



Brett Florens
Equipment: Nikon D3
Nikon 80-200 f2.8

AFRICAN EXPOSURES

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A vulture hovering over a dying child sprawled on a sandy track. Hector Petersen being carried away from the violence in 1976 in Soweto. Smoke billowing from the twin towers as planes strike them on 9/11. Who are the artists behind these pictures, the people creating the images that are our present, illustrate our past, perhaps even portent our future? This month, talented local photographer Brett Florens gives Skyways readers some insight into his life behind the lens as part of our Nikon African exposure series.

Q: What was the first photograph you saw that made an impression on you, the moment when you thought, "That is what I'd like to do"?

A: Ironically, I never had an interest in photography as a youngster. I was thrown in the deep end when I was a young policeman. I volunteered to start up the Video and Photography Unit, when the State required that a record be made of police action at protest marches during the transition changes from apartheid. It didn't take long, though, before photography became my ultimate passion.

Q: Do you remember a moment when you took a photo that made you realise you could make it as a professional?

A: When I first saw an image of mine published on the front page of the *Natal Mercury* I realised that I could take my passion to another level. The photograph was a silhouette of a fireman fighting a fire in a squatter camp. The shot was dramatic and impactful.

Q: Do you feel like a different person when you are behind the lens?

A: I feel so comfortable behind the lens it's as if I was destined to take pictures. Holding my Nikon really feels like home. I often marvel at the fact that through fate, I am working as a photographer, which for me is not a job at all – it's an all-consuming passion, that I would not give up for love nor money. There are times when I'm not quite sure how I produce the images I do; they almost seem to create themselves and I am merely a vehicle for their creation.

Q: Does your personality change depending on the subject matter you are covering and does this affect how you take the photo?

A: Photographing people requires one to be able to read different personalities, and treat them accordingly. I would use a very different approach with the CEO of a company than I would with an anxious bride. Photographing people has a lot to do with your personal interaction with them. It can be a very intimate experience and this will be reflected in the image.

Q: Are your pictures usually carefully planned, or are they more random, chance affairs?

A: Often my images are carefully planned to look natural. I shoot a lot of catalogue work, which includes lifestyle images. These images need to look natural while showing off the product in its best possible form. Images like these are carefully constructed and can take a long time to create.

Q: Have you ever encountered moments where your morals get called into question?

A: Having started my career as a police photographer shooting politically motivated crimes and township violence, I saw some shocking examples of the dark side of human beings. My morals were never really called into question, but I did question morality.

Q: What do you wish you had known about the profession of photography before you started?

A: What I didn't realise when I started, was that you also need to be a good businessman to make it in the photographic industry. There is the marketing of yourself as well as the administration of your business. Things like income tax and VAT, invoicing and debt collection need to be taken care of. Digital photography has also presented administration issues. Clients expect perfectly touched-up images and photographers need to be aware of managing their workflow properly to run a sustainable business. I'm lucky that I seem to have a creative eye, as well as having good business sense – not all artists do!

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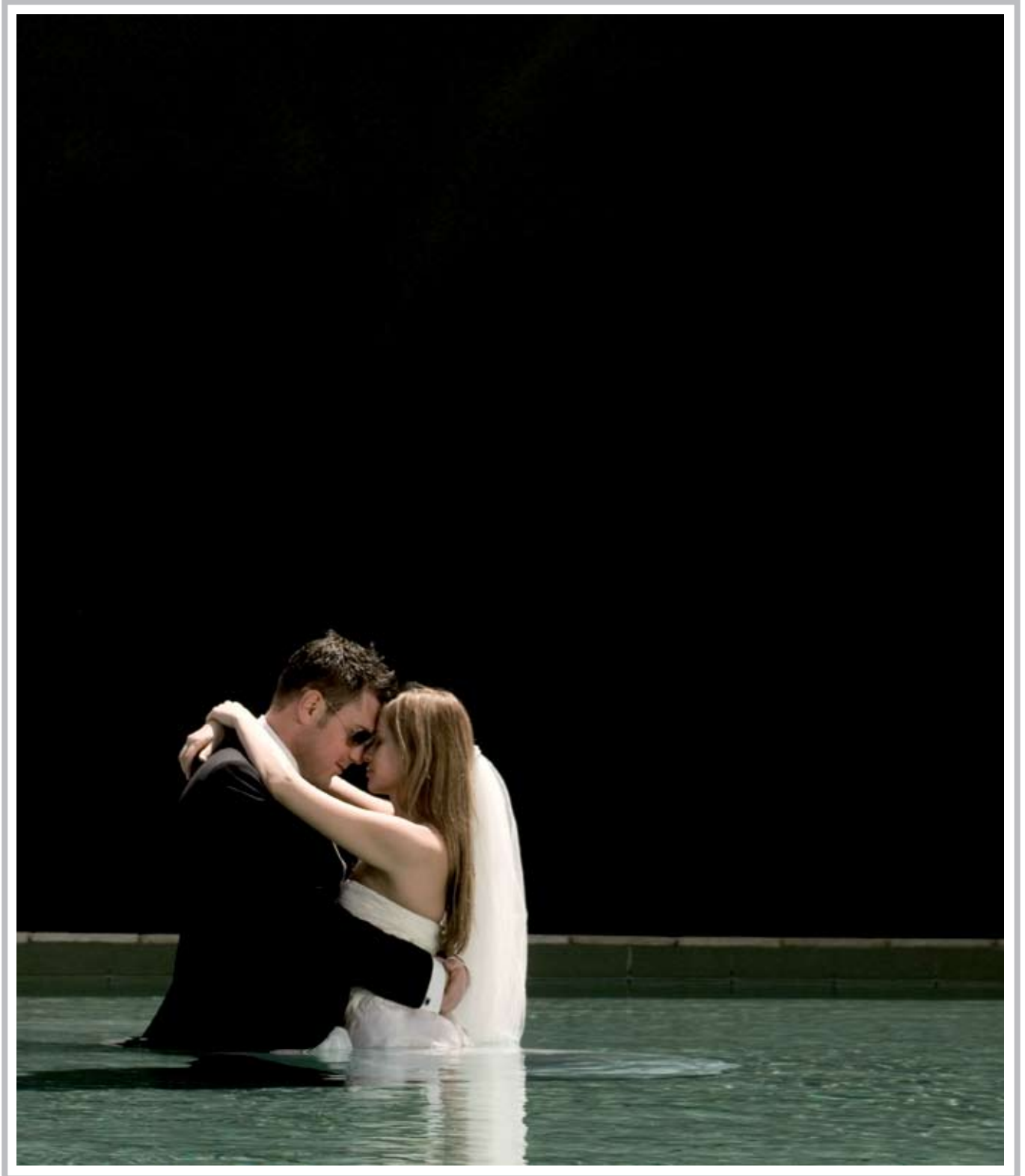


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