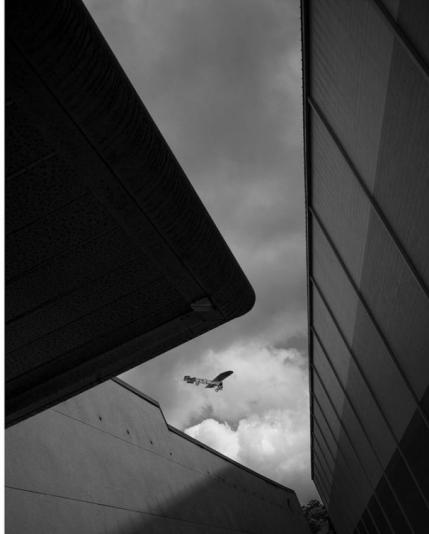


Photographers Spotlight : Phil Bekker

By Bianca Ranciato Posted October 12, 2022 In News, Photographer Spotlight

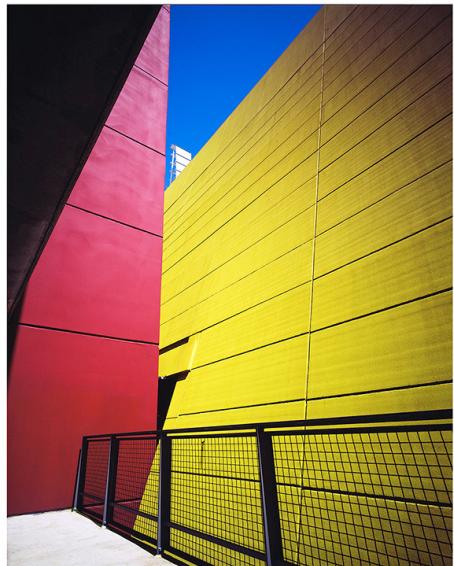


Tell me about you!

Born and raised in the former British colony of Rhodesia in Southern Africa, which later became Zimbabwe in 1980. We lived on the border with ex Portuguese colony, Mozambique and used to pop over for Peri Peri Prawns and Peri Peri chicken on a regular basis. I suspect this was the cause of my aversion to bland foods. Lots of Indian curries also followed, (and continued) which put an end to tasteless cuisine forever, thank God!

I studied at a 3 year commercial photography program in Durban South Africa followed by a postgraduate spell in London, England. After that, I assisted for a London fashion photographer with trips to Morocco and Spain included. Unable to stay in the UK because of sanctions against Rhodesia for declaring independence, I returned to South Africa and opened a studio in Durban. Those were fun, uncomplicated, care-free and often quite wild times. I was commissioned personally by Pierre Cardin to do a brochure and other assignments took me to Namibia and Mauritius and of course various parts of South Africa.

In those days there were no rental houses, so we all just went out and bought Sinars, Broncolor lighting (still have most of it), enormous studio stands and medium format. Purchased my first used Hasselblad SWC at this time along with various other pieces of equipment. You couldn't really specialize in South Africa back then, so in the morning you might be shooting Playtex bras and pants on medium format in the studio and in the afternoon, hanging out of a helicopter shooting for Southern Sun Hotels, with a Linhof Technica.



How did you discover your love for photography?

At school, a girlfriend's brother was a keen amateur photographer and showed me how to use his at home darkroom. He later informed me of a new commercial photography school opening in neighboring South Africa. It was probably the first in Africa, and I enrolled in it after completing compulsory military service in Rhodesia. This was a three year course and in my last year, I met Sam Haskins, a very well known and published, London-based photographer who had moved there from South Africa. He strongly encouraged me to do a postgraduate course in London which I did.

I do remember using an inherited Box Brownie as a first camera and then a Baldur coupled-rangefinder in my early teens. A Nikkormat FTN came later and was my only personal student camera until the college sold me a used medium format towards the end of my studies. I also remember being very fascinated by seeing multiple displayed copies of the multi-image Beatles album, 'A Hard Days Night' which would influence my gallery work decades later. As a student in London, I would charge around the city on weekends, visiting as many photo and other galleries and bookstores as I could find. Those were the days!



Who are some of your favorite photographers (past or present)?

