

salem krieger

# WYING FOR THE CHANCE

By Larry Brownstein

When Salem Krieger was working as an illustrator in Chicago, he would often spend six to eight days on a single illustration. Having worked his way up from an entry-level job as an errand boy in an art studio, he still craved more challenge and variety in his work. That's why he began photographing on his own time, for himself—an activity he turned into a career. At the time, Krieger hung out with photographers Tony D'Orio (known for photographing the Altoids campaign) and Marc Hauser (known for his celebrity portraiture), a milieu that no doubt helped him with his eventual career shift.

Another friend of



**Above:** Newsstand, 86th and Third Ave., NYC **Right:** Beijing, photo story on contemporary China

Krieger's, who was joining a group of optometrists on their way to Nicaragua to provide free services to the local people—exams, surgery and glasses—also offered him a pathway to further photographic opportunities. When Krieger decided he wanted to photograph the trip, he contacted the art director at American Airlines' in-flight magazine and pitched the story. The representative liked the idea and in addition to taking pictures, asked him to do a photo-essay on Nicaragua.

As luck would have it, the director of communications for the U.S. National Guard was on an American flight and saw Krieger's Nicaragua photos. He





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**Above:** Union Square, NYC, snowstorm (featured in Nikon World, Spring 2006) **Below:** Fashion ad for Kazuyo Nakano, Times Square, NYC



was so impressed that he called and asked him to photograph a research expedition in Greenland.

Another fortuitous occurrence took place during a recent trip through Penn Station. While wearing a T-shirt given to him by Fujifilm (he is a tester of Fujifilm equipment and speaks on their behalf at

events such as PhotoPlus Expo), Krieger was spotted by another commuter, who asked where he could buy such a shirt. As it turned out through an exchange of stories, Krieger was already scheduled to meet with this fellow commuter's partner about their clothing-manufacturing business.

For obvious reasons, Krieger is a strong

believer in making the most of chance meetings with people and seeing what may come of them. "I'm a firm believer in approaching people," he says. "If you can accept the fact that somebody can say 'I'm not interested, go away and don't ever bother me,' it's worth trying."

Krieger relates how one of his first big assignments from Whole Foods Market came about years ago: For a high-end health-food store, Krieger noticed a considerable neglect for marketing potential through window displays. There was nothing more than a few boxes piled up in any given store's window. Krieger figured it was an opportunity and went in to speak with the store's manager to offer his services. Initially, the

company was uninterested, but after a few months Krieger got the change-of-heart call. The store remains a good client of his today. In fact, Krieger not only does photography for Whole Foods, but also does imaging for them, collaging their store displays with stock images from agencies.



**Left:** Self-portrait used by Fujifilm at PhotoPlus Expo, NYC  
**Below:** Stock photo, South Dakota

Krieger offers another story about securing an interesting client: “Kazuyo Nakano, a high-end handbag designer from Japan based in New York, saw one of my personal videos at a party,” he says. “She liked my unconventional style of shooting and sense of humor and ended up as my client, hiring me for multiple assignments, including fashion photography and video work for her business in New York and Tokyo.”

Krieger is not averse, however, to more conventional routes of self-promotion—postcards, portfolio packets, etc., mailed out to lists he gets from Adbase or Agency Access—but he is keenly aware that photo buyers are inundated with photographers’ promos and thus makes it a point to go beyond the traditional.

I mention during our interview that I was struck by the variety of work displayed on his website, [www.salemkrieger.com](http://www.salemkrieger.com). “I like being able to do portraits,” he says. “I like being able to travel, and I like being able to do Photoshop work.” He seeks clients that allow him to work on such a variety of assignments.

Though being a generalist works for him, Krieger does agree that specializing is probably a good idea for many photographers. “Branding is important,” he offers. “If you do one thing and you do it all the time, yes, you’ll probably get a better rate of success. But being a generalist has its advantages in terms of flexibility, of making the best of unexpected conditions and making connections among the different specialties in photography. This has allowed me to create images that are rich, multilayered and intriguing. But there is a challenge in being a generalist—it is very time-consuming because you have to perfect not just one area of photography, but several. Like me, I spend day and night working on my craft, be it shooting or post-production. But I love it.”

