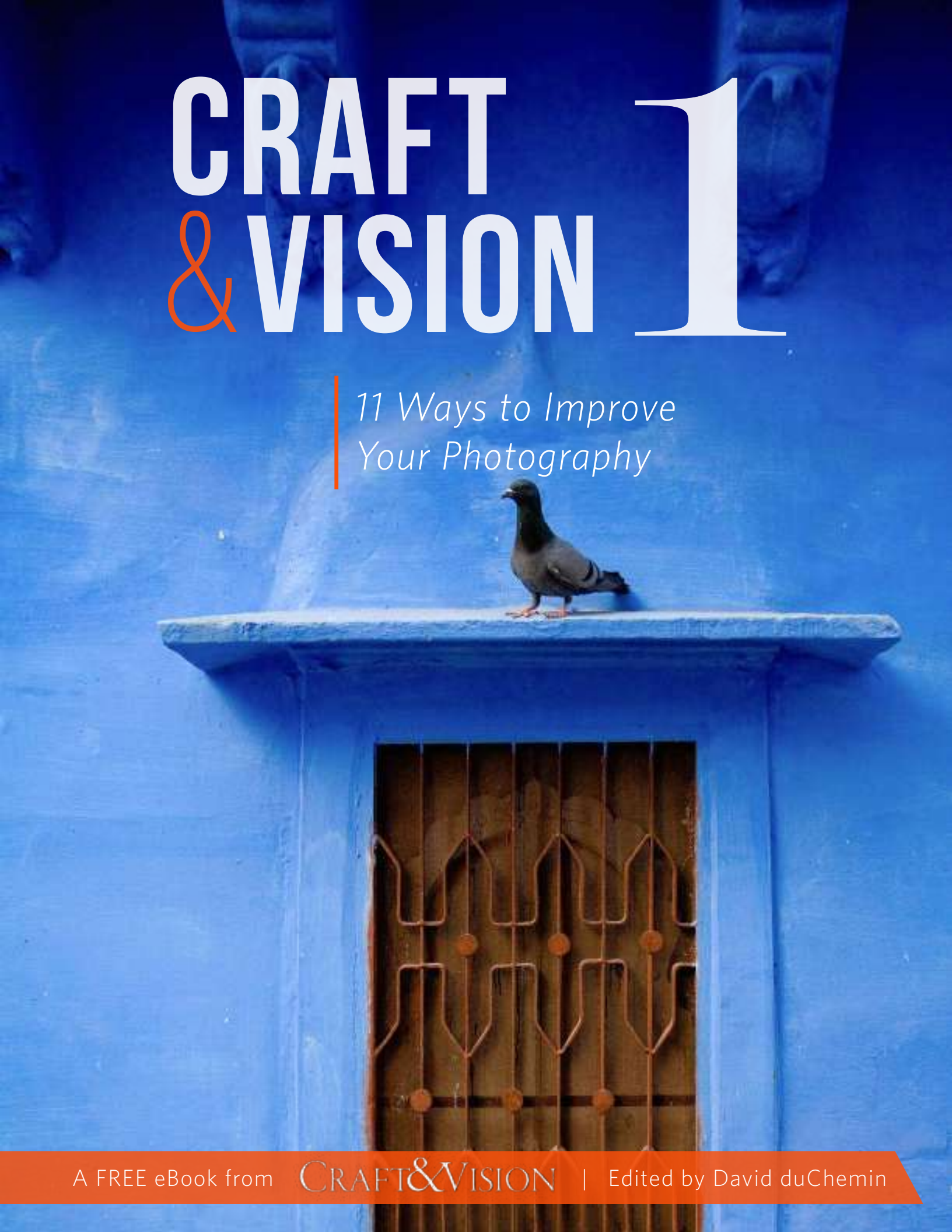

CRAFT & VISION 1

11 Ways to Improve Your Photography

A FREE eBook from CRAFT&VISION | Edited by David duChemin

Contents

Introduction

I've been a photographer for over 25 years now. Both my craft and my photographic vision are much different now than they were when I first started. I like to think they've evolved and improved in their ability to express what I hope for. Certainly, to a large extent, that evolution and growth came with the passing of time. Give anyone a quarter century doing one thing and they are bound, it is hoped, to get better. But I don't think I needed 25 years. I think with more focused teaching and study I could have learned my lessons faster, arrived at this place sooner. I don't at all mean that I've arrived at some magical photographic destination called mastery. In fact, I don't believe such a destination exists. But on this journey I think I might have avoided some of the potholes, diversions, and ruts, had I learned some lessons sooner than others.

In this free eBook I've asked the authors at Craft & Vision, our weird little publishing house, to contribute an article about something they wish they'd learned sooner, a way in which others could improve their photography. I also asked them to give me something that didn't include going out and buying new gear. Our first eBook was titled TEN: 10 Ways to Improve Your Craft Without Buying Gear. The whole ethos of Craft & Vision's efforts has been, from the beginning, to focus on those things that can truly improve your photography, and more (or more expensive) gear seldom truly does that. Better that we become more curious, more observant practitioners of our craft—photographers who understand the basics, recognize the power of the moment, and know how to work with lines and tension, tones and colour, to communicate. A new lens is often the last thing we need.

So, these friends of mine dug in and, without any further suggestions, turned in some topics close to their heart. Eli Reinholdtsen wrote about the power of moments. Nicole S. Young wrote about more intentional compositions. Andrew S. Gibson wrote about personal projects and collaboration while Alexandre Buisse discussed sharing our work as a means to growth. Piet Van den Eynde, in his usual style, gave me two articles—one about giving your images a greater sense of energy, the other about seeing beyond the usual stereotypes about lenses. Landscape photographer Michael Frye talks about learning to direct the eyes of the readers of our photographs. Stuart Sipahigil wrote about slowing down and learning to see. An upcoming C&V author, Martin Bailey, sheds some light on printing. And I've chimed in with an article about taming digital exposures and creating stronger portraits. Together we've tried to create something that is, and will always be, free. A gift back to the amateur photography community we love and from which we ourselves come.

If you enjoy this book, copy it and send it out into the world. Give it to friends. Give your colleagues a break: stop sending those emails about your cat and send this instead. Tweet about it. Blog about it. Or just read it, pick up your camera, and go make something beautiful. Never mind the new gear. Just go make some photographs that make you happy.

If this book makes you hungry for more, we're dedicated to teaching photography without the smokescreens and the distractions. At the end of this book there is an ad for the Craft & Vision store, where most of our eBooks are $5, though we pride ourselves on creating resources that are worth much more.

We'd love to be of service to you, in some way, as you pursue your vision and work on your craft, but if the only way we do that is through this free eBook, we're glad to have been a part of the journey you take with your camera.

Peace,

David duChemin
Ottawa, Canada
November, 2011

PIET VAN DEN EYNDE

Make Your Images More Dynamic

PIET VAN DEN EYNDE

It happens to all of us: you're at a great place with a great ambience, you make a picture of it and when you look at your LCD or the print later on, the image has nowhere near the impact the actual scene had. That's because three things are happening: first of all, our brain tends to focus on only the beautiful parts of what we see. It sees the beautiful landscape, and—as if our mind had a built-in Photoshop Clone Stamp or Content-Aware Fill—disregards the power lines at the top of the frame and the rubbish piled up at the bottom.

Another reason for the less-than-ideal transition from reality to image is that making a photograph (I prefer the term "make a photograph" to "take a photograph" because it better reflects the creative process of photography) means going from three dimensions (width, height, and depth) to two, eliminating depth.

Therefore, a big part of creating compelling photographs is trying to translate or even exaggerate that feeling of depth into your final, two-dimensional image. Wide-angle lenses can be a great tool for this, as I discuss elsewhere in this eBook.

But there's a third reason, and another important dynamic in photography: when you're making a photograph, you're actually not only cutting out the third dimension, but also the fourth: a photograph is not only a spatial crop (a frame from a bigger scene), but also crop in time.

The best way to translate a feeling of time (or timelessness), and therefore dynamism, into a picture is to work with your shutter speed.

CAPTURING SPATIAL DYNAMISM (Cropping in Space)

As stated above, there are a number of techniques you can use to improve what I'd call "spatial" dynamism in your pictures, i.e. better manage the loss of the third (depth) dimension. These techniques include working with leading lines, incorporating diagonals in your images, framing with the rule of thirds in mind, using shallow depth of field to isolate foreground from background, etc. In this article, however, I'd like to focus on translating the dynamics of time and movement into your images.

Make Your Images More Dynamic

PIET VAN DEN EYNDE

CAPTURING TIME
(Cropping in Time)

1) Intentional shutter speed

Digital photography revolves around these three basic variables: shutter speed, aperture, and ISO. Settling on any two will automatically lock the third one in place, just like drawing two corners of a triangle will also determine the third one. Don't work in "P" mode or one of those preprogrammed scene modes, but make informed decisions. You should be in control of your camera, not an engineer!

Let's start with a simple example to illustrate this: a rock surrounded by water right beyond Sweden's highest waterfall. Both images were taken just minutes apart. The time of capture was almost identical, the timing of the capture wasn't!

Although many people will probably like the second image more than the first, because of its more poetic nature (and quite frankly, because images with dreamy, blurry water have become somewhat iconic in photography and travel magazines), one isn't necessarily better than the other—it's your intent that matters. If you want to show the relentlessness of the waters below the waterfall, then the first choice of parameters would be the most appropriate one.

For image A, I just selected the fastest shutter speed I had, and checked if the aperture and ISO were still within working range. For image B, I knew I'd need the longest shutter speed possible, so I started by setting my ISO to the lowest and my aperture to the maximum, but the resulting shutter speed was still too fast for what I was after, as it was very bright that day. So I put on my variable neutral density filter (I use one by Light Craft Workshop, but other options exist). If you don't have a neutral density filter, in a pinch a polarizer will also do, as it also cuts a couple of stops of light.

Rocks near a waterfall, photographed at the fastest shutter speed of the camera (and resulting settings for ISO and aperture to get a good exposure).
f/2.8 | 1/4000s | ISO 3200

The same rocks, photographed with a slow shutter speed of three seconds. Camera set to smallest aperture and lowest ISO. Variable neutral density filter added to further slow down the shutter speed.
f/22 | 3 seconds | ISO 200

Make Your Images More Dynamic

PIET VAN DEN EYNDE

2) Compress motion into a still frame using panning

Panning is an effective technique to translate movement to a still image. When you're panning, you're following your subject during the exposure, so the subject is rendered (relatively) sharp against a streaky, blurry background. The results are always a bit hit-or-miss, but these tips will help you achieve a higher success ratio.

- Start by putting your camera on shutter priority and set it to a speed of 1/15 (for slower subjects) to 1/30 of a second. In bright sunlight, you will probably need to be at your lowest ISO and at your smallest aperture, which actually is helpful to get your subject sharp. Sometimes, you might even need a neutral density filter.

- Prefocus (and preset your exposure) to where your subject will appear.

- Set your camera to high- or continuous-speed shooting (the position where the camera keeps making pictures as long as you keep the shutter pressed), so that you can make a couple of pictures during the actual panning movement: this increases your chances of having a good shot.

- Hit the shutter when your subject appears in the viewfinder and follow its trajectory while shooting. Rotate your body around its vertical axis and don't stop abruptly. Some people find it helpful to position their feet in the direction the panning movement will finish.

- As said, this technique takes practice and even that's no recipe for success, but your "keepers" will definitely be worth the effort.

- Roundabouts (with you in the centre) are great places to learn the moves, as the subjects stay the same distance from you as they move through the frame.

A boring, uninteresting background...

...can become an interesting streak of colour in a panning shot.

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Astrophotography? No, just traffic in Singapore.
Nikon D90 | f/22 @ 1/3s | 19mm | ISO 100

3) Long shutter speeds and zooming

For this image, I actually had something different in mind: having just spent months in the quiet Javanese countryside, I wanted to convey the hectic Singapore rush hour with a classic long exposure, turning tail-lights into streaks of red and headlight into beams of yellow. However, the images did not convey what I wanted them to, partly because I could not go low enough with my shutter speed. So I decided to experiment and zoomed during the 1/3 second exposure. This lengthened the streaks and made the traffic appear the way I wanted: as a hectic glowing inferno.

Using slow shutter speeds to convey motion can be a good thing, if there's at least one part in the image that's stable, like the rocks (stable) in the water (flowing) we discussed before. However, when everything is moving, your picture very easily becomes an abstract. Great if that's what you're after, but not if you want the scene to be recognizable. In this picture, which I discuss in greater detail in my eBook Making Light II, I wanted to convey the frenzy of the rickshaw ride, which called for a longer exposure. Still, I wanted an anchor point in the image that would be relatively sharp, so I used my flash to freeze the driver (and also lighten up the interior of the rickshaw).

Using a relatively slow shutter speed allowed me to capture the frenzy of this rickshaw ride. A flash froze the driver and added fill light to the dark "cabin."
NIKON D90 | f/10 @ 1/3s | 10mm | ISO 200 | Flash

Make Your Images More Dynamic

PIET VAN DEN EYNDE

4) Combining flash and slow shutter speed

A similar thing was done with this image of an Iranian blacksmith: the relatively slow shutter speed (compared to the speed at which the blacksmith swung his arm) of 1/80 of a second made the arm movement register as a flow, giving the image a sense of dynamism. Some flash was added to focus extra light on the subject and freeze the rest of him.

Casting the iron while it's hot: it applies to photographic opportunity as much as it does to this blacksmith.
NIKON D700 | f/4.5 @ 1/80s | 21mm | ISO 200 | Flash

Piet Van den Eynde is a Belgian freelance photographer. He also writes books, magazine articles, and gives training about digital photography and post-processing with Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Photoshop. In 2009, he threw his camera, a flash, and an umbrella in his bicycle panniers and cycled 5,000 miles through Turkey, Iran, India, and Indonesia for a photography project called PortraitsOfAsia. Learn more about Piet on his website, http://morethanwords.be/blog/en

Check out Piet's Craft & Vision titles at

http://craftandvision.com/authors/piet-van-den-eynde/

DAVID DUCHEMIN

Tame Your Digital Exposures

DAVID DUCHEMIN

One of the first things you learn when you pick up a film camera is how to properly expose the negative. Blow the exposure with film and you've not got much recourse. The same is true of digital exposures. There is only so much room for error.

