

NEWSLETTER

MICHAEL CLARK

PHOTOGRAPHY



WINTER 2025



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Cover Image: A double exposure image of Jeff Provenzano sky diving in front of the rare Blue Supermoon, which also happened to be a Blue Moon, captured on August 19, 2024. Opposite Page: Pete McLeod performing his aerial show at the 2024 Red Bull Aviation Camp in Coushatta, Louisiana.





Sporadic Newsletters

An explanation on why the Newsletter has been so irregular the last few years

Some of you might have noticed that the Newsletter is not going out as often as it used to. Part of this is that my assignments have been sporadic the last few years as there has been major upheaval in the advertising industry. On top of that, many of my assignments have had embargoes that kept me from talking about them until they were launched by the client—and in the advertising world product launches can take a while. And last, I have had to switch over to a new email promo provider as more than half of my subscriber list was not even getting my emails about the Newsletters when they launched. On that note, if you have been on my Newsletter mailing list and did not get an email about this Newsletter (and want to keep receiving them) please send me an email and I can add you to the subscribers list.

Newsletters like this one are also a bit old school. With the crazy amounts of spam we all receive, and with the scary world of deceitful hackers out there, we are all a little bit leery of clicking on a link in an email. Since I format this Newsletter with medium resolution images there is no way to send it directly. Hence, in many respects this is very much a digital magazine. For those that don't want to download anything, note that much of the same content does appear on my blog. About the only parts of this Newsletter that doesn't appear on the blog are the editorial sections (this opening article and the

closing editorial like this issues "Thirty Years" piece). My hope is to continue the Newsletter but we will see how it goes. The good news is my blog is also going strong and gets quite a few site visits each month as well.

Hopefully in 2025 things will get back to normal—or at least edge that direction. I am going to make a concerted effort this year to get the Newsletter back on track and put out four full issues. I will also try to post articles on my blog more regularly as well. Featured in this issue of the Newsletter is an article about advances in software that solves some big issues for image quality—namely resolution and high ISO noise. The feature article details my experiences photographing the Red Bull Air Force Aviation Camp last year in Louisiana, which was literally a wild ride. Of course this issue also includes news and info on upcoming workshops as well. 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: Levi Siver catching some air while windsurfing at Ho'okipa on the north shore of Maui, Hawaii.

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



2024: Year in Review

An extensive blog post detailing my best images of 2024



A few weeks ago, I posted my [year in review blog post](#)—as I normally do every year. This blog post features what I feel are the best images I have created for the year and shares some of the stories behind those images. 2024 has been a wild ride (literally). From Patagonia to Hawaii, the Grand Canyon to high above Louisiana,

there were some memorable moments I'll never forget. The photo industry continues to struggle and in 2024 it felt like it went off a cliff. But regardless of that, I still had some incredible assignments and there were periods where I was insanely busy. 2025 also marks the start of my 30th year as a professional photographer, which is



incredibly hard to fathom. I am not sure at the start I would have ever dreamed I would make it this far and looking back it has been an incredible three decades.

Yet again, this year saw me working with the Red Bull Air Force a few times again as well as creating images for the launch of the new FUJIFILM GF500mm lens. This year I had more gigs with Red Bull than with any other client. They have entrusted me with some very complex assignments and seem to relish in challenging not just their athletes but the photographers and video teams as well in terms of how to actually document the action. As you will see in the blog post, this year was all over the map in

terms of photographic genres and clients. On the previous page and above are just two of the best images included in the blog post. Check out the full post to see all of my best images from 2024.

So long 2024. My thanks to Red Bull, Fujifilm, *National Geographic*, New Mexico Tourism, Visionary Wild and all of my other clients with whom I worked this year. Feel free to comment on the blog about any of these images and tell me which one you think is the best of the best from this year. A Happy New Year to you all. Here's hoping your 2025 is filled with even more adventurous travels and amazing experiences!

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 in-person and online workshops I will be teaching in 2025. For more information on these workshops, and to find out how to register, go to the [Workshops](#) page on my blog or click on the links in the descriptions below.

ONE-ON-ONE WORKSHOPS

In-Person or Online via Skype or Zoom

Email info@michaelclarkphoto.com to Schedule

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

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

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE: DIVING INTO ADVENTURE PHOTOGRAPHY

A Zoom seminar — Los Angeles Center of Photography

May 10, 2025 — 10 to 11:30 AM PT

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



This summer will be my first time teaching again in-person at the Santa Fe Workshops here in my home town of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Reid Callanan and I came up with a great workshop entitled "The Western Portrait" where we photograph the culture and people working on various ranches around Santa Fe. Participants will come away with an array of portraits and images of the cowboy culture as shown above from movie ranches, real working ranches and historical sites.

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

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

For more information and to register for this online seminar visit the [LACP website](#).

