



FAMOUS PHOTOGRAPHER QUOTES AND HOW TO APPLY THEM TO YOUR OWN WORK

Quick Guide
Written by Robin Nichols



About the Cover: *Created in the style of the many 'Decisive Moment' photographers, white South Africans reading the morning papers in a whites-only carriage while a black man has to walk to the back of the train to travel in a non-white compartment. (Photograph by Robin Nichols)*

One philosophy I have always tried to apply in my profession as a photographer and writer is to study and understand the work of other artists – not just photographers, but artists from all genres. The reason behind this is simple: when we begin to work in any field, it's human nature to copy what others do; otherwise, how else do we learn?

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Photograph by Robin Nichols

Having spent the best part of a year looking at the work of photographers like Tony Ray Jones and Garry Winogrand, I began to consciously search out images that reflected the oddities of life in my environment.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"There are no bad pictures; that's just how your face looks sometimes." – Abraham Lincoln

Some jobs provide training, but in photography you are essentially on your own. You can learn theory at a college or even study online, but there are very few large companies employing photographers. Pretty much everything these days has gone freelance.

In a way, this is a good thing because it forces us to look around at what other people do in the same profession. And when you do that, you can perhaps try to discover why their images might work, while yours might not.

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON

"Your first 10,000 photographs are your worst." –
Henri Cartier-Bresson

Cartier-Bresson is regarded as the father of street photography, and while that's very true, when I was a photography student I found myself incredibly influenced by his work for a different reason. At

the time, I never thought of his images as 'street photography'; I just thought he had an incredible knack at capturing a visual 'incident' at just the right time. This is what became known as '*the decisive moment*.' Because of this frozen moment in time, his images often reflect a human quirkiness that I've tried to emulate.

GARRY WINOGRAND

While on the subject of street photography, it's worth noting this quote from one of the most prolific street photographers, **Garry Winogrand**:

"Photography is about finding out what can happen in the frame. When you put four edges around some facts, you change those facts." – Garry Winogrand

When Winogrand died in 1984, his family discovered over 12,000 rolls of film that had either been exposed and not processed, or processed and not printed – a phenomenal legacy of work. He mostly lived and worked in New York around the time that

two other very influential photographers were also working: Lee Friedlander and Dianne Arbus. At the time, all three were setting new creative boundaries for a medium that was fast gaining credibility in the artistic world. Leaving such a legacy is enough in itself, but it goes to show that this man was really driven to record life as he saw it on the streets. John Szarkowski, the Director of Photography at New York's Museum of Modern Art, described Winogrand as "the central photographer of his generation." High praise indeed. Even today, I think his work remains superbly inspirational and influential.



Photograph by Robin Nichols

I have always been interested in recording the quirkiness of society. Living in England at one time provided me with a lot of potential. Rather than just deface a sign, this graffitist added strange warnings about llamas and frogs.

TONY RAY JONES

Tony Ray Jones was, to me at least, the quintessentially English version of a New York street photographer. His voyeuristic images on the English way of life owe a lot to his scholarship at the Yale University School of Art and the time he spent at Richard Avedon's Manhattan studio where he met two other developing street photographers: Garry Winogrand and Joel Meyerowitz.

"My aim is to communicate something of the spirit and the mentality of the English, their habits and their way of life, the ironies that exist in the way they do things, partly through their traditions and partly through the nature of their environment and their mentality. For me there is something very special about the English 'way of life' and I wish to record it from my particular point of view before it becomes Americanised and disappears." – Tony Ray Jones

Sage words indeed. Jones died prematurely at the age of 31. His death was, I think, a huge loss for Britain, a culture that has never been shy of self-examination. It's not hard to see where Martin Parr got a lot of his influences from.

JEAN-LUC GODARD

When I was busy studying the art of creative photography many years ago in the UK, I became aware of the works of **Jean-Luc Godard**. He's a French film director who produced several cutting-edge, or 'New Wave', movies back in the sixties, several of which featured upcoming stars like Jean-Paul Belmondo and Brigitte Bardot.

Movie making at the turn of that decade was somewhat pro-establishment, so Godard, always the political animal, made a name for himself producing

films with distinctly political messages. He also broke from the norm, shooting with hand-held cameras and incorporating radically different editing methods in his productions, all of which created a kind of New Wave look, or '*caméra-stylo*,' using the lightweight movie camera as a writer would a pen.

At the time, I thought he was one of the best directors in this New Wave art scene, along with Francois Truffaut and Claude Chabrol. This quote from Godard says it all: "*Photography is truth.*"



Photograph by Robin Nichols

A housemaid en-route to her next morning job in the privileged white suburbs of Cape Town.

DON MCCULLIN

I read **Don McCullin's** autobiography *Unreasonable Behavior* several years ago, and it had a big impact on my impact on life because of his dogged commitment to recording the truth as he experienced it.