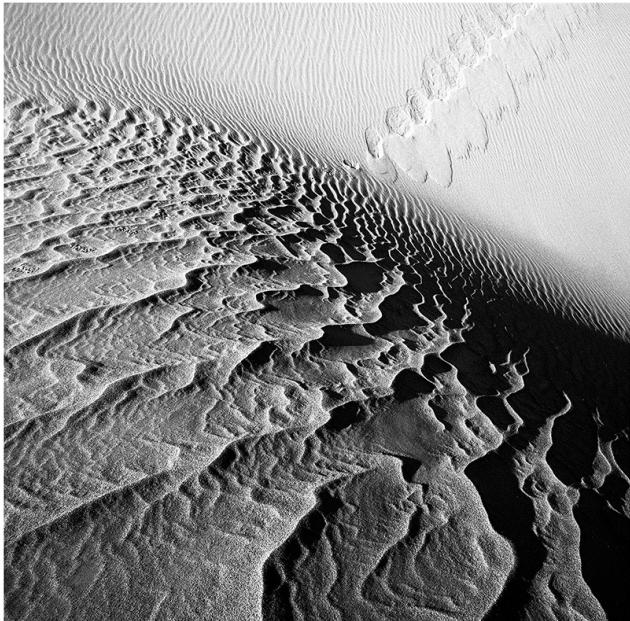
As a student, Guy Bourdin, Art Kane, Cheyco Liedmann and later, Mike and Doug Starn, Luis Gonzales Palma, Robert and Shana Park Harrison, Michael Kenna, Irving Penn, Joel Peter Witkin, Olivia Parker, Rosalind Wolf-Purcell, David Hockney and Andy Warhol, amongst others.



Of all the photographic genres you excel in, from studio stills, to abstract landscape, commercial architecture and more, is there one you feel particularly attracted to and why?

Any location work really.

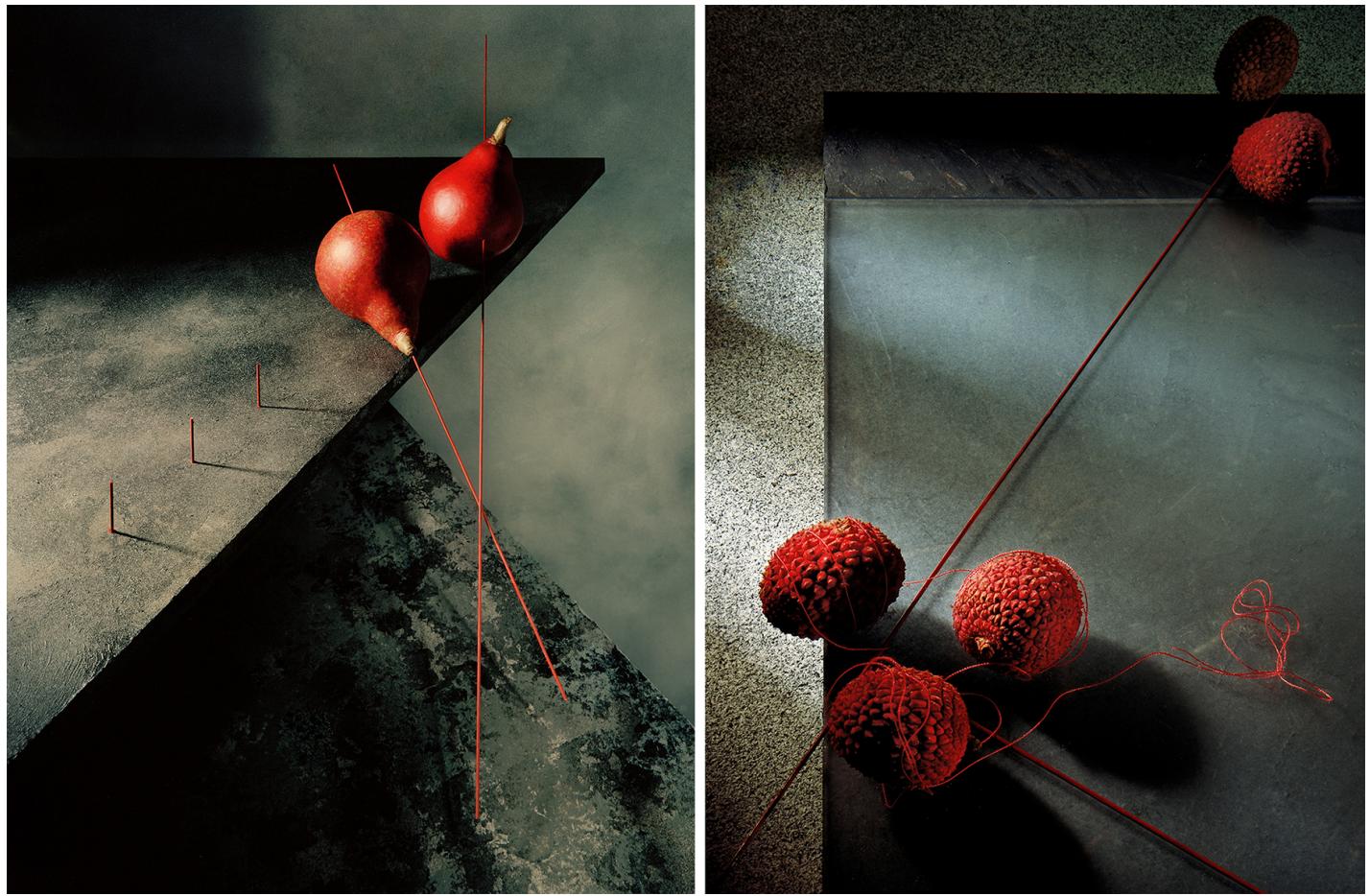
I especially respond to strong elements of design, as well as color and color combinations, which are always presenting themselves and asking to be noticed. It is then up to one to isolate an area within that scene and use the various elements to reconstruct a personal interpretation; perhaps a bit abstract and not too obvious. Including an element that introduces a narrative is ideal.



