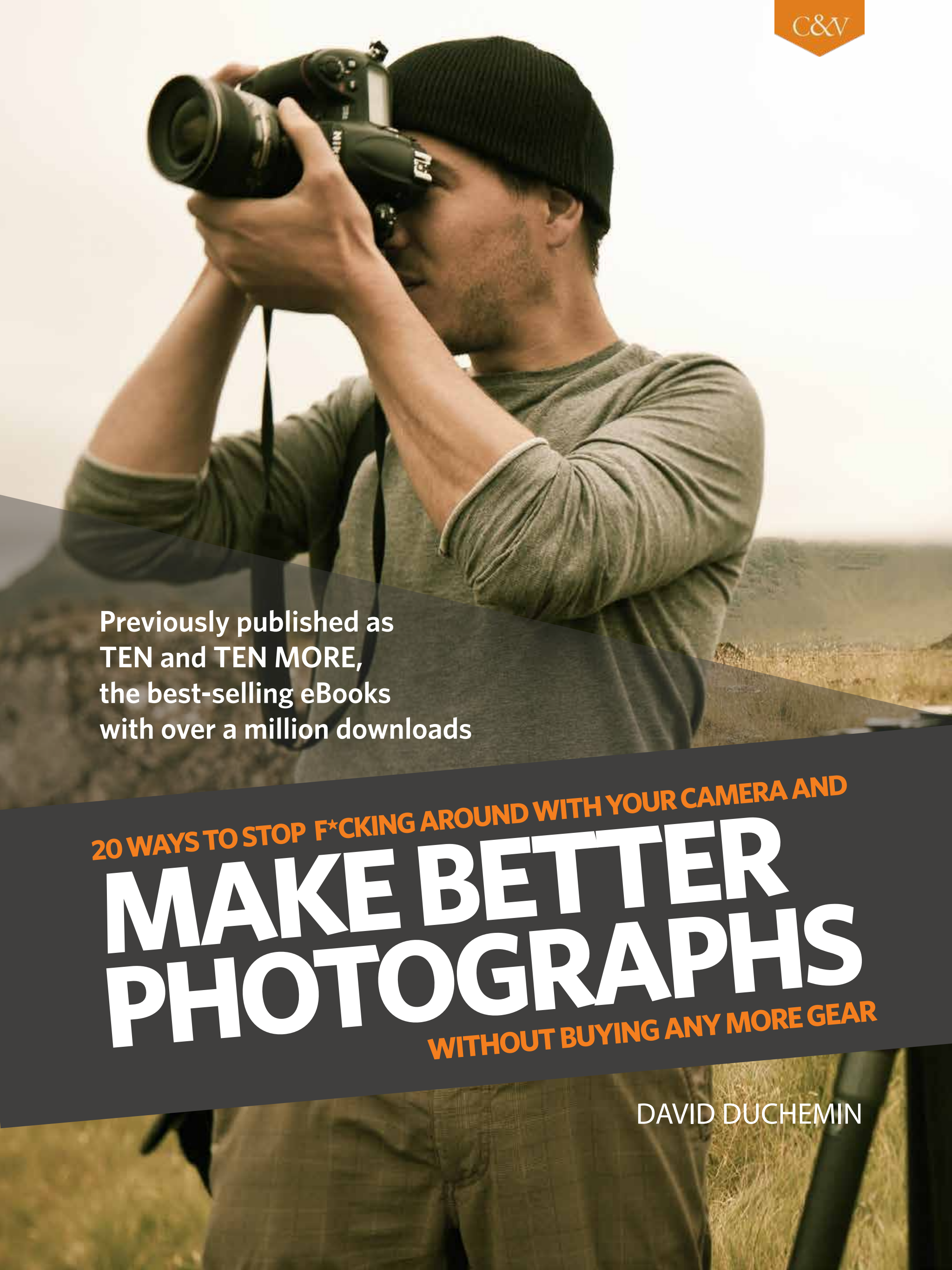

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20 WAYS TO STOP F*CKING AROUND WITH YOUR CAMERA AND

MAKE BETTER PHOTOGRAPHS

WITHOUT BUYING ANY MORE GEAR

DAVID DUCHEMIN

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01 Introduction

No matter when you got that first camera and felt the magic—whether it was this year or five years ago—you'll get a handle on the basics and come to the earth-shattering realization that there's more; that your photographs can be better. More compelling. That realization will change everything and, at some point, there are two paths most of us take.

The first path goes like this: your photographs aren't getting better, so it must be the camera. You buy a better one. Now your photographs are bigger, but not better. It must be the lens, so you buy a better one. Now your photographs are sharper, but still not better. And then it's strobes and tripods and filters and, if you're like me, a new camera bag every few months as the gear keeps accumulating. There's nothing wrong with this in some ways; the gear matters—it's necessary to the craft. But we often need much less of it that we think. And it doesn't make us better photographers.

The second path is a longer one. Accepting that the gear will always change, and having the latest is both a game you can't (cheaply) win and that those changes in gear will not make you a better photographer, just someone floundering with better gear. So attention then turns to the craft itself.

That is the hope of this book, and the promise is this: if you're going to make stronger, better photographs, it is the craft you must learn. Collectively, we must learn to be better photographers, not merely owners of better cameras, and not just competent users of those

cameras, but craftsmen and craftswomen who know that using a camera well does not necessarily lead to the making of a compelling photograph.

I wrote my first eBook in 2009. Since then, I've spent my life either making photographs or teaching people to make stronger and better photographs. In that time, I've grown more and more aware that the photography industry (as if it were one big thing with a will of its own, which it isn't), is not out to help you or me make better photographs. It's out to sell gear, and to keep us moving from tip to trick to shortcut, filling us with platitudes to offer just enough to know whatever gear we have isn't the magic bullet. They count on us to recognize that the next camera, lens, or widget they manufacture is the magic bullet—until they make the next one. The magic bullets give us hope, but they don't make us better photographers. I love gear; my home is full of it. But I know it only gets us so far.

Since 2009, my original eBooks, ***TEN: Ten Ways to Improve Your Craft Without Buying Gear***, and its cleverly named sequel, ***TEN MORE***, have been downloaded over a million times. This is a newly combined and updated version of those books. And I continue to hope that the things I write in this book, and the others I've since written, will make a difference. I want you to make better photographs. I believe photography is a way of seeing the world, of being alive in the world. It's a way of learning to be present in the few moments we have and to really live them. And I want that for you because this craft has given me so, so much.

I also want stay in touch with those who don't immediately hit the unscubscribe button the next time I send an email with a new article or an opportunity to hone your vision even more when enrollment in courses like ***The Compelling Frame*** open. If this eBook resonates with you, perhaps you'll also get value ***out of my blog*** or ***my YouTube channel***, or whatever new medium comes along over the next few years. Links to all those, as well as other books I've written, are at the end of this eBook, in hopes that they'll serve you as well as they've served so many others.

My name is David duChemin, and I've been photographing for over thirty years. I was born in 1971 and picked up my first real camera when I was 14. That camera, or any of the dozens I've owned since then, has been with me a long time. Born to military parents, I have also been travelling all my life. That's reflected in my work, but it in no way means you have to travel to exotic places to make good photographs. It's where my particular muse takes me and trust me when I tell you, based on the terabytes full of less-than-incredible photographs on my hard drives, there is no place in the world so beautiful you can't take a bad photograph. ***It's not the camera. It's not the subject. It's what we do with it.***

In 2006, after twelve years as a professional comedian, I returned to my first love as a career when I took up humanitarian photography, wrote some books (many of them best sellers translated into over a dozen languages), and have taught this craft on every continent. I'm the luckiest man in the world. *This* is my love and my passion, not cameras. They're fun too, but what stirs my soul are the ***photographs.*** And because there's no time for bullshit and platitudes, let's get started. Pretend you've just asked me what 20 things will truly help you become a better photographer. This book is my short answer.

02
Get Pickier

There is a tendency when you first start out to shoot everything in sight. Do it. Shoot it all. You need to make the initial sketch images; they help you learn the basics and go towards the first 10,000 frames that it takes to get better at this craft. But eventually, most of us have to slow down, take a breath, and get picky. Really picky.

I've been standing in front of something that doesn't interest me, or something that does but in harsh light I find unappealing, and had people ask, "How would you photograph that?" My answer surprises them. I wouldn't. Or I would, but they'd be sketch images that help me create better compositions, but then I come back when the light's different. Or when something's going on. And sometimes I come back over and over again. I've got all the requisite shots and what I'm looking for now is not a mediocre image of something great like the Taj Mahal but a great image of something potentially more mundane (but a great image nonetheless). We know what the Taj Mahal *looks like*, but I want images that make my heart quicken, and that doesn't happen every minute of every day.

One of the big mistakes of beginning landscape photographers is to shoot a mountain lake at midday and wonder why it doesn't look like the images their favourite photographers make. In large part, it's because those photographers were picky about where they shoot and when. They get up at insane hours to trudge out of their tents to create those incredible images.

Agra, India, 2007
Canon 5D, 17mm, 1/250 @ f/13, ISO 500

Once the initial thrill of using a camera begins to wear off in exchange for the thrill of creating great images and you've got all the requisite shots of cats and your own feet out of the way, start getting pickier and more selective. Don't waste your time shooting things that don't quicken your heart.

