages. At one point the internals were being built up and were fully exposed. And then just a little farther down the line we could see how they were mounted into the camera body itself—as can be seen in the image on page 17.

As with the lenses, what really surprises me is that we don't have to pay much, much more for these incredibly complex cameras. The tolerances are so small, and the

details are so critical to actually make a digital camera work—even just thinking of the physical build of the camera body and not to mention the computing side of things. It is absolutely amazing we can have a medium format digital camera for less than \$10,000 USD these days. The Fujifilm engineers conveyed a few of the challenges in building cameras with huge sensors to us—and talked about how things like shimming the sensor at the factory so it is parallel to the lens mount is even more critical and difficult on the larger sensor than on smaller sensors.



Above you can see me trying to put the rubber grip material onto the side of a GFX100 II camera body. I was meticulous with this side and afterwards got a thumbs up from the technician. On my second attempt, putting the rubber grip onto the grip side of the camera body I totally botched it. That side is much more difficult.

After finishing up on the camera line, the engineers thought it would be fun to let us try our hand at some non-critical tasks. In this case, they allowed us to try putting the rubber cladding on the outside of a few GFX100 II bodies. I started with the easier side opposite the grip (as shown above) and did a pretty solid job applying the adhesive and then the rubber grip to the camera. But, when I tried to do the grip side, I started out ok but then my alignment of the rubber material was a bit off. As shown on the following page, we watched a true

professional apply the rubber grip and her work was flawless and took maybe one-fifth the amount of time that we took in our attempt.

As I said earlier, at the end of the tour we created some images of the engineers and managers with my image up front in the lobby after our tour (see page 18). In that image you can see the engineers wearing the specialized shoes they had for us to wear in the facility. Since most of the facility is a giant clean room, it is critical to keep out



Above you can see the technician putting the rubber grip on the grip side of a GFX100 II. She did a remarkable job and in one-fifth the time it took me.

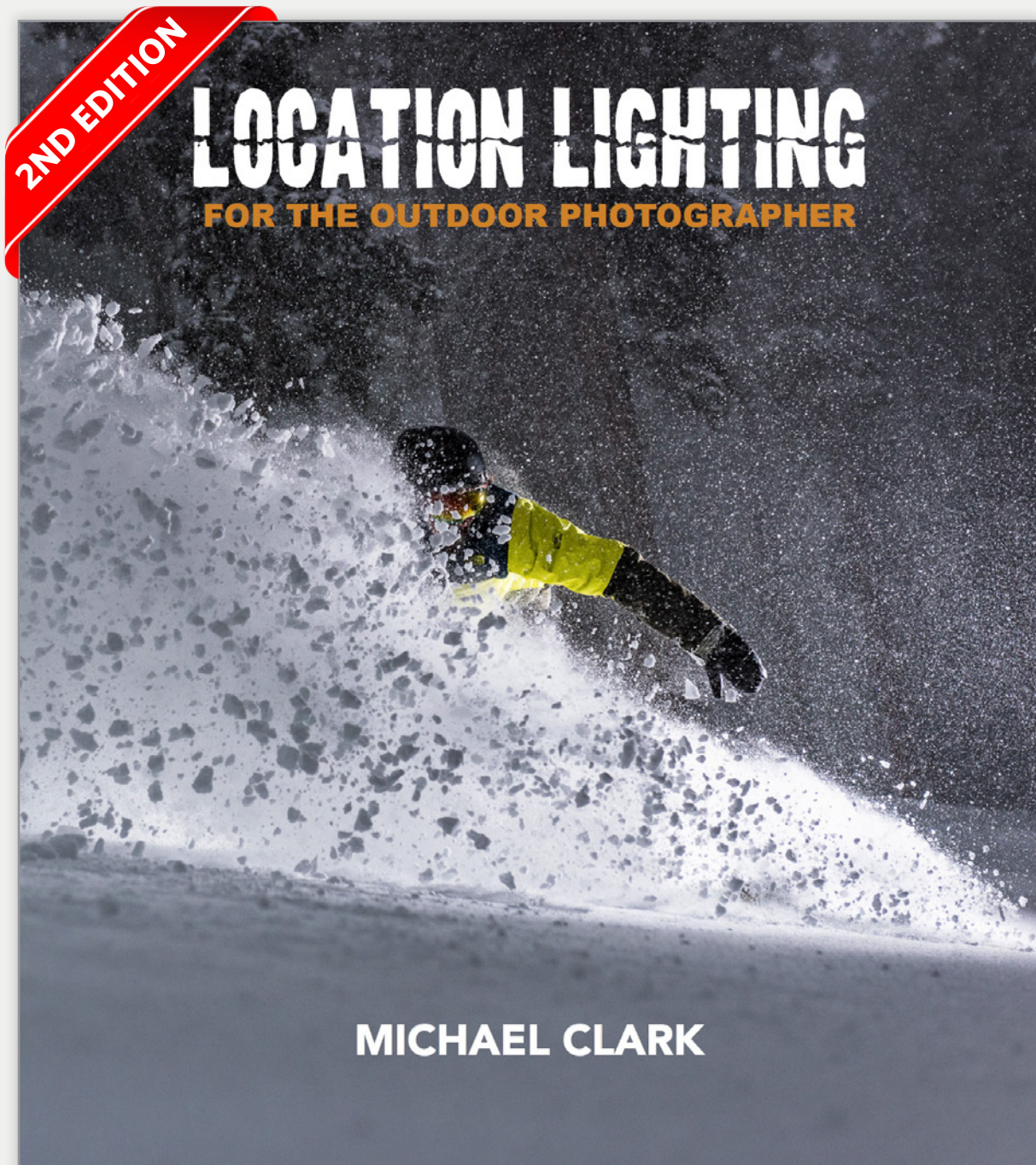
dust and any debris. None of us want that in our camera or lenses. Hence, the precautions and the reason for the clean room environment.

