



YOUR ULTIMATE EBOOK TO CREATING AWESOME COASTAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Quick Guide
Written by Kent DuFault



I live in the central part of the United States.

We have a lot of lakes. However, the ocean is more than just a stone's throw away. The result of that is I don't get to the ocean shoreline as much as I'd like to.

When I do, first and foremost on my mind is getting great photographs. (I'll bet you're much the same. Photographers love shooting the beach and coastal areas.)

If you do feel the same way, you will definitely enjoy this guide.

Coastal photography is very much at the mercy of Mother Nature. Even when you think you know what the weather forecast is, it can change in a matter of hours.

Having an open mind toward "just getting some awesome images" versus seeking a particular type of photograph will likely serve you better.

Now, if you live near the ocean, you've got a lot more options. But perhaps you'll find some inspirational tips within this eBook as well.

What you will learn today:

- How to inject some sense of perspective into a subject that is simply wide and flat
- Why it can be beneficial to include the shoreline and the water in the same shot
- Tips on how to work with the time of day (even if it's not the best time of day)
- How to add interest with common elements found around the coastline
- Inserting people to add drama
- The all-important aspect of telling a story with your photos
- If there is wildlife around, why you should use it
- If all else fails, perhaps a special effect might save the day
- Spot color – the coastal photographer's best friend
- Adding long exposure fun to your coastal visit



Image 001 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

CHAPTER ONE – CREATING PERSPECTIVE

Photographing the coastline faces many of the same challenges as other types of landscape photography.

How do you capture something large, and magnificent (and flat in this case), and then squeeze all that majesty into a two-dimensional photograph that may be represented no larger than an 8x10-inch print or the size of a computer screen?

If you don't carefully consider what you are trying to say with your photograph, you are likely to be disappointed. This doesn't mean that the photograph needs to be complicated, but it should have a clear message.

Image 001 is an excellent example of what I'm talking about. This was the view of the Pacific Ocean from the top of a cliff near La Jolla, California.

It was a beautiful day. The ocean and the sky looked magnificent.

I created several photographs, but I wasn't happy; they just didn't capture the moment. The scene was flat, and you couldn't tell that there was this massive expanse of blue water and vibrant sky stretching out forever right in front of me.

I thought to myself, "It looks more like an abstract."

However, that wasn't what I wanted to show in this photograph. I really wanted to capture the enormity of the magnificent view.

Then I noticed that if I moved about 50 yards to my right (which was as far as I could go due to a fence), I could just barely capture a couple of people and a sign that were down on the beach.

I took it, and that made the shot for me. It gave me the sense of perspective that I needed.

Use your thumb to cover up the people and the sign, and then remove your thumb. You'll see what a difference it makes in Image 001.

You'll have to decide for yourself if you like the inclusion of the people and sign or not.

Either picture could work. It really depends on the message being communicated.

For me, I wanted that sense of distance, which was lacking without the people and the sign.

All that being said... establishing perspective in coastal photography is generally about saying, "This is big."

Let's look at some examples...

