Bruce Damonte.
Photo Chris Talbott

'Controlling one's images has become challenging'

Bruce Damonte (1970, USA) saw the publishing world turn into one big grey area.

How has our profession changed in the past ten years?
BRUCE DAMONTE: Ten years ago, film was still common. Today, I think there are only a handful of veteran commercial architectural photographers who shoot on film. Digital photography has made life both easier and more difficult: you can get more shots in a day than you ever could when you needed to use lights and gels to compensate for colour and contrast issues, fixing those things at your leisure on your computer post-shoot. However, therein lies the rub: instead of spending two days to get all the shots, you're now doing them all in one day and spending a second day completing all the post-production.

This is in terms of tools and process. What has changed in terms of managing and publishing photos?
Controlling one's images has become much more challenging. Once a photo is published online, it invariably will be copied and appear in various blogs and webzines without your knowledge. In those cases, I frankly just hope they give me credit for the image. Even the better-known design publishers and websites fail to do so occasionally. Also, maintaining image rights is more complicated with sites like *Houzz* and *Pinterest*, which are based on 'shared' content.
    This concept of sharing online introduces a lot of grey area for photographers' rights. In fact, it seems like the entire publishing world is becoming one big grey area.

Copyright infringement by editorial media is something that you wrestle with all the time as an architectural photographer, especially with online media. It's a matter of picking your battles, realizing that there's not much to gain in most cases.

Who are your clients? I imagine that the percentage of income from architects and media has shifted.
Architects make up 95 per cent of my clients. In the past ten years, the percentage of income from media has decreased a lot, but, in terms of my total income, revenue from media has never been that substantial. I don't think any architectural photographer could make a living shooting editorial work alone. Editorial photography and photojournalism have always been challenging careers. It's important work, and, yes, I fear for its future.

It seems you haven't suffered from the shift from analogue to digital. Have the advances in technology improved our profession?
Actually, it has benefited me since I embraced digital from the beginning, whereas lots of my more experienced competitors clung to analogue as long as they could. I'm not quite down to shooting with a phone yet, but it is going in that direction! That said, the evolution in professional-quality digital cameras has been much slower than in photographic technologies for consumers. More megapixels doesn't really change things that much, other than creating the need for more powerful computers.

The good thing about the internet is that information about architecture has become so accessible. How has this affected our profession?
I just hope that sharing ideas will lead to more stimulating design for all, rather than the architecture becoming more homogenous. This has already happened with major cities around the world becoming more and more alike. But I think the ease to opine on the internet about various architectural stories is interesting. Would Zaha Hadid's Tokyo stadium have been scrapped if not for the sort of global outcry that the web helped to facilitate? In the past, you primarily had a handful of powerful architecture critics who decided what was a success or a failure. Now everyone has a voice. Is that a good thing or bad thing?

What will happen in ten years' time?
When I was a kid, I used to fantasize about how fantastical cars would be in 25 years. I have been very disappointed, with my favourite car still being the same [Porsche] 911 that I loved then. Fads come and go, and technologies change, but even with trillions of still images being printed, posted and shared, some will stand out ever so slightly from all the rest. Architects will always want great photos of their projects so that they can get more work, publish monographs, win awards. _