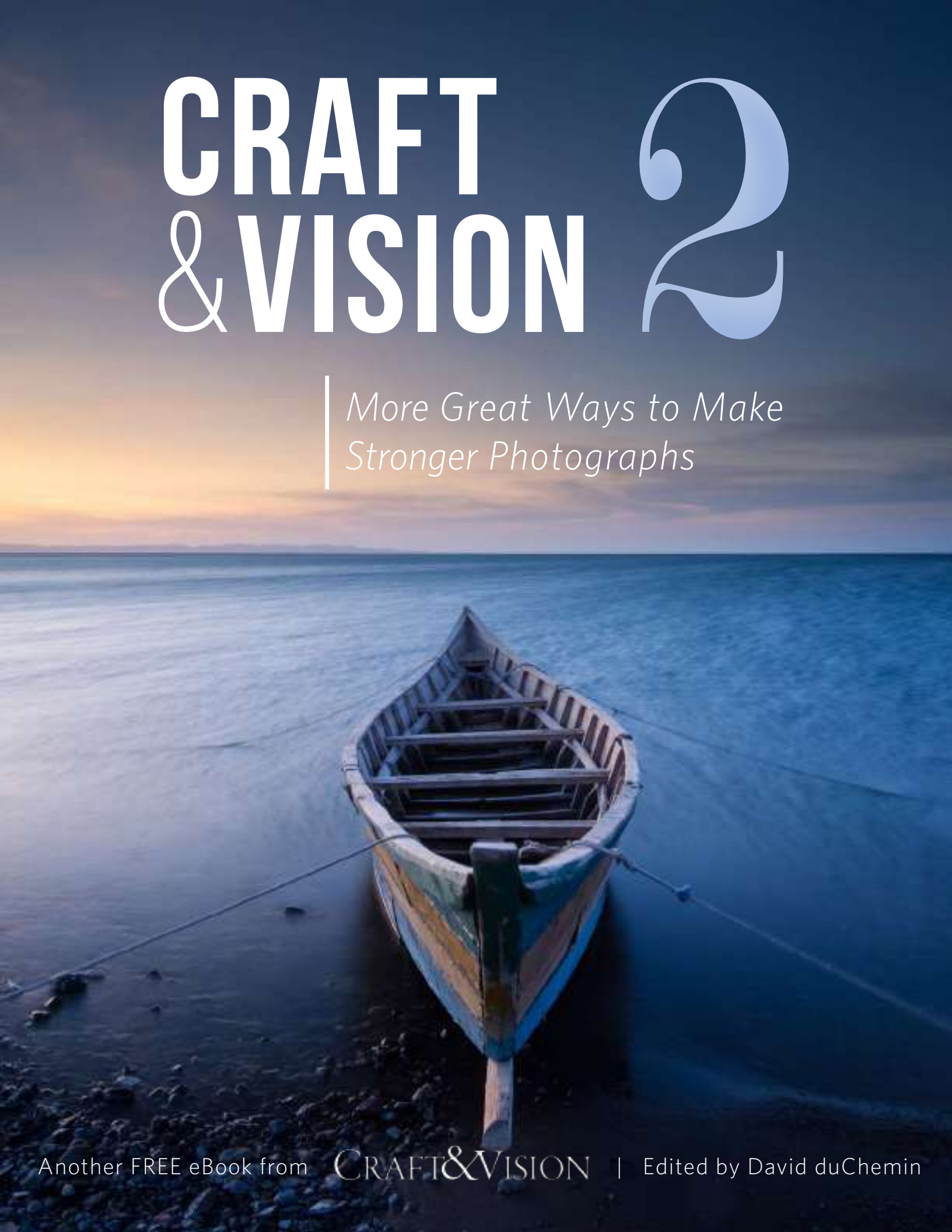
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INTRODUCTION

Photography, despite what's said by the voices of the camera manufacturers, is not an easy craft to master. Like any path on the road to mastery, it takes time and practice, and a chorus of the right voices. I've been on this journey for over 25 years now and don't for a moment feel I've mastered my art. But I've always thought the journey was the nobler part, and that when—or if—I finally got to a place of mastery, it's there I'd probably realize I've still got so much to discover. I think that makes photography exciting; the prospect of getting to the end and finding there's nothing left to learn doesn't interest me. That should give you hope. If there's no definite destination, the road there can be as winding as you like, with as many detours down scenic routes as your impulse bids you to take. And you've all the time you need to listen to as many voices as you can.

We put this book together as a sequel to the first free Craft & Vision eBook, cleverly titled Craft & Vision: 11 Ways to Improve Your Photography, to give you access, without cost, to a few more voices. Between the two eBooks, we've got a handful of qualified voices talking about 20 different ways your photography can become stronger. We're also offering a special deal for anyone who downloads this eBook, which will include: TEN and TEN MORE, plus two issues of PHOTOGRAPH, our digital quarterly magazine for creative photographers, for only $10; that's a $26 value that gets you another 20 steps towards stronger photographs, and two issues of a magazine that will expose you to great photographs and more great teaching. And if you're hungry for more, feel free to check out the entire library of over 50 eBooks, most of them only $5, or subscribe to PHOTOGRAPH.

That said, the best thing you can do is absorb these lessons and go spend time with your camera in your hands, making photograph after photograph. Reading about photography is important, but making photographs is the real thing; it's there that we learn the best, failing over and over again, getting surprised by some beautiful success, and then going back to the books with new questions. We don't do this to sell eBooks, we do it to teach photography, so the best advice we can dish out is this: go make photographs. Make a lot of photographs. Live with them, study them, and ask yourself what you like, and don't like, and why—and then go make more. Books, magazines, videos and podcasts—we've got so many ways to learn these days, but none of them surpass the learning curve of actually doing it.

Thanks for downloading this book. If you like it, I hope you'll download the first one too. Craft & Vision is a close-knit group of photographers who love what they do and are excited to talk about it. I hope the resource library of books, magazines and free podcasts will keep you company as you learn.

Peace,

David duChemin
Vancouver, Canada
April 2013

SHOOT IN MANUAL MODE

MARTIN BAILEY

There are times when our cameras, no matter how advanced, just don't understand the scenes we're shooting, or how to expose them. The best example of this is snow scenes. You've probably already learned that you need around +2 stops of exposure compensation to ensure that snow is exposed as a beautiful white—not a dull medium gray—which is what the camera is programmed to do. Let's walk through a few examples of how and why you might use manual mode, and when it makes more sense to stay in aperture priority mode.

The first choice I make when starting to think about creating a photograph is how much depth of field (the amount of focus in front of and behind the main subject) I want, and this is controlled by the aperture setting. Because of this, it would seem an obvious choice to shoot in aperture priority mode (where I set the aperture for my artistic needs) as the camera sets the shutter speed to get a well-exposed photograph. Since the high ISO performance on our cameras has become so good, I usually now also use auto ISO when in aperture priority mode, giving the camera an extra value to play with to achieve its exposure. This is useful as it can prevent the shutter speed from getting too long in low light, possibly causing subject blur.

To expose that snow scene using aperture priority, you'll add +2 stops of exposure compensation. This tells the camera to adjust the shutter speed (and ISO if using auto ISO) to make your images two stops brighter than the camera would usually make it, based on its meter reading. This is fine if you only intend to photograph a pure white scene, without many dark tones in the frame, like the above photo of a preening Red-crowned Crane.

With a predominantly white bird against a white background, simply using +2 stops of exposure compensation would be fine, but what if while at that location another white crane flew in, this time against a very dark background? If you shot this photograph with the same settings as before, your camera would see the dark background and increase the exposure to brighten it up, basically turning what should be a perfectly exposed white crane into a supernova.

These first two crane photos above were shot at the same location. It is very common for the cranes to fly over a dark background, or jump from a white background to a much darker one in a split second, and the only way to be prepared to capture this is to use manual mode. When I take a group of students to these snowy locations, one of the first things we talk about is how to set the camera to expose for the white snow.

I set my aperture first (for my desired depth of field), point the camera down to fill the frame only with snow, and then adjust the shutter speed and ISO until the indicator on the meter scale shows me that the camera thinks the image will be two stops overexposed (just like I had +2 exposure compensation set in aperture priority mode). The meter works exactly the same in manual mode, so in Evaluative (Canon) or Matrix (Nikon) Metering you will still see the indicator move up and down as you adjust your settings. This is just a guide—and will change as you point the camera at darker or lighter scenes—but our intention here is to set the camera to expose whites as whites, not grays or supernova.

For large flying birds, unless I want to intentionally blur their wings in movement, I go for a shutter speed around 1/1000 of a second, and an aperture of around f/8. This means my last exposure option is ISO, so that is usually what I use to adjust exposure until I see that I am around +2 stops over the camera's meter reading. If it's a very bright day, I may go down to ISO 100, in which case I start to increase the shutter speed to perhaps as high as 1/1600 of a second.

The beauty of manual mode is now that I have my aperture, ISO and shutter speed set for optimal exposure of a white object, be it the snow or an almost all-white crane, it doesn't matter where that crane goes; it's always going to be white, and will therefore be exposed as white. Some people resist manual mode in favour of aperture priority so that they don't have to think about the expo-

sure, but the reverse is true. You would have to constantly change from +2 stops exposure compensation for a white background to as low as -2 stops for a dark background, and, in my experience, people forget and lose way more shots than they would with the exposure locked down in manual mode.

