



BY NEIL
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URBAN EXPLORATION PHOTOGRAPHY



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the help and acceptance from my fellow explorers none of this would be possible. Thanks to everyone who took the time to answer my stupid emails, respond to my posts on forums, offer advice, or explore with me.

A special shout out goes to [Tomms](#), [Stinky Tofu](#), [JenT](#), [Zen](#), [Hi-Lite](#), [Jono](#), and [Detroit Liger](#); they keep me motivated and inspired. Thank you.

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1. WHO I AM

My name is [Neil Ta](#). I'm a professional photographer based out of Toronto, Canada. Truth be told, I've been a photographer much longer than I've been an urban explorer. I started chronicling my everyday life on the '[I am Bidong](#)' blog in March 2009, but it wasn't until a year later when I found my true calling.



After stumbling upon the Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre's [Ruins of Detroit](#) images, I was completely fascinated. I did a lot of research on abandoned buildings and quickly discovered there was an entire underground, almost secret society of people across the world who call themselves urban explorers. I also realized that I didn't have to go to Detroit to capture images of derelict buildings; Toronto had its fair share for me to discover.



My first "explore" was in March of 2010 at the Kodak #9 building in Toronto. Since then, I've been to around 100 locations from Detroit to Cambodia to Australia. I am by no means an expert on urban exploration and do not claim to be the best urbex photographer out there. I simply

want to share my experiences thus far in this amazingly beautiful art form.

Not everything I am about to say should be taken seriously by anyone under any circumstance whatsoever. These words are simply my own thoughts and opinions on this activity and I, in no way, recommend or endorse urbex for anyone. Should you choose to explore, it will be completely at your own will and risk.



Note: if I mention any product, website, or people in this free eBook, please know that none of the parties have compensated me in any way.

2. DEFINING URBAN EXPLORATION

There really is no real agreed upon definition of urban exploration. I define it as the act of accessing locations that are typically restricted to the general public. It's also known as UE or



urbex in some circles, but is often mistaken as simply the discovery of “urban decay” or “abandonment” properties. However, the broader definition also includes the exploration of rooftops, drains, sewers, construction sites, or any other location that may have restricted access. It stems from a curiosity of what's behind closed doors.

Urban exploration and photography are mutually exclusive activities, though most explorers have cameras on hand to capture their adventures. This guide will focus on both the exploring and photography sides of the equation.

3. WHO WE ARE



Most explorers are NOT criminals. We have a great deal of respect for each location we visit. We often do a lot of research on the historical significance and role the location once played in the community. We don't spray paint graffiti, we don't steal, and we don't break down doors, or smash through windows to gain entry. We're there to take pictures. We "take only pictures and leave only footprints". It would be naive of me to say that all explorers are the same and abide by these loose rules of conduct. The reality is, some explorers take things and vandalize. Most choose not to.



My personal belief is that you should leave a location exactly the way you saw it. It not only is the right thing to do, it also

helps preserve that location for other explorers as well. I was exploring a beautiful abandoned church in Toronto one day with a fellow explorer. To my surprise he had brought a paint can

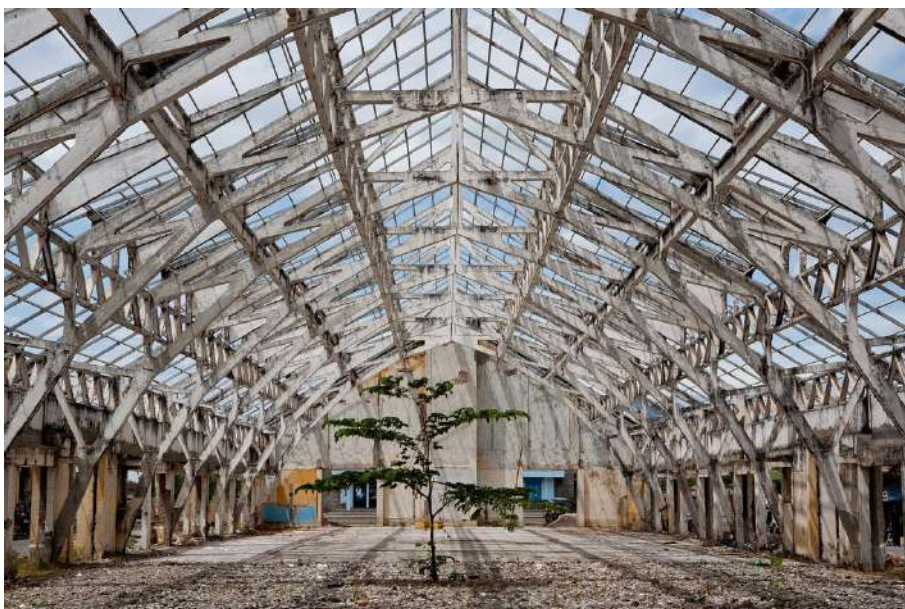
with him. You know what he did next? He covered up one vandal's graffiti tag that they left on the church walls. In some cases like this, we're sort of like modern day preservation heroes (ok, maybe that's a stretch).

4. WHY WE DO IT

For me, my love of urbex stems from my love of photography. I found images of decaying and neglected buildings beautiful, haunting, and aesthetically pleasing. They were unique, *cool*. But as I explored more places and learned more about this subculture, I realized that I was developing a better balance of exploring vs. photographing. I could have a really good time exploring and come out with mediocre images and vice versa. I accepted and embraced it.