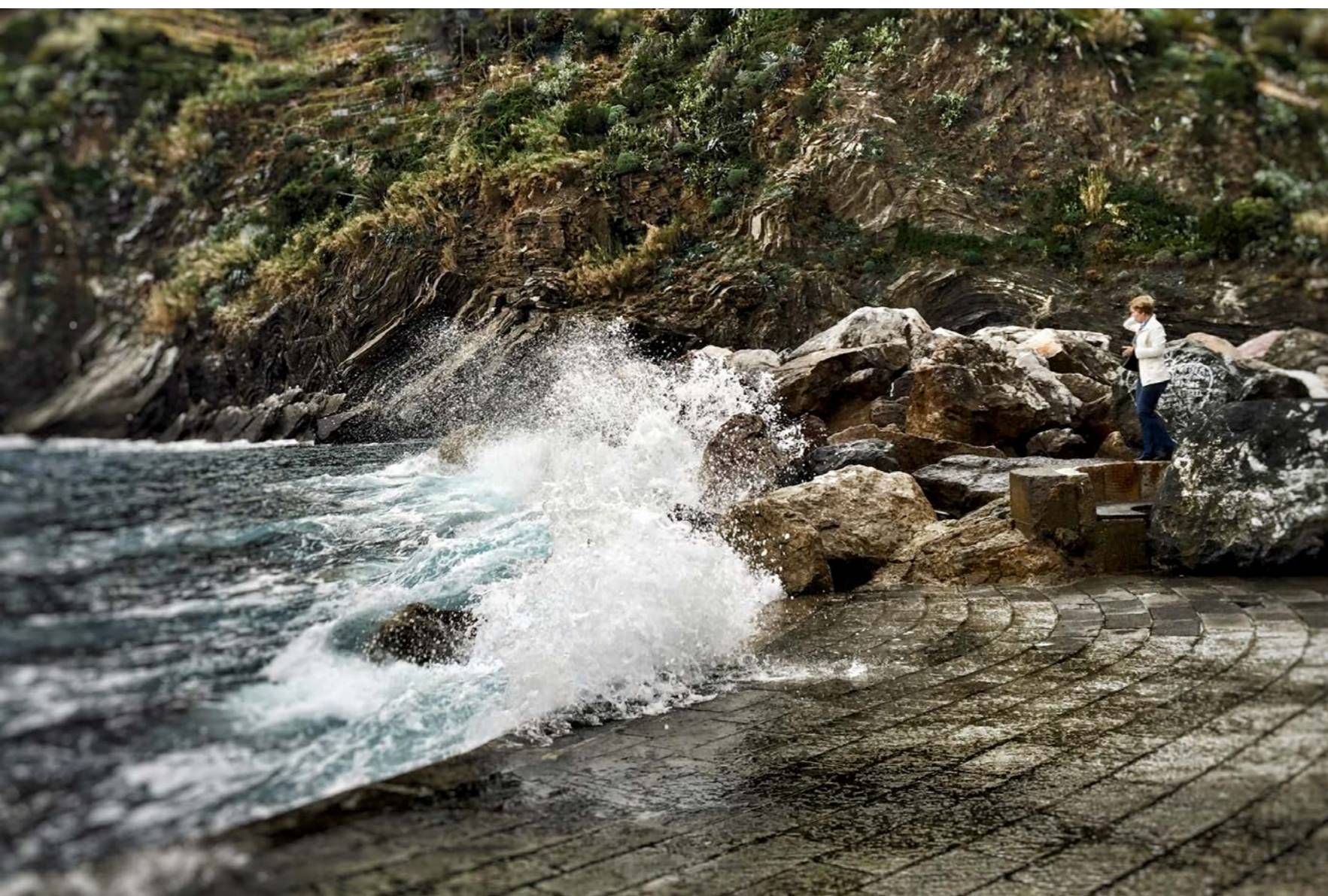


Image 002 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Image 002 doesn't share the story of how big the ocean is. Instead, it tells the story of how small we are to even the least powerful forces of the ocean.

Image 002 was created in Vernazza, Italy along the Tuscan Coast. There were so many places to photograph there. When you find yourself in a situation like that, keep your eyes open for simple compositions that tell a bold story.

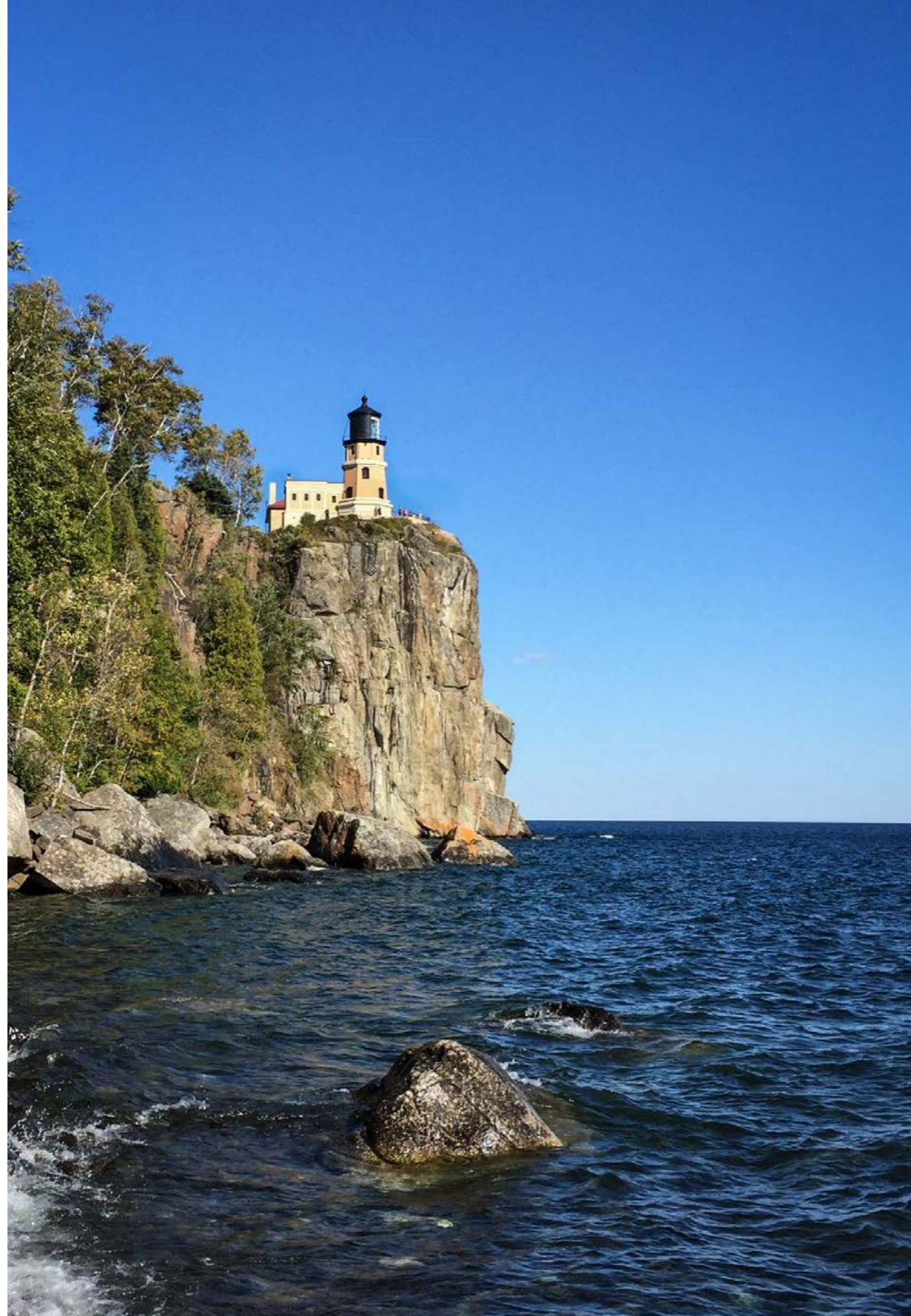


Image 003 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

The lighthouse in Image 003 is very large. Use your hand to cover the rocks in the foreground. It loses the sense of size and perspective without those rocks.

