

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

September 26, 2006

Laumont

Filed under: [photographs \(mine\)](#), [studio](#) — alecsothblog @ 7:17 pm

A few years ago I saw the fantastic film [War Photographer](#) about [James Nachtwey](#). One terrific scene shows Nachtwey working with a printer. He asks the printer to reprint his image over and over again. The printer dutifully nods and returns to the darkroom. The scene seemed as fantastical to me as the Wizard of Oz. Are there really printers out there who will work with you to find perfection? You must be kidding.

But a couple of years ago I discovered [Laumont Labs](#) in NYC. Laumont is a special place. Their clientele mostly consists of other artists. During today's visit alone I met [Bill Jacobsen](#), [Scott Jackson](#) and [Ports Bishop](#) – all fine folks (there is nothing like the comraderie among photographers at the lab).

But as much as I enjoy being in the presence of other artists, the reason I work at Laumont is to work with master printers like Alberto Blum. Just like Nachtwey's wizard, Alberto never complains in his pursuit of the perfect print (though he might quietly fantasize about downing I glass of whiskey after I leave):



Along with Alberto, the office staff at Laumont is fantastic. Sarah Madsen is smart and funny and a [damn fine photographer](#) herself. (She also makes a good model):



Sarah, 2006. © Alec Soth

13 Comments

1. Laumont does extraordinary work and works with great photographers, but pity the poor up-and-coming photographer making a few prints for a group show. I've heard many an established artist rave about Laumont, and of course there are countless examples of world class prints from Laumont, but if you are outside of that rarified circle of established art photographers, the experience can be frustrating and humiliating. I have many photographer friends in that up-and-coming or wanna-be category and their experiences always seem to range from frustrating/horrible with the attitude being "we know more than you, so shut up and take your print home."

Comment by august — September 26, 2006 @ [9:35 pm](#)

2. I needed to do a quick print for a group show recently, and Laumont did a great drum scan of my 8×10 negative with very short turnaround. Knowing the reputation of the place and the impressive list of clients they work with made the experience a bit intimidating, but they treated me well and did great work.

Since I was on a serious tight deadline, I took my drum scan to Beth Schiffer to make a self-service lightjet print, and the results were great. Can't quite afford the laumont prints anyway, although I'm sure they're amazing.

Comment by [Noah Addis](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [10:40 am](#)

3. Regarding August's comments, I am reminded of a lab in Minneapolis in the 80s and 90s. ProColor was the lab that every professional used. I went there and they treated me like dirt. Later I worked for a museum that had a major processing account. I tried to encourage the museum not to use ProColor. And when I starting generating more work I refused to use them. I can't speak to Laumont. But it is bad business for any lab or camera store to treat young photographers badly. Incidentally, ProColor is now pretty much out of business.

Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [12:26 pm](#)

4. I've used Procolor for years with varying success. I have continued to use them mainly because I have a good relationship with one employee who actually is still there after all the changes. I'm looking for another lab as I don't think they'll be around much longer. Any recommendations? Also, isn't the camera store situation bleak here in Minneapolis?

Comment by [David Kern](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [2:20 pm](#)

5. This is great info to know. Thanks, Alec.

Comment by [Zoe Strauss](#) — September 30, 2006 @ [10:07 pm](#)

6. Great exposures and subjects make great prints. Labs become famous by printing from great sources. Unfortunately the attitude towards unestablished photographers is true and unjustified. Labs are prepared to give extra attention to "winners" with whom they want to continue business to blah blah to other photographers telling we work with so and so. So the inexperienced ones never understanding the technical facts that good prints depend end up like that. Instead of coming with work that has to be corrected everywhere perhaps they should try to come with some good work first and "impress" the workers there. Make a "grand entrance" they'll have a better chance when they need corrections and special treatment. Unfortunately these are facts and the nature of things.

Comment by [Morris Alkalay](#) — October 3, 2006 @ [1:10 am](#)

7. I use Laumont, and everyone there has been really kind to me. I work closely with Esteban and Monica. The very first time I used Laumont, they mounted some photos for me. I was in NY and came in to sign some things. I was unknown (still only a little known), and was treated like gold. They gave me a whole tour of the place. I recently sent a young artist from Arizona over there, and he had a great experience.

It's a drag to be treated poorly...try talking to Sarah, Esteban, Monica or Willie next time you need something.

Comment by Liz Cohen — October 8, 2006 @ [9:40 am](#)

8. Alec calls Sarah Madsen a damn fine photographer and he knows that of which he speaks. If you haven't seen her work, you're missing out. She's talented, she's original!

Comment by David Burton — October 19, 2006 @ [7:43 pm](#)

9. I wanted my art therapy students at Grand View College to see the quality and metaphorical content of Sarah Madsen's photography so I was thrilled when I was able to arrange a show of her work. I agree she's a "damn fine photographer."

Comment by Roberta Victor — October 20, 2006 @ [10:34 am](#)

10. I've experienced varying degrees of professionalism/attitude at labs around New York, but Laumont was different. I was treated professionally and regarded seriously from the first minute I was there, and I am an utterly unknown photographer. Working with Laumont was one of the best experiences in my life as a photographer. I haven't been there in a year because they are very expensive, and I can't afford it now. But the minute I can, I will be back.

Comment by Tomm Brown — November 29, 2006 @ [8:44 am](#)

11. Has anyone heard of or tried The Small Dark Room / Picturehouse, also based in New York? Really great small outfit, fantastic attention to detail, masterful printing and REALLY look after young photographers.

Comment by midnight teteley — January 15, 2007 @ [2:23 pm](#)

12. Laumont is the Pits of the Pits. That place is terrible overall. Since there is no main person to complain to if things go wrong, you're stuck with some ego tripping printers that will make your life hell if you so much as contest their "work". Even if you're spending thousands on a show between printing and mounting, the people I have dealt with are rude and arrogant, lack personal and printing skills, and will only spend 5 minutes on your print and expect you to accept it. It is a shame because they're equipment is top of the line, but the service and printing is unprofessional.

Comment by Josh — April 7, 2008 @ [3:05 pm](#)

13. For the last nine years I have been working for one photographer, printing limited editions, but before that I spent 17 years in labs, custom printing mostly black and white. I got to the point where many bigger clients would ask for me to print their work, which of course I loved, as it meant I would get to print the professional jobs. (Which, incidentally were not usually hard, as, yes, the important groundwork had been done in camera.) The satisfying part of this was being able to provide the photographer with that little something extra that comes with a great print. The secret to this, as I understood it, was to understand the photographer. It was all about what the photographer wanted, and to listen to that, and use my skills to carry out the photographer's wishes. A good printer is happy to bring out the best in a photographer's work, and to have the patience to do that. It was not about how I would do it in my own work. The one time I almost felt ready to quit was when I had spent far too long already on a print with an impossibly dense sky and everything else underexposed. I had achieved a tiny amount of cloud detail, and the rest of the print looked as good as it ever would, after a burn in of about 3000%. The photographer asked to see me when she had looked at her print, and expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of sky detail. She proceeded to tell me about this thing you could do with holding a piece of cardboard over everything except the sky to make the sky darker. I just said, "Yes, I did that already."
I also loved doing a great print for an amateur client who would come in with a special negative, but not know how much more could be achieved with a good print. They would never know just how much had gone into their print, but would be so excited at how good it looked.

Comment by Marie — April 13, 2008 @ [4:40 am](#)