

>> Snapshot



Jacqui Hurst

Photographer

NUJ

Can you tell me a bit about your career to date?

I wanted to go to art college when I left school but I didn't have the confidence so I did a secretarial course instead. I hated it and so, against all advice, I decided to study photography. My career snowballed from there. I originally worked with film and loved it. I was asked for photos of window boxes, took 60 and the client only chose two. So I went and presented them to other people and sold quite a few elsewhere. I've worked for Crafts, Country Living, Good Housekeeping, House and Garden and have worked on several books, including Christine Walkden's No-nonsense Container Gardening, Fabric Pictures by Janet Bolton and Stitch Stories by Cas Holmes. I built up a great collection of pictures and started my own library, which became so busy I needed someone there everyday for people to look through the transparencies. I farmed this out so I could continue to focus on taking the pictures.

When digital photography came along I found the transition quite challenging. Just when you've mastered one thing, the next innovation comes for you to get to grips with. You can feel like you are always one step behind. I do now love digital photography but selling is much harder as there are so many other photographers out there. My current projects include four garden features for Amateur Gardening, documenting a sculpture exhibition, researching new projects and submitting new images to GAP Photos. My next challenge is to sell work to an on-line publication.

I find it hard to say no to work and with the exception of fashion or weddings, I will pretty much give anything a go. My philosophy is that you always learn something, which is exciting, and no experience is ever wasted!

I first became a trainer in response to an invitation and have now been teaching for 18 years. I teach adults at West Dean College and for the Field Studies Council at Flatford Mill and I am currently organising a trip to Greece that I'm running for six students.

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What do you like most about your work?

I love taking the pictures. I can get completely lost in it. Connection with the subject is important. I really enjoy meeting people and getting to know them especially if I like what they create. I particularly enjoy being a fly on the wall so people almost forget I am there. Getting my features accepted is a great buzz.

Teaching for me is about empowering people. I teach garden photography and love that you can send people off to take pictures in a relatively small place, and everyone's images are unique. I enjoy learning from the people I train, as their approach is not restrained by the 'rules'.

What are the biggest challenges of maintaining a freelance career?

Having to negotiate copyright and fees is the biggest challenge. Often you get offered a derisory fee and have to psyche yourself up to barter. It can be hard to maintain your 'bounce ability' when you are not selling. You have to believe in, and be true to yourself.

There was more of a team approach with film but now I spend a lot of time editing digital images, which is quite



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isolating, so you have to manage that. Managing your time is another challenge and I find self-marketing hard. Often the first meeting doesn't happen until after you've got the job, so all the negotiating gets done at a distance.

Have you added new work/skills to your portfolio over time?

Teaching is one skill I have developed. Also, I recently accepted a commercial job photographing optical products. That pushed me right out of my comfort zone, which was great because it made me reassess many things about how I work. It took much longer than my usual shoots, was a great experience and the client was delighted with the results, so maybe other commercial contracts would be a good way to go.

What is the biggest challenge of learning the skills that you need?

Keeping up with the technology is one of the hardest things. Everything changes so quickly and I always want to understand how it works, even when I don't need to. I like to be able to resolve any problems myself, so I have learned to persevere and adapt.

What FEU Training courses have you attended?

I've attended the CV writing workshop Get Hired, Build your Own Website and Confidence Building.

What are the most important things that you've learned?

The Build Your Own Website two day course was great. It was very practical and I have implemented pretty much all of it. I now have a website I can manage and control

- instant gratification! My old website required special software, whereas this workshop allowed me to use an accessible platform that is simple and easy to manage.

I felt very fired up after the confidence day. So much so, I came straight home and sent off a few potential features and actually sold one to Landscape Magazine! The exercises we did also made me focus more on the 'makers', the gardeners, sculptors and artists, rather than just plants.

The overriding messages I took from all the workshops were, 'I can do it,' and that you have to be tenacious.

What has encouraged you to attend FEU Training sessions?

FEU Training workshops are run very professionally. It's great that they are focused on personal development and genuinely want to help self-employed people to get out there and help themselves. The attendees are a lovely mix of people, all ages and disciplines. It's great to work together with people who want to learn like you do, and who are so helpful to each other. It's good to know that we are all there for a common cause.

Do you know any other organisation that offers business skills courses for creatives?

No.

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