FINDING ARchiTecture

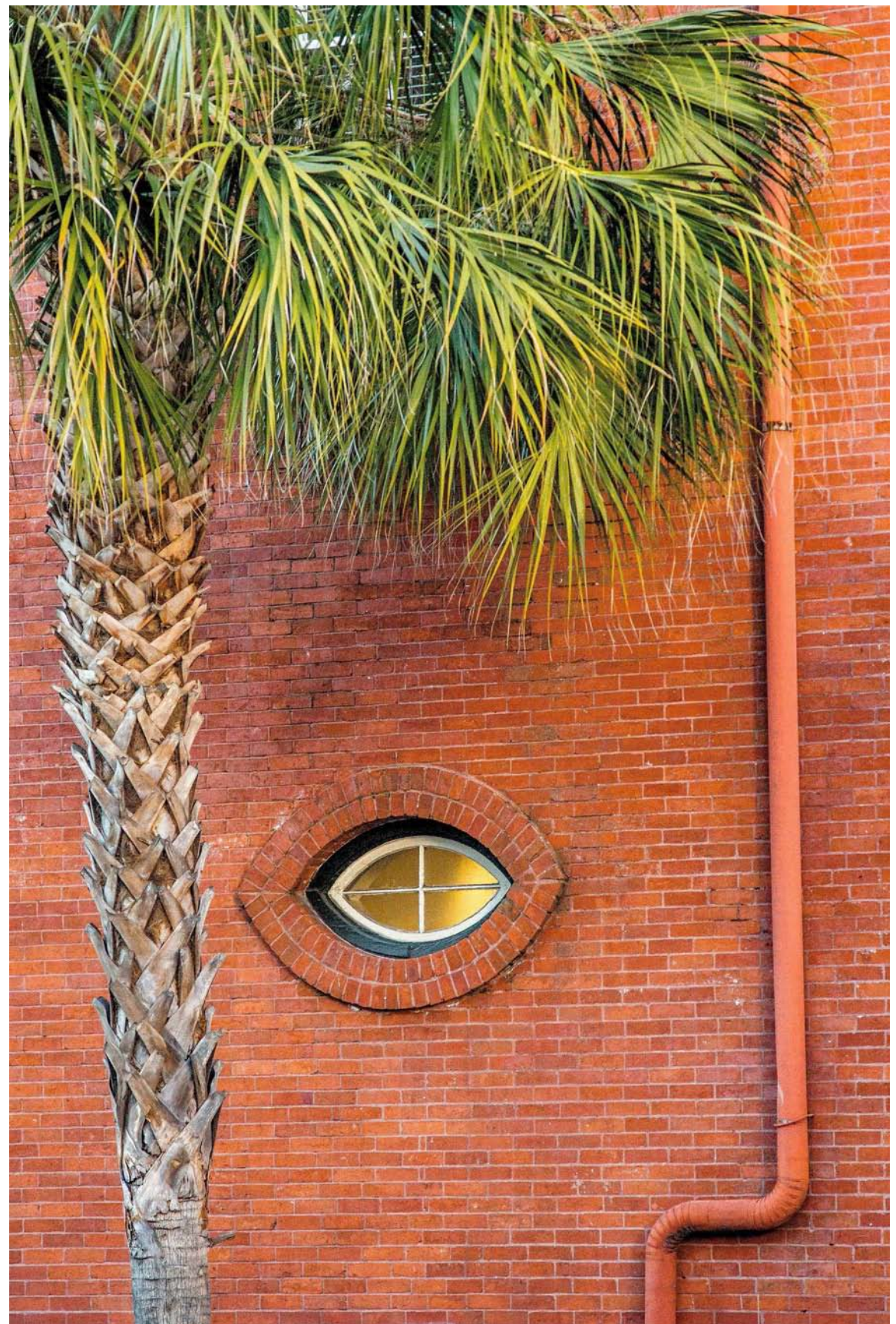## "Finding Art in Architecture"

A Photographic Series by Alexander Sharkey

"Finding Art in Architecture" is a photographic series that questions the viewer's perception. My perception of architecture has always been intrigued by how a building can take on the shape of other things. Windows, doors, and trim can transform into eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. A good example of this is when I was travelling down south and captured "Head of Savannah." My first impression upon looking at this image is not that of a building, but a face, an abstract face akin to Pablo Picasso's "Portrait of a Woman."

That day in Savannah, Georgia inspired the theme for this series. I wanted to capture architecture, yet make the viewers first impression not be of architecture. Simply, I want the viewer to perceive art. Abstracting shapes, lines, and colors can transform something concrete into something abstract. Each person's individual interpretation will be different. The details the viewer finds will vary and change how he or she connects with the photograph.

Some pieces are so abstract, with no grounding in their orientation, that the image can drastically change by rotating its side. The way I perceive the piece is how you are viewing it now. However, all of these pieces are designed to hang in any orientation. Rotate this book or, if viewing digitally, lock your screen and rotate your device. See how the piece changes. See what speaks to you.

Art is subjective and meant to be enjoyed by the viewer. When our surroundings are flipped on edge it brings new light to the things we overlook everyday. Inanimate becomes animate. What we perceive as defined becomes undefined. Maybe the places we live, work, and pass are still buildings, or maybe we are surrounded by art.


"Head of Savannah"

Captured in Savannah, Georgia this photograph was the inspiration for finding abstract in architecture.