I have to say a huge thank you to [Fujifilm](#), the staff at the Taiwa factory and the Fujifilm product design team that accompanied us for taking a full day away from their normal work to show us the factory and give us a behind the scenes look at what it takes to create these amazing cameras. It is a true honor to work with Fujifilm and to

have these incredible tools that let me live a creative lifestyle with my work. Without all of their incredible effort and know how, I would not be able to do what I do. Nor would I be able to create the images you see here in this Newsletter and on my website. These cameras are truly my passport to adventure and exploration. All of us in the photo industry stand on the shoulders of the engineers and designers that develop and build the gear we use. Truly, these engineers and designers are artisans at the highest levels of their craft.

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ANNULAR ECLIPSE

SKYDIVING WITH JEFF PROVENZANO & THE RED BULL AIR FORCE



In early September last year, Jeff Provenzano contacted me about doing a project in tandem with the annular eclipse, which was taking place on October 14, 2023. Jeff is one of the world's most elite sky divers and also a member of the Red Bull Air Force—a team of elite sky divers, BASE jumpers, and wingsuit pilots. This wasn't a Red Bull assignment, but having worked with Jeff on dozens of assignments over the last fifteen years, I knew it would be a good opportunity to create some incredible images. In our discussions, Jeff had lined up helicopters in various places along the path of the eclipse but couldn't get permits. He tried lining everything up in three different spots and struck out each time, which made it even harder to pull this off.

Jeff and I also discussed at length how we could actually pull it off. In reality, getting this type of image with a moving subject in the sky against an eclipse is really an impossible shot. With a 16-stop solar filter on the lens, which is a filter that totally blacks out the frame, I would not be able to see where he was or even attempt to focus on him. I told him I would give it some thought but in the ensuing days I never figured out a way to do it all in camera in one shot. Hence, the only solution that seemed viable was a double exposure—either in camera or after the fact in Photoshop. Both options yield essentially the same result since in Photoshop you just layer the images over each other and blend them together, just as the camera does with a double exposure. Even though the double exposure idea seemed like the best option I was still dubious as to how the end result would look.

All of the sky diving images you see here in this article are double exposure images created using images captured of the Annular Eclipse on October 14th and images of Jeff

Provenzano that were captured earlier in the year (in 2023) while shooting an assignment for Red Bull. Because we couldn't get any permits for locations in line with the eclipse, I decided I would just photograph the eclipse from my home here in Santa Fe, New Mexico—which was in line with the eclipse. After photographing the eclipse I would see if this double exposure idea could work. To be clear, Jeff was not sky diving here in Santa Fe, New Mexico—he was actually sky diving at SkyDive Arizona in southern Arizona that day.

