

Vermont photographers capture architectural beauty

By LEON THOMPSON

Ah, the freelancer's life: loose schedules, firm deadlines, eccentric bank balances.

"It's a roller coaster," said Gary Hall, a freelance architectural photographer with a home-based studio in Shelburne.

Vermont's four-season climate and natural beauty make it a haven for freelance photographers, and for the small pool of architectural photographers that live and work in Vermont, there is an added bonus: it's filled with great, diverse architecture, including resorts, upscale homes and historic institutions and barns.

So for the freelance architectural photographer, who typically works on location, many times outside Vermont, living in Vermont is like living in location.

"I have never looked back," said Carolyn Bates, of Carolyn Bates Photography, in Burlington. Bates has been a full-time photographer since 1973. "I love it here," she said, "and every time I drive away thinking Milan, New York, Hawaii, Sardinia, Paris, Newport, Chicago, San Francisco, Santa Fe, or San Diego will be a better place to live, I return and realize Vermont is just too good to ever leave. And after 41 years, I know my decision was the right one."

Architectural photography requires a special skill set and, in most cases, special equipment, for several reasons. First, the subject—a building or room—never moves, so scouting the site, sometimes days or weeks beforehand, is important, to gauge how light hits an area of a building, or all of it, during different times of day. Also, in most cases, architectural photographers work alongside architects, designers, builders, Realtors, writers and editors, for book and catalog work.

"The adventures are never-ending," said Bates.

For a clearer picture of how architectural photographers make their living in Vermont, let's see some snapshots of a few:



PANAMA ISLAND VILLA / GARY HALL PHOTOGRAPHY

Architectural photographer Gary Hall, of Shelburne, travels to exotic locations for work.

Jim Westphalen

Westphalen moved to Vermont from New York in 1996. He employs a full-time technical and production assistant, as well as two freelance grip assistants, at his Shelburne studio. He specializes in architecture and interiors but has other clients,

including luxury resorts and hotels, culinary magazines and catalogs.

"Some people know me as the architectural shooter, some as the foot shooter, and others as the lifestyle shooter," he said. "It keeps it interesting!"

Westphalen got his first camera at 17, and has been a professional photographer for more than 25 years. He entered architectural photography as a way to show how Vermont's physical structures were extensions of their natural surroundings.

Today, Westphalen's clients include architects, builders and publications. About 75 percent of his architectural work is in Vermont.

"Vermont has a very diverse array of architecture," he said. "I can be shooting a traditional post-and-beam one day and a contemporary cement-and-glass residence the next. Never dull."

Architectural photography also takes careful planning and cooperation among property owners, designers, and, if necessary, the prop stylists that

are utilized to ensure each detail in every room is perfect, Westphalen explained.

"Doing what I do is a team effort," he said.

Susan Teare

Teare, of Essex, has an art history degree, and got her first camera as a college graduation gift. When Teare's grandmother moved into a nursing home in 1995, Teare inherited her grandfather's camera, lenses and darkroom. He died in 1975.

Soon into her 15-year career, a friend of Teare's, a local builder, asked her to shoot a residential project.

"That's where I started," said Teare. "I still work for him today."

Ninety percent of Teare's clients are in Vermont, making it easier on her family's schedule. Teare's work is mainly in commercial and high-end residential properties. She also performs landscape design work and shoots for publishing companies.

"They all fit together, and require a similar approach," she said. "But, at the same time, each project is different."

Teare said Vermont is a good place for a freelancer to build a local base to take elsewhere. She likes stepping outside her comfort zone, to improve her skills, while building a good business network.

"It's always good for me to take a break, too," Teare said. "Sometimes, I need a day."

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