



2010 COVER CONTEST

We put out the call, thousands answered, a handful emerged

BY JEFF KENT

The *Professional Photographer* Cover Photo Contest once again challenged photographers to win cover glory. From more than 5,000 entries, a panel of editors and design staff pared down the selections that met the basic cover requirements to 175 semifinalists.

We were joined again by long-time image juror of the PPA International Photographic Competition, Helen Yancy, M.PhotoG.M.Artist.ME.I.Cr., Hon.M.PhotoG., CPP, API, F-ASP. An unimpeachable authority, Yancy helped the staff select five top images and nine honorable mentions.

Across the board, the judges were impressed by the brave application of color in many of this year's entries. They were also pleased to see many fewer post-processing problems than in previous years. As always, there was a plethora of creative ideas, both amusing and inspiring.

A number of this year's entries were disappointing technically—lighting, composition and focus—more than in previous

years. "You could see the photographers had great ideas, but lacked the technical expertise to realize them," says Yancy. "It's not the intent but the result that matters. The result is what separates the professional from the wannabe.

"PPA and the cover contest are about the combination of creativity and technical excellence. We looked for the images that are clearly professional. We did see images this year that were little more than fun snapshots of great moments. Snapping moments is something clients can do for themselves. Capturing moments *with technical expertise* is what sets you apart as a professional."

The numerous gems made it all worthwhile. The best are displayed on the following pages. These images' creators knew the elements of a good photograph and applied those principles to the task of making images specifically suited for this cover. The winners were separated by the narrowest of margins, all worthy of the top slot in their category.

1ST PLACE: ANTHONY ROSLUND

Anthony Roslund of Spokane, Wash., stood on a ladder to capture this winning image. He used a Canon EOS 5D Mark II camera with a Canon 24mm f/1.4 lens. The proprietor of Roslund Photography says he used the elevated vantage point to get an "in-your-face, 3D effect." He kept just enough depth of field to make the subject's torso recognizable in the background. For lighting, Roslund used five Calumet Travelite 750 monolights. He modified the main and fill lights with Photoflex LiteDome Q39 soft boxes, the hair light with barn doors, and the background lights with seven-inch reflectors. He took the exposure for 1/200 second at f/7.1, ISO 100. roslundphoto.com

HELEN YANCY'S TAKE:

"This image is totally dynamic and creative. What a great presentation—flawless in its execution. The maker's use of selective focus emphasizes his point; the subject's elbow, for example, is in soft focus, but it's completely deliberate. This was not a lucky a shot. We reviewed more of this photographer's work, and he can really shoot."

2ND PLACE: MARY LYNNE ASHLEY

Mary Lynne Ashley of Ashley Photography in Colorado Springs captured this shot with a Nikon D2X camera and a 28-70mm f/2.8 lens. She lit the scene, which included a Tranquility background from Orange Peel Backgrounds, with one Photogenic PowerLight 1250DR modified by a 4x6-foot Larson soft box and a 42x72-inch Larson reflector. The exposure was for 1/125 second at f/9.5, ISO 100. Ashley did minor retouching in Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop. ashleyphotography.com

HELEN YANCY'S TAKE:

"The child is beautifully lit. The expression is wonderful, and the use of color is fantastic. This image doesn't have the feeling of a studio, but of the child's home. Whether or not it was actually captured in the child's home doesn't matter. What matters is the comfortable feeling of the child's world. It's hard to express the concept, but it comes through in this image."



3RD PLACE: JEN HENNINGSEN

Jen Henningsen took four horses and one high school senior on a 30-minute trek into the back country near Keepsake Photography, her studio in Highlands Ranch, Colo. As the senior dismounted at the lip of the canyon, Henningsen was struck by how the subject was framed by the horse's mane and saddle, and how the light fell around her long curls.