WHEN APERTURE PRIORITY MAKES MORE SENSE

There are a few caveats, of course. First, if the subject is either close to, or over, the sun, the image would be way overexposed, and the sun and sky could start to flare and bleed into the form of the subject. If I know I'm possibly going to be shooting towards the sun, like at sunrise or sunset, I generally go back to aperture priority with auto ISO and let the camera expose for the sun and sky. This allows the subject go into silhouette, as with this photo of a White-tailed Eagle at sunrise.

The second caveat when using manual mode is that on days with patchy clouds, you have to keep adjusting your exposure as the sun goes behind the clouds and then comes back out again. However, I generally find that as you watch those changes and how they affect the exposure, you usually have just one or two stops difference between cloudy and sunny, so adjusting your ISO from ISO 100 to 200 or 400 as the light changes is often enough, as long as you stay aware of shifts in brightness. If you are in front of a field of snow, just point the camera down occasionally check that the meter is showing +2, and you'll be in good shape.

I have run my Winter Wonderland tours in Hokkaido for more than 10 years now, and I have found that you will nail more shots with strategic use of manual mode than if you try to work in aperture priority—and there are nearly 100 happy students at this point who would agree with me.

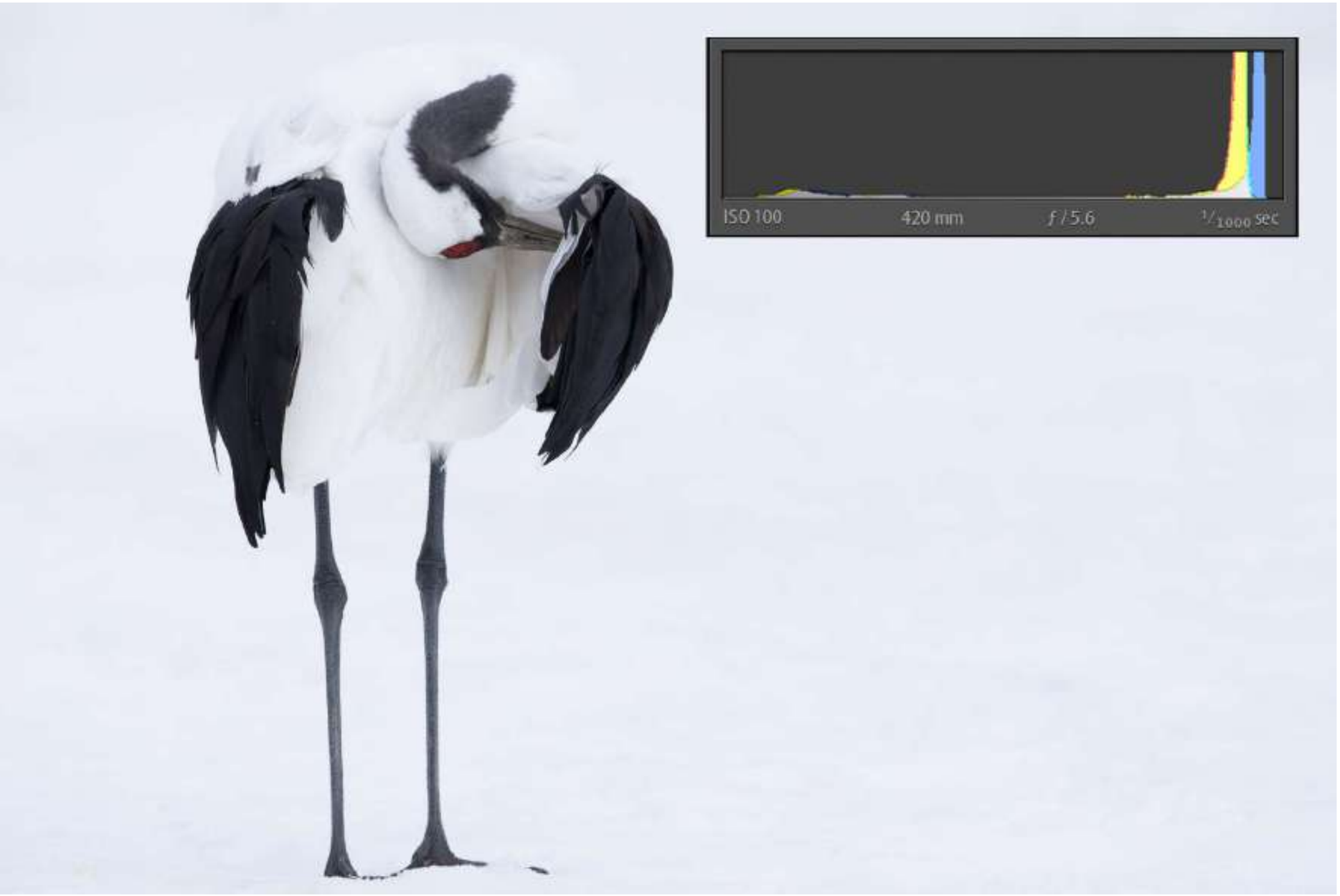
THE HISTOGRAM AS A TOOL

I generally teach people to rely on—yet not be swayed by—what they were originally taught about the histogram. I usually expose

to the right for all of my images, which means I ensure that the brightest part of my image is either nearly or very slightly touching the right shoulder of the histogram. There are other reasons for this that are beyond the scope of this article, but in this case, if you understand that whites are supposed to be recorded on the right, and blacks on the left side of the histogram, this should be easy to grasp.

Here are the two sample images, together with their respective histograms. I want to leave you with the thought that a histogram where all the data falls in the middle—which is what you may have been told is "correct"—would only happen when photographing mid-tones, like something gray on a gray background. If you have whites in your scene, they should be on the far right and not in the middle, as your camera would have you believe.

In the white-on-white scene (next page), you can see the spikes on the right (for the white of the crane and snow) and a tiny bit of data towards the left (representing the crane's black wings and neck). In the white-on-black photo (above), you still see the white of the crane on the right, but the dark background is way over on the left, where it should be.



MAKING THE PRINT: PRINTING TECHNIQUES FOR THE DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHER (A MASTER CLASS)

In this in-depth eBook, Martin covers it all: choosing a printer and papers, profiling and sharpening, calibrations, fine-tuning, adding borders, and creating your own canvas gallery wraps and printing for an exhibition. He unpacks the workflow and provides detailed explanations, step-by-step instructions and screenshots you need to make your next printing project exciting and successful.

Martin Bailey is a Tokyo-based art and assignment photographer who is passionate about creating photography that evokes emotion and helping others to do the same. He runs photography workshops and releases a weekly photography podcast, together with a photography-centric blog and forum. Learn more about Martin at martinbaileyphotography.com.

See Martin's Craft & Vision eBooks.

LEARN TO SEE THE LIGHT

NICOLE S. YOUNG

When it comes to photography, the topic of light cannot be ignored. It is easy to get wrapped up in gear, genres and the subject you want to photograph, but unless that image has beautiful, interesting—or even just appropriate—light, you are likely to dampen the effect of the overall photograph. Maybe the idea that photographs need light may seem a bit too obvious, but I find the topic of truly seeing light one that can be easily overlooked. You can create a photograph with any type of light, good or bad, but when you come to know and understand the light you're working with, you will find and create the best light for your images and, in return, create better photographs.

FINDING SHADOWS

Creating a great photograph can often have more to do with the absence of light than the actual light itself. Light is essential in a photograph, but it's just as important to realize that it's not a one-way street: light brightens up your scene as well as creates shadows. In other words, you can't have shadow without light nor light without shadow. Finding, creating and taming (or enhancing) the shadows in your scene are essential to being a skilled photographer.

The shadows created in your images will be dependent on the direction and intensity of light. The location of your light source will change where the shadow sits, and the intensity of your light will make the shadows either very harsh or very soft. Picture it like this: on a bright, sunny and cloudless day, your shadow is very harsh. The intensity of the light is strong, which also results in a strong shadow. If it's mid-day when the sun is directly above you, your shadow will be very short. However, if you wait until an hour before sunset, your shadow will stretch and become very long since the sun is sitting low on the horizon. However, if it's cloudy outside and the light from the sun is diffused (softened) through the cloud covering, your shadow will either be very soft or practically non-existent.

The key is to actually start finding shadows. If you know what I mean, you're set; practice is always good, but you've at least made it over

the initial hurdle. If you don't know what I mean, this is where you need to start really opening your eyes. When I first saw light, it was as if I had been blind my whole life and then could finally see. Embarrassingly enough, it was a little further into my time as a photographer than I'd like to admit, but once I made it over that wall my images got better. I noticed light everywhere and, alongside my subject, made light the co-star of my images.

To be clear, I'm not just talking about being able to see your shadow when walking down the street, or how to make hand puppets on the wall; I'm talking about the subtle, soft, gentle light that caresses a person's face as they sit by the window of a coffee shop, together with the overlapping shadows created by light coming from different directions. Once you can see—and I mean really see—the intricacies of light and shadow, you will be on the right path to creating better photographs.

I find many of my photographs in the shade, where there are beautiful shadows and soft, diffused kisses of light draped across my scenes. In this indoor image of a woman's hand on a pottery wheel, the light was coming in from the left and created shadows to the right of her hands, as well as within the wrinkles of her skin.

CATCHING THE MOMENT

Light is fleeting; it comes and it goes, and it changes at the drop of a hat. Light adds colour to the sky at sunrise or sunset, and it can peek in and out of the clouds during the day. Some of the most beautiful light happens during the shortest periods of time—usually when we are

either sleeping or eating—and so these moments leave as quickly as they come. The key is to be ready for them.

