



PHOTOGRAPHY **CAREERS**

Finding Your True Path



Mark Jenkinson



PHOTOGRAPHY CAREERS

FINDING YOUR TRUE PATH

Mark Jenkinson



Focal Press
Taylor & Francis Group

NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2016
by Focal Press
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Focal Press
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Focal Press is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group,
an informa business*

© 2016 Mark Jenkinson

The right of Mark Jenkinson to be identified as author
of this work has been asserted by him in accordance
with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and
Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted
or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic,
mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter
invented, including photocopying and recording, or in
any information storage or retrieval system, without
permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notices: Product or corporate names may be
trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only
for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Jenkinson, Mark.

Photography careers : finding your true path / authored
by Mark Jenkinson.

pages cm

1. Photography--Vocational guidance. I. Title.

TR154.J46 2015

770.23--dc23

2015008069

ISBN: 978-1-138-19387-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-78029-3 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-77086-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Helvetica Neue
By Gavin Ambrose

Printed and bound in India by Replika Press Pvt. Ltd.

PHOTOGRAPHY CAREERS

Photography Careers offers students an indispensable guide to beginning their professional journeys as photographers. This book presents the variety of career options available to those entering the competitive and comprehensive world of photography. With the insight and advice from industry mavens and the author himself, *Photography Careers* will help you change the way you evaluate your strengths as an artist and find your place in the photography community.

Features include:

- interviews with successful young professional photographers in a wide range of photographic specialties, from fashion photography to cinematography, and other industry-related fields such as retouching, fine art sales, and photo editing;
- tips for how to find unique approaches in a saturated market;
- best practices for students looking at graduate programs, a budding career, and a personal business.

Mark Jenkinson has been a working professional photographer for over 25 years with an estimated 50,000 photographs published in virtually every major magazine in the world, including *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Fortune*, *Vanity Fair*, *GQ*, and *Vogue*. Corporate and advertising clients include The Ford Motor Company, J.P. Morgan Chase, Phillip Morris, and Hershey. His fine art photography projects have been featured in numerous group and solo photography exhibitions. As a committed advocate for photography and visual literacy, Jenkinson has been teaching photography at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Department of Photography and Imaging for over 25 years.

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Chapter 1: Careers as a Professional Photographer	5
Chapter 2: Careers in Fine Arts: <i>The Connoisseurs and Impresarios</i>	106
Chapter 3: Graduate School and Beyond: <i>To Be or Not to Be</i>	138
Chapter 4: Careers in the Industry: <i>Advertising, Design, Stock Photography, Magazines</i>	184
Chapter 5: Getting Started	224
Chapter 6: Taking the Next Steps: <i>Becoming a Photographer</i>	236
Index	265

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Chapter 1: Careers as a Professional Photographer	5
Chapter 2: Careers in Fine Arts: <i>The Connoisseurs and Impresarios</i>	106
Chapter 3: Graduate School and Beyond: <i>To Be or Not to Be</i>	138
Chapter 4: Careers in the Industry: <i>Advertising, Design, Stock Photography, Magazines</i>	184
Chapter 5: Getting Started	224
Chapter 6: Taking the Next Steps: <i>Becoming a Photographer</i>	236
Index	265

INTRODUCTION

Take a quick stroll through the photography section of your local bookstore and you will discover five to ten different books on how to launch a successful career as a photographer; an online search will reveal 20 or 30 more. They are all valid, but all of these books assume one thing: that you know what you want to do.

A 30-year-old adult who is possibly making a career change might know exactly what he or she wants to do and might have a pretty good idea of how to do it, but in my experience very few 21-year-olds holding a freshly inked diploma from a university photography program have that level of certainty.

I've been teaching photography for over 25 years while also maintaining a full-time career as a professional photographer. In that time I've watched as two generations of my assistants and students have struggled to find their place in a profession that most of them have been dreaming of since they were teenagers. Many start out with a clear goal, and actually achieve it only to discover that they hate running their own business, promoting themselves, paying their own health insurance, and never being sure where their next paycheck is coming from. Others love being their own boss, and embrace the daily challenges of a profession that requires them to be creative every day.

