



PAPER

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by Martha Blanchfield

“I began my career as a journalist and documentarian. As I’ve grown professionally and expanded my range of interests, I’ve found that a foundation in photojournalism has served me well—it’s a skill that’s allowed me to be a better storyteller,” shares photographer Jim Graham. Calling upon his roots, before any photo session Graham will recite these questions: “What’s the assignment? What’s important?” And he repeats to himself: “Look for moments. Be concise. Know when to stop and move on. What’s not shown in the image is just as important as what’s shown.”

Graham, of Centreville, DE, is a commercial and editorial photographer. He’s also a fine art creator and a chronicler of New England life and tradition. Born in Philadelphia, his playbook goes back several years: He started a career on staff with the *News Journal Papers*, then the *Delaware County Daily Times*. During those first 10 years as a photojournalist he was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for his news photography, and was recognized as Southern Photographer of the Year by America’s longest-running photojournalism seminar series producer, the Southern Short Course in News Photography. Graham has produced images for a range of editorial clients: *Sports Illustrated*, *Vanity Fair*, *Time*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *Redux Pictures*, *Bloomberg News* and *National Geographic Traveler*. He’s landed commissions from scholarly institutions like The University of Pennsylvania, Swarthmore College and publications such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. His photography has also appeared in lifestyle magazines such as *The Hunt*, and special interest editions *Covertside* and *Driving Digest*. Beyond his editorial work, Graham thoroughly enjoys the many hours spent photographing weddings and events and covered 25 nuptial ceremonies in 2009.

Words That Describe

Traditional. Classic. Painterly. Journalist. Nuanced. Nomadic. Renaissance. Seven words hand-selected by Graham to describe his world and work. “I think I’m fairly classical in my compositions and styling. I try to allow the image to speak rather than have me speak for it. I have been called ‘painterly’ quite often of late. And truth be told, I do look at a large variety of imagery for inspiration. I visit galleries and study other artists’ pieces in all mediums,” shares Graham. Continuing, he adds, “I love where I live and find great inspiration in the Brandywine Valley environs: the arts, the land and the people here. I’m happy producing landscapes, comfortable and exploratory doing portraits, and I love the exhilaration one gets when photographing time honored sports such as fox hunting or the steeplechase. There’s nothing like having 12 horses run past you at full gallop—just a mere 10 feet away.” Graham admits that’s a wide swath to cut regarding subject matter but explains, “I’ve rarely met a photographic subject I didn’t like. I don’t like to be pigeonholed into a certain genre, look or style. Variety stimulates and challenges me and keeps me fresh.”

Several years ago Graham ventured out to include more fine art work in his photo repertoire. He shares that many of his initial steps were influenced during a 2001 summer workshop in Maine with John Paul Caponigro. “Up until then I had been keeping mostly to news, commercial and wedding assignments. August came round that year and I decided to take time off to relax and experiment. I dedicated that time to making imagery that mattered more to me. For inspiration and recharge I surrounded myself with like-minded artists.” From that point on Graham began cultivating a friendship with Caponigro that continues to grow. “Over the years he’s been a significant influence in my

fine art pursuits and my work as a whole. He's a very nurturing teacher and has really helped me to expand my artistic vision. In fact, it was during that first workshop where I created and refined 31 photographs displayed in my first solo exhibit, 'Along the Waterline.'

During this time Graham also became acutely aware of the precision required to reproduce those first 31 gallery prints, and how to output an exact desired look onto paper. "In personally printing the 31 photographs myself for the show I soon began to experience the daunting and complex art-to-color management. Fortunately, I had spent years in a darkroom so I brought with me a basic understanding of processing rules, but the digital tools needed to achieve the finished product were new to me. Photoshop became my darkroom; my canvas became a range of papers."

Photoshop, Paper, Print, Perfection

Rising to his print challenge, Graham recalls an early "ah-ha!" moment unearthed while working on images from "Along the Waterline." "Thanks to an auspicious start, I was able to start understanding dynamics between paper and ink and digital data early on. That whatever I completed in ad-

vance of sending a file to my Epson 1280 (at that time) would greatly impact the look and salability of a print," he shares. "Right off, I started devoting time to running test prints—assessing not only output per paper finish, but paper content, texture and tone. I also studied ink lay-up as dictated by what I did to the digital image file in Photoshop."

