



Paul Wolverton

Film Photographer in a Digital World

By Christy Rippel

Paul Wolverton is not one to follow the crowd. The Bakersfield, CA wedding photographer never transitioned to digital, even when the pressure was on.

"For the longest time [photographer friends] kept trying to get me to switch from film," remembers Paul. "I would tell them, 'Go ahead and do what you're doing, and I'll keep doing what I'm doing.' And now a lot of my clients hire me because I shoot film."

Paul makes up one half of the dynamic husband/wife team that is the studio Images by Paul and Kristi Wolverton (formerly known as Picture This). Kristi, a professionally trained photographer, started the business in 1988 while Paul pursued a career as an English teacher. After assisting her at weekend weddings, he got an itch to pick up a camera. Kristi handed him her old Nikon FM and turned him loose at her next wedding. A short time later, Paul was delighting clients and winning awards for his photography, obtaining the Accolade of Photo-

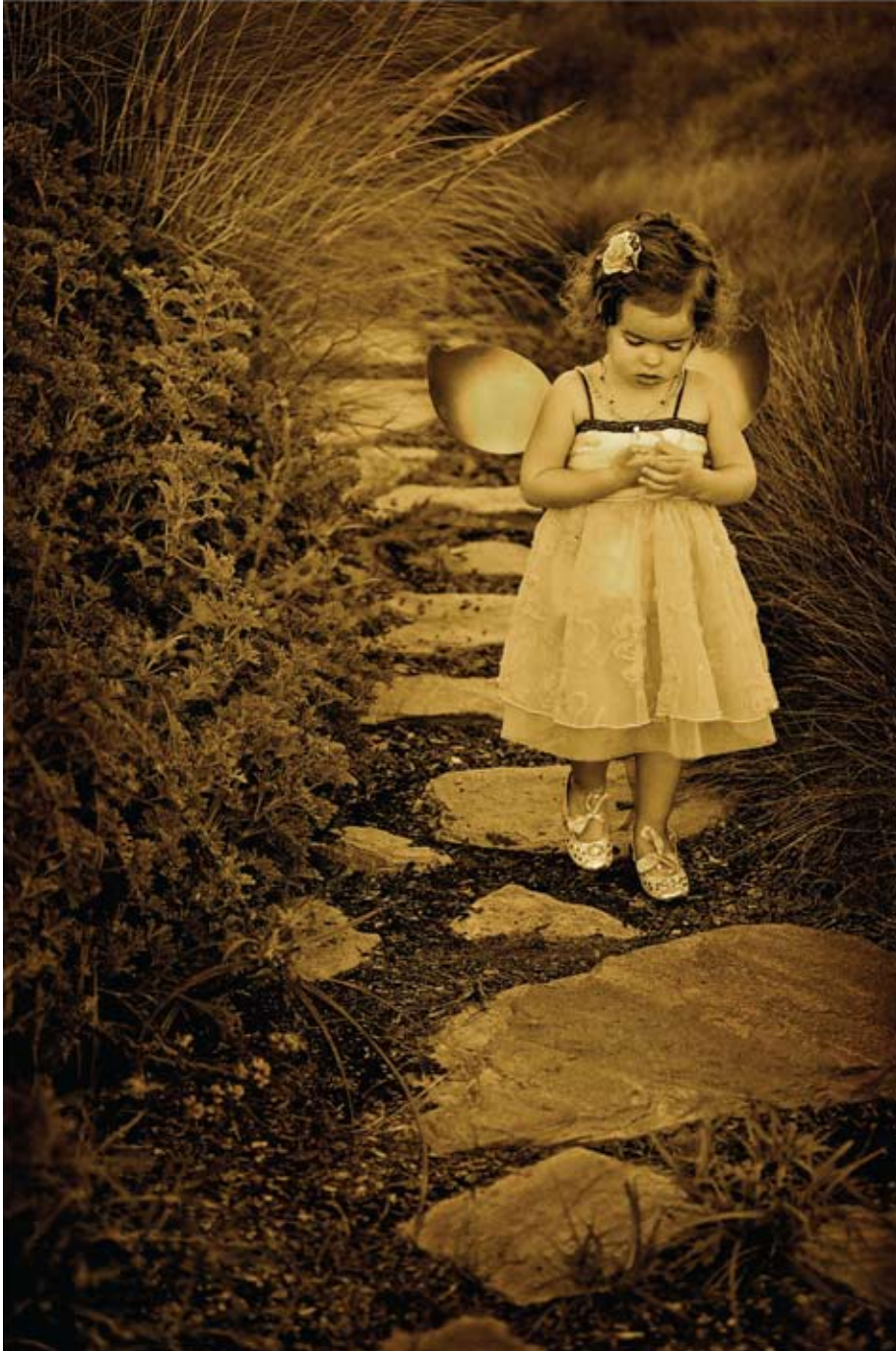


graphic Mastery from WPPI after only two years in competition.

While Paul is not formally trained in photography, perhaps his background was building to this calling. His father was a professional photographer at the age of 17 and his undergraduate journalism degree taught him to search out the story in a wedding and capture the emotions of the day.

Paul's wife, Kristi, whom Paul says has been his biggest teacher, encouraged his raw talent. "I can't say enough about how much respect I have for her and how much she has taught me," says Paul, calling her his favorite photographer. His tone is so sincere that it's evident this couple of 22 years truly enjoys the adventure of being and working together.

While Paul once assisted Kristi, the duo now works in tandem at every wedding they shoot. They also handle all client consult meetings as a twosome, and even spend their downtime together—playing in a band called Mar-



A Film Photographer

Paul shoots only in black and white, and only film—and he wouldn't have it any other way. He saw the photography industry change dramatically with the move to digital, and laments that the art form went through such a dramatic shift.