Is the picture “wrong” without those rocks? No – it just doesn’t establish the sense of space nearly as well. There are also some people standing up there by the lighthouse. They too give a sense of perspective to the photograph; however, they are very tiny within the image area. In a small presentation, such as a small print or a computer screen, they are hard to see. If I printed this to a very large print that would be framed and hung on the wall, they would have helped a lot more.

The inclusion of foreground objects is one of your best friends when it comes to coastal photography.



Image 004 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

What do you do if you have no foreground objects?

In the scenario for Image 004, there were no foreground objects that could be used to give a sense of perspective to the water and the cliff.

By changing to a longer focal length lens, and searching for a new point of view, I was able to use my own group of fellow travelers as a point of perspective to the view below us.


 **Key Lesson:** Whether you are trying to make something look big, or small, in your coastal photographs, include an object of “known size” to create a proper sense of perspective.



Image 005 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

CHAPTER TWO – WHY IT’S IMPORTANT TO INCLUDE BOTH THE WATER AND THE SHORELINE

The particular situation that you find yourself in will dictate whether to show both the water and the shoreline (and how much of each one to include).

However, in most cases, you will get your most effective shot by doing so with coastal photography.

Part of creating an interesting photograph is placing a viewer of the photograph into the scene. The more they can imagine themselves standing there, the longer they will look at the shot and enjoy it.

Here’s an example...




Image 006 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Image 005 follows the Rule of Thirds. It also has some foreground objects.

However, it's still missing something. Let's compare it to the next example photograph.

By taking a few steps back, I was able to include some flowers in the foreground. Go back and forth between images 005 and 006. You'll see what a difference the inclusion of more shoreline made in establishing both perspective and story.

 **Key Lesson:** In coastal photography, nine times out of ten you'll achieve a better composition and a better story for the viewer by including some aspect of the shoreline as well as some aspect of the ocean.