When I started teaching at New York University our department was called the "Department of Photography," and our department only taught photography (with a fairly heavy emphasis on documentary and fine art). In addition to practical studio classes the students were required to take three courses on photo/art history. Back then I could look out at my classroom and confidently assume that any student in my class aspired to become either a fine-art or commercial photographer, but as we all know, in the past two decades photography has undergone an amazing metamorphosis, the result of which is that there are many new career paths/options within the industry that didn't exist five to ten years ago.

There are a few widespread notions about the current state of photography that I believe to be erroneous. One is that digital photography has made it so easy that professional training is irrelevant. In fact, I would argue the exact opposite: the prevalence of sophisticated imagery that permeates our culture has raised the standards so high that only highly trained professionals can compete. Everyone can take a photograph, but it actually takes more skill, talent, and dedication than ever before to make photographs that rise above the pedestrian.

The diminishing presence of print media is another widespread cause for concern among young people (and their parents) entering the profession, but in fact the "death of print" simply means that new business models and creative possibilities are emergent. In fact, I personally believe that the death of print is a cause for celebration among all photographers, but especially for the hardest hit specialty in photography: photojournalism. Now that publishers have successfully established ways to monetize digital content, websites and tablet magazines represent the greatest potential market for photojournalists since Henry Luce started publishing *LIFE* magazine in 1936.

The digital revolution has created a host of new creative options and career opportunities. The recent advent of the HDslr camera has blurred the lines between photography and cinema. The internet, and the rise of tablet display devices like the iPad, have changed the paradigm for the ways photography can be used and consumed. Large-format digital printing and high-resolution imaging have changed the marketing and demand for photography in the fine art world.

In response to this changing landscape for the methods, applications, and marketing of photography our photo department at NYU was renamed the "Department of Photography and Imaging." Like most university photo programs we now teach classes in web design, graphic design, digital media, Photoshop, video, and so on in addition to all the classic methodologies (we still require analog and we still have a black and white darkroom!).

Photography has also increasingly emerged as one of the dominant modes of communication within our culture: Photography's greater role in society has created a new professional demand for visually literate people who can look at photographs critically and understand the subtleties of how imagery works to both inform and persuade. In response, the critical studies/history staff in our department has grown to three full-time professors and about five adjuncts who are responsible for teaching critical theory, curating, and history. Students are now required to take at least 24 credits in history/critical studies, with a growing number of students choosing critical studies as their primary area of concentration.

In the current employment marketplace a photography BFA or MFA is increasingly viewed as the modern equivalent to the traditional liberal arts degree by many prospective employers in fields that are not directly related to photography such as brand marketing, social media, software development, interactive tele-communications, and so on.

In any class I teach now I assume that fewer than 25 percent of my students will choose to pursue careers as either commercial or fine art photographers. The rest will become cinematographers, art directors, photo editors, web designers, art dealers, historians, multimedia artists, app developers, photo-retouchers, agents, teachers, art therapists, studio managers, and writers.

Years ago I started to run a few weekend seminars for my students on how to get started in the profession; how to get jobs assisting, how to put together a portfolio, and write a résumé. Eventually these informal seminars were formalized into an accredited course called "The Business of Art."

While the course taught the rudimentary skills of marketing and running a business, I never felt that financial success was the goal of the class. My true goal was to get students to realize that a career in photography wasn't about making a living, but instead finding a place in a career that they loved, and a lifestyle that was suited to each of their personalities.

From the beginning I recognized that there were many career options that I couldn't address solely from my own experience. As a consequence, guest speakers were always a fixture of the class in order to expose students to the diversity of employment options and lifestyles that were possible.

The format of this book follows from many of the lessons I learned when I was teaching *The Business of Art*. Many of the contributor interviews in this book are with my former students because I am familiar with their personalities, their backgrounds, and the unique challenges they faced as they began their careers. I am forever indebted to all of the people who gave so generously of their time to give this book the breadth of experience and the range of career options that I hoped to achieve.

