



Nikonians Photo Professors #18 (<http://blog.nikonians.org/archives/2013/09/nikonians-photo-professors-18.html>)

Rick Hulbert: It's a great day for a photography, everyone. Welcome to another edition of the Photo Professors, a podcast for passionate photographers everywhere. This is Rick Hulbert, broadcasting from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Rick Paul: And this is Rick Paul, broadcasting from Tucson, Arizona, USA.

Rick Hulbert: Well, folks, we have an intriguing set of subjects to discuss here. We've got actually two opposing, in a way counterbalancing, subjects. One is using flash during daytime photography, and the second will be a discussion of nighttime photography not using flash. We're going to start off ...

Rick Paul, of course is a professional photographer, events, weddings. He photographs seniors. For two years, I thought seniors were old people but it turns out of course, seniors are high school graduates. I was just talking with Rick and he's also photographing actors and actresses. He really takes advantage of portrait photography and is an expert in using a flash. So Rick, we're going to have a good chat about this stuff.

Rick Paul: You wouldn't believe how many people don't know what I'm talking about when I say seniors.

Rick Hulbert: Really, I'm not the only one?

Rick Paul: I think a lot of them are wondering how I avoid the reflections off the wheelchairs or something.

Rick Hulbert: I'm a wheelchair person and I'm in that category of senior. Seniors today, we are active. We are the baby boom generation that now is still in control of the world. Rick, I know that for a number of years now, you've really been embracing the whole notion of controlling light, using flash in your photos regardless of the location and time of day. Am I right in that?



Rick Paul: That's right. Couple of reasons for that. I mean, to get a really nice portrait of somebody outdoors can be a real challenge. You can't count on the sun and you can't count on clouds. My little theory is I always bring the sun with me and I always bring the clouds with me both.

Rick Hulbert: The clouds are your kind of ... without a flash, I have to use clouds as the great light box in the sky and I welcome clouds. I know that often on a sunny day, it's like the toughest time you can have to photograph. People often will say, "Oh, it's a sunny day, a great day for photography." I don't know. I guess every day is a great day, but it's challenging when there's such contrast.

Rick Paul: Let me give you an example that I think everybody can relate to. I think everyone if probably at some point in their life seen a swimsuit model on a beach, some beautiful white sand, blue water, blue sky behind them. Of course, famously every year, the Sports Illustrated swimsuit edition. You might look at those pictures real closely, you'll see that the model is just perfectly evenly lit. There's no harsh shadows on her. Her skin tone is just absolutely perfect. Yet the background is also perfect.

You're kind of wondering how do they do that. The way they do it is the same way I do it. I use the same tools that they do. Let me talk about that situation exactly, what I would do if I was going to do that situation, a girl on the beach. How would I shoot her with a blue sky or the sun directly over my head? I start with a ... they're sometimes called scrims, but it's basically an opaque piece of cloth stretched across a frame and that Lastolite makes.

It's going to make portable ones that expands small ones, big ones. I have all those. I have small ones and I have great big ones. My biggest one is four feet by eight feet. In fact, that's the exact same kind that they use in Sports Illustrated. Imagine a big rectangular frame, lightweight aluminum frame, with a very light white piece of fabric stretched across it.

You're going to hold this over somebody and it puts them in the shade but not complete shade. It knocks down about two stops of light from hitting them. It's even. It's like a cloud. Are you following me?



Rick Hulbert: I am. The thing that comes to mind as you're talking is you can't exactly walk down the street with all this equipment. Do you have to bring a truck to carry all this stuff in?

Rick Paul: I only use that big one when I'm doing a big family shoot, which is usually in a place where I can get away with at a park or even the people's own home. I have some small ones. Most of the portraits I do are one or two people, usually when I'm outdoors. With that, I have very, very small portable ones. They collapse down. They're made of that wire that you can twist it down very small. They pop out. They have a little handle on it. Those things are really small. I have one that will do one person, and I have one that will create the shade for two people, and they're the same thing.

Rick Hulbert: How about the lights themselves? Can they be just portable speedlights or are you using large strobe lights with big batteries?

Rick Paul: I'm using speedlights. That's the second part of this. The problem is, once you put this cloud over, now you've dropped the light on that person down, but it's even. Now your background may be really bright. That's the problem, because this is what ... you may have heard of the term of overpowering the sun. You now have to put enough light on your subject to bring their exposure up so that it matches the exposure of the background.