Having said this, what I'm *not* saying is just pick up the camera only when you're in front of something amazing. Many of the world's best images are not made of iconic things, nor were they made in a flash of inspiration. Most of us use our cameras fairly collaboratively in that we have to put it to our eye and make a lot of sketch images before we get anywhere. Do that. If you're using a digital camera, there's no real cost to making a lot of frames—just do so with the aim of not resting until you get something that is more than sharp and well-exposed. Make something that's f*cking awesome. There's no time in life for images of which the best we can say is, "Wow, that sure is sharp." Want more for your photographs. Don't settle.

How? Keep reading.

03

Better Contrast, Better Stories

Better contrast makes for better stories, and better stories make for better images. But don't mistake my saying that "better contrast" always means "stronger, or more contrast" because it doesn't. *Better* sometimes means less. It sometimes means more subtle or nuanced. Some images have very little visual contrast at all, and that lack of bold contrast makes the story what it is, like smog-bound Ulaanbator, Mongolia, on the next page. Don't lose that great subtlety of contrast; it makes the image what it is.

Visual contrast is the distinction between tones or colours, and our eyes are drawn to areas of high contrast. It pulls us into an image and usually makes the elements within immediately more interesting and identifiable. One of the commonalities on prints made by beginners is flat contrast, where the blacks aren't really black and the whites aren't really white.

You can begin improving this by getting better at exposure and your post-processing techniques, but for me, it was simply a matter of realizing it. I knew my prints weren't as good as the images I loved from other photographers. Until one day the light went on and I realized I wasn't paying attention to contrast.

Look for contrast in the frame. Sometimes it's too much—like a portrait taken in midday sun—so you'll want to take your subject into the shade or wait until the sun goes behind a cloud. Sometimes it's not enough. But paying attention to contrast both in camera and in post-processing will improve your image.

Ulaanbator, Mongolia, 2008
Canon 5D, 135mm, 1/125 @ f/8, ISO 100

Conceptual contrast is the distinction between elements within your frame. An old man holding the hand of a young child is a contrast of ages, as is the baby on the shoulder of her mother shown here. Young vs. old. Small vs. large. The sea hitting the shore is a contrast of wet vs. dry or hard vs. soft. A blade of grass pushing itself up from the sidewalk concrete is a contrast of organic vs. man-made.

All of these types of contrasts create interest and draw on themes that storytellers in other mediums have been using for a millennium. Watching for these and incorporating them into your image can give meaning beyond just the obvious and make it more engaging.

Jodhpur, India, 2007
Canon 5D, 50mm, 1/60 @ f/2.0, ISO 500

04

Change My Perspective By Changing Yours

If you want to show me something different, show it to me differently. One of the ways you can do this is to get out of the habit of shooting from eye height. There are billions of photographs taken from eye height, and while many of them are great from that point of view (POV), many more could benefit from a change in perspective.

Get on your face, your knees, or climb a tree, but change it up. Some of these changes should be immediately obvious, like photographing children. Getting down on their level not only allows you to see their faces instead of the tops of their heads, it gives you a child's-eye view; get level with some of their toys or other elements in their world. Getting high changes things, too.

Changing your POV also changes the perspective of lines. Where a line in one image is oblique or diagonal, from a different POV (to the right, or perhaps lower down) it becomes straight. Diagonal lines lead the viewer's eye through an image. Changing your POV can enhance or remove a diagonal line in the frame.

Or take this idea in another direction entirely. In Venice, I once concentrated entirely on reflections to create different views of things I'd explored many times. This change of perspective—conceptually if not specifically related to spatial perspective—gives the viewer a puzzle and a new way of looking at things, which is the great gift of photography: to open eyes.

Venice, Italy, 2017
Fuji X-T2, 25mm, 1/8s @ f/20, ISO 500

Venice, Italy, 2017
Fuji X-T2, 12mm, 1/30 @ f/6.4, ISO 2000

05
Create Depth

Depth can be important to an image. In real life, it's there in three dimensions. But we get tricked into thinking that rendering a three-dimensional image into two dimensions is automatic, but it isn't. Something gets lost in the flattening. You can't make two dimensions into three. But you can create the sense, or illusion, of depth.

First, the caveat: you don't always want to create the feeling of depth. There are plenty of images that work because they lack depth or even go to pains to reduce it (for example, mountain ranges shot with a telephoto lens to compress the scene). But images with depth pull a viewer in, gives them an experience of being there, and brings back some of the sense of captured reality that draws so many of us to photography.

Depth can be created in several ways.

1. Use a wider lens and get in closer. Wider lenses pull us into scenes in ways other optics do not. They give the appearance of lengthened lines and exaggerated perspective. Where less perspective implies less depth, greater perspective implies more depth. Next time you're shooting something with a 50 or 85mm lens, use something wider (like al 17, 24, or 35mm lens) and then push in closer to make up for the loss in perceived proximity.

Get right in there. Notice the change in appearance? See how the whole scene changes and takes on the illusion of greater depth? It won't work for every image, but when you want a feeling of more depth, this is one way to do it.

2. Pay attention to perspective. Even without a wide lens, perspective still affects images and can be used to imply depth. Oblique lines pull the eye into the image, so where a change in POV can make a straight, horizontal line into a diagonal, give it a try. Notice how pointing a lens up at tall buildings makes the lines of the buildings converge? That's perspective. It works on the horizontal plane as much as the vertical, so don't be afraid to harness it. Look for great lines and perspective to pull the eye into the scene.

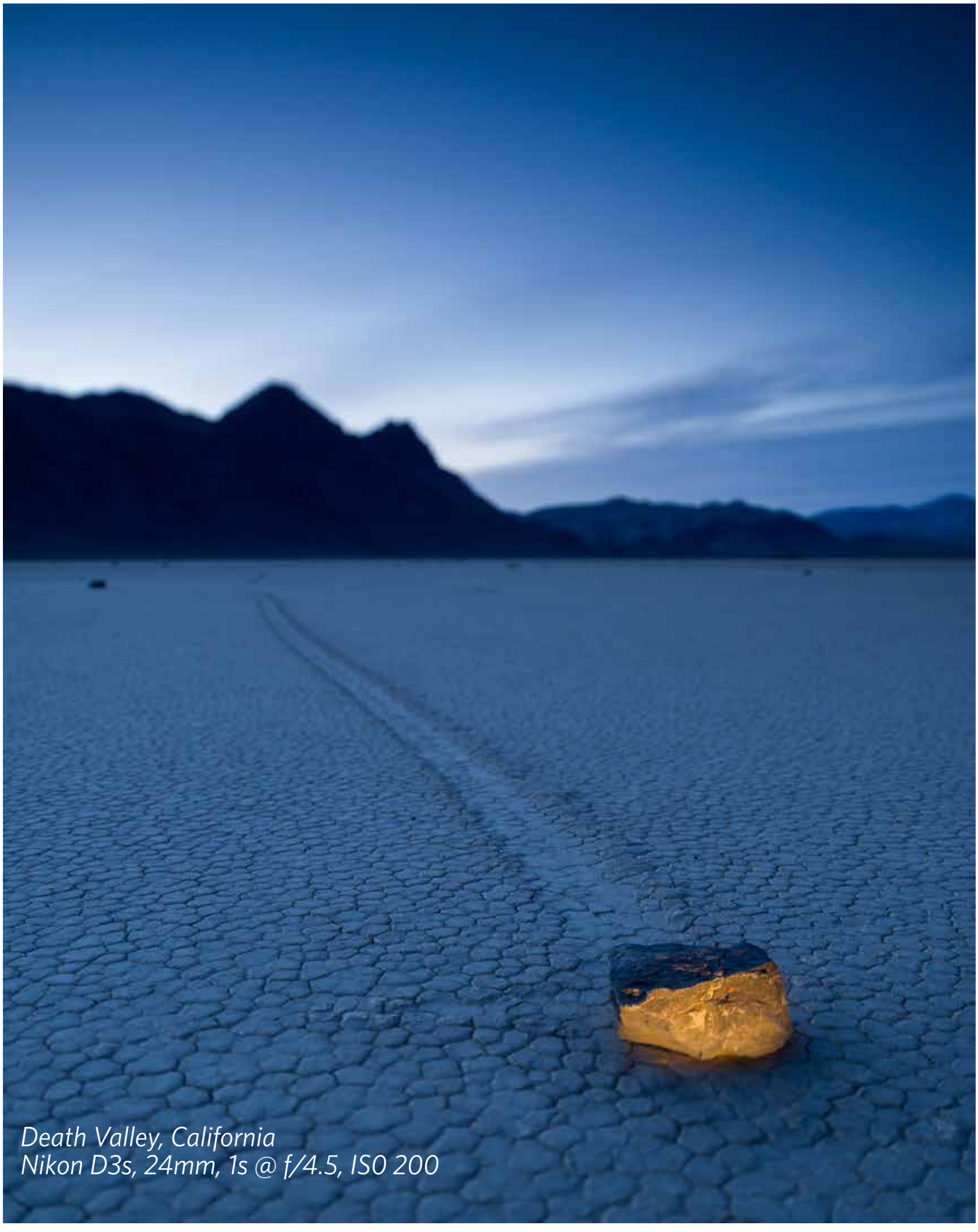
Just be aware that if you don't want your viewer's eye going in that direction (perhaps those lines lead away from your subject instead of to it), you'll want to reign them in a bit or change your POV to get rid of them entirely.

3. Use the light. Painters in the Renaissance discovered an effect they called chiaroscuro (a combination of the Italian words for "light" and "dark"), which represents the way light feathers and falls off with distance. Chiaroscuro adds the implication or illusion of depth and is why photographers love side-lit subjects using window light; it strikes the object but then gently falls off because the object itself has dimension (depth). If you want a photograph with little or no perceived depth, then straight-on light is a good way to get there.

