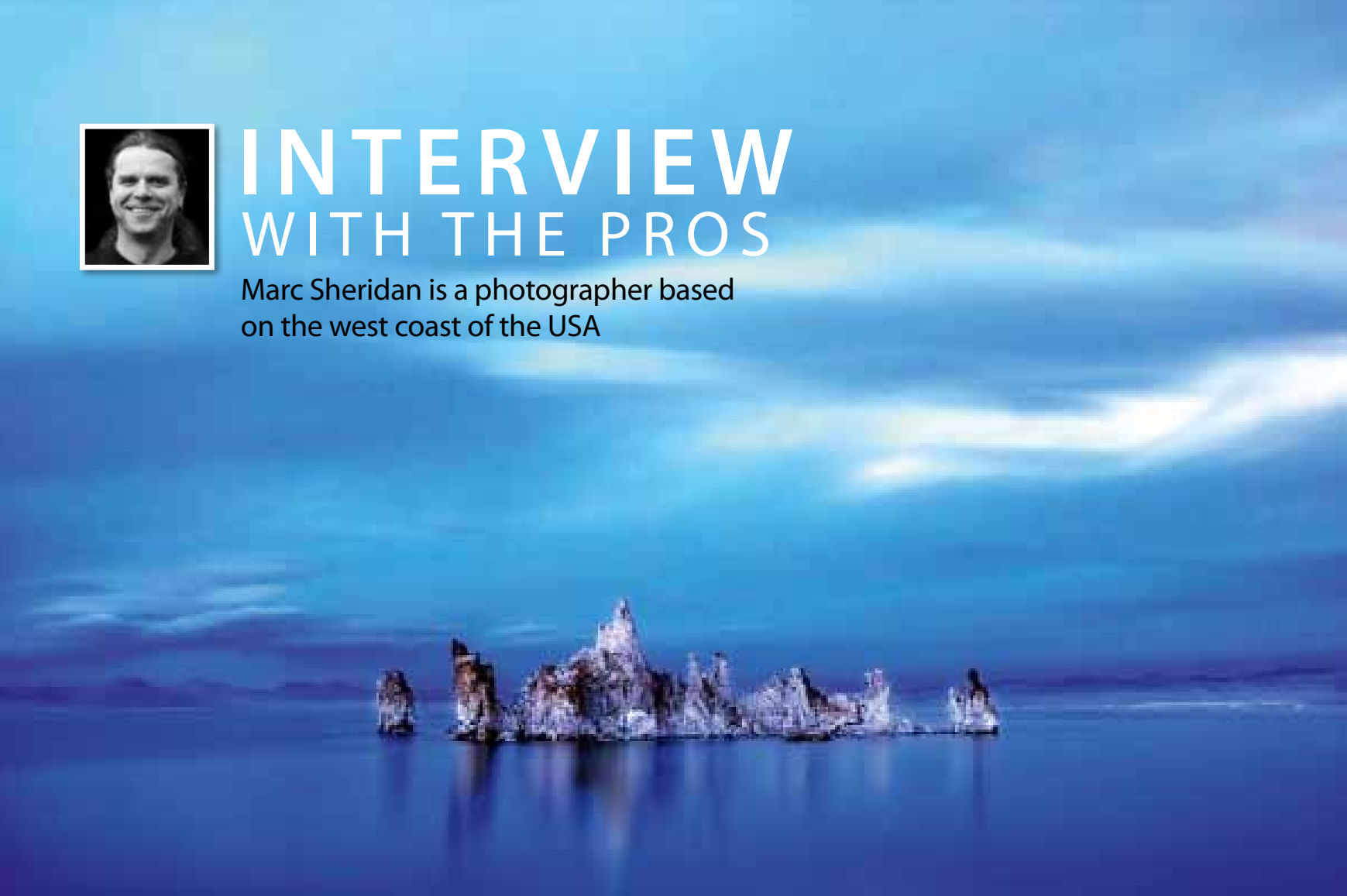




INTERVIEW WITH THE PROS

Marc Sheridan is a photographer based on the west coast of the USA



How it started

When I was in Art College at Bath Academy of Art in Corsham, Wiltshire, England, I went to the Fox-Talbot Museum of Photography and wandered into the bookstore, picking up a book about the photography of Wynn Bullock. It immediately captivated me and changed my view of photography. Up to this point, I had not regarded it as a form of artistic expression; I had thought of it merely as a recording device for reality. I still didn't take photography seriously as I was training to be a graphic designer. However, the seeds had been planted and many years later would come to fruition. Raising a family precluded setting up my own dark room and it wasn't until the advent of digital that I began to get interested again. Leaving the darkroom behind and transferring the process to the computer would not only be cleaner but would give me more control over the entire process. Unlike other photographers who 'swooned at the smell of fixer' I was the one running for the exit because of the smell.

My very first photograph with my new digital 'point and shoot' was a hibiscus flower right outside my front door. My wife and I had just moved from Arizona to Redding in Northern

California. Coming from a desert to a lush and verdant valley full of trees and flowers, lakes and surrounded by snow covered mountains was such a contrast, I was in awe and couldn't wait to get started.

I didn't go very far - just four steps outside the front door was my very first photograph, the hibiscus. It was gorgeous and from that point on I started photographing every flower I came across; knocking on peoples' doors asking for permission to enter their gardens to photograph, stopping on the side of the road, store parking lots, everywhere I went I found something colourful and somewhat unusual to photograph.

In 2002 I began giving more time to photography, eventually buying my very first DSLR, the Nikon D100. This enabled me to control the shutter speed and aperture. I treated it just like a 35mm camera, running everything completely manually, which I still do today. The digital part only really kicks in when I take the media from the camera.

I began reading and reading. Books, online, anywhere, people sharing not only their images but also their techniques. I would read every photography magazine in the bookstore and I'd take notes, maybe buy one or two and then come home and try out their suggestions.

REFLECTION IN BLUE

Just because the sun has gone down and it's pitch black outside and you can't see a thing doesn't mean your camera will not work. This particular photograph was taken in complete darkness with a 30 second exposure

Shot Details

Nikon D200, Tamron 17-50mm lens, f5.6 30 secs