For other explorers, it is simply about filling the need to know what's actually there. I've explored with people who don't even bring cameras or simply have camera phones. For them, it is the curiosity that drives them – not the photography.

Would I still explore if I didn't have a camera with me? When I first started urbex, the answer would unequivocally be “no”. Now I reckon there are many locations I would explore even without a camera to document it. This is an important realization. Now you need to ask yourself – why do you want to explore?



As I admitted, I explore mainly because I love the look and grittiness of this photography genre. I feel as though I am documenting parts of our history. Through images of abandoned buildings, I can see their celebrated past as well as the potential for repurposing these properties. On active sites, I realize that the views I am fortunate enough to see are both rare and often temporary. In this sense, I get to document properties of historical significance to the community as well as active ones that very few eyes will ever see.

5. LEGALITIES & DISCLAIMER

By writing this free guide, I am in no way recommending urban exploration through illegal means to anyone. Should you choose to try urbex in this form, I would hope that you do it with the utmost amount of respect for the properties and people you encounter. I will not be held responsible for people getting ticketed, arrested, or falling to their deaths whilst taking unnecessary risks in places they shouldn't be in the first place. There are at least two known deaths in the Toronto area directly linked to urban exploring, and I know of another case in Russia where someone had died while rooftopping. Though this is a great activity to be part of, you should be aware that the risks are VERY real.

Both abandoned buildings and active ones pose immediate and long term health risks (see Safety First section below) up to and including death.

Furthermore, the long term health effects of people recreationally exploring asbestos-filled buildings have not yet been analyzed. Unfortunately, not everyone takes the proper precautions while exploring. It would not surprise me if, in the future, the incidences of lung cancer amongst urban explorers were exceptionally high.



So as you've probably assumed, most explores are done without permission from the property owners. Some are, but far too few of them. Remember that laws on trespassing vary from place-to-place. It is best to become an expert on these matters before you venture off exploring. At minimum, know the legal risks you are taking – as well as the consequences if you are caught. You may be asked to leave a property, be warned, ticketed, arrested, or worse if you are caught (can you say “breach of national security”?). At the end of the day, you will need to decide if the risks are worth it.



Though rare, I have heard instances of excessive police force, use of SWAT teams, state police, etc. on urban explorers. Many explorers have had to shell out thousands of dollars in legal fees to drop their criminal charges down to a trespassing misdemeanour. You can see how this could become a very expensive hobby. If your professional career requires you

to have a clean record, you may opt for another hobby if you're not accepting of this risk.

6. RESOURCES



The first question a beginner getting into UE will inevitably be: “how did you get in there?” Well, there’s a number of online forums relating to urban exploration that can help you answer that and more; the main one being [Urban Exploration Resource](#). This is a good starting point if you want to get a feel of what it’s all about. It will allow you to browse through the

beginner’s forum, organize or meet up with explorers in your area, and to research some locations. The bulk of locations are for “full members only”, a designation given to you by your peers once you’ve shown enough *street cred*. This designation can also be revoked for random acts of idiocy...like writing a free do-it-yourself book on urbex (har har har). Your area may very likely have its own local websites relating to urban exploration too.

[Flickr](#) is another good resource for researching potential urbex locations. If you type in a search for your city followed by “urban exploration”, “urban decay”, or “urbex” as keywords, you’re bound to find some recent images from locations in your area. Newspapers can also offer hints on locations being demolished, renovated, or preserved.



Before I decided to venture off to do my first explore, I spent about a week researching urbex websites all over the internet. They are a great source of information, and the forums are generally friendly to beginners. Here are some other urbex resources and inspiration you may find useful.



[UER.ca](#) – Urban Exploration Resource is perhaps the most useful and comprehensive site for explorers in Canada, possibly the world.

[Infiltration](#) – one of the most historically significant sites by the late great Ninjalicious. It includes a geographic map (see [Worldwide Links](#)) with links to local UE websites across the

globe.

[No Promise of Safety](#) – one of the dopest rooftoppers/explorers out there right now. His photos are jaw dropping. Absolutely fearless.

[Blursurfing](#) – famed photographer, Thomas Hawk, called Tom Ryaboi of Blursurfing the “King of Rooftops”.

[Cave Clan](#) – one of the more well-known underground outfits from Australia.

[Detroit Urbex](#) – everything you ever wanted to know about urbex in Detroit. His Facebook



offers a photo a day from Detroit (or elsewhere in America).

[Section Six](#) – Toronto-based urbexer also known as Hi-Lite or Squirrel Brand, formerly of Derelict Dream. He's an urbex Jack of all trades.

[I am Bidong](#) – my daily blog. Not always urbex or rooftops, but pretty damned fine photos on the daily.

7. SAFETY FIRST



Safety should really be the first consideration when you are contemplating accessing a location. Here is a list of some hazards and some of my personal commentary regarding each. For more information, consult your local Google page. This list is not comprehensive and should not be considered as such.

