



mark brady photographic chameleon

By Larry Brownstein



In *Zelig*, Woody Allen's mockumentary film, Leonard Zelig is a human chameleon who becomes a celebrity in the 1920s thanks to his ability to look and act like whomever is around him. While I don't expect to see Mark Brady on TV standing side by side with world leaders, as was Zelig's habit, his ability to adapt to the changing landscape of contemporary photography reminds me greatly of

Allen's protagonist.

Brady's initial love was music, but when he first saw a print develop in the darkroom he was taken by the magic of it, and instantly bought himself a camera and taught himself photography. He took a job in a camera store. Then he worked in the darkroom of a photo studio's lab. Later, he began assisting various photographers learning the technical and the business

side of the profession before striking out on his own.

In the beginning of his career, Brady had tons of catalog clients and was shooting clothing, perfume and jewelry. In fact, he was so busy, he sometimes had three shoots in a single day. Alas, as his clients gravitated to doing more catalog work in-house, he was forced to reinvent himself as a portrait photographer.

Now, he says, numerous amateurs with digital cameras are exploring how to turn their interest into a way to make money. Some of them already have a good sense of composition and, with the great technology built into these cameras, they can now produce sharp, well exposed photos. And, since most of them have a day job, they work cheap. Which is why Brady has reinvented himself once again. Brady's efforts are now directed into two areas: as an architectural photographer and as a high-end printing service bureau. The logic behind this move is twofold. He believes that the requirements of architectural photography are beyond the capabilities of the typical amateur photographer. And he sees his printing services as a highly specialized niche, one that brings him photographers as clients, rather than competitors.



**mark
brady**

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“Architectural photography,” says Brady, “requires an eye keenly sensitive to the compositional possibilities of the design elements in the architectural space. There is a certain visual geometry that the architectural photographer must be able to solve that is beyond the casual photographer. Also, there are the technical requirements of the lighting, which the architectural photographer uses to balance, emphasize or de-emphasize elements of the space as required.”

Brady’s typical architectural client is a high-end builder of residential property. He likes to make a short visit to the prop-



erty to do reconnaissance, which gives him an idea of what he will be doing and the equipment he will need. A typical interior shot will show a whole room while simultaneously highlighting an interesting feature such as a railing or a staircase.

“In my architectural photos I want there to be balance between the various lines that make up the interior or exterior image,” Brady says. “I will view the shot from all corners, in the middle, down low and up high until I see something that connects with me graphically. I don’t follow any set rule.”

The new direction he has chosen by incorporating printing services into his studio makes complete sense in the fast-changing landscape of the business of photography. There are more photographers coming into the industry all the time, some too busy to deal with printing and some who are unable or unwilling to invest in the best printing technology. So Brady supplies a high-quality option for them. Besides photographers, his clientele also includes artists and illustrators.

Brady’s lifelong love of being in the darkroom has now shifted to Lightroom. I asked him if he missed the darkroom. “The darkroom is fun for me because I actually use my hands to paint in more light or remove light from the print in real time,” Brady explains. “Some people use dodging discs or cards with various size holes to burn in the image. The digital darkroom is just a different experience for obvious reasons. I try to bridge the gap by using Wacom Cintiq products while working in the various software programs I use. It allows me to get more involved with painting the image, similar to what I do in the darkroom with my hands.”



While the chemicals are mostly a thing of the past, the joy of a beautiful print is still a source of pride for Brady. He uses an HP Z3100 printer that can print 44 inches wide. He mentions that the printer has a built-in colorimeter—it can sample its own prints to re-profile itself. In other words, not only is the monitor calibrated but the printer is as well.

Brady recently had an interesting challenge when a client shipped him a framed oil painting, wanting him to photograph the piece and to print a limited edition of 50 posters that would each be signed by the artist. Upon receiving the artwork he immediately saw two challenges. The first challenge was one that he



had dealt with before: The painting had a shiny surface and reflections could ruin a photograph. The usual solution would be to use lights at an angle so that they would not reflect back to the camera position. However, the painting was recessed deeply in the frame and Brady was not allowed to remove it [from the frame]. Oblique lighting would cause unwanted shadows from the frame to project across the recessed painting.

could. Brady felt he could do better than delivering the equivalent of a cropped image, so he decided to do some lighting magic, turning his entire studio into what he describes as a “giant light source.”

The ceiling was already white so he pointed some of his lights right into it. He placed white foam core along much of the studio's floor and pointed more lights into it. He put some white reflectors behind the camera position too. The result

the canvas with no problem reflections. “The more you know about studio lighting,” he says, “the better off you are.”

Brady says that one of the tricks to getting a good print is to first take care of the obvious issue of monitor calibration. Beyond that, soft proofing in Photoshop is the next most important item. This feature of Photoshop allows the software to utilize the profile for the paper that will be used and to provide a preview of the print results. Brady says he typically will see a loss of saturation and contrast when soft-proofing. He'll usually create adjustment layers to make the necessary fixes and when the soft proof looks good, he feels confident that he'll get a good print.

