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**Digital
Edition**



VOLUME 12



THE MUST-HAVE COLLECTION FOR ENTHUSIASTS & PROS





Digital Photographer Annual Welcome!

For over 20 years, *Digital Photographer* charted the development of photography through one of the most exciting eras of the medium. As a final farewell, this Annual is a compilation of the very best features from the magazine's last year in print.

This volume is packed with expert advice, practical skills and inspiring interviews. Whether you want to improve your portraits, still life, landscape photography, or editing skills, we've got the tips and tricks to help. Capture the changing seasons and stunning natural phenomena, shoot mesmerising light patterns, and get creative in urban environments. Boost your Photoshop, Lightroom and Affinity skills with our tutorials, and learn how to generate eye-catching image edits *without* relying on AI programs. Thanks to our experts' insight, you'll also learn how to elevate your portraits – whether your subject is a fellow human or a beloved pet!

While the magazine is no more, we hope you have enjoyed being a part of this wonderful community of creatives willing to share their expertise. We hope this edition inspires you to try something new in your own photography.

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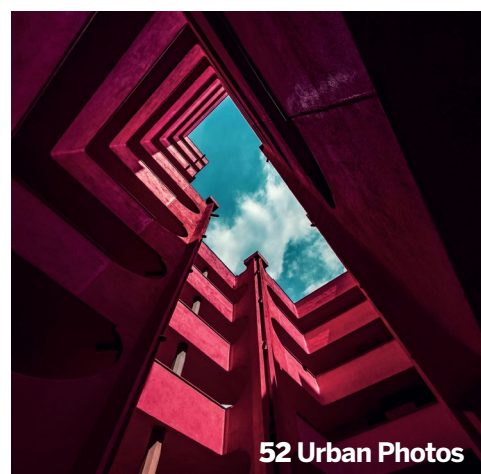
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Pictured
Arizona, July 2021
"Four strikes on one
mountain, during
monsoon season"

STORM CHASER

Paige Vincent on the adrenaline rush, the risks and her passion for shooting in the face of storms

Words by: Kim Bunermann

Mother Nature offers a complex combination of beauty, fascination, drama and danger. As a child growing up in Dallas, Texas, Paige Vincent's first encounters with natural phenomena involved seeking shelter from storms and hurricanes. As an adult, she now chases them to capture the perfect photograph.

Storm-chasing is extremely dangerous, requiring mastery of not only photography but also meteorology knowledge, experience and the willingness to trust your instincts. We spoke to Paige about the empowering aspect of being a female storm-chaser and the various risks and creative challenges she has had to overcome to achieve her goal of capturing awe-inspiring images of powerful natural events.



Pictured
Kansas, May 2022
"Self-portrait on the back end of a storm under mammatus clouds"

All photos © Paige Vincent

Pictured
Badlands, April 2022
"Watching as the storm
directly approaches the
Badlands National Park"



Your shooting environment is quite different from that of most photographers. What preparations do you have to make to ensure your safety?

Most photographers don't go straight towards danger, that's true! Safety is the top priority when storm-chasing. I always start with some thorough research, including understanding the storm's track and the potential hazards. I also monitor weather forecasts and radar updates leading up to a storm, then live-tracking in the field. It's essential to have an emergency plan in place, including having two exit routes at all times, and knowing the safe locations to retreat to if conditions worsen. I always carry a first-aid kit, plenty of water and snacks.

How do you protect your gear – or do you use specialised equipment?

My camera is weather-sealed, which adds an extra element of protection. Nikon does a very good job of creating products that can withstand the elements. For extreme winds and dust, I often keep protective covers on every lens between shots. Being prepared not only protects my gear but also helps me focus on capturing those incredible moments, so I don't miss anything.

As a female storm photographer, have you faced any misconceptions in this traditionally male-occupied genre?

Absolutely! This field is historically male-dominated and that often leads to stereotypes about who belongs in this space. Some might assume that women aren't as capable or not cut out for extreme conditions, which is definitely not true – some of the best storm-chasers I know are women. I think breaking down those misconceptions is important – not just for myself, but for all women in the field. By showing that anyone can excel in storm photography, we can help inspire others to pursue their passions, regardless of gender.

A huge shift happened when Girls Who Chase was founded, which is a group that aims to inspire women who are interested in storm-chasing and provide them with the tools needed to feel confident to do it themselves. It's a fantastic community and a great way to meet fellow women who share the same passions that I do.

Do you feel a sense of responsibility to pave the way for other women interested in this field?

It's really important to support and inspire others, especially in fields where

Paige Vincent



A native of Dallas, Texas, Paige initially pursued a career in graphic design, but discovered her passion for photography during her travels in her mid-20s. While originally accompanying friends as a passenger, she now dedicates her summers to pursuing storms in Arizona. Her striking image showcasing a mothership formation over the Badlands in 2022 (see page 78), earned her the esteemed accolade of Picture of the Year in the Storm Photo of the Year Contest.

📷 @paigevincent
paigevincent.darkroom.com

representation matters. Creating a welcoming space for women and sharing experiences can help pave the way for future chasers. It's all about lifting each other up and encouraging everyone to pursue their passions – and

“Being prepared not only protects my gear but also helps me focus on capturing those incredible moments”



*Pictured
Oklahoma,
June 2023*

*“Sunset mammatus
on the back end of a
storm in Oklahoma”*

“Over my eight years of chasing, there has been a rise in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events”



Pictured
Texas, May 2023
 "Cars drive away
 from a strong
 hailcore in Texas"



Pictured
Arizona, July 2021
 "A clear landing
 point from a bolt in
 Willcox, Arizona"

I definitely want to keep doing that through my work and my story.

We imagine that the setup time for a shoot is very short. How do you manage to capture the phenomena in time?

You're right – setup time can be extremely short during storm photography. Before I even start chasing for the day, I make sure my camera settings are ready to go and I grab a new battery and a new memory card. I like to pick a spot where the storm is likely to form and get there at least 30 minutes to an hour beforehand to look for compositions, fuel up and grab a snack. At the beginning of a chase, you have a little more time to shoot – anywhere from five to 15 minutes, depending on how slow a storm is moving – but as the storm ramps up, that can change to a few seconds! So having your camera ready to go is crucial because sometimes you only have time to shoot from the car.

Can you take us behind the scenes of an unforgettable shoot in a storm?

There is one storm in particular that always sticks with me – and the main thing it taught me was to always listen to my gut instinct. On the 22nd of April 2022, there was a potential for two storms, but the issue was picking which one to chase. One was further away from me in Kansas and the other was north of me in South Dakota.

I went back and forth for a while, but ultimately decided to head north: my first reason was that if I got to see a National Park, that would be a win-win; but my second reason was that sometimes you can get magic from a smaller, more localised storm.



Scan here to
watch Paige
in her Kühl
documentary



Pictured
Colorado, June 2023
"The most photogenic
stovepipe tornado in
south-east Colorado"



Above
Arizona, July 2022
"Running from a dusty haboob as the storm produces a microburst in Arizona"

Left
Colorado, July 2022
"A self-portrait in the red dress as a roll cloud moves through the Colorado plains"

And that's exactly what happened. The storm developed quickly in the afternoon and grew to produce the most beautiful mothership supercell I've seen to date. It had multiple layers in its full form. Combined with the foreground of the Badlands National Park, it made for my favourite shot to date and even won an award that year [see page 78].

Tell us about the red dress...

While travelling to discover new shooting locations, I observed common landscape compositions frequently captured by photographers, and sought to explore a fresh perspective. The idea of incorporating a red dress emerged as a way to introduce a vibrant pop of colour and a sense of scale to my landscape shots, while also infusing an element of fantasy into an otherwise static backdrop. When I decided to combine that with storm-chasing, I realised no one else in the field was doing that and I could really make my shots stand out from the rest. There is not much to be found in terms of the

foreground in the plains – apart from old barns and some livestock – so adding a human element brings a photo to life, especially a flowing red dress. When you combine something beautiful and delicate in the form of something ominous and foreboding, it makes for a really captivating juxtaposition.

You were featured in the Kühl clothing brand series 'The Road Less Traveled'. How was this experience?

This was actually my first experience of working with a brand, and it was so much fun. I got the opportunity to have Kühl shadow me for a week while shooting a monsoon in Arizona – which is primarily lightning, microbursts and haboobs (dust storms). I set out to get them on every storm I could find and we did exactly that!

To have a brand align with my values and document my passion in a way I don't typically get to do for myself was an experience of a lifetime – and I'm forever grateful for that team and the footage they captured.

Paige's kitbag

Here's why Paige packs these items when out chasing storms

"My Nikon Z 6II has been my main camera for three years now. It's able to handle the elements and has exceptional autofocus for quick-moving storms. The dynamic range is unmatched, which is essential for how quickly the light changes under a storm cloud.

"I alternate between three lenses because my position to a storm changes so quickly and I never want to miss a moment. My favourite lens is the 24-70mm because I'm typically trying to get as close to a storm as possible."



With so much first-hand experience of extreme weather, have you observed any differences in phenomena due to climate change since you started?

Over my eight years of storm-chasing, there has been a rise in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events – hurricanes, heatwaves and heavy rainfall. These events seem to be linked to warmer ocean temperatures and changing atmospheric patterns. During these storms, what I'm particularly noticing is larger hail, a higher percentage of lightning and an increased frequency of storms throughout the season.

In what ways do you hope your storm photography will inspire others?

My primary goal with photography is to inspire others to discover and pursue their passions. Until I began chasing and capturing storms, I had no idea how deeply I would come to appreciate this art form. I hope that by sharing my photographs, others will be encouraged to explore what brings them joy.



Paul Wilkinson



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at: masteringportraitphotography.com

All images © Paul Wilkinson

Paul Wilkinson's top 25... PORTRAIT TIPS & TRICKS

Even with so much information out there, taking perfect portraits can be hard work. Pro photographer **Paul Wilkinson** guides us through this huge genre with his pearls of wisdom

The broad range of talents you need for portrait photography makes it incredibly appealing. Part artist, part physicist, part counsellor, part clown: it is indeed multi-faceted.

Every person's face is different, so uniqueness is almost guaranteed each time you create a portrait. However, there are still skills and ideas you can bring to bear when working with

your subject, from getting the best out of natural light to creating tension in the design of the image and knowing when to release the shutter.

In this feature, I've outlined some of the ideas that have worked for me over the years and could very well work for you too. I have broken them down into sections for clarity but, honestly, they are a mishmash of many influences and millions of images. Let's get started!

Softly does it...

Getting the best lighting for portraits isn't always easy, but get out there with your gear and make the most of any conditions

The most readily available soft light source is natural daylight: all you require is an overcast sky. If you are lucky to live in sunnier climes, there are always shady porches and doorways to avoid hard sunlight and capture some simple headshots.

Provided my subject in the doorway can see the sky over my shoulder when they look up to the camera, the light will always be reliable. I know I have it sorted when I can see the sky clearly reflected in their eyes – the sky is a natural softbox, illuminating the face and creating wonderful catchlights. This pose has the advantage that the subject's body drops out of focus, making it all about the face.

If I want to keep the camera at the same eye level as my client, I will look for something a little more architectural for perfect light – usually an outdoor covered porch or a gazebo that funnels the daylight. If I place the subject

further back into the shade, the light source becomes increasingly front-on and less bright. I am still watching for those catchlights in the eyes, but now I have a directional light source. If the walls happen to be dark, this also creates shade around the cheekbones.

Make use of what you have

Frequently, I will stumble across the perfect location where there is perfect light on my subject and some illumination in the background. Underpasses are great for this.

As a result, you can have ideal light on your subject and a beautiful out-of-focus texture in the background, rather than inky-black darkness. Use a telephoto or mid-range zoom lens, and open the aperture as wide as possible to drop the background out of focus. Every image in this section was created with just a camera and a lens.

1 THE ACE IN THE HOLE

It's always a good idea to have a reliable 'go-to' shot – one that is simple, quick, easily repeatable and stunning. For me, that old faithful image has been a headshot in the soft shade. All you need is a doorway and a kerb or some steps to sit your subject: anywhere that is low and not in direct sunlight. Every portrait photographer should have such a shot up their sleeve, as it can help settle the nerves of both you and your sitter.

2 USE WINDOW LIGHT

Window light is always a reliable light source. Pose your subject on the opposite side of the window to you to get the best light on their face. Ensure that the top of the window is taller than your subject. If it isn't, get them to sit or look down so that the light cascades down their face.



“If I want to keep the camera at the same eye level as my client, I will look for something a little more architectural for perfect light”



3 BACKGROUND COLOURS

Look out for receding colours in the background. They will help throw the subject forward. This image was shot under a retail space's entrance porch that was being renovated. The blue/green in the background is the window we could see on the far side of the space.

4 BAD WEATHER? FEAR NOT!

If it rains, you still have a ton of options: why not step inside and use window light or, if your client is up for it, step into the rain and enjoy the extra light that you get reflected from all of those wet surfaces!



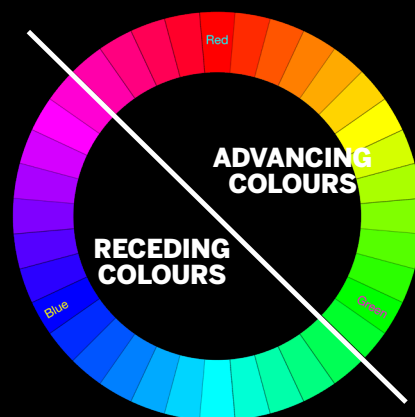
5 CHEEKY SIDE

Having dark surfaces on either side of your subject exaggerates the shape of the face and cheekbones.

Receding colours

Cool colours (green, blue/green, blue, blue/violet) are 'receding' colours that tend to appear more distant. In contrast, warm colours (red/violet, red, red/orange, orange, orange/yellow and yellow) are 'advancing' colours and appear closer.

Using receding colours in the background and advancing colours (skins tones are advancing) in the foreground can emphasise subjects.





6

Bring me sunshine

The sun is both a photographer's biggest ally and worst enemy, but with these nuggets of information, you can make it work for you

Just because all photographers love soft, diffused light, that doesn't mean you should limit yourself to it: there are great rewards for working out in the sunshine. In winter, it can be both piercingly bright and biting cold, but you can still create beautiful portraits.

Because sunlight can be super-bright, relative to the rest of a room, set the exposure for the highlights. Set the camera to Manual mode and take some test shots, adjusting the ISO, f-stop and shutter speed until just before the histogram starts to touch the right-hand edge. My experience with digital cameras is that I can nearly always retrieve info from the dark areas, but it's hard to fix highlights once they've blown out.

Get set for the sun

If you're out and about and the sun is too bright, find dappled light to work in – there is minimal foliage on the trees in autumn and winter, so branches make ideal light shapers. If you are out and about on a cloudless day and there is no alternative, you can always ask your client to wear sunglasses.

6 LITTLE DAPPLES OF LIGHT

If it's too cold outside for either you or your subjects, look for pools of light inside to determine where the sun is coming in through the windows. I am constantly scanning the walls and floors while I shoot; if I see a patch of bright sunlight, there is nearly always a way

of posing my subject there to light their face well for the portrait. When shooting, expose for the highlights, and let everything else drift into the shadows.

7 FIX SQUINTING SUBJECTS

Is your subject squinting? Tell them to look down at the floor and count to three, asking them to bring their gaze slowly up towards the camera. It takes practice, but it works wonders!

It can be helpful to lock your focus for this specific technique – use the AF-On button on the back of the camera, or half-depress the shutter release. I prefer to use the AF-On back button because then I can release the



7



8

shutter multiple times without it refocusing. If it's used well, winter sunlight can be absolutely stunning.

8 WAIT FOR THE RIGHT LIGHT

Sometimes the sunlight does more than just illuminate a face: it also creates patterns on a wall – especially if it is flooding through high, narrow windows. You may need to wait until the light moves to where you want it (the joy of a slow-moving light source), but the resulting pictures can be interesting.

9 ACCESSORISE FOR VICTORY

Don't be afraid to use sunglasses – they are a necessity if the sun is almost directly overhead to avoid getting those dark eye sockets.

“Just because all photographers love soft, diffused light, that doesn't mean you should limit yourself to it”

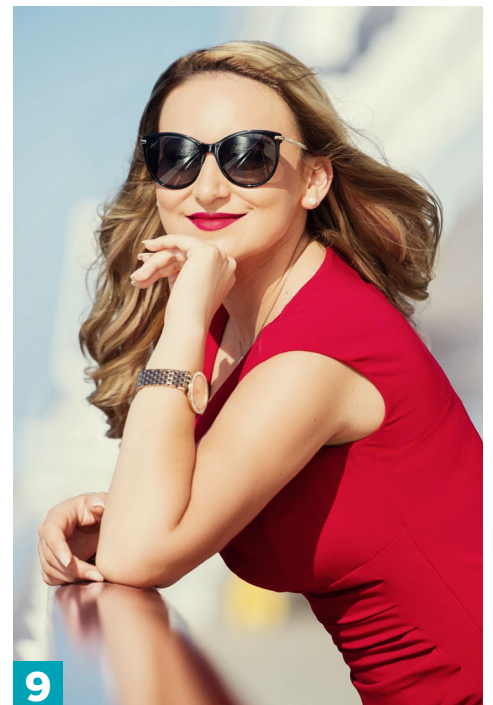


10 IMPROVISE WITH LATE LIGHT

Evening (or late-afternoon) sunlight can create beautiful lighting through windows. Here, I have positioned the subject in this photograph so that the frame's shadow also creates interesting shapes of shadows and light on her face.

Why you should use AF-On

Using the AF-On back button to focus (rather than the shutter release) takes a while to get used to, but is well worth the effort. To set it up, look for the AF activation menu option and set it to 'AF-On only'. Setting the AF-On button to focus and disabling the shutter release separates the action of focusing the camera and capturing the image. Once the camera is locked in focus, you can repeatedly press the shutter release without it changing.



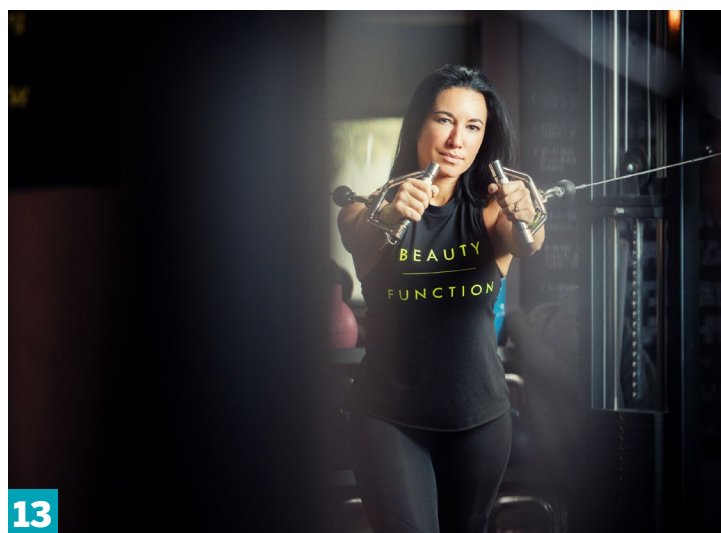
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12



13

Change your view

Stagnating is easy in portrait photography, so to grow as a photographer, you should alter the way you shoot portraits every now and again

We often talk about the composition of a shot (I prefer the term 'layout'), but we speak less about the camera's position when capturing the image. Of course, any change alters the viewer's perspective of the final photo and that change in viewpoint can really add a different angle (figuratively, as well as physically) to your work. There will always be a place for the conventional head-height camera position, of course, but wherever possible, look around for something unusual.

Keep things interesting

I have spent a significant portion of my working life lying in gutters, balancing on chairs and taking on various contortions to create an interesting angle – often having to rely on my camera's autofocus system, as I am unable to

see through the viewfinder! Today, I am lucky enough to have the Nikon Z 9 with its versatile multi-axis flip screen, so being a contortionist is becoming a thing of the past.

I love creating images with the camera flat on the ground. There is something about the low viewpoint and the way buildings loom up in the background. Be careful that your subject's legs and hips don't become enlarged as they are closer to the camera than their face. This is easily fixed by using a long lens to reduce differences due to perspective, or by getting your subject to lean towards the camera, making their face larger in the frame.

11 THE MIDDLE OF IT

Place your camera in the middle of a city pathway and open the aperture as wide as

it will go. The surrounding architecture will blur, leaving just your subject in focus while the buildings blur to the merest impression of urban life.

12 THE CITY IS YOUR OYSTER

Try nestling your camera onto some railings and have your subject lean on them. The leading lines gradually sharpen as they approach the subject, drawing the viewer in.

13 MIRROR, MIRROR

I am always looking for ways to shoot along or through things. For example, I love shooting through the cables and weight racks in this gym to create layers and depth to the images. However, the space is restrictive, and the best option is to point the camera into the



15 UNCONVENTIONAL LOCATIONS

Look at a scene and spot lines of sight that might be unique. When I started out, my favourite locations for portraits were pubs and bars. Although they no longer have a smoky atmosphere, bars still have me hooked: something about the light and the ambience creates beautiful images. Shooting along surfaces creates great reflections, while shooting through glasses or between lamps creates exciting framing. The bar-top lamps and the shiny surface here lead the viewer into the subject.

The Fresnel Effect

Surfaces become increasingly reflective as you bring the camera closer to them: it's called the Fresnel Effect (pronounced 'fray-nel' – the 's' is silent). As you reduce the angle of incidence of the camera to the surface, more reflections are bounced back. You will be surprised just how much light can be reflected off almost any work surface if you place your camera directly onto it.

mirrors and shoot my subject as a reflection. It's not ideal, but it's the only way to create the layers and perspectives I love!

14 IN YOUR MIND'S EYE

Don't just grab an image and hope it turns out fine – design it. Sketch it in your head. In this instance, the subject's head is carefully placed into the eaves of the barn roof and she is standing between the two windows in the background, giving the shot a graphical quality in keeping with the moody feel.



14

Break the rules

Where you're most comfortable is the place where you're least likely to improve – you need to step out of the comfort zone

Why do we photographers like rules and conventions so much? Rules for posing; composition rules; rules of thirds; rules of exposure; rules of rules; we just seem to love them!

But it doesn't mean you always have to follow them. The great thing about rules is that once you've learned them (and yes, I do think it's a good idea to be aware of them), you can crack on and break them. Just do it with confidence – and don't be offended if someone picks you up on it.

Rules are made to be...

Most rules are actually born out of clichés: artists have found things that work over the centuries and they have become accepted wisdom. But they are all arbitrary.

Take lighting a face, for instance. I have already talked about catchlights in the eyes (that's not a rule, but it works), but what

happens if you eliminate them? What if you light the face from an oblique angle instead of pointing light at the mask of the face, as tradition would suggest? What if you light a face from below so that it looks decidedly like a horror movie?

Just be aware that you're fighting against Mother Nature here – evolution has played a significant part in why we like faces illuminated from above; that is where we would expect it to be lit, thanks to the sky.

16 THIS SHOULDN'T WORK, BUT IT DOES

Play with the light and move your subject around until you see something interesting. Technically, this image shouldn't work – the lighting has lit the back of the coat and the cheek, as well as picking out the nose – yet somehow, the finished image has unconventional magic about it.

17 BREAK OUT OF YOUR HABITS

Step out of your comfort zone and light a face so that it feels uncomfortable. Try placing the catchlights at the bottom of the eyes, rather than the top.

18 TRY A DIFFERENT LENS

I don't use wide-angle lenses in portraiture much (although the Nikkor Z 14-24mm f/2.8 S is an excellent bit of glass), as I like to fill the frame with a face and doing that with anything wider than 85mm sets my teeth on edge due to the perspective distortion. However, give me a toddler in metallic red Dr Marten boots, and – well, who wouldn't dig out a wide-angle lens? It may not be a flattering angle as such, but when the family saw a picture of the funky little girl looking like a character from *Peaky Blinders*, it was worth breaking a rule or two. Don't be afraid to try something you wouldn't normally

16



“If you want to exaggerate the rule-breaking, make it clear what you're up to”



Wide and low

Although wide-angle lenses aren't the norm for portrait photography, they can have their place. If you look down at your subject with a wide-angle lens, the face will become large relative to the body having a slimming effect, possibly distorting the face. Conversely, if you get low and look up, the feet become enormous, and the face is reduced, giving an almost cartoon superhero feel to the image.

do, but if you want to exaggerate the rule-breaking, make it clear what you're up to.

19 HUMOUR IN THE MUNDANE

We had lunch midway through a shoot in a beautiful little coffee shop – the walls were white, the client had a white shirt and blonde hair, there was beautiful light coming from a window, and there was a no-smoking sign hanging at a jaunty angle. But, of course, I couldn't help it – the picture practically took itself. I haven't really broken any rules here, but a little visual humour is always great to photograph!

20 ON THE EDGE

You can add in a little visual humour yourself by putting your subjects right up against the edge of the frame, then creating some action that makes it feel like your subjects are about to fall out of the photograph, like they are here.





21



22

Work your magic!

There's no secret trick to portrait photography, but when it works, it can seem like magic... connecting with your subjects is what really matters

The magic of portraiture isn't in the lighting, the setup, the layout, the exposure, the rule-breaking or any other aspect of the image. Instead, the magic of portraiture lies in your connection with subjects and the magic you create. Timing is everything. This is a human endeavour, not a technical one.

Getting to know you

Step into your subject's world. Ask about their life, their interests, their family and their career. Make the conversation as you work. If, like me, you love to chat, remember to listen. If you're less extroverted, you already have an advantage as a listener: it's the listening that is the trick.

Forming a relationship with your subject creates intensity in your portraits. As your subject relaxes, the micro-muscles in the face change and intense eye contact with the camera will translate into a powerful reaction to the viewer. When your client is relaxed, it's incredible what can happen.

21 CAPTURE THE MAGIC OF COUPLES

When photographing couples, be gentle and let their relationship shine through. Of course, you can pose them, but slow down and take the time to watch how they stand naturally, who stands on which side and how they hold

hands. Tune in, then tweak the posing to create an image without destroying the magic.

22 BE AUTHENTIC

Be interested in your subject and watch for authentic responses as they relax. In this instance, my client was an architect who

Moving subjects

You will almost certainly need these three things when creating images of running children: a fast shutter speed to freeze the motion, continuous focus mode to track the moving child, and high-speed burst shooting mode to capture shots quickly. Setting your shutter speed is easy; push the ISO up high (for this kind of image, a little high ISO noise is perfectly acceptable), then set the shutter speed accordingly. I like my shutter speed for running shots to be around 1/1000 sec or quicker to perfectly freeze the movement. Set your focusing mode to AF-C (continuous autofocus mode) and the focus detection to 3D or Wide Area to track your subject. Take some time to play with your camera's focusing system to find what works for you. Finally, set your camera to high-speed burst mode so that when you press the shutter, the camera will capture a sequence of images and you don't miss anything!



became increasingly animated during the session, though I have absolutely no idea what he was showing me with his hands!

23 PASSION SHOULD BE APPARENT

If you are photographing musicians, ask them to play. I don't mean mime; I mean genuinely perform. It has always amazed me the difference it makes to the images: the body language shifts and the energy hits the roof. And on top of that, you get to listen to some amazing music while you work! The same concept can, of course, be applied to dancers and other performers.

24 LOOK FOR THE MOMENT

Like couples, when you're working with long-standing friends or siblings, watch for the laughter and the reminiscing – it creates captivating moments that they will want to see captured.

25 THE ENERGY OF CHILDREN

Get down into their world and tune in if you're working with kids. I love photographing children running and laughing. Note that their parents or guardians are always there for the photo session – I never work with children on their own.

If I want to capture that kind of magic, I will find a spot that channels them (and their energy) in a predictable direction towards the camera and the light. Pathways, trails and walkways are all good for this. It takes a bit of practice, but my camera's autofocus system is excellent, and the images have an energy to them that parents love to see! Kids are always on the move (see 'Moving Subjects', opposite page), so set your camera up to capture this and make the best of it!





Pictured
Fish feast

Here, Zuzana not only photographed the food but also added another layer by including the act of preparation and cooking

A BITE OF ART

Zuzana Rainet tells Kim Bunermann about her innovative food imagery that crosses the boundary between photography and art

Pictured

Tigernut Granola

"I created promotional visuals for the client Tigernut Group, emphasising the product's characteristics and reflecting the brand's identity and unique features"



All photos © Zuzana Rainet

Food is central to many different cultures around the world, each having its own unique ingredients and flavours, but also traditional recipes handed down through generations that bring about a sense of belonging within a community. There is, of course, a whole genre of food photography that has grown up around those who promote or sell food, with everyone from fast food outlets, supermarkets and high-end restaurants requiring images of their products. Today, I'm meeting Zuzana Rainet, a photographer who uses food as an artistic medium, to discover how she evokes emotions and appeals to the senses, ultimately merging cuisine with creativity to create a visual feast.

Zuzana takes an innovative approach to the subject, incorporating her creativity, technical skills and marketing expertise and constantly unveiling new insights and skills. "My goal is to keep learning, exploring, improving and growing," she says. "That's why I enjoy food photography – it's incredibly complex, so there's always something new to learn." Zuzana's clientele ranges from well-established brands to innovative startups needing striking contemporary visuals. Here, she explains how she incorporates engaging storytelling elements, focusing on quality and respect for the food's origins.

Zuzana Rainet



Zuzana is a food, product and restaurant photographer from Bratislava, Slovakia. She combines her photography skills and passion

for creativity with a professional background in marketing. Working with a range of clients, she aims to tell the story of the brand through her imagery.

Zuzana's photography was selected for several collections in the Foodelia International Food Photography Awards 2023 and she was also a finalist in the Innovation category of the prestigious Pink Lady Food Photographer of the Year awards in 2024.

zuzanarainet.com

Instagram: [@zuzanarainet](https://www.instagram.com/zuzanarainet)



LUNTER TOFU

"My client wanted images for the new packaging of their Lunter tofu products. My role involved developing five unique recipes and styling four ready-made tofu dishes. I aimed to give each product a distinct visual identity, so I created various tofu recipes, including soup, a main dish, a snack and a salad. Since tofu is neutral in colour and texture, I presented it in different shapes, such as cubes, triangles, sticks and crumbles. I enhanced its appearance by highlighting the key flavouring ingredients of each product, such as chilli or herbs. For plain tofu, I added visual interest with colourful ingredients, such as vibrant vegetables, and presented it in a salad or poke bowl."

A BITE OF ART



Hey Zuzana, we see that your background is in marketing management, how has that influenced your food photography?

Marketing influences my photography in many different ways – from being able to conduct market research and creating effective pitch emails when I'm looking for new clients to building my SEO-optimised photography portfolio, which now ranks organically on the first pages of Google in the Slovakian market.

It's also about understanding my client's needs and offering them added value that they will be willing to pay more for. Additionally, although I am a one-person limited company, I have developed my own internal customer relationship management (CRM) system, client templates and business processes – all these things help me to run a successful photography business.

When you are working with clients, how do you start to tell the story behind the brand through your images?

Before I start working on any client project, I study all the available information about the brand. I also analyse the competition within

the market and search for 'dream brands' in that segment worldwide. This broadens my imagination and helps me visualise creative ideas about how I could do things differently. I focus on what would fit my client best while ensuring that it's fresh and innovative. Even when clients provide a specific creative brief, I always offer my perspective and, more often than not, they are receptive to my ideas.

In your genre, the type of light makes a difference. Do you prefer working with natural or artificial lighting?

When I started with food photography, I used only natural light. I was able to create some magical images and food stories with it, but as soon as I began shooting for clients, using a studio flash became essential so that I could maintain a consistent white balance across all images. I love my Godox studio flashes, the QT1200IIIM and AD600PRO – the former is fast, powerful and can capture frozen motion with knife-like sharpness and the latter is excellent because of its powerful battery, which makes it much less of a hassle when I'm shooting on location.

Your work is highly creative, but what do you think makes it stand out and bring a new perspective to food photography?

Whenever I create a concept, I always doubt whether it's creative enough, good enough or better than other food photographers' work. I feel like everything has already been invented and seen, and even if we think we've come up with something new, it probably already exists.

My approach is to try and reinvent it but in a fresh, creative way – connecting things that seem to have nothing in common at first glance and turning them into eye-catching, mind-blowing art that evokes strong positive emotions. The other approach is to combine multiple inspirational ideas into one creative image. This allows me to create something refreshingly unique.

You were one of the finalists in the Pink Lady Food Photographer of the Year in 2024. What was the concept of this series and the message behind it?

'Raw Meat Bonboniere' was actually a client project. My brief from the agency Pekne & Dobre was to develop a creative photo concept and shoot images for a luxury product catalogue featuring raw meat and pâtés, which the company Top Farm would present at a trade fair in Dubai. I focused mainly on minimalist food styling, complemented by

luxurious props and backgrounds such as marble, gold, metal and wood. The Bonboniere was part of a triptych – one of the three images created for the cover page, along with 'Duck Hearts Ice Cream' and 'Duck Meat Cake'. The client chose the Bonboniere, and I decided to submit these three images to the Pink Lady Food Photographer of the Year competition in the Innovation category. I'm happy and grateful that I made that decision.

Can you explain how you break down the boundaries between gastronomy and art?

For me, art evokes feelings and brings up some emotions or memories, ideally positive ones. It makes you feel a sense of wonder, attraction and amazement. The same way I approach my creative styling and food photography. What I love about this process is that I create everything from scratch.

I gradually fill up my frame with what I've cooked or baked or with some client food

products, then with props, flowers and everything that is needed to convey the story or finalise the visual. I am like a painter who works with canvas – I paint by creating a story with food, styling, combining colours and textures, selecting props and lenses, shaping light and editing my original creative idea in post-production.

You also run the award-winning blog KitchenLove (kitchenlove.sk). Can you tell us more about that?