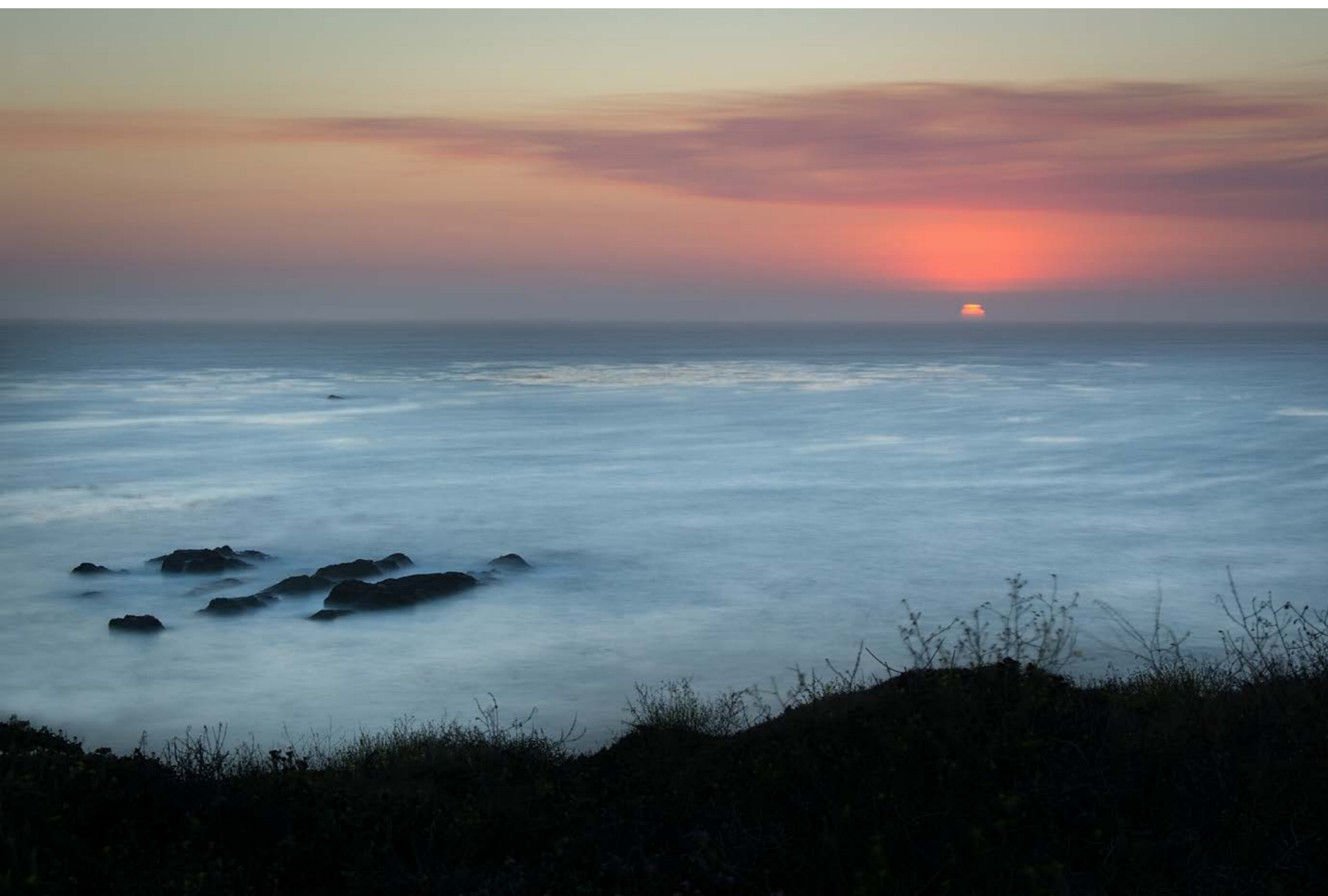


Image 007 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

CHAPTER THREE – WORKING WITH THE TIME OF DAY

I'm sure the idea of shooting at a certain time of the day to achieve the best light isn't new to you.

I'm not going to expound on the wonders of the Golden Hour because when you have limited time to create your images, you must take advantage of whatever time of day is available to you.

Much of my coastal photography occurs at all times of the day.

What I'm proposing is that **a change in technique is necessary to accommodate whatever time of day you're working in.**

Making special preparations to be at the coastline during the Golden Hour might result in nice light. However, the coastline is a fickle place, with very unpredictable weather. You may get the golden glow or you may get nothing.



Image 008 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

After getting up out of bed very early to catch the morning light (Image 008), there was little to no light to be had. I employed two techniques to come away with something useful.

1. Getting in close is one method to circumvent poor light
2. By putting color and shape close into the foreground, it takes the viewer away from the poor lighting conditions that surround the scene



Image 009 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

To take advantage of less than ideal light, look for shapes and texture.

This method works particularly well in black and white, or with toned monochrome images.



Image 010 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Another method that I often employ to add interest (when the light is bad) is to turn to special effects in post-processing. Oftentimes you don't have to go overboard, but just add a few tweaks here and there.

In Image 010 I added a tone, some contrast, some localized exposure adjustment, and blurred vignette.

Take a look at an un-retouched copy of the same scene:



Image 011 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

It's a beautiful place, that's for sure; however, on this particular day it just wasn't all that photogenic.

As you can see, just a little bit of post-production playfulness turned it into something more pleasing to the eye.

Finally, if you find yourself having to shoot close to midday, and the sun is shining, look for angles that are as close to perpendicular to the angle of the sun as possible.

The sun is never straight overhead unless you are at the equator. There is always some degree of angle. You will get your best shots when you find that angle and then shoot perpendicular to it.



Image 012 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

One trick to finding that angle is to hold your hand out in front of your face at about 12 inches away. The palm of your hand should be in the direction of your face. Slowly begin spinning around in a circle. Watch the shadows and texture of your hand. When the shadows are deepest, and the texture is most visible, you are at a 90-degree angle to the sun. Stop, and look for your shots in that direction.

Image 012 is an example of using the hand trick to find the best angle. This shot was taken at around 1:30 PM. After using my hand to determine a POV for the camera, I then found the best composition and shot Image 012.



Key Lesson: If you have less than ideal lighting, do the following: keep your shot tight while looking for color and shape, consider using shapes and textures in a monochrome image, preplan if you could use some post-production to spice up the shot, and use the hand trick to find the best angle.



Recommended Reading: If you'd like a guide that will help you with seeing and post-processing great monochrome images, grab a copy of Photzy's *Better Black and White premium guide*.

To help you to extract the best creative image from your scene, no matter what the existing light is, check out *The Ultimate Guide to Fundamental Editing*.



Recommended Videos: This free video will show you how to create the 'effect' of good light when none exists: *Fixing a Photograph – A Woman on a Bridge*.



Image 013

CHAPTER FOUR – ADDING PEOPLE AND OBJECTS TO CREATE DRAMA AND TELL A STORY

I'm not going to be the one to talk poorly of any photograph that depicts a coastal scene. We all love natural beauty; however, if you want your coastal images to stand out, you must inject some drama and story.

Think about your favorite television show. You love it, right? But what if each week it told the same story over and over? Pretty soon it would grow old, and you would no longer care. Photography is the same. The same old story doesn't inject excitement and the desire to gaze at a shot.

An angle could have been chosen in Image 013 that included sand dunes and the water and nothing else. However, doesn't the inclusion of the man with his umbrella and fishing poles create a mood? Without him, the photograph would be bland and would be similar to so many other photographs that already exist. With him, you can almost feel the heat, hear the waves, and taste the salt in the air.

