

Interview With Edward Olive : The Power Of Analog Photography

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<http://www.weddingphotomagazine.com/interview-edward-olive-power-analog-photography/>

BZ: From street photography to fashion, from weddings to nude. Different Photographic genres with one thing in common: the use of analog photography. I read that you started in 2005 with the digital. In practice you have done the reverse path of the vast majority of photographers out there. Why did you choose analog?

EO: I use digital photos for the purpose of taking higher numbers of photos, more quickly, more easily and at zero cost for myself and lower cost for clients who have to keep to a tighter budget, particularly for commercial purposes that require more conventional, focused non-grainy, less artistic images.

I also shoot color c41, black & white and cross processed c41 slide film in medium format 6x6, 645 and 35mm that I hand develop and print in my darkroom. I do this type of photo for myself, for more creative and artistic work and for clients who appreciate the difference and have the financial situation that enables them to opt for for a more one off piece haute couture production made by hand.

If I really want to do the best photo I can with a really good subject the end result I can get from a end result darkroom print that comes off well I find much more interesting, varied and satisfying.



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BZ: The first time I went on your website, I was very impressed by the long list of cameras and lenses you have. What cameras do you prefer? And, at weddings, only analog equipment uses (and if so, what are your preferences) or even provide digital files?



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EO: I have lots of old film cameras... they are very cheap to buy now... perhaps I have too many. I sell some when they don't work the way I want. If there is enough light and movement is not too fast I prefer to use the Hasselblad V series with a few lenses and a wheelbag full of 645 and 6x6 backs. I also use Mamiya m645 cameras that don't have easily changeable backs so I have a few of them loaded. I also have rangefinders like Contax 35mm, and manual 35mm like Olympus OM and Pentax. Then there are lowfi medium format and 35mm vintage cameras to give a certain atmospheric look.

If I shoot film in weddings for most photos of photojournalistic style I go for a few easier cameras that have 36 shots per roll (not 12/16/24/32 of medium format), have auto focus, auto wind forward, auto wind back, weigh less, take up less space etc... like canon EOS 5 film cameras from 20-30 years ago.

I always shoot something on digital too usually set to the same iso/asa, speed, and f stop setting as the film to act as if a Polaroid to check lighting makeup etc. and emergency backup shot that could always be used if the films all had an accident and lost any shot.



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BZ: In terms of marketing, do you think that using analog cameras limits the number of your potential customers or do you think that for many is a plus? I mean, do you think that an average customer understands the long process of your work and the intrinsic value?

EO: By offering digital and film options I don't limit the number of potential customers, by having increased options for clients it increases potential customers particularly at the very high end of the market. If I only shot digital photos that's all I would be able to offer. Some photographers will be happy limiting themselves to digital only and many clients these days won't even think about the analogue possibility but I like to be able to cover all the options. 99% of wedding photographers in Europe offer only digital photos. Of the very few who shoot film even fewer can actually produce in-house by hand prints themselves personally from an image which has never been digital or digitalised. What I mean is those who hand develop their films themselves and then hand print themselves are a rare breed now. Of these extremely few wedding photographers who can hand print even fewer also do it themselves in colour c41, ra4 etc. Darkroom colour printing is not easy. It is very difficult not to mess up any stage from the shot from the camera to the end print. Any mistake can mean the shot is lost or ends up not being good enough. Also the shot itself has to be worth it otherwise it's a load of work for nothing.

I shoot a lot of medical, dental and other such photos for which digital focused, sharp, clean not very artistic images are needed. Grainy funny color vintage looking photos from expired cross processed slide films is not what clients want nor what I do. The good thing about such commercial digital work is that it pays all bills meaning I can just shoot film for clients who really interest me or for my own more personal projects. As regards selling prints is concerned discerning clients understand the importance of hand printed limited edition darkroom prints actually made by the photographer and appreciate that they are a personal aesthetic choice for both photographer and collector. Such buyers are prepared to pay much higher

prices for something that is not just a fancy poster printed on a machine from industrial lab not made by hand nor printed by the photographer. On the internet you can't really appreciate the difference but when you see the full size darkroom print in person its very, very different even for even the non-expert to see.

