

# The Guide to **Action & Adventure Sports Photography**



an educational guide by



**PHOTOSHELTER**

&



# TABLE *of* CONTENTS

## **PART I** 4 **INTRO**

## **PART II** 6 **PROFILES**

- 7 *Morgan Maassen: The Ultimate Success Story*
- 10 *Krystle Wright: How To Tell Stories Through Your Adventure Photography*
- 14 *Clark Fyans: When One Shot Makes All The Difference*
- 16 *Jody MacDonald: Turning Your Passion Into A Business*
- 19 *Chris Burkard: Why Mobile Photography & Instagram Are Still Game Changers*
- 24 *Ulrich Grill: A Look Inside The Brain of Red Bull Illume's Mastermind*

## **PART III** 27 **CONCLUSION**

- 28 *How to Impress the Red Bull Illume Image Quest 2016 Judges*
- 31 *Conclusion*

---

PART I

*Intro*

---

## PART I

# Intro



© Morgan Maassen

**H**iking, biking, skiing, skating, climbing, rafting, fishing, surfing—outdoor and adventure sports photography is a wildly popular niche that puts the photographer where the action is. What drives photographers to pursue this type of action is typically a love of the outdoors, sports and adventure that inspires or complements their passion for creating compelling visual stories.

In this guide, *The Guide to Action & Adventure Sports Photography*, we hear from photographers who have won one of the most exclusive action and adventure photography photo contests—[Red Bull Illume](#). Photographers share the impact winning has had on their careers, tips to master storytelling and market their work, plus a look at the gear they use, and of course, tackling the elements.

## About Red Bull Illume Image Quest 2016

Today, Red Bull Illume is the world's greatest international photography contest dedicated to action and adventure sports. It showcases the most creative and captivating photography on the planet as art and aims to bring the public closer to the world of action sports.

Since the first edition in 2007, Red Bull Illume has attracted some of the top names in photography, as well as previously unknown talent.

The contest itself consists of 11 categories: Close Up, Energy, Enhance, Lifestyle, Masterpiece by Yodobashi, New Creativity, Playground, Sequence by Sony, Spirit, Wings and the new addition—Mobile. A team of 50 judges—photo editors from prominent international publications—will select 55 finalist images, including 11 Category Winners and the Overall Winner.

In 2016, the photographers' efforts will certainly not go unrewarded—The various winners will receive a selection of outstanding prizes from reputable photography brands.

The Overall Winner will walk away with a [Yodobashi](#) voucher to the value of €40,000, which can be redeemed for any number of the company's massive selection of consumer goods.

Electronics giant [Sony](#) will award the various winners with photography gear worth over €60,000. The prizes will include cameras such as the Sony ILCE-A7RII or the Sony DSC-RX1RII, along with a variety of accessories and lenses.

Photo bag manufacturer [tamrac](#) will induct the Overall Winner into their Pro Team as well as providing \$1,500 in store credit. All other winners will receive a tamrac Anvil 23 as well as Arc and Goblin accessory bundles.

External storage brand [G-Technology](#) will provide the Overall Winner with their top of the line G-Drive ev RaW SSD and All Terrain case. Other winners will receive a G-Drive ev RaW and the Public Choice Winner, which will be announced mid 2018, will walk away with a G-Drive ev ATC with Thunderbolt.

Lighting experts [broncolor](#) will award the various winners with a Siro kit, while the Overall Winner will walk away with a Para 88 system.



© Rainer Eder / Red Bull Illume

Finalist images will be unveiled at the Red Bull Illume Winner Award Ceremony in the autumn of 2016 before traveling to capitals and cultural hubs across the world as part of a unique nighttime photo exhibition.

The submission phase of the contest closes on March 31, 2016. Visit [redbullillume.com](http://redbullillume.com) to find out more about rules, categories and entry details.

---

PART II

*Profiles*

---

## PART II

# Morgan Maassen: The Ultimate Success Story



🏠 [morganmaassen.com](http://morganmaassen.com)  
f [facebook.com/morganmaassen](https://facebook.com/morganmaassen)  
📷 [@morganmaassen](https://instagram.com/morganmaassen)



© Morgan Maassen, Category Finalist 2013: Lifestyle / Red Bull Illume

**I**nsane', 'avalanche', 'amazing turning point'... these are just some of the words photographer Morgan Maassen uses to describe the effect of winning the Lifestyle category of the Red Bull Illume Image Quest back in 2013. We spoke with Morgan to learn how big an impact winning has had on his career.





© Morgan Maassen

*After you won, did you feel the impact immediately or was the change more gradual?*

When I received the award, it was a huge, insane overnight boost to my career! It put my work on a lot of new eyes and it also helped me to start to develop a fanbase on social media. Overnight it really transformed my whole operation, my career, and the direction of my artwork!

I can link so much success to Red Bull Illume. At the time, I was heavily entrenched in the surf industry. In the months after the awards happened in Hong Kong, my photography expanded so far beyond that. I used the success of Red Bull Illume as a springboard to break free of the surf world, and now I've been working with the likes of Lexus, Volvo, Nike, Apple and others. I've been doing a lot of fashion and travel work as well, all the while focusing on pushing myself and my creativity.

Overall, the experience was an amazing turning point. The event, prizes, recognition...it was incredible. It set off an avalanche! I can trace it all back to Red Bull Illume.

*How has your photography style changed since winning? Are you shooting different subjects beyond surfing?*

Red Bull Illume gave me the tools to look beyond the surf world, which is very niche, and really do something that's been a dream of mine: to be a photographer of any style. I now spend my time focusing on fashion, travel, exploring action sports and outdoor photography, whether hiking and climbing and camping or boating. Red Bull Illume was the helping hand I needed.



© Morgan Maassen

*Who are some of the clients you work with now?*

I've worked with Corona, Audi, Delta Airlines, Wired magazine, National Geographic, Outside, Conde Nast Traveller, the list goes on. Being able to plug in with Red Bull and their team was incredible. That was a top honor. I've been really just exploring the realms of photography and using that notoriety from Red Bull Illume to take every job opportunity thrown at me. It's taken me to some incredibly wild and far-flung places.

*Have you shot in any exciting locations?*

I did a shoot recently in Alaska for a yacht company. It's funny because I grew up on small boats. We were flying around in helicopters. It was so surreal flying through glaciers, seeing bears, whales, moose, wolves. It really



I  
II  
III

was the most I've been outside my comfort circle as far as working's concerned.

*Do you plan on entering Red Bull Illume again this year?*

I'm counting down the days. I've got several images in mind that I've taken, and am so excited to enter. The mobile category is also really fascinating to me; I've always used my phone just to snap random photos but in the last two years, the quality of the iPhone has become spectacular. So I'd love to throw my hat into that.

*Anything else you'd like to share about the experience?*

You know what touched me the most? Flying across the world to Hong Kong for the Winner Awards Ceremony. I got to hang out with some of my closest peers and friends, like Zak Noyle and Chris Burkard. I also had the honor of meeting and spending time with new ones, like Scott Serfas, who's long been one of my heroes. I was just glowing from that. Meeting my artistic heroes—that was the real prize.

