



Steve McCurry Studios

## Future-Proofing a History-Making Photographer's Legacy



### Use Cases

[Archive](#) / [Backup](#) / [Storage Optimization](#)

### Keywords

[Photography](#) / [SAN](#) / [Backblaze Fireball](#)  
[Archiware P5](#)

**265TB**

Backed Up

### Situation

Over decades of world travel, famed photographer Steve McCurry's archive grew to half a petabyte of data. When McCurry consolidated studios, his team didn't want to take chances moving a file server holding 265TB of work. They sought a cloud backup solution to protect a lifetime of celebrated images, many of which have appeared on the cover of National Geographic.

**100s**

of Hard Drives  
Repurposed

### Solution

McCurry's team duplicated data from the server to Backblaze B2 Cloud Storage using four Backblaze Fireballs and managed the process with Archiware P5 archive software. With the data safely backed up in the cloud, they moved the server and repurposed it as additional on-premises storage, along with countless hard drives they'd previously used for backup.

**45**

Years Of  
Work Safe

### Result

In addition to reducing the risk of server failure during the studio move, Backblaze B2 adds a level of redundancy and geographic separation to safeguard the data and eliminates the need to manually back up to hard drives. With the time savings, the team is eager to focus on cataloging McCurry's physical inventory and continuing to future proof his digital legacy.

## STEVE MCCURRY

Steve McCurry is an American photographer based outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His renowned 1984 photo of the “Afghan Girl” has been on the cover of National Geographic several times, and he has regularly photographed stories for the magazine. His work has been awarded some of the most prestigious honors in the industry, including the Robert Capa Gold Medal, National Press Photographers Award, and four first prize awards from the World Press Photo contest.



## Moving Images: Backing Up Decades of Historic Photos

From behind the lens, Steve McCurry captures humanity in vibrant detail. His images have graced the cover of National Geographic many times, most notably his 1984 portrait of Sharbat Gula, an Afghan refugee, which came to be known as “Afghan Girl.” Over more than four decades of traveling across borders, into conflicts, and among ancient cultures, McCurry amassed a body of work that chronicles world history.

But what does an iconic, world-traveling photographer do when international travel grinds to a halt, as it did in 2020? McCurry and his team took it as an opportunity to slow down, reassess, and turn the lens backward over the breadth of McCurry’s legacy.

He started by streamlining his studio spaces. In late 2020, he and his team began the process of closing his New York studio and moving all of the data, docu-

ments, equipment, and archives housed there to his studio outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The move simplified his work life, but the logistics of moving were complicated. McCurry’s digital footprint stands at half a petabyte of data containing nearly one million images, hundreds of terabytes of which were stored on a combination of Apple Xsan using Nexsan storage in Pennsylvania and a redundant file server in New York also based on Nexsan storage. The data was backed up on hundreds of external hard drives in both Pennsylvania and New York.

McCurry’s Digital Asset Manager, Phil Cifone, and Ben Greisler, owner of Kadimac, a data integration consulting firm and Backblaze partner, took charge of moving McCurry’s digital life. Their first order of business was making sure all of that data was safely backed up and available.

“ I can rest easy knowing the images I’ve made over the course of my career are stored safely in the cloud.

Steve McCurry, Photographer

## A Storied Archive Outgrows On-Premises Infrastructure

Cifone and Greisler had talked about moving a copy of McCurry’s archive to the cloud for years. As McCurry’s data grew, managing backups on hundreds of individual hard drives became a logistical nightmare. When Cifone first started in 2015, there were roughly 150TB of data at each location. Nothing to scoff at, but still relatively easy to manage on individual hard drives. But, “As cameras got better, a raw file went from 20MB to 90MB,” Cifone explained.

McCurry might return from a shoot with a full terabyte of SD cards that Cifone had to upload to the servers and back up on individual hard drives. “We just got done clearing 16 128GB cards for him to take on an upcoming trip. It’s hard to keep up with,” Cifone noted. Like most photographers, McCurry hesitates to cull any images on the chance he might want to use them in the future—his team of six regularly dives back into the archives to find an overlooked shot for book projects or to color correct old shots with today’s superior technology. Once the data was backed up on a hard drive, they would

send the drives back and forth between New York and Pennsylvania to keep them geographically separated. “We’d send a couple of hard drives at least every single week to the New York studio and back just to make sure everything was updated on both servers,” Cifone said. When they planned to consolidate studios, they would lose that geographical separation.

Greisler was also leery about moving the server. “It’s very high quality equipment, but I had absolutely no trust that the hardware would survive the trip after being shut down cold,” he acknowledged. If the server failed, that would have left only one full copy of the data plus whatever they could reconstitute from individual hard drives. It was an unacceptable risk. “Getting a copy of that data up in the cloud made all the sense in the world,” Cifone concluded.