There will then be the third case where both film and digital could be used for portraits, weddings, nudes, album art, book covers etc.. I personally much prefer the hand printed direct from negative look over just a pure digital photo or a hybrid scanned negative image. If clients are a little more informed and have the financial situation that allows them they can have darkroom prints made to hang on their walls that are importantly not just farmed out to third parties to print.

For artistic analog commercial use I scan the darkroom prints to supply the base image on which the graphic design is done to produce a book cover or music album art. Most of the photos I sell for book covers are images produced from film. I also sell products with my images on online stores, such as t-shirts, smartphone cases, greetings cards etc. and these are usually produced from scanned darkroom prints. It gives a certain retro less realistic less contemporary everyday life look that buyers seem to like in these stores. It provides an alternative to the more common digital look so many photographers do now. By far my biggest selling image on products is a very grainy black & white medium format 6x6 image taken on a Hasselblad of red roses (not that you can see the colour) that was rejected by Getty Images on the grounds of being grainy and unsharp but people seem to love on iPad cases which is a kind of paradox almost. People also seem to like the female nude darkroom prints I "paint" on or glue things to, which is nice because I have no idea how to paint "properly" or any formally studied art things like that. Different types of photos seem to find different types of market to sell in.



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BZ: Your photos are timeless. Many photographers today add texture to images, emulate the films, with more and more sophisticated photo editing programs and the use of filters. What do you think of spasmodic use of these filters? If I look at your photos, they are all very different to each other. Your photos cannot be emulated. Instead, now, with filters, our pictures could be fine, interesting, original but... equal to each other. Where do you think that this use will lead?

EO: I sometimes try to copy the look of the analog prints I do in digital photos but I don't do all the plugin action preset layer things you can program for photoshop. Maybe it fools some people but it never looks as good as the real thing to me... because it isn't the real thing. Small size images on the internet particularly on a mobile phone, if you don't know what to look for, may fool you, but full size in person there is no comparison.

Another important element from darkroom printing is that I don't actually always choose to make a photo end up looking like how it does. Often I am not sure what colour, texture, contrasts, tones, dynamic range etc. I am going to get so in some strange way the uncertainty gives a wider range of variety in the photos that maybe just by looking to create digital effects that are planned would do.

In a digital photo the photographer has to decide to do a certain computer generated effect to a digital image in photoshop. In a darkroom maybe that effect just decided itself to happen, because the room was too hot or the film too old or whatever. That is a huge difference in the creative process. You could argue that much of the credit comes from chance and not talent in a not totally controlled analogue production. I don't really choose exactly what to produce I just choose a number of variables that can create chemical reactions in a not completely planned alchemy on a hopefully interesting original shot. However many fancy techniques you know if the shot is rubbish the prints will also be rubbish even if you spend all afternoon printing it.

I like the timeless vintage retro other world look that comes from using old technology cameras, lenses and Cokin filters from the 1960's-1970's and expired films that have been kept warm that are almost as old. I am basically using equipment from the period so my photos look like they are from the period.

My Kaiser enlarger is also a relic from the 70's that has very worn out colour filtering to "white balance" prints and usually leaves them with strange colour casts. They gave it to me for free from a photography school that was throwing it out. I carried it home and it weighed a ton, but it looks like it will last forever. The only thing that I use in analog that is actually contemporary is the chemicals because when they get too old they just stop working. My film development liquids are always fresh not to lose films. That said I probably only change the chemicals in the vertical slot print processors I use once every year or two and my print temperatures or times are never quite "right" which maybe adds more variables into printing. This means almost the final print has a life of its own and has more imagination than I do. The other day the stop bath had mould on top. Maybe that was why the photos came out an interesting colour that day, but maybe it was the hot sunny weather I wasn't monitoring for temperatures or maybe it was the film I didn't store in the freezer or maybe it was the now banned vintage radioactive camera lens going brown inside. It's the choice of different equipment and technique that contributes a lot to make the photos different. If I just shot digital photos it would all look like what so many like to do still and indeed what I also do. I only have some many digital tricks. The analog tricks the darkroom plays on me seem to be endless though. In digital I have less ideas than the darkroom variables can produce and I simply don't know how to create many effects I get from analog in a computerised image. I shoot the best subjects on a selection of different films and equipment and essentially the same shot taken can end up looking extremely different in each print made from a different combination of variables, not all of which are completely planned.

