

By Lorraine A. DarConte

LASZLO regos

Eye on the Marketplace: Photographing Retail Space

Laszlo Regos knew from an early age that he wanted to be an architectural photographer. While growing up in Hungary, he marveled at the fantastic architecture in Budapest. “It is an architectural photographer’s paradise. There are so many gorgeous buildings there,” he states. “But being from Eastern Europe and an only child, my parents would have disowned me if I was only a photographer,” he recalls. And so he went to school and earned a master’s degree in chemistry from the Technical University of Budapest with the goal of working in the photo industry. “Right after graduation I started to work for Forte Photochemical Industries, a major manufacturer of photo materials,” he says, “and I became the technical manager of their Budapest photo lab fairly quickly.”

Regos worked diligently as a chemist until 1979, when he defected to the United States seeking political and artistic freedom. “I still wanted to be a photographer, and I had had enough of Hungary’s communist political system,” states Regos. “So I defected. I came to the United States

for a short visit and I forgot to go back,” he laughs.

Regos began his new life and career as a color supervisor at a professional photo lab, although he yearned to be a photographer. With barely passable English, he

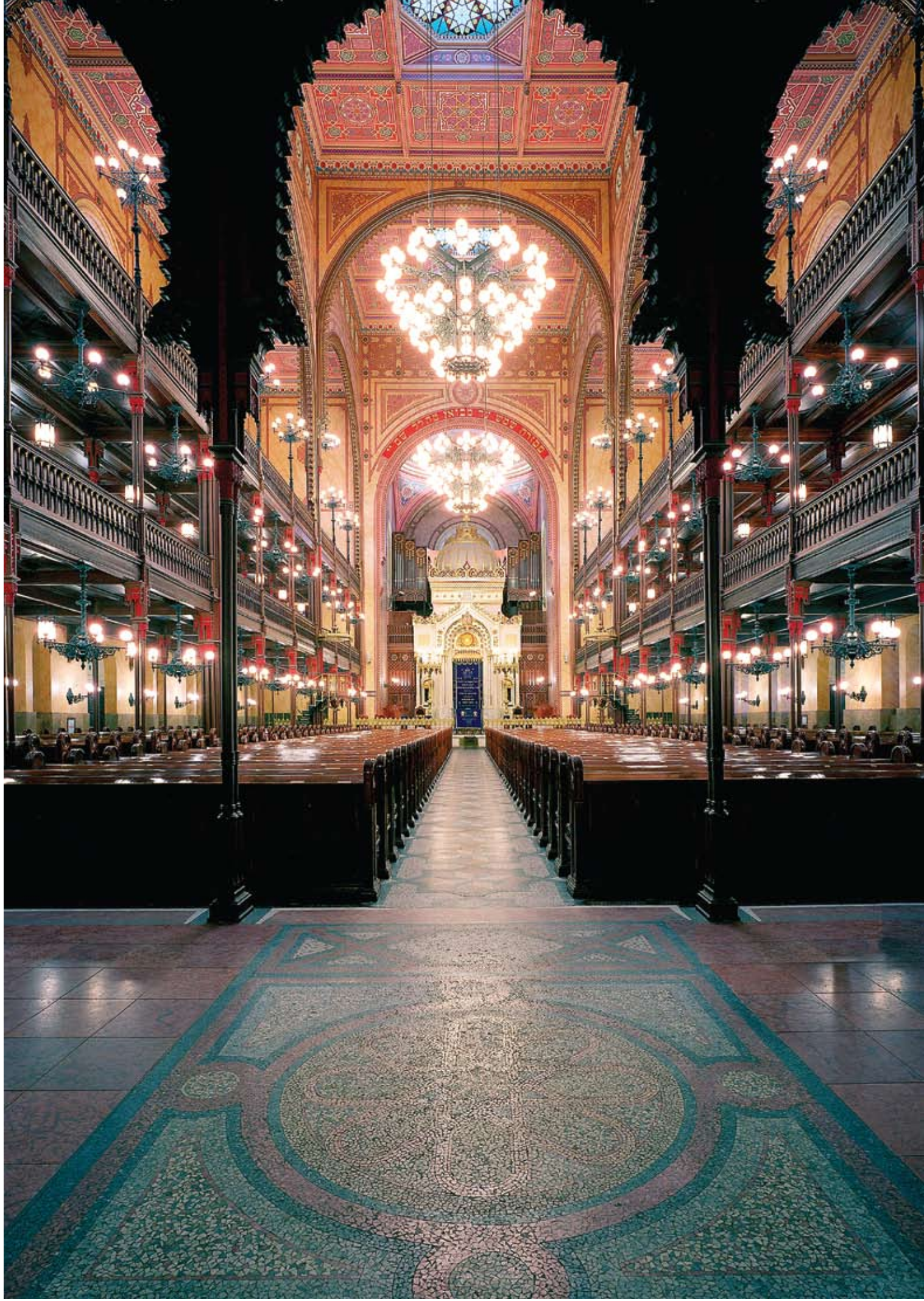
made the rounds to a variety of photographers’ studios, where he was repeatedly told he was overqualified. “With a master’s degree in chemistry, they would ask, ‘Why do you want to work as a photographer?’” He was told there was no money or future in the field and he should give up the dream.

