

Perfect shots

Helping shutterbugs hone their skill and start a business is a dream award-winning photographer Louis Pang hopes to achieve.

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THEY say a picture speaks a thousand words and in the case of wedding photographer Louis Pang, it speaks in many different languages.

In his fledgling two-year career as a professional wedding photographer, Pang has scored jobs to shoot weddings all around the country as well as in faraway locales like the Philippines, Hong Kong, Australia, India and Singapore. He's due for a shoot in the Netherlands in September and in New York next year.

Not only that, the 35-year-old recently won accolades in the Wedding and Portrait Photographer International (WPPI) 2008 Awards of Excellence print competition held in Las Vegas, Nevada. His print, entitled *Torch Bearers*, which was taken on a wedding shoot in Rajasthan, India, last year, came in second in the Non-Wedding Photojournalism category.

"It was a proud and humbling experience to win an award alongside some of the most respected photographers in the world.

"I kind of knew that I had some talent for photography but it is quite something else to win an international award ... especially since I have known and read about some of the photographers who have won (in the past).

"Really, to hear my name and my country's name announced that night in Las Vegas was really moving," said the Tawau-born photographer who is currently based in Kota Kinabalu.

Pang wasn't just the only Asian to win an award in the competition this year, he is also the only Malaysian to ever win at the WPPIs.

His winning entry was photographed at the gate of Neemrana Fort Palace.

"I was waiting for the groom and his entourage to arrive and I noticed these torch bearers standing against the clay wall of the fort. It was very rustic - the whole setting was so rich in history and culture ... it was really beautiful. I stood and aimed at the torch bearers and waited for them to look at me so that I could capture their expression as they saw me taking the shot," he explained.

In total, more than 2,650 prints in 19 different categories were submitted by photographers from all over the world this year. The WPPI organises the largest trade show/education convention in the United States for professional photographers every year and the Awards of Excellence (dubbed the "Oscars for wedding photographers") are presented each year.

And, just recently Pang was notified that he won first place in the WPPI's biannual 8x10 print competition in the "Humour" category.

His winning picture, titled *Pink Bikini* captured a groom in a compromising position: wearing a pink bikini and performing an "erotic dance" as part of the "pre-wedding games" (the groom and his men have to play before he picks up his bride) in Chinese weddings.

"It was taken at the destination wedding of Martina and Gabriel in Cebu (the Philippines). In one of the games, Gabriel had to put on a



The *Torch Bearers*, the shot that won Louis Pang the second prize in the Wedding & Portrait Photographer International 2008 Awards of Excellence print competition held in Las Vegas in March. Pang waited patiently for the torch bearers to look at him to capture their expression as they him taking the shot.



Award-winning photographer Louis Pang.

pink bikini and perform an erotic dance. A bridesmaid, mimicking a paying patron (at a strip club), stuffed some tissue paper into his bikini strap. I thought it was such a funny picture because it made me laugh every time I looked at it."

Pang's involvement in photography was accidental, or perhaps, a case of providence taking charge of one's life. A journalist with the *Borneo Post* in the late 1990s, Pang was told by his bosses that he had to start taking his own pictures at news assignments.

"That's when I started taking photographs. Apart from my own assignments, I used to follow other photographers to practise taking photos ... I did not care what events I had to shoot because hanging out and learning from professional photographers was just fun.

"I was shooting more and entered several district level competitions and won," said Pang at a recent interview in Kuala Lumpur.

From journalism, his passion began to focus on photo-journalism and the ability to capture a story in a single (picture) frame.

"At the time, I wanted badly to work for

(news) wire agencies ... to be able to shoot in war zones and all that. I tried but I was not able to achieve my dream. That forced me to question where I wanted to go with my photography. I felt very strongly that my work had to mean something ... I had to leave a legacy behind," he recollected.

However, after getting married, Pang realised that his dream was not practical.

"I realise that being a news or correspondent photographer was not what I wanted because my life would never really be in my hands. If there was a job, I would have to drop everything and go ... and anything could happen," he said.

After months of soul searching (while doing various commercial and print shoots, of course), Pang realised that some of his best work was at weddings.



Award-winning photographer Louis Pang loves capturing a story in a single frame.

"I loved meeting people and interacting with them and trying to get across an entire story in a single shot. So I decided to focus on wedding photography," he said.

He started off small in his hometown of Tawau even though his dream was to become a world-renowned photographer. To extend his reach, Pang created a first-rate website (www.louispang.com). He posted his work on the site and stated his willingness to shoot weddings anywhere.

"Bookings started coming in from all over ... from Penang to KL, within two or three months. Soon word spread and I was tagged as a national wedding photographer! I started a blog where I posted pictures of my work and wrote about them as well as the event. This was to show that I could consistently shoot good pictures as well as to put a face behind the name and the photos," he said.

As passionate as he is about his craft though, Pang is also keen to share his experiences and knowledge with other photographers or budding photographers.

This he does through his blog and also his workshops on photography which he does in collaboration with *Click!* magazine. His workshops – titled *Take Back Your Life* and *From Ordinary to Extraordinary* – are to help photographers not only hone their skills but also develop business acumen to run a successful business.

"If you have your own photography business, you basically are the receptionist, the janitor, the photographer, the accountant, the advertising person ... it's often a one-man show and you have to be savvy. If you don't know how to manage your business well, you will be buried by work and this will eventually kill your passion for photography. You need to have a business plan or at least know how to best manage your business.

"Also, while the Internet is a great platform to learn about photography, there is a lot of junk too. You can be self-taught and learn from Internet forums but practice does not always make perfect ... sometimes it is better to pay. It is more cost effective," said Pang.

Apart from weddings, Pang's other passion



Another example of Pang's wedding photography.

is shooting people whom society deems unfortunate.

"I recently shot two autistic children ... that was something I have never done before and it was a challenge. I love taking such pictures because it makes me appreciate God's creations ... we may think they are unfortunate but in actual fact, I think we are sometimes more unfortunate!

"Once I shot a grandmother who was in the final days of her life ... her grandchildren wanted to take a picture of her before she passed away and so we arranged a photo shoot.

"Later, her grandchildren told me that she was so happy and excited about the shoot that she woke up really early and got dressed up for the shoot.

"Sometimes it's not about taking pretty pictures ... photos can also restore hope and give dignity to people," said Pang.

Pang has an exhaustive list of things he wants to achieve in his career as a photographer.

"I want to get into photography education more ... this way I can combine my skills as a writer and a photographer and put them to good use. Of course, I want to win more awards and help others fulfil their dreams."

His immediate plan is to beef up his blogsite (<http://www.louispang.com/blog>) into a resource site for photographers.

"It is the thinking process that makes a good shot and I want to share that," said Pang.