



# Photographing honestly



**Talisman Brolin**  
*Commercial and editorial photographer*

I love photographing real people as honestly as possible. My priority is to make my subjects feel comfortable and confident. The people I photograph often feel empowered after the shoot and tell me how surprised they are to have had so much fun. All of this is part of my approach to photography,”

says Talisman Brolin, a New York City-based photographer, “Both my clients and subjects pick up on my genuine enthusiasm and love of connecting with people. I want my work to be accessible and draw people in; to have my audience sense something familiar in my photographs.”



While chatting with *Asian Photography*, Talisman shared that she comes from a fantastically eccentric, creative and supportive family who dragged her all over the world growing up. "When I got a Nikon FM2 at 16, I was in heaven. With a camera in my hands, people let me into their worlds and then forgot about me. I loved the new freedom and I continued shooting throughout college," says Talisman.

She studied cultural anthropology at Brown University which gave her additional insight into the beauty of individuality and the commonalities they all share. She started thinking about how her photography could connect people, plus her love for travel. During her summers, she shot for local NYC newspapers and interned with photographers like Bruce Davidson and Mark Abrahams.





Eventually, she started shooting for the *New York Daily News* and *The New York Times*. “I was thrilled. I got to do something different every day, learned to adapt to challenging situations and find the fascinating in the mundane, all the while working under a deadline. From there I gained the confidence I needed to foster my own style of photography and create a successful business doing what I love,” says Talisman.

During the conversation, she shared that she has not only worked very hard, but also has been incredibly lucky. “Doors have opened up to me at the right times, mostly when I just focused on what I loved and stopped worrying,” says Talisman, “My newspaper hustle landed me quite a few of my current clients (Rockwell Group, The New York Botanical Garden, Time Warner



Cable). You never know who you will meet.”

Talisman’s focus is on people photography. She shows to be comfortable both working alone with minimal equipment in an unknown environment and collaborating with a team to create a specific vision. She has taken these skills and applied them to her portraiture. Most of her photography is on location and her clients value her ability to connect with her subjects and put them at ease. They also appreciate her flexibility and enthusiasm.

She comes from a background in photojournalism and currently shoots for the *New York Times*. “My bread and butter comes from marketing and promotional shoots for clients like: Time Warner Cable and The New York Botanical Garden. But my current focus is portraiture,” says Talisman. Her works have been published in *O: The Oprah Magazine*, *Metropolis*, *Interior Design*, *Time* and *Departures*.

“My work flow is perfect for me right now. I am granted intimate access to different people and situations every day,” says Talisman, “Photojournalism keeps me sharp while working under tight deadlines. I have the freedom to travel and work on personal projects, and most importantly, I am being hired because of my style of shooting.”

When asked about basic challenges as a photographer/photojournalist, she replies, “Shooting is the easy part, the business aspect is another story. It would be fantastic to photograph all day and never have to negotiate contracts or licensing fees but that won’t help me grow my business. I understand all that is going on within my business, but I hire professionals to handle specific aspects of my business (accounting, legal, etc.) instead of doing it myself. I would prefer to spend money on a professional and spend my time focusing on what I do best.”

According to Talisman, the key to success is to figure out what you enjoy about photography (engaging with people, being alone, shooting on location, working with a team,









etc.) and then focus and grow in that direction. You will be the best at what you are passionate about. Next, shoot a ton and figure out your own style. If you are trying to make a name for yourself you will need to figure out what sets you apart from other photographers. "I've learned that this makes it easier for editors and creative directors to think of you for specific assignments," says Talisman, "This can be frustrating at first, especially because your style will naturally grow and change, but you just have to embrace it. Just be honest about what type of shooting makes you happy and go from there."

Talking about her photographic assignments, Talisman says, "Assignments can range from a full production (scouting, hair, make-up, props/wardrobe, lighting, etc.) to a very low-key shoot with just me, the subject and a single, portable light source. I am

focusing more on my portraiture now which involves a very natural look."

She photographs her subjects in their homes, offices, wherever they have a connection to the space. She works on location and usually with minimal lighting equipment. She helps them feel

comfortable and confident and then starts shooting. "Anyone can be a good subject as long as a connection can be made," says Talisman, "I try not to manipulate my subjects too much. People look the most natural when they are not self-conscious and can relax in their own bodies. Often

## SOME TIPS

▶ If you are shooting a ton, it might feel like your portfolio is never quite up to date and ready to show. Get over it, edit down to your strongest shots and get them out there!

▶ If you are serious about becoming a professional photographer you need a great website (a simple design will showcase your work best), professional business cards on hand at all times and you can't be afraid to network. Also try and think of one sentence that best describes what you do and who you are as a photographer. People have such short attention spans these days, you have to figure out how to make a strong first impression."

I'll scout a space, prepare my lighting and then ask them to join me. As we start chatting they usually settle into a natural pose and then I will work from there."

Talisman uses Canon: 5d MK II, 1ds MKIII. Currently, her favourite lens is the 35mm f1.4, and mainly 24-70mm f2.8 lens for regular use.

Speaking about her achievements, Talisman says, "I still am and probably will always be striving for 'the big break.' That being said I am grateful to have my work recognised in the 2009 PDN Photo Annual and the 2009 International Photography Awards."

Talisman takes inspiration from and admires the works of Elliott Erwitt, Bruce Davidson and Henri Cartier-Bresson.

To our readers of *Asian Photography*, she shares, "When I first started using lighting equipment, my enthusiasm definitely got the best of me. I set up every light I had at the same time and got totally overwhelmed. Later, I learned to master a single light source before building on it. It's all about mastering the basics first."

For young aspiring photographers, Talisman advises, "Start small, think long-term goals. If you are trying to break into the world of photojournalism start by shooting for small, local papers. You might not



get paid a whole lot, but hopefully you will gain access to some interesting situations, get some experience, and build your portfolio. Once you are confident about your work, do a tight edit, target some medium- sized papers and start meeting with editors."

To know more about Talisman Brolin or connect with her, please log on to [www.TalismanPHOTO.com](http://www.TalismanPHOTO.com) and [www.TalismanPHOTO.blogspot.com](http://www.TalismanPHOTO.blogspot.com)

— Sameen Khan