



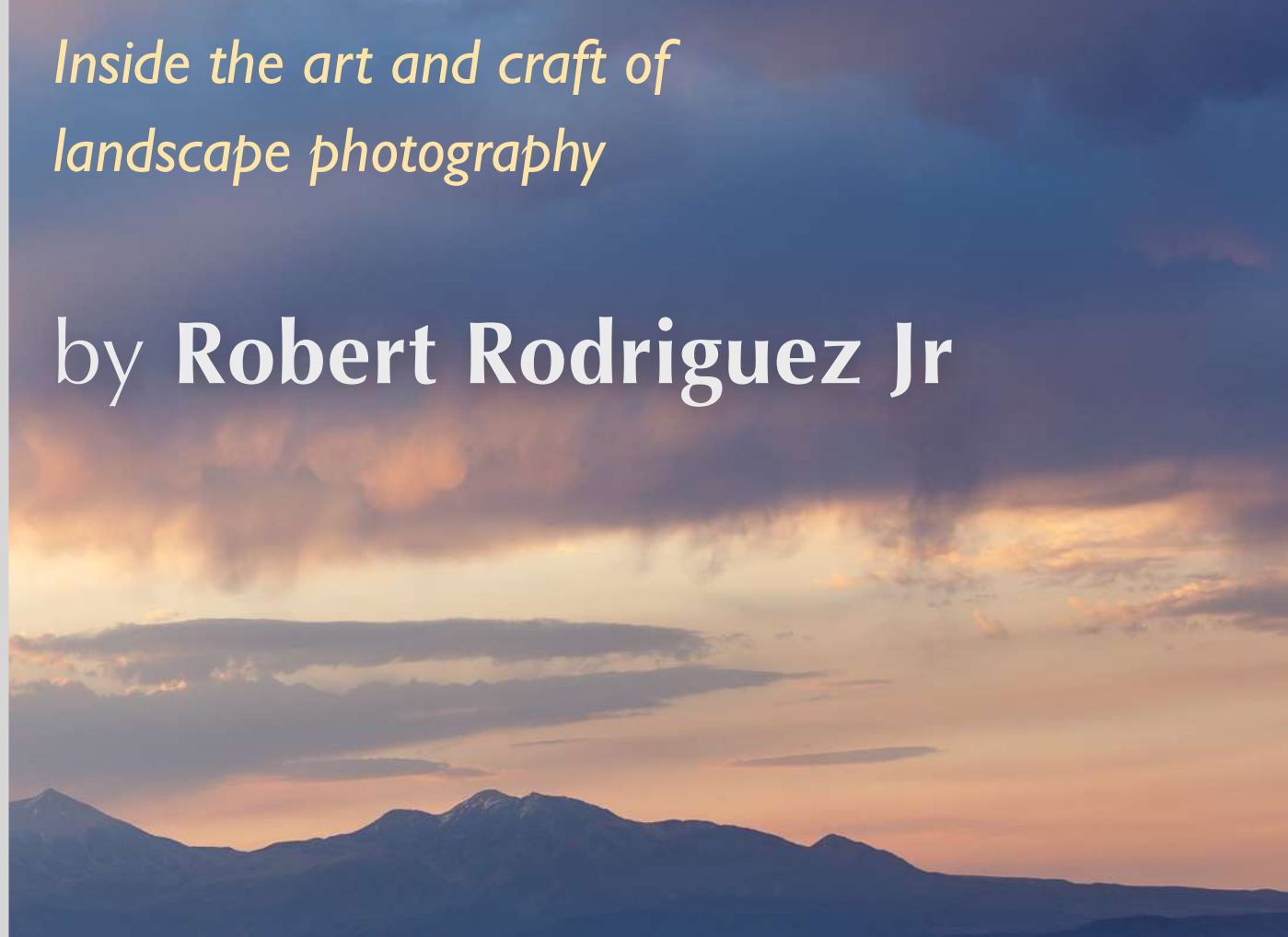
Insights from  
**Beyond**

**the Lens**



*Inside the art and craft of  
landscape photography*

by **Robert Rodriguez Jr**





## Dedication



*To my loving and supportive wife and son, Brenda and Bryce,  
without whom I would not be doing what I love. Thank you.*

*July 24, 2012*



*Hidden Path, Rockefeller State Park, NY*

## Foreword

*“Success is not counted by how high you have climbed but by how many people you brought with you.” - Wil Rose*



The story of how I became a landscape photographer follows a long and winding road (and part of a future book.) Yet from the beginning of my creative life, I always valued the experience over the outcome, the excitement of taking the road less traveled.

In these pages my goal was to take the best of what I have shared on the [Beyond the Lens blog](#) over the past few years and present it in an easier to read format. In addition, I've tried to take advantage of the latest technologies in ebooks to give you a richer and more interactive experience.

I talk about the aesthetic and the technical aspects of landscape photography, and try to provide ideas and techniques for you to start using in your own work right away.

For me photography is much more than just searching for images in the field, but a way of thinking about my place in nature and how best to convey my feelings and emotions about the world around me. A simple gesture of a tree, a fantastic color in the sky, a ray of light reflecting on the surface of a pristine lake - these are things that can stir deep emotions in all of us, and conveying those emotions through photography is worthwhile and significant.

I hope this ebook serves not as a step by step how-to, but rather as inspiration and motivation for you to get out and shoot more, share your vision, and show us how you feel about the world in your own unique and creative way.

Finally, if you enjoy this ebook, please share it with others - thanks!

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature appears to be 'Wil Rose'.



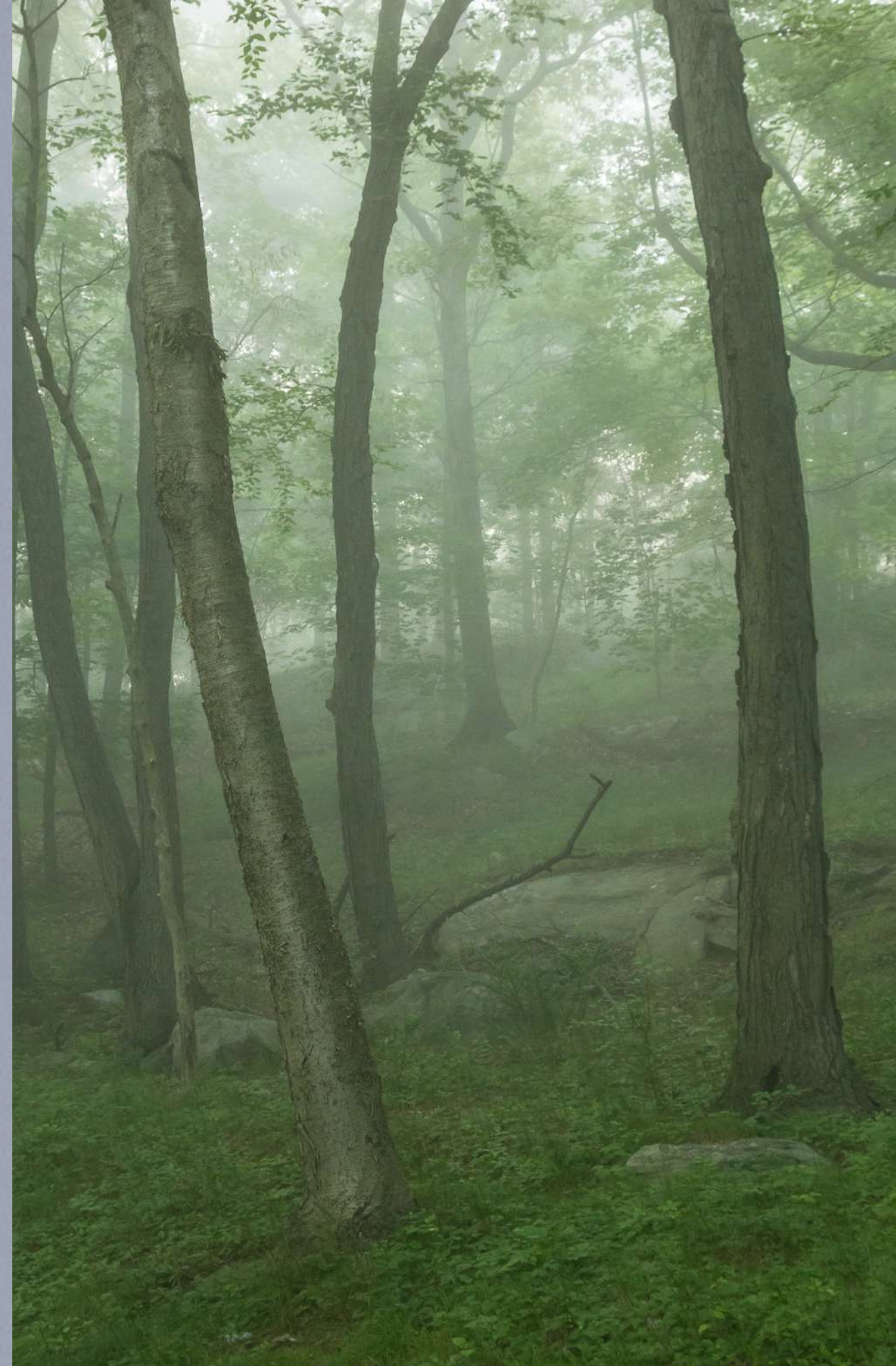


## CHAPTER I

# Insights

***“The thing to remember when traveling is that the trail is the thing, not the end of the trail. Travel too fast and you will miss all that you are traveling for.”***

Louis L'Amour



## Fear & Resistance

First, let's get something out of the way - fear and artificial limitations, otherwise known and thoroughly described by **Steven Pressfield** in his great book The War of Art, as “resistance.”

Becoming a professional photographer is not a pre-requisite for making successful images. Being passionate about your subject matter is. Having said that, photographers often ask me for career advice and guidance about going full-time and the rewards and challenges involved. Questions about making a living as a photographer rank at the top of the most requested information – well maybe after “what kind of camera do you use.”

One of the common pieces of advice I hear often from seasoned professionals is “don't quit your day job” if you have thoughts about becoming a pro. I understand the underlying reason for this response, yet I have always felt it is a negative and fear based position that I've never agreed with. Who am I to tell anyone what they can or can't do, or for that matter place a limit on their determination? Is this perhaps a sign of insecurity, after all they themselves had to make the very same decision at some point in their lives.

It reminds me of my ankle injury three years ago when I had 5 screws and a metal plate inserted to get me back to “normal”. From the day I broke it, I was determined to recover and return to the very physical activities I was so accustomed to doing. When my doctor finally told me to start walking again, I was anxious to start therapy, but he recommended I wait a month before my first visit to the rehab center. I couldn't wait! Yet to my utter dismay, on the first visit the physical therapist proceeded to explain the limitations I would face because of the injury and hardware now in my ankle.

