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Roger Hagadone

# SELLING IRREVERENCE

BY ABIGAIL RONCK

Glance at Roger Hagadone's work and you shortly start to believe that maybe there are days when he doesn't believe in gravity, that in his world there is no heaviness or weight, no inclination toward the solemn center. Where he lives, there is only noonday intensity, roads meandering into sidewalks where women walk in red fishnet stockings, priests have six-pack abs underneath their vestments and homecoming queens get run over by cars but nobody ever gets hurt. His world is conceptually rendered in photographic bleach because, even though it can be technically difficult to do, life just rocks a little more that way.

In a place where inviting, if but benignly deviant, facial expressions rule the roost, you begin to wonder about the look of the artist behind them. And if you search, you'll find him—the in-demand commercial and advertising photographer that he has become—back and forth between the coasts on both professional and personal assignments.

"For me New York is the place to be," Roger says. "Other than the sheer number of advertising agencies and magazines, the resources for the industry are hard to compare to other cities." He does, too, admire Los Angeles for its art scene. "LA seems to be the mother of pop surrealism, which I really love. I feel a synergy with the photography going on out there"—so much so in fact that he plans to open a second office on the West Coast in March, in addition

to his existing 2000-square-foot studio on 42nd Street in New York.

As much as Roger feels at home among the scape of pop and bling, though, his humble, soft-spoken voice and traditional artistic upbringing wouldn't have you know it. Raised in Kinderhook, NY, about 150 miles north of Manhattan, he grew up with artistry in his blood. "My real love was painting," he says. "I used oils and acrylics and did mostly abstracts." And yet, as experimentation often reveals, he eventually found the medium limiting. "That's how I rediscovered photography, which of course allows you to make any number of infinite pieces and variations," he says. With a grandfather and father who are artists as well, Roger returned to the camera they had given him at age 7 and "shot everything in sight."

At Purchase College in Westchester, NY, which he attended to study fine art with a concentration in photography, he found that, as a result of his background in painting, he preferred creating his own scenes rather than simply taking snapshots. "Very much a film guy," Roger loved the darkroom and spent entire nights there developing his work. Despite the normal hesitancy to switch over to digital, the boyish yearn for image-infinity clearly re-emerged in revelry in 2000 when he made the transition. "I didn't trust it completely so I continued to shoot film as well," he says, "until digital just started to blow film away." A digital



back for his Hasselblad and he was off and running again.

Throughout his university career, Roger held a number of internships with several photographers in New York City, one of whom was Annie Leibovitz. When I ask, in amazement, how he landed that job, I get a response, which I'm beginning to realize is probably classically reverential and unostentatious Roger: "I have no idea. I got an interview with her assistants and they made fun of me for how I was dressed—because I wore a tie and shirt." Something tells me the story may include a few more bragging rights and imaginative prowess, but we move on.

Singular in her ability to capture portraits and their environments, Roger says interning with Leibovitz drew him "more into commercial photography and shooting people." From there, whether traveling

the country to photograph Elvis "tribute artists" or producing a two-day shoot intended to capture a day in the life of Big Foot—"a secret fascination and childhood hero" of his—Roger's work has become a study of character and, from there, life.

"I shot a lot differently a few years ago," he admits, until teaming up with agent Doug Truppe. "A reinvention happened in 2006. I was mainly shooting portraits with a little bit of the humor that I do now. I found an agent who already really liked my work." With due perception, Doug asked Roger to take things a little further. "He asked me what I would love to shoot," Roger recounts. "I told him, even more humor, scenes with more production value. He was encouraging. He told me to shoot it. Within a year, we completed an entirely new portfolio and we were getting work from it."

What the field of advertising provides for Roger is a forum for avid and wild screenwriting with a camera. "One of my big things is conceptualizing. I like to figure out how to tell a story visually," he says. And, while Roger's newer images may be outwardly irreverent and robust, it's clear that he still values nuance and forms of subtlety when it comes to advertising. "I prefer images that have more than a quick 'get,'" he says. "Don't get me wrong, sometimes [a harder sell] works best for a shoot but if there is something in the image that you do not see immediately it adds to the strength of it."

