

Interview: Nikola Borissov

By Lidia Nekleevitch and Frank Beverdam

How would you describe yourself? What happens if we spend one day with Nikola Borissov?

I start late. I never wake up before noon, as all my retouching work is done by night. I usually go to bed at 4 o'clock.

If there is a shooting, it's huge fun. If there's not, it can be pretty boring because I have to do my PR and managing work.

My background lies far from Photography as I graduated in Political Sciences and then got my masters degree in International Economics. While I was graduating I discovered the magic of Photography and was obsessed with it. I bought my first camera in 2003. It was a point and shoot digital camera. I started to do street photography on homeless and poor people. I really loved it. I uploaded the pictures onto the internet and got positive feedback which made me happy.

After that I graduated and started to work in a bank for a couple of months. After the 2nd week I started to think about suicide because I really didn't like it. After a huge existential crisis I decided to become a fashion photographer because I wanted to be rich and famous. I still prefer to do reportage photography, taking pictures of people, but you can't do this for a living. It's a bit ironic because my whole life I had this huge despise for fashion, because I think it's a useless world.

At the beginning I thought it was fake and superficial but after a while I started to see that fashion photography, when properly done, can be a work of art. And now I'm very focused. All my time is spent on my work, I don't have any spare time. I want to be the best at what I do.

What are your favorite magazines?

I like magazines like [Numéro](#), [Dazed and Confused](#) and the [French edition of Vogue](#). Their fashion photography can be perceived as a work of art. Those magazines changed my perspective on fashion photography.

Is Fashion Photography an art form?

Fashion photography becomes a work of art when the focus shifts from the clothes in the image to the picture itself.

Commercial photography is focused on the clothes, but when a shoot is about the picture and creative freedom is expressed it becomes art.

Did you have to do more work that you didn't like at the start of your career than now to make a living?

Yes, but even if you get further you still have to do it. Even the big names do work that they don't like because they need to stay on top in commercial photography.







***How did you make sure it didn't kill your creativity, especially in the beginning?***

In the beginning I didn't really know what to do. I started with shoots for big modeling agencies for starting models. That is where my style emerged.

If you would have to start again from scratch with a very tight budget, what would be your essential equipment? Would it include variable lenses or fixed lenses?

Lenses and lights are the most important ingredients. The entry level bodies and lenses are more or less the same.

You can use both fixed and variable lenses. The expensive line of Canon has great lenses. Most of the time I'm using my 16-35/2.8 II, which is a great lens for my wide angle work. For portraits and close ups I use the 85/1.2 II Canon which is the best portrait lens ever made.

When you are on a limited budget you might go for a semi-professional Camera like the Canon Digital Rebel series (300D or 450D), get a Canon EF 24-70MM f/2.8L lens, 3 Flashes, like the Canon 580 EX II"

You can command the flashes wireless so you have a portable studio with 3 small flashes. Accessories like the small softboxes from Lumiquest are also important. You have to learn how to use the lights if you are going to produce something decent. You can't only use natural lighting all the time.

What would be your dream project, would it be for a magazine? What would it be for?

I really would like to create a photographic book that depicts the ancient Greek Goddess Gaia. Photographed in 50 beautiful savage places around the world like Kamchatka and the Salt lakes in Bolivia. Using the perfect model and mother nature, to depict timeless female beauty.

Who is your favorite model?

I really would like to work with Daria Werbowy, I would give an arm, a leg and a kidney for it.

Also, I recently met a model that is like the human equivalent of haiku poetry, pure minimalistic, timeless perfection - Rumi Krasteva, I am shooting with her for the first time next week and can't wait.

Among the girls that I've already worked with, my favorites are Silvia Dimitrova, Silvia Rangelova, Christina Mileva, Karina Nedelcheva - all Bulgarians, obviously, I usually prefer to book girls from my country.

cet obscur objet du désir







Photography is all about lighting. What kind of light do you prefer to work with? What are the challenges when shooting outdoor or in the studio?

I prefer to work outdoors because studios are boring for me. I like the unpredictability and I like it when the model can interact with the environment, you have more freedom. I like it when the model can move around to interact with her surroundings, it's more dynamic.

The studio is more comfortable because you don't have to haul around the equipment and you have everything there so it saves time.

People think it's difficult to shoot in the studio because they don't know how to control the light. They think it's easier to shoot outdoor because you just use the natural light, which is definitely not true. I never use only the available natural light. I use three to four flashheads to create specific lighting. If you see my pictures you see they are not made with natural light.

I don't use hot lights, even though I like them. They are hard to use outdoors. You have to bring huge generators because they need a lot of energy. They're also expensive to use.

How do you do deal with unpredictable things like the weather when shooting outside?

I have two approaches. When you do something really important I try to foresee everything, I scout the location, take pictures and use them to draw story boards for every possible situation. I also plan the lighting schemes, because you can't leave anything to chance.

But if I can, I like to improvise. Even when it starts raining you can make beautiful pictures.

When you look at the results, are the planned photos better than the improvised?

No, the difference lies in the fun. I love to improvise but with important work you just don't want to leave things to chance.