Asbestos – one of the most worrisome hazards for urbexers. They're generally found in older buildings used as insulation on pipes (other times there's asbestos tiles and even fibres fused into things like concrete bricks). Sometimes they're marked, other times they are not. If exploring buildings where asbestos is present make sure you're wearing protection in the form of a respirator equipped with the proper filters (or else they won't filter anything). Do not disrupt the asbestos – that throws tiny fibres in the air that is what's most harmful.

Lead paint – is harmful in dust form when ingested. Don't eat peeling paint. I would try not to disrupt it either.

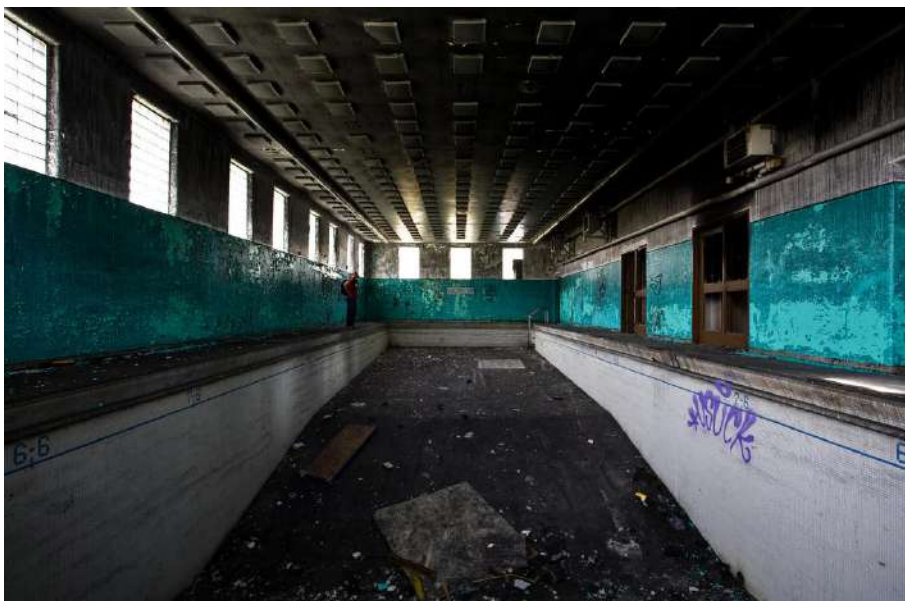
Radiation – if you're going on an epic journey to a place like Chernobyl you'll be equipped with Geiger counters that read radiation levels. There are other radiation readers that attach to your shoe that I am told are quite affordable and accurate.



Unsafe flooring – this can be caused by fire damage, weakened concrete, or even nature. When in doubt, don't step over something that looks unstable. Always be on the lookout for holes in the floor. If you absolutely must cross an area that appears unsafe, I would send your smallest friend to act as the guinea pig; just don't be the smallest one there.

Mould or bird poop – these are two items that can cause an immediate health reaction. Just try to stay away from these things. The good news is that they're both very simple to spot.

Enterprising criminals – criminals know damned well that rich suburban kids venture into abandoned buildings for shits and giggles. There have been instances of people being robbed of all their expensive camera gear. The solutions are a) travel in numbers and b) get insurance. It isn't worth getting hurt or killed to be a hero.



Flash flooding – this is a drainer's worst nightmare. The solution is to not venture into drains or sewers when there's a chance of rain. It also helps to know the warning signs that often lead to a flash flood. Better yet, don't go into sewers at all – they're shitty (best pun ever).

Fall hazards – this is more of an issue when exploring rooftops or construction sites, but can be present in other buildings as well. The logical thing here to prevent falls is to wear a harness. It's a long and painful way to

the bottom. The incidences of falling are rare, but the consequences are grave. Another tip, don't do [this](#).

8. REQUIRED GEAR

In theory, you don't need anything when you explore. I wouldn't recommend this practice, but it is possible. I generally carry with me:

A. Camera & Accessories

This is a delicate balancing act. You want to carry as much stuff to capture the images you will enjoy, but you don't want to be burdened with having too much stuff. In this case, I recommend going as light as possible. Bring one camera and one or two lenses (preferably a wide angle). Other accessories you may want to consider are: remote triggers for long exposures, extra batteries for long days (or if you use live view), and a flash to light dark spaces.

B. Tripod

You'll be shooting in places with crappy lighting. Unless you have really expensive fast lenses or like shooting at extremely high ISO settings...a tripod is a must.

C. Respirator with P100 filters

Almost every abandoned building you encounter will

have some asbestos in it. Turns out they used this stuff for everything before they found out it was high carcinogenic (whoops!). They are most commonly found as insulation (around pipes especially) but can be found in tiles, bricks, etc. A respirator will filter 99% or more of certain airborne contaminants, including asbestos. I always wear one because I look good in pink.



D. Flashlight

A flashlight is a necessary accessory because you definitely want to at least be able to see the hobo running at you with that crack needle. Remember that if the flashlight is on all the time, it makes you not-so-camouflaged.



E. Clothing

There is no real guideline for the types of clothing to wear while exploring. Just be mindful of where you are going and dress appropriately. Draining will require different clothing than rooftopping. You probably don't want to wear nice clothes exploring as they are prone to getting dirty, stained, or ripped. Keep in mind that the temperature inside drains and on rooftops tends to be considerably colder than the outside ground level.