Can you describe a photographically challenging situation that you were confronted with that you were able to resolve on the fly?

I had an assignment to photograph the Durban Yacht Mole and needed a high vantage point. We managed to get onto the top of a very tall building overlooking the scene. To get the shot without any obstructions, I lay on my stomach, and wriggled forward, hanging over the edge, with my wife / assistant sitting on my legs as a counter weight. I swear I heard her say, “If you fall, don’t forget to shout Geronimo” !

The client thought it was an aerial shot.



You've been a "Hasselblad guy" for as long as CI has known you. What aspects of their systems have kept you shooting with them all these years?

The outstanding quality has always been there and I do love the square format – such a wonderful space to construct an image within. Now, the size and weight, predictable image quality, ergonomics, stunning color space and intuitive operating system, far outweigh the few minor glitches, which have been addressed in the release of the X2D, and then some! I cant wait to use this new camera. No camera is perfect but the X1D II is wonderful to use and a pleasure to cart around everywhere.



With over 30 years of experience and publications dating back to 1989, what is one piece of advice you'd give to a budding photographer?

Develop a personal style / signature that sets you apart from others and love your chosen path. There are many fields (look at publications and online) where, apart from the perfect technical applications, its almost impossible to differentiate between photographers, due to a lack of person signature / style.

Become a really good and savvy businessman / woman with an eye on the future and changing trends and be really technically proficient and innovative.

Apart from all that, endear yourself to others so that you become the person they most want to be around and invest in for their assignments.



What is your favorite underrated photographic tool? Why?

My biggest peeve, is how often I see cameras being used without lens shades / compendiums (it seems most have never even heard of the latter), when they need to be used – which is most of the time.

Flagging the sun and lighting when the lens shade is not adequate, also seems to be unheard of. Why battle or try to make corrections in post when you can avoid flare and image degradation in the first place. Before responding to this question (in bed) I asked my learned wife what she thought i would say, and she immediately said, 'lens shade'.

We won't get into light meters!!



