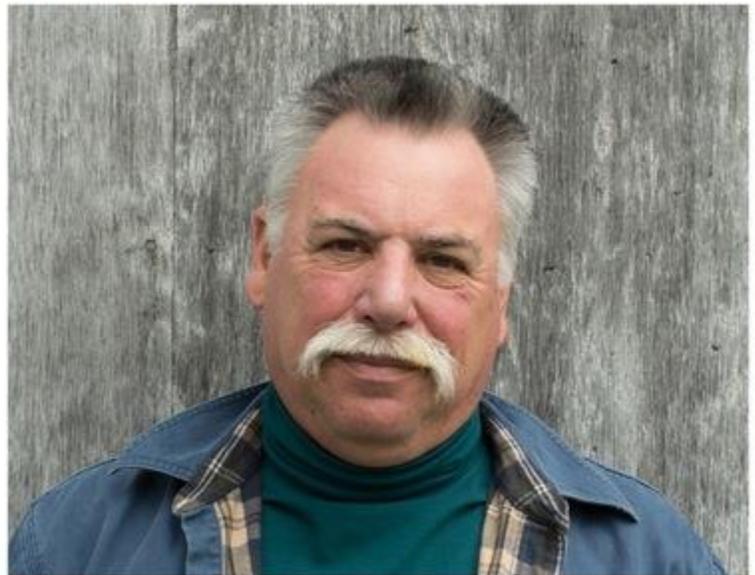

5 Minutes with a ViewPoint Member

An Interview with Paul Haresign Williams

by Eric Boutilier-Brown, July 2016

Eric: Your [website](#) biography says a lot about how you got into photography, and your [bio on ViewPoint's website](#) goes into your photographic style. You mention that your style is "fast and loose"? Can you elaborate?

Paul: *When I see something, I want to be ready to grab it; I want to be ready for it. I've never been very interested in previsualizing pictures even though I have a big background in it. I think it's become second nature now because I've done it for so long, so the capturing of the composition, I hope, is an automatic thing and not something I consciously think about anymore. I rarely use a tripod unless photographing during the night; I typically photograph immediately what I see.*



Eric: You worked as a professional set and lighting designer. How has that experience and knowledge influenced your photography?

Paul: *Designing for the theater is all about creating a world or environment in which the play functions. You have to represent what the script is describing, and through that you are creating a world where it could be real or abstract. Because of that you are constantly thinking about how is it going to look to the audience (from the last row, the fifth row, and up close). I spent most of my time designing both lights and set together because they are so intertwined, and necessary to each other. Photography is the same; you're creating an image, you're seeing the picture, you're capturing that moment when all those things are working together. I've never been interested in making movies and I think that is because of the theatre. Because you are working with the structure of plays and scenes, you're actually working from still image to still image, and the actors are animating them. Photography is the same for me.*



Eric: As a set and lighting designer, you were creating scenes, and while it is currently popular in contemporary photography to create everything in an image (the setting, and the subject both), your photography is more about finding things. Do you see your photography as a contrast to what you did as a living or do you bring something from the set design and lighting to your photography that isn't quite as obvious?

Paul: *Often what I see in my photographs, especially when I was still working in the theatre, are things I would see, things in life viewed in a theatrical context. For example, I'd walk down the street, and I see something and think "Ah! There! That would work a scene for the play I'm working on".*

Eric: As an immigrant from the States (Paul is originally from [Ithaca, New York](#)), and someone who's travelled a lot, what inspires you photographically about Nova Scotia?

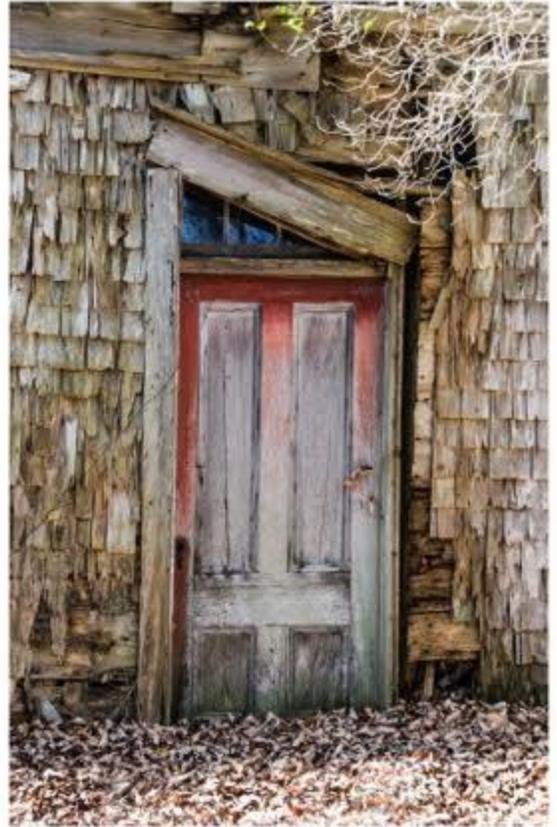
Paul: *It's really beautiful. Also, I should clarify, I'm not a new immigrant, I've been here since 1970. I always tell this story: when I was a kid, I had a big map of North America on my wall. I used to sit at look at it and see Nova Scotia and think "that place must be incredible. Look at all those harbours and bays. That has to be gorgeous!" But it always seemed a zillion miles away. When I moved to Toronto in 1970, I realized Nova Scotia was just down the Trans Canada, although ironically it was further away than where I came from (New York). But getting back to the question, Nova Scotia is just so beautiful; it's got a ruggedness that really speaks to me. I lived for 15 years in Vancouver, and I loved the drama and grandeur but it doesn't have the same feel that Nova Scotia has.*

Eric: Do you have a favorite image in your work of Nova Scotia?

Paul: *I've spent a lot of time photographing ruins and old stuff; there are several images that come to mind. One is when my wife and I were driving around Thanksgiving time, and we were in **Hants County**. We drove by this old farm and there was a dilapidated building, and there was this one door with leaves around it and faded red paint. That is a favorite.*

Eric: If you had to choose between photographing in a vibrant sailing town with lots of history or an abandoned town with lots of old but run-down buildings, which would you choose and why?

Paul: *You're describing **Lunenburg** (laughter). That's hard because I'm fascinated with both. At this point I'd go to the abandoned town, but as a sailor I'm always interested on what's going with boats or at the marina. But, getting back to my reference about Lunenburg, because we live nearby, and it probably described both options. If you walk around the foundry and see, it's criminal the way it's been allowed to go to rack and ruin. But photographically it's terrific. I've taken a bunch of photographs in that area. The whole progression of Lunenburg, from the 70's where it was a hard-ass working town to now where it's developed into what I call the trinket-trade. It's become very touristy and the fishing has gone out. But there are still remnants of how it was, and moments of what it's trying to become. For example, the **Lunenburg School of Art** which is terrific; so you get these little sparks.*



Eric: A final photography question - you are a very experienced sailor; can you name one thing that you learnt from sailing that you've applied to your photography?

Paul: *It may contradict what I said earlier, but patience, learning to wait for it (for when light and set come together, for example).*

Eric: Here are your last five questions; what is your favorite...

Time of day? Daw

Holiday? Christmas

Music Group? The Rolling Stones

Meal of the day? Dinner

Song to sing at Karaoke? I sing, but not karaoke.