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PHOTO

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PORTFOLIO • Randy VanDerStarren

Take Your Seat



Randy VanDerStarren is a Canadian photographer who walked away from an enviable career in advertising and financial services to pursue his dream. His work has been featured in Toronto galleries, shared the limelight with the Toronto Symphony at Roy Thomson Hall, and has just been installed at both Terminal One and Three at Pearson International Airport.

PHOTONews asked Randy to share his thoughts, and describe the philosophical journey behind the creation of his "Take Your Seat" project.

The United Arab Emirates showcase a desert's ethereal beauty. One of many highlights on our incredible journey. Nikon D750, 18mm, f / 8, 1/250 second, ISO 640.

One day.

How many times have you caught yourself saying those two seemingly innocuous words?

Three years ago, after testifying before the Canadian Senate Standing Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce, I realized that I had promised myself "one day", one day too often. At last, I was brave enough to face the proverbial question: *How did I get here?*

Of course, I understood how my career choices found me standing on Parliament Hill, briefcase instead of camera in hand. However, the philosophical gap between where my life was, and what I had intended, was cavernous.

My degree is in Film. I have worked for large advertising agencies including Ogilvy & Mather, and Young & Rubicam. Yet somehow my love of photography had taken a back seat to a career running an

investment management firm. I had allowed my early heroes, Yousuf Karsh and Ansel Adams, to be overshadowed by Warren Buffet.

The Take Your Seat project gave me back my inspiration. A simple director's chair, a pen and a camera reignited an almost forgotten passion. My years of creating thirty-second connections gave birth to a motivational symbol with four legs, a bit of canvas and an entire planet waiting to be rediscovered.

The director of any movie, good or bad, decides what shows up on the big screen. Think of your life as the biggest screen of all. Suddenly, you become free to enthusiastically direct what happens next.



Mosque

Abu Dhabi's Grand Mosque suggests a power much greater than ourselves. You leave having restored your faith in mankind. Nikon D750, 18mm, f/16, 1/160 sec, ISO 640.

We only get one planet. We only get one life. Take Your Seat challenges you to take care of both. The fragile beauty of nature reminds us that we have a responsibility to preserve what we admire. The insertion of a simple chair into a scene makes a compelling statement: Mother Earth, and our lives, cannot be taken for granted.

For the past two years, we have happily lugged our chair over hills and valleys to visit the temples and beaches of nine countries. I say "we" as my entire family, Austin, Spencer, Bo, Evan and Eva, my ever-patient wife, have accompanied me on countless expeditions. In fact, Spence, with his own uncanny shooting style and technical expertise, has become my invaluable partner. Shooting alone pales in comparison to sharing the experience with the people I love most.

We have survived rogue waves and desert winds. We have felt dwarfed by sequoias and mesmerized by night skies. We have been left breathless on the edge of ancient glaciers.

Incredibly, a simple director's chair has become an icon symbolizing personal choice. At our gallery exhibits and keynote presentations, I have had the privilege of seeing people experience the same revelation I had on that pivotal day on Parliament Hill.

Nowhere has that revelation been more pronounced than in our own 10-million square kilometre backyard.

Our Canada 150 series opened my eyes to the incredible and diverse beauty of my home. Only now, after driving 15,000 kilometres, skimming above the Arctic tundra in a helicopter, and stumbling across bison, moose and lynx, do I truly appreciate the vastness and variety that is Canada. "There" is no



Thailand

Bangkok, Thailand, during Songkran celebrations. A deluge of happiness leaves no room for darkness of any kind as Thai's welcome in the new year. Nikon D750, 35mm, f/5.0, 1/100 sec, ISO 400



Pic Island, a natural wonder along Lake Superior's North Shore, inspires us today as much as it inspired the Group of Seven 100 years ago. Nikon D750, 18mm, f/22, 1 second, ISO 160.



longer more compelling than "here".

Our *Take Your Seat with the Group of Seven series*, completed last autumn in collaboration with the McMichael Canadian Collection and the town of Marathon, gave me a memorable lesson in living history. The enduring beauty of the North Shore of Lake Superior compelled Lawren Harris and his fellow painters, season after season. 100 years ago became a seminal moment of my present as my legs shook standing in the same places, compelled by the same natural beauty that inspired brush to canvas almost a century ago.

Our latest expedition, *Take Your Seat, Hong Kong*, found our chair equally comfortable at the peak of Lion Rock to the edge of Victoria Harbour. The World Wildlife Fund opened a door to the natural side of Hong Kong most people never get to see.

Through my photography, I have been fortunate to become friends with my planet. Like my gear and my journals, I know her well. I hope that the *Take Your Seat* images will compel you to strike up your own conversations with Nature, with the past, and with yourself.

Hong Kong

Hong Kong's Global Geopark is as impressive as its skyline. Nature needs to be venerated. With that respect, we're certain to take care of her. Nikon D750, 22mm, f / 25, 15 second, ISO 50.



"One day" - these are the only two words that stand in your way. Flip them around - turn "one day" into "day one" of the rest of your more passionate, more enduring, more meaningful life.

I sincerely hope that the photography and words of the *Take Your Seat* project will encourage you - perhaps even challenge you - to *Take Your Seat*.

Toadstools

Utah's toadstools stand defiant against wind and time. Their precarious balancing act suggests time is no longer on their side. Nikon D750, 18mm, f / 5, 1/500 second, ISO 100.

For a breathtaking array of images from the *Take Your Seat* project, please visit www.takeyourseatonline.com and follow @TakeYourSeatInsta on Instagram.





Hong Kong

Hong Kong is one of the most vibrant, energized and dynamic cities on the planet. The light is green prompting you to go.