



PASSION + CONFIDENCE PERRY THOMPSON'S PHASE ONE EXPERIENCE

by Walter Borchenko

All photographs in this article © Perry Thompson



CALGARY IS THE CENTER OF THE OIL INDUSTRY IN CANADA. This is an affluent city that manages to feel like a wild-west frontier town at the same time! Only an hour away rise the Canadian Rocky mountains with famous locations like Banff and Jasper.

The passion of Calgary overflows each year with the Calgary Stampede, the largest event of it's kind in the world. To be a successful photographer in Calgary, the passion for what you do has to match the incredible characters that make this city so alive. Calgary is the place that photographer Perry Thompson hangs his hat and calls home! Photography has been a passion for Perry for a very long time.

"I like to have fun. I like photography. I've liked taking pictures since I started in grade six when I first got my camera. I have these images in my mind. I'm always trying to capture these images or bring them into reality. Sounds weird, but that's how it is.

If something is visually appealing to me, I like shooting it. It could be a hot model, a funky face, beautiful scenery, or shooting a really nice event in a beautiful location. We get to a lot of cool locations where everybody's happy and everybody's looking great!"

To be successful today, you have to be a terrific photographer and good at business. Seeing the opportunity for success with digital early has really helped Perry build a family of photographic businesses.

"I've been shooting digital for over seven years! I started with the Light Phase, 6 mega-pixel, tethered only digital back. I shot that in the studio until I got the P 21 which I ordered as soon as I found out about it! That was a big jump! The only thing I didn't like about it was that I like to shoot fast! The P 21 was just a bit slower than I like. So now I have upgraded to the P 21+ and it's super fast. I can shoot as fast as the camera can! I got the SanDisk Extreme IV cards and I can just go fast! It's really great! I use the P 21+ for just about everything now!

I have a few businesses. I've got *Perry Thompson Photography*, which is my portrait and commercial side. It does all get mixed up. I love our boutique portraiture, like yesterday we were up in a helicopter on top of a mountain for a portrait. On Saturday I had a wedding in Banff and Friday I was shooting a commercial job for a developer. My other business is *Kids Photo* with two stores, one located in Calgary and one in Vancouver. Here we work with kids and families in an easy relaxed style! I started this business with the Phase One Portrait solution and it's really grown!"

It takes a very high level of talent and focus to be able to successfully produce the incredible variety of work that Perry shoots. Part of this success is a strong approach



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for photographing people. Another part of this success is confidence in the equipment.

"I get into the groove and I just get pumped up and everybody gets into it. My style is very... I don't call it "journalistic" but I kind of set up a scenario. It's very interactive.



I want a fresh genuine expression and pose, so I talk to them all the time. Let's say I have a girl and a guy to work with. I'll say, "Okay, you've just had three drinks, you picked her up in a bar, you're pulling the moves on her..." so I'll try to draw this little scenario in their minds, so they're actually almost role-playing or acting it out as I'm shooting. Basically my

goal is to get their minds off being photographed. Unless they are professional models, then we are in a different league altogether.

With this way of shooting, the speed of the P 21+ really makes a difference. Moments come really fast! I do have a Nikon D2X,



that I was using mainly for weddings. Now with the P 21+, I'm not using the Nikon much. With weddings, with my money shots I only use the P 21+ and I use it for all my portraits and all my commercial work.

I was shooting in the mountains, about ten days ago. Not a cloud in the sky, blue sky on a lake — Emerald Lake — and there's a little bit of snow on the mountains, so it's a very contrasty situation. I can shoot it with confidence knowing that I'm not going to lose the highlights and shadows. You couldn't do that shooting with any other DSLR camera or back. I just shoot and don't worry about it and it's there.

I love not worrying about it. I'm editing a job where I'm stitching six shots together to get a 180° view of the project that I am working on. All I have to do is a global color correction and exposure correction to this whole shoot, in a couple mouse clicks and that's it.

I'm holding a magazine right now that I did some shots for the first week I got my P 21. The art director was there. I shot

it and literally processed about a dozen images, burned the DVD right there and we were in and out of the shoot in an hour. The art director basically just gave it to production and it was done. They didn't do any fiddling around and the job was shot on white."

Perry keeps himself ahead of the competition with a total commitment to quality. This commitment is also about craftsmanship that puts the lighting and best possible capture first. The result is more work and happier clients.

"Most people are using DSLRs, like Canons or Nikons or whatever. I know I pull out a better file. I tell my clients I'm shooting with Phase One and that most photographers are not. I just walk in there and say, 'I can do this better and quicker and less fiddling around for you guys.'

I've got a catalogue that we shot in the summertime, it was with the P 21... and the art director was blown away. We shot furniture for a competition. We did thirty-six pieces in two days and handed the



files to the art director. He got the files so fast after the shoot that his mind was blown. The files turned out fantastic and they didn't need almost any work. The client used the best printer in the province for it. The catalogue just ended up being a really nice showpiece.

