

Art & Clarity

Making the ordinary, extraordinary

By Jim Brumm

Most of us pick up a camera, click the shutter and have a snapshot. Lowell Downey and Janna Waldinger pick up a camera, click the shutter, and weave magic.

Husband and wife photography team Lowell Downey and Janna Waldinger started their photography business, Art & Clarity, in 1991. After years of working with artists and as artists in different mediums, from sculpture to theater, they settled in Napa to pursue their dream.

Both of them have extensive experience in photography. Janna's father was a professional photographer and her grandfather an avid photography enthusiast.

The camera became a mode of artistic expression for Lowell in 1983 when he was invited to join the first international peace vigil in Nicaragua. It was while photographing life in Nicaragua and scenes on a battlefield that he realized the power of photography.

"That experience influenced how I was to see the world," said Lowell. "Janna and I have different skills, but we complement each other wonderfully."

Janna agreed. "I tend to be more formal in my technique," she said. "Lowell has a phenomenal poetic vision. Therefore, we constantly teach one another. When we shoot together we bring our clients the best of both worlds."

The couple comes from widely differing backgrounds. Janna is from Los Angeles

and attended the College of Creative Studies at U.C. Santa Barbara, has a B.A. in sculpture and lived in New York City for eight years working as a mixed-media sculptor and photographer. She moved to the Bay Area in 1987 and to Napa in 1993.

Lowell was born and raised in the Texas Panhandle and the gulf coast of Florida. He earned a B.A. in theater at Florida



State University. He migrated to New York City and earned his Masters Degree at New York University in dramatic writing. He moved to Sausalito in 1984, where he co-founded a small theater company.

Both Janna and Lowell take pride in incorporating art into their work. They do a large amount of wedding photography, and feel that their experience and skill bring an artistic aspect to the work that is unique to wedding photography.

"It's an honor for us to be wedding photographers," said Janna. "It is a wonderful way to show up as artists and share our vision of how we see the world."

"Because the Napa Valley is a wedding destination, we are fortunate to meet and photograph people from all over the world," said Lowell. "Having produced many events while directing a non-profit





It's the same for whatever we shoot," added Lowell. "We're motivated by the stories in front of our eyes. The lovers in the park, the cook smoking a cigarette outside a restaurant, the struggle and poetry of life. That is the beauty that the photos can capture."

Janna and Lowell currently have an exhibition on wine caves at the Napa Valley Museum, "Napa Underground," which will run through November. Lowell has also been commissioned by the museum to photograph the Napa

arts company in San Francisco, the Institute for Living Arts, we know how to meet our client's needs and create a successful event." He paused for a moment. "To us," he went on, "photography is a way of seeing – a way of looking at the story we call life as it happens around us. Whether we're shooting weddings, travel photography or portraits, we're interested in depth. It's not just about capturing a moment, it's about capturing the spirit and essence of our subjects."

"We bring the spirit of opening night to all of our work," said Janna. "Because of the nature of our style, we are able to give our clients more than they can see. When our wedding clients view their photographs they are brought back to the love and emotion of that special day."

River for an exhibition on the Napa Valley watershed. Janna has been working on a series of photographs of people in doorways, imagery that she says signifies transition, of being on the threshold of two worlds. For the last fifteen years she has also photographed women in the ninth month of pregnancy.

"Portraiture," Janna said, "is about the magic and honesty of the moment, rather than the pose."

A collection of their work in all of these areas is available for viewing on their website.

When they are not doing photography and raising their son, Janna and Lowell are involved in their community. Janna co-founded an alternative Jewish spiritual community called a chavurat, or circle of friends. She also serves on the Napa

County Office of Education School Board. Lowell is on the Glassy-Winged Sharpshooter Task Force representing people of the valley who are opposed to forced insecticide spraying on the neighborhoods. He believes his work is to encourage the development of viable alternatives to pesticides. He also represents the Abajo neighborhood on the Advisory Board of



the Hope Center, the homeless day center.

"We are not afraid to stand up and say what we believe is right," said Lowell. "We are proud to be a part of Napa and we are dedicated to helping our community with our talent, energy and leadership."

Photographic artists Lowell Downey and Janna Waldinger are available for weddings, portraits, events, travel, classes and as design consultants to landscapers and architects. They can be reached at 707-257-1166 or at www.artandclarity.com

