



turns the limelight to every family he shoots.

Having established studios in the Inland Empire (California), and Las Vegas, Bonazza takes on every client shoot with the goal of creating the idyllic image of that family, that infant or that child. To accomplish this, he spends a great deal of time making sure that he understands the family, insisting that they meet with him prior to the portrait session. That way he knows how they look, how they interact and has insight into their relationships. "I know exactly what I want to do before the photograph. I know my end result with that family, how they are going to look," Bonazza explains. "I know what I want to do because I already know the mom, I know the kids, I know the father. I know

how they look—where her bangs are, how she wears her hair—that will determine where I put mom and the kids. How tall is the father, does he have a scar or big ears? I know all of that because I consult with



them before. I'm not doing a family photo without a photo consultation."

From the client's perspective, Bonazza is charming, dedicated and personally interested in them. His goal is to reveal them

in the best possible light and to create a family portrait that will be proudly displayed for years to come. From Bonazza's perspective, consulting is a necessary step in creating a soulful image that truthfully displays the best moment of that family's dynamic, and it is this level of quality that he believes all photographers should employ. He is a craftsman photographer that is still able to find clientele willing to pay for the quality of his work, despite the economic downturn that has had a negative impact industry-wide.

Once Bonazza finds his clients, it is not surprising that they keep coming back. Starting with the consultation, he ensures a comfort level with every client, from a three-month-old infant to a 90-year-old great-grandmother.

With his youngest clients, Bonazza understands that the interaction that makes the greatest photograph isn't with him—it's between the baby and its mother. "Mom is always next to the lens. I make her relate to

# family focus

by amanda quintenz-fiedler

cesare bonazza

When you first see the photographs of Cesare Bonazza, you have a sense that the families pictured are sharing a moment of love, faith and complete adoration. There is a tangible feeling that the photographer has captured an earnest moment, a family bond that appreciates the quirks and individuality of every member photographed. It is a powerful and genuine connection,

which reflects the keen eye, comfortable environment and personable relationship that Bonazza creates with all his clients. He approaches his images and the photography industry in much the same way, valuing the importance of sincerity, mastery and communication in all his pursuits.

Bonazza understands how to focus on a subject in the spotlight. Having been a

celebrity photographer for many years, and still maintaining close personal relationships with individuals like Pierce Brosnan and Jane Seymour, it is no wonder that he can approach his family and child photography with the same keen awareness, patience and personal touch that he has applied to celebrities. He takes that same sense of focus on the subject and





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that child, that's how I get the expression. My eyes are glued to the viewfinder. I'm on the trigger. I have to capture that moment," says Bonazza. "I let mom relate to the baby. They see mom, and I'm secondary." In a comfortable studio environment, natural relationships emerge. The reason his images have a realistic feel is that the expressions on the faces of his subjects are genuine.

With young children, the logic stays the same. The environment has to be comfortable for the children, and this, again, is where the consultation is paramount. Yet unlike a traditional business meeting, Bonazza takes the opportunity of the consultation to invite the mom and kids to his homey studio, where he or his wife will read them a story. They have healthy snacks around, as well as books, soft music and a place where mom can sit beside him to talk, allowing the children to associate him and their mother as friends. They begin to identify him as a safe person to be around. When they come back for the photo session, they know Bonazza, they know the space, and there is no tension.

The other tricks he has learned over time are a mix of common sense and experience: "Never say 'smile,'" he says earnestly.

"Don't say 'cheese' and don't say 'smile.' If I tell you on command to smile, it's unnatural. If I tell you 'I love you,' look at the difference. That's how you get great expressions. It's always about emotions. It's never about giving commands."