To this day, I will never forget how I felt on the drive home, and I decided right then only I would decide my limitations. I'm a pretty humble person, but how could someone tell me what I was or was not capable of doing? I had just finished reading It's Not About The Bike by **Lance Armstrong**, and we all know what he went on to achieve after being given a death sentence with massive cancer. I was inspired and motivated, and started my own intense therapy regiment of daily yoga, weight training, and hiking which lasted almost a year. Today, I am 95% of where I was before the injury, and the last 5% I make up by being wiser and smarter about the types of physical activities I'm willing to engage in. Experience and wisdom do come with age!

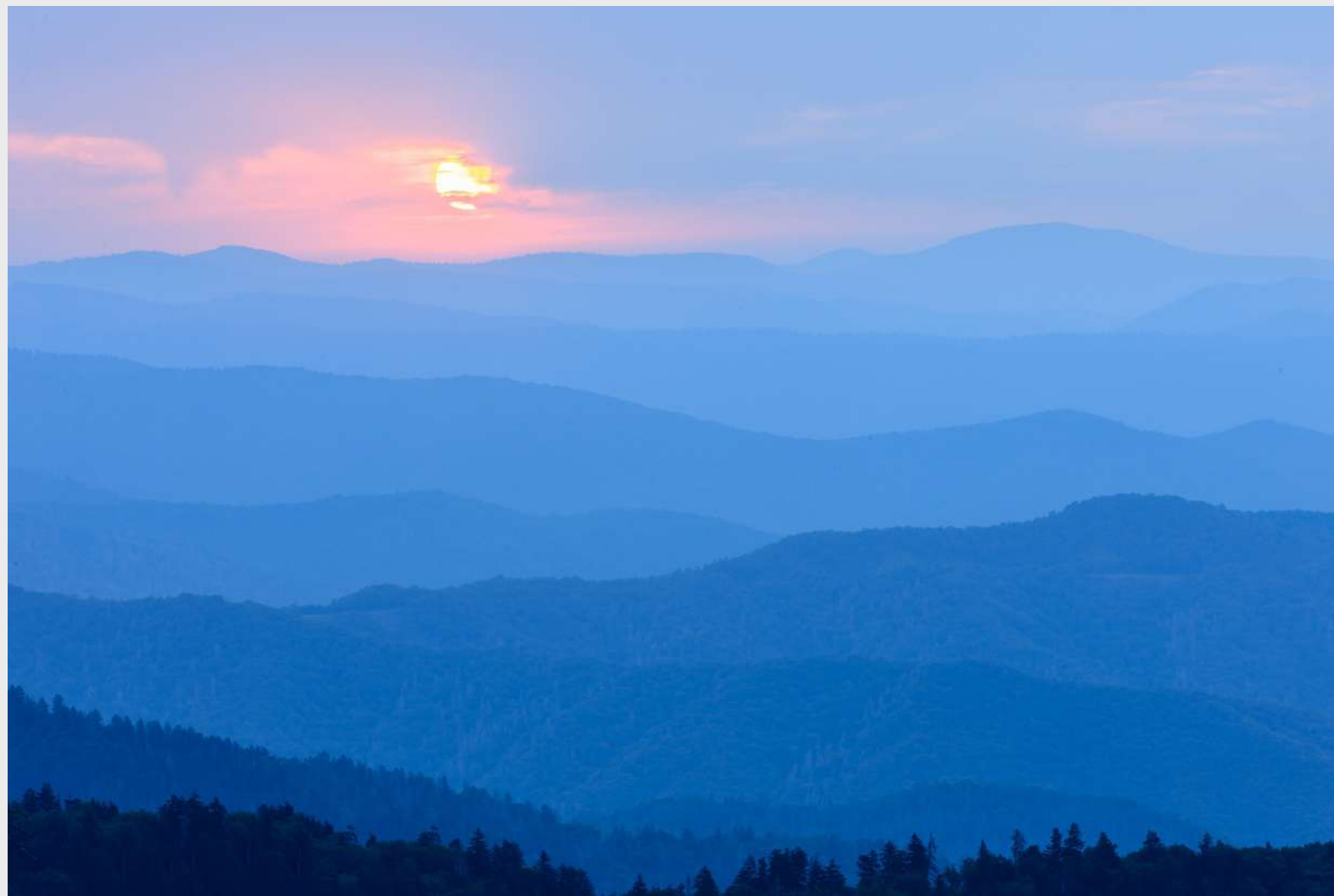
*“Success is going from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm” – Winston Churchill*



My core belief is only you can determine what you are capable of, and no one can or should tell you otherwise. IF you have the determination and stamina, then yes you can become a professional in whatever field you choose, including photography. Will it be difficult and challenging? I can tell you it is the hardest thing I have ever done. But so what – I am having a blast and I am doing what I love. I wake up every morning before dawn eager and excited about challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. If

you are not clear and focused mentally, then you will find it exceedingly difficult to succeed no matter what your goals are.

*“I’ve missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 3000 games...I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.” - Michael Jordan*



Am I afraid or worried that others will crowd this extremely competitive field? Sure, I'm human just like everyone else – but that doesn't stop me working day and night at creating my own path. The fact is no one can be me – just as I can not be you. You will know if and when it is the right time to quit your day job, but if it is, then don't look back, and never listen to the voice of fear – it will never help you achieve anything.

Now that we have that out of the way, let me offer some advice on how to become a better nature photographer.

*Clingmans Dome, Smoky Mountain National Park*

*Canon IDS Mk III, 175mm, f14@ 0.3 sec, ISO 100*

# Top Investments

No matter where you turn these days in the world of nature and landscape photography, there seems to be an ever increasing amount of gear and equipment tempting our wallets regularly. Not to mention the constant marketing and emphasis from manufacturers on acquiring more stuff in order to improve our images. For sure there are many essential items to any photo kit, but I'm constantly asked what makes a good investment, and where can you skimp in terms of your photography purchases. So after some careful thinking about my own experiences, I came up with 10 things I think are crucial when it comes to serious landscape photography.

I approach and practice photography from a **holistic** perspective, so this list is not specific to camera gear, or technology in general. Many years of experience have taught me that there is much, much more to capturing successful photographs than a heavy backpack filled with great gear.

Some of these items don't require any money, but something more valuable, your time. Decide if you're using your time wisely, and how you might get better use of it in your photographic endeavors.

## Top 9 Things to Invest In

**Tripod:** I see so many students try to save money with cheaper tripods, only to regret the decision once they get frustrated in the field. Sloppy movement and lack of precision and adjustability, unstable in rough weather, heavy and unwieldy- these are just some of the reasons to purchase a top quality tripod. Choose a carbon model from [Manfrotto](#) or [Gitzo](#) and you can't go wrong.

Also, don't forget a good ball head. There are many to choose from, but [Really Right Stuff](#) and [Kirk Photo](#) make some of the best.

**Lenses:** In my opinion a lens is much more important than a camera body. Over the course of a decade, you may own multiple camera bodies, but you will probably use the same 3 or 4 high quality lenses. Great optics will always trump a great sensor, so always buy great glass first. Plus they are really investments since their resale value will always remain high.

**Filters:** It goes without saying that if you spend a few thousand dollars on lenses, you don't want to use a cheap \$35 filter from Best Buy. The glass in the filter needs to complement the lens, otherwise your





image quality will suffer. I use filters from **B+W** and **Singh-Ray**, mostly polarizers, ND filters (for long exposures), and graduated ND filters. Worth every penny.

**Hiking Boots:** I hike for most of my photographs, and so my feet are an

essential part of my kit. Being comfortable and sure footed is critical to my safety and good hiking shoes help avoid any number of ailments such as blisters, plantar fascia, or inflamed arches. Good boots will keep your feet dry, comfortable, and provide the support you need day after day, week after week, and mile after mile.

**Camera Backpack:** While there are many type of camera bags, I like a backpack that is comfortable, gives you easy access to all of your gear, is lightweight, and can hold everything you need for a photo hike. I use Gura Gear backpacks for normal hiking, and a ThinkTankPhoto Streetwalker when I need a lightweight pack for cycling, other athletic activities, or just want to be inconspicuous on the street.



*GuraGear Kiboko 30L*

**Learning and Motivation:** Inspiration comes to us from learning more about the art of photography, and staying fresh to new ideas. Put in the time to read about things that inspire you, and it will pay you back in your creativity. I try to stay up to date on all the new techniques out there today, as well as studying those who came before us, both photographers and painters. This balance is necessary in my opinion to create work that is both relevant, yet grounded in principles that are universal, such as beauty, emotion, and mystery. Time spent in study, whether days, weeks, or years, will payoff during the split second press of the shutter when you know you've captured something special. Turn



the TV off and read an inspiring book, it will make a difference behind the camera.

**Printing Paper:** As Ansel Adams said many times, "the print is the performance", and for me my work is not finished until I make prints of my photographs. Choosing a paper that best interprets your photograph is crucial to the success of the image when viewed by others. Right now I use Canson Infinity exclusively, my favorites being **Platine Fibre Rag** and **Rag Photographique 310**. Try a few



high quality papers, then settle on one or two and learn how print your images on them – it will help you grow as a photographer.

