



**THOUGHTWASP**  
HAND WRITTEN NOTES  
by Naina



## NOTES FROM VISUAL STORIES

Vincent has photographed a lot of stuff I would consider "crazy". That also means that I totally want to do it myself. Throughout the book, Vincent mentions that photography makes him happy and that is the one thing that thoroughly resonates with me. I am the happiest when making images.

His father said to him, "You know what I love about photography? I've been doing this for over 30 years now, and every day I still learn something new."

"Technique doesn't generally lead to great photographs, but poor technique can prevent a photographer from creating great images."

Entire anecdotes of how Vincent got to photograph some historic moments are present across the book and I believe those anecdotes are a much better way of gaining insights into being a professional photographer.

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON; ROBERT CAPA; RAYMOND DEPARDON; BRASSAI; HELMUT NEWTON; JAMES NACHTWEY. (have seen some images of some of these photographers, need to see more.)

"The magic of photography is that every photograph, every piece of art, means something different to someone else, and everyone connects to it differently." (Which is why I immensely dislike critiques/feedback/statements made about a particular image without at least exploring more about the image or having a conversation with the photographer. Just because we now have the internet that allows us to instantly express how we feel, does not mean we shouldn't spend time in thought.)

"I think a photograph needs to be shared." (YES PLEASE)

"Admittedly, earlier in my career, it was about ego. It was about getting my image out there and saying millions of people saw it. Later in my career, especially as a photojournalist, I came to learn that a photograph has nothing to do with you. It's about the person being photographed. It's about their story."



"... and someone wrote me a 10-page letter about it because of how they related to it." (He is referring to his images that he thought were lacking. Think more about creating relationships through your images.) (Capturing emotion, documentation, that is why wedding images evoke a strong reaction.)

On capturing the winning moment in sports photography:  
 "There are no lines at stake here, but it's nevertheless important for the public to witness people striving to be their best."

"So there's that diagonal line falling through the image. There's the classic silhouette of the cowboy in the foreground. There's the cowboy resting on the left and the other one stoking the fire." (I tend to analyze my images after I've captured them. Usually, there is no time to consciously analyze, lines & composition. While shooting, most of my 'calculations' are performed subconsciously.)

"This image isn't technically perfect, but I think we can pursue perfection to a fault." We photographers pay attention to the rule of thirds and technical directives. We try to get the highest pixel count and the most dynamic range. Yet at the end of the day all that perfection can lead to failure, more times than not. You have to have a healthy respect for this desire for perfection, yet it has a very good chance of sucking the life out of your pictures." (I think he is being diplomatic. Screw 'technique' I say and shoot more with patience.)

"Beauty can be found in the familiar and the ordinary. It's just a matter of opening your eyes. There are few things more satisfying than capturing that beautiful moment, when things line up just right, and making an image reveal that beauty of the everyday." (Tough to think like this when starting out and trying to make ends meet but if you cannot relate to this at all, you're not doing it right. It deserves better.)



"One of the hardest things to do as a photographer is shoot emptiness, or shoot something that's not there but conveys what's beneath the surface." (So hard to do this is wedding photography unless backed with experience. The automatic shutter just happens for "pretty things".)

"It takes a lot of guts to take a picture of nothing and expect people to feel what I was feeling." ... "After years and years of making 'banger' images, I was striving to make something more poetic and subtle." (I don't think I have ever had a problem with making subtle images - but most times it's nearly impossible to find someone in the audience that 'gets' the subtle images. In this era of instant gratification from Retweets and Shares and Facebook Likes, it is easy to forget why one is a photographer.)

"It's kind of an unspoken thing that we all do. We look at what everyone else is shooting, and we find the good angles because we don't have time to find them ourselves sometimes." (With so much on our work-plate and personal-plate these days, we're usually more photography-business-person than photographer.)

"marrying the aesthetic with the content."

"I learned to anticipate, and recognized how invaluable that ability was for photographing sports." (Also true for any kind of event photography and then weddings.)