"Connected, But Not Attached"

One of my favorite pieces from the series. After deciding that abstracting architecture would be the theme, I knew that the green ZIP System wall sheathing that I pass yearlong needed to be captured. While exploring the Northern Liberties section of Philadelphia, I came across a massive condominium construction site. This photograph is of two separate buildings, yet it appears as if they connect to form a single geometric shape. "Connected, But Not Attached" is a great example of how flipping the image's orientation drastically changes its perspective.

"Bike Ramp"
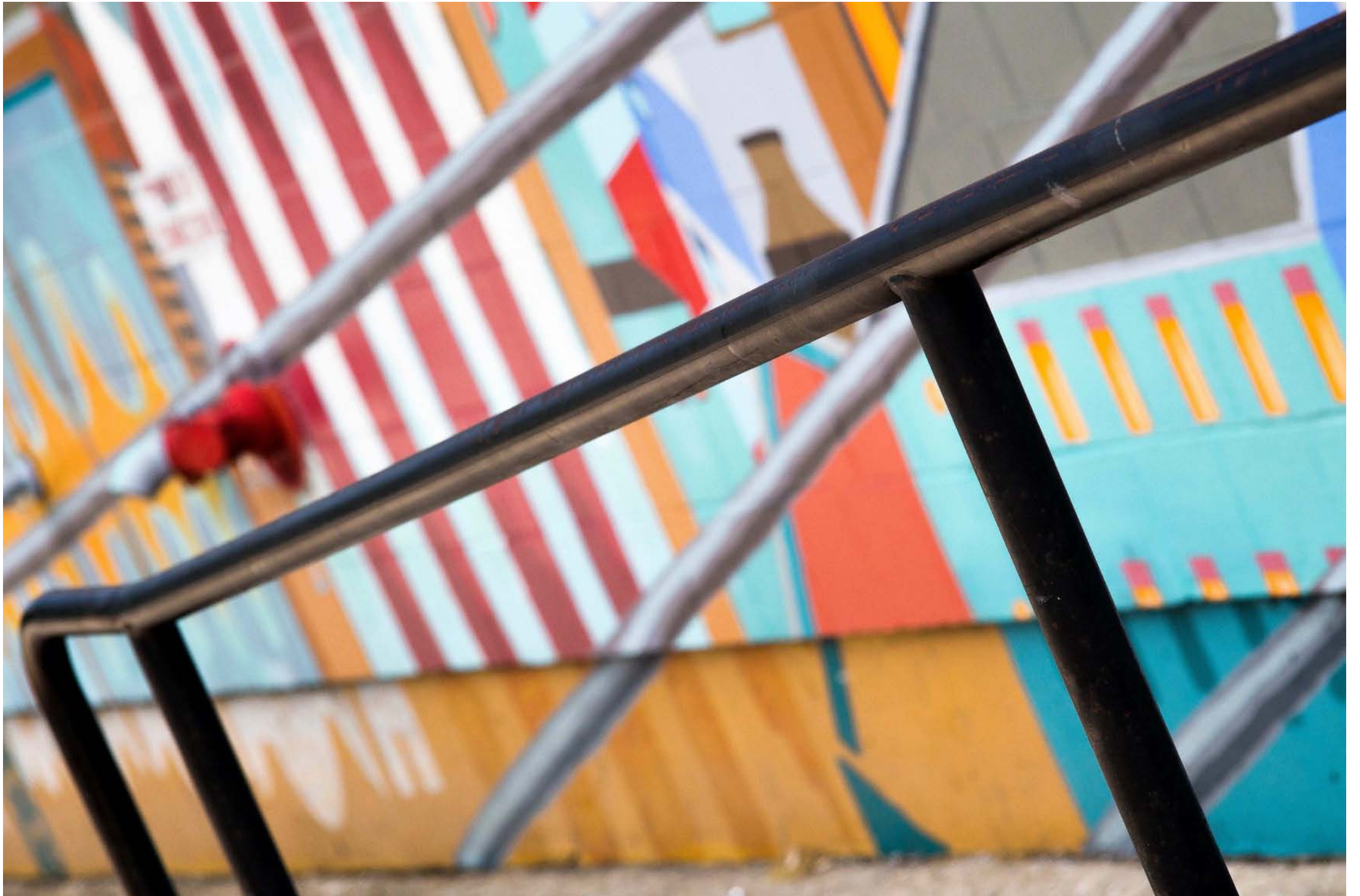
I like finding color in places people don't always associate as colorful. Almost half of this series was photographed during one day of exploring my hometown of Philadelphia. The city is very diverse with a mixture of both old and new forms of architecture. The eclectic culture that has developed in the various neighborhoods has created a colorful landscape. Half-a-century old warehouses are repurposed, and dilapidated buildings are given new life in the form of murals and street art. Upon wandering the vibrant blocks of Northern Liberties I came across many murals like the one in the background of "Bike Ramp."
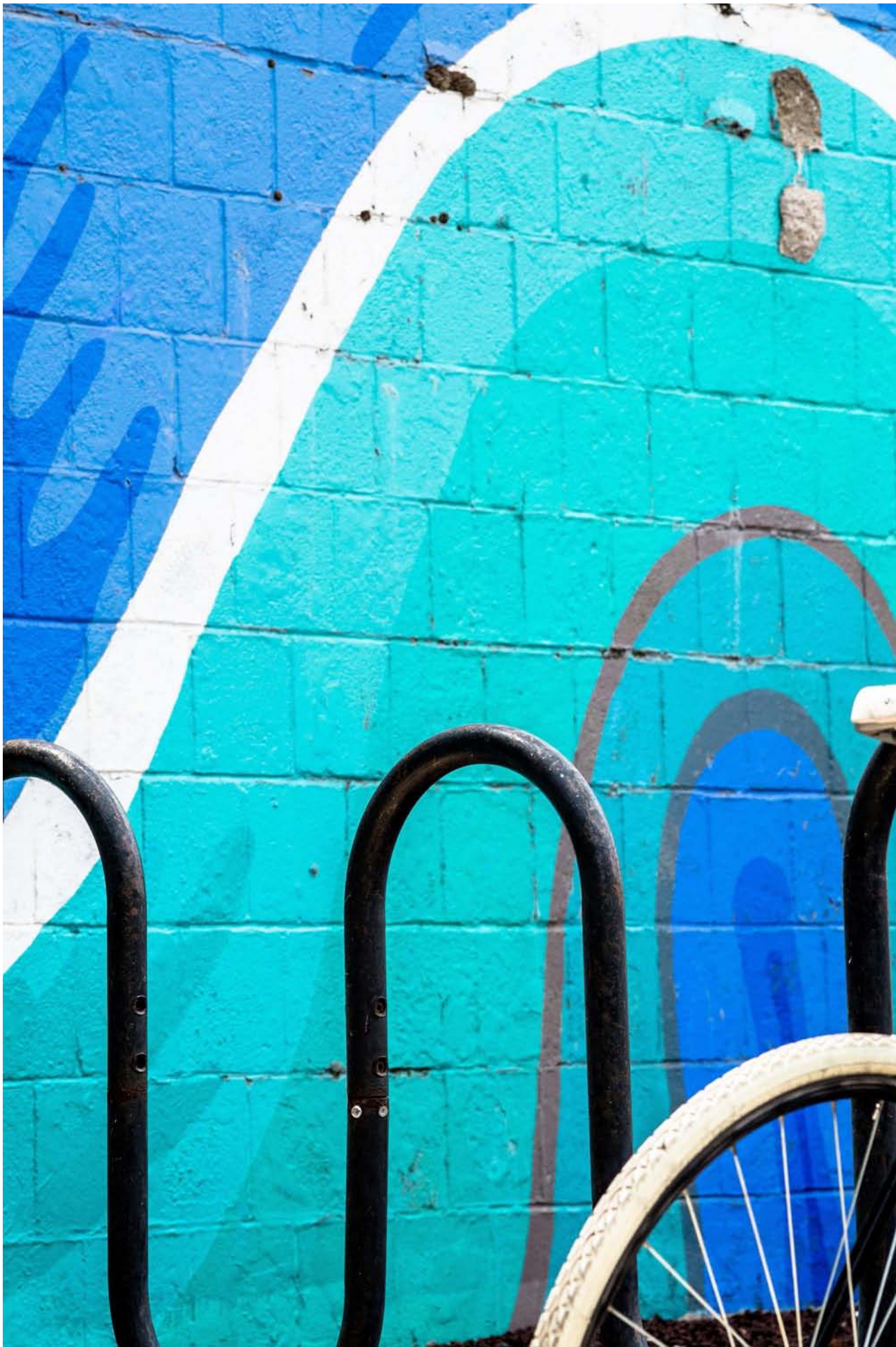
"Wave"

