

Adventures in Fusion, PART 1

Last fall, Canon shook our world when it released the transformative EOS 5D Mark II, a DSLR featuring full HD video and dynamic depth-of-field control. Along with others of its ilk—Sony’s Alpha A900, Nikon’s D90, and, most recently, Panasonic’s Lumix DMC-CH1 and the forthcoming Canon 7D Mark II—the 5D is both revving up videographers’ creativity and smearing the line between the photography and videography industries.

Among its virtues, most notably, is its interchangeable lens capability, which (unlike a lot of stock lens-only prosumer video cameras) lets you create a different look with each lens change and achieve the shallow depth of field you need to get that filmic look—without having to use 35mm adapters such as the Brevis or Letus or by heavily filterizing clips in post.

And because it uses a full-frame sensor with 35mm lenses

at 1:2, 1:4, and 2:8, the camera performs spectacularly in low light. Add to that a body so slight and compact it belies its capabilities. And, oh yeah, it shoots breathtaking stills.

Online forums were already abuzz with anticipation of the 5D’s release when Pulitzer Prize-winning photogra-

pher Vincent Laforet debuted his first video clip shot with a 5D prototype, *Reverie* (www.vincentlaforet.com). The video quality achieved by this non-videographer was so dangerously hot you needed safety glasses to watch.

Upon the 5D’s release, event photographers and filmmakers alike grappled for the cameras like bouquet-obsessed bridesmaids. But what are they saying about it now with, in some cases, several months of use under their belts?

Dave Williams of Philadelphia-based DVideography/ Dave Williams Films (www.davewilliamsfilms.com) was one wedding filmmaker who snatched one up posthaste. His 5D quickly became indispensable to his wedding and event work. He says of the so-called fusion cameras, “I don’t even think the manufacturers realized it when they introduced them. In skilled hands, these cameras blow







Reverie, the Vincent Laforet 5D film that started it all

away what is available for even three times the price in video right now. I don't ever see going back to regular video cameras."

This was also the case with Bruce Patterson. His company, Cloud Nine Creative (www.cloudninecreative.com), based in Vancouver, British Columbia, and Toronto, was among the first in Canada to work with the only two prerelease 5Ds made available in the country. Because it gave these shooters the same kind of artistic shots they had been getting with the Letus adapter, while fitting in the palms their hands, "It was a no-brainer," Patterson says. (To read another worldclass Canadian wedding cinematographer's first impressions of the 5D, check out Patrick Moreau's April cover story, "Hot Fusion: The Canon 5D Mark II and the Wedding Filmmaker.")

The first time David Robin of David Robin Films (www.davidrobinfilms.com) in Encino, Calif., used the 5D, it

was during a winter wedding. He shot with the 5D in conjunction with two Sony EX1 video cameras to capture footage for a stand-alone highlight piece.

It was this footage, actually, along with Laforet's clip, that sold Atlanta-based Dare Dreamer Media's Ron and Tasra Dawson (www.daredreamer.net) on the 5D. Watching Robin's highlight piece on the EventDV 25 alumni cruise earlier this year, Dawson couldn't deny it: The footage he was getting with his Sony EX1 paled in comparison.

THE 5D INFUSION

For Joe Simon of Joe Simon Productions (www.joesimonproductions.com) in Austin, Texas, a still photographer in his own right, the 5D fusion camera meant he could transfer the creative tinkering he'd been doing with still images to video. Now, he says, "Every project I do, that's my first choice for a camera," because he has the

power to control what he focuses on, making the viewer see precisely what he wants, creating a better story. Simon shoots with the 5D at every wedding, whether he's mixing a little 5D footage into the final piece or shooting with two or three rental 5Ds throughout to create one of his higher-end, purely 5D weddings.

Similarly, Robin offers couples a 5D add-on called the "auteur" package. The auteur includes the 5D and assorted lenses, above and beyond his studio's Sony EX1 coverage, and ends up as a highlight piece in the movie. In the process, he says, he has learned more about depth of field, aperture, shutter speed, and image than in his entire 25-year career. "It has been an amazing eye-opener and journey for me. Most importantly, it has infused a new energy and motivation into my work. I see things very differently now through the lens."

Cloud Nine Creative utilizes the 5D 90% of the time at weddings and as often as they can on corporate shoots. In both arenas, but specifically in the controlled environment of a corporate shoot, having a shallow depth of field allows Patterson to "inject a whole new level of creativity" into an otherwise boring shoot—one in which he used to feel like he was just "rolling tape." In contrast, he says, using a DSLR for video forces you to be selective in your shots since you have to actively decide your starting and ending points as well as choose what exactly you want to focus on, depending on your lens choice.