McCullin is probably best known for the images shot during his time covering wars in Indochina. You only have to see a smattering of his work to appreciate his sentiments when he said:

"Sometimes it felt like I was carrying pieces of human flesh back home with me, not negatives. It's as if you are carrying the suffering of the people you have photographed." – Don McCullin

He's one of those unique people that can connect with his subjects, even when they are under the extreme duress of a war zone.

But what many might not appreciate is that he also worked on some truly amazing documentary projects well

before Vietnam became headline news. He got his break when photographing a London gang called The Guvnors, which was published in the UK's *Observer* paper in 1958. This eventually led to an 18-year stint as an overseas correspondent for the *Sunday Times Magazine*, one of the last great newspapers to finance freelance photojournalism. He covered the Biafran War, the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, and wars in the Congo, Uganda, and Palestine. You name it, he was there. And despite being shot, blown up, burned, and imprisoned, he always returned with images that often spoke the unspeakable and depicted the unthinkable. Not many photographers have been that dedicated through an entire career. Many of his colleagues never were able to return home.

War photography is a tough, unrelenting, unforgiving, and extremely dangerous occupation.

Amid the excruciating blandness of today's lifestyle newspapers, I think it's vital to encourage this kind of reportage in order to maintain an edge between truth (whether it's pretty or not) and what's fed to us today under the guise of news.

"Photography for me is not looking; it's feeling. If you can't feel what you're looking at, then you're never going to get others to feel anything when they look at your pictures." – Don McCullin

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ELLIOTT ERWITT

Elliott Erwitt is another photographer who has given me great inspiration. He's been a member of the prestigious group Magnum Photos since 1954, but, ironically, it's his off-duty images that have provided me with the most entertainment and inspiration. Erwitt snaps dogs everywhere he goes; he's even published five books on the subject.

"To me, photography is an art of observation. It's about finding something interesting in an ordinary place... I've found it has little to do with the things you see and everything to do with the way you see them." – Elliott Erwitt

As with many great photographers, Erwitt shows his audience how to see through his camera work, not

just by snapping pictures of canines, but in his clever juxtaposition of these animals living with humans and their environment. If you have ever had the pleasure of seeing his images, you'll understand what he means in the quote above. The art of observation, profoundly exemplified in his work, is at the core of any photographic success, whether snapping something as mundane as a dog walking along a pavement, or an American president confronting a Russian supreme leader.

"The whole point of taking pictures," he says, *"is so that you don't have to explain things with words."* – Elliott Erwitt

How true.



Photograph by Robin Nichols

Looking at this image years later, I now realize it's very much an homage to the irony of Erwit's work. I remember he'd published a picture taken in the Uffizi Gallery of some very famous paintings, but in his picture you couldn't see anything but reflections from the windows opposite. Such is the nature of light.

ANDY WARHOL

Another art school hero of mine was, of course, **Andy Warhol**. Even today, I think most people would recognize his iconic screen print pictures, even if they might not necessarily know who created them. We just remember Campbell's soup cans and Marilyn Monroe.

Warhol was first and foremost an artist and demonstrated to the world that art was not just for the elite. His use of everyday images, photographed by himself – copied from magazines, newspapers, and even lifted from advertising material – could be elevated to the extraordinary through simple

processes like silk screen printing, sculpture, film, and of course, mass production.

"The best thing about a picture is that it never changes, even when the people in it do." – Andy Warhol

What I found inspirational about Warhol is that he was always true to his ethos. You might not especially like what he produced, and a lot of people didn't, but, nevertheless, he continued to push the boundaries of art throughout the sixties, seventies, and eighties, right up to his untimely death in 1987.



Photograph by Robin Nichols

Friday night at the boozer, from a series I made on life in my local pub in the city of Nottingham

JOE MCNALLY

Joe McNally is possibly one of the best commercial and editorial photographers around. His skill with lighting rigs, mostly set up in impossible-to-get-to locations, is legendary, and his resume says it all: *National Geographic*, *Life*, Sony, ESPN, Adidas, *Land's End*, Epson, and *Sports Illustrated*, just for starters.

What McNally teaches us is that it's not about the gear used to take the shots, it's how that gear is used that's most important. His work takes him to the tops of very tall buildings, into cramped industrial sites, inside busy trauma centers, and strapped into military jets screaming across the prairies.

I have met the man several times and find that, despite his reputation, he's one of the most humble characters you could imagine. His shooting style relies a lot on combining artificial light with ambient light sources that are both short-lived and difficult to control, hence this quote, which basically says it all:



Photograph by Robin Nichols

Friday night at the boozer, from a series I made on life in my local pub in the city of Nottingham

"Don't pack up your camera until you've left the location." – Joe McNally

Sane words.

DAVID BAILEY

A final thought is from **David Bailey**, a UK photographer whose career as a social and fashion photographer skyrocketed during the 'swinging sixties' in London.

This was an astonishingly creative period for many people living in the capital at that time. Actors and musicians socialized with artists, film makers, and photographers in a unique social mix that resulted in spreading British culture across the world stage. Bailey photographed everyone that was anyone, from HRH The Queen, to Mick Jagger, the Beatles, the Kray twins, Rudolph Nureyev, Cecil Beaton, Jean Shrimpton, Michael Caine, and many, many more personalities from that era.