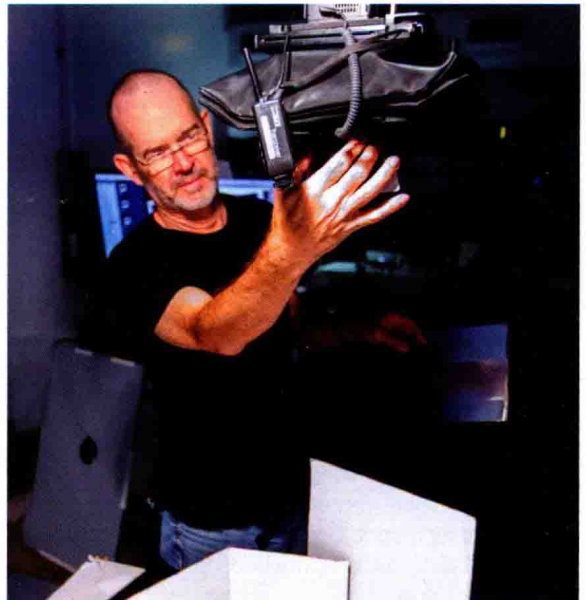
Though I've since handed the reins of *The Business of Art* class over to one of my colleagues, Kallia Brooks, I still teach three classes per semester as one of the guest lecturers. The class has continually evolved to incorporate new career possibilities, but the actual focus and goal of the class has remained the same: *It's not about making a living, but finding a way to live a happy life.*

Most careers have a fairly defined ladder towards both financial success and personal fulfillment: Doctors go to medical school, then serve as interns where they rotate through various specialties, then become resident physicians where they learn a narrowly defined field in depth, and finally choose to become staff physicians or private practitioners.

The single biggest challenge to a young photographer is that our profession has no ladder; it has a rock wall with many different routes and obstacles, and as a consequence the most successful photographers are always the ones who are the most resourceful, inventive, and adaptable.

Yes, you can get a job as an assistant to another photographer and this will certainly get you started up the wall, but eventually you will be forced to create your own path. As you progress you may get stuck and have to back track, and you may have to make many lateral moves. You may in fact, (probably) fall a few times and have to face the pain of starting all over again. There may be rusty pitons in the wall that mark paths taken by previous generations, but these should be viewed with caution; paths and strategies that worked for your predecessors are based on a market/world that has changed (and for this reason any advice in this book should be taken with a grain of salt).

Your path is necessarily unique because your route will be dictated by your idiosyncratic aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses. That's actually the best part because you will be forced to build a career that is uniquely your own.



Chapter 1

CAREERS AS A PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

Every fall at New York University I attend a weekend seminar with the parents of our incoming freshman class. My primary function at these events is to dress well, assume my most optimistic/successful persona, and assuage the concerns of a room full of nervous parents, most of whom would rather that their children pursue any other profession besides photography. I always fantasize about starting the talk by playing an old country song "Mommies, Don't let your Babies grow up to be Cowboys", made famous in a duet by Willy Nelson and Waylon Jennings.

No one becomes a cowboy, or an artist, to get rich. There are better ways to get rich: real estate, investment banking, or arbitrage for example. These are professions where money is both the means and the end. However, it's also important to remember that while artists don't become artists to get rich we all know that there are plenty of successful artists, musicians, and actors who are very wealthy. For that matter, I also happen to know a few cowboys who are multi-millionaires (raising cattle is a big business).

I also recognize that I am a hypocrite. I'm a photographer and my spouse is an actress. We live a nice middle-class lifestyle, but given our druthers neither of us would choose for our son to follow in our footsteps. That said, we would both support him in any career choice he made, even if that involved riding horses and herding cattle.

For artists, money is a means to an end. The goal of an artist is to create; money is simply a tool towards that goal, or (if there isn't enough) an obstacle to be overcome.

If life were all about money it wouldn't be very interesting, which might explain why so many wealthy investment bankers and hedge-fund managers spend so much money on collecting and supporting the arts. The world needs inspiration as much as, or more than, mere sustenance.

