

PHOTOGRAPHY

MENTORSHIP

WHY YOU NEED IT AND WHY IT HELPS EVERYONE

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INTRO



Caitlyn Edwards

*PhotoShelter Community
Marketing Manager*

Mentorship is an investment in yourself and the entire photography industry. It's an opportunity to network, learn new skills and get one-on-one advice or help. At PhotoShelter, countless photographers have told us they wouldn't be where they are in their careers without mentorship.

But what is mentorship? (And what might it not be?) How do you find a mentor? How do you become a mentor?

We wanted to explore that more this year, so in March we launched the first-ever **PhotoShelter Mentorship Program**. For six weeks, we worked alongside 40 PhotoShelter members (20 mentor/mentee pairs) and discussed everything from business basics to websites to breaking into a new market. We brought in photographer and photo editor guest speakers to hear their advice, and held open discussions with personalized Q&As.

In this guide, we're unpacking why we believe in mentorship so passionately and sharing what we

learned from our mentors and mentees. It's clear that mentorship can be one of the single most impactful things that can happen to a photographer. We invest in gear, portfolio websites, workshops and business tools, but it's paramount you remember that you're deserving of investment, too.

In addition to demystifying mentorship, we're sharing firsthand accounts from tremendous freelance photographers on how a mentor or mentee affected them - their work, their career, even their approach to the photographic medium. There is so much value in finding ways as a community to create a richer photo industry, not just for ourselves, but for our future counterparts. If you leave with nothing else, we hope that after reading this you'll feel motivated to think critically about where your unique mix of skills, experience or knack for collaboration can impact the wider world.



“I absolutely would not have the career that I have and would not be the photographer I am today had it not been for my mentors all along the way.”

– **Jean Fruth**, sports photographer and former mentee (turned mentor)

WHAT MENTORSHIP CAN OFFER YOU

Everyone has faced rejection and experienced periods of insecurity. Yes, even the Pulitzer Prize winners and veteran photographers who land coveted magazine covers still benefit from the reassurance of collaborative partnership. When you take a step back, mentorship is one of the most dynamic sources of reassurance. Reassurance that your creative brain brings value to the world. Reassurance that you're producing something really special with your latest deeply personal project. Reassurance that, even if your work needs to be tweaked or edited differently, the work you do matters. And more than anything, reassurance that you matter.

There are images all around us all the time. We scroll through Instagram like it's second nature, drive past billboards and are spoon-fed ads throughout our day. Insecurity is possibly more rampant than ever. Plus, everyone has a camera, be it an iPhone or an impressive DSLR. And while better images often inspire, they can also become a source of defeat when one's own journey, access or skills differ from those we perceive as more successful than us. Part of being an artist means getting stuck in your own head. Imposter syndrome is real! A one-on-one mentorship relationship is a great avenue to consider if you're feeling a little lost artistically or just need a confidence boost.

It's also important we note that seeking out a confidence boost is not just for the mentees of the world. Established photographers, too, need that recognition and validation that their journeys matter. Mentors who offer their professional knowledge and portfolio reviews can get their own reassurance that their distinctive skills are useful and valued. Helping someone has a profound effect on your own self worth and has the potential to boost creativity.

This much we know is true: mentorship can help you root yourself in your work. The confidence boost it provides helps propel you toward your own artistic or professional goals. But what does the idea of mentorship offer the larger world?

In an industry where so many of us are in direct competition, it's hard to step back and remember that we're all in this together. We're all working to share important stories and offer glimpses of powerful emotion without saying a word. We all struggle, but together we can all thrive.

“Lockdown was really hard. I was questioning whether I had a point of view. I didn't know what I wanted to say anymore. But being a mentor and rediscovering that I do have something to say truly nourished me. Mentorship helps create this energy within you that makes you want to help lift up everyone else, too.”

– **Chris Parkes**, *documentary photographer and mentor*



As **Todd Owyong**, music photographer, blogger and Nikon Ambassador so perfectly **puts it**, “Competition may drive you, but community will build you.”

So if an individual mentor/mentee relationship provides reassurance, the greater mentorship community provides important inspiration and camaraderie. Together we evolve photography as an art form and career. There’s great power in fostering community.

©Beth Eisgrau-Heller

WHAT MENTORSHIP INCLUDES (AND DOESN'T INCLUDE)

Like various types of photography, there's a huge range when it comes to what mentorship might look like. It can be a quick but invigorating chat at the end of a seminar. You could get a portfolio review as a graduating senior that totally changes your understanding of your future as an artist. There are programs like the Eddie Adams Workshop (and the network associated with it) that can help you both artistically and professionally. You could connect with a photographer over Twitter and decide to be each other's accountability partners.

But before we unpack all of the different facets of mentorship, let's break down why you might want a mentor or mentee. That's a great place to start.

First and foremost, mentorship allows you to find and connect with someone who inspires you and gives you the strength and encouragement to try new things. Even in the midst of failure, mentorship can be a profound source of support. Plenty of successful photographers didn't go to school for photography. We've heard stories about people who started out doing studio portraits and then went into action sports. Things change. Following a hunch or interest of yours, especially when you've got a mentor right alongside you cheering you on, is something to welcome and explore.

On the flip side of that, having a mentee's support can motivate a mentor just the same. Discovering new approaches by way of a mentorship relationship can impact a teacher's work, too. Maybe your mentee's file delivery workflow is much faster than yours. Always wanted to try out portraiture but are known for landscape photography? See if your mentee has any tips or words of encouragement. Start a portrait project together that takes you both out of your comfort zones. Wonder who inspires your mentee? Ask them to show you their favorites and explain what calls them to the images.

