



Attic Fire Flares

By Bruce Hamilton Dorn

The artistic community of Savannah, GA, is the ignition point of Attic Fire, a contemporary architectural and commercial studio built around the diverse photographic and post-production skills of Jeremiah Hull, John Fulton and Eric Prine. After gaining substantial real-world experience as individual practitioners, the three Brooks Institute graduates have reunited to share skateboards, studio space, creative collaboration and rapidly growing industry recognition.

Dynamic lighting design and meticulous post-production techniques are the cornerstones of Attic Fire's unique illustrative style. *Rangerfinder's* always-curious Bruce Dorn grills the young principals to learn more about what fuels the fire behind this hot and very busy photographic team.



before

Bruce Hamilton Dorn: Attic Fire. Love it. I think this would be a great name for any creative operation, but I find it extra entertaining for a studio that specializes in architectural photography. I'll bet you did exhaustive market research and testing before you committed to this name, huh? Give it up—who came up with it? I can't help but wonder what other titles might have been batted around when your collaboration began. And who's the poor soul who gets to field the calls that really should go to 9-1-1?

John Fulton: After we decided to join forces, the three of us brainstormed off and on for months about what to name our company. There were many reasons we chose not to simply use our names, not the least of which was that Fulton, Hull and Prine sounds like a law firm. After scouring Workbook, we noticed a lot of boutique studios starting to have fun with their names—names that could just as easily

have been mistaken for some up-and-coming Japanese punk band. We liked that idea because it represented our personalities and would be very memorable when compared with our competition. I came up with the Attic Fire idea while brainstorming names with Eric and Jeremiah over drinks one hot evening in Savannah. Attic Fire didn't click with us immediately but seemed to linger in the back of our heads. We conducted an online focus group by emailing friends, clients and family to see what they thought. When it finally came down to choosing a name, Attic Fire had the strongest response and had the odd and fun uniqueness that we all wanted.

Every new client asks "So, why Attic Fire?" With such a specific and unusual name, people understandably assume that there's some crazy backstory. As it stands right now, we're still looking for one. No 9-1-1 calls yet, but several firefighters have remarked, "Attic Fire? That's the worst kind of fire!" So far, it's been the best kind for us.

BHD: I'm sure our readers are curious about how your collaboration came to be.

Three individual photographers working together to offer a consistent vision and product; could you each take a moment to describe your individual backgrounds and a bit about what led you to this point in time, both creatively and geographically? What were you doing before the creation of Attic Fire? Were you all on the local scene working as individuals or have you migrated towards this conflagration from other cooler climes?

JF: We have diverse backgrounds, but we all attended Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara, CA. We all cut our photographic teeth together, lived in the same neighborhood together, and spent school breaks on extensive photo expeditions around North America. Upon graduation in late 2002, we went our separate ways. After graduation, I moved to San Francisco and attained a position at a high-end retouching house. During my tenure there, I worked one-on-one with such industry heavyweights as Jim Erickson, Erik Almas and retouching rep Kate Chase. More technical and business know-how was gleaned there in one year than in all



my time in school. I built exponentially on my retouching skills and applied them to campaigns for AT&T, Ford, Ikea, etc. Most importantly, I further developed my own creative vision and sensibilities.

Eric Prine: I began assisting for established photographers in Los Angeles after Brooks. I assisted for three years in a wide variety of genres including advertising, editorial, catalog and, of course, architecture. I tried to take advantage of the opportunities to learn from people with thriving careers. I was lucky enough to be assisting a photographer who did architectural resort work when his main client decided they needed an additional shooter, which is when I began shooting architecture. I immediately started talking to John about a new and better way to shoot architecture. Within a couple of months John and I were collaborating on exclusive resorts projects. Over the next year or so we developed our technique, fell in love with Savannah and set up shop.

Jeremiah Hull: After graduating from Brooks, I moved back home to Ohio. Immediately upon my return, I began

working with several local advertising agencies, shooting everything from ads to catalog work. Such varied projects were very engaging and helped me hone my skills in a wide array of genres. One week it'd be low rider cars, Schwinn bicycles or lifestyle apparel. The next week it might be World War II airplanes. As I progressed, I attracted the attention of Paul Mitchell who commissioned me to shoot beauty images and educate his students about on-the-set expectations.

JF: In 2006, the three of us, having kept in close contact over the years, were all coincidentally ready for a locale change. Having primarily national and international clients allowed us to live wherever we chose because everything was just a flight away. Eric had lived in Savannah for about a year when Jeremiah and I visited him. We all fell for the provincial and artistic city.

BHD: It sounds like this was destined to happen. Was there a particular marketplace consideration for coming together? Studio operations represent a lot of overhead but artists also gather to feed off of each other creatively. What was the



main factor behind your gathering to create Attic Fire?

JF: We subscribe to the philosophy that you should always be aware of what the market wants, but shoot what you want to shoot. If you do this well, the market can't ignore you. Obviously some great marketing must be included in this equation. One of the main factors in us forming Attic Fire was simply that we wanted a great working environment and we're all very close. Doing what you love to do while surrounded by your best friends seems like a no-brainer. Working in the same space every day keeps us focused, motivated and inspired.

