



FROM CLICHÉ TO MISSION CRITICAL.

How stock photography is evolving in beauty, breadth, and efficiency.



Stock photos get a bad rap sometimes. We've all seen images of women smiling inexplicably at their forkfuls of salad, or an unnaturally giddy customer service representative standing by. "Some stock photography just looks like stock photography," says May Curry, a graphic design veteran with almost 20 years of experience.¹

But stock photography has always been an essential part of the designer's toolkit. When used right, it helps brands make just the right impact. Today, collections are evolving to meet designers' most pressing needs—to keep pace with visual trends; to create unique, attention-grabbing images in a visually cluttered marketplace; and to do all of this quickly and within budget.

Let's take a look at stock's rapid transformation, and how it's helping designers push their creativity.



Stocking up—The evolution of STOCK.

Stock hasn't always been the designer's most efficient tool. Years ago, when you needed a stock image, you dialed your local stock house and described what you needed.

Then you waited while a staffer searched their library, and delivered a batch of slides with images that might work. It was expensive. And it took a long time. The advent of CD stock collections sped things up considerably—design houses stored file cabinets full of them, catalogued by a good record keeping system, or someone with an impressive memory. Then, web-based libraries delivered another huge leap in productivity. You could even argue that online stock collections have sped up content production and raised expectations for even shorter deadlines—by making high-quality images quickly available fast to everyone.

Right now, designers everywhere are facing the same demands—they need to create more content, more quickly, for more platforms every day. And as the pace quickens, the standards get higher, too. It's not easy to grab attention in a visually saturated world and consumers are telling us that they're more choosy than ever about how they spend their limited time. Our recent State of Content research found that 59 percent of consumers would rather engage with beautifully designed content than simple content. Add to the mix that in today's global marketplace, there's an increased need for localized content. All of these factors are driving a significant expansion and refinement of stock imagery.

“The way tech has changed and the way the whole process has sped up, people don't allow for the time to do a custom shoot. I think this has been a huge driving force for why stock photography has become so heavily used. Everything is moving so much faster than it did when I started. The deadline is sooner.”²

