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Photography Projects with Street Photographer Valérie Jardin

This week I welcome back an old friend of the show, Valérie Jardin, to discuss the importance of personal projects for the working photographer, not shooting for the likes, and finding your own voice, the importance of consistency in a body of work, and why every visual artist should write.

About Valérie Jardin

Valérie Jardin is a French photographer, currently residing in the United States. She is self-taught and worked for several years as a commercial photographer. Today, Valérie is known internationally through her workshops. When she is not teaching others the art of street photography and visual storytelling, Valérie is a prolific author and public speaker. She is also an official X-Photographer for Fujifilm USA. She lives and breathes in pixels.



Martin: It's been eight years.

Valérie: Okay. It's way overdue.

Martin: Yeah. It was nine years since we first talked and eight years ago you jumped in on, I think, it was like the 400th episode party or something.

Valérie: Oh, yes. I remember that. Now, you're at what, episode 2000?

Martin: No. Well, I was going to say, I wish. I've slowed down a little. What I'm doing now is, I'm trying to do three episodes per month. This will be released at the end of January 2022, and it's going to be episode 768.

Valérie: Wow. That's crazy.

Martin: I was thinking the other day. If I'd have had a child on the day I started this podcast, it'd be in high school now. I'm like, "What's that all about?"

Valérie: That's crazy. I remember when I said, "Oh, Martin, I'm thinking of starting a podcast," and you're like, "Are you crazy? Don't do it. You already have an audience. Don't do it."

Martin: It was lovely to hear from you, and you told me that you'd stopped

doing your podcast. Tell us a little bit about that because your podcast was popular, I know that you could have kept going. But what happened? What was the reason for stopping and everything?

Valérie: Well, I had two podcasts. I started the podcast, Street Focus, with the TWiP Network over eight years ago, and then I did that for about three years. And then, I left and I started right away, Hit The Streets With Valerie Jardin, which was very popular. For several years, it was weekly. I run at least 12 workshops a year on a normal year, and they're all international. The weekly podcast was getting really crazy. Having enough episodes so that I could actually get on the plane and not have to worry about releasing episodes and having- so that was difficult. About a year ago, I switched it to every other week, which ease things off, right at the beginning of the pandemic. And then during the pandemic, everything went online. I still had the podcast, but then I was doing a lot of presentations for online conferences and photo society and everything, and teaching some online classes. Everything was online. I'm a people person. I'm a face-to-face person. So, it felt like the podcast was yet another online thing. It was like too many things.

When I restarted the workshops last summer after a year and a half of not running anything. I just felt like, "Nope, I can't do this anymore." I remember when I started the podcast and we had talked, and you had said, "That's a huge commitment." I said, "Yeah, I know," and you had told me, "But you already have an audience, your workshops are selling. Why would you want to start the podcast now? I had said, "I'm doing it for fun, and it will never be one of the top things I do. It will be kind of a side thing that I do for fun." I had sworn to myself that day that I would stop doing it if it became a burden, and it became a burden. It was like, "Oh, no, I have to record another episode." I didn't need that extra stress in my life. So, I stopped. Also, I'm excited because now that I

stopped producing my own show, I have more time to be the guest on other people's podcasts, and I actually love this.

Martin: Yeah. It's a lot easier, and you don't have to edit anything, you don't have to do anything-[crosstalk]

Valérie: I had someone do that for me. I hired a sound editor. Podcasting is costly no matter what, whether you do it yourself-

Martin: You hire people to-

Valérie: Yeah, but if you do it yourself, time is money. I hired people. It just all added up to being just one too many things on my plate. I miss it once in a while. It's kind of funny, now that I stopped, the first few weeks after I made the announcement because it was very popular. It was probably on its all-time high and with an audience and over 150 countries, and then I started getting all those emails from people that I had never heard of that said, "Why did you stop? I loved it." I was like, "Where were all those people when I was running it?" You kind of feel invisible when you're podcasting. And then when I stopped, then all those people were missing it. It made me feel good because I think it's a good thing to stop on a high note versus stopping because you have to because the audience is gone. So, it felt good to actually stop it on a high note.

Martin: That's great. I remember the conversation when I said, "Don't do it." I know what a commitment it is. I was saying that my point of view is if you're going to do it, you've got to keep doing it, and you've got to really make it into something. But you did the right thing in making the decision to stop if you no longer enjoy doing it. I don't do anything that I don't enjoy.

Valérie: Well, same with me.

