

Photographer, Edwin Tan

Nov 17, 2020 | Yiu Hong Leung

[Yiu Hong Leung]: How did you start? Tell us a bit of your background?

[Edwin Tan]: Every photographer has a unique journey. I started my career in the shipping industry achieving one of the most senior roles as General Manager of the company. During my thirties, I developed photography as my hobby and became a part-time wedding photographer. After seven years of photography practice with multiple international awards, I decided to quit the day job and change my path to a full-time wedding photographer. With full support from my family, I devoted over a decade to wedding and commercial photography, covering thousands of assignments all over the world. This eye-opening experience strengthened my passion and vision in photography. My connection with Getty Images started two years ago when I was keen to explore a different way to produce creative imagery, and since then, I am moving more towards commercial photography especially in stock photography which has more areas for me to explore in the sea of photography.

[YHL]: What inspires you to create?

[ET]: Telling a story by freezing time. This is how I started with wedding photography by capturing the “once-in-a-lifetime” event. Nothing inspires me more than producing authentic images that capture the true nature of a subject that’s happening around us. I love observing details and appreciating people around me and then trying to capture and tell the story in a single frame. Creating an image that evokes feeling and emotion is what drives and inspires me. Getting more involved with stock photography let me explore more than weddings and opened to me an opportunity to see more of the world through my camera. I really enjoy the freedom to create countless authentic moments of my family and friends and become closer to them more than ever.

[YHL]: Do you work with a large team? How do you advise others to build a team?

[ET]: The biggest photography team I’ve ever had was a staff of eleven and nowadays I only have three teammates working together which I am very comfortable with – it’s a big contrast to the one hundred and fifty team I had under me during my corporate days! I used to manage that team with a leadership style that focused on power and authority but after all these years, I now believe it is more about trust and empowerment. A good team is like a Formula One pit crew - they have a clear shared goal to complete in a tight timeframe. Each individual has their own unique contribution. Even within the group of three people responsible for changing a tire, each one has a completely independent set of tasks and only focuses on those tasks. As a leader of the team, assignment and delegation are very important to

make the team a success.

Nothing inspires me more than producing authentic images that capture the true nature of a subject that's happening around us.

[YHL]: Walk us through your process a bit. How do you plan a shoot? Is it a concept, group of people or a location that starts the process?

[ET]: We always start with a concept in mind first. Medical shoots are one of the hardest themes, especially to create something authentic using a real hospital or clinic as a location. Getting legitimate permission to shoot there is tough and I received many rejections from private hospitals in Malaysia, but after tireless communications and conversations, we successfully secured a decent hospital location and created a fantastic shoot.

The Golf shoot was another challenge. We started with the concept in mind and used my network of connections to get the most important piece, the venue. The location is so vital - we travelled over 200km just to check on the venue. After that was confirmed, with your guidance and support, we focused on sourcing the suitable wardrobe, researching the potential shot-list, logistics, scheduling and forecasting the weather, etc. It was meeting after meeting but planning is vital to a successful shoot. It was a good experience in the end and we all learned a lot. We encountered heavy rain on the shoot day, but I was so lucky to have Jet, one of the models who was also an additional photographer on the shoot who was willing to be photographed in the rain! A happy accident that resulted in a great shot. I mean, how many times do we get to shoot a handsome talent in a superb golf location in the rain? Bad weather didn't stop us. That was a good lesson for me that we need to be responsive to unexpected events and always have a Plan B.

[YHL]: Do you have a particular aesthetic you are trying to achieve?

[ET]: I believe that authenticity is essential to differentiate my work amongst the ocean of visual content in Getty Images. So, I focus on approaching real people who have their own unique stories to be in my shoots. One example was Christine who I featured in a series on youth talent. I was impressed by this well rounded teenager, she has multiple skills in ballet dance and sports, and she is very mature, taking care of herself and family. In the shoot, I was invited into her daily life to capture the most authentically touching moments, such as spending quality time with her dog, helping out at the family business with her granny, and her ballet practice. She felt so comfortable in front of the camera! Real people and a real story, it seemed almost like photojournalism! My wedding photography experience may also strengthen my sensitivity to adapt to various situations and capture real moments.

[YHL]: What are your favorite shoots of all time?

[ET]: Beside Christine's day in the life series, my recent swimming and underwater shoot is a very unique and unforgettable experience. First of all, I don't know how to swim! LOL, and yet I have always had this

dream to shoot underwater with a swimming theme. After discussing my concept with EJ Yeap from Swimmin12, I started to learn how to swim. After only my 2nd swimming lesson, where I'd only just learn how to swim in a bit and some basic breathing exercise, I spent the next two days solid, sixteen hours, in the swimming pool, shooting both above and underwater. I can still remember my sunburnt skin peeling off after a few days and the large amounts of pool water I accidentally drank during the shoot! It was a very fun shoot, especially with all the support from the talent and EJ Yeap. There are a lot of obstacles and challenges including how to keep myself under the water for more than 30 seconds but the end results are very rewarding - plus I got to conquer my fear of water!

Another example would be the saxophone repair artisan. It is a very niche topic, but I appreciate all the elements coming along in the shoot. In Japan, artisans focus on a single practice in their entire life, and I think this shoot sort of demonstrates that idea - art and perfectionism.

[YHL]: What mistakes have you ever made? What came together perfectly?

[ET]: At the beginning of the year, my common mistakes were not planning properly before the shoot and not focusing enough on the concepts. So the result was bad and I spent a lot of time in post processing covering those overlooked logos and worst of all, the shoot doesn't bring out the concept and idea clearly. With the guidance and support from Hong, I began to understand the importance of concepts and planning which will save me tremendous amounts of time when executing the shoot. All the shoots now are well planned in detail with a strong concepts in mind in advance to maximize the result.

[YHL]: How do you stay motivated?

[ET]: A great income of course is the main motivation for me! With the current Covid19 situation and most wedding jobs postponed, it is my most important income. It's also extremely motivating to see my images being purchased and used in all forms of advertising campaign. It confirms that I am taking the right direction.

[YHL]: What type of gear did you use?

[ET]: This question will surely come up during each interview I have. Hahaha. I come from a wedding photographer background and we always have backup and multiple fast cameras, lenses and flashes and studio light to capture the moment. I am a Nikon D850 ambassador and at this moment, I have 1 x Nikon D850 , 1 x Nikon Z6 , 1x Nikon D750, 1x Nikon FM2, plus lenses from 20mm f1.4, 35mm f1.4, 50mm f1.4, 85mm f1.4 , Macro Lens, 70-200mm f2.8 EDL, Fisheye. Other accessories including multiple ONSMO LED lights, Flash Lights, Studio Lights, DJI Mavic Drone, DJI Pockets, Gopro 9 Black and mobile phone... yeah, the best camera is the camera with you, so a good mobile phone camera is important to me as well.