Learning from your mentee and uncovering what inspires them can also help keep the mentor's creative juices flowing. Photography can be isolating and lonely at times. A mentee's willingness and enthusiasm to share their work with you, a successful photographer with more experience, may just be the reminder you need of why you got into photography to begin with. It's a real '*Wow, I've made it*' moment when someone asks for your mentorship or opinion. A mentor is someone who will push you creatively, but also can make sure you're staying focused on the right things and not getting distracted. Be clear with yourself and your mentor about how you want to spend your time.

©Syndi Pilar





A mentor can also help take the mystique of the industry away. In a recent conversation with PhotoShelter's first-ever mentorship class, **Todd Bigelow**, photojournalist, professor and author got real. "You need to know the things to do from a business perspective to somehow make your mortgage or rent payment. When you go to these nice conferences and watch amazing photographers like the Carol Guzy's of the world... Everyone is there showing their images and you think *'Wow, you're still as great as you were 30 years ago,'* but we don't talk enough in the industry about how they pay the rent every month."

Todd's point above can also help mentees avoid or anticipate common problems. Fellow photographers know what it's like to have hard drives crash without any other backups. They'll tell you how screwed over they got by those first work-for-hire contract terms they accepted. They have stories that will demonstrate that it's less about having the gear and more about working thoughtfully with the camera you have. (Or, at the very least, advise you to rent something before you buy it!) Paying it forward, with a mentor sharing past mistakes and subsequent solutions, elevates the entire industry. That benefits everyone.

©Inès Morin Elias

Recently, we heard the story behind photojournalist and former NPPA President **Melissa Lyttle**'s entrance into full-time freelance work. Early on, not knowing where to focus her efforts, she embraced what she's coined a "Year of Yes." Melissa recounts, "When I left newspapers and went freelance, I didn't know what it was I wanted to do. I didn't know what I even liked to do. I didn't know what all was out there. But people need photographers for a lot of things, so I promised myself in year one that I was going to say yes to everything."

That Year of Yes resulted in Melissa working on film sets, attending exclusive events and accepting assignments she'd only dreamed of. She shared that during that year, the TV network TNT called and asked if she does production stills. Melissa says she said yes while simultaneously Googling what "production stills" meant and found out what equipment she'd need to get the job done. TNT hired her for six episodes and Melissa subsequently traveled around the Southeast with the cast and crew. That job then led to working with CNN, who asked if she wanted to go down to a remote island in the Florida Keys to do production stills for Bill Weir's upcoming show about endangered birds. After that,

there were calls from *Inc Magazine* asking whether she'd cover an event they were hosting. One thing led to another. She learned new skills and made new professional contacts at every stop. All because of her Year of Yes.

There's an important accountability element to mentorship we want to call out, too. A mentor is someone who will push you creatively, but also has the eye to point out where your workflow might be breaking down. Be clear with yourself and your mentor on what you want to focus on. Are you looking to have better time management after an assignment? A mentor can point out where you're losing unnecessary time when delivering photos to a client. Feel insecure about communicating with photo editors and pushing back against initial contract terms? Run that email draft by your mentor.

Examples above aside, that accountability in a mentorship relationship also applies to mentors. Contemplating redesigning your website? Ask your mentee what they think would help give it that extra edge. Interested in going mirrorless? Ask your mentee about their switch to Sony and commit to renting a mirrorless camera by the end of the month. When was the last time you got opinions on your logo?

“Don't get so locked into what you're doing. There's always room for growth. There's always room for improvement. There's a lot of benefit that just comes from pushing yourself out of your comfort zone.”

– **Melissa Lyttle**, *freelance photojournalist and former President of NPPA*

©Tao Jiang

Sample ideas for what to focus your mentorship on:

- Portfolio review
- Website redesign consultation
- Photo archive organization
- Workflow and time management
- Business insights and advice
- Lighting technique help
- How to break into a new market
- How and why to diversify income streams
- Editing and post-production assistance
- Creating marketing and branding collateral
- The benefits of building or upgrading your studio space
- How to find your visual voice
- Tips for breaking out of a creative funk

No matter the problem or your experience level, having someone who will simultaneously challenge and encourage you is a great way to push you and your career forward.

Whatever you choose to focus on, it's important to set explicit goals and expectations around how the relationship will work. Agree on your preferred form of communication. Set boundaries around what will and won't be discussed throughout the mentorship. How often can you realistically meet? What seems feasible for everyone's schedule? Actually write down the goals and discuss how you and your mentor or mentee can work together to achieve them.

In order for the relationship to really work, it's also important to form a genuine bond with one another. Get to know one another personally. Go through your portfolios together. Review your websites and social media accounts. Ask for honest opinions and initial reactions. Have editing challenges where both photographers edit the same RAW file and discuss why each of you made the decisions you did. Just remember, unbiased feedback can be immensely impactful.


Open yourself up to the opportunity, no matter how uncomfortable or scary, to be wrong. **Ami Vitale**, a National Geographic photographer and Nikon Ambassador, started out as a wartime correspondent, but now expertly documents efforts in China to increase the giant panda population and is highlighting how a local community in Kenya has come together to open Africa's first-ever community-owned elephant orphanage, the **Reteti Elephant Sanctuary**. Her advice is a lot like Melissa's: "Inspiration can come from discomfort. Tunnel vision kills creativity, so seek out new perspectives."

At PhotoShelter, we believe everyone can benefit from a mentor or mentee. But don't just take our word for it. Mentorships have been around for a very long time, regardless of profession or artistic ability. Socrates mentored Plato. Then Plato mentored Aristotle. Jump ahead and we've got Oprah Winfrey, who was mentored by Maya Angelou. Steve Jobs mentored Mark Zuckerberg. Now we're not asking you to be Oprah or invent Facebook, but instead want to point out that everyone benefits from mentorship. Whether you're the advisor or the advisee, there's always more to learn.

Listen and trust the process.

