

Welcome to shooting spaces real estate photography podcast discussions on gear technique industry news and interviews with the best in the business.

Now here's your host Rich Baum and Brian Berkowitz.

Welcome to shooting space's podcast. This is Rich Baum from Sacramento California and Brian Berkowitz out of New York and we have a special guest joining us today.

Straight out of San Diego California owner and lead photographer of Aloha photo video. Let's welcome Sam Chen. Sam why don't you say hello to everyone and tell our listeners where they can find you online.

All right hello everyone. This is Sam Chen the founder owner and chief photographer at Aloha photo video based in California. The Web site is Aloha dash photo video dot com and Instagram is Aloha Dot photo video just stopped by. Check out what I've been up to you and feel free to ask questions and hit me up.

I just want to say thanks for coming Sam. I really feel I've known you for a long time though we just met once. It was just such a great contributor to the society and from the apartheid days to the Facebook groups and everything. Like always there's the people love to hear from Sam Chen. It's my pleasure. And you know I think that I'm so if I was going to say I admire one thing for you. I just think it's you just do all these really cool things and the results are great. You're like in some ways living the dream because a lot of us would love to be shooting places like we see you shoot. And I'm sure you shoot some Alaska. There were other of palatial palaces but you know you're seeming to do some cool and the like to kind of maybe something people don't know about you or you know talk about you or your drones in your business or your background your history and just anything you want to talk about. Sure. Where do we start. Where do you where did you start or were you don't want to go back to your your teething years. Breastfeeding I've certainly I certainly would think. Let's go just from college or high school and just how you got into photography and then how did you get into this. Two buildings right.

I was born with a silver camera on a silver platter and silver camera in my now no holds photography. You know for a lot of us all started with probably are our dads. You know my dad was really to photography and the. One of those mechanical cameras from the 60s or whatever and I've always been fascinated by cameras. He would go to an owl Polynesia Indonesia Taiwan come back with the most amazing slides you know very probably Kodachrome or something like that. And they're absolutely hated by now but I usages. Religiously look at his pictures and dream about the world and I was fascinated by gadgets and art. So the two kind of combine. But you know I never really was spoiled with that nice camera until I got to college and that's when I really treat myself to a real camera. It was probably a Munno to Maxim 5000. Remember those days and you know autofocus just came out is a big deal. And so I shop for my college UCLA. I was on the newspaper's staff and I shot for the yearbook and I just I you know I'll just do this as a side job and make some money. It's going to be piece of hey you know no problem. Of course you know dating myself the Persian Gulf War broke out and we as protests all over the campus. Hunger strikes violence you know so I thought I was going to be a cakewalk and it turned out to be a total full time 24/7 job and I loved it. I love every second of it. I was shooting six rolls of TMX 30 200 100 and getting to now check out development in the dark room there. It was basically shoot free. My most was probably six rolls of 36 in one day and we roll our own films. You know there's these bulk loaders we actually just roll was so satisfying to be able to be part of that. And I felt the rush when I graduated from college I wanted it to join National Geographic to shoot those beautiful pictures.

I grew up lucky in the magazines and you know just live the dream. But then I got one of those desk jobs in Silicon Valley doing high tech for a 10 years so that's where I kind of fell in love with. They'll make an animation.

So what were you doing and what kind of technical in Silicon Valley.

Yeah my background is actually computer science engineering. So it's really helpful to have a science background so you're not afraid of cameras and gear you're here. No that's why I'm always MacGyver bringing in a DIY budget accessories together because I'm a teen. I would never do anything like either. It's kind of like instead of cars. For me it's like Dremel gear and drones. I was doing a lot of DIY Drones my drone was always open stuff hanging out. You know this is way before the maverick can inspire. So it was filmmaking that really got me you know back into the arts. And the reason why I liked filmmaking is a combined two of my passions in life which Ardan number one music Number Two photography and filmmaking kind of takes music and you can put beautiful pictures on top of the motion picture. So long story short for probably 12 13 years I mean movies and I did the film festival circuit then I have some films out there you could buy my film on iTunes and Amazon etc etc.. So having said that all of that was really training my eye for composition for colors and you know leading the eye from one part of the screen to another. So pretty much everything I'm doing in real estate photography now is on top of the foundations of years and years. Kind of training that muscle and that sensibility of controlling where the eye sees how to do that using colors and contrast and brightness that you know kind of you know rule of thirds or knowing when to break rule of is you know things like that.