F. Wet wipes

There's nothing like a moist toilette to clean your hands of crud during/after you've explored. In the summer heat, they offer some relief when used in the facial region.



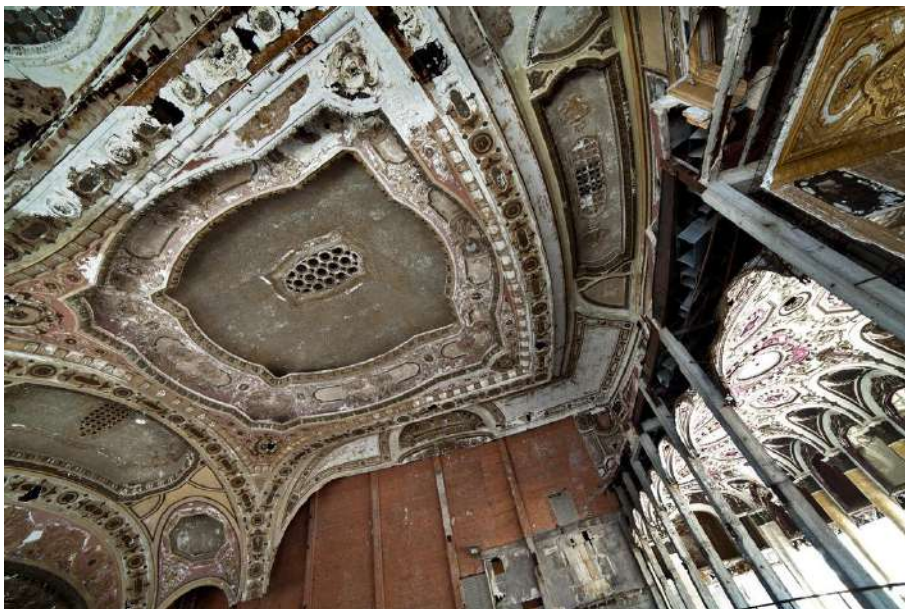
Water & Food

Water is a must-have for all explores, even if you weren't planning on going for a long excursion. These things have a way of dragging out for hours longer than anticipated. It is a good idea to bring a power bar or something to keep you energized on long explores.

As you can see, I don't pack anything that isn't absolutely necessary to complete the explore safely and successfully. You can opt to carry additional items like first aid kits, rubber boots or hip waders (for drains/sewers), a few \$1 bills or smokes to keep homeless people from bothering you, camping equipment (for overnight explores, etc.).

9. ACCESSING LOCATIONS

During the research portion of your introduction to urban exploration, you probably stumbled upon tips and tricks to access locations. You've also likely passed by locations in your area and



noticed ways to get into these buildings (like lack of doors). For the purpose of stating what is the obvious, I will focus more on alternative methods of accessing locations.

Contacting Property

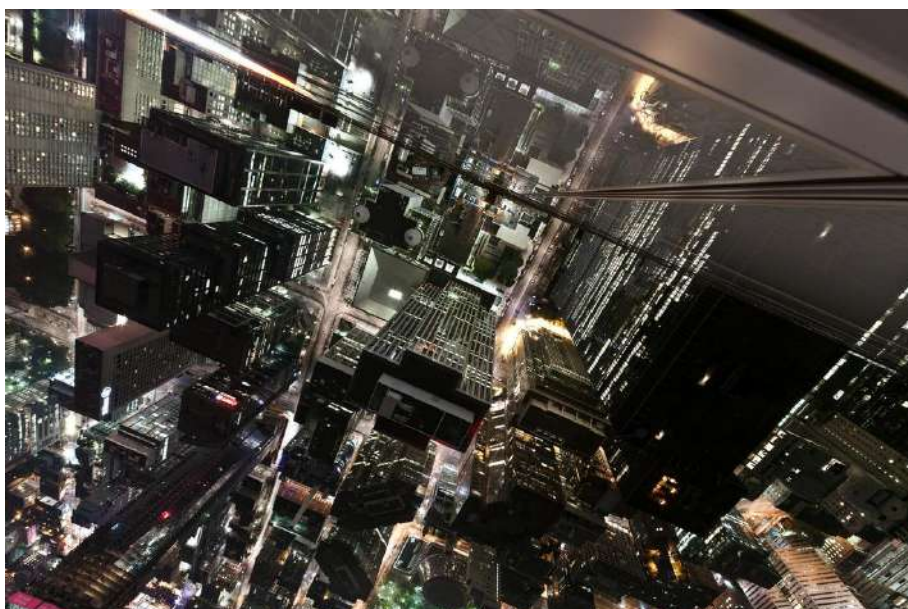
Management – with a little bit of research and some perseverance, you can find the property owners or management to ask for access. This doesn't work all the time, but it has and can work. The idea is to pitch them on an idea like working on a photography project for school or an exhibition and to communicate the benefits to them for allowing you access. I know of some people who've been to very



inaccessible locations using this method.

Attend Open-House Events – in my province (Ontario), many municipalities do a one or two-day open house for locations generally closed off to the public. I was in Sydney, Australia earlier this year and my visit happened to coincide with an open-door event for a decommissioned generating station! Keep your eyes open for events like this; they're not only good for seeing what's behind closed doors, but also gives you a better sense of its historical importance that it played in the community since the tours are often guided.