KitchenLove is my second food blog, the previous one was called Vegan Lady. I enjoyed creating recipes and doing the photography, however, the blog didn't bring me any clients. Besides, I didn't want to be a professional cook or baker, I saw myself as an artist, food stylist and photographer. I decided to invest my time, energy and money into photography education, professional equipment and a photo studio, creating a portfolio website and

“For me, art evokes positive emotions. It makes you feel a sense of wonder, attraction and amazement. It's the same way I approach my food photography”



Pictured & left
**Raw Meat Bonboniere,
Duck Heart Ice Cream**
The image 'Raw Meat Bonboniere' earned Zuzana her place as a finalist in the Pink Lady Food Photographer of the Year competition in 2024



Pictured
Mango cheesecake

For this colourful capture, Zuzana styled the cake with flowers for additional contrast and visual interest





ZAX CHOCO

"The client's brief was to create a new visual concept for their e-shop, re-photograph all products, and craft engaging descriptions. Photographing hand-painted chocolates and pralines was a comprehensive project involving 130 images across seven product categories. My goal was to re-shoot a modern and luxurious e-shop to attract customers and inspire them to make a purchase. I developed the overall concept from scratch to accurately reflect the identity of the ZAX brand while harmonising with the vibrant colours of the pralines. Each photograph was carefully planned to highlight the craftsmanship and appeal of these handmade products.

I focused on details, colours, and textures to ensure the images not only captured the authenticity of the items but also created an immersive visual experience that resonated with customers and strengthened the ZAX brand image."



**Pictured
Tigernut Bundt Cake**
"This shoot was created
to promote recipes that
use Tigernut flour"



**Pictured
Romanesco broccoli**
Zuzana photographed
this subject with a macro
lens to highlight the
smaller structural details

"The most important things in food photography are creativity, attention to detail and the way you see colours"

building my Instagram. This was a turning point and soon I started getting clients and earning money. Since then, I've had no time to write my blog anymore due to work. I might return to it someday, or perhaps one of my daughters will take it over.

In your experience, what is the most difficult food to photograph aesthetically?

Some traditional Slovakian foods, such as 'Bryndzové halušky', which are potato dumplings with soft sheep's cheese sprinkled with cooked bits of smoked pork fat, aren't easy to photograph. Things like tofu, tempeh, mayonnaise and raw meat are generally not pretty as they often lack colour, structure or shape. I had the chance to photograph most of them and, since I love challenges, I'm happy I did. I've learned a lot, and thanks to my raw meat project, I was a finalist in the Pink Lady Food Photographer of the Year competition. Now, I'm being interviewed by *Digital Photographer*, isn't that great?

Do you have any tips for aspiring photographers to make the food look its best while maintaining realism?

The most important things in food photography are your creativity, your taste, your attention to detail and the way you see colours. These are things you cannot learn; you have to be born with them. And it's what distinguishes top photographers from the average ones. If you have these gifts and want your food to pop, focus on contrast in colours and textures, and then on light and shadows. This means dark food stands out on a white plate and the white plate is clearly

visible on a dark backdrop. Play with light so the food is well-lit but the surroundings can remain in shadow. Place a lot of emphasis on the main hero element and much less on the props, which should be smaller than the food. These are just a few styling and production tips, as post-production plays a huge role as well.

What are you looking forward to capturing next and can we expect more conceptual food photography?

Currently, I am working on a few projects for my clients and I hope it continues this way. I love shooting for clients and working with agencies, as it pushes my boundaries and helps me step out of my comfort zone. It's exciting because I always learn something new and that's something I truly enjoy. Moreover, I enjoy working with people and receiving feedback, as it allows me to constantly improve and learn.

However, when I get some more creative time for myself, I want to start exploring videography and shoot more drinks, as I feel that's one thing missing from my portfolio. I also want to collaborate more with restaurants and magazines, and I'd love to shoot a cookbook for a chef someday. I also love graphic design and would like to work on more complex projects where I can offer this service too. I've also started shooting artistic portraits and want to incorporate more of the human element into food photography. This is tempting and exciting for me, so I will definitely pursue that! Additionally, I want to shoot for other markets, such as the Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary or even the UK. Why not?

Zuzana's equipment

A food photographer's kit picks

CANON EOS R6

Zuzana uses the Canon EOS R6, with its 20MP full-frame CMOS sensor striking a great balance between resolution and efficiency. This means it is particularly suited for workflows that target web and small print outputs.



CANON RF 24-70mm f/2.8L IS USM

A hybrid lens with a constant f/2.8 aperture, its shallow depth of field effectively highlights the subject. Zuzana uses it for top-down images, as its zoom range facilitates effortless frame adjustments.

CANON RF 85mm f/1.2 L USM

This prime lens boasts an even lower f-stop capability than the 24-70mm lens in Zuzana's kitbag. It is unmatched for sharpness, while this focal length is ideal for expansive scenes and advertorial shots.

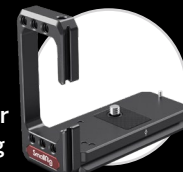


CANON RF 100mm f/2.8L MACRO IS USM

This macro lens delivers an impressive 1.4x magnification, which outperforms a standard 1.0x lens. Zuzana uses this optic to showcase stunning details, drawing the viewer's attention to them.

SMALLRIG 2976 L-BRACKET FOR CANON R5 & R6

This L-bracket gives her flexibility when working with a tripod, allowing swift transitions between horizontal and vertical shooting. Two anti-twist pins and a rubber pad prevent wobbles.



TETHER TOOLS TETHERPRO USB-C TO USB-A, 4,6 M

Connecting the camera to a laptop using the cable allows Zuzana to view her food photographs in real-time while shooting, allowing her to enhance the workflow for maximum efficiency.



10 TECHNIQUES FOR BETTER LANDSCAPES

Expand your skills to take your landscape photos to the next level

Words & images: Jeremy Flint

Broadening your techniques is a surefire way of mastering the art of landscape photography. Capturing epic landscapes involves thinking beyond the ordinary and being creative in your

approach. Besides the basics of camera kit, using a tripod and achieving good depth of field, the key aspects professionals consider when capturing awe-inspiring landscapes include composition, framing, lighting and balance, making use of the different elements and focal points available, such as a lone tree, an interesting building, mountains, rivers and a wide-open sweeping landscape.

The way a pro landscape photographer approaches and captures a scene comes from vast experience and knowledge from being in the field, where applying specific exposure, colour and composition techniques can separate their image from the rest. The methods highlighted here are tried-and-tested tools that draw on one professional's outlook: they can be applied to any location, wherever you are capturing the landscape, so give them a try and elevate your images.

Jeremy Flint



From Oxfordshire, UK, Jeremy specialises in travel, landscape and location imagery, capturing cultures, traditions and humanity. His

work features in publications such as *National Geographic Traveller*, *Lonely Planet* and the *Digital Photography School* website, among others.

Instagram: [@jeremyflintphotography](#)
Website: [jeremyflintphotography.com](#)



1 CAPTURE THE FOG

Capture remarkable, ethereal images of foggy landscapes

Fog adds another dimension to your landscapes. It can elevate overcast scenes, provide an ethereal quality to woodlands, or add drama to seascapes. How you expose for the scene depends on the overall effect you want to achieve. Setting a fast shutter speed will help you freeze the fog, while a longer exposure time will allow you to create a dreamy scene with smoother fog. It is also a good idea to review your histogram and overexpose if required, by dialling in positive exposure compensation to brighten a foggy scene, as the camera usually underexposes for fog.





2 SEEK OUT FOGBOWS

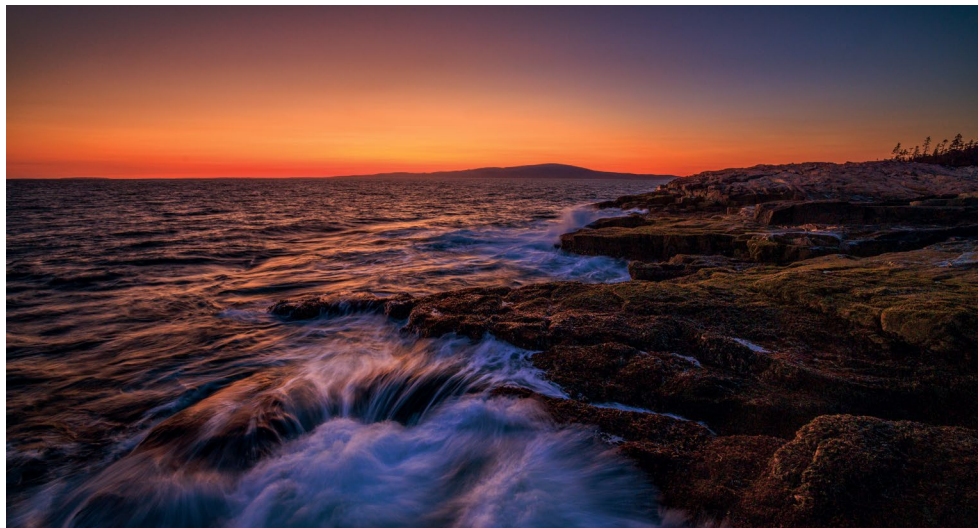
Capture a mesmerising 'white rainbow'

Fogbows are one of the Holy Grails of landscape photography – and I have been fortunate to witness two. These amazing white rainbows are a rare, natural phenomenon formed by water droplets inside fog. When the conditions are right, they can suddenly appear in the sky as the sunlight interacts with these water droplets, forming a wide arc. To capture them, you need to be in the right place at the right time and have a clear view of the fog with the sun positioned behind you. Overexpose the image to capture the beauty of this wonder of nature.

3 USE BOLD COLOURS

Work colour into your images to help them stand out

There are many ways you can introduce bold colours into your images. Strong individual colours can be used to change the ambience of a photo. For example, the orange glow of a sunset can add warmth to an image. Alternatively, capturing the blue hues that appear after the sun has set, during the 'blue hour', can change the mood of an image. Adding a cool cast makes your image look atmospheric and works particularly well for seascapes.



4 **APPLY SPECIFIC SHUTTER SPEEDS**

Use an intermediate exposure time to retain details on water surfaces

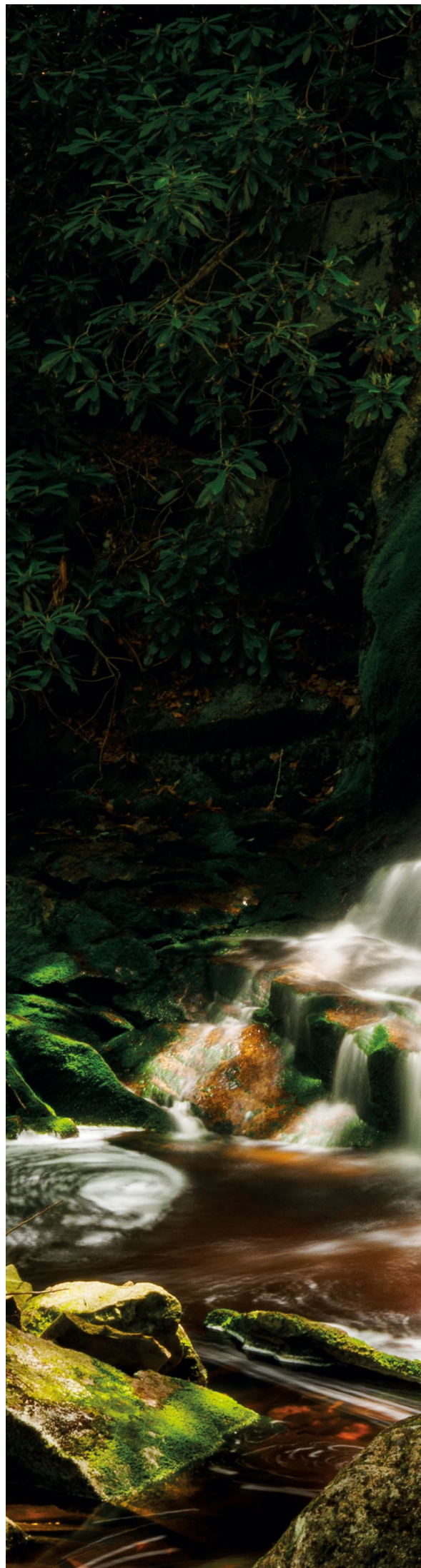
Extending your shutter speed is a great way to slow water movement. Setting specific shutter speeds can work well for certain subjects. I find using an intermediate shutter speed of one second works brilliantly to portray some motion and flow in the water, while retaining details in the surface of a stream and the ocean. Experiment with shutter speeds to get the balance right – and use a tripod to stabilise your shots.



5 **SHOOT VIVID SKIES**

Shoot contrasting skies to add drama

Capturing colourful skies makes for dramatic scenes by adding mood and drama. When the sky ignites, it is a wonderful element that can make your images stand out. Harnessing these conditions helps to create magical landscapes, where wonderful light can elevate a scene. Compose the sky to cover a third of the scene or even position it over two-thirds of the image. When an intriguing sky presents itself, use it to provide a more expansive vista that frames your subject.



6 CAPTURE LONG EXPOSURES

Extend your shutter speed to capture another dimension

When it comes to long-exposure photography for landscapes, you will want to capture a single image over an extended period. In terms of timings, shooting long exposures of five seconds or more can elevate a scene, particularly when capturing moving clouds or the water's motion. Waterfalls are a great subject to shoot, where long exposures help the roaring cascades come alive.

7 USE COMPOSITION CREATIVELY

Go beyond the rule of thirds and seek out creative compositions to elevate your images

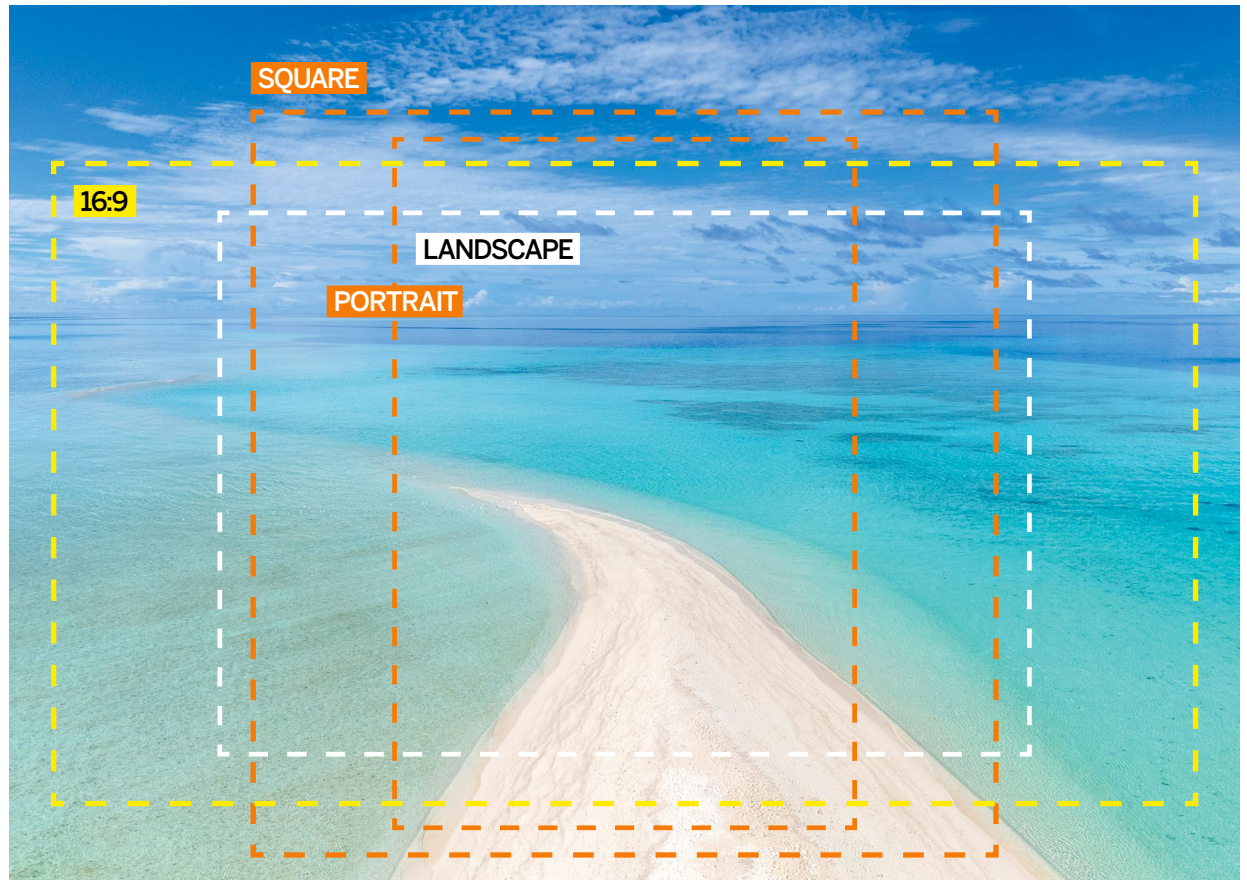
The way you arrange elements of a beautiful scene within a frame doesn't have to be limited to the rule of thirds or leading lines. Harness your imagination and seek out new ways to compose compelling images. You could use patterns, find interesting frames for your main subject or play with depth and perspective by applying a wide aperture for blurred foregrounds, for example. Here, the horizon line was placed just below the centre of the image.

8 COLOUR CONTRAST

Seek out compelling colour schemes

Understanding how different colours interact with each other is a great way to improve your landscape imagery. Whether you are looking to add contrasting colours in your images or complementary colours, they will enhance your composition. Red and green, green and blue, or blue and yellow are reliably great colour schemes that can look fantastic when they're paired together, so be sure to look for these combinations and incorporate their varied hues into your shots. Oranges and blues are also available during the 'golden hour' and complement each other beautifully.





9 CROP YOUR IMAGES

Crop your images for visual impact

How you frame a landscape can make or break an image. Ultimately, landscape vistas usually lend themselves to be composed in landscape format –

although, on occasion, cropping into a scene with a format like a square can generate a visually interesting narrative and surprise the viewer. Alternatively, choosing

a panoramic format like 16:9, which can be achieved in-camera, can work wonders to emphasise a wider format and show off the landscape at its best.



10 BALANCE & SYMMETRY

Create a feeling of harmony in an image with symmetry

Landscape images reflecting two equal sides in the frame can make an eye-catching image. A symmetrically composed image, such as mirror-like reflections of mountains in a lake or river, can evoke a sense of harmony. An avenue of trees of similar proportions on either side is another great subject, particularly in the autumn. Alternatively, composing for two different subjects that hold the same weight where the elements are balanced, such as a pair of trees, can be a great technique.



Pictured
At the Dentist
"I always try to find
the humorous poses
in every session," says
pet photographer Elke

CANDID COMPANIONS

Elke Vogelsang shares the joys and challenges of pet photography with Kim Bunermann, while emphasising the importance of animal welfare

Dogs are often considered the best friends of humans; while cats, as much as they're known for their independent and aloof nature, have also been cherished for their companionship and close bonds with humans for centuries. However, successfully photographing these four-legged friends

presents some unique challenges, not least that it requires the rapid establishment of trust and comfort between the owner, photographer and pet.

Elke Vogelsang, a professional pet photographer, has dedicated her career to capturing candid and vibrant photos of our furry friends. The chances are that you have already seen her work, possibly

through her international collaborations, such as those with Adobe and Pedigree. However, her passion for animals extends far beyond capturing images: she uses the medium of photography to actively engage in animal welfare and protection, with her documentary perspective shedding light on the global reality of animal welfare and to advocate for pet adoption over purchasing.



Pictured
Sammy

"This rescued podenco from Spain is one of my favourite models. He's super-smart and fearless and just incredibly cute"



Pictured

No Catnip, No Smile

"If a cat doesn't want to take part, that's the end of the session. But this gorgeous guy made this cute face for a fraction of a second. Sometimes, we interpret the pet's expression from a human point of view"



Pictured
Yoko

"Dogs will endure lots of silly things for treats and praise. It's all about trust and bribes. If the dog trusts you, they don't mind a silly idea"

How does a shooting day look for you and your furry models?

I'm currently in the fortunate position that I can arrange my job all around the things I love the most. There is no routine working day as every day, I more or less choose what I work on. That said, there's lots of paperwork and editing that needs to be done and takes up a lot of my time. But, as I don't do that many private sessions a year, I mostly work on commissions, projects and my licensing archive. It sounds fun and it is fun, but I'm also a bit of a workaholic. That's why it's even more important to be able to say no once in a while.

I wake up and walk my dog. That's a very slow and not-too-long walk, as she's 16 now and still telling us what to do. Afterwards, I answer emails and work on the commissions and my list of tasks I have deadlines for. When I'm finished with that, I might take images but, quite frankly, as a photographer you spend more time doing other stuff than actually taking images.

As I'm mostly known for my studio portraits of dogs, that's also what I do the most. But I also take images of cats. For this, I travel to their location. Furthermore, I make sure that I do my own projects – these mostly consist of outdoor photography, which is what made me fall in love with photography to begin with. I learnt to love studio photography too, but being out in nature, and trying to seize the endless opportunities for images it offers, is still one of my favourite things.

I do have a model database of dogs I can hire for commissions, but also for my personal projects. They are mostly my type of dog: rescued, mixed, Spanish or Portuguese, ex-hunting dogs, or whatever dog showed model qualities. And with model qualities, I mean enthusiasm, patience, looks or whatever might be recommendable for the task. It's a top priority that my models, as well as their owners, have fun. They love to return not only for commissions but also for my private projects, which is lovely.

How do you manage to build rapport and trust with the animals during your photo shoot sessions?

As I said, it's super-important that the model has fun. A dog or cat couldn't care less about being photographed. They need a different motivation. That's mostly treats, toys and praise. That said, cats couldn't care less about praise. But lots of cats also love treats or try to catch or hunt something.

Nearly every dog would do anything for treats. My photo sessions are not an obedience class at dog school. I tell my models how great they are, I cheer them on and.... they get stuffed with yummy treats. For cats, I have feathers and little pieces of cloth on a string to try to awaken their hunting instincts.

Of course, it's also convenient to have an obedient dog for portraits outdoors. There's no use trying to take portraits when your dog is already chasing squirrels two streets further down the road. For dogs that can't be off-leash, I have a fenced-in garden. Also, timid dogs might be better photographed outdoors, in a secure and quiet space, than in the studio.

How do you balance capturing spontaneous, candid moments with more posed shots?

Even when you're letting a dog pose for a portrait, you can still find those little moments where the dog is looking elsewhere or sniffing a blade of grass or the wind. Try to see scenes like this to get something a little different from a standard shot.

Integrating action is always a good way to get more personal images full of character,

Elke Vogelsang



Elke Vogelsang is a commercial and editorial photographer, specialising in pet portraiture. Based in Germany, her work has appeared in

numerous adverts on US and German television, and has been published in books, newspapers and a range of magazines globally, including *National Geographic*, *The Sunday Times Magazine* and *The Daily Telegraph*.

elkevogelsang.com

Instagram: [wieselblitz](https://www.instagram.com/wieselblitz)

“There's no use trying to take portraits when your dog is already chasing squirrels two streets further down the road”



Pictured
Little Hunter

“Cats, especially young cats, still love to play and hunt. Here the kitten tries to catch a feather”



Pictured
Rainy Afternoon

"My girl Scout was always willing to pose for my images. She used to be shy, but she's turned into a stunning, confident little diva"

even if you just let the pet jump a bit or catch something for a treat.

Having an assistant who can pose the dog, but also make sure they are engaged with the session, can be a benefit. I don't have a personal assistant, but outdoors, when I'm further away from my model, I will ask the owners to entertain the dog, to make sure I get the poses and expressions I'm looking for.

Can you share some of your favourite pet photography techniques or styles? Is there much difference between your commercial shoots and your personal work?

When I started out in photography, with a one-picture-a-day project, I wanted to try studio photography, too. Before that, I thought studio photography was boring. I wanted to be out in nature with my dogs. But as I took images every day in winter, studio photography was an alternative to the dark and grey winter days.

I tried to find something more interesting to me – and that was provoking funny

"When I shoot for myself, my photos might look completely different from my colourful studio images"

expressions. I love adding humour to my photography and that's what I'm now known for. But to be honest, I love to capture all kinds of emotions, whether it's the expressions of my models or the style of the images.

I absolutely adore a nostalgic, melancholic, dark, even sometimes moody, atmosphere in images. When I shoot entirely for myself, the photos might look completely different from my colourful studio images. I love to have everything composed and set in-camera by using the Film Simulations of my Fujifilm camera. I might underexpose and add grain and contrast in-camera to get a moody look.

Photography is such an endless playground of creativity. When I finished the one-picture-

a-day project, I started another project where I set myself tasks or topics. Every week, I tried to shoot images for the topic of the week. This is called, for example, '52 weeks of dog photography', where you shoot for a year to improve your skills. The topics included black-and-white, lines and textures, shooting through something, etc. The opportunities are endless.

During these projects, I learnt what I like most and what I would love to pursue more. Shooting in black and white is something I absolutely adore. It might not resonate with many people in pet photography, as lots of people think that a black-and-white picture of a dog means that the dog is dead. I don't see it like that. I love the textures and the mood.



Below right
Klusefelsen

"To get out of the studio, I get myself some models and do my own projects. Until a few years ago, I did this with my dogs every week, but they got too old for longer excursions"

Below far right
January at the Window

"This is one of my favourite images. It breaks several rules: it's shot with a wide-angle, it's underexposed and contains lots of grain. That's all done deliberately and in-camera"



This page
Podenco

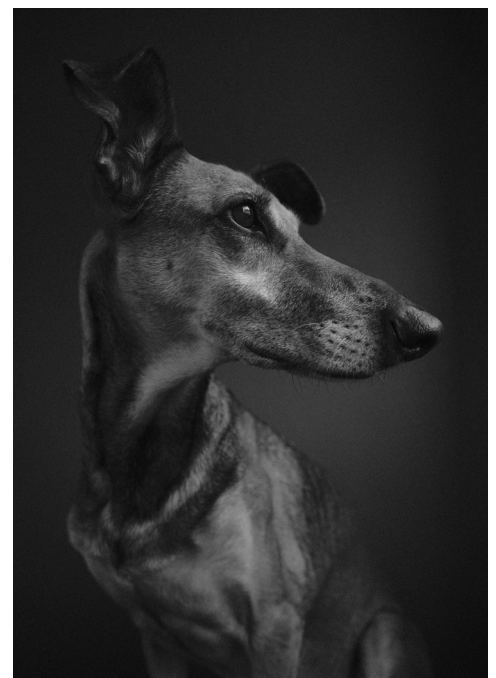
"I call this the side-eye you give to hunters who abandon or mistreat their dogs. The model was rescued and lives with a loving family"

You are a Fujifilm shooter – what particularly attracts you to this brand?

I got myself a little compact camera by Fujifilm, the X20. At that time, I still had my Canon equipment, a Canon 5D Mark III. It was a great camera but with the fancy lenses it was just too heavy to carry around with me – remember, I took photos every day. I was able to place the X20 in my jacket pocket.

Of course, it didn't offer me the same features that the Canon was able to, but I tried out different approaches, which was the start of me becoming known for my dog portraits that were a little different from the standard. It was the start of my project of big dog noses licking, snapping for and chewing treats or yawning in close-ups.

Step by step, I replaced my Canon equipment with the professional Fujifilm equipment, which was lighter and more compact. I always have only one hand on my camera, as I've got a treat, a toy or a squeaker in the other. Therefore, I want my equipment



This page
Galgos del Sur
"With journeys like the one to Córdoba, I combine different things I love: dogs, reportage photography and travelling," says Elke



to be as compact as possible. And you get me with a nostalgic design. The picture quality is fabulous. And the buttons for ISO and shutter speed are also super-handy.

You provide your photographic services free of charge for chosen animal protection organisations. Can you tell us more about the passion that drives you in this aspect?

My own dogs were rescued from death row or from the streets. These little mutts have given us so much that I can't express my gratitude in words. The two girls saved my husband's life when he collapsed with a brain haemorrhage. If it hadn't been for them barking, howling and running to the bathroom door to alert me, I wouldn't have found him in time.

My dogs have brought me through several dark times. They are, or were, my source of laughter and my mental and physical health coaches. That's why I would like to give back a little bit. Where my dogs come from, thousands of others get discarded yearly. I couldn't have asked for better family members. Therefore, I try to advocate for shelter animals. I found these formerly unwanted gems and they changed our lives for the better. All three of them were very different in character. My Noodles was the perfect dog for beginners. She loved every human being and every dog. Sure, rescued dogs can also come with a package of challenges. You have to make sure to find a reputable organisation and you have to get information and be prepared. And not every dog fits everybody. But you can find the perfect dog for you in a shelter. I'm absolutely sure.

My very first images of other dogs than my own were of the dogs here in my local shelter in Germany, which was a fantastic way to improve my skills. It's a win-win situation. I get to hang out with dogs, learn and practise, do what I love and help a little along the way.

I also went to Morocco and Spain in the past to photograph the work of a dog rescue there.

But your commitment to animal welfare doesn't end there. The July issue of *Dogs* magazine featured an article by you on this topic. Can you share more about it?

This year I went to Spain to photograph discarded hunting dogs, in a shelter near Córdoba called Galgos del Sur.

Every year, tens of thousands of hunting dogs are discarded in Spain. The lucky ones find shelter at private organisations like this one. They were handed in by hunters, found as strays on the street or confiscated. Spain now has a new, stricter animal protection law. Sadly, it explicitly exempts hunting dogs, livestock and research animals. The dogs often arrive in a poor mental and physical state but the people at Galgos del Sur treat the dogs and find homes for them. This is

"These little mutts have given us so much that I can't express my gratitude in words"

mostly outside of Spain, as the popularity of the galgos and another hunting dog breed, the podenco, as family dogs has not yet fully reached their mother country.

My own dogs are galgo mixes. That's why this breed is so close to my heart. They do make great family dogs. They are sensitive, and they love a good couch. You have to be aware of their hunting instincts, for sure.

I was very happy to get the German magazine *Dogs* on board to publish the reportage. Also, my sponsor Fujifilm kindly helped me to be able to undertake this journey and draw attention to the plight of the hunting dog, whose exploitation is a shame not only for Spain but for the whole of the EU.

You have worked with numerous clients but one particularly stands out for photographers, as many of us work with their products daily. What was it like partnering with Adobe?

The cooperation with Adobe is, for sure, a highlight for me. I have worked with Adobe products for decades now. I started with Photoshop when I was still working as an employee as a translator, and later on in a marketing department in the 90s. I tried out other software over the years but always came back to Adobe. And yes, also with the subscription model, as it ensures that I can benefit from the newest versions and features right away.

When Adobe asked if I could, for a change, hop in front of the camera, to tell our story, I did so, even though I certainly prefer to stay behind the camera. They have a wonderful team here in Germany, as well as in the UK. I felt super-comfortable. It brought a lot of attention, which is, of course, wonderful. And I learned to love doing Photoshop tutorials. There's currently one in the making, in cooperation with other pet photographers.

What are some of the most rewarding aspects of your job?

Next to meeting my gorgeous models, I'm grateful that I've got wonderful, supportive people from all around the world on my social media accounts. The internet can be a vile place sometimes but I receive kind messages and am fortunate to have such a safe space for dog fans, Dogs unite. Well, cats too, of course, but they wouldn't admit that.

Elke's favourite kit

Here's why Elke likes to work with these items

FUJIFILM X-H2S

"It's fast, and offers animal eye focus."



FUJINON XF 90MM F/2 R LM WR

"For outdoor photography, to get a creamy bokeh and pin-sharp images."

FUJINON XF 16-55MM F/2.8 R LM WR

"The lens I use most of the time in the studio, as I can shoot quirky, wide-angle shots at around 16mm and more elegant portraits at around 55mm."



HOBOLITE AVANT LED CONTINUOUS LIGHT

"To be able to take images of very timid and easily scared pets in the studio without strobes."

THE EXTRA BITS

"Lots and lots and lots of treats, patience and praise for my models."

Pictured
Me and my Loli
Loli – one of three dogs that Elke brought home from a shelter in Spain





14 WAYS TO TAKE BETTER URBAN PHOTOS

Capture creative images in built-up environments
with this expert advice from **Benedict Brain**

Making photographs in an urban or even semi-urban environment can be utterly rewarding. There are so many opportunities to explore that it can initially seem overwhelming. Over the following pages, we'll look at ways to explore cities, towns, suburbia and everything in between. You only need a camera, an inquisitive eye and an open mind. From contemplating composition and appreciating light to thinking philosophically, artistically and creatively, you

will discover skills that will help you get the best out of your urban photography.

Sometimes, getting started can be the hardest thing. The Norwegians have a saying about 'the doorstep mile' – the first mile from your front door can be the hardest part of any journey. But getting out of the door and taking those first steps is a crucial part of the creative process, too. So use these tips and discussion points as your inspiration and creative springboard – then get out there and explore.



All feature photos © Benedict Brain



1 Straighten up

Use software or a specialist lens to avoid converging vertical lines

If you've ever stood underneath a building and pointed your camera up, you'll notice that the vertical lines converge within the frame. It's as if the building is leaning backwards. Generally speaking, architectural photographers don't like this effect.

The solution sounds simple: position your camera so its sensor is perpendicular to the subject and then all the vertical lines appear straight. To do that, ideally, you would use a long lens, go a long way from the building, find an elevated position, make sure everything's level, straight and perpendicular and then take the shot. Easy, right? Of course not, and it's often impossible.

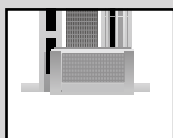
This is why most photographers who specialise in photographing buildings use a tilt-shift lens. Its distinctive design allows parts of the lens to be moved up and down by twisting a knob without angling the camera. Effectively being able to 'shift' the image that falls on your camera's sensor means you don't need to angle your camera up. The camera's sensor can remain perpendicular to the building, and your final image will not show converging verticals. The tilt bit of a tilt-shift lens changes the angle of the lens and is more useful for shifting planes of focus. This can be fun, too. If you don't have a tilt-shift lens or want to experiment, try renting one for a weekend and see how you get on.