The allure for most young aspiring photographers is the stereotype as we are portrayed in movies and fiction. It's a romantic image: we are dashing and brave, we travel all over the world, and we witness the historic events of our time. We socialize with beautiful models, celebrities, authors, and political power brokers. We create the images that define our epoch in history. We wake up every day to a new adventure. According to the Hollywood script, the lifestyle of a rock star pales in comparison.

At this point you are probably expecting me to tell you that this is pure myth, but I can tell you from first-hand experience that it's all true. Really! Living the life of a freelance photographer is a privilege that is full of great adventures. The reward of this profession is that it dares us to be great, and demands that we are better today than we were yesterday. These are intangible perks that few other careers can match. We are responsible for our successes, failures, and the legacy of our vision. These are the rewards that make financial matters seem trivial.

Given this reality, who wouldn't want to live the life of a photographer as Hollywood portrays us?

Hollywood doesn't show us slogging around our portfolios, or spending sleepless nights building websites, digging through receipts for the *inevitable* tax audits, or calling clients who are overdue on paying their invoices. It doesn't show how many times you are likely to be on the brink of bankruptcy. In short, Hollywood often does a pretty good job of showing the *practice* of being a photographer, but it never shows the *business* of being a photographer. It's hard to be creative when you have no financial stability, so the creation of a fiscal foundation that supports their creative aspirations should be part of every artist's plan.

There are a few inherent problems with the way photographers begin their careers that contribute to financial difficulties later on.

Most of us begin shooting when we are teenagers, and photography at this early stage is often very gratifying with very little formal training. In this formative phase we get a lot of positive reinforcement for adolescent work that seems very accomplished, original, and creative to us, and the people around us. This is truer than ever with the proliferation of smartphones and social networking. It would be hard for a 17-year-old with 50,000 Instagram followers not to be seduced by the idea that photography might be a pretty easy way to make a living and have fun. There's a parallel for young musicians who quickly master the three basic "cheat chords" and begin to fantasize about life as a rock star. It's one thing to impress your friends and family, but as your career progresses it is going to get much, much harder and you may not be prepared for the level of commitment it will ultimately require.

Another factor is that every professional artist starts his/her career as an amateur. Henri Cartier-Bresson was an amateur before he ever became "Cartier-Bresson," so were Jackson Pollack and John Lennon. Lawyers and accountants don't start their careers as a hobby. Doctors don't begin their profession as teenagers by setting the limbs of their friends after accidents for fun, but judging from the application portfolios I see annually, every aspiring teenage photographer has photographed a pretty girl (in a white dress in the woods), or their friend performing a trick on a skateboard.

While all artists start as amateurs, it is also vital that even after we become accomplished pros we still maintain our "profession" as a hobby. We need to continue to innovate and keep our work fresh by doing projects and personal work that don't earn income. This means that we often find ourselves saying, "Don't tell anyone, but I'd do this job for free"; as a consequence we often undervalue our skills, underestimate jobs, and undercharge for our work.

Photography is, for the most part, an entrepreneurial profession, but very few university photography programs provide the requisite training for graduates to become successful entrepreneurs. Business professionals love to make fun of artists and photographers for the terrible ways we run our businesses. Very few photographers ever start with a real business plan or any start-up capital to speak of. We are all amateurs until the day when we get a call, usually the friend of a friend, and they want to know if we can shoot something, a wedding, a headshot, or some photos for a website, and we do it. Maybe it

goes well, and we have a happy client who refers us to someone else. Then we do another job, and another, and in a year or two we quit our day job, build a website, get some business cards printed, and before we know it we have become professional photographers.

No other business is started like this; there was never a formal business plan, no capitalization, no advertising, no branding, and no market analysis. According to every commonly accepted business practice no photographer should ever succeed.

If you went to a bank and asked for a loan to start a business that would require you to spend thousands of dollars in materials and time, and allowed your clients to pay 90 days after the job was delivered, your application would be stamped "rejected" before you finished shaking the loan officer's hand. Yet photographers buy thousands of dollars of equipment and materials for jobs on credit cards all the time. We accept credit card debt as a "cost of doing business," and we routinely advance money to multi-million dollar corporations, ad agencies, and magazine conglomerates at zero interest rates.