THE WESTERN PORTRAIT

Santa Fe Workshops — Santa Fe, New Mexico

June 30 - July 4, 2025

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

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



This fall I will again be teaching for the Maine Media Workshops up in Rockport, Maine. We have set up a very exciting workshop exploring Cutting-Edge Lighting Techniques as shown above and on the following page. Pre-Covid this was one of my most popular workshops and I am very excited to bring it back. I am also very happy to announce that this workshop is also sponsored by Elinchrom and MAC Group, who will be providing the lighting gear for us to use in this workshop.

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

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

TUITION: \$2,610 (Model and Location Fees included)

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

CUTTING-EDGE LIGHTING TECHNIQUES

Maine Media Workshops — Rockport, Maine

October 13 - 17, 2025

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



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

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

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

Workshop Fee: \$1,950

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

**BHUTAN AND NEPAL:
THE HIMALAYAN KINGDOMS**

Andy Biggs Safaris and Custom Travel
January 27 - February 8, 2026

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

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

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

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

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



In January 2026, I am once again teaming up with my good friend Andy Biggs to lead a photography workshop in Nepal and Bhutan. We start in Kathmandu and finish in Bhutan. Andy has been leading some of the highest-end workshops in the World for many years now so this one will be quite an adventure. Together we have an incredible depth of knowledge on photography and of course in Nepal and Bhutan we will have plenty of amazing scenes to photograph.

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

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

For more information and to register for this incredible photography workshop visit [Andy Biggs website](#).

Workshop Testimonials

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

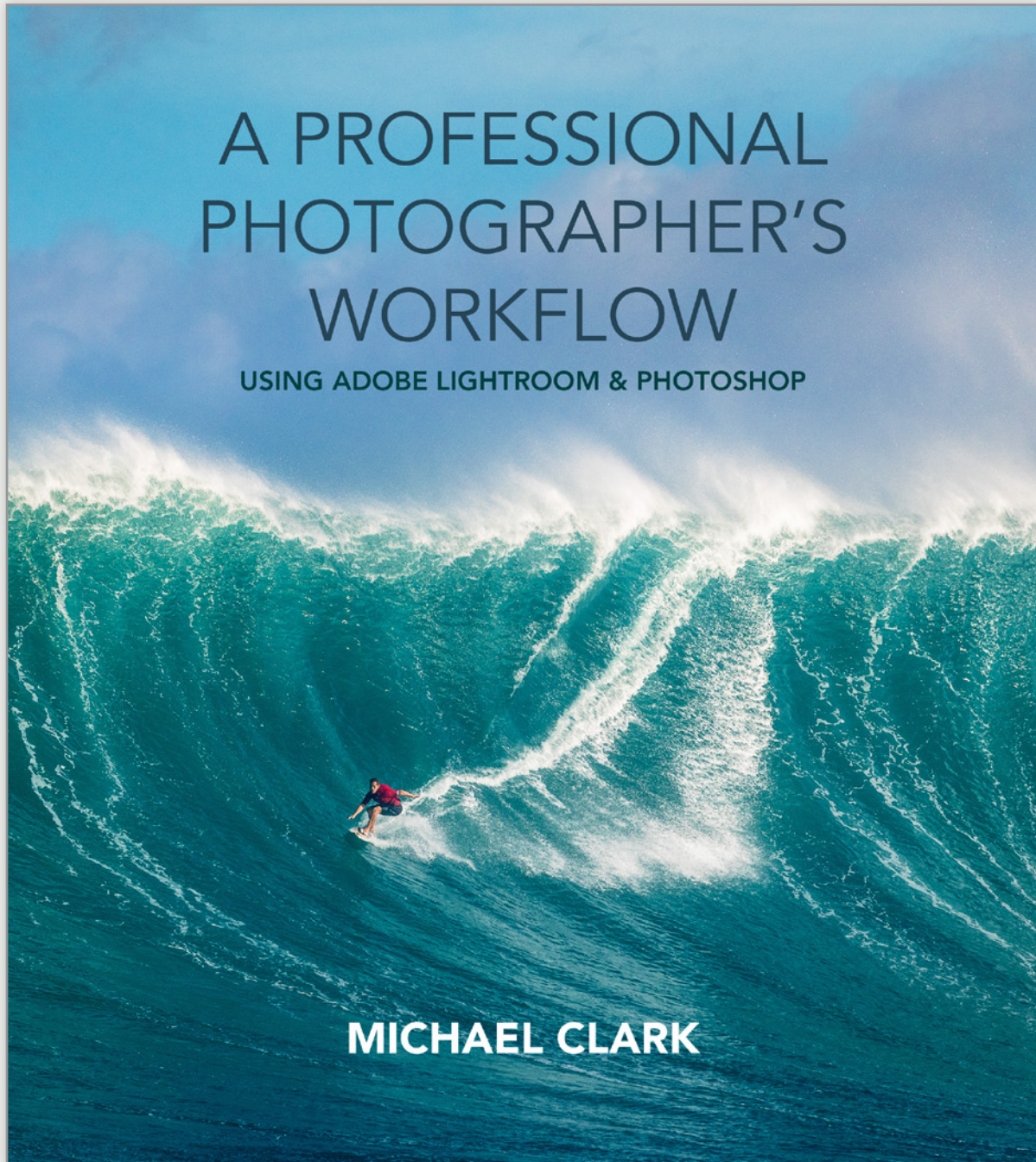
"The Adobe Lightroom Intensive Workshop in Seattle was excellent. The two-day format was perfect-just enough time to cover all the important features but not so much time as to be draining or get in the way of work. Michael Clark was an outstanding instructor. Not only was he clear, concise, and comprehensive,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

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

For more information on my upcoming workshops please visit the [Workshops](#) page on my blog. For any questions regarding my upcoming workshops please [email](#) me.