Hire a Helicopter – want the thrill of photographing your city from great heights but don't have any idea how to get high? Arguably, the photos taken aerially from a helicopter or small airplane wouldn't be that far off the mark from those taken from rooftops or construction sites. This is a risk-free way of getting the shots...in daylight! You can also find rooftop restaurants, bars, and patios that allow public access.



Volunteer for Editorial Work – one popular rooftop photographer from New York accesses his locations through contacts with a magazine. The magazine helps him find the locations to shoot from and he volunteers his expertise as a photographer in return. He delivers a photo or two for the magazine but manages all rights



to his photos...so he is free to sell them on his own will.

10. PLANNING AN EXPLORE



Once you've done sufficient research on locations you want to access (and have evaluated the risks associated with exploring), it is time to plan a trip. My first explore was with my friend [Ronnie](#). It was both of our inaugural journeys into the urbex world at one of the most explorer-friendly locations in Toronto. Though it was our maiden voyage, we were both experienced photographers and had done a lot of research in preparation of this trip.



I would recommend connecting with someone in your local community and ask if they would like some company on their next explore. You can find these people through local urbex forums or by messaging them on Flickr. The advantage of exploring with an experienced

urbexer is that they often know more about the specific dangers a location has as well as history of the property. I've been lucky enough to connect with and make friends with people who share this passion all over the world.

In places like Detroit, it is almost essential to explore with locals. They know the accessibility of locations and are better at blending in. There have been cases of urban decay tourists being relieved of all their gear – so exploring with locals give you better cover.

11. CAMERAS & SETTINGS

What urban exploring has taught me about photography has been invaluable. In most situations you will be dealing with difficult lighting conditions with a lot of dynamic range within each room (see bright light shining through windows). Perhaps it is this reason why so many urbexers rely on the HDR crutch. By this I mean that many explorers bracket their



exposures and fire indiscriminately, relying not on exposing or composing correctly because they're saved by the 3, 5, or 7! exposures they've taken. This is a lazy man's way of photographing and I choose not to partake in this game. So to prevent the HDR crutch, you



can use these tips to overcome these difficult lighting situations. In almost all cases, you will need a tripod if you want to take good pictures in dark places. It's science.

Using Live View – live view, for those of us lucky enough to have it, is a great tool to really nail down your focus points. Because

lighting is generally quite bad in many of the locations we visit, the autofocus tends to fail or is inaccurate. By using live view and manually focusing to adjust the desired focus points, everyone wins. Note: live view sucks up a lot of battery.

F/8 and Forget It – you don't want to be fiddling around with your aperture all the time, so just set your ISO to 100 or 200 and the f-stop to F/8 (perhaps F/11 on a full frame) and don't worry about it. Your images should have a nice sharpness at those apertures no matter what you're shooting.



Wide Angles – often times, you will find yourself in small spaces or rooms that are not friendly to longer focal length lenses. One favorite tool for urbex photographers is the wide angle lens. I would suggest picking up something in the 10-14mm range on a crop body and 14-17mm on a full frame. One of the most inexpensive lenses I own is a Samyang (aka Rokinon, Bower, etc.) 14mm aspherical lens. Used on a full frame, I get stunningly wide angle images...at low low prices.

The Freehand Approach – you may find yourself at a location that has sufficient light to handhold your pictures without using a tripod. The advantage of using the freehand approach is that you have more flexibility in terms of positioning and angling your shots. The obvious downside is you're likely shooting at a wide aperture and high ISO. Still though, if I am casually taking images (if I know nothing is

portfolio worthy), I will likely freehand it.

12. CHOOSING A TRIPOD

Arguably, one of the most important pieces of equipment you will need is a tripod. Ideally, you want something light, sturdy, cheap, and with all the bells and whistles. Here are some things to consider when choosing a tripod:



Ball vs. Pan-Head – this all comes down to personal preference. Ball-heads offer the ability to position the head quicker, but I find them to be less secure/stable (i.e. tightening the knob into place will slightly shift the position of the head). 3-way pan-heads offer more security and stability when moving the knobs because they all work independently from one another. However, the pan-heads tend to take up far more space (and add weight). After using a pan-head for a couple of years, I switched to a ball-head and will likely never go back.



Leg Releases – do the releases to let out the legs snap or is it a twist? My first Manfrotto had twist releases which drove me absolutely insane. Switching to snaps has made it much quicker

for me to extend and retract the legs of the tripod.

Removable Plate – even inexpensive tripods almost always have removable plates so that the tripod mount can be released with the camera when it is taken off of the tripod. This is a must have feature that some older tripods may not have. Make sure the plate is secured tightly when mounted on the tripod.



Weight – this isn't a huge deal for me, but with a lot of people it can be a deal breaker. Carbon fiber is the clear choice here, but the costs can be outrageously expensive. Don't go for a lightweight plastic; it sucks.

Minimum and Maximum Height – something often overlooked but important nonetheless.

There are instances when you want the tripod to extend quite high (say, if you're exceptionally tall and want to shoot at eye level) or low to the ground as much as possible (for compositional purposes).

Tripod Dexterity – not all tripods can be positioned the same. Sometimes, tripod legs can be moved in certain angles or the centre column can be placed horizontally from the tripod base. Being able to move the tripod in different ways will allow you to anchor securely in many positions.



