

## Photographers, Bell Collective

Jun 10, 2022 | Amy Lehfeltd

[Amy Lehfeltd]: What made you create Bell Collective? How did it come to be?

[Alina Rudya]: For a while, I was very active on Instagram and would be invited as a travel photographer and influencer to different countries along with other influencers to shoot content for clients. Very often I was the only woman. At first, I thought it was cool because I like adventures, I like going on hikes, and I was traveling all over the world but more and more I started to feel like one of the boys. At the same time, I began to realize that a lot of clients see women as less adventurous or thought some jobs were too dangerous for women. I also noticed that when I was scrolling through Instagram, women travel influencers were disproportionately being represented as sitting by the pool, wearing a beautiful dress and being a muse to somebody else while their male counterparts were portrayed in more hardcore scenarios. Women were being stereotypically represented on social media. Me and a few female friends definitely were not like that and as travel photographers did not want to show our faces in order to be successful but rather show our work. Representation of women is important to me, not only to show my own work but to show other women's work as a diverse group.

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[AL]: What kind of projects have [Bell Collective](#) worked on together?

[AR]: When I started the collective in 2017, I wanted to showcase as many different female creators as I could. After working with some big clients, I started putting forth friends and women I had worked with to some of my clients, thinking it would be great to work alongside other women. Now, we've done jobs for Mercedes Benz where we basically took road trips together to different places. We've also done work for Nikon. I also curated a Bell Collective book, presenting fourteen different women who look at travel from various perspectives and styles of photography, trying to make the point that there is no one type of female photographer and no one female gaze.

[AL]: You are a creator but also a mentor and educator. Can you tell me about working for Nikon and other mentoring you do?

[AR]: Sure, we have done some jobs for Nikon and continuing working with them. Me and another photographer from Bell Collective are mentors where we lead workshops online and this past month, Bell Collective organized a three-day networking and community event with workshops, photo walks, portfolio reviews and a gallery show in Berlin specifically for women. It came about after being on

various photo walks that were very male dominated. I would ask my female friends who were interested in photography why they didn't join and they'd say they didn't feel comfortable and were afraid of asking questions because they would be mansplained to. I know in my own workshop I have had men tell me how to make better pictures.

[AL]: I can imagine some men being overly technical and overly focused on the perfection of the image and missing the sum of what the image is conveying.

[AR]: It's unfortunate because working for Nikon, I have met other female mentors who are very technically savvy. The technical part is important to talk about for both men and women but that knowledge does not really make a great photographer. Maybe more so for studio portraits and product photography but if you are into people photography or if you want to learn natural light or just an amateur who wants to take great pictures who isn't interested in that perfection there are so many other ways to be a better photographer.

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[AL]: I was listening to your podcast this morning – I like how you talk to all kinds of female creators and tackle important topics within the industry. Can you tell me a little bit more about why you created it and what you talk about?

[AR]: It is only one season, but I really liked doing it. I wanted to talk to different female photographers about their work because there are so many different aspects and there's so many of the same issues despite working in different fields. All of them have issues with gender inequality and clients seeing them as less professional than men and would be paid less in some situations. I think most of them are quite bad at\*\* women who know how to negotiate those things, but we also know that it's very important to have those kinds of conversations, so these women can be role models for the next generation of photographers. I attended a workshop once on negotiation and fees and there were a mix of men and women in the group. When the teacher asked about everyone's day rate, all the men said basically double of what the women said. I don't know if they lied or if men are socialized to just go for it and really get what they want.

[AL]: I think it's important that you talk about pricing and negotiation. The business of photography is essential to someone's success. I was surprised that in one of your interviews you said you sometimes lack confidence in asking for things. To me you seem so confident and communicative.

[AR]: This is why it is important to meet other women and hear their stories and how they charge clients and create their rates. It can be very surprising; you can be talking to two women with similar talent and there can be a great disparity in what they charge because one person may not have a community behind them or have someone telling them they are worth more.

[AL]: Talk about running a photography business. Most people get into photography and don't understand the business portion of it.