Martin: I turn work down all the time because it's either not enough money or it's not something that I know I can hit out of the park. I just wanted it to be

that. Really even now, I get you completely. I sometimes feel, especially as we were talking briefly before I hit the record button, about this development work that I'm doing. I am just not good at time management when I'm doing development work. But with everything else I do, I'm pretty good at managing the on-off of the work and not work. I'm pretty good at it. But I'm no Tim Ferriss. I am terrible. I overwork constantly and it drives my wife crazy. So, I should be taking it a little bit easier, but I—

Valérie: That's very you though, you work under pressure.

Martin: I still enjoy doing the podcast. Things have changed slightly. I'm not sure if you've been keeping up with it, but because my business model was always, "Do the podcast, use it as a marketing vehicle." Initially, it was just exactly the same as you started it for fun because I wanted to put something out there. Podcasts were new, I was the third photography podcast in iTunes. It was great, and it still is. It turned into a business, and the business model was rich people, and a percentage will end up in a bus or a car with me in some wonderful country. The money that I make from the tools helps to keep the wheels on the wagon, and the tools had to stop two years ago. I'm like, "Okay, now I'm in a little bit of a mess." I'm frantically trying to release software products and things that I know will sell. But it means that I had to turn recently to Patreon. And now we've got 26 or so patrons, that are helping to keep the wheels on the wagon.

Valérie: It's good.

Martin: Hopefully we'll keep getting more. There were already 20 or so people that had signed up for what I call the MVP Pro Program. We've got like 50 people or so that are helping to support the show. It'd be nice to get more. But at the end of the day, I promised that the podcast itself would be free, and I'm keeping it free. It's just that the text is now locked unless you're a patron, and

there's a whole bunch of other things like a forum that I've started, it's locked to anyone that's not a patron. But it's working, and it's still a lot of fun. So, here we are.

Valérie: Yeah, it is fun. It's the interaction with photographers from around the world, so many people that I would have never met, so many people that I got started in the industry even for the podcast, it was so gratifying. I loved every minute of it, but it's a lot of giving.

Martin: It is a lot of giving. In some ways, it's not a lot of getting back.

Valérie: That's right. Yeah.

Martin: But it's fun. We're going to talk about a number of things today. We've got a little bullet list. You sent me some topics that you thought you'd like to talk about, and I instantly thought, "Oh, yeah, well, I want to talk about all of those."

Valérie: [crosstalk] -we could be here for three hours.

Martin: I'll try not to keep you for more than an hour. But one of the bullet points was the same as the topic— One of the topics that I've just done. I didn't finish something I mentioned earlier about. I'm doing it three times a month now. Another reason for the three times a month thing is, because I'm doing one question time with my patrons, and the general audience doesn't get to hear this. One of the topics of this month's Patreon Question Time was working on a photography project. One of the first things that you had in your bullet list was the importance of personal projects for the working photographer. I want to jump in and just talk about some of these bullet points a little bit. I've got my own views, could you tell me a little bit about what you were thinking when you wrote this first bullet point?

Valérie: Well, I find that a lot of photographers once — this is mostly for pro photographers, forget to work on personal projects. And then,

photography just becomes another job. I find that the only you'll really be able to have your own voice and give your own voice in photography is when you're working for yourself. Obviously, when you work for a client, yes, it's your vision and the client trusts you with that, but the client also has requests and they want things done a certain way. So, you always have to compromise. I find that it's always on your personal project, no matter what, the personal projects that you're going to shine the most. It's also such a way to grow too, because you can start projects in areas that you're not so familiar with or in areas that you're truly passionate about, and that will feed your creative soul, whereas client work may not.

I don't work for clients anymore. I haven't worked for a client in 10 years because I teach, and I only shoot for myself, which I find is the best thing in the world. I don't have to please anyone else but me. That's exactly what the personal project does. I shoot for myself, but I always work on different projects. I always have short-term projects, long-term projects, and that also is a way to get you out there, because sometimes, especially when the weather's bad, it's cold, it's like, "Ugh, I don't really feel like going out with my camera. I don't have friends to go out with. Everybody's busy." So, it's always easy to find excuses. Having several projects, you can always say, "Oh, yeah, today I'm going to go and work on this or that. I'm going to work on motion in photography, practice panning, or I'm going to work on my hand series," that's another one on my project, you can always fall back on one of those projects and it gets you out the door. The only way you will become a better photographer is by spending time with your camera.