I photographed the eclipse with the intention of creating something atmospheric for the double exposure images. Having photographed a few eclipses, I knew the standard shot with a pitch black sky and the crescent sun-moon was not really going to be that exciting. I intentionally overexposed the images, which created purple and blue halos around the fuzzy eclipse. The eclipse looks fuzzy and out of focus but that is just the intense light scattering through the 800mm lens that I was using to photograph the event. I was able to adjust and recompose the halos by moving the lens. The halos are essentially reflections bouncing around inside the giant telephoto lens. Here in Santa Fe, New Mexico we did not get the total eclipse perfectly centered, but that didn't really matter since I felt the crescent shape might actually lend itself better for the final double exposure image. Interestingly in one of these images if you look closely (see Page 30) you can see a fairly large solar flare flying off the sun's surface on the edge of the eclipse.

While photographing the eclipse, I kept moving the camera to move the halos around the frame—and also so I would have a lot of options when I came back into the office and started putting the images together. I chose

the images of the eclipse that I thought might work well and then pulled the skydiving images from my archives and overlaid them in Photoshop using a simple blend mode, which is pretty much the same as doing the double exposure in camera. I just about fell out of my office chair when the first image came together. I was blown away at how good it looked and how well it worked. I was so inspired by that first image that I started putting together a bunch of different images to see how they worked out. A few hours later I had over thirty composite images worked up and began looking at them as a whole to figure out which ones work the best.

In my excitement I zipped off a few low res jpegs to Jeff, who was at the time sky diving in southern Arizona at a jump zone. In between sky dives, he responded and was just as blown away as I was. I posted a few to Instagram and my feed blew up with comments. Jeff did the same and he got even more comments and likes—especially since he is quite famous in the sky diving world. Some of Jeff's friends were wondering how he jumped in front of the eclipse when they didn't see it in southern Arizona. Hence, the long explanation of these images here and on my social media posts.

I have been asked to do this sort of shot several times by a few different clients. One of those times the client knew the odds of capturing the actual image was so difficult they wrote into the contract that I would still get paid even if I came back with zero images—luckily that assignment fell through as they couldn't get permits for what we wanted to try. My response has always been that for subjects in motion the only real way to do it is a double exposure. Now I can say that it works. I have a lot more playing around to do with various images combined with

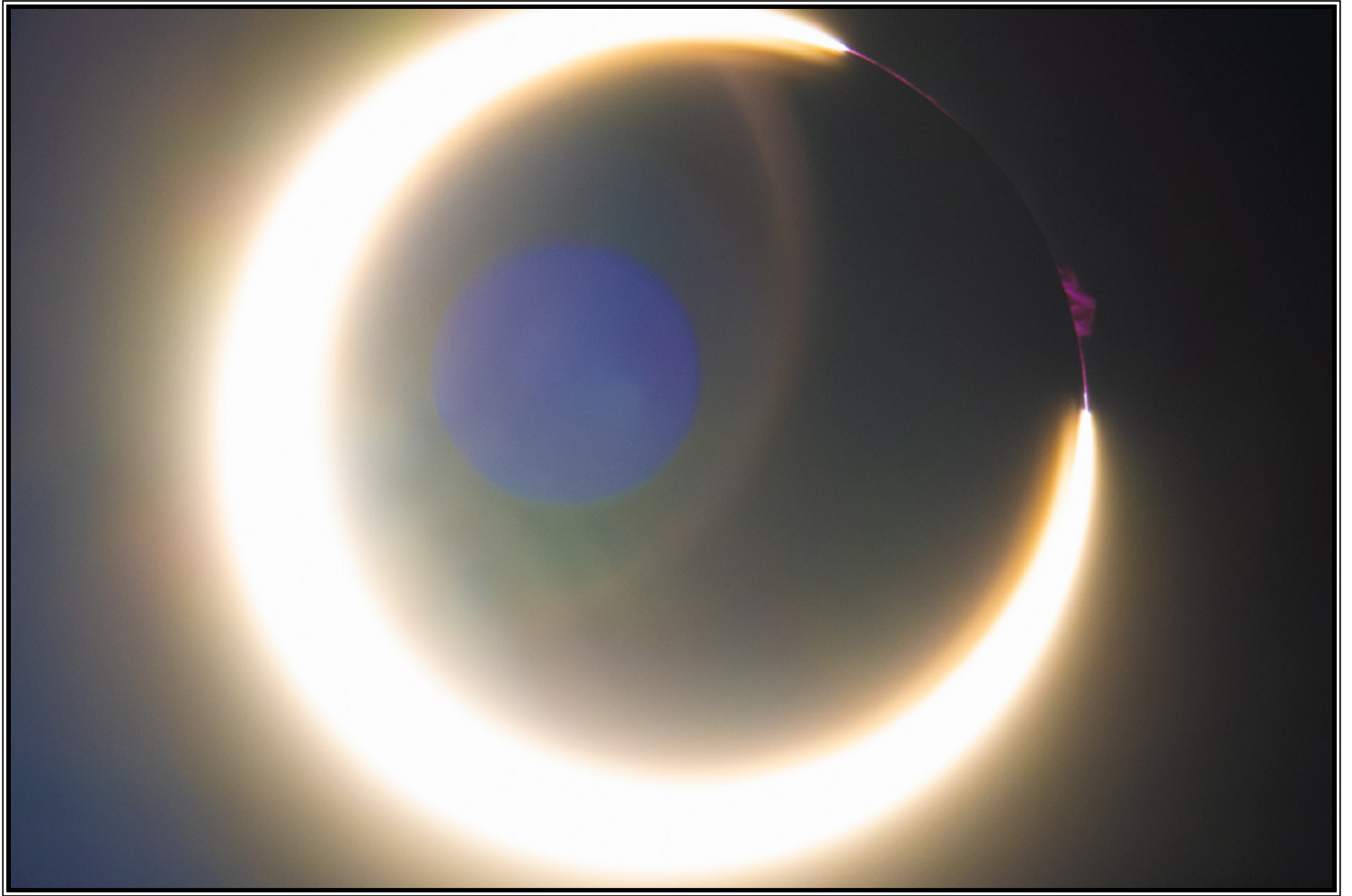
the eclipse but on the following pages are a few of my favorites that I have put together so far.