Shooting with a Canon EOS 5D Mark II camera and Canon 70-200mm f/4 lens, Henningsen exposed the sensor for 1/250 second at f/4, ISO 500. She provided supplemental light with a Canon Speedlite 580EX II modified by a Chimera soft box. She processed the file in Adobe Lightroom before softening the subject's skin with Portrait Professional software and enhancing her eyes with Mama Shan's Digital Imaging Goodies. keepsakephotographypics.com

HELEN YANCY'S TAKE:

"This is a beautiful, straightforward shot. The horse is behind the subject, and its head is cropped so as not to distract from the girl. There's a great sense of the subject's placement in the environment, and she's serene, comfortable here. The image is beautifully lit and professionally done."



4TH PLACE: TRICIA DAVIDGE

Tricia Davidge's subject wanted lighthearted, colorful maternity images. The two women came up with an idea about a watermelon. Davidge, owner of Tricia Davidge Photography & Styling in Redding, Calif., did all the hair, makeup and styling herself. In-studio, she hooked up two AlienBees B800 studio flash units and modified them with 47-inch foldable octagon soft boxes. She shot with a Canon EOS 5D Mark II camera with a Canon 16-35mm f/2.8 wide-angle lens to create distortion on the subject's head to animate the image. Davidge exposed the frame for 1/100 second at f/13, ISO 250. Post-production, she used Adobe Photoshop to delineate the subject's upper body from the background. triciadavidge.com

HELEN YANCY'S TAKE:

"This is an absolutely wonderful image. What a cute way to photograph a modern-day, soon-to-be mom. The watermelon, the belly painting, the hair color—everything coordinates very well, and it's very skillfully done. The contrast of the white skin against the bright color is totally deliberate on part of the maker."

5TH PLACE: JOSE INFANTE

When Jose Infante made this image, his goal was to portray a playful, child-like feeling. Envisioning a "Candy Land" theme, he surrounded the model with color and set about capturing her reaction to the set. He used a Fujifilm FinePix S2 Pro camera with a Nikon 35-135mm f/3.5-4.5 lens. Infante, who runs Jose Infante Photography in New York, lit the scene with two Profoto Acute/D4 flash heads attached to an Acute 2 1200 and modified by Profoto 5-foot octagon soft boxes. The exposure of this image was for 1/125 second at f/5.6, ISO 100. infantephoto.com

HELEN YANCY'S TAKE:

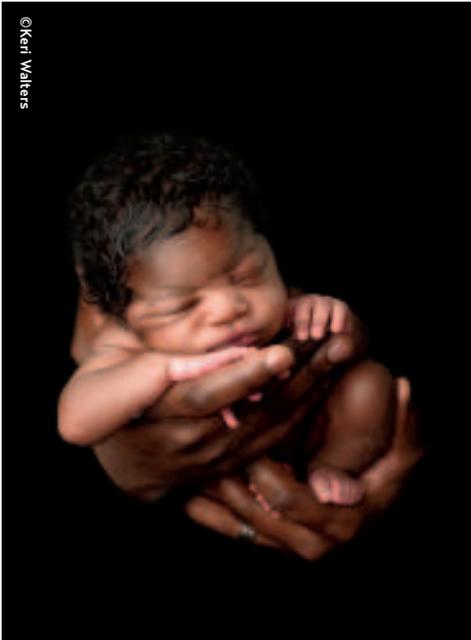
"The child's bright blue eyes stand out from her skin tone and the background colors beautifully; the maker did a great job of playing up the color contrast. The placement of her hands is delightful. Hands placed in this manner sometimes look contrived, but here it looks natural. This is a playful yet professionally lit image, which is great to see."

©Tricia Davidge



©Jose Infante





©Keri Walters

KERI WALTERS, Zachary, La.
 "What an adorable little ball of a baby. This image holds the detail, even in the dark areas. The photographer did this common pose in a totally creative new way, and it works. The image wasn't a top winner only because there's not quite enough definition at the top of the child's head."