Martin: You've just covered probably the majority of what I had in my notes and when I started speaking. Multiple projects at the same time don't necessarily need to be. I quoted a few people, and one of them was Sebastião Salgado. He is a Brazilian photographer.

Valérie: I met him, actually.

Martin: Oh, wow. That is amazing.

Valérie: A year or so ago. Yeah.

Martin: When he did his Workers project or his Genesis project, he'll go off and he'll do things for years at a time. A lot of people can't do that. Michael Kenna will go somewhere for a few weeks and come back with a good bunch of work to add to a project. I think a lot of people do it that way. Also, what you just said, you're going to have your hands project, having lots of different projects in mind all the time, you used the word 'fallback'. You'll just go in and do something on a certain project, feed a project for a while and then go back to something else. That is a flexible way of working on projects that I've personally found really, really useful, and stress relieving in many ways.

Valérie: Absolutely. It's very therapeutic. The projects don't have to be far away. That's the thing. I have a project that's entirely in my home. You have to work with what you have. Yes, I much prefer to be photographing the streets of Paris, but I can't do that every week. I'm stuck in a very cold climate for months at a time, especially during the pandemic. Usually, I travel a lot more in the winter, but, hey, it was minus 39 this morning when I got up. It's warming up to almost the freezing mark tomorrow. So, we're really excited. There's no one on the streets. There were not a lot of people on the streets during the past winter in the pandemic, and now this winter, it's pretty much the same thing. Or, you are photographing people wearing masks, and that kind of got old quickly. So, you want to back to normal.

Last winter, the first winter of the pandemic, I started hitting the ice, and I live in a state with over 10,000 lakes and the ice is so thick, you can literally drive semi-trucks on them. I started just exploring the lakes and life on the lake. That's one of my projects called "On Ice." I started that project last winter. That was probably my favorite winter in

Minnesota, because I was out in the cold and snow, on the ice every moment I could, every weekend for sure. It became a family project because, “Oh, which lake are we going to have a picnic on this weekend?” We really spent the winter outdoors in a really cold climate.

I discovered so many activities. After living here for so many years, things that I never thought people would do on ice and I had so much fun. I’m continuing it this year. It’s not quite as fun the second year because I feel I’ve done it all. But then on January 1st, as I was just thinking, “Oh, should I continue the On Ice project or expand it to more anything on snow?”, I ran into a tennis match on ice and people were actually on skates playing tennis. I said, “Well, I didn’t see that last winter.” So, I photographed that, so I’m adding to the series. It’s all for fun. But it really saved my —

Martin: Sanity.

Valérie: It saved me. Oh, absolutely, because normally, I travel, I teach in the winter, I start the year in January in Paris, and last January and this January, I’m here. It really kept me sane. You know how it is. The minute you’re with your camera, you forget everything else around you, and you’re in the zone and things look better.

Martin: Yeah. You sent me a bunch of images and I see some of the On-Ice ones. Is this the one with the three people in the cutout square? This is crazy stuff. I love it.

Valérie: Ice swimming. They were out today at 30 below. They spent about 15 minutes in the water. Well, granted the water must feel pretty warm. But, yeah, they—

Martin: Compared to -minus 39 or whatever.

Valérie: In the air, yeah. They ice swim. They keep that square, they have to break the ice every time they go there. They have to go every day to break the

ice. Otherwise, it would be unbreakable because the ice is so thick. That’s some of the people I met during my On Ice adventures. I met people playing ice Jenga. You know with a giant Jenga set with blocks?

Martin: Yeah.

Valérie: I met, of course, ice fishers, ice skaters, those are the normal things you see on ice. But ice dancers, I went last winter to a party on ice, where the DJ was on a little island. We were all dancing on the lake. I have one of those photos in the bunch too.

Martin: There’s a late lady with two fans and a veil.

Valérie: Yeah, she’s dancing on ice.

Martin: Thanks for sending these.

Valérie: It doesn’t have to be fancy. It doesn’t have to cost money, you don’t have to travel. Do something that’s close by, and something that you’re passionate about. I find that if you’re passionate about dogs, well, then go find some dog walkers or go do a project about dogs. Really, if you can combine one or two passions with a passion for photography, for sure, with another passion of yours, not that I’m very passionate about ice. I was forced into it. But I couldn’t live in a warm climate, trust me. But if you’re passionate about something else like football or dogs or horses, then combine the two. I think that’s when you’ll do your best work. You never know who’s going to see that work. Two, if you post your work on— I only use Instagram these days. If you post your work, I get requests for prints. I’m not even trying, or some of my pictures were part of a major international ad campaign for a big ad agency in Europe. They saw it on Instagram. So, you never know. I think if you do that work with passion, it will show in the work.

