

It's a tough market, and only the unique thrive. Photographers demonstrate how they use combinations of composition, lighting, tone, focus and more to both enhance the subject and distinguish their personal style.

PORTRAITS

By Kate Watson

# Elements of style

Develop a signature look that makes it your own

In today's competitive landscape, you know you need to stand out. One way to do that is to develop a unique style.

Style is a combination of all the aesthetic and technical choices you make, from the equipment you use, to your approach to art, to the colors you choose. A defined style is evident throughout the body of the artist's work. To learn how stylistic elements come together to create a signature look, I asked seven photographers to discuss a facet of their work and its relationship to their signature style.

The medium and equipment one chooses

are part of the foundation of style. Readers of *PP* are photographers, and some of you also apply painterly effects or create art with mixed-media. The equipment you use—camera format, lenses, lighting—begins to create your look.

Jennifer Loomis uses film cameras to create maternity portraits ([jenniferloomis.com](http://jenniferloomis.com)). "When I press the button, I have to know in my heart that I got the image I wanted," she says. "It makes me a better photographer." She chooses the 35mm format because "the rectangular negative is more attractive for pregnant women, and the size of my Nikon F100s

gives me more agility than a larger format."

Your approach is how you work with your subject. Do you get close or stand back? Do you shoot on set, outdoors, in clients' homes? Do you pose or document? Your approach is also the feeling and perspective you bring to your work.

Lone Mørch of Lolo's Boudoir is known for her images of understated eroticism and mystery ([loloboudoir.com](http://loloboudoir.com)). "I am a voyeur," she says. "I want to see you in your private space." Her largely intuitive approach is to create a safe space for exploring "who we are as women," she says. "It's me dancing with my subjects, bringing them out, finding a place where they allow me to see them."

**Erik Almås couples' romantic stories are set against the drama of a sweeping background.**



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Light is the heart of photography. How you harness its power—selecting natural or contrived light, diffuse or specular light sources, the direction of the light—has a huge impact on your style.

Mark Robert Halper's work for Halper Fine Art shows a mastery of light ([studiomark.com](http://studiomark.com)). His personal, classic style harkens to mid-century processes and optics. "The imperfections of the medium to me are beautiful. I tend to use a lot of larger, soft sources, and I'm always looking to add a bit of drama to that light. I want defined highlights and defined shadows," he says.

The composition of your image includes every element in the frame. Are your set-

tings simple, or do you prefer the complex and layered? Your compositional style reflects the way you prefer to use the elements in the frame to emphasize your subject, maybe with leading lines, or by cropping the frame in unexpected ways.

Erik Almås has a sweeping, romantic style ([erikalmas.com](http://erikalmas.com)). "There are certain elements in every photograph of mine," he says. "There's usually a big vista or background, some kind of line or middle ground that pulls you into that background, and there's a foreground element telling a story," he says.

Color, in essence and balance, can be approached in camera or in post-processing. You might demonstrate your color style with



©Lone Mørch

©Allison Trentelman



©Jennifer Loomis



Allison Trentleman (above) uses post-capture techniques to top off her signature look, allowing her to portray her subjects in her own style. Lone Mørch (top right) of Lolo's Boudoir creates a dark and sensual world. Jennifer Loomis (bottom right) creates her signature style using the rich elements of black and white film.

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Dawn Tacker exhibits her natural aesthetic, printing her images using environmentally friendly materials.

your preference for warm or cool tones, pure black-and-white or sepia tones, saturated or unsaturated hues. In camera, you might control the color with the film type you choose, with your lighting, location or clothing.

Slovakian photographer Katarina Krizanovicova uses color to convey her feminine, contemplative style ([katarinakri.com](http://katarinakri.com)). “When I shoot portraits, I try to find colors and light that complement the personality of the subject,” she says. Her “obsession” with color, as she calls it, arose from experimentation. “I like softness and subtlety. It took me awhile to find film that would portray colors exactly how I imagine them.”

Post-capture processing through custom film development or digital manipulation can also contribute to a signature look with color, tone,

contrast or texture. Allison Trentelman of Rocky Top Studio says post-processing is integral to her simple, natural style ([rockytopstudio.com](http://rockytopstudio.com)). “[It] gives me the ability to fit my subject into my own style and create a really specific color scheme, which for me is usually a palate of delicate pastel colors. Post-processing allows me the creativity to create the image

that I have in my head,” she adds. “I love the fact that if I can dream it, I can create it.”

