

How a Visual Diary Completely Transformed My Photography (And My Life)

What's poppin', people? It's Dante.

I'm going for a beautiful walk here along Penn's Landing in Philadelphia, and I wanted to share some thoughts about how I've been practicing photography as a **visual diary** for over three years now—and how it's completely transformed the way I experience my life.

From Chasing Great Photographs to Simply Living

In the past, I would travel the world, visit new places, or even photograph in my hometown with the hope of making a **great photograph**.

I was always looking for something specific—a candid moment, an interaction between strangers, something that fit within the vein of street and documentary photography.

Engaging with humanity. Photographing people.

That approach was at the forefront of my practice for over a decade.

But over the last three years, I've shifted toward approaching photography much more personally—as a visual diary.

And I honestly believe it's made me a much more joyful and engaged person.

Whether I'm commuting to work, walking along the river, or spending time with family and friends, there's something incredibly special about **integrating the identity of the photographer with the identity of the person simply living life**.

In the past, my identity felt split between **me, Dante**, and **me, the photographer**.

That shift in identity is what completely transformed my practice.

Bringing the Camera Along for the Ride

I no longer put the camera around my neck, wipe down the lens, and schedule dedicated photography outings.

Now I simply live my everyday life.

The camera comes along for the ride.

I carry a **Ricoh GR IV Monochrome** in my front right pocket wherever I go, and I photograph whatever catches my instincts.

I'm no longer dwelling on an outcome.

I'm embracing the streets with openness and receptivity, photographing whatever personally calls me.

I'm not trying to make photographs with impact.

I'm making photographs as a **record of my day**.

A diary of what I saw. A diary of what I experienced.

From Documentation to Interpretation

When I'm out photographing now, I'm not dependent on the location.

I'm not dependent on seeing something "interesting."

I'm simply responding to what's in front of me.

Photography has become an act of preserving a memory.

Preserving a feeling.

I've shifted from **documentation to interpretation**—through my own subjective way of seeing and feeling about life.

And I find this to be one of the most fulfilling changes I've ever made.

Why This Matters

Maybe these thoughts encourage you to think differently about how you're engaging with photography.

Because honestly, it can become grueling.

You can burn out.

Going on dedicated trips.

Blocking off time to perform.

Feeling pressure to stay within a theme or a project.

When you liberate yourself from all of that and begin focusing on **experiencing your life**—photographing for yourself, for its own sake—you naturally begin experiencing more joy.

Photography as Life Affirmation

At this point, I treat photography as **life affirmation**.

The camera is simply a way for me to say:

Yes to life. Thank you for today.

I'm not even caught up in individual frames anymore.

I recognize that making photographs with real impact requires time.

Walking.

Wandering.

Observing.

Photographing.

If you want one of those dream photographs, consistency is unavoidable.

But by integrating photography into everyday life instead of separating it into dedicated sessions, I've discovered something much more valuable:

Longevity.

I no longer carry the burden that I have to perform.

The work has become **play**.

Play Instead of Performance

That attitude of play has completely changed my relationship with photography.

Now I genuinely enjoy going outside.

I enjoy the day.

The sights.

The sounds.

The smells of the street.

Photography has become a tool that helps me remain present.

When you let go of outcomes...

When you stop trying to make something...

When you use the camera simply as an excuse to experience something...

Everything changes.

The photograph no longer has to mean something to someone else.

It only has to mean something to you.

Photography Is a Selfish Act

For me, photography is a selfish act.

Of course I love sharing photographs with others.

I hope they spread joy.

I hope they uplift people.

But at the end of the day, it's worth asking yourself:

Why are you photographing?

For me, the answer is simple.

I'm photographing to cultivate:

- More joy.

- More presence.
- More gratitude.

When I shifted my motivation from making something great to improving my internal state, I found that the work naturally became a more authentic expression of who I am.

Your Style Is Born From Instinct

These days, all I'm really trying to do is notice and respond to my instincts.

I believe that's where style comes from.

Your style is born from your instincts.

Your style is born when you stop thinking and simply do.

By treating photography as a visual diary, I naturally make more work.

I walk more.

I photograph more.

Photography no longer feels like a chore.

It feels like breathing.

It's become second nature.

The Pocket Camera Changed Everything

One surprisingly important change was simply moving the camera from my neck into my pocket.

Technically, it's a small adjustment.

Practically, it's a massive shift.

That one decision completely changed how I engage with photography.

Now my practice can exist anywhere.

No matter where I am.

No matter what I'm doing.

It feels like there are infinite possibilities because photography is no longer about making something great.

It's about expressing myself throughout the day.

It's about affirming life.

Final Thoughts

That's how treating photography as a visual diary over the past three years has completely transformed my life as a photographer.

I hope some of these thoughts inspire you to rethink your own relationship with the medium.

Maybe the greatest shift isn't making better photographs.

Maybe it's living a richer life—and allowing the photographs to naturally follow.

Thanks for watching.

Peace.