The two images on the following pages are examples of two extremes of the use of depth. For the first, shot at sunrise on Kenya's Maasai Mara, I used a long lens (about 1200mm) to compress the three zebra flat against the sun and the orange sky. This results in a very flat, strong, graphic image, but it's not particularly immersive.

The second image, from Death Valley in California, has much greater visual depth that comes from several things: a much lower POV, a wide lens (24mm), and the placement of that great line leading diagonally into the background. The final thing that gives this image depth is the warmth of the rock, lit with a flashlight covered with a warming gel (basically an orange piece of plastic). The contrast between the warm and cool colours makes the rock seem much more prominent in the foreground, while the background appears to recede.

Maasai Mara, Kenya, 2016
Fuji X-T2, 800mm, 1/2000 @ f/18, ISO 800



Death Valley, California
Nikon D3s, 24mm, 1s @ f/4.5, ISO 200

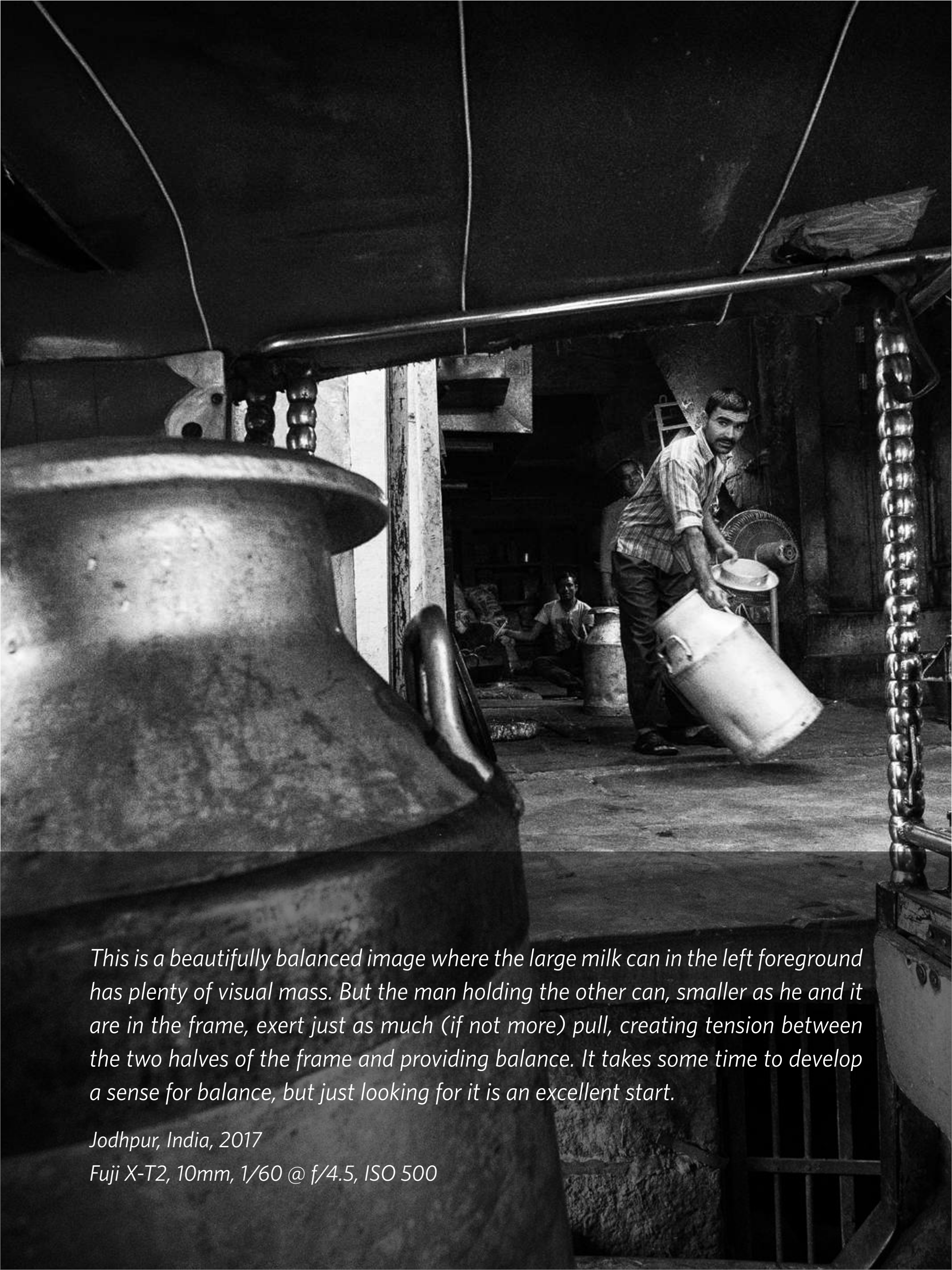
06
Get Balanced

While the rule of thirds is taught like a cure-all for bad composition, it's rare that anyone seems to teach *why*. The truth is that it's all about balance. There are two kinds of balance: static and dynamic. Put a person smack in the middle of the frame and it's balanced, but static. Boring. Put that same person on the leftmost third and it'll also be balanced, but dynamically so. That's a simplification, but it's a start.

First, let's talk about physical objects. An object is said to have mass by the layman because it's heavy. But it's "heavy" because of its interaction with gravitational pull. The more the pull, the heavier it feels. If you put two items on a scale and one has more mass than the other, the scale dips because it's unbalanced.

It's like this with visual objects as well. The more visual mass an element in a photograph has, the more it pulls the eye. If I put an element with greater visual mass (like a human face, or elements that are lighter, sharper, warmer vs. cooler, or more recognizable than other elements in the frame) on the left third, it has two-thirds of the frame—with less visual mass—to balance it out. The image is now balanced, and because it's not central in the frame, the balance is dynamic.

Balance is one of those things you might not consciously notice in an image, but can certainly feel. Becoming more intentional about creating and playing with balance helps you create images that more intentionally express what you have to say.



This is a beautifully balanced image where the large milk can in the left foreground has plenty of visual mass. But the man holding the other can, smaller as he and it are in the frame, exert just as much (if not more) pull, creating tension between the two halves of the frame and providing balance. It takes some time to develop a sense for balance, but just looking for it is an excellent start.

Jodhpur, India, 2017
Fuji X-T2, 10mm, 1/60 @ f/4.5, ISO 500

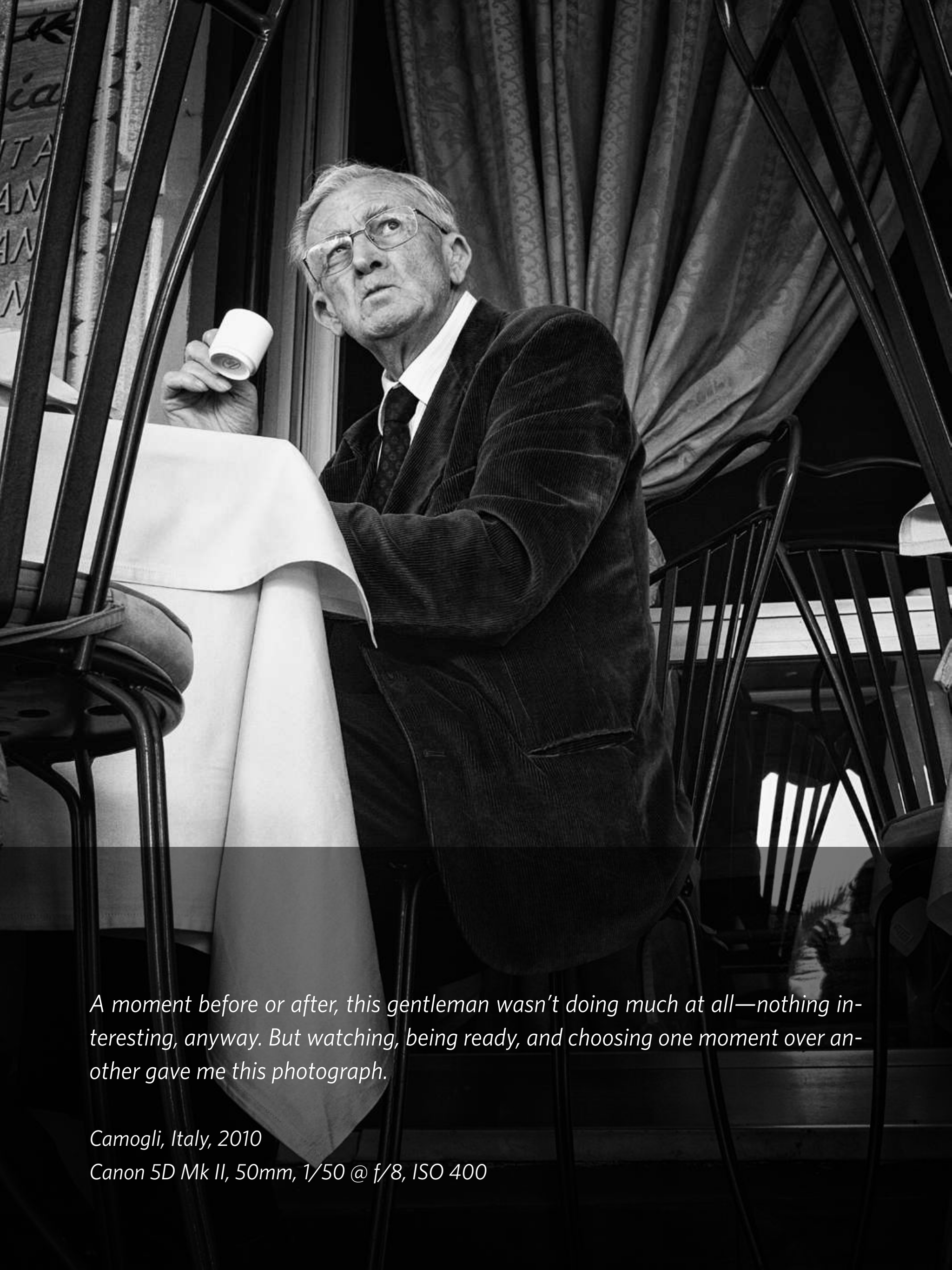
07
Choose Better Moments

The moment you choose is so important that it often makes or breaks a photograph.