Yeah. That's that's just kind of was thinking we I'm a musician myself and have worked on a film. So it's in a small world. Where did you grow. What part of the California rent.

Yes anyway go back to my hometown.

Oh you were there. Lucky guy.

Yeah I mean and I think beautiful you know I taught college classes for six years in animation filmmaking cinematography. One thing I tell my students is you know enter enters the main the traditional arts. A lot of people just want to you know learn animation and go right to Pixar. But a lot of it comes down to life drawing a lot of it comes down to basic you know design composition from this using a pencil and paper. So I think a lot of people who want to jump into photography they should totally study you know learn how to draw learn how to paint. You know listen to music if they're making videos you know or real estate. Music is a big part of it. Knowing how to edit the pacing rhythm.

Yeah there's definitely something to that because I am a graduate of School of Visual Arts in Manhattan and I took a lot of photography classes too and they required us to take drawing classes and all that type of stuff. And at the time I was thinking to myself What am I wasting my time for. But even the subtleties of learning and highlights and shadows and stuff like that really go a long way when you're learning your craft of photography and learning to excel at it.

Yeah SVA that's a great school. A lot of awesome animation I curated a animation program for the Ziegler Asian Film Festival for 15 years and we got a lot of great films out of Sta. So you know it's very encouraging to see young people now get that foundation.

Hey Sam. I know me. Kind of like you being a dear Guy.

Brian you're a real beard.

Are the steps like that.

I'm not so much a gear guy in reference to DIY but I'm I am a gearhead in the sense I love tech and I buy a lot of gadgets. And my wife who gives me that look.

But you know I don't have I don't know where you want to call and I don't have it in me to go and start pulling my drone apart and putting it back together because I also fly drones Sam.

But I won't build my own on I'm not I'm not that advanced or anything like that. You know I do like tech and I do like gadgets.

Let's put it that way though. What Sam what equipment want to kind of go just down really really don't go too into it but just so sort of touch bases on the brands or the models if you want to go into it but just kind of give people an idea of what are you shooting with these days.

OK I started with a cannon. I've always wanted a graduate ironically Sony can I bought that but first Sony DSLR Laar when they buy Minolta and Konica I believe this is like that Alpha y or a mine. And I still have it today. So Monday I had a chance to sort of buy a real camera. Got canon 70 crop sensor and I shot with attendant 22 millimeter crop lens and it was fine think great until I dropped it shattered and the 70s still works. But the lens was toast. So it was a chance to go to Beaupre. I started shooting with a 60 and I love it. Everything was great about it is focusing on horrible sports but I'm usually manually open sea anyway. And then recently I upgraded to the fight for just a little bit more dynamic range low noise and also dual card for me. Your card is very important as I see a lot of stuff that's hard it repeats. And then in terms of the rest of the system I always always shoot with Cam ranger that I can't shoot with interiors without him anymore I just say touching the camera I barely use the many system of my camera but everything see the camera Ranger tripod I've kind of gone from the cheap stop. Now I've settled on a Banro or 10 but not sorry not fortunate to get a sweet looking like you're right up on an Sproull sweet.

Yeah but if it was in the market that's something like looking yeah stoppers recommendations.

So I just went with the carbon fiber it's very bulky and heavy in a good way very light. And so I really dig it. Oh it's 410 meaning 400 dollars not the model number so really good value. And then of course the order and your head and then Krono to 405 and now the D4 I've settled on the bore and you know how do you like your deep or rich.