While a great photograph is so much more than "getting the exposure right," there's much to be said for understanding at least the very basics of your craft. The more skill and understanding you have, the easier it is to use that skill to get the results you want, and make the photograph look the way you want it to.

So let's look at the basics. First, there are two fundamentally different ways to approach your digital exposures. You can shoot in JPG, do very little to your photographs in the digital darkroom (Adobe Photoshop, Lightroom, or Apple Aperture, for example) and move on. Or you can make the digital darkroom a much more important part of your process. Most photographers I know prefer to work in Adobe Lightroom to make up for some of the shortfalls of digital capture and bring their photograph into closer alignment with their vision. Either approach is fine but it's good to know which path you're going to take so your in-camera approach gives you the best possible digital negative. I'm going to assume you are going to do a little work in the digital darkroom, but if not, you can still use this article to get great exposures.

It helps to know what your camera is doing when it meters. It also helps to know what it means to create the best possible digital negative.
So let's look at both.

Tame Your Digital Exposures

DAVID DUCHEMIN

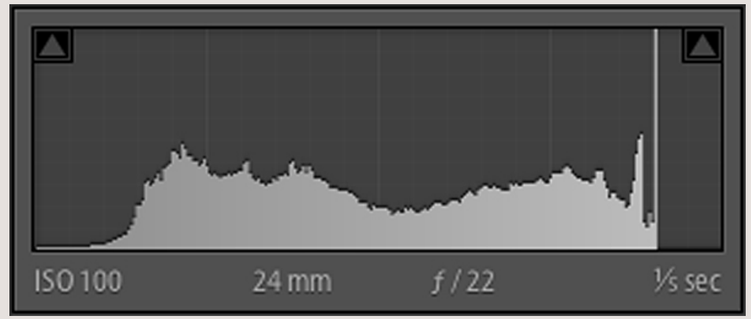
The meter, for all its advances, aims to do one thing—to give you a good exposure for any given scene. There are two problems, however. The first is that the camera doesn't know what you want the photograph to look like. So it guesses. That's problem number one. The guess. The second problem is how it makes that guess. It assumes that for any one scene the best exposure is an average of middle grey, or 18% grey. So if the camera sees a largely black scene it will give you a reading to render that scene 18% grey. To do so it has to overexpose a little. Likewise if the camera sees a largely white scene, it will give you a reading to render that scene the same 18% grey, underexposing to do so, and making the bright snow, for example, a muddy grey. Not ideal. So when we were shooting film we learned to overexpose the brighter scenes a little and underexpose the darker scenes.

Cameras are getting smarter, and the spot meters today allow for some very accurate exposures. The problem, of course, is that many of us—most of us?—are no longer recording to film. We're recording to digital with the intent of working on the images in the digital darkroom. Digital work introduces a new problem: digital files, composed of pixels, are only so flexible. They contain only so much information. So if you accidentally underexposed your photograph, and want later to pull details out of shadows, there is only so much detail there before you get horrible digital noise. There are other problems with trying to bend a digital file past the limited flexibility it has, all of them making the photograph look less than beautiful. The solution then is to create a better digital negative.

I define the best digital negative, assuming I will be working on the image in Lightroom or Photoshop, as the one with the most amount of data, or digital information. More digital information means more flexibility. More flexibility means more ability to manipulate without making a horrible digital mess of your photograph. If only there was some way of knowing how much digital information we'd captured. There is, but first I have two suggestions for getting the best digital negatives you can. The first is to shoot in RAW. RAW files are huge, but that increase in size is because they contain MUCH more data. That's important. Secondly, while digital sensors are getting better and better in low light at high ISO, you'll still get cleaner files and more room to pull detail out of shadows if you favour lower ISOs when you can. Now, back to our wish that there were some way to know how much data was in our files.

Enter the histogram, and every digital camera I know of has the ability to display this important graph. Those same digital cameras have an LCD preview screen for looking at your photograph. Ignore that preview image. Sure, use it to check focus and composition, but it will not give you an accurate representation of the exposure. For that you need a very basic knowledge of the histogram, and it's not as intimidating or complicated as you might think, so hang in there.

This is the histogram from Adobe Lightroom, but the one on your LCD will look similar. The histogram below represents a scene captured with no blown highlights—notice the mountains and valleys don't go off the right side of the chart, which means there is no lost detail in the highlights—and the data doesn't go off the left side, which means no lost details in the shadows.



Tame Your Digital Exposures

DAVID DUCHEMIN

Now, I'm going to assume you know nothing about the histogram. It's a graph, that's all it is, and it's deceptively simple. That graph represents the light values in the scene you've just captured at the exposure values you've captured it at. On the far left are shadows with no details, totally plunged shadows of darkness. On the far right are highlights with no details, total burned out whiteness. And between those two extremes are all the tonal values from black (left) to white (right). The height or shapes of the peaks and valleys, for this exercise, don't matter. Ignore them. You can do something in-camera about where the peaks and valleys sit from left to right, but can't do a thing about their height or shape. That's the scene, and unless you're in the studio or have large lights to overpower the natural light, ignore the height of the peaks.

Why the histogram matters now gets—for a moment—a little more complicated. It's logical, or so you'd think, that as long as you get the whole scene into the box of the histogram—neither wildly over- nor under-exposed—you can tweak the rest in Lightroom and be done with it. Simple, perfect exposure, right? Wrong. You've created a digital negative but not the best one. Why? Because the histogram reflects some quirky math that can only really be understood by wizards and occultists, and it doesn't respond to the logic of mortals like you and I.

Remember I said the best digital negative was the one with the most information? Well the right half of the histogram is capable of storing exponentially more information than the left half. WAY more information. And the right quarter of the histogram, WAY more than the other three combined. How much more? Again, I'm simplifying, but if the right quarter of the histogram can hold 2000 levels of information, the quarters to the left of it can hold 1000, 500, and 250 respectively. There isn't much information at all in the darks. That right quarter of the histogram can hold twice what the rest of the entire histogram can hold. It's a WAY bigger bucket, and it holds WAY more information. Remember: more information means better image quality and more flexibility in the digital darkroom before noise becomes an issue.

So what do you do with this knowledge? Here's how I approach exposure. First, I shoot on AV mode or manual almost 100% of the time. I leave my metering on whatever your camera's equivalent of centre-weighted average is. Then I take the shot. Click. (1)

Before you look at the images/histograms: I did this in Lightroom as a simulation only and it's meant to be just an illustration. Pretend you're looking at the histogram on your camera's LCD screen.

Now I look at the histogram. Way too dark. See those peaks and valleys? They're all on the left half of the histogram, with very little information in the right half, never mind the rightmost quarter, which is where the most amount of digital information is stored. So I want more information, which means more light.

Tame Your Digital Exposures

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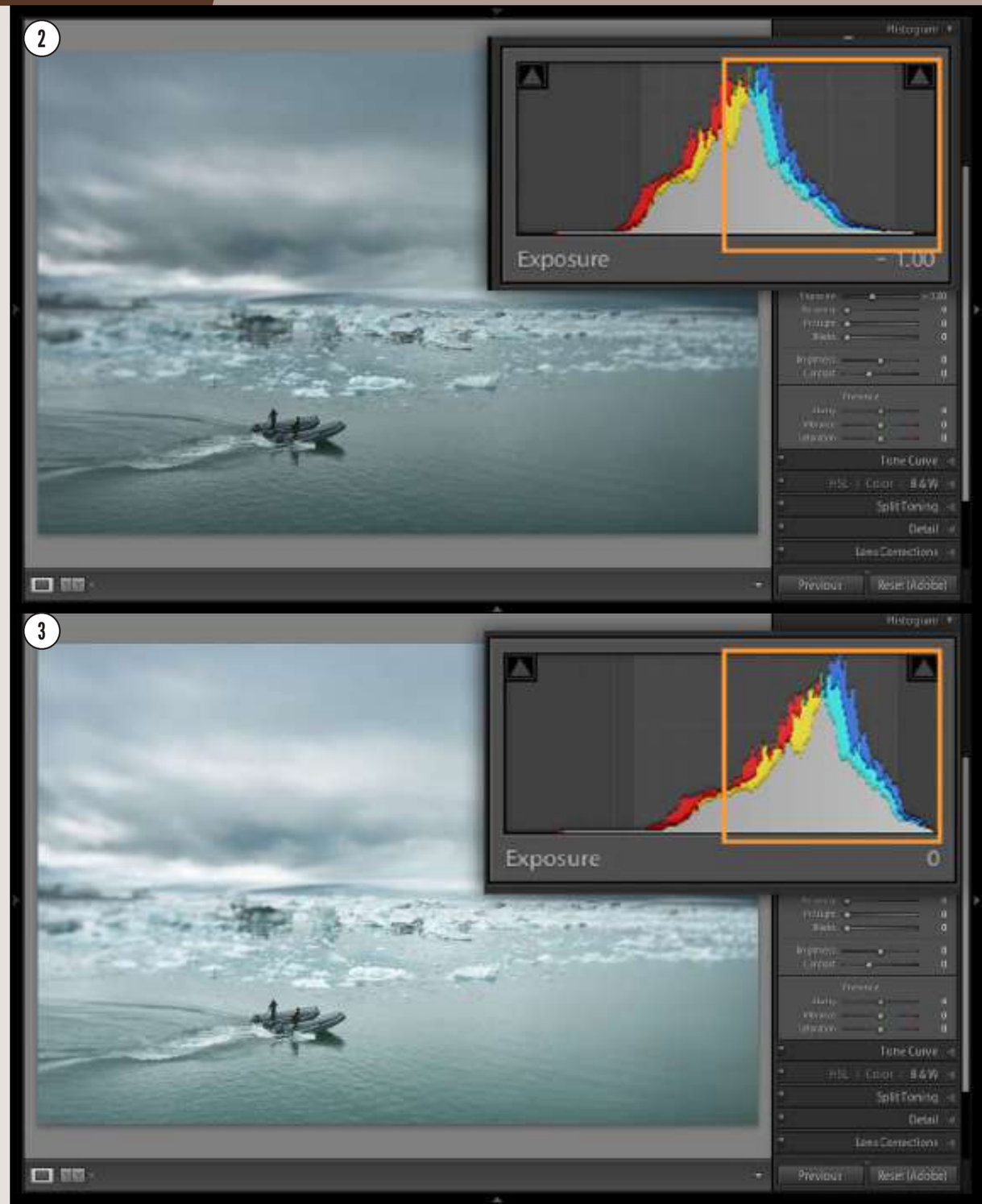
I need to overexpose. So I use the EV+/- function on my camera, push the exposure a stop, try again. Click. (2)

Getting better. But while the image LOOKS OK-ish on the LCD screen, the histogram is telling me otherwise. It is still, in terms of a good digital negative, underexposed. So I go back to my EV +/- and bump it another stop. Click. (3)

Much better. But remember, this is just a simulation in Lightroom and what we're looking at is the histogram only. What the photograph looks like on the back of the LCD doesn't matter. You're exposing for data, not aesthetics. You fix the aesthetics in the digital darkroom where you'll have much more control. Even if things are a little light-looking, you know you can bring the exposure back in Lightroom or Aperture without a loss of detail or quality. Look at the histogram—it's where it should be, as far over to the right without going off the end. What matters is that now you have LOTS of digital information.

So the name of the game is getting to know your histogram so you can create the best possible digital negative. And the best possible digital negative is the one with the most information. There will be times when you have a scene with a larger range of tones than the camera can capture. In this case you have options, several of them. Decrease that range with the use of graduated neutral density filters to hold back the sky, which is often the brightest part of the frame, or use a flash to pop the shadows. Or you might take three to five bracketed exposures and bring them together in Photomatix or Photoshop as an HDR (High Dynamic Range) image. Or you can just make a choice to create an image with either plunged shadows and/or burned out highlights. Sometimes there are highlights you can't, or shouldn't tame. The sun for example. Sometimes it's OK to blow the highlights completely out, then what matters is which highlights you are losing detail in.



Tame Your Digital Exposures

DAVID DUCHEMIN

The same goes for shadows. Current digital cameras just can't capture every scene from darkest shadows to lightest highlights, so sometimes you make the best decision possible, asking yourself what you want the photograph to look like and what detail you are willing to lose. In the image of the woman lighting candles in Kathmandu, I knew my histogram would peak on the left—there's just no way the camera can capture such a broad range of light, so I let my shadows plunge. And there was no way I could get detail in the flames of the candles, so I knew my histogram would peak on the right. I just made sure it didn't peak so much that I was losing detail in the other light areas, like her face. I also made sure I was shooting RAW instead of JPG, and shooting at the lowest ISO I could, in this case ISO 800 (once upon a time ISO 800 was incredibly high, but with today's cameras, it is still relatively low).

This should give you a good start on digital exposures. Remember to expose to the right and when you blow out highlights, ask yourself which highlights you're losing. There is no perfect histogram, just a great digital negative, and you sometimes have to make compromises to get there.

David duChemin is a nomad, a world and humanitarian photographer, the accidental founder of Craft & Vision, and the author of Within The Frame: The Journey of Photographic Vision, VisionMongers: Making a Life and a Living in Photography, and Vision & Voice: Refining Your Vision in Adobe Photoshop Lightroom. David's latest book, Photographically Speaking, was published October, 2011. David's work and blog can be seen at http://www.PixelatedImage.com

Check out David's Craft & Vision titles at

http://craftandvision.com/authors/david-duchemin/

MARTIN BAILEY

The Power of the Print

MARTIN BAILEY

Digital photography has given us so much. We can now totally control the photographic process from capture to output, in a multitude of formats, in the comfort of our own homes and without smelly chemicals.

Photography is booming because of the ease in which a good photograph can now be made and viewed, but with this, many of us have become lazy when it comes to actually creating physical prints of our images. To compound the problem, in the first five years or so of mainstream digital photography, although we had good inkjet printers that could print photographs, getting really good quality prints was difficult and left many photographers frustrated with the process and unhappy with the results.

The sad thing is that this nasty aftertaste from early experiences is robbing photographers worldwide of a pleasure that we took for granted just a decade ago. In fact, although we made prints, a decade ago, our options were so much more limited than they are now. We'd select a type of film for a certain look, then we'd select a finish for our images, usually either gloss or lustre, and we'd have them all printed at a size just about big enough to see what we'd shot, and we'd then maybe get a few enlargements of the best photos every once in a while. Even for those fortunate enough to have printed their own images in a darkroom, there were still only a relatively limited number of papers and chemical processes readily available, and once people bought into a process, they'd often stick with it for some time.