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**Ben Geisler, Owner, Kamdimac Data Integration**

## Backblaze Brings Backup Into Focus

Geisler recommended Backblaze to safeguard the data through the move and provide a geographically separated duplicate backup afterwards. He considered Amazon S3, but quickly ruled it out. “You just cannot predict the price for Amazon. The Backblaze pricing structure is simple, and I have all the trust in the world in Backblaze. It was an easy recommendation for such a large job,” he explained.

At Geisler’s insistence, Cifone had started using Backblaze Computer Backup personally in 2019. “Once Backblaze was in the running for Steve’s work, I was all for it,” he said. His familiarity with Backblaze’s ease of use made him confident he’d be able to handle the move himself.

To help manage the archiving and backup process, they chose Archiware P5, a data management software for media and entertainment. With all the pieces in place to make the move a success, they prepared McCurry’s data for transfer, planning out the appropriate staging and migration phases to move 265TB of data.





## Going on Location: Moving 265TB to the Cloud

To enable the transfer of such a large amount of data in a relatively short amount of time, Cifone and Greisler used four Backblaze Fireball devices. Cifone set up the Fireballs on the file server in New York with Greisler managing uploads using Archiware P5 software in Pennsylvania. “Transferring so much data was a delicate duet, but it was made easier because Backblaze is so user friendly. I was able to set up the Fireballs myself, and I’m not an IT guy,” Cifone explained. Throughout the move, Greisler monitored the Archiware software closely to make sure everything transferred successfully.

Once the data transfer was complete, they moved the file server to the Pennsylvania location to use as on-premises storage. Fortunately, “When we got the equipment there and plugged it in, it fired right back up because Nexsan is damn good. But I wasn’t


going to risk Steve’s life’s work on that,” Greisler said. With McCurry’s data backed up in the cloud, he didn’t have to.

Now, the team ingests images to their on-premises Xsan and uses Photo Mechanic to metatag the data. They use Backblaze as an archive and backup storage solution and manage their infrastructure with Archiware P5 software. They organize their assets using PhotoShelter, a digital asset management software, as well as iCloud, so they can easily access data for use on social media, in book projects, and for print work. They also share images on Magnum, an international photographic cooperative that McCurry has been a part of since 1986.

## Future Proofing a Lifetime of Work

With the New York studio data safely duplicated in Backblaze B2, the team is eager to integrate it with the data stored in Pennsylvania. “We’re slowly working our way to getting things mirrored,” Cifone explained. “Trying to figure out what is the same between the data pools from the two locations is tough. There was no automation in place before, no true backup. That’s one of our goals—to get everything automated and consistent,” Greisler added.

Without spending time manually backing up data to individual hard drives, they’re also able to focus on cataloging McCurry’s physical inventory of prints, equipment, correspondence, and ephemera collected over his lifetime of travel. “Now that everything is in one spot, we can finally make sure we have everything of value organized and properly stored. That’s our next big job,” Cifone said.

A man wearing a white cap and a light-colored shirt is seen from behind, sitting in a wooden boat on a narrow river. The boat is filled with a large, vibrant arrangement of colorful flowers, including red, purple, and yellow blooms. The man is holding a long pole or stick, possibly for navigation. The river is surrounded by lush green trees and foliage, creating a serene and natural setting. The water reflects the surrounding greenery and the flowers in the boat.

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**Phil Cifone, Digital Asset Manager, Steve McCurry Studios**

As stewards of McCurry's legacy, Cifone and Greisler are grateful to know his data is not at risk. "I sleep a little better at night knowing that we're not going to lose Steve's work and all of the hard work we do at the studio scanning old slides and retouching hundreds of images," Cifone noted. McCurry himself reiterated, "I can rest easy knowing the images I've made over the course of my career are stored safely in the cloud."

Ultimately, they'd like to modernize McCurry's data infrastructure for a future where they don't have to rely on local storage and can make the data accessible when McCurry is in the field. Adding Backblaze as a cloud partner was the first step in a landmark journey to digitize a lifetime.



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**Phil Cifone, Digital Asset Manager, Steve McCurry Studios**



Kadimac specializes in integrating Apple technologies and storage solutions into business environments. Owner, Ben Greisler, is a certified Apple consultant and trainer based in the Philadelphia, PA metro area.

## ARCHIWARE

Archware P5 is a data management software that allows IT teams in the media and entertainment industry to conveniently archive and back up to a single LTO drive.

## About Backblaze

Backblaze B2 Cloud Storage is purpose-built for ease, instant access to files and data, and infinite scalability. It seamlessly supports workflows via hundreds of third-party software integrations, or through direct APIs and CLIs. At only \$5/TB of object storage per month (a fraction of the cost of the largest solutions), Backblaze B2 is priced so users don't have to choose between what matters and what doesn't when it comes to backup, archive, data organization, workflow streamlining, and more.

[backblaze.com](https://backblaze.com)