But of course, he persevered and slowly but surely made a career and a name for himself. In just six years, he opened his own photography lab—Spectrum Photo in Berkley, MI—a full-service professional photo lab and stock-photo agency. In addition he focused his sights on architectural and interior photography. “Retail space is my specialty,” states Regos. “I came to it almost by accident. I had photographed several malls for a customer, and JGA [a major retail interior-design firm and now an important client of his] had seen some of my work.” Although the company was already working with a photographer, he was too busy when JGA needed a quick turnaround on a job. “They asked me to do a rush job, and they were



Left: Budapest Opera

Right: Dohany Street Synagogue, Budapest





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Above: Sentry Food, Milwaukee, WI

very happy with the results,” Regos recalls. “I now do all of JGA’s photographic work, and naturally, I’ve picked up other retail businesses too, including Jim Ryan and Associates [mall and retail designers],

Cubellis-Marco Design [high-end grocery store designers], Illuminating Concepts [lighting designers] Wyland Galleries, Transworld Entertainment, Hershey’s, Godiva, Volkswagen-Audi, Hot Topic and Northface.”

Today Regos spends approximately

40–50% of his time shooting retail space, which, architecturally speaking, comes with its own unique set of challenges. “I still have to use the same technique as with other architecture,” he explains. “But it’s also very important to remove all seasonal advertising, promotional and sale signs,

and price tags from the space.” Regos, who has learned how to properly fold pants and shirts, must make the store and every display look perfect before he begins shooting. This often requires more effort than taking the actual photograph.

Regos often deals with tight deadlines and must work very quickly. “Sometimes it’s a nightmare,” he admits. Usually, he arrives for a job in any given city late in the afternoon and goes directly to the store. Since most retailers close at 9 or 10 p.m., Regos tends to shoot well into the wee hours of the morning—between 2 and 3 a.m. His photographs must all be shot before or after store hours because they never include people. Hence, it’s not unusual for him to photograph on Saturdays and Sundays in order to get shots that are void of both cars and shoppers. “Including people in retail interior shots not only creates logistical and sometimes legal problems, but they also date the shots and distract from the design,” notes Regos.

Enjoying the Night Life

Regos prefers to work nights, as opposed to early mornings, because there is less pressure after hours and more time to merchandise the store. “Employees are also more willing to stay at night to help set up, as opposed to coming in early in the morning,” says Regos. “Usually, I work alone, without the designer present; I have a floor plan where the client has marked out the main points to photograph.” Besides being provided with a people-free environment, Regos likes to photograph at night because of the light—or lack thereof. “I feel the light, especially at dusk, is much more glamorous and a little bit romantic. Clients like it best when I shoot at twilight, when the value of the building and sky is about the same,” Regos explains.