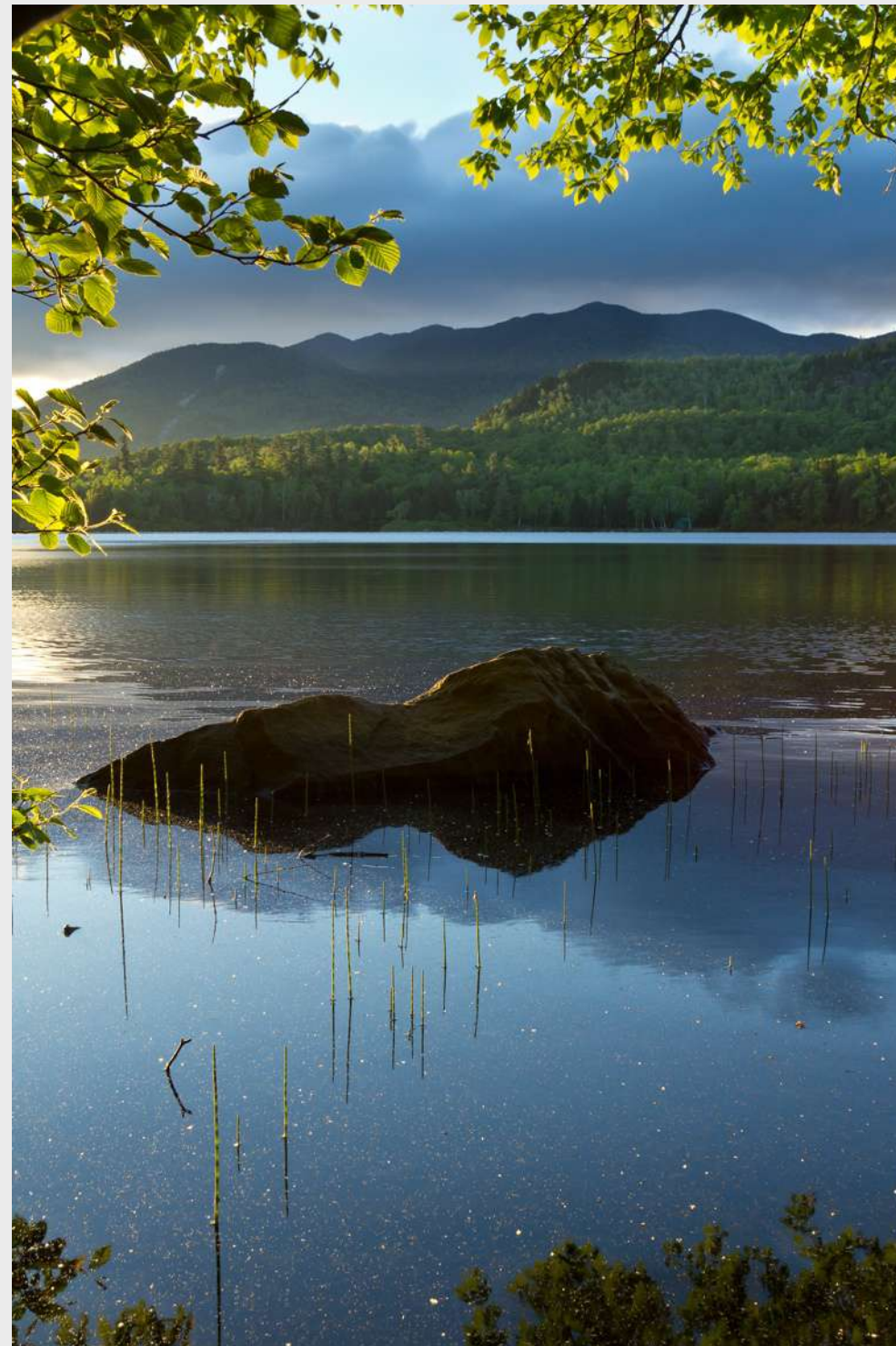
**Computer Monitor:** After all the money and time you invest in all of the above, why skimp on the single piece of equipment which shows you the fruits of your labor? Similar to camera bodies, I've gone through several computers over the last few years, but still depend on my monitor to deliver true, accurate colors and tones. I use the NEC PA series monitors which offer a wider color gamut than most monitors. This allows you to see the colors in your images more accurately, improving post processing and helping to create better prints. Save on the computer, spend on the monitor.

**Time:** Finally we come to the most important investment of all, and that is time and dedication. Nothing will improve your work more than spending time practicing the craft. Many think that practice is only valid

when you are in a situation to capture a beautiful scene, but in fact anytime you use your camera, whether in your backyard or snapping photos of family is a chance to learn about light, composition, technique, and many other aspects of image making.

For sure, the nature photographer makes his own luck, which means you put in the time in the field day in and day out in order to be prepared for mother nature's gifts. Visit the same locations year round and learn how the light interacts with the landscape, and you will improve your work and make better images.

"Spray and pray" may get you quick results, but time and dedication will provide the ingredients to make images that convey your vision, experience, and sensitivity about nature.



*Connery Pond, Adirondack State Park, NY*

*Canon 1DS Mk III, 24mm, f/1.1 @ 1/25, ISO 200*

## Knowledge & Practice

*“The true gestation period of a photograph is not the seconds, or fractions of seconds, of exposure, but rather the years the photographer has spent on a journey that is both physical and intellectual before reaching the point when the shutter was opened.”*

-David Ward

When I first became serious about landscape photography, I read all kinds of books on the subject, both technical and aesthetic. I wanted to learn as much as I could, including the history of the early landscape photographers, and how they practiced their craft.

Of course who would not be inspired by Ansel Adams and his great photography, as well as his generosity about sharing his knowledge and expertise through many books. I also read about and looked at the work of other important landscape photographers including greats such as **David Muench**, **Art Wolfe**, **Galen Rowell**, **Philip Hyde**, and others.

I wanted to know how they got started, what equipment they used, and how they were able to sustain a career as landscape photographers. I was both intimidated and inspired by what I read, and still continue to re-read many of these books today for inspiration and motivation. Learning is a passion for me, and the more I learned about landscape photography, the more I realized I didn't know.

Yet, the only way to really get good at something is to practice, preferably on a daily basis. **Malcolm Gladwell** repeatedly mentions the "10,000-Hour Rule" in his great book Outliers, claiming that the key to success in any field is, to a large extent, a matter of practicing a specific task for a total of around **10,000 hours**. I made a commitment to learn my gear until it became second nature and an extension of my mind. As an example, I became



intimately familiar with my lenses, their strengths and weaknesses, and which would be best for the image I wanted to make.

In order to achieve my goal, which was to capture and convey my feelings or thoughts about a landscape, much depended on not letting the equipment get in the way. Only then did I really start to “see” more, and the camera took on less of a role in the overall mental process of making expressive photographs.

The digital camera is a fantastic tool, and I continue to learn as much as I can about the technology and what it can offer. But getting out there and experimenting with its features, having fun, and making it a regular practice is the only way to really become fluent in the language of photography.

**Knowledge is great, but practical knowledge is even greater.**

Once the gear is no longer an obstacle, then the real work (and fun) begins - the study of light, composition, and visual story telling.



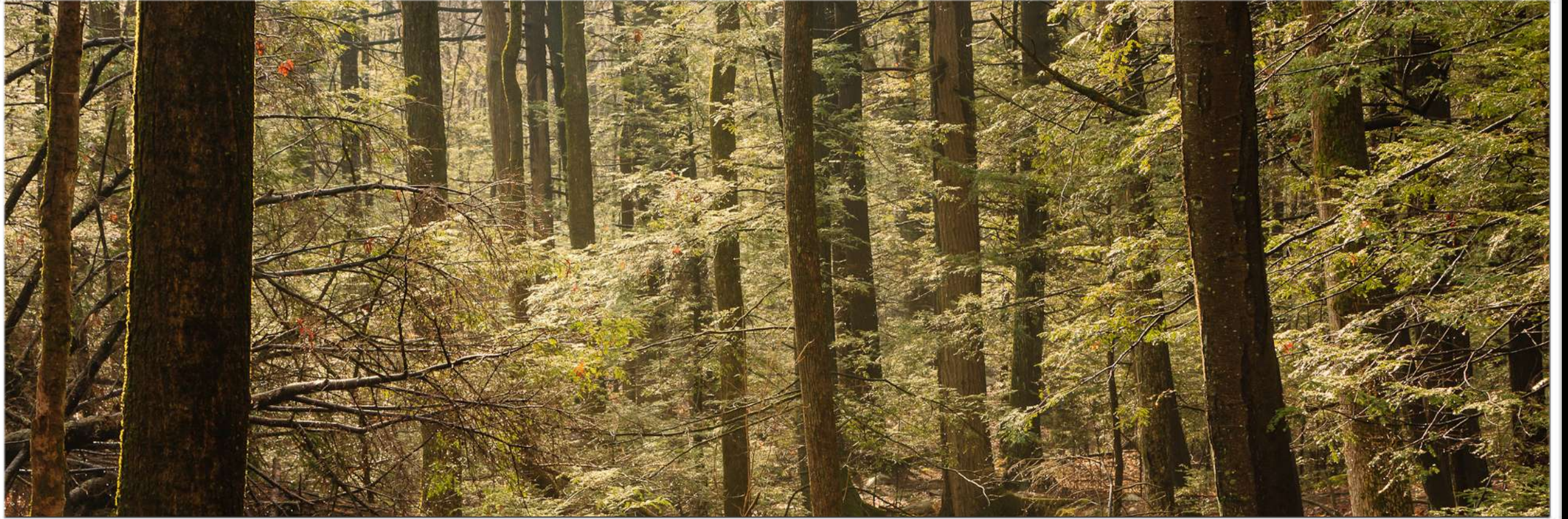
Groups of three are always strong compositional elements. Can you identify the three groups in this image?





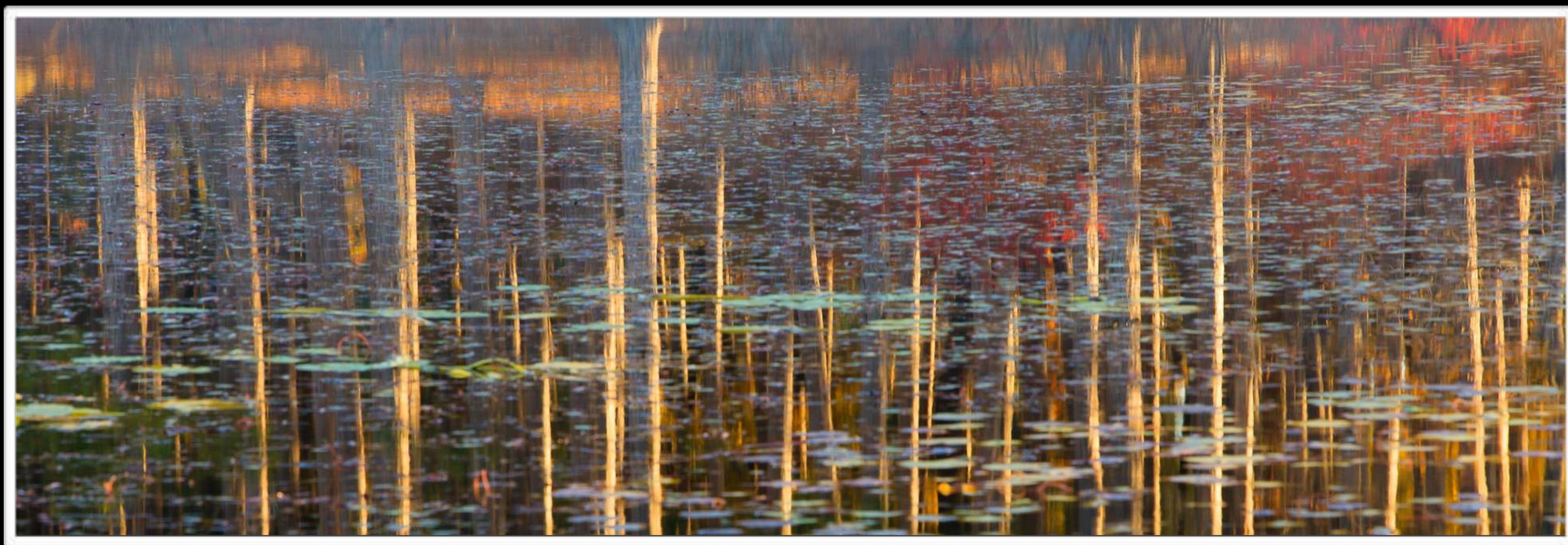
Mist and fog often create the conditions for surreal lighting effects, but you have to stay alert.





