

WALL PAPER

The outlook for the sale of photo art prints has never been brighter. Terry Hope explores this expanding market, looking at how different photographers approach it

The term 'photo art' covers a multitude of approaches, and there is no single definition that sums up all its facets. Subjects can be anything from a landscape or a nude through to a still-life or an abstract. Prints can be black and white or colour; a high quality inkjet print or a hand-made silver-halide one-off; they can be a matter of inches in size or have dimensions that will fill the average wall.

They can be limited editions by top photographers that are collected for large sums of money, or they can be unlimited editions designed to have more of a mass-market appeal at very reasonable prices. By and large, however, they are pictures that are produced by living photographers – or artists, depending on your viewpoint. This is what separates them from the historic sector that covers work by the likes of, say, Bill Brandt, Ansel Adams or Lartigue.

Some photographers aspire to make a living from their photo art work but, for the majority, it's a question of making some money from images that, however compelling, might otherwise struggle to find a niche. For those who are seriously involved in making and selling photo art prints, much of the reward comes from the satisfaction of knowing that someone, somewhere, has thought enough of their work to want to display it in their home or office.

The market in the UK, while nothing like as buoyant as the US where photography has long been accepted as an artform in its own right, is flourishing compared to a decade ago. The opportunity is undoubtedly there for those who wish to get involved – and who are marketing the right kind of images at the right price. There's also the fact that the tools at their disposal, from high quality inkjet printers through to websites that can reach a worldwide audience, are making the whole process much more viable as well.

Here we talk to four photographers working in this sector, each approaching the market in different ways.



IMAGE © ANDY SMALL

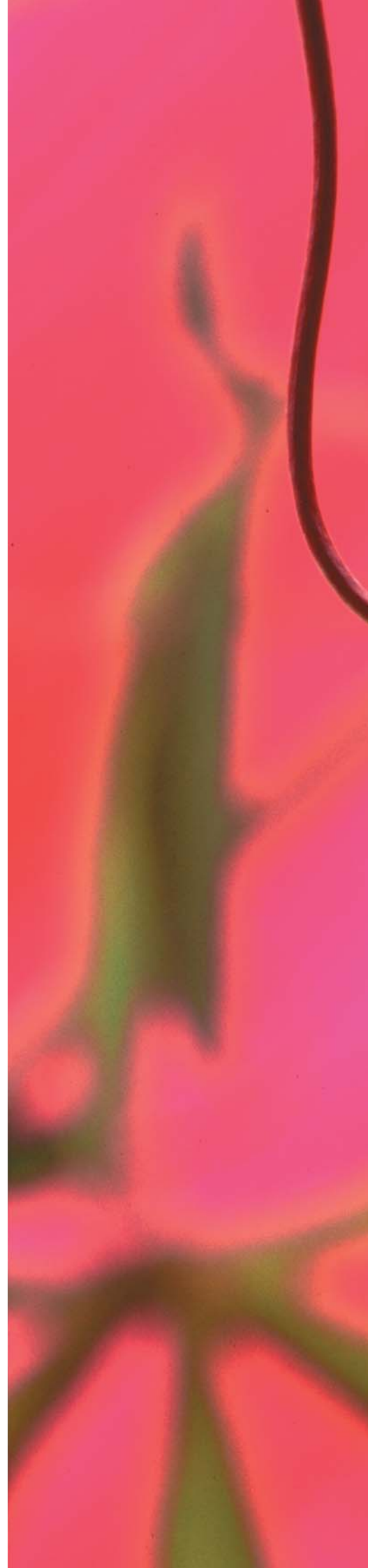




IMAGE © ANDY SMALL

ANDY SMALL

In selling photo art prints it pays to have a recognisable style. Andy Small has certainly established his own way of working, with pictures that appeal to a wide range of customers looking for something original to put on the wall, but who are not so concerned about investment potential.