Martin: Yeah. We’re the same. I sound like I’m listening to me talk to my audience a few weeks ago. Everything that you do







from the heart is going to be your best work.

Valérie: Absolutely.

Martin: Your second bullet point was, “Don’t shoot for likes, find your voice.” I’ve never shot for likes. It’s nice to get a like, but it’s not the driving thing. I always shoot for myself. This was why many years ago– I haven’t submitted any work for a few years now, but I’m still with Offset, which is a Shutterstock sister company. It’s like their high-end, curated stock work. When the person that contacted me to see if I wanted to join that agency, when they first contacted me, I said, “I don’t have any stock photographs. I don’t photograph–

Valérie: Lifestyle, that kind of thing.

Martin: Yeah, or a cinema full of people all going, “Aah.” I don’t do that. She said, “Martin, we want your work that you do for yourself, and that will sell.” I’m still getting checks.

Valérie: Oh, good.

Martin: I literally just sent them a hard drive with all of my final selects I’ve ever shot. They loaded a lot of it onto their site. It’s continued to sell. So, working for ourselves, I absolutely agree. It’s the best way to go. And I, like you, I haven’t taken a commercial assignment for many years, just because I got fed up of trying to tell people that, “No, you can’t hire a photographer for three days for \$100.” Yeah. I had one very famous company contact me and they wanted four dawn and dusk shots in three days, in different areas. I’m like, “Okay, so do we need to talk about the Earth’s rotation before we even get to the crappy amount that you’re offering for this?”

Anyway, there are a lot of reasons why I don’t do it anymore. But I wholeheartedly agree, finding what you want to photograph, and working on that in projects. You mentioned earlier about On Ice, you’re going to put it to sleep. I never really finish a project, if

something comes up that I know will fit into it. Most of my projects, or what I call projects become portfolios. If you go to my portfolio area on my website, you can see the result of everything. I will drop an image into a project or a portfolio at any time afterward. I keep them in mind.

Valérie: Yeah, and they can turn into books sometimes too, which is what I did. Well, who knows maybe On Ice will be an exhibit or book. But the long-term projects, a couple of them have turned into fine art books, that’s a great goal for a project. They kind of die on their own if they die. It’s not like you’ll end it. It’s like, “Okay, it’s getting boring,” or, “It’s getting too simple,” or, “I’ve covered it all and it doesn’t excite me anymore.” I think you don’t need to put an ending to it.

Martin: Sort of fizzle out.

Valérie: Yeah, exactly. It’s good because also it shows growth. If you look at pictures you took 10 years ago versus pictures you take now, we’re all really tempted to go and delete all those pictures from 10 years ago. But on the other hand, it shows growth. I think that’s really good because we never stopped growing. So, long-term projects can be really good that way too.

Martin: You also mentioned in this second bullet point about finding your voice or finding your own voice. To me, that is another part of all of this. People ask how do I find my style. I always say you don’t find your style, it finds you. Anything that you can find by looking outwards, at least, is not your style. It’s always going to be someone else’s. Your style comes from within. Also, you mentioned earlier, you don’t get good at photography unless you do a lot of photography. That’s how it defines you, the more you do something and the more you shoot what you love, the more your style will gradually define you as a photographer. And that is something that I find you don’t really see in your work until you have a lot, many years of work that you can go back on. So, yeah,





you see your growth, but you also see your style develop.

Valérie: Develop a style. Then, people start telling you, "Oh, I saw that picture. I knew right away it was you."

Martin: Yeah. That is great.

Valérie: I hear that all the time. Actually now, an interesting thing, and something that came up today again, I can spot my students just from their work, because I see a lot of me in their work because either they attended a workshop or more, some people have attended 10 workshops. So, of course, they start to see a little bit as I do. It's quite interesting now that I see my student's work, it pops right away. I know that somebody that I mentored, so that's really exciting, actually. But, yeah, it goes with the, "don't shoot for the likes," because if you shoot for the likes, you're not true to yourself, and it's easy to post pictures that you know people are going to like more than others. Especially in documentary photography, in street photography, I know exactly which pictures will get the most likes. They're going to be more dramatic silhouettes, which are often easier than getting a true expression on somebody's space, where humor is going to be so much more difficult to capture on the streets because it's all

candid, but that won't get as many likes as an amazing silhouette will when one has actually more merit than the other.