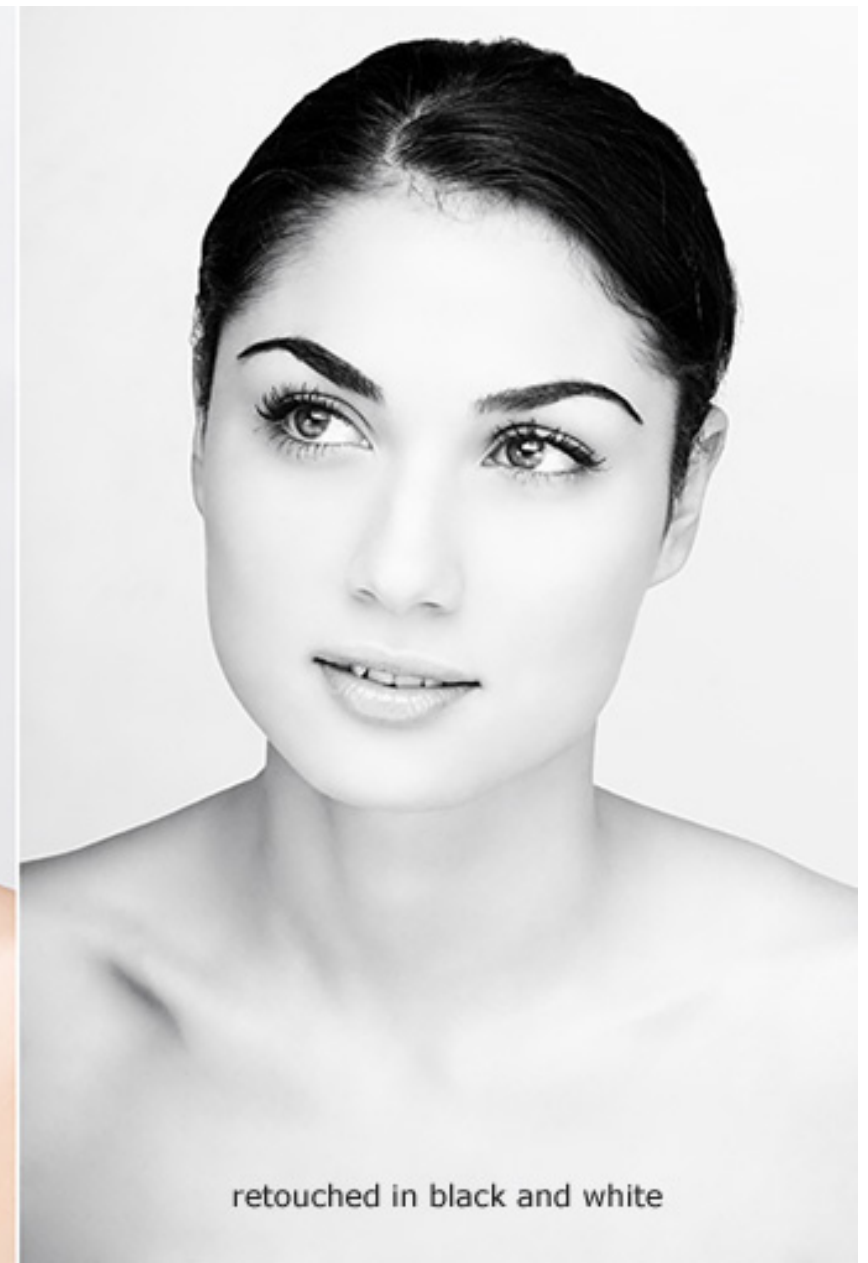
How do you deal with clients that have a "different taste"? Do you still publish the photos when you are not satisfied with the clients demands?

I try to convince them. If that doesn't work I just don't put my name under there. In the beginning, I was happy to get any job. I didn't like many pictures, but the further I got in my career the more I was able to filter the assignments I did.

How much of photography is the raw picture and how much is the post production?

It's probably 50/50. A common misconception is that a good photo is achieved by just making a good raw shot. The end result in my pictures needs a good raw shot, but post production work is just as important. Some people think photography is all about good raw shots, because of its analog past. They forget that during the time when there was only analog photography there was also post processing. It just took a lot more time.

When I shoot I always keep my post production workflow in mind. If you see my raw pictures they are very different from the final result. When I start to shoot I know how the post process production works and I take in account what I can and can't do.









What were your sources for learning Photography?

I used the Internet, the best thing that happened to humanity together with globalization. There are many sites I visit, amongst them are photo.net and deviantART.com.

One photography book is very important; [Light: Science and Magic](#): An Introduction to Photographic Lighting. It explains you how lighting works instead of just giving you a few predefined lighting schemes like many other books. So you can design your own lighting schemes, because you really start to understand it.

Do you use unusual types of lighting, for instance the lights of a car?

Yes, my favorite example was when I was shooting a car in the dark with eleven models, at a harbor. To push the boundaries I had a basic 85/1.2 II using ISO 1200 with a very low shutter speed. But I didn't want to use my big lights. So while shooting one model I asked the rest of the girls to illuminate her face with mobile phones using their flash lights (some of them can be turned on continuously).

Can you explain the difference between hard light and soft light and how you use it and control it?

At the beginning I only used soft light, because it is easier and more flattering for the models. Then I started to like very hard lighting, which is difficult to control but creates a unique look with hard shadows and lots of contrast. But it all depends on the mood I want to create.

Who are your favorite photographers?

I'll have to mention more than one. For a natural portrait I would trust [Sebastião Salgado](#), [Henri Cartier-Bresson](#) and [Robert Capa](#). These three are my favorite photojournalists.

For the fashion photographers I would choose:

- [Greg Kadel](#)
- [Mert Alas and Marcus Piggott](#)
- [Peter Lindberg](#)
- [Patrick Demarchelier](#)
- [Camilla Akrans](#)
- [Mario Testino](#)

I like their style because they go for perfection.

Does the model determine the way you shoot or the concept of the assignment?

A lot depends on the model, good models are like actresses. But it's more difficult than in a movie. You only have one frame to capture it all so it's very difficult.

Charisma is important, but the most important thing is how she moves and how she portrays her artistic side.

To get the best out of a model you have to be a good psychologist, make her comfortable. For long shoots I try to create a nice atmosphere with music and alcohol, just like in any good party.

What can we expect from you in the near future?

I'm going to do an exhibition in Paris. So stay tuned and keep track of my blog!