Nile Rogers plays a defective cut price Fender he bought in a pawn shop before he was famous. It creates a sound you can't just go out and buy digitally in a modern music shop from a synthesiser. No doubt many musicians prefer original analog pianos, string and wind instruments even though it would be easier to just play something digital and computerised. This is even considering that music listeners end listening product is often just a compressed digital mp3 file streamed online rather than a live concert or analog vinyl. Similarly more people see a scan of my prints online than the real print in their houses or a gallery framed. I have a wall in my house just of photographer books and apart from a few contemporaries like Mario Testino, Rankin, Nigel Parry and Chema Madoz the photographers are all from the 70's or earlier and most are dead. Even in the case of the modern photographers I mention there is still plenty of film in many portfolios. I love David Bailey but not his modern stuff. I love Avedon, but not his later colour photos.

I hope I don't copy people, but I try and do what I like and my tastes and influences are all old. Even the books I buy themselves are usually ex-catalogue second hand and old smelling from Amazon UK teaching you studio lighting and darkroom techniques with models in funky period clothes and nudes without tattoos or piercings but with "hairstyles" you don't see now.



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BZ: What are the advantages of digital?

EO: Digital photography does not smell a bit like off warm boiled eggs, which is a good thing.

Digital photography is much easier, much cheaper, much safer, usually sharper, and cleaner.

Digital photography makes money without quite so much effort if you have to earn money from photography.

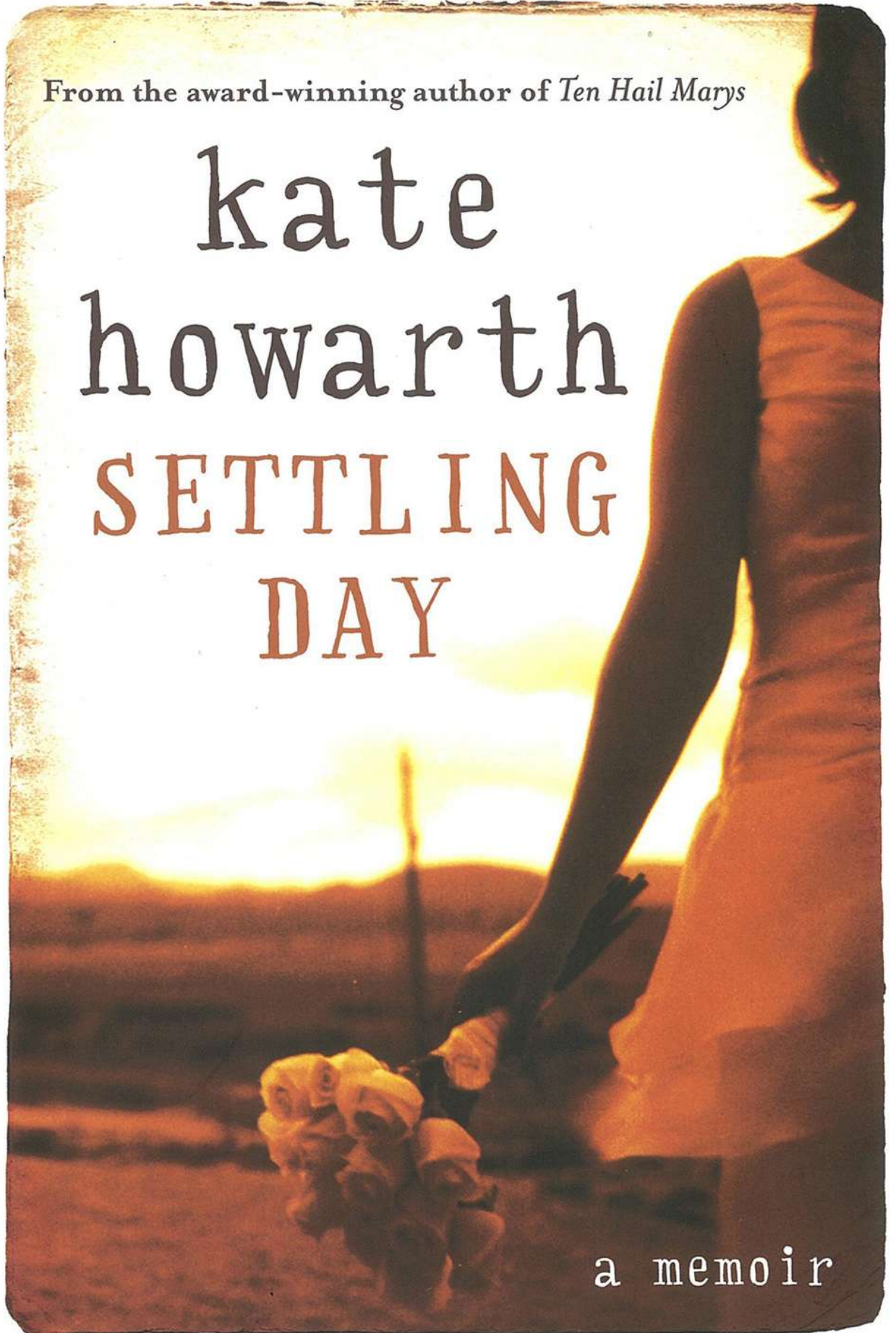
To do a digital photo is practical for non-photographers who love to pout their lips in mobile phone selfies or take photos of what they are eating for lunch for Instagram or Facebook likes and other such similar contemporary things.