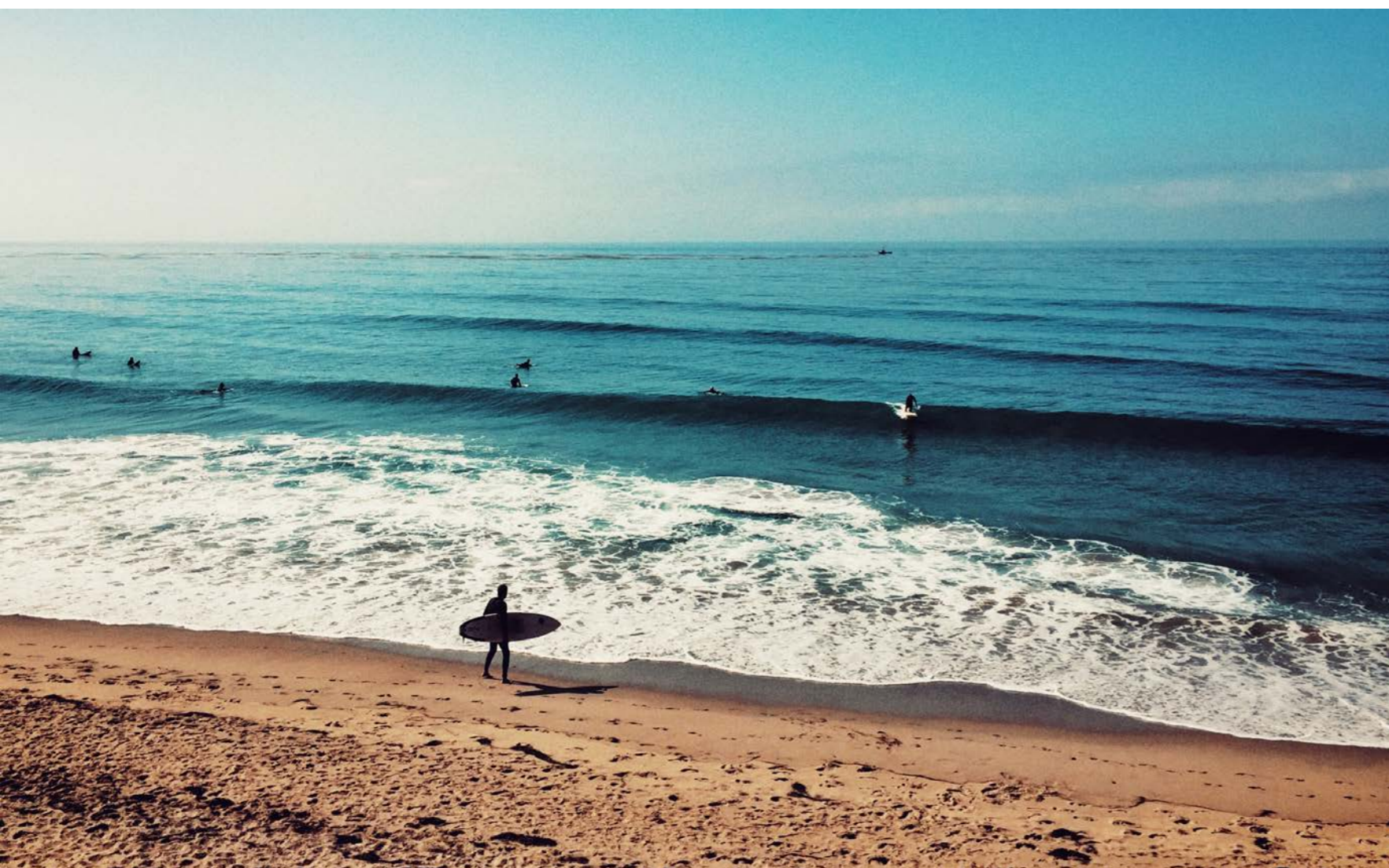


Image 014 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

The inclusion of a storytelling element doesn't have to be huge and in your face to add drama. In Image 014, the surfer takes up a tiny percentage of the overall image area yet without him, the photograph falls apart and loses meaning.



Image 015 – Photograph by Kent DuFault


It doesn't always have to be a human element to add story to your photographs. You can look for objects. Be prepared for an interesting element that might be entering the picture area.

In Image 015, I was standing on the coastline of the San Francisco Bay looking out at Alcatraz Island.

The weather was poor, and the prison was quite a distance away. I really didn't think I was going to get a meaningful shot.

Then I noticed a flock of pelicans, way off in the distance, coming in my direction. I waited, and sure enough they flew right into my scene and added a perfect leading line to the prison. They also added story through the sense of irony (nature versus man) in the photograph.

Is it a perfect photograph? No. However, being alert to the approaching pelicans made it worth taking versus not getting a shot at all.

 **Key Lesson:** Whenever possible, keep in mind the possibility of adding a human element, animal element, or object element to your coastal photography. These elements don't have to be large in the photograph, and they don't have to be the subject of the photograph.

