



# DAVID VESTAL: IN PASSING

Volume 11

Number 1

## December 2013



David Vestal  
Counsels Len Kowitz - 2004  
©Anthony Mournian

### *In this Issue*

- Al Weber Remembers David Vestal
- Len Kowitz Remembers David Vestal
- Russ Hepworth: Remembering David Vestal
- Free Shipping 'til January 2, 2014
- 2014 Summer Workshop Schedule
- December Newsletter Specials

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' FORMULARY, INC.  
 P.O. Box 950, 7079 Hwy 83 North  
 Condon, Montana, USA 59826-0950  
 E-Mail: [Anthony Mournian, editor](mailto:Anthony.Mournian@photoformulary.com)  
 Website: [Photoformulary.com](http://photoformulary.com)  
 Tel: (800) 922-5255 or (406) 754-2891  
 Fax: (406) 754-2896

### **Editor's Note:**

This is an interactive newsletter. To view larger versions of photographs, *please click on the thumbnail* and a larger image will automatically load.

**Editors Note:** In 2005 we asked Al Weber, friend and colleague of David Vestal for many decades, to write something about David for an article which was never published. With David's passing on December 5, 2103, there cannot be a more appropriate time to share Al's thoughts about David. We also asked Len Kowitz, David's "pen pal" for many years, and co-trustee of David's photographs, and Russ Hepworth, David's assistant in his most recent workshop at the Photographers' Formulary to share their thoughts about David, a remarkable teacher, friend and photographer.

### AL WEBER REMEMBERS DAVID VESTAL

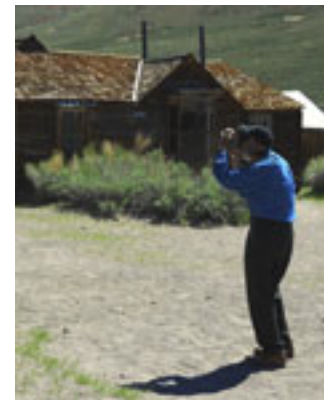
After knowing David Vestal long distance for 30 plus years, we finally closed the gap and got together. He came along on two of my workshops. . . .

I first met David when he came to Yosemite in 1967 and did an article for Popular Photography about the Yosemite Workshop called, *David in Adamsland*. It was a good article, and over the following years, actually decades, we swapped notes once in a while about things of which I can't remember.

When David put out his own newsletter, *Grump*, I became an immediate and avid subscriber. Now at issue 85, he plans to retire *Grump* at issue 100. Doing six a year, that means *Grump* will only be around another 2.5 years. As I've said repeatedly, it's the best newsletter going, and although I understand bringing it to a conclusion, I am sorry to see it go. There will be someone who attempts to copy and continue his venue, but rest assured, that will never happen. There is only one David Vestal, and there shall never be another. His two books, *The Craft of Pho-*

*tography* and *The Art of Black & White Enlarging*, are classics that belong in all photo libraries. However, having been in the Adams camp for some time, there are differences of opinion, and I just wasn't sure how this would play out in the field.

David eased into camp on 22 October, 2002, in his shiny new car, jammed with all the things most of us who travel carry along. We hadn't seen each other since 1967, and gosh, he wasn't the same as I remembered. The eyes and the old M-2 hanging around his neck however, gave him away. For two weeks we traversed Eastern California and over to Northern Arizona, car camping and sharing meals and other items of necessity. He joined easily with the two groups,



David Vestal  
©Russ Hepworth

both of which took to him quickly. At times, when we were not in accord, both sides were presented in a civil manner, and the students had the benefit of learning that there is more than one way to skin a cat.

In general these topics usually came down to things like light sources and print presentations. As a teacher, I've always been concerned that when a student deals with a single instructor, they wind up extending that teacher's point of view only. I like the idea of a student knowing they have options.

David Vestal is a quiet, low profile person who makes an obvious effort to be invisible. When talking with someone, anyone, he listens. His



Sid Grossman  
©David Vestal

response to questions is never quick, but comes after he has thought it over, put his ideas in order, editing all superfluous elements, then in a low voice, usually sparked with dry humor, states his answer. In my opinion, I doubt he makes any photographic statements without having tried it himself. Occasionally he quoted Ansel and countered him, based on his own testing. He wasn't sarcastic or argumentative, he simply gave those who were there the benefit of what he had done himself.

Looking back I doubt there are many who have written as consistently as David, and for a number of journals. He taught at the substantial Pratt Institute, for twenty years; no small feat. Low key and actually shy, it becomes clear how he has gotten where he is simply from the fact that he photographs continuously.



