



It's a dream many if not all of us have had at one point in time: to quit the day job, pack the camera bag and head out to make a living from photographing the great outdoors. It has always been a hard dream to turn into reality, but these days, with traditional revenue sources for photographers dwindling rapidly, it seems more unreachable than ever. So, it takes great courage and maybe a little bit of crazy spirit to make the leap, just as Doug Chinnery has.

Doug was in the midst of packing for a week-long workshop on the Isle of Skye when we caught up. 'It seems there are a lot of people giving it a try now. Just about every photographer's site has workshops on offer. More and more people are aspiring to be professional outdoor photographers. I think it is a good thing, but I don't think people realise how hard it is; it's pretty tough. A lot of better photographers than me sadly fail because they don't realise that 70 percent of it is being a businessman rather than being a photographer. You can be very good with the camera but you have to be the accountant, salesman, and marketing person, too, as well as all the other things that come with running a business. I really appreciate my business training; it has helped me even more than my photography experience.'

Doug grew up in a small market town in Essex and has always been outdoorsy, spending much of his childhood wandering through the fields opposite his house or going off on camping and biking holidays with his family. 'Essex isn't like being brought up in the Lake District or Scotland, but I was always at my happiest when playing outside.' At the age of seven or eight he got his first camera, a Kodak Brownie, but it was a later gift from his stepfather that triggered his passion for photography. 'He bought me an old Russian Lubitel 6x6 medium format camera when I was 10 or 11, and started to teach me photography. That was when I really started to get in to it. I progressed on to an Olympus OM-10, which took me through my teenage years and into my early twenties.'

As often happens, the demands of other parts of life start to encroach on the time we can make available for our hobbies, and it was no different for Doug. 'When Elizabeth and I got married, photography got pushed into the background for almost 15 years. We bought a tumbledown house and had to do it up. Then, around 2005, Elizabeth bought me a Canon 350D as an anniversary present and that really fired me back up again. Since then, it has come on in leaps and bounds.'

Surprisingly, given how much he loves it now, photography was not Doug's first choice of medium for his artistic expression. 'I always wanted to be creative. I tried really hard at art at school but I am absolutely hopeless; I have tried sketching, watercolour painting, and all kinds of other ways, such as creative writing, to express myself, and it just never worked out; I don't have the ability needed. But with a camera, because it does some of the heavy lifting for you, I have found a way to be creative and get

## IN CONVERSATION WITH Doug Chinnery

A burning, lifelong passion for photography and being creative led Doug Chinnery to finally make the leap to becoming a professional photographer, and he hasn't looked back since. He talks to us about his love of squares, campervans and experimenting with style

Interview by Steve Watkins



results that please me. That is the magic of photography, for me.'

At first, Doug went out shooting straightforward landscapes, but he found he became less and less fulfilled by them; 'You know, front to back sharpness and super wideangle lenses stretching the skies and making dramatic scenes. I find when I look at those sorts of images, I can appreciate them for their beauty but I quickly lose interest in them. It was seeing the work of people like Chris Friel, Chris Tancock, and Paul Kenny that made me realise there are other ways of using a camera to express the landscape. So, I have been working over the last few years to be a bit more creative with my photography. I want people to feel what I felt when I was there – it is more about

emotion and letting people discover things in pictures, or to build their own story. The classic landscapes reveal everything instantly and there is little left to find. Some of the more creative photographs allow you, as a viewer, time to immerse yourself in the image and to make up your own mind up about what is going on. If you take some of Chris Tancock's work for example, I can go back to his images again and again and still see things in them I haven't seen before. They are the kind of photographs I could have on a wall for a lifetime, whereas many of the landscape pictures we see I could have on a calendar and look at for a month, but I am quite happy to turn over to October from September just to get something fresh.'



It doesn't take much more than a cursory glance at Doug's website to realise he has a particular affinity with two things: the square format, and experimenting with different subjects and styles. He says, 'There is certainly something about square format. I find it very hard to describe what it is but every time I put something into a square it seems to make sense to me. I have a love of symmetry and order and I often end up putting horizons in the middle of photographs and key objects dead centre; all the things we are not supposed to do.'

His exploration of different styles stems from his range of influences and love of the medium, and viewing his extensive range of camera gear as a toolbox from which to pick the right

tool for the job at hand. 'There is a war going on in my head with regards style,' he admits. 'On the one hand, I really admire photographers who have a particular style – I would love my collection of images to be as identifiable as those by Michael Kenna, Steve Gosling or Dav Thomas, for example. It would be great if one day people say "that is a Doug Chinnery" but the problem is that right now I haven't quite found it. The experimentation with techniques, cameras and mediums is a sort of striving for a style, and I think I am getting closer to it. On the other hand, from a commercial point of view I appeal to a wide range of photographers, as I am able to teach pinhole photography, street, black & white, long exposure, classic



landscape, and so on. So, this exploration for a style has been beneficial for my business.'

Among the varied courses Doug offers round the country, one of the most innovative is a night and low light workshop in London. Run in conjunction with London cabbie and photographer Terry Gibbins, the tour by black cab takes in some lesser-known locations gleaned from Terry's knowledge of the city. 'As he drives round London he is constantly on the lookout for photographic opportunities, and as he is a photographer he knows exactly what I want. We are developing a 'Director's Cut' version of the workshop for next year because we have so many people who have done it once and want to do it again, but they don't want to do all the same locations.'

Just over a year ago, Doug's wife Elizabeth finished working for the National Health Service and now works alongside him, making sure the business runs smoothly. With their beloved Volkswagen Transporter campervan acting as a mobile office, the pair often go on location together, along with their ever-faithful dog, Stan. 'The van is brilliant, absolutely brilliant! I wish we had bought one years ago. We call it Air Force One,

because it is ready to go at a moment's notice. Being able to park very close to photographic locations is great, and on workshops I can teach Photoshop and Lightroom in there during the day, when the light isn't so good. It's a simple life. We get rid of the everyday clutter and can concentrate on the photography and spending time together. Stan loves it, too. He curls up in the footwell next to Elizabeth. Every time I put the handbrake on he goes and sits next to the sliding door, as he thinks that means he is going to jump out on to a beach or a mountainside. So, if it is just a stop at traffic lights, he rolls his eyes and walks back to the footwell. He came down to Tuscany with us in the spring and then back through Provence; he loves travelling!'

John Steinbeck wrote in *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*, 'A journey is a person in itself; no two are alike. And all plans, safeguards, policing, and coercion are fruitless. We find that after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; a trip takes us.' The journey to becoming a professional photographer has certainly been a unique one for Doug, and there will no doubt be more innovative business ideas and boundary-pushing work to come as he, Elizabeth and Stan travel further along the road. n

Find out more about  
Doug's work at  
[doughinnery.com](http://doughinnery.com)