Dave Williams, Dave Williams Films

We've been using multiple 5D Mark IIs since December 2008 for some fusion projects, but mostly stand-alone films.

We don't offer photography. Instead, when clients want photos fused into their films, we bring in established photographers who have a similar vision. At present, we don't see offering photography in the near future.



Three-time EventDV 25 honoree Dave Williams of Dave Williams Films was one of the earliest adopters of the 5D.

Bruce Patterson, Cloud Nine Creative

I truly think that it's inevitable that more videography companies are going to start offering photography to not only compete with photographers who now have video capabilities courtesy of these new DSLRs, but also because clients more and more seem to want both photography and videography services combined into one company.

The solution to this, in my mind, is to actively offer photography so that you become the company that couples come to first and you have a much higher quality of video product that you're able to show them at a consultation meeting. I would recommend having a dedicated shooter to handle stills though, because if you try to juggle both mediums, the quality will suffer for both.

Make an educated decision as to whether or not you will gain more revenue by offering photography than you'll lose by not having photographer referrals, because photographers are less likely to refer video work to you if they know that you offer photography as well. If you feel that you can gain more revenue offering stills, then I would suggest you advertise that as part of your services.

In order to develop a portfolio of photography, I would offer free sessions to either your past or upcoming videography clients, and take more pictures on your vacation. Post all of these to your blog. Even if you don't "officially" offer photography, clients will start to get the hint. If you can get the client into your studio initially because they're interested in photography, you have the option at that point to introduce them to your videography—something that you may not have had an option to do in the past if they felt they didn't "need" video. This can lead to more bookings in both photography and videography.

At Cloud Nine Creative, our 1-year plan is to offer photography for destination clients so as not to upset our local market. In 3 years, I'd like to be offering full photography and videography coverage in all markets with shooters that just photograph for us.

The goal would be to still produce the wedding films we're known for (which don't have any still images in the actual film) and, if we offer photography, to include that as an album or slideshow for the couple. The only crossover in terms of one product would be that the stills would provide the imagery for the packaging of the DVDs and menu screens.

Move over Scorsese. Now that Ron Dawson is shooting video with the 5D, "I feel more like a 'real' filmmaker now," he says with a laugh, adding, "Please people, no hate mail." It's just that the 5D has made video production so much fun again.

CHOOSE YOUR LENSES WISELY

But with all the fusion cameras' cool points, even advanced filmmakers can appreciate that some additional techniques must be learned. As Williams points out, while "the advantages and results of shooting with an HD DSLR are like night and day," let's not forget that you do have to put forth some effort to master their capabilities, because they do require more skill and more knowledge than a traditional video camera.

And it's not just the technical aspects that will force you to work differently; it's the logistical challenges. Williams shoots with multiple lenses but uses separate camera bodies—it's always better than changing lenses back and forth, he says. Either way, multiple



Re:Frame co-founder Bruce Patterson of Cloud Nine Creative dove headlong into the fusion world after acquiring his first 5D.

lenses present a challenge and require some planning. If you've already been using a 35mm adapter (which most shooters—even the Brevis and Letus aficionados—use only part of the day), then you're somewhat accustomed to the process. But if you're going straight from a video camera to a fusion

camera, the meticulous planning required might shock you. Williams explains: "Sometimes, in a two-camera shoot, both cameras need the 70–200 IS, while other times one camera might be fine with a 16–35 or a 24–70." You've got to think ahead for what you'll need beyond the general-purpose 24–70 or the critical long lens (200mm or longer). For example, if the reception is going to be candlelit, plan for your 85/1.2. "We use a few more lenses for specialty shots," he says, "but we rarely use anything slower than 2.8."

Simon concurs: Familiarize yourself with what each lens can do, he suggests. And do what photographers do—have two cameras around you at all times so you don't have to switch. If you're not used to the lenses, Simon warns, "It's easy to make a wrong decision and spend the next 30 seconds changing a lens. You could miss something that you're supposed to get."

Besides learning the lenses, there are other growing pains to endure, for

Ron Dawson, Dare Dreamer Media

Just because Ma and Pa Kettle photographers aren't yet offering "fusion" services, don't rest on your laurels. Assume they will and plan your business accordingly.

Photographers in general still display more savvy marketing than what I see among my video brethren. And in the wedding world, brides still primarily book the photographer first. A simple fusion photo/video highlights piece could be such an offering. I'm not saying the sky's falling, but always be prepared for change.