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Camera Specs that may no longer matter

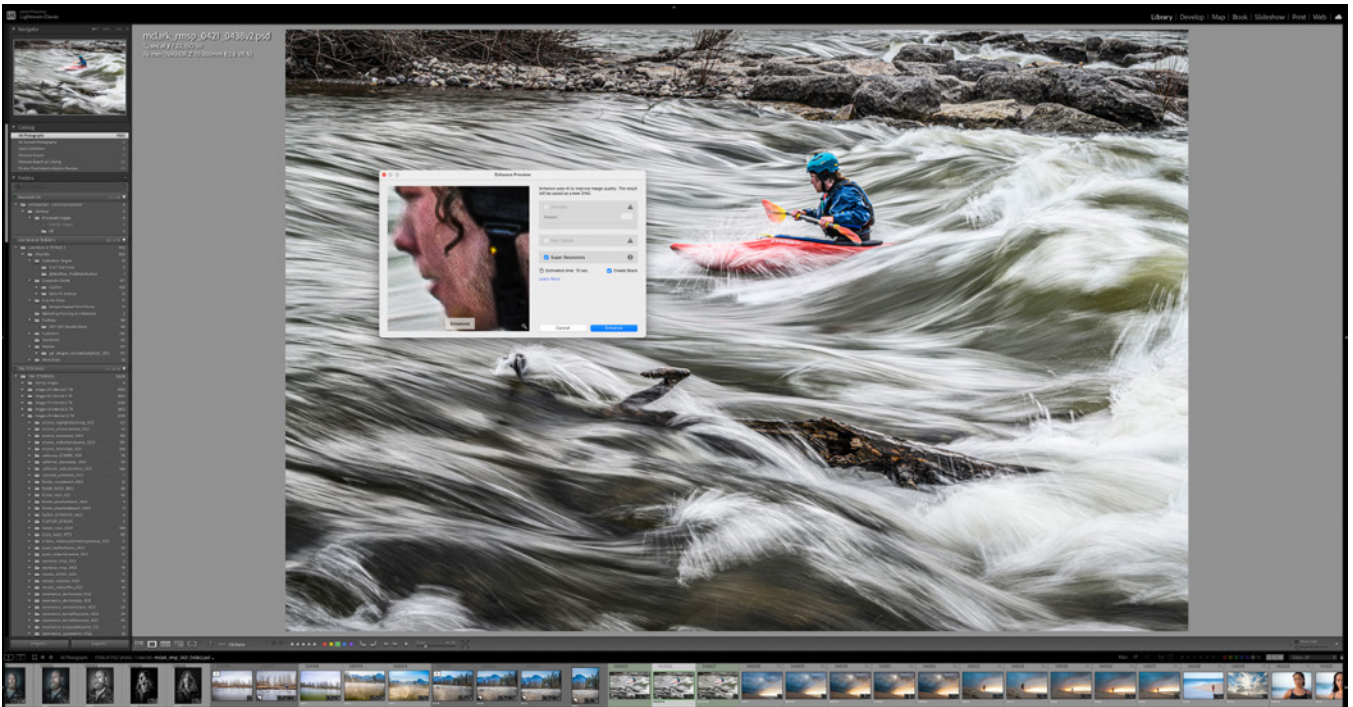
A discussion of recent software innovations that have changed the game

With the recent improvements in software, notably from Adobe and Topaz, there are a few camera specifications that may no longer merit too much concern. Those two specifications are sensor resolution and high ISO noise. It feels strange to write that last sentence as I have been chasing the best cameras and sensors for decades now. My leap into medium format cameras, first with the Hasselblad and more recently with the stellar FUJIFILM GFX cameras, has been a major part of that quest to find the best image quality possible. This isn't to say that a high-end camera is not worth it anymore, but here I would like to point out that other factors may be more important—like dynamic range, autofocus capabilities, frame rate and so on. Since I mainly use Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop to process my raw images there are two features in those software options that have really revolutionized what we can get away with. Topaz offers similar software solutions but since I don't use those regularly I will stick with the Adobe options here in this article.