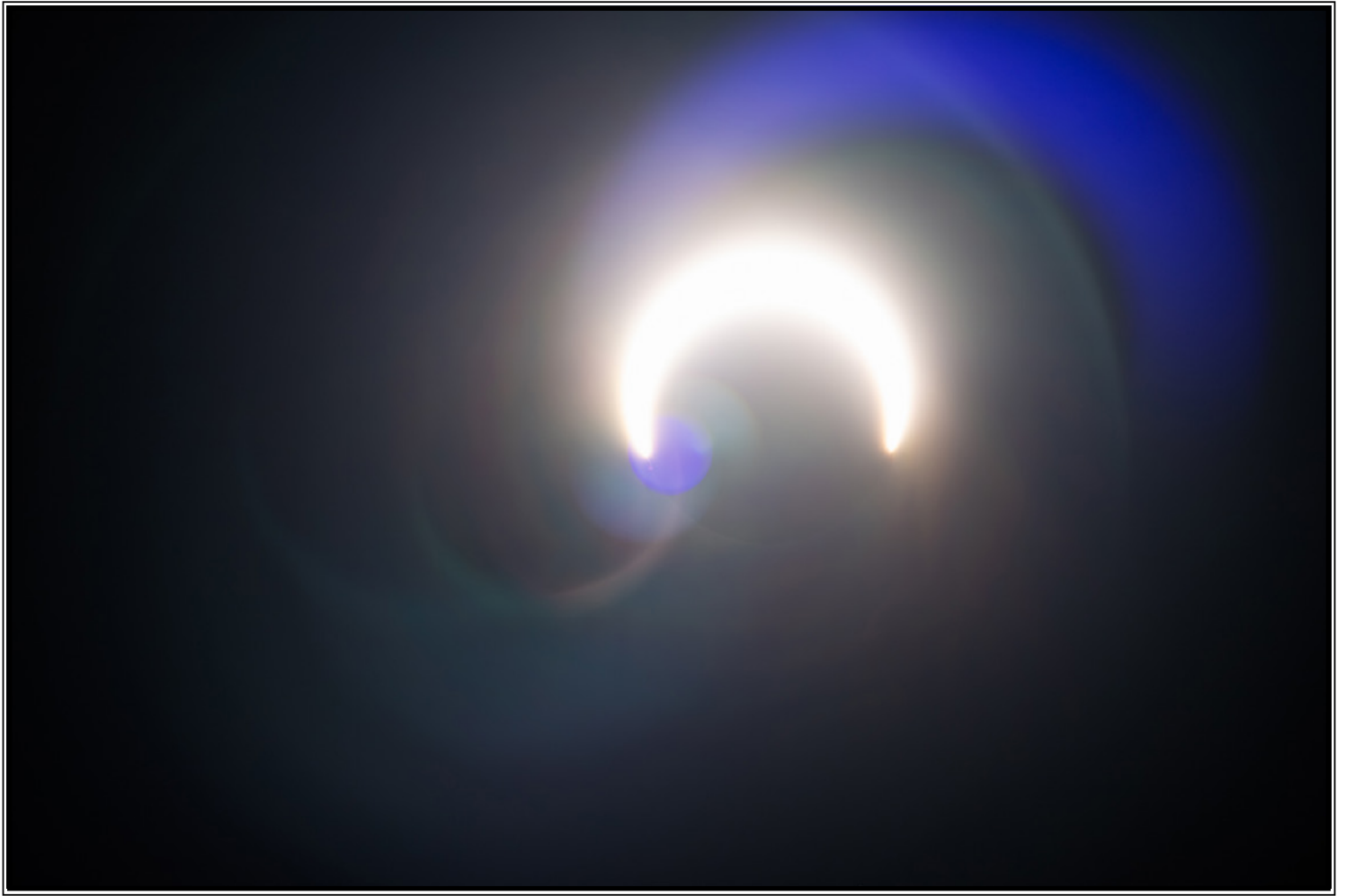
I have also put up a gallery on my website with the best images from this project. Check those out [here](#). I created a variety of composite images using photos of Kirby Chambliss in his stunt plane (as shown in the opening spread of this article on Pages 24-25) and using photos of Aaron Fitzgerald flying stunts in his aerobatic helicopter—as can be seen in the gallery on my website. I am quite excited for the next big eclipse to try out this technique and to do everything in camera—stay tuned for that. Sadly, I will miss the next big eclipse here in the USA in April but there is another Annular eclipse in South America in October 2024. Fingers crossed I can make that one.

