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IN FOCUS

sustained focus

going behind the lens at the Santa Fe Photographic Workshops

by Eve Tolpa

FRED ROBERTS HAS PUBLISHED three books of photography, been represented by numerous galleries worldwide, and shown at the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego and the Rubin Museum of Art in New York. This past April, he was named “Best Foreign Photographer for India” by the Indian Government, which marked the first time an American had ever won that prestigious award.

An investment banker-turned-photographer, the Los Angeles-based Roberts attributes his success to the Santa Fe Photographic Workshops (SFPW), which offer year-round, week-long courses at all levels. The program, he says, “began my life in photography. I started in August 2000 with a beginner’s class, then took nine more workshops. Everything I know about and have accomplished in photography, I credit to my experiences at The Workshops.”

Director Reid Callanan started the program in 1990 after living in Maine, where he developed his skills as a photographer and administrator at the Maine Photographic Workshops. Along with a group of colleagues (including *Santa Fean* photographer Douglas Merriam), Callanan eventually brought those skills to the high desert. “Santa Fe is a big thing—being located here. I think it’s the reason we’ve been so successful,” he says, referring to the area’s photographic legacy and artistic population, as well as its legendary light and landscape.

Another reason The Workshops have been so successful is the program’s campus on the Immaculate Heart of Mary Retreat and Conference Center. “It’s no mistake that we’re located in a retreat center,” Callanan notes. “You have to remove yourself from everyday life to immerse yourself in this photographic culture.”

But the real key to SFPW’s popularity and longevity is its high-caliber instructors, all of whom are working professional



Courses at the Santa Fe Photographic Workshops accommodate all levels of aspiring shooters—from amateur to professional—and focus on subjects like nature, landscape, and portraiture, as well as procedural topics like how to process and print your photos. The Workshops’ *Around the World* series takes students to places like Cuba, Burma, and Death Valley, California.



photographers. “They’re the most talented, influential people I can find,” Callanan says.

Primarily freelancers who shoot for magazines like *National Geographic*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Details*, instructors come to Santa Fe from all over the country (and occasionally the world) to spend a week imparting their knowledge to a class of 12 to 14 participants. “Jay Maisel, Paul Elledge, Leasha Overturf, Norman Mauskopf, Carlan Tapp . . . I can list an incredible assortment of photographers whose workshops and influence helped shape me as a photographer,” says Jennifer Spelman, who specializes in portraiture and has been an SFPW participant, employee, and instructor.

“It’s a heady experience to put aside all other distractions in life and simply embrace the art of making images,” says instructor Jennifer Spelman.

The majority of workshop participants, Callanan says, are from Texas, California, and New York, with a “small but significant number” of people coming from countries like Brazil, Singapore, Australia, and Japan. Almost three-quarters of participants identify themselves as “advanced amateurs,” and more than half are between the ages of 40 and 64. This diversity creates what Callanan describes as “the synergy and energy that happens between people with a common interest,” adding that “the conversations are dynamic, and young people interact with people in their 70s.”

Although SFPW offers 180 classes year-round, it has three main “seasons”—spring, summer (its biggest), and fall—during which on-campus lodging is available. In addition, SFPW produces workshops around the world in collaboration with *National Geographic* and participates in People-to-People Educational Exchanges in Cuba.

Whatever the topic and wherever the location, it’s SFPW’s intense focus that keeps people engaged. “It’s a heady experience to put aside all other distractions in life and simply embrace the art of making images,” says Spelman. “I keep waiting for the magic of the place to wear thin, but after being involved with some 60-plus workshops, I still finish each week there with a renewed commitment to making images true to my own vision.” ■