If you start looking at what people like, then you will be more likely to say, "Oh, silhouettes are really big. I'm going to start shooting silhouettes and showing them more." Or, "That night photography is really popular and really moody stuff. I'm going to start shooting that." Well, that's great if you really love it, but are you doing it for yourself, or are you doing it to get the likes on social media? That's a really good question because I would say most people are shooting for likes.

Martin: It's like the so-called influencer. To a degree, I've been approached with someone saying, "You're an influencer?" In some ways, yeah, but I'm not. I don't do anything to influence people. If what I do influences people, that's nice. I'm always humbled when people say- I just had one gentleman who started a mentorship with me via the Patreon program. He was thanking me for the inspiration that I've provided over the years. If I can inspire someone, that is humbling and an honor for me, but it's not why I do this. I do it because I want to do it. And if it has that effect, that's an amazing thing to be able to achieve.

Valérie: It's the icing on the cake. I totally agree. Doing what we do and being solo entrepreneurs is hard work. You better love it. Otherwise, you're not going to stick with it. Teaching workshops is hard work. I think a lot of people have a misconception of what that actually is. They think, "Oh, they travel the world and take pictures." No, that's kind of secondary to actually what running a workshop is. It's a people business. It's a lot more than just traveling.

Martin: Yeah. In your notes, you have the importance of consistency. What are your thoughts on consistency and how important it is?

Valérie: I've been shooting with an X100 camera for nine years, and that's 23 millimeters. It's very rare that I shoot with anything else. Except, sometimes I use the Lensbaby on another camera body because they're fun lenses. People say, "Don't you miss shooting at different focal lengths?" No. In a body of work, the consistency of a focal length, especially in street photography is quite important. To start shooting at 23, and then 200, it's not going to look very good in a body of work, in that genre of photography at least. I think limitations are really good anyways. So, for me, it's the simplicity of the kit makes me happy. I think it also made me a better photographer, for sure, just working with that limitation and then enjoying the consistency of it.

I don't shoot only black and white, only color. A lot of people do, and people want their body of work to be consistent in that way. I don't, because that is something that I feel is not up to me whether the photograph should be color or black and white. It actually is dictated by the subject itself. If the subject is all about color, it's going to be in color. If the color is distracting, then it's going to be black and white. I don't make those limitations, but I make the decisions before I press the shutter, however. That's important to me.

Martin: One of the photos that you sent

is the red door. If you're going to have a white wall with a red door in it, it's going to look better most of the time in color because it's about red. Again, I feel I'm listening to myself here as you speak. Pretty much everything that you're saying is very much close to my own sentiment. I like to work in black and white, but I will leave color in a shot if the color is what the shot is about. I like to take out the color if it's not adding anything to the photograph. But if it's adding something or it's obviously about it- Some of the shots I see that you sent, were it some brushes as well. Yeah, paintbrushes.

Valérie: Yeah, that's actually another project that I started last winter. It's all shot in the classic negative, camera simulation. When I shoot a project like the On Ice project is only in black and white. I set some rules for myself.

Martin: For each project.

Valérie: I'm the only person I have to please, so that project is black and white Acros yellow filter. The project of more contemplative photography, which was objet du jour, objects of the day or object in the light and was purely objects that I saw during my outings, I could be in a store or around the house, that jumped on me because of the way the light hit it or because of the color and they were all shot in color. No moving the object. So, I don't touch the object. It's all about finding the strongest possible way to make the photograph without changing anything. So, it's about moving myself. Those are all fun projects that I do to keep them- they're like visual push-ups in a way. Because we were all stuck in lockdown for so long and I couldn't photograph people, then I started looking at ordinary objects in a different light, and then I started that project. It was a lot of fun. Anywhere I would go, I'd always have my camera with me and I'd see, "Oh, the light on that red door," which is an elevator door, I stopped right in my track when I saw it, the way the shadows or the light was hitting on it.





So, any ordinary object can become so extraordinary if you just take a moment to see it because we look but we don't usually take the time to see. And then, make it an exercise to work the frame. You may only have time for one shot, but if you have a few minutes, then shoot it from different angles, with different depth of field, and try to really work it. Every time you do an exercise like that, whether you show those pictures or not, it doesn't even matter. Every time you do an exercise like that, you learn, and you become a better photographer. Get out there. But again, that could be in your own house. I spent a lot of time photographing objects in the window light in my house. Things that look sometimes invisible because I never saw it with the sun hitting it in a certain way, and then all of a sudden, I see this lamp that just looks beautiful because I just happened to look at it at a certain time. All of a sudden, it just became so extraordinary. So, I just grab the camera and make a few shots. Again, it doesn't matter if it's only for you, you are learning something. And that's really what matters.