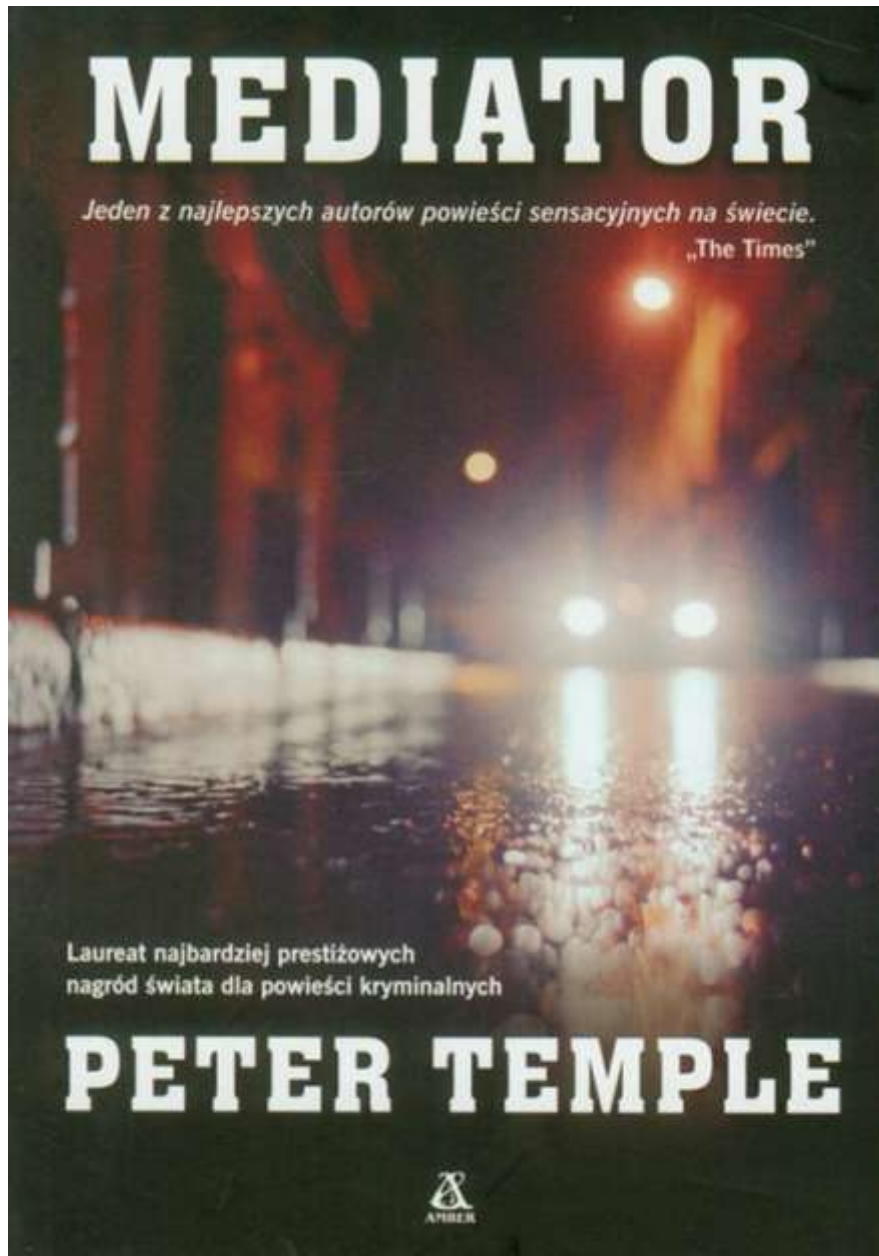


From the award-winning author of *Ten Hail Marys*

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BZ: I love your sequences (photo below). You already know what you want to achieve during shooting, or is there a part of re processing and post production in the darkroom !?

EO: I usually make a list of shots I want to do and choose a large heavy load of kit to do it but end up doing something else that comes up nobody planned. As regards the analog image look, since the old cameras and expired film has plenty of uncertainty in I never really know what I am going to produce, not even the colors. Sometimes I even make mistakes like shooting a 645 back thinking it was 6x6 so framing was different to planned. Fortunately they were cropped nudes not cropped faces. For such reasons I always shoot a lot of different cameras at once plus some Fuji instant film and a few digital photos connected via HDMI cable to a big screen to check and play safe just in case. Being an ex lawyer I like purple blurry surprises as long as there is a plan B, C and D to prevent law suits or wasted shoot days. I

always get plenty of photos, just not always what I had initially thought I was going to do. I try to anticipate people about to do interesting things and sit in wait with the lighting set ready, I suppose like a wildlife photographer hoping to have chosen the right photographic elements that will match the subject. It's much harder to do on film, but when it works I much prefer what I can do with the negatives in the darkroom. I sometimes get a bit sad if I took a good shot of something that can't be repeated but just did it on a digital camera.



BZ: In conclusion: in your opinion, a photograph as it should be for be considered good?

