Managing Photography at Historic Sites: Effectively Capturing Collections, Buildings, Landscapes, and Visitors on a Budget

Christa Carr & Corey Ames Heyward

MARCH 19, 2019
Agenda

• Collections, Landscapes, and “DIY” Photography (Corey Ames Heyward, Drayton Hall)

• Managing Onsite Photography, Press, and Events (Christa Carr, The Glass House)

• Question and Answer Session
Speakers

Corey Ames Heyward  
Wexler Curatorial Fellow, Drayton Hall

Christa Carr  
Director of Communications, The Glass House
Photography of Collections and Landscapes
Corey Ames Heyward, Drayton Hall Preservation Trust
Drayton Hall Studio Set-Up

- Background Stand
- Backdrops: Vinyl, black velvet, white
- Adjustable Lamps with Wireless Flash Receiver
- Tripod with Adjustable Arm
- 360-degree Tripod Ball Head

- Table-top studio set-up
Other Set-Ups

- Permanent Macro-photography studio set-up (Forensic Digital Imaging, Inc.)
- Camera Stand on Casters
- Small Adjustable LED lights
- Backlit Tabletop
- Compact and Transportable Backdrop/Table Stand
Arranging the Object

- Purpose of the Photo
- Accurate Representation of the Object
Adjust the Camera Settings

• Exposure
• Aperture (depth of field—affects light)
• Shutter Speed (f-stop)
• ISO (Light sensitivity—affects noise)
• Consider Shadows
Color-Checking

Using the first grey square

- Must take the photo in RAW (NEF) format
- Using Adobe Bridge/Lightroom and Photoshop
- Opens the raw photo in “Camera Raw”
- Use the dropper tool to select the first grey square of the color checker
- Need a range between 196 and 206
- Continue taking photos without the color checker
- Last step: sync all photos’ settings with the image that was color-checked (in Camera Raw)
Photoshopping

• Minimize the Editing in Photoshop

• For Obtaining True White Backgrounds
  – Select your background
  – Open the Curves Window
  – Use the White Dropper Tool to select the edges of your background
  – Can adjust to alter the amount of shadow that is left behind
File Saving

- Original Photos taken in RAW (NEF)
- Keep raw files while working
- Do not need to keep raw files once finished
- Always save a large format TIFF (16-bit is the international archival standard)
Landscape Photography

- Need a weighted tripod and remote release
- Take the time to orient correctly
- Use the on-camera histogram to tell you if your levels are accurate
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MANAGING PHOTOGRAPHY AT HISTORIC SITES:
Effectively Capturing Preservation, Programming, Landscape, Events, + More

Christa Carr, Communications Director, the Glass House
Photographing Historic Sites
Tell Stories: Grow Your Audience

- Shoot at different seasons – show how the character, light + atmosphere changes throughout the year
- Share work within departments
- Share your work externally
- Raise awareness
- Community engagement
- Conservation
- Build relationships with donors and sponsors
- Preserve culture
- Shape culture

“Some people are not interested in visual architecture, but that’s really the only thing that there is in architecture.”
- Philip Johnson
Photographing Historic Sites

- Share with the media / press increases chances of coverage
- Audience and donors / sponsors / community outreach
- Promotional use – ads, reports, documents website and more
- Social media – maintain and build your audience locally and globally
- Prepared when opportunity knocks: Be responsive when asked for photography, develop a reputation. We are now regularly asked for photography to be used in catalogues, museum shows and more
- Don’t be shy to invite your dream photographer to the site. Be upfront on the terms. Have no budget? Sometimes photographers are willing to barter. Providing exclusive access to the site has cache
- Get to know your local talent and work with local students
Photographing Preservation

Case Study 1: The Sculpture Gallery Restoration

Engage and grow your audience + make your donors feel special, appreciated. Share photography assets to show their work as supporters of preservation

- Meet with the production team
- Determine the budget
- Establish a timeline with the team to capture key developments in the project
- Establish a liaison with the Communications Team of Sponsor / Donor
- Recommended: Use a local photographer
- Photographer needs to work well with the team / photographer needs to be discreet/mindful of the workers, nimble, flexible, opportunistic, creative, careful of the collection and site, decisive, precise
Trust and Shared Vision

Case Study 1: The Sculpture Gallery Restoration

Photographer: Lane Coder
- A good photographer studies the site and building, observing weather and light through the day
- Photographer establishes a chart of viewpoints to be meticulously followed upon shooting

Equipment
Camera: Nikon D810 DSLR Camera
Lens: Carl Zeiss 28 mm Otus
Tripod: Gitzo Carbon fiber Legs (extra-large)
    Manfrotto 405 gear head
Interpretation and Visual Communication

Case Study 1: The Sculpture Gallery Restoration

A photographer’s job is to interpret and communicate through their photography

- Scale of the job would determine the time needed to document the project
- When shooting in the landscape, natural light is preferred
Discovering More About Architecture Through Photography

Case Study 2: The Replacement of the Glass House Ceiling

Photographer: Michael Biondo

- Due to the material and angle of the Glass House facing West, a time-lapse video + photography was determined to be the most appropriate medium for documentation

Equipment

Camera: Microfiber 4/3 Mirrorless Camera
Lens: Wide Angle Zoom Lens
Misc: Remote Intervalometer (hardwired to an electrical source) and movable platform
Photographing Events

- Meet with your team to discuss details of the event: theme, time, location(s), purpose
- Think about key visual moments you’d like to capture for site, guests, host, any sponsors, donor expectations?
- Determine if you need to hire a professional photographer or if you can cover the photography internally using an iPhone or camera
- Determine overall budget
Covering Your Own Event

