



Photo: nature's kiss

It started with a kiss

words: **Kim Newth** images: **Neil Williams**

It is a long way from Loburn Lea to the Oscars of photography, the World Photographic Cup (WPC) at Montpellier in France. Local photographer Neil Williams, of Tandem Photography, rubbed shoulders with the world's best there in April after one of his award-winning wedding photos won him a place amongst the finalists.

World Cup glory was the furthest thing from his mind back in mid-March 2014, when he was out shooting a wedding at a farm in mid-Canterbury. On that particular day, he had already photographed bride and groom at several locations, including a woolshed. Evening was approaching and the couple were about to head off to the marquee when they stopped for a final embrace.

"I was fifty metres or so back. Without them being aware, there were these trees leaning over in the foreground kissing as well! Compositionally, the arch of trees framed the image strongly ... I thought I had a nice image. Later, my colleague in the office saw it coming off the printer and suggested I enter it in the 2014 New Zealand Institute of Professional Photographers' (NZIPP) Iris Awards."

By this time, the photo had been through post-production that had involved removing farm equipment and power lines that detracted from the strength of the image. Editing also created the photo's subtle, almost lithographic look without too much colour.

After winning gold at the NZIPP Iris Awards, the image was selected to represent New Zealand in the wedding category at the World Photographic Cup 2015. Competing against photographers' entries from 26 countries, Neil's was selected as a finalist. In April, Neil attended the ceremony to announce the WPC winners in Montpellier, France where he found out his image had been ranked fourth best wedding photo in the world.

"It was very inspiring. All the rock stars of photography were there ... The great thing about an accolade like this is it makes you realise you don't have to be in New York to win recognition for your work. It shows you're doing things right. For a wedding, that means capturing the essence of the day and telling a story with stunning images that bride and groom would be proud to hang on the wall."

World Cup kudos for 'nature's kiss' photo

With time for just one more shot before bride and groom left for their reception, North Canterbury wedding photographer Neil Williams snapped the happy couple as they shared a last lingering romantic moment framed by trees arching together as though also snatching a kiss. Neil knew he had captured something special at this wedding day in March 2014. Little was he to know how far this beautifully composed image would take him: it has been judged the fourth best wedding photo in the world for 2015.

The WPC placing has created a real buzz amongst the couple's circle of friends and family in mid-Canterbury, many of whom have also used Tandem Photography for their weddings. The same image also received a silver distinction award at the Australian Institute of Professional Photographers (AIPP) awards round last year.

Neil and his wife Katherine, also an award-winning photographer, set up Tandem Photography in late 2005, specialising in wedding photography. Together their work has been recognised by some 90 national and international awards.

As a child growing up in the United Kingdom, Neil remembers taking his first shots with a pinhole camera made out of a biscuit tin. "It was painted black on the inside and there was a sheet of paper on the inside. I had an awesome time with that and can remember taking this shot of some leaves in the schoolyard by these big old trees. There was the magic of creating this image out of something so simple."



By the age of 12 he had his first proper camera – a Canon EOS10 – and began developing his own photos, (using part of his mother's stables converted into a darkroom). He remembers playing with perspective, shooting a series of shots involving a bowler hat, a magician and two of his brothers.

After leaving school, he went to work at a commercial photography studio in the UK before working as a photographer in the cruise ship industry for 10 years. "This is where I met my Kiwi wife. We were married in 2004."

As well as working hard as photographers, Neil and Katherine juggle a busy family life as parents to Arabella, 5 and Olivia, 7.

At last year's NZIPP Iris Awards, Neil received two golds and a silver distinction award while Katherine gained two golds and four silver awards. Both were made NZIPP Fellows in recognition of their outstanding professional achievements.



How he created a world-leading photo...

What did he use to take the shot? A Canon EOS-1D X Digital SLR Camera with a 70-200 L IS telephoto lens.

What compositional tricks were involved? The Rule of Thirds: Imagine breaking an image down into thirds (both horizontally and vertically) and using these to place points of interest, rather than working with the centre of the shot.

What post-production tools did he use? Adobe Lightroom, Photoshop.



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