I have to say a huge thank you to Jeff Provenzano for spearheading this idea and reaching out to me. I never would have even tried this approach or even photographed the eclipse in this manner without his enthusiasm driving the project forward. He was very aware of my extreme doubt about this project and the possibilities. That doubt made it all the more fulfilling when the final images came together. Throughout the pandemic, I have found it hard to get motivated for personal projects, but this one revved me up in a way that hasn't happened in years. I love pushing the envelope and creating images that are nigh on impossible to create. Many of my clients know me for those type of images—and have come to expect that I can pull off the near impossible time and time again. That is part of the fun with photography for me and this is definitely where my science background and analytical thinking comes into play with my work. It's great to see an idea come together—as this one did.



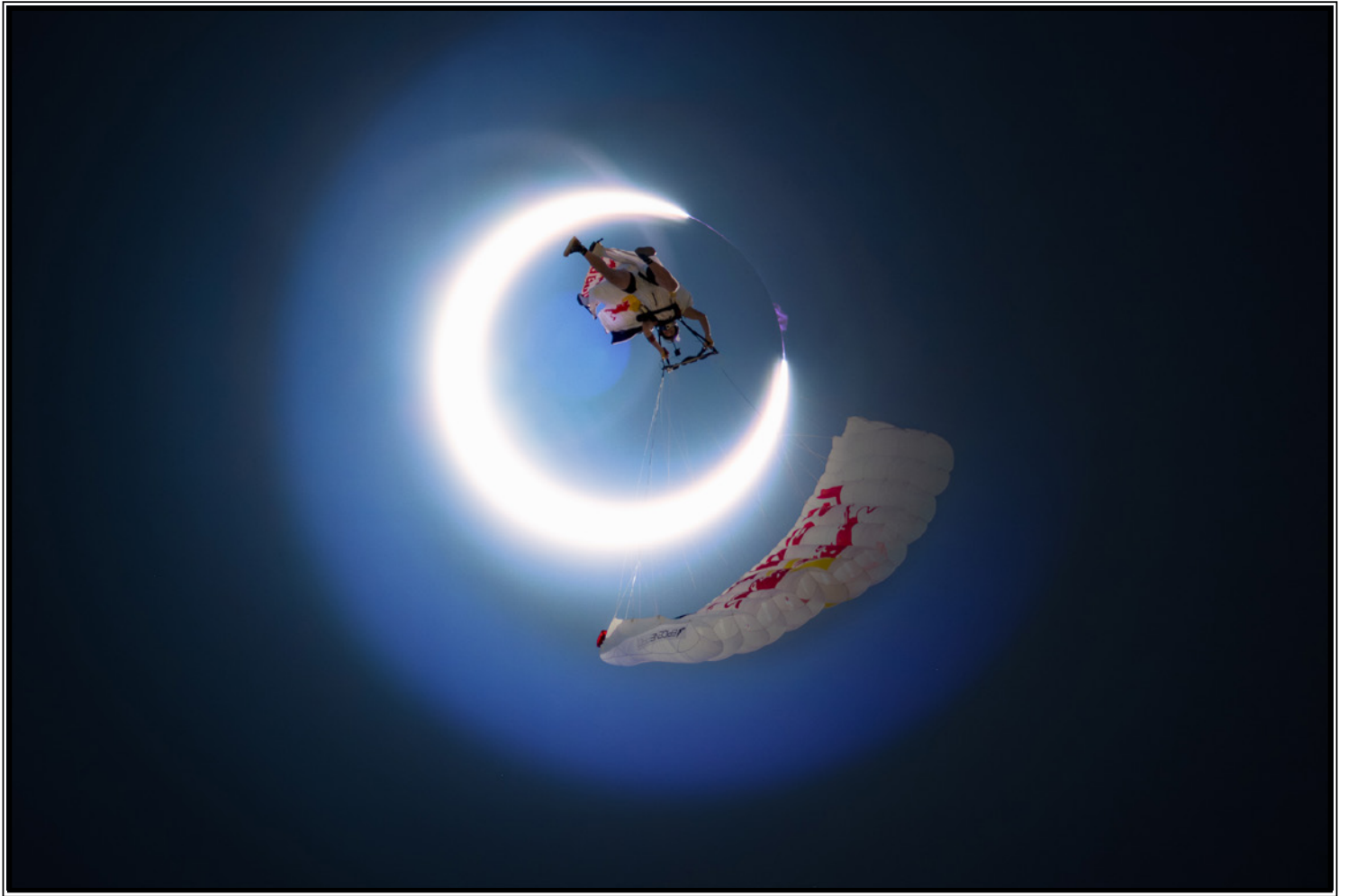












portfolio





The Year Ai Goes Big

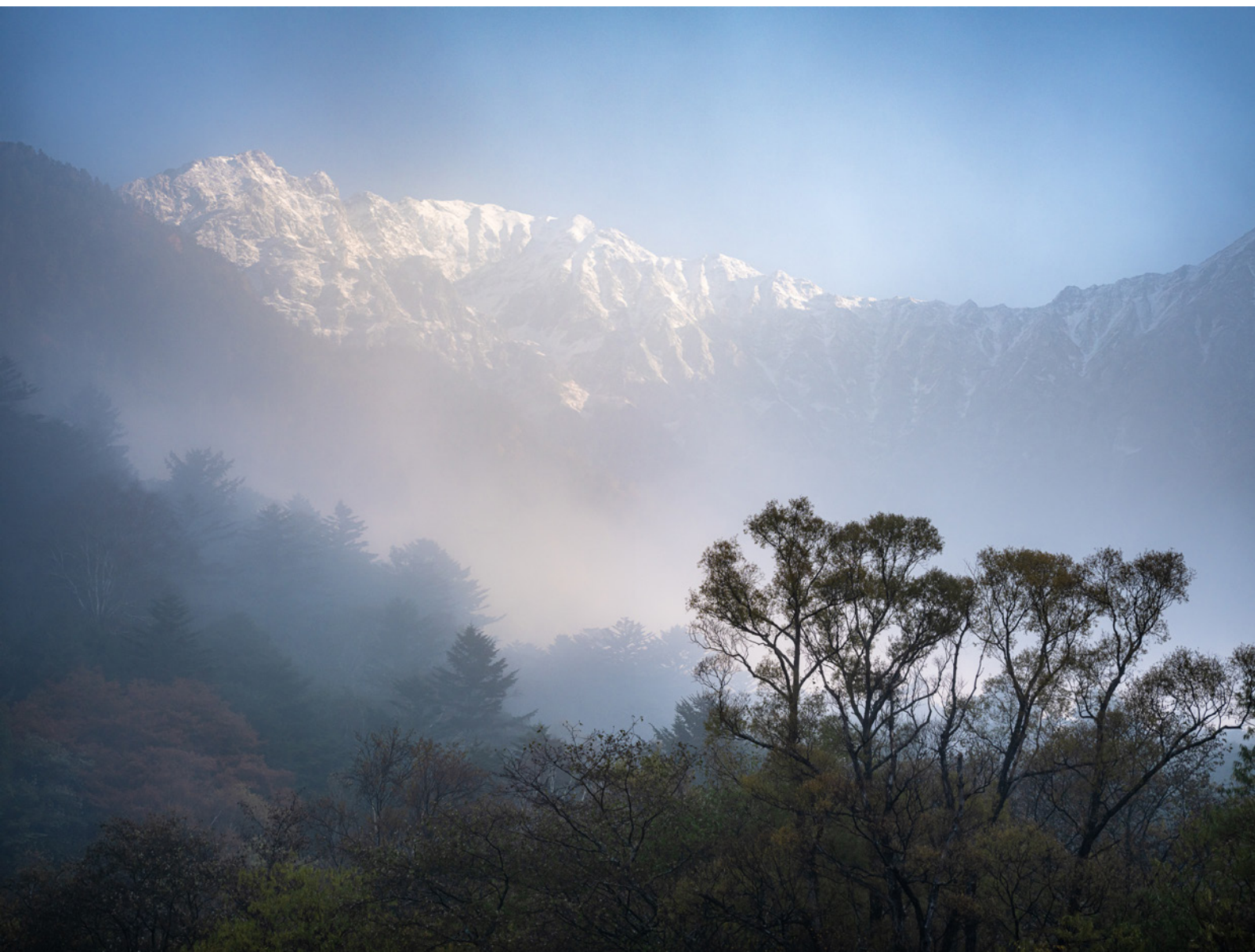
by Michael Clark

It has been a year since I first wrote about Artificial Intelligence (Ai) imagery in the Winter 2023 Newsletter. In that time, what has become clear, and was probably pretty predictable, is that the Ai image rendering engines have massively improved so that now it