Shooting a scene where there is action of any kind, there are some moments that are "better"—or perhaps more appropriately, stronger—than others. There are moments when the emotion or the action culminates, and that culmination coincides with the best composition within the frame. Those moments are golden and rare, and they differ from photographer to photographer. The moment I choose might not be the one you choose, but the moment matters.

What makes a good moment? That depends. Sometimes it's in the revelation, like the relaxation that happens after a forced smile in a portrait. Sometimes it's when the action is at its apex, like a basketball player at the peak of a slam-dunk. And other times it's more subtle, like a look, a glance, or a gesture of a woman as she reaches out to touch her lover's arm. Whatever it is, the moment is no mere detail in the image: it's vital. Sometimes the moment itself becomes the subject of the image.

What makes capturing the moment so difficult is that it's not often gained without patience. Waiting is a much underrated photographic skill: be patient, watch what happens, and be ready when it does. Don't settle for good when waiting a few minutes might give you something truly revealing.



A moment before or after, this gentleman wasn't doing much at all—nothing interesting, anyway. But watching, being ready, and choosing one moment over another gave me this photograph.

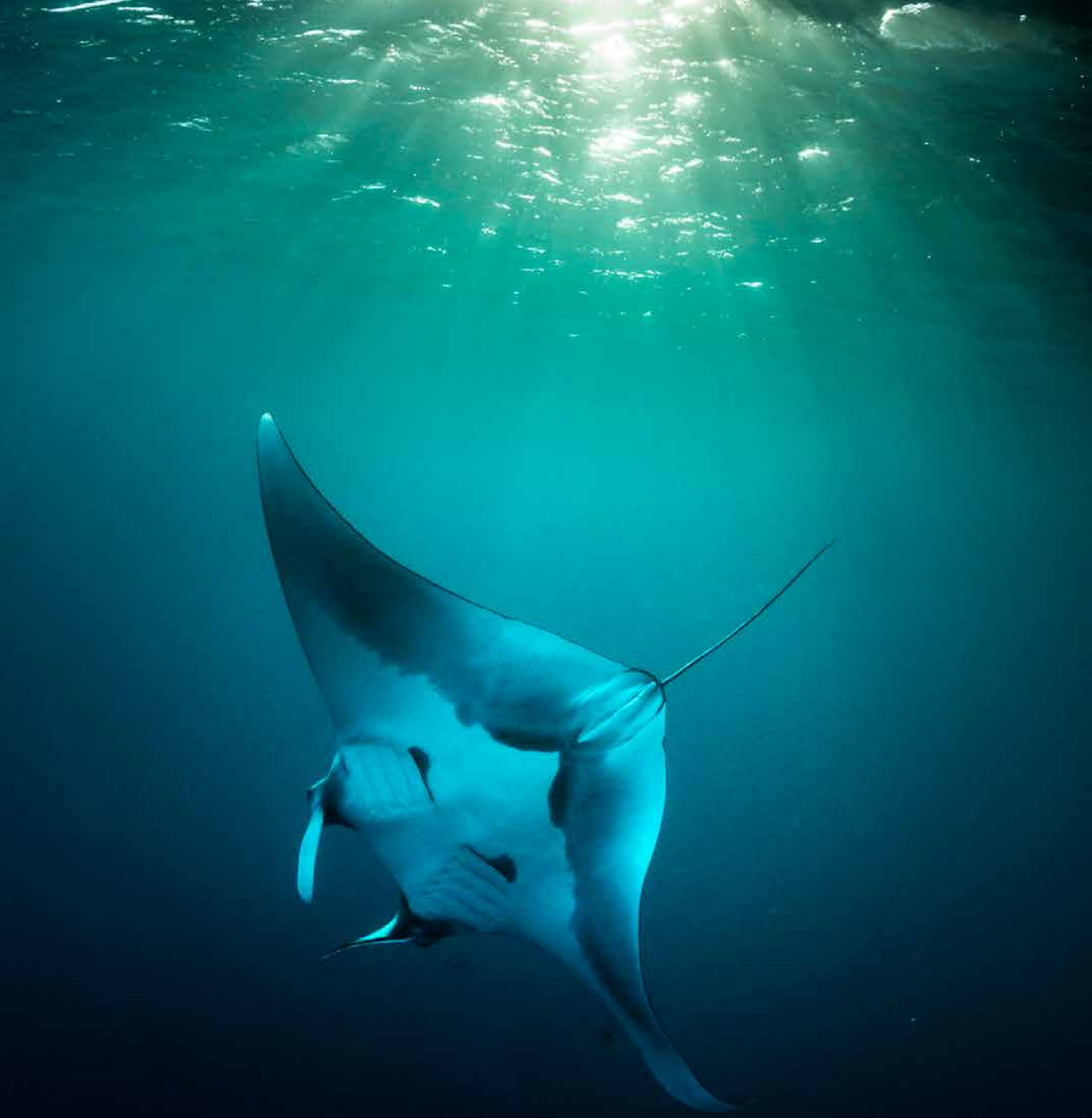
Camogli, Italy, 2010
Canon 5D Mk II, 50mm, 1/50 @ f/8, ISO 400

08
Look To The Light

I don't know why it took me so long to learn this. I spent years focusing on how much light I got into the camera. Years worth of perfectly-exposed images recording unexceptional light. If there's one thing that'll improve your photographs, it's the ability to see the light. Photography is defined as "painting with light," but no painter in his or her right mind would pay more attention to the brushes than to the paint.

Photographers also need to learn to see light. What colour is it? From which direction is it coming? Is it hard? Soft? What kind of shadows is it creating and where are they falling? And once you begin to see the light, you'll find yourself saying, "Wow, look at the light right now!"

There is no "bad" light—only light that works with you or against you to accomplish your vision—so take the time to study light. Fortunately for you, there's no secret. All you have to do is be observant. Actually ***look*** at what different light does in different situations, shoot it, then review the images. Don't like harsh shadows? The light did that. Don't like the colour temperature? The light did that, too. I know it doesn't sound like a tip or a technique that'll make or break your images, and yes, it's hard work, but whoever said photography was easy? So if you want to be better, to ***see*** better, ***study the light***.



The light in this image is everything. Without it, it's just a photograph of an stunning giant oceanic manta, but it wouldn't be a beautiful photograph because the mood would vanish.

Revillagigedo Archipelago, Mexico, 2016

Nikon D800, 15mm, 1/400 @ f/10, ISO 800

09
Use Better Lenses

There are equipment retailers by the hundreds that desperately hope you'll stop reading this, launch your browser, and go buy some new glass. And while I think you should get the best lens you can reasonably afford, that's not at all what I mean. Rather, I urge you to use the most appropriate lens for the image you're hoping to create.

Like learning to see the light, it took me years to finally learn to use my lenses for more than just their ability to cram more crap into the frame (wide angle) or make small things big (telephoto). Lenses are your most important tools for translating the three-dimensional world into two, and knowing what they do to make that translation is absolutely critical in moving forward.

In other words, each focal length behaves very differently from any other. Going back to the translation metaphor, it's like the wide angles translate into Spanish, the standard lenses translate into French, and the telephotos translate into Swahili. Different languages. Only that's a terrible metaphor because they also say different things. (Abandons metaphor, moves on to the most significant behaviour of optics: compression.)

A telephoto lens (e.g., 200mm) not only makes what you're focusing on much larger in the frame, it also creates the illusion of bringing the foreground and background and all the elements in between closer together. It compresses them, hence the name.

A wide-angle lens does the opposite. Far from getting more into the frame, a wide-angle lens creates the appearance of all elements moving further apart.

Compression is helpful in pulling a scene together to better imply a relationship between elements. Want to photograph a giraffe against a setting sun and thorn tree on the African savannah? A telephoto lens can pull those elements together without losing impact. A wide-angle lens would get them all in but significantly reduce the impact and implication of a relationship between them. "Yeah, but how do I get them all in there? I mean, if they fit into a wide-angle frame, how do they also fit into a telephoto frame?" You back up. When using my 70-200mm/2.8 lens, I often racked it out to 200mm and would then take a hike back several feet to re-frame my image. I could have used my 50mm and stayed put, but if that doesn't give me the look I want, what's the point?