[AR]: I must admit, I got really lucky because I'm not a very entrepreneurial type. I became a Suggested User on Instagram so I grew very quickly to a certain amount of followers not millions, of course, but it was enough for clients to come to me and start offering me jobs. I'm very thankful to Instagram because I've had an opportunity to travel the world. I understand that now. I think a lot of photographers don't have that opportunity and must create a portfolio, apply for jobs, create a network of people to work with or find representation. It can be a really difficult process and marketing yourself like a business owner means that you're only shooting a few days a month because you have to actually write and answer emails to get jobs. I'm really thankful because I know there are some amazing photographers out there who are not earning - especially women, because women are really still socialized to negotiate less and to doubt their abilities.

[AL]: How did you get into photography?

[AR]: I got into photography because of my father. He was a nuclear physicist in Chernobyl but he was also an amateur photographer and had all kinds of old Soviet analog cameras lying around. He also had a dark room in our bathroom. When I was twelve, I got my little plastic camera but I didn't really know what to do with it and there were no professional schools in Ukraine. I actually studied political science and journalism and got two MA degrees before I started studying photography in Berlin. I learned how to use the darkroom, how to develop the film, dry it, and print it at school. Recently, I've been shooting a lot of film just for fun and also because I really like the quality that film provides; the depth; the colors; the grain. I sound like a bit of a hipster I guess - it's a very expensive hobby. It was nice to learn but now I shoot digital for my clients.

[AL]: Do you have a creative framework or style you try to stick with?

[AR]: I prefer natural light and I like playing with the light. I also like contrasting colors. I don't really photoshop or edit my pictures too much. I look for colors in the environment and try to make them pop or combine them. Often people who follow me on Instagram can recognize the pictures because they're always so vivid and so colorful.

[AL]: You are also a drone pilot - how'd you get into that and are you learning anything new?

[AR]: I'll be teaching an online course on Domestika for drone photography soon. I started because I was traveling with a group of guys and they all had drones. I thought I would like to try it out but also assumed that it was not really creative. I just thought it was a different angle. I started doing top-down shots with a little DJI Spark; doing portraits of my friends and myself and saw that there were so many opportunities to do really creative photos with drones and got really into it. After a while I started creating videos and now I'm actually shooting quite a lot of videos. Shooting in Berlin is hard because of the restrictions so I've been working on my professional drone license because if you need to do

commercial work, you need to apply for permits with a professional license.

[AL]: You've traveled all around the world, is there any place that you found was completely unexpected; that wasn't what you'd had in your mind?

[AR]: Iran was definitely not what I expected. Everybody told me what an amazing place it was and how friendly the people are but you have this picture in your mind. I did not expect so many people to speak English or be so open minded. They have long history of amazing architecture, food, and very friendly people. Usually, if you go to any other country they are trying to sell you something but there the people actually gave me presents. It was an amazing experience, and I was lucky to be invited by a friend who organized a tour. Of course, they try to show the beautiful parts and I absolutely understand there are political and social issues which cannot be overlooked. We constantly see the negative sides so it's nice to see the beautiful side in order to realize that it's not all so black and white.

[AL]: What other places stick out in your mind that are either amazing to shoot because of terrain or light which is like no other?

[AR]: So, I've got three top spots, as the most beautiful places I've been to, and I keep coming back to two of them. Iceland is a beautiful country and I've been there six times. I absolutely love the Nordic climate and the idea that people managed to go that far north and create a beautiful life there. The weather conditions are also absolutely stunning, and I appreciate the moodiness of the country. It's very empty and you can just drive for hours and hours and not see anyone - just animals and the extraterrestrial landscapes. Iceland can feel lonely but also a place where you connect to nature and understand how small you are and how big this universe is. It's one of those places where you can just forget about other people and just look into the horizon and dream. Another country I love is Bolivia. It was absolutely breathtaking and one of the least expensive but most amazing three-day trips I've had in my life. The skies are stunning. Last but not least are my road trips through California, Arizona, Nevada and Utah. I've done this trip twice with my husband, and I think California has it all. I wouldn't need to go anywhere else if I were living in California!

[AL]: What are you looking forward to working on?

[AR]: I'm looking forward to not only working as a photographer but also expanding our collective and working with other women. I really want this kind of community to grow, and I also want other women to be successful and to be seen.