“This means the color temperature of the light during these hours (dusk and dawn) is much higher than during the day, resulting in images with a beautiful deep blue sky, especially when combined with tungsten film, which makes the natural light appear even bluer.”

For each job, Regos must produce at least 10–12 magazine-quality shots. He shoots exclusively with 4x5 Sinar view cameras and an assortment of lenses ranging from a 47mm Super Angulon XL to 65 and 90mm Nikkors. “Sometimes I use a 150mm lens, but nothing longer than that,” he explains. Regos used to shoot a lot

Below: North Face, Beverly Hills, CA



of transparency film, especially a few years ago when magazines required it.

“Unfortunately, in retail sometimes there are four or five different types of lights used [in a store] simultaneously,” he explains. “I spent a lot of time turning them on and off and using filters on the camera to correct the transparencies, which was very tough. Sometimes I’d have to make three or four exposures on the same piece of film. And given the enormous size of the spaces coupled with the time constraints, filtering individual lights was out of the question,” states Regos. “Correcting different fluorescent light sources was

even more difficult.”

Regos’ life has gotten a little easier now that the majority of his clients want prints and/or digital files; he’s no longer dealing with transparencies and their color-shift issues. “I’m shooting with Fuji NPL and NPS films, which tend to color-correct fluorescents, so I no longer have to worry about the green shift of the fluorescent lights.” It probably would be easier for Regos to shoot digitally and make corrections via a computer, but he thinks the quality of 4x5 film is much better than digital. “Also, I’m a chemist and still have a vested interest to utilize my lab. I can develop and print my own film, which is very convenient for me. “I’m not against digital,” he says, “and I do have a Canon EOS 20D digital camera that I sometimes use to shoot jobs like construction progress photos or scouting, because it’s quick and convenient. But I don’t see the same quality. Besides, they don’t allow for [architectural] corrections such as perspective control, or the ability to shoot long and/or multiple exposures, which I can do with the 4x5 camera. I also don’t want to invest a lot of money in a camera system and have it be obsolete in two years. I have an investment in my Sinar cameras, so I think I’m going to hang onto them for a little while.” Regos has stepped into the digital world somewhat, however; he does scan his images with an Imacon Flextight scanner and supplies clients with high-resolution digital files on CDs.

Word of Mouth

“The best marketing is word of mouth,” Regos explains, “and that’s what I’m getting a lot of. And I have my website. I don’t make too much effort to cold-call or mail promotional cards. I have