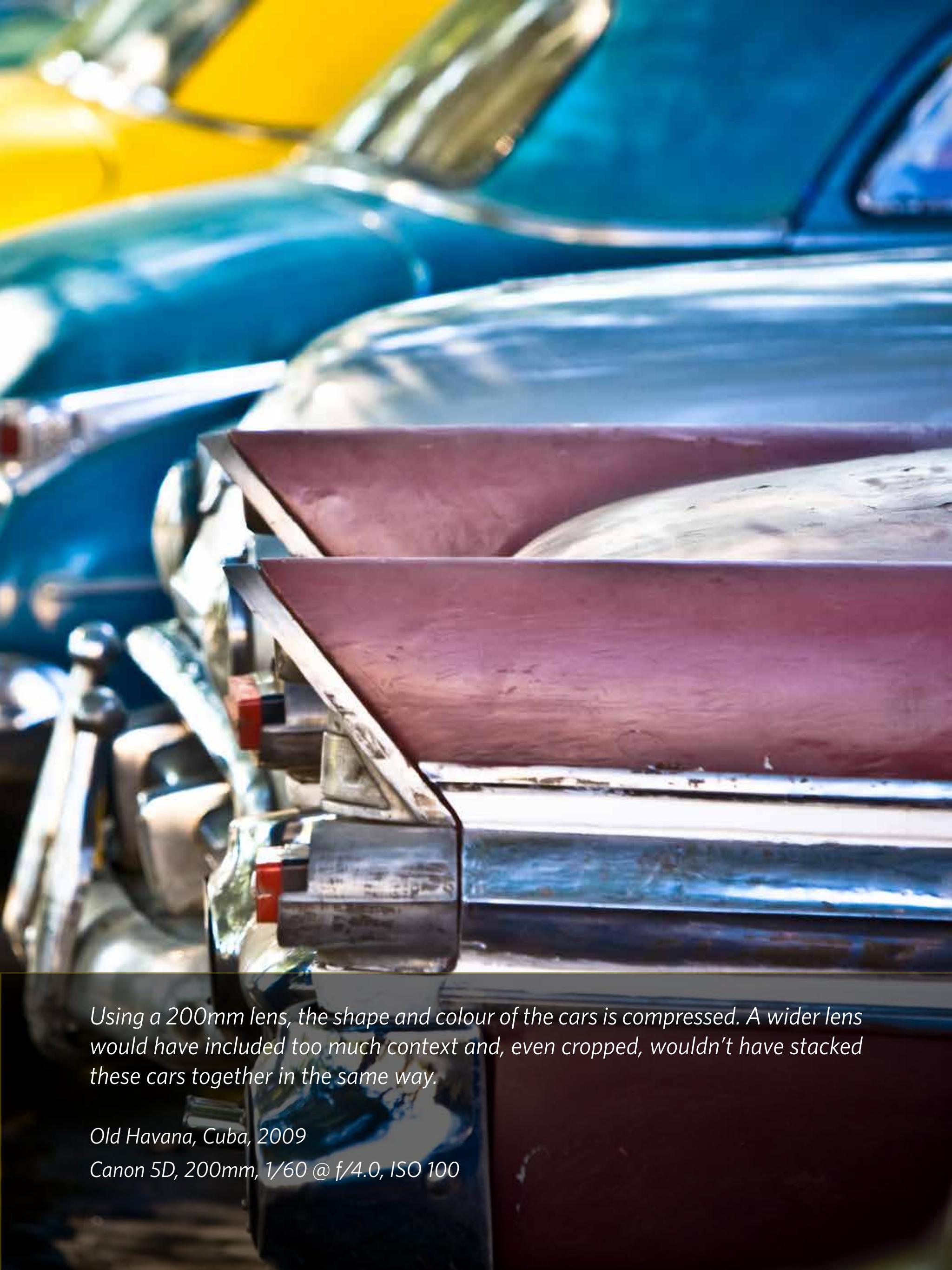
Wide-angle lenses push elements further apart. They also exaggerate lines that can then create compositions to pull the viewer into the frame more powerfully than a telephoto can. Telephoto lenses compress lines, often diminishing how dynamic those lines are. But wide-angle lenses exaggerate the dynamic nature of those lines. They do the same to faces; ultra-wide lenses can give a cartoonish or playful look. That same ability to push elements apart means you can give really great play to a foreground if you go wide and push in tight, while still keeping a great background to provide context.

It's important to remember that none of this is affected by sensor size. I once had a student ask me whether she should get a 50mm/1.4 lens or a 30mm/2.8 for portraits, using a crop sensor camera. Ultimately, it's her preference, but I told her that a 30mm will crop more like a 50mm, but it won't compress like a 50mm. It will compress like a 30mm, because that's what it is. Sensor size doesn't change angle of view or lens behavior (though it does affect depth of field). That's important because photography is about the look—the *aesthetic*—created through the lens and in the camera.

I couldn't have fit anything longer into my underwater housing, so it was the wide lens on my Canon 5D that gave this image its look and feel. Lens choice can be impactful on how immersive an image feels.

Jamaica, 2010

Canon 5D, 30mm, 1/500 @ f/10, ISO 400



Using a 200mm lens, the shape and colour of the cars is compressed. A wider lens would have included too much context and, even cropped, wouldn't have stacked these cars together in the same way.

Old Havana, Cuba, 2009

Canon 5D, 200mm, 1/60 @ f/4.0, ISO 100

10
Expose For Aesthetics

Your shutter speed and aperture do much more than allow you to finesse your exposures; each setting has an affect on the aesthetic of the image. I somehow overlooked this for years. I knew it in my head, but somehow figured none of it really mattered. Want to take your images to the next level? Be intentional about the shutter speed and aperture you choose, knowing that *how* you say something affects *what* you say.

Every book on photography talks about this, but the internet remains littered with images where merely getting a good exposure was clearly the top priority. It's not. It's only one priority of several, chief among which is the ***look*** of the image.

This is why I always shoot in Manual mode. Not because there's any badge of honour for doing so, it's just that it's faster for me. And since the camera has no idea what I want to do, I need to take control. For example, wildly underexposing a scene with really bright highlights (like the street scene in Rome on the following page), panning, or creating blur in a scene that would for no other reason require a shutter speed of 1/4s requires that you tell the camera what you want to do.

So how do I expose? ***For the look I want.*** There are 20 ways to get the right exposure for a scene, but often only a couple ways that'll be sure you've got the right depth of field or the best motion blur or the darkest shadows and no blown out highlights. Remember, the camera has no idea what you want, so take control!

Rome, Italy, 2017
Fuji X-T2, 20mm, 1/500 @ f/20, ISO 400

Delhi, India, 2008
Canon 5D, 17mm, 1/8 @ f/22, IS0 400

Venice, Italy, 2017
Canon 5D Mk II, 23mm, 0.8s @ f/14, IS0 200

11

Great Foregrounds & Backgrounds

It's said that a great story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. So do alot of crappy ones. More accurately, a great story has a great beginning, a great middle, and a great end. So it is with photographs, only our equivalent is a great foreground in front of a great background.

What makes a great background will mean different things to different photographers and will depend on the image being made. Sometimes that means a background that's been simplified through a shallow depth of field and doesn't distract. For others, like landscape photographers, it might be a perfectly sharp mountain range at first light. But if you have a spectacular foreground, its impact will be reduced by a crappy background. Same with a great background with a lousy foreground.

So if you've got a great foreground with a lousy background, do something about it. Walk around your subject and find a better angle. Lie down, stand on a ladder, or move in some other way to change your POV and, therefore, your background. Use a wide-angle lens and push in closer. The foreground will be just as large, but the background will be less significant.

Alternatively, use a much longer focal length and take advantage of the narrower angle it captures. The background will be closer, but there will be much less of it there. Dial the lens down to 2.8 and it should all look like a dreamy blur, like the shot of my friend Russ on the next page, shot with a focal length of 125mm at f/2.8.

Ladakh, India, 2017
Canon 5D, 125mm, 1/3200 @ f/2.8, ISO 100

12
Get (Way) Closer

Robert Capa said "If your photographs aren't good enough, you're not close enough." Here are three ways to get closer.

1. Proximity. Move your feet. This is the most literal interpretation of the "get closer" maxim. Get your camera closer to your subject matter. Of course, the opposite is true, and you'll often need to back up (especially if you're using compression) but there are times your proximity to the subject can't be replicated with a longer lens, like when you're shooting with a wide-angle lens and want to be in tight. You *could* use a longer lens, but it would change the whole look of the image, and isn't the look the point of it all? Still, moving in and being unafraid of being close can dramatically improve images, especially portraiture where proximity implies intimacy and allows you a deeper connection with your subject.

2. Compression. Use your lens. A longer focal length allows you to get closer when you physically can't. It also allows you to pull that background close to your foreground, and in some cases where this effect is important, you'll find yourself needing a longer focal length but having to back up to use it. Get closer by walking backwards. Weird, but helpful.

3. Research. The more you know about your subject, the more intimate and revealing your images about that subject will be. This is not physical closeness at all, but a mental, emotional, or even a spiritual proximity to it through familiarity, intimacy, or respect.