So, how can you be ready? You could emulate a street photographer and carry your camera with you at all times, which would up your odds at capturing beautiful moments of light as they happen. If you enjoy photographing landscapes, you're in for a lesson in patience as you will likely be waiting for the light to change until it's "just right" for your scene, which can range from several minutes to an hour or longer. You should also expect to wait for a bit after you think you got "the shot" before moving along, as the sky can light up with a rainbow of colours even after the sun has set.

Seattle doesn't get too many dramatic sunsets, but when it does you have to be ready. I ran up to the rooftop of my building with my camera in hand after spying this gorgeous sunset from my window. It lasted just long enough for me to get a few hand-held photos before the colours in the sky faded away.

COMPOSING WITH LIGHT AND SHADOWS

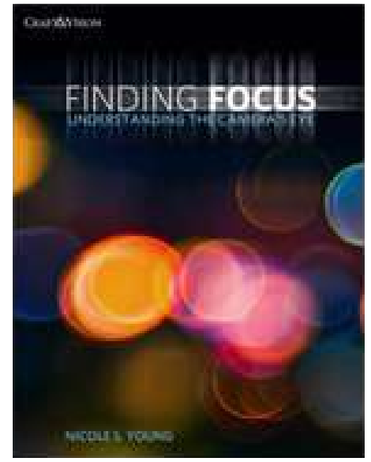
When you can look past your subject and see the light and shadows surrounding it, the possibilities of photographic compositions open up dramatically. A great photograph often has nothing to do with the solid object in front of your lens, but more to do with the beautiful light embracing it and the shadows it creates. I've stopped in my tracks several times to stare at something just because of the light. It could be something as simple as a trash can on the side of the road; if the light is good, you will very likely have a good photograph.

I was roaming the streets of Hoi An, photographing the hustle and bustle of the market in the very early morning. The sun was still hiding behind clouds, so I had a very nice and soft diffused light. I found a bright red lantern against a vibrant yellow wall and thought I had a good photo; nothing great, but decent enough, as shown in the first photo above. Just as I thought I was finished and stood up to leave, the sun emerged from behind the clouds and created the perfect shadow to complement my lantern image (next page). It was at this moment that I knew I had the perfect shot. Without the shadow, the image was just a pretty lantern against a wall, but with the shadow there was added depth and dimension; the shadow made the shot.

Had I left the scene before the sun came out, I would have missed this shadow, and the shadow made the shot!

Understanding light can vastly transform your photography. Once you learn how to see light, you can manipulate it to photograph anything. You can take what you know about photographing outdoors in the sun with a reflector and apply it in a studio setting by using strobes and flashes. The possibilities are endless!

The bottom line is that, no matter what you're photographing, where you're set up or what time of day or conditions you're in, light is light. Light is not all the same, but the principles of it remain unchanged. If you can break through the barriers of what's in front of you and only see the light surrounding and wrapping around your subject, where the shadows fall, and how you can soften and re-direct that light, you've made a huge step in the right direction.



FINDING FOCUS: UNDERSTANDING THE CAMERA'S EYE

This eBook merges together the best of both worlds: the Artist and the Geek. Nicole's insights and hands-on advice zero you in on the advanced focusing techniques you need in order to photograph subjects of all kinds (people, groups, animals, still life, macro, landscapes) while at the same time leveraging the element of focus to further develop your visual storytelling. You'll love the illustrations and in-depth analysis of aperture, depth of field, camera settings, lenses and lens compression, and post-production editing.

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 on NicolesyBlog.com.

See Nicole's Craft & Vision eBooks.

LEARN TO ISOLATE

DAVID duCHEMIN

It's been said that photography is the art of exclusion. In making a compelling photograph, it's as important to exclude what we don't want within the frame of our image as it is to include what we do want. In fact, when we include what we want without carefully excluding the rest, we introduce too much to the image and dilute the impact of the elements we were hoping would make the photograph stronger. Honing this art of exclusion is a significant step forward on the photographic journey, and learning to isolate your subject is an important part of that. Here are four significant ways you can begin to isolate your subject, and give it greater power within the frame, undiluted by the noise of elements that do nothing to help you tell the story.

POINT OF VIEW

Shooting on my belly along the snow allowed me to isolate these swans from the pond they were sitting in and push them up against a more gentle background. Standing, or lying anywhere else, and this scene was much busier.

The first and most obvious way to isolate elements with the frame is the intentional use of point of view (POV). What appears and does not appear in front of, around, and behind your subject has a everything to do with where you stand and put your camera. Though there are plenty of situations in which moving around will do nothing to get rid of background chaos or unwanted elements, many times a simple change of position can move that unwanted element in relation to your subject. A little movement to the left or right, standing on a ladder or lying on your belly can push unwelcome elements from the frame. Just playing with your point of view, making no other changes, can improve an image. Next time you're photographing something, take a little extra time to be aware of what is in and out of the frame, and try moving—do a complete circle around your subject if you have to—and see if you can't strengthen your image that way.

OPTICS

This Red-crowned Crane was surrounded by a hundred others. Using a 600 mm lens allowed me to isolate this particular crane from its chaotic background.

Photographing this Japanese Macaque with a 19 mm lens, and very close, makes him much larger in the frame, and the other monkeys much smaller. This allowed me to isolate, or exaggerate, him while keeping the context.

Of course, there are plenty of times that moving in relation to the subject isn't preferable. Moving changes the perspective, and with it, the lines. Moving changes what the light is doing, so, if you've got your heart set on a backlit photograph, moving 180 degrees will change the photograph completely. When that happens, it's time to explore other options. The first thing I try is changing the angle of view. Where a change of POV means a change of photographer position relative to the subject, a change to the angle of view is all about which lens you choose. A wide-angle lens, as the name implies, has an angle of view that is extremely inclusive; it pulls a lot into the frame. A telephoto, by definition, is a much tighter angle of view. The most obvious move in pursuing a more isolated subject is to use the longer telephoto lens, and that often leads to beautifully simple images, which are free from extraneous elements. Next time you're trying to really isolate something, try backing up and using a longer lens. But that's not the only choice.

A wide-angle lens can also be used to isolate, though it'll involve both a change of optics

(put that wide-angle lens on!) and a change in position (get as close as you dare!). A wide-angle lens pushed in close will still be a wide-angle lens and will still include more elements than a tighter, longer lens. So how can that be used to isolate? Isolating an element is about making it more prominent than others, giving it greater visual mass and diminishing distractions. When you push a wider lens much closer to your subject, in the right circumstances it does two things simultaneously: 1) enlarges the subject, and 2) diminishes the rest. When a longer lens doesn't give you the look you're hoping for, or excludes too much context, try going much wider and much closer.

DEPTH OF FIELD

This crane was standing in front of a forest of trees. Using f/5.6, my widest possible aperture, gives me limited depth of field, blurring the otherwise busy background.

The third means of isolation is the use of depth of field. Assuming your subject and the elements from which you want to isolate it are not on the same plane of focus (if they are, try using shallow depth of field and the focus-plane shifting effects of a tilt-shift lens), a wide aperture (f/1.2, 1.4, 1.8, 2.8) will provide a much shallower plane of focus and allow your background to go soft—even completely indiscernible—and isolate your subject. At the beginning, using your camera's depth of field preview button will help give you a sense of what will be in, and out, of focus at different distances and apertures.

MOTION

Sometimes the use of depth of field doesn't help. And sometimes it just doesn't give you the aesthetic you're looking for. Motion can be a great isolator. When the subject is moving, you can use a slower shutter speed and pan the camera to create a sharp subject against a blurred background. When the subject is stationary but its surroundings are in motion, you can use the reverse technique to keep the subject sharp while the moving surroundings blur around them. Both techniques require practice and a slow shutter speed. When allowing the surroundings to

Panning with this swan at 1/30 of a second allowed the entire scene to go soft, which gives the most amount of visual mass to the face of the swan, and much less to the background.

blur around a sharp subject, you'll also need a means to stabilize the camera, like a tripod. A friend of mine uses her handbag, while others use beanbags or parts of buildings. However you do it, the longer shutter speeds create blur to simplify the once distinct and distracting elements, allowing you to isolate—or more clearly point to—your desired subject.

These aren't the only techniques. For example, consider the role of light and the ability to blow out a background, or plunge areas into shadow. However you do it, the most important part of this article for some will simply be the awareness that intentionally isolated elements can dramatically strengthen a photograph, giving the main subject greater visual mass and allowing other elements to remain outside the frame, gain reduced visual mass, or fade into blur.

BALANCE YOUR FLASH WITH AMBIENT LIGHT

SEAN McCORMACK

A photographer's creative possibilities expand into uncharted waters once they have taken the leap into getting their flash off-camera. When the technical aspects have been addressed, the camera and the flash become mere tools in the execution of vision. Of course, you have to put them to bed first, and a lot of people trip up as they try to get a handle on using their flash off-camera, especially when they're shooting outside; this article is written to help with just that.

We'll look at two scenarios that have very different requirements and talk about how to handle them from a practical viewpoint.

FALL INTO AUTUMN

Our first scenario is photographing in overcast skies and dull winter light, where keeping the depth of colour in the leaves can often lead to dark faces. There are two approaches to solving this: 1) a stylistic view that gives prominence to the flash, and 2) a more natural view.

When you're outside shooting with flash, you're really taking two shots at the same time: one for the ambient light and one for the flash. The trick is making them meet in the middle. On an overcast day, I start by making two settings in manual mode on the camera. First, I set the ISO to 400; this lets more light in to the camera, and also helps save the batteries in my speed light. Second, I set my shutter speed to the sync speed of the camera. I have a 5D Mark II, so for me this is 1/200; yours may be higher, and 1/250 is a more common sync speed. The sync speed is the fastest shutter speed in which the camera exposes the whole frame at once during the exposure. If it's any faster than this, the flash gets cut off in the frame.