Martin: I'm having problems remembering everything that I want to say in response to the comments that you're making. One thing that I did want to mention. You talked about the one focal length. As a nature and wildlife photographer, I obviously use a lot of different focal lengths. It's horses for courses, you use the lenses needed for different types of work. But I'm not a big street photographer. Your genre is something that it's— I love looking at street work, but going out and doing it, is something that I don't do often. You'll probably recognize this, the brown leather cases.

Valérie: Oh, yes. Fun.

Martin: I have a Rollei. This, I love it. It's got a 75-millimeter lens on it, which is the equivalent of 15 millimeters roughly in 35-millimeter terms. When I go into Tokyo these days, most of the time, I'll throw 12 frames, one roll of 120 film into

this. I completely appreciate the fact that it's only got a certain lens, I don't even miss the fact that I can't zoom with it, because that's what it is. I don't really think of it as a limitation. It's just one aspect of this camera. I have to do various things that I don't normally do with my EOS R5. I understand what you're saying completely about how they're liberating. Not have to think about that extra thing. When I'm using this camera, it's like a passport.

I remember when I was in Ginza, an up-end part of Tokyo, it's got a lot of people walking around the streets there. This elderly gentleman came flying over to me and saying, "Oh, my God, you're shooting. I used to have one of those cameras." Just using a camera that's actually three or four years older than I am, it opens doors.

Valérie: Yeah, that's true. [crosstalk]

Martin: People will come and talk to me about it. To a degree, we all understand that it's more about the photographer. We are the brains behind the camera, we are the eyes behind the camera. But to a degree, the gear that you're using does influence the work that you do. I'm completely with you when it comes to the one focal length and not having to think about that extra stuff.

Valérie: Yeah, actually, I used to have all the beautiful Canon L lenses and everything. But overnight, I switched to that camera, and it's about the time where I let go of my last commercial client. I was getting ready to board a flight, I had my 70 to 200, my 24 to 70, and everything in a backpack, and I had just received the X100. I wasn't familiar with it yet. It was kind of intimidating. It's so different. I was flying to Europe, to Paris, but I was doing a few-day layover in Reykjavik. At the last minute, I left the backpack behind and I only took the X00. I saw Iceland with a 23 millimeter. It was so liberating. I'm not saying that I didn't miss the 200 when I saw some horses in the distance, but I worked with that focal length, and I spent the whole

summer with that camera. I sold everything else when I got back. There's no way I could have gone back to the other camera. No regrets and that was about nine years ago. I got good money from my— it was a 5D Mark II at the time. All my lenses, I still had all the boxes and everything. Back then, you could still get good money for a DSLR.

Martin: I sell all of my stuff back to the shop that I buy it from, and I get good money from those as well. It's nice to be able to do that. Literally though, over the last couple of years, I have completely changed everything, still with Canon, but changed to the mirrorless system. I actually ended up spending the first \$100 this year, put towards getting the new RF macro lens. But everything else that I've done over the last couple of years was done with money selling my own EF lenses and gear, and gradually I've converted everything to the RF system. I'm loving it still.

Valérie: Yeah. I think people spend way too much money on gear. I've never been a gear-head, but even when I was working for clients, I never spent money on gear until the client was paying for it. I started commercial photography. I did food photography for really big restaurants with a \$100 50-millimeter lens because it did the work. I wasn't going to invest in expensive gear until I knew that's what I wanted to do. I always live by that. Do we ever use the potential of our cameras ever before we trade them in? No, I really don't believe it. It's pretty rare. Pretty rare that a photographer ever switches cameras because, "Oh, it doesn't do what I need it to do." No, it's because people want the latest and greatest. It's good because camera manufacturers need those people. They would all be out of business with just people like me.

Martin: I would sort of respectfully disagree that we don't use the full potential but I do agree that we change before we need to change. For me, most of the time, it's because I want to do a

review. As much as people say the gear is not important, gear posts are popular. I like to get a review of new gear out. But I also like to be using the latest gear. But I totally agree that we could use, as you are, like eight years or so, you're saying with the X100?