Red Bull Illume gave me the tools to look beyond the surf world, which is very niche, and really do something that's been a dream of mine: to be a photographer of any style.



© Morgan Maassen

## PART II

# Krystle Wright: How To Tell Stories Through Your Adventure Photography



🏠 [wrightfoto.com.au](http://wrightfoto.com.au)  
📘 [facebook.com/krystle-wright](https://facebook.com/krystle-wright)  
🐦 [@krystlewright](https://twitter.com/krystlewright)  
📷 [@krystlejwright](https://www.instagram.com/krystlejwright)

**F**ormer Red Bull Illume Finalist Krystle Wright has documented her expeditions a little differently from some of her fellow adventure photographers. Using her breadth of knowledge of photojournalism from her Agence France-Presse and Sunday Telegraph newspaper days, Krystle's images weave together, depicting the full experience of what it's like to be exploring different lands, from Pakistan to Antarctica. Here, we talk with Krystle about how she edits down her images for an essay, what kind of gear she takes with her on a journey, and how keeping close tabs on World Press Photo, POYi, NPPA winners helped shape her critical eye.

### *Tell us about your expeditions. What's typically your role?*

There are times when I'm approached to join an expedition specifically as their photographer but I've never wanted to be ousted, I much prefer to be one of the pack which naturally happens. Expeditions can test everyone whether it be physically, mentally, or emotionally. I believe you can't just sit on the outside and expect to take great images. For me to properly document an expedition, I want everyone to feel comfortable with my presence and trust that I will respect them and capture the best images possible. Ultimately, I don't see them as athletes or clients but as friends. Being an adventure photographer is a lifestyle and a passion. With a common love of adventure with the athletes, there comes a mutual respect for what

each brings to the table and unique friendships tend to happen often.

### *What is the editing process like for you when creating these stories?*

I used to wait until I got home to begin editing; however, these days with the expectation of constant blog updates and social media, I've begun editing along the way. Especially last year during a 2-month kayaking expedition across Mongolia and Far East Russia, I was able to find a few hours occasionally to download and quickly make a rough edit each time. It made a huge difference after the trip as I was able to get the media out far quicker than on previous trips. It's a hard balance,



© Krystle Wright, Category Finalist 2013: Wings / Red Bull Illume



© Krystle Wright

though, as I felt like I was missing images whilst downloading and performing the quick edits. Ultimately it depends on the nature of the trip as my next expedition coming up will be 2 weeks in Alaska's backcountry documenting first female ski descents. I doubt I'll have time to edit as it will be non-stop shooting and filming so there is a strong chance that I'll only edit after the trip.

#### *Your work resembles straight photojournalism – did you study this in the past?*

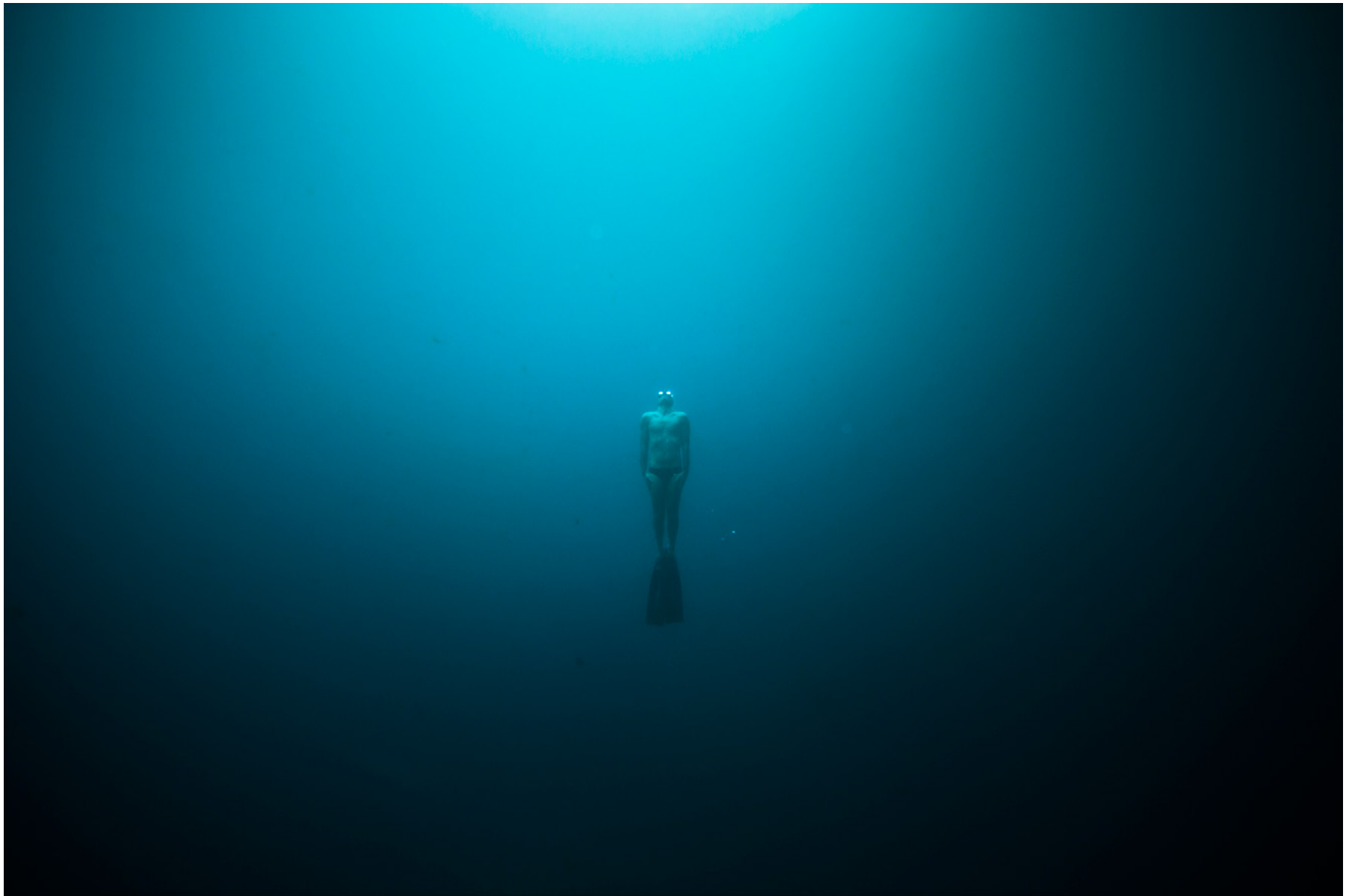
I did go to university, however I was hopeless and rarely turned up to class. I was frustrated with my courses mainly because I felt I was on the outside-in, wishing to be a sports photographer and no one to give me direction. I sought out mentors in the field such as Tim Clayton, Craig Golding and Steve Christo. It was under their mentorship I began to learn on constructing a strong photo essay. Watching each year's winners of the World Press Photo, POYi, and NPPA, opened my eyes on how photographers would construct strong powerful short photo essays.