MAY CURRY
Graphic Design Veteran

In the stacks—Stock libraries rise to the **CHALLENGE.**

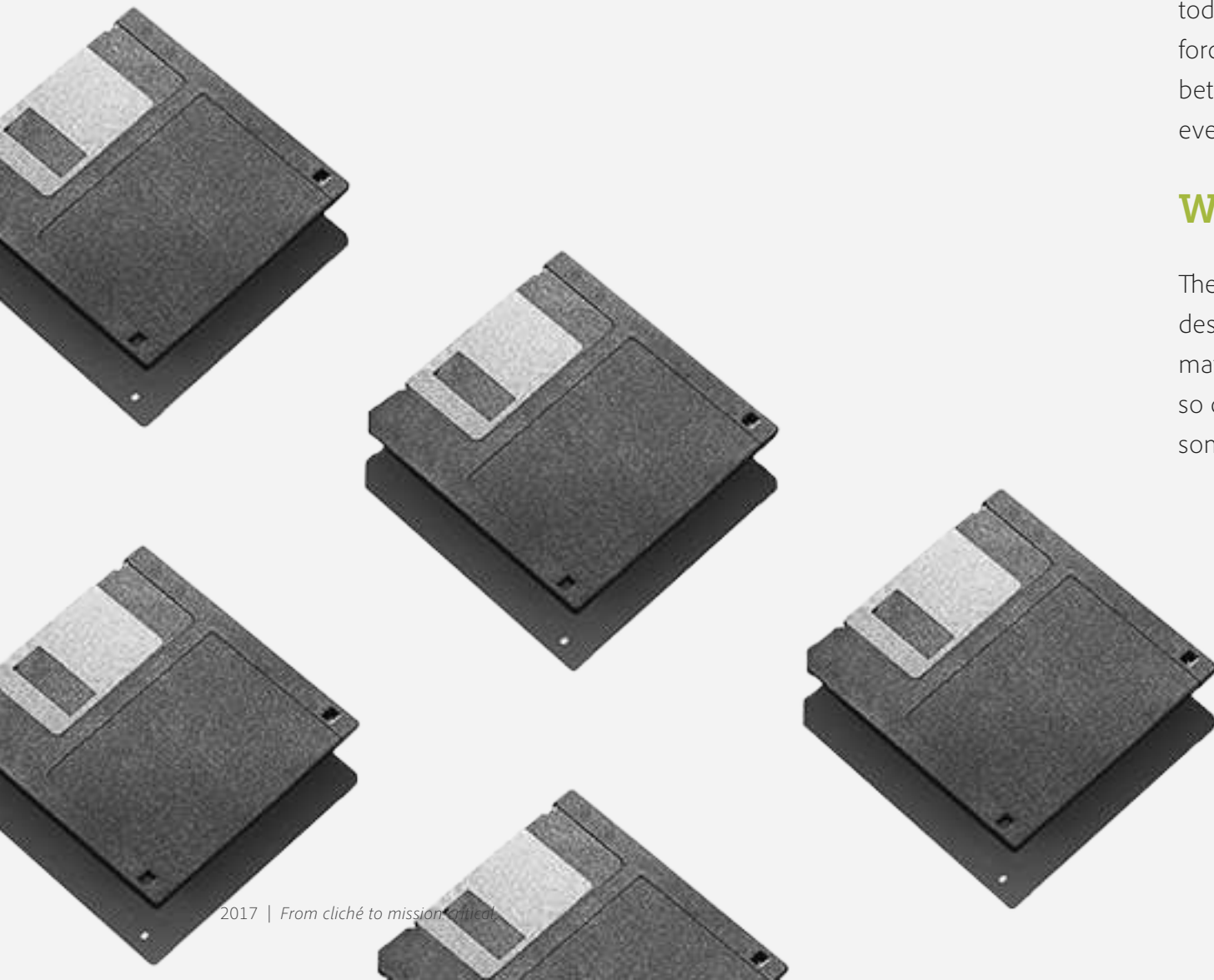
As designers demand more from stock, stock collections are growing to deliver greater breadth and quality. In the most innovative cases, this means not just offering assets, but curating them.

The biggest challenge for libraries today is to find “authentic” images. Authentic images feel natural, not forced. Their details and styling are modern and all of the technical aspects work—a close eye to composition, focus, noise, lighting, and color casts are all critical.

A stock library is different from an art gallery. It’s about images with an audience, images that will meet a need for designers. And the libraries that are emerging today shouldn’t include images that fall into stock clichés: white backgrounds, forced smiles, cheesy moments. The guiding principle is to find the intersection between art and commercial value, and fill that space with images that shine, even when they stand alone.

White space.

There are always exceptions, even when it comes to clichés. For example, designers can do a lot with images against stark-white-backgrounds as raw materials. Adobe Stock offers these kinds of images at lower price points so designers can break them apart, and use them as components to create something new.





Using the trends at your fingertips.

Trends are key. Designers want fresh images that fit the trends their clients notice, but still push boundaries in attention-getting ways. Stock libraries that understand this build categories around ideas that users search for most. When this is done successfully, you can find breathtaking colors, angles, textures, and ideas—an invitation into a catalog of new ideas.

Current trends are also a unique window into broader cultural ideas and what designers are thinking about right now. For example, the following trending types of images suggest that as a culture, we're still exploring our relationship with technology:

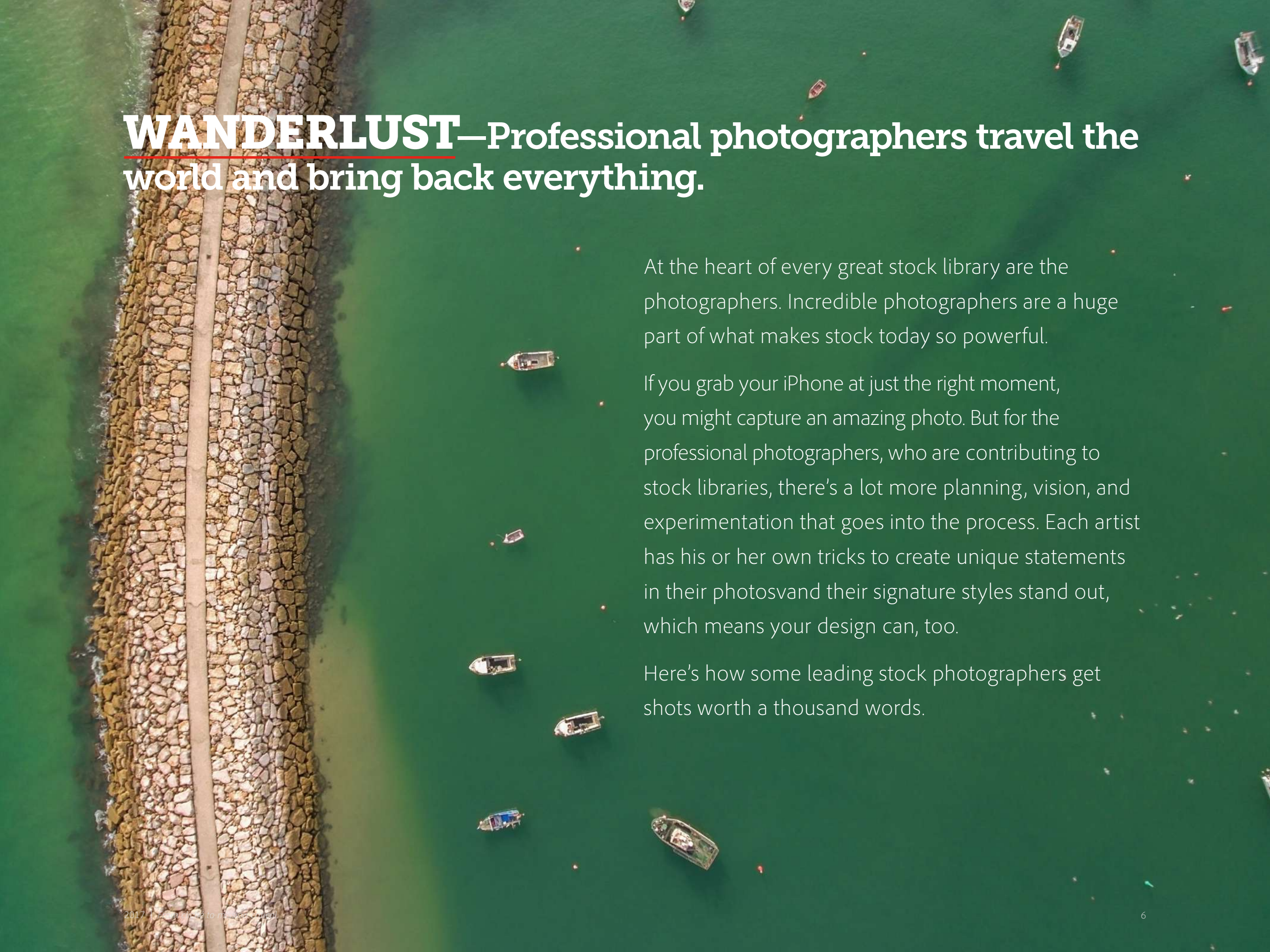
- Natural settings where the digitally addicted can "detox."
- Clean, striking, well-organized, minimalist imagery.
- Images of technology's latest developments reaching an ever-growing audience, for example, a child in a virtual reality headset.
- Low-poly style graphics—these are polygon mesh images used for 3D computer graphics.
- Illustrations that take us back to the basics, like artisanal sketches done with paper and pencil.

Some trends are stable year after year, even on a global scale. Business, graphic backgrounds, and families are perennial top searches. Of them all, Christmas (*Weihnachten* in Germany, *Noel* in France, *Natale* in Italy, *Natal* in Brazil, *Navidad* in Spain, and クリスマス in Japan) is the most popular keyword used to search stock globally, all year round.

Finding the needle in the haystack.

Searching for images by keywords can be a maddening guessing game. This is another area where stock libraries are evolving quickly. When you find an image that is not quite right, you can now use visual search to find similar options. It makes a lot of sense to search for images using images—because then there's no need to translate a visual concept into a written one.

Here's an example of how it works: A designer for an auto manufacturer is looking for ideal landscapes for their cars. They need the right time of year, a particular vantage point, and a specific setting that's also just a little generic. This could quickly turn into search-term gymnastics, but the designer deftly avoids this by using an image from an unrelated campaign in a visual search. They find what they need in moments.