©Rhea Nall





“Whitney was incredibly generous with her time, considering that her workload began to pick up midway through the program. She gave me tons of great feedback, helped me with editing and talked about her workflow. We talked a lot about being women in photojournalism and photography. We just clicked on a personal level.”

– *Beth Eisgrau-Heller, PhotoShelter mentee*
about her mentor *Whitney Curtis*

CASE STUDIES

Below, we're highlighting two mentorship relationships we recently had the pleasure of watching bloom. Both were part of our first-ever mentorship class whereby 40 photographers worked alongside one another and collectively created a truly nurturing mentorship community. All mentees were selected from a curated list of applicants by our group of 20 mentors.

You'll hear from Mexican documentary photographer **Miriam Alarcón Avila** as she shares her experience with mentor and photo rockstar **Daniella Zalcman**. Plus, one pair, UK-based photographers **Chris Parkes** (mentor) and **Jacky Chapman** (mentee) pull back the veil on what made their match feel like two friends who had known each other forever.

We hope to inspire everyone with these firsthand accounts and share how, when fully devoted to the process, mentorship has the power to affect photographers in a profound way.

Spotlight: Miriam Alarcón Avila's Close Connection With Mentor Daniella Zalcman



Miriam Alarcón Avila
PhotoShelter Mentee



Daniella Zalcman
PhotoShelter Mentor

Miriam Alarcón Avila is a photographer, multimedia artist and visual storyteller. Her mission is to pursue her bliss by creatively producing strong works of art that leave a legacy for a better, sustainable and inclusive world. Through her work, she aims to inspire, connect, educate and engage with a borderless world.

Born in Mexico City, Miriam devoted herself to photography at a very young age. After witnessing the devastating 1985 earthquake that killed thousands of people, walking in the middle of the destroyed city, she experienced a profound urgency to photograph and document both the disaster and the human resilience in the wake of the aftermath. This experience framed her life and artistic work; understanding that healing and recovery can take place through art and a community support system. At that time, Miriam dreamed of owning a camera to capture such moments, but her widowed mother couldn't afford to provide such a luxury. From then on, she says that she stored thousands of images in her memory and has been devoted to visual documentation with a photojournalistic approach ever since.

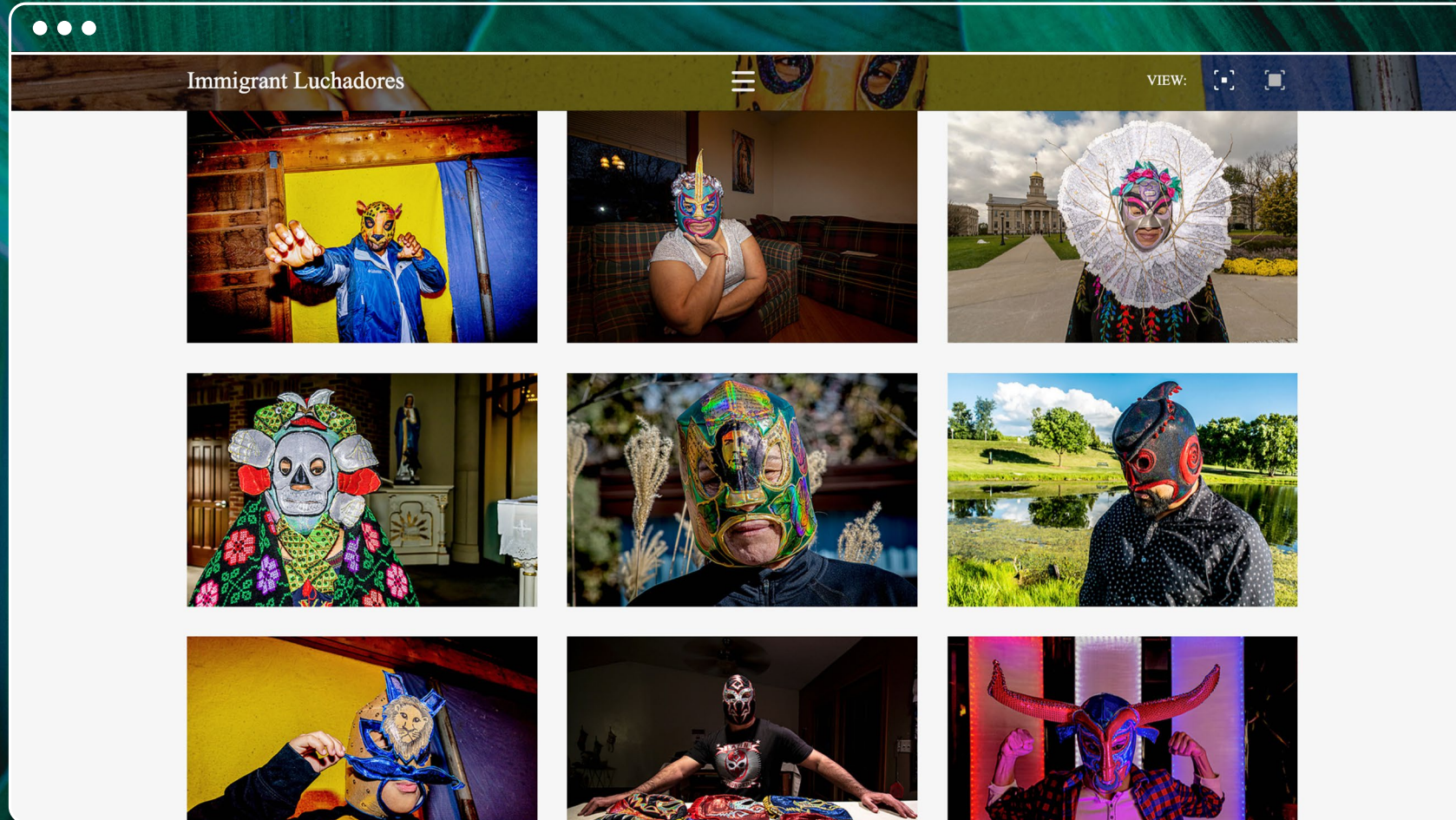
Fast forward to 2002, Miriam has since moved to Iowa and her childhood dream of having a camera has come

true. It was in Iowa that she was able to take her first photo class: a black and white photojournalism class. Her professor just so happened to be Puerto Rican and an immigrant like Miriam. During the semester it became clear that they had a lot in common and instantly formed a bond. After noticing her palpable passion for photography, he allowed her to audit his photo classes in exchange for help in the photo labs with his other students.