Nepal, 2008
Canon 5D, 160mm, 1/250 @ f/2.8, ISO 100

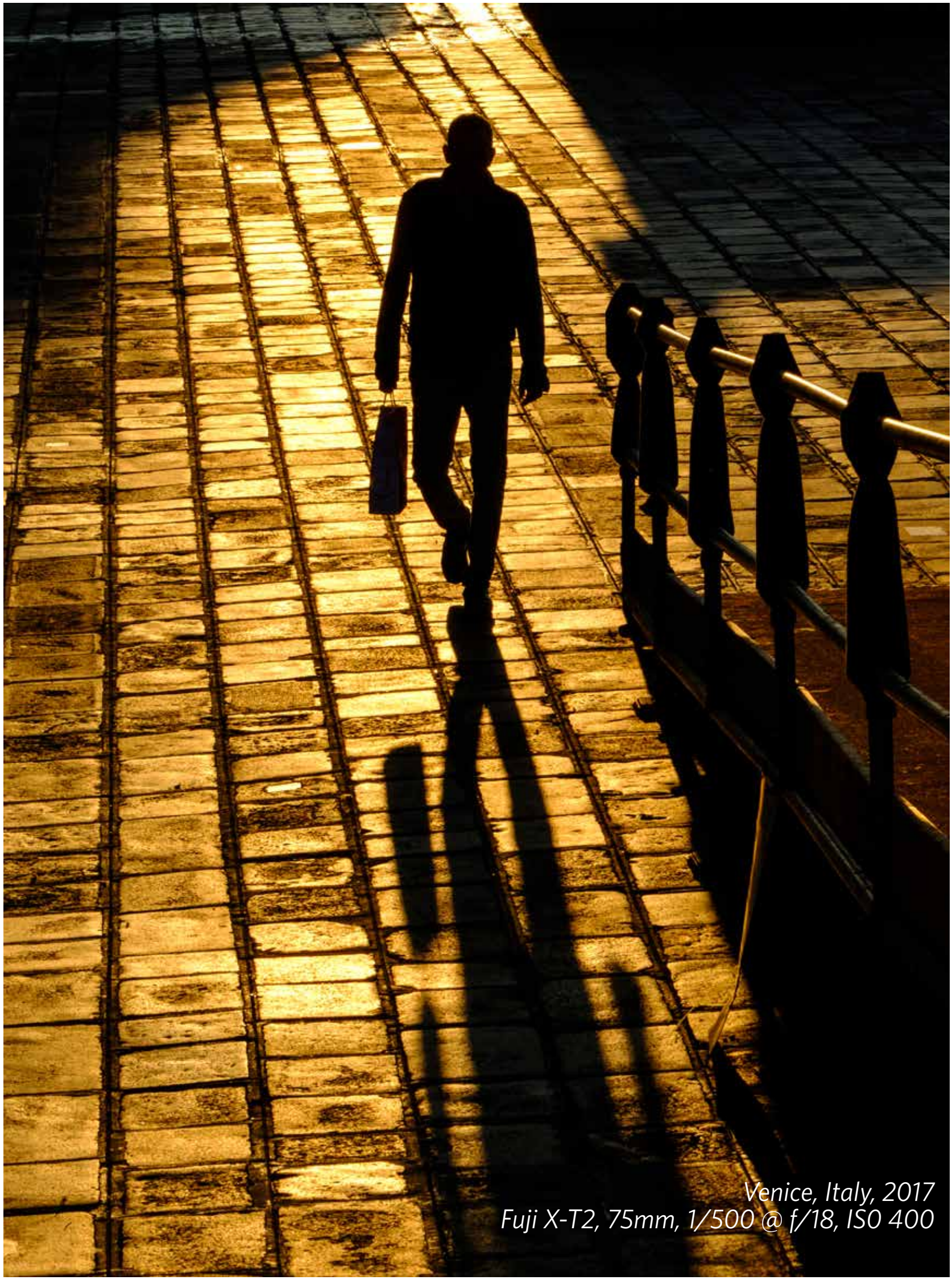
13
Embrace Constraints

Photography is a creative pursuit and creativity works best under constraints. So while our tendency as photographers is to labour under the delusion that the size of our camera bag or gear closet is directly related to how creative we can be, that doesn't seem to bear itself out in the real world. What it does instead is paralyze us with options and choices.

But give a photographer one camera and one lens and watch her explore her options. I used to carry way more gear than I needed when traveling on assignment, but after leaving most of that gear behind in the hotel or in the Land Cruiser, I've learned. I now mostly limit myself to two bodies and two lenses. I leave the gimmicks and the toys at home. And in those times I want to play with the toys, I still embrace the idea of constraints. If I'm playing with my Lensbaby, I go out with only my Lensbaby, and I work it. It's then that the ideas come to me, that the unexpected happens, or the muse shows up to inspire me. It's when I've run up against the wall of the constraints and exhausted the possibilities that I have to rely on my creativity to kick in.

Want to jump-start your creativity as a photographer? Go with less gear, not more. Even beyond creativity, it's good advice. Better to master one lens than be mediocre with four.

The image on the next page was shot during one of my Venice workshops. My constraints were a specific lens and a specific kind of light. Choosing constraints is a key part of all my workshops.



Venice, Italy, 2017
Fuji X-T2, 75mm, 1/500 @ f/18, ISO 400

14
Study Photographs

They say we become who we are in large part due to the people with whom we surround ourselves and the books we read. Photography is a hands-on craft, an art that's improved by getting out there and doing it, frame after frame after frame. But there is a needed place for good old-fashioned study.

When I was 16, I studied the images and the life of Yousuf Karsh. I pored over his images, taking his work out of the library so many times I can't help but wonder why the librarian didn't just let me keep them. I immersed myself, lost for hours in the tones, lines, textures, and emotions of his portraits. Same thing with Steve McCurry, and now in my adulthood, studying many others, including Cartier-Bresson, Frank, Koudelka, and Levitt. As I study the work of men and women who brought this craft to where it is today, I learn new ways to make stronger photographs. I learn what *makes* a stronger photograph.

Studying the work of master photographers is a chance to see how and why they made those images and to see how they used the basic tools of light, colour, gesture, to create their images.

Their work changes me; it challenges my methods. I may never meet them, but I can study under them all the same. This doesn't have to cost a thing: go to the library once a week and borrow the work of the masters. Everyone has something to teach you if you're willing to learn. Want to make better photographs? *Study* better photographs.

15
Print Your Work

This is a short one. Print your work.

I know, buying a new lens is sexier. People will think you're much more serious about the craft if you have a Canon L lens or a Leica. But if you really want to be serious, make your next investment a printer and learn to use it.

Fewer things have made me a better photographer than printing my work. As a photographer, you need to hold your photograph in your hands, to study it, to live with it for more than the 10 minutes we usually give it in the digital darkroom before sending it to Instagram or Facebook and moving on.

Your work needs time to mature, to teach you, to get you past the initial rush of how new and sharp and lucky you were, or how hard you worked to get the shot in the first place. It needs time to show you its flaws. It needs time to suggest alternatives. This is how you learn and most of us don't give it enough time. We sign the work too fast. And we miss the chance to learn.

Live with your work. Print it. Put it in books. Hang it on walls. Study it. This isn't an afterthought; it's a significant part of the craft. It will make you a better photographer with a sharper sense of the visual language and the areas where you're getting lazy or have room to learn something new.

Very few of you will actually do this, preferring to buy the next lens, the next magic bullet. There is no magic bullet. But printing your work will improve your craft. I promise.

When I return from a trip, I immediately import and back up my images, and the very next thing I do is print my portfolio selects. The best of them get framed. Saw & Mitre is my framer of choice, showcasing one of my favourite bear photographs below. However you do it, print your work, and put it on display!

16
Play. Fail. Learn.

For something that most of us take up for fun, we sure know how to take it way too seriously at times. I occasionally wonder if the Canon vs. Nikon wars that rage in forums across the internet will end in casualties, and other times, I realize they already have. The more seriously we take the wrong issues, the less time we give to learning and making photographs. If the participants in those forums put as much passion into their art as they do into their arguments, there'd be a photographic Renaissance. I'm all for taking photography seriously, but not at the risk of losing the sense of play and the willingness to experiment, fail, and learn from those failures.

When we take things too seriously, we begin to censor our efforts and silence the playful, creative voice that used to say, "Hey, what if?" or "I wonder what it looks like when I do this?" If you're like me, you do your best work when it comes from a place of playfulness, curiousity, or willingness to try something just to see what happens.

Art carries with it an element of risk. And it's that risk, even in matters as simple as making a few bad frames, that separates the good from the mediocre. It's the ones who colour outside the lines that go on to become Picasso and the ones who colour within the lines that go on to become, well, *not* Picasso.

Failure is our best teacher. Stop reading every magazine and watching endless videos and go figure it out for yourself. It's easier than it seems.

Not everyone loves the idea of setting out to fail, but failure is the most faithful teacher. So much of what I know now, and techniques I use regularly in my work, came from failure, like going out and playing with slow shutters and sun flare and multiple exposure and weird out-of-focus abstracts. And no, the images won't work for everyone all the time and are sometimes they're complete rubbish. But they teach me more about cameras and photographs than all my successes put together. This multiple-exposure image was made with my iPhone.

17
Shoot From The Heart

There are billions of photographs out there, and the world in no way needs more mediocre photographs. What it *does* need is more passionate photographs, images that come to life perceived by the eyes but expressed through the camera with the heart.

To create better photographs, begin with things you care deeply about. If that's the natural world and issues of conservation, show me. If it's your children, then show that. Photographing the things you are passionate about does a couple of things. It shows me more of *you*. It shows me more of what you love. And it makes better photographs. You might make a nice image of something you're apathetic about, but when you turn your lens toward the things you love, it comes through in your work, because you do it over and over again and your intimacy and knowledge of the subject shows.

Ask yourself why the great art in history resonates the way it does with the world; why the great images are considered great. It's not technical prowess. It's not Photoshop filters. It's not even sharp focus. Sure, craft matters. But passion matters more. Passion fuels the dedication needed to sustain life-long learning and dedication to craft.

We know what the world looks like, so show us what your world *feels* like. When you see something that excites you, like the reflections and colour on the next page did for me, ***photograph it!***

Rome, Italy, 2017
Fuji X-T2, 18mm, 1/500 @ f/16, ISO 1600

18
Shoot On Manual

To use your camera to best express yourself, master it. Every setting you choose has an aesthetic effect on the photograph, so the more comfortable you are with the camera, the more able you will be to use it to express your vision.

