

No matter how slow the film,
Spirit always stands still long enough
for the photographer it has chosen.

– Minor White

Profit with Purpose

Making a living from doing what you love is something I've often thought existed only for the lucky. But after spending a couple of hours with Doug Beasley, it seems possible, with a little passion.

When I first stepped into Doug's studio home, the first thing that struck me was the aroma, like a wood fire mixed with cedar. The next thing that struck me was that this is how Minnesota would've looked if it had been settled by the Japanese. What I came to realize is that Doug has successfully combined what he loves, what feeds his soul, with how he lives and works. Doug has combined photography (yes, for money) with subjects and challenges he is interested in that drive him to explore and discover. He also has founded Vision Quest Photographic Arts Retreat Center in Northwestern Wisconsin where he is rewarded with the inspiration and artistic growth he brings out in his students.

What follows is the conversation I had with Doug about his work.

Suzann Beck: How did you discover your passion?

Doug Beasley: It was a process of discovery. Since I was a kid, I always wanted to look at things deeply. I liked going up to things and looking at all the details, getting closer and in depth. I didn't discover the camera as a tool for that until college. The camera was an excuse for me to act like a voyeur, a passport to get up close to things and capture the detail. I was searching for beauty—to capture it. But I don't believe that any more, it's presumptuous to believe that



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you can capture something on film. You're just recording how light strikes it in a particular moment of time that's why interpretation is necessary. Now, I search to interpret the essence of my subjects.

SB: How did combining your passion and making a living come about?

DB: I had two careers going on—commercial photography for advertising and fashion, and outside of that I had exhibitions, fine art and teaching. It was like I had two separate lives, making a living and pursuing my personal art. Initially, it served me well. One didn't affect the other. They were separate entities. Later, it became a conscious decision to bring them together.

SB: What sparked that decision?

DB: I wanted to bring my sensitivity as an artist into my work and how I made a living—and not have two compartments to my life.

SB: Most Americans want to make a ton of money at their jobs so they can do what they want in their free time.

DB: If I was highly successful and had given it all up to do what I loved, that would be a good story. But I wasn't making a ton of money. I was successful, but if I'm not going to make a great living or follow my passion completely, why not combine them? Why not change in the present, what am I waiting for? It wasn't a glamorous decision. I just didn't want to become a mediocre commercial photographer and a mediocre artist.

SB: What kind of struggles did you encounter?

DB: I ran a successful studio with employees and struggled then. I had ups and downs, so why not go through them following my passion? I also changed with having a daughter. I realized I didn't want to live life not following what my heart wants to do or regret not following my passion to play it safe.



SB: Did you have any failures along the way?

DB: All the time. What counts is how you deal with it. How you choose to look at things. A Chinese proverb says that crisis means opportunity. Failures are opportunities to change. I fail all the time and still do. When I read stories of successful photographers, I find it amazing and disheartening, because my life doesn't play out like that. We see our shortcomings,

but other people see our successes. It's up to us to learn and grow from failures.

SB: Was it worth it?

DB: Completely worth it. It's about living your life with purpose. There's no other way to live! I didn't want to live life waiting for the phone to ring, waiting for someone to tell me what to do next. Now, I'm free to do what I want and still pursue jobs that give me the way to do it. I still want the next call and the challenge I get from it, but now I can do what I want while I wait.

SB: How does your work feed your soul?

DB: It gives me the opportunity to investigate what I'm interested in. When something interests me, I find a photographic tie-in to investigate deeper.

SB: What inspired you to help others discover their passion in photography?

DB: I was teaching weekly classes and workshops and found I loved the format of workshops. People don't have to go back to their problems each week with a workshop and I get so much out of seeing students immersing themselves into their art. I feed off their excitement and enthusiasm as that side of them comes alive.

SB: What would your advice be to others struggling to find meaning in their work, or find work with meaning?

DB: Find meaning in your life first. Define what your values are and then live your values. Then, let your work follow your values. Decide what you believe in.

SB: What would you say to people who feel limited in their freedom to pursue their passion?

DB: Start small. A lot of people use their limitations as an excuse for not trying. Being an artist or photographer can mean living without a lot of security. You need to embrace that or decide how much security you need to live with. There's nothing wrong with that. Don't devalue that. Then, start with small steps and increments. Not everyone is comfortable with leaping. Freelancers tend to be risk takers. Realize if you are that or not. Everyone needs to find their own path. You can't take someone else's path and expect it to work for you. Find the path that is comfortable and challenging for you. Find that edge.

SB: In light of your experience, what would you do differently?

DB: Start with a big inheritance and work down from there. I don't know if I could do anything differently. I've made mistakes, but they've led to things better than would've happened in the first place. Sometimes when I think I've made all the mistakes I possibly could, I make a new one. I do think one of the biggest challenges is keeping financially solvent. Realize it is a business and treat it as such.

SB: In light of 9-11-01 what will you do differently now?

DB: I've done a lot of international travel previously, but the more I travel, the more I appreciate home, my garden. I don't want to stop traveling, but I appreciate home more than ever.

To see more of Doug's photography or check for upcoming workshops go to www.vqphoto.com.

Suzann Beck
suzann@beckhausdesign.com