In 2017, Miriam Alarcón Avila received an Iowa Arts Council grant award to develop "**Luchadores Immigrants in Iowa**," a powerful photo-documentary project that gave voice to new Iowans and shared their challenges as immigrants of Latino heritage. It's since become her personal long-term project and her exhibit has appeared at various universities and venues across Iowa, including the University of Iowa, Drake University, Muscatine Art Center, in addition to receiving regional media attention.

Recently, we had the pleasure of meeting Miriam after she was accepted into our first **PhotoShelter Mentorship Program** class and matched with her mentor, **Daniella Zalcman**, a photojournalist and the founder of **Women Photograph**.

Miriam's Website



“When I got the email saying I was matched with Daniella, I couldn’t believe it. I’d been following her for years and the fact that she picked me as her mentee meant so much to me personally. She’s a rockstar,” Miriam says. “Over the years I’d applied to so many different mentorship programs and workshops. I never got anything. I really was in the process of giving up, but I said to myself ‘What’s one more?’ When I saw the email [saying I was accepted], I honestly thought it was a joke.”

Just as we suspected, Miriam and Daniella immediately hit it off.

“Early on, she invited me to one of her workshops and when they were talking about mentorship, she stopped to say that her mentee was here. It was so moving to me. Later, she told me that when she was looking at potential PhotoShelter mentees, she saw a few people who were talented but she didn’t connect with them like she did my work. She recognized that I am an immigrant who documents other immigrants, and she said, ‘This is someone I want to work with.’”

©Miriam Alarcón Avila



That mentorship community also addressed one of Miriam's personal insecurities: her education. She says she didn't feel so alone when she found out others didn't have formal training.

"I started to realize that Daniella didn't go to school for photography. So many great photographers are like me, they didn't go to school for that."

"It was so reassuring for me because it finally felt like I wasn't by myself. There's this saying in Spanish, *patadas de ahogado*, which is like when you're kicking but still drowning. And Daniella's mentorship helped me feel like I wasn't drowning anymore."

Miriam also urged us to share that the mentorship program's impact on her didn't solely come from Daniella. The community of other mentors and mentees, plus the hand-picked guest speakers, all of those people made her feel welcome and similarly reassured. She notes that it was immediately clear to her that everyone, no matter their skill level as a photographer, wants to grow.

She went on about her mentorship classmates, "So many photographers don't want to talk numbers. They see everyone as competition and don't share details about their businesses. This experience made me feel like it wasn't a competition. Instead, everyone deserves to have that information." Within the mentorship community, her fellow photographers openly shared their real rates and how they determine them. "You can help other photographers by declining offers and I'd never thought of that before. Daniella really helped me understand that too," Miriam told us.

She continued, “Previously, the industry was just run by white men. It was really separated between them and everyone else. But digital photography really democratized photography. It lets us all have access to share our point of view.”

So now back to that one-on-one relationship...

Miriam shared that she’d “watched so many videos about putting a portfolio together but seeing Daniella do it with me, it just blew me away. It finally just clicked. Daniella explained why she chose one photo over another and how even with that change, you’re still telling the story. It doesn’t matter how much you watch a video, it’ll never do that for you. Daniella was amazing.”

They also discussed the ever-elusive topic of money. Daniella urged Miriam to really keep in mind the business part of freelancing. “The first thing she said to me was *‘No more giving away photos for free! Your work is good and you deserve to get paid for it!’* More than anything, she gave me the reassurance that my work has real value.”





Throughout our conversation, Miriam was just gushing from excitement and gratitude. Another wonderful thing Daniella did was connect Miriam with other photographers. “She was very transparent and sincere when she didn’t have experience with something. She’d tell me she knows another photographer going through the same thing and would connect us.” It was through Daniella’s introduction that she met **Josué Rivas**, who is also an Indigenous photographer from Mexico. They had a meeting and totally hit it off because of so many shared experiences.

Miriam went on about the networking component of the PhotoShelter Mentorship Program, “And the program did that, too. When we had **Aundre Larrow** come on to talk about **lighting people with darker skin tones**... That’s helped me so much with my project documenting Black business owners in Iowa. Every tip has been so helpful.”

Daniella’s mentorship and her fellow mentorship classmates have helped Miriam feel more prepared and inspired than ever.

©Miriam Alarcón Avila

A Match Made in Heaven: Chris Parkes Mentors Jacky Chapman



Jacky Chapman
PhotoShelter Mentee



Chris Parkes
PhotoShelter Mentor

Both based in the UK, proud visual storyteller **Chris Parkes** immediately gravitated toward his mentee, photojournalist and fellow visual storyteller **Jacky Chapman**. Developing great rapport throughout the six-week pilot program, they've become fast friends.

We spoke with both Chris and Jacky about their mentorship relationship - what they focused on, how each feels they benefited and their advice for how to make the best of a photography mentorship opportunity.

After hitting it off right away and feeling reinvigorated after a long and lonely pandemic, Chris and Jacky got straight to work.