I received further help under the guidance of photo editors Sadie Quarrier and Ken Geiger. Ken encouraged me to look at the whole story, the small delicate moments that go into an expedition that may be overlooked. Whether it be preparing camp, eating, etc, there is so much story that goes into these big trips rather than just the high action octane moments. Each trip teaches me how to improve and do a better job next time round. Aside from editing and getting critique from others, ultimately it comes down to shooting more!

#### *On average, how many images do you take during an expedition?*

Through each expedition, I always feel that my photography develops to another level. Rather than aim to shoot as many photos as possible, I really try to slow it down and really think about every single frame. Sometimes you're thrown into the thick of the action and naturally fire more frames, though ultimately you want to shoot for quality over quantity. Make every frame count!

On average, I find that I shoot approximately 10,000-12,000 images per expedition that is 4-6 weeks long.



© Krystle Wright



*Do you show your “Stories” work to potential clients? Do you think it’s helped you get more work?*

Most certainly! In fact, it’s essential for me to show such work that has drawn new clients to me. I used to work for AFP and The Sunday Telegraph newspaper when I was based in Sydney; however, when I took the gamble to become a full time adventure photographer, I would show editors my personal work which impressed them. I refused to wait for someone to come knocking on my door as I knew I needed to create opportunities for my work. The beauty about expeditions is that they are unique trips that provide incredible opportunities for different imagery and I am the only photographer there. Generally the story that comes with the big expeditions create interest amongst an array of magazines and news outlets so I do feel very lucky that it is my personal work that draws work for me.

*Physically, what was the most difficult journey you’ve been on? How did that affect your images?*

My first major expedition to Baffin Island challenged me in many ways. I’ve never felt so cold! I let a lot of image opportunities disappear on that expedition but it was also a major learning curve. I tried to shoot through some of the harshest conditions thrown at us, yet I remember dropping the camera around my neck because the camera body was too cold to hold and my fingers were in excruciating pain. It was frustrating not being able to keep shooting through the situation but I also needed to beware of frostbite. It was better to rest and rewarm the fingers rather than push it too much and risk permanent damage. There is always a delicate balance and of course trying to be prepared with the right gear so that you can battle the elements without risking physical injury.

*What gear do you carry with you? How do you pack light—and how does the extremes from the weather affect what gear you bring?*

Every journey always has me re-evaluating what gear is needed for the trip. I will always carry two bodies. Originally the primary reason was to be able to have a backup in case one of the camera bodies would fail due to an accident or to the elements. Nowadays however the other reason is needing a camera body dedicated to filming and the other to stills. I find the process much easier having the bodies separately dedicated to their settings (stills or film) rather than trying to change my settings continuously between the two. The Canon bodies I use are burly bodies. They’ve easily withstood the freezing temperatures in the



© Krystle Wright

Arctic, monsoonal storms on the Asian continent and sandstorms blasting at me in the desert. I try to protect the gear when I can with an AquaTech weather shield, but there are situations when you simply need to shoot whether you’re prepared or not.

Choosing between the lenses is difficult as I prepare the fixed lenses. However, there are times I can’t choose such luxury especially if I want to hike up huge mountains. The weight is key because it isn’t just camera gear I need to carry. I also need to carry other equipment whether it be ropes, carabineers, first aid medical, emergency down gear, avalanche gear, the list goes on. Ultimately it comes down to safety, efficiency, and the bare necessities to get the job done.

*Is there a “sweet spot” for how many images should be in the final series for a story?*

That’s a difficult question! Originally I used to think 12 images due to the nature of most competitions such as World Press Photo. However, I’ve appreciated the opportunity to showcase a larger feature during photojournalism festivals such as Reportage in Sydney. At the moment, I believe the number 30 is a sweet spot for me. No doubt many photographers would argue this point, but it comes down to personal preference.



## PART II

# Clark Fyans: When One Shot Makes All The Difference



🏠 [clarkfyans.com](http://clarkfyans.com)  
📷 [@clarkfyans](https://www.instagram.com/clarkfyans)  
⚡ [redbullillume.com](http://redbullillume.com)

**B**efore picking up a camera, Clark always had a love for adventure and pushing the limit. As an aspiring snow scientist/ ski patroller and EMT, Clark left Utah in 2001 and relocated to Alaska to continue pursuing a career in the big mountains. He worked on the Alyeska Snow Safety Team and also started guiding the Seven Summits Circuit, leading guests to the summits of the highest peaks on the continents of North America, South America, Antarctica, and Oceania.

In 2004, he landed a spot on the helicopter ski guide roster of Chugach Powder Guides in Girdwood, Alaska. One year later he was promoted to lead guide and helicopter operations manager and then continued on to guide heliskiing in Chile, in addition to the Canadian Rockies.

Photography and film production was always an interest. Working with professional skiers and snowboarders with iconic companies such as Teton Gravity Research, Matchstick Productions, Warren Miller, Quiksilver, DC, Burton, The North Face, Volcom, and GoPro eventually led to him leaving his position as a full-time guide in Alaska and signing on as lead guide/ field producer for Brainfarm Cinema's/ Red Bull Media House *The Art of Flight*. Clark is now based in Venice, California, working as a producer for Red Bull Media House, and other cinema companies.

Photography quickly became more than hobby as his work began to be published in magazines, advertisements, storefronts, catalogs, and coffee

table books. In 2013, Clark submitted one photo of boarders scoping a line in Alaska to Red Bull Illume. Of over 28,000 photos entered worldwide, Clark secured his seat to the Top 50 Finalists Ceremony in Hong Kong.

Leading up to Red Bull Illume Image Quest 2016, we caught up with former finalist Clark Fyans to find out more about his career since entering the contest.

### *Is photography your only profession?*

I've never been a straight-up 100% pro photographer. From a pretty young age I always wanted to be a heli ski guide. I followed that career path and fortunately have been very successful. But I've always loved photography. I've been shooting since I was seven years old, back in the film days. I did a course in high school and even learned how to develop in a darkroom with chemicals and all that stuff.

*But you followed your passion into the mountains?*

Long story short: I was always taking pics. When I first became a heli ski guide I started packing a camera and pretty quickly started working with pros in the ski and snowboard world. I'm super fortunate to be in helicopters flying around crazy locations. I never really thought I'd make any money off photography and never pursued it. It's just been a passion.