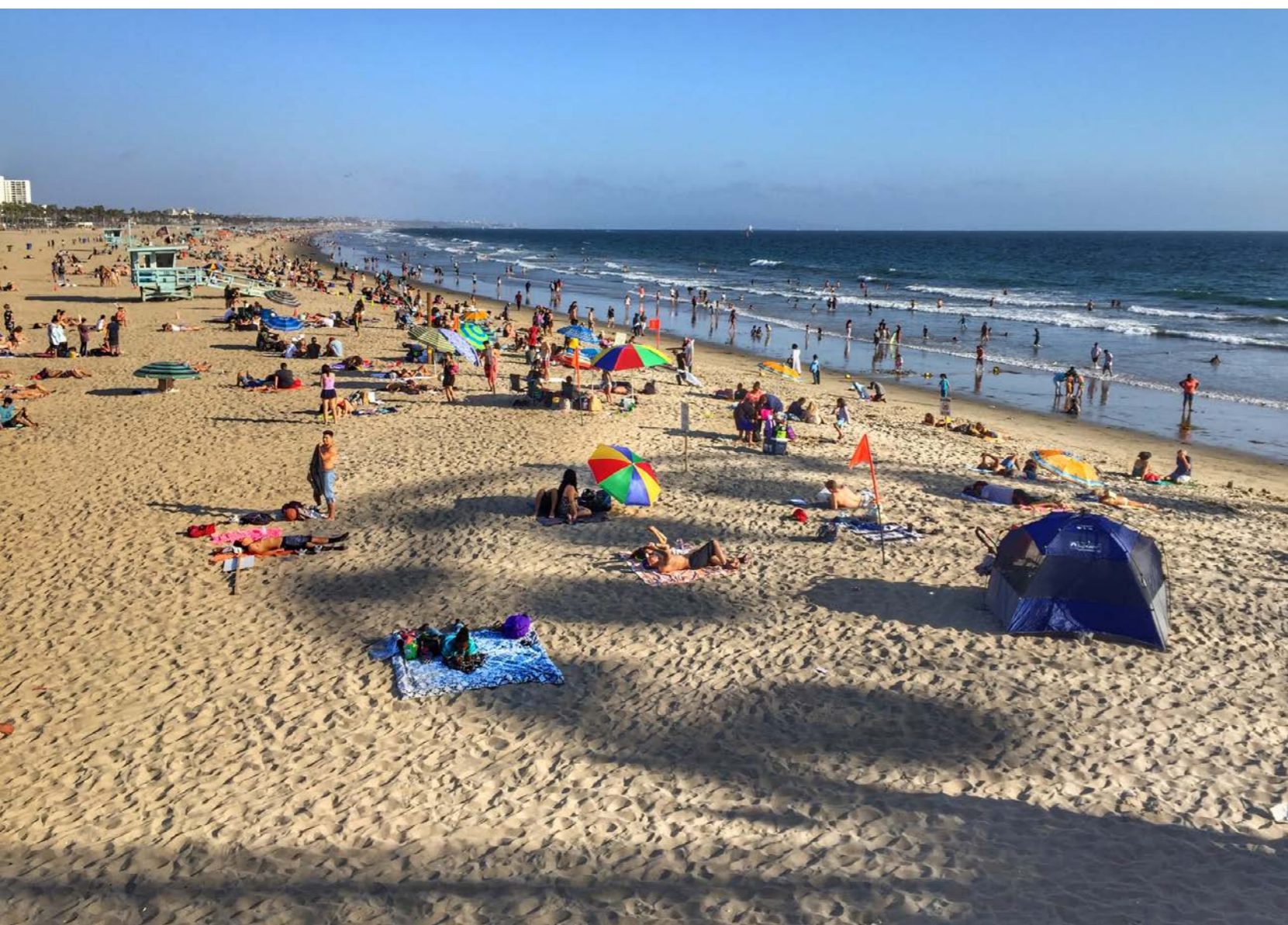


Image 016 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

CHAPTER FIVE – SPOT COLOR: THE COASTAL PHOTOGRAPHER'S BEST FRIEND

Think about the elements of most coastal photography. What do you see? You see water, beach, and sky. All three elements are most likely to contain the colors blue and brown (or some variation of those).

Adding some 'spot color' to your composition can be the 'secret sauce' that elevates your coastal photography above your competitors.

Let me show you some examples.

Image 016 was taken at the Santa Monica Pier at around 7:00 PM and looking toward the south. It was the shadow of the Ferris wheel that initially caught my eye.

However, it was the spot color of the umbrellas and the blankets that added enough "visual weight" to that portion of the scene to turn it into the subject of the photograph. It's no longer a photo of a just a busy beach; there is a place for the viewer of the photo to rest and receive a message about the moment.