It was very important to Chris that they have structured sessions and outline Jacky's goals. Jacky admits she primarily needed help focusing. "I think structure is really important. It's a bit like going to therapy," he jokes. As someone with so much experience doing so many different types of photography, Jacky was feeling a bit lost. "I've been doing lots and lots of jobs. I didn't really know what I was doing with my PhotoShelter website, so it became a dumping ground for all my work. It didn't matter if I was photographing a protest or doing portraits

or doing corporate work, it was all just being added to my site," she told us.

She went on, "I'd get messages from people saying they didn't really know what I do. I'd say I can do everything, but then they'd say 'Well, we really want to know that you can do x well.' It wasn't until I talked to Chris that I realized that ultimately, when you break it down, I'm a storyteller. So it doesn't matter whether I'm working with companies or photographing protests, it's all storytelling."

Before diving into the details of her site and portfolio, Chris needed to get to know Jacky on a personal level, not just as a photographer. What were her passions in life? Where was she coming from? Where did she hope to go? What are the things she's most proud of?

"Once I knew a bit more about Jacky's background, I instantly knew I could help as a mentor. I could totally see why she felt so stuck," Chris says. "I think it's really important to have that gut response as a mentor. You have to know that you can help. You have to really feel their work."

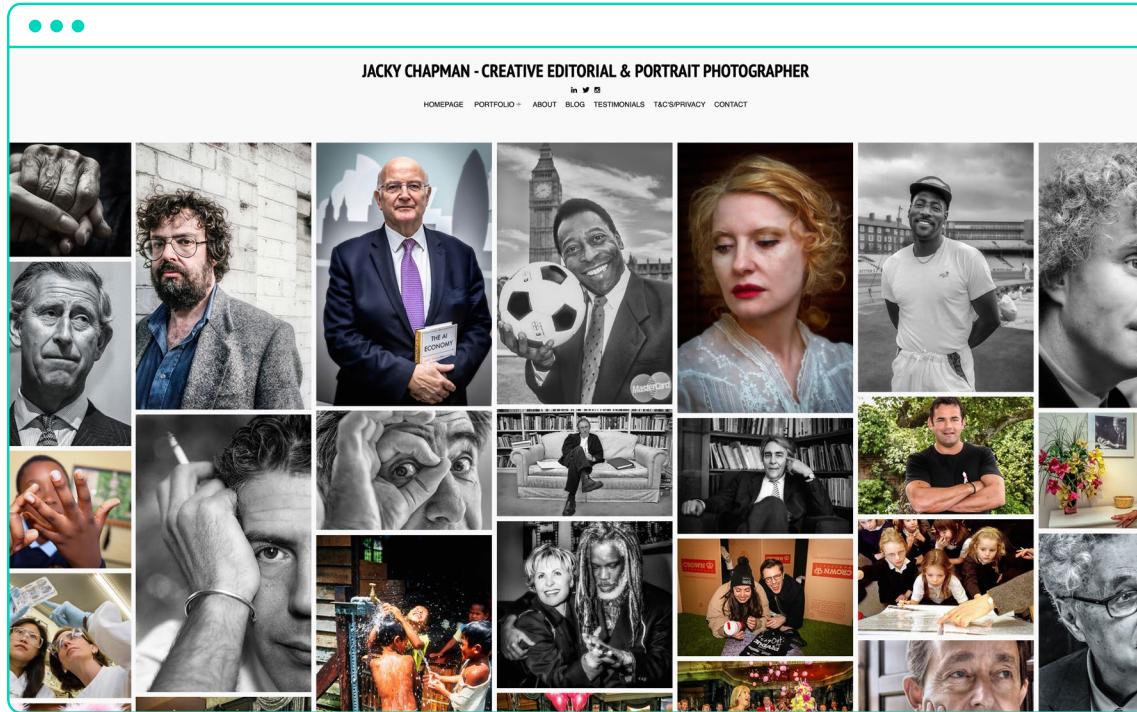
From then on, things just started to organically fall into place.

“What really helped was starting with the presentation of the work. Going into her website and basically Marie Kondoing it. I’d ask her if an image was aligned with who she is and how she wants to be perceived? And if it’s not, it goes.” He jokes that a few times Jacky was really attached to images and he found that to be a great teachable moment whereby he’d advise her to put it in her back-end archive. It didn’t need to go away completely, but it didn’t serve her on her site. “Once she realized that, she really got into the process: all of her natural abilities as a storyteller and journalist started to show through.”

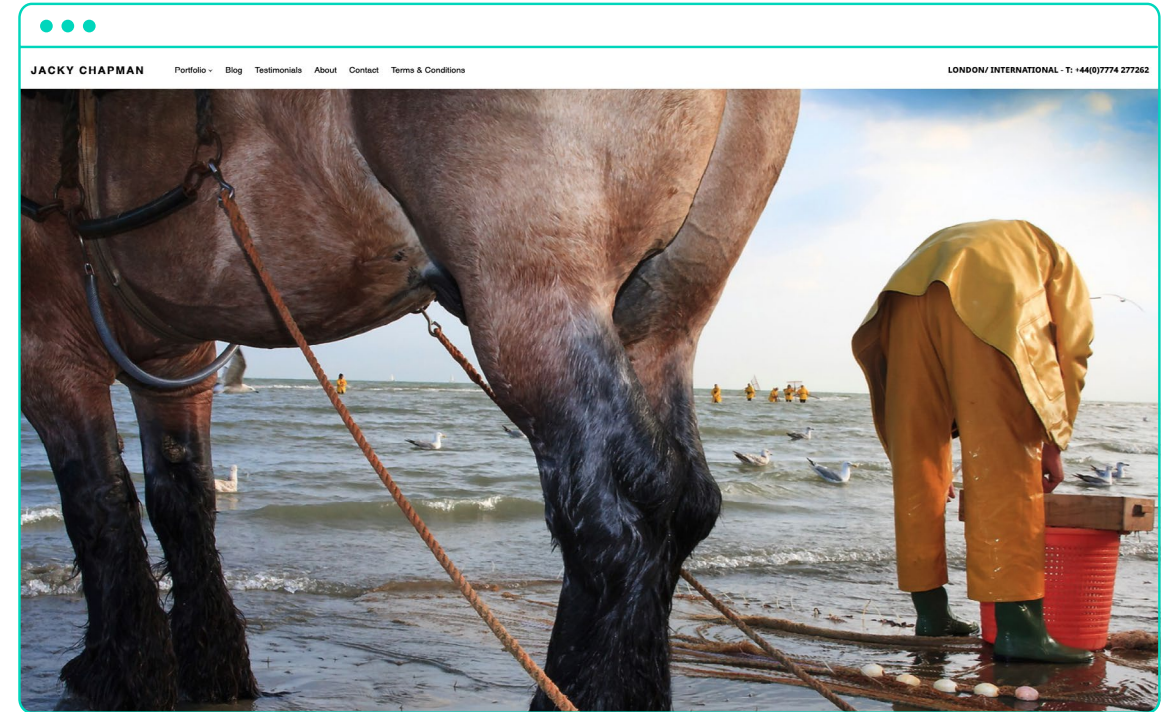
“Within seconds he knew what had to go and what didn’t. ‘We don’t have to get rid of it, we just have to retire it,’ he’d say. I think within the first meeting we had on Zoom we changed the template and immediately it looked better. I could hardly believe my work could look that good!” Jacky told us.