David Vestal  
1924-December 5, 2013  
©Len Kowitz

[David] rarely is without camera in hand, either the old M-2 with peeling leather or a crusty Olympus OM-4, easily 20 years old. He still loads his own bulk film, and has a rather intricate numbering



Minor White  
©David Vestal

and recording system. In a follow up letter, he told me he had shot 50 rolls of film during his western trip. His meter surprised me, a quite new combination Sekonic which I feel sure was used mostly in the incident mode. The proof of the pudding, as the old cliché goes, is in ... *aha!*



Harry Callahan  
©David Vestal

I think David and I have some common ground, particularly when it comes to personal values. After the workshops, he caravanned home with me and spent a couple of nights on our living room couch. I never was quite sure if he was happy or not, but since he didn't complain or throw things, I assume things were all right. I broached the subject of his joining me again, instead of as a guest, as a co-teacher, and he wasn't interested.

Workshops rob one of both time and energy, and both of us are no longer spring chickens. I suspect his reply was based partially at least in not wanting to spend time doing something that just wasn't



Eugene Smith  
©David Vestal

to his liking. I'm sorry about that, because I think we could work out a good co-teaching platform. No argument from me however, whatever his reasoning. So East came West and we tore around together.

I learned a lot and appreciated his presence, especially the last two days at Canyon de Chelle, when I got sick and he took over for me without a hitch. Although he photographed at all locations, I noticed that when some element of humanity was present, he seemed more animated. Quiet and remote old sand dunes don't seem to be his forte.

In summary, I would like to bring up an article David did in the September/October 2002 issue of *Photo Techniques*. The very brief article, titled, *The Case for Obscurity*, is directed at the vast majority of those who photograph. A pittance of us will



*Woods, Tuxedo, New York*  
©David Vestal

gain recognition, at least of any stature. Considering the numbers, your chance of a major show at MOMA or elsewhere with “those” types is quite remote. In a most thought provoking article, David addresses this issue and explains in typical Vestal clarity why it is OK to not only be obscure but to take advantage of the situation. Of all Vestal writings, for me this is the one piece that best reveals David Vestal, and made the deepest impression.

### LEN KOWITZ REMEMBERS DAVID VESTAL

I first met David when I wrote him a letter to ask if he would sell me a print.

Anne Tucker [Curator at Museum of Fine Arts, Houston] had mounted an exhibition of the work of Sid Grossman. I had seen a portrait of Grossman that David had taken when he was studying photography with Grossman at the Photo League in New York.

David was quick to respond and was asking what seemed a reason-

able price for the picture. I sent him a check. This all happened in 1992.

Shortly after that first encounter I wrote him a letter and asked if he would like to do a "deal". The deal was, I would send him a small check when I had a little extra and when he got enough checks he would send me one of his prints, his choice. I was very fortunate



*Ann Treer and Valise Cat*  
©David Vestal

because we continued “the deal” until just recently.

. . . I found David not to be the easiest person to get to know. I think he found it much easier to express himself through his writing



*From Back Window, W22nd St, NY*  
©David Vestal

than face to face. He was a great teacher as the letter I've included will show but he was very private and not prone to self promotion.

It's fair to say he might have been a little shy in front of strangers except when it came to talking photography.

Charlie Morrell once told me that he thought of David like a 'monk'. All David was really interested in was photography and making



*Rio de Janeiro, 1961*  
©David Vestal

photographs and he lived his life accordingly.

. . . [H]e read widely and often and was very curious and interested in learning new things.

It's not well known, but when he was a young man he tried to dance ballet. He was very serious about it but came to realize that he wasn't likely to make the first string of any good ballet company so he turned to the visual arts. Recently he made it clear that aging and its attendant loss of capacity was very troubling to him.

I have learned a great deal from David, both what to do and what not to do. I'm thrilled that I took the risk and wrote that first letter all those years ago.

### RUSS HEPWORTH:

#### REMEMBERING DAVID VESTAL

In 2008 Al Weber invited me to assist at his workshop in Carmel, California. My chief responsibility was to accompany and assist David Vestal for the duration of the workshop. We were put up on “Wildcat Hill” in the small studio Edward Weston built for Charis.



*David Vestal to Len Kowitz, 1992*  
©David Vestal



*W 22nd St., New York, NY*  
©David Vestal



Monte Serrate, Salvador-Bahia, Brazil, 1961  
©David Vestal

There at the close of each day we sat and talked through the night, not getting much sleep, but becoming close friends.