An aerial photograph of a long, narrow stone pier extending from the left side of the frame into a body of green water. The pier is constructed from rough-hewn stones and has a smooth concrete walkway running down its center. Several small boats are scattered across the water, some near the pier and others further out. The water has a vibrant green hue, and the overall scene is captured from a high angle, looking down.

WANDERLUST—Professional photographers travel the world and bring back everything.

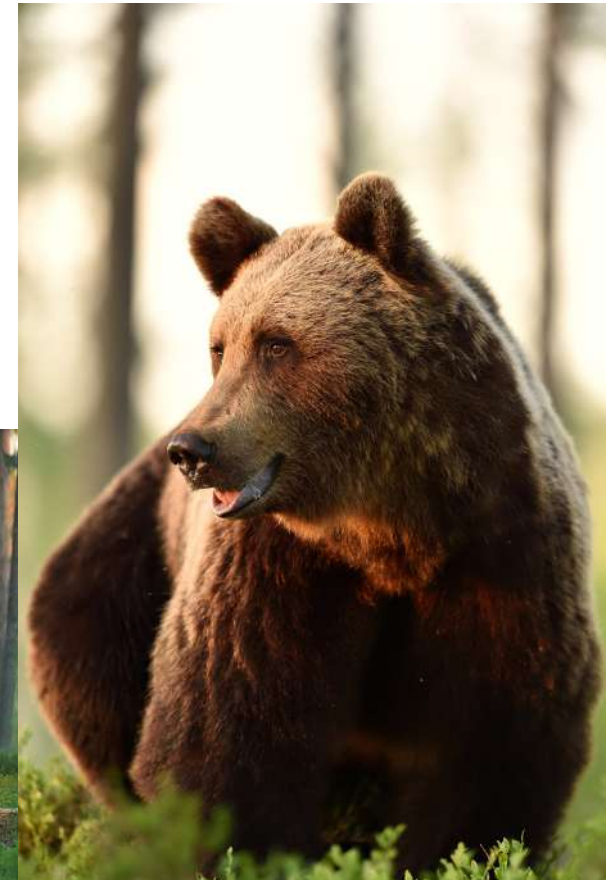
At the heart of every great stock library are the photographers. Incredible photographers are a huge part of what makes stock today so powerful.

