

Budd Studio: The Cherished Legacy of Abraham and Sidney Waitrob

Two creative and resourceful brothers spent more than 50 years chronicling the hunter/jumper sport, culture and the arts through photography.



“The Boys”: Budd, left, and Sid Waitrob at work

COURTESY OF THE USHJA WHEELER MUSEUM

Anyone who has looked at classic horse show photos from the 1940s through the 1980s is likely to be familiar with the small handwritten signature “Budd NY.” Sometimes “NY” is replaced by the year. If you’ve ever had a Budd photo in hand, you would have seen “Photography by Budd” or “Budd Studio” stamped on the back.

Budd photos of legendary horses and riders at iconic horse shows have helped create the visual history of the best of the hunter/jumper sport. Original Budd prints are prized possessions, and Budd photos flood the hunter/jumper history and nostalgia pages on social media.

The USHJA Wheeler Museum has been honored to feature more than 100 Budd prints in “Through the Lens: The Art of Hunter/Jumper Photography.”

What may be less familiar is the fact that the brothers Abraham (Budd) and Sidney Waitrob were collectively behind the “Budd Studio” logo. Known as “The Boys” throughout their long lives, Budd and Sid together followed the top horse show circuit, shot photos at private clients’ farms, and were commissioned to provide photos for a number of books, including Bill Steinkraus’ “Riding and Jumping” and Nancy Caffrey’s “Scene from the Saddle.”

The Waitrob brothers spent half a century photographing horses and selling prints they themselves developed in their dark-room/studio within their New York City apartment. They lived together; their sister, Lillian, had an apartment in the same building. Their technique made the most of what was then state-of-the-art equipment, and their feel for horse sports produced carefully framed shots of exquisite hunters and soaring jumpers that put Budd among the best horse show photographers of all time.

What’s always been fascinating about their photos is that while many wonderful images freeze the action of a moment over a jump or on course, Budd photos often tell a story. They seem artfully staged, giving attention to the surroundings and providing a window into American horse shows as

sporting and cultural events. Their photos chronicle change over time through details of tack, jump types, horse show arenas and use of open space, fashion in and out of the ring, and spectator

involvement. Their depth of field often allows viewers to recognize notable horse show figures watching from ringside. What were they thinking behind the lens?

In 2004, equestrian journalist Vicky Moon came across a Budd envelope with

horse show proofs she had saved since the 1970s. She called the contact number, and Budd answered the phone. Sid had died in 2002. Budd was 95; he would pass away shortly after he turned 96. He said that he had some photos, but many had been thrown away. Moon rushed to New York to interview him for her book “A Sunday Horse,” discovering the story of their passionate interest in the visual arts. Moon’s book prompted me to dig deeper and seek out their grand-nephew and heir, David Stekert.

The Origins of Budd Studio

The Waitrob brothers’ attention to detail spawned from the inspiration they took from fine art that later led them on a parallel career path photographing some of the great painters and sculptors of the 20th century. It all started with the joy Sid found at a museum.

The older of “The Boys,” Sid was born in 1902 and had made \$1 million on Wall Street in the 1920s. Like so many others, he lost it all overnight in 1929. Budd graduated that year from Washington Square College (now New York University). They needed to start afresh.

“During the Great Depression,” Sid said in a video interview made by grand-nephew David Stekert when Budd and Sid were in their 90s, “everybody was deeply depressed. And a very good therapy was going to a museum or a gallery. And if I saw one good painting or

We weren’t after beauty;
we were after soul.—
Budd Waitrob



PHOTOS BY BUDD

Clockwise from top: Johnny Bell and McLain Street at the 1964 Piping Rock Horse Show over a “coop oxer” of the period; Mary Mairs Chapot and Tomboy jumping the “polka-dot” barrel created by Olympic Games rider-turned course designer Arthur McCashin at the 1962 National Horse Show; Bill Steinkraus and First Boy at the 1957 Fairfield Hunt Club Benefit Horse Show, with the fence judge leaning in for a good look during a touch class.

piece of sculpture in an afternoon, that was enough for me. It would set me for the week.”

The brothers later learned photography at the West Side YMCA. Too old to serve in World War II, Budd went to New Guinea through military connections as a civilian moving supplies, which gave him access to cameras. Sid took an engineering science and defense management training course. Budd occasionally rode in Central Park, and the brothers became interested in racing.

Budd recalled, “One day I went to a horse show and saw another man taking photographs of horses, so I said, ‘Look, if he can do it, I like horses; I’ll do it, too.’ So I started in horse photography.”

Shooting at the 1949 National Horse Show, Budd was by then doing “a lot of work” and decided he needed help, so he enlisted Sid: “I couldn’t get rid of him after that. So we became horse show photographers.”

Documenting the Art World

“I went into the studio on the following night, and I never left,” said Sid. “But then I decided I wanted to try some portraits.”

He started with his friend Jean Liberté, who had “a wonderful face.” Liberté was a painter and instructor at the Arts Student League. “He was pleased—so much so, he introduced me all around,” said Sid, who then began photographing world-famous (or soon-to-be-famous) artists in their studios, bringing Budd into this new endeavor.

Among their subjects were Alberto Giacometti, Henry Moore, Alexander Calder, Marcel Duchamp, Walker Evans and Georgia O’Keefe. Their photos were collected for a 1957 exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art called “Faces in American Art.” Much of the exhibit was then put on tour around the world, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. Their work is also part of the permanent collections at the Smithsonian Institution’s Archives of American Art and the National Portrait Gallery.