It was more than an honor and a privilege to know David. We went on together to do a couple more workshops including one at the Formulary in 2009. Weber and



Central Park, New York, 1961  
©David Vestal

Vestal served as two good reasons why workshops are so important. The remarkable depth of their character and experience, and their willingness to share things you'd

never find in a textbook were priceless.

David was at his best one-on-one with younger photographers. He looked for and demonstrated their strengths; never critical of shortcomings, he guided gently. In group sessions David had a tendency to digress. Though some would fault him for this, the wiser realization would be that his actual experience as a professional photographer for many decades in New York City was rich enough to make any side-trip a journey worth the taking. In my view David Vestal was a National Treasure. His history with, and contribution to American photography and to photo-education go down as legendary.

David and I were not fond of email so we corresponded on regular basis by US Mail. Right away we found a mutual fondness for was a surrealist game called "Exquisite Corpse" which we conducted routinely in our letters to one another. Another of our shared appreciations was for the French photographer Eugene Atget. Like Atget, David has left behind a multitude of images that I hope will not end up unexplored. Hope-



John Foote's Porch, Champaign, IL., 1954  
©David Vestal

fully fate will send a modern day Berenice Abbott to resurrect his life's work from obscurity, for the sake of photographic history.

Out there somewhere in the shadows, is a photographer wearing a dark coat and ball cap. Beneath his dark sun-glasses he scans the world around him. His black cam-



Flatiron Bldg, New York, NY 11/1963  
©David Vestal

era on its strap over his shoulders is always at the ready. Silently, from time to time, he lifts it and lets the shutter fly. The memory of David Vestal will live on.



*the* Photographers' Formulary

**'TIL MIDNIGHT, JANUARY 1, 2014 - FREE SHIPPING  
TO ANY POINT IN THE CONTINENTAL US**

**Order today and get  
free shipping!**

**To take advantage of  
this offer, Use the  
*Free13* Shipping  
Code with your order!**

**Offer ends at  
Midnight, January 1,  
2014**

---

Receive **free shipping via UPS Ground only**, to the shipping point in the Continental United States closest to you on any **prepaid order over \$115.00**. If you live in Europe, for example, you will receive **free shipping** to New York, then pay regular shipping to your order's ultimate destination.

We want everyone to enjoy **free shipping** from **December 3, 2013 to January 1, 2014**. We can't ship overseas or to Alaska or Hawaii, but we can give you the same break as all our customers here in the Continental United States.

---

Call the Photographers' Formulary to take advantage of our **Christmas Special**, and get **free shipping** on any **prepaid order over \$115.00** to the US shipping point closest to you. You'll pay regular shipping from the US shipping point closest to you to your shipment's ultimate destination, but you'll get exactly the same break as everyone in the Continental US. This offer does not include any HAZ-MAT charges or charges for any special handling.

The offer is good from **December 3, 2013 until January 1, 2014**. All prepaid telephone, fax, email or internet orders **over \$115.00 during this time period will receive the free shipping**.

Use the **Free13** Shipping Code with your order!

---

The offer expires midnight, January 1, 2014.

Retail orders only, please.




Call toll free, 800-922-5255. From outside the US, dial 406-754-2891. Send faxes to 406-754-2896. Our email is: [formulary@blackfoot.net](mailto:formulary@blackfoot.net).

Formulary office hours are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., MST, Monday-Friday. Formulary **Internet hours are 24/7, so order online!**

**Click here** to go directly to the Formulary Online Store.

The Formulary URL:  
<http://stores.photoformulary.com/StoreFront.bok>

*Happy Holidays  
from the  
Photographers' Formulary*

NEW**	April & May Introductory	<b><u>Our Introductory Workshop Series</u></b> Film Photography - April 25-27 Printing From Film Negatives- May 2-4 Alt Process Printing from Digital Negatives - May 9-11 with Ray Nelson		Week 7	August 3-8 2014	Daguerreotype A Contemporary Approach with Jerry Spagnoli	TBA with Tom Persinger
	June 8-13 2014	**Amazing Tri-Color Gum & Casein with Christina Z Anderson		Week 8	August 10-15 2014	iPhone and iPad Infrared Art with Theresa Airey	
Week 2	June 15-20 2014	** Everything Albumen with Zoe Zimmerman		Week 9	August 17-22 2014	Carbon Printing Using QTR Digital Negatives with Sandy King	
	June 22-27 2014	Alternative Process Printing with Digital Negatives with Ray Nelson			Week 10	August 31- Sept 5 2014	
Week 3				Week 11	September 28 Oct 2 2014	Photography and Lightroom workshop with Rick Sheremeta	
	July 13-18 2014	**Making a Personal Album or Journal, Start to Finish A Women's Retreat with Laura Blacklow			NEW**	October Introductory	<b><u>Our Introductory Workshop Series</u></b> Large Format Photography Oct 3-5 Printing From Film Negs- Oct 10-12 Alt Process Printing from Digital Negatives – Oct 17-19 with Ray Nelson
Week 5	July 20-25 2014	**TBA with Jane Goffe		NEW**		Register by March 31, 2014 and receive a 15% discount on your workshop tuition.  **Register and attend two classes consecutively and receive one night of your B&B stay free. Also receive a 10% Discount off the second week's tuition	
	July 27 -August 1 2014	Bookmaking with Anna Tomczak				Remember our bring a friend Discount 10% is available when you both sign up for the same workshop	