Shot at night with a tripod. Processed with Photoshop

Sometimes they worked, sometimes they did, but needed modification to bring them into my own way of doing things. With a few contests under my belt, I thought I'd try a gallery. I stopped off at a Gallery in Sacramento, California and surprisingly came away with my own one man show of flowers. Exhibiting in a gallery is a completely different experience then posting your photographs online. I had already started developing my skill of printing photos using my inkjet printer, but the whole process of matting and framing to an exacting standard was new to me and very costly. To exhibit in a gallery you can easily learn all you need to know relatively quickly, but to print photographs requires years

of experience and even now, ten years later, I am still learning and I think I always will be.

In December 2006 I joined Flickr, a photo-sharing website where you share your own photographs and other photographers share theirs with you. Flickr was extremely important in that enabled me to look at the work of better photographers. Evaluating their photographs helped open my mind to trying anything. Annie Lebovitz said that she became better by emulating people with superior techniques; she studied their photographs and found out why they were so good and incorporated that into her own work. I believe there is always someone out there that is better than me that I can learn from and I think that is what keeps me moving forward. That and the fact that I am an exceedingly curious person.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember in photography is that no matter how good your camera and how much Photoshop can do for you, these are just tools. It all comes down to the photographer catching the right light, the right subject matter, composing it and taking the shot. There's nothing that can replace the photographer's eye.

My technique

For flowers I like to get in really close, so I use my 90mm macro lens and sometimes I combine it

with an extension tube so that I can focus in on a single water drop for instance. When it comes to landscapes however, I switch to my wide angle and tend to use it as wide as possible. Sometimes I use a Singh-Ray graduated neutral density filter in a Cokin holder to darken the sky. I also run long exposures with a B&W ND110 filter. As I'm sure you are aware, the best time to shoot is first thing in the morning or last thing at night; the light is much warmer and softer than during the day. Very often I will use an action to defuse the light or to increase the hardness and contrast, such as the draganizer. Before using an action, I always duplicate the image, run the action or changes, flatten it and bring in back into the original image as a separate layer. By doing this I can change the opacity and control the strength of the action.