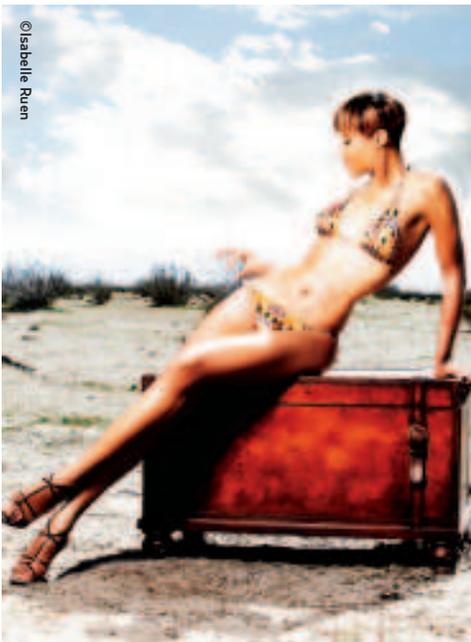
©Kyle Dreier

KYLE DREIER, Franklin, Tenn.
 "A great straightforward commercial shot. The reason it wasn't a top finisher is the lack of detail on the bottle cap. Blown up for a cover, the detail wouldn't hold up, and there might have been banding in background. It's a great idea, though. Nice image overall."



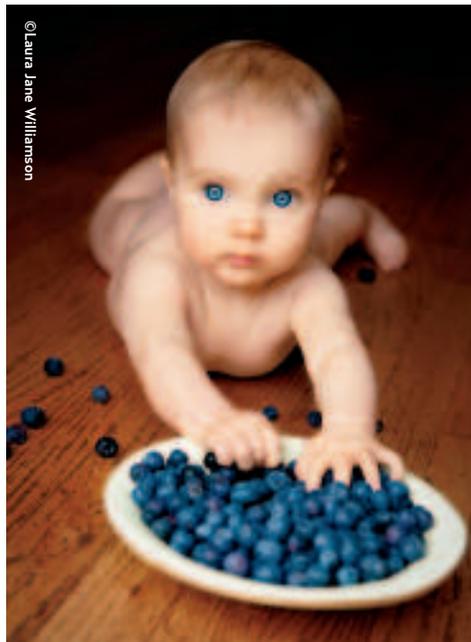
©Sommer Ortiz

SOMMER ORTIZ, Longs, S.C.
 "I love this image. The maker was courageous in her use of color. I found it refreshing. The expression on the child's face is wonderful. Altogether, it's a creative image. Only the heavy burn at the upper left kept it from being a top finisher."



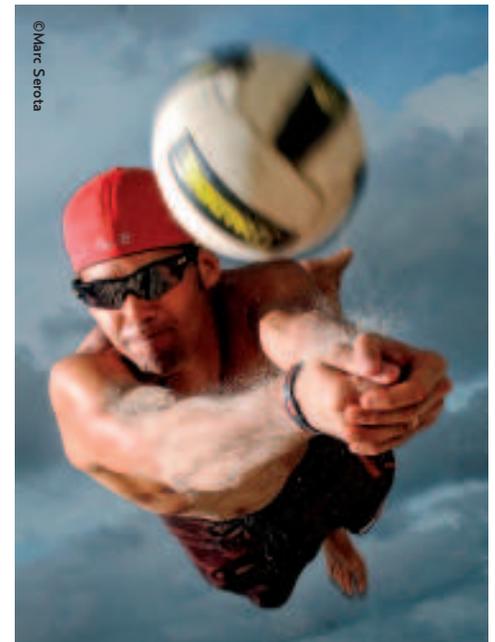
©Isabelle Ruen

ISABELLE RUEN, Studio City, Calif.
 "This image works overall, and it's a great presentation of the model. It's a tight crop, divided in the center, and that composition wouldn't work on the cover. The highlights are quite hot in this image, almost blown out. That would have been magnified at the cover size."



©Laura Jane Williamson

LAURA JANE WILLIAMSON, Los Angeles, Calif.
 "The eyes are electric like the blueberries—that connection really caught our eyes. The only thing keeping it out of the top level is the soft focus on the baby's hands. Soft focus on the blueberries alone, okay, but those hands are a problem."

