

PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD!

Getting a foot in the door of a professional career opportunity is not an easy task, especially when you don't know the ins and outs of your field. Photography is no exception. And since the photography profession hides many different options, you'd better know what to do and what to avoid when you wish to enter domains as specific as stock, fashion and fine-art photography or photojournalism. We have gathered information from five key personalities who have developed successful careers in each of these domains. Here is their best advice for the new generation of emerging photographers.

ANNE BASTARACHE

Director, Photography,
First Light Associated
Photographers

Established in 1984, First Light is one of the last remaining Canadian stock photo agencies. Anne Bastarache, a graduate from Ryerson, scouts new photographers, edits and works with their roster of dedicated, talented shooters to get relevant content into First Light's collection, which is sought after by commercial and editorial clients. From the beginning this independent Toronto-based agency has been a venue for emerging Canadian talent who see their work distributed internationally in over 40 countries.

According to Bastarache, there are many reasons why some photographers are successful with stock while others are not. "You have to know your audience, what clients are looking for, all of the subtleties that make your image stand out—whether it's the model, clothing, styling, lighting, location or concept." "The most successful stock photographers diversify their work by having separate collections with a variety of stock agencies, or sell their content under different sales models. Photographers also need to consider that it can take time for all of the work to pay off in terms of commissions, so patience is also a good quality to have!

Her best piece of advice: Get the right camera. Without the right equipment you will be wasting your time. And always, always get a model release, and property release if necessary. The image is essentially useless commercially, and even editorially, in some cases, without one.

What not to do: Exceed your costs. Think through the shoot before you begin. Emerging photographers may want to involve like-minded friends for styling, makeup or modeling, essentially keeping costs as low as possible while still maintaining a decent level of production. Succeeding as a stock photographer—like any photographer—is all about balancing what you earn with what you invest back into your business.



STEPHEN BULGER

Gallery owner,
Stephen Bulger Gallery

The Stephen Bulger gallery, located in Toronto's Art and Design District, is one of the few galleries that specialize in photography in Canada. It is known for exhibiting and selling exemplary photographs. Founded in 1994, the gallery has a mandate of showing both historical and contemporary photographs, which makes it a destination for anyone interested in the medium. "We strive to contribute positively to the Canadian industry," said Stephen Bulger.

This graduate from Ryerson University made his first step into gallery management at the university's gallery. Being located in a building with over 20 other galleries gave him valuable insight into opening his own gallery, which he did about five years later. "Without Ryerson, I'm not sure what I'd be doing today," said Bulger.

The Stephen Bulger gallery presents approximately nine to ten exhibitions per year, which are generally scheduled about 18 months in advance. They can include work from the photographers or estate represented by the gallery or work from group exhibitions on a particular subject. "Being located in Toronto, I also prioritize exhibiting photographers that haven't been exhibited here," Bulger explained.

What he is looking for: Simply put, I am looking for extraordinary photographs that I wish I had made. I am interested in photographs that tell me something about the world and the medium of photography, and I show the work of photographers who consistently make excellent photographs.

His best piece of advice: Concentrate on making excellent prints. Often people forget that if they want to exhibit in galleries, the quality of their print is as important as the image itself. These images are scrutinized by serious collectors, so each decision that lies behind the making of a final print is of the utmost importance. The goal is to make a coveted object, not just a well-composed picture.



DENIS DESRO

Editor in Chief Fashion,
Elle Canada/Elle Québec

As top Canadian fashion magazines, Elle Canada and Elle Québec set quality benchmarks in photography and bring recognition to each of their contributing professionals. For the past decade, Denis Desro has been in charge of the fashion division for the two magazines. He travels the world for inspiration from the best fashion shows. He then gathers photographers, stylists, makeup artists, and other professionals to build the team best suited for a specific concept to be created during a shooting session.

One might think that such sessions would last for a few days; however, the photographers have a very limited amount of time to get the best out of the situation. During an eight-hour session, which includes models' elaborated preparation, they have to render eight images of equal quality. It is essential that the hired photographer master his tools and photographic technique, and it is equally important that his vision meet the demands of the creative team.

These conceptual shooting sessions represent only one aspect of the photographic needs of a fashion magazine, however. Half of the photographic production is composed of product shots of clothing, accessories, make up and other fashion essentials.

His best piece of advice: Be creative and experiment! Some of the new generation of photographers tend to rely too much on the models, the clothing or the magazine itself. Experimentation will help you to find your own style and learn how to stand out from the other photographers on the market.

What not to do: Be a diva. Fashion photographers work in a team, and therefore should adapt to their coworkers and not the opposite. A pleasant personality brings out the best in people around you—the same applies for models and other members of a team during a photo shoot.



MARIO MERCIER

Creative Director,
Orange Tango

Located in Montréal, Orange Tango pushes the boundaries of creativity thanks to its distinctive approach of teamwork. Photography is at the heart of some of the agency's most renowned advertising campaigns, such as the series of close-up portraits produced in collaboration with photographer Marc Montplaisir for l'Opéra de Montréal.

Creative Director Mario Mercier likes images that tell a story. His studies in graphic design and film, along with his passion for theatre, have certainly played a role. Highly faithful to the photographers he works with, Mercier cultivates relationships where friendship and creative collaboration become a fertile ground for the best ideas.

The creative team develops original concepts for each client and the creations that come out of them remain exclusive to the agency and the specific campaigns. "Illustration and photography convey very different things. When we need to reach higher levels of emotion, we will choose photography. A photograph speaks for itself," said Mercier.

Personality is a major aspect when considering a photographer for a project. Humility, generosity and professionalism are highly estimated by Mercier. "For the photographer, working with us on a concept is very different than working alone. Teamwork is essential as the creative direction is often a four-hand play."

His best piece of advice: Develop your video skills. Thanks to the possibilities offered by newer cameras (the Nikon D5, without naming names), photo sessions now often include video capture as well as still images. Photographers who want to enter the field of advertising should have some interest in the cinematographic aspect of the image. Mastering both photography and video is the way of the future.

What not to do: Overlook the details. Preproduction and postproduction are as important as the photo shoot itself. A good advertising photographer should have control over every aspect of his work. As well, coming to a shoot without being well prepared can result in time wasted for everyone involved.



JEFF WASSERMAN

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