

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Chloe Hall

Chloe Hall turned her back on a lucrative career as a lawyer to follow her star and become a full-time professional photographer. She chats to Nick Smith about working intuitively, and why variety is the key to her creative approach and commercial success



NS Tell me about your classic, iconic image of prayer flags in Ladakh...

CH It's been on book covers and in magazines everywhere. I took it in 2002 in evening light. I was trekking alone, and on the other side of the valley there was a Bollywood film being made. All the tourists were flocking to see the Gompa, and so I headed off in a completely different direction to where the prayer flags were. I was shooting with Velvia film, and took maybe three frames. About a month later, I got home and processed the film and thought 'yup, that's my shot.'

NS Is it mainly the Far East that interests you?

CH During my gap year I went to Africa,

and I didn't go to the Himalayas until I changed career from being a lawyer to studying photography. From then on I was completely hooked on the Himalayas, both the trekking element and the photography. And being able to combine the two. Taking photographs in the mountains was a dream come true.

NS But being a photographer isn't just about taking photographs, is it?

CH No, it isn't! My original aim after leaving college was to become a travel photographer, but I realised pretty quickly that this was totally unrealistic. First, you'd be spending all your money up front funding the trip to get the shots, and then spending months after the trip

selling the images. So this got me thinking about doing commercial work as well, and I've successfully built up that side of the business.

NS Explain why you don't specialise in one field?

CH Well, you see, when I started out it was made quite clear to me by people such as course tutors that you needed to specialise. And when I was designing my website people told me that I should stick to one thing: if you want to do travel, then just say you're a travel photographer. Maybe say that you're an NGO photographer, too, but you'll need a separate site for promoting your wedding photography.

NS So having a varied portfolio is a real strength?

CH In the end, I strongly believe that variety is the key, and that your work in one discipline will help you with others. My documentary street photography gives me a whole fresh approach to my wedding photography. Clients love that.

NS You've been doing this for 12 years – do you miss the legal career?

CH I could have been on a fat salary by now. To be honest, I left that career because I didn't want to be going through the same (or any) office doors for the rest of my life. Being a full-time photographer isn't always about heading off for glamorous shoots. There's a lot of hard work involved, but I love it. n

opposite page
Prayer flags
in Ladakh

above left
Durbar Square,
Kathmandu

above right
Kathmandu, Nepal

below
Incense burning
at Boudhanath,
Kathmandu, Nepal



CHLOE'S CRITICAL MOMENTS

To see more of Chloe Hall's photography visit chloehall.co.uk

2001 Left a career as a solicitor for a one-year photography course at London College of Printing (now the London College of Communication).

2002 College portrait of Cherie Blair – a lesson to always put film in the camera!

2003 Trip to Himalayas began love affair with trekking and photography.

2004 Development of commercial work in the UK with weddings and portraits, and overseas work with photography for NGOs.

2008 Started to teach photography through workshops in London and photographic holidays abroad.

2014 Continuing the variety: guiding, workshops, and as much commercial work as possible.

CHLOE'S TOP TIPS

- » I never go on a shoot without... a few nerves. There's always a fear you won't get the shot, and that's fine. It's good to be nervous.
- » My one piece of advice is... engage people. Be bold and talk to people. If you see everything through a lens, that's a shame.
- » Something I try to avoid is... funky camera angles. That's just lazy photography. Keep your horizons level.

NICK SMITH Your photography work feels very spontaneous. How does that come about?

CHLOE HALL I work quickly and I'm on the lookout all the time. I have a fundamental understanding of the technicals of photography, and so I don't have to waste time thinking about how to work the camera. It's that Cartier-Bresson thing of being in position at the decisive moment. And so you become almost intuitive about when something is going to happen.

NS And yet your style is unconventional...

CH It's not really a strategy of mine. I shoot what I see and what I feel and what appeals in the moment. I shouldn't be saying this, but when it comes to technique I don't follow the advice of photography magazines, and I don't follow trends, and I'm not really interested in kit. When I go out to take photographs I just try to get into the process of recording what interests me.