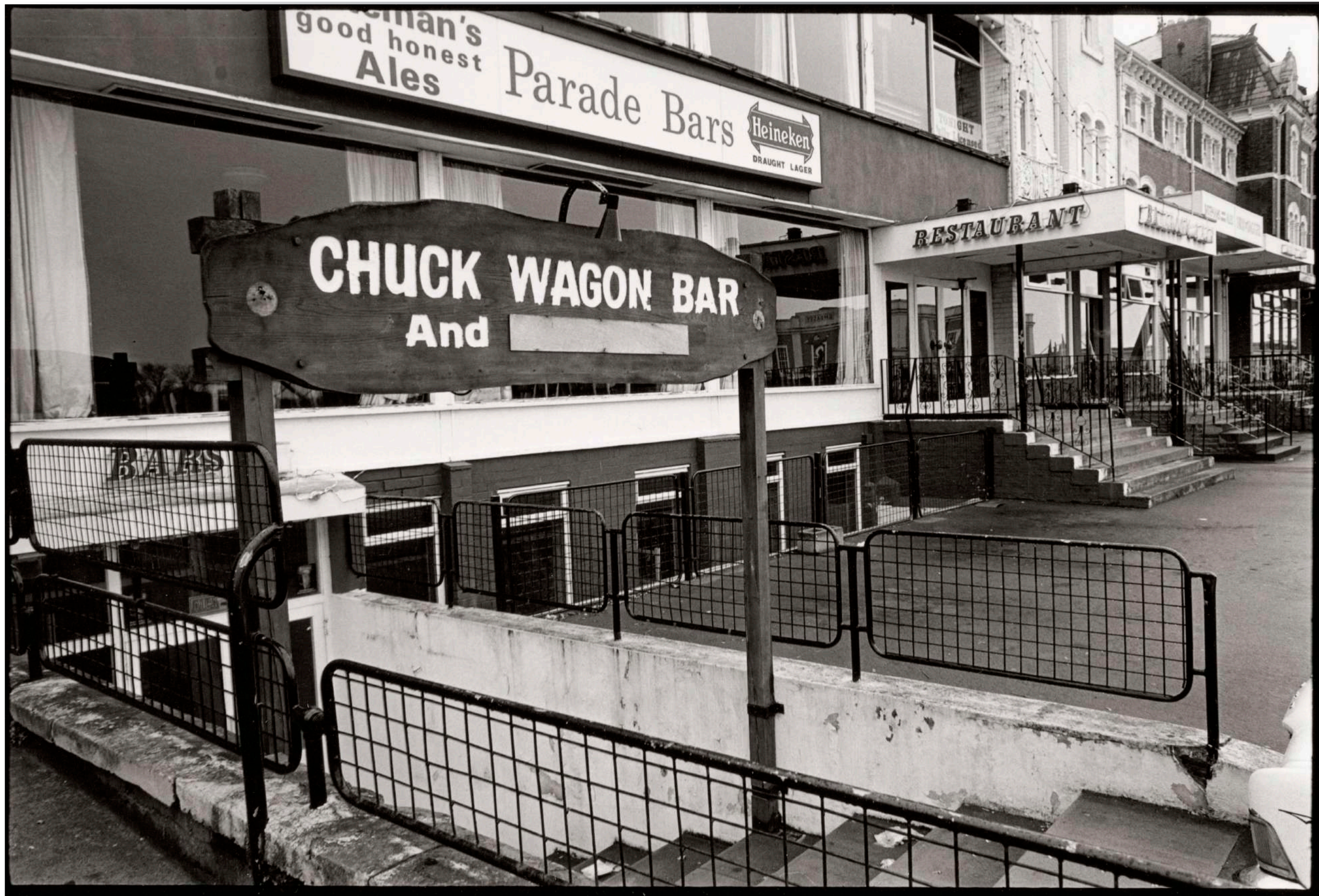
"It takes a lot of imagination to be a good photographer. You need less imagination to be

a painter because you can invent things. But in photography everything is so ordinary; it takes a lot of looking before you learn to see the extraordinary."

– David Bailey

I love this quote from Bailey, partly because he had the gall to say it, and partly because it's true. No disrespect is intended for painters; he just says it like it is.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Robin Nichols is a UK-born photographer. He has spent the past 30 years in Sydney, Australia, where he began work as a cameraman, then as a freelance photographer.

He worked as a freelance writer and then as a magazine editor for several photography publications for more than eight years. He also ran his own publishing business, producing two specialist magazines - *Better Photoshop Techniques* and *Better Digital Camera* magazine.

Aside from conducting photo tours and workshops, Robin teaches photography, video, and post-processing classes through the Centre for Continuing Education at Sydney University.

His work can be seen online at

Blog: www.robinnicholsworkshops.blogspot.com

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