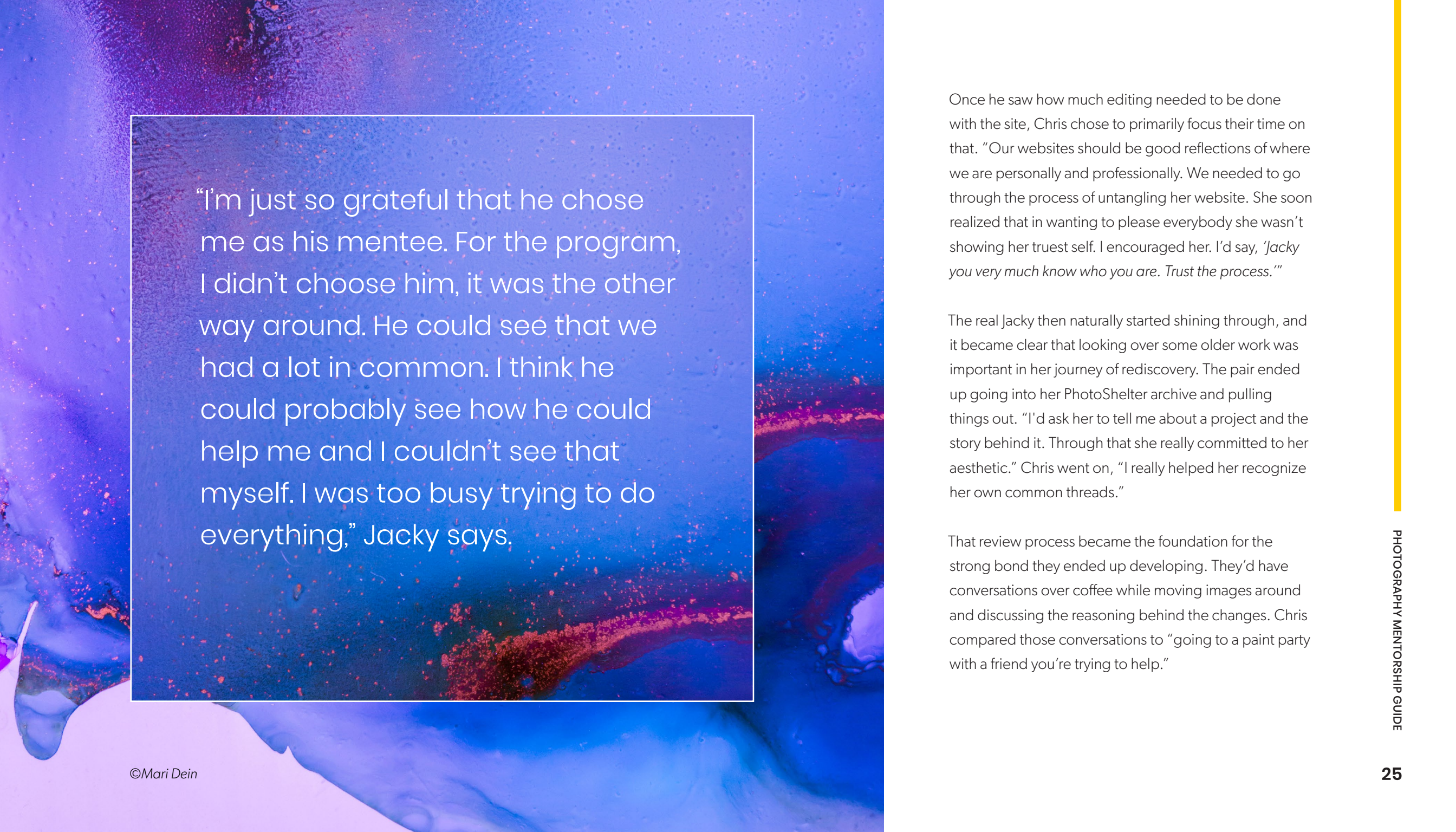
Jacky's Website



Before



After



“I’m just so grateful that he chose me as his mentee. For the program, I didn’t choose him, it was the other way around. He could see that we had a lot in common. I think he could probably see how he could help me and I couldn’t see that myself. I was too busy trying to do everything,” Jacky says.

