

JUPITER

Magazine

BARRY SEIDMAN

Stretching Visual Boundaries

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TO UNDERSTAND BARRY Seidman's influence on American culture, one needs only to turn on a television, open a magazine or look at a newspaper. Whether it's Levi's Jeans, Coca-Cola, Panasonic or Smirnoff vodka, you've probably seen his photos dozens, if not hundreds, of times. As one of the nation's top commercial photographers, his eye for capturing unusual detail has made a wide variety of products and celebrities appealing to millions of people.

"Personally, I think he's a creative genius," says David Wojdyla, president of & Wojdyla Advertising in Chicago. That's no typo, just a highly creative name. "His sense of composition is unparalleled. His lighting ability exceptional. In an age when we're all told 'don't sweat the small stuff,' Barry's attention to detail refutes that notion."

Until recently, that attention focused primarily on advertising print media. Now, however, Seidman is expanding the scope of his darkroom artistry into the world of fine art photography. For an exhibit in New York called "Souvenirs," he turned his lens on the people in the exotic locations of Kenya, Papua New Guinea and Borneo. For a show called "Drinks," he used his revelatory exposures to create close-ups of martini olives, beer bottle necks and bubbles in a glass of red wine.

Seidman's first exhibit in Florida, titled "Bagged," will run Feb. 28 through April 26 at the Palm Beach Photographic Center in Delray. "The images in 'Bagged' are like paintings," says his agent Elaine Meier. "They are carefully planned and executed with great thought. He takes everyday objects like brown paper bags, cherries or pears and gives them an exquisite quality, as if you are seeing them for the very first time."

Seidman continues to stretch visual boundaries with a new series titled "Bloomers." This time exotic flowers are his subject. Incorporating a method called giclée (zhee-clay) – making fine art prints from digital photographs using ink-jet printing – he magnified the shots more than 100 times and mounted them on canvas, some up to six feet in height. The elegant and surreal photos are on display April 10 through May 16 at the Palm Beach Gardens City Hall.

"We're very excited about showing Mr. Seidman's work," says Amy Stepper, supervisor of the Gardens Art Program. "It's big, bold and beautiful."

Photography was not on Seidman's mind when he graduated from Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn. He landed a job in the mailroom of William Esty advertising agency where he gradually worked his way up to art director. While preparing a presentation for clients, someone asked, "Anyone know how to use a camera?"

Seidman, whose previous photo experience hadn't gone much beyond a Kodak Brownie said, "I'll try."

The clients liked the result, setting him on a new path. Seidman started absorbing information about photography from every available source – books, magazines, other photographers. "I had to learn technical aspects on my own," he says. "Making a can of beer look cold – not just wet – isn't as easy as it may seem."

In 1975, Seidman made a major career decision: He rented a studio in Manhattan and became a full-time freelance photographer. "I'd go in each day and pray for the phone to ring," he recalls.

But Seidman didn't have to worry. His reputation spread, and he began to receive assignments not only for products, but for celebrity shoots as well. He learned quickly, however, that inanimate objects are one thing, but photographing a star with ideas of his or her own is quite another.

His first celebrity assignment was almost his last. Seidman flew to Las Vegas, along with a large contingent of agency people, to photograph Sammy Davis Jr. He rented studio space, set up a half ton of equipment and prepared to go to work. Davis arrived by limousine, walked in, took one look, said, "I've got bad vibes," and walked out.

Jaws dropped, but Seidman wasn't thwarted. The next day, he arranged to photograph Davis backstage at Caesars Palace, where the star was appearing. While waiting for Davis to show, a beefy hand landed on his shoulder. It belonged to a union representative who told Seidman in no uncertain terms that he could not work there. As it turned out, Seidman mentioned that his father – who left home when Barry was 6 months old – was an officer of the Las Vegas culinary union.

The man quickly replied, "Why didn't you say so?"

The classic picture he got of Sammy Davis Jr. smiling over a glass of Alka-Seltzer would become his first of hundreds of celebrity shots.

In a career that spans more than three decades, Seidman is responsible for the published photos of more than 4,000 products and personalities. Along the way, he's won scores of major awards.

Always restless to find new and more appealing ways of using a camera, in 2005 Seidman added a new element to his photographic repertoire. "The beauty of Florida's east coast always appealed to us," he says, "so my wife Mary Anne and I decided to build a house with a studio in Palm Beach Gardens."

It's here where he is now producing the giclée prints for his show "Bloomers," which will be on display at the Palm Beach Gardens City Hall.

What's next for Barry Seidman?

"He's expanded the already flexible definition of photography," says *New York Post* Executive Editor Steve Cuzzo. "With his imagination and skill, almost anything that can be seen through a camera lens, or the mind's eye, is possible. We'll just have to wait and see."