And yet, in spite of the odds against us, many of us succeed; we build careers, make enough money to support our families and spend our days doing what we love. We work obscenely hard, but it never feels like work because if it's all going well you are having too much fun.

It's Not About the Money, But the Money Does Matter

I doubt that anyone becomes a photographer to get rich and even if that was the goal then they are probably doomed to fail. In my professional practice I have photographed hundreds of very successful business people for *Fortune*, *Forbes*, and other publications. Successful business people are a different breed; they compete in a world where money is their way of keeping score. If net profits are up by 10 percent then they are winning, if their stock portfolio drops by a few percentage points they are a failure. If they get a raise or a promotion, it is tangible evidence of their value.

Our successes are measured in exhibitions, books, magazine pages, and memorable images.

A young photographer friend of mine recently sold a personal fine art project to a major publication. He did the project on his own dime; he saved diligently for a year from the money he earned assisting other photographers and shooting

weddings on weekends. He had no thoughts of the project being a financial success, and he never even sent it to the magazine; the editors discovered it on his website when they were randomly trolling Instagram for fresh young photographers. The money the magazine paid for the rights to the project was fantastic (he was able to pay off his remaining student loans in a lump payment) but the really exciting part was the prestige of getting 15–20 pages published in one of the world's premier magazines. The story will launch his career and open up a world of new opportunities. The financial reward is appreciable, but that's just a side benefit to the body of work he created. He is 23-years-old and his future is very, very bright.

In fact, even when you look at the careers of the few superstar photographers who are billing millions of dollars annually it is important to remember that they didn't achieve their financial success by being good business people. *They got there by being exceptional photographers*, by taking every photograph, every assignment, as a creative opportunity. If you look at virtually every great and financially successful photographer from Avedon to Liebovitz you will see that they routinely took on projects that were financially disastrous, but creatively fulfilling. These are the projects (loss leaders in business parlance) that made them inimitable and allowed them to demand top dollar for commercial assignments; advertising, and so on, where the money available is much, much greater.

Why Do We Become Photographers?

Like many photographers of my generation I became a "professional" by accident. I was just a guy who loved getting up every morning and throwing a camera over my shoulder as I walked out the door. Life is a daily adventure and making photographs enhances that adventure; the challenge of being a participatory observer of the world around you puts "skin in the game". Photography makes life, and your place in the world a little more vibrant, and lot more meaningful.

I hadn't considered what I'd do after college. I had no plans to make a living as a pro because I thought professional photographers were "hacks"; technicians who just made the pictures that they were paid to take, and my few experiences assisting low-level professional studio photographers only confirmed that impression. My heroes were Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand, Diane Arbus, Robert

Frank, and Walker Evans. None of them worked for magazines, or ad agencies (or so I thought); they were pure artists.

As a student I had done internships at art galleries, so after graduation I got a job at a gallery that showed photography. I loved working at the gallery so I thought I'd become an art dealer and make photographs during my free time purely for art's sake. When I started shooting exclusively in large format color film my personal projects got too expensive to fund from my salary, and as my job became more demanding I found I had less and less time to pursue my own work. I only became a professional photographer as a more efficient way to finance my addiction to making photographs and carve out more time to pursue my personal work. Being able to deduct the expenses for my personal projects was a welcome side benefit.

The point is that like most photographers, musicians, dancers, and cowboys, I never really cared about the money. The surprising thing was that becoming a professional raised the stakes and meant that I actually had more skin in the game. It gave me access to subject matter and situations that would have been difficult or impossible without the framework of a magazine assignment, and it presented fresh challenges and obstacles that made me a better photographer in my fine-art work. It made the thing that was already the most exciting and rewarding thing in my life even more challenging and fun.

