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Features Interview s "Funny enough, I am a good teacher but a poor student."

## "Funny enough, I am a good teacher but a poor student."

Kadambari Khaire-Ghate | Apr 11 2011

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A self made photographer, **Martin Osner** is well known for his distinctive style. His passion and willingness to experiment has resulted in some noteworthy works. A multi-award winner, Osner specialises in contemporary portfolio in fine art photography and loves to shoot with a subconscious attitude. Co-founder of a premier photography institute in South Africa, he enjoys the energy and creativity that comes from his students. Currently working on a project called, 'Home Sweet Home', Osner will depict the importance of a house in every segment of society.

### What motivated you to pick up the camera and how did you teach yourself photography?

I have always said that photography and I met quite by accident. A friend of mine had purchased a SLR system and we were out windsurfing for the day. He passed the camera over to me and asked if I would take a few pictures of him. The moment I held the camera and looked through the lens, I knew this was something I would enjoy. A week later, I scraped my last pennies together and bought my own camera. I have never looked back since. Funny enough, I am a good teacher but a poor student. I tried to study photography at first but got frustrated at the slow pace. Luckily I got on the job training for three years and then opened my first studio. Ten years later, I opened a photography college and taught photography for many years, at a faster pace of course.



Your social commentary and documentary work has drawn inspiration from master photographer Henri Cartier Bresson while your still life studies are inspirations of painter Henri Matisse. Would you regard the two as your biggest influences?

Yes. Ansel Adams is also a big inspiration with regard to my landscape work.

How has your approach towards photography changed since you took to fine art photography?

I have become far more relaxed and now I don't try to control the situation anymore, but rather shoot with a subconscious attitude.

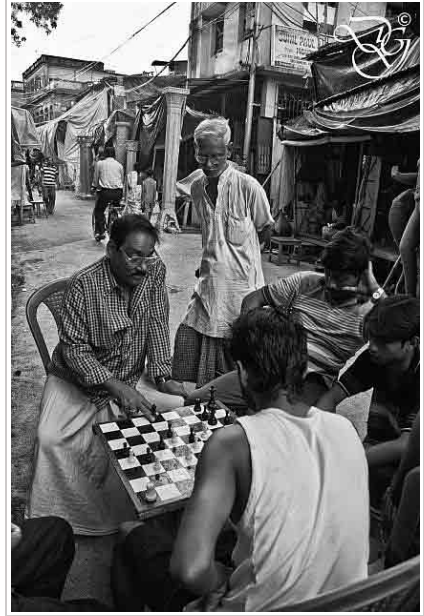
Just like colour adds life to a painter's vision, can we say proper lighting enhances the vision of the photographer: the message he wants to convey through his images?

Light is the most important component in photography. Learning to work with the qualities of light is absolutely essential and this is the very thing that separates the best from the average. It took me seven years to learn to

*It took me seven years to learn to work with light and the rest of my career to try master it.*

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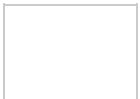
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Shirsendu  
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# HAS BEGUN!

work with light and the rest of my career to try master it.



Your much acclaimed 'Abandoned' and 'Urban Reflections' series feature some of the best images from your collection. Can you share some memories while you made these photographs?

I have certainly enjoyed working on these two collections. The challenge for both series is to make old derelict subject matter appear compelling and eye-catching, without sacrificing on the mood. I think the picture of the old caravan in the 'Abandoned' series was certainly the most surreal for me. Working so hard to find the right subject in the right environment with the correct light and weather conditions requires a lot of patience. With this shot, everything just fell into place: a friend found the caravan and took me to the location. The weather was perfect, the light angle just right....it was just so simple. I remember thinking if only it could always be this easy.

So far, what do you feel has been the highlight of your career?

Two things, I have just opened a signature gallery in Cape Town. The response has been fantastic and an absolute confirmation. Also, recently I was honoured to have been presented with the grand prize in the "Art in Vogue 100 Contemporary Artists - Masters of today" hosted by Artoteque - London - very humbling.



Your pictures have always been very expressive; does that make you work hard on your compositions?

I suppose so - expressive and abstract imaging requires a lot more effort. Here the subconscious attitude we spoke about earlier really plays a big roll, not only with shooting but also with selection.

You are a co-founder of the prominent photography college in Africa. What encouraged you to get into the educational side and come up with a photography institution?

Simply a desire to share my passion with others encouraged me to get into the educational side of photography. Since then, I have learned more from my students than anyone else. I figure that's a good investment.

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"Great shots don't grow on trees."

"I'm passionate about sharing how I see the world."

"Worries only kill an individual."



**So how do you maintain a balance between teaching and photography?**

It was difficult initially to manage time for both. However, since the college has been sold to a large educational company, my time has been free to open my Gallery and I am currently taking an extended sabbatical from teaching. I will get back into the classroom soon but will not be teaching main stream anymore. Instead, my focus will be on teaching fine-art photography and the joy that this medium can bring to one.

**You are working on a project called 'Home Sweet Home'. Can you tell us something more about it?**

The idea is to show how a home is important to all segments of society, rich or poor. We have recently moved from Johannesburg to Cape Town and now live in a wonderful seaside village called Hout Bay. This area is a microcosm of the new rainbow nation of South Africa. One of the reasons for choosing to settle down in Hout Bay is to complete this project as it has the stark contrasts I need to shoot an exciting series. I am a few years away from publishing a coffee table book on the project.

*I sometimes take up to three hundred images of a subject before I find one that I am completely satisfied with.*

**What are your thoughts on digital and film? Do you prefer darkroom techniques or photoshop?**

It's like asking do I prefer strawberries or cream I love them both.



**There are many budding photographers who are still paving their way to success. Would you like to convey any message to them?**

Believe in your talent and know that you are completely unique. Treat your career as a calling rather than a profession. Know that experience takes a life-time to learn. Relax and enjoy the journey.

Photos by Martin Osner | Fotosocial

Quick8:

- **Your Favourite Camera:** I don't have one! If it captures light it's cool.
- **Your Favourite Printer:** I don't have one. As long as it's archival I am happy. Favourite paper, by the way, is Hahnemuhle Museum Etching.
- **Your Favourite Shoot:** Two weeks I spent in Scotland.
- **Your Preferred Location:** Landscape: Namibia Urban: Woodstock in Cape Town Seascapes: Cape Peninsula Abstract – my one studio.
- **Favourite Photographer:** Henri Cartier Bresson.
- **Most memorable story:** God's love for mankind.
- **Current photographers you like:** Koos van der Lende, Klaus Tiedge, Sandy Mclea.
- **Toughest day at work:** Great shot and you have forgotten to bring your camera along.

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