Advice to beginners

If this is your passion stick with it, always enjoy it, don't worry about the money (in other words, keep your day job for as long as necessary.) It's always helpful to have a partner to encourage you and have the common sense to stop you if need be. You are so focused on getting the photograph and tend to be completely oblivious of the danger you may be in. See the photograph 'White Tree in Snowstorm' where I was up to my

knees in snow as this massive storm was rolling in. I kept waiting and waiting for the clouds to get darker and darker until my wife was screaming from the car for us to leave. The way out was down an unpaved road through the snow in my little Volkswagen. No wonder she was upset!

What photography means to me

Photography means capturing an image in my own personal way. When I show or sell a photograph, I'm not just capturing an image, I

WATER DROPS ON PINE BRANCH

This was taken using the 90mm macro plus an extension tube. I used a technique called focus stacking. Because I'm so close, my depth of field is insufficient to get all three water drops in focus at the same time. Taking three different photographs, each one focused on a different water drop, I can then combine them in Photoshop using layer masks

Shot Details

Nikon D200, Tamron 90mm lens with extension tube, f8.0 .5 sec, three photos each focused on a single drop. Processed with Photoshop using layers to bring all three into focus





am giving my impression of that image and in doing so, I am telling a story that hopefully the viewer can relate to.

The future

Right now I am busy experimenting with HDR and panoramic photography, sometimes combining the two. When I use HDR, I try not to go over the top, trying instead for a more realistic image. But HDR is a wonderful tool to pull information out of the shadows and highlights that would otherwise not be there. ●

SURFER SUNSET

Having recently moved to San Diego, California, I found I had easy access to the beach and, of course, sunset being the optimal time to photograph, I caught this surfer on his way home. This is one of those rare times, even in California, when there were no clouds in the sky

Shot Details

Nikon D200, Tamron 17-50 lens, f2.8 1/5 with tripod, single exposure HDR. Processed with Photomatrix and Photoshop

WHAT'S IN MY CAMERA BAG

I can't carry everything at once of course, but I normally try to bring as much as possible because the thing you leave behind is always the thing you need!



- Nikon D200 camera
- Tamron 17-50mm f2.8 lens
- Tamron 90mm f2.8 macro lens
- B&W Neutral Density filter (ND110)
- Cable Release
- Wireless Remote
- Lens Cloth
- Singh-Ray Graduated Neutral Density filter
- Circular Polarizer Filter
- Medium sized Manfrotto tripod with ball head and quick release



WHITE TREE IN SNOW STORM

I was up to my knees in snow as this massive storm was rolling in. I kept waiting for the clouds to get darker and darker until my wife was screaming from the car for us to leave. The only way out was an unpaved road through the snow

Shot Details

Nikon D100, Nikon 28-105 lens, f8.0 1/640
Processed with Photoshop

HIBISCUS

This was my very first digital photograph taken right outside my front door. The detail and subtle color of this flower astounded me

Shot Details

Nikon D100, Nikon 24-120 lens, f32 1/5
Processed with Photoshop

**STORM OVER STONEHENGE**

It's always good to go out and photograph in stormy weather. That way you don't have a boring blue sky and no clouds. With clouds in the sky it's a lot easier to control your highlights from being blown out and there are less people around. If you're like me and you don't want people intruding into your photographs, there are three different things you can do:

1. Get up really early before the other people (I'm still working on that one).
2. Go out in stormy weather when there are less people around and then you can combine that with...
3. Removing the people using Photoshop.

Shot Details

Nikon D200, Tamron 17-50mm lens, f8 1/1000. Processed with Photoshop B&W filter