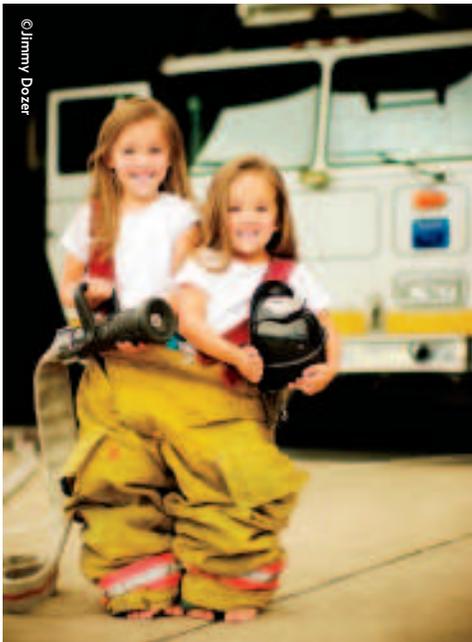


©Marc Serota

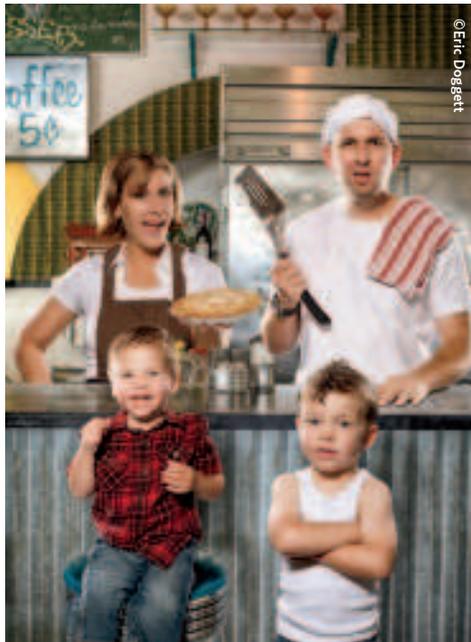
MARC SEROTA, Boca Raton, Fla.
 "Absolutely super shot. The only thing keeping from the top of the list is the placement of the subject's foot. I know the photographer couldn't help that in a freeze-motion action shot. But when you're looking at a magazine cover, every little distraction is amplified."

HONORABLE MENTION

COMMENTARY BY HELEN YANCY



JIMMY DOZER, Castle Rock, Colo.
"Charming. Its rim is lit beautifully, and the light on the hair is great. However, there's no direction to the light on the face. It's too flat in that area. That's all that kept it out of the top."



ERIC DOGGETT, Austin, Texas
"I love the story. I love the expressions. I love the courage of the photographer to put it all together. Therein lies the reason it didn't make it to the top: It looks too put together. There's kind of a cut-out effect in several areas. But what a clever image overall!"



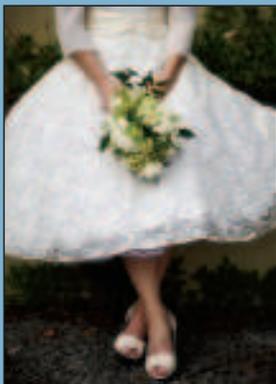
TOM ZUBACK, New York, N.Y.
"Totally creative. I love the way the dog reads me as I read this image. Very clever and fun. There's a bit of softness in the nose. The photographer chose to sharpen the glasses and the collar and to leave the nose soft. That's what kept this image out of the top level of finishers."

READER'S CHOICE

The annual *Professional Photographer Cover Photo Contest* brings in thousands of entries (more than 5,800 individuals in 2010). This year we gave readers a chance to tell us which images they liked. The contest's new online gallery, "Rate My Cover Photo," gave you the opportunity to vote with a mouse click.

More than 38,300 of you browsed the images and rated your favorites—or least favorites—on a scale of one to five stars. The five images below garnered the highest reader ratings.

©Scott Morris



No. 1
Scott Morris

©Bonnie Romano



No. 2
Bonnie Romano

©Stephen Kaufman



No. 3
Stephen Kaufman

©Jon Caron



No. 4
Jon Caron

©Jessica Rose



No. 5
Jessica Rose