*Tell us about your winning shot.*

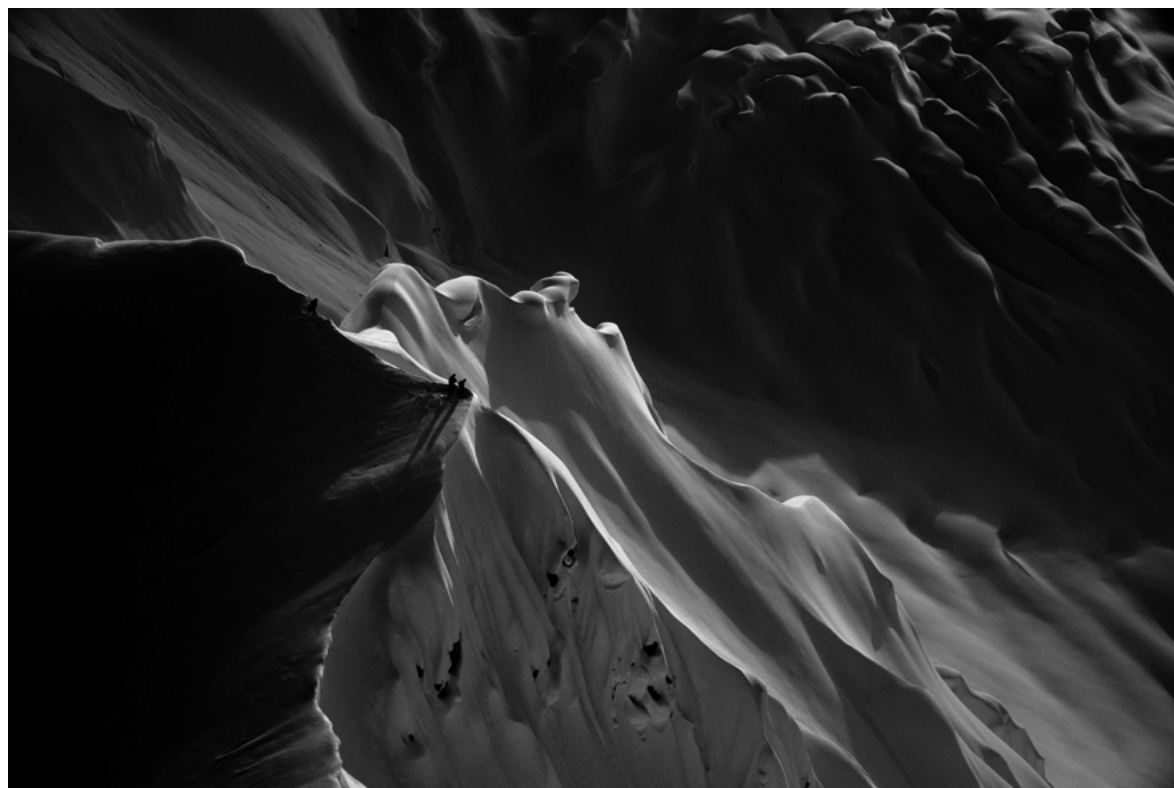
I only entered one photo. I selected 50 photos to enter but I got super busy in the middle of a Red Bull event I was running and couldn't get any of them to upload! I was freaking out and thought maybe I had blown it. I just picked my favorite photo and submitted it. To have it go all the way to the Top 50 was surreal.

*Did it bring any recognition?*

It definitely got me more recognition and more of an international look. Everyone knows I was in Red Bull Illume. It's one of the biggest honors.

*What was the best part about being part of the Top 50?*

The Winner Award Ceremony in Hong Kong was amazing—to be among all these guys who inspire me, like Scott Serfas and Chris Burkard. It validated me and made me think; maybe I do have an eye and need to pay a bit more attention to this. I received a lot of recognition, even within Red Bull.



© Clark Fyans, Category Finalist 2013: Illumination / Red Bull Illume

*Did the experience open any doors?*

100%! I've been featured in four or five publications. GoPro also reached out to me and asked me to be a media ambassador. It's all from that image. Maybe they knew me before but Red Bull Illume took it to a new level. It's opened a ton of doors for me. I also sold the print and it's on walls in a couple of places.

*Do you plan to enter Red Bull Illume 2016?*

Red Bull Illume 2013 was a really cool thing to happen in my life. Since then I've had the contest in the back of my mind all the time! I already know which images I want to submit. This time, I'm not going to be an idiot and leave it to the last minute!

## PART II

# Jody MacDonald: Turning Your Passion Into A Business



🏠 [jodymacdonaldphotography.com](http://jodymacdonaldphotography.com)  
📘 [facebook.com/jodymacdonaldphotography](https://facebook.com/jodymacdonaldphotography)  
🐦 @jodyphoto  
📷 @jodymacdonaldphoto

**P**hotoShelter member & Red Bull Illume finalist Jody MacDonald has a clear personal photography brand, and it's not limited to her paragliding lens (yes, that's literal), either. Jody's work has appeared in National Geographic, Red Bull, Outside, and many other editorial publications. With a background in outdoor recreation, a paragliding pilot's license, and a global kiteboarding business, Jody has carved out a niche for herself as an outdoor, adventure, and documentary photographer. We caught up with Jody to find out how she turned her passion for the outdoors into a thriving photography business.

### How a Love for the Outdoors Began

Born in Canada and transplanted to Saudi Arabia at two years old, Jody got the travel bug early on. "I've always loved the outdoors, adventure, and wildlife. Because I travel so much, adventure sports photography fits perfectly," she says.

### Getting Serious About Photography

For Jody, adventure sports photography is about expressing a passion for a lifestyle lived outdoors. The business aspect began when she decided to sail around the world on a 60-foot catamaran ten years ago. She knew it was crazy not to be taking photographs while she was wandering, and the thought of whether she would be able to sell her images didn't worry her. With a career as a photo editor at an outdoor company already under her belt, she had an insider's knowledge of how to pitch potential clients. "I started submitting

to different magazines," says Jody. "I had a good idea of how many images to submit, what to say, and how to approach them."

Jody still remembers her days sifting through photo submissions as an editor. People would "submit way too many images," she says. "They were clearly not being critical of their work. That's a huge turnoff, because editors don't have a lot of time. They don't want to look at semi-good images, and they don't want to look at hundreds of images."

### Pitching New Clients

Jody sends 20 to 80 of her best photographs when she pitches prospective clients. "I am my biggest critic. I'm so critical that I could never tell anyone 'these were good images.' To me that's the sign of a professional. If someone tells an editor 'hey—I've got some GREAT



I  
II  
III

images that you need to see!" you can bet they are going straight in the garbage can.

### Knowing What Sells

Editorial buyers also are always looking for something new and different—and Jody has that covered. But when it comes to understanding what will sell, Jody goes with her gut. She begins by doing her research and finding a story that interests her. Because she works primarily with magazines, storylines are an important aspect of her image-making.

For example, when Jody was in India working on another project, she saw a movie featuring Rajan, "the world's last swimming elephant," floating in tropical blue water. Jody remembers thinking, "Oh my god, I have to experience that. I have to go see if I can find this elephant," and she did. "I went to go swim with him and found out that his story was incredibly compelling. It was a story that blew me away. I didn't know if people would relate to it the way I did." It turned into her best selling story.

Though magazine stories are at the top of the heap, Jody also relies on stock and print sales to make money. At this point in her career, she's approached by editors and clients for work.

### An Approach to Marketing

When it comes to self-promotion, Jody relies on social media, saying, "I am continually impressed by how powerful and influential social media is." Jody is also a whole-hearted believer in approaching her clients and suggesting that they profile her. "I think that's the best form of marketing—get somebody else to talk about how good your work is."