For most successful professionals it's a two-way street: personal projects nourish your soul and reignite your enthusiasm for your work; they bring fresh ideas to your commercial practice. Clients can sense when you are just "churning it out." This is a creative field; if you aren't excited creatively your clients will find someone who is. You became a photographer because you loved making pictures long before anyone paid you to. You became a good photographer by experimenting and trying new things. Keeping that passion alive is necessary for your growth as an artist as well as your financial success. You can't be a good sales person when you are bored with your own product. When you are excited about your work so is everyone else.

You don't become a photographer to get rich; you become a photographer to make photographs and satisfy your creative needs. When you stop being a creative photographer you are short-changing the very dreams that made you become a photographer in the first place. Running a business well is simply a way to serve your creative aspirations.

The Changing Scene: When One Door Closes Another One Opens

When I speak to my room full of nervous parents at NYU I have to tell them the same hard truth I will tell you here: It's not easy, and it never has been. Every generation of photographers has to reinvent both the medium and the business for themselves and for their place in history. The ways that photography is used in the world today is completely different from the way it was used a scant five years ago; it is changing that fast. Reinventing the medium and adapting your business to an ever-changing financial landscape is not easy, but it is absolutely necessary.

This should come as no surprise to anyone conversant with the history of photography. It has always been incumbent on photographers to be adaptable creatures. This is because photography has always been tied to science, technology, and the economic realities of society. Avedon's reinvention of fashion photography was largely due to the advent of commercially available strobe lighting and the rise of color reproduction in magazines. The introduction of faster films, the invention of the 35 mm camera, and the rise of mass media all presaged Cartier-Bresson's reinvention of photojournalism. The work of the F.S.A. photographers was directly influenced by the economic realities of the depression, and in fact the work by the F.S.A. photographers was forced to evolve as the United States moved towards joining the Allies during World War II.

With the rise of e-commerce there is more demand for competent/creative studio photographers than ever before. A side benefit is that many e-commerce studio jobs offer a level of financial security that past generations of photographers could only dream of.

Conversely, the decline of print journalism also means that thousands of gifted photojournalists and sports photographers (many of whom had enviable staff positions) have had to transition to wedding photography in order to pay their mortgages. One possible bright spot on the horizon is that as tablet devices replace print magazines photojournalism may be poised to make a comeback (in my opinion).

Video, the rise of the HD SLR, and multimedia production offer new creative and financial possibilities that were unheard of ten years ago.

A recurrent theme among the professionals I have interviewed for this book is that any young

photographer who has not embraced video is likely to have a very tough time in their future practice. Video/motion production is here to stay and must be considered part and parcel of the contemporary photographer's skill set.

In this chapter I've interviewed a few photographers who represent a cross-section of traditional areas of specialization: fashion, travel, architecture. They are all very different from each other yet there are a few recurrent themes to their respective successes:

- They have made learning new technology a habitual part of their practice.
- They treat every project as a creative challenge, not a job.
- They are all working far too hard, but they don't mind it because the work is so fulfilling.

And that's the best part ...

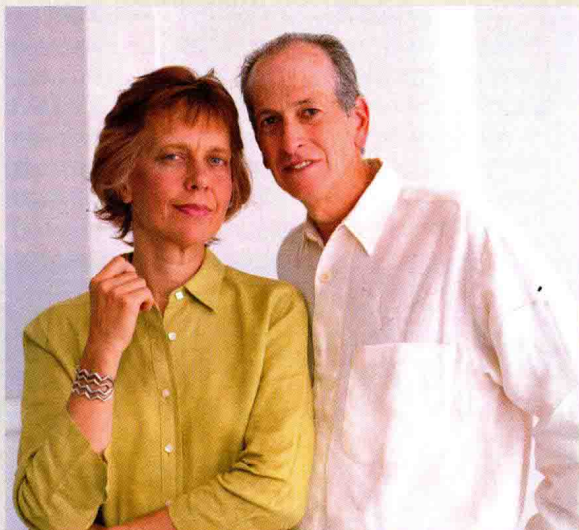


Case Study

DIANE COOK AND LEN JENSHEL: LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHERS

<http://cookjenshel.com/>

If there is a better example of two people who have more fully integrated their creative careers, financial success, and love lives in photography, I haven't found them yet. Len Jenshel and Diane Cook haven't just made careers as photographers, they've made their lives and their marriage about photography.