To get your foreground or your background correct, your camera may be set at 1/250th of a second in F8 or even higher to keep the sky from blowing out. Think about trying to push a flash through 1/250th of a second in F8. A lot of power to max that exposure. That's what's called by overpowering the sun. That can be a challenge with a speedlight, I'll tell you. There's some tricks to that. You'll notice in a lot of wedding photography outside, people will often try to position the person so the background is a forest or trees or a building. That way they're not trying to expose that bright sky.

They minimize the sky, basically, to try to get a darker background. So that's one trick. The other trick is to go for higher power. I have a little bracket, also made by Lastolite. In fact, it's called the Joe McNally Special actually. It's a bracket that



will go onto a light stand. It's got a spot to hold three speedlights. The little heads you actually twist so you can position the flashes the way you want. You can put three flashes and pump them all through an umbrella or a small light box. That gives you three times the power, which is ... that's getting you up towards the power of a portable studio flash. It's not quite there, but it's almost there when you get the three of them.

Rick Hulbert: Now we should also maybe mention, you can tell me if this makes sense or not, that you're in Arizona so the sun or the amount of light can be pretty harsh and pretty bright. If you can make your system work in the Arizona climate or environment, it's probably going to be pretty good in most places.

Rick Paul: Yeah. There's a couple of things you can do. Everyone knows that the best light is always early in the morning and late in the afternoon. That has a secondary effect here, is it's much easier to compete with the sun when it's low in the sky. I usually try to schedule outdoor shoots for early in the morning or late in the afternoon because of that. It's just a lot easier.

So that's what I do. Basically, my formula is I either try to put the person into the shade, the shade of a tree or the shade of a building. I'll try to find the natural shade myself. If I can't find the shade and it is sunny out, I'll bring out my portable cloud. Then I'll light them with either a small portable soft box that I have or a shoot-through umbrella to light them up.

What I end up achieving is a very, very natural-looking portrait. They do not look like flash was used. If you use a straight bare flash, it's going to look like flash was used, but use a soft box or an umbrella, it really looks very, very natural. When you blend the light like that, you can get a very, very natural-looking portrait. A lot of people look at my portraits that don't even know that a flash was used.

Rick Hulbert: I think that's one of the secrets to your success is that ... and I believe in this approach is that if you can tell a flash was used, you used too much, right? It's too powerful. You don't want to notice that, that even augmented light was used at all.



Rick Paul: I will tell you. We go out quite often. There's a local park here in Tucson that we use quite often for portraits. It's a park that's popular with other photographers also. We'll go out there on a nice Saturday morning. We may see even one or two other photographers out there shooting families. I will call the photographers "pros" because I'll see them out there with their camera, with their speedlight on top of the camera shooting the family's portrait with an on-camera flash just straight at them.

Rick Hulbert: Right.

Rick Paul: I'm just sitting there cringing. I almost feel like drawing their attention to myself, saying, "Hey, look over here. Look what I'm doing. See? See what I'm getting?" Or at least look how the family is going and say, "Hey, I can do this better for you."

Rick Hulbert: Let me ask you a question about flash. The innovations in flash pretty much have been in what appeared to be better and better automatic modes versus manual that we both probably grew up with. I want to get a take from you on that whole notion of automatic versus through the lens or other kinds of ... excuse me. Manual versus automatic such as through the lens and other options. How do you approach that kind of automation?

Rick Paul: This is actually true whether I'm indoor in my studio or outside. Manual all the way. The camera is on manual. The speedlights are on manual. The reason is that TTL can ... there are times when it can work and there's times when you might want to use it when things are moving rapidly. But overall, it can just be so easily fooled. If your light changes a little bit, it changes and your look changes.

I can set up with the manual flash and manual exposure on my camera and set up like say next to a tree in a park. I have the exposures set correctly. I can take a light-skinned person, take their portrait. I can take a dark-skinned person. I can take their portrait. I can now shoot there for an hour. My exposure is going to be the same every single time.

Rick Hulbert: Are you using a meter? And if so, are you using the meter in the camera or are you using a handheld meter?



Rick Paul: What I'm doing is I'm usually metering the scene for the ambient exposure with the camera. I'm looking at that. I'm judging it. I've gotten good enough where I usually know whether I need to knock it down a little bit from there or pump it up a little bit. Then I'll take a couple of test shots. Take a look at the histogram. See if I'm pleased with the tonality and the scene with that exposure.

