

Photography at the Flick of a Switch

John Henshall finds a new lighting angle in Jay Myrdal's Oxfordshire studio

When I went to turn on the main lights in Jay Myrdal's studio, I was intrigued to see his dimmer switch. When I asked Jay where he had bought it, his reply was not quite what I expected.

"I make them myself," he said.

Jay had been photographing electrical fittings for the catalogues of companies such as Contactum Ltd www.contactum-group.co.uk and Savvy Switches Ltd www.savvy-switches.com for some time when Savvy asked Jay if he could print photographs and other graphics onto electrical switch plates.

Never one to shirk a seemingly impossible challenge, Jay was determined to overcome the huge problem of how to get the ink deposited onto the switch plate with correct colour. There was also the problem of the ink drying, adhering and being resilient to normal handling.

Jay is the kind of photographer who enjoys turning 'challenges' into wonderful 'opportunities'.

Take a look at his outstanding work at www.myrdal.com. He is an advertising photographer who used 10 x 8 inch film and adopted digital imaging long before the days when Adobe Photoshop made it accessible to everyone.

Jay's first challenge was what printer to use and how to get the ink into the surface of the plate.

After considerable research – and good old trial and error – the plate preparation is a now a two-part process which has to be carried out by different companies. A special powder coating is first applied to the blanks, followed by a second coating of an inkjet receptor.

Then comes the small problem of selecting a suitable printer capable of



straight-through flatbed printing onto a 2mm thick metal plate.

At first the Epson 2100 seemed a natural choice – but it will only print onto material 1.3mm thick.

Much experimentation followed, at the end of which it was back to the Epson 2100. Jay phoned Epson for help and advice but they were horrified and said that they would not recommend or support the printer for this use.

So Jay got out his toolkit.

He now has a suitably modified printer which prints directly onto the 2mm thick prepared metal plates – and a big bag of parts which can be used to return the printer to its original state if it ever needs to be returned for repair under warranty. Only joking, Epson.

The advantage of using printers such as this is that they are sold at low prices as vehicles for selling repeated quantities of expensive ink and paper.

Jay has fashioned a special jig to hold the plates and a straight-through platen to feed them into and out of the printer.

After printing, the plates are heat dried and receive two coats of protective lacquer and heat curing to harden them. Then the switch, dimmer or plug hardware is rivetted into place.

I selected a shot of one of my daughter Martien's puppies for Jay to make into a switch, with the toggle in the puppy's nose. My daughter loves it. No puppies were harmed during this purely photographic process.

The electrical mechanisms behind the photographic plates are the highest quality British manufactured Contactum units.

Existing design rocker switches start at £23, dimmers from £30 but much more exciting

is the printing your own images onto electrical fittings at what I feel are very reasonable charges.

A one-off set-up charge of £30 is all it costs to have your image prepared for printing.

Perhaps you could offer this service as something extra – for example a picture of the happy couple on their big day or a company logo for the boardroom?

Your images are full of power when they are seen at the flick of a switch.



FACING PAGE ABOVE: Jay's studio dimmer switch.
 FACING PAGE BELOW: The modified Epson 2100 printer in the process of printing switch plates.
 THIS PAGE ABOVE: A selection of Jay's single-gang switches and plugs. Wider multi-gang plates are also available, giving more space for images. Wedding images and children's artwork are other popular subjects for photographic switch plates. RIGHT: The choice is not limited to conventional shapes. The hearts and roses design was for Valentine's Day and the sponge is for the switch outside a bathroom. The more unusual the applications, the more Jay Myrdal's inspiration.

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