Paul explains that he's heard of so many people who hire someone to shoot their wedding and then are disappointed with the end product—the result of a crowded market and fly-by-night photographers who offer services on the cheap.

So, what is it about shooting film that keeps Paul from making the leap to digital? "I like the purity of film... the surprise of film," he says. "With digital cameras you take the picture, you see the picture. Since my style is all about the moment, I'm not focused on what was—I can't be—or I won't get what is. So often photographers are looking at the viewfinder and some great moments are happening that they aren't getting."

While digital is now the overwhelming, pervading medium, Paul is noticing a shift as others become interested in film again. "Some people have dusted off their old film cameras and taken them to weddings, just to see what they can capture. There is definitely a movement going on," he says.

Paul has been approached about teaching a course on film shooting at WPPI—especially for photographers who've taken up the craft in the digital

ried with Volume. Says Paul, "We work so well together at a wedding that neither of us can imagine doing it without the other person."

Despite international recognition and demand for their work, the Wolvertons have stayed a boutique operation, neglecting the route of the make-a-buck studios with slick advertising and several underling photographers and assistants. Rather, they prefer to focus on craft and a connection with clients.

"We have respect for the fact that our work will outlive us. We want to provide those heirlooms. If we connect with a bride, we will try to work with that bride [within her budget] to do that wedding," Paul says.

Hiring the Wolvertons to shoot a wedding is an investment, but they are far more reasonable, than, say, an outfit in Beverly Hills. "Because of where we are in Bakersfield, we can keep our fees relatively low," Paul explains. The couple has thought about relocating their studio to Los Angeles, which is a little under two hours away from their current home, but they are so in love with their 103-year-old Victorian home, which also serves as the home base for the studio, that they can't stand to part ways with it.

While they remain rooted in Bakersfield, Kristi and Paul frequently travel up and down California for their wedding work—and have shot weddings abroad. "We'll pick up and go anywhere the client wants."



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age and have never put their hands on a film canister. “Teaching a course is probably something I will get into, eventually,” says the former teacher.

Paul’s Wedding Approach

Paul doesn’t do any posed photography—when a client requests posed shots, his wife handles that. But while Kristi may be snapping away with the wedding party, Paul is at the ready,

waiting to capture those between-the-lines moments—the expressions that tell the story of the day.

“When I look through the camera, I’m waiting for that look,” says Paul. “Like the father and daughter getting ready to walk down the aisle, or 30 seconds later when the groom sees his bride for the first time. Those expressions are major. I want to reveal what the subject is feeling at that moment.”

The Monochromatic Revolution

By Paul Wolverton

What’s left in wedding photography? First, wedding photographers prided themselves on exquisite posing and the ability to obtain f/8 anywhere in the room. Then, we turned into ninja, SLR-wielding photojournalists capturing and documenting special moments of the wedding day. Many photographers are now high fashion photographers; others produce haunting and dark images of the wedding day.

Whatever our style, our clients want their images to be works of art. Being a film shooting photojournalist purist, I asked myself, “How can I turn my expression style of photography into art that will blow my customers away?” The answer is what I call the Monochromatic Revolution.

Purely by accident I stumbled upon a way of obtaining amazing gold, blue, red and split tone effects with an embarrassingly basic program. These images can be printed on metallic papers to achieve startling results at an excellent price. One bride was so impressed she had us mount 50 11 x 14s in an Italian-made album. At WPPI 2009, I even had several well established photographers looking at me in disbelief when I told them how I had achieved these results.

Better yet, an entire wedding can be given this treatment in a short amount of time. Once you are familiar with the process, you start to see how each shot will react to each tone. Even though I shoot 100% film, I know this is a treatment that also works well with digital. For example, at every wedding we display a slideshow on a laptop at the reception with 100–150 images of the day put through this treatment.

I start with Kristi’s digital images (approximately 500) at the beginning of the reception and within 20 to 30 minutes I change some of her shots to gold, blue, red, split tone and black and white. Then I put them into a basic slideshow format, put the laptop in a conspicuous area, and let the show begin. People freak! At the next wedding I’m going to videotape the guests and put it on the website because it’s absolutely amazing. We receive immediate respect and the bride and groom cannot believe they are already viewing their images.

The Monochromatic Revolution has enabled me to use the influence of such printing artists as Robert Cavalli and mold it into my own personal vision. In the future I plan to teach seminars on this technique so if you are interested, email me at info@paulwolverton.com.

In a day and age when many of our clients can do Photoshop better than us, one must step away from the crowd, reinvent the art, and give customers something completely different.






Paul, who only shoots in natural light, concentrates most of his effort on the pre-ceremony activities and the ceremony itself, along with the big reception moments. "By the time I reach the reception, I've probably shot 12-15 rolls of film," Paul says. "I'll probably do two more at the reception, but this isn't where my main focus lies."

In addition to the father-daughter walk and the groom's first glimpse of his bride, Paul also looks to the parents of the bride and groom during the ceremony. "During the vows is a heavy moment for them," he points out. Another big emotional moment that produces some great expressions, says Paul,



is at the reception during the first dance.

Paul's portfolio tells of his keen ability to capture these emotional moments, and he continues to rack up awards for his work. Witness the tear-jerking moment of a son, ready to give away his mom to her new husband [left], an image that garnered Paul one of his many Accolades of Excellence in a WPPI 16x20 print competition.

To view more of Paul Wolverton's work, visit his Web site at www.paulwolverton.com. 

Freelance writer Christy Rippel is a frequent contributor to Rangefinder and the WPPI newsletter. Learn more about her work at christyrippel.com.