If you don't have access to a lens, it's possible to correct the perspective in most image editing software. It's nifty and saves a lot of hassle in the field. If you plan on doing this, shoot a little wider than you envisage your final image, as the correction process will crop into the image.



Play with perspective

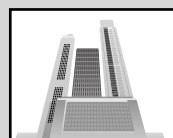
Get to grips with how perspective in the city works



1 Not enough space

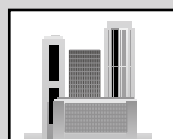
Even when you shoot with a wide-angle lens in the city, there often isn't enough space to get far enough back

to compose your shot – busy roads or other buildings are usually in the way. This means it can be tricky to include the entire building.



2 Converging verticals

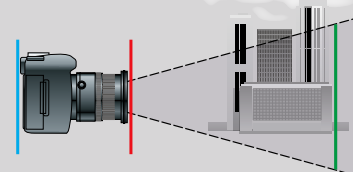
If you stand directly at the bottom and point your camera up, the chances are that you will end up with converging verticals in your photo. This is when the building appears larger at the bottom than the top and it looks like it's falling backwards.



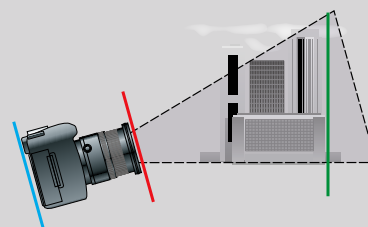
3 Correct the problem

One way to get round this is to use a tilt-shift lens, which enables you to move the body of the lens in relation to the sensor.

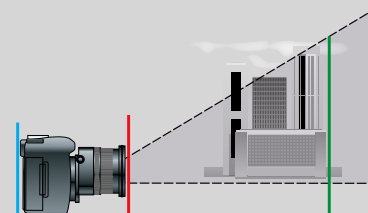
These lenses are expensive, so instead you could use image-editing software to correct any problems.



Straight-on will miss the top of the building.



Shooting up creates perspective distortion.



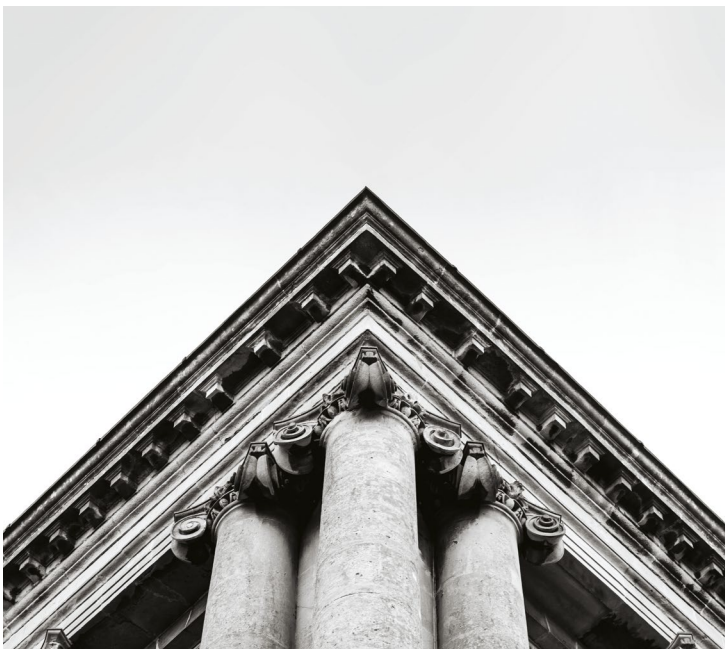
Shift the lens up to correct distortion.



2 Use composition

Create a sense of balance when you frame your scene

As with all aspects of photography, composition is a vital part of photographing in the urban environment. The usual rules and guidelines should be part of your creative repertoire. However, the rigours of shooting the hard lines and shapes of buildings often found in urban or semi-urban environments seem to command greater attention to composition than other photography genres. This image composition seems quite simple, but the lines, shapes and textures all conform almost perfectly to the 'rule of thirds', giving the elements a harmonious balance.



3 See negative space

Use space creatively to add dynamism to your images

Negative space is an often overlooked but vital aspect of composition. It's essentially all about the parts of an image that aren't the subject – parts of the image that don't have anything in them. This could be the sky or the area of 'nothing' between two objects. This space also makes a shape, and it's important to notice this space and how it affects your picture.

Returning to the main image on the opposite page, the small gap between the two buildings in this image is vital to its success. Moving the camera an inch or two to the left or the right would lose that gap, resulting in a messy composition. Negative space can be a subtle element that's easy to overlook, but it's crucial to be aware of, especially when you're photographing buildings.

Look at the photo of Manhattan above. Here, the negative space has been turned into a positive space by turning the photo upside-down. The area of sky between the buildings in the flipped version looks similar in shape to a skyscraper, and the association our mind makes gives it a 'positive' role in the composition.

4 Employ symmetry

Draw attention to an important feature

You cannot force the rules of composition onto all subjects: some scenes require a different approach. In some instances, an exact symmetry might work to accentuate a feature. This is especially true when with buildings and architectural scenes.

This image relies on a specific and precise sense of symmetry. If you like the symmetrical approach, pay extra careful attention to ensure everything in the frame is symmetrical – which isn't as easy as it might look. A tripod can be helpful to keep the camera still while you frame up.

5 Play with light

Use hard and soft natural light to transform your images with strong shadows and contrast

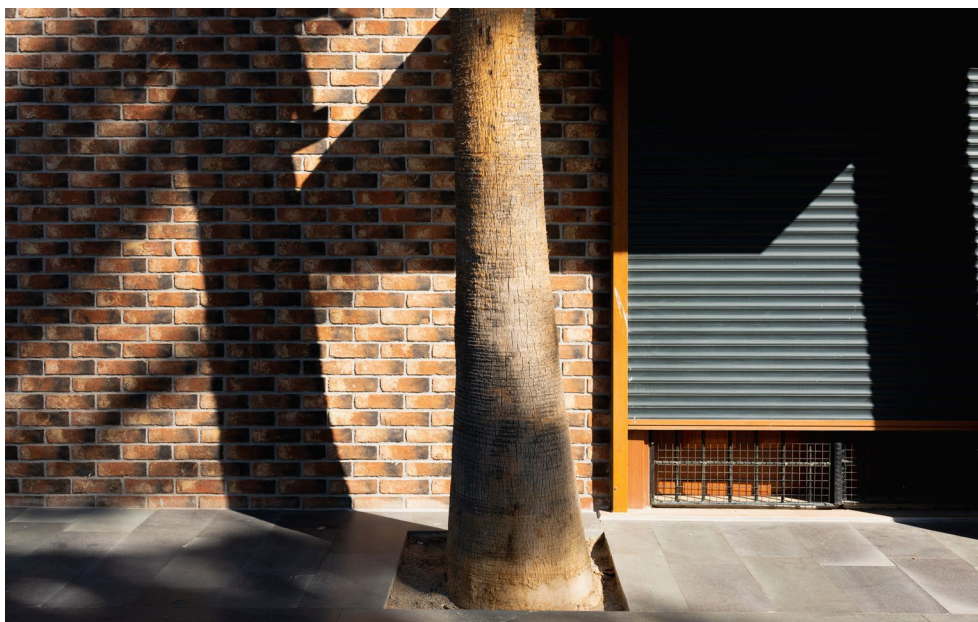
Light is the essence, the essential ingredient, of any photo. The word photography itself means 'painting with light'; it's derived from the Greek words 'phos' (light) and 'graphê' (drawing). Learning to notice light and how to use it in your creative photography is crucial.

Perhaps the best way to get started in your journey of appreciating light is to simply start looking. Take the time to notice, in a mindful, contemplative way, how light falls throughout the day; how it changes colour and intensity; how the weather affects it; and how it changes from season to season and in different parts of the world. Then look at artificial lights and notice how they look – for example, compare the striplights in a corporate office with the warm glow of a bedside lamp.

A strong, hard light, such as the midday sun on a bright day, can feel quite brutal, with characteristics such as harsh shadows and high contrast. While many photographers avoid this kind of light, it can be expressive when used creatively.

On the flip side, sometimes the light is soft and diffused. These even tones have the opposite effect to the savage rays of hard light. Natural outdoor light is usually softer because of clouds, which act as a massive diffuser.

Some of the most impressive effects of light come in the transitions between day and night. Apps such as PhotoPills help you work out when and where the sun will rise and set, so you can calculate when 'the blue hour' and 'the golden hour' will be, and then make sure you're in the right place at the right time, which is often very early.



6 Be reflective

Make reflections part of your shots, not just an incidental detail

Looking for reflections is a great way to add depth and nuance to a scene. There are lots of interesting surfaces that offer varying degrees of reflection and transparency – from freshly cleaned shop windows and finely polished brass features to the crisp facades of modern skyscrapers, or the rippling reflections of a river. It's easy to overlook reflections: we've probably all had that realisation that a beautiful shot has been ruined by the reflection of a delivery van in a shop window that you overlooked. But, like many of the other elements we look at here, if you open your eyes and are receptive to reflection, you'll start seeing opportunities everywhere. The trick is to look at what is being reflected.

Best of all is after a rain shower when there are plenty of puddles. One helpful tactic is to get down on your knees and use the reflective property to add to your composition. Some photographers have



been known to carry a bottle of water – not for hydration (which is also important!), but so they can make an artificial puddle in the right spot to generate a creative reflection.

At other times, you may want to remove

reflection altogether; in this case, it's time to use a polarising filter. It's one of the few filters that is nearly impossible to 'fudge' in Photoshop, so a polariser is a useful accessory to have in your camera bag.



7 Add in people

Incorporating people into urban scenes is a wonderful way to add context, scale and, most importantly, an element of storytelling and narrative. This can be a slightly 'fuzzy' area where urban and street photography merge, but let's not get too hung up on genres and trying to categorise what you're doing. Just make photos.

Looking again at the reflection image in the previous tip, the hotdog vendor and the cart he's pushing are a vital part of the image and also the story, especially because hotdog

Enhance your urban scene by presenting people in the vicinity

carts are so synonymous with New York. The reflection in the glass wall helps, along with the low raking late afternoon light.

Picking a spot and waiting for the 'action' to happen was part of the creative process, introducing another crucial aspect of photography: timing.

As well as incorporating people into a cityscape, there are myriad opportunities in the urban environment to make portraits. Look out for interesting-looking people and ask if you can take their portrait. Chances are that

if you politely explain what you're doing and why, people are happy to oblige. If they say no, that's cool too: just thank them and move on.

Look for areas in and around buildings where the light is soft, such as an area of open shade. Choose the background wisely to avoid too many distractions. The relatively neutral and purple-hued hoarding on a building site works perfectly for the portrait above. Work out your camera settings before approaching a potential subject so you're not wasting their time by faffing with menus.



8 Think like an artist

Use geography, autobiography and metaphor to add depth

The urban landscape is a much broader subject than just the 'classic' vistas typically associated with the genre. It can include everything from parking lots and suburban sprawl to industrial topographies. It can be beautiful or ugly, political or poetic.

Take the time to explore the urban space and get to know it, especially if it's a space new to you. The wise words of the American photographer and writer Robert Adams can be a constant source of inspiration. Adams was one of the New Topographics, a loose grouping of landscape photographers working in the 1970s; their work is interesting and worth looking at.

Adams wrote an excellent book called *Beauty in Photography*, in which he writes about what he thinks makes interesting and engaging landscape photographs. It's good advice and something to ponder when you are contemplating your own urban

photography. Adams suggests that an interesting and engaging photograph should work on three levels: geography, autobiography and metaphor.

By geography, he's talking about the topography, the light and the weather; by autobiography, he's speaking about how you feel about the place where you are and how you respond to it; and by metaphor, he's suggesting that the image you create could present alternative meanings. Adams suggests that in isolation from one another, these criteria can create one-dimensional and potentially boring images; however, when all three elements are vibing and working together, an image can become much more interesting.

I'm paraphrasing his eloquent words, of course. Still, in general principle, this is a good, solid approach to keep in the back of your mind when working. Look up the work of the New Topographics online, it's fascinating.

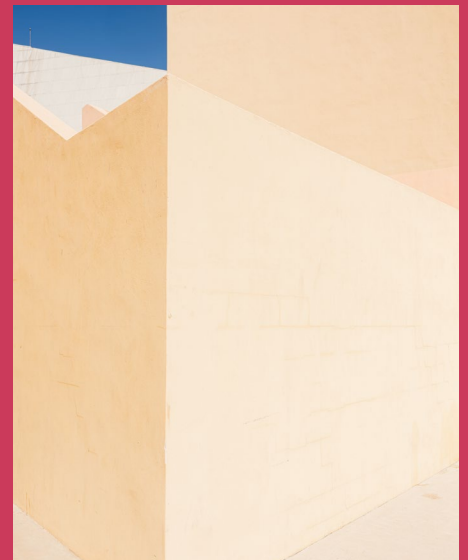
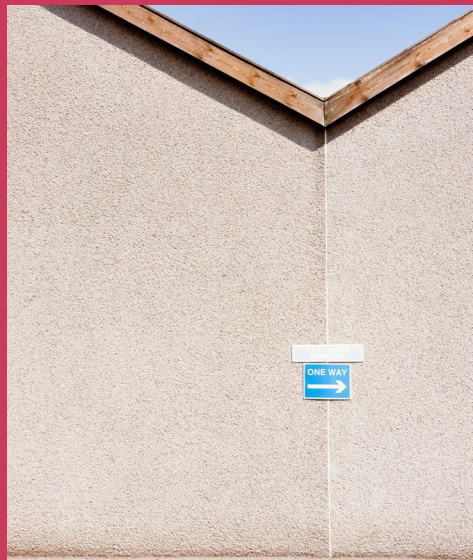




9 Use colour (or not)

Shoot in colour or mono for different results

Whether you choose to realise your images in full chromatic glory or moody mono tones is entirely up to you. Like so many aspects of photography, there's no right or wrong involved in choosing between the two. The answer is found in your creative intent, not someone else's expectations (unless you're on a professional assignment, of course). It can be helpful to use your camera's Picture Styles or Picture Controls. For example, if you're imagining your work to be black and white, then switching to the Monochrome Picture Style can help you see how the end result might look.



10 Seek the spirit of a place

Use angles, crops, textures and space to enhance expression

There are many ways to interpret a scene, subject or location. It's good to try to find your own vision. While looking for the 'honey pot' photo spots and postcard vistas can be a good starting point, there will be a time

when you might want to express how you feel about a place; this is when photography starts to become more interesting, and you can start to make more exciting work.

There's no easy tip or technique to use:

it's simply a question of asking yourself what vibe you're getting from your surroundings, then looking for angles and applying techniques that speak to that vision. It takes time, but it's worth it.

11 Be detail-oriented

Look more closely at your urban scene

Narrowing in and focusing on parts of a building, an interior or some small aspect of the urban environment can yield fabulous results. It's easy to get seduced by the wide, epic views that include a whole building or a wide cityscape, but honing your vision and opening your eyes to the potential of small corners or a particular area can keep you occupied for hours. Seeking out and playing with contrasting shapes and textures or looking at the way light and shade accentuate shapes, curves and angles can be endlessly fascinating. Take the time to explore.

Also, ask yourself how you feel about a specific location or building. Use your other senses, such as hearing, smell and touch, to build an image in your mind's eye, then consider how you might translate these feelings into an image using the language of photography. Will your photo be dark and moody or light and airy; bland and white or bursting with colour? The decision is yours.



12 Work on projects

Create coherent images that speak together

Whatever you like to photograph, it can be useful to think about projects. Think about creating a unified body of work that works together. I typically have myriad 'projects' on the go simultaneously. Some are big and profound, and deal with subjects like humanity's relationship with nature and the environment; others are short, easy to complete and not too taxing on the mind.



Take the bench photos below, for example. As I travel the world, I keep an eye out for benches with views. If I spot one, I always photograph it with the top of the bench more or less in the middle of the frame. In time, I will have maybe 20 or 30 images, enough for a small body of work. Consistency, style, approach and sequencing are all important to consider.





13 Be dull and boring

Capture the mundane to see another side of your location

Being bored can be surprisingly conducive to finding your creative mojo. This is not as crazy as it might sound. Being bored is good. The moments when I'm free from the tyranny of distraction, free of electronic devices and the spiralling doom of the infinite scroll, then I start to be my most productive. I also find looking for boring subjects surprisingly fruitful.

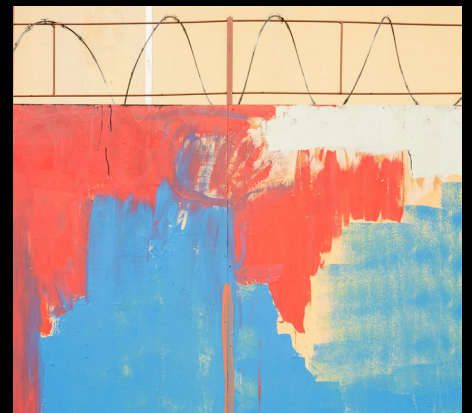
When I visit a new town, city or port, I often make a point of seeking out at least four really boring, humdrum scenes to make into a postcard (see above). This project was inspired in part by Magnum photographer Martin Parr's lovely and slightly humorous series of books called Boring Postcards, where he compiles mundane postcards from

the past. Inspired by these, I have tried to make my own. Even the act of just seeking locations helps me to engage with a place and to notice the less everyday vistas, suburban houses, streets and so on. My growing collection of 'boring postcards' is becoming a more accurate and thought-provoking representation of the places I visit.

14 Be driven to abstraction

Get creative by cropping into textures and patterns

Building on the idea of focusing on the details (tip 11), try putting an abstract hat on. Any urban environment can present endless opportunities when you open your eyes. Try to dislocate yourself from what you know an object or surface to be: instead, try to focus on shape, form, colour and texture. Old shop fronts, the boards around construction sites, peeling paint, graffiti and so on all offer amazing potential to the keen eye. Once you start seeing potential abstract shots, you'll see them everywhere you go.





Pictured

An Eerie Levitation

"This photo freezes a moment in time with the iceberg on the cusp of transformation. Moments later, cracks appeared on the surface and it crumbled into fragments with a haunting prelude to collapse. This illustrates the essence of photography: capturing those fleeting moments"

R CROSS A D S

Thibault Gerbaldi takes us on a journey to explore the friction between nature's transience and human resilience

Words by: Kim Bunermann Images by: Thibault Gerbaldi



Pictured

A Bite of Tradition

"This photograph captures a man preparing paan, a traditional Indian delicacy made from betel leaf, areca nut, slaked lime and spices. Often shared during rituals, weddings and festivals as a gesture of respect, paan symbolises hospitality and tradition"



Pictured

A Divine Presence

"In a high-altitude village in Peru, during preparations for annual celebrations with traditional dances, I was captivated by a young girl dancing. Her determination and pride in her ancestral culture were striking"

In the world of travel photography, the lens serves not merely as a tool but as a bridge connecting diverse cultures and landscapes to a broader audience. Here, travel photography is a medium for documentation that allows us to share and preserve stories. Thibault Gerbaldi's artistic approach examines the themes of nature's impermanence juxtaposed with the resilience of human culture, set against the challenging environments of Greenland, Iceland and Namibia. While illuminating the precariousness of landscapes, he sets the cultural focus on marginalised communities, including Andean alpaca farmers, Mongolian eagle hunters and the Himba people of Namibia – documenting their endurance in the face of external pressures.

A pivotal moment in Gerbaldi's photographic journey came during the Covid-19 lockdown after a transformative trip to Ethiopia. Inspired by his experiences, he self-published his first book, setting him on a path that led to further travels and a series of similar publications. In 2019, Gerbaldi joined the board of The Forgotten International charity, using his photography to help raise funds and awareness of the effects of poverty.

With exhibitions in cities including Paris and Los Angeles and recognition from winning the Travel Photographer of the Year Rising Talent award in 2024, Gerbaldi's work is now inspiring viewers around the world. We spoke to him about his artistic vision and his commitment to documenting the rich narratives of our planet and its diverse communities.

Thibault Gerbaldi



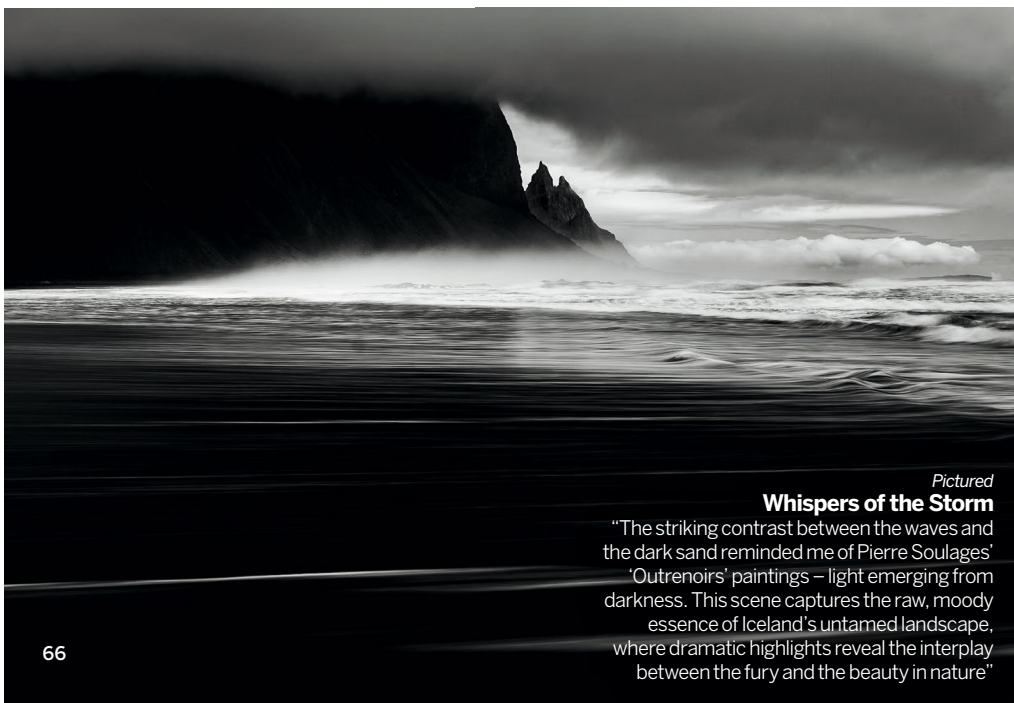
As a self-taught photographer and passionate traveller, Thibault Gerbaldi has documented diverse cultures and landscapes through his lens. Over

four years, he has self-published six books on Ethiopia, Namibia, Greenland, Peru, Mongolia and Iceland, using photography to share his experiences. His work also supports The Forgotten International, a charitable organisation that aims to alleviate poverty. Last year, his work was exhibited in Paris, Rome, Los Angeles, Miami and Venice and he also won the Travel Photographer of the Year Rising Talent award.

tgcrossroads.com

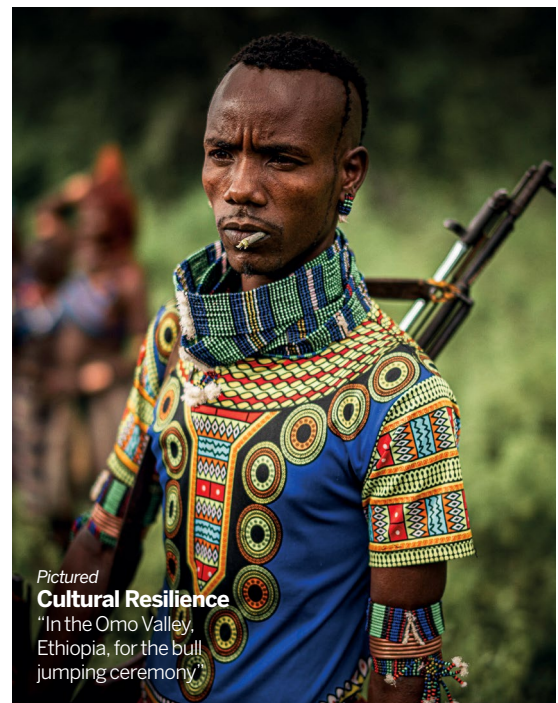
[@tg_crossroads](https://www.instagram.com/tg_crossroads)

"Travel photography allows us to document and preserve stories – it's a bridge to connect diverse cultures with a broader audience"



Pictured
Whispers of the Storm

"The striking contrast between the waves and the dark sand reminded me of Pierre Soulages' 'Outrenoirs' paintings – light emerging from darkness. This scene captures the raw, moody essence of Iceland's untamed landscape, where dramatic highlights reveal the interplay between the fury and the beauty in nature"



Pictured
Cultural Resilience

"In the Omo Valley, Ethiopia, for the bull jumping ceremony"

Pictured
A Kazakh Tradition

"In the rugged landscape of western Mongolia, Kazakh eagle hunters, or Burkitshi, uphold the tradition of training golden eagles to hunt foxes, hares and wolves – skills that are vital for survival in the harsh winter"

Hey Thibault, how do you ensure that you respectfully represent the cultures and communities you photograph, especially those that may be marginalised or misunderstood?

Respect starts with time and understanding. I never approach a subject with preconceptions; instead, I try to listen, observe and build relationships before picking up my camera. Whether it's spending time with Mongolian eagle hunters or Andean farmers, I engage with them beyond the photography – sharing meals, learning about their daily lives and understanding their perspectives. This allows me to portray them with dignity and authenticity, avoiding stereotypes.

At times, I feel the frustration of not having enough time to build deeper connections. Photography is not my full-time job and my other commitments limit how long I can stay in places like Mongolia or India. In reality, I don't spend as much time as I would like with the communities I document. This has pushed me to refine the skill of creating a genuine connection in a short time – sometimes, it's as simple as a smile, a shared laugh or a silent understanding through eye contact. These fleeting moments of trust and warmth can be just as powerful as long conversations, and I continue to work on deepening these connections with every journey.

I also make it a priority to share my work with the people I photograph whenever

possible, whether through email or social media. However, in remote areas where internet access is scarce, this can be a challenge. Many of the communities I document are not connected to the global world, making it difficult to stay in touch. To bridge this gap, I plan to use a portable mini-printer on future trips, allowing me to give physical copies of my photos directly to the people I photograph – it's a small but meaningful way to give something back.

Can you share an experience from your travels that impacted your perspective on cultural resilience?

One of the most striking experiences I had was witnessing a bull-jumping ceremony in the Omo Valley, southwestern Ethiopia, near the South Sudan border. I travelled there with my wife and after hours of chaotic driving through dry riverbeds, we finally arrived at the site of the ceremony. This ancient ritual marks the passage into adulthood for young men and is central to the cultural identity of the communities involved.

Before the ceremony, people from several villages gathered, dancing, singing and painting their faces with intricate designs. What fascinated me was the coexistence of tradition and modernity – some participants were using smartphones to take photos or communicate, yet they were fully immersed in the ritual with deep respect and devotion. Even modern clothing, such as t-shirts, had been adapted into traditional styles, blending contemporary influences with ancestral customs in a way that felt organic rather than forced.

This experience reinforced my belief that resilience isn't about resisting change – it's about integrating the future while honouring the past. Cultures don't survive by remaining static; they persist by adapting without losing their essence.

"I've refined the skill of creating a connection in a short time. It can be as simple as eye contact or a smile"

How do you feel your images reflect the ongoing changes in the environments and cultures you've documented, especially in light of globalisation?

My images often highlight contrasts – the traditional against the modern, the untouched against the altered. One of the most striking examples of this I've captured was in Greenland, where I photographed a massive ice arch breaking apart in front of a motionless boat. To me, the static presence of the boat against the collapsing structure symbolised how human society often remains a passive

Left
Cultural transformation

"In Cusco, Peru. I saw a group of Andean people in traditional ceremonial attire, beside young locals sitting on a bench and dressed in modern clothing, absorbed in their iPhones. These scenes tell stories of cultural transformation – how ancient traditions continue to exist alongside rapid modernisation"



witness to the dramatic environmental shifts happening around us.

A similar juxtaposition struck me in Cusco, Peru. I saw a group of Andean people in traditional ceremonial attire, beside young locals sitting on a bench and dressed in modern clothing, absorbed in their iPhones. These scenes tell stories of cultural transformation – how ancient traditions continue to exist alongside rapid modernisation.

Rather than offering fixed interpretations, I like to leave space for the viewer to engage with these images and find their own meaning in these moments of contrast and coexistence.

What elements do you consider essential to convey a strong narrative in your travel images?

A compelling travel image should go beyond aesthetics – it should evoke a sense of place, culture and time. Light and composition are crucial, but the real strength lies in storytelling.

I look for contrasts: a lone figure standing in a vast open-air salt mine in Peru, emphasising both human presence and insignificance; a small sailing boat framed against the towering mass of an iceberg, highlighting the scale of nature versus human fragility.

Emotion is another key element – whether it's the pride in a herder's posture or the quiet solitude of a landscape. Lastly, I aim for timelessness, capturing moments that could belong to the past, present, or even an uncertain future.

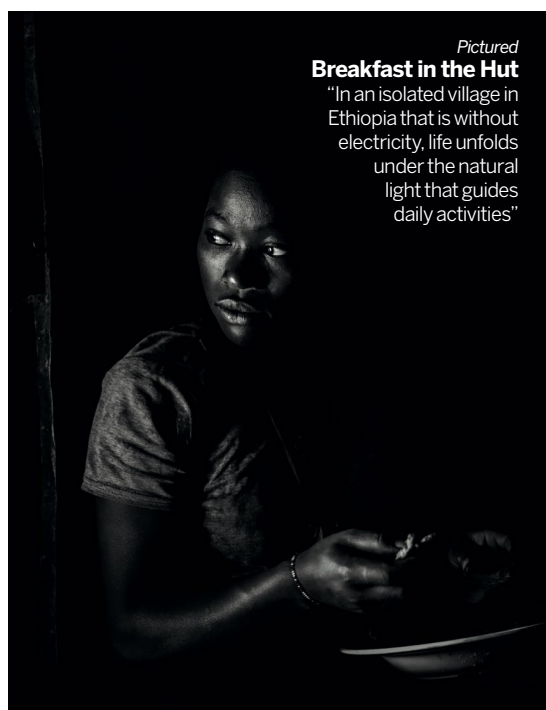
Are there any cultures or places that you are passionate about that you haven't yet explored in your work?

I am particularly drawn to Kashmir and Ladakh in India, regions where stunning high-altitude



Pictured
Curiosity

"People are often curious when I take photos of them, like this man in India"



Pictured
Breakfast in the Hut

"In an isolated village in Ethiopia that is without electricity, life unfolds under the natural light that guides daily activities"

Pictured
An Arctic Odyssey

"The iceberg stands as a testament to nature's power, while the sailing boat symbolises human resilience and exploration. This juxtaposition invites reflection on the vastness of nature and human ambition, underscoring the courage it takes to navigate these formidable waters"

"I look for contrasts, such as a boat framed against a towering iceberg, highlighting the scale of nature and human fragility"

Thibault's travel kit

THE CAMERAS

"I work with a Leica SL3 for travel and Q2 for street photography. I feel Leica brings beautiful micro-contrast, natural colours and a three-dimensional 'pop' that's hard to replicate."



THE LENS



"My go-to lens is the versatile Vario-Elmarit-SL 24-90 f/2.8-4 ASPH. This

Leica lens excels in rendering light and shadow with an almost cinematic quality."

DUST BLOWER

"Because I always like having clean instruments."



MINI PHOTO PRINTER



"My next investment will be a mini photo printer so I can share my work with people who have agreed to be part of my photographic adventure."



landscapes meet deeply spiritual and culturally rich communities. The intersection of Buddhist and Islamic influences in Ladakh, combined with its remoteness, makes it a place I'd love to explore through photography.

Another area that intrigues me is South Sudan, particularly the herder communities that maintain their ancient pastoral traditions despite the socio-political challenges of the region. Their way of life, which is deeply tied to cattle and communal identity, is one of the last remaining examples of a lifestyle that has endured for millennia.

Left

The Salt of the Earth

"In Peru's Maras Salt Mines, the local workers extract nature's precious crystals from the vibrant orange pools that make up the mountain's intricate veins. The image showcases both the breathtaking beauty of the landscape and the silent dedication of those who labour to extract the salt of the earth, illustrating the enduring human spirit in high-altitude rural communities"

PAINTING WITH LIGHT

Dan Mold demonstrates how to create otherworldly light paintings that will leave your friends wondering how you did it

With the shorter days, it's easy to think we have less time to get out with our cameras. However, that isn't the case; you just have to be creative with your lighting. Photography literally means light (photo) and draw (graph) so we can add our own light to night scenes with a technique known as 'painting with light'.

Unlike shooting in the daytime, where your lighting is completely at the mercy of the sun and weather – harsh direct light, soft diffused overcast lighting, golden sunset light and so on – once the sun has set, you have full control over what light is in your scene and how you want to light it. You can 'paint' large swathes of your scene with a flashgun and even use flash gels so that your flash light takes on a coloured appearance, or use a small hand torch or even a bare bulb to paint much finer, intricate lines of 'light graffiti'.

In this light painting technique, I'll show you how to shoot and edit a light orb image. These mind-bending otherworldly shots look completely alien and you might fool your friends into thinking the picture was simply created in AI, but they will be shocked to find out how it's created in-camera.

Of course, shooting in the dark comes with more challenges and I'd always recommend shooting with a friend. That way, one of you can operate the camera while the other does the light painting and you can take it in turns, plus it's safer and more enjoyable. You'll also want to wear dark clothing to stop yourself from appearing in the pictures as you paint your scene with light. Here's how to pull it off...