Tripod Bag – I never knew how important a tripod bag was until I had one. Even if my camera bag has a tripod holder, I still prefer to carry the tripod separately in its bag. I find that mounting it on a camera pack makes the bag exceptionally large and awkward, making it



difficult to walk, climb, jump, etc.

All this being said, I am a huge fan of Vanguard tripods. They offer great value for the money, and most of their tripods come with a carrying bag. I have the [Altapro 263](#) and a [SBH-100 ball-head](#). Absolutely love it for so many reasons.

13. COMPOSITION

Symmetry – perhaps one of the most widely used compositional techniques in urbex photography is symmetry. By keeping things the same on both sides of an image, you get a really nice balanced look. Gymnasiums, swimming pools, and churches are some places that benefit most from keeping things symmetrical.



Use of Light – generally, there's a lot of dynamic range when you shoot in abandoned structures. You get a lot of light coming through windows but the interiors are very dark. This scenario results in either a) overblown windows or b)

darkened/silhouetted interiors. Lazy photographers will go the HDR route (see below) rather than being more creative by using flash to illuminate interiors, using strong silhouettes as an advantage, or by changing composition so that there is less dynamic range in the photograph.



The Human Factor – urbex locations are amazing spots for self-portraits and other images that include people in them. They not only make for impressive [Facebook profile pictures](#), they also often give images a nice sense of scale in large spaces.

too much (I am guilty of this). There is a lot of beauty in little details; peeling paint, leftover documents, blueprints, and other historical records. I challenge all photographers to focus their time on the details and to force themselves to shoot with a longer focal length lens (85mm or above).

Fishing – one increasingly popular lens used in urbex photography is the wide-angle fisheye. The distortion on a fisheye gives certain images a really interesting perspective, especially when you want to exaggerate the size of a space or to create curvature of a horizon. I used this lens so much in the past that it eventually became my crutch.



The only solution I had was to kill it. I've been several months free from fisheye and feel like a changed man...but I do appreciate other people's fisheye images all the same.

Fuck HDR – only in the direst circumstances will I use HDR or exposure blending when I process urban decay images. I will NEVER use HDR for rooftop images. It is easy to spot clown vomit HDR but less so to spot exposure blending. In my opinion, exposure blending looks like images were taken with the sharpest lens on the market and then sharpened further in post processing. Both HDR and exposure blending (for the most part) make my eyes bleed. This being said, the use of HDR and exposure blending is common among my peers. I choose not to do it. And yes, I will judge you. If you can make your HDR image not look like HDR, then you're doing something right (but why even do it in the first place?).



Quest for Unique Angles – there are many locations in the urbex community that are very popular or “epic” as the kids say. Particularly, there have been many buildings in cities like Detroit that have been symbols of urbex. As you can imagine, getting unique images from places that have been “photographed to death” can be a difficult task. When exploring

such locations, my goal is to find at least one unique angle or image that I have not yet seen. If I can succeed in this task, I have done my job.

14. AFTER THE EXPLORE

After exploring, you have a number of options. For me, all of those options include feasting on food and ‘chimping’ (the process of reviewing your shots on camera) the images you’ve just taken.

In Toronto, we partake in a ritual we call **PHO**tography. We will explore some abandoned buildings and then go to a local Vietnamese restaurant (shout out to [Pho Pasteur](#) on Dundas!)



for a bowl of pho (beef noodle soup). For rooftop adventures, the post-explore meal typically consists of [New Ho King](#) – an epic late night, cheap eats greasy Chinese food restaurant in Chinatown.

In Detroit, you can't go wrong with [Slows BBQ](#) (best BBQ anywhere) or a *Coney Dog*.

15. EDITING & POST PROCESSING

When I first starting exploring, I would take 150+ images in one location and post sets of like 40 pictures. Luckily, those days are well behind me. I spend far more time editing images (the act of sorting, flagging, and ranking images) now and releasing only my best. I generally take



about 50 shots per location and am more careful about what I post. I rarely ever post sets containing more than about a dozen shots. Most of the time now, I will release images individually over a longer period of time.

Here are some guidelines you may find helpful when editing and post processing your images:

Define Your Intentions – I guess the first thing you want to do is define your intentions of posting your images. Will they be shown to your friends and family? Used for an exhibition or part of a project? For some locations, you will have a couple of very “iconic” images that can tell a story on their own. Other locations will require a series of photos to tell a more complete story. There’s no right or wrong way of doing it, but I prefer to find locations that can be defined by a handful of images. If you’re posting to wow your friends and family, the standards are probably not as high; they will think you’re pretty amazing no matter what you post.

Wait a Week or More – in theory, you should wait about a week before you go through your images. The reason you would wait a week is that you have an immediate emotional attachment to certain images when they were taken which can cloud your better judgement. I personally never wait a week, but I do go over the images from time to time and recognize some images have been previously overlooked.



How to Narrow 50 Photos Down to Five – so now you have a bunch of images you’ve taken and don’t know how to narrow them down to manageable amount. My editing consists of flagging and rating. I take a look at all images I’ve taken from a location (say there are 50 of them) and I will flag all potential keepers. Assume I’ve flagged 20

of 50 images. I now look at the 20 flagged images and apply a star rating out of 5 to them. Anything rated 4 or 5 have posting-potential to them. There may only be 3 to 5 images out of the original 50 that I've flagged and rated 4 or 5. *Adobe Lightroom* is an invaluable tool for managing your photo workflow. I can't remember life before it.