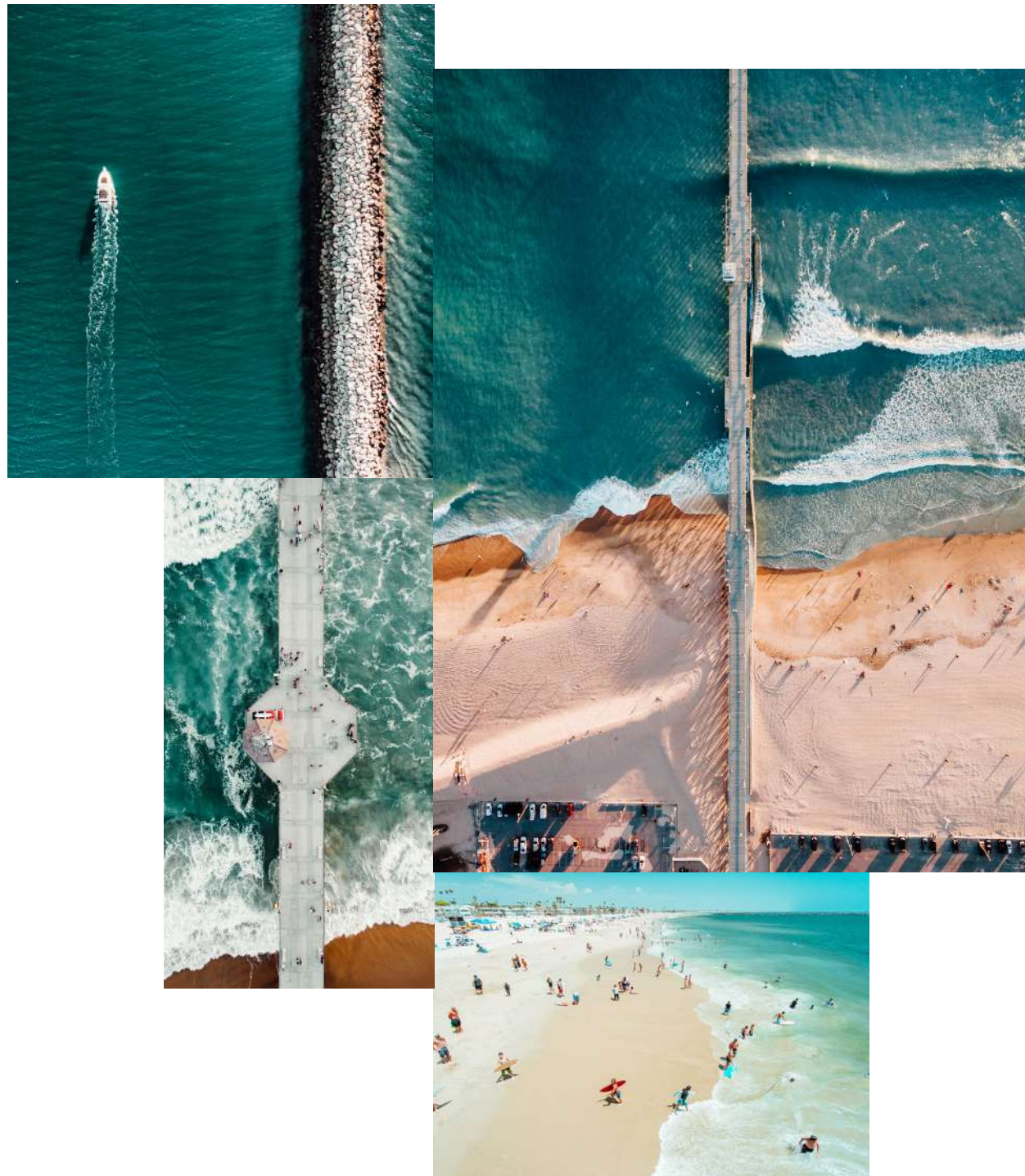
If you grab your iPhone at just the right moment, you might capture an amazing photo. But for the professional photographers, who are contributing to stock libraries, there's a lot more planning, vision, and experimentation that goes into the process. Each artist has his or her own tricks to create unique statements in their photos and their signature styles stand out, which means your design can, too.

Here's how some leading stock photographers get shots worth a thousand words.

Erik Mandre — Capturing authentic wildlife moments.

Erik Mandre immerses himself in the wilderness, and that's how he captures images of tranquil landscapes and animals at play, especially those of his all-time favorite subjects—brown bears. He's worked hard to learn how to photograph them doing what they do when no one's watching. "Of course every bear is an individual and you never know what goes on in their minds," says Mandre. "But usually brown bears are afraid of humans and go away immediately as they smell or hear the human. So the only way to get close to them is using a special hide, which eliminates most of our odor and, of course, makes us invisible for them."³ Mandre gets his shots in the late evening or early morning when the animals are most active and the light is stunning. He also revels in misty conditions—it's part of how he captures his trademark mysterious, peaceful mood.





Ryan Longnecker — Documenting the California coast and the world.

As a travel and documentary photographer, Ryan Longnecker captures images from angles you've never seen before—by using drones. "Having new technology has awakened this sleeping part of my artist soul, the same kind of feeling I had when I first held a camera," he says.⁴ This adds a challenge—avoiding the flat feeling that often comes with drone photography. Longnecker's solution involves a lot of work color-tweaking the shadows and highlights, but also recognizing what makes drone photos unique, and embracing it. "When you pull up that high and you shoot straight down, you get this two-dimensional aspect of photography that often people don't want. But for me, there was something that felt very 'painterly' to the fact that it was shot straight down and everything got lost in the scale of it."⁵ It's the sense of scale, and the dizzying height he captures, that makes Longnecker's drone series unmistakably unique.

Lindsay Adler — Stunning the audience with high fashion.