Since starting out, Jody has noticed the effects of digital and social media on the adventure sport photography industry. Today her clients look for "interesting and



© Jody MacDonald

For Jody, adventure sports photography is about expressing a passion for a lifestyle lived outdoors.

I  
II  
III

unique content for the web,” and she needs to produce a lot more work for different media platforms. In addition, video production has become part of her repertoire. There was a learning curve (she learned as she went along), but video is a lucrative new revenue stream for her—and one that takes much more time to produce, too.

### Advice for Aspiring Adventure Photographers

There are a couple of things that Jody would tell an emerging photographer. One, which she knows is controversial, is don't give your work away for free. She struggled with this when she was starting out, wanting to get her work seen by as many people as possible. But she's an advocate for producing quality work and selling it for what it's worth—something she believes is more than possible.

“Go out and find good stories to photograph, then contact the places where you want your work to be seen. Whether you want to work with an NGO or you want to sell in galleries, it all comes down to shooting a lot and getting your work out there in those different avenues.”

But ultimately, the key is to love the work. “For me it's less about the money and more about the passion and the love of it and the lifestyle. I place personal importance on that more than the cash flow. I'm a firm believer in that if you do those things, then the cash flow will follow.”



© Jody MacDonald, Category Finalist 2013: Illumination / Red Bull Illume



## PART II

# Chris Burkard: Why Mobile Photography & Instagram Are Still Game Changers



🏠 [chrisburkard.com](http://chrisburkard.com)  
📘 [facebook.com/chrisburkardphotography](https://facebook.com/chrisburkardphotography)  
🐦 [@chrisburkard](https://twitter.com/chrisburkard)  
📷 [@chrisburkard](https://www.instagram.com/chrisburkard)  
📌 [chrisburkard.tumblr.com](https://chrisburkard.tumblr.com)

**L**andscape, travel and adventure photographer Chris Burkard won Red Bull Illume back in 2010 with his beautiful sun-drenched photo of Peter Mendia surfing in Chile. The experience rightfully catapulted Chris into the spotlight and he hasn't stopped since.

At 29 years old, Chris has been published in every surf magazine worth mentioning and has shot for an impressive list of clients, including The North Face, Apple, ESPN, Toyota and Patagonia.

Over the years, Chris has also fully embraced mobile photography and Instagram to share his work. We caught up with Chris to learn more about how he felt winning the big award, plus find out what he's up to today.

### *How did you feel about winning the Red Bull Illume Image Quest 2010?*

I was overjoyed, it's hard to put into words what it felt like to win this award in front of all your peers and people I respect, I was truly blessed. When I submitted my image, my expectations was just to hope that a few editors would see it!

More than anything I'm grateful to Peter Mendia, the surfer in the image who made the shot possible. And to the landscape around us: we live in such a beautiful place and my main goal in photography has always been to inspire people to see and seek out the world around them.

### *What's the story behind your winning shot?*

We went to Chile and it was one of the most beautiful places I've ever been. We sat in the rain for weeks and it was terrible. We woke up one morning and it was bluebird skies and the waves were the best I'd ever seen.

We went down to check all these spots and this was the last place we went. This was the last session of the day and I hiked up to a sand dune so I could get a pulled back shot to capture the whole landscape and environment that the surfer was in. This image was the outcome. For me it was scary. Photographers usually want to get up close to the action but in this case I went further away. I'm lucky I did because the shot came of it.

For me it's all about light or the absence of light, dark clouds or a moving storm: the simple moments. Or the most beautiful evening you have ever seen. By shooting a silhouette like in this image it makes them timeless. I want to capture moments on earth like this in their natural state, as if (humans) were not even there.



© Chris Burkard, Category Finalist 2010: Illumination / Red Bull Illume

*It's been a few years since that great moment. Fast forward to today: What's the most exciting client project you've worked on recently?*

I recently got to do a job with Swissair and Switzerland Tourism. I'd never been to the Swiss Alps before and getting to spend several days exploring Switzerland was amazing! The Matterhorn is of course the most iconic symbol of Switzerland's natural beauty, but there were so many other places that we visited that were equally stunning. I could have spent weeks there. Lauterbrunnen Valley was a personal favorite of mine with their giant rock cliffs that resemble Yosemite Valley.

*You've truly embraced mobile photography over the years. What do you enjoy about it and what challenges does it present?*

Mobile photography has certainly come a long way in the past several years! Mobile phone cameras these days have the ability to make images that are as sharp and detailed as professional digital cameras from 7 years ago. It's been a real game changer to have such a powerful tool in your pocket at all times. There are a lot of moments on the road when the closest camera is the one in your pocket, and you'll manage to get a shot with your mobile device that you would not have gotten with your pro bodies and lenses because they weren't around your neck at that moment. Mobile camera phones also have their own challenges in that they don't have interchangeable lenses or batteries, so you essentially get one perspective, and once you run out of power that's it (although I always have a GoalZero Venture 30 with me to extend the life of my phone).

*You have a very large Instagram following. What's your goal using the platform?*

I was lucky to have a successful career before Instagram, but it has definitely changed a lot for me (and for many other photographers). I think my favorite aspect of Instagram is that it allows me to share with people my latest work very soon after it is created. With professional websites, even the top photographers don't have people returning to their sites every day to look at new work or projects. And, the formality of the sites tends to detract from showcasing new work quickly. Instagram is a great way to show people what you're up to on a day to day basis, instead of only through curated selections on a formal site.



© Chris Burkard

Mobile photography has certainly come a long way in the past several years. It's been a real game changer to have such a powerful tool in your pocket at all times.





© Chris Burkard



© Chris Burkard

### *Do you have a social media strategy? Explain.*

My strategy is to post work that I'm really stoked on! I've been lucky that people seem to be excited about the same things that I am, and my goal is to post work from my trips that motivates people to go out and explore the world for themselves!

### *Have you ever gotten a job inquiry as a result of a post on Instagram?*

I definitely get jobs through Instagram. You really never know who is going to be scrolling through their Instagram feed and come across one of your images. Brands now have managed accounts that they use to network with photographers and other creatives, but there are also art directors, creative directors, designers, account executives, etc., who all have their own accounts, and are always looking for new and exciting work to collaborate with.

### *Can you recall one of your most popular posts on Instagram? Why do you think it did so well?*

About a year ago I posted an [image from a trip to Spirit Island in British Columbia](#), and it got almost double the likes of all of the other images I was posting at the time! I'm still not sure why it did so well, but it was really cool to have such a strong response to new work that I was excited to share.

### *What would you advise photographers not to do on Instagram?*

I don't really give advice about what not to do. I think that Instagram is an avenue that allows people to express themselves how they see fit, and while some people have more followers than others, I don't think that the point of Instagram is to get as many followers as you can. I always encourage people to create work that they are stoked about and proud of, and share it with the world. I can't predict what will be popular, or why, but I can say that being able to have anyone on the planet review your work and give you feedback at any given moment is an incredible opportunity for young artists.