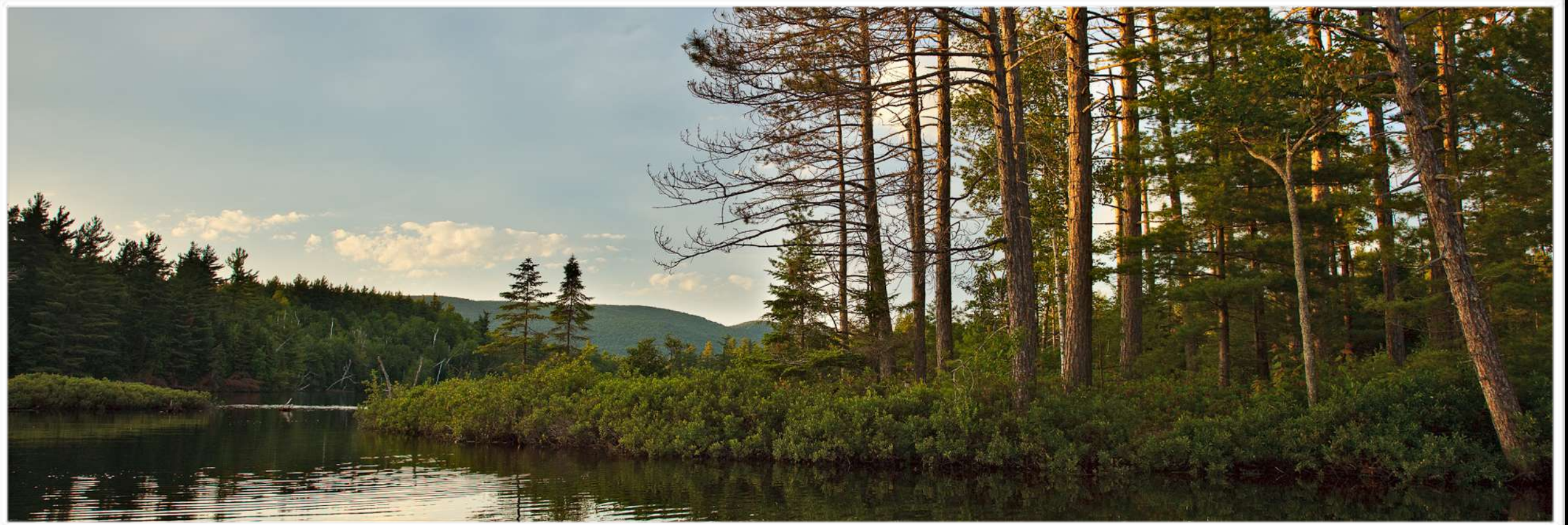
Backlighting makes vegetation come alive and adds a nice rim light to the trunks.





Reflections are limitless in their potential to transform the scene into something more abstract and personal.





A simple image of the late fleeting light on a summers day in the Adirondacks of New York.



## Section 4

# Working with Light

Nothing has influenced the way I see in nature more than learning to see and appreciate light, and its many qualities. This seems to me like an endless process, one that I will never be able to complete in my lifetime. Yet each experience I have teaches me something profound, both mentally and emotionally.

Working with light is photography at its essence, where everything else is stripped away and all that is left is your vision and intuition about how to convey what you think or feel. We are so distracted by the technology and complexity of digital photography these days, that the opportunity to be still and just notice can become a rare occurrence.

So here's a useful exercise—put the magazines down, shut the computer off, put a camera around your neck with one lens (yes, leave the backpack home), and find your favorite spot in nature close to your home.

**Then just look.** (Feel free to substitute look with watch, see, feel, and breathe)

Over a period of time, observe how the light changes throughout the day, or in different weather conditions. Study not only what it

does to the landscape around you, but how it affects you and your emotions. Notice how the same tree can evoke different feelings, and symbolize different ideas based on your own perceptions and experiences. This level of thinking requires passion, study, time, and more time. Is it worthwhile? Only you can answer that for yourself. What does photography mean to you, and most important, why do you photograph? Ask yourself this question repeatedly, and make it a regular ritual.

Remember the tools are here to serve us, and not the other way around. Knowing and understanding this is not enough, you must apply it in real life—maybe the next time you go out to make photographs.



*Valley Light, Utah*



## IMAGE 1.1 Zen Trees



*Canon IDS Mk III, 32mm, f/4 @ 1/40 sec, ISO 800*

### Field Notes

**Zen Trees** is an image I made while hiking in heavy fog. Working in fog is difficult, since the direction of light, the little that there is, is crucial to the success of the image. The same ideas apply as in direct light, but here they are so subtle, and the light so soft that you really have to watch how it changes carefully.

Also, the drama that we normally have with direct light is not quite the same, so composition is crucial. I was just trying to emulate many of my favorite landscape paintings, where the light is soft and ethereal, yet directional as well. Using color I tried to frame the different shades of green to greatest effect.

It was relatively dark, so I wanted as fast a shutter speed as possible to minimize leaf movement. A forest scene is more forgiving with higher ISO's, so I wasn't worried about using 800 on this camera, which I know has great high ISO performance. (Knowing every aspect of your gear is important here). The rest is just working with the composition until it feels cohesive, but also with some tension created by the strong pull of light in the top left, balanced with the rocks lower right.

**Failure is a great teacher!**



## Failure & Success

***“Anyone who has never made a mistake  
has never tried anything new”***

- Albert Einstein

Inspired by a **Seth Godin** blog post titled “the difference between a failure and a mistake,” I wondered how I might apply it to nature photography and the issues we all struggle with in our attempt to make successful images. While this idea can apply to life in general, I think it provides many paths of exploration for those of us trying to be more creative with our photography.

As a workshop instructor, I work hard on trying to help students get beyond whatever is limiting their potential. In my experience the majority of reasons are due to mistakes and less often to failures. My goal is to reverse this and promote failure as a way to learning. Certainly I don't want students strictly to fail as that would be rather frustrating and demoralizing in the long run. Who wants to come away from a workshop with mostly failures to show for it?

What I mean is that by promoting failure as part of the process of succeeding, I can inspire students to take chances, try new things, and hopefully help them become more creative, successful photographers. It is so easy these days to stick to the tried and true, and get the predictable approval of those who view our images. But approval is not necessarily what we want as photographers. What you want is an emotional response, something that shows who YOU are, and not what you saw.

**Trusting your instincts and taking risks will reward you with valuable skills that are hard to come by any other way.**

Many of the issues I see students struggling with usually have more to do with mistakes than with failures. Here are some common ones...

### **Lack of sharpness due to**

- improper focusing
- wrong use of hyper-focal distance
- improper aperture setting

### **Other common issues**

- not eliminating distractions
- not being aware of contrast limits
- wrong lens choices.

These can all be corrected in so far as they do not become mistakes that are repeated. Failures however involve an understanding of these mistakes, and then breaking the rules in order to attempt something new and interesting. For example, using a narrow depth of field in order to eliminate distractions, using extreme contrast as a way to lead the viewers eye, or using blur as a way to convey motion and rhythm in an otherwise static image.

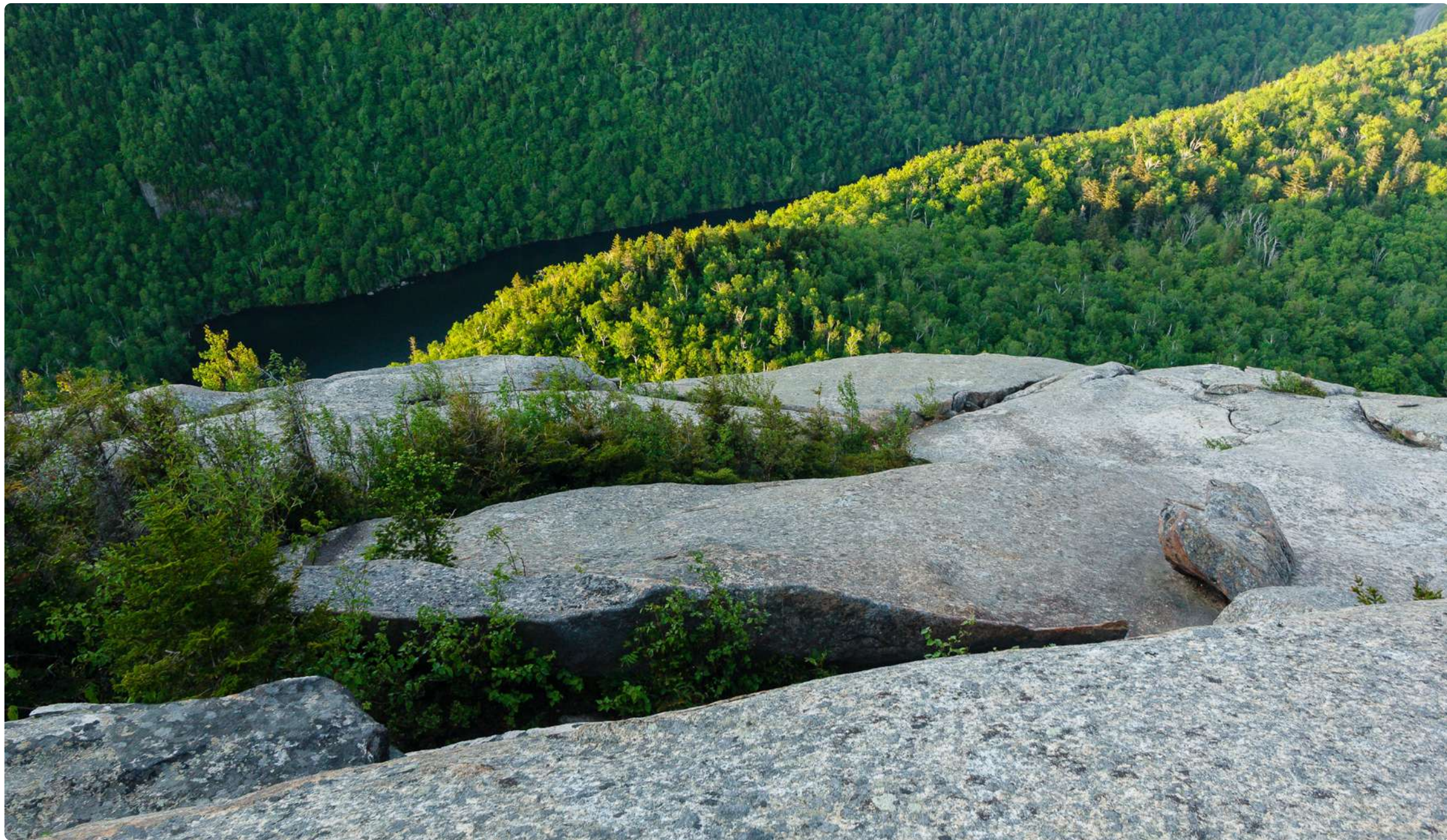
Sometimes it is not so easy to differentiate between a failure and a mistake when we're trying to be creative. That's where practice becomes a mandatory part of the process. Over time, the mistakes become less

frequent, and the failures become a way of improving your technique and vision.