Lindsay Adler first picked up a camera when she was a teenager, and it changed her life. "It was a natural extension of myself," she says.⁶ She went about learning everything she could about the art and business of photography—she was determined to make a name for herself in the industry. Since her early days, that's just what she's done. She's worked for top ad agencies and for magazines like *Marie Claire* and *Elle*. Her signature style is bold and packed with energy. Take, for example, her photo shoot with a dancer. She dressed her model in a long, flowing tutu and then poured bags and bags of flour on her. As the dancer began to move, the flour flew into the air, creating an other-worldly sense of movement. "In fashion photography, your goal is to stop people in their tracks and make them look twice, whether it's an advertisement, a billboard, or a fashion editorial," says Adler. "Every day, we are bombarded with thousands of images. If you don't capture people's attention, it's like you didn't shoot anything at all."⁷



ROCK the stock—Designers' challenges, tricks, and triumphs with stock photography.

Because of the way stock libraries and the artists who contribute to them have evolved, the way you use stock imagery in your designs can evolve too. Stock doesn't have to be backup or a compromise. We asked designers how they make that first decision to go with stock, and they told us that time and budgets tip the scales: "Truthfully, stock is usually *the* option," says Curry. "I would say that 95 percent of the time we're going to use stock because of cost and schedules. There's just not enough time in the budget to pay for custom photography, and not enough time in the schedule."⁸



Control and choice can also seal the deal for stock over a custom shoot. Brian Barrus, a designer with 18 years in the industry, explains, "When you find a stock photo that fits a given project, you are buying the exact photo you need. You're finding every detail ahead of time, whereas if you hire a photographer, one of the downsides is that you are *hoping* that they will achieve the exact photo you need...sometimes it's a perfect fit, and sometimes you get results that aren't what you had in mind."⁹ Since stock is so often the best option, we asked designers about some of their top tips for making it work.

Be open to serendipity.

One pro tip for designers is to keep an open mind when you search for stock assets. It's a natural impulse to come to your desk with an idea, and then search with just a few keywords. But a lot of creativity can happen if you take the time to explore a library. Searching in unexpected theme categories, or trying visual search to move a few steps away from an image that's almost right can take a designer beyond the original vision in delightful and unexpected ways.

Create an original.

Another vision-expanding strategy is to set aside the search for the perfect image. In fact, selecting portions of multiple images, then reconfiguring them with other elements and stock assets, can turn stock into something completely original.

Remove distractions.

When it comes to selling a client or a room full of colleagues on an idea, designers have to show their work in the best possible light. This is when watermarks can become a designer's worst enemy. "A watermark is okay if it's a small, interior inset image, but when you're trying to sell a concept, especially for a cover, it gets really distracting," says Curry. "It's hard to make a sell on an idea if it doesn't look the best that it can. The client doesn't really have the vision to see, 'Okay, when this is high resolution, and it doesn't have a watermark on it, it's going to look really good.'"¹⁰

If possible, it's best to use stock libraries that have discrete watermarks, or even better, that allow you to use un-watermarked, high-resolution images before you make your final commitment to license them. This can make the difference between a frustrating design meeting and a productive one.

Make a masterpiece.

We challenged four prominent artists to re-create lost or stolen masterpieces of art using only their technical wizardry and Adobe stock photography. It wasn't just a fun project, it demonstrated how designers can alter and combine simple stock images to make something profound.

[See for yourself how they did it.](#)





spree

CASE STUDY

Powered by Adobe Stock, Spree Reinvents E-Commerce

When Media24, a major publisher in South Africa, moved into the digital world, they decided to create a unique fusion—a fashion publication that’s also an e-commerce site. They call it *Spree*, and it’s a big hit. With their success came a sudden need to produce a constant stream of creative, elegant content to keep shoppers engaged. The Creative Cloud—with Adobe Stock—became their essential toolkit. They use stock images for critical design and creative elements. “Adobe Stock is less expensive, but the benefits are much more than cost savings,” says Ryk Benadé, Spree’s art director. “I can download a comp and add it to every piece of content in a campaign: banners, newsletters, pages, and more. Once I get approval, it just takes one click to license the image and the image automatically updates across all creatives. It’s saving us time and money, both of which are hugely important to Spree.”¹¹

In stock—From cliché to **MISSION CRITICAL.**

Stock has come a long way. The cliché images are certainly still out there (handshake in front of a white background, anyone?), but libraries have caught up to designer's needs with a deep breadth of high quality images, visual search, and significant efficiency improvements for the enterprise.