*What else do you do to market your photography and get your work out there?*

I have a rep, Jonathan Feldman at Massif Management, and I also have a licensing agent, Kimberly Ayl (also with Massif). They work to establish contact with various clients (commercial or editorial) and handle a lot of the requests that come through. When I was getting started, I would take portfolios to meetings with anybody who would give me a minute of their time. From what I've seen, and from my own experience, it can take years of pounding the pavement before you get enough clients to stabilize your business. Taking meetings, sending out promos, and reaching out to anyone and everyone that you have a connection to are always a part of the business it never stops. Now that I've been doing it for ten years, I'm able to team up with people like Jonathan and Kimberly who can help me do some of that, but the work is the same.

*What other tips would you give aspiring adventure photographers looking to grow their network and reach potential clients online?*

The main thing is to create good work. A great marketing plan might get people to see your photos, but if the pictures don't stand out, none of that marketing effort will matter. If you really want to be an adventure photographer, grab your cameras and go have some adventures! And don't come home until you've got some work that you're proud of.

*What's next for you in 2016? Share with us any exciting client assignments or personal projects you have coming up.*

Well, unfortunately, many of my client assignments have to be kept secret, as the images and locations are key to campaigns that are waiting to be launched. That being said, I have a few ski trips lined up for January that will take me to some of the most rugged ski locations I've ever been, and I've been working on pulling together an epic surf trip that will be one for the books. Keep tabs on my [Instagram account](#) and you'll get to see for yourself!



© Chris Burkard



## PART II

# Ulrich Grill: A Look Inside The Brain of Red Bull Illume's Mastermind



redbullillume.com

**W**hen Ulrich Grill wasn't performing acrobatic stunts with his hang glider back in the late 90s, he was trailblazing action sports photography with Red Bull. The thrill-seeking athlete and pro photographer is also the mastermind behind Red Bull Illume. We interviewed him to find out how it happened.

*Tell us how Red Bull Illume came about?*

I was a Red Bull athlete and its first photographer and did all of their shoots. Eventually it became just too many projects for me to handle and I realized we had to get new talented photographers onboard.

It started with Red Bull Photo Challenges, which provided workshops and internships and built up a network of photographers and trained them up. It helped young photographers gain knowledge, credibility and work.

At some point I realized there wasn't one good international contest that recognized action and adventure sports photographers. It just didn't exist. I knew it would be super cool to put the spotlight on these people who often risk their lives to get these amazing shots and are in many ways responsible for the success of an athlete or a big action sports story. For example, unlike a free skiing athlete who rips down a cliff face, the photographer has to go down that same face with a 20kg pack and expose him or herself to more risk than the athlete. We wanted to put a spotlight on these guys because, frankly, they deserve it. This is the idea that gave birth to Red Bull Illume.

*There are a lot of photography contests—how did you make Red Bull Illume stand out?*

As you say, photo contests are a dime a dozen. There's just so many. So we decided to focus on the execution of the photo contest and make it really high quality and high profile. Firstly, it's judged very transparently and by a large panel of photo editors. They're not other photographers, but mostly photo editors from core and special interest magazines, newspapers and periodicals from around the world. We have a really broad panel of judges and all the judging is independent—it's a completely even playing field. You don't need to have a big name to win; you just need to have a great image. It's a contest that can give you a really big name which means you can make photography a profession and become internationally recognized. It's the highest award you can get in action and adventure sports photography. We're really proud of that.

*Are there other benefits to the winning photographers?*

Sure, the top 50 images are exhibited around the world and put in front of an audience of millions. The images don't just stay within the action and adventure

I  
II  
III

sports community, but are brought out to the public through media and the Red Bull Illume Exhibit Tour, which travels to capitals and cultural hubs all over the world as a unique nighttime photo exhibition. I've had a lot of photographers tell me they have never seen their images in the quality seen at the tour—it's much more sensory and three dimensional. Getting your name out there in this way means you have athletes approaching you, brands approaching you, all sorts of projects pop up. It's a great opportunity in many ways.

#### *How has the contest changed since its first edition?*

It's increasingly becoming a creative process rather than a matter of just being in the right place at the right time. And the creative possibilities will never run out because the field is still wide open. But this means it's more tricky to win. You have to have a truly unique and outstanding concept to move forward. It's really about people coming up with carefully thought through concepts and ideas and to shoot that specifically for Red Bull Illume. You have to be into the sport, you have to take risks, you have to conceptualize the shot and execute it. A lot of the images submitted are the result of projects that take months to set up before they can finally get that specific shot. But you never do know—sometimes the shot can just be a case of being in the right place at the right time.

#### *For the first time, the 2016 edition of Red Bull Illume includes a mobile category—why this addition?*

All photographers know the saying 'the best camera is the camera you have with you.' It's very simple and very true. We cannot carry all our DSLR equipment with us all the time. It's impossible. The other thing is the quality of mobile cameras is constantly increasing and while you are more limited in terms of what you can do with them, the great thing is you have one with you all the time. It's a tool to express your creativity, just as any camera is. When I go out to shoot, I love to have one camera with a 28mm fixed lens and nothing else and work only with that. It helps you to be really focused. You can similarly do some great stuff with mobiles. There are still disadvantages in terms of resolution and technical potential so we have this separate category to evaluate those images. It also opens the contest up to everyone who has a mobile phone.



© Ulrich Grill / zoom.at

I  
II  
III

It's the highest award you can get in action and adventure sports photography. We're really proud of that.

#### *How will it continue to change?*

The technology is evolving quite interestingly now in terms of new camera systems and what you can do, for example in terms of light sensitivity. So there's new possibilities, new conceptual projects that can be realized with new cameras. These new tools make it possible to create something that hasn't been seen before.

#### *Any tips to photographers looking to win Red Bull Illume?*

##### **1 GET CLOSE AND PERSONAL.**

The close up category of the contest is one of the most interesting because very few people shoot them, yet these make some of the greatest images. Normally not as many close up images are submitted so as a heads up to the PhotoShelter community, look into this category. If you have a great concept it could go far.

##### **2 MAKE IT ORIGINAL AND UNIQUE.**

You have to have a lot of passion. The tool doesn't matter. You can do amazing stuff with every camera. Get some inspiration from Red Bull Illume's previous top images and then think of your own concept and be sure to make it something original and unique. This is crucial for an image to go far in the contest.

##### **3 SEE IT IN YOUR MIND**

My background is shooting analogue and to do this well you always had to have the image you wanted to create in your mind beforehand. You wouldn't see it until the film was developed and then you were back home so you couldn't reshoot it. That's an ability every photographer should have—being able to create the image in your imagination. When you can do that really well, then you can shoot it really well.



© Ulrich Grill / zoom.at



© Ulrich Grill / zoom.at

---

PART III

*Conclusion*

---



## PART III

# How to Impress the Red Bull Illume Image Quest 2016 Judges

**T**hey're photo editors of prominent publications from around the world. Their job involves pouring over thousands of incredible images, so impressing them certainly isn't easy. But follow these tips and you might just catch their attention.