What's really great is what happened later. I go to the meeting and this art director says, 'Yes, I'm using you for all my stuff now.' They've turned out to be a great client. The guy who shot the catalogue before was using a Hasselblad with another competing digital back. I never saw the photographer's files but apparently the art director could see the difference! I think the difference is, my Phase files are better quality, don't need much retouching and print easily.

Perry is a master of lighting on location or in the studio. Creative lighting is a process, not a formula. This is especially true with the advanced tools we have to work with today.

"About twenty years ago I saw Dean Collins give a lighting seminar. He used one light to create a high key background and light the subject for a portrait. He positioned the light to cover the subject and the background with a fairly wide reflector. His background was at f/11.5 then he used a scrim to pull back the light on the subject 1-1/2 f-stops to about f/8. The shot was terrific. This really got me thinking about lighting.

A lot of people feel that they need a leaf shutter based medium

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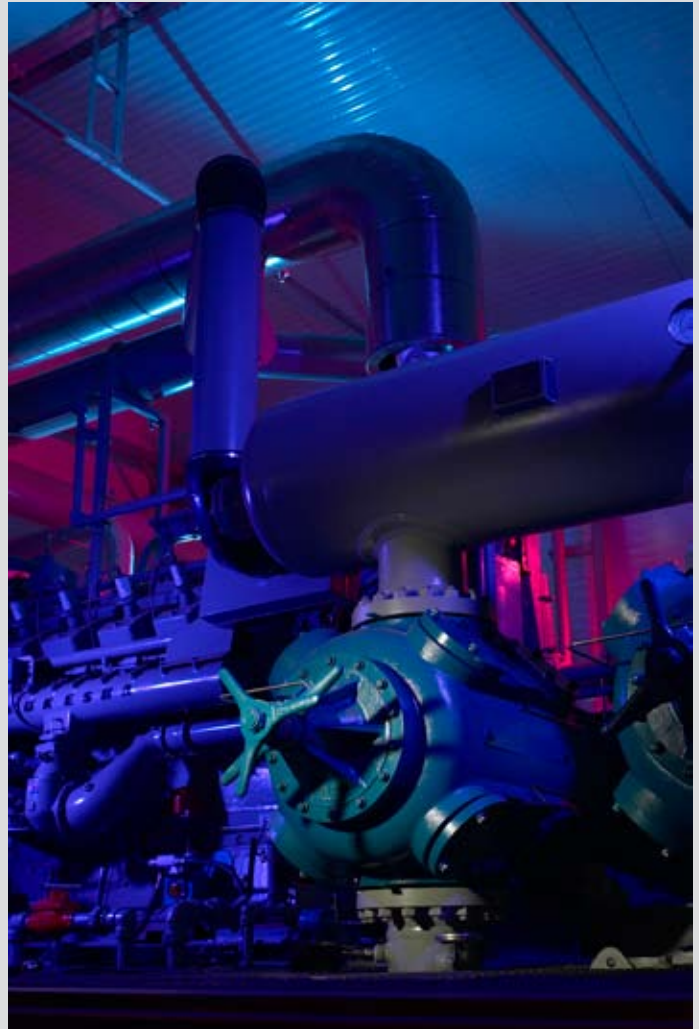
format system to shoot weddings and portraits yet I have never found this to be true. Just like my Dean Collins experience, thinking about your tools and how they work gives you creative options.

I use my P 21+ with the Mamiya 645 AFD II Pro system and never have a problem. The incredible ISO range of the P 21+ combined with the incredible range on my on camera flash system means that I never have to worry about it. I have lots of room to adjust the light and balance daylight with flash!

For a lot of my most important shoots, I like to take extra lighting with me, even for location. I had a job to shoot 120 corporate executives as a group, outdoors in bright sunlight. They were wearing dark blue blazers with red ties and khaki pants. I brought some of my battery operated studio flash for balancing to the daylight. The end result was terrific skin tone even in the shadows!

My competition capture with DSLRs. These photographers set their camera to auto and have no idea about what is happening. A lot of DSLR shooters don't really think about lighting. If something is not working, they think that Photoshop work will save them.

I know how my equipment works and what to expect. I adjust exposure and flash settings accordingly with fabulous results that I can count on. I delivered the job long before my competition have the image looking right in post-production.



You have to understand the quality, they're just beautiful files. I get excited every time I download the files. I'm excited to look at them every day! That's what I'm doing right now. I'm processing out files just so I can see what they look like. Everything is RAW and everything goes through Capture One. With *Kids Photo* and my stuff, we put well over one thousand images a day through Capture One. Every one of my retouchers use Capture One!

If you have any comments about this article, please email me at walterb@k-i.inc.com