

By Jared Trent Stonesifer

ULTRA-HIGH CONTRAST

Glenn Olcerst logs long hours as a labor lawyer while pursuing a unique talent as a photographer

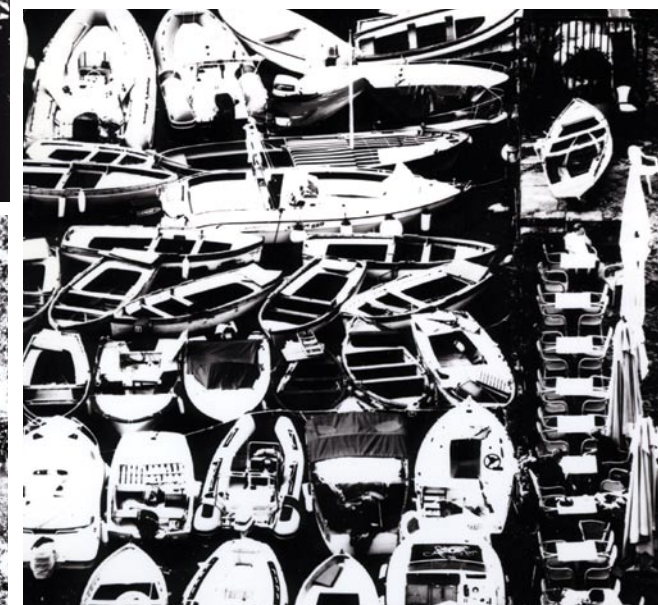


Photo by Michael Haritan

Sitting on the patio of his North Side home, Glenn Olcerst explains how he intricately cut the stone and glass to create the colorful patterns that crisscross the floor and table. Moving inside, he talks about the 10 blades he broke (each costing \$275) while spending 10 months meticulously cutting the granite to create a fireplace that will be featured on the HGTV show "Look What I Did," a program about people who are not professionally trained artists but create notable work.

But the stone and glass cutting are just hobbies, Olcerst says. His artistry with a camera has "taken off" professionally, and some of his ultra-high contrast black-and-white prints are now displayed in restaurants in Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio. Olcerst has been using a special film created for astronomy. It was discontinued several years ago and he is planning to use the last of his stock on a month-long trip to Paris.

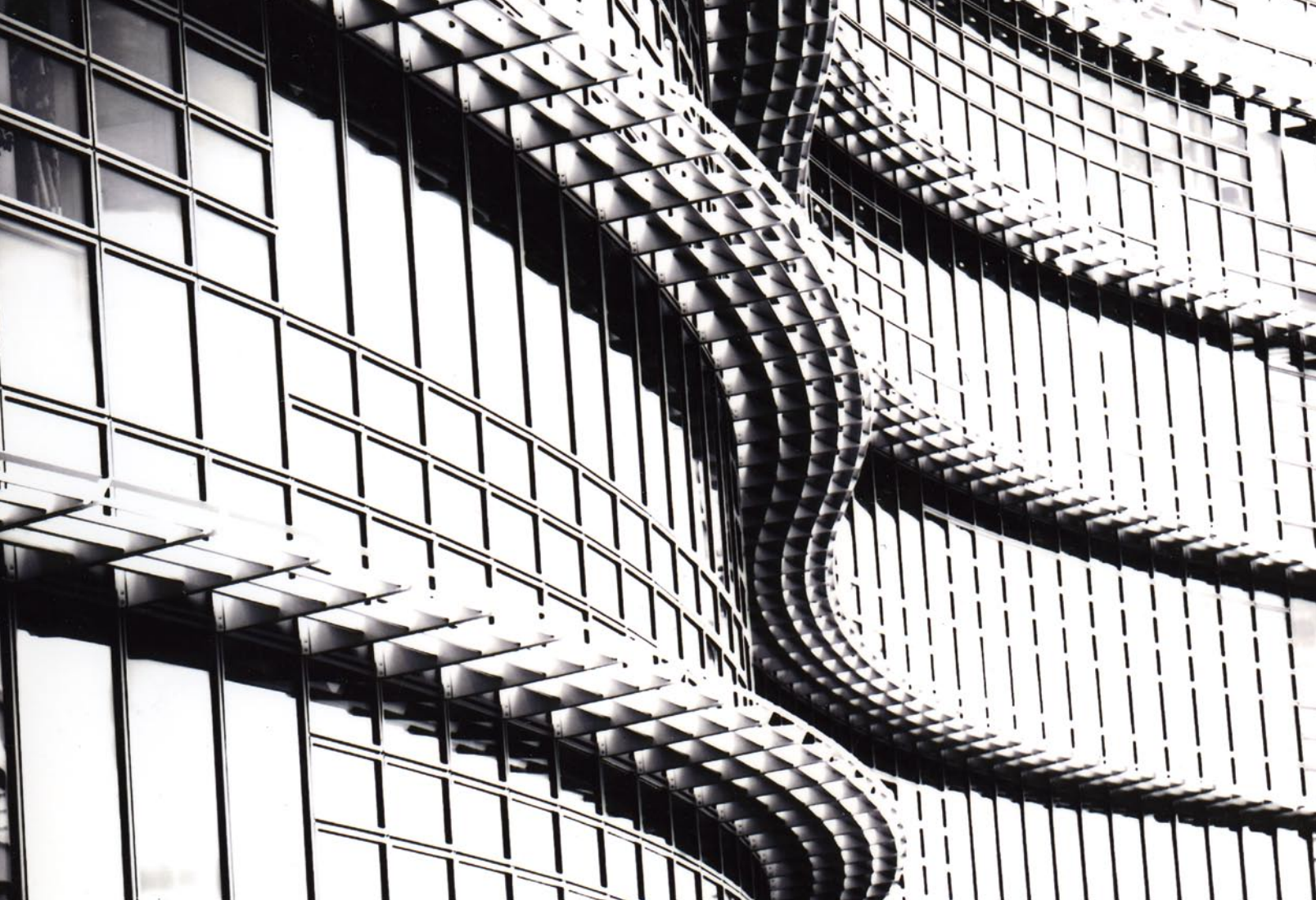
Oh yeah, Olcerst adds a little sheepishly, he's also managed to create an almost perfect win record in his real job as a labor lawyer with Marcus & Shapira, where the demand for his