The need for quick turnaround is one of the reasons that most of Krieger’s work is done digitally. He has used his medium and large format equipment far less in the past. He mentions his temptation to move to a medium format system with a digital back. However, he believes that given the pace of change of technology, it’s not cost-effective to spend top dollar for a system that may soon be obsolete.

To get a good feeling for his work, we look at some representative photos. The picture of the girl with blue hair in front of the portrait of Chairman Mao Tse Tung (p. 11), taken at the entrance to the Forbidden City in Beijing, was done on a trip to China to shoot stock images. His goal was to contrast the old China with the new. Krieger





Photo for ZUMA Press on Biodiesel fuel, Texas.

estimates that about 40% of his time is spent traveling, whether shooting stock or assignments. His stock images are represented by several agencies including Getty, Veer and ZUMA Press.

Still, Krieger doesn't wait for clients to call and give him specifics before starting a project. He is happy to stake out his own stock shoots. "I just like to make images," he says, adding that some people "make images to make sure they make the right move."

With an eye to his own work, Krieger says, "I am inquisitive. I like to explore. Photography must be fresh for me; it should have something unique to offer the world of images. It often strikes me how similar or familiar most images look, and as an artist/photographer, I want to offer something unique—a fresh perspective in looking at the world."

Acknowledging that certain stock images are not selling as well as they once did, he says, "It's gotten too easy for too many people to make decent images." And while Krieger thinks most of these images are the ones that people see and think of as "nice," unfortunately this often means "too familiar" or "too generic." According to him, it's what the industry has always wanted and that's why there is an oversupply.

In response, Krieger likes to shoot trendy images on occasion, though he says

there is always the risk that the trend will end before the images make it to market. He tries to spend more time making pictures that interest him and trusts that his personal style will distinguish his images from the pack.

Living in New York City, he often takes inspiration from the city itself. Recently, he came across a newsstand he intended to photograph to use in a composite image (p. 10). He secured permission from the owner and returned the next day with an assistant, placing strobes within small softboxes to fill in late afternoon shadows. The man in the booth was also lit with a strobe triggered by a slave. As he set up, he saw an old woman in a leopard coat walking towards him. He could see that she was an amazing subject and got excited about the potential. He asked her to be in the shot, but she was a bit standoffish and said she was too busy. When she finally consented, she just stood there waiting, without much expression. Krieger offered to buy her something from the newsstand. She accepted a newspaper, looked towards the camera and the image was done.

Krieger uses Nikon cameras and lenses, Profoto flash, and an Intel-powered Mac Pro that includes Adobe Lightroom as the linchpin in his workflow. He is a real believer in Lightroom's abilities to process a

large number of images efficiently. "I can rank them, sort them, label them and make selection collections," he says. Krieger likes that he can use the same settings and retarget an image for the Web or print.

New for Krieger is his venture into video. He says there is a great deal of overlap between photography and video and that with the help of a few good assistants, the transition went smoothly.

A strong interest in the environment and animal rights also keeps him busy, as he has sought out assignments for organizations such as Greenpeace.

"There is no shortage of ideas. There is only a shortage of time," Krieger laments. He keeps notebooks with his ideas. He mentions that a recent visit to New York's Hayden Planetarium gave him an idea that he is beginning to pursue, though it is a bit premature to reveal the details. He did, however, leave me with this intriguing teaser: "It's germinating, in the early stages. This much I'll say: It's based on the idea of space exploration." And, with a laugh, he concludes, "I'll leave it at that." OC

*Larry Brownstein is the photographer of the books Los Angeles, Where Anything is Possible and The Midnight Mission. He is represented by Getty Images, Alamy and other agencies. See his work at [www.larrybrownstein.com](http://www.larrybrownstein.com) or contact him at (310) 815-1402.*