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Cambodia and Laos with Julia Dean	Jan. 4–12	Phnom Penh, Cambodia. (310) 392-0909; workshops@juliadean.com; www.juliadean.com
Photodex ProShow Workshop Interactive Training Seminars	Jan. 9	Tampa, FL. All day workshop covering most important features of ProShow Gold & Producer. www.photodex.com
Capturing the Invisible Spirit with Infrared	Jan. 11–13	Venice, CA. Presented by Julia Dean Workshops. With Elizabeth Opalenik. Limited to 15 students. www.juliadean.com
Don Gale "On the Road" 2008: Eastern Sierra and Death Valley	Jan. 12–15	Workshops by Don Gale, (626) 448-3691, (626) 444-8008, www.photographybydon.com
Don Gale "On the Road" 2008: Eastern Sierra and Death Valley	Jan. 17–20	Workshops by Don Gale, (626) 448-3691, (626) 444-8008, www.photographybydon.com
The Digital Printmaking Intensive	Jan. 27–29	Presented by Santa Fe Workshops with Jerry Courvoisier. Streamline digital printmaking. www.sfworkshop.com
Don Gale "On the Road" 2008: Yosemite in Winter	Feb. 2–5	Workshops by Don Gale, (626) 448-3691, (626) 444-8008, www.photographybydon.com
Don Gale "On the Road" 2008: Yosemite in Winter	Feb. 7–10	Workshops by Don Gale, (626) 448-3691, (626) 444-8008, www.photographybydon.com
Advanced Photoshop for Photographers with Arduina Caponigro	Feb. 17–23	Presented by Santa Fe Workshops. Techniques for photo-realistic retouching/compositing. www.sfworkshop.com
Light, Gesture, Color, and Perception with Jay Maisel	Feb. 17–23	Presented by Santa Fe Workshops. An active week of focus on figure-ground relationships. www.sfworkshop.com
John Sexton: The Expressive Black-and-white Print	Feb. 19–24	Carmel Valley, CA. Darkroom demonstrations in the art of B&W; www.johnsexton.com or (831) 659-3130
Fine Art Digital Printmaking for Photographers	Mar. 9–15	Presented by Santa Fe Workshops. With David Saffir and Jack Duganne; www.sfworkshop.com
DSLR Photography & Imaging Workshop Cruise	Mar. 14–22	St. Maarten, St. Lucia, St. Kitts. With Arthur Bleich and Dan Burkholder. www.dpcorner.com/cruise
WPPI Annual Convention and Trade Show	Mar. 14–20	Bally's/Paris, Las Vegas; (310) 451-0090; www.wppionline.com
Vietnam With Julia Dean	Mar. 19–30	(310) 392-0909, workshops@juliadean.com, www.juliadean.com; group exhibit following trip at JD Gallery
APA Photo Tours: The Jewels of Costa Rica Photography Workshop	Mar. 23–30	Costa Rica. Travel, learn and experience. Visit www.apaworkshops.com for more information.
From RAW Capture to Print with Tim Grey	Mar. 28–30	Presented by Santa Fe Workshops. Control image-optimization to the final print. www.sfworkshop.com
Adobe Photoshop Intensive	Apr. 4–6	Santa Fe, NM. Two-and-a-half day work in CS3 with digital lab guru Jerry Courvoisier. www.sfworkshop.com
Prof. Photographers of Washington (PPW) Annual Edu. Conference	Apr. 4–8	Wenatchee, WA. Contact radley@yaryphoto.net for information.
Kevin Kubota's Digital Photography Bootcamp	Apr. 20–25	Rock Sprints Guest Ranch, Bend, OR. www.kubotaimagetools.com/workshops.html
Prof. Photographers Assoc. of NJ (PPANJ) 2008 Convention	April 27–29	Bally's Hotel, Atlantic City, NJ Contact Leslie Meltzer at (866) 985-4300; www.ppanj.com

some promotional sheets I created in-house using a Fujix Pictography printer that I send out when someone has seen my work and is interested in hiring me.”

Regos has several pet projects he’s working on, including a book about synagogues in Europe and the United States and a customized calendar that he sends to his clients each year. This year’s calendar, of which 5000 copies were printed, features some of Detroit’s finest architecture. “There’s an absolutely gorgeous, classic art deco building in Detroit called the Guardian Building,” he notes, “which was built in 1929. Its owner has asked me to do a coffee-table book, and I am very excited about it. Also, I plan to publish a book about Detroit’s beautiful but often unnoticed and neglected architectural treasures, such as the Fox Theatre and the Fisher Building.”

In addition, Regos has made a number of trips back to “the old country” to work on a book project about the Budapest Opera House, which is 150



Above: American Museum of Natural History, New York City

years old. “As a young boy I sang in the Budapest Opera’s children’s choir and always admired the magnificent building, which

is one of the most beautiful opera houses in the world.” When Regos first turned his camera on the opera house, it was merely to take a few shots for his portfolio. “But I got carried away, and during visits home the last four years I shot more than 400 images,” he says. And thus, a book was born. The finished tome will be published in March. “To see my work published in magazines and books gives me great satisfaction, which cannot be measured only by a paycheck,” concludes Regos. “I can’t imagine having any other career.”

Laszlo Regos’ work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Architectural Record*, *Retail Design*, *Interior Design*, *Contract Design*, *Luxury Homes and Style*. To view more of Regos’ work, visit his website, www.laszlofoto.com. CC

Lorraine A. DarConte is a freelance writer and photographer living in Tucson, Arizona. Her work has appeared in numerous publications, including Rangefinder magazine, Studio Photography & Design, Newsday, and Tucson Visitors Guide.