The digital age has liberated the photographer. Not only can we now change ISO for each image, without having to finish up a roll of film first, we can view the images as we make them, and correct mistakes right there in the field. In post-processing, we can change the look of each individual image, and our options for papers or other substrates to print to are now almost endless. Of course, when working on a project, you'll often select one or two types of paper, and aim for a consistent look across your body of work, but there's a myriad of possibilities.

If you don't yet own a printer and aren't yet sure that home printing is for you, consider picking up an A4 or US Letter size printer, as these are now very cheap, and recent models provide excellent quality. Just make sure you

The Power of the Print

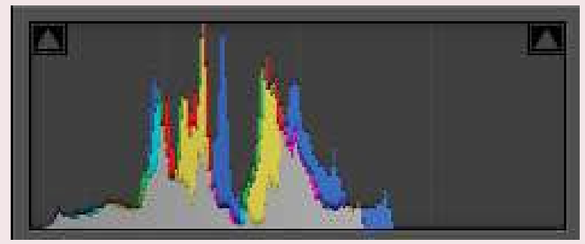
MARTIN BAILEY

select something that has individual colour cartridges, not multiple colours in one or two cartridges, as some colours will run out before others, causing waste if you had to throw out the entire cartridge. Also, look for a printer with at least six colours in the cheaper end of the market, or eight or more if you decide to go for a 13" x 19" (A3 Plus/Super B) printer. Resist the temptation to buy an older used printer if you are on a tight budget. You'll get better results with much less stress using something as cheap as a new $100 A4 printer.

One of the main sources of frustration for photographers printing their own work is dark prints. The source of the problem though is not dark prints, it's overly bright monitors. Factory settings for computer displays have them set too bright for most photographers' working environment. In general, this gives the photographer a false impression of what their images really look like and so we expect the prints to be brighter.

To set your display brightness accurately, you'd need to ensure that your display is calibrated and use the ambient light checks to adjust your brightness during the process. If you don't already have a calibration tool, try turning your display down to around one third of its full brightness. As a reference point, I have my external monitor turned down to 12% Brightness! This can be a shock to the system at first. Your images will look dark, and it will feel horrible, but I assure you, once you've worked like this for a few days you will get used to it.

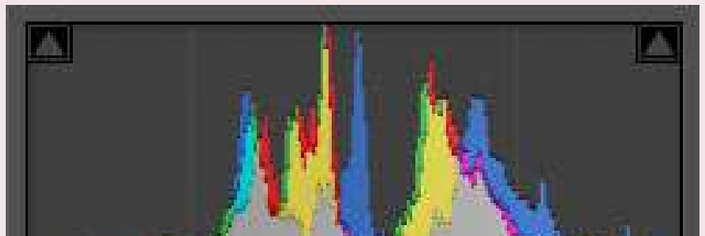
You might also find that some of your images are too dark out of the camera. To overcome this, you'll need to rely on the histogram, either when shooting new images or preparing old images for print. Unless you intentionally shot a low-key or dark image, you should not see much of a gap between the data on the right side of your histogram data and the right shoulder of the histogram box, like in this histogram.



The Power of the Print

MARTIN BAILEY

If you do see a large gap, you might need to brighten up your images using the exposure sliders in Photoshop, Lightroom, or Aperture (or whatever program you use) until your histogram looks more like this. Once you've adjusted the exposure of your image, try a print and compare it to what you see on your display. If it's still too dark, your display may still be too bright. Continue to adjust until your prints are close to what you see on the display.



It's important to note though that this is just a quick way to get close results and not your ideal workflow. The goal is to shoot images that are brighter (if they were too dark) and to do all of your editing on a darker monitor. Then your prints will look great from the start and you're actually seeing a more accurate view of what your images really look like. Resist the temptation to increase the brightness of your monitor again when you're not printing.

Although this will give you better results straight away, to ensure that your colours are accurate, you also need to remove your printer manufacturer's interpretation of what the average consumer wants to see in a print. To do this, you need to turn off printer management of the colours, and tell the printer exactly what profile to use and allow Photoshop, Lightroom, or Aperture to handle the colour. Your printer will come with profiles for your printer manufacturer's papers. If you buy a third party manufacturer's paper, you can usually download their profiles too. If you really get into this, you can create your own custom profiles relatively easily too now, with a slightly higher-end calibration tool.

It might all sound like a lot of hard work, but once you've got a few basics under your belt, it really isn't. Printing can be frustration free most of the time, and very fulfilling. If you had a bad experience printing more than a few years ago, I implore you to give it another try. There's never been a more exciting time for photographers to create images, and to create beautiful, tactile prints from them to display and enjoy. I show my work a lot, and receive praise in many forms, but the highest praise I've received was when people stand in front of a physical print, and actually shed a tear. I would love for you to experience this too, through the power of the print.

Martin Bailey is a Tokyo-based art and assignment photographer who is passionate about creating photography that invokes emotions, and helping others to do the same. He runs photography workshops and releases a weekly photography podcast, along with a photography-centric blog and forum. Learn more about Martin on his website,

http://www.martinbaileyphotography.com

Check out Martin's Craft & Vision titles at

http://craftandvision.com/authors/martin-bailey/

(The Passionate Printer – available January 2012.)

MICHAEL FRYE

Learn to Direct the Eye

MICHAEL FRYE

When someone looks at one of your photographs, what do they see? Where do they look first, second, and third? How do their eyes move through the frame? To communicate effectively through your photographs, you have to direct your viewers' attention. You can't just hope that they'll notice your subject—you have to make them look at it. How do you that? With light, design, and processing.

LIGHT

Light can make your subject stand out, and draw viewers' attention right to it—or pull their eyes away to something completely different. Look at this image of Half Dome (A) and notice what areas attract your attention. Where does your eye go first? Second? Third? If you're like most people, you probably looked first at the sunburst, and next at either the yellow trees or the cloud wrapped around Half Dome. Why? Because these are the brightest and most colourful areas in the photograph.

Our attention is naturally drawn to bright spots and warm colours. In this image, I want people to look at the sunburst, the yellow trees, and Half Dome; to me these are the most interesting parts of the photograph. So the light complemented this scene perfectly. But it doesn't always work this way.

Learn to Direct the Eye

MICHAEL FRYE

LIGHT – continued

In the first image of Bridalveil Fall (B), most of the waterfall is in the shade, so your eye gets pulled to less interesting, but brighter, areas in the upper-right and lower-right corners of the frame. There's competition between the subject—the waterfall—and the light.

In the second photograph (C), a sunbeam spot-lit the waterfall, drawing attention to the two main subjects, the water and the rainbow, because they're the brightest and most colourful things in the frame. To me this image is far more successful.

If your main subject is dark, with bright areas next to it, or behind it, you'll create a visual competition between your subject and those adjacent highlights. Ideally you want the main points of interest to be the brightest things in the frame, so that viewers' eyes go there immediately.

Of course there are always exceptions. If a dark subject contrasts with brighter surroundings, our attention goes right to it, as it goes to this Joshua tree silhouetted against the sky (D). So a dark subject can work—if it stands out clearly against a brighter background. While our eyes usually get drawn to bright spots, they always get pulled toward contrast.

Learn to Direct the Eye

MICHAEL FRYE

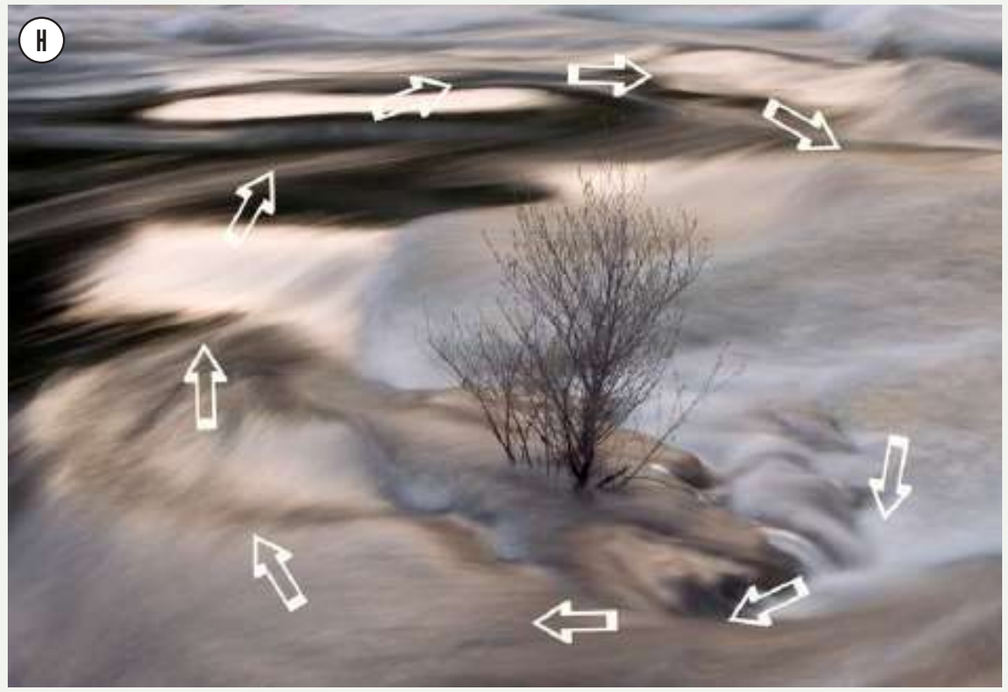
DESIGN

You can also direct viewers' eyes with lines and shapes. In this autumn photograph of El Capitan (E), the light does a lot of the work: the two main focal points, the cliff and the foreground leaves, stand out because they're the brightest and most colourful things in the frame. But your attention is also directed to El Capitan because nearly every prominent line in the photograph points right to it (F). Even though El Capitan occupies only a small part of the frame, you can't miss it.

The next example (G) is more subtle, but shows the power of circular design. Again, light plays a role: the dark silhouette of the small bush stands out against the lighter water behind it, while your attention also gets pulled toward the brighter patches of water, particularly along the left and top sides.

Those bright reflections in the river form a semicircle, and in the lower-right corner there's another, less-obvious semi-circular shape that draws your eye back, and completes the circle (H). This circular design keeps your gaze from wandering out of the frame, and brings your attention back to the central bush.

The subjects in this photograph are mundane: a shrub and some water. But the light and lines make the image interesting. The more you think about the underlying design of your photographs, and how lines and shapes direct the eye, the better your compositions will be.



Learn to Direct the Eye

MICHAEL FRYE

PROCESSING

Nature rarely provides perfect illumination, so sometimes we have to help it along. Even the best photographs often benefit from dodging and burning—selectively lightening or darkening parts of the image in software. Lightening an object draws more attention to it; darkening something makes it less obvious. Both can be used to direct the viewer's eye.

I was lucky to find beautiful, backlit mist underneath Bridalveil Fall in Yosemite one June morning (I). But the left side and upper-left corner are both bright, and light areas along the edge tend to pull your eye out of the frame. On the other hand, Bridalveil Fall is a major focal point, but it is shaded and dark, and needs to draw the eye more.

I used Lightroom's Adjustment Brush to darken the left edge and upper-left corner, and lighten the area around the waterfall. The illustration (J) shows the areas I changed, and the exposure settings I used with the Adjustment Brush (negative amounts for darkening, positive numbers for lightening).

Of course you can make similar adjustments with the Dodge and Burn tools in Photoshop—or, for more flexibility, make a Levels or Curves adjustment layer, then paint on the layer mask to select the area you'd like to change. (Paint with white to select, black to hide.)

With either Lightroom or Photoshop (or any other software) large, soft-edged brushes usually work best for dodging and burning, as they create gradual transitions that make the changes less apparent. And don't overdo it—a small amount of lightening or darkening can make a large difference, and bigger moves usually look heavy-handed and obvious. In this example the changes are subtle, but your eye now travels more easily to the most interesting parts of the photo—Bridalveil Fall and the mist in the centre (K).

Almost every photograph can benefit from dodging and burning. After you've adjusted the overall colour balance, contrast, and saturation, look at the brighter parts of the image. Are any of these spots distracting—do they pull the eye away from more interesting things? If so, darken them to help draw attention elsewhere. Then look at the darker regions. Are any of these areas important focal points that need to draw the eye more? If so, lighten them.


I

J


K

Learn to Direct the Eye

BE THE DIRECTOR

You can't always control the light, but you can look for situations where light makes your subject stand out from its surroundings. You may not be able to move mountains or trees to create a perfect composition, but you can become more conscious of how lines and shapes direct attention, and use that to your advantage. And if the light and design aren't perfect, you can use dodging and burning to draw the eye a little better.

When you make conscious decisions about where you want viewers to look, and use the tools of light, design, and processing to direct people's eyes, you become a creator and communicator with a camera, rather than just a snap-shooter. Take charge: be the director of your photographs—and of your viewers' attention.

MICHAEL FRYE

Michael Frye is a professional photographer specializing in landscapes and nature. He is a contributor to numerous magazines on the art and technique of photography, and is the author of The Photographer's Guide to Yosemite, Yosemite Meditations, and Digital Landscape Photography: In the Footsteps of Ansel Adams and the Great Masters. Learn more about Michael on his website,

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Check out Michael's Craft & Vision titles at

http://craftandvision.com/authors/michael-frye/

ALEXANDRE BUISSE

Understand the Stages

ALEXANDRE BUISSE

From the first moment you picked up a camera, you have been on an image making journey. There are lots of different stages, lots of different directions, and not really any final destination. There are milestones and pitfalls, and you undoubtedly have encountered plenty of both already.

There are goals, of course, both concrete and more abstract. Yours might be to one day make a living from your images, to be the main shooter at a wedding, to see your name in the credit line of magazine, or to have a solo exhibition. Or maybe it is simply to create images of your kids that you would be proud to frame over the mantel or to be able to call yourself a photographer without feeling like you are being dishonest.

As soon as you reach one of those goals, however, you realize that they are not the real reason you take pictures. It is the same with my climbing: as sweet as any summit may be, it is meaningless in itself. What really matters is the journey, the climb itself. And as soon as a particularly desired summit is reached, a big painful void is open, with a burning question: what now? There is only one reasonable answer, of course, find another higher, harder mountain to climb. We are climbers because we love to climb, and photographers because we love to photograph. Simple as that.