"Wave" features another mural from the Northern Liberties section of Philadelphia. This bike rack, outside a gym, is where people travel everyday. The piece combines many elements in its foreground and background. The title of this piece is defined by both the mural and the bike rack which is a form of a sine wave. I crop very little in postproduction. I framed this shot in camera to have just enough of the white wheel and bike seat to compliment the white in the mural. "Wave" is another piece that changes with the rotation of its orientation.

"Googie Green"

Google Googie; and then say that ten times fast. Wildwood, NJ can be viewed as a historic architectural landmark. The town is stuck in a time capsule of the "Doo-Wop" mid-20th century. This image of the Caribbean Motel really abstracts our perception and is a great example of the use of a quality lens. The open roof veranda was shot with a 135mm Carl Zeiss lens that was produced in the same era as this building. There is very little color correction used in the image since Zeiss lenses are renowned for their accurate color rendition. Combine that with a polarizer filter and the blue sky couldn't be richer.

"4:36 PM"

At first glance many people would not consider this to be the facade of a building along Spring Garden Street in Philadelphia. It has every color in the wheel. Depending on how natural lighting is used, sometimes shadows are a photographer's worst enemy. When reviewing this image I was drawn to how the shadow resembled a sundial. The angle is almost 45° which would equate to 4:30. I immediately looked at the digital time stamp of when the photo was taken and that's how this image got its name.

"Pan-African Divide"

This image is turned on its side. It combines a wooden wall in the foreground with a painted concrete wall in the background sharply in focus. Neighborhoods in Philadelphia are known for their cultural heritage. In the mid-1900's neighborhoods where segregated by your church which was Polish, German, Irish, or Italian. Over time, new ethnicities have immigrated and changed the landscape. The colors red, black, and green resemble the Pan-African flag, which can account for a large percentage of the Philadelphia population. The wooden wall is what divides the foreground from the background.

"Reptile Brick"

Kensington and Fishtown are two rapidly changing neighborhoods in Philadelphia. At one point very run down, these neighborhoods are now the stage for new development and change. The building in this image immortalizes the bricklaying history of Philadelphia row homes. The combination of wood, veneer, and brick creates an interesting texture that is worn with age and weather. The slashes in the veneer resemble claws of a reptile scratching at the surface, wanting to expose what lies behind its many layers of history.