"It also helped to accept the fact that I would often have only one chance. It's probably the biggest factor in photography, across all fields, more so in sports, but especially in photojournalism. There's a tremendous amount of pressure that comes with that reality and it can lock you up mentally." (Which is where the 'spray and pray' mentality comes from I guess. Burst mode is a friend but supporting that with thought, planning, research and preparation will make it a killer combination. Think STRATEGY.)

(I absolutely LOVE the image of the diner on page 64!)

"The reality of war is that it's not always back-to-back fighting. It's not nonstop confrontation. It includes a tremendous amount of calm, peace and apparent normalcy, followed by intense chase and horror."



"You absolutely need to put a face on tragedies and on the story of that struggle and that kind of perseverance."

"It's always important for me to remember that I am not just making photographs for myself, to satisfy the desire of my own ego, but to be there to help tell someone else's story."

(I aspire to ... EARTHQUAKE! ... do this especially when I am photographing weddings.)

"I began to learn that each lens, each choice of equipment had to be rooted in what I was trying to do / achieve with the camera. Otherwise, I would be bringing everything and the kitchen sink with no guarantee that I would get the shot."

"As much as I evangelize gear for the companies with whom I work, it's important to remember that gear alone never makes a picture. Gear that doesn't work or that you don't know well stands in your way of getting the photograph."

"The reality is that you can make a great photograph with virtually any lens or camera there is, but only if you know what you are doing."

(Now if only people will actually implement the above! Gear lust with the anticipation of making better images, is wrong. Naturally, I get asked a lot about "what camera to buy" and when I am not looking at biting someone's head off, I always ask one question, "What do you want it for?" and most don't have an answer. Ready to throw money on equipment you don't need? Oh, but not ready to pay me for advice that will save you money AND make you a better photographer. MORONS.)

"The philosophy I try to live by is KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid), because while I'm busy thinking about the gear, the moment has come and gone."

"And although missing a shot can be disappointing, it's always important to remember that this isn't rocket science. If you miss a photograph, no one dies at the operating table. No one falls from the sky because you designed a rocket poorly. This is photography and it should be fun; at its best, it's liberating." (AMEN)



"One of the most important rules of photography is to always have a camera with you."

"I always have extra batteries, and I always make sure to charge them before I sleep. No exceptions. Ever. No matter how tired I am, no matter what the excuse is, I never go to bed without making sure my batteries are charging." (Page 103 of the book *Max Vincent's ACCESSORIES AND WORKFLOW*, shared in minute detail. Impressive.)

"One very important thing to keep in mind when you're doing a series of photographs is to diversify not only the lenses you use but also the type of photographs you take." (Page 106 is exceptionally clear in highlighting why Vincent Laforet is such a well-known photographer and why photography as a job is not as glamorous as it is assumed to be by most non-photographers. ~~AND~~ MIND-BLOWN.)

"The choice to take care of those little things is not just an option, it's imperative, because proper preparation prevents poor performance. It comes down to discipline. There's a lot of discipline in photography, from knowing your gear to using it all consistently, but it's all there to serve a singular pursuit: to get the photograph."

(Vincent then goes on to talk about his favourite aerial photography. Was fascinated to read and get a perspective that I had not even imagined.)

"One of the biggest questions I ask myself when composing the photograph is: What is it that I want inside that frame? In other words, I need to decide what will add to or detract from the picture. It's an important rule that I tend to live by."

"The point with an image like this is that you see the potential for something and you just wait. That's a lesson I learned from studying the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson. There's a famous image he captured of a descending staircase with a bike passing by in Hyères, France. I saw his original contact sheets. He shot 36 frames of the exact same composition, and only one of them included the bicycle."



"A lot of photography is about finding that environment and waiting. In some documentary of Antony Beezon, you may see him jumping around like a bumblebee taking pictures from every angle, but that's what he wanted you to see. The reality is that he waited, and waited, and waited."