This, in short, is the drive, what pushes us to further our art, to try to become better at what we do.

In this journey, I would like to argue that there are six distinct stages. This is of course a somewhat arbitrary classification, and I have no doubt there are many other ways to subdivide the creative evolution of a photographer, but here comes my version nonetheless. Please also be aware that this is a very, very broad generalization.

• In the first stage, there is no artistic intent, the role of the photograph is simply to record. Nowadays, most families own a point and shoot digital camera of some sort and use it to fix memories of birthdays and holidays. Images are not expected to be beautiful in any way, but simply to show what was happening at a particular moment. The photographer is simply a camera operator, expected to keep things reasonably sharp and well exposed.

• In the second stage, the photographer has discovered an interest in creating beautiful images and is enthusiastically playing around with whatever camera he has available, though without any real direction or technical knowledge. He still mostly follows the automatic mode of his camera but does a lot of random experimentation, happy to find the occasional good image in his files, but still unsure of why it is good or how it was achieved. This is a time of great creativity but with a relatively poor yield of good imagery.

• In the third stage, the photographer has realized that the lack of technical knowledge was hindering his efforts and has made a conscious decision to learn the craft of image making. He focuses heavily on technique, starts buying a lot of equipment and perusing review websites. His images improve dramatically, at least from a technical point of view, but they do not necessarily satisfy him any more than before. This is a dangerous time, as the unbridled enthusiasm of the second stage, where everything was new and exciting, has given way to the cold world of lens reviews and MTF charts.

• In the fourth stage, the photographer has had a new realization: focusing exclusively on technique is a dead-end, while composition, quality of light and other similar, intangible notions are equally crucial in the creation of a great image. This is much more difficult to learn, however, since it is not nearly as quantifiable as the technical aspects of photography. This is the time where he gets interested

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in the history of photography, studies the works of the masters and perhaps follows some workshops.

• In the fifth stage, the photographer has finished acquiring the technical and artistic tools he needed and starts worrying about what to do with them. He can take a beautiful photograph, but realizes he needs more - he needs something to express with the image. This is the time where he develops his own vision, finds his voice. He was a craftsman, he is becoming an artist.

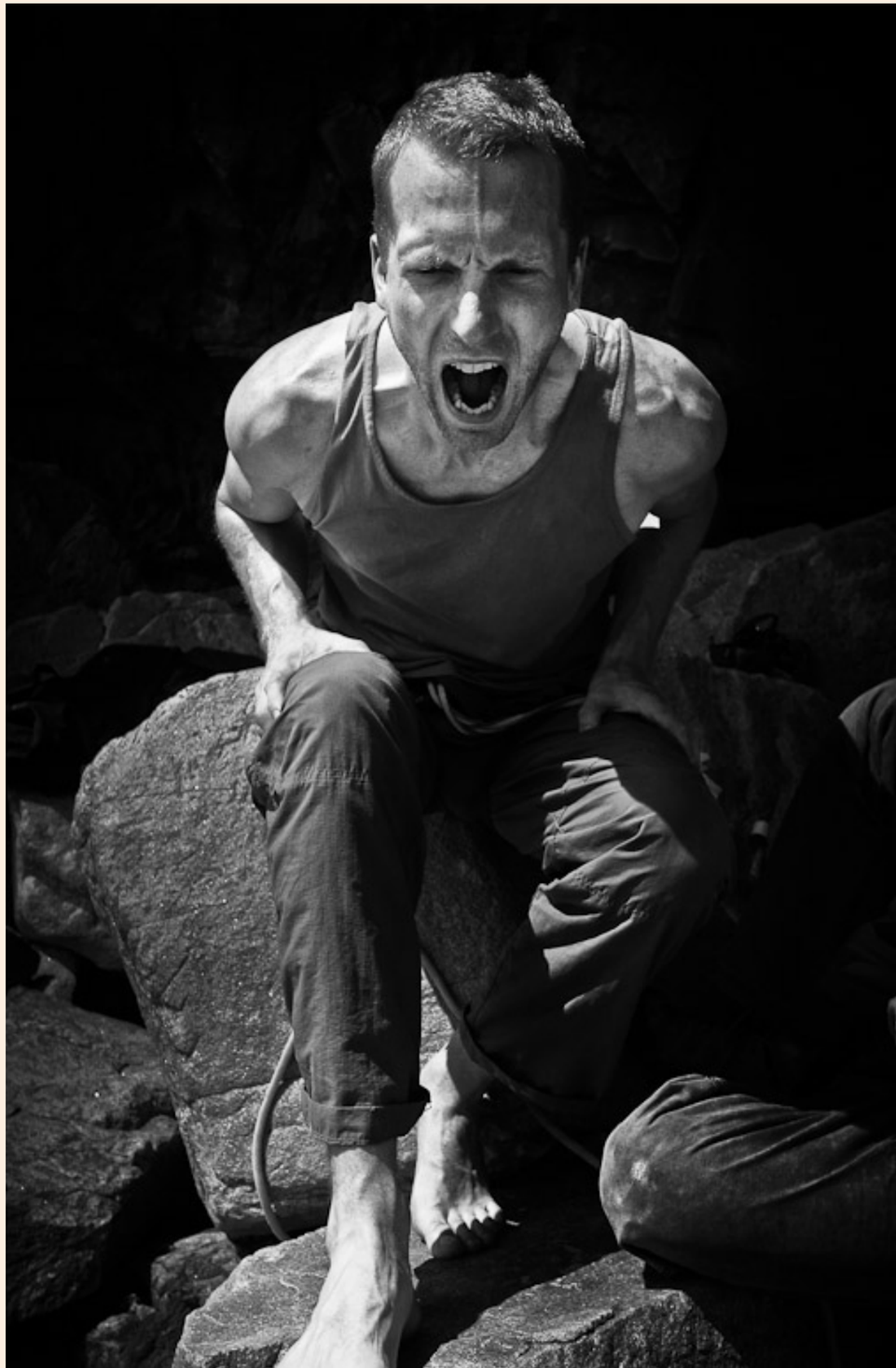
• In the sixth and final stage, the photographer has found his voice and stopped worrying. He has a message to express, and he knows how to do it. He just shoots, because that's who he is and what he does. Arguably, no one ever fully reaches this stage.

The transitions from one stage to the next are also interesting. They can't be forecast or forced, and only in retrospect does the photographer realize he has progressed to the next level and has stopped worrying about whether his lens is sharp enough, for instance.

Of particular interest to this article is where communities, especially online, fit within this scheme, and how useful they can be to progress to the next level.

As anyone who has perused Flickr for any length of time can readily attest, there are a lot of stage two photographers sharing enthusiastically. They are still at the beginning of their journey and post a lot of "cliché" images, of flowers, babies and sunsets, simply because this is what they are naturally attracted to. They are also looking for the magic pill recipe to automatically make their photos great, be it HDR tone mapping or instamatic filters. The role of the community is not to offer criticism but reinforcement and support. While the tidal wave of flourished awards may seem a bit ridiculous at times, it still serves a very important purpose: encouraging the photographer to persevere, to keep shooting and sharing.

When he reaches the next stage, the technical hole, the photographer completely switches communities and starts spending his time reading reviews of cameras and lenses, and debating endlessly on dpreview over which exotic telephoto has the best corner sharpness, or whether he should switch to Canon if the 5D Mk III is released before the D800. Crucially, he will usually stop sharing images online at this stage (with the possible exception of brick walls). Internet forums will help him further his technical knowledge, but not his creative eye or personal vision.



Understand the Stages

ALEXANDRE BUISSE

After a few months, or most likely years, the photographer will end up realizing that debating over whether Canon or Nikon is the best brand, fun as it may be, does not help him create better pictures. He will gradually move away from debate forums and start sharing again, either back in select subcommunities of Flickr or on more “mature” platforms like 500px or 1x. He will be looking for both validation and measured criticism (in proportions that vary according to his character), and, in an equally important manner, he will consume a lot of images created by others and offer his own take on them, thereby developing his critical eye.

Then something strange happens. The photographer reaches the fifth stage, where he tries to find his own voice, develop his personal vision. And he stops sharing almost completely. At first, maybe out of habit, he does share his latest creation, on which he feels quite strongly. The reactions, however, are not what he was hoping for, and maybe comments are made on how it is not technically perfect, or on how the composition could be better, or the light more flattering. The danger here is that the photographer, despite having developed a thicker skin in the previous stages, has put a lot more of himself into this new image, and criticism is, once again, taken personally. As the process repeats itself, he finally decides that now that he is creating something deeply personal, he doesn’t need to share with others as much as before, if at all.

Understand the Stages

This I believe is a mistake, and it is the point I would like to (finally) make. Though it is indeed very frustrating to receive comments on how an image is improperly exposed when the entire point is for it to be improperly exposed, there is still a tremendous value to be found in not only sharing one's images, but also in being open to feedback. It keeps the photographer grounded in reality, it helps him see the images differently, opens new perspectives or new levels of reading. More importantly, except for a few rare Zen masters, most of us do create images to share with others, to create a response, an emotion within the viewer. Online sharing and commenting, with all its flaws, is also a great way to get closer to the viewers and gauge their reactions. Furthermore, knowing he has a public pushes the photographer to shoot more, edit more, create more, which, as we all know, is the real key in becoming a better photographer—you simply have to spend a lot of time doing it.

There is a fine line to tread here, keeping your own voice while still listening to what others have to say. If you systematically cave whenever others make suggestions, you will end up producing lowest-common-denominator images, which may please crowds but don't truly express your voice. If on the other hand you live in an ivory tower and never consider any external feedback, convinced of your own genius, you will quickly stop growing as an artist and repeat yourself endlessly.

It gets even better: by being forced to perform this delicate balancing exercise, you will progressively become better at recognizing what is really yours in any image, and how you are expressing your voice. It will in turn help you differentiate between the superficial and the deeper, more personal parts of your work.

This is the simple message I have been trying to pass on here: do move on when you feel you have outgrown a particular community, but never stop sharing and opening your work to feedback and criticism. You will be a better artist for it.

ALEXANDRE BUISSE

Alexandre Buisse is an adventure photographer and a mountain climber, raised in the French Alps and now traveling to the world's major ranges from his base in Scandinavia. His first print book, Remote Exposure, was published in April, 2011. Alexandre's work can be seen at http://www.alexandrebuisse.org

Check out Alexandre's Craft & Vision titles at http://craftandvision.com/authors/alexandre-buisse/

ANDREW S. GIBSON

Create Projects and Collaborate

ANDREW S. GIBSON

The word depth comes up more than once in photography. There's depth of field—the zone of sharpness within the photo. There's depth as in perspective—imparting a sense of distance or space into the image. Another type of depth is depth of treatment. It's the type of depth you get when you follow a theme, or set yourself a project to photograph the same subject over a period of time.

Projects are an ideal way to explore a subject in depth. Whatever your preferred subject matter, it's possible to get into a routine of shooting a certain thing a certain way. A new project can help you break out of this routine and give you impetus to move out of your comfort zone. It gives you something to do and a new subject to focus on. Coming back to the same subject will challenge your creativity as you search for new ways to photograph it.

So, what sort of project can you take on? The question of what to photograph can be a difficult one, but your personal interests may be a good starting point. Perhaps you have another hobby or interest that you can combine with your photography. Craft & Vision author Alexandre Buisse is a good example. He combines his love of mountaineering with photography (you can see some of his work in the eBook Extreme Perspectives). If you're into something physical, like mountaineering or rock climbing, then a project as simple as making a set of portraits of your fellow mountaineers/rock climbers could be very interesting and rewarding.

Projects should be driven by the type of photography that interests you. If you like landscape photography, for example, then how about a project exploring the coastline or landscape near where you live? A popular technique at the moment is combining long exposures with black and white photography. Another (the two often go together) is landscapes with minimalist composition. Either of these could make a worthwhile project.

If you prefer photographing people, how about a portrait project? Actors, dancers, surfers, firemen—all have been subjects of successful projects. The thing is to find something that interests you, then photograph it over a period of time rather than superficially. That gives the project depth. Bonus—it will improve the creative side of your photography too.

Another type of project that has become popular over the last few years is the 365 project. This involves taking a photo every day for a year. It's challenging because it's difficult to find time to take a photo every day, let alone be creative and original at the same time. Some photographers concentrate on a single subject for their 365 project. Self-portraits seem to be a popular theme (there's always an available model).

Another unifying element in a project is the treatment. For example, if you're taking a series of portraits, how about taking them all with the same lens, or the same background, or all in black and white? This approach worked for Richard Avedon's series In the American West and it could work for you too.

Projects can also arise over a number of years. This happened to me when I made a series of trips to the Andes mountains in South America over a six-year period (see my eBook Andes). Each time I visited a different region and took some more photos. I took time to speak with some of the people that I met and to read about and understand the culture and issues of the region. This, and the time that I spent there, helps add depth to the collection of images. Someone who goes there for just a week or two can't achieve the same depth of coverage. Another long-term project you should look at is Jessica Hilltout's Amen.