Andy completed a fine arts degree at Bristol Polytechnic, which explored a range of different mediums such as printmaking and painting, and also introduced him to photography. After leaving, his interest in photography waned for a while but was then rekindled during a lengthy trip to Australia. "I took loads and loads of pictures there," he says, "and realised that this was what I enjoyed doing the most. I started to get more seriously involved."

Following his return to the UK he moved into a house with a well-stocked garden, and here he found that the abundant flowers were ideal subject matter. "I bought myself a macro lens," he says, "and started to experiment with moving in close to fill the frame with colour and exclude the background."

One day he happened to see an internegative that had been produced from one of his transparencies and he knew that this was what he had been looking for. Unlike a normal colour negative, which has an orange mask, the film was clear so that the image and colours could be clearly seen. The colours were complementary and looked a little unreal, but the subjects were still perfectly recognisable. By printing the internegative onto Cibachrome paper Andy found he could retain the colours he was seeing, yet still produce a high quality print.

"Although I knew that this was the way that I wanted to work," he says, "I still had a lot of refining to do. The colours were interesting, but not quite what I wanted, and I ended up experimenting with such things as uprating and downrating, using a lot of different colour →

IMAGE © ANDY SMALL

Photo art



IMAGE © ANDY SMALL

‘Images on Andy’s website are grouped by colour...It’s not the subjects that people are generally interested in; it’s how the colours will match the decor’

transparency materials to find the ones that worked the best for me. The Agfa materials were excellent because they featured a combination of high contrast and saturated colours, but when the film I favoured was discontinued I moved on to Fujifilm Velvia.”

Andy showed his results to friends and orders for prints immediately started to arrive: just a trickle at first, but slowly it started to build up. “Initially this wasn’t the reason I was producing the pictures,” he says. “I was doing them for myself, but it was nice to get a positive reaction.”

When he started to exhibit the work, Andy found that the demand grew stronger, and slowly he started to acquire a reputation in his local area. His big break came when he took some space at the Contemporary Photography Fair in 1998. It had been organised by Manuela Hofer, whose gallery in Islington, London, specialises in pictures produced by working photographers – as opposed to high-value images produced by the great masters.

Shortly afterwards Manuela organised a show



IMAGE © ANDY SMALL

called Organics at her gallery that featured photographers who were working with natural subjects, and she recalled Andy’s work from the fair and invited him to take part. His images sold so well that he was taken on as one of the ‘resident’ photographers. It gave Andy the flexibility to display his work as he saw fit, to fix his own pricing and to present his images direct to collectors.

To date Andy has not been able to generate enough income through his photography to give up his profession as an art teacher, but he expects this to happen within the next year. He sells through a number of different galleries now and has also sold pictures to the giant furniture chain IKEA, for use as a poster. Some 30,000 copies have flown off the shelves to date. He’s also sold to the French postcard company Nouvelles Images, whose details he found on the internet. The Corbis Picture Library also holds a selection of his images.

His own website, www.andysmall.com, is a recent venture that has been set up to promote

his work and to allow those who might not see his pictures in regular outlets to make a purchase. All the pictures, apart from the smallest 6x4in size, are hand-printed in limited editions of 50, since he has been told that this is the best way to offer them to clients.

A variety of different sizes are available at prices that are reasonable but still allow him to make a decent profit: he charges £12 for a 6x4in, £95 for a 12x8in, £170 for a 16x10in and £350 for a 36x24in. All are printed to order, partly to reassure clients who are worried about the longevity of the images that they haven’t been sitting on a shelf for a long time.

To take advantage of the kind of clientele that he has, all the images on Andy’s website are grouped by colour – orange, purple, green, red/pink, yellow and neutral – as well as by subject. It’s not the subjects that people are generally interested in; it’s how the colours will match the decor. “This was what I was always being asked,” says Andy, “so it seemed logical to present the pictures this way.”

PETER DAZELEY

Commercial photographer Peter Dazeley, who works out of a purpose-built studio complex in Parsons Green, off the New Kings Road in London, sees the photo art market as an ideal way of utilising pictures that would otherwise be unlikely to enjoy an audience outside the four walls of his studio.