Then from there, once I have the ambient exposure set, now I move to the flash light. There again, I'm usually pretty good at these days of being able to dial it in the first try. I'm not using a flash meter. I usually know whether I need to be at an eighth power or a quarter power or a half power even. I usually dial it in. Again, take a test shot, see where I'm at. I'm usually pretty close. I'm usually within half a stop or so.

Frankly, if you're using a flash meter, you'd be pretty much at the same place. You could use a flash meter and look at it. Then you'd probably tweak it up or down a little bit from there anyway.

Rick Hulbert: In order to get to the point where you're at, where you can just look and just nail it, probably it takes quite a bit of experience, no, of doing?

Rick Paul: Yeah, it does. It does. You need to play with this and you need to learn your camera. The digital camera is always on the same ISO. I'm always shooting at its base ISO, which the D3 is 200. I know how that camera responds. I know how much power those flash genres put out. All my flashes are the same, so I know the power they put out. I know what an eighth of power does.

Rick Hulbert: Let me ask you a question. I appreciate the great stuff you're doing. By the way, maybe you'll put an example up on our website or we'll let you give out your website here in a moment. The thing is let's say I've got one speedlight and I don't have a big scrim, and I want to improve my flash photography. How would I do that, either with the equipment that I have or what would I buy next, because I'm not going to go out and buy like a whole pile of light stands and scrims and all this stuff. Do you understand what I'm saying? How do people get into this one step at a time?



Rick Paul: The first thing to do is ... let's start with on-camera flash. Your flash is on the camera. You don't know how to get it off your camera. If you're inside in a building, that's the best place for that. What you can do is you can rotate that head. You can bounce that off the ceiling, bounce it off a wall and get a better quality of light. Get a larger surface of light. That's what you can do there. Outdoors, you got nothing to bounce it off of usually.

The second thing you can do, and this is true indoors and outdoors, is get that flash off the camera. There's two ways to do that. If you've got any modern Nikon DSLR that has a built-in flash, especially the higher units do, the D300s, the D7000s, the D600s, the D800s, all of those up. The little pop-up flash can be the commander for the off-board flash. You can do it wirelessly like that. That's obviously the best way to learn and to do that.

If you've got an older camera that can't be the commander mode like that or doesn't have a pop-up flash, you can get a sync cord. You can get a sync cord that ... Nikon makes one that goes onto to the hot shoe and then it's got a hot shoe at the other end. You put the flash on the other end. That's the best one, because the TTL information is still being communicated across from the flash to the camera when you use that cord.

You don't want to use an old PC sync cord because that's not going to give you that advantage. You use that one that goes in the hot shoe. You can do it. Then you can literally have the camera in one hand, stretch the flash out with your hand in the other hand and get to the side and up a little bit. You'll be amazed at how much better that looks even with a bare flash. Just get in the flash away from the axis of the lens a little bit and point it down. It will look better.

Of course, there's things we've talked about before in previous podcasts. We interviewed Gary Fong. Getting a Gary Fong LightSphere for indoors is great and things like that. I was talking about the umbrella. You can get an umbrella and a little bracket that holds the umbrella and a cheapo Deluxe light stand for a total of about \$50. It really doesn't cost a lot.



If you go to B&H Photo, if you start looking around, you can find very, very simple light stands that cost \$20. You get an umbrella for \$15 to \$20 and that little bracket thing costs about \$10 to \$12, the little bendable ... it's a little plastic thing and you can rotate it and bend it so you can move the umbrella around. You can put together a whole little kit for about 50 bucks.

Rick Hulbert: Of course, you could tell people that if you have a friend or a significant other, you can tell them what a VAL is. You know what I'm talking about?

Rick Paul: Yes. I actually have three VALs.

Rick Hulbert: Describe what a VAL is.

Rick Paul: A VAL is a remarkable piece of technology known as a Voice-Activated Light Stand. I use the Voice-Activated Light Stand on my outdoor shoots. What I have for my outdoor shoots is I use a monopod. I bought a cheap Manfrotto monopod. I took their camera head off of it and just got a screw at the bottom of it then. I put an umbrella bracket onto it and I put the umbrella and the flash on that. I have a monopod is what I use. That way we can quickly move around in a lot of room.