What you'll need

- ✦ Camera and lens
- ✦ Tripod
- ✦ Shutter release cable
- ✦ A torch and some string
- ✦ Flashgun and coloured gels

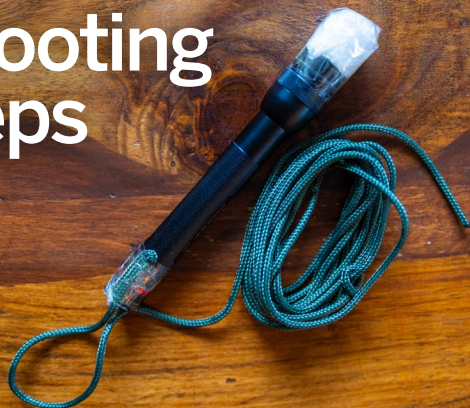
Words & images: Dan Mold

Difficulty level: Intermediate

Time taken: 2-3 hours



Shooting steps



1 Set up your torch The light orb is created by swinging a torch through the scene. You'll need a small hand torch, preferably with a keyring or loop that you can use to tether some string. The amount of string used creates the radius of your orb. To make the light more easily detected by your camera, tape scrunched up clingfilm to the torch.



3 Focus in the dark It can be hard to focus in the dark, so the best option is to get a friend to stand where you'd like your light orb to appear in the frame and shine a torch on their hand so your camera can lock on to this. Go to Manual Focus to lock the focus and place a marker on the ground so you know where to stand to spin your torch.



5 Start swinging Press the shutter to begin the self-timer and run over to your marker so you're in position. Switch your torch on and start swinging your light before the exposure begins to avoid any streaks. Try to swing it so that it passes over the same marker on the ground with every swing as you move around to create the orb effect.



2 Set up your tripod This technique involves keeping your shutter open for a long enough time to allow you to swing the torch through the scene as you paint with light, building up the orb effect. To ensure you achieve a sharp shot with long exposures, such as 10 secs, you will need to set up your camera on a tripod.



4 Camera settings In Manual mode, dial in a shutter speed of 30 sec and enable the 10 sec Self-timer mode – this should give you time to capture your light painting and also run into the shot. Use ISO 100 for best image quality and set the aperture to f/3.5. Take a test shot and change the aperture (or ISO) until the exposure looks right.



6 Paint the background Once you've nailed the light orb, leave your camera set up and add a little colour to the background. For this image, I lit up the railway bridge archway with a flashgun fired off-camera during the 30 sec exposure, using separate red, green and blue flash gels to inject a splash of colour.

The setup

TRIPOD

A sturdy tripod like this Manfrotto Befree model is essential for ensuring pin sharp shots after dark

PAINTING WITH LIGHT

COLOUR GELS

These can be added to the front of your torch or flashgun to make the light take on a different colour.

FLASH

A flash is a useful light painting tool, allowing you to cover big areas of your scene with the flash off-camera.

TORCH

Torches come in different sizes and bulb types and many are bright LED models. A small, powerful handtorch with a keyring attachment works well for light orbs.

EL WIRE

'EL' wire, or electro-luminescence wire comes in different colours and is great for building up a spooky electric mist in your light painting scenes.

CAMERA

Any creative camera with manual MASP modes will work great for light painting, though the larger the sensor the cleaner the images will be in low light.

Top tips for light painting

Follow these six tips to ensure your images work for this technique

1 Wear dark clothes Dress like a ninja and wear the darkest clothes you can as any reflective clothing will show up in your shots and need to be digitally removed. I even wear black gloves to stop my hands from appearing in the shot.

2 Stay safe Heading out with a friend makes for a safer and more enjoyable experience at night. Find a photographer friend, so you can alternate who does the light painting and who's taking the shot.

3 Shoot with a friend If you can take a friend along, you could try shooting in Bulb mode with a shutter release cable. Here, the shutter stays open for as long as you hold the button, so you can release the shutter once they have finished painting.

4 Take your time Don't try to achieve all of your light painting in one single exposure. Instead, illuminate different parts of your scene in chunks and merge them together in software later on. This will give you more control over how the light graffiti is blended together.

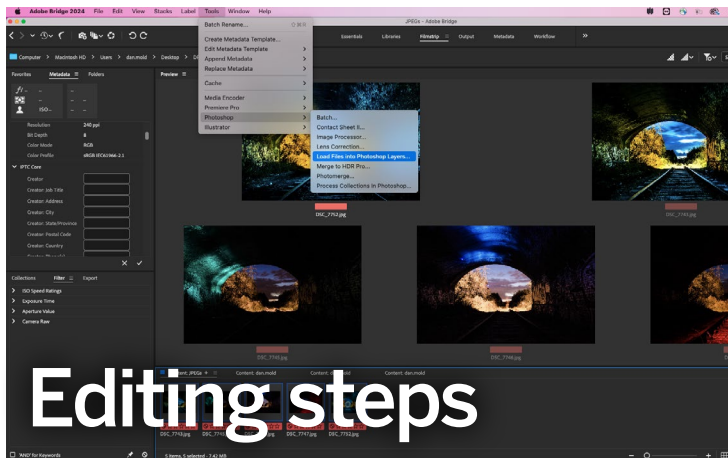


**Pictured
Light trails**

Standing on the same spot as you swing the torch creates an uneven spiral effect rather than a neat spherical orb.

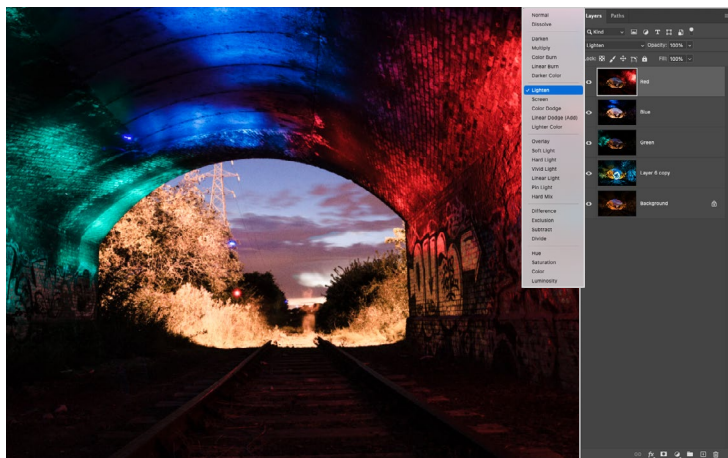
5 Don't overdo the ISO Because you are shooting on a tripod, you don't need to raise the ISO to extreme values. This means you can keep the ISO value low, for example, at a value like ISO 100, for best the image quality and extend the shutter speed, or open the aperture if you need to increase the light flow.

6 Always shoot in RAW format RAW isn't an acronym, it literally means the 'raw' data straight from the camera. RAW files are larger than compressed jpegs, so they have far more exposure detail to work with, making it much easier to adjust the exposure and white balance levels in post-production.



Editing steps

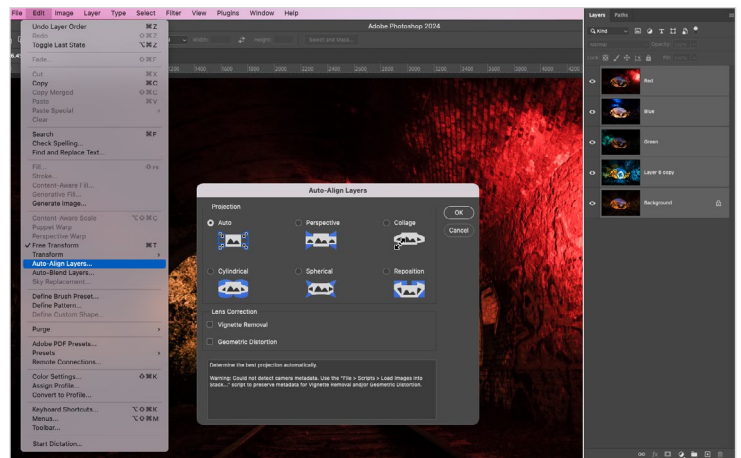
1 Load up your layers First, go into Adobe Bridge and select all of the images in your light painting series. Next, head to Tools > Photoshop > Load files into Photoshop Layers to bring all of your various light painting exposures into one single Photoshop document in the layers stack.



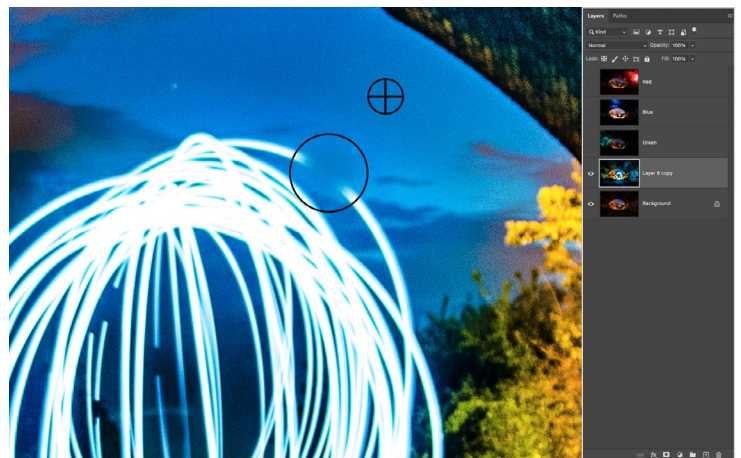
3 Switch the Blending Modes You can change the Blending Modes and opacity of each individual layer to vary how it interacts with the layers below in the stack. To change Blending Mode, click the dropdown box that says 'Normal' in the layers panel and choose the blending mode – the Lighten and Screen blending modes tend to work best.



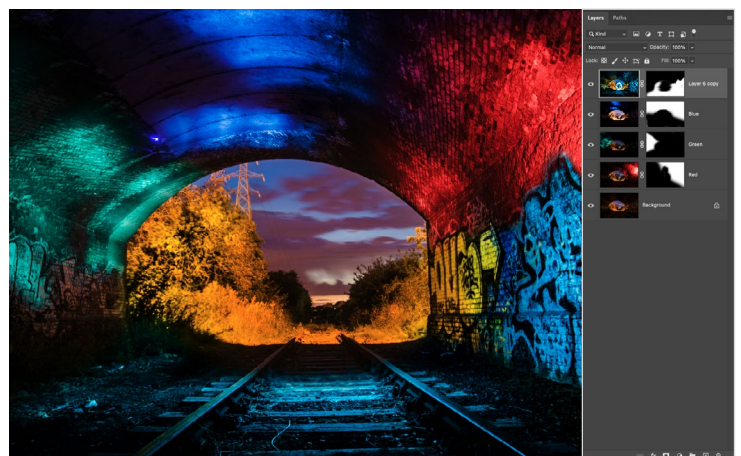
5 Select the orb Make a neat selection of the orb so we can remove any edges. Use the Elliptical Marquee tool to draw roughly over the orb, or hold Shift as you drag for a perfectly round selection. For more refinement, go to Select > Transform Selection and drag the corners of the box to adjust it. Hold Ctrl/Cmd as you drag to warp the perspective.



2 Align the images In the Layers panel (Window > Layers) click the top layer, then hold down the Shift key and click on the layer at the bottom of the layers stack. Now go to Edit > Auto Align Layers. Leave the Projection set to Auto and then hit OK to make sure all of your layers are perfectly aligned.



4 Clone out imperfections You're unlikely to achieve a perfectly spherical orb, so you may need to clean up the edges in Photoshop to make your orb look perfectly round. Click the Clone Stamp Tool and hold Alt then click to sample a 'clean' part of your image and then paint over any stray light painting to remove it from the shot.



6 Use Layer Masks Now, we are going to use Layer Masks to 'mask off' parts of a layer you want to hide from view. In the layers panel, click the Add Layer Mask icon and hit Ctrl/Cmd+I to completely mask off the whole layer, then use a soft white brush to paint over areas where you wish to bring your light painting back into the frame.

Pictured
Light rails

The unedited original image, taken from under the arch of an old railway bridge doesn't really make the most of the setting

PAINTING WITH LIGHT

BEFORE

Pictured
Light trails

With the colours on the walls and the light painting being edited to a perfect orb, the image has been vastly improved

AFTER

Create toy stories

Mark Phillips on bringing little toy figures to life using low angles and selective focus



Toy photography isn't just about snapping a picture of a toy; it's about making those toys look lifelike, which can be quite a challenge. You need to rely on angles, lighting and selective focus to bring the toys to life. To achieve this, getting down on their level is key. Once you're on the ground,

you see them in a whole new light and can visualise endless possibilities. A narrow focal plane is important to avoid distractions, and good lighting is crucial.

One great benefit of toy photography is that it's an excellent way to practise your skills. You have a free model that doesn't get tired or fidget, making it perfect for learning techniques. The setup mirrors any photo of a real person, just scaled down. Another bonus is that lighting doesn't have to be expensive; you can use something as simple as a flashlight from your phone.

The main difficulty lies in posing, which can be tricky. Toys often have limited movement due to their joints, so it's

What you'll need

- Macro lens or lens with close-up focus
- Remote shutter
- Tripod
- Additional lighting options
- Bounce card



Mark Phillips



Mark Phillips is the creative mind behind the Instagram account **Frame the Toys**. With a talent for transforming ordinary toys into captivating

stories, he invites his audience into a whimsical world of imagination. Mark has mastered the challenges of budget-conscious photography by uncovering hidden gems at second-hand shops to craft striking visuals. [@frame_the_toys](#)

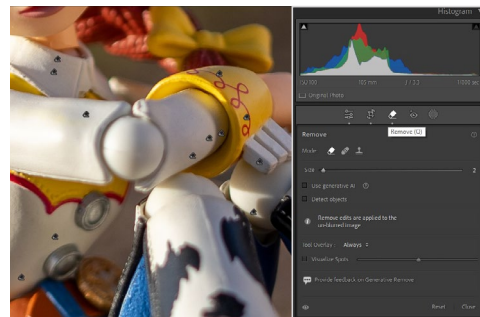
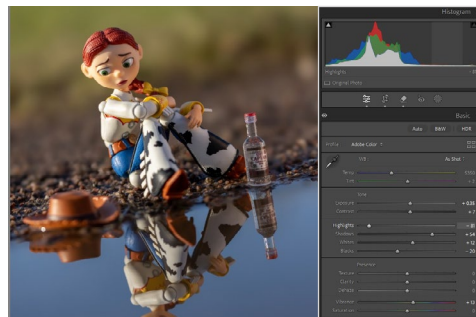
essential to be mindful of their capabilities when brainstorming ideas. Ultimately, toy photography is a fun experience that opens up a world of creativity, which is limited only by your imagination.



1 Have a plan Think about the image you want to create, including the pose and scenery. Having a plan makes the process more manageable. I recommend posing the toy beforehand to ensure it is balanced correctly when you place it down.

2 Involve light Ensure you have various lighting options. Useful tools are a white piece of card and clip to serve as a bounce card or a torch, a Lumecube and a panel light. Keep in mind that some tools might require a mini tripod for optimal positioning.

3 Set the scene Set up your camera and tripod, and attach the remote shutter. Position your figure, considering the lighting, angles and composition for the shot you want to achieve. Arrange your lighting to either create atmosphere or manage harsh shadows.



4 Prioritise aperture Shoot in A Mode and select a wide aperture to keep the background out of focus. Any background detail can diminish the illusion of the toy appearing lifelike. Set ISO to 100, activate live view, focus manually and take the shot.

5 Keep edits simple Since I was shooting in harsh light, I reduced the Highlights, raised the Shadows and decreased the blacks to balance the lighting. Increasing Clarity on the figure while lowering it on the background will also keep the focus on the subject.

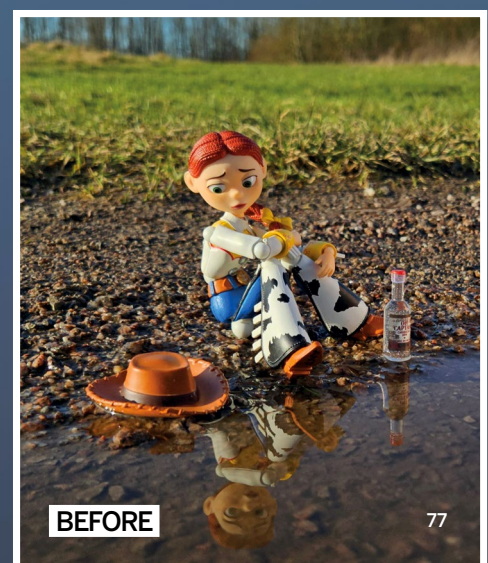
6 Clean and crop Finally, tidy up the image by removing unwanted distractions, such as dust particles and debris. Zoom into the image and use removing tools such as Clone and Healing. Then, give it a final crop to highlight the toy figure to the maximum.

*Inset***Missing depth**

The toy figure scene lacks atmosphere, while the sharp background diminishes the focus on the subject. In a genre that relies on an illusion of reality, this can minimise the effect

*Main***Visual storytelling**

The final photograph conveys emotion, which is enhanced by the Dutch Angle perspective that creates a connection between the figure and viewer



BEFORE

STEP INTO SPRING!

Spring has sprung so get outdoors with your camera and catch some top landscapes. **Dan Mold** shares his tips...



Spring has finally sprung and that can only mean one thing – it's time to get out with your camera to take some top landscape shots. During this brilliantly colourful and varied season, flowers start to re-emerge from their winter slumber. Snowdrops are always the first to appear in January, followed by daffodils in February and bluebells in March, while wild garlic and tulips can both be seen as we head into April.

The British weather is changeable at the best of times and spring is no different – we have the notoriously wet month of April to contend with. But you can use this to your advantage as wet landscapes can give your scenes shimmering reflections and close-ups of flowers will be coated in droplets of water that can glisten like jewels in the sun, so don't let it stop you from getting out.

Head out early to catch a sublime sunrise and you might even be treated to

some atmospheric mist. It's a good idea to keep an eye on the weather and check the forecast the night before you plan to head out for the most accurate data. If you aren't rewarded with a sunrise, don't fret, overcast cloudy conditions will give you flatter images with less contrast, but can still produce decent shots. Bring a reflector with you and you'll even be able to bounce some colourful light back onto small flowers to brighten them up.

What you'll need

- Camera with a wide-angle lens
- Tripod
- Mist filter

Words & images by: Dan Mold

Difficulty level: Easy

Time taken: 2 hours



Pictured
Bluebell dawn

An early start rewarded me with a beautiful sunrise. I shot this at the edge of the woodland, where sunlight drenched the forest and its colourful carpet of bluebells

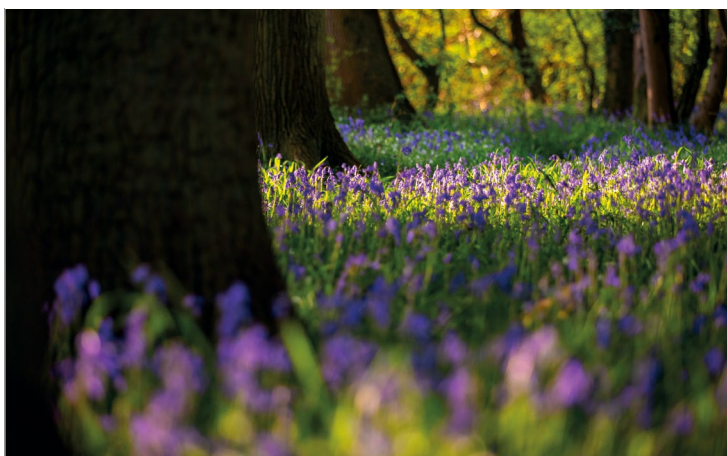


Shooting steps

1 Set up on a tripod There are many photographic genres, such as sports or wildlife, that are too fast-paced and reactive to work with a tripod. However, with landscapes, we have the luxury of time as we wait for the perfect light to materialise. A tripod eliminates camera shake and is ideal for fine-tuning focus for macro shots too.



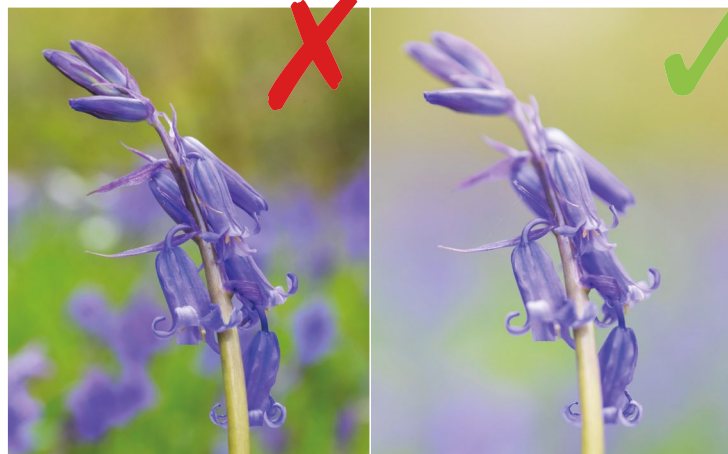
3 Macro lens A 'true' macro lens has a reproduction ratio of 1:1, also called life-size, which means your subject will be captured at the same size as if it was laid across your camera sensor. A macro lens, such as the Tamron 90mm f/2.8 pictured here, is great for close-ups and also tight landscapes to compress the perspective.



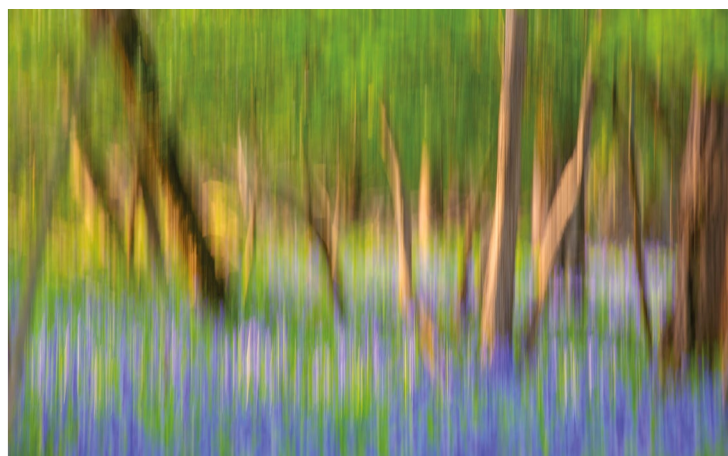
5 Shafts of light Keep an eye out for where the sun is falling within your spring scenes and head out early to catch the best light during the golden hour. Use apps such as PhotoPills to work out where the sunlight is coming from throughout the day. A shaft of light picking out a few flowers makes them stand out from areas in the shade.



2 Settings Go into Aperture priority mode and dial in your widest aperture, say f/2.8 for bright landscapes at first light. For more depth of field, close this down to f/11 or f/16 – these higher apertures also turn the sun into a 'sun star'. Set the ISO to its base 100 and enable the two-second Self-timer mode when using a tripod.



4 Aperture priority mode The aperture in your lens is made up of a series of blades that can open or close to control the amount of light coming in. This is important for adjusting the exposure but also your depth of field (how much of the scene is in focus). Opening the aperture makes it easy to blur the background.



6 Impressionist blur You can pan your shots with a slow shutter speed for a more painterly, abstract look. This technique is perfect for blending the colours in bluebell woods. Switch to shutter priority mode and dial in a shutter speed of 1/30 sec or slower, switch off image stabilisation and pan your camera upwards as the shutter fires.

HALATION

Shooting towards the sun with a Black Mist filter has allowed the light to bleed for an ethereal glow

CONTRAST

Sunrise and sunsets are a great time for spring landscapes as your scenes will be bathed in golden light

BLUEBELLS

Bluebells are delicate flowers so make sure you don't trample over them by sticking to the footpaths

Scene analysis

Use a Black Mist filter for a defused hazy glow

Image-softening filters such as the Kenko Black Mist create gentle, diffused scenes

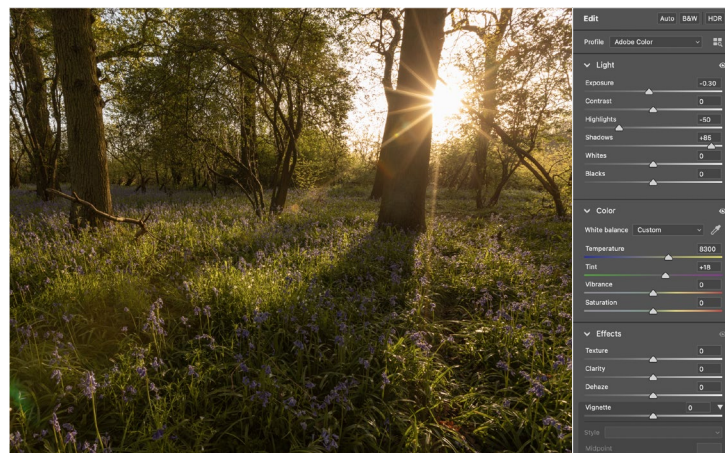
Modern lenses are made to be razor sharp so it may seem counter-intuitive to attach an image-softening mist filter to the front of them. However, these filters such as the Kenko Black Mist No.1 (right), are particularly good for sunrise shots and are brilliant for early morning spring shots in woodlands bathed with first light. To see their effects best, you'll want to shoot towards the sun to create a diffused glow and extra halation. Kenko also makes a Black Mist No.5, which is half as strong for a more subtle effect, and also makes the White Mist No.1, which gives images a more washed-out faded look.



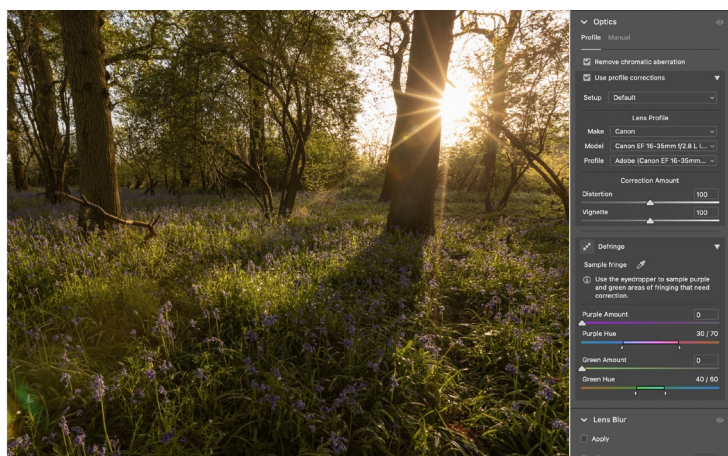


Editing steps

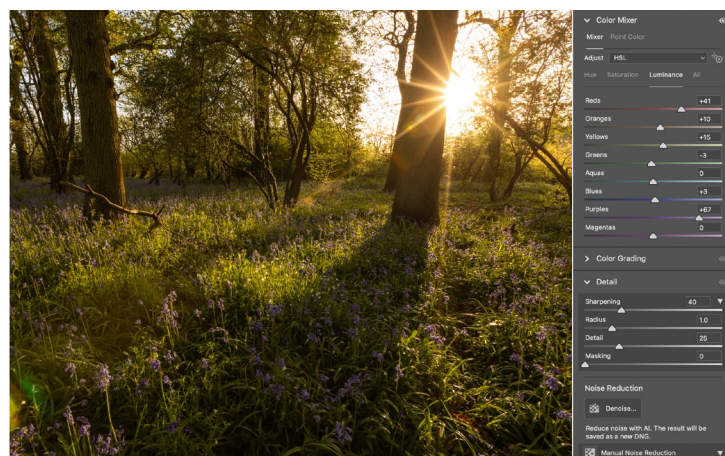
1 Expand the dynamic range Shoot in RAW format so you have extra detail to use back at your computer. Load the RAW file into ACR or Lightroom Classic and use the Exposure slider to shift the overall brightness of your woodland scene to your liking and pull Highlights to the left to control super bright areas such as the sun.



2 White Balance Next, we'll tweak the colours. White Balance has a big effect on how warm or cool your images look, and for sunrise and sunset scenes taken in the golden hour, we usually want images to look warmer. If your images look too cool, tweak the Temperature slider and give the Vibrance and Saturation a little boost too.



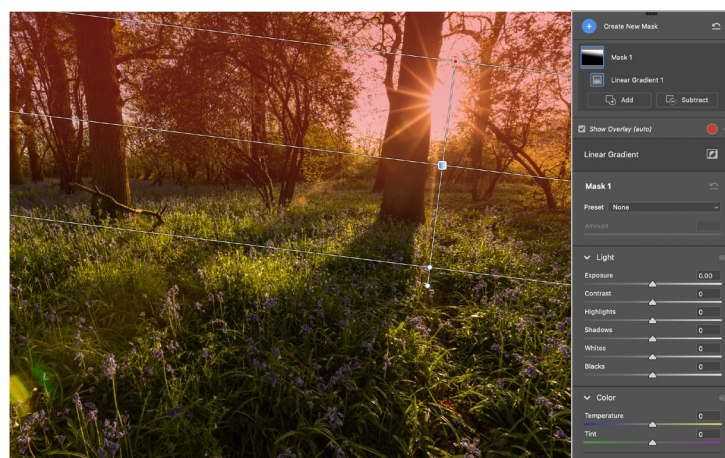
3 Lens corrections You'll usually want to use a wide-angle lens to squeeze as many of the colourful flowers into the frame as possible, though wide-angle lenses are more prone to distortion. Turn on your Lens Profile Corrections to help correct barrel distortion and vignetting, and also remove any unsightly chromatic aberration.



4 Colour mixer Take further control of the colours in your scenes with the Color Mixer panel. Here, you'll see the eight individual colour channels, which you can adjust to change the Hue (colour), Saturation (intensity) and Luminance (brightness). This is handy for boosting the yellows in the grass or purples in the bluebells.



5 Sharpen your shot To make sure the details in your landscapes are crisp, head to the Detail panel and boost Sharpening to 50, then hold the Alt key and drag the Masking slider to the right – you'll now see only the white parts of your mask are being sharpened. As we shot at our base ISO, we shouldn't need to apply Noise Reduction.



6 Adjustment masks Now it's time to hone in on specific key areas. We'll use a Linear Gradient Mask to mask off the sky and darken the exposure, though you could use the AI-powered Sky Mask instead. You can also use the Adjustment Brush to paint over some areas and tweak them, such as painting over the shadows to darken them.

AFTER

INTO SPRING

BEFORE

Inset

Unedited RAW

RAW files look flat in comparison to jpegs because they have no in-camera processing applied to them

Pictured
Bluebell woods

Applying a few simple editing tricks to the RAW file helps bring out the sunrise colours and makes the scene pop

Top tips for great spring images

Follow these six tips to ensure your images work

1 Get up early Sunrise times at this time of year are still fairly manageable, so get yourself up and on location before the sun rises so you can get set up and ready to shoot.

2 Watch your footing Stick to the footpaths and avoid walking through the bluebells as they are delicate – it's just good practice and courteous to any other photographers who may wish to shoot the same scene in the days and weeks after you.

3 Add variety Landscapes are synonymous with wide-angle lenses for good reason but be sure to add a short telephoto lens, such as a 70-200mm and a macro lens too, if you have them. These lenses in particular will add variety to your spring shots.

4 Shoot through a lens backwards If you don't have a macro lens, one trick to try is shooting through a 50mm lens backwards. Flip it around and shoot through it the 'wrong' way to focus closer.

5 Use photo apps Download a photo app onto your phone so you always have it to hand on a shoot. Weather apps are good for staying up to date with the forecast, whilst apps like PhotoPills can help you plan and work out the direction of the sun throughout the day.

6 Return to the same location Once you've found a good spring location full of flowers, return there year after year. With experience, you'll work out where the best angles are and how the light falls.





Reveal more detail

Meet the editing pro



James Abbott is a respected professional photographer and photography journalist, specialising in shooting and editing techniques. His book *The Digital Darkroom* covers a range of professional image editing skills in both Photoshop and Affinity Photo.
@jamesaphoto jamesaphoto.co.uk

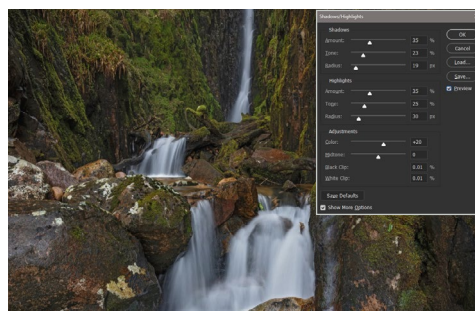
Use the Shadows/Highlights tools in Photoshop for powerful detail recovery



Shadows and Highlights in Lightroom are great for when you're editing RAW files, but there's only so far you can push them, and that's to 100. And how do you deal with these tonal ranges when shooting jpegs? The Shadows/Highlights adjustment in Photoshop offers refined control and, despite appearing complicated, there's a simple trick that makes them work like a dream every time.

What you'll be using

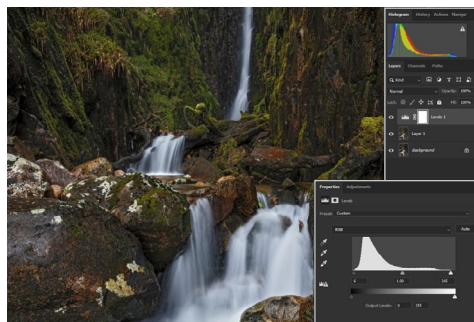
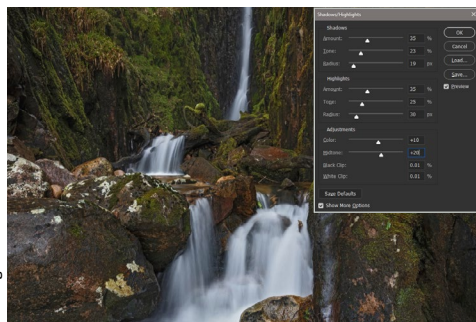
- Shadows
- Highlights
- Adjustments
- Levels
- Blending modes



1 Duplicate Layer Press Ctrl/Cmd+J to duplicate the Background Layer and go to Image > Adjustments > Shadows/Highlights. When the dialogue opens, click on Show More Options, as we'll be using most of these controls. All current settings will be the default, which we'll change in the following steps.

2 Lift Shadows The secret to success here is to position the Shadows sliders so they make a line like a forward slash. Start with the Amount, adjust the others and then refine them using the Amount as the starting point. For this image, Amount was set to 35 per cent, Tone to 23 per cent and Radius to 19px.