Oh you know it's a little bit honest it's a little getting used to. No I still don't feel comfortable with the idea of manually doing the Pam. It's only got to access gears. And it's hard to get kind of. And it's not a big deal but it's just hard to get used to it. And the other one is the hands are different. They're opposite of my four are completely basic and that's yes tell you that's really playing with me because I always use to have my right hand with do what or the other but sure it's often the middle. So anyway. Yeah I know that sounds great. And I just wanted to know one thing because I'm thinking about doing a video on tilt shifts and trying to put together everybody's talking about tilt chips these days. I mean I'm sure a partially guilty of it but you know there's a lot of misnomers a lot of you know people feeling they've got

to get it or you know blah blah blah. We all know that. But I was just thinking what would you say in 30 words or less. No. In just a minute. Some people read quickly or just a canned explanation of why you would use a tilted lens. And who was right for them like that.

All right. So I shoot with a 70 millimeter and a 24 Munier Cannondale ship. And I like 99 percent of all my interiors and more and more exteriors are shot with all tilt shift. I love them. I can't live without them. Having said that I recently had to ship it to the canyon USA to get it tuned because it was starting to get soften the edges. So the last week I shot with a 1749 zoom lens. And guess what. It was a miserable experience on the spot because I'm doing bake tell shift light tilting the camera down and shooting the widest possible and then hoping that everything comes together in a post. But having said that I was shocked at how good everything. But once you correct that perspective it was really sharp if you know how to tweak the right levers and might it actually fool the guy. It's not that much less sharp than a 71 year 24 without a light adjustment. So I think you could fake it pretty well. So it's more about the experience on location I like to know that we live in the rain. What's not and not leaving the guesswork until after post you know there's pros and cons if you can afford it or Sherko if you can afford it. Now it's not a must. You can fake it until you make it.

And the other question is definitely going to be 17 or 24 right Nikon will record nineteen point four.

OK so I think a lot of people you know preach 24 24 I'm a big 70 fan and here's why you can always drop until it looks like it's 24. And the beauty of that is that Hamis they have so much resolution. When I upgraded to the five mark for it me a lot more pixels to work with. So now I cropped it usually about 20 millimeters but sometimes I leave at a 75 with the Seelie on our side. I want a little bit more height I can get that. So I dare you to see the difference you know once I crop it compared to a native 24. I rather have that flexibility too know because I do a lot of post anyway. If you don't want to touch posted you don't want a crop then maybe 24 knows your answer. I love seventeen and how much flexibility you have.

It's funny you say that because I recently about 2 3 months ago got the 24 hour shift which is the first Tosha Verne's I've bought and I was kind of torn in going back and forth between going with the 24 versus the 17 and I was actually heavily considering getting a 17. Along with the Canon also with a Canon one point five times extender which will kind of make your 17 just around a 24 give or take a little couple of millimeters. It turns out that I ended up getting the 24 millimeter but there's a little part of me that regrets not getting the 17 with the extender as well because then I have the option of both like you said shooting Weider and cropping if I need to.

And then just throw in an extended ad if I want a 24 millimeter or a rod around there but semi.

I just want to jump in and say I will see your bet and say that they say that in general because of Chewton with the 19 millimetres which hasn't happened yet. He is 17 and but the 19. Here's the deal for me I love it because I can use it for a whole house and I don't have to switch because the 24 I was always helping to put some water for the little bedrooms up new. So now I love the 19. Should the whole house with it. But to tell you if I'm trying to do it. Lately I've been doing more detail shots of let's say a nice thing going along with a stove. Try to get that shot close up. You've got to move in so close that it just doesn't work for me so I need the 24 also.