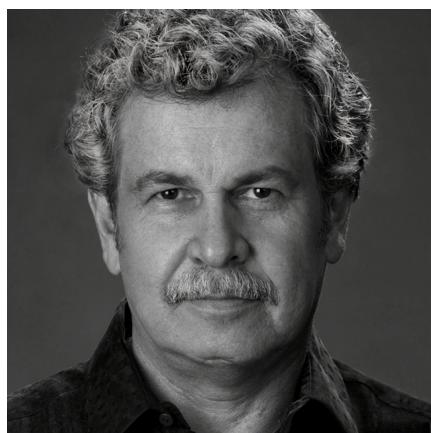
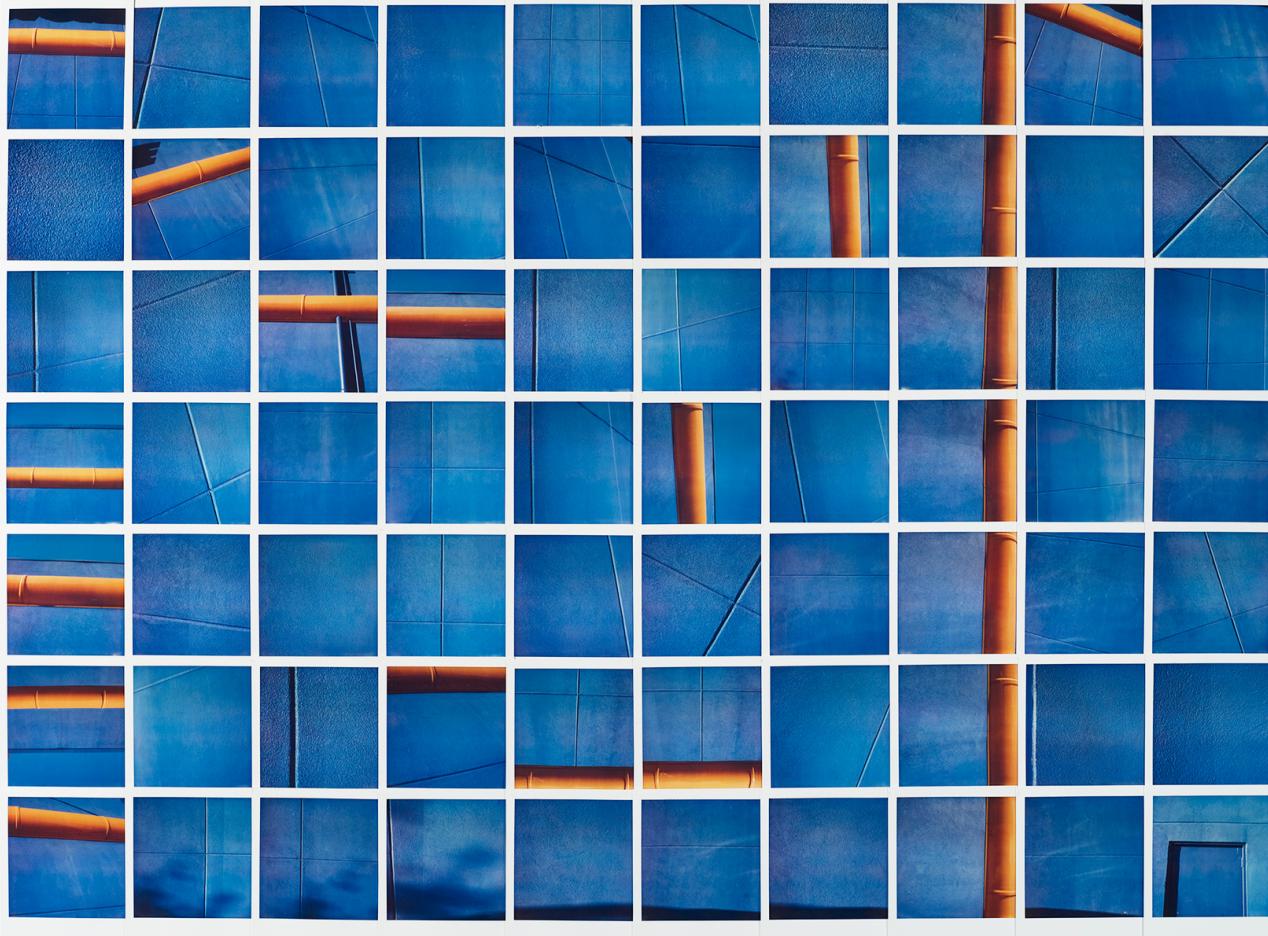
If you could choose anything to be in your viewfinder, where would you be and what would you be looking at?

Bad timing at the moment, but some of those appalling, run-down industrial sites in Eastern Europe, with maybe smoke stacks still billowing, surrounded by polluted flooded areas and of course lots of rust and interesting paint work and structures. One or two grubby, oil stained workers to complete the narrative would help.



Why did you select Capture Integration as your equipment partner?

CI has always offered outstanding support and service, 7 days a week. Just super people to deal with, so accommodating, friendly and generous in every way. Not to mention incredibly knowledgeable! I remember talking to Hasselblad a few years ago and telling them that they really needed to have a partnership with Capture Integration in Atlanta, as the best company to support their brand and really the only option in the region.



Want To See More Of Phil's Work?

Click Here

