



Moving Forward, Looking Back

With his new two-volume retrospective, Howard Schatz reflects on 25 years of passionate photography

By William Sawalich >> Photography By Howard Schatz

To commemorate his 25th year in photography, Howard Schatz is publishing a new book. A massive two-volume retrospective, *Schatz Images: 25 Years* includes work from 32 personal projects, as well as never-before-seen images from throughout his career. On these pages, we're hosting our own mini-retrospective. Schatz had the very first cover of *Digital Photo Pro* in 2003, and since that issue, his work has been featured in the magazine and on the cover several more times, including this

November 2014 issue. We've always been particularly struck with his ability to come up with a project and then create a body of work that has its own unique visual style. As a photographer, he lets the subject dictate his interpretation. Schatz spoke to us from Slovenia, where he was on press to monitor the printing of his life's work.

DPP: There are a lot of images in this book, but even more had to be left out. How did you decide what made the cut?



Schatz: I'm very project-oriented, and I've done over 40 separate personal projects. We edited all my work, four million images, and I selected about a thousand. There were so many images and so many pages, we designed a two-book boxed set. A photographer really can't see his work as clearly as an unbiased stranger can. So we hired a world-renowned photo editor to look at everything. My wife, Beverly, looked at everything, I looked at everything, and the photo editor looked at everything, and the only pictures in the book are those pictures that got no vetoes from any of us. We agreed what belonged. I feel like we made a really strong edit. I'm very proud of it.

DPP: I understand there are some previously unpublished images included.

Schatz: Lots of them. Even if you've seen all my books, you haven't seen well more than half of these images. I asked the photo editor to find gems that we missed, and there were many. We change. We're on a constant waveform. I'm a different person today than I was 25 years ago. In fact, what was wonderful about this project was, I was able to sort of see who I am and how I've grown and how I've changed and what I've learned. It was a really wonderful, rich endeavor.

DPP: What are the biggest differences between your early work and what you're doing now?

Schatz: The question really can be answered by the difference between being a physician and being an artist. When you're a doctor, it's about getting it



right, getting exactly the right diagnosis and doing the exact right treatment. Whereas in photography, there are no mistakes. In fact, it's mistakes that make miracles. In photography, it's often about getting it wrong. So, in a way, I'm much freer. I'm more open to all kinds of ideas and all kinds of things, I'm willing to try anything. I've become much more imaginative and creatively open.

DPP: Some of our readers may not know that photography is your second career.

Schatz: Yes, I was a retinal surgeon. And, then, in 1995, having been working in photography just on the weekends for five or six years and having a lot of attention, Beverly suggested we take a sabbatical for a year, go to New York and just do photography full time. And it was so much fun. We would go to

bed giggling every night over the fun, the adventure. I kept re-upping the sabbatical, and I never looked back. It has been 19 years.

DPP: From the beginning, was it always about personal projects?

Schatz: When you do a commercial project, you're really photographing somebody else's dreams, their fantasy, their desires. So, in a way, when I do an advertising shoot, I'm a contractor; just like a contractor in a house has to follow the architectural plans, I, as the photographer, have to skillfully, technically follow the art director's plans. So they're not my pictures. Occasionally, an art director will let go and I'll make something that comes from me, but what I do is, I shoot for myself. The advertising work is so that I can pay to shoot for myself.



DPP: Finding the time and energy to pursue personal projects is a challenge for many photographers.

Schatz: My main goal is to do that. I shoot five days a week, and commercial and editorial work sort of just get in the way. I don't need to do commercial work all the time. I just need one good job every week or two weeks or month, depending on how well it pays. And I still have plenty of time to do my own work. I shoot all the time and I don't feel like I'm prolific. I know I've produced a lot of work, but I feel like it's just natural. I'm shooting all the time; it seems only natural that some good images would come from that.

DPP: I know there's no chance you're slowing down, but was there any hesitation to look back?

Schatz: Well, it was fun, and it was sickening.

With my early stuff, I went "Oh, why did I do that?" I can't believe I was doing that. I've learned a lot in 25 years! You can see in the book there's lots of stuff that nobody has ever seen. There's stuff like the "Growing Up" project and "Folsom Street Fair." I've never shown it, but I've been shooting it for 20 years. There are so many images from the Folsom Street Fair that are fantastic, that's my next book. There are a lot of parts to me. As long as I'm working all the time, I feel like I'm reasonably productive and I can make some good stuff.

DPP

You can see more of Howard Schatz's work and order his latest book at www.howardschatz.com. Read an extended version of this interview at digitalphotopro.com.