Fast-forward to today, and Graham has a smooth workflow that governs his fine art printing. He starts with perfected color calibration between his Apple 30-inch Cinema Display monitor and Epson K3 7800 and 3800 printers using an X-Rite ColorMunki. "I run test images all the time," smiles Graham. "I've also become fairly familiar with my favorite papers from Moab and Legion (including their classic resin-coated luster papers and Somerset textures). I often use the Moab by Legion's Somerset Enhanced Velvet and Moab's Colorado Fiber Satine." By test printing, Graham does not necessarily mean printing a full image or even the entire image in reduced size. To get that precise density or opacity of color, he may experiment with only a specific area of a print, checking the final look of the ink. "There are tricks I



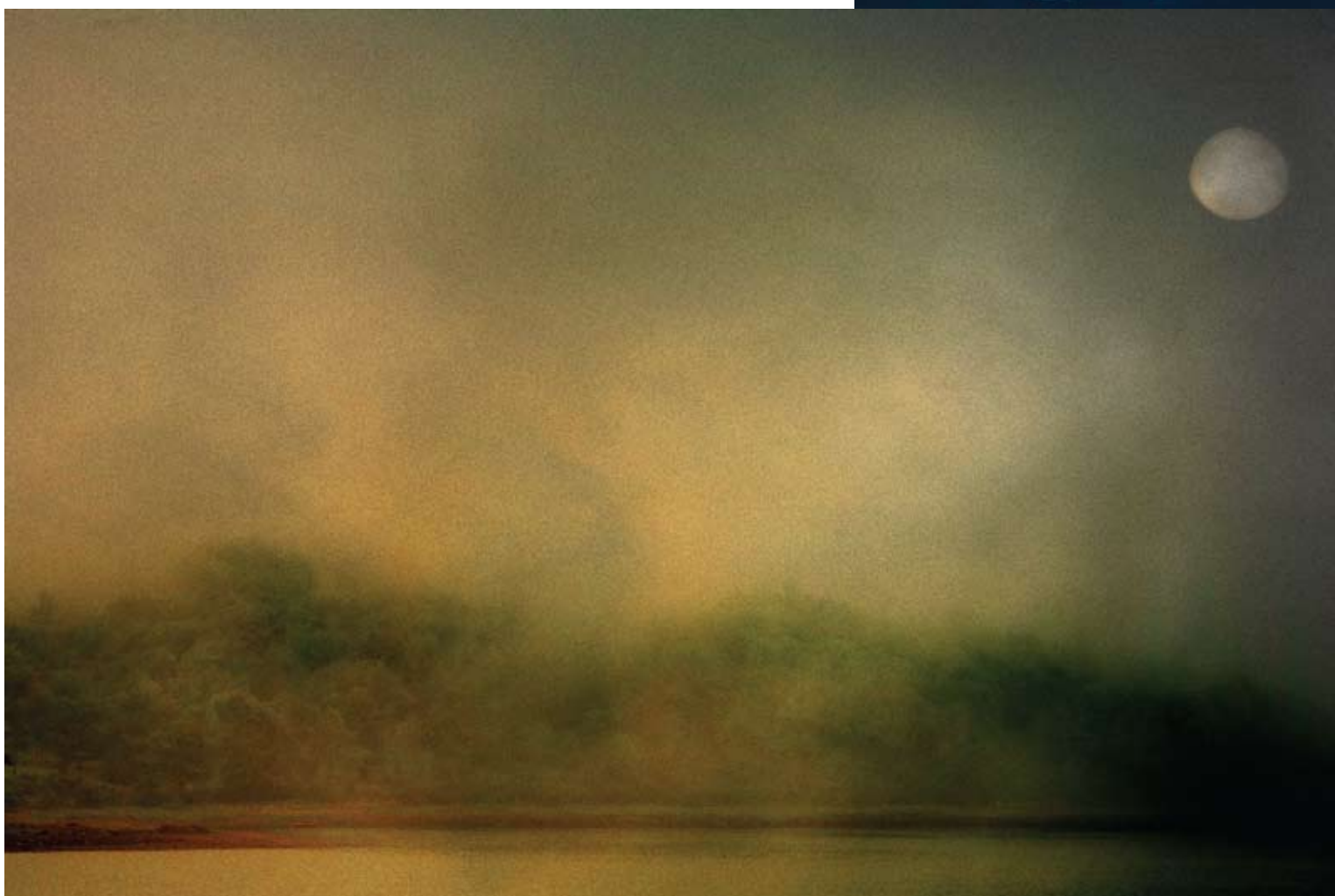
From Away



Coral Dunes



Charon's Crossing



learned along the way," he comments. "A file built for a print may include several layers that mask specific area. I'll adjust levels, curves and saturation points to tone one or many colors."

He continues, "My overall editing path is simple. For individual images I use Photoshop CS4. For batch images I pull up Lightroom, and for simple JPEG export it's Photo Mechanic." When approved, Graham will save the file two ways: as a JPEG and as a layered Photoshop document. Saving the file in the latter manner gives him the ability to change the image in the future. And he uses tons of hard drives and DVDs for this backup. Tacking on a few more points about his images, Graham names Photoshop as his darkroom. "My approach is not to play tricks on the viewer. I strive to add something that did not show up in the photo, or I add something I feel is missing and should be there. My goal is to render the final print as I saw and felt it. Being classically inclined, I love to highlight essentials that play up light, shape, texture and form."