3 Recover Highlights The forward slash pattern also works for Highlights, so follow the same process as with Shadows. If a Shadows or Highlights adjustment isn't required, leave Amount at zero. For this image, Amount was set to 35 per cent, Tone to 25 per cent and Radius to 30px, which worked well.



4 Refine Adjustments The Color slider deals with saturation, which is reduced when Shadows and Highlights are adjusted. Midtone increases mid-tone contrast, which may also reduce. Increase Midtone until the image looks right, here it was +20. Color was then reduced to +10 from the default amount.

5 Use Layers Click OK to close the Shadow/Highlights dialogue, then change the Blending mode of the Layer to Luminosity. If the image still looks dull, create a Levels adjustment Layer and adjust the points. Here, the black point was set to 6 and white to 245. The Blending mode was also set to Luminosity.

KEY TIP

WHY THIS WORKS

Shadows/Highlights provides three sliders for controlling how these tonal ranges are recovered to provide refinement. The result can be effective but take care, as less is often more.

Inset Dark tones

The dark tones in this image work well and create contrast against the brighter waterfall, but there's a huge amount of detail and texture available

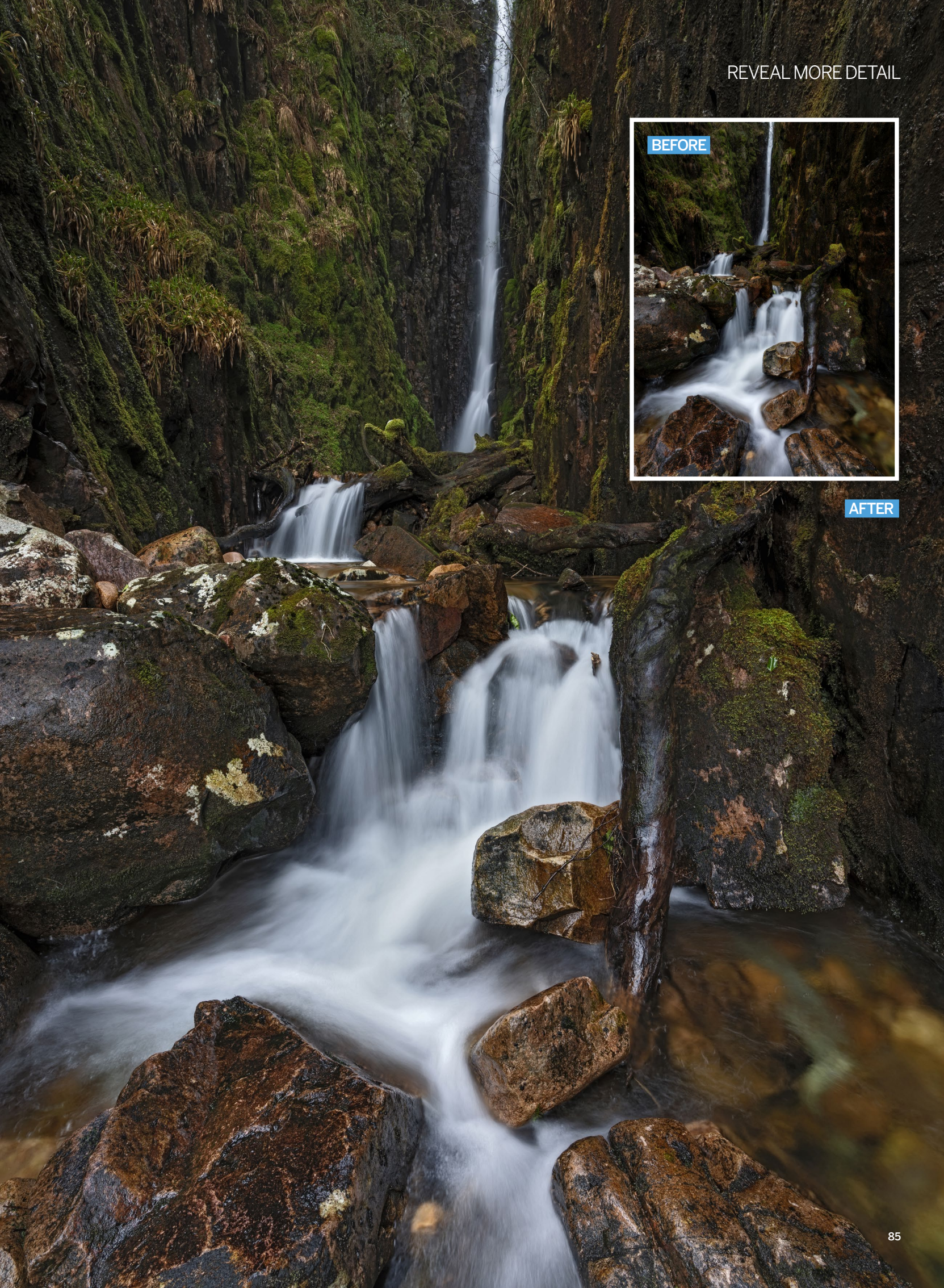
Main Added texture

By lifting the shadows to show more detail and recovering some highlight detail to reveal texture in the water, the image is successfully lifted

REVEAL MORE DETAIL



AFTER





Three simple techniques to improve any photo

Apply Texture and Clarity reductions, add a vignette and create a matte effect in Lightroom

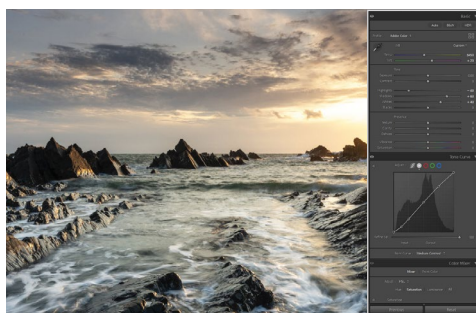


We all have tried and tested approaches to editing that are effective across a range of subjects. But by adding these three simple yet highly effective techniques to your workflow, you can

improve almost any image while also creating a consistent style across all your images. The great thing about them is that they aren't blindingly obvious so subtlety and using them in combination is key.

What you'll be using

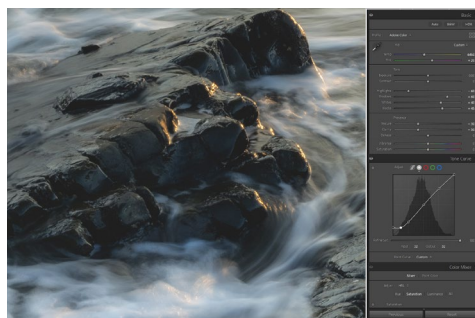
- Basic adjustments
- Masking
- Presence controls
- Blacks slider
- Tone Curve



1 Process normally Process your photo as usual, using the Basic adjustments and any of the tabs/tools below as required. The aim here is to finish the image in terms of brightness and colour before moving on to the main effects. For adding contrast, use the Tone Curves Medium Contrast preset.

2 Apply Masks Following on from the Basic adjustments now is also the time to apply any localised adjustments as required. For this image, the sky was darkened slightly while the foreground was lightened to balance out the exposure. The Brush was used to paint over the dark rocks and reveal extra detail.

3 Add a vignette Keep the Masking open, or open masking and drag a Radial Mask over the image so that the edges almost touch the edges of the image. Check the Invert box to target the outer area and set Feather to 70. Here, Exposure was set to -70 and Shadows to 30 to maintain detail in the darker areas.



4 Inject some softness Zoom into an area of the image with sharp detail and reduce the texture and Clarity sliders to between -15 and -40 depending on the resolution of your camera and personal taste. This will create an Orton-style effect. For this photo, both sliders were set to -30 for a pleasing look.

5 Make it matte Scroll down to the Tone Curve, which should have the Medium Contrast preset applied. Left-click on the left corner point and drag up the left side of the box. Now, lift the next one along up slightly. To finish the look, increase the Blacks slider to around +45 or less if the contrast is low.

KEY TIP

SAVE EFFECTS AS PRESETS

Save these effects as Lightroom Presets – one for portrait format and one for landscape format – and you will be able to apply them to all your images at the touch of a button.

Inset

Cool and harsh

Despite being taken at sunset, this backlit scene has high contrast and the light has been captured cooler than it appeared

Main

Warm atmosphere

With some basic processing, including reducing Texture and Clarity, adding a vignette and a matte effect, the scene has been transformed

AFTER

BEFORE





Denoise your photographs

Recover low light frames by eliminating image noise

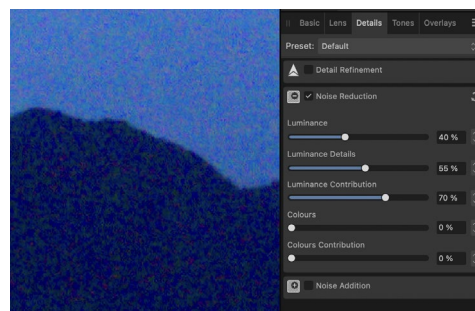
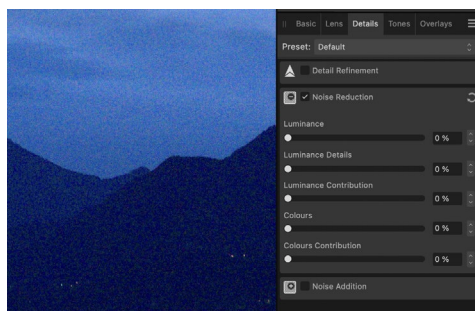
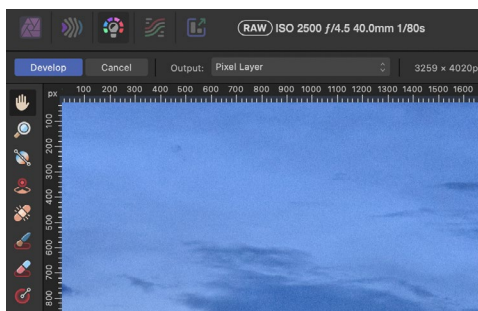


Photographing scenes in low light can be a challenge, especially when lengthening the exposure time is inconvenient – you don't have a tripod and there is nowhere to place the camera.

To compensate for this, a common solution is to open the aperture and increase the ISO. However, pushing the ISO too high can increase the amount of noise in your image, so let's correct this using Affinity Photo 2.0.

What you'll be using

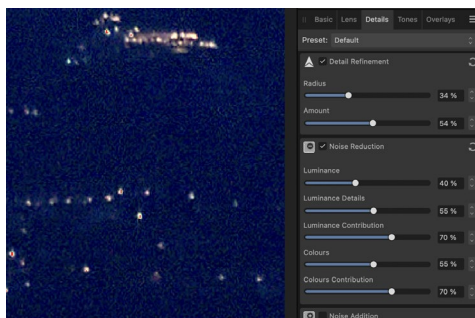
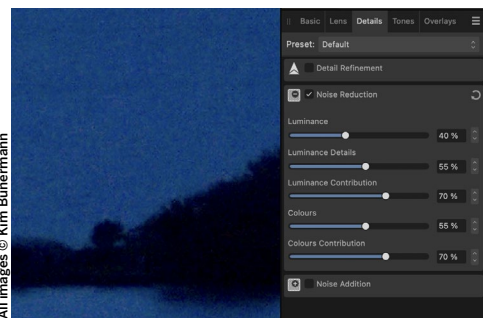
- Develop Persona
- Luminance Noise Reduction
- Color Noise Reduction
- Zoom tool



1 Start the process Open your image in Affinity Photo 2.0 – if it's a RAW file, the Develop Persona feature will open automatically but for a jpeg file, select the Develop Persona option on the left in the bar at the top. On the right, you'll see editing options with a different focus, starting with Basics.

2 Start denoising Navigate from the Basic options to the Details section and tick the Noise Reduction option, which enables Affinity Photo to reduce some noise automatically. Now it's time to start fine-tuning the sliders, with the Luminance and Color sliders being the two most important ones.

3 Adjust luminance noise Achieving a clear outcome while preserving detail is key, so keep zooming into the image. Concentrate on the Luminance slider to control the intensity of grain based on brightness. Bring back details by moving the Luminance Details slider and, finally, adjust the Luminance contribution.



4 Control colour noise Adjust the Color slider, which controls the intensity of the noise removal from the chrominance channel and grain based on the colour. Balance the Color and Color Contribution sliders to taste and, when you're done, untick the Noise Reduction box to see before and after versions.

5 Work on details When denoising images, the detail in the frame is likely to suffer. To optimise the outcome of your photograph, select the Detail Refinement feature, which is located above the Noise Reduction option. To bring some detail back, carefully increase the Radius and Amount sliders.

KEY TIP

SHOOT IN RAW FORMAT

RAW files are larger and contain more image information than jpegs, which is useful when post-processing as it opens up further possibilities for editing. So always shoot in RAW if you can – it might save the outcome of your image when captured under difficult conditions.

Inset Noise pollution

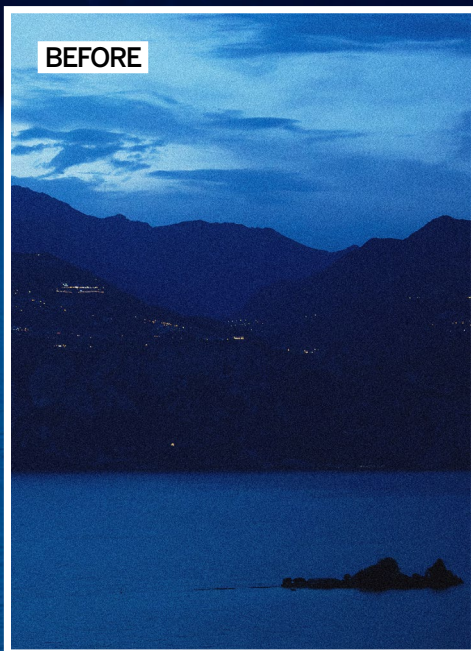
To compensate for the exposure, a high ISO value was selected. This has resulted in a scene that is suffering from noise

Main Blue hour magic

Using the denoise tools in Affinity Photo 2.0, it was possible to enhance the frame and create a much more pleasing result overall

AFTER

BEFORE



Pictured
Double drama
To enhance the vivid effect of the sky, Katarzyna used the pool of water on the beach to reflect the dramatic colours in her composition

Words by Kim Bunermann

Learn how to capture eye-catching images that have the wow factor by following our simple pro techniques

SHOOT SPECTA

A vibrant sunset, a thunderstorm with spectacular flashes of lightning or even dynamic waves on a stormy day at the seaside – all these and many other natural phenomena can provide the perfect backdrop to creating photographs with dramatic impact.

A full-page background image of a sunset over a beach. The sky is filled with vibrant orange, red, and purple clouds. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm glow. The ocean is calm, and the foreground shows a sandy beach with a large, shallow pool of water that perfectly reflects the colorful sky above.

SHOOT SPECTACULAR!

CULAR!

You don't even have to travel far or be in the right place at the right time to capture these scenes – there are plenty of well-known photographic techniques that will help you to create spectacular images. The essential component here is light, and understanding it so you can handle it

correctly is important, but perspective and the use of camera equipment are also key. Different lenses can transform the scene and create a visual distortion that enhances the dynamism and tension in the frame.

Over the following pages, our experts will discuss different approaches and techniques

that you can use to create dramatic and spectacular images wherever you are. We'll show you how to capture dramatic skies and nature images, as well as urban landscapes. We also speak to a professional photographer who creates inspirational, dramatic portrait images indoors.

COMPOSE INDIVIDUALLY

Not every composition strategy suits every scene, so rather than focusing on applying one specific strategy, maintain a fresh perspective and apply compositional techniques individually. Although classic composition rules are valuable, they can be limiting, so experiment with unconventional approaches that highlight the subject, rather than forcing techniques that don't fit.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

Go low

Why lowering the eye level is a clever approach when composing a dynamic subject

Adopting a low angle when shooting is ideal for capturing objects that are just above the ground, as is the case with this image. The waves crashing over the concrete slabs and stones covered with algae make a perfect foreground, while in the background of the frame are the ruins of the Hexengrund torpedo research facility near Gdynia in Poland, which was used by the Luftwaffe in World War II. This shot was taken just before sunset and the whole setting is in cool blue and green colours, which strengthens the dramatic character of the photo.

Dynamic composition

Katarzyna Kujawska explains how composition can enhance the drama and direct the viewer

Images with a dramatic impact have the goal of attracting the viewer's attention, drawing them into the image and focusing their attention on the main elements of the frame – so following the optimal composition is essential.

What I like about dramatic compositions most is their dynamics – each composition must be well thought out. In the field, consider how to use the current surroundings to make the photo interesting for the viewer. The photographer's task is to create a composition that is a visual story of a given moment and which a viewer can interpret in any way.

First of all, contrast, understood in the broad sense of the word, plays an important role here. This applies to light and shadow, bright expressive colours combined with pastels, moving objects and static objects. It is also about combining what the viewer perceives as beautiful and ugly. I am from Poland and we still come across artefacts of WWII on the beaches, including bunkers or ruins such as the building where torpedoes were tested.

I often use symmetry in my photographs, which draws the viewer deeper into the photo. Leading lines and placing distinctive landscape elements in strong points are other interesting elements of the composition that can be used. I also like to create dynamic foregrounds

Katarzyna Kujawska



Katarzyna Kujawska is a Polish photographer who specialises in scenic and seascape photography. She has honed her craft over the past five years

and, in 2023, attained a Certificate of Professional Title in the field of image registration, processing and publication. Katarzyna's captivating photographic works are showcased at both individual and collective exhibitions held in the Pomerania region of northern Poland, where she currently lives.

Instagram: @kkujawskaphoto

to immerse the viewer in the image – and seascapes are perfect for this.

Capturing the elements that are in motion, such as the waves or clouds, plays an important role here. The sea currents and blowing wind make it possible to photograph waves, which are one of my favourite subjects to shoot in dramatic photography.

Figure out framing

Keep these points in mind to find the most drama in your scene

ANALYSE THE SCENE

First, it is vital to decide on what elements you want to focus on says Katarzyna. "Paying attention to atmospheric conditions like light, shadows and colours as well as the surrounding objects is key. Think about what composition strategies and photographic techniques you can apply to highlight the subject," she adds.

FIND YOUR POINT OF VIEW

Now, explore the part of the landscape you want to photograph from different viewpoints. "It is worth doing that through the viewfinder or camera screen," says Katarzyna. "Adjust the point of view to the location of the most dramatic feature in the frame and its subject matter."

DECIDE ON STRATEGY

Remember those tried-and-tested composition strategies that highlight the subject. "Determine the composition – look for symmetric elements and leading lines or apply the rule of thirds," Katarzyna says. "Keep an eye on the landscape shape, the subject's appearance and its location."

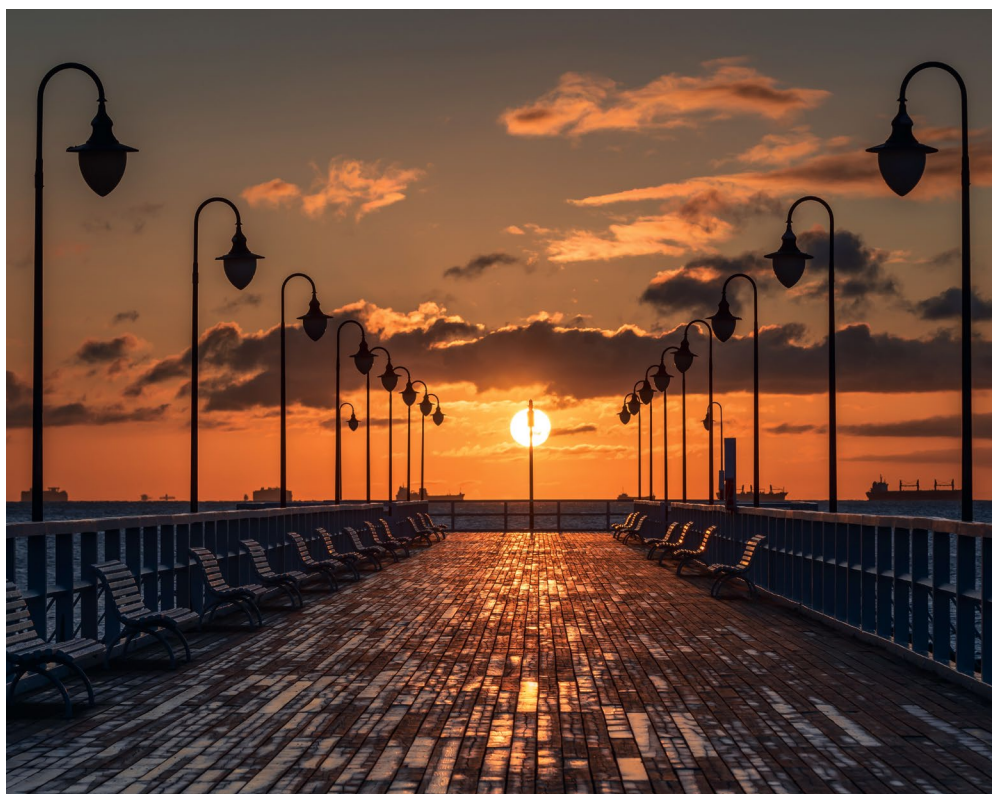


IMAGE ANALYSIS Create symmetry

Draw the viewer in using lines, repeating elements and tonal range

The most interesting elements of this composition are the symmetry and leading lines, which draw the viewer deeper into the picture. However, for creating a photo with a dramatic character, you need a little more, so in this case, I used a wide tonal range.

Here, the sun is the main subject and also the brightest object, with the leading lines being much darker. The streetlights are turned off, which makes them appear almost black when photographing against the sun.

I took this photo in Gdynia, Poland. In spring and autumn, you can photograph the rising sun here, and I pressed the shutter when it was perfectly aligned with the pier. I used a subtle vignette to emphasise the direction of light.

Create contrasting skies

Jignesh Chavda offers some insight into combining mesmerising dramatic backdrops with true black pixels

Jignesh Chavda



Based in Ahmedabad, India, Jignesh Chavda is a self-taught street, travel and nature photographer and curator by profession. Jignesh was a finalist in

the Environmental Photographer of the Year competition and his work has been published on many platforms, including *India Photo Art*, *Better Photography*, *Shutter* and *Digital Photographer* amongst many others.

Instagram @jigg_s

I've always been a sucker for a dramatic sky – I love calm sunrises, vibrant sunsets, mid-day blue skies and stormy clouds all the same. Beautiful skies feed my soul and add life to my photographs. An interesting background gives you the opportunity to create some outstanding memorable frames. I'm sharing my top tips for photographing dramatic skies, including how to get the exposure right in-camera. The latter is a challenge as the sky often requires a different exposure than the foreground to underline its dramatic impact.

One solution here is to transform the foreground scenery into a silhouette using 'true black pixels'. Creating silhouettes is an art form, creating a different perspective and bringing in high-contrast elements that enhance the dramatic impact of the sky in the

background. When framing colourful skies, I combine the subject's silhouette – often creatively, but it depends on the scene.

Another approach is to aim for a more balanced exposure so that the foreground subject still contains details instead of true black pixels. For this, I sometimes use my Pro DMC ND Filter, which acts like sunglasses for my lens, but only for scenes where sunlight is intense. For example, in the mountains, the sunset lights are bright so, when shooting, close your aperture to f/8 to maximise your depth of field to keep both foreground and background in focus. In addition, most DSLR cameras have a function called automatic exposure bracketing, which allows you to take three different exposures of the same photo with one click of the shutter.

DON'T GET CONFUSED WHEN MERGING

When you are capturing multiple HDR frame sequences so that you can merge them in post-processing, it is easy to lose track of the specific series of images you are trying to take. For a better overview of the series when starting, hold your hand in front of the lens and snap an image so that you can see where your next merge sequence will start.

*Pictured
Aurora backdrop*
"To capture a clear Aurora, a cloudless sky is a requirement. Avoid evenings when there's a full moon"

Push the values

To boost the dramatic effect of skies, a polariser filter, such as the Marumi DHG Super Circular PL, comes in handy. At certain angles, this filter will intensify the visual impression of the sky by darkening it and saturating the other colours in the frame. Next to this, it helps to reduce unwanted glare from shiny surfaces.



SHOOT SPECTACULAR!

Embrace tonality

Discover how enhancing the dynamic range in an image can elevate the dramatic impact of your work

"HDR stands for High Dynamic Range, which is a technique that supports you in bringing more detail in both bright and dark areas of an image. HDR photos can be displayed on devices with over 1,000 nits of brightness," says Jignesh. An HDR image is a result of multiple photographs, all exposed in different ranges and merged either in post-processing or in-camera.

"The more contrast between the exposures, the 'higher' the HDR will look," he explains. "By bringing different exposures together, you make the most of every pixel so that the images more closely resemble what the human eye can perceive."

Here, creating an HDR image at the editing stage gives you more control. For most cameras, the in-camera HDR function is designed to extend dynamic range via exposure bracketing and is often just available to shoot as a jpeg.

Following this approach creates more realistic-looking scenery. As Jignesh's work focuses mainly on travel, street and documentary photography, carrying a tripod around can often be an inconvenience. Therefore, he often shoots multiple frames handheld at different exposures. However, there are plenty of factors that need to be considered when shooting to enable as smooth a merging process as possible.



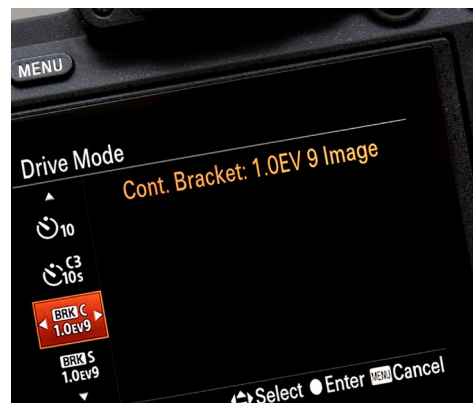
1 Seek support "When shooting handheld, I shoot through the viewfinder. This way, I get support from my face to get sharp results," says Jignesh. In general, have a look in the scene for ways to get extra support. A wall or a stable surface that you can lean against or place the camera on is best.



2 Activate settings Next, shoot in manual mode. If you want to merge the files in post-processing, select the RAW file option. When creating an in-camera HDR, select the jpeg option. Now activate the Image Stabilisation feature in-camera and on your lens to balance out movements.



3 Set the values Use faster shutter speeds, such as 1/80sec, to minimise the risk of small movements between recorded image sequences. Then, select a moderate aperture to prevent a shallow DOF and ISO to achieve a relatively balanced exposure, ensuring that both the brighter and darker image elements are displayed well.



4 Shoot the scene For an HDR merge in post, record the scene multiple times using different exposure settings so that some scene elements are underexposed while others are slightly overexposed. When creating an in-camera HDR, select the auto exposure bracketing function and set your preferred number of stops and shots.

Create monodrama

Francisco Rosario on how photographic approaches contribute to theatrical results

I enjoy the challenge of creating dramatic images. I use many different techniques to achieve this, whether it's playing with perspective, doing long exposures, creating low-key images or sometimes all three.

A low-key image is defined by its largely dark tones, with nominal light and shadow contrast. Low-key photography gives you a clear focal point in the image and there are few to no visual distractions. It also lends itself to being even more dramatic when converted to black and white. Monochrome tones will naturally accentuate the contrast between light and dark and help bring more attention to your subject through the absence of colour. It is important to consider a wide contrast and tonal range as well as the subject and mood. A broad spectrum of tones from the darkest blacks to the brightest whites will contribute to the depth and dramatic effect, thereby increasing its overall impact on the image.

Choose subjects that allow for dramatic interpretation. The lack of colour will focus the viewer's attention on the form of the subject and the mood of the overall image. The great thing about low-key photography is that it can be done at any time of the day, so you can create your own drama and set the scene for your images.

SELECT DARK TONES

To optimise contrast in your composition, prioritise including predominantly dark image elements while guiding the viewer towards the brighter elements.

DROP THE BRIGHTNESS

Close down your aperture using a higher f-stop number. Alternatively, increase the shutter speed. This way, less light enters the sensor, resulting in a darker and moodier frame.

Pro advice

Four top tips to enhance the dramatic impact of your images

USE ND FILTERS

Neutral Density filters give you greater control of your exposures during the daytime. They also allow you to capture natural elements, such as water and clouds in a trail of movement while still elements remain sharp. This can add more drama or serenity to your images.

FIND DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Go low, shoot from the hip, look up – possibilities are everywhere, not just straight ahead. Going low or high

over your subject allows you to play with perspective, changing the size and shape of your foreground and background. Looking up at skylights can also make for dramatic low-key images.

HONE YOUR CAMERA SETTINGS

In general, you should shoot in Manual mode for greater control. Use as low an ISO as possible and retain a fast shutter speed – unless you're controlling motion with ND filters. Use Spot Metering to get

the meter to read off your subject and maintain darker backgrounds. Always check your histogram to ensure the desired exposure.

EDIT FOR CONTRAST

In post-processing, boost the contrast to deepen shadows and highlight the subject. Fine-tune the exposure and use curve adjustments so the image retains strong contrast between light and dark areas. This can enhance the dramatic and atmospheric qualities of low-key imagery.

IMAGE ANALYSIS

Stretch the perspective

Exaggerate distances to spice up your visual language

This is the Olympic Stadium in Montreal, Canada. I was walking around with my 12-24mm lens, trying to get an interesting composition when I saw this grate cover. I got down low with my camera, to the point where the camera was just a few inches above it and shot handheld at a focal length of 12mm.

By doing this, I was able to exaggerate the distance between the foreground and background, making it appear as though the grate cover was almost as big as the stadium itself. For full disclosure, there was a featureless grey sky that day, so I added a cloudy sky in post-processing for a little more drama.

SWITCH TO SPOT

Switch to M mode and communicate to the camera that you intend to create an unconventional exposure. That means selecting the Spot Metering mode to bias the exposure towards a specific area of the scene.

METER FROM HIGHLIGHTS

To create a darker mood in your low-key photograph, focus on the brightest area of the scene and position the AF point here. Now take a meter reading and adjust these settings accordingly.

FRANCISCO'S LENS OF CHOICE

The G Master edition of Sony's FE 12-24mm f/4 G zoom retains the ultra-wide viewing angles while featuring a wider max aperture. As a result, the front optical elements are noticeably larger but the lens remains lightweight and easy to handle. It boasts exceptional performance, with superior image quality and fast autofocus justifying the high price for a G Master lens.

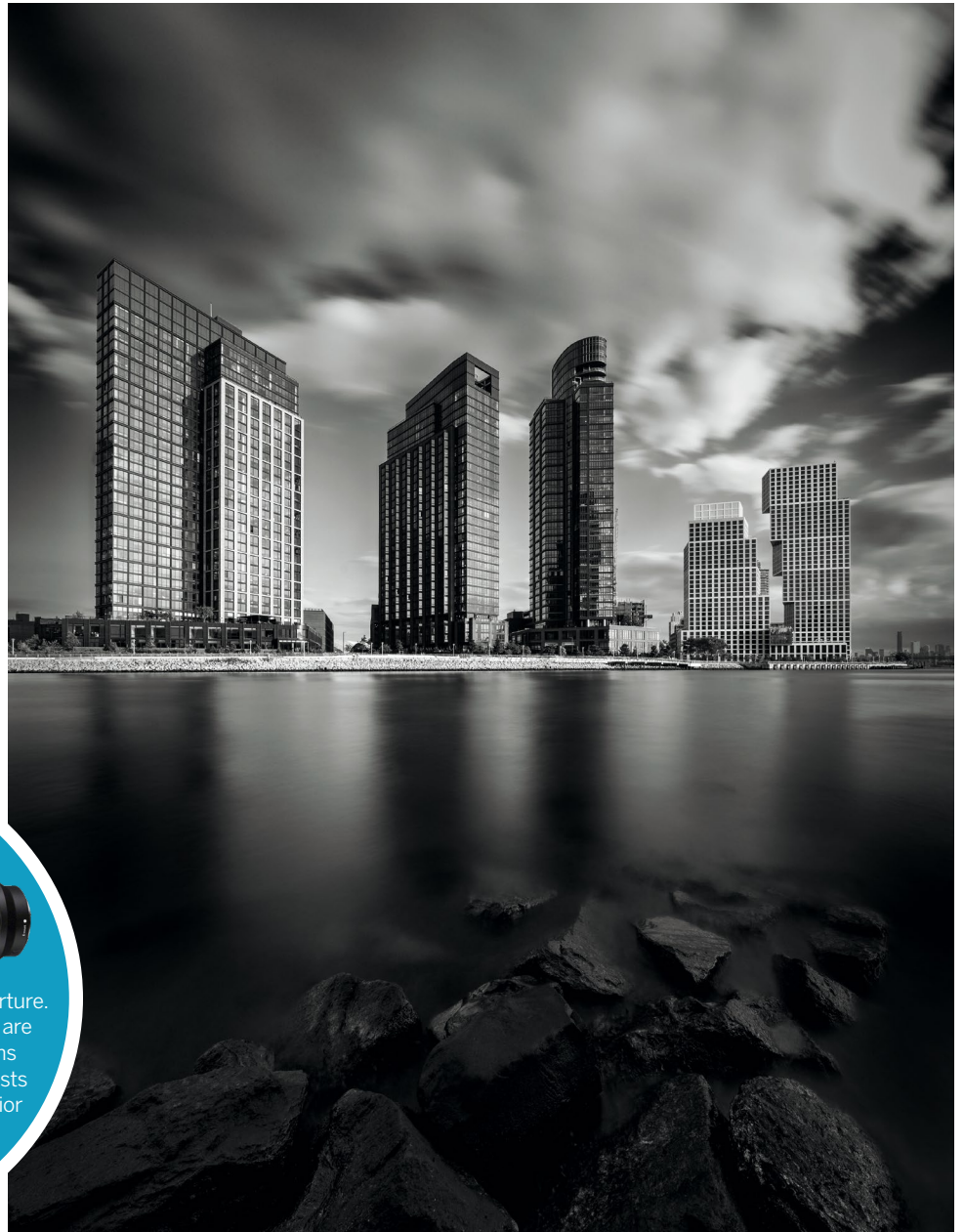


IMAGE
ANALYSIS

Follow the clouds

Lower the shutter speed to turn backgrounds into an additional dramatic element

This is Greenpoint Landing in Brooklyn, New York. I photographed this at the end of the day, setting my tripod low to the ground to capture the rocks in the foreground and use them as my leading line into the background. I shot for 30 seconds at 12mm using a six-stop ND filter to add the motion in the clouds and water. For me, landscape or cityscape long exposures are enhanced when clouds are present. The wind was blowing north, which made it appear as if the clouds were going out of the frame while the rocks appeared to be going inside the frame.