First off, let's talk about Adobe's Super Resolution feature built both into Lightroom and Photoshop. When this feature was first announced in March 2021, I wrote a fairly detailed blog post about it which you can find [here](#). That post goes into much more detail about how to use it and the results. The upshot is that by right clicking on any

image and choosing "Super Resolution" Adobe's software will use AI to increase the resolution of the image by a factor of four. It basically doubles both the horizontal and vertical axis of the image—and it does a fantastic job. Hence, with this feature a 24 MP image becomes a 96 MP image. As shown on the following page, this feature can radically increase the size of any image making it possible to make larger prints than otherwise would be an option with the lower resolution image file.

In the screenshots on the following page you can see an image of a whitewater kayaker created with a 24 MP camera blown up to a 96 MP image using Super Resolution in Adobe Lightroom Classic. In the bottom screenshot, the 24 MP image is on the right and the 96 MP version is on the left. Here, I have used the Compare feature in Lightroom to show both images at 100% magnification. Notice that the larger image looks practically no different than the smaller one—Lightroom did a fantastic job upsizing the image. With a 96 MP image there is very little you can't do in terms of print sizes. In addition to simply upsizing the image, Adobe's Super Resolution also seems to retain the sharpness of the original image as well—much better than any previous upsizing method I have seen. The final results are greatly dependent on the image quality of the image you start with. Hence, the sharper the original image the better the results.



In 2024, there are still quite a few cameras coming out with 20 to 24 MP sensors. The 24 MP benchmark has been and continues to be a popular sensor resolution. 24 MP makes a lot of sense for most photographers as the files are easy to deal with and don't fill up a memory card

as fast as larger file sizes. Of course, these days 46 MP is also a very popular sensor resolution as well (like with the Nikon Z9 and Z8 and the Canon R5 II). My tests in the past with 46 MP sensors have shown me that you can easily make prints up to 40 x 60 inches. With the



Super Resolution feature in Lightroom you can now go even larger with no worries—or simply make large prints at higher dpi (dots per inch) settings for better final print quality when viewed up close.

The Super Resolution feature also works wonders with even larger image files. Take for example images produced by any of the FUJIFILM GFX 102 MP cameras like the landscape image shown above produced with the

FUJIFILM GFX100 II. This 102 MP image file becomes a 408 MP image when Adobe Super Resolution is applied. I realize a 408 MP image file seems absolutely ridiculous but if you need to print something on a 60-foot long wall or the side of a bus then this option will really help out in those rare circumstances. Also if you want to apply an extreme crop but still want to have some detail in the image Super Resolution can help in that instance as well.

As shown on the previous page, the large 102 MP GFX image files look amazing when Adobe Super Resolution is used to increase the file size. In the lower screenshot, on the left is the 408 MP version of the image and on the right is the original 102 MP version of the image. I have found that higher resolution image files tend to net better results when you use Super Resolution—probably because there is more information for the software to work with when upresing the image file.

The other camera specification that really may not matter that much anymore is high ISO noise. Adobe introduced Denoise AI in 2023 and it is unbelievable how well it works to remove noise from images while retaining or even enhancing the detail of the image. When I first tried it out I was completely blown away at how well it worked. I also found that the default setting of 50 was way too much noise reduction for my taste. As shown on the following page, I tend to use a setting of 25 to 35 when using this tool in Adobe Lightroom Classic. For me, 30 to 35 seems to be the sweet spot. I don't feel the need to remove all of the noise, just to remove enough noise so that the noise itself is not the thing you look at when viewing a print of the image. I have used Denoise AI on images created at ISOs up to 12,800 and the results are absolutely stunning. The software can make ISO 6400 look

like ISO 200. Hence, with Denoise AI the only issue with high ISOs is the limited dynamic range inherent in those higher ISO settings.

The Denoise AI feature in Lightroom can be found in the Detail section (in the right hand column) of the Develop module. Once you click on the "Denoise AI" box then a dialog will show up as shown in the screenshot on the next page and you can move the slider to select the amount of Denoise AI you want to apply to the image. The image preview on the left side of the dialog box will show you the results at 100% so you can adjust as you want. I have found Denoise AI to work much faster on the newer, faster Apple computers—i.e. those with the new M1 to M4 chips. With the older Intel computers Denoise AI can take several minutes to process one image. And if you are trying to run it on several images at once, then it can take a lot longer. One of the cool things about Denoise AI is that you can batch process a bunch of images—though as I just said a fast computer will be key to making that happen in a timely manner. Also, note that Lightroom will make a new DNG image file from your original raw image when you use Denoise AI so that the original image file stays untouched.

I realize both of these features are using AI to some degree—and there is a lot of hate out there for AI image generation—but this is a very useful application of AI for our needs which does not create anything that isn't already there in your image. I too am not in love with the AI image generation software and have written a few different times about how that will have a huge impact specifically on the photography industry (and already has had a massive effect). But I do applaud Adobe for adding these very useful features into Lightroom and Photoshop.