The original orientation of "Reptile Brick"

"Summer Shade"

Since this series was first exhibited at the Ocean City Art's Center, I felt it only appropriate to feature an image from Ocean City, NJ. One architectural style that always stands out in this town is many older buildings with canvas awnings. Taken down every fall and installed every spring, these awnings adorn many people's homes and businesses. They add color and offer protection from the hot summer sun. "Summer Shade" combines an umbrella, the epitome of summertime, with an awning attached to a wooden facade. I find that when this image is turned vertically it takes on the presence of a nautical flag, which seems suiting for a community with a large sailing population.
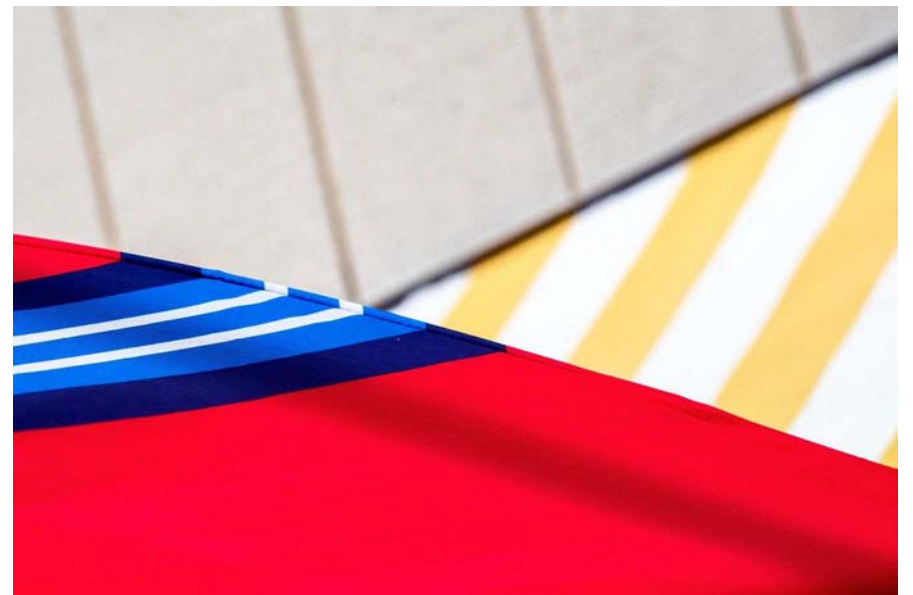
The original orientation of "Summer Shade"

"Too Many Pools to Drown In"
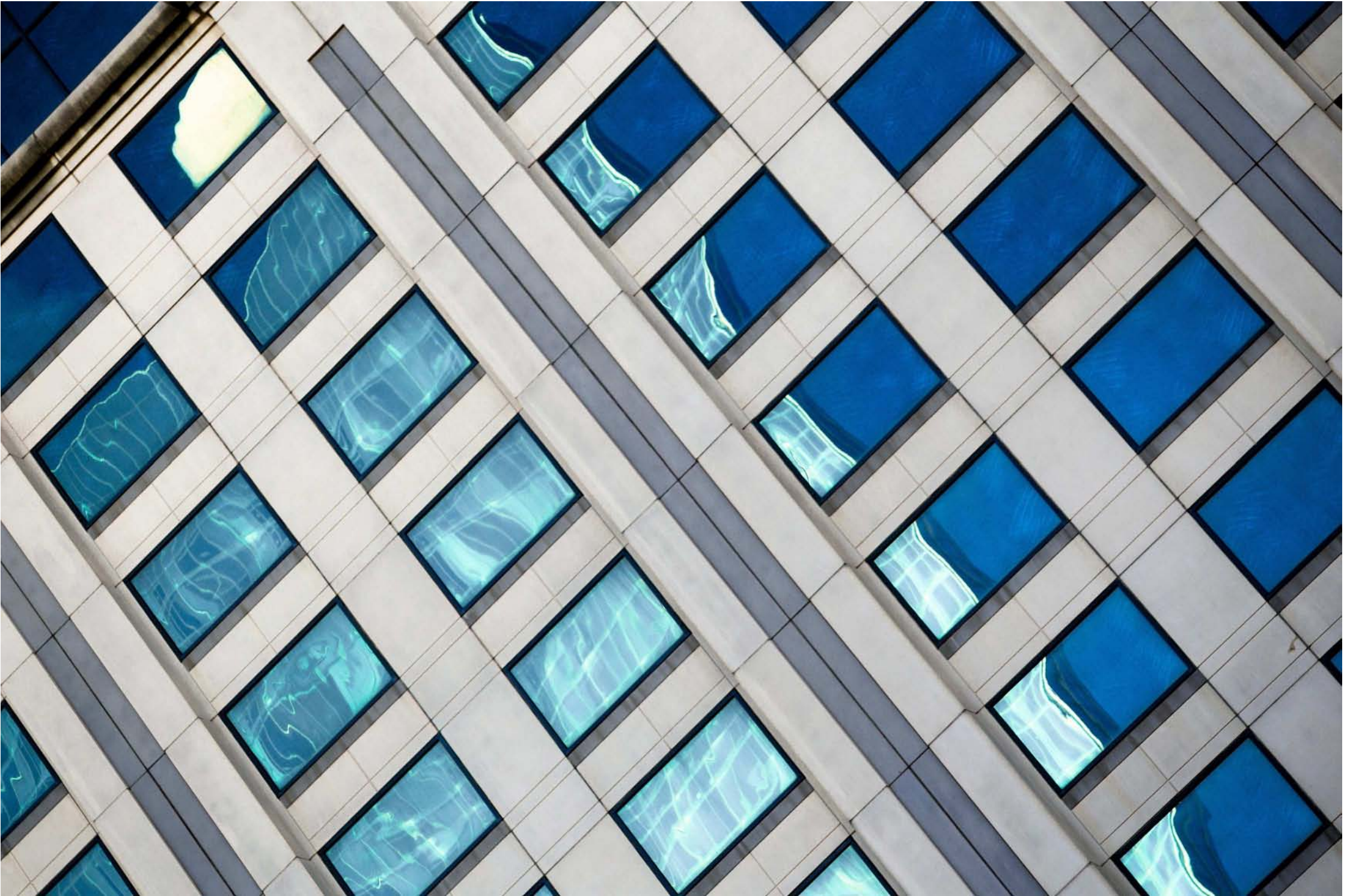
One of my favorite examples of abstracting architecture, this is an image of the now bankrupt Showboat Casino's windows reflecting the also bankrupt Revel Casino (look for the golf ball). Gambling is a risky venture with many different pools to get your hands wet. Clearly both entities were in over their heads.