Post Processing – post processing is the act of actually changing the selected images. The post processing should actually be a short painless process. You want to adjust the colour balance, maybe play with curves, etc. With Adobe Lightroom, you can save your edits as a *Preset* to give your images a similar look and feel. The bulk of your time should be spent editing (see previous point) and not post processing.

16. BIDONG'S FREE ADOBE LIGHTROOM PRESETS

As a special gift to you, I've included a few of my most-used custom Lightroom presets for you at no charge. I tend to process my images with a little warmer feel to them and a lot of contrast. For skyline and rooftop images at night, I am less consistent, but do find myself using the same presets as a guideline over and over again. Have a look at the following samples and download the free presets [here](#). I have included a few others that I did not profile below.

Note: these presets are used to edit RAW CR2 files from a Canon DSLR and will vary depending on your image type and file. Images noted are before (left side) and after (right side). You can click on the right image to view it larger on my Flickr.

Bidong's Chrome Nights – it gives images a much more de-saturated look. With the proper skylines of glass and warm lights, you can transform it to look like chrome.



Bidong's Black and White – I enjoy a lot of contrast in my B&W images. I like my blacks very dark and my whites very bright. I don't mind blown out highlights in my B&W images.



Bidong's Warm Curves – this is best used for images that come out a little bit cold on the colour balance and could use a bit of life in them. You can also use this preset and set the colour balance “colder” if you feel your image is too “warm”.



The reality is I use these three presets more often than not, making adjustments as I see fit. I believe all presets should act as a guideline only, so it is up to you to take these presets and transform them into your own.

17. POSTING ON THE INTERWEBS

So you've completed an explore successfully, edited, and processed your photos. All that's left to do is share them on Flickr, 500px, Facebook, or your blog/website. But hold it! Do you know the consequences of what you're about to post? In many jurisdictions, you may still be liable for your actions taken when accessing the location. For example, in Ontario, the statute of limitations for trespassing is typically six months (this can be extended in certain instances). In theory, you would be "safer" posting these images after the statute of limitations has come

and gone (a very difficult thing to do I realize).

Should you choose to post the images earlier, make sure you're aware of the consequences should the property owner try and pursue charges. You can do your part by not including any information in your posts (remove and not sharing your camera's EXIF information) that may implicate you – making it



difficult for them to attach a date your photo.

18. THE POLITICS OF URBEX

There's a lot of interesting discussion among those in the urbex community. There's no such thing as consensus or agreement on most topics. In fact, most of what I have written could be argued by many other more experienced explorers.



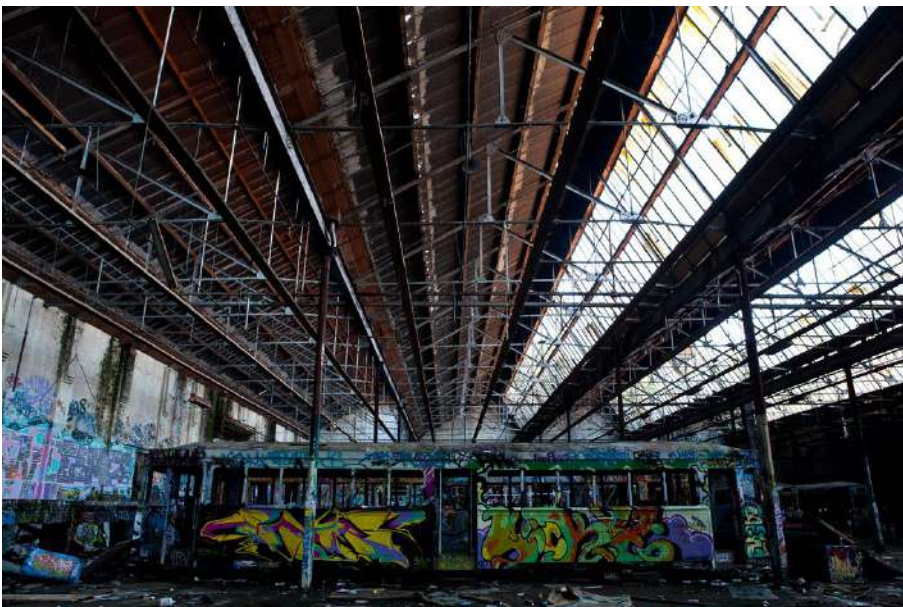
Some interesting topics of discussion include:



Keeping Secrets – you’ve discovered a great new abandoned building that is completely pristine or a rooftop view of your city that no one has accessed. Do you share it with the community or keep these locations to yourself? People are naturally territorial and disclosing your location will give other explorers the green light to “rape and pillage”. It is

common in Toronto for someone to post images from a new location one day then have 20+ people explore it the very next weekend. Not long after, the location becomes inaccessible. As locations become more and more well known, the place deteriorates at a rapid pace. I’ve shared a fair number of locations in my time, but also admit to hoarding other locations for fear that others (including property owners) will discover it.