*Subject to change as we're still working on this schedule*



# DECEMBER 2013 NEWSLETTER SPECIALS

Specials for the darkroom. All items *limited to stock on hand*

## TANNIC ACID (Cyanotype toning)



**Cat. No.: 10-1453**  
Regular \$5.50  
**25% off:**  
Your price: \$4.13  
Promo Code: D1453

<http://stores.photoformulary.com/-strse-725/Tannic-Acid/Detail.bok>

## ORIGINAL CYANOTYPE (DRY)



**Cat. No.: 10-0090**  
Regular \$19.95  
**25% off: -\$4.99**  
Your price: \$14.96  
Promo Code: D0090

The **Formulary's Original Cyanotype Kit** is one of the oldest photographic processes and one of the least expensive. Cyanotypes have a long full scale and distinctive blue color. The process can be used to produce a pale white image on a blue background or a blue image on a white background. This process is a contact print process and can be transferred to a variety of media; paper, cloth, leather, ect. This kit will produce 24 8x10 prints. Liquid kit comes packaged as 500 ml each of solutions A and B in black bottles.

### Chemicals Contained in this kit

Chemical	Amount
Arrowroot starch	20 grams for Sizing
Potassium ferricyanide	40 gm Sensitizer B
Ferric ammonium citrate (green)*	100 gm Sensitizer A
Potassium dichromate	1 gm Contrast Control

<http://stores.photoformulary.com/-strse-226/Original-Cyanotypes-Liquid-%26/Detail.bok>

## PREMIER 4-1 MAGNETIC EASEL

**4-in-1 8x10 Magnetic Easel**  
**Cat. No.: 14-0237**  
Regular \$39.95  
**35% off: \$25.97!**  
Promo Code: A0237



The Premier 4-1 Easel has perfectly aligned masks positioned for 1/4" margins. No adjustments needed. Magnetic latching locks instantly, keeping paper secure. Special focusing base. All steel construction. Rubber feet prevent slipping. Accommodates four most used paper sizes: 8x10", 5x7", 3.5x5" and 2.5x3.25".

With this easel, and a bit of practice, you can achieve perfect, borderless prints. Or you can center the exposure on the paper, resulting in a bordered print. The patented angles of the Delta retainer bars assure precision registration of each sheet of paper. The top easel bar is gently sloped and the left edge is flat to allow sliding of the paper in and out with ease. The non-skid bottom prevents the easel from slipping out of position. Each easel comes with three magnets: a 4, 8 and 10. Use one, two or three magnets to hold your paper in place.

<http://stores.photoformulary.com/-strse-820/Premier-4-dsh-1-Magnetic-Easel/Detail.bok>

## CRANE'S 90 LB COTTON RAG PAPER

**Cat. No.: 07-0156**



Regular \$12.95  
**25% off: -3.24**  
Your price: \$9.71  
Promo Code: D0156

Crane's 90 lb Cotton

Rag Paper is recommended for alternative process printing by expert printers. It is 100% cotton fiber, acid-free and neutral PH. It is available pre-packaged in 9x11 and 11.5x14.5 sizes, as well as full sheets. We can also custom cut to any desired size less than 26x40.

The larger sizes of paper 26x40 will require additional shipping added to them when shipped. Due to the size of the packaging our website isn't able to calculate that..

<http://stores.photoformulary.com/-strse-235/Cranes-90-lb-Cotton/Detail.bok>

## BORAX (Cyanotype toning)



**Cat. No.: 10-0260**  
**100 grams**  
Regular \$4.95  
**25% off: -\$1.24**  
Your price: \$3.71  
Promo Code: D0260

<http://stores.photoformulary.com/-strse-378/Borax/Detail.bok>