I have to have my wife or one of my daughters or whoever else is with me, an assistant. At a wedding, sometimes I use the best man or one of the groomsmen to help me. The Voice-Activated Light Stand is amazing, because you can give it these commands like move left, move right, move up, move down, and it does it.

Rick Hulbert: It's a friend or relative that will hold the light for you, put it on a monopod or just handheld. It actually, as funny as it sounds, actually it's a great system. In fact, it's the system that Joe McNally uses, certainly during his workshops.

Rick Paul: I was actually using this technique yesterday even in my studio. We were shooting a senior and I was using a very, very targeted light. I was going for a very dramatic portrait of her. I had one light coming in and just hitting her right in the face direct on. I wanted to get some hair light. I wanted to get some separation from behind. I used another flash with a grid on it from behind. The position of that, the light is so directional. It's like a laser beam coming out of it.



I had Margaret standing behind the person with this unit and I was able to tell Margaret, “You move it up an inch, down an inch, over,” just to get it just right where I wanted it. A little bit off was going to be wrong. If I’ve been by myself, I would have put her on a light stand but then I’d be running over there every exposure. “Up a little bit. Okay, back.” Sometimes it’s a lot better.

Rick Hulbert: Here’s how I want to conclude. I want to just touch on a little bit about gear in terms of lights. I started with the SP series Nikon flashes 600 and then 900. That’s as far as I got. When I bought the V1 series camera, I got their little speedlight which is a Nikon 1 SB-N5 speedlight. What I love about it is that it swivels and tilts. I will tell you, I will admit to everyone, when I go to a party, I use a camera and a flash as a buffer or a foil around me where I can just go have fun photographing strangers and people.

I do keep the flash on the camera but I always bounce the light off some other source. Tilting and swiveling is a big deal for me. I thought Nikon was on to something fantastic when they came out with that little speedlight. It’s such a cutie. Also, the power comes from the camera itself. Since then, I think they’ve gone backwards. You can correct me if I’m wrong, that the newer flashes that have been announced don’t have that tilt, swivel ability. I just think I just can’t believe they’re ignoring that important aspect of the equipment. Any comments?

Rick Paul: Yeah, I haven’t looked at it in a while but I think you’re right. I looked at it when it came out and I went, “Blah,” because ...

Rick Hulbert: The latest one, the new one.

Rick Paul: Yeah, they blew it.

Rick Hulbert: I think it’s a 300. I can’t remember. I think it’s SP300, that is a new flash, small, which is great because it doesn’t have to be big. I heard you earlier talking about shooting 1/8 power or ¼ power, ½ power. We tend to think that, “Oh, we need so much power from the light.” Actually, you don’t need all that much power. That’s why I think these little flashes are fantastic power-wise.



The issue is the ability to maneuver it around and maybe if you don't have a VAL with you. So, any final comments? How about giving us your website so we can take a look at some of your images?

Rick Paul: Yeah. I can do that. I'll say it but I'll probably have to spell it because people who don't live in Tucson can't even pronounce it. It's saguaroshadowsphoto.com. If you just Google for Saguaro Shadows Photography, you'll find my page. When it comes up, if you just sit there and let the page run, there's a slideshow that runs. You could sit there and watch. You'll see, there's lots of outdoor pictures. You'll see what I'm talking about. You can't even tell that a flash was used.

One funny story about the V1, you were talking about rotating that little flash. When I had first gotten the camera, I took it to the Imaging USA convention with me. There was a product I wanted to take a picture of. I didn't want to shoot the flash straight at it. Margaret was wearing a white t-shirt. I bent the flash around so it pointed off her shirt. I positioned her and I bounced the flash off her shirt and I got a great picture.

Rick Hulbert: Great. Sounds super. It's amazing what you can bounce off of and recognizing that whatever you bounce your light off it will affect the color balance. It's still a super opportunity to be creative. Let's move on to our special guest.

We're at the point now in our podcast where we're very pleased to welcome a special guest for today. Howard Ignatius is a photographer that I met about four years ago when I attended my first semester at sea, Ultimate Travel Workshop that Nikonians was sponsoring at the time. I met both Howard and his wife.

Let me say first of all, Howard is a great guy. That's to begin with, but as I got to know Howard over the years, I realized how he has been exploring and more than exploring, I would say perfecting, nighttime photography. In fact, he actually has come up with a name, "nocturnography." That was enough for me to say, "Whoa, this would be great to chat about."