"Revel in Geometry"

While Revel Casino may have been a failure as a business, it certainly is a marvel in Atlantic City Architecture. The architecture firm, Arquitectonica, definitely reveled in their creative use with geometry in the design of this giant casino. Its many windows, curved facades, and open beams create interesting intersections of shapes and lines. The now vacant building stands as a giant art form with a price tag only for those with deep pockets.

"The Balcony Sea"

"The Balcony Sea" effectively turns something concrete into something that has motion. An old Atlantic City concrete building stained by the salt water air takes on the shape of waves. Something that hasn't moved for decades suddenly looks turbulent.

"Beach Bar Series "

Both of these photographs were taken for a commercial commission in Atlantic City, NJ. The assignment was to bring color to the empty walls of the newly renovated lawfirm, Cooper Levenson.

Color evokes life, beauty, and emotion. Trying to find color beyond the neon lights of the boardwalk and casinos led me to the people of Atlantic City: the dockworkers, boardwalk entertainers, and dreamers. The energy of people and the places where they work, live, and play are what make our surroundings vibrant.
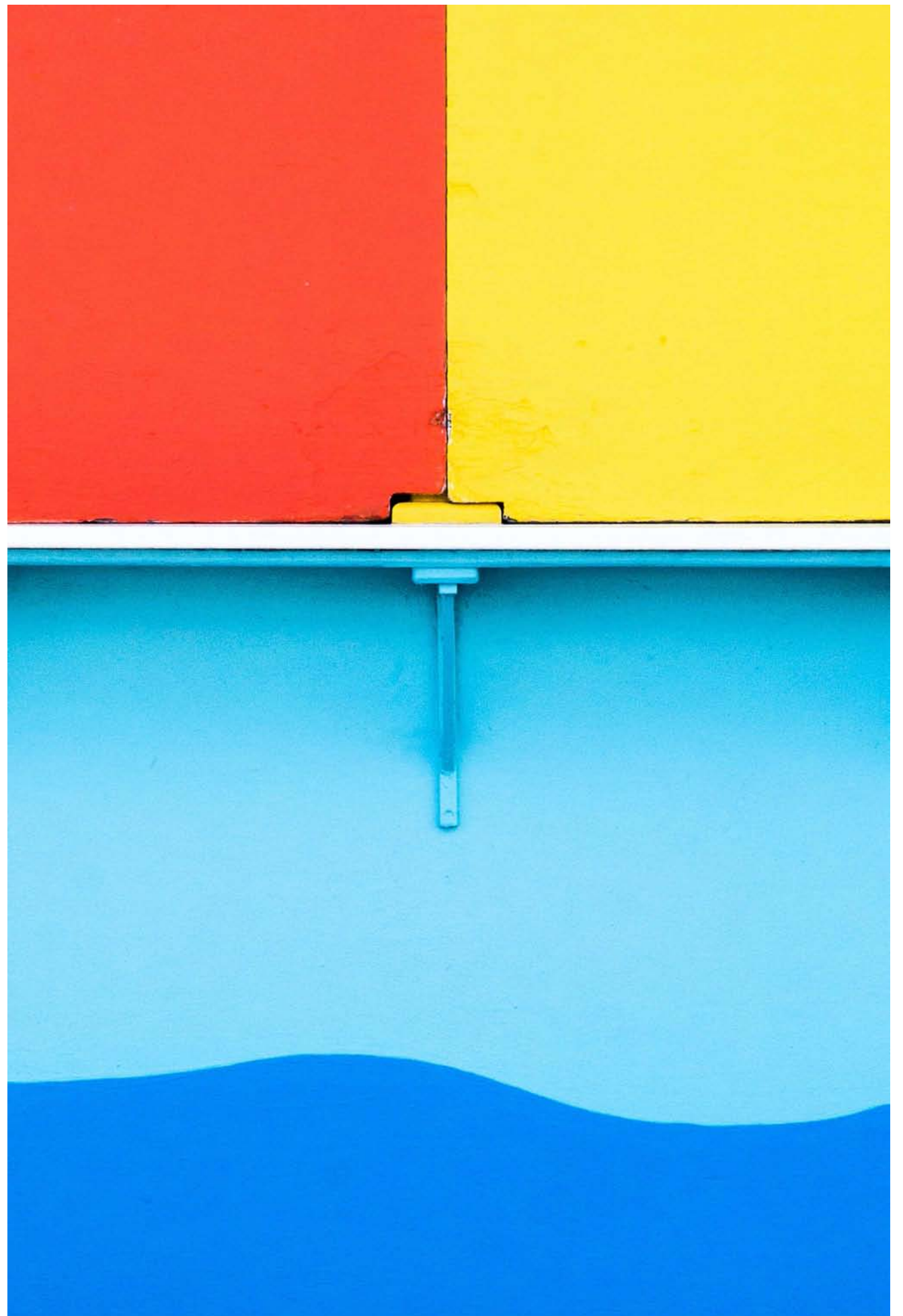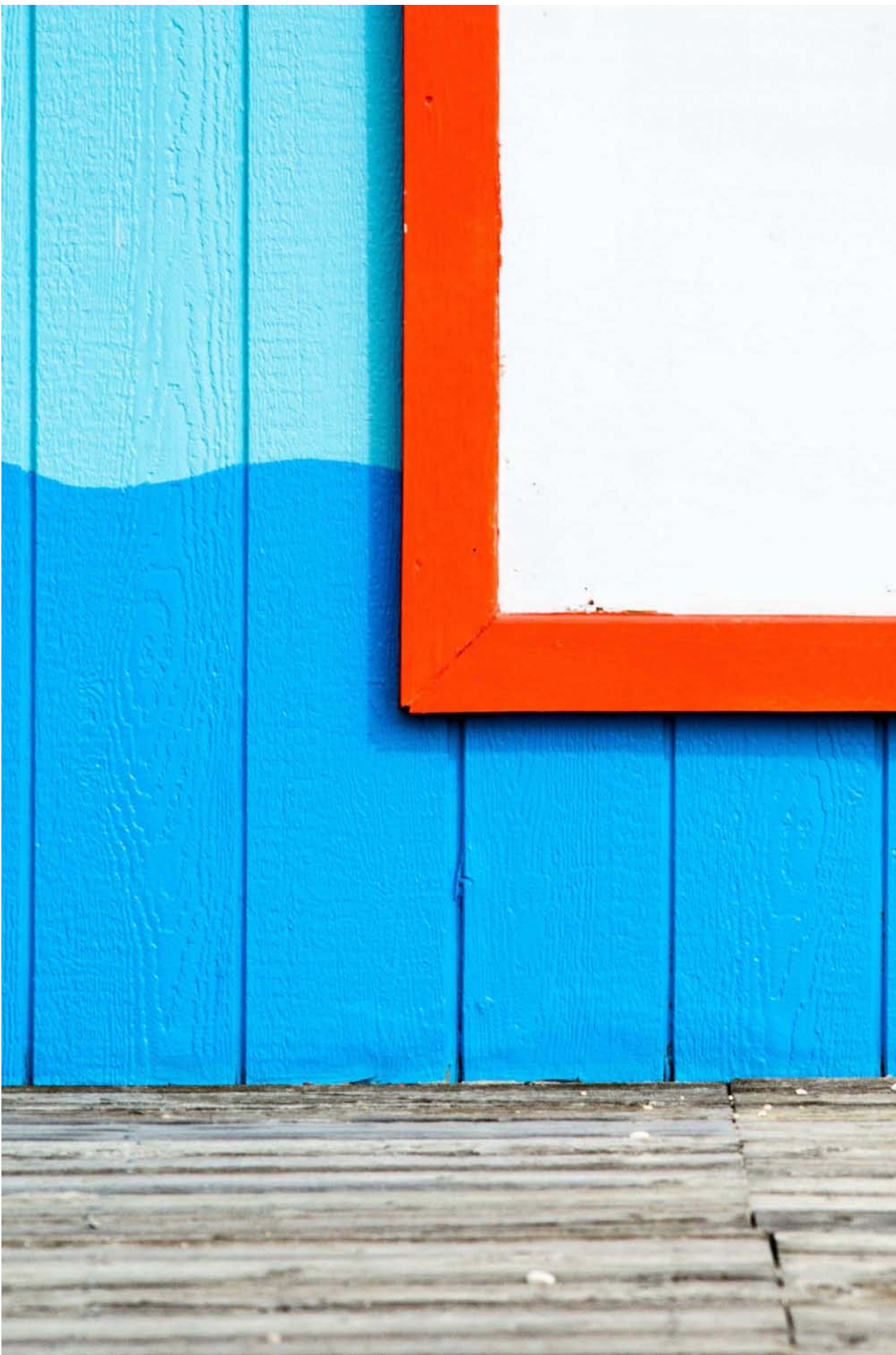
These two images are of an outside beach bar along the boardwalk. The summer season had passed and the bar along with its hatches were closed. The whole commission was shot over the course of a month while wandering around the many vacant areas of Atlantic City. It was rewarding to stumble across little jems like these two pieces of architecture.

The lawfirm currently has over 30 pieces hanging in both their Atlantic City and Cherry Hill offices.