"The photo art side of my work is really my hobby," he says. "The thing that I do for fun. Although some of the pictures that I'm using have come from commercial jobs, many of them are experimental things or odd ideas that I've had. The personal work has always had a role to play, not only in keeping me interested but in demonstrating to agencies the things that the studio is capable of."

Faced with increasing levels of interest in the purchase of prints, Peter recently set up a website, www.dazeleyfineart.com, dedicated exclusively to this aspect of his work. Despite launching it in a low-key fashion, it's already attracted several hundred hits and started to generate sales.

"I'm not so concerned at the moment about selling work through the site," he says. "For now, the most important thing is to get the work out there and to have people see it. I'm hoping that

eventually the interest levels will build up, and that a book of my work might eventually come together on the back of this."

The work is a mixture of colour and black and white, split on the website into three categories: Abstract, X-ray and Platinum. The abstract work is full of spectacular hues, shapes and designs, and is a result of playing with movement and focus.

The X-ray series started when Peter was asked by Fujifilm to produce a self-portrait for an exhibition in New York. "I went off at a tangent," he says, "and decided to try to get an X-ray done of my hand to serve as my contribution. I discovered at that point that this wasn't such a good idea: due to the radiation involved, people are supposed to have as few X-rays as possible. However, it had set a train of thought in motion, and I decided to try to see if there were some other inanimate subjects that might be more suited to this kind of treatment."

The result was a long-running series, produced with the co-operation of a major hospital, whose facilities he was able to use out of hours. He went on to digitally manipulate and colour several of the pictures to give them an even more surreal and unearthly appearance. →

Photo art



IMAGE © PETER DAZELEY

IMAGE © PETER DAZELEY



IMAGE © PETER DAZELEY

IMAGE © PETER DAZELEY

‘People are more prepared now than they’ve ever been to accept photography as art and to put it on their walls’