Of course, Topaz Labs has similar software that can up-size images and reduce noise using AI enhancement and that has been out for quite a while now. I tested that software a few years ago before Adobe launched their versions and found it didn't work as well as I would have liked. I am sure it is much better now than it was years ago but for my work the Adobe tools seems to work just fine. Topaz also has software that can help sharpen images that are a little on the soft side as well. While that might be useful for some, I have not found a need for it and would rather rely on good camera technique and fast shutter speeds to get crisp images.

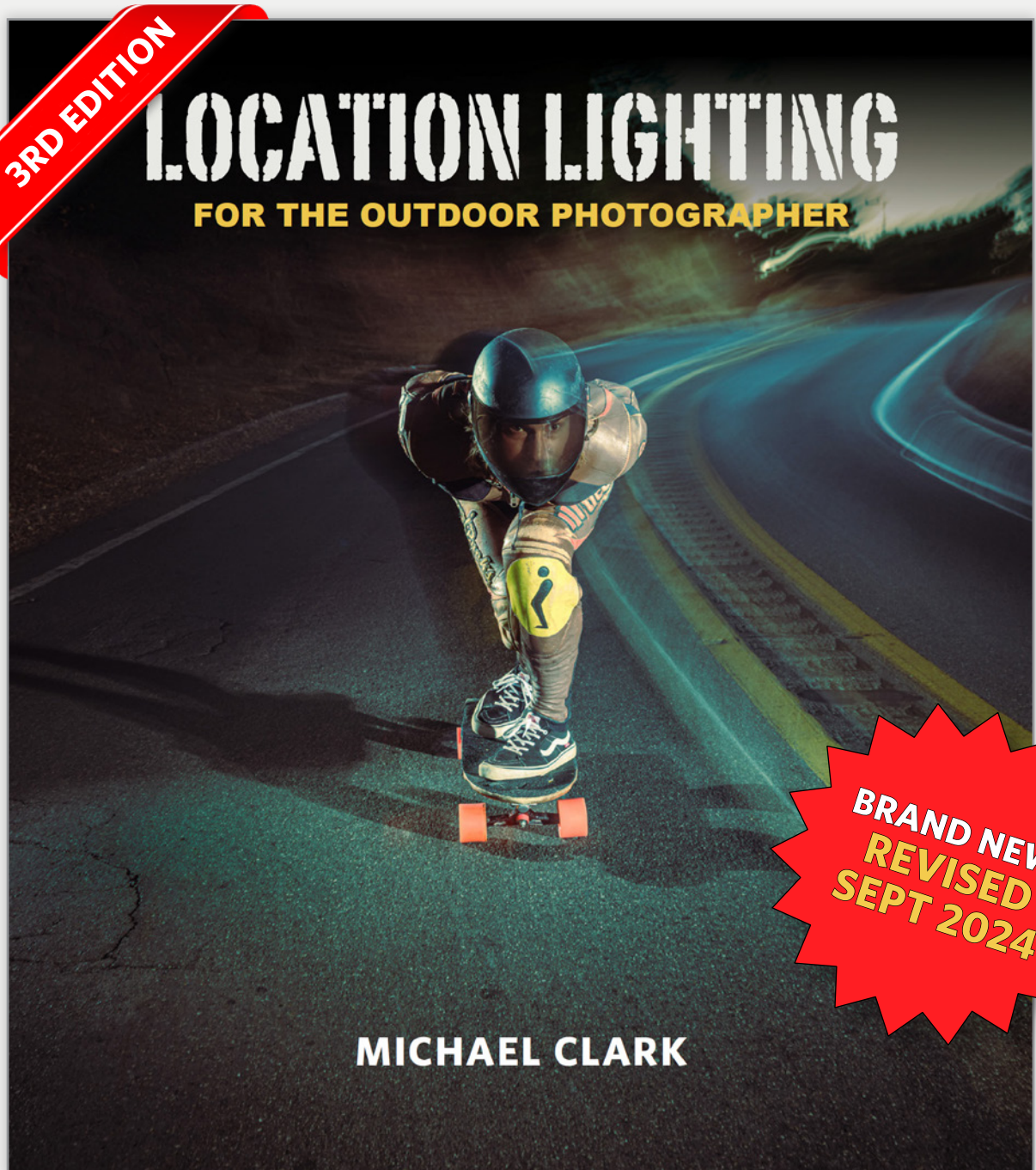
We are in an age where the software is a huge part of the final image result. This has been the case with Apple iPhone (and all mobile phone) images for quite some time now. But for those of us using larger cameras and sensors, it is wonderful to see these options come to Lightroom and Photoshop. Regardless of how well these

features work, this isn't to say that high resolution cameras are not important. As the old saying goes, "Garbage in, garbage out." We still need to use care and good camera technique to craft our images. But, this also means that if I choose to take my lighter 24 MP camera on a trip I don't have to worry that it might not be enough resolution for making larger prints. These two AI options just improved the image quality of all my cameras.