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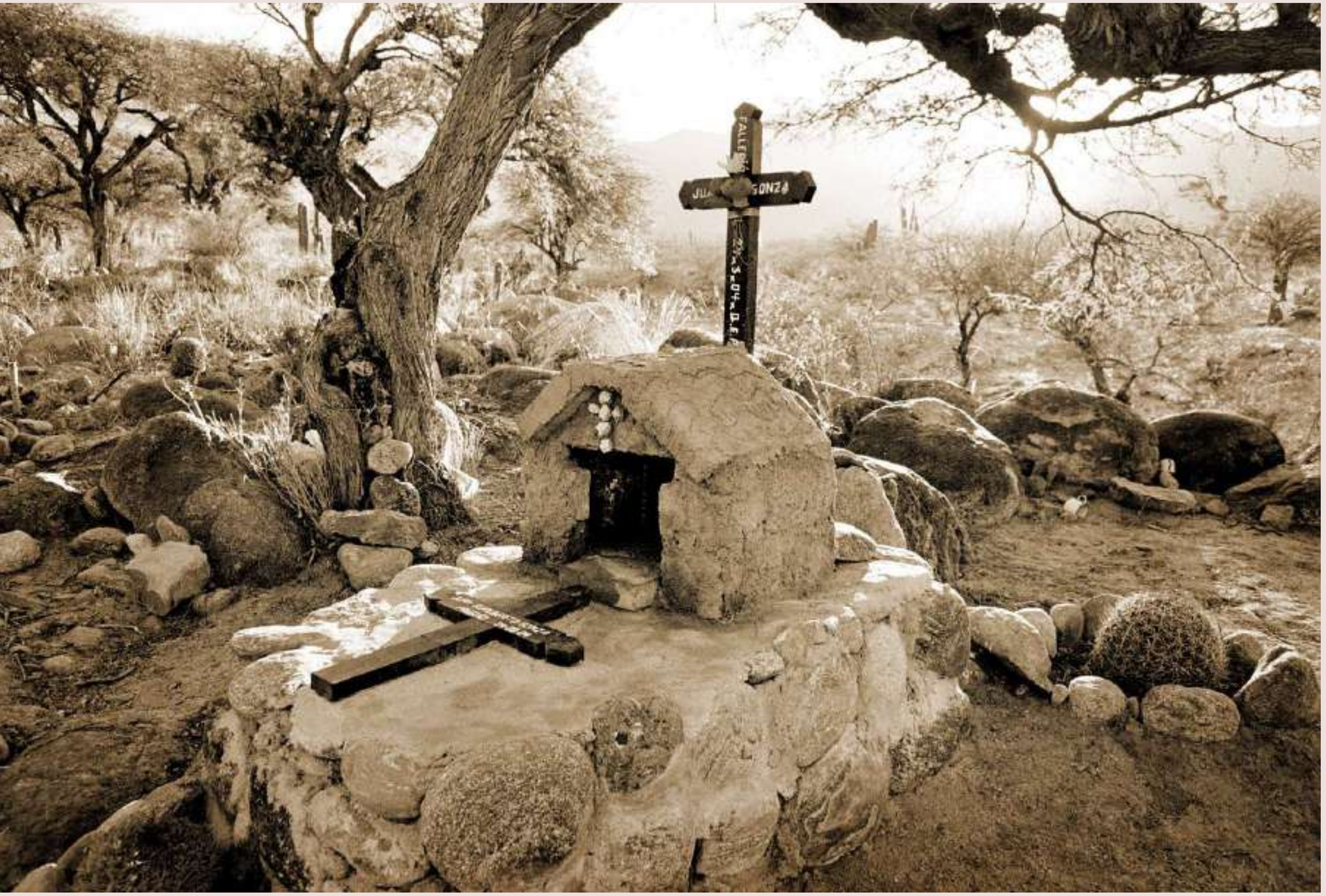

You don't have to go somewhere far away or exotic to undertake a project like this. There may be somewhere relatively close by that is just as interesting to you. In some ways, the closer the better, because it's easier to visit more often.

Once you've started a project you probably want to display the best photos online somewhere. Projects are a great way of developing your photography and editing skills—selecting the best photos and arranging them in a cohesive way that tells a story can be as much of a skill as creating the images in the first place. There are some fairly obvious places to start, such as Flickr, that most photographers are aware of. It's nice to have your own website though, and even if you know next to nothing about web design it's easy to start your own photo blog using services such as Blogger, Wordpress.com and Tumblr. These are all free to use and there's no need to buy your own domain name or hosting.

Create Projects and Collaborate

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Another photo sharing website that I like is the Behance Network. Behance is dedicated to creative projects of all descriptions, not just photography. It's a great place to look for inspiration and to see the work of other photographers and other visual artists, as well as upload and display the results of your own projects. It's well worth a look.

Don't think that you have to undertake projects by yourself either. There's great value to be had from collaboration. Apart from the fact that it's fun to share an activity that you enjoy with a friend, working with another photographer has the potential to add interest and depth to a project. Another photographer will approach the same subject from a different perspective. They may have different skills or techniques that complement yours. They can also help when it comes to editing and displaying photos. It's always difficult to be objective about our own work, and the insight of another photographer can be invaluable.

Create Projects and Collaborate

ANDREW S. GIBSON

Professional photographers use personal projects to expand the range of their portfolios and attract new business. There are plenty of photographers who made their name with a project that made people sit up and take notice (Richard Billingham's Ray's a laugh comes to mind). If your project is interesting enough, and the photos are good enough, you never know where it will lead.

Links:

http://www.richardavedon.com/index.php#mi=2&pt=1&pi=10000&s=0&p=7&a=0&at=0
http://www.americansuburbx.com/2008/11/richard-billingham-rays-laugh.html
http://www.jessicahilltout.com/collections/amen.html

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NICOLE S. YOUNG

Refine Your Composition

NICOLE S. YOUNG

When I think of photographic composition, two things come to mind: where and how the elements are placed in the frame. The "where" refers to the actual location of the subject, background, or even empty space in relation to the area you have to work with in the viewfinder. The "how" refers to the position, angle, direction, or even the colour and sharpness (or lack of sharpness) of these elements.

Now, most of us know good composition when we see it. We are, in fact, internally programmed to appreciate visual balance and harmony, but when it comes to actually creating a photograph which results in a pleasing image it makes us take a step back and really think about how to replicate that beauty.

Understanding how to create a well-composed photograph can happen in one of a few different ways. For some, and let's be honest here, it's just natural. These are the artists who, as little children, were able to effortlessly create beautifully composed works of art (albeit with crayons and construction paper). But does this mean that the principles of composition can't be learned by the rest of us? Well, obviously not or I likely wouldn't be attempting to write an article on the topic.

The thing is, we need to approach composition as something we do, not something that magically happens randomly while holding your camera. Composing a photograph is akin to composing a song. The music doesn't just fall together when random notes are played or a group of people spontaneously play different instruments at the same time. A composer might start by playing something to test the waters, but then as he starts to hear something he likes, each note and instrumental addition become deliberately placed to make the piece harmoniously flow and make sense. We should approach the composition of our photographs in the exact same manner.

HOW TO COMPOSE A PHOTOGRAPH

So, how do we go about doing this? Sometimes it depends on the type of photography you're creating. With landscape and street photography, it might mean positioning yourself so that the elements "move" into place based on your perspective, focal length, etc. If you photograph still life or portraits, then you are in complete control of all of the objects in your frame and may be physically moving each item while watching the composition change in the viewfinder. Or, if you photograph moving subjects (like sports, children, or pets) then you might need to anticipate their movement in order to frame the elements to your liking.

Where you place your subjects in its surroundings is, of course, important as well. Sometimes placement is determined by what you are photographing, but there are also several guidelines you can take into consideration and use to create a more powerful image. Here are a few of the things I feel are some of the more important aspects of creating a beautifully composed photograph.

Refine Your Composition

NICOLE S. YOUNG

RULE OF THIRDS

The rule of thirds is one of the most common "rules" in photographic composition. To visualize the rule of thirds, imagine a tic-tac-toe grid across your frame, and where the lines intersect is where you place your subject. It's actually a dumbed-down version of what is called the "golden ratio," a mathematical formula that depicts an aesthetically pleasing composition and can be found in art, music, architecture and even in nature. I won't get into the mathematical details of the golden ratio (mostly because my teeth start to hurt when I try to do math) but it is similar in appearance to the rule of thirds and has been used in many forms of creations for hundreds of years.

You can use this method of composing your photographs when you have one subject or a group of items (by placing them on one or more of the intersecting lines of the grid), or if you're photographing a scene with a horizon or strong vertical lines, like a landscape or side of a building (by composing your photograph so that the horizon (or line) is along one of the grid lines of the frame).

Refine Your Composition

NICOLE S. YOUNG

ANGLES AND LEADING LINES

Another way to boost the compositional appeal of your image is to use angles and shapes with strong lines or curves. These lines give your viewer a path to follow when they look at your image, and even when used minimally they can really strengthen the outcome of your photograph. When you position them so that they diminish and fade off in the background of a photograph they can also give the viewer a sense of distance and perspective.

When adding lines and angles to your image, watch the corners of your viewfinder. When you have lines that angle and lead off of the frame, the best practice is to position theses lines so that they intersect with the corner of the viewfinder, so that they aren't cut off along the edge of your photo.

COMPOSING WITH COLOUR

Unless everything you create is in black and white, colour is very likely to play a big part in your photographs. It's also something that you should be very aware of in every part of your frame, especially the background and foreground of your images. Creating a photograph filled with subjects that have similar colours can create a sense of peace in a photograph. Or you can add tension to a scene by separating your subject from the background with colour, like photographing a person wearing a bright red shirt walking alongside a pale blue wall.

One thing to keep in mind is that when we view an image, our eyes tend to gravitate towards the brightest part of the frame. So if most of your image is dark, and your main subject is a bright colour, then we are very likely to look at that part of the frame first, which is a good thing when the brightest colour is the main focal point of the photograph. You do want to be careful of brightly coloured objects in the background of your image that can take away the spotlight from the subject; try to frame your subject so that it is free from distractions in the background.

Refine Your Composition

NICOLE S. YOUNG

CONCLUSION

While there are many “rules” in photography and composition, there’s nothing that says you always have to follow them. Sometimes placing your subject in the centre of the frame creates a stronger image than using the rule of thirds, or perhaps you have lines and angles jutting off of the frame in many different places. The key is to find balance and harmony with your compositions, make your images flow and be deliberate as possible with everything you can see through the viewfinder.

Nicole S. Young is a full-time photographer and author specializing in commercial stock photography. She is an accredited Adobe Certified Expert (ACE) in Photoshop CS5 and is a Help Desk Specialist with the National Association of Photoshop Professionals. She is author of the books Canon 7D: From Snapshots to Great Shots and EOS Canon 60D: From Snapshots to Great Shots published by Peachpit Press. Nicole blogs regularly at http://NicolesyBlog.com

Check out Nicole’s Craft & Vision titles at

http://craftandvision.com/authors/nicole-s-young/

ELI REINHOLDTSEN

The Power of the Moment

ELI REINHOLDTSEN

I love walking around a town, camera in hand, whether in my home town of Oslo or some exotic location abroad like Nepal. I think it is the indulgence of observing, lingering, watching a street scene unfold before my eyes, combined with the relaxed feeling of being part of it all—of blending in, unnoticed, ready to capture something unique.

And that is the real fascination for me; each of these moments is unique. I can't plan them, nor can they be repeated. It is a moment. And I like to be there with the option of capturing it with my camera.

Observing people at work, people at play, people having a good time just relaxing with their friends on the streets, these are all glimpses of ordinary life happening in front of me. But to me they are instant scenes. There is a certain thrill in having observed a once-in-a-lifetime moment, guessing that some people were where they should be, and some probably where they shouldn't be. The thrill of being in the moment. Right there, right then. And then going home knowing or hoping you captured that moment. Forever.

For me, a good photographic moment is capturing a situation in which the viewer could just as well have found themselves. Maybe it is a situation that makes the viewer smile in recognition, an inherent positive feeling that both the image and the viewer share, or perhaps it's a moment that contains an interesting juxtaposition. Regardless of which type of moment, a guiding principle for me is that the image must be respectful and it must translate across cultures. This is a critical cornerstone of my work—it helps me to show a common humanity, rather than the all-too-present world of "us and them."

I find it is easier to photograph strangers than people who are close to me. Photos of people I love are always beautiful in that they reflect the relationship that we have, but they may not necessarily hold the same meaning or impact for others who do not know the subject. I seem to be more biased—less objective—when photographing someone close, so I find it difficult to create images of people I know that engage others.

The key to finding a moment that allows you to create an engaging image is patience. The patience to hang around and wait to see what develops, but also the patience sometimes to just sit still. Other times I might wander around, not needing to be anywhere else or thinking about work or deadlines. It is a different sort of patience. Usually it requires being alone.

If I am not in the mood to engage with people I try and look for a quiet spot to just sit and observe. It may be just in front of a background I like, waiting for the "right" person to walk into the frame that will transform or enhance an otherwise dull background. Often, I try to look for a place where there are many people passing by, but this has to be balanced with not having so many people in the image that you lose the potential power of that lone monk, or old man that will just ooze character!

The Power of the Moment

ELI REINHOLDTSEN

Sometimes, by waiting, things develop way beyond what originally captured your imagination, as happened to me in Nepal. The jumping girl came running by while I was sitting on some steps just enjoying the view of the passers-by and the scene of two monks relaxing at a kiosk. She was so happy and ran up to the kiosk several times. I started observing her, and the way the monks looked at her, and suddenly I knew there could be an image there.

Sometimes it is less about patience and more about preparation. For example, when I am looking for panning shots, I usually have the camera settings on shutter priory, at 1/30 of a second. My Canon has a custom preset that, with just one twist of the dial, has all the correct settings for panning. All I have to do is raise the camera to my eye, compose, and shoot. This is what happened when the shepherd boy appeared. My timing was probably a bit off, but when he twisted his head back his face froze. I held the shutter down, shot a series of images, but only the first image was sharp.

It turned out that there was a fleeting moment that deserved to be captured. Luckily I was prepared, but even if I had not been, it was a unique moment. Never to be repeated. Within seconds he had disappeared around the corner with his goats and I never saw him again.

The Power of the Moment

ELI REINHOLDTSEN

If I am just walking around a city the camera has to be ready. I need to be as prepared as possible to respond to the unexpected. The purists tend to always shoot in manual. I confess I'm just not that quick at predicting light so I normally shoot in aperture-priority or shutter-priority mode. I am not afraid to just shoot and see what happens, instead of losing a scene. Expression beats perfection. So my default set up is aperture priority, with the aperture preset to f/2.8 in twilight and perhaps f/5.6 in better light. For panning, as I mentioned before, I use shutter priority.

I try to always first ask if I can photograph someone. I don't think it has to spoil the moment. My facial expression usually shows that I think it is a great scene or an interesting person, and most often I can read if photographing them will be okay! But sometimes I get it wrong, such as with these four women, when—too late—I realized it was not. By the time I understood, I had already pressed the shutter. To me this image radiates power. If they were to pose for me and give me their time, they would want compensation. I respectfully left after that. Now I wish I had just put the camera down and stayed to see what happened. In retrospect I think it was the camera that created the awkward situation for them. It wasn't my mere presence.

The Power of the Moment

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Asking for permission may still ruin your image if the scene just unfolds in front of you. To me the key is not to present people in a bad light. If appropriate I will show the image afterwards, but this is just not always possible.