©Mari Dein

Once he saw how much editing needed to be done with the site, Chris chose to primarily focus their time on that. “Our websites should be good reflections of where we are personally and professionally. We needed to go through the process of untangling her website. She soon realized that in wanting to please everybody she wasn’t showing her truest self. I encouraged her. I’d say, *‘Jacky you very much know who you are. Trust the process.’*”

The real Jacky then naturally started shining through, and it became clear that looking over some older work was important in her journey of rediscovery. The pair ended up going into her PhotoShelter archive and pulling things out. “I’d ask her to tell me about a project and the story behind it. Through that she really committed to her aesthetic.” Chris went on, “I really helped her recognize her own common threads.”


That review process became the foundation for the strong bond they ended up developing. They’d have conversations over coffee while moving images around and discussing the reasoning behind the changes. Chris compared those conversations to “going to a paint party with a friend you’re trying to help.”

The six-week PhotoShelter program may be over, but both agree their mentorship relationship will continue far beyond the allotted time.

Next up? Chris is helping Jacky with her editing processes and workflow - how to get more out of camera raw, how to use Lightroom. In one of their earlier conversations Jacky shared that she has always edited in Photoshop, which Chris feels is far too time consuming for large batches of photos. "I really want to help her through the process of leaning into the drama with her black and white narratives," he says.

He'll also continue to work on Jacky's confidence building. "I tell her all the time, 'You're really good. You need to believe in yourself.' Nurturing her confidence has been a very important part of the process. And it was through redoing the website and going through her work that we got into those little vulnerable spaces. That gave her the confidence to say 'You know what? I've actually got this.'"



An aerial photograph of terraced rice fields in a mountainous region. The terraces are arranged in a series of concentric, curved steps that follow the contours of the hills. The fields are filled with water, reflecting the sky and the surrounding landscape. In the background, there are more mountains and a valley with a dirt road. The sky is filled with dramatic, dark clouds, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning setting. The overall scene is a beautiful example of traditional agricultural engineering in a mountainous area.

“I would say that anyone wanting to be a mentor has to come from a very nurturing place. That was the major unexpected joy and power of the PhotoShelter Mentorship Program. Mentors need to find someone they can genuinely nurture and help grow.”

– **Chris Parkes**, PhotoShelter mentor

MAKE YOUR MENTORSHIP WORK FOR YOU

For both mentors and mentees, taking full advantage of a mentorship necessitates total commitment and a heavy dose of vulnerability. You both must set goals and stick to a schedule. Establishing goals helps clarify what the mentorship is and is not for. A mentor isn't a springboard for every single photo-related thought that comes into your brain. If you all agree to focus on improving your website, don't go too deep into editing and post processing. Stick to the plan as best you can.

Now back to vulnerability -

Want to get a pro's opinion on your portfolio? Mentees, be open to hearing new insights and potentially harsh opinions about your work. Remember that photo editors and potential clients won't necessarily be able to hear the context of a highly emotional image, so focus on remaining objective. Your mentor has a lot of experience and you should wholeheartedly embrace that, even in cases where they're critiquing your work. Both parties should encourage open dialogue from the start, and talk through things you might not understand throughout the process. Take advantage of the time you have with one another.

"Mentorship is a bit of a trust exercise," says mentor Chris Parkes. Mentors need to encourage their mentees to take

risks and go to vulnerable places, while remaining respectful to the mentee's specific needs and goals. Mentors, too, should lead by example. Be open and emotive; it'll build trust. Admitting to rejection, defeat and mistakes is important for us all to do, no matter where we are in our careers. Mentors owning where they took a wrong turn and providing real examples is a great gift, for both your mentee and the greater photo community.

Tara Pixley, photographer, media scholar and founding member of **The Authority Collective**, was kind enough to share a story with our mentorship class outlining the importance of communication when you're booked for an assignment. She'd recently been approached by a major publication to do a portrait for them, but because she was coming back from a trip to New York and planning a few other things in her life, she admitted she was in a bit of a rush when she was initially in contact with the photo editor. "I had neglected to ask where the portrait was. I thought 'Well they assigned it to me. I'm in LA so it's in LA somewhere.' But it actually ended up becoming a very complicated thing for me," she explained. Turns out, the photoshoot would be taking place outside of LA.

©Mat Boyle





“I think that’s a great example of the importance of communication with editors. I hadn’t asked those questions and as soon as I realized that it was going to be a six or seven hour round trip, I knew that would be more of a day rate. So I reached out to the photo editor and explained the situation. They came back saying they could offer me a half day rate for travel time and mileage—everyone should always offer you mileage—and also \$200 toward a hotel stay. If I hadn’t done that, I probably wouldn’t have gotten that extra four to five hundred dollars,” she says.

Sharing triumphs and mistakes with a mentee chips away at that mystique we talked about earlier. It takes away the perception that things just always fall into place for successful photographers. We are all human. We all make mistakes and every photographer gets rejected (and that includes the ones with established careers). It’s a universal experience and there is great power in mentors candidly sharing those experiences with emerging photographers.

Finally, when it comes to making mentorship work for you—this may be the hardest one of all—do your best to set your pride aside. It’ll allow you to take full

©Aaron Spicer

advantage of every opportunity. **Jean Fruth**, sports photographer and photographer for the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, said that early on in her career, she just got used to asking everyone questions. “Mentors can be as casual as a friendly group of photographers who are working alongside you. Maybe they’re people who are on the sidelines of a football game who you’re working shoulder to shoulder with.” She noted that many of her fellow west coast photographers were very giving and nurturing and really helped her when she was first starting out.

She recalled that early on, “I still had questions about my camera settings. We’ve all been there. You’re embarrassed to ask but if you don’t ask, you’re never going to find out what their settings are and why they’re doing it that way... Sure, you can learn that in school but more than anything, you learn on the job.” Be curious to see what fellow photographers know. Mentors, ask your mentees what they think of your Instagram. Mentees, ask about a pro’s lighting set up. If you don’t ask, you’ll never know.