I am still a total geek about getting the best image quality possible in any and all circumstances. That is why I still use the FUJIFILM GFX system as my main cameras—all three of the latest 102 MP cameras. They have incredible image quality (that few other cameras can match) and they also have remarkably low noise at higher ISO settings. Super Resolution and Denoise AI help us take our images further than ever before—and that is something that a lot of photographers will rely on in the future regardless of their camera's specifications.

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on assignment:

Red Bull 

AIR FORCE





Last spring, in Mid-March, I once again had the honor of working with the Red Bull Air Force. The Red Bull Air Force is a team comprised of the best sky divers, wingsuit B.A.S.E. jumpers, and stunt pilots in the USA. Hanging out with them is like hanging out with Superman and Superwoman. Practically nothing is impossible and that is a huge part of why this crew continues to push and evolve their respective disciplines. I have worked with the team for the last fifteen years. This was the sixth team training camp I have photographed among many other assignments with them—and they have all been memorable.

The 2024 training camp was held in Louisiana. The weather was touch and go on a few days but overall the team managed to do a bunch of skydives and also try out some new formations and maneuvers that they can use for their air show demos. My assignment, as usual, was to document as much of the action as possible and also to create portraits, lifestyle images, can-in-hand images (images of the athletes drinking the product) and a team photo incorporating all of the athletes. The team photo is shown as a double page spread on pages 26-27.

The team photo itself was tricky to pull off. Trying to fit eight skydivers, two stunt pilots and an aerobatic helicopter into one still frame is challenging. The helicopter is pumping out some serious downforce just behind the skydivers standing on the tarmac. Aaron Fitzgerald (in the helicopter) also had to keep that bird steady as a rock while two stunt planes flew right over the top of him. He held the Helicopter there for five minutes or more as the stunt pilots Kirby Chambliss and Kevin Coleman tightened up their formation on five successive flyovers. I started farther away from the team not knowing how far

out the pilots would be from the ground and then moved in closer and closer on each attempt to make the skydivers bigger in the frame. The Air Force has had some iconic team photos over the years (many that I created with them) so the pressure is always on to top the last one.

The whole point of the team training camp is to get the whole team together, which rarely happens, and practice the air show that they perform throughout the year at various air bases—and also to come up with new ideas and concepts and practice those as well so they can incorporate those new stunts into future air shows and events. One of the stunts they have been doing at air shows lately is scenario where Aaron takes up Miles Daisher or Luke Aikins in the helicopter and they jump off the skid of the helicopter just as Kevin Coleman buzzes the bottom of the helicopter. Kevin comes in at 180 mph (289 kph) and his tail fin is only six-to-ten feet away from the bottom of the helicopter. From the ground it looks pretty epic as shown on pages 30-31. In that image, Miles Daisher is doing a backflip off the helicopter as well, making it even more dynamic.

When I was working up the final images, I showed the image with Miles jumping off the skid over the stunt plane to Katie, my partner, and asked her what she thought. Her response was that it was so out there she could barely even understand what was happening or where I was in relation to the action. I would say that is often the case for a lot of skydiving images and perhaps many of the images in this blog post. For some images it is easy to tell where I am in relation to the athlete and in others not so much. My hope is if the photograph looks this crazy to the viewer they have some sense of just how out there it looked in real life.







Of course, a huge part of the training camp is to skydive as much as possible—both for fun and for the team to get footage they can use to promote the team and Red Bull in general over the course of the next year. In the opening image for this article (on pages 22-23), team members Andy Farrington, Miles Daisher, Sean MacCormac, and Jeff Provenzano let loose while skydiving. For a lot of these skydiving images I am using either remote mounted mirrorless cameras or GoPro action cameras mounted on the team members helmets. They are all experts at using a GoPro or an Insta360 style action camera and they pretty much all have at least one (sometimes two) recording video on every single skydive. To get still images I have my GoPros running in time-lapse mode and firing off two frames every second. As you can imagine, that ends up being an incredible number of images in the end.

The Red Bull Air Force team members are true professionals. They know how to make something look off-the-charts cool. And they know how to play to the camera. Andy Farrington, the skydiver smiling into the camera in that opening spread, is not only one of the best skydivers and wingsuit pilots on the planet but he is also one of the best at filming skydiving. Hence, every time I put a camera on someone's helmet they seemed to make some magic happen. At some of the training camps we will have a few extra aircraft for myself and the video crew to shoot out of but at this Aviation camp we had just the team, myself and an incredible drone pilot working to document the action. This meant that I had to rely on remote cameras a bit more than usual. Even so, hopefully the images speak for themselves.

The GoPros were also mounted in the cockpits of the stunt planes (as shown on page 3) and also on the wings

of the aircraft as well. In the image on Page 3, where Pete McLeod is buzzing the tarmac, the image was captured by a GoPro mounted on the dashboard of his plane. On Page 35 is another GoPro image of Kirby Chambliss upside down with the ground reflected on his wing. In all we created over 35,000 images on the GoPros over the course of four days. I am never quite sure what we are going to get but one thing is sure—there are always a few epic GoPro images.