Howard is actually a former high tech marketing executive. He currently lives in Morro Bay, California. He went to the University of Minnesota. When he graduated, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy but at the same time, he purchased his



first 35mm camera. Not only that, he also got a dark room with it. Now he's gone from film to digital I think. We'll chat with him about that.

He ended up for most of his career in the world of, we'll call it semiconductor manufacturing in the Silicon Valley. He always retained photography as a passion and a hobby. Now he's combining his love for photography with his strong technology background to look at photography as an art and in what he would describe as a nontraditional and unique way. Part of that has to do with photographing at night.

Welcome, Howard. Thanks for joining us.

Howard: Thank you, Rick and Rick. How do you separate that? Rick squared.

Rick Paul: Yeah.

Rick Hulbert: It's beautiful because if you like what we're saying, it's Rick Hulbert who's saying it; if you don't, it's Rick Paul.

Rick Paul: Hey!

Rick Hulbert: Just kidding.

Howard: Okay. Good.

Rick Hulbert: Just kidding. Rick and I go way back and we started, we met each other at an ANPAT years ago. We've been enjoying this process of actually putting on the podcast but secretly it's also a great learning experience, okay? Here's an example of that by having someone like you on. I know very little about nighttime photography. I'm anxious to hear about how you even got into that aspect of photography.

Howard: Okay. Well, actually, I'll go back and fill in some of the blanks on how I got started and all this. I actually started when I was in the service, I got my first SLR when I was overseas in Hawaii. I quickly learned that I needed to take charge of



the whole process if I want to do something creative. That's why I purchased the dark room.

It was great. I'd get black and white film and I'd go out and shoot and bring it back in. I really loved the creation process in the dark room just as much as behind a camera. That really started my love affair with photography. Then after I came home, like you said, I got interested in computers and factory automation, ended up in Silicon Valley, basically helping semiconductor manufacturers build chips.

In 2007, actually, what helped revived my interest and passion for photography is my wife encouraged me to take a photographic expedition to Greece. At that time I had a Nikon D80. I would basically would hike all day and take photos and then at night, we'd come back in and review them. That's what started things for me because I really got some valuable feedback from the people that were there and ultimately went out and started investing in more equipment. Not only just the camera equipment but also the software from the computers.

That got me interested in photography. Also on that trip I got really interested in night photography, because Greece is a great place to take photos. And at night, it's just amazing. They have these beautiful little churches that they light up at night and with gorgeous backgrounds. That just really turned me on.

Rick Hulbert: Awesome. I think you've been honing that skill incredibly well. I think some of your work has been used and published in some pretty highfaluting journals and magazines. Am I correct?

Howard: Yeah. I don't know if I included one of my images. I took an image in Vandenberg Air Force Base of a rocket launch which they used pretty much to put in their annual reports and went in a couple of magazines. I also published things for a Nikonian magazine too. There was a picture I did at CARMA which is a radio telescope in New Orleans Valley, California. That was also published too.

Rick Hulbert: Yeah, it's great stuff. I'm just going to jump in the deep end of the pool here and say to you that what I admire so much about your images is that you've got some examples where for instance you're looking at celestial objects like stars



that obviously move. You got them in a position where they don't appear to be moving. In other words, they're still, so your shutter speed had to be reasonably quick. At the same time, you've got very, very little light. I don't see, I should say, very much if any noise. How do you do this, is my question.

Howard: That's a really good question. It took me a long time to figure all that out. When I first started taking images, D80 was not considered to be a really high quality, low noise camera. I started using some software tools to take out the noise. Then as I got better at taking the images, I also was able to do some stuff in the field as well that helped take out the noise.

What I do is actually teach a four-day workshop on the topic. I've got one coming up next month in September in Las Vegas. Every night we go out. We do very challenging situations both ... I'm sure you would like this, Rick, Vancouver. I would do some cityscapes of the Las Vegas trip at night. Then we go out to a ghost town in near Las Vegas in Nelson, Nevada, where the lights are totally out. We take pictures around an old gold mine that's out there.

Then we go out to Valley of Fire State Park. We have access there one night and we take pictures with these beautiful rock formations at night. It takes a bit to figure this all out. During the day, I bring the students back in and we talk about how to get that noise out of your image and how to post-process them to a point where they are acceptable.