Francisco Rosario

Francisco Rosario is a photographer based in New York City. He began his career at various studios around the city and now

specialises in professional real estate and interior photography. In his free time, he enjoys capturing the ever-changing cityscape of New York and embarking on photographic adventures across the United States.
@frophoto

Pictured

Mist opportunity

Daniel nearly abandoned this shoot, but on the way to his car, he looked back and saw dense fog drifting along the river



IMAGE
ANALYSIS

Guiding light

Three key points Daniel considered when creating this dramatic frame

1 SEIZE THE MOMENT

"Patience was key. Despite the initial disappointment of clear skies, staying at the location allowed me to witness and photograph the fog as it slowly enveloped the statue. This experience highlighted the importance of persistence and being ready to adapt to any sudden changes in the photographic conditions."

2 EMBRACE WARMTH AND LIGHT

"As the fog began to thicken, the early morning sun cast a warm, golden light across the scene. I took full advantage of this light, which beautifully outlined the statue's silhouette against the mist. Observing the way in which light interacts with the fog can significantly enhance the mood and depth of your photos."

3 COMPOSE WITH THE FOG

"The fog served as a dynamic backdrop, making the Cristo Rei statue appear as if it were emerging directly from the mist. I carefully composed the shot to accentuate this effect, experimenting with various angles to capture the statue's grandeur as it emerged from the ethereal scene."

Work with the weather

Daniel Costa on the critical nature of working with foggy conditions that transformed his imagery

The 'Guiding Light' image (left) depicts a scene that I had envisaged for some time. After several attempts, I finally managed to align the foggy weather conditions with a day when I was available. On that particular day, the weather forecast had predicted fog, but clear skies greeted me before sunrise, leading me to nearly abandon the shoot.

However, just 30 minutes after sunrise, as I was halfway to my car, I looked back and saw dense fog beginning to drift along the river.

I ran back to my previous spot as fast as I could. In just three minutes, the fog started to turn golden, enveloping the Cristo Rei statue. Within minutes, the statue had completely disappeared into the fog.

By embracing the unpredictability of nature and adapting my approach, I managed to transform an uncertain situation into a stunning image. Always be ready for unexpected changes – they can lead to extraordinary photographic opportunities.

Daniel Costa



Daniel Costa is a professional landscape, seascape and urban photographer from the town of Sintra in Portugal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site

located inside the Sintra-Cascais Natural Park. Daniel is a brand ambassador for both Formatt-Hitech and Sunwayfoto and has travelled to many countries around the world over the past few years. He is the author of two published books and now focuses on writing magazine reviews and articles and on running photography workshops and tours.

Instagram: @danielcostaphotography
danielcostaphotography.com

Capture natural spectacles

When most people stay indoors, venture out to explore powerful subjects

Even though this approach may not be the most comfortable and relaxing, it's worth seeking out the dramatic potential of natural influences like thunderstorms,

mist and fog. It's also important to pay attention to celestial events such as the aurora or shooting stars. Make sure to not only inform yourself about the

timings but also take your safety precautions into account. As Daniel said, being adaptable and ready for unexpected changes is key when it comes to capturing

these dramatic natural events. Here are some tips on how to protect yourself while selecting the optimal camera settings to make the most of the conditions.

THUNDERSTORMS

Best shooting times: Most frequent in spring and summer, especially on hot and humid summer afternoons and evenings

Safety precautions: Always photograph from inside a building or a car to dissipate any potential energy from lightning strikes.

Camera settings: Focus the camera lens on infinity, use a low ISO of about 100-500, aim for a medium aperture of f/8, and lengthen your shutter speed to 5 to 20 seconds.

Tips: To effectively convey the size of the lightning flashes, consider incorporating landscapes or cityscapes into the composition rather than solely focusing on the thunderstorm. This approach accentuates the dramatic impact of the storm.

Additionally, creating a series of images showcasing the lightning flashes enables you to merge frames in post-processing, enhancing the photograph's overall dramatic effect. Don't forget to secure your camera on a tripod to facilitate a seamless merge process during editing.



MIST AND FOG

Best shooting times: Mostly common in the early morning hours or evening hours

Safety precautions: Humidity, condensation and water in the air can ruin non-water-sealed gear and create the conditions for fungus to grow. When you are back home, dry your kit to maintain its quality and longevity.

Camera settings: Use a lens of 70-200mm or even 100-400mm to compress the distance and heighten the effect of the mist (See p31-32 for our tutorial on shooting and editing mist).

Tips: Most common near the shores or water. Getting on a high viewpoint and shooting down is an effective way to showcase the mist or fog. Also photographing in a dense forest is great for showcasing both, especially when changing the perspective and shooting straight upwards into tree crowns, which mystically become enveloped by the conditions.

Fog and mist can also magically transform cityscapes by changing the lighting at night, which offers great potential for capturing mystic shots of urban areas.



CELESTIAL EVENTS

Best shooting times: Apps such as 'PhotoPills' can help you find specific dates

Safety precautions: Visit the location beforehand to get familiar with the surroundings. On the day, ensure you're in place before it gets dark. Take a head torch to help you see in the dark environment.

Camera settings: Mount the camera on a tripod, focus the lens on infinity and use an open aperture and a shutter speed of approximately 1/4sec, push ISO higher if needed and use the self-timer shutter option.

Tips: To showcase the night sky, stars or other phenomena with a clear approach, light pollution is your biggest enemy. It is caused by surrounding light sources and is a common problem in urban areas. Aim to visit places that are far away from the city and check the light pollution intensity online (www.lightpollutionmap.info). These maps determine the intensity of light pollution, using the Bortle Scale on a measure from one (dark sky) to nine (severely light-polluted).



Shoot impactful portraits

Don't limit the drama to outdoor images. **Gavin Taylor** illustrates the power of studio lighting and how to handle it for maximum effect

Gavin Taylor



Internationally published, self-taught photographer Gavin Taylor is based on the Isle of Wight, UK. Collaborating with talented, aspiring

models and creative professionals, as well as clients who are stepping in front of the camera for the first time, Gavin specialises in creating striking and impactful images that serve to inspire, instil confidence and evoke a profound sense of empowerment.

Instagram: @g.t_imagery

I like images that draw people in and make them go 'wow!' – bold, dynamic shots with drama, passion and mystery have this impact. There is no better feeling than working with a client or model on an image and seeing their reaction to the final photograph. Here, my process begins with a meeting with the model, looking at ideas and discussing ways to create the image. This involves considering lighting, themes and locations – for me, clear communication is vital for any shoot I do.

I prefer to have full control over the image from start to finish. When shooting on location, I balance natural light with studio strobes to reduce the background ambience, adding more drama and moodiness, while using strobes to highlight my subject, making it visually stand out from the background. If I'm in my studio, I use multiple strobes to

manipulate the light to what I require. I tend to favour simple, one-light setups, but for a more dramatic look, I add more lights to create high contrast and a dynamic that is hard to beat. While I do feel more comfortable in a studio environment, the limited size of a home studio shooting area can present challenges in choosing the right modifiers and lighting setup. In such a situation, flexibility is key to being able to adapt quickly.

If you are new to this genre and style, my advice is to do some research. The internet is full of inspirational content, find a style you feel suits your ideas and adapt it to your own concept and flair. Most importantly, don't be afraid to try something – think outside your comfort zone, break the rules and don't dismiss an image on first look, you never know how the image may change in post-processing.

Pictured

High contrast

Gavin favours simple, one-light setups but for a more dramatic look, he adds lights to create high contrast and dynamism



IMAGE
ANALYSIS

How this was shot

Camera: Canon EOS 5D Mark III
Lens: Sigma 50mm f/1.4 DG HSM Art
Aperture: f/1.4
Shutter Speed: 1/50sec
ISO: 100

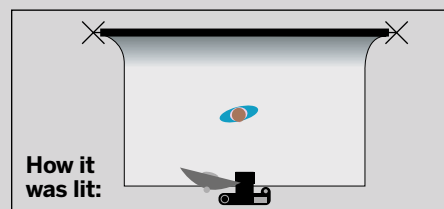
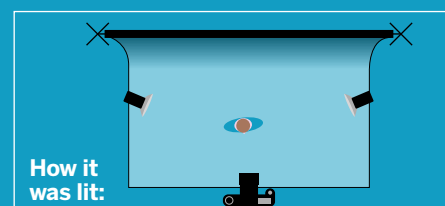


IMAGE
ANALYSIS

How this was shot

Camera: Canon EOS 5D Mark III
Lens: Sigma 50mm f/1.4 DG HSM Art
Aperture: f/7.1
Shutter Speed: 1/125sec
ISO: 100





SHOOT SPECTACULAR!

Follow your vision

Shoot film noir-style for a powerful, classic frame

This image came to life during the editing stage. It was taken in a hotel on the Isle of Wight. Ellie wore a stunning vintage dress and we were aiming to create a film noir-style shot in one of the corridors. I used my Canon 5D Mk III and a Sigma 50mm Art lens and shot with a wide aperture for a shallow depth of field, along with a lower shutter speed to use the ambient light of the corridor. I worked with a 16-inch beauty dish with a grid to focus the light on Ellie's face, creating traditional 1940s-style film lighting with contrasting shadows.

However, I wasn't happy with the image in colour, so I converted it to black and white during post-processing. I increased the contrast to bring out the light and dark tonality and added a vintage colour tone to create more mystery. What could have been an image I discarded turned out to fit our vision perfectly.



Pictured
Strobe effect

Gavin uses natural light with strobes to reduce the background ambience and make the subject stand out

Gavin's lighting kit

The equipment he uses for shooting dramatic portraits

I have always been a Canon shooter, using Sigma Art lenses. My current go-to setup is the Canon R5 with either the Sigma 35mm, 50mm or 85mm Art lenses. They give me every option for shooting with bulletproof reliability. I use Pixapro/Godox studio lights, which are the best value lights. Being wireless, I can use them anywhere. Add them to Pixapro's range of light modifiers and you have a winning combination.

CANON EOS R5



SIGMA 35mm f/1.4 DG HSM ART

SIGMA 50mm f/1.4 DG HSM ART



SIGMA 85mm f/1.4 DG HSM ART

3X PIXAPRO CITI6000 MANUAL STUDIO FLASH BOWENS MOUNT (GODOX AD600BM)



PIXAPRO EASY-OPEN PARABOLIC WHITE SOFTBOX LIGHT (65CM)



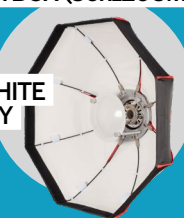
PIXAPRO DEEP PARABOLIC SOFTBOX (90CM/120CM)



2X PIXAPRO SUPER LARGE STRIP SOFTBOX (30x120CM)



PIXAPRO STUDIO WHITE WIDE ANGLE BEAUTY DISH GRID (60CM)



PIXAPRO SILVER BEAUTY DISH LIGHTING STUDIO WITH GRID (42CM)

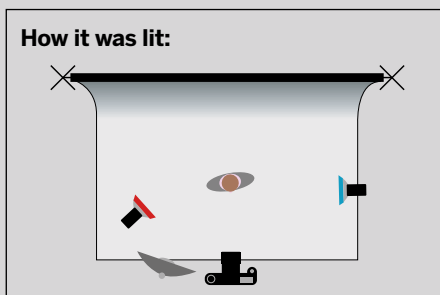


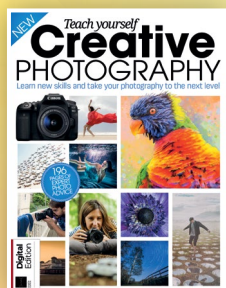
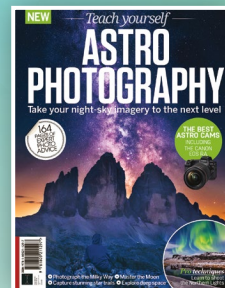
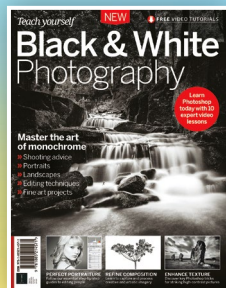
IMAGE
ANALYSIS

How this was shot

Camera: Canon EOS 5D Mark III
Lens: Sigma 50mm f/1.4 DG HSM Art
Aperture: f/1.4
Shutter Speed: 1/50sec
ISO: 100

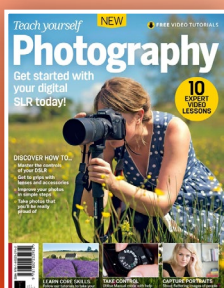
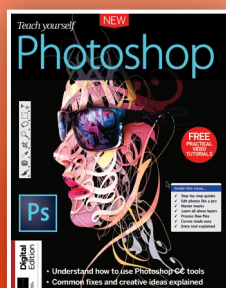
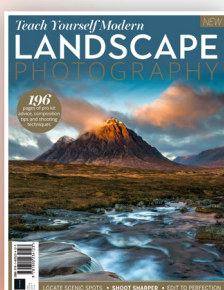
How it was lit:





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FLASH IT UP!

Uncover the potential of artificial flash lighting indoors and outdoors to expand your photographic options

Words by Kim Bunermann

Pictured

Wedding day

Our flash expert Vince Preston uses his Profoto A10 flash to enhance his beautiful wedding images

Flash: some photographers embrace it and see it as an essential tool in their photographic arsenal, while others approach it with caution and prefer to rely on natural light or other lighting techniques. However, when balanced right, artificial lighting transforms your subject, offering the opportunity to enhance your imagery in innovative ways. Using flash grants you greater control and flexibility, allowing for the creation of more

creative and professional results, even when shooting in bright daylight – so diving into this topic is beneficial for any photographic genre.

These days, working with flash lighting is safe but this was quite different when it was first used in the 20th century. Initially, flash powder was used as a method of artificial lighting, but it was both inconvenient and posed safety hazards. Due to these safety concerns and the need for more reliable lighting solutions, this method was replaced by flashbulbs and, later, electronic flash units.

In this special feature, we'll delve into the fundamentals of flash photography, and explore how to master and shape light to achieve your artistic vision. We'll also demonstrate techniques for blending in with natural light and embrace more unconventional approaches that will challenge your creativity. Finally, our flash expert Vince Preston, will fire away professional advice and give an insight into his on-location shoots when working with diverse clients and photographic genres.



**AVOID
BLACK STRIPES**

Shutter speed is crucial when working with flash and you need to take the camera's specified sync speed (approximately 1/125sec to 1/200sec) into account. If you shoot with a faster shutter speed, black stripes can appear in your picture.



Pictured

Blue lights

If your focus is on studio portraits or product shots, then monolights or studio lights will be essential for your work

A guide to using flash

Understand the basics of flash so that you can use it to highlight your photographic work

When deciding how to integrate flash into your workflow, consider your specific approach to work. If your goal is to primarily work in a studio and focus on creating portraits or product shots, then monolights or studio lights are beneficial. However, it's best to keep your options open, so investing in an easily transportable wireless lighting system is key. For example, the Profoto B10 meets these criteria and is a worthwhile investment. By maintaining this flexibility, you can take the system outdoors or to a client's location and work wirelessly, even in smaller shooting areas.

On the other hand, a powerful speedlight or flashgun sitting on your camera shoe is another type of flash that offers a versatile way of working. When mounted on the camera, it allows you to quickly adapt to fast-paced environments with a lack of light or mixed lighting situations, such as when capturing

events or weddings. However, these flashguns can also be mounted on a tripod or stand to function as an off-camera flash, allowing you to have maximum control over the light. For instance, the Profoto A10 flash is powerful and can effectively illuminate most scenarios.

While powerful flashes and their intensity can make or break an image, controlling the flashlight is essential, especially when working with strong studio lighting. Depending on your specific genre of work, different tools are available, which can be organised into three categories: modifiers, diffusers and shapers. These accessories don't have to be expensive, as you can also make them yourself at home using household items. For example, paper plates combined with wooden picks can be used to create a DIY beauty dish, while placing a white plastic bag over the on-camera flash can act as a makeshift softbox, and so on.

Triggering off-camera flash

When using speedlights, there are different types of flash triggers

When using a flash, the camera and the flash device must communicate to ensure that the flash fires in sync with the shutter button. If you're using a speedlight attached to your camera, the 'Commander' (CMD) mode acts as a reliable line-of-sight flash trigger, eliminating the need for an additional physical trigger. When working with off-camera flash, various triggers are available to transmit the TTL information.

For extended line-of-sight trigger distances or more flash groups, the Optical Commander trigger is the optimal choice. However, using wireless triggers allows you to position your speedlights virtually anywhere, as they operate with radio control and transmit signals effectively even when the speedlight is out of your line of sight.



Understand groups and channels

Take greater control and avoid cross-triggering

To use wireless flash and work with multiple flashes, you need to make sure that the speedlights respond to the same radio frequency. This involves assigning channels to the flashes. You can set the channel from the camera and flash menus, or physically switch the radio triggers. For more control, you can divide the flashes into groups, each with independent outputs, allowing you to activate or deactivate them from your camera.



Control the light

An overview of how to modify, shape and diffuse your flash

SOFTBOX

Type: Modifier

Available for:

On/off-camera speedlight, monolight.

Popular light modifier for multiple photo genres which softens the light, eliminates hard shadows and gives the subject a flattering look.



UMBRELLA

Type: Diffuser

Available for: Off-camera speedlight, monolight.

A white umbrella creates soft and even lighting, whereas the golden/silver umbrella produces a slightly harder light and adds warmer/colder tones.



BEAUTY DISH

Type: Modifier

Available for:

On/off-camera speedlight, monolight.

Produces a soft-contrast light, perfect for portraits or beauty photography as it creates a circular catch light in the subject's eyes.



GRIDSPOT

Type: Shaper

Available for:

On/off-camera speedlight, monolight.

Creates a hard and focused light that acts like a beam of light on your subject, available in different grid sizes for different intensities.

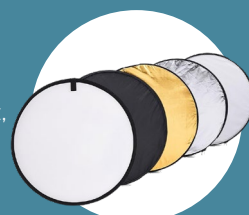


REFLECTOR

Type: Diffuser

Available for: Off-camera speedlight, monolight.

A low-cost, must-have off-flash tool which allows you to direct the light onto specific parts of the subject with different surface options to master intensity.



PACKING THE POWER

When heading out to a flash on-location shoot, make sure to pack spare batteries for your speedlight. Depending on the age of your flash, the light intensity you use and how often you fire away, batteries may run low on energy quicker than you might expect.

TECHNIQUE 1

Increase the speed

Use high-speed sync to freeze fast-moving details

To capture the action without introducing motion blur, you can use a high-speed camera or introduce flash, as this can freeze faster movements than the highest shutter speed setting of your camera. Here is a project you can do at home to develop a feeling for this technique, it involves photographing sharp details of water.

First, position the flash off the camera to the side of a container or glass with water, leaving some space between the subject and the flash. To capture clear surfaces of the

glass without imperfections, place a reflector's translucent diffuser panel between the setup and the off-camera flash so that the light gets softened. Next, set your flashgun to Slave wireless setting and ensure it is on the same channel as the camera. Then, select Manual flash power and start with a flash setting of 1/4.

For this project, it's best to mount the camera on a tripod and use the self-timer



function or a wireless shutter release to work hands-free.

Shoot in Manual mode (M), use a sharp aperture around f/8, and low ISO values to minimise image noise.

Place an object into the water vase where the action will happen and focus. Lock the focus by switching your lens to MF. Lastly, get in position, let something like a fruit or an ice cube fall into the vase, and press the shutter.

Flash to highlight

SEPARATED SUBJECT

The flashlight is dominant and is aimed directly at the subject so that the background is visually separated by the ratio of the flashlight

DYNAMIC LIGHTING

The subject visually stands out and eliminates ambient light from falling on the subject, creating a striking contrast associated with an editorial look



TECHNIQUE 2

Blend in

Balance scenes by supplementing ambient location lighting

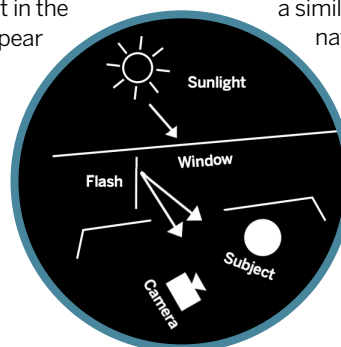
Using flash in an indoor setting during the daytime, even when it is well-lit with natural light, might seem contradictory. However, the additional artificial light from the flash can enhance your subject's appearance when used correctly. It creates a catchlight in the model's eyes, making them appear lively, while also brightening the skin and reducing shadows on the face.

The key challenge is to carefully balance the natural light, ambient light and flashlight to achieve natural-looking photographic results. To achieve this, place the

subject near a window. The flash can be a studio light or a speedlight used off-camera for this technique. Mount it on a tripod and position it next to the window so that natural light and the flashlight enter the scene from a similar direction.

To maximise the natural light look, use a modifier such as a softbox attached to the flash – the larger the modifier is, the more natural the result. Use a low-power flash setting to create a soft effect.

Next, set your camera to Manual (M) mode, and choose a wide aperture (low



TECHNIQUE 3

Go slow

Make movements visible by using slow-sync flash

1 Set the scene

For this photo technique, placing your subject in front of a black background works best. To maximise the effect, work with colourful subject features, for example, a brightly coloured dress. To make the movement visible, ask your subject to dance or move an object like flowers around while you are taking the image.

2 Decide on the flash type

For smaller scenes, where the subject does not need the entire backdrop to perform the movement, the power of a flash gun is sufficient. However, when more space is needed, studio lights are more powerful and are best placed to the left and the right of the scene. Bear in mind that, to make this approach work, you will also need a continuous light as well as the flash.

3 Stay stable

Mount the camera on a tripod to avoid camera shake and to keep your hands free, which is important when working alone. Shoot in M mode, select a sharp aperture of around f/8, lower the ISO settings and lengthen the shutter speed. Start with two seconds and take some test shots to see what works best.

4 Adjust flash options

In your camera menu, select either the First or Second Curtain flash option. If your camera has a flash button, press it until Rear is selected. The First Curtain flash fires the flash at the beginning of the exposure time, while the Second Curtain flash fires at the end of the exposure time.

5 Press the shutter

To avoid the subject appearing blurry due to camera shake, select the self-timer function in your camera menu or connect a remote shutter device. Now, press the shutter. Direct the subject in front of the lens to move or move objects in the scene yourself. Bear in mind that if you're working with the first or second curtain option, you need to be in the best position when the flash fires.

Pictured

Life in motion

With slow sync flash, we can visualise movement through introducing some blur to the shot



f-stop number) of around f/5 or less to achieve a good balance between natural light, ambient light, and flash light. Since you are working with natural light, you might need to adjust the aperture and ISO as the position of the sun and cloud cover can change while shooting.

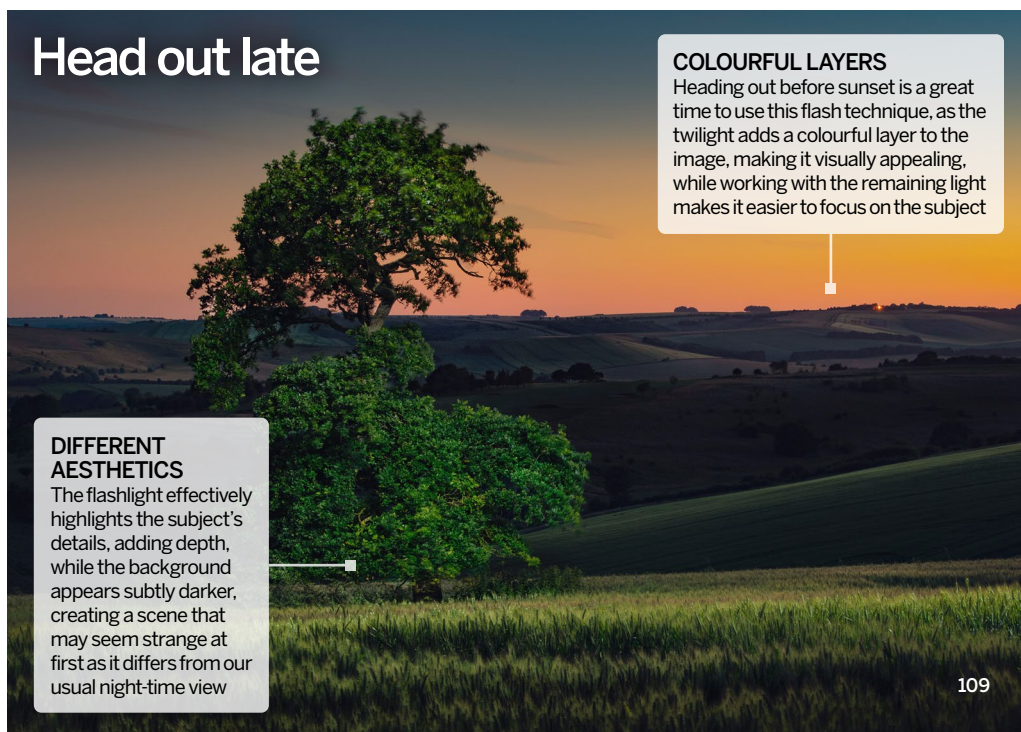
Head out late

COLOURFUL LAYERS

Heading out before sunset is a great time to use this flash technique, as the twilight adds a colourful layer to the image, making it visually appealing, while working with the remaining light makes it easier to focus on the subject

DIFFERENT AESTHETICS

The flashlight effectively highlights the subject's details, adding depth, while the background appears subtly darker, creating a scene that may seem strange at first as it differs from our usual night-time view



Flash on location

Vince Preston



Vince Preston is a photographer and Calibrate ambassador based in Leicestershire, UK. He specialises in portraits, weddings,

events and commercials, collaborating with high-street brands and clients of all kinds. Vince won the Best Corporate Events & Wedding Photographer 2023 and Most Innovative Corporate Events & Weddings Photographer 2024 at the Midlands Enterprise Awards.

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Vince Preston explains how to work with speedlights outside your comfort zone

"Flash photography is a versatile tool that can elevate your photography when used correctly," says Vince Preston. "Whether you're working in low-light conditions or outdoors, mastering the use of flash will allow you to manipulate light to your advantage," he adds.

This is especially true when working on location with clients, as the natural light doesn't always allow for a balanced exposure, whereas using flash opens up new possibilities, such as working in various locations and shooting at different times. "On location, wireless gear is key, from portrait shoots to products and weddings. Reliability and quality are essential to what I offer my clients, that is why I rely on Profoto lighting," says Vince.

While the style of flash photography is popular when creating product photography or portraits, flashing in daylight supports lifting hard shadows and freezing moments in motion. "The key is knowing when to use flash, how to control it and what mistakes to avoid. Practice and experimentation will help you harness the full potential of your flash for better, more dynamic photographs," he says. As with every aspect of photography, practice makes perfect, so to get a feeling for the flash settings, intensity and subject placement, a 'photo per day' project is a great way to gain experience in different light scenarios. This will provide you with confidence and adaptability you can use when working on set.



Pictured
Window dressing
"Mastering the use of flash will allow you to manipulate light to your advantage," says Vince



Make it an experience

How to work with clients to create unforgettable shoots and visuals

"Since the start of my photography career, I have prioritised providing a great experience for my clients. It begins with the first interaction, continues through the shoot and lasts in their memories," says Vince. "While style is important, what sets me apart is the personal connections that I build. Offering a memorable experience is crucial because it adds value beyond the photos. A meaningful experience engages the senses, evokes emotions, and fosters loyalty," he adds.

"A great experience helps differentiate brands, build relationships and generate positive word-of-mouth feedback. It also leads to higher satisfaction and repeat business."



Vince's lighting system

Here's why he uses different systems for different purposes

PROFOTO B10

For studio and on-location portraits, Vince works with the Profoto B10 pro lighting system. With the flash power of five speedlights, a continuous light mode with adjustable brightness and colour temperature makes it perfect for both stills and videos. This lightweight system operates wirelessly, giving him room to move and focus on capturing images. It also offers flexibility as the setup can either be mounted on camera tripods or light stands. It connects to the Profoto app, is compatible with Profoto Air remotes and can be combined with over 120 light-shaping tools.



PROFOTO A10

When Vince is booked to photograph events or weddings, he always makes sure to bring the Profoto A10 flashgun. This flashgun has 76W of power, meaning that it is strong enough to be used in daylight, even when competing against the bright midday sun. The A10 can be mounted directly on the camera shoe and is ready to capture a series of fast-paced moments in front of the lens due to its rapid recycling time. It operates as a trigger when used on-camera and offers a range of shooting modes. However, various ways of controlling the light, for example, via Profoto triggers, smartphone or iPad are also available.



Highlight colour

Capturing natural colours or getting creative with gels? Here's how it works

When it comes to colours in photography, the creative freedom is virtually endless, and this is a positive aspect. Colours transform the visual language of an image and consequently impact the viewer. This is demonstrated in the colour grading seen in popular movies or brands, which have adhered to a specific colour grading style. Additionally, you can experiment with attaching colour gels to the flash to infuse an artistic touch into your shots. These gels also play a crucial role in establishing a particular atmosphere and are instrumental in creating a mood-driven effect.

In genres where working with clients or their products, precision in colours is key. Vince emphasises that two genres where accurate colours are crucial are those where a flash is often used: portrait and product photography. When capturing a portrait, rectifying a colour tint in the skin tone during post-processing can be a time-consuming and challenging task. Similarly, when dealing with products, accurately representing the packaging and the product's colours is essential to prevent misleading customers of the client or brand during product advertisements.

One effective approach to achieve this is by using the White Balance settings or a Grey card. Here, Vince relies on the Color Checker Passport, a tool that enables him to capture true-to-life colours effectively during his shoots. The Calibrite ColorChecker Passport resembles a colour palette and features a standard 24-patch colour reference target for creating custom camera profiles and carrying out colour assessments. Its user-friendly interface and straightforward approach make it supportive even for beginners who have never worked with this tool before.

Pictured

Colourful tones

Colours transform the visual language of your images and can also infuse an artistic touch

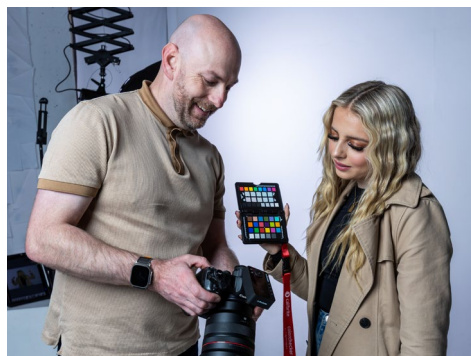


Check the colours

How Vince achieves 'true' tones working with the ColorChecker tool

Vince uses a technique called subjective colour calibration. First of all, he sets the scene, adjusts the lighting and subject and then places the ColorChecker in front of the subject. To oversee the process, Vince uses a tablet PC to display the scene's colours. This setup is connected to an app equipped with the capability to detect authentic colours using the ColorChecker Passport, ensuring accuracy and consistency in colour representation.

Once the colours have been captured, Vince saves his reference sample to a specific colour profile, streamlining the process of colour editing in Lightroom and ensuring that the final product reflects the true essence of the scene.



The ColorChecker Passport

GREY BALANCE

You can set exposure with the in-camera meter or use a handheld meter to ensure consistent colour neutrality

WHITE BALANCE

To ensure a consistent white balance across all images, you can create a custom in-camera setting, reducing the need for corrections at the post-processing stage

CREATIVE ENHANCEMENT

Instead of neutralising colours, you can also use the ColorChecker Passport to create an individual and distinctive colour look



CLASSIC TARGET

To create custom camera profiles, it is equipped with 24-patch colour reference targets following the industry standards

Vince's kitbag

The kit Vince packs for an on-location shoot with flash

CANON EOS R5

The Canon R5 is a powerhouse, delivering pristine image quality with outstanding autofocus performance. This is important for Vince when shooting events or occasions such as weddings. The full-frame camera has excellent in-body image stabilisation (IBIS) and can also capture up to 8K video.



CANON RF 85MM F1.2L USM

Vince uses this prime lens mainly for shooting portraits. Due to its accurate sharpness and low f-stop capabilities (f/1.2), he has control over achieving an extremely shallow depth of field, creating wonderful bokeh backgrounds to make the subject in front of his lens stand out.



CANON RF 28-70MM F2L USM

For wedding and event photography, flexibility is essential. Vince uses a zoom lens with a focal length range of 28-70mm, which allows him to adjust the framing, capturing wide-angle shots to provide an overview of the surroundings, as well as focused scenes such as shots of speakers or guests.



CANON RF 35MM F1.4L VCM

Compared to the previous model, the RF is lighter, sharper and much improved. Vince uses this lens for food and product photography because of its outstanding sharpness and the ideal 35mm focal length for overhead shots of food or for capturing atmospheric restaurant interiors.



CLIC CTO KIT

When shooting events with mixed light conditions, Vince uses the Colour Temperature Orange filter kit. This allows him to balance out warm lighting, which is often the case when working indoors. The filters can be quickly attached to A-series flashes due to their magnetic mount.