In general I try to look for scenes where there are several people interacting with each other. Scenes where there is already something happening. The language I use for communication is the universal language, body language. If my face and hands express that I see beauty I believe they will understand. I am easy to read and prefer it like that. Unless it is a very private situation, they often laugh or shrug their shoulders and let me participate with the camera. Sometimes observing, sometimes interacting. If it is a group of people having fun, they may just be delighted to have their portrait taken. We all like our moment of fame, our spot in eternity, and the camera is a great “vehicle” for allowing that to happen! One would think that it is easier to approach just one person rather than a group, but I find the opposite to be true for me.

If I could give you any advice, it would be to begin by connecting with people and not think about photographing them. Engage. Let images slip away. Capture the moments only in your mind. And when you relax, bring the camera back on stage again. I think what you radiate through your personality and openness will open up so many opportunities, that soon it will become second nature.

The Power of the Moment

ELI REINHOLDTSEN

Expressing happiness will give you happiness in return. Creating that unique moment begins with you. Capturing a moment, creating an image that stands alone and tells a whole story in a single frame, is challenging. It requires a different approach than a photo essay or telling a story over several images. Capturing a moment requires the viewer to have instant recognition and, perhaps also, instant surprise. A momentary image tells a universal story. A single human moment.

I like being close to the people I photograph. This implies working with wide angle lenses. Needless to say, the camera has to be ready and the lens cap has to be off. I always use a lens hood so that I don't have to worry about the lens getting scratched.

Sometimes when I look at the work of photographers I admire, I keep wondering how they did that. The simple answer is probably somewhere between luck and experience. The more I practice, the more I find that these scenes can somehow be predicted. Not always of course, but you learn to recognize when an interesting scene may be about to appear.

You don't then want to reach for a camera that is stored away in your bag.

Eli Reinholdtsen is an award-winning photographer from Oslo, Norway who has a distinct style, killer visual instincts, and strong sense of humour, all of which finds itself in her work. Learn more about Eli on her website,
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Check out Eli's Craft & Vision titles at
http://craftandvision.com/authors/eli-reinholdtsen/

PIET VAN DEN EYNDE

Forget Lens Stereotypes

PIET VAN DEN EYNDE

“The all new [enter your favourite lens brand here] 16–35 zoom with super-clear coating will allow you to capture sweeping panoramic vistas.” It seems like every time a lens manufacturer announces a new wide-angle lens, the only people that should rejoice are landscape photographers. Similarly, when new telephoto lenses are announced, the marketing hyperbole of the manufacturers almost exclusively talks about the great people (or animal) shots these lenses will allow you to make.

This leads to what I would call “lens stereotyping”—before long, we’re made to think that “portrait” equals 85mm or higher and that “landscape” implies 35mm or lower.

There is no such thing as a portrait lens, or a landscape lens, however; there’s just the right lens for the right job, or the right look you’re after. If you asked me what my favourite portrait lens is, I’d actually have a hard time choosing between my wide-angle 16–35mm and my 85mm f/1.8.

There’s no denying that the typical 85mm f/1.2, f/1.4, or f/1.8 lens yields great portraits. The beautiful background blur of these wide apertures makes it easier to just focus on the eyes and the main features of the subject, leaving less interesting parts of the composition in a blur. Getting my first 85mm f/1.8 was one of the best investments in photographic hardware I ever made, as it allowed me to shoot in a way that no other camera or lens I owned could.

Nikon D700 | 85mm f/1.8 @ f/2.0 – Nikon D700 | 16–35mm f/4 VR @ f/6.3 | 17mm
A typical 85mm f/2.0 portrait and the “environmental” version, taken at 17mm, f/6.3.

But one thing often lacking in these beautiful telephoto images, shot at wide-open aperture, is some context, some information about the person’s environment. Enter the concept of “environmental” portraiture. Enter the wide-angle lens.

Forget Lens Stereotypes

PIET VAN DEN EYNDE

Wide-angle portraiture might seem a little more difficult at first—after all, you cannot hide behind the convenient, beautiful bokeh of your f/1.2 or f/1.4 lens or the interesting features of your subject's face alone. So let's examine some of the things you have to pay attention to when shooting wide-angle portraits:

1) Make the background really interesting and informative.

Because wide angle lenses take in so much of the environment, you have to pay close attention to your background. With a 200mm telephoto, rotating five degrees to the left or to the right will get you a completely new background; it will hardly change anything on a wide angle lens. So, make sure that the background really informs about the person portrayed or that there's some interesting stuff happening in the background. In the images above, the wide angle setting immediately suggests a nomadic lifestyle. There's a hint of snow-capped mountains in the upper right corner, suggesting high altitude.

2) Underplay the background using your aperture.

Wide angle lenses have a much higher depth of field. Unless you're working with the really expensive prime lenses like the 24mm f/1.4 (and even then, you have to be really close to your subject for the background to become blurry), you should try and make your background less distracting if it's not inherently interesting.

Nikon D700 | 16–35mm
f/4 VR @ f/10 | 24mm

I accidentally chose an aperture that was too high (f/10). In this image, the aim of the background was to inform about the rural setting, but not to overwhelm, as it does now. There's too much sharp detail drawing the viewer's eye in all directions.

In this image, as I noted my mistake only afterwards, I blurred the background in post-processing. Choosing the widest aperture at capture time would have saved me a lot of work afterwards. This simulated open-aperture version works better though: our mind is intelligent enough to recognize the rural environment, yet the shallow depth of field lets the viewer focus on the woman.

Forget Lens Stereotypes

PIET VAN DEN EYNDE

3) Move in close.

If you're a little shy, it's harder to inconspicuously make portraits with a wide-angle lens, as you have to be really close to have elements fill the frame. Yet, this does not mean that your images have to look as if the subjects are aware of the camera. If you wait some time, they'll get used to your presence (or they'll throw you out altogether).

One "advantage" of really long lenses such as the 200mm is that it's easy to inconspicuously make "portraits" from a distance. You'll notice that I've put "advantage" and "portraits" in quotes, though, as I think this is not the way to approach portraiture. But while a 200mm can at least tempt you into this kind of paparazzi approach, with a wide angle lens you have to get really close. There's no hiding your presence as a photographer. In this image, I was probably about three feet… from the subject's own feet!

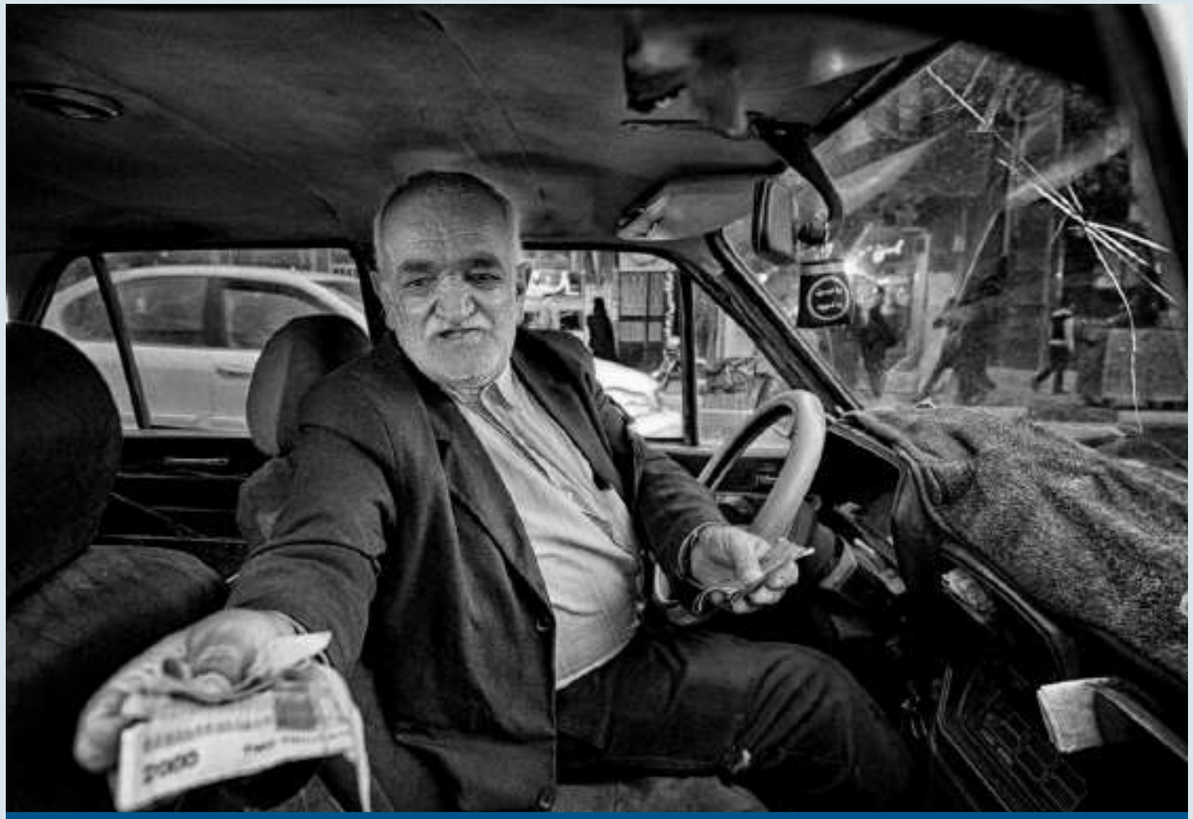
Nikon D700 | 16–35mm f/4 VR @ f/4 | 22mm

Forget Lens Stereotypes

PIET VAN DEN EYNDE

4) Watch out for distortion.

The hand of this taxi driver, giving back the change, is almost as big as his head. This is because it's so close to the lens (see also tip 5) and it's in one of the corners of the frame. In this image, however, this does not matter, as it helps to lead the eye of the viewer. By definition, wide-angle lenses project a wide-angle view of a scene onto a flat, rectangular surface. This means that, especially towards the sides of your frame, elements that are close to the lens (such as your subject's limbs) can be distorted. Sometimes, this is unwanted, and you should frame your subject more to the centre or take a few steps back. At other times, this distortion can be effective to help convey the story.



Nikon D700 | 16–35mm f/4 VR @ f/4 | 22mm

5) Use leading lines and exaggerated perspective.

A bemo (small bus) in Blitar, Java. Three powerful diagonal leading lines disappear in the three corners of the frame. The face and the steering wheel, the only two round elements, are placed diagonally in opposition to each other, each occupying one of the "rule of thirds" intersection points. Wide-angle lenses really let you play with composition.

Nikon D90 | Nikon 10–24mm f/3.5 – f/4.5 DX @ f/8 | 10mm

Another example of the use of leading lines and perspective is this picture of a temple guardian at Rambut Siwi temple in Bali. I immediately loved the symmetry of the stairs.

Wide-angle lenses are also said to exaggerate perspective: objects seem further apart on a wide angle image than they are in reality. This also means that angles of lines get exaggerated as well. You can use this to your advantage by using these lines as compositional elements in your frame.

Nikon D90 | Nikon 10–24mm f/3.5 – f/4.5 DX @ f/11 | 10mm

6) If your subject isn't in the foreground, find another way to draw attention to him.

I wanted to include the apocalyptic foreground in this image as well as the butcher. This called for a wide-angle lens, which would make the butcher relatively small in the final image. To emphasize him in spite of this, I chose to light him with a flash. The result is a much more dynamic picture, as your eye gets drawn from the carcasses in the foreground right corner to the butcher in the background left corner.

Your subject needn't always be in the foreground. But, if he isn't, he'll wind up rather small in the overall image, because of the exaggeration of distance we discussed in the previous point. If you can't emphasize your subject by his physical size in the picture, you'll have to find another way of drawing attention to him. As our eyes always get drawn to the lightest part of an image first, putting your subject in a beam of natural light can be a good idea or… you can create your own beam of light using a flash.

Nikon D90
Nikon 10–24 mm
f/3.5 – f/4.5 DX @ f/5.6
12mm

Forget Lens Stereotypes

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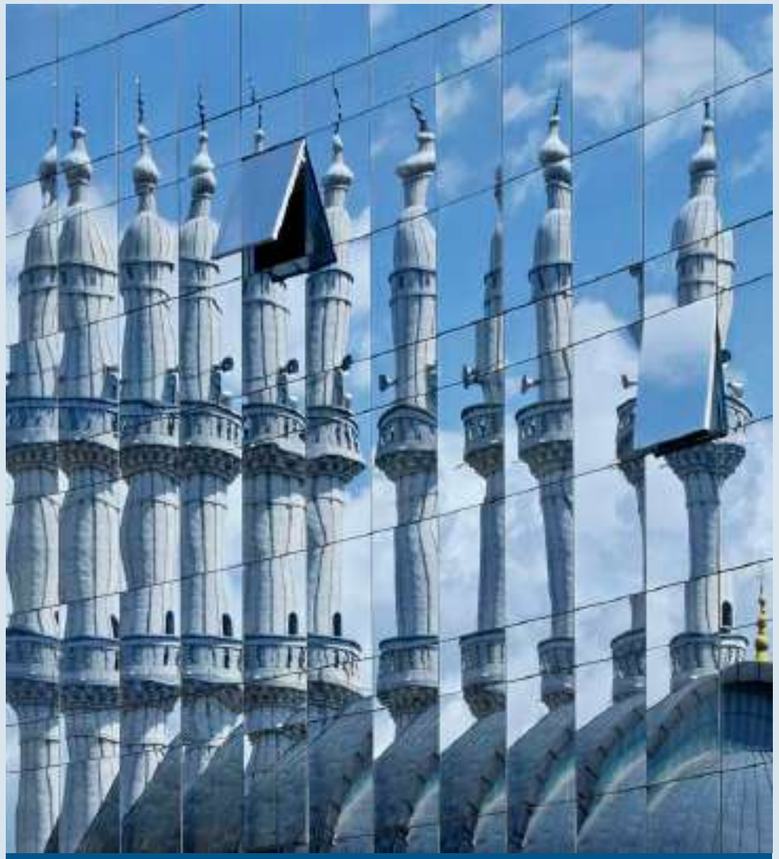
7) Try a little role reversal.

Using a “typical landscape lens” for portraiture is one side of the story. Similarly, you could experiment with using telephoto lenses in situations where you’d normally only think of a wide angle. I’m mainly a portrait photographer, but I’ll finish with this example of the latter: in this image, I was drawn to the juxtaposition, literally as well as figuratively, of the contemporary glass building and the old mosque. However, all my ultra-wide-angle attempts to frame this scene with both buildings side by side looked very uninspired and included too much irrelevant clutter.