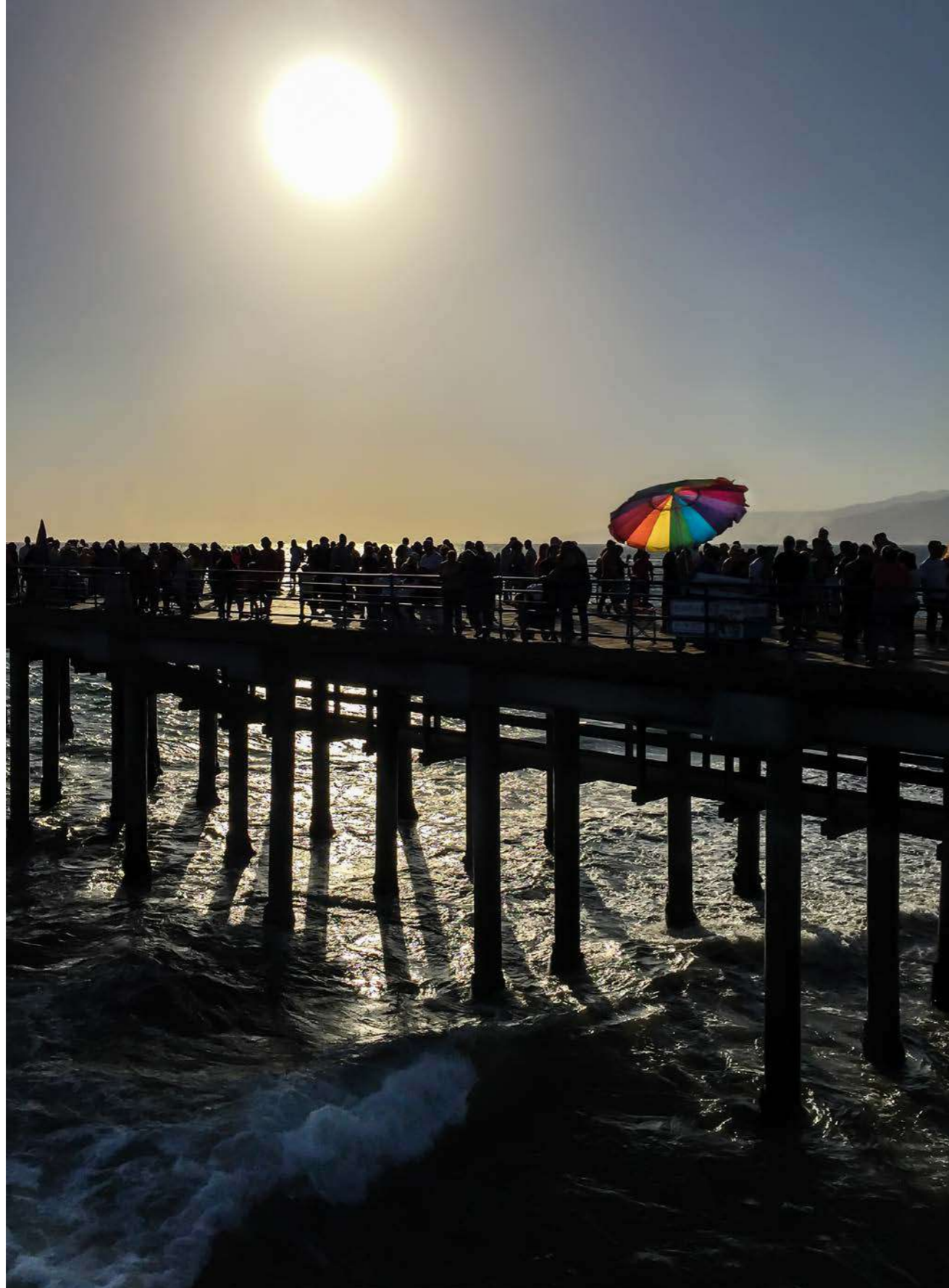



Image 017 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Image 017 was taken within minutes of Image 016. I walked off of the pier and then turned back toward the north. I saw the one umbrella backlit by the sunshine along with the multiple shadows of the people.

Consider this: both Images 016 and 017 were taken within minutes of each other, both are examples of coastal photography, both have a unique look and tell a unique story, and both relied on spot color to solidify the composition. Both images have been substantial moneymakers for me in the area of stock photography. Look for spot color.

 **Key Lesson:** You can add significant impact to your coastal images by keeping your eyes peeled for potential spot color situations. This works especially well when you use colors outside of the blue and brown spectrum.