Well here's the deal. So it's a pretty tough day. You got to play a mind trick on yourself. Jen I my trick. Pretend you have a 24. Even though you don't read the stand where you stand with a 24. But you're shooting with a 17. Now your subject is. But maybe not tiny but medium and so by knowing that you can crop imposed no you have your pick. So knowing that with Lightroom voter shop you have just amazing ability to fool the eye. And for most of us who are just submitting to MLS it really doesn't matter if you're shooting you know if you're like Hargens or Mike Kelly or Scott prances then that's different. Your picture is finally blown up really big for ad campaigns. But for MLS you can get away with murder. So you just stand where you stand with a 24 or 19 shoot it as is and it looks like crap and then you know you crop it in post done Ambre and you shoot all the time with your tilt shift since I got it I've started to.

Like I said I have the 24 so there's a lot of situations where 24 as we just spoke about is not wide enough. You know a small bathroom or something like that.

So I do have a 16 35 camera to a lens which I'll use if I need to get a little wider I'll use it on small bathrooms. The first two months I got it. I was guilty of using that more than I should just because I got it and it was a new toy until I kind of got over that. And I was like All right now I really need to use the right lens for the right room. You know I was shooting really tight bathrooms with the 24 just because I was like I got this Tosha shaft I have to use it you know. So once I got over that and kind of went back to the I guess artistic side of my head said OK I need to use the right tool for the job and not just the new toy I bought. Now I kind of go back and forth between the 16 35 and the 24 until I get to 17.

And what's what's on the horizon for you Sam. What's your comment.

Gosh more the same me. So maybe a good topic to talk about is real estate versus commercial architecture. A lot of people aspire to do all those things. But something people don't talk about is sort of the gray area in between. There is such a gray area and there's a huge market in the middle which is really luxury real estate. And I know not every small town has that if you live along the coast. That's a huge piece of pie a waiting to be taken. If you are starting up you know target that I mean that's what I did. I started with the Samedi dollars per shoe doing very humble you know hundred thousand dollar homes and that's like a dump in San Diego. Three and a half thousand. That's like a crack addict. You know opium here in San Diego. I've also cut my teeth by doing a lot of surf shacks. You don't see any of the surfer town. We have a lot of homes that are now just kind of just basically a place where surfers go to sleep and that's it. And that dumbly that they train you to learn how to sort of incorporate that lifestyle into every shoot for her. My market of San Diego. It's not just about selling home it's selling a lifestyle. Sometimes the home is a dump and instead you are focusing on the view the view from the living room from the patio deck the roof and the you know jacuzzi or whatever. So you're trying to always incorporate a sunset. Picking the right time of day always trying to get that view in there getting on trees and working in that palm tree that silhouette and break me and things like that. So you know I think that's where I started then. I always knew that I wanted a target luxury real estate in San Diego. To me that's a sweet spot because eagles full of luxury Realty's like Pacific Sotheby's huge here. Berkshire Hathaway Coldwell Willis Allen Keller Williams says are some of the sort of targets that you can go after. And the pie is big enough for everybody if you're good enough. Yup it worked. Now it's yours for the taking. So the beauty of doing luxury real estate is once you've get a couple of clients and then it's nonstop. You don't have to spend so much time promoting yourself. Bittie and underbid negotiating negotiating. I mean just worst part of commercial. We have tons of commercial photography. I live in an area full of whole towns. You know during comic con this whole my all my neighbors here are hotels that get booked and they just there's just so much opportunity for commercial here. But I almost feel like that's a pain in the butt. Now. Ita pain in the ass. I rather go for Sotheby's or Berkshire Hathaway

whenever. Where once you kind of lock in and become your preferred photographer part of their preferred vendor lists then you don't have to do any marketing or they just come. And the money may not be as good as commercial or hospitality but at the same time they're they're good.

They're way better than regular not luxury and you only have to shoot like one house a day and you can make it Livi and you'd never have to go and now go through the pain of bidding looking for more architects.