Of course, there are plenty of opportunities to get up in the air as well. When Aaron Fitzgerald isn't practicing his aerobatic helicopter routine, I can often hop in the helicopter and photograph the action out of an open door. Flying with Aaron is a huge privilege. I have spent many hours in the back of his helicopter and it never gets old or routine. He is one of the best helicopter pilots on the planet and what he can do in a helicopter is literally mind-blowing. I have been in the helicopter once when he ran through his entire aerobatic routine—and that was one of the highlights of my career just to be there.

Of course, I also have a lot of other obligations on the shot list when on assignment at the Aviation camp. Chief among those are to create new portraits of the team (as shown on page 32) that will be used for all the air shows and events they participate in. The team is constantly traveling and it seems almost every weekend they are skydiving into a Formula 1 race, performing at an air show or some other major sporting event. They don't stay in one place for long and their portraits are displayed on giant LED screens to give the audience a sense of who it is falling out of the sky right in front of them.

I take the portrait part of these assignments pretty









seriously and try to create portraits of each athlete that we can both be proud of. The hope is that they actually like the portrait of themselves as well, which is usually a much higher bar than just how cool the image looks stylistically.

Shown on the previous page are a slew of portraits including Sean MacCormac (top left), Pete McLeod (2nd from top left), Andy Farrington (3rd from top left), Jon DeVore (bottom left), Miles Daisher (top right), Aaron Fitzgerald and Miles Daisher (center right) and a shot of the team taking a selfie with the helicopter right behind them. These portraits are produced on the fly so to speak. Typically, as with this occasion, I set up a little studio space inside a hanger and leave it set up for the entire camp. For this setup we used a gray background and lit it with three Elinchrom strobes (big studio flashes). When there is some down time I grab a few athletes and we hammer out some portraits of them in various poses. Usually these mini-sessions last no longer than five minutes per athlete. We get serious straight on portraits, then a few with them looking away from the camera, and then we just let go and get some funky off the cuff moments. We try to have some fun with it as getting your portrait taken is never all that much fun. All the athletes know the drill and are professional about it but still I like to make it painless.

It isn't often that I see the team members take selfies but during this camp there was a moment that was hard to pass up. The image on the previous page (bottom right) was from right at the end of our team photo session. It isn't everyday that the team has everyone together and a helicopter hovering right behind them. They had been standing there getting blasted by the rotor wash for five

minutes or so when Jeff Provenzano pulled out his phone and snapped what has to be one of the coolest selfies ever created. Luckily I saw this happen and snapped off a few images of them taking a selfie together.

Another part of the assignment is just documenting the behind the scenes happenings in-between the skydives and aerobatic routines. On the average training camp day the team might make anywhere from six to a dozen or more skydives depending on what is happening. Hence, there is a lot of parachute packing in-between skydives. Communication between the skydivers and the pilots is also critical for safety so there are a lot of group discussions that I try to document. These images aren't necessarily portfolio images but all just part of the story. A few of these doc-style images can be seen on the next page.

Over the course of the week, the stunt pilots Kirby Chambliss, Kevin Coleman and Pete McLeod (from Canada) and Aaron Fitzgerald (flying the aerobatic helicopter) are constantly going up to practice their routines and work on new maneuvers as well. Sometimes I am in the air to document these flights but more often I am on the ground. Seeing the stunt pilots go through their entire routines is pretty wild. As shown on page 25, these planes can go full vertical at any moment like a rocket launching into the sky. In that image Kevin Coleman flew down the length of the runway and then went vertical.

By far, one of the most intense moments of the aviation camp was when Luke Aikins was flying his plane (that has an air brake attached to it) while the rest of the Red Bull Air Force skydived around him. This resulted in an absolutely mind-blowing set of images from the remote cameras. All of the skydivers rotated around the plane as



it descended. At one point Jeff Provenzano reached out and grabbed the wing of the plane as they all descended at the same rate. The air brake that Luke has attached to the plane allows the plane to fall at the same rate as the skydivers, about 120 mph (193 kph), which is terminal velocity for a human body. The video from this stunt is even more compelling than any of my still images and can be seen [here](#) and [here](#) on Instagram.

I wasn't in the plane for this first skydive but shortly there after they tried the same thing with wingsuit skydivers and afterwards Luke ran over to me saying, "We gotta get you up in the plane" to photograph his perspective out the door. I knew that if Luke was excited about the perspective it was going to be pretty wild so I jumped in the

plane to head up. After climbing up in altitude for about ten or fifteen minutes Luke engaged the air brake and we immediately slowed down and started descending rapidly. I was waiting for the wingsuit skydivers to show up and seconds later they were right there just outside the open door. In the image on page 37 team members Andy Farrington, Mike Swanson, Jeff Provenzano, and Miles Daisher are floating just next to the plane. They seemed so comfortable it was almost comical.