Nina Subin

After studying with Garry Winogrand, Tod Papageorge, and Joel Meyerowitz at Cooper Union, Len Jenshel quickly established himself as one of the most original photographers of his generation; a pioneer who was reinventing the traditional notions about color photography and its acceptance as a valid form of expression in fine art/documentary photography.

In 1980 he received the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship and came to the attention of the New York gallery scene with a solo exhibition at the prestigious Leo Castelli Gallery. He followed this success by publishing his first monograph, *Travels in the American West*.

Meanwhile Diane Cook graduated from Rutgers University in 1976 where she studied with Larry Fink. After graduation she continued to work on her

personal photo projects, which consisted of mainly black and white landscapes, while making her living as a photo editor at Time Inc.

Introduced by mutual friends in 1979, they were married in 1983.

In 1990, Diane left her job as a photo editor at Time Inc. and they began their first collaboration—a long-term landscape project on the volcanic landscape entitled “Hot Spots: America’s Volcanic Landscape,” which was published in 1996. The success of “Hot Spots” cemented their lifelong collaboration in the fine arts—combining color photographs by Len, and black-and-white photographs by Diane—contrasting and joining their two mediums and their individual sensibilities.

In that same year they also began collaborating on magazine assignments. Because most magazines required color photography, Diane began shooting color when they were on assignment. As collaborators they were committed to the idea that there was less difference between the fine-arts world and editorial magazine photography than most people believed—and that the story was the thread between the two. That approach has been a cornerstone to their careers, both as individuals and as a team.

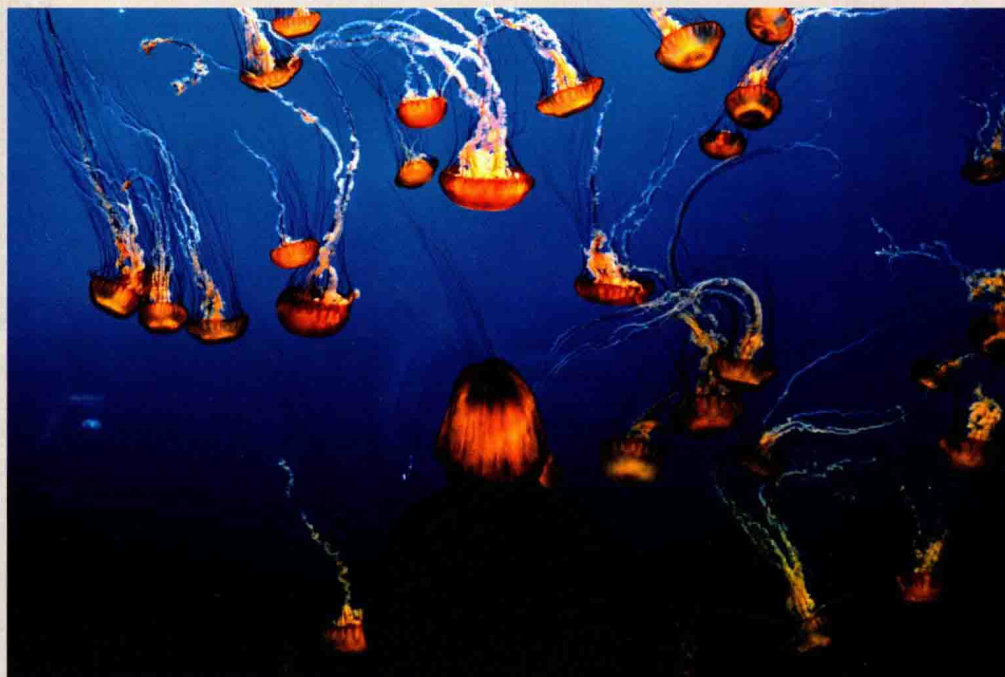
Len Jenshel



Two photographs from Len and Diane's book *Hot Spots: America's Volcanic Landscape*

Diane Cook





Len Jershel



Diane Cook

Two photographs from *Aquarium*