Their approach to photographing artists was to capture the artist in the studio, in natural light, at work. Sid believed that they “were showing the history by showing what the artist looked like, how he dressed, what his studio looked like, how his things were arranged or disarranged.”

Budd and Sid worked closely together, taking turns at the camera; one artist called them

“the two-headed photographer.” Sid enjoyed capturing more of the background, creating an image that told a tale through details of attitude, objects and setting; Budd focused more on close-ups and facial expressions.

Crafting Parallel Career Paths

Their collaborative approach and their subtly different emphases also appear in their horse show photos. While it’s impossible to verify who shot which horse show images, knowing their documented approach to the artist portraits gives some clues to deciphering what aspects of horse show culture they intended to capture in each photo.

They considered horse show photography



the children of the Depression, they were resourceful. On each of their annual trips to Europe, they would buy a Mercedes-Benz to get around to horse shows and private stable shoots, then ship the car back to the United States and sell it for a profit. They regularly stayed with artist friends and their patrons on those European trips, also photographing them and their art collections.

Budd and Sid were also good marketers. Peggy Augustus and Sherry Robertson, among other horse show customers, remember they sent a Christmas picture taken somewhere in their travels.

“You could be sure to get one of their photos if you had a horse named after one of their favorite artists,” said Robertson. “Mine was Canaletto, and they sent me a beautiful photo as a gift.”

Augustus spoke also of Budd’s good humor, recalling a whimsical 1950s photo of her and Betty Beryl Schenk in top hats seated at Piping Rock Horse Show, their faces obscured by a jump rail.

Robertson remembered the brothers as



their income-producing “vocation,” and their lifetime passion for shooting visual artists at work their “avocation.” As such, they refused payment for the artist photos and received instead drawings, paintings, prints or sculptures that became valuable when the artists achieved fame.

Combining their vocational and avocational paths allowed them to travel widely in the United States and Europe. Ever



Clockwise from top: Bill Steinkraus with his viola; a commemorative portrait of Trail Guide, Frank Chapot’s mount for the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome; Peggy Augustus and Betty Beryl Schenk at the Piping Rock Horse Show (Budd was known for his sense of fun amid his professionalism.)

PHOTOS BY BUDD

“two of the nicest men you could ever meet. We became ‘see-you-at-the-horse-show’ friends. They were very thoughtful. One year after one of my horses had been champion at Lake Placid for both weeks, she died the day after I got home from the show. A week later, the most beautiful sepia photograph appeared in the mail with a nice note,” she said.

They created other special projects that merged the talents honed through their interest in the equestrian and art worlds. A series of photos of early members of the U.S. Equestrian Team features Bill Steinkraus with his viola, recognizing Steinkraus’ passion for music.

Budd created a softly lit oval portrait of Trail Guide, Frank Chapot’s 1960 Olympic Games partner, after the horse’s untimely death at that year’s National Horse Show.

“My mother would buy every picture he ever took, so of course he would take more.—

Mary Chapot

the horses shipped then,” she said. “The horses came from Gladstone in Hennessy trucks, then walked up the ramp into a cargo plane. It also shows how much this was a team thing. USET President Whitney Stone and some major supporters came to see us

off. The riders flew with the horses.”

The rest of the book includes jumping shots by European photographers. Budd mounted and trimmed 46 images to fit into the book.

Budd and Sid’s professionalism, creativity and generosity runs through their horse show friends’ memories. The range of Budd Studio photos through the decades is a testament to the skills and techniques they learned from the days of heavy 8" x 10" box cameras through state-of-the-art, mid-20th-century film cameras. At the horse shows they used a 3" x 4"

Linhof and a 2" x 2" Rolleiflex, often setting up multiple cameras.

Anthony D’Ambrosio recalled that they used a motorized drive for the first time to shoot the famous sequence of D’Ambrosio and Sympatico setting a Puissance record at the National Horse show in 1973. Later, they primarily used 35mm Leica M2 and Leica M3 prototypes the company had asked them to test.

Just as Sid and Budd shot the visual artists in their studios alongside their work to better understand both the artist and the art, they included the trappings of specific horse shows and reactions of the audiences in their horse show photos to highlight the majesty of horse and rider in action.

As Budd noted, “We weren’t after beauty; we were after soul.”

Their combined vision and the masterful techniques they brought from the art world to their equestrian work has left a legacy of images that help define an era in hunter/jumper history. ➤

CHRONICLING THE HORSE SHOW WORLD

“They were wonderful people—of course, wonderful photographers,” said Mary Chapot. “They knew Frank earlier, and they took much interest in [daughters] Wendy and Laura. Their first show pictures are by Budd.”

Budd, in particular, got to know many of the riders, and Chapot remembers he was “a worker bee,” always busy. “My mother would buy every picture he ever took, so of course he would take more. He would then make us presentation frames with multiple pictures all nicely matted.”

Mary Chapot (Mairs at the time) particularly cherishes the 4.5" x 8.5" leather-bound photo album Budd created to commemorate her 1962 USET European tour. Budd went to the airport for the team’s departure. “It’s kind of a piece of history. It chronicles how



PHOTOS BY BUDD



Budd produced this photo album for Mary Mairs Chapot as a memento of her first European tour with the USET. Clockwise from top left: Chapot, Bill Robertson and Kathy Kusner on their first European tour; Tomboy walking up the airplane ramp with Judy Hennessy assisting from behind; Chapot with Vestryman, left, and Tomboy on the plane at Idlewild Airport (now John F. Kennedy International Airport)