



# Doing it by the book

There is still a place for photobooks in the modern world, say **Mary Virginia Swanson** and **Darius Himes**, authors of a book explaining how to publish your own photobook. **Gemma Padley** picks up some useful advice

**HAVE** you ever toyed with the idea of producing your own photobook, but hastily shelved the idea (excuse the pun) out of anxiety or sheer terror? If so, then you are not alone. While many photographers may secretly dream of putting together a collection of their finest photographs in book form, it is not something to be undertaken lightly. As with doing anything worthwhile, there is much to think about – but that doesn't mean it is an impossible task.

In an attempt to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about the process of producing a photobook, US-based authors Mary Virginia Swanson and Darius Himes have published a book revealing all the insider know-how, from how to get started and fine-tuning the

initial idea, to designing, producing and marketing the final book. Their book, *Publish Your Photography Book*, contains assorted information on the subject and features an insight into the history of the photobook, an overview of the publishing industry and industry insiders' advice.

'The publishing industry can be confusing, so we wanted to publish something that would be useful to photographers of all backgrounds and aspirations,' says Mary, a consultant in licensing and marketing fine-art photography, and who also lectures widely and runs workshops. 'We wrote a column for online photography bookstore photo-eye, called *Booklist*, which got photographers thinking and talking about publishing their work. The column ran for 12

**There are myriad ways of producing your own photobook – researching what's out there is key**

instalments over three years [2004–07] and was a recurring topic of conversation among photographers wherever we went. We knew that we had the makings of a book. The column was really successful, and in 2008, we pitched the idea of the column, as a book, to Princeton Architectural Press.'

'There are many reasons why a photographer would want to publish,' adds Darius, lecturer, writer, founding editor of photo-eye, and co-founder of Radius Books. 'Many people see a book as a means to advance their careers and to gain exposure for their work, while others are simply engaged with the book as the final expression for a body of photographic work.'

## THE GOLDEN AGE

Photography and books have been closely related since the earliest days of the medium, says Mary. Indeed, when William Henry Fox Talbot discovered that salts of silver were sensitive to light, his initial experiments were published in booklet form as *The Pencil of Nature*. 'Artists and photographers have been organising their work into book form since the invention of the photographic process,' she says. 'Today, technology makes that path easier and more affordable than ever. We see photography books being celebrated everywhere.'

We live in the golden age of the photography book, she adds, at a time when the number of photography book publishers is continuing to grow. In addition, technological developments have placed more tools for book-making directly into the hands of photographers.

'The process of making a book of your photographs will allow you to communicate more effectively with your audience, and perhaps most importantly, will help you to know your work better,' she says. 'Whether you create a hand-made book, utilise print-on-demand technology or traditional printing and binding technology, the process of making your book will impact your image-making in the future.'

In recent years, a number of books have been published looking at the history of photography books. 'There are several titles in existence, such as *The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photography Books of the Twentieth Century* by Andrew Roth, and a brilliant two-volume book called *The Photobook: A History* by Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, published by Phaidon,' says Darius. 'These books are organised either alphabetically by artist, thematically or chronologically, and present many books that are considered to be classics of photography.' Turn to page 41 to see AP's list of suggested photography book classics.

## GETTING STARTED

Working out why you want to produce a book in the first place is the first step, say the authors, and equally important is developing a clear idea of how you intend to go about putting the book together. 'There are a set of questions every photographer should ask themselves, which have to do with the question, *Why?*,' says Darius. 'Identifying

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goals and expectations is very important. Go out and look at other books. Start to make a list of the things you like about books and the things you don't like. This could include the size of the book, the design, the typography, the layout or the cover. Learning to speak the "language of the book", and of publishing, is very important.'

### OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

There are, of course, pitfalls and obstacles that need to be confronted during the process of producing a photobook. Researching what's already out there, ensuring you have a clear vision, setting a realistic timeframe for preparing content, and so on, are all important considerations. While the completion of the final book is an accomplishment in itself, any compromises made during the book-making process can lead to disappointments. This is why the design and image selection need to be clearly thought through from the outset.

'Identifying your expectations and being



realistic is very important,' says Darius. 'You're probably not going to sell 10,000 copies of your first book, so you should be OK with this from the beginning. Working with a team of professionals is also important. Too many photographers try to do it all themselves, from designing the book, to managing the pre-press and marketing it. All these can be huge tasks, and you need the advice and help of professionals.'

### MAKING YOUR BOOK STAND OUT

With so many photography books already in circulation jostling for attention, ensuring that your book holds its own in a crowded market place is a key consideration. 'In terms of making your book stand out from the rest we encourage people to bring their work to the printed page in as authentic a way as possible,' says Mary. 'In other words, to ensure that the edit and sequence of the images, the addition of any text, and the design and choice of materials featured in your book clearly convey your voice.'

### GETTING YOUR BOOK OUT THERE

Another key question is how do you promote your book once you've produced it? Mary's answer is a positive one as she confidently lists a host of avenues to explore. 'There are so many ways to "get your book out there",' she says. 'From social media, book signings in your local bookstore and radio interviews, to short documentary videos about your project and your book – all opportunities should be explored. Exhibitions of the images featured in your book can also be an important marketing tool as they often provide opportunities to speak about your work and are a chance to generate book sales.' **AP**

## OPEN BOOK

**IN DARIUS'S** words, a well-made photobook is a perfect combination of photography, book-making, typography and design. While the internet provides an instant connection with a community stretching to the ends of the earth, the book, he says, with its rich printing and tactile materials, provides a more immediate, visceral experience. 'You don't need electricity to enjoy a photobook,' says Darius. 'Just a lap, some sunlight and a little bit of time. And before you know it, you've been transported into another world.' You can't say it more honestly than that.

*Publish Your Photography Book* (published by Princeton Architectural Press, 2011) is available to buy from most online and high-street bookshops, priced £18.99. For more information, visit <http://publishyourphotographybook.com>

