

# RESOURCE MAGAZINE

For the Professional Photo Productionist

Spring 2008



One Night

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# splashlight. SOHO

By **Justin Muschong**

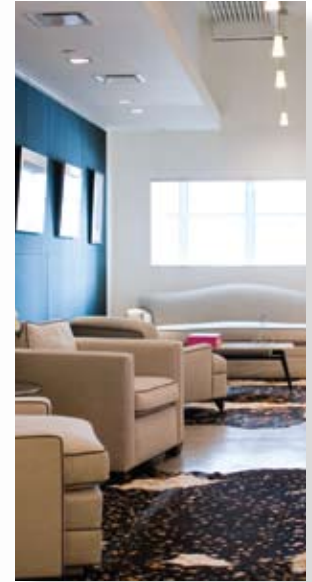
Portraits and environment

photographs by **Blake Sinclair**

and courtesy of Splashlight

Still life by **Naoya Fujishiro**





## “We love what we do.”

When Benoit Lagarde says these words, there is no winking or ironic detachment, no sense of I’m-just-saying-this-because-it’s-expected-of-me. They have not been carefully considered beforehand or designed to win anyone over. In fact, they can easily be lost amidst the many other words he speaks with evident passion as he leans forward in his chair, gesturing to highlight his points or to show off the objects and features of which he speaks. They are simply five words casually spoken while discussing Splashlight, the photography studio he co-founded in 2001, and the photo production industry in general. But they are the key to understanding what makes Splashlight work.

When he says them, we are sitting in EET, the restaurant inside the recently opened Splashlight SoHo location, and in his next breath he begins to tell me about the thought that went into designing the restaurant’s space, which is an elaborate homage to Manhattan’s Dutch colonial history and the nearby Holland Tunnel. The very name of the restaurant is the Dutch word for “eat,” and the national color of the Netherlands, orange, is one of the dominant colors used for the ceiling, chairs, and tables. On the walls are images of old New York City maps and automobile schematics. Through the careful attention that has been paid to the tiniest of details, I can see the truth in those five words.

## “We love what we do.”

Since Splashlight’s initial location opened on West 35th Street seven years ago, they have become one of the most well-known photography resource providers in the country. They have expanded to include locations in Los Angeles and Miami, all of which offer services such as studio and equipment rentals, creative

imaging, post-production, and even catering and event hosting. So why open a second location in New York? “We were running out of space and badly needed to expand,” Benoit said. “We found the space on Varick Street and it was perfect—it allowed us to custom-build all the studios from scratch and also increased the number of dedicated client studios. Finally, all of our operations—executive staff, digital retouching, and account management—are in the same space. At our West Side location, we were spread out over two buildings.”

The notorious vagaries of New York real estate provided an additional incentive. The city has been rezoning much of the West Side, and the 35th Street location has found itself in the cross hairs. No official word has come down from up high yet, but Benoit expects it to close in the first months of 2009. The Splashlight staff is currently scouting for another location to replace the specialized offerings of 35th Street, which can accommodate oversized productions. If you want to photograph dozens of models cavorting across an alien landscape while dodging elephants, the 35th Street location is the place to be. Aaron Limoges, the Digital Capture Manager for Splashlight, said, “We’ve had clients build almost an entire house in one of our studios, and the organization and skill of everyone working together to make something like that happen are really impressive.”

The SoHo studio is smaller and more intimate. According to Benoit, “It’s more refined and there’s much more privacy because of the nature of the space—we can do this because there are less big productions that are stressful or damaging to the building. It has a more beauty, celebrity, high-end fashion focus.” Clients using the location will have four studios to choose from and a number of amenities to enjoy, including retouching and CGI suites, a conference room, a lounge equipped with televisions and a martini and espresso bar, two freight elevators, and a loading dock.



The studio is on the third floor, the same level as the tops of the few trees in the area, which gives it a feel that Benoit describes as green but private. "I hope with this space that the [photo production] community will see another side of Splashlight. How can we help them do business better? That's what it is."

To ensure everything goes right from the start, each client is assigned an account manager who helps them through the entire process, from booking the space to renting equipment, sorting out the logistics, actually shooting the damn thing, and figuring out all that post-production work. "Our client service and relationships are one of the biggest advantages of working with us," says Benoit. "Our clients get to know us and work with us on a regular basis. We become a member of their team and can help them handle any photography-related question."

In New York alone, Splashlight has about fifty employees to assist clients with every aspect of their shoots. Benoit views his employees as the studio's best asset. "You have to treat the operator the same way you treat the customer. By them enjoying what they do, the client is happy," and from their own words it appears they would agree with their boss. Arri Weeks, Operations Manager for the Los Angeles facility, said, "As a whole, the staff at Splashlight takes immense pride in their work. We expect a 110% from all of our employees, but Splashlight, as a company, gives that, and more, in return. It's an amazing company to work for." For them, making sure the clients have all their needs met and are able to focus on the creative aspects is the top priority. Robyn Donnelly, the Front Desk Manager for the Soho and 35th Street locations adds, "The most satisfying part of my job is helping a client solve

a potential crisis during their shoot—they are always so grateful and I really enjoy making things easier for them." (For more on Splashlight's employees, please see next page.)

Splashlight seems to be emerging from its adolescent growth spurt to becoming a company capable of riding out with ease any turbulent changes the photo production industry and the New York real estate market can throw at it. "I know we bring a very good service to the industry," Benoit says. "Now I want to bring craftsmanship. If we can increase [the clients'] level of comfort to increase their level of creativity, I think we will be successful."