### Get the ABCs right

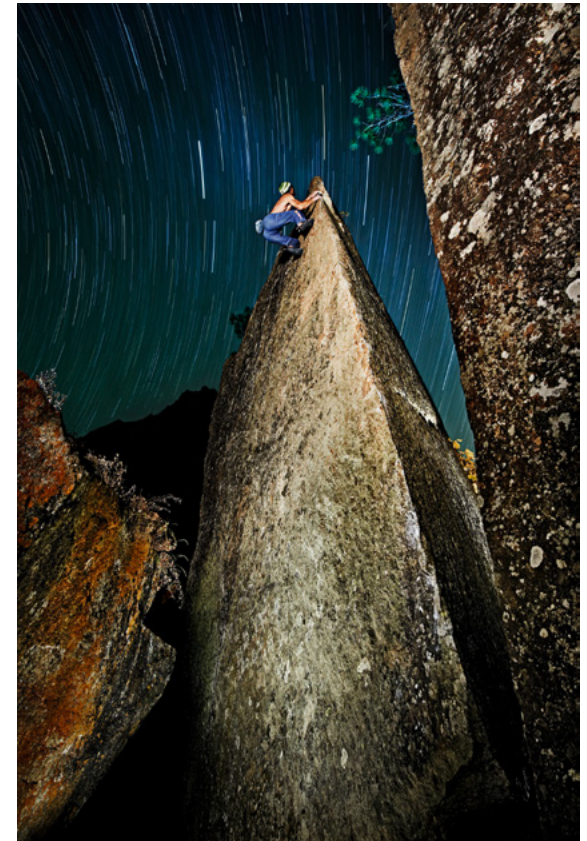
Excellent lighting, composition, quality and storytelling should go without saying for Red Bull Illume submissions. The image must be of an accepted action and adventure sport and it must match the category you're submitting to. Take time to carefully read the definitions of each category and ensure the image you're submitting is bang on. Lastly [check the rules](#) and make sure the images you are submitting fulfill all the necessary requirements. Tick off the above and your image will be considered. To win, keep reading.

### Don't overthink it

To repeat, make sure you've understood the category definitions. The Spirit category doesn't invite images containing fairies or ghosts and, likewise, the Close Up category isn't about close encounters between man and beast. It's always a bummer when a great image is rejected because it was submitted to the wrong category.

### Do your homework

Go through the previous editions of the competition and look at the [winning photos](#). Use the top 250 images from the previous years as guides. This will help you understand what the standard is, what's been done before and how to step it up. It will also give you a clearer understanding of what each category is asking for.



© Ray Demski / Red Bull Illume



## Hatch a plan

One option is to try and match an existing photo from your portfolio to a category. Another strategy is to plan a photograph specifically for it. Many photographers plan months in advance, scouting out locations, playing with lighting and so on.

## Surprise us

Beware of convention. It's fine to submit something that's been done before, but for it to progress in the competition it must be done in a different way so it catches the judges' eyes. Better to stand out with your own style. Take some risks!

## Take advantage

The Sequence by Sony and Enhance categories receive the fewest submissions. If you're talented at sequencing and post-production, there's a big opportunity to stand out. The Mobile category is another opportunity to show off. Most of the pros will focus on other categories and, at the time of publishing, few mobile images have been submitted.

## Category-specific tips

**Close Up:** Make sure this brings the judges close to the action, immerses them in it. The frame should be filled with the action.

**ENERGY:** To wow the judges in this category, make them feel like they've been hit by a strong gust of wind. Think high intensity, explosive energy, dynamism and power.

**ENHANCE:** The gloves are off in this category. The judges aren't looking for nicely retouched images; they're expecting to see really good enhancements in post-production. Unlike with all the other categories, you can break the rules and do anything you like.



© Dimitrios Kontizas / Red Bull Illume

**LIFESTYLE:** Take the judges behind the scene of an action and adventure sport and show them something surprising. Make sure the image has a clear connection to action and adventure sports. It makes it hard for the judges without it.

**MASTERPIECE BY YODOBASHI:** This should be the centrepiece of your portfolio. Try not to emulate what's been done before; instead, push your limits and step up your creativity. With Masterpiece by Yodobashi, it's about your version of perfection.

**MOBILE:** If you can get a mobile shot that is as good as something you would capture on your DSLR, then it will catch the judges' attention. To make it easy for them, consider the same guidelines as an image for the Masterpiece by Yodobashi category, but taken with your mobile.

**NEW CREATIVITY:** To impress the judges, the image must be something that hasn't been done before. Remember though, this isn't the Enhanced category so you can only make the basic edits. If you've developed a new, creative technique, that's perfect for this category.

**PLAYGROUND:** Show off the landscape and the locations, whether indoor or outdoor, of action and adventure sports. Don't make the mistake of submitting a landscape-only image; the sport itself must feature too.

**SEQUENCE BY SONY:** Be very detailed in post-production so there's not one pixel out of place. Not only must it be a well thought out, original sequence, you also need to make good use of the overall space.

**SPIRIT:** Portray the personality of the athletes; the pain and emotions they go through, what it takes for them to achieve a goal, being injured, failing, or succeeding.

**WINGS:** This category is about capturing someone getting serious airtime. Make sure the athlete is clearly in the air, not just off the ground. As always, make sure it's something different to surprise the judges.

Be sure to visit the full list of judges [here](#) and browse through their profiles to pick up some tips. Submissions for Red Bull Illume are currently open and there is a [handy FAQ](#) that will be of help to photographers with questions.



