



"Take a walk in their shoes," ad for MedStar Health



"Some things aren't meant to be open," ad for MedStar Health



Craig Wroe playing director as Starla Benford and Maria Dizzia are lost in private thoughts.



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"Sharing," ad for MedStar Health

richard anderson

Bringing Passion to Best Practices

BY ETHAN G. SALWEN

"I'm just not the kind of person who anyone can hold back," says Richard Anderson, Baltimore-based advertising and corporate photographer, as well as one of today's most important digital workflow experts. Anderson is incredibly mild mannered, kind and welcoming, and therefore his strong statement might seem incongruous for those first meeting Anderson in person. However, to get to know Anderson—as I have over the last four years—is to come to realize that his mild-mannered exterior hides a passionate and headstrong man who fights for what he believes in.

Professional photographers are lucky that Anderson, who constantly pushes to improve the quality and efficiency of his own photographic workflow, has made it his mission to benefit all photographers with his knowledge. Anderson's first impressive success in spreading critical digital workflow expertise was to spearhead the Universal Photographic Digital Imaging Guidelines (www.updig.org). Anderson served as the principal author of UPDIG, which was started as a collaborative project among a small group of photography associations that included the American Society of Media Photographers (ASMP), of which Anderson is chair of the association's Digital Standards Research Committee. However, thanks in large part to Anderson's vision and dedication, eventually the scope of UPDIG's intended audience went far beyond the members of the consortium of associations. Anderson realized that the only way to truly safeguard photographic quality in the digital era is to ensure that everyone handling images understands the same best practices, not only professional photographers.

"Digital capture offers extraordinary image-enhancement opportunities at every stage of the photographic process," Anderson told me two years ago. "But constant change has also led to confu-

sion, loss of quality and a lot of wasted time and money. The goal of UPDIG is to help get everyone in the industry on the same page."

The UPDIG site—an amazing resource with recommendations for all aspects of the digital workflow—has been a godsend to many in world of digital imaging. Still, Anderson wanted to go further, delving deeper in photographic digital workflow practices, and presenting a variety of best workflow options, and presenting these multiple approaches in a more educational manner.

Pushing Into Bolder Best Practices

In May 2009 Anderson received the Photographer Leadership Award from the International Photographic Council (IPC). This reward recognized Anderson's volunteer work on UPDIG, as well as his key role in securing for ASMP a major grant from the Library of Congress. This grant is to support the development "dpBestflow" (www.dpbestflow.org), of which Anderson is the project lead.

Having toured the dpbestflow.org website—which will go live in mid-November—I can confidentially announce that it takes the critical UPDIG concept to a whole new level. Beyond a greater depth of knowledge—informed by respected collaborators such as Peter Krogh, Patricia Russotti, Judy Herrmann, Mike Starck, Jay Kinghorn, Dan Stack, Rick McCleary, and others—the site is designed to offer much more educational content: the whys and hows behind the whats.

Working with Patricia Russotti, professor at Rochester Institute of Technology, Anderson co-authored, *Digital Photography Best Practices and Workflow Handbook*, which is related to the "dp-Bestflow" site, but also uniquely different. "As a book, it is organized in a linear way," says Anderson, noting that it's perfect for

teachers to use with a curriculum. "You could probably read the book in day or two. It's very friendly and perfect for getting a better grasp on digital workflows. The website is more of a pure resource and you might never finish."

The Man Behind the Help

"I might have been crazy to take on this job," Anderson told me two years ago when he was neck-deep in working on revising the UPDIG site on a completely volunteer basis. When I found out that all of Anderson's UPDIG work was voluntary—not a cent received—I asked him what he got out of the project. "Honestly, I really like to help people," he responded.

Beyond the desire to help people, Anderson explained that he saw the job to communicate best practices as a necessity: When one undereducated person in the workflow lifecycle of his images could ruin them, he had to take action. To me, this begged an obvious question: What makes Anderson the kind of photographer—the kind of person—who not only can understand best practices, but is fiercely committed to communicating them?