IMAGE © PETER DAZELEY

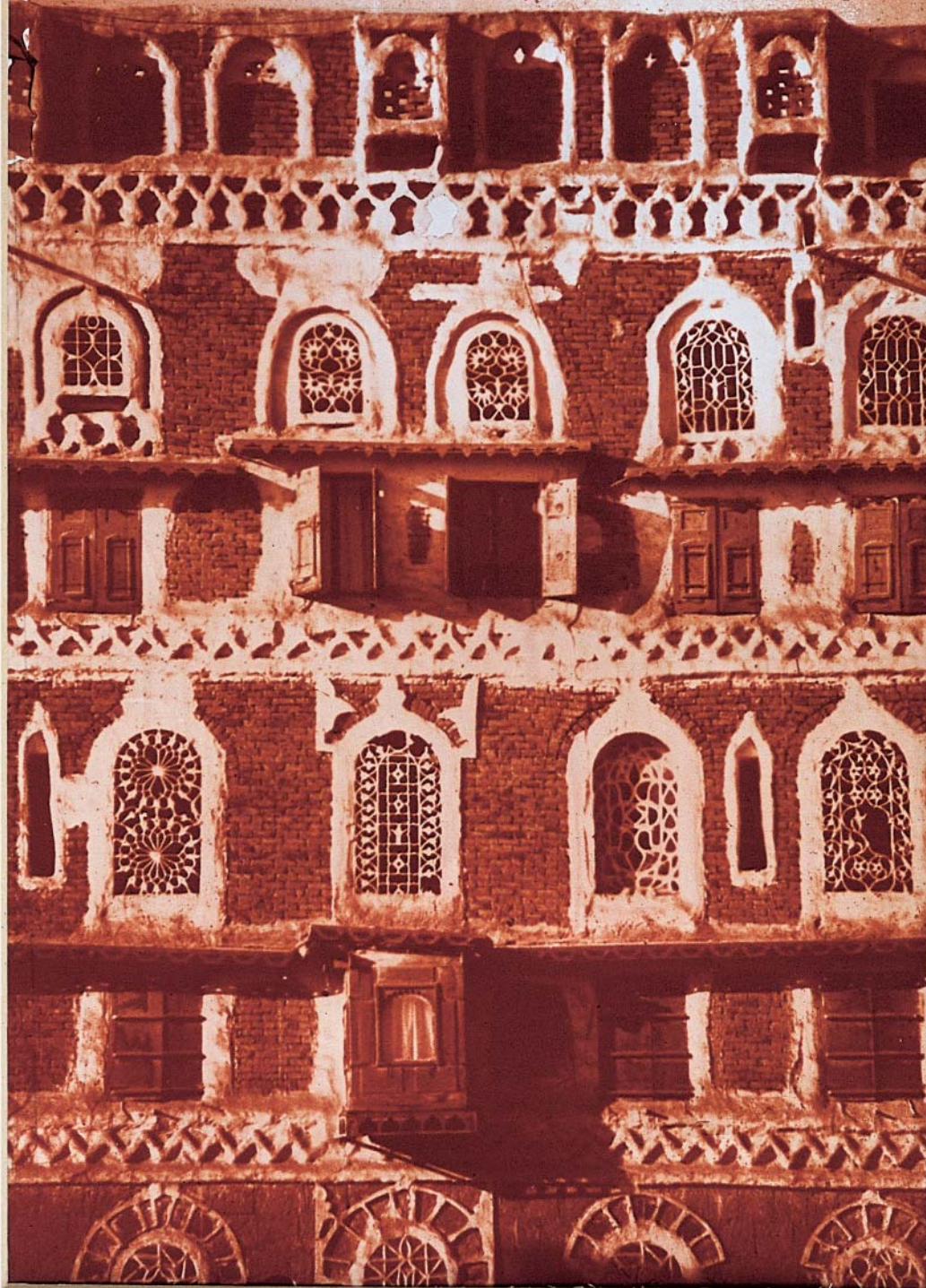


The Platinum category concentrates on assorted black and white work, all of which has been hand-printed by the father-and-son team, Paul and Max Caffell of 31 Studio, Gloucester, using the original Platinotype method devised by William Willis in 1876. The base for the prints is Aquarel Arches, a French hand-made paper designed for water colourists. Each picture is 15x19ins and produced in a limited edition of 25. The cost of each one has been set at £800, and the price is consistent throughout the edition.

"At the moment I'm having problems deciding how to present the colour work," says Peter. "The pictures in my portfolio are prints produced on art paper by an Epson inkjet printer, and they look fantastic. For this use, longevity is not really an issue because I can always print another copy should I need one. For a photo art print, however, I'm not sure that I would trust inkjet to last; it's not a risk I want to take. The solution, I believe, will be to produce four-colour lithograph prints of the colour work and to sell these instead."

Peter is unsure at the moment whether the time is right for photo art to make its big breakthrough: "It's certainly true that people are more prepared now than they've ever been to accept photography as art and to put it on their walls," he says. "But there's still a discrimination against photographers, in that if you're an artist it's accepted that you can use photography as part of your medium. If you are a photographer who wants to be accepted as a true artist, however, you'll find it much more difficult."

IMAGE © RANDALL WEBB



RANDALL WEBB

A life-long interest in photography lies behind the work of Randall Webb, who has specialised in the use of ancient and intricate printing processes for over 30 years. Indeed, so proficient is he at techniques such as gum bichromate, bromoil, albumen and platinum prints that he co-authored a book, *Spirits of Salts*, with Silverprint proprietor Martin Reed a few years ago that has gone on to become an indispensable guide to the whole area.

The collectability of prints made in this fashion is assured because they can be marketed as being hand-produced, and as a result there is a close connection with the artist. The striking visual appearance of a picture produced using a vintage process ensures that it will attract interest and will appeal to those with a sense of photography's history.