Valérie: Yeah. Because I'm an ambassador for Fujifilm, I always get the latest version. I actually still have the old ones. But still, that's pretty much the same camera. It's evolved a lot, it has a little bit more bells and whistles. But if I wasn't a Fujifilm X-photographer, I probably would still be shooting with the previous one and this one came up a few years ago.

Martin: What's with the X-photographer thing? It sounds like you used to be a photographer.

Valérie: I know it's funny. It always sounds like that. That's how they call their ambassadors. Official X-photographers because of the X series, which actually turned 10 years old this month.

Martin: We're actually getting through your bullet points pretty well here. Why every visual artist should write, tell us you tell us a little bit about your thoughts on that. Again, I totally agree.

Valérie: Well, that's also very much for people who make a living with their photography. First, I think it's nice to have a little bit of backstory on the photograph. People like that. If you're working for yourself, being able to write articles— you don't have to be a writer. I wrote—I don't even know, 12 books in five years. I'm not a writer. I just know how to get my message across. I love to teach. So, my teaching, my writing is pretty much the way I teach. I could not write fiction if my life depended on it, but I can write, I've written hundreds of articles. To be able to write can help you share your work better. Also, everybody dreams of selling their travel photographs, for example, to a magazine. It's really hard to do. Even online magazines, there is no money in that. But if you put a little bit more chance on your side to make a

little bit of money by having your pictures published, write the words that go with the pictures and give them the finished product.

Again, if you're writing about a destination and you have amazing photographs, and then the 600 words that go with them, that will most likely sell because what are they going to do with just the pictures? Nothing. Then, they have to look for somebody to write the article. So, if you have the finished product, you're more likely to be published. That's a pretty easy thing to do. I think people are really intimidated by the idea of writing. I never thought I could write a book. It's really not that difficult. It's not even the fact of writing. Now, I dictate all my books. I dictate them to my tablet, so they write themselves.

Martin: Yeah. It's pretty amazing. The technology definitely helps. I've written about photography, and I've not sat and actually calculated how many pages I've written. But in letter or A4, it's got to be tens of thousands of pages. I think that writing, for all of the reasons that you just mentioned, I totally agree. I think as well, writing helps us to put some sort of a logical format around our thoughts. Say, for example, they say that the best way to really learn something is to teach it. I feel as though, for me, for years, even when I was studying for college here in Japan, and you're in a culture and a society that is not even your own native language—

Valérie: Absolutely.

Martin: But for me, in college here in Japan, I was doing all of my notes in Japanese, because I was learning in Japanese. But just writing it all out really helped me to put a logical structure around what I was being taught. I would go home each day and write out more notes. I think that even writing a journal about what you're doing through the day, writing, that act of handwriting, or even typing it out on the computer, helps you to hammer it into your own

memory as well. You remember things much more easily if you write it down. I find that just to become better at something, writing is an essential part of that. Even if— sorry, you're going to say something?

Valérie: No, it's true. I agree. I can't say it's for everyone, but I think more people should give it a try. Too many people are way too intimidated by the thought of writing. You don't have to be a trained writer to write. I don't even write in my own language.

Martin: I know. That's so cool you do that.

Valérie: And now, my books are translated into so many languages. It's cool. Also, I find even if you do it for yourself—I started a series of eBooks on teaching moments. It's the creative vision behind the lens because I find that every photograph has what I call emotional metadata, which is to me much more important than the regular metadata. It brings you back to that moment. It has the power to bring you back to that moment. It could be 10 years old, it brings you back to that moment. Now, if you take that emotional metadata that you feel when you look at the picture, and you actually put it into words, it's almost like journaling. It's so therapeutic. So, I love writing those because while I use them as teaching tools, what I saw, how I approached it, and then what emotion I had at the moment when I saw this, and what emotion I have now that I see the finished photograph. Just putting that into words, I think it's wonderful.

It's a great legacy too, because what is going to happen to our pictures when we're gone? That would be another whole other topic. I think about it once in a while. Just to know that I have a few books out, a couple of fine art books, but mostly educational books. It's nice to know that we'll be there after I'm gone and forgotten, and somebody will pick up a book like, "Oh, yeah, that's how Paris looked like," in the year 2040 or

whatever. I like it. I feel photography is going to change very rapidly, and the way we capture the world is changing so fast. I think we need to put that into words. How do we feel when we actually hold that camera and capture that moment that has never happened and will never happen again? I think writing a few words about that is good too.

Martin: How you feel when you hold the camera is vitally important. Rich Annable, actually just joined my Patreon community, which is amazing. Do you remember the Focus Ring podcast? It was Chris Marquardt and there was Ibarionex Perello, a number of us used to get together occasionally.

