

# the high-flying dutchman

Henk van Kooten is up there with the top six photographers of modern times, according to Ray Lowe. He's a true artist who has real business skills and the highest standards, and he is a speaker at the October awards weekend.

You might have been to a Henk van Kooten seminar in the last year and think that you have seen his best work, but let me assure you that now his new 'state of the art' studios are open his work has gone up another level in creative awareness. Henk leads and creates the 'style' that every other photographer tries to copy, look around so called modern contemporary high key portrait studios and you will see Henk's influence.

Without doubt Henk is one of the most innovative portrait photographers in the World today; winning untold numbers of awards for both his off-the-wall wedding work and pulsating, energetic portraiture. He has a customer base that seek him out from all corners of Europe.

As Henk is one of the top line speakers at this year's BIPP/MPA joint awards weekend, I visited his new studios for a couple days and left not only in awe at the most amazing portrait studio set up I have ever seen, but also at just being in the presence of a pure artistic genius.

I have met hundreds, if not thousands of photographers in my travels around the world and have to put Henk into the top six that I have ever seen at work, alongside Jay Stock, Rocky Gunn, Don Fraser, Al Gilbert and Eric Lawe. His humble approach to his work is the mark of a true genius. He will also, like the aforesaid, help anyone to achieve more for themselves and this in fact could be his ultimate undoing. He cannot keep giving to this profession as much as he has done, whilst his customer demands are growing at such a fast pace. This might be your last chance to sit and absorb what Henk has to offer.

I visited Henk's old studio some three years ago and stayed with his wonderful family, his supportive beautiful wife Christina and four delightful vibrant daughters who made me feel like one of the family. Whilst there Henk showed me a large plot of waste ground and said 'in a couple of years that will



be our new house and studio', you could feel the vision through his enthusiasm.

To go back and see his vision in place was indeed a satisfying

feeling, from the moment you drive towards the entrance you know you are entering a special world of excitement and creativity. There's a saying in marketing terms for your

shop window displays that 'what you show, you get', it also works the other way around. Henk's customers know that what they are seeing on the walls is exactly what they are about to experience. Something so individual, so spontaneous, so different, that you can see the excitement building in them as they walk along the corridor, glancing at every stunning image.

So many studios take photographs by numbers, giving every customer, regardless of who they are the same stereo type poses, sitting after sitting. Not Henk, he chats to every customer over a cup of coffee for however long it takes to get to know them, to understand what makes them individuals and then shoots a totally personal



set of images that are a true statement of them and their relationships together.

Henk would never dream of shooting portrait sessions every hour on the hour, conveyor belt style, customers going out meeting customers coming in and treating it just as a business, and a customer as a cheque book. He treats every one as if they really are the only ones, this is truly a personal service and his huge sales are a testament to that, without huge prices, his customers truly get value for money and exactly what they came for, 'something completely different'.

When you look at Henk, you see a clean but unkempt, nee scruffy artist, the way an artist should look, you know this man is an artist, at his worst he looks to be on wacky baccy - but wow, he must have such a tidy ordered side to him as well. The one shock for me was that his are the tidiest studio and workrooms I have ever seen, even the kitchen was immaculate and with a few great portraits on the walls, which customers never see... he has such a pride in everything he does. Everywhere was faultless and clean, everything in its place and a place for everything; this was a very busy business with lots of great work going through the workrooms, yet the order was noticeable.

To be a customer of Henk's must be a privilege, the same as it would have been to be a customer of Michelangelo or Renoir, but I really hope he gets his just reward before he becomes immortal! Henk's portraits will in years to come be regarded as some of the best photographic art of the 21st century.

If you miss out on seeing this humble, brilliant photographer and warm, family man with images that will stimulate your work onto a higher plane and motivate you as a photographer, on Monday at the awards weekend in Coventry.

Don't say I didn't warn you - you will miss out on being in the presence of someone special if you are not here.

IT'S GREAT BEING A PHOTOGRAPHER!

If you would like to read more of Ray Lowe's thoughts, as the MPA's next President, he writes a regular monthly article in Panorama, available free from your wholesaler or laboratory.

Photographs: Henk's new purpose built studios as seen by Ray Lowe, and Henk's portrait clients as seen by Henk. Call 01325 356555 to book your seminar pass!

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