Rick Hulbert: Is there a particular software that you happen to like for noise reduction that you found that is tops in its field?

Howard: I use two. I use some of the noise capabilities in Lightroom 5. That does a decent job. But I find that Topaz actually does a better job for me. I will use their noise reduction software. I sometimes also use the Nik software as well. If I'm trying to do it really quick, I know there's not much noise there, I may use the Nik. Then if I want to get a more detailed look at the noise and filter a little bit more, I usually go with the Topaz.



Rick Hulbert: You mentioned that noise reduction is not just in post-processing, if I can use that term. Also, you need to take it into account when you're actually recording the image, if that's a good way to say it.

Howard: Correct.

Rick Hulbert: Is that ... besides I'm going to guess using a low ISO, are there other aspects that you learn in the workshop?

Howard: Yes. There are some settings you can ... depending on which camera you have. Everyone is a little bit different. You can go in and set your camera up in such a way that it will also help reduce the noise as best as it can.

Rick Hulbert: That's really cool. That's great. Rick and I were looking at your images and like I said earlier, were really impressed. You have one image of the moon with an airplane. At first, I looked at it and I thought, "Oh, what did you do there? Is that superimposition or is that one image?"

Howard: It's actually one image. You see the plane on there is actually a little bit out of focus. That was with a 600mm lens. It was right after sunset. If you expose for the moon, the background goes to near black, but the plane was at 30,000 feet and therefore was still in the sun.

Rick Hulbert: It's very cool.

Howard: If beautiful light was across the plane you get this gorgeous sunset light. It looked like it was at night but it was just after sunset.

Rick Hulbert: I should tell everybody. People know that I love gear. Howard has the ultimate gear. It's great. You're using, I think, a D800 and a D4, am I correct?

Howard: Right. Yeah. Actually, the D800 is my go-to camera lately. I really love that camera. It's just a high res, it gives me beautiful images. Great tonal quality. I really like the AF on, back button focused kind of guy. I like having the F on button and the AEA F, a lock button to close to each other because I use them both.



It's what I usually grab first. If I'm going to be doing action photography, bird photography or anything like that, street photography then I usually go to the D4 and use it. Used to have a D3S but I sold that for the D4. D4 is good too but I think the D3S was just it's had better especially for low light work.

Rick Hulbert: That's what I hear. That's what I understand. We'll see what Nikon comes up with next but it's a balance. I use the D800E. I love it. I have not done a lot of nighttime photography in part. I guess maybe I could consider that. You've enticed me totally. The last few months in Vancouver, I generally have to sleep in the little darkness that we have. I was going to ask you, during your workshops, you mentioned the nighttime activities and then the daytime reviewing, do people have a chance to sleep at all during the four days?

Howard: Yes. We actually start about noontime. Then we go into there's a presentation that I give. We sit down and we talk about what we're going to do that night. Then we go out before sunset and survey. It's best to survey during the daytime hours. You know where the hazards are so you don't trip over them at night. Then as soon as the sun goes down and it gets dark enough then we start shooting.

Rick Hulbert: A couple of questions. One, it sounds like you're saying that if you have a camera and I'm going to suggest it could either be digital or analog. If you have a camera and any lens. I'm going to take a leap there. You could take advantage of this whole nocturnography approach that you're teaching.

Howard: Yeah. I mean, I really haven't found a camera that you cannot do it with any DSLR and anything where you can control the shutter speed. Most of the night photography I do is less than 30 seconds. In many cases, you don't even need the remote. It's best to have the remote but in many cases, you wouldn't need it depending on what camera you have.

Rick Hulbert: You could have a delayed shutter release and then have it up to 30 seconds.

Howard: Nikons have some really great feature called exposure delay mode. I don't know if you're familiar with it or not. They've expanded that in the D800 and the D4 and the D7100 where you can program the number of seconds as well up to



three I think. You basically can set that up. What it does is when you hit the shutter button, it waits a specific period time and then it releases the shutter itself. The mirror up thing is what causes the most vibration. Usually by that time you have your hand off the camera and it stabilize enough to take the picture.

Rick Hulbert: How many seconds do you advice?

Howard: It depends on the situation. Usually, one or two seconds is more than enough. Some of the older Nikons, I think it was half a second to a second was default. I found that that works well. I've even used my half if it got really bad.

