



George Kamper

Fresh Light

In philosophy, the eclectic thinker begins with a problem and picks the most effective tools to solve it, from whatever school of thought seems most fitting. The Greek word *eklektikos* means, quite simply, “selecting the best.” This could well describe the ethos of Miami-based photographer George Kamper, who, rather than committing himself to any one doctrine, approaches each shoot with a totally fresh perspective. “I try to choose the method to go with the assignment,” he says. George selects the best tools for the job at hand from a vast range of techniques and experiences he has built up over 30 years in the business.

His range of expertise means that George feels just as comfortable producing a glittering product shoot for a jewelry company, as he does shooting hotels for the Miami tourist board. However, his real love is photographing people, with an emphasis on lifestyle, sports and fashion.

His vibrant sports shots include beautifully lit images of runners in New York’s meat packing district and a series of his teenage son wakeboarding against a bleached white sky. Elsewhere in his portfolio are endearing school scenes, brightly lit images of young people on the street, and lush fashion shoots using carefully chosen palates.

While most would agree that George’s versatility is a strength, there is a certain stigma in being called a generalist. How does he avoid being labeled a jack-of-all-trades? “When clients hire me they want me to do the one thing that I do for them,” he explains. “So I try

and assess what I should show them and not mix it up. Once they see my strength in terms of production then they might be more open to giving me a project they didn’t originally think of me for.”

A client who hired George to shoot still lifes later hired him to create lifestyle images for a new brand, while another fell in love with his fashion images, then gave him a cell phone campaign to shoot. “I believe that what the client really wants is the total package,” George reflects. “They just need to be massaged into understanding that more is more.”

Being flexible doesn’t mean that George’s photography is not distinctive. Many of his images feature particularities such as a characteristic fresh, cool color palate and a unique de-saturated blue sky. “In a sports shoot in Miami we were trying to figure out how to make it more than just conventional and my digital tech and I came up with this bluish de-saturated color,” George explains. “This has become a kind of trademark now.” These traits have made him popular since they can be applied to a wide range of situations. *Ocean Drive Magazine*, among others, asked George to recreate this look for them.

Perhaps it is this balance of uniqueness and versatility that defines his success. “Every photographer has to have something that people from all over look at and go, ‘Wow, that’s really fantastic and beautiful,’” he says.

Although he has developed a key look, his approach to shooting is always open and unrestricted by any preconceived way of doing



things: “I don’t really plan the lighting and the look on a shoot until everyone is together and we have an opportunity to really consume it,” he explains. “I have a great crew and resources. We travel with a trailer filled with grip and lighting gear so we always have what we need steps away. I like to get everyone’s input and look at the models in the environment before we really jump in,” he adds.

His attitude helps him see each image as a fresh opportunity, giving him the ability to mix and match approaches within one set of



images. In a recent fashion shoot in Donald Trump’s mansion (see “What’s Inside,” pgs. 16–17), for instance, this meant they were comfortably able to shoot both outside on the green and inside the grand, chandelier-lit hall using two completely different methods.

George thanks his education at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) for giving him such a wide range of abilities. “I remember being so excited arriving at the college and seeing the whole building dedicated to studios and labs,” he recounts. “There I was



able to use different formats of camera and techniques to shoot everything from people to tabletops.”

Upon leaving RIT George began to acquire a wide range of equipment from wherever he could. He recalls a time before digital when he would often use many different cameras on just one job. “I was doing collages where I had up to five cameras, taking the film from one to the next,” he recalls. “Now, since we have such strong skills in terms of post, I always use the same camera, a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark II, but I know where it’s got to get to.”

George’s current setup, with his team of professionals and van full of equipment requires him to be a great producer. “I really like people and production, and I enjoy massaging people to get what you need,” he explains. “I can even imagine that my next phase might be in front of that camera directing, with an assistant behind the camera.”

This expertise in managing people owes a lot to George’s early career path. He chose to forfeit assisting in favor of starting his own studio in Rochester, then later New York and Miami, overseeing up to 20 people. Now though, he has sold his part

of the business and come full circle. “Since four years ago, I’ve come around to being pretty much myself, a retoucher and other freelancers,” he explains. “My focus is where it should be, what’s going on in photography rather than, say, healthcare.”

It wasn’t easy to make this decision, however. “Working with a lot of clients, you feel everything is great. But you look around and say where am I? I always wanted to be a photographer and do great photography,” he explains.

Nowadays, in a challenging economy, George often seeks work from outside of his hometown of Miami, and has agents in New York, Detroit and the Southwest, so that he can spend as much time as possible doing what he loves—shooting. He also capitalizes on a good relationship with a stock agency owner in order to refresh his portfolio. The agency covers the expenses for the shoots and once they recover their money George gets a percentage for each use of the pictures.

His stock agency photos allowed him to develop his signature “fresh blue sky,” a technique, which later inspired the treatment of the images on other shoots. For

instance, in a set of images shot in a school museum, he used a similar desaturated technique and limited palette to create a striking result. “More challenging than the technique of creating this effect is knowing what you want,” George explains. “It’s not a big complex process but it has to do with taste and what you’re looking for more than anything else.”

Though developing certain key visual looks as part of his ever growing “toolkit,” George remains difficult to pigeonhole, and that’s the way he likes it. “I enjoy diversity and believe each experience builds your abilities for the next opportunity,” he says. However, no matter what kind of job he is working on, he always has one overwhelming inspiration: the buzz of the shoot. “I work hard to create new imagery as much as I can since I just love being in that moment,” he says. “I just love being on a shoot and creating.”

To see more of George Kamper’s work visit www.georgekamper.com. CC

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