Here's the thing, the best part of all of this hard and laborious work is that you will experience successes, more than you will remember the failures. Each success outweighs the many failures by an exponential factor. I see them not only as positive rewards, but together with the failures as part of the journey we call creative photography. So go ahead and fail, because it will lead to insights you will not gain any other way.

**Those who view and enjoy your work will only remember the successes.**



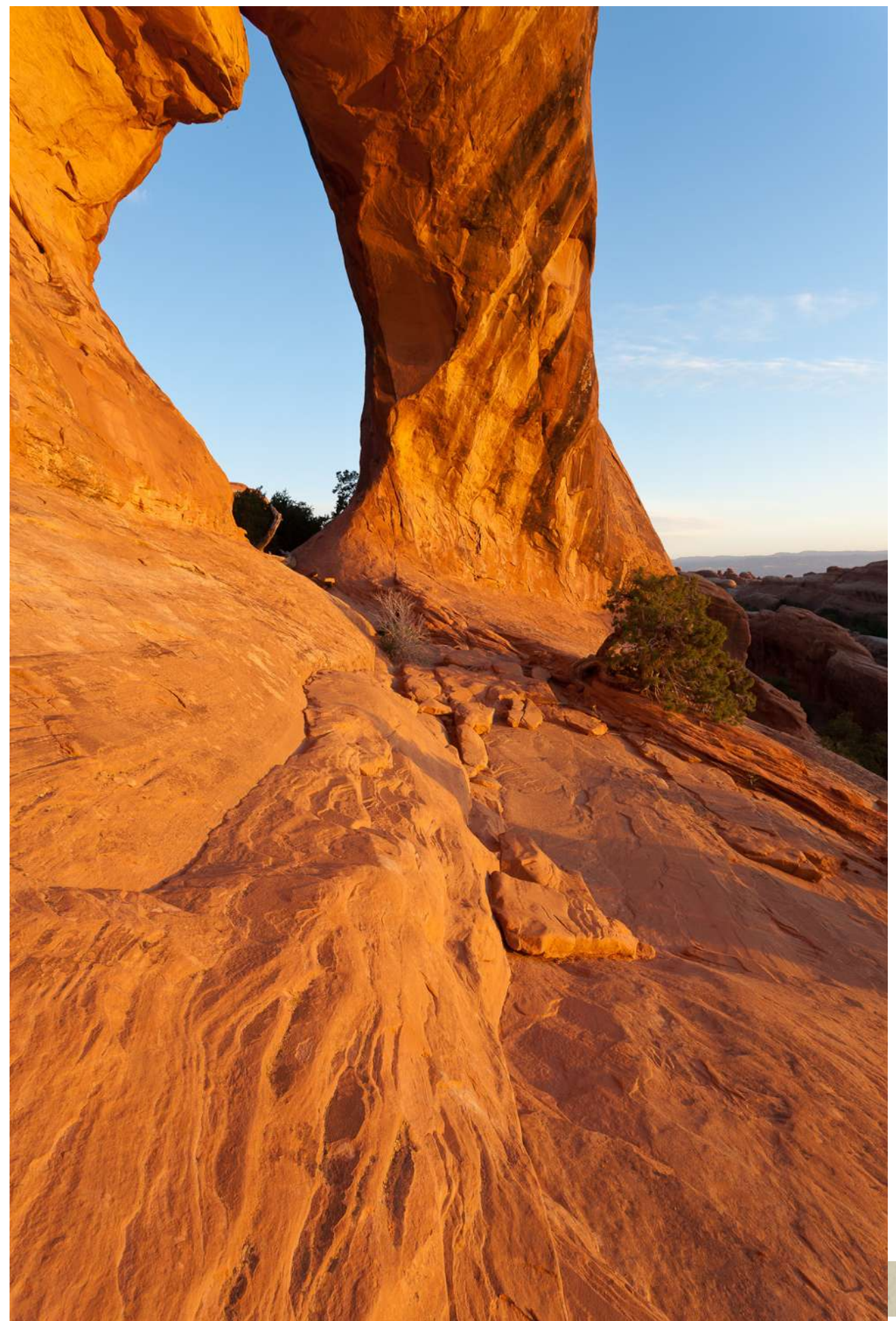


*Here I failed on several levels, but mostly for me it lacks a clear path for the viewers eye to travel, which translates to a weak story. A lack of textural contrast makes the image rather busy, and the light in the background competes with the details in the foreground. I was experimenting with trying to omit the sky and horizon in order to create a lack of perspective, but it didn't quite work out as envisioned.*

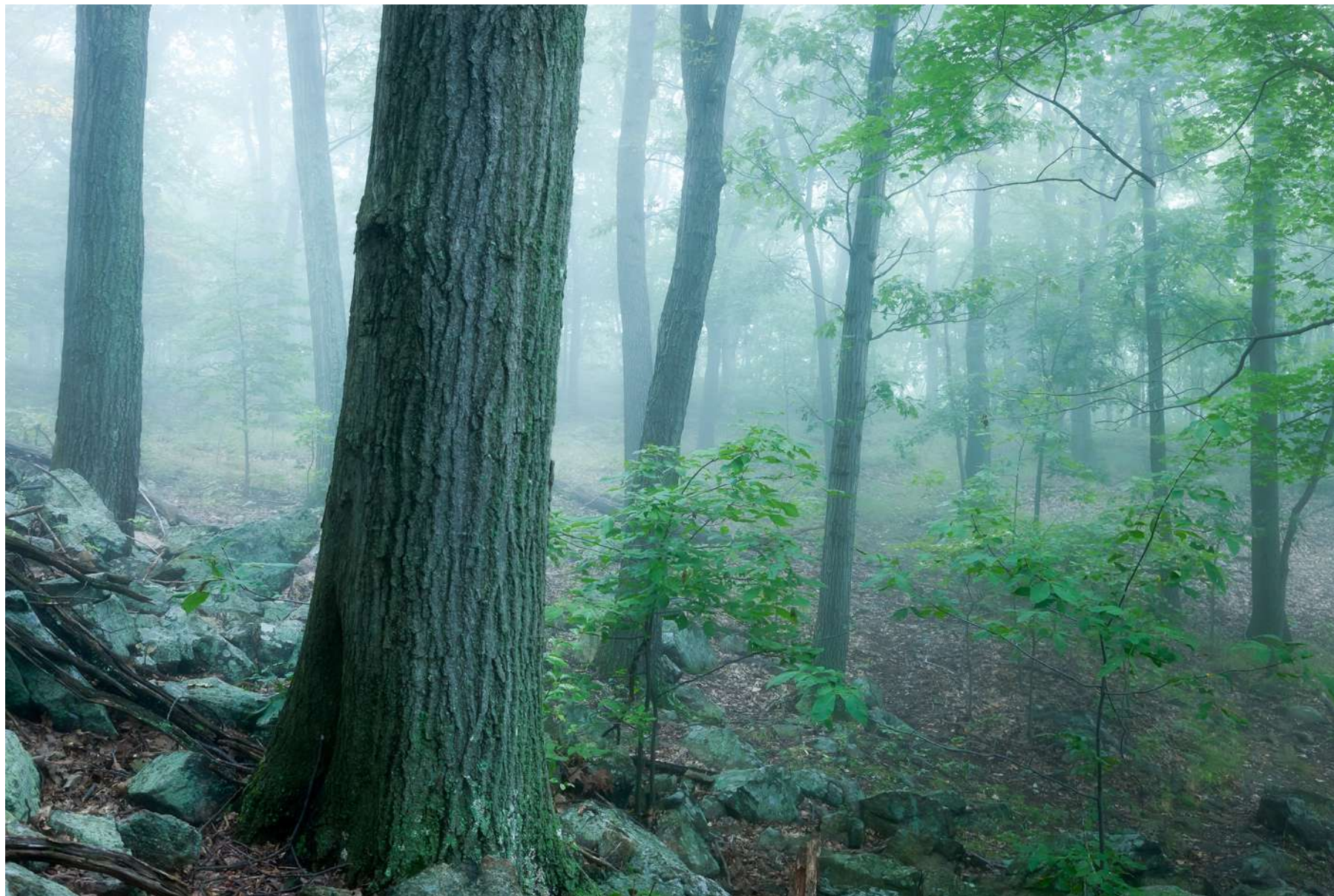


*This image of Partition Arch, Arches National Park was an attempt to bring together several elements in a harmonious composition, but doesn't quite succeed. I was attracted to all of the various lines and how I would get them all to work together.*

*Trying to balance the small trees in the foreground with the rest of the scene proved difficult once I started to work with my camera, and that is a good sign that what I'm feeling isn't going to translate well to a photograph. I also couldn't quite get the sky under control, and I feel it dominates the overall balance of the image.*







*This image tries to blend both a strong foreground and depth in the background to convey the sense of surprise and mystery I felt on this summer day while hiking along the Hudson River. I like strong and bold foreground elements, and I'm constantly trying to find ways to create both visually compelling compositions that also feel fresh and different on some level – almost like using different instruments in an orchestra to play the same melody. Somehow the tree in this foreground dominates in a way that does not complement the image overall, as the tension created is too great for the feeling I wanted to convey. I tried several different compositions, but it never felt quite “right” when I reviewed the images later. The small trees in the foreground disrupt the rhythm I was after, even though the attempt was to minimize them by trying to emphasize the larger trees on the left.*