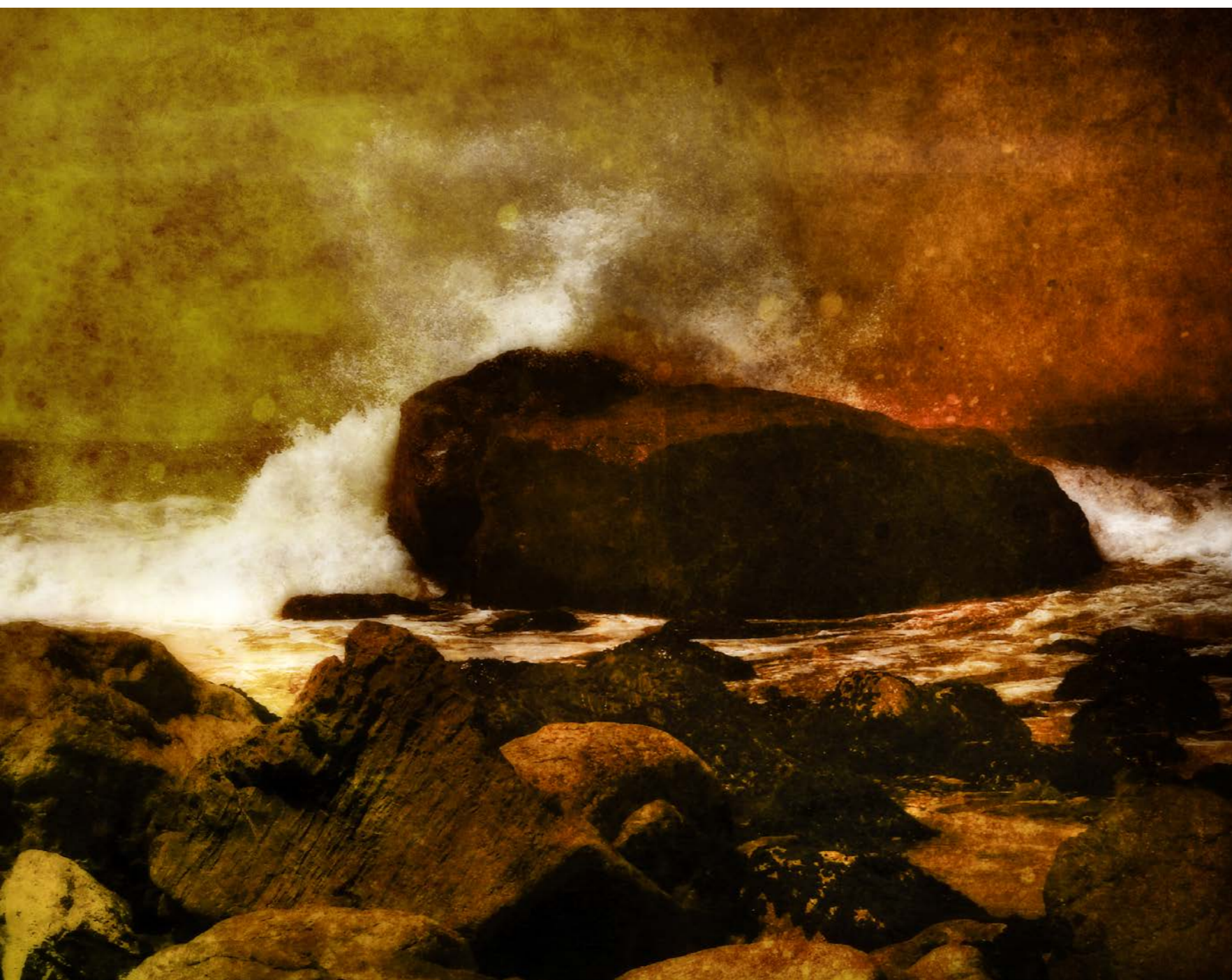


Image 018 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

CHAPTER SIX – IF ALL ELSE FAILS, CONSIDER SPECIAL EFFECTS

I know that getting cutesy with special effects goes against the grain for many of us.

I put myself in that same category.

However, if it means getting something or getting nothing, I'll go as "grunge" as the next guy or gal.

Here's what I'm talking about...

The day I took Image 018, the only good thing happening (visually) was the crashing waves. There was almost no sunshine whatsoever. There was no color, no texture, and no outside elements to add anything meaningful. (There might have been a trashcan nearby)

You might ask, "Why don't you just pack up and go home on a day like that?"

Well, there are several reasons.

1. If I've gone through the effort to go and find photographs, then by golly, I'm coming away with something.
2. All of my coastal photography is done while I'm traveling either for business or on a vacation. I need to get some shots while I'm there, and my time is limited.

I actually really like Image 018, and I believe that it would make an interesting large canvas print for art décor purposes. If you're open to trying new things, you never know what you might end up with.


 **Key Lesson:** If you're determined to come away with something good (inside your camera), don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone. Go crazy and worry about it later when you're sitting in front of your computer. Let yourself have some fun.



Image 019 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

CHAPTER SEVEN – TAKE A DIVE INTO LONG EXPOSURE PHOTOGRAPHY

One of the aspects of long exposure photography that I truly enjoy, is that it really doesn't matter what the light is doing. If something in the picture area is moving, and something else is not, then you have potential for awesome photographs.

Let me show you some coastal photography examples using the long exposure photography technique.

The light in this situation (Image 019) wasn't horrible. The level of light was low, which created a lack of contrast, color, and shape. Using long exposure photography added interest by bumping up the contrast levels.



Image 020 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Here (Image 020), there was almost no light at all. Long exposure photography created the contrast and shape in the highlights that was necessary to make this shot worth something.



Image 021 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

In Image 021, the sky was deeply overcast; I used it as an excuse to play with long exposure photography and color balance. The teenager just walked up and stood in my shot, so I took some with him in there and ended up rather liking that version.

Long exposure photography is too detailed to outline here. If you're interested in it, check out the recommended reading. (By the way, we are not talking about night photography here. We are talking about using ND filters to drastically reduce exposure during daylight hours.)

Recommended Reading:

- *The Complete Guide to Long Exposure Photography*

SUMMARY

In your coastal photography, consider the following:

1. What objects, human or otherwise, could you include in your photograph to add depth and perspective to your scene?
2. Ask yourself, will the inclusion of both the water and the shoreline tell a better story than leaving one of them out?
3. If your time of day is limited, try getting in close, look for shapes and texture, and pre-visualize possible post-production effects that could add interest.
4. Look for “spot color” to enhance your compositions.
5. Don’t put the camera away, even if the weather is horrible. Give yourself the luxury of being experimental.
6. Learn long exposure photography, which is more fun than you can imagine.

 **Shooting Assignment:** On your next adventure into coastal photography, do the following:

- Shoot a scene with a human element and without. Evaluate which image is more interesting.
- Shoot a scene where you have discovered some spot color.
- Shoot a scene with the intention of totally grunging it up in post-production.

Self Check Quiz

1. Coastal photography often depicts scenes that are wide and _____, which makes it difficult to establish depth and perspective.
2. What can including a foreground object help with?
3. If you include a foreground object, it helps the viewers of your photograph if the object is of a _____ size.
4. By including both the water and the shoreline in your coastal photography it generally helps the photographs tell a better _____.
5. Name three techniques that you could employ to add interest if you're forced to shoot under poor midday light.
6. When the sun is high in the sky, what technique can you use to determine the best angle to shoot your photograph?
7. Whenever possible include a human, object, or _____ to add storytelling elements to your coastal photographs.
8. Why does "spot color" often help in coastal photography?
9. True or False: If the conditions at the shore are poor (no light or bad weather), it's better to put the camera away and go home rather than just shoot something.
10. True or False: Long exposure photography is an excellent tool for the coastal photographer because it allows you to shoot creative shots under virtually any lighting conditions.

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