# Resource Q&A



**Name:** Francisco Diez-Pena  
**Title:** VP of Operations

## **Please describe your role at Splashlight. What happens on a typical day?**

I'm the VP of Operations of Splashlight. I usually start my day at the 35th Street studio, making sure everything is ready for the clients. I try to greet every single employee. I will probably stay at the 35th location until 10am to be able to say hi to some of the studio clients. Then I will go to our SoHo location, walk around again saying hi to all the employees and clients and again making sure everything is OK. Later I will probably have a meeting with one of the department managers. I try to meet with them at least every two weeks. I also have a quick call with our LA Office everyday. I try to be present in the floor and office as much as possible.

## **How did you become involved with Splashlight? What drew you to the photo production industry?**

I came to NY from Argentina in 2003 to continue my career as a photographer. I tried to find a job assisting and it wasn't easy without experience in NY. People recommended that I intern in photo studios to learn how the photo industry works here. I interned at Milk Studios and then moved to Splashlight and worked in the equipment room. I became the equipment manager, then was promoted to studio manager

and am now VP of Operations. I really like working behind the scenes: I like that by working with a strong team and without making a lot of noise you can give great service and accomplish a lot.

## **What do you like best about your job?**

The people that I work with, because there are so many different personalities in the different departments and they help you recharge every time. There are new things that happen everyday.

## **Any good anecdotes you can share?**

When the blackout happened in 2003, we called right away to get as much generator power as we could. We put all the generators in the street and ran extension cords through the entire studios for people to be able to finish their shoots.

## **Your ultimate dream?**

To own a boutique hotel that I can run with my wife.



**Name:** Gokhan Mutlu  
**Title:** Equipment Manager  
**Phone:** 646-536-9183  
**Email:** gmutlu@splashlight.com

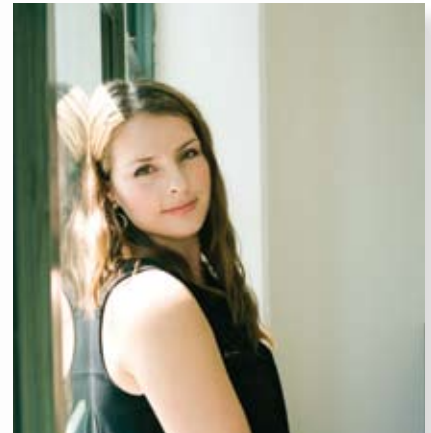
## **Please describe your role at Splashlight. What happens on a typical day?**

I am in charge of the Equipment Department. We ensure every photo crew in each studio and location gets top of the line equipment as quickly and efficiently as

possible. Our goal is for the photographer to focus on the creative side of the shoot rather than being concerned with the technical aspects. A typical day is filled with a lot of movement and excitement.

## **How did you become involved with Splashlight? What drew you to the photo production industry?**

I studied film and worked in that field for a while, but photography was my real passion. Building a career around my passion became an obvious choice. At Splashlight, I still learn something new everyday.



**Name:** Robyn Donnelly  
**Title:** Front Desk Manager  
**Phone:** 212.268.7247  
**Email:** rdonnelly@splashlight.com

## **Please describe your role at Splashlight. What happens on a typical day?**

My role as Front Desk Manager involves managing and scheduling all front desk staff to assure excellent client service, and working closely with the maintenance crew to maintain building facilities. I also coordinate special requests from clients, and manage the studio budget.

## **What do you like best about your job?**

The best part about my job is working with my fellow Splashlight staff members. We handle a lot of requests and I always feel like I am part of a great team.



**Name:** Jordan Sacks  
**Title:** Retouching Manager  
**Phone:** 646.536.9220  
**Email:** jsacks@splashlight.com

**Please describe your role at Splashlight.  
What happens on a typical day?**

I am the retouching manager here. My days vary depending on what projects we are working on. I work closely with clients reviewing work, going over new jobs, and helping them with any questions or problems. I also am very hands-on and will not hesitate to sit down and complete a project myself. My team and I are very close and I will sit with them and look at work on screen. I am always researching new technologies and trying to improve workflow.

**How did you become involved with  
Splashlight? What drew you to the photo  
production industry?**

I have always enjoyed photography. I started learning on my own in high school and then continued in college. While attending college I learned both conventional and digital photography. I enjoyed Photoshop and strived to learn more about printing, so I spent many a summer interning with photographers and printing shops. When I returned to school for my senior year I taught an intro to electronic imaging class. Since college I have worked at a few different shops, but none gave me all the opportunities that I have now at Splashlight. Working here allows me to interact earlier in the creative process. I can better help photographers and agencies this way.



**Name:** Aaron Limoges  
**Title:** Digital Capture Manager  
**Phone:** 646.536.9218  
**Email:** alimoges@splashlight.com

**Please describe your role at Splashlight.  
What happens on a typical day?**

As the Digital Capture Manager, I ensure that all of our digital equipment (computers and cameras) is up to date, functioning properly, and that all of our digital technicians are allocated appropriately on photo shoots. In addition, I oversee the Post Production department, which handles the digital asset management services and any processing or print requests from our clients.

**How did you become involved with  
Splashlight? What drew you to the photo  
production industry?**

I came here to further my knowledge of digital workflow and to gain more hands-on experience with high-end camera equipment. As much as I enjoy shooting, I realized some time ago that I was drawn more to the inherent solitary nature of it, rather than the big-production aspects of advertising or fashion shoots. While I will always continue to shoot my personal work, being in an environment that allows me to discuss what I love and stay current with photographic equipment and trends is the reason why I enjoy this side of the industry.