Using the camera meter and pointing the camera into the scene, I find that the correct aperture for the ambient light is f/2.8. You may or may not take a test shot at this point. Bear in mind that your aperture will probably be different depending on how bright the day is (fig. 01).

After taking the reading, I drop the aperture to f/4 to make the background darker and to help saturate the colours. This also means that the flash needs to be set to f/4. Remember that aperture is the connection between the flash and the ambient light from when you initially set up the shot (fig.02).

FIG. 01

FIG. 02

FIG. 03

FIG. 04

So, how do you know when the flash is at f/4? The best way is to use a flash meter. To read off the flash power, put the meter in flash mode and fire the flash from the transmitter. If you don't have a meter, all is not lost. When using bare flash applications, I start with the flash set to 1/16 power. This gives about f/5.6, but it depends on the exact distance between the flash and the subject. This shot shows the result at 1/16 power, which is a little bright for this use. Note that with flash, each halving or doubling of power is the equivalent of one stop (fig.03).

To reduce the flash power, simply drop the settings on the flash by one stop (to 1/32 power) to match the f/4 setting. These settings create a stylized look. Increasing the camera settings to f/5.6 instead of matching the 1/16 power would darken the background too much. Ignoring the ambient for a moment, if the camera was brought up to f/8 (two stops from f/4), the flash would need to come up in power to match it (i.e., 1/8 power). If the camera was set to f/2.8, the flash would need to drop by one stop (to 1/64 power) to balance the flash (fig.04).

Hopefully you can see now that the aperture affects the flash power. If we don't change the aperture once it's set, the flash power will always stay the same, independent of the shutter speed; however, changing the shutter speed will affect the ambient light. By reducing the shutter speed to 1/100, do you notice how the leaves became brighter in this photo? Do you also notice that the flash is the same as the previous shot? There's a mantra for this: "aperture controls flash, shutter controls ambient." It's only a mantra because shutter and aperture control the ambient, but it helps to remember which control to adjust if you want to change the flash or the ambient only (fig.05).

TAKING IT OFF

If you've never shot with off-camera flash, it's pretty easy to get started. In addition to your camera and flash, you will need a trigger, a transmitter and a receiver. Yong Nuo makes a great value set: the RF602 series. More expensive options include: Elinchrom Skyports, Cybersync and Pocketwizards. The trigger sends a radio signal to tell the flash to fire. There are ways to send through the lens (TTL) information, but that is beyond the scope of this article. A light stand and a bracket to hold the flash rounds out the accessories you need, but initially you can always get someone to hold the flash.

To get a more natural look with the flash, I set the shutter to 1/100 and kept the aperture at f/4 (equivalent to the initial reading of f/2.8 at 1/200), turned off the flash and took a test shot. The light is nice, but there's a lot of shadow under the eyes, so I need to lighten that area (fig. 06).

From the previous shots, we know that 1/32 gives us plenty of power to light the scene. To use flash as fill light, drop it down two stops from the ambient light. Dropping down to 1/128 power fills in the shadows. This also creates catchlights in the eyes to give them more depth and life. Despite this, the flash isn't calling attention to itself (fig. 07).

Jumping back to the more stylized look (camera back to 1/200 and flash to 1/32 power), let's add

FIG. 05

FIG. 06

another flash. For this look, I prefer to put the second flash diagonally opposite the key flash. This one is set to taste. I usually match the power to that of the main flash (for this photo, 1/32 power) and then change it up or down depending on how I want it to look (fig. 08).

If you keep the distances between the flashes and the subject the same, you can actually move the setup without changing settings. However, it's always better to re-meter when possible.

SUNLIGHT

All is well and good when you have a dull overcast day, but what about bright sunlight? Days like this can really test your battery flash, and while more power is the best solution, it's not the only one. Let's look at this second scenario in more detail (fig. 09).

As with the first scenario, start by getting the ambient right. There's an old rule from the

FIG. 07

FIG. 08

film days called the “Sunny 16 Rule.” The premise of this rule is that objects in sunlight will be at f/16 if the shutter speed is 1/ISO. For example, with ISO 100 and a shutter speed of 1/100, a sunny day setting would be f/16 for objects lit by the sun. Shooting into the sun would require dropping the shutter speed more (but only to the sync speed of 1/200) and the aperture to f/22 to get the blue in the sky (fig. 10).

An aperture of f/22 is massive compared to f/4 from the previous example: five stops! Going from 1/32 power to full (1/1) power matches this difference. Therefore, at full power, just match the light needed to balance the sun, and then test and fire (fig. 11).

For the final shot, I used the zoom function on the speed light. This focuses the light into a tighter beam and increases the power. Here I set it to 70 mm.

The problem with running at full power is that recycle times are approximately six seconds, not to mention a drain on the battery. If you have a second flash and receiver, you can attach it (upside down) to the main flash. With the two flash lenses together, they appear as one light. Running both at half power increases the recycle time to about two seconds, which makes waiting between shots more bearable. If you want to add modifiers to soften the light, direct sunlight is not your friend. More modifiers absorb about two stops of light, so you’d need four full power flashes to do this with an umbrella!

You’ll never learn this stuff just by reading, so get out there and start creating!

FIG. 09

FIG. 10

FIG. 11

ESSENTIAL DEVELOPMENT: 20 GREAT TECHNIQUES FOR LIGHTROOM 4

Take your Lightroom workflow to a new level! This eBook is an amazing resource for any photographer who wants to get the most out of Lightroom’s Develop Module without all the guesswork. Dive into the Develop module, with topics like: Understanding The Histogram, Making White White, Beauty Retouching, Dodge & Burn for Beauty, Cross Processing, Achieving a Filmic Look, Image Toning, Tilt Shift, Effective Sharpening, and Correcting Lens Issues.

Sean McCormack lives in Galway (West of Ireland, halfway between Connemara and The Burren). He’s a photographer, author and sound engineer. He’s been shooting for over 10 years, starting with film then moving quickly to digital. Initially his work was with bands, and then he added landscapes, before eventually moving to studio work. While people photography is the main focus of his work, he still has a great love for landscapes. He’s been using Lightroom since it came out and is an Adobe Community Professional for it. Visit seanmcfoto.com to see Sean’s work.

See Sean’s Craft & Vision eBooks.

TRY IT IN BLACK AND WHITE

DAVID duCHEMIN

Losing the conflicting bright colours, the B+W rendering of this portrait allows the eye to focus on the subject's eyes and expression.

None of us see our work objectively—if there really is such a thing to begin with. There is too much to read into the photograph: everything we saw in the moments before and afterwards, the smells and sounds, the image we were trying to create and the one we actually made. One of the things I inevitably encourage my students to do is look at every image in black and white. I'm not telling them to stop shooting in colour, just to look at the final image free from the seduction and influence of colour. Doing so can help us see the image—if not objectively then differently—and I think that can point us towards both strengths and weaknesses we hadn't seen, and suggest new crops, or new ideas, for digital darkroom work.

To begin with, it helps a little to understand that everything in a photograph's frame pulls the eye of the viewer with greater or lesser force. That pull is called visual mass and it matters a great deal to how we build our photographs and how they will be read. Visual mass affects what we believe the photographer is trying to tell us. It affects the way photographs are balanced, and the way we feel about a photograph. Colour has a great deal of visual mass, particularly colour that's bright, highly saturated, or of a warm hue (e.g., red or orange).

Like the first image in this article, the absence of colour here changes the visual mass. The subject of this portrait is the Turkana woman, not her colourful beads.

Elements that get their visual mass from colour not only pull our attention—as readers of the image—to themselves, but they can also pull our attention away from other elements in a photograph. This works well as an isolating technique; it's a way of saying, without words, "look at this and not at this." However, when you want your readers to see the whole image, colour can work against you. Using Lightroom or Photoshop to preview a version of your photograph in black and white gives you a chance to see other elements at their best; you can see if the images stand on

their own without colour, or work even better as a whole without the influence of colour. A photograph with strong, or contrasting, colours can be all about the colour, and there's nothing wrong with that. However, if the photographer, wants that image to be about the lines, moment, texture or some other story within the frame, removing the colour gives those other things greater visual mass and will pull the image into closer alignment with the intent of the photographer.

A scene from Antarctica that I initially struggled with, worked great in B+W. In this case I set my camera to show the image in monochrome while I was taking it.

That's not to say you have to keep the image in black and white. Merely looking at it differently can suggest other changes than simply leaving it in black and white. You might like the colour, but choose to selectively de-saturate the brightest hues a little to reduce—but not remove—that influence. Alternatively, you may, after seeing the image in black and white, see lines you didn't notice before and use your digital darkroom tools to lighten or darken them to either increase or reduce their own influence in the frame. Finally, having looked at the image in black and white, you might decide that the balance works better with more or less tension in it, and choose to re-crop slightly, based on seeing it without the colour.

Whether you choose to present your work in black and white or in full, blazing, colour, the choice to spend a little extra time looking at it in monochrome can reveal strengths and weaknesses you hadn't noticed, or suggest alternate post-processing decisions. It will also most certainly help emerging photographers see past the seduction of bright colours, and begin to notice in new ways lines and shapes, and balance and tension. No matter what, looking at your photographs "objectively" can only strengthen your ability as a photographer.

MAKE SHARPER IMAGES

MARTIN BAILEY

At one time or another, we've all rushed home after shooting the photo of a lifetime, only to find when we look at it on the computer screen that it's soft or blurry. If you want to use your images for more than impressing your friends on Facebook, this probably means that your momentary pride and joy heads straight for the trash can.