The Artistic Process

Photography Mounted on Styrene
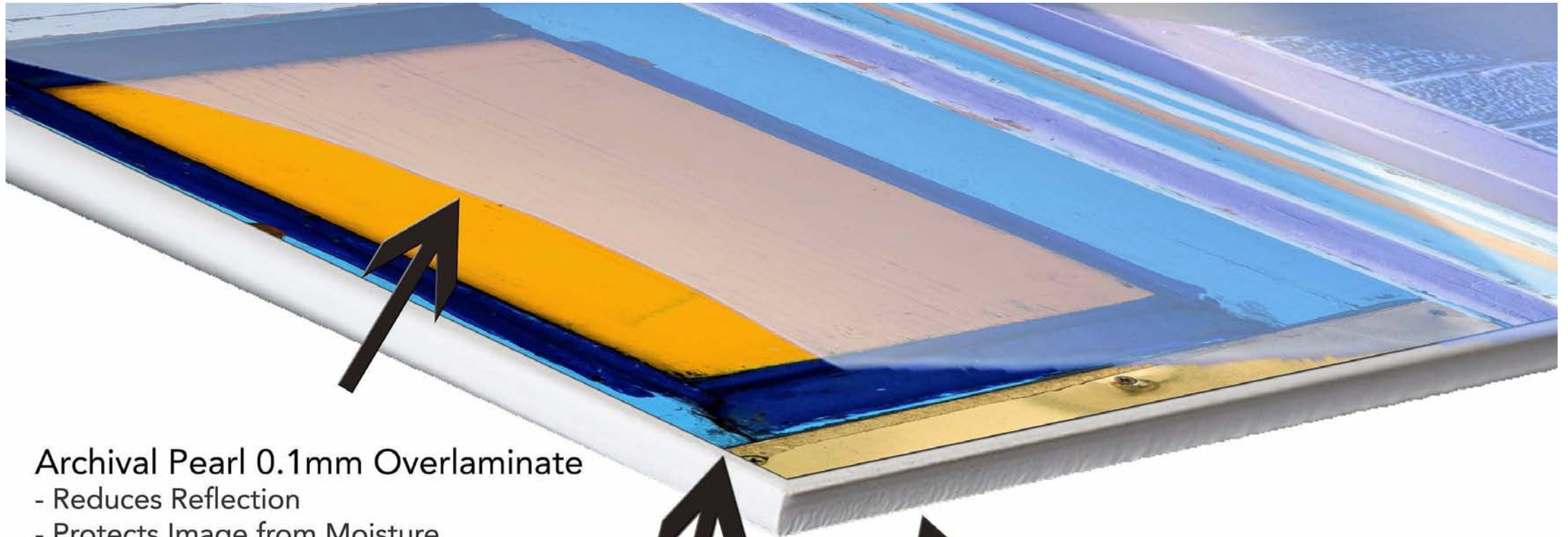
Archival Pearl 0.1mm Overlaminate
- Reduces Reflection
- Protects Image from Moisture, Pollutants, and UV Light
- Safe to Touch
- Clean with Damp or Dry Microfiber Cloth

Kodak Endura Lustre Print
- Premium Color Quality
- Rated to Last Over 100 Years

Archival 2mm Styrene
- Pressure Sensitive pH Neutral Substrate
- Does Not Absorb Moisture
- Ideal for Wet and Humid Environments
- Keeps Photograph Flat and Rigid

A classic way to present photography, prints on paper are displayed with preservation in mind. In order for a paper print to stand the test of time it must meet conservation standards that protect from acid, UV light, and humidity. Alexander Sharkey's artistic process meets these standards and is of the highest quality workmanship.