Bonazza works with each of his subjects, making the photo about everyone and their interactions. He memorizes the names of everyone in the family, and when he identifies a single individual that may look uncomfortable or unfocused, he jokes with them directly. They loosen up, and everyone else can laugh along, generating a warm and earnest image. Oftentimes, his business takes him on location, where the comfort level of his clients is easier to attain. He searches out locations that are familiar and meaningful to the families he photographs. In special locations, a family will be more at home in the space and more likely to relax and interact in a natural way. Seeking out those places that are important to a family helps to reveal their true, loving dynamic. Bonazza's personal engagement with his clients imbues his portraits with a delicate quality that sets his photography apart.

Still, to stay afloat in this challenging market, Bonazza has to know where his

clients are. He understands that he must promote himself in places where potential clients can see the quality of his work and his name. He stays away from marketing in the phone book or places where clients merely shop around for the lowest price. But simply finding your client is not the only obstacle. "There are victories and there are defeats in any type of business," he admits. "Four of my favorite baby stores have closed down. They have disappeared because of the economy, and they were selling expensive clothes. They were a magnet for my children's photography. So now where do I go to address that same client to continue to be successful?" Bonazza understands that he has to stay diversified with many different streams of marketing. It is something that he thinks other photographers, especially young photographers just starting out, have trouble doing. He believes in sharing information, passing along knowledge and mentoring promising talents in order to help raise the bar across the industry so that more photographers are providing the quality that commands the prices that Bonazza requires.

With that in mind, he has started offering workshops focusing on the basics of great photography, including hands-on

interaction with a real family. Bonazza works with his students on lighting, posing and eliciting the kinds of expressions that make family photography great. The workshops are intended to help photographers that already have a technical baseline, but are lacking some of the refinement he has honed over the years. Initially, he started exploring this opportunity by communicating with photographers who would call him up, asking how he accomplished certain images. He understood right away that these photographers were good, but that something was missing. His first few students were photographers that he mentored one-on-one when he saw they had an interest in learning. After a few of these mentorships he realized that he could be helpful to a greater number of photographers by establishing an intensive group workshop. "All of these photographers who wish to do better—that is who I am trying to help," he explains.

He is currently offering a workshop in Las Vegas in October and ironing out the details for seminars in Tahiti and St. Thomas. He has set up contacts through his Web site and limits entries to 20 people per workshop to ensure that he has as much individual attention as possible to share with the photographers that are coming to learn.

His workshops cover all elements of family portraiture. "It's not only taking the photo. It's knowing how to group families or how to make them relaxed. This is what I'm trying to show photographers, it's not only, 'Get the camera and go shoot them.' I don't shoot people and I don't hang people. I create photographs and display images." Bonazza feels strongly about working with emerging photographers because he learned from others much the same way when he was beginning.

He encourages photographers to go out and see other photographers, to work with the people that inspire them and to learn from whomever they can. He freely admits that it was studying photographers such as Don Blair, Monte Zucker and Ken Whitmire—who also have a philosophy of sharing their methods and practices—that inspired him to pursue new and unique approaches. He believes that all photographers need to focus on defining their work with lighting, expression, and posing, and elevate the level of quality across the industry. If every photographer has bet-

ter quality and asks similar prices, in the long run, everyone would be better off. The clients would choose photographers based on their personalities and individual touches. This is an especially frustrating issue for Bonazza: "Because someone has the same camera, they think they can do what we can do. How do we tell a client who we are? I think through display, being an artist, having consultations, being very friendly and showing them that we are different through our work."

In the end, Bonazza continues to thrive because he has differentiated himself as an engaging, hard-working, and fun photographer capable of creating an image expressing the true, natural interaction of children and families. His desire to share his knowledge with burgeoning photographers expresses his overall commitment to his art as well as confidence in his approach and style. Once he makes a personal connection with his clients, they will continue to come back to him, year after year, from the wedding to the firstborn, and through to the final family photo with all the college-bound children in one place. His commitment to becoming a part of the

lives of his clients ensures one thing: He will be their photographer for life.

To see more of Cesare Bonazza's work, visit his Web site: [www.cesarebonazza.com](http://www.cesarebonazza.com).

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