It’s only when I switched to a slightly longer lens, and captured the reflection of the old building in the new, that everything fell into place. The result is a much more powerful image that conveys my idea in a cleaner, simpler, but more effective way.

So, next time you go out shooting, let your lenses and subjects play a little game of “role reversal.”



Nikon D200 | Nikon AF-S DX VR Zoom 18–200mm f/3.5 – 5/5.6 @ 52mm | f/10

Piet Van den Eynde is a Belgian freelance photographer. He also writes books, magazine articles, and gives training about digital photography and post-processing with Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Photoshop. In 2009, he threw his camera, a flash, and an umbrella in his bicycle panniers and cycled 5,000 miles through Turkey, Iran, India, and Indonesia for a photography project called PortraitsOfAsia. Learn more about Piet on his website, http://morethanwords.be/blog/en

Check out Piet’s Craft & Vision titles at

http://craftandvision.com/authors/piet-van-den-eynde/

STUART SIPAHIGIL

Slow Down and Learn to See

STUART SIPAHIGIL

The world keeps getting faster and faster, it seems. We have more obligations than ever before: family, friends, career, etc. Finding time to make photographs, especially for ourselves, can be a daunting task. Slowing yourself down, both physically and mentally, can give you the opportunity to examine what it really is you're trying to photograph, so you can make the time you have to take pictures really count.

Figuring out the craft is much easier than figuring out the art—our art—and so we tend to dwell on the easier things, simply because we don't know how to reach that part of ourselves that makes art. Learning how your camera works, figuring out lighting diagrams, and knowing what lens to use when all require time to learn, but once you understand them, they're yours. Given enough time and enough money, we'd all know the same techniques and we'd all be able to have the same gear. What does that leave? You. Why you make photographs and what subjects you choose to shoot will never be fully mastered.

Like anything you take seriously, photography—and why you do it—requires your commitment of time and focus and, like anything else, getting better at it takes time and practice. The good news is that, like anything else, if we spend the time to practice it, we will get better. We'll be able to call upon that artist within us a little quicker and a little easier when we don't have the time we'd like. We just need to spend some time with him or her to understand how to draw upon our insight and way of seeing. The more we practice, the better and easier it will become.

This article is about two ways to do that: slowing ourselves and our minds down when we're shooting to allow us to observe our world more deeply, and to shift our brains a bit to peer more clearly into those depths and see really what it is we're trying to photograph. My words and pictures are examples of how you might do that, but it will be up to you as to how much you get out of it. Your commitment to your photography and its power to affect your life and the lives of others will take you farther than any article like this one—because your pictures are worth more than a thousand words.

SLOWING DOWN

What do I mean by slowing down? Of course, I mean to slow your pace, both physically and mentally. You've probably found yourself lately actually running from one place to another to get to a meeting or an appointment on time, or to catch a train or bus. By literally speeding up our lives, we don't take the time to see the deeper levels of things and so, without meaning to, we become shallower thinkers and observers. Photographs are moments, pieces of time that are captured to look at again and again. In order for you to capture these moments, you must learn to slow down and see them.

Deep thinking and observation are key to good photography. Rather than creating the world we want from a blank canvas or piece of paper, we must usually wait for the world to align itself with our artistic desires. Patience is essential for the landscape photographer looking for the perfect light at sunrise. It's critical for the wildlife photographer seeking that moment when a rare bird finally shows itself.

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It's necessary for the street or portrait photographer looking for a person or a group of people to reveal themselves to the camera. Without patience and keen observation, we can only produce shallow, uninteresting photographs.

Freeman Paterson calls it "relaxed attentiveness," the ability to shed all of the other things that are competing for your attention and focus on a single object or event. By doing this, you begin to see photographs and not just subjects. You give yourself time to observe and consider the photograph you want to make in order to show the rest of us what it is that you see—perhaps showing us things we've never seen ourselves.

Slowing your life down, even for an hour or two a week, can provide great rewards for you and your photographs. You'll be surprised at the things you see that you missed before and how much richer your day-to-day life becomes as a result.

Leica M9 50mm | 1/180s | f/5.6
I was on a photowalk in Chicago with several other photographers and it had been raining all morning. I stopped on a bridge over the Riverwalk to get out of the rain for a bit and to watch the passersby below. These two people were walking some distance apart, but not too far away, making me wonder what their relationships was to each other.

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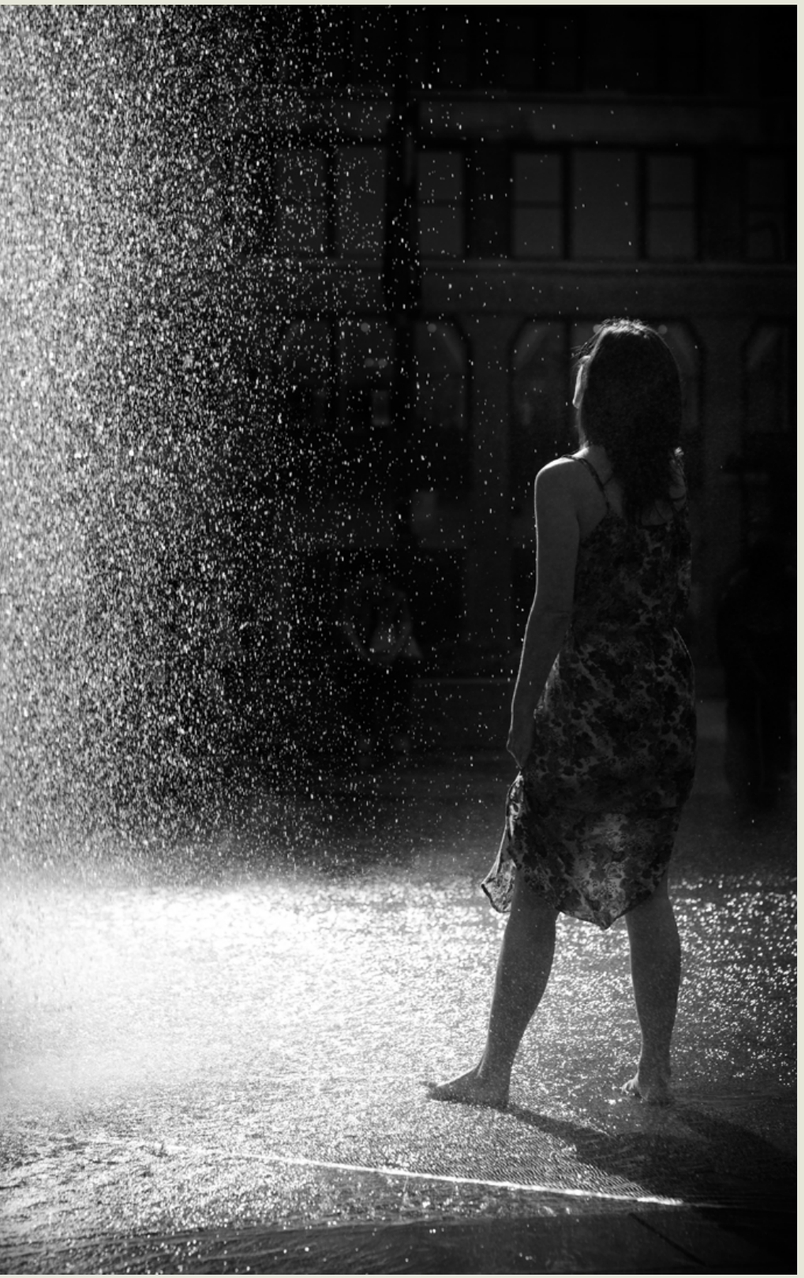

EXERCISE: STANDING STILL

This exercise will help you to slow yourself down and to focus on some of the things you normally miss in your busy life.

Find a comfortable place, but not too comfortable, where you can observe life around you—the natural world, other people—wherever you can. A downtown plaza, a hotel lobby, a park, your back yard, a place where you can watch the world around you and without you. Sit still for at least 30 minutes and observe what is happening. Don't take your camera or your cell phone or your laptop, or even a book. Sit and watch the world as it unfolds before you. (You could bring a small notebook where you can record your observations for future reference, but don't distract yourself from the real point of the exercise, which is to enhance your powers of observation.)

Pay attention to details. Is there an insect crawling on that nearby plant? Watch how it makes its way around the leaves and flowers. Is it repeating the same path over again, or is it seemingly just wandering? If there are other people around you, what are they doing? What about that couple over there sitting together and talking? Are they happy? Sad? Angry with each other?

In addition, observe yourself and your reactions to the various moments you see while you're doing this exercise. Try to observe your mental and physical reactions to an event. If the couple you saw were arguing, how did that make you feel? Did you feel sad? Did you flinch when she got up and walked away? How you feel about a moment can be as important as the moment itself, and should be present in your photography. Many of the best photographs give you an indication of how the photographer felt when she made it, or at least how she wanted you to feel. If you can observe the emotions that a photograph invokes, you can also see better how to create a photograph that invokes that particular emotion in your viewer.

When you think you're getting the idea, try this exercise again, but this time bring your camera and see if you can make a photograph of what you observe. Try to let go of all of the techniques and "rules" you've learned about photography and simply observe and record. Again, pay attention to how you're feeling about the various moments you see and how you're reacting to them. Try to capture some of these emotions in the photograph. Your photography should reflect those moments that are interesting to you and that you think provoke a response from your viewer.

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LEARNING TO SEE

In addition to slowing yourself down enough to begin to observe your world more closely, you must begin to look at it a little differently than you have before. Seeing more photographically is a broad discussion that entire books have been written about, but to me there are a few things that can help you get yourself into the right frame of mind to do so. The first is recognizing the difference between conceptual seeing vs. perceptual seeing. Put simply, it's seeing the photograph that is there, rather than the photograph you think ought to be there.

Conceptual seeing adds other factors—both emotional and informational—that exist only for you. Your conceptions about an object can lead you to photograph it in a certain way because that's the way you've seen it photographed before or that's the way you think it ought to be photographed, rather than focusing on what that subject represents to you. Just identifying an object by its name will lead you to think you need to make a photograph of it in a certain way. For example, as I write this, I'm sitting on the deck on the back of my house. There is a flower box nearby with flowers in it that my wife has planted. If you were sitting here with me and I asked you to photograph one of those flowers, I'll bet you've already begun to form an idea of how you would make that photograph—without even having seen the flower—because you have a preconception of how to photograph a flower based on photographs you've already seen or made yourself.

Perceptual seeing, on the other hand, simply observes things as they are. Using some of the same techniques for slowing down that I mentioned earlier, you can begin to clear your mind of your preconceptions and see an object for what it is. Then you can begin to see the photographs that lie within it. Returning to the example of the flower, you might now see the sensuous curves of the petals or the structure in the alternating leaves on its stem. You might see a photograph of the contrasting colours of the petals and the greens of the leaves around it. You might pull back from the flower and photograph it in its surroundings, perhaps to tell the story of a small piece of nature in an urban setting. However you shoot it, you should begin with what you actually see, rather than what you think should be there.

There is a bit of a paradox here. Good photographers see through their own conceptual thinking to perceptual thinking, but can recognize objects and themes that invoke certain concepts in others. The more universal the concept, the more iconic a photograph becomes. Think of your favourite photograph by one of the masters of the craft. Does it trigger certain emotions in you? Can you identify what those emotions are? How do you think that photographer captured those emotions? How could you do the same in your photography?

Leica M9 90mm | 1/45s | f/4
A local arts centre hosted a children's carnival with several games and activities. This little girl wasn't so sure about getting her face painted and both her dad and the clown had to hold her still.

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Leica M9 50mm | 1/45s | f/8
I was sitting at the table, eating dinner, when I saw this scene outside my kitchen window. I grabbed my camera, ran outside, and got a few shots before the sun's light faded completely from the backlit grass.

EXERCISE: BRAIN SHIFT

This exercise is designed to help you move from conceptual seeing to perceptual seeing and focus on the objects you photograph as they are, not as you might think they ought to be. To do this, you must first quiet the ongoing chatter in your mind. Try to focus on one particular thing and empty yourself of preconceptions. One cannot fill a cup that is already full.

First, find a non-moving subject that you think might be interesting to photograph, a vase of flowers or a piece of furniture in your house, perhaps. If you're outside, maybe there's a group of colourful flowers or a puddle on the ground from a recent rain storm. Position yourself in front of the subject, get comfortable and close your eyes. Empty your mind of the day's events and activities and focus on a single thing, such as your breathing. Feel your breath going in and out and listen to the sounds it makes as it does so.

Now, when your mind is calm and quiet, open your eyes and look at your chosen subject. Look at the shapes and lines. Look at the contrast between light and shadow. Look at the different colours represented. In other words, look at it only as it is, not what your brain tries to tell you is your concept of this subject.

Edward Weston said that composition is "the strongest way of seeing," so forget about the rules and principles and even suggestions about what makes a "good" photograph. Concentrate on what it is you see. Instead of just the puddle on the ground, see the juxtaposition of the clouds reflected in the water and the pavement surrounding it. Instead of just grass in a field, see the glowing embers of the end of the day. Instead of seeing what you think it is, see what it really is. Leave your preconceptions of this object behind and look at it simply as a collection of shapes, a set of lines, or a palette of colours. Look at it as the subject of a photograph.

Now take your camera and make that photograph. Think about what settings you need to use in order to achieve what it is you see. Do you need to isolate the glowing grass from the rest of the scene? Perhaps you need a larger aperture for a narrow depth-of-field. Perhaps you need to underexpose the image by a stop in order to darken the rest of the scene and really emphasize the backlit grass tops. Slow your photographic process down and

Slow Down and Learn to See

EXERCISE: BRAIN SHIFT – continued

think about each of these things. Be intentional about what you're doing and make these decisions in order to get the photograph you really want. Eventually, you'll even start to think about post-processing techniques—is this image going to be better in black and white?—and you'll alter your photographic process to accommodate it, too. By seeing clearly what it is you're photographing, you can begin to create a mindset where you think about the photograph you're going to make before you set up your tripod or push the shutter release.