Images mounted on Styrene are a modern way to display photography while maintaining these conservation standards. The overlaminate protects from UV Light and mositure, making it safe to touch and clean. There is no need for a frame or glazing. The finished product is lightweight and designed to "float" off the wall with a recessed frame that allows for hanging in any orientation. Simply use a drywall anchor or picture frame hanger rated to hold 10lbs.
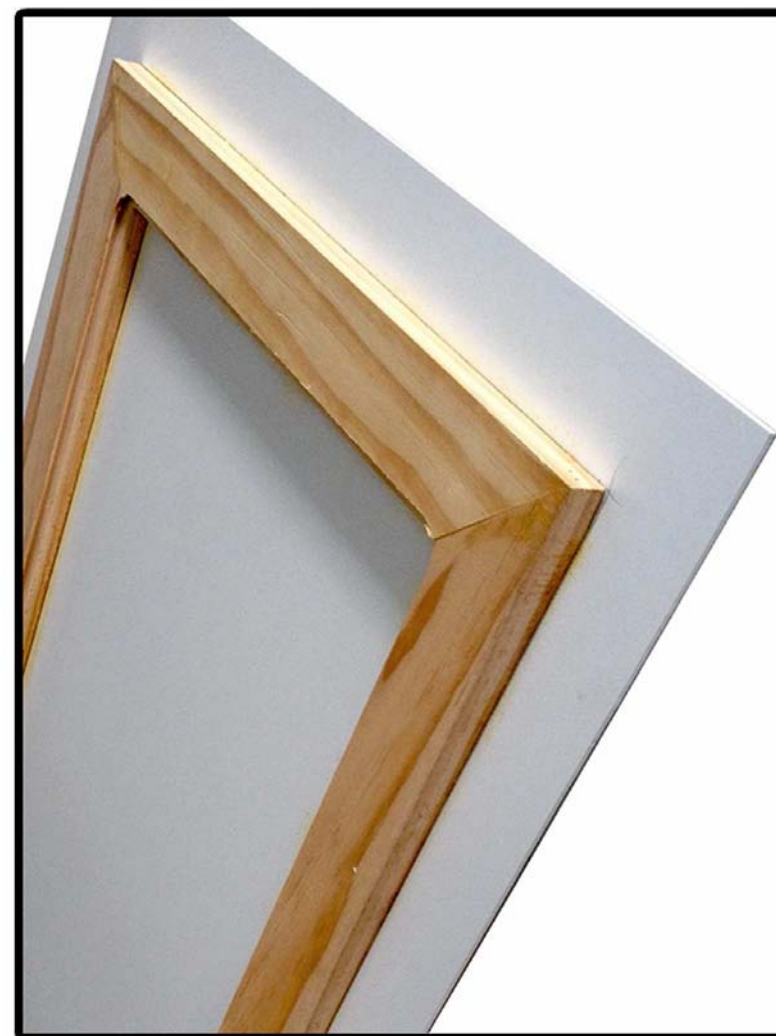
The recessed frame allows the image to float off the wall 3/4 of an inch.
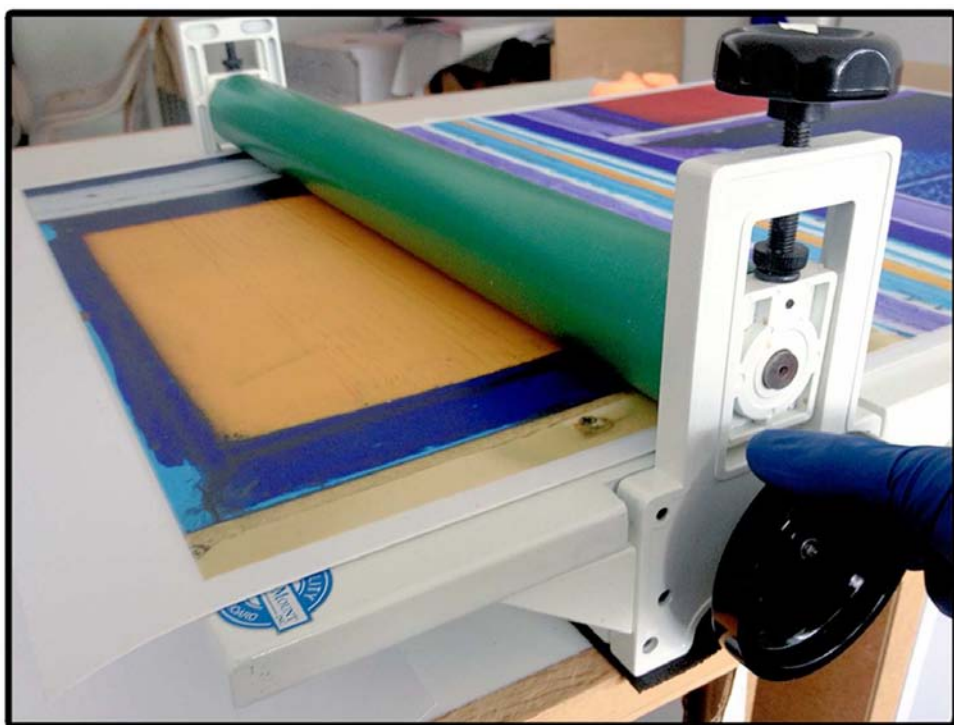
A cold laminator uses pressure to adhere overlaminate film and styrene to the image.

A slot in the recessed frame eliminates the need for hanging hardware and allowing the photograph to hang in any orientation.

"Artistic Statement"

My photography is drawn from the intrinsic values that make a scene interesting and beautiful. I am attracted to the often-disregarded subject. With the world around us moving so fast, sometimes we forget to pause and realize the hidden beauties within arm's reach. However, something beautiful does not need to have the straightforward definition of beauty. Shapes, lines, and patterns, along with color, contrast, and lighting are aspects of beauty that attract my attention.

My body of work encompasses moments in our natural surroundings, where scenes are not staged and people are not directed. The color and lighting are what naturally occur and the finished piece of art stays true to the original moment. However, my interpretation of nature is not simply flora and fauna or landscapes and sunsets. In a broader sense it is our environment, both organic and manmade. Our everyday scenery has become second nature and my goal as a photographer is to engage the viewer to perceive nature and our surroundings in an abstract manner.

While abstract may seem as far from nature as possible, when our environment is captured in an unfamiliar way it allows that photograph to have an open definition. I use a camera to transform something real and resolute into something intangible that can be interpreted. I want this to spark a connection between the viewer and the image that begins a conversation and evokes an emotion. These feelings redefine something two-dimensional into something multi-dimensional, beyond what we perceive naturally.

Alexander Sharkey

Photographer, Adventurer, Carpenter

Born and raised in Northeast Philadelphia, Alexander Sharkey departed the city to study Film and Photography at Ithaca College, NY. He left concrete and paved roads for country and wilderness, and never wanted to look back. A love for adventure and nature grew while traveling throughout Australia, Kenya, parts of Europe and the United States. Sharkey has now settled in coastal Southern New Jersey.

Sharkey refrains from digitally manipulating, "photoshopping," his imagery. He limits the digital process to what traditionally is performed in a darkroom (cropping, color balance, exposure, tone curve, dodging & burning). He believes that a photograph needs to speak for itself from the moment it is envisioned and the shutter released, not with improvements made later in post production.

Sharkey has combined his skills as a carpenter and photographer to control the entire artistic process from capture to display. He hand crafts his framing to compliment his body of work and fabricates stretcher bars to stretch canvas giclée prints. His artistic process meets conservation standards and the highest quality of workmanship. While pursuing his art form, Sharkey has begun a successful custom framing business.

Sharkey views his work, photography and carpentry, as art. From the image to the picture frame, each is unique and purposeful. You will not find his photographs for digital sale or in mass reproduction, but hanging in people's homes and businesses to be discussed and enjoyed.

A. SHARKEY

Photography & Custom Framing

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