

# YIORGOS KARAHALIOS

Classic Portraiture





By Harvey Goldstein

Yiorgos Karahalios, of Salt Lake City, Utah, is a classical portrait photographer in every sense. Like his mentor, famed photographer Philip Stewart Charis, Yiorgos draws inspiration from the master portraitists he has studied—from Renaissance painters to contemporary photographers. Their influence is apparent in his portraiture—in the rich tones, carefully selected backgrounds, classical posing and lighting techniques, and acute attention to detail.

In this age of digital photography and the “I’ll fix it later in Photoshop” mentality, Yiorgos may just be one of the last remaining purists.

Although he has been working in photography for almost 30 years, Yiorgos began at the age of 14 at a color lab in Salt Lake City, where he learned all of the dos and don'ts behind the camera. As a classically trained oil painter, Yiorgos has done extensive study in backgrounds and exposure, poring over the works of Giotto, Peter Paul Rubens, Sandro Botticelli and Michelangelo. He learned a great deal about lighting from the work of Jan Van Eyck, Thomas Gainsborough, Caravaggio, Johannes Vermeer, Leonardo Da Vinci, Raphael, Rembrandt, James McNeill Whistler and Francois Boucher. His inspiration for posing came from Boucher, Whistler and Rembrandt; William Hogarth was instrumental in his posing of children. For framing, he studied Francisco De Goya, Vermeer, Da Vinci and Raphael. He was also a student of the works of Van Gogh.

Yiorgos carried what he learned from the medium of fine art into the world of photography upon opening his studio in 1991. He owes dividends to the three modern-day photographers he admires most: Philip Stewart Charis, Doug McEwan and the late Don Blair. McEwan and Blair taught him about the technical aspects of photography, and Charis instructed

him on the artistic side. "Doug McEwan was a master at all of the different types of lighting," Yiorgos says, "and I use all of them in my sessions."

All of Yiorgos' portraits are created on 4x5 film, and any enhancements to original portraits are done with pencils and acrylics. He is particularly noted for his children and family portraits, both of which are exquisite. While he does photograph some high

school seniors and the occasional wedding, it is his studio bridal portraits that will take your breath away. Their nuanced posing, lighting and finesse highlight the delicate nature of any bride and her gown. A bridal gown is the most expensive article of clothing a woman will ever own, with regard to the number of times it will be worn. Failing to give the garment special attention prior

heirloom piece of fine art.

"Today's photographers try hard to create something different," Yiorgos continues. "In doing so, they lose what is important. High fashion is okay if you are a fashion photographer, photojournalism is okay if you work for a newspaper or magazine, but portraiture must be something that is jaw-dropping."

Yiorgos differs from many of the current "point-and-shoot photographers," in that he believes a portrait process should be well thought out, beginning with the time the session is scheduled. Questions need to be asked: Who is the subject, and what is the purpose of the portrait?

To answer these, Yiorgos has an extensive interview with the prospective client prior to the day of the session. He needs to know the mood of the portrait, where it will be displayed in the home, the size the customer plans to purchase, what will be worn in the shot and whether the portrait will be formal or casual. He considers all of these questions very important in creating his type of classic perfection. "There are three things, in



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to the wedding is a disservice to the bride, the gown and the designer, according to Yiorgos, who photographed his first bridal portrait in 1988 and has done as many as 50 in one year.

"The bridal portrait is a defining moment in a woman's life," Yiorgos explains. "It should be a piece of art that will last for generations. The eye must not tire of looking at it; it must be treated as an

my opinion, that make an exceptional portrait," Yiorgos says. "Beautiful lighting, well balanced ratios and rich colors. The great master painters were able to capture this through the medium of paints; today I do it through the lens of my camera."

In keeping with the look of the masters, the furniture that Yiorgos uses in his portraits is all original from King Louis XIV of England. Though the pieces have been

reupholstered, the frames are original.

Yiorgos' portraits are original works of art, delivered with certificates of authenticity for insurance purposes and value. Since orders average over \$4000, with many in the \$8000–\$10,000 range, the certificates are nearly as valuable as the portraits themselves. Each portrait is fully enhanced by hand to create the feeling of a painting. "I have studied oil painting and have produced several paintings," Yiorgos says. "I apply the same theory to my portraits. There is a fine line between making a portrait look natural and making it look artificial."

If a client is interested in gift sizes for family and friends, after the original portrait is created and enhanced, Yiorgos will make copies of the original portrait; he does not make the copies from the original negative because it lacks the artistic effect that will be apparent in the copies.

When Yiorgos was unable to find a frame company capable of matching the quality of his portraits, he again studied other great master painters, who made their own personalized frames. He eventually found an artisan willing to take a large, solid chunk of wood and make frames for him, from which the Yiorgos Frame Company was created ([www.yiorgosframes.com](http://www.yiorgosframes.com)). All of his

frames are hand-carved and may be finished in wood, gold and silver metal leaf, or even 22-carat gold leaf. Individual portraits range in price from \$1200 to \$10,000; his frames maintain a similar price range.

Yiorgos believes that what sets him apart from others in his region is the quality

and personal touch he provides to his clients. While other photographers are taking digital captures and making Photoshop enhancements, Yiorgos' 4x5 negative images lend themselves to the 28x36 and 30x40 portraits he sells—with his hands-on pencil and acrylic enhancements noticeably distinct from computer-generated

around 3:1; for a stronger, more assertive mood, he increases the lighting ratio to a robust 5:1. Backgrounds are all one-of-a-kind hand-painted tapestries.

All of Yiorgos' work is sent to Nichols Photo Lab in Salt Lake City, with each portrait approved before he begins final artwork. Yiorgos spends approximately half of

his time in the camera room and half in post-production

His goal is to bring photography back to its roots. "It is time for photographers to take a little more pride in what they are selling," he says. "Learn to pose, learn what a ratio is, and learn the art of photography. And if you are going to enter a national print competition, make sure that the photograph is one you would sell to your client and not just something to get you a high score."

He adds, "I love to watch my clients' jaws drop when they see my portraits. Silence is the best form of flattery for me. After they catch their breath, they ask if these are photographs or paintings."

With the onset of a digital world, it is refreshing to have photographers who still enjoy film and know the basics of what makes a good portrait.

Yiorgos is one such photographer. Visit [www.yiorgosportraiture.com](http://www.yiorgosportraiture.com).



retouching. His portraits are created with an Omega View 4x5 camera with a Schneider lens and Kodak 160 NC portrait film, "for the richest colors and deepest three-dimensional look." Lighting quality depends on the mood he seeks: For a soft, pleasant look, his lighting ratio is usually

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*Harvey Goldstein from Branford, Connecticut has been in the photographic industry for almost 35 years. He is a former studio owner and presently edits numerous association newsletters and magazines, as well as being a freelance writer.*