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Halley Ganges of Go-Studios

By Louisa J. Curtis



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This month I'm excited to share my conversation with photographer [Halley Ganges](#), owner of [Go-Studios](#) and a dear old friend, who I met years ago when I was working for American Showcase and *Archive* magazine. We hadn't seen one another in quite a while, but he just so happened to email me about his brand new penthouse studio space, so it was a perfect opportunity to not only catch up with him, but also interview him for this month's article.

When I first met Halley, he was a still life photographer in a relatively small studio on 36th Street. When his lease came up for renewal though, business wasn't exactly booming but he knew that he didn't want to give up his studio, or have to start up a completely different business altogether, so instead of downsizing he went looking for an even larger space that he could also turn into a rental studio. It was a way to keep his own studio and make an income at the same time.

Although it was a big leap in faith, his advantage at that time was there were actually more studios available because many photographers were being forced to give up their spaces due to the high running costs. So that's exactly what he did. He went out and found a beautiful all natural daylight studio on West 29th Street. It wasn't one studio though - it was the entire floor, with an L-shaped floor plan, and one that could be divided into 3 separate shooting spaces, one of which had all south-facing windows. And thus Go-Daylight Studios was born.

When I went to sit down with Halley for this interview, he invited me to visit him in the new space – an absolutely fabulous, and uniquely private penthouse studio that he and his good friend Kevin Goon have been building together for the last year and a half. I could see how excited he was to show me his brand new baby, and with good reason. It is truly a special and spectacular space, and the same dedication and love (if not more so) that was put into the West 29th Street Studios, has now been applied to his new Penthouse Studio on West 39th Street. I was curious as to what on earth made him take on such a big venture and how had he been able to survive the recession thus far? I said, "You have to be feeling pretty proud of yourself when you look at what you have built, and are continuing to build – you've come a long way since 36th Street!" HG: When I took the new project on, 29th Street was doing well, and although it was a big investment and the space needed a lot of work, it was too special to pass up. I literally felt it was one of those moments in time where you have an opportunity and you can either seize it or let it go – and I chose to seize it! Of course the business climate is a little different now than when we started, but we are still very excited to be here and extremely proud to finally have the space open for business.

I asked Halley if building the studios and running them as rental spaces has resulted in his having to sacrifice some his own photography? HG: Yes absolutely, as well as many friendships too! It has been very consuming in many ways – people have no idea how expensive it is if you don't have a lot of staff or money. I have done a lot of it myself and even though the staff is still fairly bare bones, it's a very efficient operation, although I really need to make better use of interns!

Certainly during this past year much of his focus was on getting the penthouse up and running so it can start making an income, but now that it's open for business, he will have more time for his own shooting again. Sometimes our minus can be our plus, and even though he may not have been shooting as much, he was and is always building his network and his contact list, which in turn becomes a vital support system to what he has already been doing so successfully. We all know that the photography industry has changed over the past few years, so I wanted to know how some of these changes had affected what he does? Changes such as digital, and now video, or how about the recession?

HG: Fewer photographers have studios, but then there are also more rental studios now, which adds to the competition. Renting studios for photo shoots is simply the way it is nowadays, but digital has also affected the running costs. It costs a lot more to have all the necessary equipment these days so it also costs a lot more to set up a studio. Where previously you might have spent hundreds of dollars, now you literally have to spend hundreds of thousands on equipment. So the biggest investment is the equipment, and Kevin has become my partner in the sense that he has been responsible for investing in the Go-Studios equipment rental since 2009.



Halley is a Libra, the sign of partnerships, and with these two Halley designs while Kevin figures out how to build it, and together they have worked their magic – a match made in Heaven, you might say. The day I was there, they were working until late into the evening making yet more improvements and repairs in preparation for the next day's clients. Already glorious before they got their hands on it with south, east and west facing windows, they have opened up the walls, built a massive skylight that now takes up half the roof – that in itself is something to see, let me tell you – plus there's a large terrace on 2 sides with fantastic views where they'll be building a roof deck, and there are plans to add a larger kitchen as well. I for one can't wait for the summer BBQ's on the roof deck! And that's the whole point with Halley, as much as this is a business for him, it is also about building a community and a space that people will want to come to. It really is a beautiful space and I found myself not wanting to leave, I was mesmerized by it all, from the signature sliding glass doors, to the clean white walls and occasional red accents on the large ceiling pipes or seat cushions, to the enormous skylights through which I watched the pouring rain, and his most crucial and precious piece of equipment, without which he assured me they could not have built this space – a giant battery operated scissor lift which he drives around the studio and then extends up to the super tall ceilings so they can replace a light bulb or fix the strings on one of the automatic window shades.

I asked Halley what makes his studio(s) successful over another? Or what is say “special” or particular to what his space has to offer over another? I know from my own perspective, he never stops making improvements, and yet everything remains so beautifully minimal. There was and still is always something new for me to look at and admire each time I visit him. HG: I enjoy providing a beautiful space for people to work and create in – there’s nothing I enjoy more than when people say, “I really loved working here; the space has a great energy and vibe.” It’s almost better than getting paid! (Right, almost!) I want it to be a positive and beautiful experience for my renters so I go out of my way to make it feel like it is their own space – not just to enjoy, but also that it’s theirs and they can modify it and set it up how they want, that’s why I put everything on wheels. This was always one of my favorite features and ingenious on Halley’s part from way back when he first opened Go-Studios, was how he literally put everything on wheels, from the tables, to the make-up station, the clothes racks and even one of the couches – simple but brilliant!