Toward that end, visit Roger's website to see his studio series "White People," where you'll find a great mix of ruddy-skinned and rouged Caucasians, African Americans and Hispanics—all shot against a stark, white backdrop. The point? Perhaps that none of us are really white people. Or, how about his "Smokers" series, in which you won't find a single person smoking. This chronology of images confuses even me, so I am compelled to ask about the linear line between the portraits, about the tie between them. "It's their motivation," he says. "I told [my subjects] to pretend that there was a person next to them smoking a stinky cigar. I chose people that looked kind of quirky to begin with and photographed them with a similar background and lighting—but the motivation was all the same. I found it interesting to see what they would come up with, and usually it was these exaggerated, hilarious faces." Light an imaginary cigarette, it seems, and Roger found that you'll



# WHITE HOT WORLD

Even though Roger prefers to capture his subjects “correctly” in-camera, all of his imagery requires some level of post. He estimates that 85 percent of the work he does to any single image happens in Photoshop. Below, he details a sample of the process with his image “**White.**”



A recent image I shot titled “White” is something I have wanted to do for a while. Why? Because I really hate to shoot anything white. Everything blows out so quickly so it’s a true challenge. The idea sat in my notes for about a year. Once I decided that the focus would be an 18th century powdered white wig, everything fell into place. My first thought was to use a typical, beautiful model, but eventually that changed to an 8-year-old girl. The wig was an adult’s that I chose for its exaggerated size. Originally I had planned to place objects in it to tell a story. In the end, I didn’t and instead shot the same scene over and over again with changes of expression, props and wardrobe. I used six lights on this portrait. Using multiple points of light is important for the look that I try to achieve in post-processing.


I started with a fairly flat image and did all of the dirty work there, compositing, masking and retouching. Nearly every part of this image was altered in some way. First the background: I liked the pattern but it was too small and the color and brightness were not right. I shot the wall separately and enlarged it, took the saturation down 90% and added a curve to get the correct white. After masking the background in the photo I popped in the new wall and added a bit of shadow and blur. I felt that the wig did not have the impact that I was going for so I copied the layer, enlarged it to a size more to my liking and masked out the remaining non-wig bits. I then added more hair in places until it looked right. Next was the hairline. Because of the size of the wig it would not sit properly and allowed the model’s dark hair to show. I had to recreate the forehead and then sample a hairline from another photo, blend them together and use the Liquify tool to put everything in proper proportion. Next onto the skin. I removed blemishes and added a hue saturation layer, lowering the saturation on the model’s white powdered face. I added a mask, filled it with black and painted back the effect on the skin where I wanted it. At this point, with the image “corrected” but flat, I added a personalized image effect that I have saved as an action. My effect is really nothing fancy—the usual layer effects and blending modes but I use it on most all of my images. After it was applied, I saved and flattened the layers.



inspire anything from disgust to delight to downright comedy incarnate in the person beside you.

When it comes to his other projects, like shooting the Discovery Channel's Mike Rowe of *Dirty Jobs*, Roger uses a combination of a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III and a Hasselblad with a Phase One digital back. For the *Twilight* books cover series, one of which graces this month's *AC* cover, he shot with a Contax 645 with a Phase One back. At the time of writing, Roger's in Hollywood shooting his specialty—more character portraits. “We have a few shoots planned,” he says. “A hermit in the desert, a sexy polygamist lady, an Elvis in the Las Vegas boneyard. Also, we’re going to shoot geishas—something similar to ‘The White Shot’ but with color. I know red will be the overriding theme,” Roger wonders aloud.

And there's just something about the way he does. It's almost as if I can hear it—his white peroxide world still blinging bold, but changing color again.

To see more of Roger Hagadone's imagery, visit [www.rogerhagadone.com](http://www.rogerhagadone.com). 

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