



women  
create.

A PROFESSIONAL PATHWAY TO  
PHOTOGRAPHY

International lifestyle photographer **ELIZABETH MAXSON** specializes in natural light photography. When asked to teach photography and shoot a women's creative lifestyle retreat in Tuscany, Italy, the St. Louis resident found her 25 years of shooting experience was challenged by the variety of subjects presented to her. The textured-filled Tuscan environment was the patina-perfect backdrop for Elizabeth's passion to shoot lifestyle, texture, and still-life images. Her years of shooting for various lifestyle and culinary publications culminated deep in the heart of the Tuscan hills.

Instagram:  
@Elizabets\_Humble\_House

## DISCOVERING MY STYLE OF SHOOTING

The key to shooting successfully (for me, at least) was to shoot how I saw the world and to shoot what truly intrigued me. Interiors, texture, details, still-life, lifestyle, and food photography all shot in natural light are my passions—and thus my niche. In the beginning, I felt that in order to be a “real photographer,” I had to become an expert in all fields of shooting, proficient at using all types of equipment, and especially an expert at using artificial lighting. I spent time taking studio lighting courses and quickly discovered it wasn't a challenge that interested me. I finally stopped trying to learn how to shoot in all situations and styles and began to concentrate on what I do best and enjoy immensely: photographing lifestyle shots in natural light.

## TESTING MY SKILLS IN TUSCANY

After years of shooting professionally, I had a new photography challenge the summer of 2017. I was asked to be the photographer for the La Dolce Vita Retreat, a women's creative lifestyle retreat held in Tuscany, Italy, hosted by Carolyn Peeler. I was asked to teach photography classes. Jo Packham was attending and needed a photographer as well. Shooting for the lifestyle retreat was a big challenge, as nothing was in my control. First, there were people to shoot—a subject I rarely shoot. Secondly, I am a natural light photographer, but now was faced with the issues of night parties, low-lit rooms, dim kitchens, and the time of day completely out of my control. Finally, there were the technical challenges of no internet and being gone for almost a month.

After some research, I accepted the invitation, did my homework, upgraded my equipment, and prepared as best I could. I will come right out and say that knowing my camera settings extremely well was the best skill for this situation. For example, I quickly learned that shooting chefs while cooking is like shooting the Kentucky Derby.



Photo Credit: Sydney Baye  
sydneybaye.com



My intimate knowledge of equipment helped immensely with quick decisions in rapidly changing situations. On-the-spot decisions were made regarding how to let in enough light without sacrificing clarity. Italian chefs move very quickly from the counter, to the stove, to the sink, back again to the counter, all of which have different lighting, different angles, and very little room to capture it all. There is rarely a second chance to capture the cream being poured into a pan, whisked quickly, then poured into the ramekin and dashed into a hot oven with the door slamming shut. All done in a matter of seconds. Did I get it? Is he going to make another one just like it to get a better shot? My equipment knowledge was vital.



## TEACHING PHOTOGRAPHY

Teaching photography was a wonderful challenge, as I never had a reason to truly explain how I shoot. I taught the students how to see versus how to shoot. I taught the students how to see the world through a lens. Aside from some basic phone camera and DSLR techniques, my focus was to get my students to see the world differently. To see texture, light, shadows, patina, and then how to use the camera (or phone) settings to capture what they see. What good is knowing a camera's settings if you can't even see something in a special way?





## 7 STEPS DOWN THE PATHWAY TO BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

### ■ SHOOT, SHOOT, AND SHOOT MORE!

I can't stress this enough. I literally shoot an average of 10 to 20 images Every. Single. Day. The more you shoot, the better you become.