There are a number of reasons why images might be soft, but let's just look at the top three and some ways to overcome these issues: (1) camera shake, (2) subject movement and (3) focus error.

CAMERA SHAKE

If everything in your image is blurred, including any foreground and background objects, it probably means that your camera moved during the exposure. First, ensure that you are supporting your camera properly. If you are shooting with an SLR camera, you'll be holding the grip with your right hand, your finger placed on the shutter button. Most people find the best way to support the camera with your left hand is to cup your hand under the lens with your palm facing upwards, and your hand wrapped around the barrel of the lens. This also enables you to zoom the lens, or manually tweak the focus, when necessary. It also really helps to tuck your elbows in to your sides, and, if you know that you are pushing it a bit on the shutter speed, find something solid like a tree or a wall to lean against.

This is a well-known guideline, but just to recap, the golden rule regarding the slowest shutter speeds for hand-held shooting is to use the focal length you are shooting at as the shutter speed. For example, if you are shooting with a 50 mm lens, you will want to use a shutter speed of 1/50 of a second or faster to avoid camera shake. If you are shooting at 200 mm, you will want a shutter speed of 1/200 of a second or higher. The longer the focal length, the faster your shutter speed needs to be.

Image Stabilization (Canon) or Vibration Reduction (Nikon) will also help and usually provides two or more stops of stabilization.

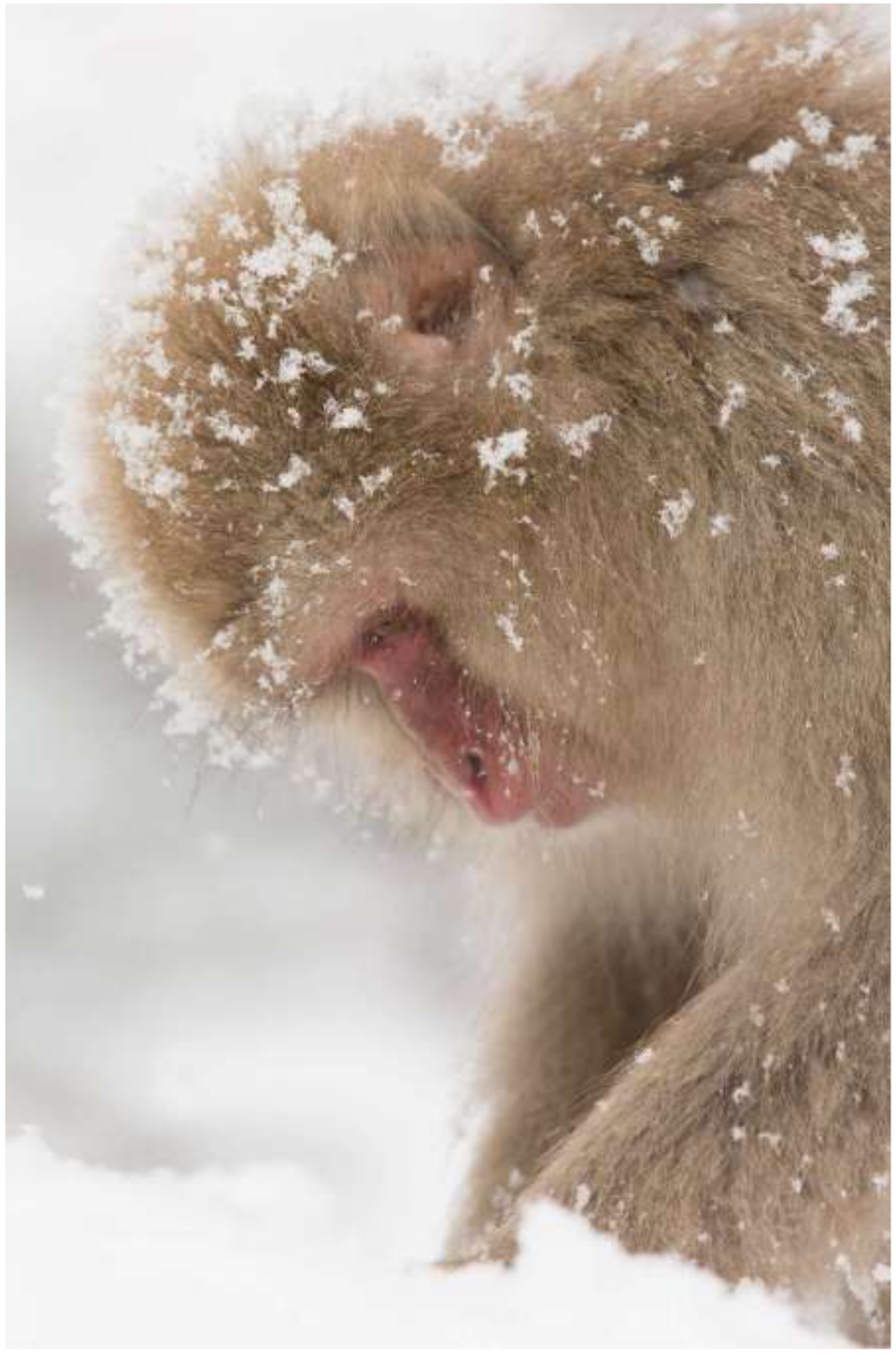
If you have three stops of stabilization, you could get away with a shutter speed as low as 1/25 of a second at 200 mm. The problem with going this slow is that you may start to see blur because of subject movement, so the focal-length-as-shutter-speed rule is a good base to work with, but care is still needed.

The most obvious alternative to holding a camera by hand is to use a tripod and, as long as you buy something sturdy enough to hold your gear and withstand a bit of wind, that will certainly help in most cases. There are, however, still many variables to bear in mind, and we'll look at those in an upcoming Craft & Vision publication.

SUBJECT MOVEMENT

If, when inspecting a blurry image, you can see that some parts of the image are sharp (e.g., the ground around a subject's feet or the road around a moving car), but your subject itself is blurry, it may well be unwanted subject movement. To overcome this, you will need to increase the shutter speed. How you achieve a faster shutter speed will depend on your chosen shooting mode, but you will generally need to either select a higher ISO to make your sensor more sensitive, or choose a wider aperture to let in more light, or perhaps a combination of the two. If you are in shutter priority mode, select a faster shutter speed and your camera will change the other values for you, as well as let you know when it reaches its limits.

How fast you need to take your shutter speed will depend on the subject, but to freeze a child running around a lawn, you'll probably want 1/500 of a second or faster. To freeze a large bird in flight, you'll want no less than 1/1000, and for smaller birds or fast-paced sports, you may need 1/2000 of a second or faster. You may also find that you need to introduce flash to get shutter speeds this high in lower light situations, assuming that you aren't using blur creatively.



FOCUS ERRORS

If, when you look at your blurred image, you can see something in the foreground or background that is sharp, chances are you missed the focus. This is a common problem when photographing subjects at close distances and shooting with longer focal lengths at wide apertures such as f/2.8, or even f/5.6 or f/8. Of course, using a smaller aperture will help to get more of the subject sharp. However, assuming you want to have fun with shallow depth-of-field, let's think about what can be done to reduce your focus errors.

First, choose the correct focus mode. If your subject isn't moving around, select One Shot on a Canon, or Single Servo mode on a Nikon camera. This locks the focus when focus is achieved, and keeps it there as long as you half-press the shutter button, or while you hold the back AF button if you use that to focus (another topic we'll look at later on in this article).

When using a tripod for landscape and still life photography, I generally use the LiveView feature and zoom in to 5X or 10X on the camera's LCD and manually adjust the focus. Zooming in LiveView is generally activated using the same buttons that you use to zoom in on a photo during playback. This is a great way to achieve critical focus for still subjects, but it doesn't make much sense when shooting hand-held or for moving subjects.

Another common focusing problem can occur when you have a relatively wide aperture and use the center focus point, and then recompose your photo. It's much better to manually select one of your camera's focus points closest to where you want to focus on your subject. Most of the time, if your subject has eyes, you'll want to focus on them. There are times when you'll break this rule, but unless you have a good reason to do so, focusing on the eyes with the closest focus point to them will provide the best results.

MOVING SUBJECTS

If your subject is moving around, select AI Servo on a Canon camera or Continuous Servo mode on a Nikon camera. When using continuous focus, most cameras will lock onto your subject with one active focus point—often selectable—and then use all focus points to track the subject. This allows you to recompose your photo once you have your subject in focus. This is also useful when it's difficult to keep the subject in the same place, like when tracking birds in flight or a soccer player darting around the pitch.

Continuous focus works best when the subject is over a plain background. When there is a lot of texture or contrast in the background, the camera sometimes loses focus on your subject, usually at a critical moment, and this can be frustrating. Cameras are definitely getting better at sticking with your subject, but you'll generally need to experiment with the autofocus settings to find the perfect balance between responsive tracking and sensitivity of focus.

420 mm, f/4, 1/1000, ISO 125

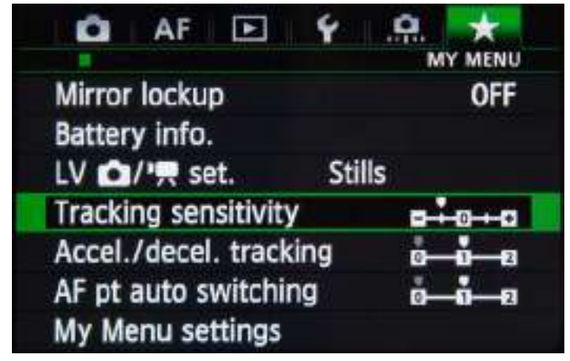
Continuous focus also works better if you have time to stay locked on your subject, as this will give the camera time to detect what it's focusing on and refine the focus. In this photo, I focused on a Steller's Sea Eagle way up in the sky, stayed locked onto my subject as it darted downwards, and then fired off nine frames as the eagle swooped across the surface of the water and caught the fish in its talons.

