

FOCUS ON PHOTOGRAPHY

Tell about subject with environmental portraits



MONTE
NAGLER

When most of us think of portraits, we picture the standard head shot of high school seniors or that executive in the newspaper who just received a promotion. These shots are OK but they certainly lack pictorial impact and stopping power.

Imagine how thrilling it would be to produce portraits with a flair of excitement, pictures that really say something, pictures that tell a story about the subject. Wouldn't this type of portrait stand apart from the rest? You bet! They're called environmental portraits and they contain elements not found in standard head shots.

Basically, environmental portraits are taken in the subject's surroundings using elements and props common to that person's interest or field of expertise.

If photographing a friend who has strong string musical inclinations, doesn't it make sense to photograph him or her with violin in hand, perhaps in a room setting conducive to the mood? If your son is hooked on football, a portrait of him in full uniform right after the game when he's sweat- and dirt-covered will be impact-filled and memorable.

In the accompanying photograph, I gave much thought to how I could best depict cowboy Iverson Martin. First, I asked him to wear his hat and sheepskin gloves to add realism to the portrait.

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I selected the porch of the old cabin with the woodpile and decorative antler as the setting. I placed Iverson slightly to the left for compositional strength. His relaxed stance rounds out a neatly executed environmental portrait that says a lot about Iverson Martin and his interests.

Two acknowledged masters of the environmental portrait are Yousuf Karah and Arnold Newman. It would certainly be worth your time to browse through their books during your next visit to your library or bookstore.

Monte Nagler is a fine art photographer based in Farmington Hills. You can leave him a message by dialing (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then his mailbox number, 1873. His fax number is (810) 644-1314.

In environment: The old, rustic cabin is the perfect setting for this environmental portrait of cowboy Iverson Martin. Monte Nagler took this picture in Lakeview, Montana.



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