services often requires him to bill more than 3,000 hours per year (that translates to more than 58 hours per week for 52 weeks). Not bad for a kid from the Bronx who says he was already a J.D. (juvenile delinquent) when he earned his juris doctorate degree from the University of Pennsylvania.

"I taught myself how to cut glass, I taught myself how to cut stone and I taught myself photography," Olcerst says with a smile. "I just like to say I'm very confused and that I don't know what I want to do when I grow up."

His art may bring out the little boy in him, but Olcerst is "a brilliant lawyer" whose clients "love him because he will work for them day and night," says Daniel H. Shapira, who recruited Olcerst to join his firm in 1988. "He's very interested in winning all of the matters he works on, so in that he is the perfect lawyer."

Olcerst says he wanted to become a lawyer since his sophomore year in high school, which for Olcerst was just the beginning of his teen years. He graduated when he was 15 and had attended schools where "kids had guns in the eighth grade" and the "police knew my mother



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by her first name.” With that kind of upbringing, becoming a lawyer “just seemed like the right course,” he says.

After fast-tracking his way through high school, Olcerst also finished college in three years while graduating summa cum laude and being inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa society. He worked as a field attorney for a dozen years with the National Labor Relations Board before Shapira persuaded him to enter private practice. “He impressed me with his expansive knowledge of labor law and his ability to apply it in a practical way,” Shapira says. Olcerst now represents many of the firm’s major clients in various labor matters, including unionization elections, contract negotiations and strikes.

“When you do labor law, and you do 24-hour-a-day labor negotiations, or there’s a strike, you put in an enormous number of hours. It’s the nature of that practice,” Shapira says of the incredible number of hours his partner logs on behalf of clients.

Despite the long hours Olcerst devotes to his law practice, he somehow manages to find the time to hone his artistic skills. He started cutting glass with his mother over 30 years ago, but he didn’t seriously pursue his creative side until he remarried 10 years ago.

Olcerst now travels around the country and the world capturing images for his side business, Destination Photographs. His subjects include people, plants and structures, but Olcerst is not interested in creating ordinary black and white pictures. Olcerst says he strives to create photos that are “unique in all the world.” In addition to the unusual film he uses, Olcerst’s photos take eight to 10 minutes to develop in the darkroom, compared to eight to 10 seconds for a normal photo.

“Each picture is unique, like a drawing,” he says. “It’s very hit or miss, very temperamental. But as far as we can tell, no one else is doing this in the world. It’s completely unique.”

Unlike his track record as a lawyer, Olcerst measures success as a photographer more modestly. He recently took 40 rolls of film to Vancouver and managed to produce only six usable photographs. But his work with the camera has impressed a growing number of customers, as well as his law partners. “He’s a genius,” Shapira says. “We have his photographs all over” the firm’s offices in One Oxford Centre.

Despite his growing success as a professional photographer, Marcus & Shapira and its clients are in no danger of losing their star labor lawyer. Olcerst says he has no plans to retire any time soon from his law practice. Not that he needs the money, but Olcerst says an art career is a hard way to pay the bills. “It’s definitely hard to be an artist in Pittsburgh,” he says. “You need some other way to support yourself.”

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