When I first started photography, the first thing I had to learn was how to manually expose film using classic bodies like the Canon AE-1 and the Pentax Spotmatic. I learned the give and take of shutter and aperture and became proficient with them to the point that they were second nature so they got out of the way, allowing me to focus on other things, like composition. While the technology that drives current cameras is a gift, I do think there's a time and place for putting that gift aside for a time in favour of something even better: a vivid familiarity with your settings.

Abandoning Program, AV, or TV mode for awhile and learning to work only in Manual may scare the heck out of you, but it's time that has a guaranteed return on investment. It'll make you more keenly aware of the interaction between shutter and aperture and force you to be more intentional about your selections. When you return later to shooting in AV or TV mode, you'll consider your preferences more intentionally and not blindly allow the camera to make these choices for you. Better control = better images.

Kenya, 2011
Nikon D3s, 20mm, 1/125 @ f/4.5, ISO 100

19
Simplify

Without a camera, we live in a three-dimensional world with pretty great peripheral vision. Then we raise the box to our face and are immediately confronted with the limitations of the medium. Three dimensions are flattened into two, dramatically reducing the field of view.

That's the nature of photography, and the sooner we photographers get used to the nature and limits of our medium, the sooner we'll embrace the medium for what it is and not what it should be.

Part of that is the need to simplify. A photograph isn't reality; it's a flattened, limited perspective on a fraction of a second of reality, and it can only say so much. So work with the medium. Don't ask the photograph to say more than it can. Simplify. Ask the image to powerfully show one thing, and no more.

The more you try to cram into the frame, the less each element is allowed to speak, reducing its impact. So simplify—push in closer, make use of blurs and shallow focus, and allow each image to speak with the greatest impact or subtlety. The image on the next page was simplified in a few ways: the specific monochrome treatment removed the green hues that drew the eye away from the bear; a longer lens allowed for a tighter crop; and the slower shutter speed allowed the water to blur and become a cleaner white line, all so I could more directly focus on the Spirit Bear itself.

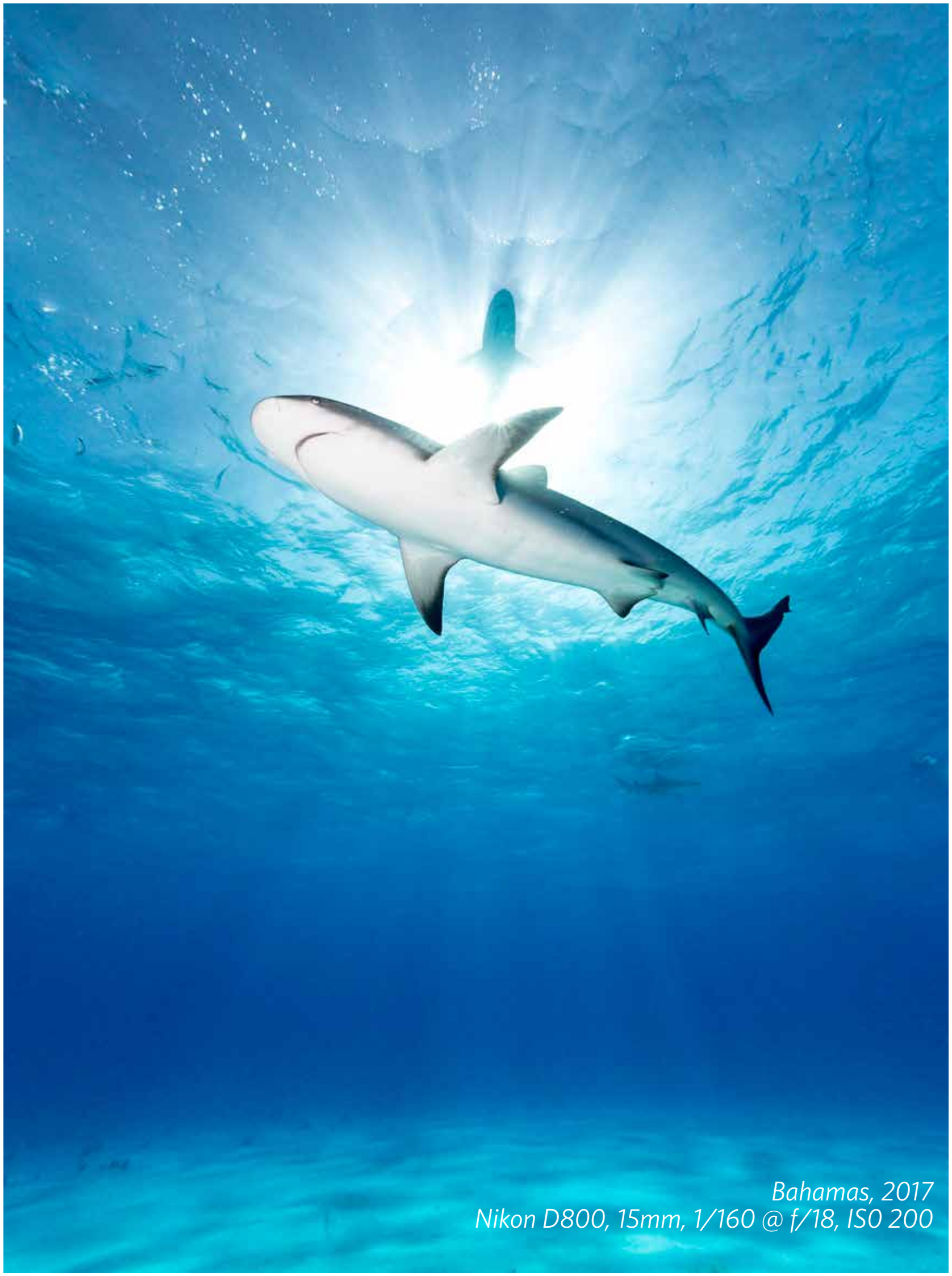
Great Bear Rainforest, 2017
Fuji X-T2, 140mm, 1/8 @ f/7.1, ISO 200

20
Build Muscle Memory

The best thing any camera can do is get the hell out of your way. You should know by memory the location of every important setting and function button on your camera so you can find it by touch without giving it much thought (and I don't mean every custom setting deep in the menus). Could you find and change your ISO without taking your eye from the scene? How about the focus points, or whatever other function you use daily? Not only should you know how to use every button on your camera, you should be able to find them intuitively. No looking at the camera; your eyes need to be on the scene.

Know what the camera can do. Inspiration only goes so far. The better you know what your camera is capable of, the more your inspiration can make use of that. If you don't know what the camera can do, then your inspiration has nothing to go on. I know this is dry as toast, but take an hour, medicate if you have to, and read your manual. Learn how and where to quickly access those tools without looking.

The more comfortable you are with your tool, the more easily the tool can become instinctive, allowing inspiration and your own particular creative process to proceed unhindered. Photography so often depends on capturing that particular moment, so don't miss it because you were trying to find your ISO or change your aperture. Like the image on the next page, the moment that makes the image won't last long. Be ready. Don't fiddle.



Bahamas, 2017
Nikon D800, 15mm, 1/160 @ f/18, ISO 200

21
Try It In Black & White

I think the reason black and white photographs are often deemed more powerful and gritty is because the absence of colour forces us to look at other things instead, like story, lines, and relationships between elements.

Colour is powerful. The eye is quickly drawn to colour, and colours have persuasive associations, evoking emotions and mood simply by looking at them. It's no wonder then that in a colour image the other elements of tone, line, and gesture take a back seat. But remove that colour and those elements (and others, such as contrast and texture) leap out and are given the chance to tell the story.

If I were teaching an introductory course to photography in my imaginary perfect world, my students would shoot only black and white film on manual cameras. Colour can be a crutch on which to lean to carry your images. Want to know how strong your photographic legs are? Kick out the crutches.

Rendering your work in black and white is a valuable exercise. It more clearly shows you the weaknesses in your images and suggests ways to improve. And the absence of colour shows you where an image shines. When colour doesn't contribute at all, like any other extraneous element, taking it out makes the remaining elements stronger. The image on the next page was full of great colour, but those colours were not the point and overshadowed the other elements that are so much stronger: the emotion and the story.

Jodhpur, India, 2017
Fuji X-T2, 10mm, 1/30 @ f/18, ISO 1600

22
One More Thing

I'd like to leave you with one final sermon, one that comes from my own growing—and increasingly stubborn—rejection of shortcuts.

Shortcuts in art lead to cliché and propaganda. They lead to artists more concerned about the product than the expression, and they lead to art that denies a basic truth about humanity, and that is that *there are no shortcuts*. No shortcuts in love, health, spirituality, or even the wildly pragmatic world of business. A pursuit of shortcuts creates shallow art, if it's art at all.

A pursuit of shortcuts does something else. It deeply discourages the growing artist. The shortcut drops the earnest artist in the middle of nowhere, with no map or water, then vanishes. It leaves that artist with a sense of "now what?" and in the end, he or she is forced to walk back to the starting point, making up for lost time on the path that should have been followed from the beginning.

Art is pretty hard to define, but I don't think you can separate the product (the end) from the process (the means). So what am I saying? For one thing, I'm back to reminding you (and myself) that it's just plain hard.

There's no secret to success or photographic virtuosity, but I'd say the closest thing is that it's a long, hard, but glorious road with no shortcuts.