DIY Photography - in a nutshell

Prepare

▪ Create a Shot List: review guest list and determine what guest photos you want to capture with your team
▪ Know what the event is about, location and outline program and important moments to capture
▪ Action shots are far more interesting than posed shots
▪ Be quick and on your toes, ready to get the right shot

Don’ts

▪ Photograph the backs of guests’ head
▪ Avoid photos of guests eating or drinking (unless for the drink sponsor, catering prefer presented food not half eaten)
▪ Too many shadows: Look at the foreground and the background
▪ Do not photograph into the sun
Covering Your Own Event

Everyone can be a good photographer you just need to follow a few rules

Do’s

- Photos need to look clean and balanced
- Check the thirds rule with your photo (break the photo into landscape 3rds)
- Check all four corners: what do you see? Is someone or something photo-bombing the image?
- Look at the foreground and the background: Are there too many shadows? Too dark?
- When taking photos at book events, make sure you include an angle with the cover of the book, so the cover can be distinguished
When To Hire A Photographer For An Event

- Your event is important and includes VIPs guests – Creating memories
- There is a sponsor / donor / artist involved who will expect photography from their participation in the event
- Press will need the images for coverage
- Photos will benefit sharing your message / capture your activities to be further used such as for advisory council meetings, report, internal documentation
- Determine the best photographer to suit the event. Social (wedding) photographers capture the best people photos. They are accustomed to working fast, capturing moments, sensitive to capturing key guests, and detail
- Does the Communications team need to liaise with any outside partners?
- Make sure you have the entire event’s timetable and locations mapped out and agreed with your photographer in advance
Event Day Preparation

- Get there early, walk around and check out the layout
- Check the weather – send out a photograph (can be with iPhone) with a note about how beautiful the day will be on social media. (This assures those traveling from a distance that it’s worth coming – helps with far-away locations from city hubs)
- The best time to take photos of catering and atmosphere is before guests arrive
- Meet the photographer(s) 45 minutes to 1 hour before the event to review plans / any changes start to take atmosphere and sponsor shots as they are laid out nicely
- Review guest list and, if needed, share photos of VIPs so photographer knows who to look for
Post Event Photography within 24 - 48 Hours

- Work with your staff to review photos, ensure correct spelling of guests’ names, delete any shots you don’t want, select photos for press by category (local guests, national interest etc.)
- Prepare photos to send to sponsors. They will be keen to see them!
- Create a link of selected photos to share with your mailing list/press both local and national
Capturing Programming on Site

- Museum / Gallery standard photography is a must
- Press will only publish high resolution (300 dpi), professional quality photos
- Choose a photographer best suited for the project, each art project is unique
- Need to be sensitive to the artist’s vision of their work. Work closely with the gallery / artist to understand
- Prepare a press selection. Offer an exclusive to press using their first pick of the images, then distribute the rest through regular press channels. Press always love an exclusive
- Take the time to choose the right photographer is key
Capturing Programming on Site

Case Study 1
Fujiko Nakaya: Fog

**Challenge:** Who could capture the flowing fog, architecture and landscape the best?

**Photographer:** Richard Barnes for Fujiko Nakaya was familiar with atmospheric photography in the landscape. NY Times regular.

- Establish budget, negotiate the price with the photographer – at the time think of all the uses for this photography: will there be a book? Postcards? Limited edition print? Museum catalogue?
- Amazing photography is worth the investment, our audience quadrupled
Capturing Programming on Site

Case Study 2
Yayoi Kusama: Narcissus Garden, Pumpkin + Dots

Challenges:
- 1300 floating steel balls in the pond, pumpkin in the landscape and installation of signature red dots covering the Glass House – a first
- Artist had very specific views on all photography of her work
- Her two galleries and assistants also had ideas concerning views – had to make everyone happy
Telling Your Story on Instagram

Exclusive Experiences: Engaging + Growing your audience

The influencer event Case Study: An exclusive gathering held at The Glass House for Yayoi Kusama’s site specific, *Dots Obsession-Alive, Seeking for Eternal Hope*. September 7th 2016, 5-7pm

- 50 NYC’s highest profile social media influencers in the arts, culture & lifestyle space, are invited to preview the installation as part of a unique Instagram-centric food & art experience
- Instagram influencers build buzz by sharing their experience, allowing the Glass House to tell visually the story and vision of both the installation artist and the architect through social media
- Worked with “cultural experience” agency focused on curating, producing and storytelling – Melting Butter Studio
- Influencers take inspiration from the installation on site
- Use the installation and site as a basis for visually displaying event elements such as the food installation. Food includes influencers in their field
- 2014: Glass House has 3,000 followers. Today, the Glass House has 18,000 followers on Instagram
Photography Builds Profile and Helps Raise Funds

- 4 exclusive press features on opening day: (New York Times T Mag, WSJ, Vogue and W Magazine)
- Sold out tour season, highest level of private tour requests, GH profile raised
- Brought in more donors and photo shoot requests = $
Community Outreach

The Local Instameet

- Fall Foliage Glass House + Grace Farms = small targeted event
- Created opportunity to collaborate with two like-minded institutions in our town.
- Created special hashtag #instaNewCanaan
- We informed the New Canaan Chamber of Commerce
- Invited a small group of local photographers and the CT tourism social media manager
QUESTION AND ANSWER

Use the chat box on the bottom right to ask questions of the speakers.
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