Printing and product selection cement your artistic style. For example, you might exhibit modern photography on canvas, or classic work in traditional matted albums.

Dawn Tacker of Eos Photography and GreenerPhotography.org uses environmentally friendly products to showcase her natural style ([eosphoto.com](http://eosphoto.com)). “The emotional connections I illustrate really stand out on fiber paper, and it satisfies my inner environmentalist as it will eventually biodegrade, unlike photographic paper. I also choose paper made without optical brightening agents to avoid the yellowing that can occur as photographs age.”

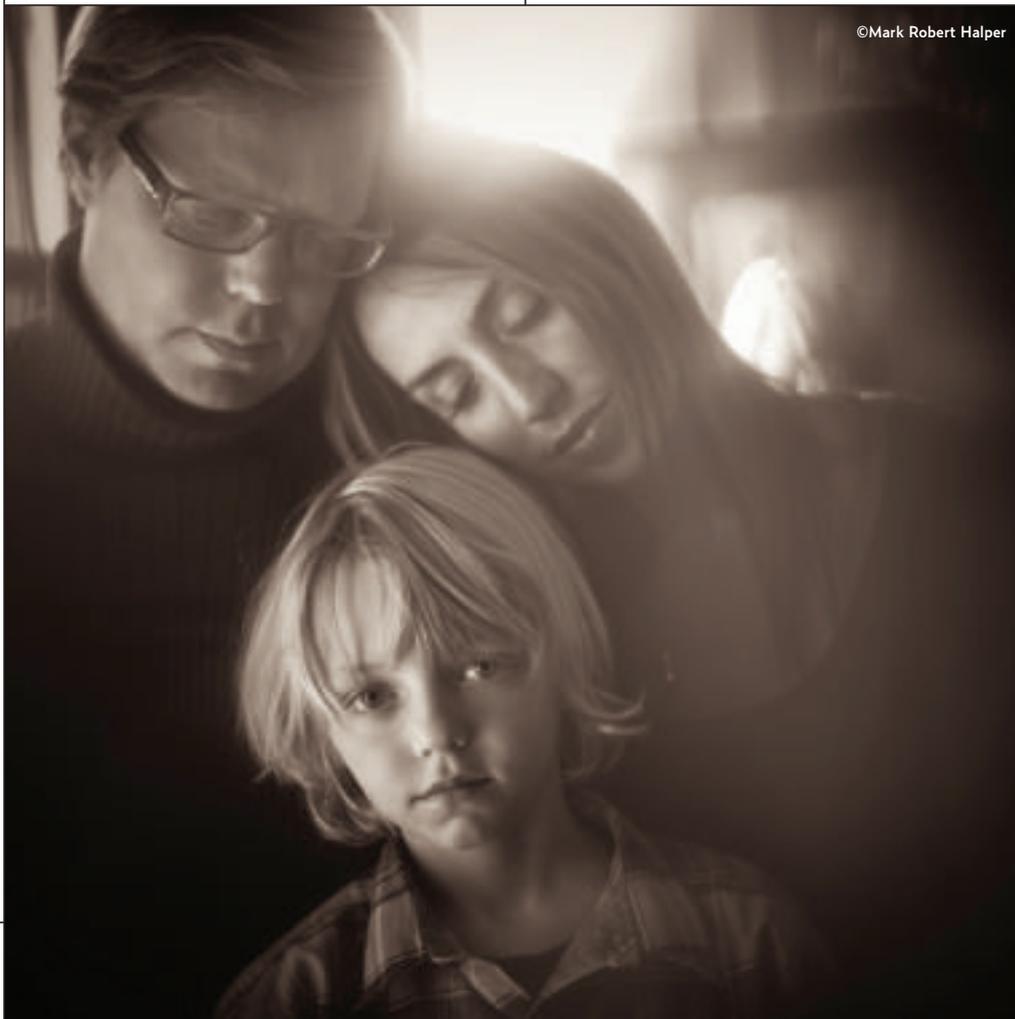
Creating a differentiated style requires choices and consistency. You can’t use every tool available, or change your look frequently if you want your work to be recognizable. Halper sums it up well when he says, “The most important element in a photograph is the *intent*, and all the [stylistic] elements work to support that.” ■

*Kate Watson is a creative business strategist at [ArtAligned.com](http://ArtAligned.com).*

Mark Robert Halper prefers large, soft light sources, and intentional imperfections that are a nod to mid-century processes and optics.



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