Gone are the days when designers settle for clunky stock libraries. Today, stock imagery can play a crucial role in your content development, spurring on creativity and efficiency at the same time.



ADOBE can help.

We asked Pfeiffer Reports to run the numbers on how Adobe Stock stacks up against other web-based stock libraries for efficiency. They found that Adobe Stock's tight integration with Creative Cloud applications, like Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign, made working with Adobe Stock up to ten times more efficient.¹²

With a standard web library, designers begin by downloading a low-resolution watermarked image to use in a preliminary design. Once the concept is approved, designers have to license the high-resolution image and manually replace it in their layout. Pfeiffer's study found that this process took almost three minutes for just one image. But Adobe Stock eliminates these steps since the image can be licensed and automatically replaced within the application—this reduces the time for the same task to less than 30 seconds.

As a designer's workflow gets more complicated, the time-savings for Adobe Stock grow. Say a designer wants to crop, color-correct, or otherwise modify a low-res file in the initial design phase. With a standard web library, this means all of the changes have to be recorded and

then manually re-applied into the final, high-res version. But with Adobe Stock, the changes are automatically applied when the designer licenses the image. This reduces a five-minute process down to 28 seconds. And up to 10x efficiency gains adds up quickly when you consider the sheer volume of images a designer might use, even in a single piece—each layer of design complexity multiplies the value of Adobe's efficiency.

Adobe Stock is also optimized for efficient management of assets across an enterprise. Companies can manage all assets centrally, assign a number of images to teams or individual users, determine who can use images, quickly track which images have been used, give and revoke designer access, and centrally manage image licensing. These management features help an enterprise move quickly and wisely.

Today the Adobe Stock library offers over 60 million carefully curated photos, graphics, videos, templates, 3D assets, including the Premium collection's elegant, stereotype-busting stock. Plus two new asset categories, 3D and templates, are designed to help users kick-start new projects. And everything is integrated into the Creative Cloud, where designers are already working. Our library takes designers around the world, invigorates their creativity, and powers them at peak efficiency.

See a selection of our images and learn more about Adobe Stock for the enterprise [here](#).



Up to
10x
more efficient than
other web stock

60m
images, graphics,
videos, 3D graphics,
& templates

Adobe Stock for enterprise makes it easy for teams to search and license world-class assets inside Adobe Creative Cloud apps—all while meeting the critical licensing requirements of large organizations. For more information about how your team can get started with Adobe Stock for enterprise, visit www.adobe.com/go/stock.

- 1 May Curry, personal interview, October 27 2016.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 The Adobe Stock Team, "Behind the Image: The King of the Taiga, Brown Bear Photography with Erik Mandre," Adobe Creative Cloud, September 13 2016, <https://blogs.adobe.com/creativecloud/behind-the-image-the-king-of-the-taiga-brown-bear-photography-with-erik-mandre/>.
- 4 The Adobe Stock Team, "Behind the Image: Mastering Drone Photography with Ryan Longnecker," Adobe Creative Cloud, August 30 2016, <https://blogs.adobe.com/creativecloud/behind-the-image-mastering-drone-photography-with-ryan-longnecker/>.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 The Adobe Stock Team, "Behind the Image: Mastering High Concept Fashion Photography Shoots with Lindsay Adler," Adobe Creative Cloud, August 9 2016, <https://blogs.adobe.com/creativecloud/behind-the-image-mastering-high-concept-fashion-photography-shoots-with-lindsay-adler/>.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 May Curry, personal interview, October 27 2016.
- 9 Brian Barrus, personal interview, October 28 2016.
- 10 May Curry, personal interview, October 27 2016.
- 11 "Inspiring the Hottest Looks. Media24 Expands Business from Editorial into E-commerce with Spree," <http://www.images.adobe.com/content/dam/Adobe/en/customer-success/pdfs/media24-spree-case-study.pdf>.
- 12 "Adobe Stock: Boosting Design Efficiency through Integration," Pfeiffer Consulting, 2016.



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