Rick Hulbert: It's exciting. Let me ask you, tell us a website to go on if we want to learn more about your workshops.

Howard: I have a website called nocturnography.com. It's actually a word, believe it or not. It's defined by Merriam-Webster as images collected by way of film or digital cameras during periods of darkness without the benefit of sunlight. I'm now teaching workshops for High Sierra Workshops. That's at highsierraworkshops.com.

Rick Hulbert: It's great. You're enticing me to want to try to take one of those because the images that I've seen that you've taken are really stunning. Any advice that you would want to leave with our listening audience or someone who is interested in getting into appreciating the exciting aspect of photography without the benefit of sunlight.

Howard: Just in general, I think that I really encourage people to expose themselves to as many different styles, techniques, ways of doing things as they possibly can. I really believe in workshops. I really believe in being member of local camera clubs, going to art galleries, taking online classes, basically exposing yourself as much as possible to many different perspectives.

I'm finding that when you go to a workshop, you're not only are getting information from the expert or experts at the time but you're also there's maybe 10 or 12 other people there who during the course of socializing, you find out more about what they do. There's a tremendous wealth of information in that.



I'm finding that you and I have a friend Elbert, I'm sure you know who I'm talking about, Elbert. He taught me that I really should be using decoupling my focus from my shutter button. Ever since I did that, I'll never go back. It's just an amazing tool for what I do.

Rick Hulbert: You bring up a good point. I'm just going to interrupt for a second. You bring up a good point that we're both teaching workshops. As much as you go to a workshop to learn from the instructor, it's amazing what you can learn from the fellow attendees just by interacting with them. That's a good example.

Howard: I was with a friend of mine from Toronto. We were up at Yosemite photographic half dome at night, at midnight. It was more like ... got some great shots. I was really happy with it. He said, "You know, there's something wrong here." I took a look at him incredulously at the time and I said, "Something wrong? It's a beautiful site. We're up here. You could see half dome. You could see all the sierras and back of it." He said, "Yeah, there's not foreground."

I'm going, "Oh my God, he's right." As a nighttime photographer, I was more interested in basically just getting that scene and not going back to some of the basics in landscape photography and including the foreground. Ever since then, it took a while because we stepped back and we tried to get some foreground in. All of a sudden, I need four more stops of light and I was already shooting at 20 seconds or 30 seconds. We're talking almost two or three minutes. The whole scene changed in two or three minutes.

It wasn't the same. I had to boost the ISO way up. Since then, I've figured out some new ways to do it. It really added a tremendous amount to my night photography to be able to include not only the background but also a good solid foreground object in part of the image. I do things like campfires with lightning bolts going off in a distance and stuff like that.

It's really helpful to go out with somebody or to interact with people. You will learn more about yourself and you will develop new techniques to add to your style that you wouldn't have thought of by just being by yourself and trying to do your own thing.



Rick Hulbert: I think that's great advice for everybody. Rick, I don't know if you have any questions you want to ask right now. We're going to invite Howard to stay with us during our inspirational segment here. Rick, was there anything right now that you wanted to comment on?

Rick Paul: Yeah. Howard, I just wanted to say that I looked at a lot of pictures. I looked at a lot of pictures in magazines and on the web and things and there aren't very many that I can't figure out how they were done. I look at some of your pictures and I just wonder, "How did he do that?" Really, really great stuff.

Howard: Thank you very much. I really appreciate that.

Rick Paul: To look at like the shot you had. You had one where it was like a fire down on like a ring and the smoke coming up from that and the stars in the background. The stars are perfectly crisp and still which means you used a fast exposure for that, a relatively fast that you have beaded enough light in for that but the campfire is not blowing out. It's like, "How did he balanced the stars with the campfire?" Some of these are just wild.

Howard: Last year I went to Iceland.

Rick Paul: That's on my bucket list.

Howard: A great place by the way. Unfortunately, I went in July, not much night in July. It's pretty much four hours of twilight. That's about it. The photographer that was leading us around, his name is Tony Prower. He had a technique called magic cloth. Without getting a lot of details, basically it's like graduated neutral density. You can use graduated neutral densities at night too.

Rick Paul: That's something I wouldn't have thought of.