Photography will be an entirely different business for us, separate from Dare Dreamer. In actuality, our photography business will be a client of our video business.

We've started a new teen photography business, Teen Identity Portraits & Magazine (geared toward teen girls). My wife and partner Tasra is the photographer, so we'll be using the 5D for that too. I foresee this business taking advantage of both the photo and video side of Dare Dreamer. We plan to offer music videos and personal documentaries, as well as produce an original online show.

In 5 years, I would love to see the photography business franchised and the online show on cable. (We don't call our company "Dare Dreamer" for nothing.)

example, learning how to record separate audio if you don't already do this. Don't expect to use an XLR adapter such as BeachTek's. "The unit I tried was unreliable at best," cautions Patterson, adding, "If you have something like a shotgun mic plugged into the camera, you're not able to also monitor the audio levels with headphones—meaning that you're flying in the dark and hoping the BeachTek adapter is doing the trick. An improvement would be to show audio levels on the LCD screen itself."

NEVER MIX, NEVER WORRY?

If you spent any time at all on a videography or photography forum last fall when the 5D debuted, you couldn't have missed the buzz surrounding the fusion concept or the speculation about the merging of the photography and videography industries.

While some harrumphed that 2-in-1 is a great shampoo concept but a terrible idea for a camera, and others, mainly photographers, swore that the HD video feature in the hybrids was yet another expensive toy that would go unused, many

professionals cheered its advent. They called it "the best of both worlds." One poster remarked, "I would love to carry ... one kit around and have both options." Another had an epiphany: "Wow. Maybe I can add still photography to my business." On one



ReFocus authors Ron (above) and Tasra Dawson saw the writing on the wall when Laforet's clip appeared online and when they saw David Robin's 5D-shot footage of the EventDV 25 alumni cruise.

forum, the joke went: "So what's the difference between a photographer and a videographer now?" Someone offered a punch line: "Paychecks."

Since then, studios on both sides of the aisle have been taking baby steps toward the other medium, trying not to step on anyone's toes. An intrepid photographer with a 5D wants to start shooting "just a little" video at weddings. A videographer endeavors to fold some still photos taken with the 5D into her wedding highlights package. But are we dipping our toes in each others' pools, or are we taking the plunge?

It might be hard to swallow to those who have experienced too many prickly encounters with their photographer counterparts, but to customers—wedding couples and corporate clients alike—photos and video go together like wine and cheese. If you can get both at the wine cave, why shop elsewhere for cheese? And it's not just consumers who recognize this. "Especially in tough economic times like these," Ron Dawson adds, "expect photographers to be looking for new revenue streams." Know this: It won't pay to be fashionably late to the party.

CROSSING OVER

But seriously, can you expect fusion technology to threaten your livelihood? Could you, in turn, usurp a photographer's business (not that you'd intend to)? Or are fusion products more of an innocuous experiment with a novel, and now convenient, medium?

As was stated, the 5Ds and other fusion cameras take strikingly beautiful pictures—reason enough for a photographer to purchase one. But, points out Julie Hill of Orange County, Calif.-based Elysium Productions, "Most of the photographers we know—industry leaders—bought the 5D for two reasons: the high ISO/full-frame capabilities and because of the video feature."

Vouching for the 5D's spellbinding low-light performance is Simon. "You can use the natural light in the reception so much better than [with] most of the photo cameras," he says. "There are so many times I'll be shooting a wedding and I'll show the photographer something I've shot,

and even just the pause of the video screen on the still looks better than the stills they've shot!" Where a photographer might traditionally use a flash during a dimly lit reception, leaving the subjects in the foreground illuminated but the background as black as night, "the 5D gives you a really full view of everything. It looks so much nicer," he says.

All this means is that a great many cutting-edge photographers, who know a good product when they see it, now own fusion cameras. And don't think the video capability doesn't intrigue them. That photographers will start offering video is as reliable as the sunrise.

Just ask Hill: "All of our photographer friends keep telling us that they see themselves having to offer video someday. If you just take a look at the most populated photo forum, DWF [www.digitalweddingforum.com], you'll see video is way more prevalent than on any video forum. It's kind of sad, really," she says.

As far as Patterson is concerned, this trend doesn't bode well for either industry. "My fear is that there is going to be a whole new crop of poorly shot video footage emerging from photographers



Joe Simon—wedding cinematographer, indie filmmaker, BMX documentarian, and photographer—is a crossover artist if there ever was one, and the arrival of the 5D has enabled him to absorb his still-image techniques into his moving-image work.

who feel they need to add it to their portfolio to stay competitive."