Randall is pragmatic, however, about his work and the prices he is likely to achieve at the regular exhibitions he holds around his home town of →



IMAGE © RANDALL WEBB

Photo art



IMAGE © RANDALL WEBB

‘People look for something with local flavour, a place they recognise. They don’t want a picture postcard, they want something that will show a place in a different light’

Richmond in Surrey. “I don’t sell a vast amount of pictures,” he says, “and the prices that I put on them are normally between £90 and 150. Usually, anything much more than £125 will be difficult to sell: after all, they are just photographs, and people aren’t prepared to spend vast sums on them.

“People in Richmond are looking for something that has a local flavour, a place they recognise. They don’t want a picture postcard, however – they want something that will show a place in a different light, perhaps because the picture has been taken at night or from an unusual angle.”

The pictures are in limited editions of 50 for the simple reason that people enjoy the thought that they are getting something that has a little more in the way of rarity value.

“There’s no accounting for the taste of the purchaser,” Randall concedes. “I’ve got one picture, a 5x4in shot that’s a view of Richmond Hill, and this has sold so well that I’ve made it an edition of 150 and I’m up to number 75 already.

“Some of the old processes also create their own rarity value. With photogravures and etchings, for example, you can only produce around 30 prints before the plate wears out and the picture starts to become fuzzy.”



IMAGE © RANDALL WEBB

The policy of exhibiting in order to show the work to a potential audience is one that has stood Randall in good stead over the years. Having worked as a freelance lecturer on photography of all kinds for the past 20 years, he developed close connections with the arts department of his local council by organising workshops for children and taking pictures of events that the department organised. In return he has been able to put his name forward for exhibition space in council galleries, and he’s had around eight shows in the past ten years, some individual exhibitions and others that are collaborations.

His latest venture is a joint show with fellow photographer Christine King entitled *Penny Plain, Tuppence Coloured*, which is running at the Riverside Gallery in Richmond until 5 October.

“I don’t think you are likely to make a great deal of money from selling your photographs unless you’re a major name – or have expired,” Randall says. “My exhibitions always cover their costs, and it’s a really good way of getting the work seen by the public.”



IMAGE © ALDO CERRATO



IMAGE © ALDO CERRATO

ALDO CERRATO

Aldo Cerrato is already making a living from his photo art, although he admits that it's been a struggle and that he has had to tailor his prices to suit the clientele that he is attracting. Aldo sells his pictures from a market stall in central London on three, sometimes four, days a week. His ambition is to raise his profile and eventually to sell his work through a gallery at prices that he considers are more reflective of the effort that have gone into his images.

Aldo came to the UK from Verona, Italy, ten years ago. He was initially trying to market a musical invention, a quest that also took him to the US for a period. Eventually he realised how difficult it was going to be to negotiate all the necessary patents and to raise the cash for development of his idea, and decided that he would try to express himself in different ways.

"I started taking pictures," he says, "and



IMAGE © ALDO CERRATO

realised that photography was a very direct way of putting my ideas across to people. I bought myself a basic camera and started to teach myself the rudiments, and also took a course to learn about the darkroom side of things: a correspondence course run from the US that gave me the basic rules of composition and so on."

Black and white was his chosen medium, and he set out to look for pictures around London, concentrating on views that would be familiar, but taking care to ensure that his images were original interpretations of the landmarks and locations.

"I just like to get out and find something," he

says. "I'm looking for a theme that I can explore, such as sadness or happiness, and I like to put my own interpretation on the things that I see. To date I've never taken on a commission and I wouldn't want to: I just think that I would be less inspired if I felt that I had to do something that was someone else's idea."

Looking for a way to make his photography pay for itself, Aldo eventually hit on the idea of taking on a market stall in Camden Town four years ago. He had visited the market and been impressed by the idea of direct selling, and was welcomed at the site as a craftsman who was →



Photo art

producing goods that were unique to him.

"I was able to make a living out of it straight away," he says, "although it was very hard work. I had to sell cheaply to generate the interest. I charge £20 for an unlimited edition 10x8in hand-made print in a 12x16in mount. Obviously this is way below gallery prices, but that is the price that people are prepared to pay when they are buying from a market. It generates enough income for me to survive."

