

# Take Stock

How will you survive in these economically testing times? Julian Jackson talks to a selection of experienced photographers and those just starting out to get feedback

WORDS Julian Jackson

**T**oday's photographer has to work harder and harder to make ends meet. In a downturn, advertising revenue suffers first. Photographers' income has also been reduced by microstock, as well as perceived saturation in numbers of images available. Can experience or youthful optimism overcome these barriers? Is it possible to have a photographic vocation in these economically-challenged times?

To investigate this I looked at the careers of two highly-experienced photographers and contrasted them with the insights of a pair of newcomers to the industry. The result was a mixed, but still mostly positive, view. The young blades are Michael Preston, who combines graphic design with photography, and Spencer Murphy, one of a group of people involved in Young Photographers United, while our experienced duo

were Tim Hazael and Carol Sharp, who combine assignments and traditional stock, while Tim additionally teaches holiday photography courses.

Despite the downturn in the economy and the lure of low-priced stock photos for clients, both Michael Preston and Spencer Murphy were optimistic. Since being made redundant from his job a couple of years ago, Michael has turned his hobby of photography into his career. "I couldn't have picked a worse time to establish myself in this industry," he says, "but it doesn't put me off. If I can make it now, then I can make it anytime." Nevertheless he admits that his graphic design work provides more of his income than photography does just now.

Spencer ceased being an assistant two years ago and has not been finding it easy to obtain commissions as a freelance photographer since

then, but now his persistence in showing his portfolio around is paying off. "I'm getting a fair bit of work, both advertising and editorial. At the moment I am not struggling as I used to, but it has been quite tough up to now." He uses his paid work to subsidise his own projects, which are more art photography oriented, such as his idiosyncratic portraits of his own family, and Wastelands – an AOP Bursary project to create images of waste sites.

Carol Sharp of Flowerphotos has been described as "Britain's best flower photographer". A self-described "complete digital convert", she attributes her success to her passion for her subject. Originally starting out shooting food still life, she had an outdoor area behind her studio so she kept photographing the plants, and this ultimately became her speciality.

Tim Hazael meanwhile moved to the

South of France four years ago after a long career as an advertising and design photographer. He now combines some advertising work with teaching photography in what he describes as "surroundings that are far more pleasant than the M25" – a luxury hotel in the Languedoc region. The beautiful light helps him bring out the best in students who are combining a holiday with a digital photography course which is tailored to their individual needs.

Tim echoes the idea that if you start off in a recession, you have nothing to lose and, by establishing yourself as a lean operation in hard times, you will be better able to prosper when good times come around again. "It's harder now than it was when I started out," he says. "However success is still possible for anybody who is good enough and determined enough to work to achieve their goals."

## Be motivated

Everybody I spoke to stressed the importance of motivation for a photographer at any stage of their career. Spencer Murphy summed it up by saying, "I enjoy every job. Tight advertising briefs are a challenge, and looser editorial work means I can be creative. It is very worthwhile to do that for a living." He has no career plan "set in stone," though he would like to do more gallery work as well as book projects.

Spencer is one of the 150 young photographers from over 30 countries worldwide currently being promoted by Young Photographers United. YPU focuses on supporting its photographers through exhibitions, websites, magazines, art projects and providing them with expertise, experience and knowledge through challenging projects with a multicultural approach: "The period between graduation and professional recognition is a time when many

young photographers struggle and even give up sometimes," says Spencer. "Not because they lack talent, but because it takes much more than that to succeed as a photographer." Carol Sharp's advice for younger photographers is this: "Find a subject you are passionate about, a subject you love. You will encounter hazards on the way, but the people who succeed are those who are not put off by difficulties. Success is 10% talent and 90% marketing."



## The business of photography



© WWW.FLOWERPHOTOS.COM

"Success is still possible for anyone determined enough to achieve their goals"



© TIM HAZAEL

**View from the AOP**

AOP's Executive Director of Business & Legal Affairs, Gwen Thomas, says that clients were becoming increasingly demanding, wanting more and more for their money. "Don't demean yourself by working for next to nothing," she advises rising photographers. "Don't undercut other photographers and hold onto your copyright." The AOP Career Talks, which are open to anyone, not just AOP members, are held on the last Wednesday of the month from 3 - 5pm in the AOP Gallery in London, and involve a professional photographer or an assistant offering invaluable advice and tips for newcomers to the industry. Gwen also recommends that photographers spread their income streams out by getting their photography into photo libraries in addition to maximising their own direct sales routes.



© MICHAEL PRESTON

**Useful links:**

Tim Hazael:

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

Tim Hazael's Photography courses:

[www.goholidayfrance.com](http://www.goholidayfrance.com)[www.flowerphotos.com](http://www.flowerphotos.com)[www.hub.the-aop.org](http://www.hub.the-aop.org)[www.ypu.org](http://www.ypu.org)[www.spencermurphy.co.uk](http://www.spencermurphy.co.uk)**Next month:**

Video – is it converging with still images and is a new market emerging for professional photographers?

● Julian Jackson is a writer and consultant to the photography industry. His latest eBook is *The Photobuyer's Handbook*, available from:

[www.julianjackson.co.uk](http://www.julianjackson.co.uk)