Beacon Light, Hudson Valley

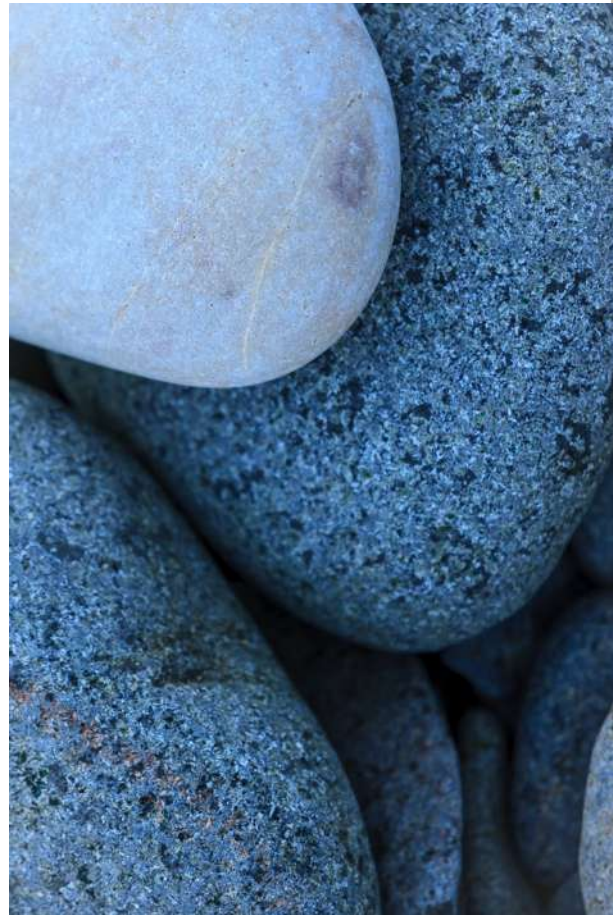
*As I mentioned above, I'm constantly trying to find variations on similar compositional themes, and here it works to my liking. Balance between the two dominant trees and the rest of the trees feels rhythmic and harmonious, the strong green color in the foreground is contrasted by the subtle blue of the sky in the distance and creates a pleasing diagonal, and the light adds the drama in a controlled manner that doesn't over power the details. I can't help describing these elements in musical terms, perhaps because they are ingrained in my psyche and influence the way I see the world. Hopefully you can appreciate these ideas and incorporate them into your views and feelings about your favorite subjects.*



## Mindfulness

As a landscape photographer, you are always at the mercy of nature and its unpredictability, especially when it comes to weather. It is able to completely transform the mood and feel of a place, even when you think you have seen it all. I enjoy this challenge as it reminds me of my days as a performing musician, and improvising was a skill I practiced regularly in order to gain confidence and improve my musical abilities.

I do the same in photography, trying to adapt my way of seeing so that I'm not looking for the same types of images, but instead allowing myself to be open to new ideas. So often it's easy to fall into a routine in terms of composition, color choices, or favoring certain techniques or visual cues. I try to focus on how a place feels, what intrigues me, and what I want to say or convey in the image to others. You may prefer high contrast, skies with lots of interesting clouds, and exciting colors. But working with what you



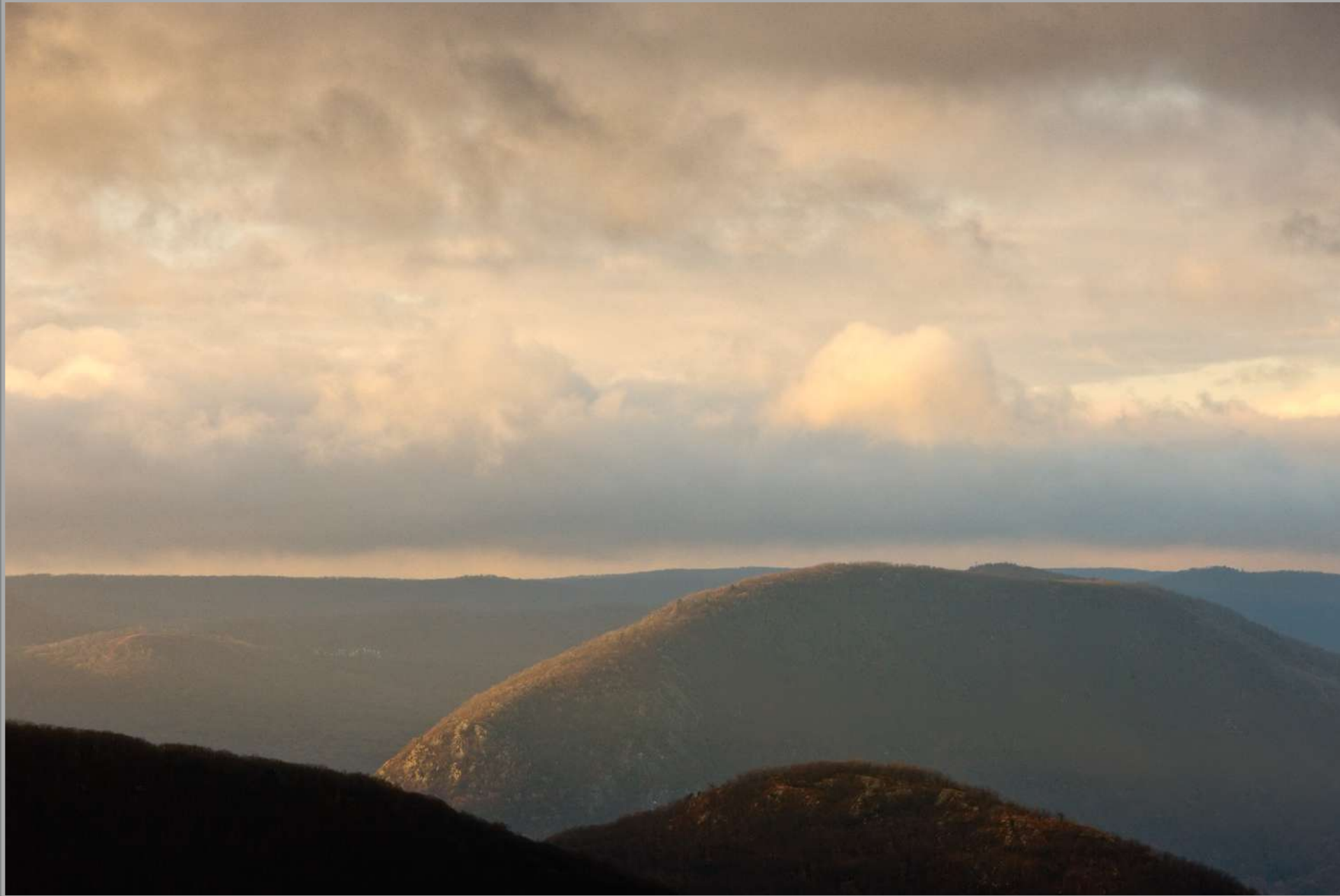
have at any given moment, and adapting the right mental attitude about the situation is key to growth and success.

When I first started I fell into the trap of thinking I could only make images during the so called “magic hour”, sunrise and sunset. But over time I started to copy myself, and my photographs started to look similar and predictable. I realized that any time of day or any weather condition was ripe with potential for a good image, I just had to adapt and learn to “see” better - and experience the moment.

I've been asked what is my favorite lens, and I honestly don't have one. First, it depends on the situation and what I'm trying to accomplish, and second, my favorite is the one I have on the camera the moment something exciting and dramatic is happening in front of me. I could say my standard lens is my Canon 17-40mm wide angle, but I often find myself improvising when either I don't have time to change the lens, or only brought one with me.

One of the phrases I repeat to students in my workshops is “if you can't state what an image is about in a single phrase or sentence, then it's too busy”. It was certainly on my mind this particular morning, and I tried to apply it as I worked to get just the right balance of trees, ground, and fog.

Always stay open to the moment, and let your passion guide you. Sometimes you'll find a photograph where you least expect it.



*Canon IDS Mk III, f8 @ 1/500 sec, ISO 800, 148mm*

### Field Notes

Often I carry only one lens , and this day I only brought my 70-200mm zoom lens on a hike up to the summit of Mt Beacon on a rainy, foggy morning. I do this as an exercise in order to really get to know a particular lens, and also to focus more on “seeing” and less on the gear and its tendency to get in the way sometimes..

When I found this scene, I wished I had brought a wider lens, but realized I would have to improvise and compose a much “tighter” view of the trees, which I think is what makes the image stronger. Had I used a wider lens, perhaps it would have been too ambiguous, often a sign of a weak image.



# Motivation

*“Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us or we find it not.”*

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Motivation for me seems to come in waves, and when I'm inspired it's a great feeling that gets me out with my camera regardless of the time, weather, or any other distraction that may arise.

Sometimes however, that motivation can fade ever so gradually, perhaps because of other responsibilities in life, the demands of paying bills on time, or a creative road block. I've struggled with all of these, but I use these times as an opportunity to take stock of where I am in my artistic journey, and re-charge my batteries so to speak for the future.

I've always believed that having a lifestyle that supports your passion is a sure way to keep motivated even when things get a little dry. I'm extremely fortunate to have a family that shares and enjoys this lifestyle. While many think I have a dream career, it is **hard** work, with long solitary hours both in the field and at home in the studio. Often we complain of not having enough time to achieve our personal goals, and when we get off track we can get discouraged and unmotivated. But finding time is often just a re-examining of your priorities, and deciding what really matters to you.

## **Here are a few of the ways I stay focused:**

**Reading** is also a favorite way for me to find motivation, and this includes art and non-art books as well. I am an avid reader, and never leave home without my iPad which is loaded with all sorts of books. *The War of Art* by **Steven Pressfield**, which I mentioned earlier, is a great motivational book I highly recommend to anyone

who really wants to take their creative passion to the next level. Here's a favorite quote:

*"The professional dedicates himself to mastering technique not because he believes technique is a substitute for inspiration but because he wants to be in possession of the full arsenal of skills when inspiration does come."*

### **Yoga and meditation**

**practice** helps me both physically and mentally to stay sharp and focused on and off the trails.

Where as in the past I might have let the weather become a mental distraction, now I am better at accepting nature as it comes and making the best out of every situation. A mind that is negatively biased is a sure way to lose motivation even before the camera gets out of the bag. Like I've told many workshop