Although the stall was busy, Aldo felt that a move to a central London location would benefit his business still further. After making the move three years ago he now pays £60 rent per day and employs a friend on a commission basis to do the selling for him so that he can concentrate on taking new pictures and producing his prints. "I'm stuck in the darkroom most days," he complains, "which is not something that I enjoy, but it's a necessary part of the process."

He supplies frames for his pictures, but feels that this is a necessary part of the overall service rather than a money-spinner. "There's not a huge profit to be made from frames," he says. "To offer a reasonable choice to the customer you have to carry a massive stock. It's a nuisance more



IMAGE © ALDO CERVATO

than anything else, but it's something that I feel obliged to do."

Although his stall is situated in an area that is full of tourists, he reckons that many of his sales are not to visitors but to people who live and

work in the area. Prints are destined to become part of people's decor or are purchased as gifts for birthdays or special events, with the original aspects of the pictures making them more special than a mass-produced item.

Would he consider producing other items that would expand his stock? "I have to be very careful not to cheapen what I'm doing because, in the long term, it will make it more difficult for me to make the move into galleries," he says. "For this reason I am not considering producing postcards right now, although I will be producing posters in the near future, which I hope will stop me having to be in the darkroom quite so much."

He is also about to set up a website that will have on-line selling facilities, and he hopes this will be a valuable extra arm of his business. "Although overseas visitors don't make up the bulk of my customers," he says, "it's still a good thing for me to offer anyone who has seen my stall the opportunity to make further purchases in the future from wherever they may be based. It will also be good to have a site that the US audience can access, because photography is much more accepted as an artform over there." ■

THE MARKET

Although it's a very wide area, there are parameters that apply to the photo art market in general. For a start there are archival issues, which are extremely important if a purchaser is planning to make a long-term investment. Black and white prints should be washed thoroughly and mounted on acid-free board, while colour work should be sold with display advice to ensure maximum print life. The jury is still out on the inkjet front: claims of extended print life by manufacturers have been met with some scepticism so far and, naturally, the best test is time itself. Inkjet prints simply haven't been around long enough to have become an accepted art medium just yet.

It's extremely difficult to make a full-time living just from photo art, although the public is now more prepared to invest reasonable sums in work that appeals to them. For selling from a market stall or at craft or art fairs, it's probably best to take a mass market approach and sell pictures as unlimited editions at reasonable prices. But the danger here is that it's then difficult to take the step up and sell limited editions through galleries at far higher prices.

The 'hand-produced' nature of photo art prints is what carries the most appeal to the general public, so make sure that you emphasise this aspect of your work. Each picture should be signed, possibly titled, and well presented.

Many photographers are more interested in producing photo art prints as a sideline that might generate some extra profit while being personally fulfilling. In such cases it may be better to offer limited edition prints, which will emphasise the rarity value of the items. If the figure is set at 50 for a certain size or even a certain finish, that sounds fairly exclusive, but the reality is that very few photographers selling for the higher prices will ever get close to that number.

When setting prices it's important to take all factors into consideration. If you're selling through a gallery expect a commission of 50 per cent of the sale price. If selling direct you can set your own prices, but there are rules to follow here as well. You will need to keep prices consistent so that buyers don't feel cheated if they find your work cheaper elsewhere, and you will need to do all your costings carefully to make sure that you're operating at a reasonable profit. There's no point in being the most popular photographer in town if you're selling prints at a loss and are never seeing the outside of a darkroom.

Remember too that this pricing philosophy also applies if you're selling direct, but have work with a gallery as well. If a gallery prices your work at £200 and you decide that you want to sell direct at £100, then you're undermining the gallery and it could sour your relationship.

CONTACTS

Andy Small

email: andy@andysmall.com
www.andysmall.com

Randall Webb

email: randall.webb@lineone.net

Peter Dazeley

email: studio@peterdazeley.com
www.dazeleyfineart.com

Aldo Cervato

www.coventgardenphotography.com