I didn't know what to expect or how long this would go on so I had the camera cranked up into the 20 fps mode and I was blasting away as Andy Farrington (the closest to me) just outside the door flashed me the "rock on" hand signal. They flew next to the plane for thirty seconds or



more—much longer than I expected. I had so much time that I framed up a variety of compositions. This one (on page 37), which includes the door frame, the wing and the plane's wheel, seemed to give the best sense of the scene. I even stopped shooting a few times as my right eardrum had pressure building up in it so rapidly it was painful. We fell over 10,000 feet (3,048 meters) in those thirty seconds. Because the air brake wasn't fully

deployed we weren't falling straight vertically at the ground but we matched the glide path of the wingsuit skydivers which is a 3-to-1 glide ratio. Hence, we were falling roughly at a 35-degree down angle as can be seen in the image on page 36.

In the image on the following page you can see my foot and part of my upper body sticking out of the plane door.



Usually I try not to break the plane of the open door as there is a lot of wind pushing you around if you do, but in this instance I was trying to get a different composition without the door frame. When I am photographing out of an open door on an aircraft or a helicopter I am typically tethered in but in this instance it was a serious safety hazard to be tethered into the plane. Hence, I was wearing a parachute and was not tethered to anything in the plane—just in case I fell out. Being tethered in is a safety hazard in this instance because if the parachute somehow gets deployed while I am still in the plane and I am

tethered in then the plane is going to crash with all of us in it. Being untethered meant that if somehow the parachute opened while I was still in the plane it would pull me out of the plane and we would hopefully all survive. It is definitely not a good thing to have your parachute deploy while you are still in the plane so I made sure not to accidentally catch any part of the rig on something inside the plane or accidentally pull the release while photographing the wingsuiters. Regardless, it was pretty comfortable sitting on the floor of the plane next to Luke and photographing out the open door. To get a sense of what



it was like photographing the crew wingsuiting next to us in the plane check out Luke Aikins [behind the scenes video](#) he created while I was photographing the team. And then consider that he was flying the plane in a 35-degree nose dive and filming that on his iPhone at the same time.

There are endless images I could share here. That is a huge problem with these types of assignments—you have to photograph everything to make sure you don't miss it since the action happens so fast. I created almost 60,000 images. It took a week just to go through them

all—and then another week to work them up.

My sincere thanks to Red Bull for hiring me yet again to work with the Air Force team and to the team members themselves for allowing me to be a part of the action. This collaboration with the Red Bull Air Force has become one of the longest professional relationships I have ever had. I have seen and done so much with them over the last fifteen years that I truly feel a part of the crew. Jon DeVore even said as much during the week, "Mike. You are a part of this team." That hit me deep. Thanks Jon!

portfolio





Thirty years

by Michael Clark

This year marks the start of my 30th year as a professional photographer. Just typing out that last sentence is a surreal experience. Thirty years feels like three centuries in this profession. I would have never dreamed at the start I would make it this far. Those first ten years were a serious grind to get things rolling and establish myself (and my income). To say it has been a wild ride would be a serious understatement. I have had some very close calls along the way—I have used up at least eight of my nine lives. Hence, I seriously should not be alive much less still working as an adventure photographer. Regardless, the last thirty years have been filled with wild adventures all over the World.

In the early years when I was just starting out, I worked in an outdoor store to make ends meet while my photo career revved up. One day James Balog, a famous *National Geographic* photographer (who later made the film [Chasing Ice](#)), walked in and I helped fit him for a pair of boots which is a lengthy process. Once I recognized him, I quizzed him up and down about the industry (sorry James). At one point he told me, "It never gets easier." Somehow in my mind I felt like if I could make it through the first ten years I would have it made in the shade and it would get easier (in terms of getting assignments and making a living). While getting assignments and making a living seemed to get a bit more consistent, it never got easier. As a freelancer, you are always on the chase for

the next gig, the next paycheck and that next glorious adventure. When outsiders see your images they only see the glamour, not the struggle. Even though it isn't always pleasant, that struggle is where the fulfillment comes from. To watch your career grow, your images improve, and your skills expand—and for clients to acknowledge that and seek you out for those skills—is all part of the joy of being a professional photographer. I have learned that the struggle is what helps move you forward, both personally and professionally. Hence, embrace the struggle.

Other keys that I have learned to foster growth are experimentation, curiosity, and keeping your passion alive. I learned early on in my career that adventure and stepping out into the unknown are what got me excited about photography, which is why I have continued in the adventure genre for all these years.

Hopefully marking thirty years as a pro is just a step along the path and I have another twenty years to go. As the images in this Newsletter can attest, I haven't really slowed down that much. More than ever, I find that I thrive on pushing the boundaries of what is possible with my photography. I love those assignments where we aren't sure we can even get an image of the action and have to figure out how we can pull it off. I also love the incredible people I get to photograph and work with. Happy New Year. Onwards and upwards.



A double-exposure image (built in Photoshop) of the rare Blue Supermoon, which also happened to be a Blue Moon, captured on August 19, 2024, and a photograph of Jeff Provenzano of the Red Bull Air Force Skydiving during an aviation camp.

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