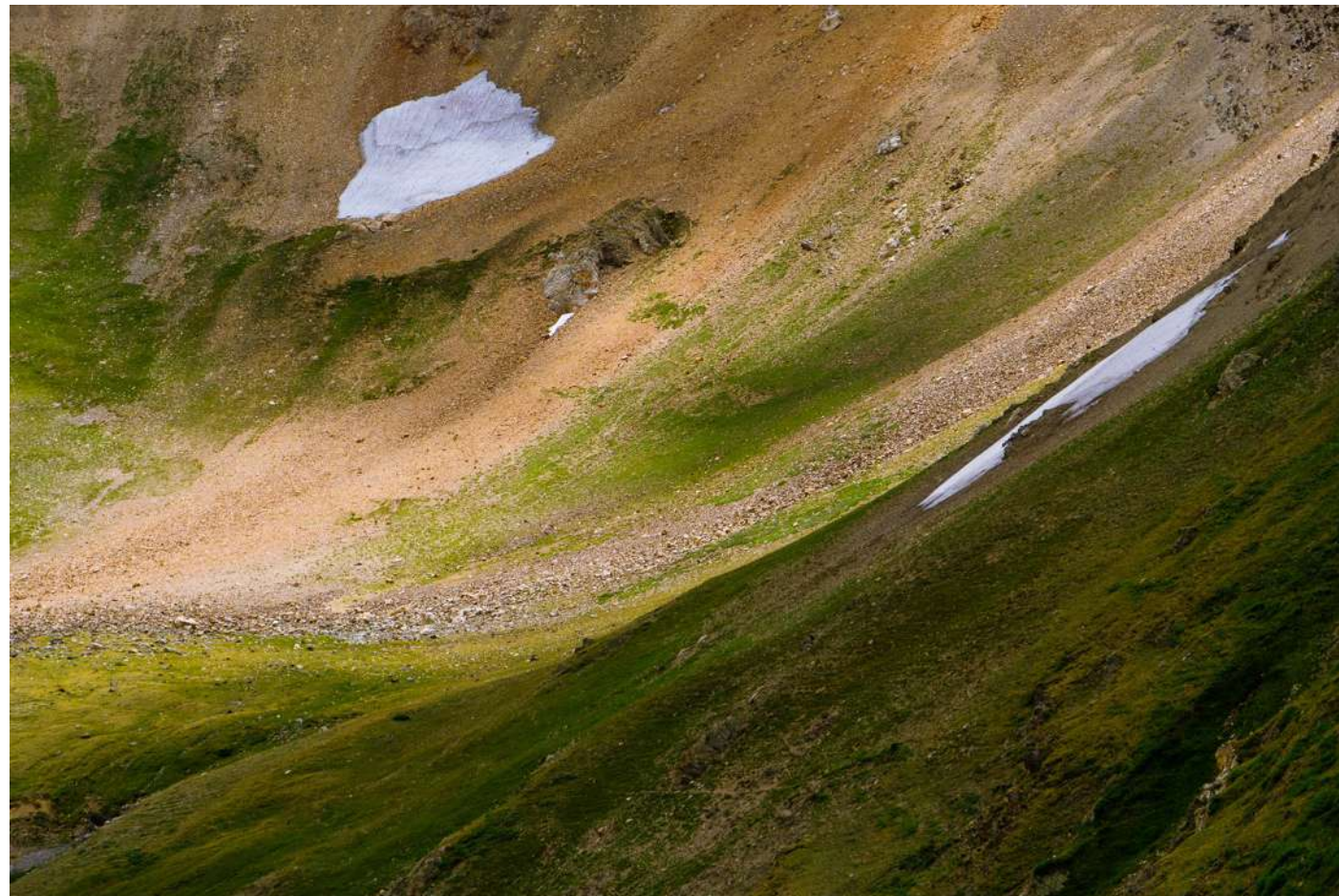
students, "seeing" is often more mental than physical, and being open to the moment is where true creativity comes from.

Focusing on how I can grow today, and not worrying about past failures or regrets is another benefit.

### **Canceling my cable**

**TV** service has provided many extra hours a week that I use for study, reading and learning new skills, and working in my studio, all things that keep me motivated creatively. Sure we still watch television, but that content comes from internet services such as **NetFlix**, and DVDs where we control when we watch. Most importantly, I have more time to spend with my family , read more books,

and get out in nature, which is so key to a balanced life in general. And best of all, I feel I'm making better use of my time on day to day basis.



*Tundra, Rocky Mtn National Park - Panasonic GH2 f/6.3 @1/1000 sec, ISO 160, 70mm*



**The study of painting**, and specifically landscape painting by the **Hudson River School** has been extremely enjoyable and a rich creative leaning experience for me. A recent visit to the **National Art Gallery** in Washington DC to see spectacular masterpieces up close by **Thomas Cole** and **Frederic Church** left me in complete awe. The mastery of light and shadow, texture, and perspective by these 19th century artists reminded me of how much I need to continue to learn and grow as a photographer. Studying other mediums is a practice I recommend highly as you develop, and nothing has improved my photography more than the study of painting. There is always something to learn from other visual art forms, and often the seed of motivation and inspiration will come from these experiences.

I hope you can use some of these ideas to help you overcome those times when nothing seems to be working for you. I know the feelings all too well. With the right attitude and mindset, they can become pathways to search for and find those sparks which can turn into a flood of great ideas.

On the following pages, explore some of the greatest masterpieces from the **Hudson River School** of painters. They celebrated the awe and beauty of nature through masterful use of light, detail and allegory to convey how they felt about the landscape.

There is much to learn about composition, mood, and artistry from the study of these paintings, and all nature and landscape photographers should add them to their resource of knowledge.





**Merced River, Yosemite Valley - Albert Bierstadt**

*Light is the main character of this painting, and its use conveys a deep sense of depth and dimension.*





### **In The Woods - Asher B Durand**

*Intimate, introspective, yet positive and uplifting are words to come to mind as enjoy this classic woods setting.*





## **The Oxbow - Thomas Cole**

*Note the juxtaposition of dark, moody, and wild on the left and domesticated and bright on the right. Allegory at its best.*

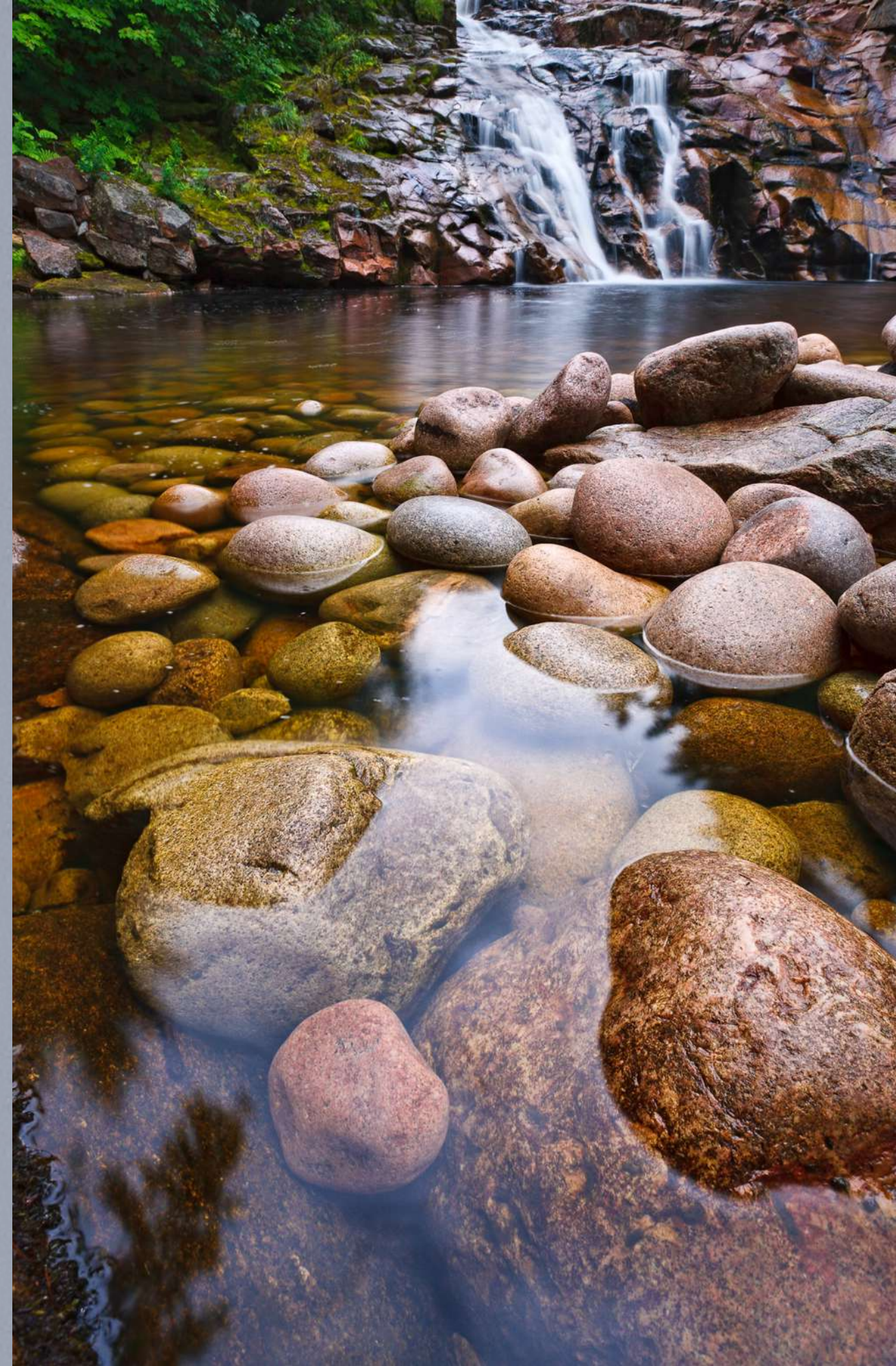


## CHAPTER 2

# The Making Of

***“They are able who think they are able”***

Virgil (Roman Poet)





## River of Ice, New York

The place where I made “River of Ice” is very close to my home in the Hudson Valley. I am very inspired by painting, and specifically the **Hudson River School** of painters who celebrated nature over 150 years ago. The way in which they were able to use **allegory** and **symbolism** in their work is something I try to learn from each time I make an image.

Blocks of ice on the Hudson River are nothing unusual for anyone who lives in the area, so the challenge for me is how to capture something that goes beyond the ordinary and inspires someone to see winter differently, even if just for a moment.

Anyone who has been very cold knows how that first ray of light at sunrise feels on their face, and what it does to their mood and spirit, and that's what I wanted to convey in this image. When I first saw the ice, I was attracted to the strong shapes and how I might be able to use them as a strong foreground element. However, there really wasn't anything in the background that appealed to me, and so I thought the image might not be strong enough.

But I figured I would give it a try, so I setup my **Canon 1DS Mk III** with a **Zeiss 21mm** prime lens, and my usual settings: **ISO 100, f/**

**16** (to keep the image sharp from about 18" in front of the lens to infinity), and a low perspective close to the ground to emphasize the size of the ice. Wide angle lenses expand the landscape and create a greater sense of depth, which I figured would help with this particular scene. As I made a few images, I was not exactly inspired by my attempts, but suddenly the sun started to appear above the horizon. I wasn't exactly sure where the light would shine, so I waited a few moments to see what would happen.

Once the light became strong enough, the scene was totally transformed in front of me, and I realized I had a great opportunity to make a really special image. The backlighting really brought the blocks of ice to life in a way that was totally unexpected, so I adjusted my approach and carefully positioned and repositioned my tripod in order to get the light to “flow” from left to right, down from the sun and through the pieces of ice, finally resting on the last piece in the lower right.

This was different for me since I usually start from foreground to background, but in this case, it was reverse. I think this pushed me to “read” the elements differently, and pay more attention to the overall composition as a whole. At the last moment I thought about creating a star burst effect, so decreased my aperture to **f/18** and tried another exposure.

That's the one that I chose as a keeper.





River of Ice, Hudson River, New York - Canon 1DS Mk III, 21mm, 1/40 sec @ f/18, ISO 200

*Strong backlighting is the key to creating a strong visual sense of rhythm, and telling a story about winter on the Hudson River.*



## Mt Beacon Sunset, New York

**Mt Beacon** is the northern most peak of the **Hudson Highlands**, a part of the Appalachian Mtn range that crosses the Hudson River about 50 miles north of NYC. This creates a very dramatic and unique landscape, and combined with the history and culture of the area, provides great opportunities for landscape photography.

