

# Jackie Brenner: In Her Own Words

The old world character of my hometown, New Orleans, is rich with visual artistry—the architecture, cemeteries, ancient oaks, bayous, the French Quarter, and, of course, the natives. To know the city is to become enamored with her. As a documentary photographer, I am drawn to subjects that expose the night people of my hometown. Nightlife in New Orleans begins on Bourbon Street, and that means strip clubs. However, to approach them and attempt to gain entrance into their darkened, world is difficult, almost impossible. Fortunately one of the owners I approached allowed me to enter his place for the purpose of my project.

The first time I stepped into the club, it was without a camera because I just wanted to prowl and see what I would need, check the possibilities, the angles, the lighting. Flash was not allowed, so that limited my equipment, and also my choices for images.

To become invisible and be able to shoot with integrity and not bother anyone, I became familiar with the managers, bartenders, DJs, wait staff, as well as the dancers. I was accepted by all but one performer. So I just hung out in the dressing room, talked a lot, showed them my work, and convinced them I was not out to exploit them; that this was to be a personal project. I also had to assure them I would retain the copyrights, and that the images would be shown only in galleries and other fine art venues, and that they would be able to view the contact sheets on a regular basis. All but one of the dancers agreed to let me into their world. Remembering who is who was difficult, at best. On one occasion, when, unknowingly I began to photograph the dissenter stopped and pulled out my film, exposing my mistake and the film. That move served to establish even more trust between us, and tighten our shaky bond.

I shot in that club for almost four months, without a notebook or tape recorder, until one of the girls let me know that although this was just a project for me, it is their way of life, and I had become an intruder. The only notes I took were in my mind and when I looked at the contact sheets—the only logs of the shoot—words and images would come to mind. The girls liked what they saw and ordered many prints from the contact sheets. But the whole series was never seen by any of the dancers because by the time I had them finished and printed all but a couple had moved on to other cities, other clubs, other lives.

Kodak T-Max 3200, which I had used on many previous documentary occasions, allowed me photograph in the dim light of the club without reservation and with complete confidence. I kept my equipment simple, just a Leica R8 (hand held), 80mm f/1.4 and 35mm f/2.0 lenses. Because of the delicacy of the situation, a tripod was out of the question, as was any other accessories.



After pouring over my contact sheets, I make notes of what I hope to pull out of the print. I frame rather tight, but there are times when the composition does require cropping and I decide what mood I want through the highlights and shadows. For the print of “Crystal,” which is a lead-in to the article, *Stripping the Night Fantastic*, in *CameraArts* magazine (Feb/Mar 03), it was important to bring the audience into view, showing their somewhat bored disinterest in the performer and how hard she was working. (Details of the image are on the following page.) I then take the images to my printer, David Zeitz, and go over my notes with him, all the while listening to his suggestions as well. Then, we go over each image individually, and, by some miracle, he always understands what I’m trying to communicate—with each image. Once we agree on what we want to achieve, as a team, then I will turn the work over to him. This is the part of the process that is magic to me because while I know what I want, sometimes I am not too sure if David, even though we have been working together for more than five years, will be able to achieve it. That is why I am very fortunate to have found a printer I can work with.

## The Master Printer at Work

David Zeitz, a master printer in Baton Rouge, LA, has been working with custom black and white photographic images since 1977. He had worked with several different labs and decided to work for himself in August of 1991. He accepts work as contract labor through a local lab in Baton Rouge. And while he works many hours during the course of a week (60-80), the results of his work far outweigh the amount of effort. In his work he has discovered that the way to please a photographer is to adhere to the following:

- Do an R.C. guide print first—like I like it—noting precise information about how I did this print, e.g. filters, percentage of burning and dodging, cropping, f-stop and exposure time.
- Show it to the photographer and discuss changes they want to make on the print (e.g., composition, density, and altering certain areas by burning; dodging and/or flashing).
- Make a final print on the fiber paper of their choice.

This is the perfect blend, giving the photographer final controls without having to go in the dark-room, thereby giving them time to shoot more.

On the print of Crystal he used TMZ 3200 film developed in T-Max developer, on Ilford multigrade IV fiber warm-tone glossy paper, with ethol LPD developer at 90-120 seconds and 70 degrees Fahrenheit. The print was selenium toned (1:8), and printed on a Leitz Focomat V-35 with vario-contrast module prints often flashed with a different enlarger to get complete details in the highlights. He then dodged the men in the audience during the initial exposure, and burned the edges 100 percent, while spot burning the highlights and then flashing the highlights at the top of print to get added detail in the body. An additional flash with a Dauxlight II was made while the print was still in the developer

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Master Printer

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*"Crystal," the untouched photo.*

Burned area



*"Crystal" the finished photo*