JH: The three partners work together on most commissions but we all have our own interests and strengths. During these first two years of Attic Fire, we've put most of our efforts into building the architecture portion of the business, but our future



development will include diversification into advertising, fashion and product. As this happens, we expect that each of us will take the helm of our respective markets, all the while benefiting from the support and collaboration of each other.

BHD: On your site you make a point of mentioning that your blend of classical architectural technique and contemporary digital methodology makes the shooting session much more streamlined. That implies a lot less tonnage of grip and lighting equipment to my mind; are you using smaller and fewer instruments in this digital era? It looks like you are building off of a baseline of ambient daylight, the existing architectural fixtures, and a variety of small photographic instruments. Does your architectural work utilize mostly continuous-light sources or does strobe play a significant part of the process? I imagine that you let the structure or space dictate what needs to be done but could you share some of the general philosophies behind your lighting style?

EP: We abandoned hot lights very quickly

when we realized they weren't necessary to achieve what we wanted. This, of course, reduced our kit substantially and expedited the process. Our basic setup includes two to six Profoto heads run through several Acute 2400 and 1200s. Some are diffused and some aren't, depending on the space. Some may also be snooted or fitted with grid spots. We mix things up quite a bit based on the overall look we're trying to achieve. Whether we're going for light and airy or dramatic and sexy, we let the natural colors of the scene establish the majority of the contrast. The space or the overall branding of the client dictates the look and feel of each image.

JH: Our background is in creative advertising work. As a result, we like to think that we bring a creative approach to the often technical field of architectural photography. We are also fairly young when compared to our competition and this means that digital capture and postproduction have been in our blood from the beginning. Though we have experience in the classical methods, they have only

a minor influence on our approach. This frees us from any of the technical and orthodox constraints that traditionalists may adhere to.

BHD: I have been remiss in asking about your camera kit. Our readers are always interested to hear what sorts of capture devices are being used out there on the sizzling edge. What formats do you utilize for the bulk of your architectural capture? Tethered shooting would seem to be mandated by such a detail-oriented style of capture.

JF: We shoot entirely Canon gear and always have. My first camera was a 20-year-old AE-1 that my dad bought to take my baby pictures with. Currently we're operating on the Canon EOS-1Ds Mark II tethered to a MacBook Pro. Occasionally, if it's beneficial to the client, we'll bring a 30-inch cinema display for easy viewing.





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Our go-to lenses are the EF 17–40mm f/4L short zoom, the EF 24mm Tilt/Shift, and the EF 24–70mm f/2.8L mid-range zoom. We have three retouching stations, all Intel-based Mac Pros with 30-inch Apple Cinema Displays and Wacom tablets.

BHD: And so the pendulum swings; small-format for architecture would have been unheard of only a few short years ago. Technology is evolving rapidly on the camera side of things and tempting updates are appearing every day; quality lighting gear, on the other hand, seems to be a more long-legged investment. Who wouldn't want magical light that was instantly available? Subtly-appropriate or excitingly-daring lighting is at the heart of much of the best work. Making good choices in lighting gear offers a great foundation for any commercial photographer.

I'm not at all surprised at your choice of strobe for the bulk of your architectural work. I find it much easier to balance strobe with volunteer daylight, both from a color temperature and intensity standpoint. Your Profoto packs offer a lot of

daylight-balanced punch in very manageable packages. When you travel to distant locations do you rent locally or spend big on overweight luggage charges? And finally, is there a gel-junkie lurking in the Attic or do you mostly "fix it in post?"

JF: We travel so much that we're platinum members on our regular air carrier and get a break on both the weight and quantity of our bags. Luggage charges aren't usually more than \$150 unless we're traveling in France, for instance, where they've charged us something in the neighborhood of eight euros per pound over 35lbs. A flight from Paris to the border of Switzerland cost something like \$600-plus for luggage one way!

We try to avoid the "fix it in post" attitude if it's something we can accomplish on-site. That being said, it always seems like we could have used five points of CTO here and five points of magenta somewhere else. It's a nice reassurance that we can dial those in at a retouching station with perfect viewing conditions after the fact.



BHD: Thanks for candid responses, gentlemen, and best wishes for continued success. Tend that fire.

I'll continue my dialogue with the young principals of Attic Fire in an upcoming issue of *AfterCapture* magazine. We'll talk further about their approach to after-capture post-processes for both architectural and commercial image creation.

Bruce Hamilton Dorn of iDC Photography has 20 years of Hollywood filmmaking experience, which has shaped his cinematic-style wedding day coverage. As a member of the Director's Guild of America, Bruce's previous career involved casting, coaching, filming and glamorizing "real people" for a laundry-list of commercial clients including McDonald's, Sony, Budweiser, AT&T, Ford, Kirin, Chevrolet, Mitsubishi and Coca-Cola. Bruce, along with his artistic partner and wife Maura Dutra, now offers this award-winning expertise to a very select group of artistically-inclined wedding clients. iDC Photography's Cinematic Style layers theatricality and romance onto a sound foundation of carefully considered documentary coverage.