Do's & don'ts in flash photography

Vince's advice on what to focus on and what to avoid when using flash

Flash photography is a powerful tool that can dramatically enhance your photography. However, when used incorrectly, it can also spoil your shot. Natural light and flash photography all have a time and a place to be used. Whether you're illuminating your subject when shooting in low light or adding some creative light shaping to your landscape shots, knowing how to use flash can be the difference between a great shot and a missed opportunity. Here are my essential do's and don'ts to help you master flash photography.

Do's

USE FLASH TO FILL SHADOWS

One of the best uses of flash is to incorporate it as a 'fill light' to reduce harsh shadows in natural light settings. For example, when shooting outdoors with bright sunlight, use flash to illuminate the shadowed parts of your subject's face or body.

BOUNCE THE FLASH

Direct flash can create harsh, unflattering light. To soften the light and avoid strong shadows, try bouncing the flash off nearby walls or ceilings. This diffuses the light and creates a more natural look. If your flash doesn't swivel, consider using a diffuser or reflective surface.

ADJUST FLASH POWER

Many cameras allow you to adjust the flash output, which can help you avoid overexposure. Experiment with the power settings to find the right balance for your

scene. Sometimes a subtle flash works best, giving you just enough light to brighten the image without washing out the subject.

USE FLASH OUTDOORS

Contrary to popular belief, flash isn't just for low light or indoor situations. Using flash outdoors can help balance the light on your subject, especially when shooting in uneven or backlit situations, such as during sunset or bright midday light.

EXPERIMENT WITH OFF-CAMERA FLASH

Off-camera flash can open up creative possibilities. By placing your flash at different angles, you can create dramatic shadows, highlights, and textures that you can't achieve with an on-camera flash. Try using wireless triggers or a flash cord to position your light source for more dynamic lighting.



Pictured
Diffuse situation
 When using an external flash, attach a diffuser to soften the light and create an even spread

Don'ts

USE DIRECT FLASH IN CLOSE QUARTERS

Shooting with direct flash at close range can cause red-eye, harsh shadows, and an unnatural look. Avoid using direct flash in tight spaces, especially if you're close to your subject, as it often results in unflattering portraits and blown-out highlights.

RELY ON FLASH AT NIGHT

While flash can help in low-light situations, it isn't always the best option for night photography. Instead, consider using a tripod and slower shutter speeds to capture ambient light. Over-relying on flash at night can flatten the image and reduce the overall atmosphere of the scene.

MISS FLASH DIFFUSERS

If you're using an external flash, don't forget to attach a diffuser. A diffuser softens the

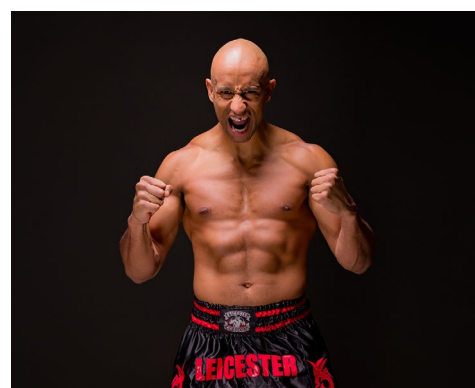
harsh light of the flash, reducing glare and creating a more even spread of light. Without it, flash lighting can be too sharp, particularly in portrait photography.

IGNORE FLASH SYNC SPEED

Be aware of your camera's sync speed (the fastest shutter speed that allows for proper flash exposure). Exceeding this speed can cause part of the frame to be underexposed or result in black bars. Consult your camera's manual to understand its maximum flash sync speed and adjust accordingly.

FORGET THE FOLLOWING

After firing, your flash may need a second to recharge – this is the so-called flash recycling time. Be aware of this lag so you don't miss any key moments. Also, make sure you pack enough extra batteries to keep the flash running until the end of your shoot.



4x © Vince Preston

Flash Glossary

Useful terms when diving into flash photography

CATCHLIGHTS

A reflection in the subject's eyes that is created from a diffused light source, for example, a softbox light or an overclouded sky. Catchlights make the subject visually more lively and appealing.

FILL FLASH

When capturing subjects, shadows in the face can be unflattering. To minimise them, a fill flash is ideal as it balances the ambient light while enhancing the appearance of the subject in a professional look.

GUIDE NUMBER

This value indicates how far the light of the flash can reach. The higher the Guide Number (GN), the further the flashlight reaches. This setting can be increased by selecting higher ISO settings.

HOT-SHOE

Electrical contacts or connection pins are found on top of the camera. Those can trigger a flashgun or synchronise flash lighting when the specific type of device is mounted. Ensures a smooth and in-sync shooting.

LIGHTING RATIO

The lighting ratio describes the relationship between the exposure in the shadow and highlight areas in your shots. If the ratio is described as low, the frame has little contrast, whereas a high ratio means that the image has achieved a rich contrast.



2x © Vince Preston

LIGHT TYPES

In total, there are three types of light in photography: hard (direct light), soft (diffused or modified light) and reflected (non-directional light entering the scene due to reflective surroundings).

LIGHT QUALITY

There are six factors that can influence the effect of light and image and therefore should be taken into account when creating imagery: angle, direction, quantity, distance, colour and size.

NIMH

Nickel Metal Hydride (NiMH) is a rechargeable battery technology. By switching from alkaline batteries to NiMH cells, you can power flash units compatible with AA-sized batteries more sustainably, increasing longevity and cost-effectiveness.

PENUMBRA

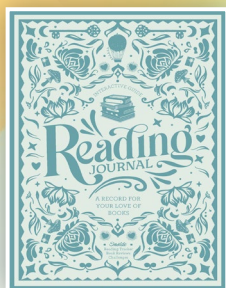
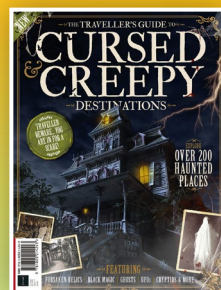
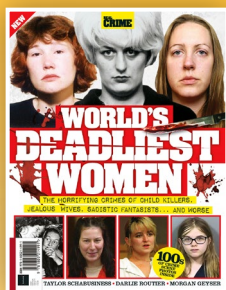
Describes the gradient between shadows and highlights in the photograph. A small penumbra shows an image with hard lighting whereas a large penumbra consists of a smooth gradient.

TTL

TTL flash, which stands for Through The Lens, supports accurate flash exposures. When activated, the camera adjusts the flash exposure settings based on the amount of light entering the lens.

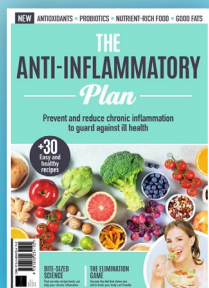


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SHOOT THE COAST

Drama, colour and amazing light are waiting to be captured, as **Karolina Konsur** explains how to photograph seascapes



Pictured
Fanad Head Lighthouse

The photo was taken on the Irish coast during sunset. The last rays of the sun wonderfully illuminated the rocks, and the long exposure highlighted the movement of waves and clouds

Words & images by **Karolina Konsur**

Coastal photography is an artform that goes beyond simply capturing the beauty of the sea. It is about conveying the dynamic essence of the coastline, the interplay of light and water, and the mood of the ever-changing weather. Coastal photographers have a distinctive opportunity to combine technical mastery with a deep appreciation of the natural world. It is not just about finding the perfect composition, but also about understanding the rhythm of the tides, the movement of the waves and the subtleties of coastal light.

For an experienced photographer, capturing coastal scenes provides a rich field for experimentation. Mastering the

use of long exposure times can transform crashing waves into ethereal, hazy veils, while a fast shutter speed can freeze the raw power of a breaking wave. Polarising filters can cut through reflections, revealing textures beneath the water's surface, and neutral-density filters help manage the intense brightness of the midday sun.

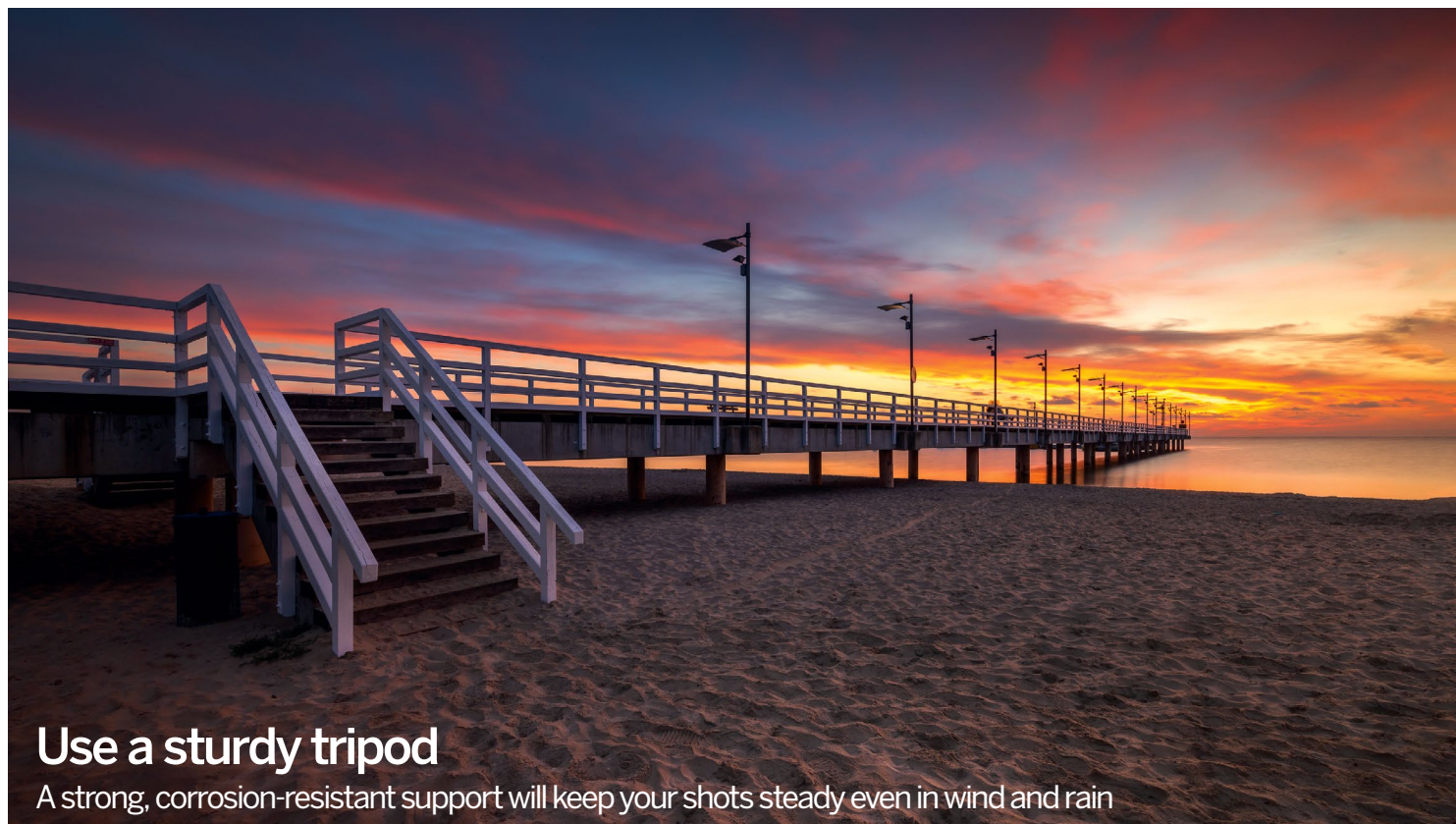
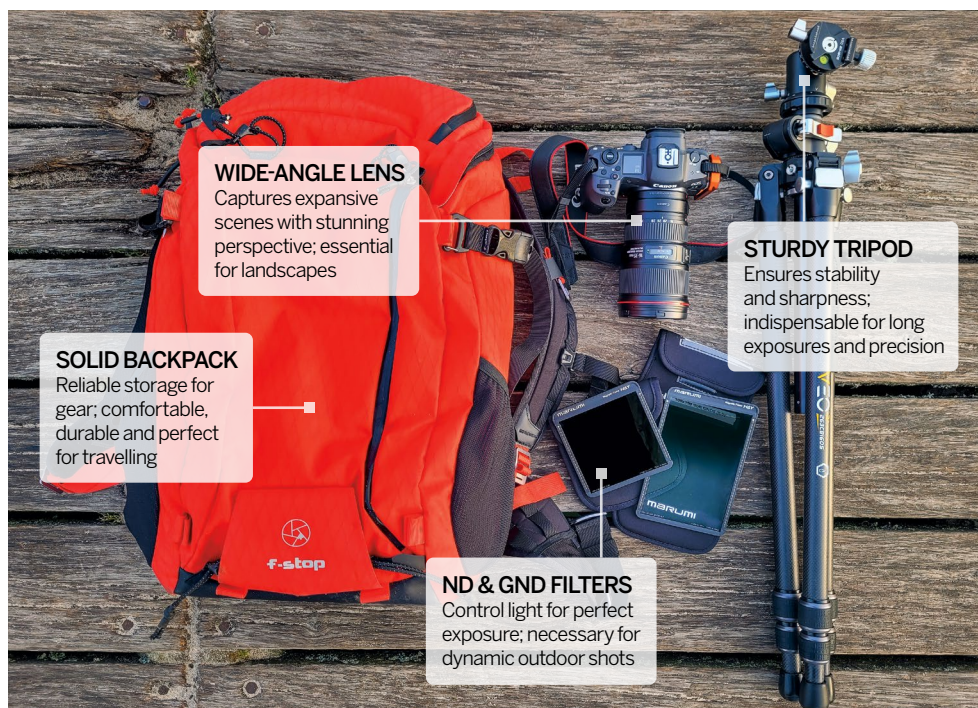
Beyond technique, coastal photography requires patience, timing and a connection with your surroundings. It is about braving the elements, waiting for the perfect light and being ready to capture fleeting moments of beauty. As your skills improve, it becomes clear that every shot of the coast is an invitation to tell the story of the timeless dance of shore and sea.

Build your kit bag

Opt for weather-sealed cameras, wide-angle lenses and ND filters to tackle harsh conditions

Coastal photography exposes your equipment to harsh elements such as salt water, sand and high winds. To protect your gear, choose a weather-resistant camera body and lenses that can withstand these harsh conditions.

A wide-angle lens is especially useful for capturing sweeping seascapes and dramatic skies, making your coastal photos even more impressive. ND filters are useful for controlling exposure and allowing slower shutter speeds in bright conditions, which is perfect for creating smooth, dreamy water effects. Carrying the gear in a sealed backpack and using UV or polarising filters can further protect it from splashes and scratches, ensuring the kit is reliable and ready for any coastal photography scenario.



Use a sturdy tripod

A strong, corrosion-resistant support will keep your shots steady even in wind and rain

Shooting seascapes often requires long exposures to capture smooth water movement or sharp sunset photos. A sturdy tripod is essential to stabilise your camera and avoid blurry images. Choose a tripod made of corrosion-

resistant materials such as carbon-fibre: salty sea air can corrode metal components. Make sure the tripod has a reliable locking mechanism to prevent it from collapsing or shifting in high winds. Consider using a tripod

with spiked feet, for added stability on uneven surfaces such as rocks or sand. Investing in a high-quality tripod will save you time during post-processing and ensure sharp, professional results in demanding offshore environments.

Pictured
Frozen bay, Kuźnica

In this composition, the ice blocks, shoreline and mast all guide the eye into the scene and towards the boat

Karolina Konsur



Karolina Konsur is a landscape photographer from Gdansk, Poland, who specialises in seascape and long-exposure photography.

Photography has been her passion for many years, allowing Karolina to constantly discover new places and capture unique moments in the frame. Her work has attracted a large international audience, and has been awarded in prestigious photo competitions, published in magazines, and presented at exhibitions.

Instagram: @karolinakonsur



Choose filters for light control

ND, GND and CPL filters effectively manage light, reduce reflections and balance exposure

Lens filters are an essential tool for controlling exposures in bright coastal conditions.

Neutral-density (ND) filters reduce the amount of light that reaches your lens, allowing slower shutter speeds and wider apertures without overexposing the image. They enable you to create motion blur in waves or to soften water surfaces, even in strong sunlight.

Graduated ND (GND) filters are perfect for

balancing exposure between bright skies and darker foregrounds, helping you avoid overexposed skies in your shots. Circular polarising (CPL) filters eliminate reflections from water and enhance the colours of the sky and clouds, making them appear deeper and more vibrant in your photographs.

Each filter type offers its own distinct benefits, so combining them can greatly improve the quality and creative possibilities of your coastal photography.



Adjust the aperture to control depth

Your f-stop choice directly affects how elements work together

In coastal photography, using a narrow aperture such as f/11 to f/16 is essential for capturing the full depth and detail of expansive landscapes. This setting increases depth of field, ensuring that everything in the scene – from the pebbles in the foreground to the distant horizon – remains sharp.

To maximise sharpness, consider focusing at the hyperfocal distance, which is the closest distance at which the lens can

Use shutter speed creatively

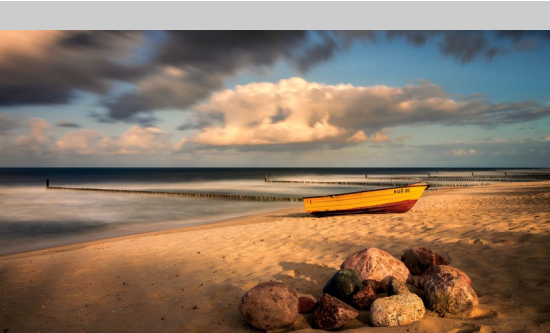
Experiment with different shooting speeds to capture dynamic scenes, from sharp action to smooth motion effects

Shutter speed is a powerful tool in seaside photography, allowing you to control the style and atmosphere of your photos. When freezing fast-moving subjects, such as crashing waves, seagulls in flight or water splashes, choose a fast shutter speed of 1/1000 sec or higher. This ensures that the action is captured

clearly and in detail. To introduce a sense of motion or calmness, use slower shutter speeds. Personally, I prefer a range from one to a few seconds, to combine stillness and movement in my photos. It creates a captivating contrast in which still elements remain sharp, and water and clouds appear soft and dynamic.



Pictured
Orłowo Beach
Filters help you control how much light reaches your lens, allowing you to extend the exposure and achieve cool effects



be focused while maintaining acceptable sharpness for objects at infinity. Focusing at this point achieves the greatest depth of field possible for the selected aperture, making it ideal for multi-layered scenes such as tide pools, rocky shores and distant waves.



Compose unique frames

Use whatever you find along the coast to create narrative and interest

Emphasise lighthouse solitude

Capture the isolated beauty of lighthouses by focusing on their surroundings and playing with the light

One of the artistic ways of photographing lighthouses is to show their solitude and resistance to coastal elements. Choose a composition that highlights their location in the landscape – whether they are placed on rocky outcrops, surrounded by crashing

waves, or standing tall against vast skies. To set the mood, shoot during changing weather conditions, like fog or stormy skies, which can add drama and emphasise the lighthouse's role as a beacon. Experiment with different times of the day – the soft

morning light or the glow of sunset can give a lighthouse a warm, inviting hue. Take advantage of reflections in nearby water or pools and play with negative space to highlight the solitary presence of the lighthouse in its stark surroundings.

Perfectly frame coastal cliffs

Use leading lines and scale references to effectively capture the majesty of coastal cliffs

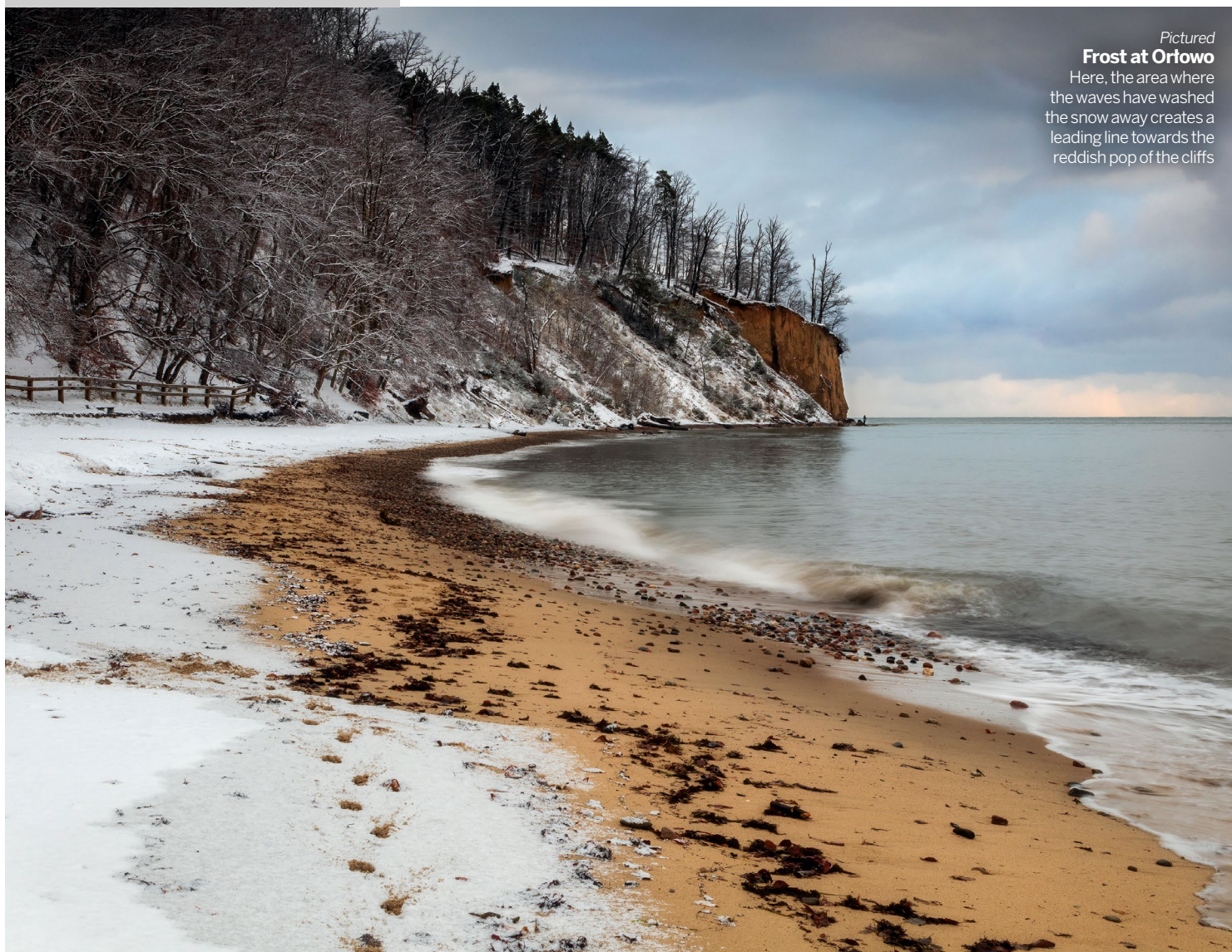
When photographing cliffs, consider placing them off-centre, using the rule of thirds to increase visual interest. Look for natural leading lines like paths or wave patterns, which can lead the viewer's eye toward the cliffs. Including a point of reference, such as a person or a boat, can convey the enormous scale of the cliffs. Experiment with angles – shooting from a low angle can make cliffs look more dramatic, while shooting from above can highlight the rugged coastline. Consider the direction of the light: side lighting during golden hours can highlight the textures and layers of the cliffs, adding depth and dimension.

Include foreground details in the frame

Highlight foreground elements such as boats or rocks for an eye-catching layer of interest

Including foreground elements can anchor coastal compositions and create a sense of depth, leading the viewer's eye through the image. Boats, driftwood or feature rocks can act as focal points that add context and scale to the scene.

When shooting boats, especially with a wide-angle lens, position them according to the rule of thirds to harmonise the composition and enhance perspective, making them appear more prominent. Aim for balance by taking into account the position of the horizon: lower for a dramatic sky, higher to highlight foreground details. Experiment with angles and perspectives, getting low to make boats or objects look more dominant, or shooting from a higher vantage point for a broader view.

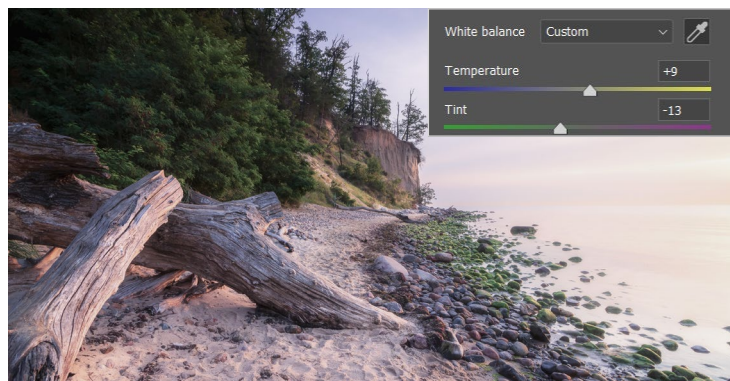


Pictured
Frost at Orłowo

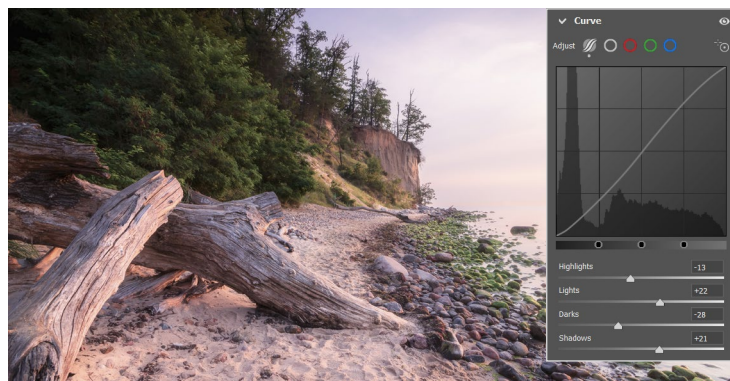
Here, the area where the waves have washed the snow away creates a leading line towards the reddish pop of the cliffs

Retouch your coastal images

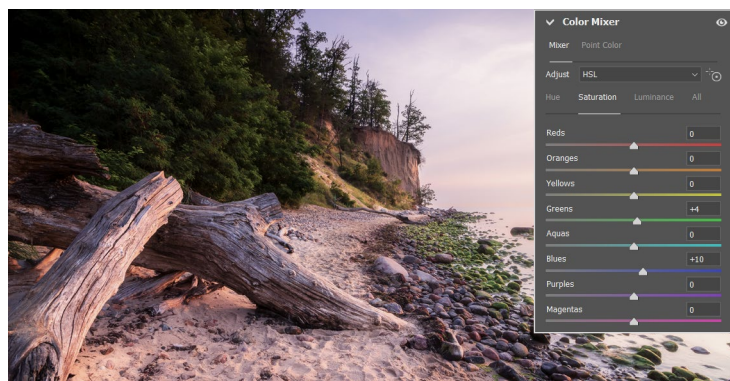
Enhance colour, detail and tone with Lightroom or Camera Raw



1 Correct white balance Adjust the white balance to remove unwanted colour casts and set a natural tone. Use the Eyedropper tool to select a neutral point in the image or adjust the sliders manually. This helps achieve a realistic look.



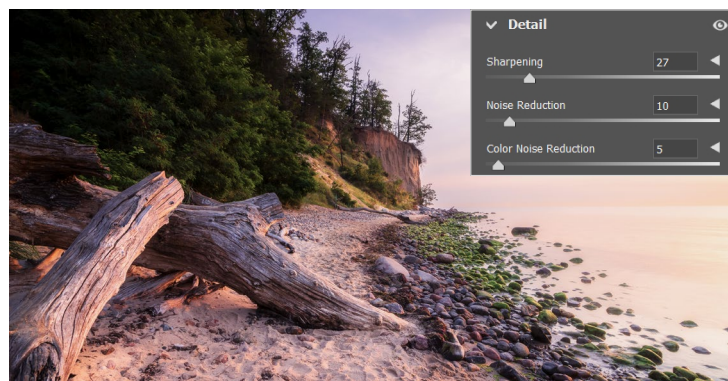
2 Adjust exposure levels Check the exposure to ensure the image is not too dark or overexposed. Adjust Exposure to correct the overall brightness. Fine-tune Highlights and Shadows to balance the image while preserving detail in the lightest and darkest areas.



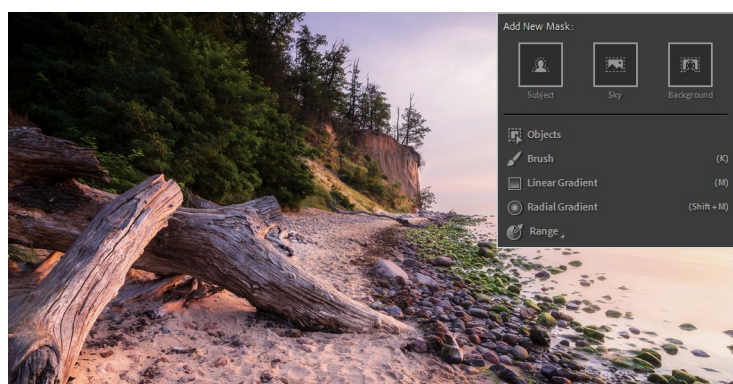
3 Enhance colour Increase Vibrancy to make the colours pop without being oversaturated. Adjust Saturation carefully: too much can make the image look unnatural. Coastal photos often benefit from a slight boost in Blues and Greens. Aim for a balanced yet vivid look.



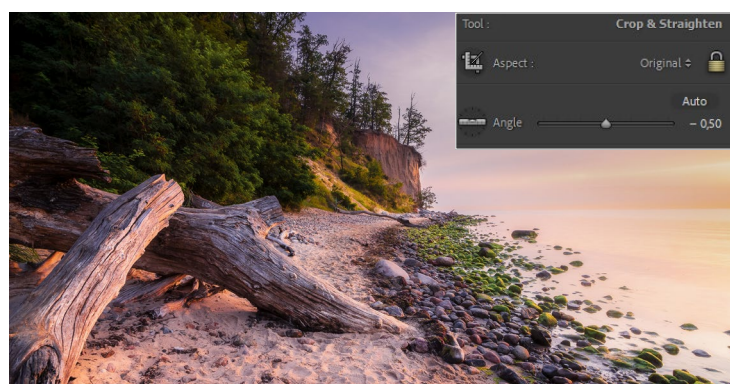
Pictured
Morning in Ortoowo
An accomplished coastal photo relies on good sharpness, balanced tones and – last but not least – a level horizon



4 Sharpen image details Sharpen the image to highlight textures such as sand, water and rocks. Use Masking to bring out details without creating noise in flat areas, focusing on foreground elements. Be careful not to overdo it, as this may cause artifacts in the photo.



5 Apply gradients Use Gradient Filters to adjust specific areas, such as the sky or water. Darken the sky slightly with a Graduated Filter to add drama or enhance the colour of the water. This helps create depth and aids balance between the light and dark areas.



6 Crop and straighten Crop the photo to improve the composition by removing unnecessary elements and focusing on the main subject. Straighten the horizon to keep it level – crucial for coastal shots. A well-composed image draws attention to key features.

SHOOT CREATIVE AUTUMN LANDSCAPES

Master exposure techniques to capture the subtle side of the most colourful season of the year

Words by Peter Fenech

Autumn is the favourite season for many landscape photographers. While there are plenty of image opportunities in spring and summer, the harsher lighting, longer days and more uniform colour palette mean we often have to work harder to find moments of refined beauty. Meanwhile, in winter, the lack of texture can be a challenge, calling on our skills in controlling negative space. Every year, during autumn, we look forward to the stunning transformation of colour and light as the sun sets early and the humid air introduces scenes bursting with atmosphere. There are more chances than ever to capture a postcard or calendar-worthy shot.

However, it is easy to get carried away with colour saturation and carpets of dense forest detail. Even pro photographers have to show restraint when it comes to

accurately depicting a classic autumnal scene, without overloading the viewer experience. Autumn has far more to offer than bold colours and stark contrast. In fact, these only occur under specific conditions, the rest of the season is punctuated by overcast days, low clouds and misty mornings, which make for greater atmospheric shots in many cases.

With help from two pro landscape photographers, Lynne Douglas and Justin Minns, this workshop will focus on capturing these gentler landscapes. You'll learn to work with longer exposures to create painterly ICM scenes, using abstract colour to present a unique view of the fiery reds, yellows and oranges with which we are so familiar. We'll then explore how to use environmental conditions to our advantage, working with misty weather and watery reflections to enhance the emotive impact of our seasonal scenics.

Pictured
Subtle beauty

The autumn season offers many more opportunities for atmospheric images than the bright woodland colours associated with it

Lynne Douglas



Lynne is a landscape photographer from Glasgow, now based on the Isle of Skye. Before going professional, she had a successful career as a research scientist.

A self-taught photographer, Lynne has developed creative techniques for bringing movement into her images and her bold and vibrant compositions celebrate the colours of nature.

📷 @skybluegallery
skybluegallery.com

Justin Minns



Justin is an award-winning landscape photographer, based in Suffolk, UK. He runs landscape photography workshops in stunning locations from Iceland

to Namibia and in the UK for the National Trust, Forestry Commission and Royal Photographic Society. In 2023, Justin received a Fellowship of the Royal Photographic Society.

📷 @justinminns
justinminns.co.uk

Pictured
Familiar obscurity
Although fiery autumn colours are still the main feature of the image, ICM has turned it into a more creative artistic interpretation

Use creative exposures

Lynne Douglas explains how to work with extended shutter speeds to capture movement in the scene

One of the most attractive aspects of autumn as a season is the explosion of colour variance in each small area of the landscape. Along a riverbank or on a small stretch of woodland path, there can be a plethora of subtle colour shifts, creating a medley of hues that give the scene a painterly appearance. This opens up many opportunities to create abstract frames as much as picture postcard studies.

