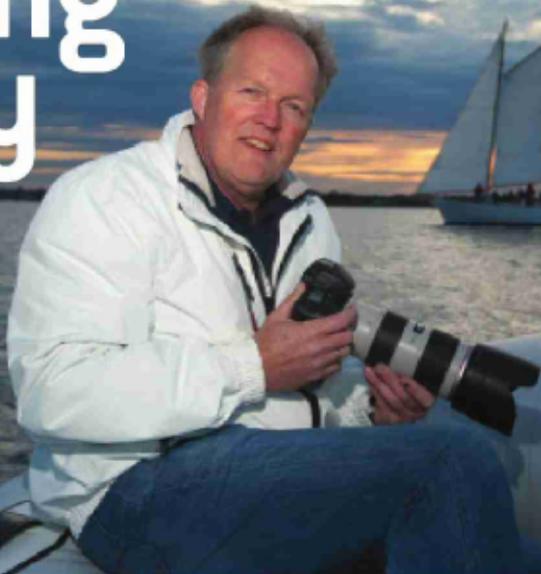


Sailing Away

Plotting a new course in a stormy economy



Who are your clients?

Up until about two-and-a-half years ago, 90 percent of what I did was commercial work—advertising in the marine industry for boat builders, sail makers, anything to do with boat building. I did very little editorial work, because the money there is one-fifth the day rate of a commercial job. But the economic crash changed this.

How did that affect you?

My bread and butter was shooting all the new models of boats, and since no one is buying these anymore, about 60 percent of that work evaporated. I've been doing a lot of stock work, though that's dried up a lot—I'm doing about 10 percent of what I used to do for the stock agency Corbis three years ago. The real work that saved me in this economy was starting to shoot for a shipping company that transports oil rigs around the world, which is currently my main work.

What are sailing shoots like?

Typically, these are of a new 40-foot sailboat for a boat-building company's brochures and ads. I'll go to where the boat is located—generally on the East Coast. I prefer shoots here on Rhode Island, because I know the bay, the breeze, the angles of the light, and my chase boat and helicopter are here. We set off in the chase boat around 5:30 p.m. to get the nice late light, before the breeze dies and clouds come up in the evening. The sailboat takes off also with good-looking people onboard who can handle the various angles with each sail up. Shoots take one or two days: on the second day, I might shoot interiors onboard at the dock in the evening, using a wide-angle lens.

How does your work for the shipping company differ?

These companies need to show future clients what they do, so I shoot the moving of oil rigs—or other monster loads they have—

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and off their ships around the globe. I'll go to all the meetings and briefings to learn and understand what to capture, then I'll make a 5- to 8-minute movie of the complete operation, plus a set of stills. I'm usually on location for 7 to 10 days. I use five cameras: one for time-lapse, two regular still cameras, and Canon XF300 and POV V10 video cameras. Moves can take days due to load-size, so time-lapse is crucial.

How big is your team?

I'll usually use one assistant to carry the gear, move equipment around, help set up lights for interior photos, and check and operate time-lapse cameras. They also get models and boats ready for the next scene. I'll do a shoot on my own if it's simple and isn't gear-intensive, or if I don't have the budget for a second set of expenses.

What gear do you use for stills?

I use two Canon cameras: an EOS-1DS Mark III and 5D Mark II.

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The longest lens I use is a Canon 500mm f/4L; and I use a 300mm f/2.8, 70–200mm f/2.8, 24–70mm, and 16–35mm wide-angle zoom. I work handheld for exterior shots, in natural light. For interiors I use a Manfrotto tripod with a few hot lights and long exposures; I rarely use flash. I generally edit in Lightroom, making very small adjustments—tweaking the highlights and shadows, or adjusting the color balance.

Any advice for shooting at sea?

When you're working on the water, you have to deal with the

boat's continuous motion and the spray. Shooting in a very bumpy, wet environment while protecting the gear is always a challenge. Use a fast shutter speed, and keep the front element clean and salt-free.

How do you do that?

My cameras deal with moisture quite well, so I'll continually wipe the front element clean of fine salt spray with an old cloth diaper or the kind of soft face cloth found in hotels. At the end of the day I wipe down gear with a small wet towel and then dry it off with a large towel. While on the boat and not shooting, I keep the gear in deck-mounted coolers to keep it dry.

Do you use other protective gear?

If I need to jump in the water to shoot the action from up close, I'll mount an Aquatech waterproof housing on the Canon 1DS. Working in salt spray or driving rain, I use Aquatech's rain covers. For the Canon XF300 camcorder I use the EWA Marine waterproof bag. For longer rides ashore or in a small tender for those hairy landings through the surf, to keep them dry and safe, the cameras are in a cooler or LowePro DryZone bags. DryZone bags are great when it's rough and very wet—100% waterproof, and they float!

How did you get started in sailing photography to begin with?

I used to race professionally on large sailboats, and I'd bring a camera to capture interesting moments. In 1981, preparing for an around-the-world race, I met a few guys from *Sail* magazine; after I showed them my photos, they asked me to shoot exclusively for the next around-the-world race. The rest was reading and practice. Getting the right weather is a challenge; but working for myself makes it rewarding work.

—Interview by Kathleen Davis