Clean Aesthetics, Efficient Workflow

"My aesthetic is very clean and straightforward," says Anderson, who notes that his favorite job is pretty much whatever comes in the door. "That's because it is something new, and there is a new challenge to be solved." Anderson, who works for both ad agencies and directly for large companies, often uses extensive lighting set ups. However, he always aims for a natural look, both in terms of lighting and in how his subjects are presented.

"There are a lot of hip styles that come and go—like the current use of shift lenses to blur backgrounds," says Anderson. "But I like a more classic look. If I use a shift lens, it is to correct something, not to distort it." Anderson explains that while photographing he concentrates on creating a sincere connection with his subject. He does this particularly well with children, whom he photographs extensively for school admissions and capital campaigns.

One of Anderson's talents is photographing live theater performances, which he has been doing for more than 30 years for Baltimore's highly respected Center Stage. Anderson's approach to theater photography is decidedly unique. He never photographs posed scenes, and he gives himself only one chance to get it right: shooting the entire final dress rehearsal as unobtrusively as possible—no "do-overs."

Anderson's do-it-once, get-it-right attitude regarding photographing theater relates to one of his most prominent personality traits: "I am obsessed with efficiency," he admits. This efficiency is one of the key factors behind Anderson's ability to author UPDIG, as well as the resulting value that the guidelines hold for photographers.

Photographer's Spirit, Economist's Mentality

Born in 1949, Anderson's interest in efficiency can be seen in his decision to study economics at Western Maryland College (now McDaniel College), from which he graduated in 1971. "I was always interested in English literature, history, social studies and other liberal arts," explains Anderson. "But when I took an intro course in economics during my freshman year, I said, 'Ah, This is the key!' I realized that to get to the route of why



E. Faye Butler as Willetta Mayer



Hiking with Nicholas & Tommy



Maria Dizzia applies make up before the show.



Group photo of the director, the cast, and the stage managers

things happened, you had to understand economics. Everything is driven by economics.”

“It was a very political time, and a lot of people had a lot to say,” recalls Anderson. “I was intrigued by writing and wrote a number of articles for the school newspaper. And then I started designing for the paper, too. And then we needed good pictures. So I started borrowing cameras to take pictures.”

Anderson got swept into the world of writing and designing the newspaper, but especially the photography. “In about my junior year, photography struck me as the thing that I wanted to do with my life. It resonated with my personality. I found that I had this visual sense and I enjoyed the whole creative process. And it was also a means of being involved, to engage the world.”

Anderson never took a photography class in college, but encountered a small group of students who shared a culture based around the darkroom and traded information. “It turned out to be better than an organized class because these people were completely driven by passion,” recalls Anderson. “There were no artificial boundaries.”

Rapid Road to Professional Success

Surprisingly, although Anderson saw his future in photography, he didn’t even own a camera until after college. “I bought a Nikkormat FTn right before my first trip to Europe,” says Anderson. “I had just seen the work of Robert Frank for the first time, and during my travels—shooting Tri-X—it was Frank who I tried to emulate. I took from him the idea of being the observer.”

Back in the States, Anderson used his talents in graphic design to land a production job at an ad agency in Baltimore, which had a darkroom but no photographer. “This was really my photography school,” explains Anderson. At every chance Anderson eagerly volunteered to make prints and received critical feedback from the

art directors. “I am the kind of person who always has my hand in the air,” says Anderson. “And once I am interested in something, I search out anything that will help me learn about it.”

In less than a year Anderson had moved to another ad agency, but this time as the photo assistant. He worked under Robert deGast, a former *National Geographic* photographer who liked what he saw in Anderson. “I mean, deGast was a real finishing school for me,” says Anderson with a laugh. “If I couldn’t make 70 or 80 good prints in a day for him, I wasn’t doing it right.” After two years, deGast moved on and Anderson took over his mentor’s position. A year later, the 27-year-old Anderson struck out to make it on his own in 1976.