Theft – some explorers feel that taking small keepsakes of no value is justified. Others are dead set against it. There really is no right or wrong answer to this. Though I have not taken



anything from any of the properties I have explored (a personal preference), one friend of mine took hundreds of pictures that were scattered in the cafeteria floor in a school that was set to be demolished. The pictures would have perished in the demolition otherwise. Keep in mind that should you get caught with a

stolen item, you will be charged with more than just trespassing.

How Far to Go for Entry – in most instances, we can literally walk through opened gates, fences, and doors for access. There are situations that come up where the doors are boarded or locked. Some explorers take the liberty of freeing these entry points for others, while others deem these properties inaccessible until it opens up. The argument here is that without the explorers willing to do the dirty work, there would be no accessible location for anyone. Remember that “freeing” a location will put you in a new section of the criminal code (namely break and enter). I do not recommend this to anyone. There’s more than enough people willing to take the risks that I’m not prepared to make.

Gaining Street Cred – the community where I began my research was UER.ca. At this site, I could research some locations and attend regular monthly meetings. In order to gain the trust of others in the group, you need to prove that you’re not a complete idiot and that you respect a few unwritten rules. In short, you need to gain *street cred*. Rumour has it that if you’re a young (perhaps good-looking) female, your street cred will come much sooner than if you were a middle aged man for example. Gaining this credibility at UER.ca gives you full access to the entire database, something that new explorers cherish.



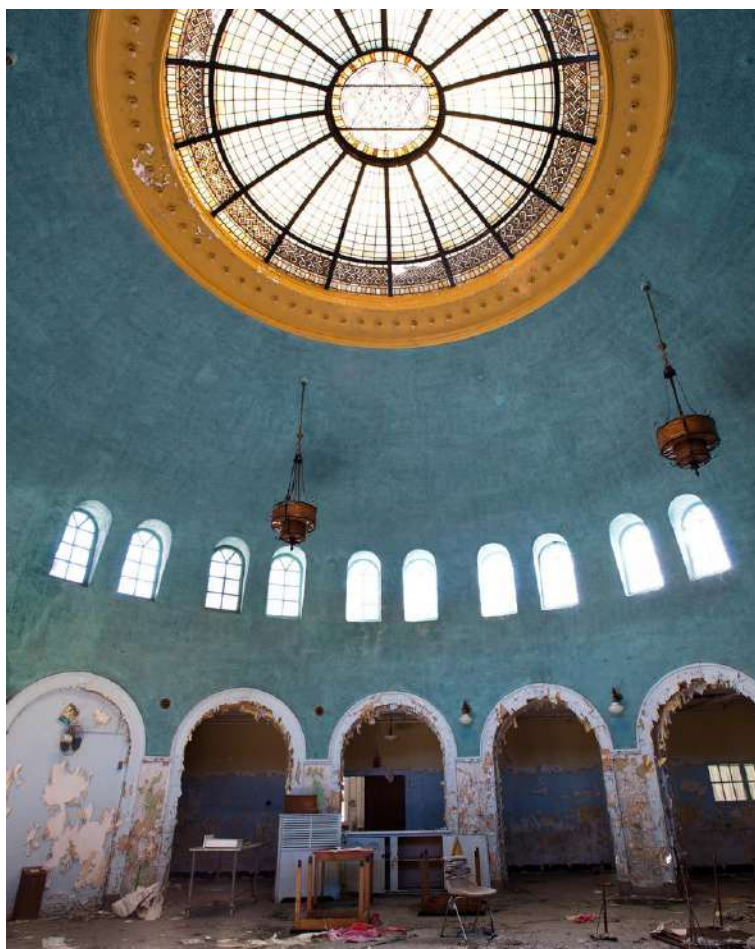
They Hate Graffiti and Street Artists – I don't know too many people involved with urban exploring who actually tolerate graffiti or street artists. For some strange reason, many urbexers have this "holier than thou" attitude towards these people. I personally don't care either way – without these artists, a lot of the locations would look pretty boring; on the other hand, I can do without the Swastikas spray-painted inside churches. The important thing for urbexers to realize is that these artists were urban explorers long before urbex was even invented. Respect.

Exploring Vs. Photographing – one of the more interesting discussions in this community is the idea that there are those who identify themselves as pure explorers vs. those who are exploring photographers. I definitely fall in the latter category and am not the least bit apologetic about it. To me, exploring and photographing the location is about documenting the history/greatness of the location and not about documenting a bunch of explorers frolicking around in places they should be.

19. CONCLUSION

So do you think urbex is for you? This isn't something I can answer! Every person I know who started urban exploring has continued to do so. For me, it is more than a hobby or activity – it is a lifestyle that (for now) I am happy to be part of. It has taught me a great deal of patience and respect for the craft and has made me a more knowledgeable and creative photographer and artist.

When I reflect on the growth I've experienced over the last year and a half both as an explorer and photographer, I find myself in awe at what I've been able to accomplish in such little time. It



boggles my mind that people who I admired at a distance on Flickr are now my peers and in many cases – good friends. To be part of a community where there's such admiration and respect for each other is incredible.

Whether or not urbex is for you isn't important. It's about searching for what inspires you and not giving up until you do.

~Neil Ta, November 2011.



Neil Ta is a Toronto-based photographer.

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