"You find the right set of circumstances with the right light and geometry, and you sit, pray, and try to blend in. It's like a hunt."

(I realize my handwriting is quite jagged and jerky today. Many factors to blame: the molestation video news story from Guwahati, the half a litre of coffee in my system and the excitement generated by LaForet's book. All coming together to make me a tight ball of nervous energy.)

"The reality of photography is that there are always infinite possibilities in front of you. And if you think you're probably missing a million photographs every time you take one, it is easy to feel overwhelmed. This makes lens choice even more of a consideration."

"Part of the discipline of photography is asking the question, 'What do I really need?' To answer that question, often you first have to ask yourself, 'What am I looking for?' 'What is my vision for the photograph?' (And if you are indecisive and confused, it will show in your images and you will hate them.)

"One of the principles that I haven't heard too often, but that informs much of what I do with my photography, is not to make a lens choice based on how far my subject is or how wide or tight I want to shoot. I choose a lens based on compression, how the lens impacts the relationship between the foreground and the background."

"If I want to create the impression that the foreground and background are closer to each other than they may actually be, I choose a longer lens, to at least a 200mm."

"One of the tricks that a photographer has to practice is simply moving around."



"It's important to learn the sweet spot of your lens, particularly a zoom. What I often do with students is have them put gaffer's tape on their zoom lenses and force them to shoot at a specific focal length for two weeks. They are not allowed to move it! They are forced to learn the sweet spot of that particular focal length on that lens, as well as discover when it fails." (sweet spot? What sweet spot? Damn, I think I still have a lot to learn. Who ever has been Vincent's student, you're very lucky and I am very jealous. I will proceed to find some gaffer's tape now.)

"The goal is to find a way to accept the limitations of the equipment or the situation and to begin engaging in the act of art. Each of us has to aim for that space between the technical and the artistic, where discipline and knowledge mix with talent and luck." (You are making art, not just a photograph. Which is why most people / the audience on Facebook does not know how to critique your images. You might have created art - where the reaction to it is personal and different - but most people have never looked beyond photography as technical mastery of equipment. I understand all too well why there are comments like "Why do use Photoshop if you're such a good photographer?" )

"... as my career matured and grew, I was naturally leaning toward taking more chances and pushing that envelope, stepping away from pure editorial photography. I found it was tremendously limiting to creativity not to be able to use different tools, and to light things in certain ways." (This is from the section in the book where Vincent talks about tilt-shift photography.)

"One of the single most important pieces of advice I can give share with photographers if they want to learn about light, they should find one single light source."

"The general rule is that a heavier person will look better side lit, because you will see only half of them."

"... how to use light and exposure is an aesthetic decision. There's no such thing as a perfect exposure. The exposure is only perfect when it fits with what you are trying to achieve with the camera." (And if you didn't set out with some clarity about what you are trying to achieve, everything you produce will be a muddy soup with no personality.)



"For almost any series you work on, I recommend always trying to have a beginning, a middle, and an end. As you get advanced, you can begin to breakdown that formula, but when you're getting started, always try to have a basic structure to ensure you tell a complete story."

"It's when I overcame my fears that I started to become a better photographer."

"The reality for any photographer is you are only as good as your last image."

"You have to strive for the images you think are unattainable, the images you're not sure you can make, because when you do make them, even if it's two or three times a year, it keeps you going."

"I knew innately that the praise was not helping me. Praise does not help you grow. Praise slows you down. Praise lets you rest on your laurels. Instead of pursuing praise, spend your time studying your failures."

"Don't listen to just anybody, because most people don't really know what they're talking about."

"Over time, no matter what the size of your ego, you're going to learn some lessons as a photojournalist. One is that the event bumps you and your work. And it's going to happen - over time the world will teach you that it's not about you."

"I tell people that if you're a photojournalist or a street photographer and you're uncomfortable photographing someone, everyone within 100 yards can feel it."

"Finally, this game is about persistence."

"This photograph is the result of not giving up. It wasn't an option."

— (end of my notes) —





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