Fiercely Embracing Digital

Once exposed to digital, Anderson’s conversion was immediate and fierce. “It was in 1999,” Anderson recalls. “A young photographer with a Nikon D1 wanted my permission to shoot while I was photographing one of the shows at Center Stage. I made him a deal: he could shoot if I could use his digital camera for 10 minutes. And that’s all it took.”

“This is the end of film,” Anderson remembers thinking. “I don’t see film having any future.” Within two months Anderson had sold his film cameras and was working only with a Nikon D1x. “I was a digital evangelist, and I did everything I could to show my clients the incredible value of digital,” says Anderson. Typical to form, Anderson buried himself in learning the most efficient ways to work with digital.

Anderson soon changed platforms and now shoots with either his full-frame sensor Canon EOS-1Ds Mark II or his Canon EOS-1D Mark III. “The cameras work really well together,” says Anderson, noting that sometimes he prefers the lower resolution of the 1D for portraiture work—when he doesn’t want to show ev-

ery pore. “I basically use the 1Ds when I would be using a 2¼ film camera and the 1D when I would be using a 35mm camera.”

Joining the UPDIG Effort

“I was not a part of the original planning behind UPDIG. What put me in a position to become the principal author of UPDIG is that I had been studying every aspect of digital workflow with the goal of creating the most efficient workflow for my own photography.” Anderson explains that the genesis for what would become UPDIG came from the efforts of the ASMP, which in 2004 was interested in creating a set of standards for digital imaging.

“Eventually we moved away from the idea of standards,” says Anderson. “We realized that the technology is changing too fast and that different users have different needs. That is how we have ended up with the guidelines in the format they are now. They are accurate and based on extensive research and input from all sectors of the industry. But they are still just guidelines. This makes them more ‘friendly,’ and gives wider usability.”

“The whole key to writing UPDIG is the fact that all the information has been out there on the Internet,” says Anderson. “It’s just that no one had pulled it all together in one clean package.” Before working on UPDIG, Anderson had been writing documents to clarify digital concepts for clients. He had also published a couple articles for photographers in trade magazines. This is what brought him to the attention of Susan Carr, then president of ASMP, who tapped Anderson to lead the UPDIG group.

Anderson is very direct about the fact that he had the impressive knowledge needed base to write the UPDIG guidelines. However, he makes it clear that it required the efforts of a diverse group of volunteers to make UPDIG possible to ensure the highest level of quality. In addition to Michael Stewart, the UPDIG technical editor, and the principal contributors to the first two versions of UPDIG, Anderson

credits scores of unnamed experts for making UPDIG a reality. “I did write the UPDIG guidelines,” says Anderson. “But their value lies in the fact that I was synthesizing the information of others.”

Still A Photographer’s Photographer

Anderson’s background—his fascination with economics to his perfectionism in his photography—made him the ideal man for the job to lead the UPDIG effort. In turn, his work on UPDIG allowed him to gain the writing and organizational skills—not to mention the vision—that led him to lead the Library of Congress-funded “dp Bestflow.” This in turn has led to his first book, *Digital Photography Best Practices and Workflow Handbook*.

After coming to better understand where Anderson came from, what made him tick, I had gained a much better understanding of what has made him so capable of understanding and communicating guidelines, standards and workflows in the evolving digital era. But all this led to another question, and I asked Anderson if, with his success, he would start to spend less time photographing if he could?

“I’m just a boy taking pictures,” Anderson responded with a laugh. Then he told a story that took place several years ago. His son—who is now 10—was photographing with a point-and-shoot, and Anderson asked him if he was a photographer. He gave the same reply that Anderson had given me. “That’s how I see myself,” Anderson explained. “I got into this business because I loved taking pictures, and that’s still what I love to do. And that’s what I would do all the time if I could.”

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