EO: An image stock photo bank will approve and sell photos at 100 iso, f8 125 speed or higher with "correct" colour balance that are in focus etc. etc... Wedding clients will like photos their closest family and friends appear in. Portrait clients will approve shots that are flattering. Music groups will love funky weird stuff. Novel publishers will buy dark, moody out of focus things that imply rather than provide concrete images. Internet publishers will want close-ups you can appreciate small in a smartphone on the metro. A commercially good photo will keep one or more of these groups happy however generic it might really be. I have photos that are very average but sell over a hundred times a month so they must be good for someone... as well as my bank account. I probably make more money from average photos than any that I actually like.

I personally like the photographers who can go against the grain of generic endless perfectly good photos you see all over the place to produce individual unique shots you know could ONLY be taken by that particular artist. These photos will express own technique, vision, emotion, point of view, taste... and will create emotions, special ambience and a memorable sensations in others in a way different to the others. That is not easy to do even for the best photographers, singers, musicians, painters... It's that additional element or combination of elements you often can't quite put your finger on that take someone to that other level that few will be able to see as different from the endless perfectly good or even very good... but in the end similar. The Guy Bourdin and Anton Corbijn 's don't just grow on trees, especially in weddings.



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Edward Olive (EO) is an international destination wedding photographer, commercial and portrait photographer in Madrid (Spain) specialized in fine art handmade prints.

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