When you’re looking for a mentor, Miriam Alarcón Avila urges the importance of persistence.

“You have to believe that the right person will come at the right time, when you’re ready for it. I’d been following Daniella Zalcman’s work for a long time and then finally, years later, I got the chance to work with her as part of the PhotoShelter Mentorship Program. On top of that, I now have a community of other people who shared this experience with me and understand it. This giant intimidating thing, the industry and all the money related to it, is less intimidating now.

“Photography is a medium that allows you to share and create. From that space is where we connect. And I’m connecting with a whole new community now because of this program.”



CONCLUSION

We hope that this guide has provided you with fresh ideas for why and how you should approach mentorship. Whether you're looking to be a mentor or be mentored, your distinctive skills, experiences and personal journey all add value. The more voices we hear, the more accurately we tell stories visually. Even in the face of competition, always remember there's a community of photographers all around you.

Offer to help a photographer whose work resonates with you. Do what you can to boost the confidence of a talented photographer feeling creatively stifled. Be forthcoming about business mistakes you've made so someone else can avoid them. Uplifting one another is what helps the industry evolve.

Just remember: mentorship doesn't have to stick to a mold. A mentor can be multiple people, a brief encounter with a respected photographer, an impactful portfolio review from a friend or stranger, or a longer term one-on-one relationship. A mentee can be a photo assistant you take aside and talk about

your lighting set up with. Consider giving old unused gear to someone who's always been interested in photography but wasn't able to afford a camera. Just a quick compliment or comment on an Instagram post from someone an emerging photographer admires can be hugely impactful.

Let's all move forward together, looking for the pockets where we can provide support and encourage one another. Sharing insights and being vulnerable are some of the most powerful things you can do in your photography career, no matter where you are in your own journey.



MENTORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Below we've collected a few mentorship programs we recommend, as well as portfolio reviews and one-on-one opportunities with incredible organizations and photographers. Our hope is that where possible, you share your industry knowledge and foster a sense of community through mentorship. There's really nothing like it.

Mentorship Programs

- [The PhotoShelter Mentorship Program](#)
- [The Every Day Projects](#)
- [Women Photograph](#) (currently closed for 2021)
- [NPPA](#) (accepting 2021 applications in August)
- [Nia Centre for the Arts](#)
- [Girls Who Click](#) - (ages 16-30)

Portfolio Reviews:

- [Ami Vitale](#)
- [World Photography Organisation](#)
- [Magnum Photos](#)
- [NYCFotoWorks](#)
- [Los Angeles Center of Photography](#)
- [NANPA](#)
- [ASMP](#)

- [Palm Springs Photo Festival](#)
- [iLCP](#)
- [APA](#) (Timing varies by chapter)
- [The New York Times Portfolio Reviews](#) (2021 dates TBD)
- [Various local photo festivals and photographers](#)

Other

- [1:1 sessions through Summit Workshops](#)

IMAGE CREDITS

PhotoShelter Mentorship Program Members and Speakers (March 2021)

- Miriam Alarcón Avila (mentee)
- Mat Boyle (mentee)
- Jacky Chapman (mentee)
- Beth Eisgrau-Heller (mentee)
- Jean Fruth (speaker)
- Sara Kempner (mentee)
- Inès Morin Elias (mentee)
- Rhea Nall (mentee)
- Chris Parkes (mentor)
- Syndi Pilar (mentee)
- Aaron Spicer (mentee)



THE PHOTOSHELTER

MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The PhotoShelter Mentorship Program allows photographers to build meaningful relationships with fellow creatives and connect with industry experts.* Get business tips, personalized feedback and opportunities to network.

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**You must be a PhotoShelter member to take part in the Mentorship Program. Interested in joining? Scroll down for a special deal.*

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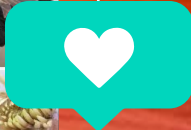
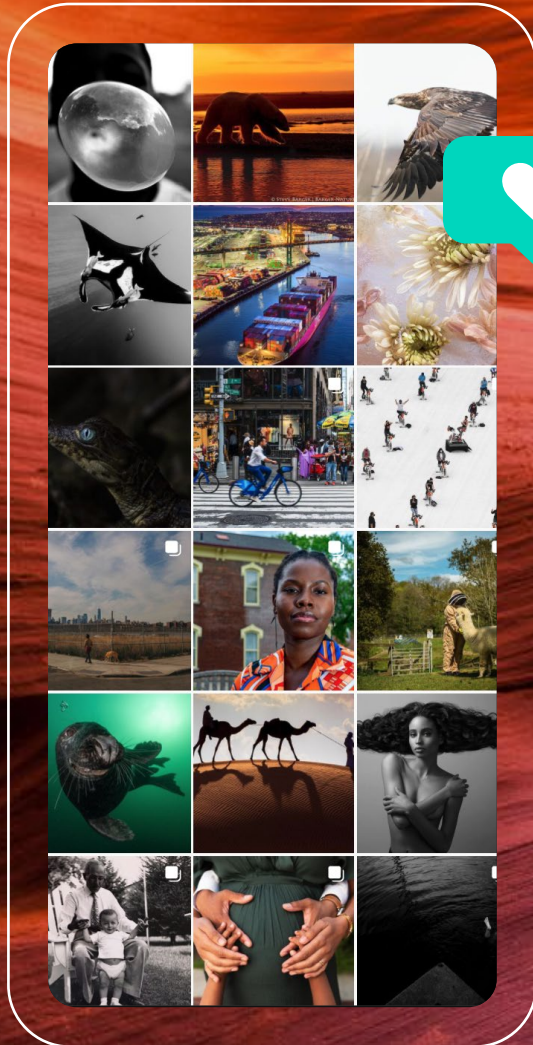
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