Halley continued: HG: I love creating spaces and thinking about what would be comfortable for my clients, where would they like to gather, talk, etc. Sometimes I think I’m like a frustrated boutique hotel owner! It’s a similar business in some ways, except they’re not sleeping here – thank goodness! I also think that being a photographer helps because I look at it as shooter as well, what would I like or want, let alone need. I have to add here that Halley is a Libra, the sign of the zodiac who is the natural host of the party and connected with other people, so they are excellent at making sure your needs are met and your visit is a comfortable one – whether it is a photo shoot, a business meeting or an industry party! This conveniently brings me to my next question about how this new Penthouse Studio differs from the other studios on West 29th Street, and is he going after a completely different clientele? HG: Yes, this new space is certainly for bigger productions, high-end clients with bigger budgets, and more film and video. It is also a great space for celebrity shoots because it is a private and unique space. There is a lounge area, plus the roof deck area outside, so it makes it more special for the VIP and celebrity clientele. And of course there is massive amounts of natural light with the giant skylights.

Speaking of clients, I asked Halley what kinds of clients currently rent his studios on West 29th Street? HG: We do a lot of catalog, magazine editorial, some advertising, as well as some film & video. And within that, there is a real mixture – we have beauty, fashion, food, and we have also done some reality TV shoots, including *Celebrity Apprentice* and Kim Kardashian.

And I also asked how and where he finds his clients – is it word of mouth, repeat business, does he advertise? HG: All of the above – we have lots of repeat business (which speaks for itself!) but getting new clients is harder, and we get a good amount of referrals as well (happy customers tell other customers!) As far as advertising, we are currently in Resource magazine, we do email blasts, and I want to host some events at the new studio, it's a great way of promoting the space itself. And what about Social Networking, are you using any of that to promote the business? I haven't used it much, but I do see it potentially as a great tool – how else can you announce to 100's of people instantly that you have an event coming up?

This is always one of my favorite questions, and comes in two parts. I asked Halley what is his favorite thing about running a rental facility and he said: HG: I was very isolated when I was just a shooter, especially as still life guy, but as a rental I now get to meet my colleagues, other photographers, stylists, art directors, and so on, many of whom have become friends (like me, for one!) By renting the studio, it expanded my world, and I enjoy meeting more people, I'm a people person (there goes that Libra again!) And the second part to my question is what, if anything, would he say have been the more challenging aspects to what he does? HG: I would say the amount of time it takes, especially with this latest project. It has taken a good year of sacrifice to build the new studio and we have worked many, long hours. I felt bad because I barely saw my daughter during this time. The industry is changing so much, but I am the eternal optimist and this is my security. It's not just a cool project for me - it's not about ambition, but more of a real love for my survival and what I do for a living.



And last but not least we have the **ChatterDozen** quick questions:

- 1) What is your favorite day of the week, and why? HG: Monday – because it's the start of a week and full of promise (He's an optimist, remember?)
- 2) What is your favorite TV show? HG: Mad Men (Also not terribly surprising when you see the décor at his studios, he's always been a big fan of that retro, Mad Men sort of vibe!)
- 3) What was the last movie you saw? HG: I won tickets to see "Haywire" – I have not been to the movies forever, so I took my friend George. On Netflix – "Exit Through The Gift Shop" and "Beautiful Losers" – both documentaries
- 4) When is your birthday? HG: September 26th - Libra
- 5) Who (dead or alive) do you admire? HG: Steve Jobs – he is my idol, certainly in business
- 6) What is your favorite music, song, or band? HG: That's a tough one – Lenny Kravitz... Marvin Gaye... I like a lot of different music (that was something I always loved about going to visit with Halley in his studio – he always had new music and an extensive library to select from!)
- 7) If you could be born in another period of history, when would that be? HG: The future – because I'm really excited by technology. I would like to be 10 years old now because I can't begin to imagine what's up the road if you consider the advances we've seen just in our lifetime!
- 8) If you could get on a plane tomorrow, perhaps to somewhere you have never been before, where would you fly to and why? HG: Paris – I opened my 1st studio at 21 and didn't take a vacation until I was 38! I went to London & Madrid for work but I really haven't been free to travel – I'm hoping the new studio will free me up so I can do some travelling
- 9) What is your favorite food? HG: Fried chicken
- 10) And your favorite color? HG: That changes – I've never been a believer in loving just one color for your entire life – so currently it is black!
- 11) How about your favorite animal? HG: Dogs – any dog
- 12) If I handed you an Oscar, whom would you be thanking in your acceptance speech? HG: My Mum, who bought me my first camera, my good friend Charlie Sforza who gave me my first commercial photography assignment, and Kevin Goon, my indispensable "partner in crime" in building this amazing new studio.

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