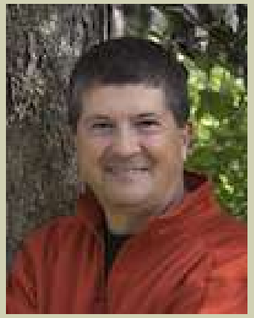
Sometimes it feels like we're on the bullet train of life and photography doesn't always get the attention we'd like it to. Slowing yourself down, if only for a small amount of time, can help you refocus your mind and spirit on your photography and help you get closer to the images you want to make. Taking the time to really pay attention to the world around you and finding the moments that count can help elevate your photography beyond technique.

You'll also be able to see your surroundings more clearly and be able to focus your mind on the elements of your photograph, rather than simply recording the subject. Seeing shapes and lines and light and colour, rather than simply an object, will let you let go of preconceived notions about your subject and perceive it as it truly exists. You will also be better able to create photographs that reflect the emotions that you want your viewer to feel when they look at it by understanding the conceptual thinking they can bring with them.

We tend to glide along the surface of the world these days, unable to take the time we need to really understand something that interests us. It's why we can get caught up in the gear and technique of photography, rather than the photographs themselves. It's why we're looking for others to give us formulas and step-by-step instructions to make certain photographs, rather than trusting our own instincts. It's why you're reading this eBook, hoping to glean some tip or trick to making better photographs. In the end, though, we simply have to put in the time to make the photographs we want.

By taking the time to truly focus on what it is you see and how you represent it to the rest of us, you'll be able to make a greater connection to the people who look at your photographs. In the end, that's what photography really is: making a connection with the viewer and helping them see the world in a way they may never have before.

STUART SIPAHIGIL



Stuart Sipahigil is an award-winning, published photographer who shoots and teaches for the love of the craft. In addition, he is the staff photographer for Outside Source Design , a multimedia design agency based in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Stuart posts his thoughts on photography on his blog,

http://www.thelightwithout.com

Check out Stuart's Craft & Vision titles at

http://craftandvision.com/authors/stuart-sipahigil/

DAVID DUCHEMIN

Make Stronger Portraits

DAVID DUCHEMIN

I love portraiture. My first photographic influences were Steve McCurry and Yousuf Karsh. I believe the human face can tell a thousand stories, all of them together giving glimpses into who we are, who we've been, and who we can be, as individuals and as a race.

There are few things I like more than sitting with someone, a beautiful African nomad or Indian elder, and taking the time to make their portrait. It's part art, part craft, and part relationship. And it's never once the same. Here are five suggestions for improving your portraiture.

1. Get Closer, Go Deeper.

I photographed these two brothers, Gujjar goat herders in Kashmir, India, on the same day in their family tent. Getting closer and taking time with them allowed them to get comfortable with me. One was a ham, the older was more curious, but neither of them wore these expressions when I first entered their family tent.

The strongest portraits are a revelation—they show us something about the subject. They are, to use language I've used before, photographs about a person, not merely photographs of a person. To do that, and to do it well, you need to get closer. The most common cause of lacklustre portraits is a failure to get closer to the subject either in proximity or relationally.

Getting closer in terms of proximity can mean one of two things: bringing the camera much closer to the subject, or using a longer focal length to allow you to fill the frame. Which you use depends on how much background you want to include. Some backgrounds contribute to the photograph by adding information and impact; they tell us more about the subject than we might know alone. Some backgrounds distract and detract from the portrait, pulling our attention, or our empathy, away from the subject. Where backgrounds distract, you might choose a longer focal length, not so you can make the subject from a greater distance, but for the shallower angle of view that the longer lenses afford, this isolates the subject and removes the distraction of the background. We'll discuss that more later. The advantage to getting closer physically is a big help in getting you closer relationally.

The moment you get closer to a subject you're able to touch them, lower your voice, and speak more intimately. There is a link between how close we get to people and how intimate the exchange with that person can become. But being close isn't a substitute for intimacy. We've all been on buses or in crowds, standing, pushed up against strangers. Very close, but not very intimate. Getting closer means asking questions, being genuinely curious. Ask people about themselves, ask them to tell you about their children, their work, their dogs, their art. Ask them what gives them great joy, or inquire about the saddest moments of their lives. Remember the best portraits are not a record of technical expertise with your gear, but of a moment between two people. The more you remember this is not about your camera or even the photograph itself, the stronger, more honest and intimate that portrait will be.

2. See the Light

The first photograph was taken in direct, undiffused light as an illustration for my first book, Within The Frame. Notice the hard shadows and difficulty in seeing this saddhu's eyes. The second photograph, made moments later, was made in the much softer light created by placing a large diffuser between the subject and the sun, just out of the frame.

There is no good light or bad light. There's light that is appropriate or inappropriate for what you are trying to do. One portrait might demand harsh, dramatic light. Another might demand softer light. Knowing which you want is part of the creative process you alone need to decide upon, but first you have to be conscious of it in the same way you become conscious of trees or lamp stands that appear out of people's heads.

One of the easiest ways to begin to see what the light is doing is to look at where it isn't. Look to the shadows. No shadows at all means one of two things. First, it could mean the light is so directly hitting the subject's face that the features of that face aren't showing texture or casting a shadow. I can't even imagine an uglier light. Such direct light would create a flat portrait with no appearance of depth. The colours would be washed out and ugly. But if you wanted a harsh, ugly portrait of a harsh, ugly person, it might be appropriate. The other reason for absence of shadow might be soft, diffused light, and that would have the opposite effect—soft light allows the eyes to pop, now that they aren't squinting. Or it gives the face even tones and natural colours.

We generally find portraits more flattering in that softer light. Shadows distract and can create strange tones and patterns, and areas of high contrast. Why I say "look to the shadows" is because it is those that so often create undesirable effects. High, undiffused light can create shadows under the eyes, causing the appearance of bags, or under the nose, causing a nose to look larger and more like a bird's beak than most of us are likely to want in our portraits. If the subject is wearing a hat, or glasses, these too can create strange shadows, or prevent us from seeing the eyes well. And the eyes are most often the primary point of contact with the subject.

If what you want is softer, cleaner light, then again, look to the shadows. But this time look to the biggest ones. Photographing under an overhanging roof or just inside a door, or taking your subject to the shady side of the street can all result in kinder light. If you opt for a tree, or more organic shade, keep an eye out for patterned or dappled light; used well it can introduce texture to either your subject or the background. Used unintentionally it can result in distracting patterns. You might also want to consider using a large litedisc or flexfill, to block or diffuse the light. I rarely use flash, but often use the larger discs to modify the light.

3. Recognize the Moment

Seconds before this frame was made, my friend Lori was posing with Parker, the dog. Beautiful. But it's the interaction between the two of them in this frame that shows the joy that characterizes their relationship.

One of the key differences between a mediocre photograph and a much stronger one is the moment at which it was made. Learning to anticipate and recognize the moment a laugh breaks or a glance stops being so self-conscious, or a subject touches his eyebrow in deeper thought, will improve your portraits like very little else. In fact I think it's the single most important thing you can do to improve any of your photography. In the end, great composition or attention to colours or line matters, as does focus and exposure. But a great moment trumps it all. Of course, a great moment well-composed and in focus is even better, so don't let your craft slacken, but once you're competent technically, pursue those amazing moments. Honest moments. Unexpected moments. Human, funny, dramatic, revealing moments. Whatever they are, you know them when you see them. If your portraits aren't captivating you, ask yourself if you missed the moment. The more time you spend with people, and your individual subject, the more able you will be to see, and seize, those moments.

4. Clear the Background

Cluttered backgrounds distract us. Distractions reduce the impact of the subject of the photograph, and thereby reduce the overall emotional response when we look at that image. In portraits, as I mentioned, the background can serve a real purpose, but that doesn't mean you have to crank your aperture down to f/32 and give us 2 miles of depth of field. You can show background and context by implication. We know the blurred, iconic, shape of the Eiffel Tower at f/5.6 as well as we do at f/16. So don't be afraid to hint at context rather than clobber us with it.

You can clear the background with a shallow depth of field (larger apertures like f/1.8 rather than smaller ones, like f/16). You can maximize that blurred effect even more by separating your subject from the background. Ask them to move forward a few more feet. Using a longer lens, with tighter angles of view, will mean less background to deal with. You can also play with the light: place your subject into significantly brighter light than the background and expose for the subject, and that background will just drop off into shadows. (See the photograph of my shepherd friend in "Watch The Eyes," next.)

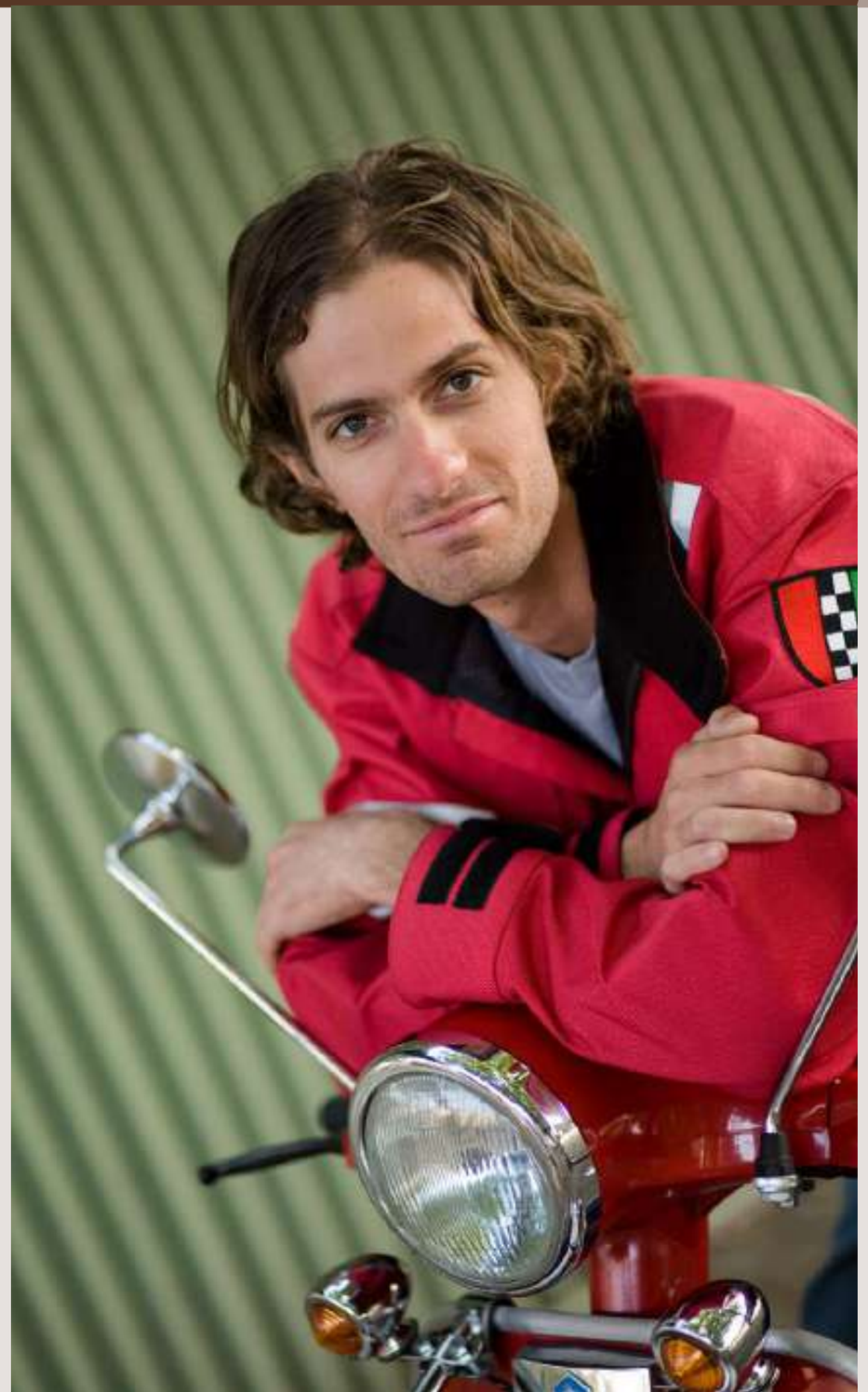
The photographs of this second saddhu in Kathmandu show this simplification. The first image was made with a wider-angle lens (32mm) and a tighter aperture (f/6.3); the second, with a longer lens (70mm) and a wider aperture (f/2.8). I don't think one photograph is better than the other—that would depend on what I was trying to accomplish—but I do think the second image, with its softer, less distracting background, is stronger and has more impact.

Make Stronger Portraits

DAVID DUCHEMIN

5. Watch the Eyes

The eyes are often the point at which we make the strongest connection with people. When we read a portrait, we look first (most of the time) to the eyes. So when I say "watch the eyes," I mean two things. The first is paying attention to what they are doing. Where are they looking? Whoever reads your photograph will look there too. Are they looking straight at the camera, and therefore at the viewer? That can be strong, but isn't always the interaction we want to create. A camera-aware subject is only one direction in which we can take the creation of a portrait. Allow your subject to look around, to interact with more than just you and your camera. Remember, too, that we smile not with our mouths but with our eyes. A genuine smile will be first seen in the eyes and the way the lines around the eyes deepen. Look for that, and don't settle for fake mouth-smiles, usually the result of telling your subject to smile instead of letting your time together bring them to a natural smile or laugh. Remember not all great portraits are of smiling subjects.



Make Stronger Portraits

DAVID DUCHEMIN

5. Watch the Eyes – continued

The second thing I mean when I say watch the eyes is to be aware of the catchlight. The eyes are orbital and shiny, they reflect the world behind the photographer back at the camera. The appearance of catchlights implies life and vitality, gives us clues about where the subject is looking, and in the case of people laughing, can be the only thing to indicate eyes when the eyelids are drawn tight. A subject with empty eye sockets is creepy, so unless that's the look you're going for, watch the eyes. If you want great catchlights, a spark of dialed-down flash (and I mean, really dialed-down flash) can provide that, but I prefer making sure the subject is in softer shade, looking out at the brighter world behind me—that will give you natural-looking catchlights as well as softer light.

David duChemin is a nomad, a world and humanitarian photographer, the accidental founder of Craft & Vision, and the author of Within The Frame: The Journey of Photographic Vision, VisionMongers: Making a Life and a Living in Photography, and Vision & Voice: Refining Your Vision in Adobe Photoshop Lightroom. David's latest book, Photographically Speaking, was published October, 2011. David's work and blog can be seen at http://www.PixelatedImage.com

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