Valérie: That was probably before I even met you on TWiP.

Martin: Probably, yeah, it must have been. Rich, I believe, was a part of that. One of the things that he talked about was how he felt as though when he picked up a camera, everything went quiet. He's in this bubble. I always think of it as like I'm in a bubble. It can be a dangerous bubble because it can stop you from hearing trucks coming towards you and things like that. But if you're careful with it, it's a wonderful place to be. It can be so stress relieving. It starts quite often as you put your hand around the grip of the camera and raise the finder to your eye. I feel that just framing the world through a camera viewfinder is a big part of taking away the rest of the world. It's like, "Okay, the world to me right now is everything that I can see through here." And it's a great place to be.

Valérie: It's very therapeutic. People are needing that now more than ever. It's an escape. It's definitely an escape. It's such a beautiful one. We are so lucky to have that. So many people don't have a passion as we do. I am thankful every day for having photography in my life. I started late, but I just can't imagine my life without it.

Martin: Well, when the pandemic locked us down, one of the things that I did was

try to figure out how to keep the camera in my hand. And I ended up it's like this is actually the second version, but this is my main lens now and it's an adapter for a microscope. So, I've been doing microscope photography for almost a year now.

Valérie: I saw that yeah.

Martin: It's been a savior for me. This is what's kept me sane over the last year.

Valérie: Your world got smaller, so everything got smaller for a while.

Martin: One of my favorite shots at the moment is literally just less than two millimeters wide. It was a four-frame panorama of a cross-section of a ginkgo leaf stem that had fallen from a tree.

Valérie: I saw some of those. You must have posted them on Twitter or something.

Martin: Yeah, it's crazy.

Valérie: That's crazy. Yeah. Wow. I think everybody delved into some uncharted territory out of obligation because we were all confined to our own little world. But I think that probably was good in many ways. There was some positive in all this mess, hopefully.

Martin: Absolutely. My wife says it's tough to have to be together like 24 hours a day, all the time, but she also has appreciated that I've not left her on her own. Normally, my trips are two to three weeks at a time, and not being left on our own for those periods, has been a bit of a silver lining around the COVID cloud.

We're coming up to an hour, and I don't want to keep you too long. We've already covered the last one. The purposeful limitation is something that we've talked about quite a lot through this. So, we'll skip the last, we won't jump in on the last of these bullet points. Valerie, is there anything that you wanted to add before we start to wrap this up?

Valérie: If people need a little boost, I just published a free little downloadable eBook. It's short, but it's sweet and people are loving it. It's 10 Tips to Boost Your Creativity. A lot of people were in a rut coming out of this pandemic, and then back in it and hopefully coming up for air again. So, they can go on my website and download it.

Martin: Just in case someone wants to type this out right now, what's your website address?

Valérie: They just go to valeriejardin.com, they can find me. V-A-L-E-R-I-E J-A-R-D-I-N, or they google my name, I'll probably come up in the first few.

Martin: I would imagine so. Yeah.

Valérie: Everything is there. I'm on Instagram and Twitter, but I post my pictures on Instagram daily. That's pretty much for social media these days. I left Facebook years ago and never looked back.

Martin: You reminded me. An ex-girlfriend contacted me a few years ago and said, "Oh, I feel like a super sleuth. I tracked you down and all of this." I'm like, "Type in Martin Bailey. I've got the top three pages on Google."

Valérie: That wasn't too difficult. That's funny.

Martin: Anyway. Well, Valerie, it's been an absolute pleasure. I always enjoy speaking. I thank you for your time this evening.

Valérie: That was fun. So nice to catch up with you.

Martin: Yeah, you too. Absolutely.

Valérie: I may be going to Japan. It could have happened this year, possibly but a few things happened the past couple of years that kind of laid a lot of workshops. But I may be teaching a street photography workshop in

Tokyo in the next couple of years.

Martin: Well, it's one of the best places to do it. Let me know

Valérie: Yeah, you'll be the first to know.

Martin: Yeah, we'll go out for something to eat or something. Maybe I might even take my Rollei and go and wander

around the street.

Valérie: That's right, we'll tag along. Sounds good.

Martin: Well, it was an absolute pleasure to speak.

Valérie: Thank you, Martin.

Martin: I look forward to talking again at some point.

Valérie: Sounds good. Thank you.

Martin: Thank you. Bye, bye.

Valérie: Bye.



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