But I also want to encourage you. If you're feeling frustrated because it's taking a while, proving to be harder than the

camera makers and the Shoot-Like-A-Pro websites told you it would be, that's good. It means you're in the same boat as the rest of us. The difficulty and challenge of the craft—the way it stretches you and demands more of you than you expected—is not an obstacle to getting where you want to be; it's the path to getting there. What's in the way is the way.

Don't give up. Keep at it. Take baby steps if need be. But keep taking them. Daily. And in time, those steps will get a little more sure, a little wider and faster. Trip, fall, get back up. Just lay off the shortcuts, because they're only sabotaging your progress.

Thank you so much for making me a part of your photographic journey. I value your trust and will do everything I can to earn it and keep it. I try very hard to be a voice of sanity and passion in an industry that has a tendency to go wildly off balance in the pursuit of gear. Gear is good, but vision is better. Thanks again!

For the Love of the Photograph,

David duChemin
Victoria, Canada, 2017

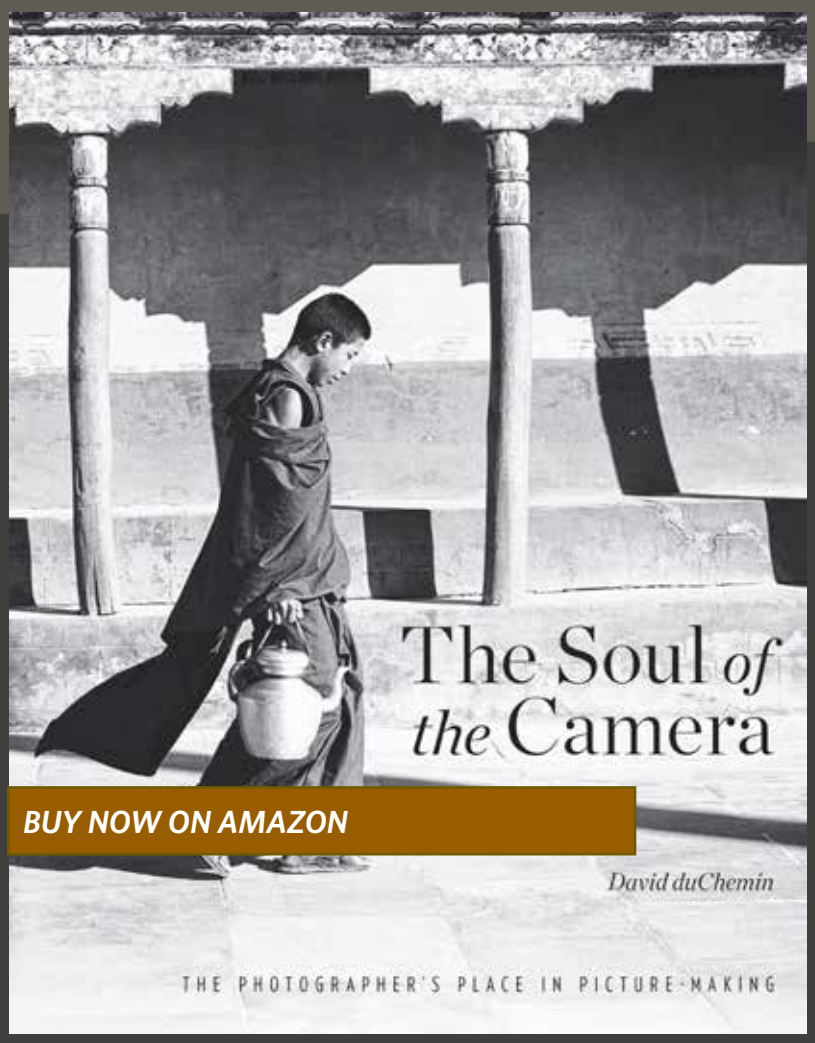
Want More?

Find more of my eBooks and other resources on the C&V website.

You can find my best-selling books, including *The Soul of the Camera* and *Within The Frame*, on Amazon, or watch the Vision Is Better Show on YouTube.

Find me on my blog and see my latest work at davidduchemin.com. I also post photographs and story slices of my adventures on Facebook and Instagram.

FOUR MORE WAYS
TO LEARN THE CRAFT YOU LOVE.



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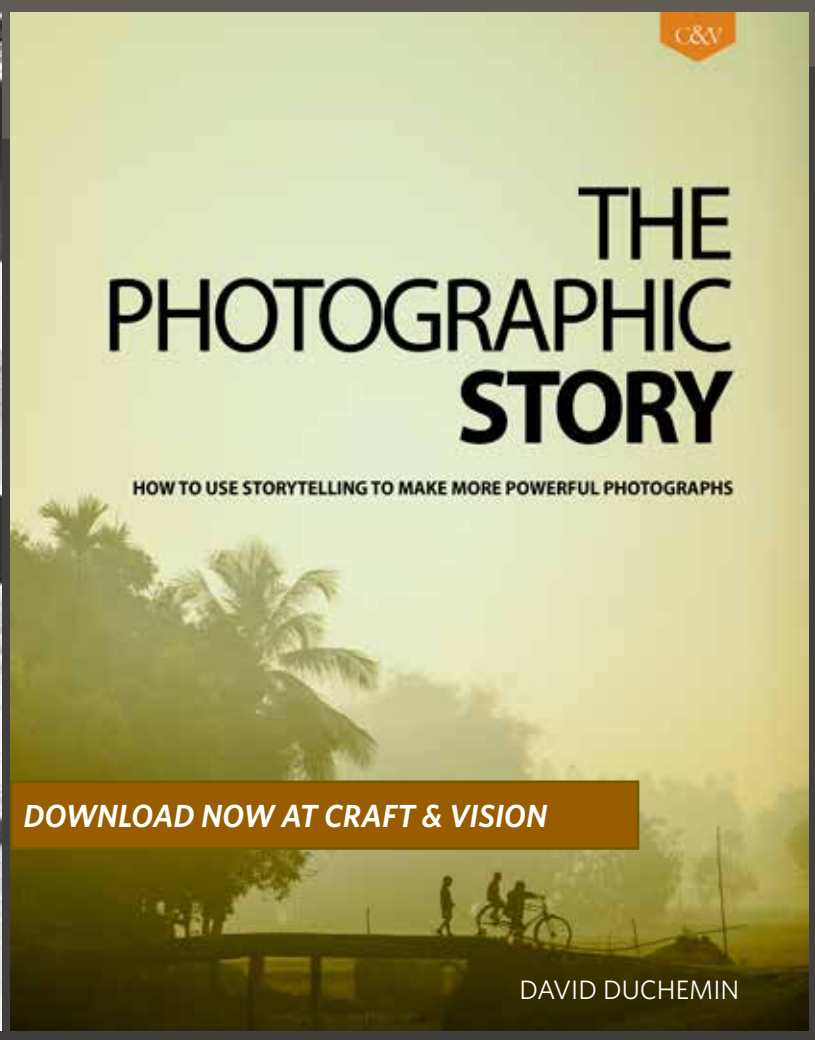

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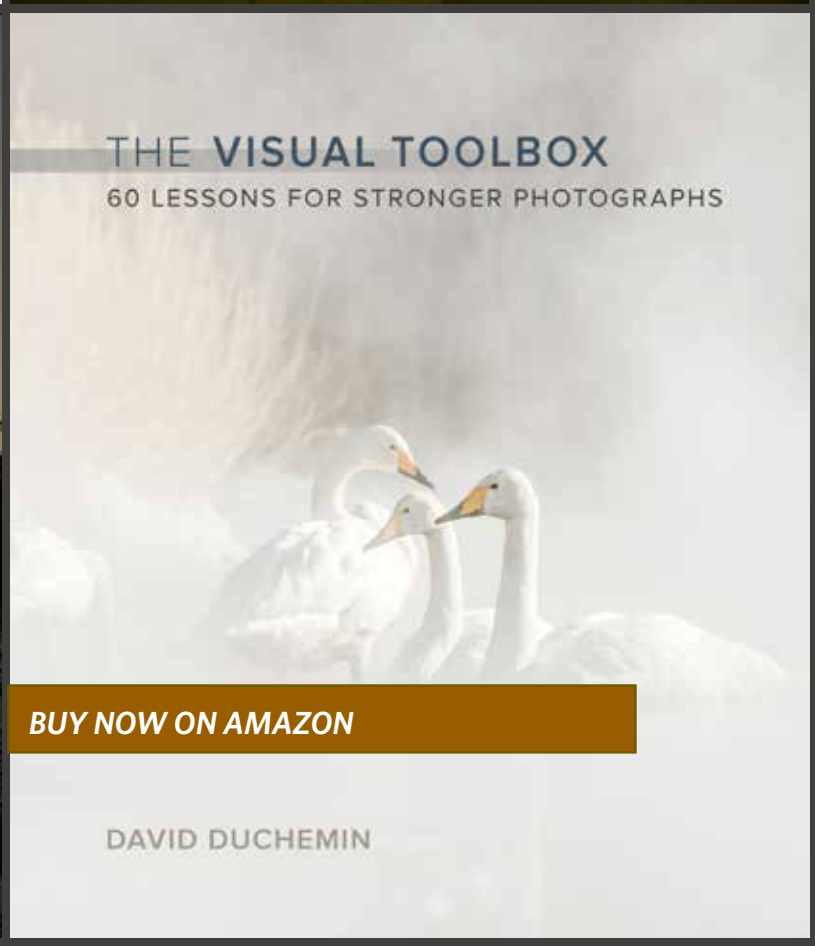

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