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Picture Perfect

Vision problem forces photographer to see world in a different light

By Sylvie Belmond

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COOL VIBE—Photographer Glenn Cohen demonstrates an eye for the unusual in the two pictures above. At top, he crops in perfectly on a set of eyes from a mural in downtown Los Angeles. And near USC, the iconic Felix auto dealership sign framed by a deep blue sky.

For Dr. Glenn Cohen, the world is a pictorial playground.

A Westlake Village hand surgeon, Cohen relies on exceptional hand-eye coordination to treat his patients. And he also puts these skills to use behind the camera to transform everyday scenes into photographic artwork.

Be it a lone telephone booth in England, a puddle of water on a cobblestone street in Rome, or the sun setting on the Pacific Ocean, each of Cohen's pictures captures a distinct moment in time.

"Every subject is available. Whatever I see that is interesting and will translate into something I think someone else can feel by looking at my photo, I'll take a picture of it," said Cohen, 48.

While accompanying his wife and daughter on a recent shopping trip in downtown L.A., Cohen brought his camera along looking for fields of focus. Some of the pictures he took tell about life on the street. Others, featuring inanimate objects such as buses and mannequins, emphasize illumination, color and symmetry.

Just like his work as a surgeon, Cohen's photography reflects a desire to get it just right, said Tammy Bleck, an Oak Park resident who was recently treated by Cohen.



Watching a photographic slide show on a big screen TV in Cohen's waiting room, Bleck said she knew straightaway that she was in good hands for her medical needs.

"Anybody who has that kind of eye for detail and beauty also has an understanding of the human soul," she said.

"He gets what life and beauty is about, and how ordinary is extraordinary. The photos are amazingly beautiful," Bleck said. "For me it transcended that, and it told me he was detail-oriented, compassionate and has a vision."

Architecture, people, landscapes and seascapes: all of it is game for Cohen's camera. His photos transform ordinary scenes into images that contain a blend of both the noticeable and not so noticeable.

"It's an insight into who I am and how I see things," said Cohen—who nearly lost his sight when he was younger.

Precious vision

While attending UC San Diego, Cohen began experiencing eye problems due to the contact lenses he was wearing. He'd been diagnosed with severe corneal abrasions and was told he might need multiple surgeries to prevent permanent damage.

"I could not even look at a candle without my eyes burning. Six world-class ophthalmologists could not make sense of it," Cohen said. But after a year of struggle, Cohen said, his eyes healed themselves and his vision was restored, allowing him to pursue his two passions: surgery and photography.

"I see details that I never could see before my injury," he said.

Cohen grew up in Brooklyn and New Jersey. His family moved to Calabasas when he was 12.

After graduating from college, he took a year off to travel to England and Israel. Upon returning to the U.S., he went to medical school in Brooklyn and worked at both Tufts New England and USC medical centers as an orthopedic surgeon.

Cohen, his wife Tricia and their two daughters live in Westlake Village. He owns an orthopedic practice in Thousand Oaks specializing in the treatment of the hands, wrists and elbows.



BLACK AND WHITE AND COOL ALL OVER
—Above, even without color, London's famous red double-decker bus is recognizable.



A rare moment without traffic on San Francisco's Market Street.

While surgery and photography share certain similarities, Cohen takes a different approach to each discipline.

"I became a surgeon because I want to fix things and I want people to get better (reasonably quickly). With photography, I walk around, take my photos and I don't really spend too much time setting up things," he said.

Cohen said his patients' positive feedback has inspired him to take his art to the next level.

Dr. Mary Margaret Thomes, a retired faculty member at California Lutheran University, appreciates the doctor's discerning eye.

"He selects interesting themes and uses these to create photos that have a distinct impact. He has a wonderful sense of composition and of lighting," Thomes said.

Cohen's photography website is www.glenndavid.photography.

His orthopedic practice is located in Westlake Village:

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