So Sam I wanted to ask you because I'm also a drone operator. I'm a Purwanto 7 but you were telling me earlier that you got into real estate photography from drones and that kind of segue into I guess you can call it land or ground shots. I kind of had the opposite happen to me. You know I started doing ground shots and took my license I went into a drone from there.

So tell us a little bit about your story with your aerials and your drone and how that led into the photography you do now.

Yeah like before I wish any real estate I was the artsy fartsy films for myself and for V.M. and for the tourism board it's Yego city. So I was always around town shooting time laughs. Just you know cool like Faye miniaturisation cool stuff. But then I was always frustrated with not being able to access higher vantage plays. The shoot down because that's when you shoot fake miniaturisation you kind of have to look down like dogs dance. So I was like wow how do I get up higher and as ice running out of skyscrapers.

The issue from. And so it wasn't until this video that I saw on YouTube. Whereas a friend of mine who shot surfers as they interviewed surfing was all from the air and he was right about the line up there. He's shooting the surfers you know getting to him and the big difference was the camera was absolutely stable. And that's when the brushless Gimbel now and it even though is the only two access the ocean was still amazing. And I immediately knew that that was something special something I had to learn and master.

So I went out and by being the one with them go pro 3 and you know in a Gimbel and everything was very DIY it kind of hook it up yourself as Saturday and I was hooked. I mean I was able to bring the camera up to vantage point that I was before and I was completely hooked and went over. So one day I was shooting some friends training for a triathlon. The guy was I mean this is so incredible was the future. And my dad was very he's like have you ever thought of using his real estate. Yeah totally his. My dad was a broker for Century 21 is very familiar with that. He loves architecture and on my DeVone realtor. So yeah me I like really.

So he gave me my first shot and I shot his listing in La Jolla California Asri short we shot a video hoodie lifestyle of Surfer Girl surfing. My drove was like following them in Panny you know Dolly and cranes and all these like cinema moves.

And long story short this investors in China saw the video sight unseen just the video back at home. And this is like four or five years ago and it was like wow I think we're onto something here. So from then on I started to see more and more viral videos photos and then I would often get assayed into interior L.A. of course I did. You know that's that's actually my first love as interior. Now the toggery. So it was it was the drone era Parky that kind of got it inside the home of a lot of these listings.

It's pretty interesting how that segue for you.

As far as marketing or advice for people starting now because we're going to wrap this up in a couple of minutes. What kind of advice would you give people that are starting out that are looking to get to where you are whether it's a year from now or two years from now. What are some hard lessons you learned.

You know the hard way and maybe you can give a little insight to that so many people don't have to go through the struggles that you did and can get a quick leg up.

Yeah. You know I think the number one thing is education.

I mean that when I started out I was totally living on YouTube and you know this is way before rich bomb and Nathan cool and all the other stuff that's out there. Now. I was watching Scott Hargis when dad got a little bit too basic. I went to Mike Kelly. So education is very important stuff on the Nadarkhani created light. So I was only beat up on that in terms of here. You really can get really really far without all this fancy Tosha carbon fiber all that stuff. I'm just speed like a simple rebel camera and you need a Thor's hammer. Yeah. Young new old. That's all you need. It was five for many years it's not all of that. Not OK now. Page Goda oxen 256 360 600 and carbon fiber you can do a lot with very little it's all about nation. Two more things I would say is it's important to know in a post because when you're on location a lot of times you can do a lot of stuff like reflections of things that aren't just not would take too long to fix on location. A commercial shoe.

Sure you can have your sister do all this stuff for you but for these type of run and gun you gotta have that confidence is exposed. And there's something that I think that's really on the cusp of our our tools and usage and Sailability is outsourcing. So even today you don't have to own shop expert and outsource a lot of stuff they'll fix a lot of things for you. When I was starting out there was not much outsourcing but now it's very competitive and we might as well take advantage of it and starting to outsource more and more and I think they come back about 75 percent in the last 25 percent. My signature look but it's a happy medium that is fine when we can make outsourcing work.

