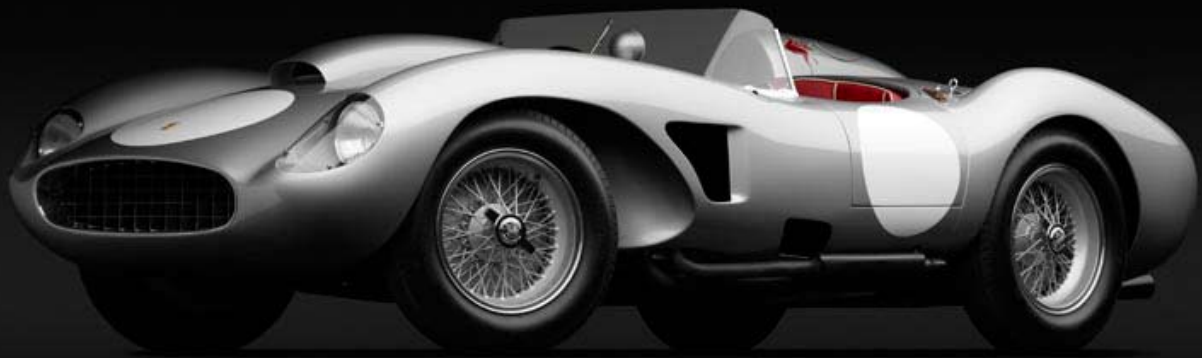


PHASEONE

what the world's best photography is made of



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Michael Furman

New perspectives

by Walter Borchenko



Michael Furman

New perspectives



THE PROCESS OF PHOTOGRAPHY IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVISIT THE SUBJECT from a new perspective each time it's photographed. Cars fall under this rule more often than almost any other subject matter. Imagine how many Porsche and Ferrari images we have all seen in our lives, yet we continue to see images that show us something new.

Philadelphia photographer Michael Furman takes the idea of a new perspective to a whole new level.

"Getting the image right is also a matter of historical and design perspective. What I try to do is understand the designer's perspective when he designed the car. That's not just his artistic perspective, but also taking into consideration the global situation at the time of the design. For example, designers in 1929 were creating cars with different thoughts in their mind than they were in 1953. So you want to get a sense of where that designer was coming from; what part of the world were they from; how they saw things; how the art world affected their designs at that time. Cars do not exist in a vacuum. They are very representative of the human condition and the aesthetics at the time of their creation.



© Michael Furman

It's really about light and it's about the perspective that you choose. Most people choose the wrong perspective to shoot from.

I like to find that spot that the designer really would have designed the car from — one location where they were standing when they started to make their drawings.

Fortunately for me most of these designers have long since passed away and they're not around to argue with me over my selections!"

Recording the subject and then trying to create a personality in post production is an impossible way to create a strong image yet today, this approach is becoming too common. Photographing a car in the studio is an opportunity to visually investigate the opportunities that are present. Interacting with the car before and during the shoot creates a strong sense of what needs to be part of the image.

"It's really about light and it's about the perspective that you choose. Most people choose the wrong perspective to shoot from. I can only really talk as an expert regarding cars, but I'd be willing to bet it pertains to most things — that people are just standing in the wrong spot. Find the right spot, that's the first thing. Then, if you're a studio photographer like me, you have the obligation of making the lighting right."

The relationship between retouching and photography has become confusing with many images created in retouching with the original image as only a starting point. Some call this process "photo illustration". Michael has both a unique and insightful perspective on retouching.

"I hear about more and more photographers who retouch everything! In the old days retouching meant you took the work to a retoucher. The photographer probably didn't do the work himself. The implication with retouching today is that you could do it yourself. Obviously, you can do it or anybody else can do it — because everybody's kids are doing it! There's no real respect granted to someone who can do retouching... when in fact it's extraordinarily complicated to do well. It takes extraordinary experience and knowledge that goes way beyond any particular program.

I get very concerned when people look at our work and they think that we just retouched everything to make it look as it

does. Yes, we do use retouching, but we use it as a support for what we do. It's not the glue that holds everything together.

The other thing is that people assume that you don't have to do things well. You can just retouch it. And again, the perception is that because everybody's children can retouch, how hard could that be? Invariably once somebody starts playing around with retouching and they play with the controls; they get this great sense of power like they can do anything; and invariably you can kick up the contrast and kick up the saturation and before you now it, something has much more presence than the original photograph had. That doesn't mean that what you've done is reproducible; that doesn't mean what you did makes any sense.

There's this false thought out there that with retouching you can do just about anything. It still comes back to the photographer making the right decisions about... didn't I say "lens choice" and "perspective" and of course "lighting". It comes back to those basic issues.

Then if you use retouching to enhance something or to correct something that you know you can't deal with on set, then that's fine. I don't think too many of us photographers are given credit for what we bring to the table. It's assumed that a computer can correct everything, and that's not really the case."

The craft of photography is in a transition state with the experience of film photography weighing heavily on the best in digital capture today. Photographing on film spotlights the moment of capture such that it is a challenge to achieve the results in any other way. Photographers like Michael Furman can envision the end result with incredible accuracy that can only be described as a commitment to craftsmanship and a dedication to "getting it in the shot".

"I developed my knowledge of lighting working with films that required more precision in lighting. I respect that post-production tools can help improve things. But I do know that to make an image great, I've got to get the image most of the way there and "most" means 99%!" +

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