What's more is that, as discussed, photographers typically get dibs on couples, who sometimes book videographers merely as an afterthought. This is what weighs most heavily on

Patterson's mind: not that photographers' videos will be better, "but that they will get a chance to meet the client before us and sell some sort of video coverage to them. So if that happens and they are able to successfully offer video as an add-on to the clients, then they'll never get to us before we have a chance to sell a well-made, complete wedding film to them."

Simon is seeing a trend on both sides—photographers selling video as a kind of "second-hand offering" and vice versa. It's like, "We do this, but we can also do this for you." But if the couple is meeting with a photographer who offers them video, he reasons, they "might say, 'Well, we might as well just take what they're offering us.'"

Simon relates a frequent exchange between himself and photographers who blithely approach him while he's shooting a wedding to ask for tips on shooting video with the 5D.

Rest assured, they want to shoot "just a little" video. Simon has a smart answer: "I tell them to come see me at my conference," he says laughing.

You might wonder (or maybe you don't), can a photographer, but a nonvideographer, really produce video on par with what you can?

Joe Simon, Joe Simon Productions

I do a lot of photography work on the side, so it's been great to be able to take that camera and do two things and not have to carry a second unit with me. I've done fusion pieces with high school senior work and engagement sessions. I haven't done any stills photography with weddings yet. It's so hard to focus on one thing as it is, so trying to get photos and video at the same time would be a crazy headache.

The 5D would be nice for corporate work. I think one of the biggest things about corporate work is that people expect you to have nice equipment. So when you show up with this little camera, they look at you like, "What are you doing?"

When you add accessories to it, it not only helps you use the camera but it also makes your camera look a lot more impressive. I have some Cinevate products that I use, like a matte box and a rails and cage system, and when you put all of that onto the camera, it makes it look like this huge camera. Then it's more impressive and doesn't look like you're just coming in with a photo camera. Most people don't realize what the camera can do. They just see the camera and think, "Is this guy joking? Is he going to really shoot us with that?"

First impressions are big. If you come in and they think you're a joke, then they're not going to give you respect or trust your judgment when you're trying to do your work there.

Same things with weddings. It's weird: People will pose for your camera a lot at the weddings, so it's kind of hard when you're trying to get candid shots and people keep saying, "Hey, take a picture! Take a picture!" That happens a lot.

David Robin, david robin | films

I do believe that, in time, the two mediums will come together. If the situation were right for me, I would definitely add photography to my services. But it would have to be done right. Not just an add-on. The photographer would have to be an artist/filmmaker of equal caliber.

Regardless of both mediums being in one camera, they are two very different animals. Very few artists will be able to master both, or will want to. If anything, these cameras have sparked an awareness on both sides that has opened some eyes to new possibilities.

I do not want to become an event photographer. I will hire some super talent in that field to do what he does best. Capture the magic one frame at a time. I will just concentrate on 30 frames a second (or maybe 24). Then see how we can bring both mediums together.

I have one of L.A.'s most talented event photographers starting to come out and shoot 5D video with/for me. He wants to learn what I do, and I want to learn what he does. As that relationship progresses I am sure some new and interesting things will come out of it.

I believe within 5 years I will be offering both services, but not in a traditional sense. I see the wedding day being captured by a crack team of gifted filmmakers, with three or four 5Ds shooting video. The photography aspect will be utilized in such a way that it stands out and has a distinctive style, but is not thrown into the mix just because it can be. A creative statement that benefits the story is my goal. The bottom line is a great story. The story being told is No. 1, only enhanced by gorgeous images and eye candy.

So far, and for the most part, the answer is no.

But Rome wasn't built in a day. And to offer another well-trod adage: It's the talent, not the tools. Don't forget that the two mediums are most assuredly cut from the same cloth. Now, it's a matter of not getting hung out to dry.

Ron Dawson believes that with a little gumption and a lot of talent your artistry can transcend mediums. "What you don't know you can learn," he says. He predicts that there will be more photographers checking out events such as WEVA, Re:Frame, In[Focus], and NAB. Re:Frame is featuring a star photographer on its program for Re:Frame San Francisco in October, and it was already devoting significant time to fusion cameras at its April event in Austin. Dawson says you'll also see photography associations such as WPPI (Wedding & Portrait Photographers International)

offering more video-related seminars. Mark his words: "I already know for a fact that WPPI has invited WEVA to participate in their show."

While it may be true (in theory) that a dyed-in-the-wool photographer could become the next Jason Magbanua, that's not exactly what's happening now.