© Stuart Gibson / Red Bull Illume

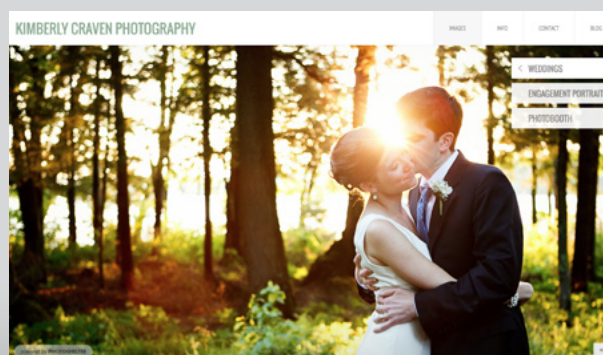
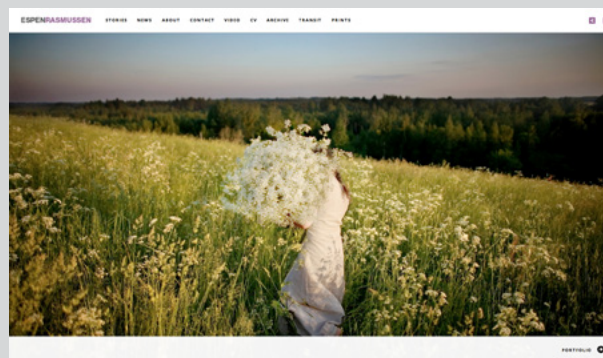
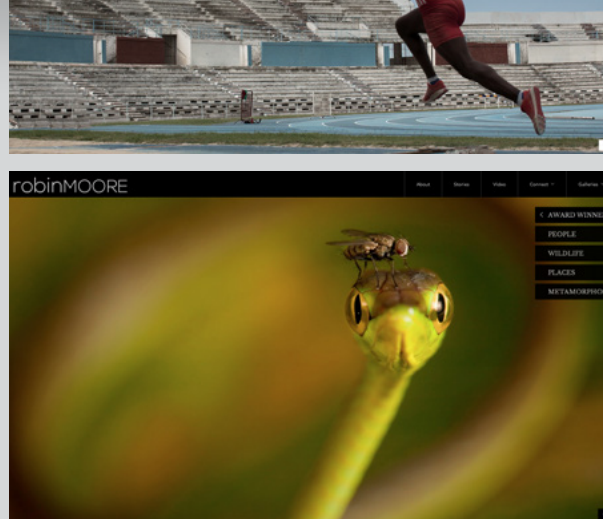
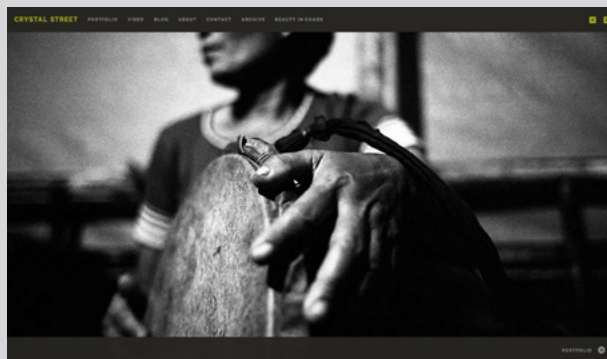
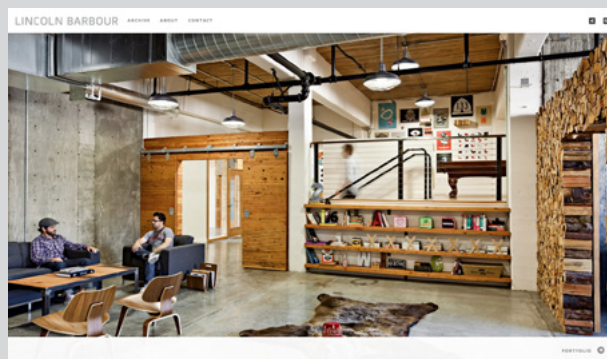
## PART III

# Conclusion

**T**he action and adventure sports photography celebrated by Red Bull Illume attracts a specific type of photographer—a creative whose passion for thrill-seeking inspires their passion for storytelling. To succeed, these photographers place themselves at the heart of the action—whether that be hiking, skiing, rafting, surfing, or climbing. Managing the elements, including weather and nature, can often impact their own safety, yet when others may be inclined to say no to a shot, adventure photographers say yes. After all, the thrill of capturing the image they want is what drives them to keep at it.

For more information on how to enter the Red Bull Illume Image Quest 2016, visit: [redbullillume.com](http://redbullillume.com). The deadline to enter is March 31, 2016.





**SPECIAL OFFER**

# Get 20% off PhotoShelter!

Build a stronger photo business with a PhotoShelter website.

With PhotoShelter, you also get powerful features and resources to market your photos, such as SEO and social sharing capabilities, in addition to the most options for licensing photography, selling prints online and pro-strength file delivery tools to please your clients.

**GET STARTED WITH 14 DAYS FREE + 20% OFF YOUR FIRST YEAR**

Learn more & [join PhotoShelter](#) today!

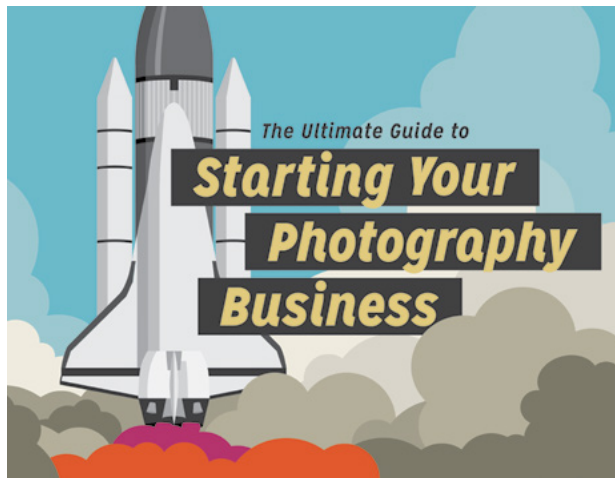
Or, visit [photoshelter.com/signup](https://photoshelter.com/signup) and enter

**ACTION**

Questions? Contact us anytime at 212-206-0808 or [support@photoshelter.com](mailto:support@photoshelter.com).

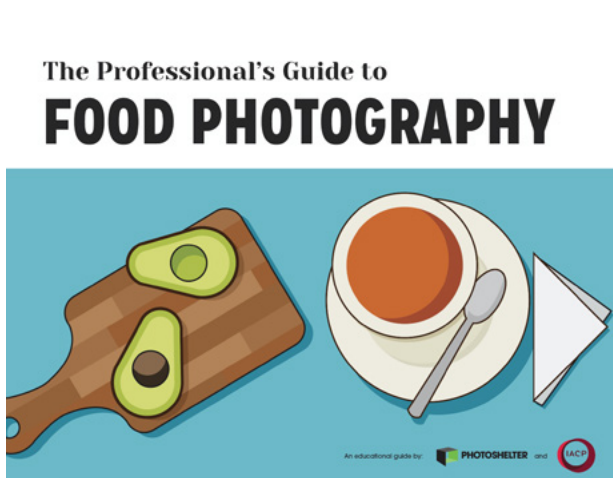
Offer valid for new PhotoShelter users. Get 20% off a monthly Standard account for the first year only.





# CHECK OUT PHOTOSHELTER'S library of free photo business and marketing guides

Get them all: [www.PhotoShelter.com/resources](http://www.PhotoShelter.com/resources)



# FIND PHOTOSHELTER *online*



[www.PhotoShelter.com](http://www.PhotoShelter.com)



[@PhotoShelter](https://twitter.com/PhotoShelter)



[linkedin.com/PhotoShelter](https://linkedin.com/PhotoShelter)



[facebook.com/PhotoShelter](https://facebook.com/PhotoShelter)



[vimeo.com/PhotoShelter](https://vimeo.com/PhotoShelter)



[instagram.com/PhotoShelter](https://instagram.com/PhotoShelter)

---

# FIND RED BULL ILLUME *online*



[facebook.com/RedBullllume](https://facebook.com/RedBullllume)



[@RedBullllume](https://twitter.com/RedBullllume)



[youtube.com/RedBullllume](https://youtube.com/RedBullllume)



[instagram.com/redbullillume](https://instagram.com/redbullillume)



[pinterest.com/redbullillume](https://pinterest.com/redbullillume)



[flickr.com/redbullillume](https://flickr.com/redbullillume)