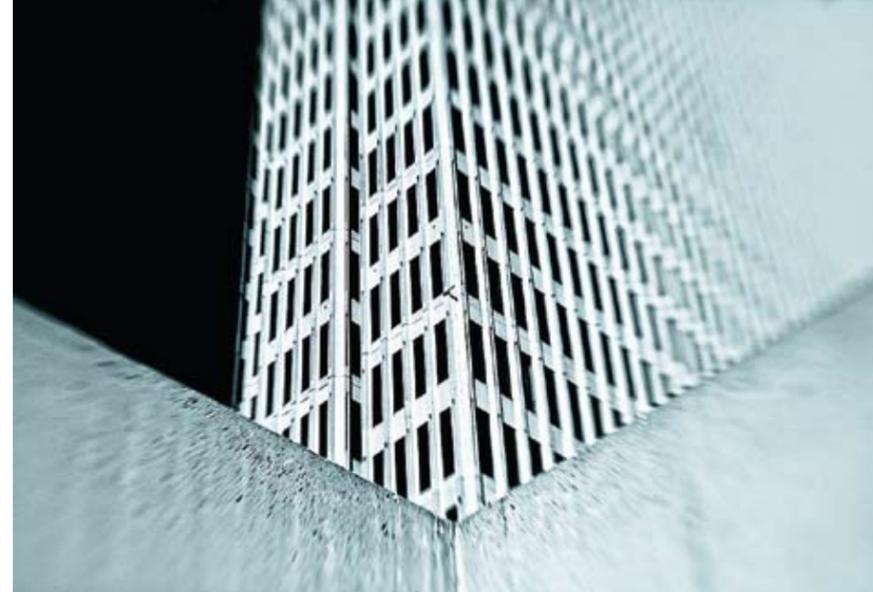
Brady finds that photographers like to print large and more photographers want to make 44-inch prints from scans of their old slides. He says that the Genuine Fractals algorithms are surprisingly good at making the most from existing data and upsizing to make such large prints a reality. (Of course, he admits, that the limitations can be seen at close-viewing distances.)

Brady's studio is in the Potrero Hill

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He informed the client of the challenges involved and was told to do the best he

was the equivalent of a giant softbox, allowing soft light to cover the surface of



neighborhood of San Francisco, CA. Both the Golden Gate Bridge and the San Francisco Oakland Bay Bridge can be seen from his studio. He loves working right in the heart of the city and takes inspiration from his surroundings. Playing with the plane of focus is one of Brady's favorite techniques to capture the city's famous architectural landmarks. He became enamored with the technique when he would use view cameras in his commercial work. Today, though, his preferred method of doing the same thing is with a Lensbaby.

“Lensbaby allows me to replicate the very narrow depth of field you can get with a view camera. Extreme shallow depth of field is just another tool I use to evoke emotion out of my images,” says Brady. “To be able to use this lens so effortlessly while shooting is just pure fun.”

Lensbaby lenses mount onto today's SLR and DSLR cameras and have a flexible barrel so that some of the features once available only with view cameras can now be attained with far more ease. The Lensbaby comes with a set of aperture rings that are placed inside the lens. With no ring at all, the Lensbaby 2.0 (there are three versions of Lensbaby) shoots at $f/2$, which makes it difficult to control the point of critical focus. Brady likes to use an aperture ring that brings the aperture somewhere in its middle range, about $f/5.6$ or $f/8.0$. His Lensbaby selective-focus images of the Transamerica Pyramid, the Bay Bridge and more, are a refreshing new perspective on these often-seen subjects.

Brady may also use post-processing to interpret a scene and has a variety of plug-

ins to do so. He says he often uses plug-ins from onOne Software and Nik Software. “There are so many different options and techniques, which open up new creative possibilities that I could not imagine just a short time ago. Anything that enhances my creativity or inspires me to try something new is always in the forefront of any image I am working on,” he says. “Life is good in the digital age!”

He also keeps his eye out for amusing

everyday moments while he wanders the city. For example, he has an amusing image of an exhausted little boy being carried by his mother while his limp arm hangs behind her back, clutching a toy pistol.

While his current focus is on his architectural photography and printing services, Brady—chameleon that he is—continues to do portraiture, travel and nature photography as well. He is always ready to find his place in the fast-changing world of photography. Whether his catalog clients are moving work in-house or his portrait clients are settling for Aunt Sally, Brady seems to have an answer to the challenge. His photography can be seen at www.markbrady.com. Information about his printing services can be found at www.bradyfineart.com.

Larry Brownstein is the photographer of the books Los Angeles, Where Anything is Possible and The Midnight Mission. He is represented by Getty Images, Alamy and other agencies. He has a growing wedding and portrait photography business. He also offers stock photography consulting and career coaching for emerging photographers. See his work at www.larrybrownstein.com or contact him at (310) 815-1402.