### ■ KNOW YOUR EQUIPMENT.

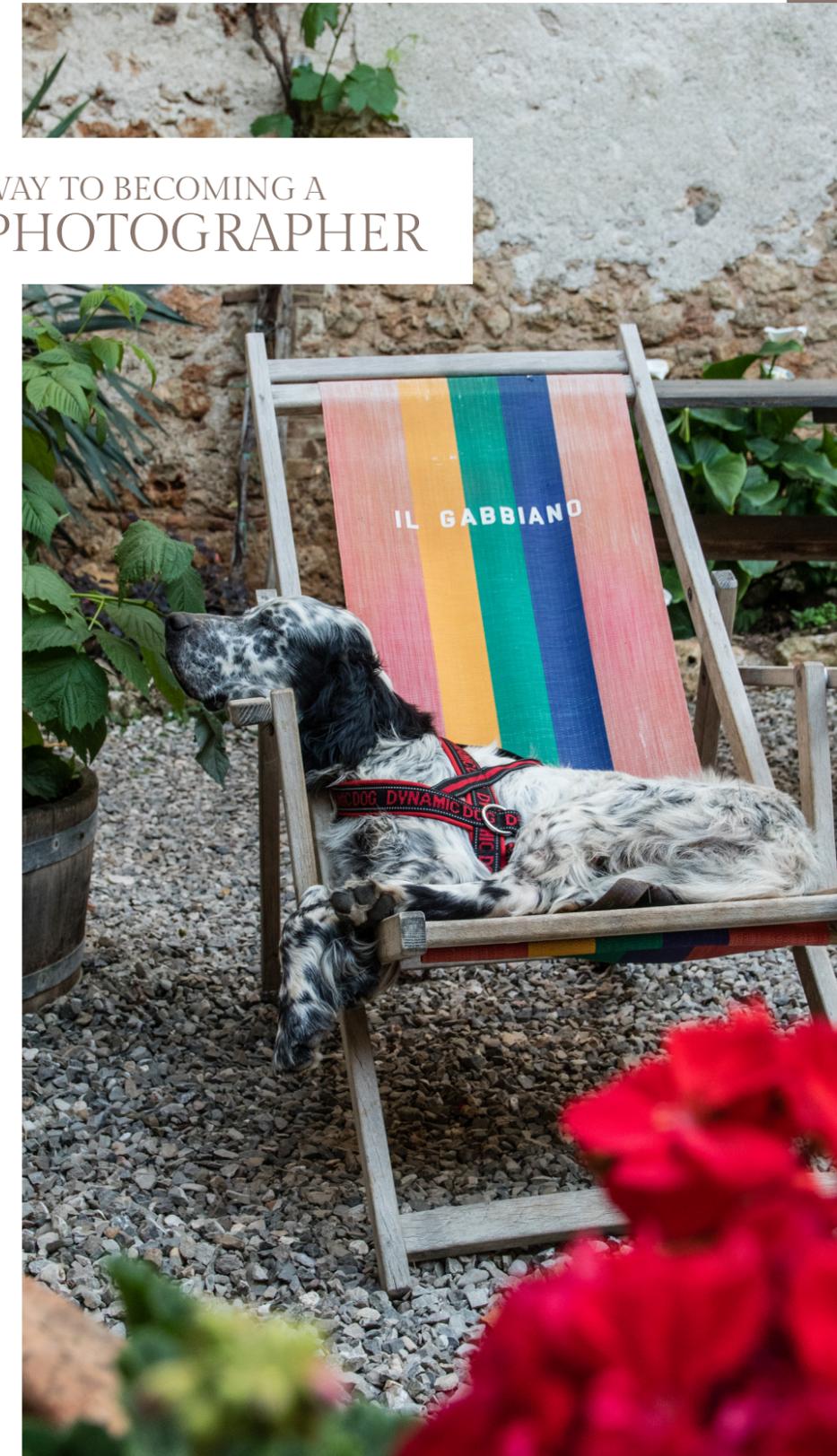
No matter how simple your camera may be, it still has settings. Shoot only on manual and learn your settings.

### ■ BE PATIENT.

It was 10 years after I created my own darkroom before I landed my first national feature. Take initiative and approach editors (or potential clients) with a very well-thought-out, unique idea. If you have text, styling, and great images of a unique idea, chances are very good that you will get picked up. Fill a void and editors will take notice. Most importantly, post only your best shots on social media. Save your niece's birthday party shots for private accounts. Clients and editors will go to your social media.

### ■ NEVER MISS A DEADLINE.

Give more than required, and be open to changes and criticism. Editors just want the best and you can learn from them. Offer ideas and know the format of the publication. If you have any questions, just ask.





■ DECIDE YOUR WORTH.

What to charge for your work? I have researched this one and never found a suitable answer. If you can find anyone in your area doing your type of work who is willing to share what they get paid, that is great starting point. This is easier for wedding and portrait photographers, as their pricing is usually listed on a website. But with publishers, fees vary greatly. Publications have a set budget and will tell you what they can pay. Either you are OK with it or not. If not, simply counter their offer and see what happens.

■ HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF HOW YOUR IMAGES WILL BE USED.

I have a very simple image-use agreement where I maintain ownership of all my images. I learned the hard way that without a proper usage agreement, others can take advantage and use images from one assignment to generate income from a completely new assignment and not pay the photographer for the second publication. Understand how your images are being used once you hand them over to a client.

■ IF YOU LOVE WHAT YOU DO, YOUR JOB NEVER SEEMS LIKE WORK.

It's a passion. I am very blessed by God to have been given such a passion for photography. I continue to grow and evolve with my photography skills and feel very blessed to have outlets in which to share my passion with others. I am eternally grateful to Jo Packham, who has given me numerous opportunities, as well as life experiences that not only showcase my photography but have also blessed my life immensely.

May your passion for photography grow and evolve as you develop your own unique way of viewing the world through your lens.



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