I think the I think that's the key to being able to scale up your business if people are being able to do that because there's only so many hours in a day that you can shoot and process and if you're looking to get to the next level and scale up that's what you have to do.

Yeah I wish I could call myself you know my dad always asking you when you get a major how you say yeah it's I everyone's I'm going to hire more people I know it's too much to train and you know they're going to leave me. Once they have the jet I power and then back at me like I love red. And he's like he'll when I'm sleeping or something. But the last thing I'll say is I always say this TV's photography is 49 percent oppose and it's 51 per cent business in the least. You know it's just out of the way of saying it's more business than photography trying to run a business. So what does that mean. Well beat yourself up educate yourself with business savvy. I recently went on a shopping spree during Black Friday and Christmas and I just went nuts. I bought a bunch of classes and traded lives. I have no affiliation. I don't make a cent but I am totally plucky creative like they are really good classes about how to maximize your profit how to market social media how to leverage that and I've learned so much. Just sitting there while everyone's watching TV and game of thrones The Walking Dead or whatever. I'm sitting there slaving in front of pretend live tutorials and guess why it's so much fun.

I love learning and I would highly recommend teaching yourself is as savvy and know how and how to market how best to maximize profit realty. It's all out there you know and they're cheap.

Classes are less than a hundred bucks and be friends with people that are successful a business also because that helps.

You know I tell people it's really hard when people ask me about business and church and what do we do. Do this do the was hurt for me because so different from everywhere. Brian you're in Manhattan New York. I mean this that's crazy. Try on the work there. And Sam you're doing these huge Gosh darn I don't want to talk about places I don't even have all want to do those houses.

But man I. They get pictures. You know.

I think that we're just it's different everywhere.

So it's whatever works for you and would work for me. Just don't think it would work for anybody else. I don't know what to say.

Yeah I think the key is to remember like anything else in life. One size does it also. It's funny when you sit back and listen to reds and people you know very very defensive and religious about their solution. Well you know you know you have to remember that every market is different locations are different. What's important said look for those intersection you know what is common among all of these locations and markets and then try to learn from that and adapt it to your particular market.

Sam as we wrap up do you want to tell people how they can find you into some of your work through your social media handles and all that. I want to go see it.

Yeah. Once again it's aloha. Dash Botho video dot com and my Web site is all that mold.

So it's a good starting point.

There is not much there. If you are old moldy Dakang it's not collected.

The reason why I like that is I don't get business from there. My business is 99 percent word of mouth. I'm kind of spread around like you know I don't know like crap

. By news. What might lead encourage.

Yeah. What I like. I like that analogy because I liken it like the chemically dependent on me like I went on a vacation in April of last year. They were panicking. They're like oh you know they're going through withdrawals and they're like What do we do. And I like that you know. So I get to see my latest work. But it is the private Rob Bysse Aloha dot over video.

I've seen it greets the all right call on.

I know you're also very active in a lot of the real estate Facebook groups so people can also find you there and see some of your work there. Chat with you there. We thank you for coming on.

My pleasure. It

was fun great and at such short notice brief and we'll all be looking for your future stuff your DIY stuff and your things you put a thumbs up. OK. Think we're going to call it a wrap there. MR.

BRIAN Yeah I'm just going to remind everybody to leave a review for our show. And like us and spread the word. You can also find us at shooting spaces across Instagram Facebook Twitter all that you can reach us if you need to add info. Shooting space's podcast dot com.

And what's the new feature was those two guys.

Yes the guys a new feature don't forget to record a question you have for us. Send it over and we'll take a listen. And if we deem a word they will make it a topic of discussion for one of our episodes deem it worthy.

Well that's pretty serious stuff. Hey hey. OK. Well thank you. Thank you all. Until next time. Until next.

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