

INVESTING IN IQ PHASE ONE GEAR TURNED OUT TO BE A SAVVY FINANCIAL AND CREATIVE INVESTMENT FOR RENOWNED WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER R.J. KERN. HE EXPLAINS WHY TO MICHAEL ROSCOE...

By Michael Roscoe

It doesn't take long to realize that R.J. Kern is a romantic at heart. When I ask him why he dedicates himself to wedding photography he states that he wants to create something that is meaningful, that is about love and something that will last for years.

During our conversation he is easy to talk to and without doubt one of the most open and honest photographers that you'll be likely to meet — all traits that have helped him to succeed in wedding photography. He tells me, "I first became involved in wedding photography seven years ago and I felt like I had a knack for it. So much of wedding photography is people skills... I say sometimes, that I play one part photographer and three parts therapist."

But R.J is the first to point out that being personable is not enough to make it in this industry, he declares, "At the end of the day the images still have to be bad-ass. They've got to stand on their own for critique. I'd like to think that I could walk away from every wedding with at least ten portfolio shots."

There's no doubt that R.J has a distinctive style that he attributes to his admiration for fine art and his dedication to his technical skills that can certainly come in useful in more challenging shooting scenarios. As he explains, "If the weather isn't coop-

PHOTOGRAPHER

R.J. KERN

erating, you've still got to make it work, so I rely a lot on off-camera lighting. A photographer that shoots with a lot of beautiful backlit Californian light will produce great images but what happens if the light is not there? I've developed some lighting techniques and I do some compositing in my work that help me get a different look."

Since turning professional, R.J has shot weddings across America and he has even been commissioned as far a field as Hawaii, Ireland and Greece. In fact, R.J states that he's clocked up over 80,000 miles in the last year, so it's not surprising that he likes to travel light and keep things simple. "I generally just use one Profoto D1 flash head, my 645DF camera with my IQ140 and I always use the vertical grip... A lot of the time I just shoot solo without an assistant, especially at intimate weddings where you don't want to bring this entourage of people; it's not a fashion shoot and most people aren't comfortable in front of the camera."

A Smart Investment

When asked why he uses a medium format camera in an industry that is awash with DSLRs, he insists that while he keeps things simple he never compromises on quality. The camera system also means he has a different approach to working that helps him achieve his characteristic look, he adds, "Some new DLSRs are lowering the flash sync speed to 1/200th second when my Leaf Shutter lenses on my 645DF can go up to 1/1600th second. I also like the fact that the Phase One is a unique tool, among an industry saturated by sameness. To achieve a 'different' look helps distinguish my work while conveying the importance I place on optimal image quality."

R.J took the decision to go medium format over a year ago with a refurbished Phase One P-series back but the IQ series back proved to be too much of a temptation six months later. R.J's reasons for upgrading include the high-resolution touch screen display, faster processor and lower base ISO, which means he can get one stop more flash power; any concerns about making a loss on his initial investment were quickly quashed.

I BELIEVE THE IQ
DIGITAL BACKS WILL
RETAIN THEIR VALUE
FOR MANY YEARS DUE
TO THE ADVANCED
TECHNOLOGY OVER
THE P+ BACKS.

"I bought the P30+ through my local dealer (Capture Integration in Atlanta) and they were able to credit me 100% of my purchase price towards an IQ140," he states with a wry smile before adding, "Their support has been amazing. I love that I can call them up and speak with a highly qualified technician, quickly, without going through dial prompts and playing voice tag. They treat me awesome and I call them friends."

Since making the upgrade he has discovered a number of work-flow benefits, "The IQ140 makes focus confirmation one-step easier. Since I shoot at shallow depth-of-field frequently, if I miss a shot due to it being wrongly focused, I have to toss the image. Now, my hit-rate has gone up, which makes for less time in front of the computer."





R.J has also cut time in postproduction thanks to another useful IQ back feature. "I can star-rate my favorite images in-camera so when I'm back at my computer, I know exactly which ones I want to edit – it's one less step in my workflow."

Quality Counts

Perhaps the most important aspect of the IQ back capabilities is its renowned reputation for outstanding image quality and it certainly passes RJ's demands. "I need a file with a high dynamic range so that I can push and pull it in postproduction and I also need that detail tonality that the Phase One IQ140 can produce, which is amazing. The 16 bit depth per color channel means you can really dig deep into those rich files, push them however you wish and maintain the image quality and stunning, realistic color."

The resolution hasn't gone unnoticed by the people that matter the most to him. "When I show the clients the finished albums, and I do big 16x20 albums, they say 'WOW!' I tell them that I don't just shoot for Facebook photos, I shoot for print and not just small prints. When you open up an album page and it is almost 3 feet wide, they see it; especially when it's used in conjunction with a metallic paper that brings out the clarity and the color."

While R.J may say his job as a wedding photographer involves also being a therapist there is no doubt he is also a savvy businessman. "While DSLRs depreciate quickly, I believe the IQ digital backs will retain their value for many years due to the advanced technology over the P+ backs," he states confidently. He is also as assured when asked how quickly the upfront investment will pay off. "I think it will pay for itself in a year... I'm sure of that."

But any operational and financial benefits would prove irrelevant if the system ever stopped working at the wrong time, or indeed at any time. When queried about its reliability he states positively, "It's been absolutely rock solid. So far, everything's been amazing."

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