The first and last frames of the series were slightly soft, as the camera identified the new direction in which the subject was now moving, but the seven frames in the middle were all tack sharp. You can see the sea ice in the background too, which is good at stealing focus, but with my selected settings—based on a lot of bird photography over high-contrast sparkly water and sea ice—I'm pretty happy with how the focusing on my Canon EOS 1D X is working.

You will need different settings for different subjects and scenes. My go-to settings are: tracking sensitivity at -1, acceleration/deceleration tracking at +1 and AF point auto switching at +1. Note that I add these three options to my menu so that I can access and tweak them quickly in the field. I rarely go back to the preset scenes.

With good shooting and focusing techniques, I've been nailing focus for years. While I am not advocating that you run out and buy a new camera, I will say that the camera technology improvements in recent years are enabling photographers to achieve better focus more regularly than ever before. During a recent trip to Hokkaido (the day after I shot the Steller's Sea Eagle photo above), I turned and a White-ailed Eagle was just meters from the boat. I raised the camera and hit the back focus button and mashed down on the shutter button for seven frames. Despite only having a split second to focus, the middle five shots were all tack sharp. This photograph is probably one of my favourites from the trip.

Even with the latest camera bodies, you won't nail every shot in fast-paced photography, but I'm finding that even in challenging conditions, I'm now hitting focus probably twice as often as I used to (in comparison to the last generation of Canon pro bodies). Of course, I doubt that even the next few generations of cameras will enable us to nail focus every single time, but then there'd be no fun in that would there?



REDEEM THE LIGHT

DAVID duCHEMIN

The Westcott Scrim Jim diffuser used on the portrait at the start of this chapter.

I wanted to call this chapter, “How to Deal with Bad Light,” but there is no bad light, no matter how many times I’ve used the term myself. There is, simply, light. That light can be dramatic or subtle, soft or hard, warm or cool, or any of a dozen ways in which we categorize it. To be sure, there’s light that just doesn’t work for us; light that doesn’t meet our expectations and makes it hard for us to make the photographs we were hoping for. But it’s hardly the light’s fault. And the light that doesn’t work for you today might be the exact light you’re hoping for tomorrow. On my first trip to Antarctica, we barely saw the sun, hidden as it was behind layer after layer of cloud and weather. Some photographers on the boat loved that moody, soft, beautiful light, yet others hated it and longed for the sun, and wondered how long this “bad light” would follow us. The following year it was the mirror opposite: relentless sun hanging low in cheerful blue skies. I wanted the light to do what it did the previous year, and wondered how long this “bad light” would vex me. Some people are never happy.

The fact is this: unless you never leave the studio, the light doesn’t always do what you want it to. There is no bad light, only light that does or doesn’t help you achieve your intent for the photographs you want to make. Still, there are three kinds of light that are harder to shoot in, and below are ways to use these types of light instead of just writing “bad light” off and staying inside.

Softened by a large diffuser, this portrait was made in harsh light in the Kenyan Desert.

Saddhu in Kathmandu's direct morning light.

The same Saddhu, this time in much softer light. This was made with the open shade created by a large diffusion panel.

HARSH PORTRAIT LIGHT

Harsh, directional light makes portraits difficult; the colours bleach out, the shadows become harsh, and the eyes squint up making them smaller and robbing them of a comfortable, expressive look. This kind of light is marked by really bright highlights and dark shadows—and too many f/stops in between—making it hard, if not impossible, for our current digital cameras to capture the complete dynamic range. If those cameras could, we'd still have high-contrast images with rough colours and a squinting subject. So what do you do if you've got no choice but to shoot in this light?

The first solution, and the one I look for before I try anything else, is to look for shade. It's rare that you'll be making portraits in the middle of a desert with no shade available. More often than not there's a door, an overhang, a tree or a side of the street that casts shade further than the other. That's where I head. Try it. Take your subject from the bright sun, push them into shadow and watch what happens. The colours pop again. The shadows soften. The eyes open and catch the light from the sunny areas beyond the shade, and light up with that catchlight, which makes a portrait so full of life. Why don't we do this as a matter of instinct? I suspect it's because we're so used to thinking of quantity of light as a matter of first concern, and not quality. As newer cameras with better sensors are developed, the ability of those cameras to shoot at higher ISOs with no appreciable loss of quality gets better and better. Your camera can handle it. Get into the shadows. While

A weather-beaten tree in uninspiring light.

The same tree in B+W takes on a more dramatic look.

you're there, play with how far you push your subject into the shadows; the closer you bring them to the light, the more noticeable the fall-off—or feathering—of the light, and the more dimension you'll be able to get. It's not that one look is better than another; they're just different. If you understand that not all shade is created equal and play with it, you'll see the nuances and be able to use that in your images.

Open shade nowhere to be found? Make it! There are some really good ways of creating small pockets of shade in which you can make portraits. My favourite tools for this are collapsible light discs made with a diffusion material. They pack small and, as long as you can recruit someone to help, you'll find them invaluable. They aren't subtle (and there are places I just wouldn't want the added attention), but they're the only real light tools I bring with me when I shoot. Westcott makes my preferred light discs, but there are several companies making similar products. Lastolite sky panels and Westcott Scrim Jims can both take a diffusion panel and come in various sizes. The key with these is to watch your background; the diffusers are small, so you'll be making shade for your subject, not necessarily the background. Find a darker background to shoot towards, or better yet, a background that's also in shade. Experiment with how close you bring the light panel to your subject; the closer you bring it, the softer the light.

HARSH LANDSCAPE LIGHT

Like portraits, landscapes often find their most beautiful expression in softer light that doesn't create hard shadows or bleach colours. That doesn't mean, however, that your hands are tied. Where hard light doesn't lead to one particular aesthetic, it shines at creating another. This is your opportunity to embrace the drama and the contrast of more direct light. Look for the lines and textures made by the shadows and allow them to inform your composition. Consider using the lack of inspiring colours as your chance to explore your landscapes in black and white. Use a polarizing filter to darken that sky, remove some of the reflected glare from water and other elements, and then throw that dramatic image into Lightroom or your favourite digital darkroom tool and make a series of high-contrast black and white images.

OUT-OF-RANGE LIGHT

Digital sensors can only capture so much. To make up for this, some photographers make multiple exposures at different exposure values, and then blend them into so-called High Dynamic Range (HDR) photographs. I guess it's an acquired taste, but I've never been a fan of the way these photographs treat shadows, which we rely on to make sense of the logic of light. The resulting photographs sit anywhere on the

spectrum, from subtle and beautiful to garish and ridiculous. The argument has been made that these images more carefully replicate the way the eye—with its much higher ability to process broader dynamic ranges—sees things. I still think we need shadows. But that's not my point here. I simply mean to suggest that there's an alternative. While one option is to see a liability in the limited dynamic range of digital sensors, the other is to see the opportunity to create Low Dynamic Range (LDR) images.

Celebrate the shadows, allow vast areas to lose detail and embrace the mystery! Consider metering on the bright areas of the scene and allow the shadows to create vast blocks of dark negative space in your compositions. Alternatively, meter for the darker areas, showing those details, and allow the highlights to blow out and create an ethereal mood. While details in highlights and shadows are often desirable, this is art not religion, and there's no dogma that can't be intentionally broken to achieve certain aesthetic or storytelling objectives.

A market scene in India, where my camera's meter did the best it could.

The same scene, metered for the hand, allowing the rest of the shadows to lose their details.

SHOOT MORE, DEVELOP LESS

Confessions of a Digital Photographer

PIET VAN den EYNDE

Too many tourists? Why not come back in the early morning when no one's around (and the light is much better!) when you can take a series of images and have Photoshop remove the tourists automatically?

I have a confession to make: I'm not exactly the most patient person. One of the reasons I got into photography was because I didn't have the patience to just draw. That same impatience is why my first camera was digital: a Nikon Coolpix 950 with a two-megapixel sensor the size of an ant. My knowledge of photography was even tinier than that. At that time, I very much liked (and still do) the work of Belgian photographer Stephan Vanfleteren, whose portraits feature a razor-thin depth of field, printed with a great printing technique on an analog printer. I also very much liked the black sloppy borders around his photographs and, having never set foot in an analog darkroom, I had absolutely no idea how these actually came to be, nor did I know that Stephan used super fast lenses, large format cameras, and exquisite analog dodging and burning skills to make these memorable prints.

Uninhibited by such essential knowledge, I tried to emulate this look with my tiny-sized camera, which had a depth of field ranging from Belgium to Belize. I spent hours trying to recreate that shallow depth of field in Photoshop, which at that time had about as much sophistication of Microsoft Paint; it didn't even have layers! I made complex depth masks and used convoluted techniques in Photoshop to achieve a similar style, although with varying degrees of success; my best images were those of people who had the top of their head cropped away, or, better still, were just bald—the less hair, the easier it was to make my depth map. Realizing this would probably make for an overly restricted client base if ever I wanted to make a living in photography, I eventually got myself an analog SLR and enrolled in the local Academy of Fine Arts. That's where I learned that shallow depth of field is a combination of f-stop, sensor size, focal length and camera-to-subject distance, and not something you can simply squeeze out of a $119 Photoshop plug-in. I also learned that a negative border not only used to be a photographer's signature, but it was also proof that a photograph hadn't been cropped—instead it is now an overused gimmick that has become the method for to adding instant "authenticity" to images.

