

ENERGY

Local oil and gas photographer's works find 'homes' worldwide

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The work of photographer Mieko Mahi, who has been photographing the energy industry — particularly the petroleum facet — since 1988, has been featured in such publications as *The New York Times*, *Offshore*, *Business Week* and *World Refining*.

One of her photographs was chosen for the cover of this publication.

However, since dividing her company a year ago into EnergyImages.com LCC, an online component marketing stock photographs, and Mieko Mahi Photography and Video Services, her business has taken on a whole new dimension.

WORLD VIEW

Now, 100 of her framed and matted photographs are about to be sent off to West Africa. Another 10 were recently purchased by Ernst & Young LLP for display in Houston's E&Y Energy Center.

The West African order came from a company in Lagos, Nigeria, which found her site through search engines. The black and white photographs will hang in four petroleum clubs operated by West Africa Catering.

"They didn't know I have an international reputation," Mahi says. "They wanted a variety of scenes, upstream and downstream — offshore rigs, land rigs and refineries."

Although the 100 photographs are Mahi's biggest online order to date, she admits she's had enough smaller orders to double her income since opening her more sophisticated Web site. She has orders on an ongoing basis from Canada, Norway, India and Scotland and other parts of the world.

"I've had a Web site for 12 years, but before, you could search and look at the photographs but you couldn't purchase them online," she says. "Now it's a top-of-the-line site with Verisign and Merchant Solutions providing security and handling credit card payments."

In addition to her own photographs, Mahi is introducing photographs by other photographers. In addition to her own photographs, the site now includes work by *National Geographic* photographer Lowell Georgia, and she plans to add others.

IN THE CAMERA'S EYE

Mahi, who has found success in an unusual niche for a woman photographer, says that about 98 percent of her work is oil and gas photography.

She got her start in the business when she was hired in 1988 by a Dallas-based oil and gas company "to put together a video department to create safety videos and as a reports photographer," she recalls.

Two years later, she moved to Houston to accept a photography position with Marathon Oil Co. She ventured out on her own in 2000, with security provided for three years by Marathon, which gave her 90 percent of the company's report work for three years.

"I spent three years trying to get other clients," she says. "Now I have 400 clients. Each hires me once, or up to six times, a year."

At home in the roughest conditions, Mahi even began her honeymoon on an offshore rig, completing an assignment that had been repeatedly postponed and ended up taking place right after her wedding.

"They kept rescheduling, and then I said, 'I'm getting married tomorrow, and I'm bringing my husband with me,'" she recalls. "It was a 3-1/2 hour flight for Diamond Offshore. I was through with the assignment by the time my husband woke up the next morning."

Part of the fun of the job, she says, is working with the people on the rigs.

"These people have to get along with each other. If you're a troublemaker, you aren't going to last very long on a rig," she says. "If I were out of place, they'd get me out of there in two minutes. I have liability insurance and have had offshore survival training. I've been working in the oil patch a long time, but I've never had any trouble." ■

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Mieko Mahi has been photographing for the petroleum industry since 1988.

One hundred of photographer Mieko Mahi's framed photographs will be heading to West Africa.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIEKO MAHI