I happen to live at the foot of Mt Beacon, so it is literally in my back yard. I'm a big believer in familiarity when it comes to landscape photography, the idea that you need to be intimately familiar and passionate about your subject in order to discover those rare moments of light and mood that are so elusive. In essence the work becomes less about the actual location, and more about the mood and feel I want to capture and convey. I'm often reminded of a quote I often repeat to my students- "the true journey of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having fresh eyes" by Marcel Proust.

While I do enjoy traveling and exploring new landscapes, I gain the most gratification when I can capture something new and unique in my most visited locations. Difficult? Extremely, but worth it for me in the long run, both creatively and commercially.

"**Mt Beacon Sunset**" was made on a rather dramatic summer evening while hiking to the summit of Mt Beacon with my wife. The views are amazing, and you can actually see NYC on clear day even though you're almost 60 miles away. While the normal temptation is to look out over the Hudson River, I've learned over the years to **look in all directions** when you're out in nature. On a glance away from the Hudson, I noticed this amazing cloud formation highlighted with spectacular light. I had just enough time to expose 2 frames, and then as so often happens, it was gone.

Serendipity was on my side for sure, but as they say the harder you work, the luckier you get. I've been up there hundreds of times and never experienced that particular moment. When it did happen, it felt really special, like a gift from nature, and when you're inspired that way the camera just becomes an extension of your vision. That takes practice and lots of failure—something I'm very familiar with!

Ultimately nature inspires me to feel gratitude for the magic it creates, and sharing that is really a passion that exceeds all others. I want others to appreciate what truly extraordinary moments happen around us each day, and how if we just stop and look it can have a positive effect on our lives.





Mt Beacon Sunset, New York

*Canon 1DS Mk III, 17mm, 1/50 sec @ f/11, ISO 400*



## Ingonish Harbor, Nova Scotia

**Visual balance** is an important part of creating images with simplicity and clarity. By clarity I don't mean "in focus" but rather a clear intention or idea. This comes about through careful composition and use of light. "**Ingonish Harbor**" is an image that I scouted days before I actually made it, and I immediately formed a mental picture of what I wanted to capture.

On a photo trip in **Cape Breton Island** a few years ago, I had to drive past the shallow end of this harbor daily, and I couldn't help but notice the incredible detail and color of the grasses there. The water was so shallow I was able to walk out 15 to 20 feet in knee deep water - great for really getting into the scene (and cooling off the tired feet)! I made a few reference shots (it was mid-day), and took note of where the light would be in morning and evening. Because the harbor faces east, I decided I would re-visit during the evening hours initially and see how things looked and felt.

On my return a day later, I realized I made my first mistake. I had failed to take into account the changing of the tides which are quite dramatic in this part of the world, and most of the grasses had disappeared underwater. The light was amazing...but not the

composition - **Strike 1**. With 5 days left in my trip, I would need to return when the tides were in sync with sunset, and that would only happen once more during my stay. But there was a sunrise opportunity during low tide, so I planned to come back two days later.

Upon arriving at sunrise on my 2nd attempt (5:10am), the sky was very overcast and there was little to no light for making a compelling image. **Strike 2**. At this point I wasn't frustrated but was starting to wonder if I might have to leave this location for a future visit or give another location more priority. But holding to my instincts, I decided to give it one last try during sunset and low tide.

On my final and 3rd attempt, conditions seemed very favorable, but there was some wind -not good for foreground grass. Also the water wasn't as shallow as I would have liked (tides are not always the same), but I still managed to get out about 10' from shore, and setup my tripod and camera - **Canon 1DS Mk III, 24-105mm lens, ISO 100, and a 2 stop graduated ND filter**. This particular type of image is very fluid and improvisational since I was working with both static objects (grasses, water, mountains) and the ever changing shadows, colors, and clouds. In other words, ***many things are happening that I need to stay aware of if I'm going to be successful.***

There are 3 major elements to this image: **the foreground grasses, the middle mountains, and the broad painterly sky** with



beautiful clouds. As I waited and the light fell below the horizon, the colors became softer and more muted, and the lower contrast gave more depth to the foreground grasses. I imagined this image to be very painterly with subdued colors, and as I adjusted and re-adjusted my composition, the soft light created the effect I wanted.

I decided not to go super wide, but instead settled in around **40mm** in order to remove as many distractions as possible and simplify the image. As the light fell more and more, I found the leading lines I wanted both bottom right and left, together with the blue tones that would complement the green in the foreground - the way in which to get a viewer out of the detail rich grass and into the expanse of the color and shapes of the sky.

I made about 8 to 10 images, then the color was gone. I felt good about it, and it was a really nice evening to be out, but I wasn't really sure about the success of the shoot.

A few days later when I got a chance to really evaluate the images back home and make a few prints, I knew I had what I wanted - detail, color, balance, and the feeling of summer in **Cape Breton Island**



Original scouting shot



Unsuccessful attempt





Ingonish Harbor, Nova Scotia

*Canon 1DS Mk III, 40mm, 1/6 sec @ f/10, ISO 200*



# Resources

***“Education is not preparation  
for life; education is life itself.”***

John Dewey





## Further Reading

## Websites and Blogs

[Luminous Landscape](#)

[Digital Photography School](#)

[Photofocus](#)

[The Digital Picture](#)

[Lightroom Solutions](#)

[Landscape Photography Magazine](#)

[Photograph America](#)

## Fine Art Paper

[Canson Infinity](#)

## Recommended Books

[Mastering Landscape Photography](#) - Alain Briot

[Waiting For The Light](#) - David Noton

[Mastery](#) - George Leonard

[Landscape Beyond](#) - David Ward

[Inner Game of Outdoor Photography](#) - Galen Rowell

[World's Top Photographers: Landscape](#) - Terry Hope

[Creative Outdoor & Nature Photography](#) - Brenda Tharp

[Mountain Light](#) - Galen Rowell

[The Art of Photography](#) - Bruce Barnbaum

[Visual Poetry](#) - Chris Orwig

[Examples; The Making of 40 Photographs](#) - Ansel Adams

## Hudson River School of Painters

[Thomas Cole](#)

[Albert Bierstadt](#)

[Frederic Church / Olana](#)



# Join us for a photography adventure



Photography is the language of light, color, shape, texture, and emotion. Your ability to learn and use this language effectively is the basis of how I approach each Beyond the Lens workshop.

Any camera today can make perfect pictures, but only by seeing photographically can you convey an emotion, express your style, and create images that rise above the mere “snapshot”. If you are serious about your photographic potential, then our workshops are designed to provide you with the ideas, concepts, and personal attention that can dramatically improve your photography.

Join me as we travel to **Acadia NP**, **Arches NP**, **Great Smoky Mountains**, **Rocky Mtn NP**, and many other fantastic locations.



Please visit the website for availability, dates, fees, and free resources.  
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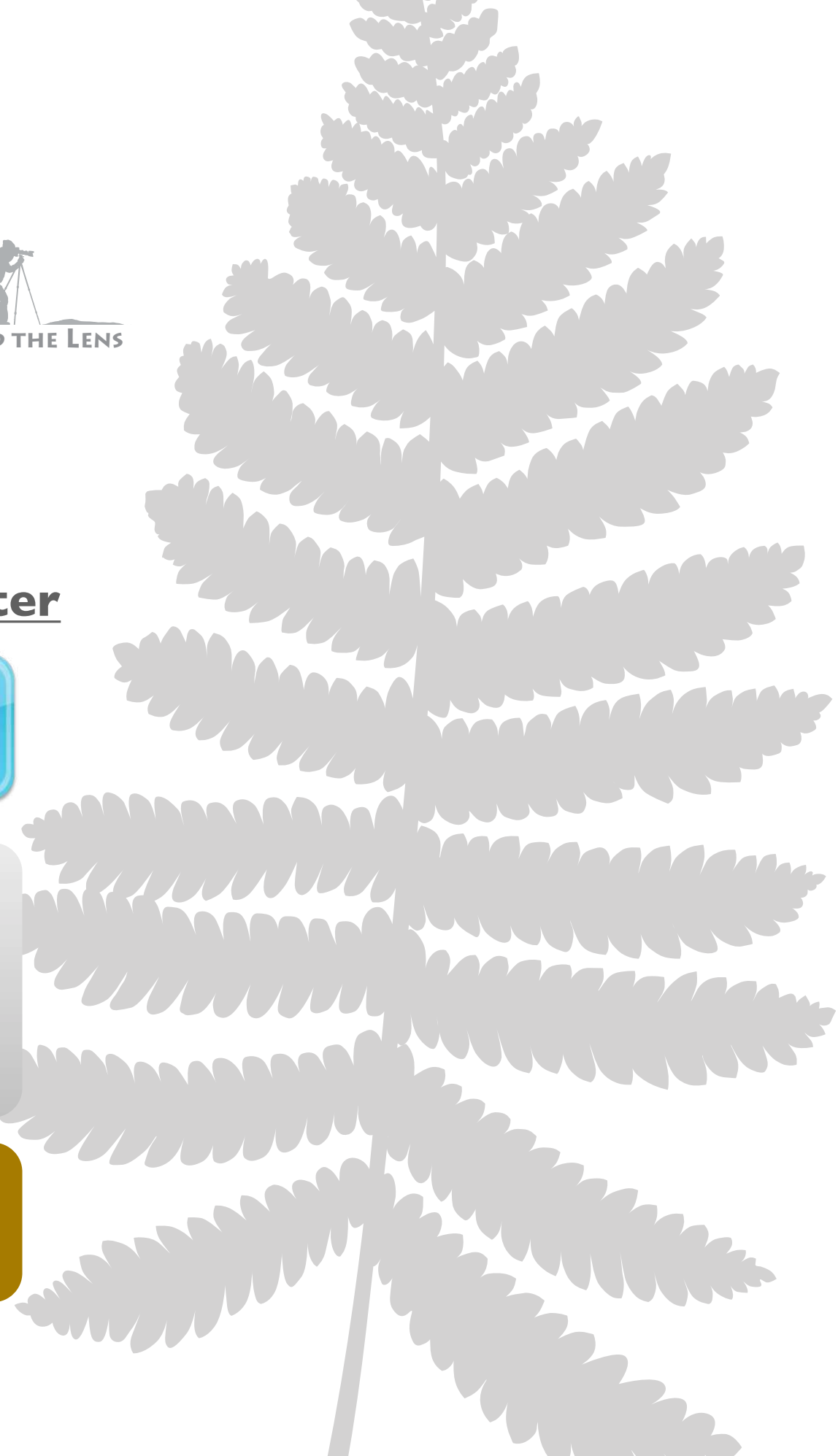
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