I've now learned about all of the variables that determine depth of field and I try to get it right as best I can in-camera. But the digital skills I learned 15 years ago occasionally serve me well. In the image below, not only did I use too much depth of field, I also mistakenly focused on the crowd in the back instead of the boy in front. If there's one thing worse than an out of focus image, it's an image with the wrong parts in focus! This one has both issues. Normally I wouldn't bother, but this

image was important so I had to try and salvage it. I sharpened the foreground as much as I could in Lightroom using a localized adjustment brush, since I didn't want to sharpen the background even more. I then made a selection of the boy in Photoshop and combined that selection with a graduated selection of the foreground. I combined both into a so-called depth mask, which I could use in the lens blur filter (Filter > Blur > Lens Blur) to realistically photo-blur the background. I used digital grain to tie the blurred and unblurred parts of the image together. It took me about an hour. Getting everything right in-camera would have taken me 1/60th of a second; that's a 200,000-fold increase in efficiency!

Sixty minutes vs. 1/60 of a second: getting everything right in-camera would have saved me an hour's worth of work in post-production.

THAT WAS THEN, THIS IS NOW

Back in the analog days, if you did not print yourself, your post-processing options were pretty much limited to ticking "colour" or "black & white" on the envelope into which you put your roll of film.

Fast forward to 2013, where pressing the shutter seems more and more like the beginning of the photographic adventure, rather than the end; there are countless RAW-converters all claiming to cure every problem but the plague, and hordes of plug-ins promising salvation for photographic issues you didn't even know existed. Throw in Photoshop and it's easy to lose track of the basics and, thus, lose track of time.

THE 20-80 RULE

There is a tried-and-true law in marketing that says 20% of your customers account for 80% of your business. The beauty of this so-called 20/80 rule is that it can be applied to almost anything . . . and that includes photography and post-processing.

Post-processing is part administration, part creativity. A portion of the steps can be automated or batch-applied, and a portion of them will be unique. Some of them can be avoided altogether if you make an effort to try a bit harder or focus (yourself, not your camera) more during capture. Most of us are spending more time in the digital darkroom than we should.

The fact that there's a lot of peer pressure when it comes to post-processing doesn't help either. But not everyone is a pixel peeper. You should take comfort in the fact that even the bluntest of today's digital tools are still ten times faster to apply, and one hundred times more precise, than the set of aluminum rods with cardboard masks that Ansel Adams had at his disposal.

"Just because you spent 5 hours post-processing an image does not mean it automatically deserves more appreciation." – Ansel Adams

It is my firm belief that you can get an image to 80% of where you want it to be in 20% of the total time. The last 20% will require 80% of the total time, most of which will not be evident to the viewer. Here are a few tips on how to cut down on your post-processing time without visibly compromising on quality. These tips are aimed at Lightroom, Camera Raw and Photoshop users because these happen to be the industry standard, but they'll translate easily into any software application you use.

"Just because you spent 5 hours post-processing an image does not mean it automatically deserves more appreciation." – Ansel Adams

1. Shoot with post-processing in mind. I heard a great quote from wedding photographer David Ziser: "Get it right in-camera. Unless it's easier to fix in Photoshop."
2. In Lightroom, if you want your raw files to better resemble the JPG-preview on your camera LCD screen, try the different profiles in the Camera Calibration panel. They're meant to replicate the Picture Styles (Canon) or Picture Controls (Nikon) that are already applied to your JPGs in-camera. Remember, however, that while profiles might visually give you a more pleasing image, they don't necessarily give you an image that is colour-corrected or properly white-balanced. If you're shoot-

ing fashion or products and this is your concern, the $100 or so you spend on an X-Rite ColorChecker passport will be money well invested.

3. In the Lens Corrections panel, select the Enable

Watch the Video

Profile Corrections checkbox.

4. If you want tips 2 and 3 always applied to all of your images, turn them into a Develop preset that you apply upon import.

5. In all but a fraction of my images, I'm happy

Watch the Video

with the default noise reduction Lightroom applies to my images: ISO 3200 looks about as good as 400 ASA did on film only 10 years ago, and I really don't want to spend minutes on each image to try and make it look marginally better unless it's going to be printed large format. If your camera's on the noisy side, it might be a good idea to decide on specific levels of noise reduction for each ISO value. You can turn these into presets, but did you know that you can actually set up ISO-specific defaults for the camera you use?

6. Work that Basic panel in Lightroom! With the

Watch the Video

new separate Highlights and Shadow controls, there's much you can do to tone down or brighten up specific zones of your image without having to dive into the more time-consuming local adjustments. In fact, I think the Basic panel is a pretty nice example of the 20/80 rule all by itself.

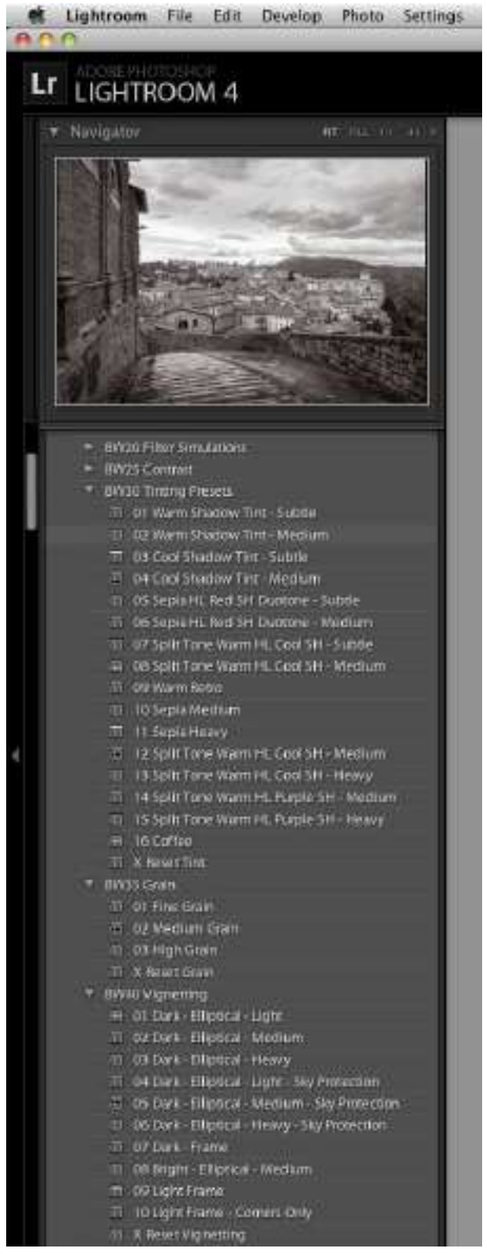
7. If you want more local control than the Basic panel allows, try the Curves panel or the sliders of the HSL panel.

8. Turn everything you need to do more than once into a preset. I have presets for just about everything in Lightroom, including those for Watermark, Export and Import. In the Develop module, things like (Split) Toning, adding Grain and Vignettes are perfect preset candidates.

9. For my "finishing touch" presets for black and white workflow, while I'll generally craft—or at least fine-tune (based on a preset)—the actual B&W conversion (Basic Panel adjustments + positioning of the sliders in the B&W Panel), what I call finishing options (Grain, Vignetting and Split Toning) are subcontracted to the capable hand of stackable presets. In Lightroom,

The top image has the typical dynamic range issues of a landscape/cityscape shot: a mix of bright sky and dark foreground. Getting it right in-camera was not an option. Perhaps it could have been if I knew of a graduated filter maker that tailor-made filters for every skyline. All it took was six Basic panel sliders to get it 80% right (middle image). Some dodging and burning took the image even further, but was also a relatively considerable time investment. Definitely worth the effort if you plan to make a large print; maybe not so much if you just want to share it on Facebook.

there's the added advantage of having an instant preview in the Navigator window, even before applying the preset. Even if you only have four presets for each of the

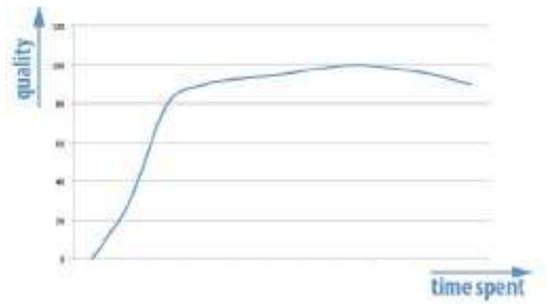


three effects, you have a total of 125 [(4+1) x (4+1) x (4+1)] different finish options with a maximum of three mouse clicks. Why +1? Because you can also choose not to choose a certain

> We can just about move every pixel in every direction we want. But just because we can, doesn't mean we should.

option. While some may find this an assembly line-type workflow, I prefer to think of it as efficient.

10. Think twice before going to Photoshop, especially with larger, memory intensive files; you can get to 80% in Lightroom by the time you've actually opened your file in Photoshop.
11. There's a final reason for not working too



long on the same file and it has to do with quality rather than time-efficiency. If you were to plot the time spent on an image to improve the quality, your graph would look something like the one below, based on the following scenario:

You make great improvements first. Additional improvements start to take more time and working on it too long will degrade your finished image because you run the risk of overdoing it. You regularly compare your image to the original by using the backslash key in Lightroom to help prevent that. If you work longer than expected, you let the image rest and return to it with a fresh set of eyes.

We can just about move every pixel in every direction we want. But just because we can, doesn't mean we should.