What's happening is that photographers, good ones—no, great ones—are creating subpar videos with fusion cameras. As someone who has already begun to capitalize on photographers dabbling in video, Hill sees this firsthand. She actively markets her studio to fusion photographers as a place to outsource their editing—arguably the highest hurdle on the way toward creating a quality film. The footage she's seen from her clients is, more or less, "not the greatest, to be honest." (To be fair, her photographer friends say they would never try to wear both hats; should they offer video, they would assign the



Four-time EventDV 25 honoree and WEVA Hall of Famer David Robin says the 5D has transformed the way he approaches his work: "I see things very differently now through the lens."

task of videotaping to an assistant or a colleague.)

Hill's service works like this: "They send us DVDs containing the footage and photos they want incorporated as well as music. Usually, they have a pretty good idea what they are going for and then we put it together, send them a preview, and then make any changes. We can deliver in any and all formats they need."

So far, because photographers are still in the experimentation phase with video, she's edited just a handful of films for them—all engagement shoots and portrait sessions. But "knowing that the cutting-edge photographers who set the trends will want to offer video yet [may] not want to attempt to learn how to edit (or spend the necessary time) in order to edit well," she expects there will be more work on the way. Simon adds that, mastering an editing program aside, learning how to tell a story is "a huge step to take."

It appears that photographers who want to get into video really have their work cut out for them. While their mastery of composition and light will allow them to make good use of video right away, "There's that whole issue of holding the camera steady," Simon points out. Without internal



The Canon EF lens collection

stabilization, there is a lot of shake with the 5D. “If you don’t have the right tools to keep it steady, you’re going to ruin your picture right away.”

For Hill, the proof is in the pudding. The footage she sees from her clients is very shaky. And, she says with a smile, “Sometimes they forget they can’t hold the camera vertical.” But it’s just a matter of getting used to the medium. “They are used to capturing a moment, not holding a shot,” she reasons. “It’s one thing to hold a camera still for a 60th of a second. But 60 seconds is a whole different animal,” Williams adds, pointing also to the task of learning how to record audio, which is arguably more important than the image for making a good film.

FIRST FUSION PHOTO FORAYS

So what’s a hapless 5D-wielding videographer to do? Maybe you’d like to start incorporating still photographs into your work slowly. Or maybe you’d like to create a separate arm for your business dedicated to capturing stills. Perhaps you just want the 5D for its obvious moving-image advantages and have no intention of adding still photography—in fusion pieces or as a stand-alone offering. But then how will you adapt to the changing landscape?

The general consensus is that mastering both mediums yourself is harder to pull off than a stock lens on a fixed-lens camcorder. For a videographer—especially one who has worked with multiple lenses before,



Re:Frame co-founder and two-time EventDV 25 honoree Julie Hill actively markets her studio, Elysium Productions, to fusion photographers as a place to outsource their editing.

manipulated depth-of-field with a 35mm adapter, and developed a style based on solid imaging principles—some believe learning how to shoot stills is a little like a juggler learning how to play catch.

“Videographers have an upper hand,” argues Patterson, because “we already know composition and how to properly expose an image.” Making matters better, you don’t have to worry about audio or keeping the camera steady longer than one frame.

If you’re an accomplished videographer and you can learn tech specs such as f-stops and lens capabilities, you’ll be able to take photographs “no

problem,” says Simon. “I think we have it easier, going over to photo.”

OK, but should you? Is owning a fusion camera reason enough to start offering still photography? And will the changes in the industry force you to add photography to your business or get out of the game? There’s no single or obvious answer to any of these questions, but our panel has some thoughts. Here, they discuss how they see the industry changing and what they are doing (or not doing) about it.

POPULAR, PROFITABLE, NEITHER, OR BOTH?

With all this information, you might agree that fusing still photography into your work to some extent is a foregone conclusion. But an excellent point is made by David Robin, who says, “Ultimately, it is the consumer who will decide if it is a viable, worthy product, or if the two mediums should stay separate.”

There’s always a possibility that blended photo and video won’t survive. But even if the consumer votes for them to merge, don’t be so sure you’ll be able to pull it off on the business side, regardless of how cool your 5D photos may look. “I think only a few will be able to present a compelling product and make a good profit,” Robin offers as a parting thought.

Success will depend on the person holding the camera, after all. “These cameras won’t make you a great filmmaker if you aren’t already one. Don’t get so geeked out on the technology that you forget to hone your craft,” adds Ron Dawson. Your surest shot at success: “Practice video storytelling with a crappy camera. Then, when you do use a camera the likes of the 5D, your work will really shine.”

It might also help to hear what photographers have to say on the matter, which we will present in Part 2 of this article in December. Stay tuned.

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