is quite difficult to tell an Ai image from an actual photograph. [Note that I am not calling Ai images “photographs.”] Seeing how far the Ai images have come in just one year and looking into my crystal ball (wink-wink), I predict 2024 will be the year that many big corporations incorporate Ai images into their marketing—and the vast majority will not disclose that the images were generated via Ai. In case you have doubts, it has already happened a few times and some of those companies are in the creative space. Wacom in particular got caught using Ai images in one of their latest ads.

Last year, I somehow thought that it would be a while until Ai images really made a huge impact on the photo industry but that was short sighted. Especially now that the Ai image landscape has filled out a bit with Adobe’s Firefly image generator and Getty Images announcing recently that they also have an Ai image generator in the works. Both of these Ai image generators were built with images in the Adobe Stock library and the Getty Images library respectively so that eliminates the legal issues that are a massive problem with Midjourney and other publicly trained Ai image generators. Regardless, as

companies continue to chase profits, the temptation to use cheaper Ai generated images instead of producing them with photographers is certainly going to be the new reality.

In terms of how Ai images will impact the photography industry and my own work in particular, there are certainly genres and clients that will need real, authentic photography documenting real life events. I don’t see Red Bull generating Ai images anytime soon to show what their real athletes are doing. Hence, the adventure sports genre to some degree seems fairly safe—at least the part that documents real world action. No one wants to see an Ai image of Kai Lenny surfing a giant wave at Peahi (aka Jaws). They want to see the real image documenting the amazing wave and athletic force that is Kai Lenny. But, with all that said, in the greater photo industry, there are plenty of scenarios where Ai images can fill the gap—and do so convincingly with no one ever knowing it was an Ai image. And that right there is the scary bit. The photo industry is currently in a very rough spot, with fewer and fewer assignments. With TikTok taking up a huge percentage of the world’s advertising budgets, and companies cutting back to trim their bottom line I don’t see it getting better anytime soon. As one of my clients recently told me, “Buckle up, the start of 2024 is going to be bumpy ride.” Regardless, creativity and hard work trumps any market volatility. It is time to get to work.



Mt. Oku-Hotakadake (3,190m) in the Hotaka Mountains range in Kamikochi National Park, Japan.

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