THIS ONE GOES TO ELEVEN

This last tip is perhaps the most important one and provides a direct feedback loop to the first. Tip eleven is this: Learn from your mistakes. Make a list of the things you regularly have to correct in post:

- Do you always have to straighten the horizon? Maybe it's time to activate that virtual spirit level on your camera's LCD.
- Do you often need to brighten people's faces with an adjustment brush? Maybe it's time to get acquainted with the marvels of on—and especially off—camera flash.
- Do you frequently need to blur backgrounds? It's time to learn all about the physics of shallow depth of field!

PURSUE CONSISTENCY

DAVE DELNEA

There's a lot of talk in photography about the idea of creative vision. In my role as a commercial advertising photographer, this is often referred to as your "visual style," "voice" or "stamp" (i.e., the unique "signature" a photographer brings to a project that makes them different from everyone else). Whether you are a hobbyist or an aspiring professional, there are few things more important to your artistic pursuit than developing your stamp and working towards creating a unified body of work.

For those of you looking to enter the world of commercial photography, building this unified body of work is your product: your visual brand, represented by a portfolio of images that shows not just what you shoot but how you see. It shows how the technical and creative come together to produce an aesthetic that's unique to you, and is what will determine how potential clients think of you—the more unified your work, the more your visual style will be etched in the minds of art buyers, art directors or photo editors. For those of you who are driven to take your photography to a higher level but have no interest in the commercial world, working to create a visual style is the thing that can take you from continually shooting cliché images to creating work that truly represents you and what you have to say as an artist or a creative.

Photographed on location in Tunisia. Nikon D2X, 17-35 mm, f/2.8

So, where do we start? We all want to produce interesting and unique work, but it seems that the photographers who really do express themselves in a fresh unique way are few and far between. The truth is you started the moment you picked up a camera. Creating a body of work that represents you and your creative vision is a lifelong effort. It's that creative bug that gnaws at you, causing you to continually strive to produce better work. The problem for many is that—once they're able to take good photographs—their focus is so much on what they're putting in front of the camera that they stop thinking about what it is in them that makes their perspective of the subject matter unique.

In the last few years, I've found myself paying much closer attention to this "pursuit of visual style" that we work through as photographers, artists and creatives. I've been working to make photographs that are more than just nice, well-composed images, and instead create a larger body of work that represents my unique stamp. It's that body of work—and the ability to clearly show my visual voice—that has had the biggest impact on my career and has given me renewed passion for my craft.

Developing our visual style may be a lifelong pursuit, but it seems many photographers hit a spot where they just get stuck. It's like our visual version of writers block: the desire to create images that express our unique aesthetic and perspective, but not knowing exactly what that looks like, or how to go about it. What I want to outline here are some of the techniques and exercises I've used in my day-to-day work, in order to get "unstuck" and keep myself in a place where I'm photographing new work that continues to push my visual style forward.

DECONSTRUCT YOUR IMAGES

I love traveling to far away places with my camera. When I was first developing as a photographer, I would travel to these places and shoot from sunup to sundown (often even longer than that), and return with thousands of photographs. Once I was home and had a chance to review all I had shot, however, I would often come away feeling dissatisfied and somewhat disappointed. Although there would be a few pretty sunset or dusk pictures in the mix, or a nice portrait of some fisherman or a street vendor I'd met along the way, the images weren't representative of what I wanted to show or communicate. They looked like all of the other travel images I had seen from the area. They were nice photographs, but my style or voice seemed absent from them. Once I recognized this, a breakthrough came for me when I was photographing in Tunisia. I was walking to get lunch when I stopped for a moment and took a picture of a garbage can; three garbage cans, actually. The harsh midday sun was something I would have usually worked to avoid, and there was nothing "culturally unique" in the frame that I would normally seek out when traveling in a foreign country. I looked at the result and found I quite liked the image, though I wasn't sure why. It was, after all, a plain shot of a few

Photographed on location off the coast of Belize. Canon EOS 5D, 17-40 mm, f/4, Aquatech housing

An example of a composited image series. Nikon D3X, 24-70 mm, f/2.8

garbage cans in mid-afternoon light. I took the time to examine the image closer and deconstruct what it was I liked about it:

- The simplicity of the frame;
- The way the colours of the cans are the only thing in the frame that grab my attention; and
- How geometrically clean and straight-on all the lines in the image are

So, with these style elements in mind, I went out to try to create more images similar in style. It forced me to take a rather abstract concept like "visual style" and actually break it down into more concrete ideas that I could apply to the other images I was creating. This experiment changed the style of my images for the rest of that day, and the resulting photographs have become the foundation of much of my recent work.

WORKING IN SERIES

The Tunisia photographs ended up becoming a body of work consisting of more than 30 images, and in that work you can see how I was exploring and experimenting with the concepts of simplicity, straight lines and colour. By shooting a whole series around these three concepts, I was really able to learn, refine and begin to incorporate them into my work. I now work to shoot the large majority of my personal work as a small series of images. Working this way forces me to go through the process of deconstruction: breaking down an image to determine what I like about it. It is in trying to re-create this under different circumstances, or with different subject matter, that I'm forced explore, experiment and further develop these creative concepts.

"GOOD ARTISTS BORROW, GREAT ARTISTS STEAL"

I'm sure many of you have heard the above quote (often attributed to Pablo Picasso). Anyone who has spent a lot of time and effort working to develop their own creative vision or perspective in their art understands how tongue-in-cheek this statement is. This article is about finding your own voice in your art; as counterintuitive as it may seem, allowing yourself to be influenced by both the work around you and the work that came before you is an important part of that.

I'm not at all suggesting that we hijack another artist's work or ideas and present them as our own, but original work and ideas don't just fall out of the sky either. They are built upon a foundation of understanding your craft and what has come before you. Find images that inspire or excite you, and then ask yourself why. In the same way that you should deconstruct your own imagery, you should also deconstruct other images that you're inspired by to determine what it is that resonates with your creative self. Explore those elements and make them your own.

Don't limit yourself to photography. Much of the visual inspiration I deconstruct comes from outside photography; film, paintings and even my friends' Instagram accounts have provided visual ideas for me to explore.

STUMBLING ON GOOD IDEAS

Visual style isn't built by sitting around thinking and planning exactly what a photograph should look like; it's built by getting out with a camera and taking a ton of pictures until, like the Tunisian garbage cans, you stumble across an image that intrigues you. Often the images I "stumble" upon aren't all that good initially, but they plant a seed of an idea or a look that I then develop over time, taking me one more step down that road to establishing my creative vision.

CRAFT VS. CREATIVITY

Craft and creativity don't always line up, so it's important to keep this in the back of your mind as you build your body of work. There are many creative ideas that I wanted to experiment with at a time when my craft just wasn't in a place to execute them. Just as the pursuit of your own visual style is a lifelong path, so is the technical craft of photography. These two things are interrelated, but when you're working to photograph a new look or idea and are feeling unhappy with the results, it's important to know why the image fell short of your vision before totally abandoning it. Was the idea simply bad, or are your lighting or retouching skills just not yet where they need to be in order to execute what you have in your head? There are visual ideas I've had for years that I've just recently had the technical skills to complete.

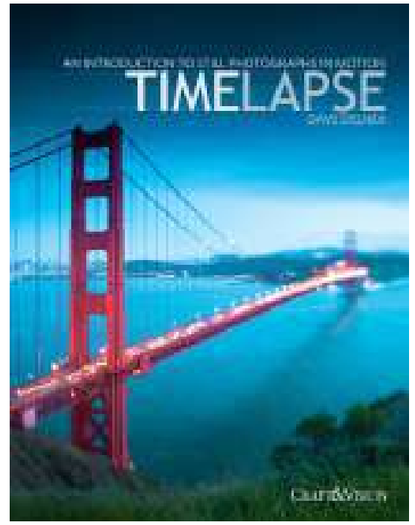
HINDSIGHT IS 20/20

The endless exploration of our personal creative vision, and the unified body of work that comes from having an understanding of what that is, can be a frustrating pursuit as we endlessly push to take one more step forward in our creative lives. It's just as important, however, to take the time to look back and see just how far you've come. In reviewing your body of work, you'll also start to see the themes that are expressing your voice and you'll begin to see just what your stamp is. Your perspective is the thing that makes your work different from anyone else's, so start with where you are, use the themes that inspire you and the skills you have, and build from there.

When in doubt, make more photographs.

Nikon D800E, 24-70 mm, f/2.8 and 70-200 mm, f/2.8

A composited image series photographed on location in Belize.



TIMELAPSE: AN INTRODUCTION TO STILL PHOTOGRAPHS IN MOTION

This eBook takes a step-by-step approach to the important aspects of creating moving photographs. Dave discusses the following key areas: cameras and lenses, tripods and support gear, intervalometers, tethering, filters, and, of course, the settings and techniques to pull it all together. Dave also walks you through Lightroom so you can successfully tackle the editing process, flicker, and output options.

Dave Delnea is a commercial photographer primarily serving the resort industry with life-style images of people and places. His clients include Ritz Carlton, Trump Development, Raffles Hotels and Resorts and Johnson & Johnson. His work can be seen at DaveDelnea.com.

See Dave's Craft & Vision eBooks.

THAT'S A WRAP!

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Pixelated Image Communications Inc.
PO BOX 29115, 1535 West Broadway
Vancouver, BC , Canada V6J 5C2

Editor & Publisher | David duChemin
Production Manager | Corwin Hiebert
Production Coordinator | Eileen Rothe
Copy Editor | Cynthia Haynes
Design & Layout | Rhia Bachynski

Got a Question? Send an email to:
support@craftandvision.com
CraftAndVision.com