Ice and Sand

One example of an image file that required very little retouching is "From Away" (above left), an ice caps photograph produced at Jökulsárlón, located on the southeast coast of Iceland. Fashioned at sunset (roughly 10 p.m.) using a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark II with a 300mm f/4 and a Gitzo tripod, Graham waited and watched for the shapes to flow into perfect alignment: the farthest ice bank being roughly eight feet tall, the nearest about 18 inches above the waterline. The only work done was smoothing curves and color saturation; he feels that almost every digital image needs both a black point and some color saturation. When complete, Graham produced the print using Legion Paper's Somerset Velvet.

Compare and contrast this icy image with a second favorite, "Coral Dunes" (above center), that again falls upon classic photo elements of light, shape, texture and form. For this photo he used his Canon and a tripod once again. "Somerset Enhanced Velvet was my paper of choice. In each case the Somerset allows for great

DMax in the darker tones, and provides plenty of saturation ability—but not oversaturation," says Graham. "I like the paper's slight texture because it adds an extra dimension to the image. Had I printed on a gloss surface it would have been an entirely different representation. I find that as I go along I'm more and more interested in color symmetries, and there seems to be a color theme that runs through many of my groups of photographs."

In a third image, Graham plays a bit to fashion a look not possible in nature, yet quite real in his mind's eye. "Charon's Crossing" (above) is very Monet in its color dappling. Yet the image also offers both a brilliant splash of reflective light and double play poignantly associated with romantic late day sun hitting water. "For this photo I pulled the curves and worked with a saturation layer. My approach for this, and all other images, is to be a good craftsman rather than good technician. I really prefer to let each image speak for itself. Each has a way of telling me what to do and when I should stop."



Fine Art at the Mart


Until recently Graham relied on a majority of his work coming in as commissioned, whether editorial, commercial or wedding. “I’ve been very fortunate in that I’ve really not had to dedicate a lot of effort to marketing myself; customers typically find me through word-of-mouth. It’s only recently that my newer, non-commissioned work—the fine art—is where I put marketing clout.” Since this is a relatively new channel of income with growing significance that adds to the bottom line, Graham has decided to start mapping out and devoting added promotional effort. “The gallery work is starting to become a steady and regular aspect for me. I try to do at least one show a year,” he says. In the most recent showing, Graham offered 28 of his “Island” images for display

at the Hardcastle Gallery in Centreville, DE (www.hardcastlegallery.com). This was his sixth annual showing at the venue.

“Island” is a compilation of images from Nantucket and Iceland (Island). There are several natural abstractions, as well as some very representational images. I use both image styles to give the viewer a sense of place and take them to the abstract place within it,” says Graham. “We’re expecting at least 350 walkthroughs this year.” Showing at venues like the Hardcastle can bring a nice addition to the bottom line, but Graham also sees the outlet as a strong way to market within his immediate community. “It lets folks know I’m not just a wedding photographer, or just a photojournalist, or just an equestrian photographer, and so on.” Exhibitions round out an overall business

plan, but also keep Graham professionally in balance, challenged and stimulated.

After all, it’s been Graham’s wish to not get typecast into a certain look, subject or style. He can then approach any assignment with an open view and open mind. “I’d rather be thought of as a problem solver, than a photographer pigeonholed into a certain look or subject. I want to be considered as someone who can go out and work in any area and come back with strong images. That mindset stems from my days at the paper where I had to be open to shooting any subject at the drop of a hat.”

For more information, visit www.jimgrahamphotography.com. 

Martha Blanchfield is creator of the Renegade Photo Shoots (www.renegade-pr.com) and a freelance marketing and public relations consultant.

RULES THAT GOVERN A GRAHAM PRINT

■ **Print to the size and scale called for by the subject.** Don’t be afraid to make a nonstandard sized print. Allow the subject and photo to tell you the optimal size.

■ **Experiment. Let your print find its own voice.** Don’t reach for a paper merely because it’s in the studio. Experiment; find the paper that most advantageously displays your art.

■ **Paper is part of your palette.** Paper is an element of overall design; treat it accordingly when prepping the image file. Every paper reacts differently once the ink is on it so test to be sure the resulting look is one that’s desired

■ **Apply darkroom knowledge to digital change.** Apply the same basic principles applied from the darkroom—alter an image

file’s levels, curves and saturation points. Experiment with software like Photoshop, but learn the best ways to selectively and specifically render a desired look.

■ **Calibrate often.** I use X-Rite ColorMunki every time I print a new image file to assure that monitor and printer are working in tandem.

■ **Consider topical applications.** Years ago I loved working with Legion’s Arches, a 310 gram textured paper. A chance application using a protective surface, Shurgard Photo Lacquer, yielded such a wonderful and surprising finish that I was inspired to use the treatment many more times. The look produced a wonderful look and feel reminiscent of acrylic paint finish.