Howard: In this case, the campfire was very hot and I can't remember what ISO I was using at the time, probably 800 or 1600. In the background, I had a thunderstorm that was leaving. I wanted to get the lightning bolts but I also wanted to expose the fire. I used the magic cloth idea which I now call magic mittens because I ended up buying some Icelandic mittens, black mittens for it.



You basically set it up like a graduated neutral density. You control the hot part of your image by not exposing it as much. Then through technique, I just waited for the lightning to occur before I got the shot. It took about five or six shots. It was lightning quite a bit. The ISO was cranked up. It was going to catch anything. The camera is going to catch anything that happened.

Rick Hulbert: That's great. At the conclusion of our podcast, we have a segment where we have had an inspirational quote from other folks that frankly inspire us to better photography. This time, I decided to ask Howard to contribute what he thought was a quote that he found inspiring. Howard, I'm going to ask you to stay with us for this segment. We'll have a good chat about this.

Howard sent me a quote from Jay Maisel. Actually, do you know Jay?

Howard: Yeah. I took Jay's class in New York. When I got into photography, there was a lot of technical information about photography but I really wanted to get more to the artistry part. Jay is the go-to guy for that. He's not very technical. He doesn't edit his own images or at least I have never seen him edit his own images. The artistry part, he's just one of the most amazing people I've ever met. He had lots of quotes.

Rick Hulbert: Jay actually is recognized as one of the top light-colored photographers in the world. He's got an incredible reputation for a colored photography. Howard actually gave me a ... it's a kind of double-pronged quote if I can put it that way. I'm going to give it to you. Here goes. I'm just looking for your ...

The first part goes like this. "Always bring your camera because it's tough to take a picture without it."

Howard: Yeah. That's what he would tell us before we would ... the first day, first class. Then he came up with a much clever ... actually, this was through a second party who took a class later. He came back and stated that I think in a much more clever way which I think I've internalized more than the other quote which was that he was having a discussion with one of his friends.



He asked the friend, “What’s the best image you ever saw?” The friend said, “Gee, I don’t know. It could have been that shot I took up on Empire State building or you know, the shot over here or that shot over there.” He says, “No, it’s the one you saw when you didn’t have your camera.”

Rick Hulbert: That’s very good. The best image I ever saw is the one when I didn’t have my camera. Taking together, it’s so simple but it’s so powerful because I talk about in my workshops how one of the highest forms of photographic accomplishment is luck. The bottom line is that we all have luck. We are always presented with incredible images and often if not, most of the time, we don’t have our cameras with us.

The two quotes together are great. I hope our listeners find inspiring if nothing more than to try to have your camera with you as much as possible. That I think is one of the reasons why we’re finding more and more better quality cameras that are smaller and more portable. I don’t know if you’ve explored other smaller cameras than what you’ve been using, Howard.

Howard: I actually have my iPhone. It’s amazing what you can do with an iPhone. I don’t know but rumors have it the next one is even going to have a larger sensor, better image quality. We’ll wait and see about that. I use it a lot. Most of those images end up on Facebook. I normally don’t publish those elsewhere. I get some amazing stuff just because I have it.

I’m also looking at we have another mutual friend Michael Marienthal. He’s scaling back and using some of the smaller format cameras and having very good success with that. I just had coffee with him yesterday. I’m starting to look at that direction as well because these cameras we have are pretty darn big.

Rick Hulbert: I’ve been doing the same thing. My current love affair with the little Sony RX1 camera. I know Michael has been looking at and using the Fuji, some of the Fuji, the new Fuji cameras. That’s the direction. The point is is that the quote gets us chatting about photography and hopefully having the camera with us when we next see an awesome image.



I want to thank you very much for joining us. I'm going to also conclude since we chatted about workshops, I got to give a little plug for my two workshops that are coming up near the end of September and the end of October where I'll be in Boston, Massachusetts at the end of September and in Seattle, Washington at the end of October again for four-day workshops. I cover urban photography. Maybe Howard, one day maybe we could do a joint one. It would be pretty cool.

Howard: I would love that. Just name it.

Rick Hulbert: We'll continue to chat. Once again, Rick and I both appreciate you joining us. Howard, are you in Morro Bay right now?

Howard: Yes, I am. A matter of fact, tomorrow I'm headed for Vegas and we're going to the Photoshop World.

Rick Hulbert: Fantastic. We've got Howard in Morro Bay and we've got Rick Paul in Two Son, Arizona. I'm Rick Hulbert. I'm in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Good light and good luck.