Neil Binkley Chooses the Work of Photographer Dave Moser

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By Neil Binkley

© DAVE MOSER
Real housewife on a swing from HouseWife Series.

The Real, Real Housewives

It's my experience that commercial photographers' personal projects (i.e. the ones not shot for money) often get the most resonance from their clients, other photographers and the media. Often times I'll ask a photographer who the client was on one of my favorite images on their website or portfolio, and they typically (and sheepishly) reply, "Oh, I just shot it for my book." As if to say that the images were somehow less significant or interesting because they didn't have a commercial founding.

On the contrary, I frequently suggest that they pursue personal work for the very reason that it allows them ultimate, creative flexibility.

The image above is from Philadelphia photographer Dave Moser's ongoing personal essay, the "HouseWife" series. His subjects are all true housewives, cast from an expanding network of his sister-in-law's friends. Moser photographs them on their properties, using their personal items as props and wardrobe. Dave also wants to avoid any cosmetic retouching.

In this particular shot, the subject wears her own dress (chosen by the photographer), and rocks on her kids' swing. Apparently, she hadn't been on a swing in over a decade, but was game for the shoot.

Dave said that he started the HouseWife project "to create dignity and understanding around the role of housewife." He decided to tackle this subject after becoming a father, and experiencing the prejudices that he sometimes saw directed at his wife and other housewives that he knew. I asked him why he thought that was the case:

"We claim that we admire housewives, and respect the role, and yet we don't. In practice, when people find you're a housewife, there's not a lot of respect for it...Because it's not a paying job, it doesn't generate money directly...there's also misconceptions of what housewives actually do. Besides keeping the house in order, they're caring for our children, which we're all looking to improve on the model, right? I mean, is there a more important role than bringing our children up?"

For his commercial work, Moser typically shoots a combination of CEO's, celebrities and "real people" for magazines, ad agencies, and pharmaceutical companies. He shoots personal work to push his comfort level and expand his style, and always tries to have a project in the wings.

Dave wanted this project to cover new territory, in comparison with that of his last personal essay: "The former project I had done was recovering addicts, ex-cons and homeless, and I wanted to do a very, very different group of people. And I've been sent to people's homes all of the time to photograph them, and they can be extremely...confining...So I wanted to really focus on honing my skills working in an environment that I find very challenging."

A former fine art student, Moser also wanted to employ a more painterly style with the HouseWife series, expanding on his previous personal project, which (in Dave's words) drew on German Expressionism.

Moser began shooting the House Wife series in late 2010, and will photograph a total of about 25 subjects. Part of his challenge is to not replicate any of the images. He's also not limited the subjects to just women, either, as you'll see at least one man in the HouseWife gallery on his wWeb site. He also shot his first nude for this project.

The project name, "HouseWife", is additionally a response to the TV shows on the subject ("Real Housewives of Orange County" and "Desperate Housewives" come to mind), because Dave perceives that they present more of a caricature of their subjects than is warranted.

Finally, the project allows Dave the opportunity to do what he loves best: photographing people.

"Photography is about people for me. Like if I wasn't taking pictures of people, I'd be in a different vocation altogether. I don't enjoy the camera equipment. I mean, the lighting I enjoy, but it's the interaction with the people, meeting people and getting to know them, pulling something out of them and provoking them."

And on his housewife subjects in particular, Moser says, "people see the energy that you project. If you're comfortable in your own skin then you have your own power. And that's really want I want in these pictures. It's this power, this dignity."

You can see more examples in the HouseWife gallery on Dave Moser's Web site at www.davemoser.com.

Neil Binkley, Consultant
www.neilbinkley.com
(610) 937-1997

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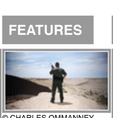

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