Extended shutter speeds are especially useful in scenes where water is present or where there is already some movement

within the landscape. A common challenge in woodland photography is that the subject matter is mostly stationary. Trees are a symbol of longevity and sturdiness, which can be a difficult characteristic to convey in a single still image. Long exposures, therefore, can balance the fixed and ephemeral nature of the tree trunks and the colourful leaves that currently decorate them.

Due to the proximity of each of these colours, it is possible to move a step further and use longer exposures to blend them

together creating a patchwork that resembles a watercolour. With careful manipulation of the camera position, we can draw colours across the frame, overlapping them and reducing hard shapes to mere impressions. This can be an immensely powerful way to convey the intensity of the seasonal colours without capturing a homogeneous sequence of images with little individuality.

Pro photographer Lynne Douglas is an expert when it comes to the technique of intentional camera movement (ICM) photography, having built a reputation for her beautiful, abstract, long-exposure landscapes. Here, she explains the process, both behind the camera and in editing software.

2/25

© Lynne Douglas

Choose essential kit

ND OR VARIABLE ND

Cut the light entering the camera to allow extended exposures in all conditions, during the daytime. A variable model will allow greater versatility to match lighting conditions and control blur strength.



CIRCULAR POLARISER

A polariser cuts light transmission by between one and two stops, helping to lengthen exposure times, while also strengthening colours in the scene by reducing polarised reflections.



PAN/TILT HEAD

This is more controllable for fluid motions than a ball head as it can be manipulated on each axis, allowing both up-and-down and side-to-side movement.



Pictured
Universal and unique
Moving the camera during the exposure is a great way to capture the autumn transformation in any location

© Lynne Douglas

Get creative with ICM

Balance shutter speed and camera movement to paint a scene

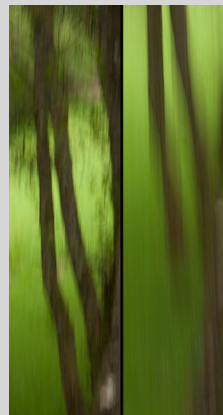
1 Control exposure time

The controlling factor in ICM is the exposure time. Stop down your aperture or add a neutral density filter to lengthen the shutter speed. Early mornings, low light or even rainy days work best for this type of work.

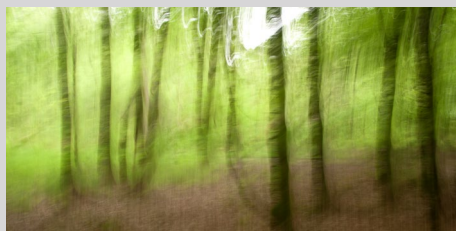


2 Experiment with timing

Identify a direction you want to move in your selected subject (left to right, following the horizon or upwards through the trees). Short exposures result in soft images with some detail and longer movements in more minimalist abstract images.



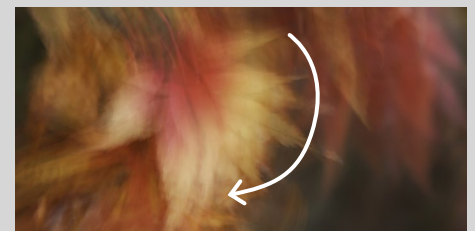
3 Take test shots Move the camera gently as you take the shot. Check the results on the back of the camera then adjust your speed. A good place to start is between 0.25sec and 2sec.



4 Avoid sharp contrasts Various creative effects can be made by moving the camera in different directions. Avoid dragging from bright areas like the sky through darker tones as this will result in white streaks or patches in your shot.

5 Tripods for panning

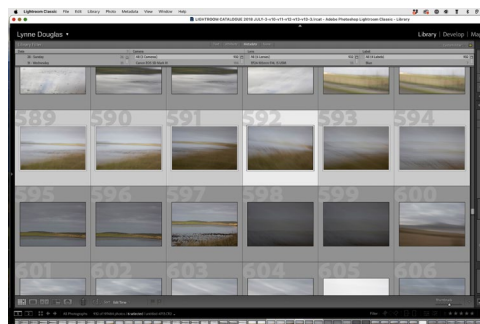
To create minimalist images that rely on colour, choose a subject without much detail and longer movement – beaches are a great place to start. Try using a tripod to keep the camera steady as you pan straight across the horizon.



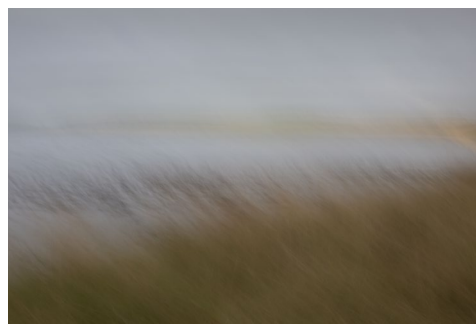
6 Get creative The possibilities are endless! Try twists and jerks, move with the waves at the edge of the beach or the leaves as they blow in the trees. Autumn is a great time to try this, especially on a windy day.

Edit your long exposures

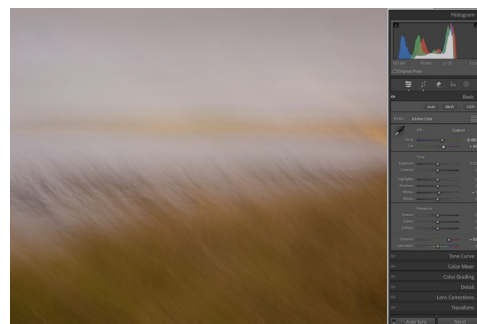
Introduce a burst of creativity to your autumn landscape images



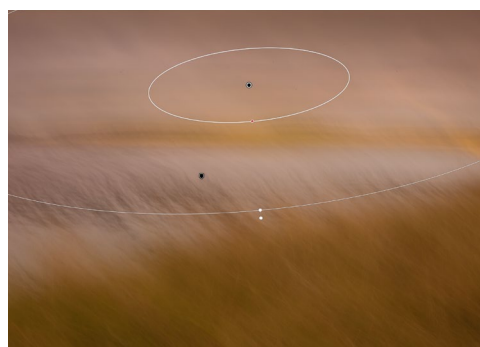
1 Image selection Shooting ICM, you will take a lot of shots as it is so much fun but this makes image selection difficult. Start by selecting and comparing images with different timings of the same scene. You will see they have different levels of movement.



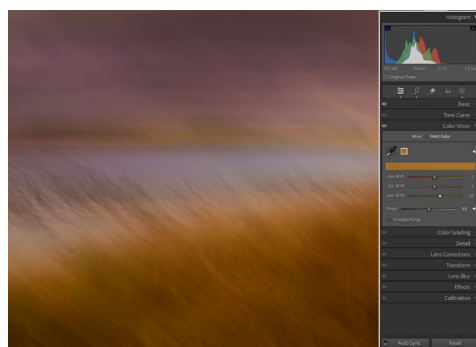
2 How much blur? Too little movement can result in a blur that looks accidental. Too much and there may be no details at all. If that appeals, fine, if not, try to find an image where there is some detail but still enough abstraction to make the image interesting.



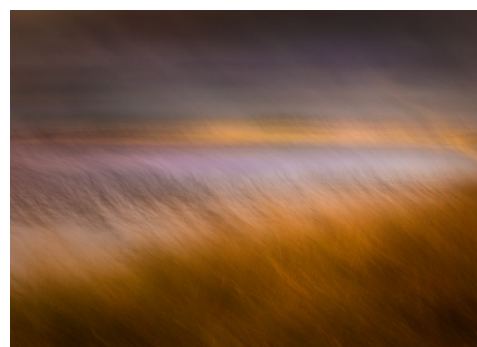
3 Developing with colour With your selected image, play around with the temperature and colour balance until you come across a combination you like. You will find colours that are dominant and sometimes get a surprise at other colours that pop out.



4 Composition Although the details are reduced, general image composition rules apply. Crop your image to ensure you have a nice balance in terms of the rule of thirds and leading the eye through the image either with colours or light.



5 Working on features With composition in mind, you can now use contrast and highlights to bring out the details you like best. Try adding highlights and shade to various areas or adjusting the temperature of some of the colours you see as most important.



6 Final steps With the image coming together, this is a good time to check for impact. Try looking at your image both as a thumbnail and as a full-screen image. Stand back from the screen to see the overall effect then add any finishing touches.

How to emphasise movement

Adjust the camera elevation to help convey moving elements

When capturing streams or rivers in your autumnal landscape scenes using a longer exposure, try lowering the camera and shooting with a wide focal length. This will exaggerate the movement of objects on the water's surface, tracing their shapes through the frame.

Compose your frame so that the lines and shapes drawn by the water while following the current act as leading lines that guide the viewer through the scene.



© rpeterson86 via Getty Images



Pictured

Recognisable detail

Here, Lynne has introduced just enough blur to create interesting streaks of colour while retaining the general shapes of the tree branches and the environment

© Lynne Douglas



© Peter Fenech

Capture the falling leaves

Add motion to autumnal woodland or urban shots

Images of trees make up a large proportion of images taken at this time of the year but, without a little creativity, shots can appear static and passive. To introduce energy, capture leaves falling from trees using a longer exposure. For this type of shot, use a shutter speed of between 1/30sec and 1sec and use burst mode. This will increase the variety of leaf positions in your shots, convey some motion by tracing the leaf journey, and retain sufficient detail for the shape of the leaf to be recognisable.

Work with autumn light

Justin Minns explains how to control and enhance the characteristic qualities of autumn lighting

Mist is commonplace during autumn thanks to a combination of atmospheric conditions. This allows misty sunrises and sunsets to be far more frequent during these months, which can be a goldmine for landscape photographers, perfectly aligning a natural diffusion material with golden hour light. It's not uncommon to find yourself out in the field watching a glowing dawn, filtered through a layer of mist or causing a bank of fog to seemingly light up from within and wondering if conditions could get any better.

Naturally, as with most subjects in photography, the elements that make it attractive can also make diffused light or misty landscapes technically challenging. Most camera metering systems, even those in advanced recent mirrorless models, are confused by mist into underexposing when left to their own devices, so must be guided

through manual control. Conversely, beware of clipped highlights where sunbeams shine through areas of bright mist. Meanwhile, focusing can be difficult when hard edges are obscured making autofocus unreliable. In this case, switching to manual focus and zooming in using a loupe view on your main LCD is advisable to help you achieve sharp subjects.

Beyond technical precision, there is also the matter of tonal integrity. Flat tones, such as those found in delicate morning mist and the muted colours associated with it, easily break down when pushed in editing. This generates blocking artefacts, banding and image noise which can be tricky to remove. The key is to capture colour and exposure as accurately as possible in-camera to avoid making large-scale adjustments in post-processing. Shooting RAW is an essential step, as this gives you the maximum digital information to work with.

Capture superior reflections

METER FROM THE REFLECTION

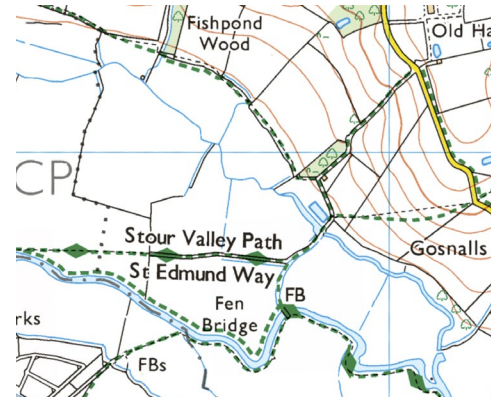
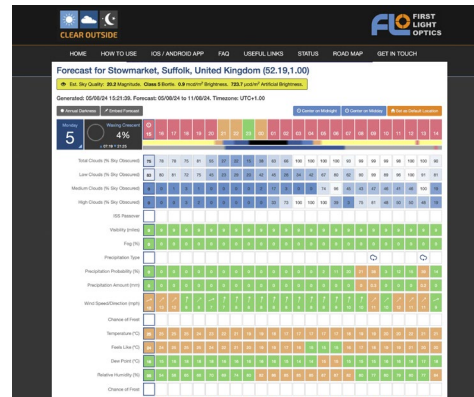
Some light is absorbed by the water so use positive exposure compensation to prevent underexposure

ADJUST ELEVATION

Don't chop off important reflected image areas. Adjust camera height to carefully compose these parts of the image

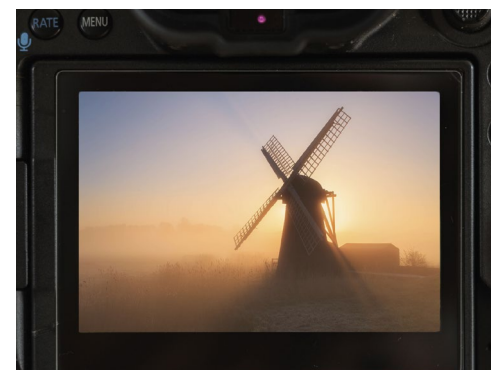
Capture misty conditions

Prepare for and shoot challenging autumn landscape scenes



1 Check the weather Misty mornings are caused by the weather conditions. Check the forecast for clear nights with little or no wind and falling temperatures. If your forecast shows the dew point, it should be within 2°C of the air temperature for mist to form.

2 Find a high viewpoint Although it isn't essential, even a little elevation will help you to fully appreciate the blanket of mist over the landscape. Use an OS map to find a suitable vantage point or if the area is flat, a drone will have the same effect.



3 Take a telephoto lens While it's tempting to use a wide-angle lens for landscapes, lenses in the range of 70-200mm or even 100-400mm compress the distance, which heightens the effect of the mist. Especially useful when shooting from a distant hillside.

4 Use the light Shooting into the sun can be challenging but early in the morning, with its strength diffused by the mist, it is usually possible. The resulting backlit misty images are often atmospheric. If the sun is too bright, hide it behind something, as above.



5 Compose yourself As always with landscape photography, composition is crucial. Look for an interesting focal point such as a church tower, outstanding trees or even cattle amongst the swirling mist to take your images to the next level.

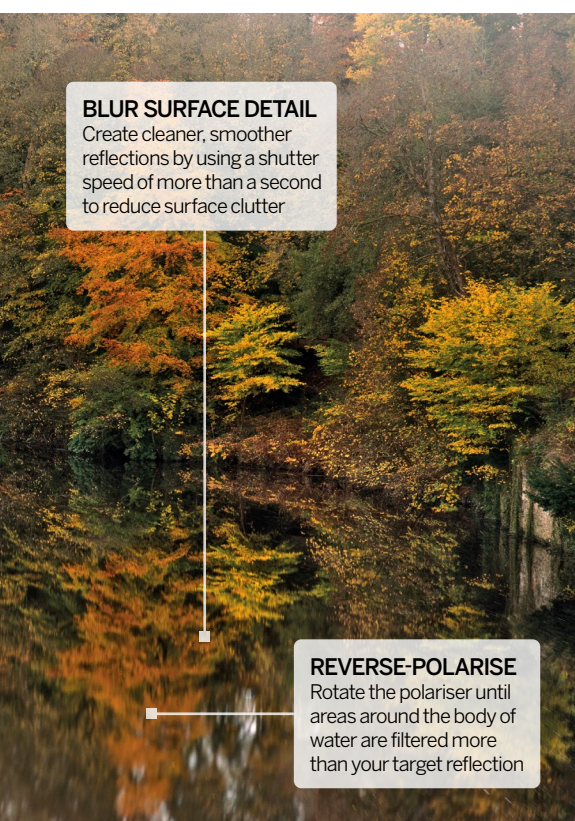
6 Adjust the exposure compensation Camera metering systems are usually accurate but bright mist can fool them into under-exposing and leaving your image looking dull. Keep an eye on the histogram and add positive exposure compensation if necessary.



Back-lit beauty

When shooting in misty or foggy conditions, care must be taken to protect highlights while preventing global underexposure

© Justin Minns



BLUR SURFACE DETAIL

Create cleaner, smoother reflections by using a shutter speed of more than a second to reduce surface clutter

REVERSE-POLARISE

Rotate the polariser until areas around the body of water are filtered more than your target reflection

© Peter Fenech



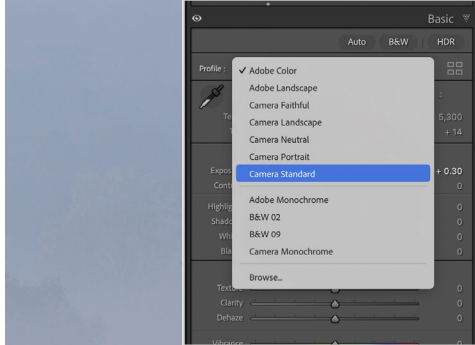
Pictured
Create layers

To convey depth in scenes with obscured foregrounds or middle-grounds, divide the frame into segments. Here, the golden tree is a starting point for a journey through the shot

© Justin Minns

Retouch delicate tones

Edit autumnal scenes with subtle colours and diffused lighting



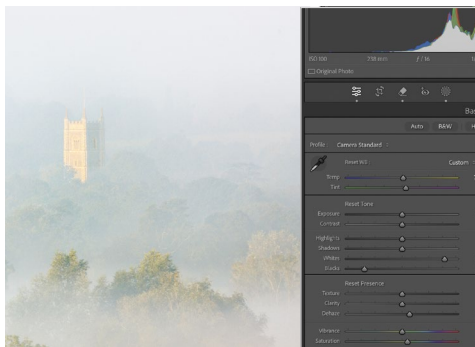
1 Choose a profile I always choose a profile to give me the best starting point. Lightroom's profiles differ from presets in that they are more powerful and don't move any of the sliders. Adobe Landscape is a favourite but, on this occasion, I wanted a neutral look, so I picked Camera Standard.



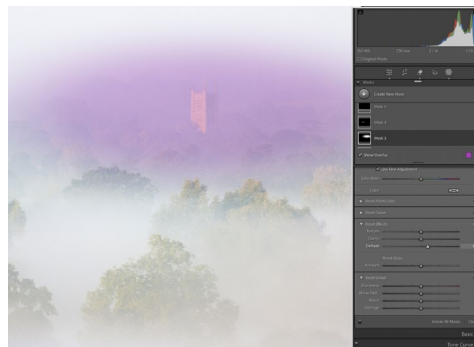
2 Adjust the white balance I often use the white balance to introduce mood rather than aiming for accuracy. Originally shot with a daylight white balance setting, the image has a cool feel, so with the eyedropper tool, I clicked on the mist and used that as a neutral white balance target.



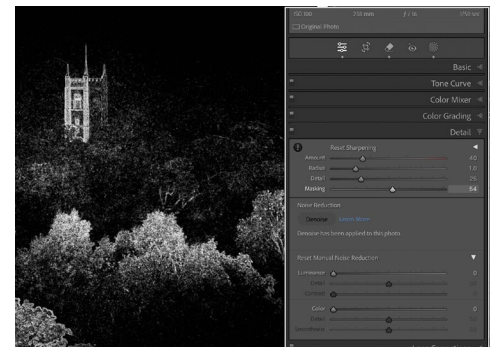
3 Set the white/black points This church was around a mile away and with poor visibility, the image looks flat. Adjusting the whites and blacks will add contrast. Watching the histogram, move the whites slider right until it reaches the right edge of the histogram. Do the same with the blacks, but to the left.



4 Tweak the mistiness The Dehaze slider is great for improving contrast in a misty image or when used negatively, enhancing the misty effect. Fog also tends to wash out the colour somewhat, so this is one of the rare times when I add a little saturation.



5 Fine-tuning Most of my adjustments are done selectively using masks to highlight or reduce the impact of parts of the image. In this case, I selected the area around the church with a radial mask and added a bit more Dehaze to make it stand out.



6 Sharpening Using a sharpening preset in conjunction with the masking slider, I sharpened the church tower and trees without altering the soft areas. Holding the alt key while sliding the masking slider shows in black and white which areas are being sharpened.

Capture colour in-camera

Besides tonal integrity, capturing accurate colour in-camera will act as a reference for image editing. It is tempting to keep turning up the saturation in autumnal scenes, but having a reference image that you know was close to how the colours were in the field will make it easier to identify when you have found a balance of impact and authenticity.



© Peter Fenech





10 WAYS TO SHOOT SHARPER

Start shooting sharper shots in seconds with these top 10 killer tips

Words and images by Dan Mold

In the modern age of high-resolution digital cameras, detailed computer displays and smartphones where we can pinch-zoom in to peep at pictures on the pixel level, it's easy to see why there's a drive towards sharpness.

However, I do want to add a caveat that sharpness isn't everything – there are certain times when a little subject blur can add some dramatic movement to the

shot and some petroleum jelly around the edges of a filter can provide a beautiful soft-focused vignette. But while intentional blur and softness have their time and place, most professionals will require absolute precision regardless of their genre, as their clients usually demand top-notch, razor-sharp images. Whether that's product pictures taken in a studio, corporate headshots in an office environment or

the moment a player scores the winning goal of an important football match – if it's not critically sharp, it won't make the grade.

So while you shouldn't obsess over sharpness, it is important and it's a useful skill to understand the reasons why your photographs might turn out blurry. Here are ten of the most important settings and tips you should follow to achieve razor-sharp pictures when you are next out shooting.



1

Watch the shutter speed

Use your camera's Auto ISO so that your shutter speed doesn't drop too low

Whether it's a person walking or rushing water in a river, if the shutter is left open for long enough moving elements of your scene will be rendered blurry, even if your camera is mounted on a tripod.

If you want every aspect of the scene to be pin-sharp, you'll need a fast shutter to freeze your subject still, this is ideal for fast-paced

sports and wildlife action shots. The easiest way to do this is to open the aperture wide open – this is where fast glass, such as a 70-200mm f/2.8 lens comes in handy. Next, enable Auto ISO, which will automatically adjust the ISO value so that you never go below your specified shutter speed. Here, I would recommend setting it at 1/2000sec.



Pictured

Sharp-eyed

For pin-sharp wildlife shots, shoot wide open and enable Auto ISO so you don't go below your chosen shutter speed





2

Stack your focus

Depth of field in an image is usually limited by physics, so expand it further with this clever photo hack

Your aperture value can be adjusted to control the depth of field, which means that more (or less) of your scene is rendered in sharp focus. However, it isn't always ideal to do this as you'll change the light flow and potentially run into image-softening diffraction if you close the aperture to extreme values. The solution is to 'stack' the focus, taking a series of pictures with the focus set to different distances within your scene and then merging them into a single pin-sharp shot in Photoshop. Many modern cameras also have a focus bracketing feature to assist with this and some can even create the stack in-camera.

3

Know your AF Modes

Take the time to learn and master your camera's various autofocus modes and what each one does

Autofocus modes are incredibly useful but many photographers never change this setting, which is a missed opportunity. By default, your camera is set to single servo autofocus mode, this means that when the shutter is half-pressed and locked on, it won't try to refocus until you release the shutter – this is useful for locking and holding the focus if you need to recompose.

There is also a continuous servo mode that continually refocuses on your active AF point for as long as you keep the shutter half-pressed. Face and subject detection modes also use continuous servo to lock onto and track the faces and eyes of your subjects. Lastly, manual focus (MF) is where you take control and adjust the focus ring on the lens to set it.

AF operation

Servo AF

ONE SHOT

AI FOCUS

SERVO

Pictured
Flying visit

Modern cameras have autofocus modes, such as subject detection, that can lock onto the subject and maintain the focus

4

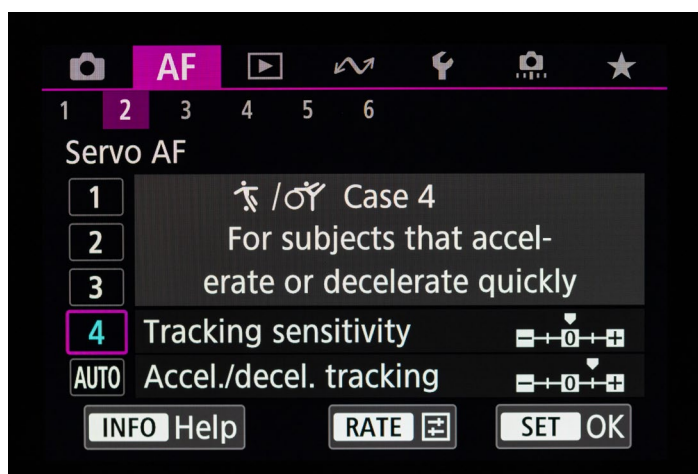
Adjust the autofocus sensitivity

Fine-tune how your autofocus algorithms react to the specific subject you're shooting

Modern cameras use autofocus algorithms to lock onto your subject and help you achieve a sharp image, however, shooting a racing car requires a different approach to garden birds.

Many cameras, such as my Canon EOS R6 Mark II, have the ability for the autofocus to be customised and on Canon cameras, this is found in the Autofocus Cases Menu. Here, you can choose between different preset AF cases, each with its own specific settings for different subjects. These include an AF Case designed to ignore possible obstacles in the foreground and another

AF Case for subjects suddenly entering the frame. The good news is each of these cases can be refined even further to make them more or less sensitive.



5

Stabilise yourself

Camera shake when shooting handheld can be fixed with a sturdy tripod

A tripod is usually the ideal solution to remove camera shake completely, just make sure you enable the two-second self-timer so you don't nudge the camera when you fire the shutter. If a tripod isn't practical, consider a monopod which offers more range of movement and speed. If you need the freedom to shoot handheld, make sure image stabilisation is enabled and watch your stance: tuck your elbows in and firmly hold the camera and lens with both hands, making sure one hand is placed under the lens to support it and create a stable platform. Also, look for walls or fences you can lean on to steady yourself when shooting handheld.



6 Watch out for lens flare

Internal reflections caused by direct sunlight within your lens can soften the image

Lens flare is created when shooting towards a bright light source such as the sun. Lens flare can take many forms, ranging from an odd string of circles appearing across your image to a faded look with reduced contrast, which makes the image look less sharp and punchy. While intentionally shooting towards the sun can be a great creative choice if you want to add a hazy, dream-like quality to your shots, if you're after the sharpest pictures, it's best to avoid it.

To do this, you can frame up so that your bright light source isn't directly in the frame or add a lens hood to prevent stray light rays from coming in from the side. I'd also suggest removing any filters as these can create another place for light to bounce around and cause internal reflections within the lens. In post-processing, you can also use the Dehaze slider in Photoshop or Lightroom to cut through the haze.



GOOD LENS FLARE

A touch of flare

Shooting towards the sun can add a hazy, dream-like quality to your shots, but if it's sharpness you want, it is best avoided



Pictured
Soft rock

Flashguns let you bounce light off a ceiling or wall – spreading the light and making it appear softer and more professional

7 Freeze with flash

Use flash to illuminate your people pics in dark environments for sharper headshots

Shooting in a low-light situation is likely to result in a slower shutter speed as the camera struggles to suck in enough light to achieve a shutter speed of at least 1/50sec for sharp handheld shots. One option is to simply add your own light source to get around this. Flash is a good choice for portraits as it will light your subjects' faces and freeze them.

Pop-up flashes are known for casting harsh directional light, so a hot shoe-mounted flashgun is a better choice. Not only is a flashgun a bigger and brighter source of light, but most flashguns allow you to swivel the flash head around to bounce it off a ceiling or wall – this softens the light, making it appear more flattering and professional.

8 Dial in the dioptre

Make sure your optical or electronic viewfinder is calibrated for a clear image

While everybody's vision is unique, many photographers don't realise that their camera's viewfinder can be calibrated to suit them better. This is important so that you can see a clear image on the viewfinder display, whether it's an optical or electronic one. Set up your camera on a tripod and lock autofocus on an object in your room so



you know it should be pin-sharp. Then look through the viewfinder and adjust the dioptre until the viewfinder is crisp – this will require a different setting if you wear glasses. Some dioptre dials need to be popped out before you can adjust them, this stops them being accidentally nudged out of position.

Pictured

Sharp dressing

Try turning on focus peaking to see where focus is lost then zoom into your shot to check the focus hasn't slipped



9

Precision focus

Check your images on the rear LCD screen to make sure they are pin-sharp

Aside from camera shake and subject movement, the other factor that can make an image look soft is when the focus isn't perfectly placed on your subject. Make sure you have positioned your active autofocus point directly over your subject, such as a lighthouse in a landscape or a model's eye in a portrait, and only fire the shutter when this

has locked on. This is particularly important when shooting portraits with wide apertures, such as f/1.8 or wider, as you usually want the eyes to be pin-sharp so check your shot on the rear LCD and zoom in to make sure the focus hasn't slipped onto the model's eyelashes or nose. If it has, now is the perfect time to retry and have another go.

10 Enable back-button focus

If your camera has an AF-ON button on the back, start using it to shoot like a pro

By default, cameras are set up to autofocus when you half-press the shutter and fire the shutter once it's fully pressed, though it will only do so once the AF has locked on. This can cause you to miss a moment even if you could see your subject was in sharp focus (or sharp enough focus). Many pros use a method called 'back-button focus' where the autofocus activation is divorced from the front shutter button and instead placed on the rear AF-ON button. Setting the AF mode to servo then allows you quick access to continuous servo, single servo and manual focus override without ever having to dive into menus or change settings.



WHO

Challenge the medium of
photography to create AI
aesthetics without the use
of AI creation programs

Words by Kim Bunermann

Pictured
Missing elements
Make your image
look AI-generated by
eliminating human
characteristics and
adding a surreal touch

WHO NEEDS AI?

The rise of AI in photography has dramatically reshaped the landscape of image creation. One of the most immediate effects is that it has compelled photographers to compete by producing even more captivating images using classic techniques. In an era when the possibility of generating mesmerising AI images is limitless, this could be seen as a challenge. But where some may see this trend as a threat to the authenticity and skill inherent in photography, others may view it as a way of opening up the art.

Many photographers and creatives have enthusiastically dived into the world of AI-generated imagery, fuelled by curiosity and a desire to explore new horizons. However, a key question emerges: why does AI-generated imagery resonate so deeply with viewers? The answer lies in its striking visual aesthetics – AI imagery not only captivates with its innovation, but it also presents a distinctive visual language and compelling storytelling. Combining subjects in unexpected contexts redefines our conventional perspectives of reality and engages viewers on a profound level. However, as photographers, we are also able to recreate these AI-like effects through the skilful application of real-world photographic techniques. Historically, photography was the only medium capable of capturing and reproducing moments of reality. However,

during the 'New Vision' movement in the 1920s, photography began to push the limits of technical possibilities to produce abstract imagery that diverged from straightforward representations of reality. Over the next few pages, we will draw connections between historical techniques and modern approaches to show how photography can be a powerful force to counteract the movement towards AI imagery. We speak to two accomplished photographers, Ali Zolghadri and Michael Bross, both of whom mix surrealistic elements with reality in their distinct styles, to get their expert insight and share valuable insights into their work. We also speak to Miles Astray, a photographer who captured the attention of the whole industry by winning an AI imagery competition with a traditional photograph.

Understand aesthetics

Learn technical approaches to replicate AI-generated imagery in your photography

AI-generated imagery typically blends elements of surrealism and abstraction, based on supposed perfection, by introducing or combining unexpected image elements. These dream-like scenes are created by the use of algorithms to generate unique outputs that may not conform to conventional artistic styles. This challenges our understanding of imagery and evokes a sense of wonder in the viewer by provoking their curiosity.

Characteristics of this style are unusual colour palettes, combined subjects and distorted forms of our perception of reality. Key factors to observe are the use of light and composition, as generated imagery often uses clever compositional techniques to draw the viewer's attention to harmonious image elements.

Although AI imagery is computer-generated, it is often good at evoking a sense of emotion in the viewer and conveying a narrative.

The good news is that these elements should be familiar to photographers, as they are the fundamental principles of photography. The medium can create dream-like scenes through various techniques, such as long exposure, double exposure or focus manipulation. Such approaches have been used, not just in the digital photography era but throughout its history.

Here, adopting a minimalist philosophy can be crucial for creating surreal effects. By concentrating on the elements and their appearances, we can enhance the surreal quality of the image and leave a lasting impression on the viewer.

TECHNIQUE 1

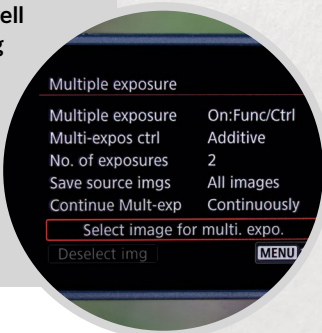
Double up

Combine two subjects to create double exposures

Shooting double exposures is a technique that has stood the test of time. Its roots go back over 200 years but it gained prominence in the 1860s. These days, some advanced cameras come with built-in double exposure features that allow you to preview the outcome before pressing the shutter. Examples of such cameras include the Canon EOS R5, Fujifilm GFX 100S and Nikon Z 7II – some devices even offer an option for creating multi-exposure images (see p14). You can also achieve this effect through post-production techniques, by overlaying, applying masking and playing with opacity. This gives you greater control over the final image, albeit more time spent at the editing stage.

To create captivating double exposures, it's crucial to select your subjects thoughtfully; not every subject lends itself well to this effect. Therefore, we need to start with a compelling filler image that emphasises structure, texture, and colour, then we have to match that with a subject featuring strong black elements or distinct outlines – consider silhouettes, mountains or side profiles.

By combining these two types of images, you can present a clear visual anchor for your viewers while allowing the filler image to add a layer of abstraction.



Multiple exposure
Multiple exposure
Multi-expos ctrl
No. of exposures
Save source imgs
Continue Mult-exp
On:Func/Ctrl
Additive
2
All images
Continuously
Select image for multi. expo.
Deselect img MENU

TECHNIQUE 2**Clean up your images**

Eliminate some elements to add a graphic touch

Eliminating distractions, such as signs of weathering on buildings or marking on the ground, can transform an image and impart a timeless quality. This approach introduces a clean aspect to the image that isn't typically found in real life, leading to a more stylised perception. This technique also lends architectural subjects a graphic quality (read our tutorial on how to achieve this effect in Affinity Photo 2 software on page 62).

For the most striking results, it is important to maintain straight architectural lines – using the in-camera grid helps you here. To transform reality, keep an eye on your camera angle and try to avoid reflections being visible in any windows in the scene. Also, shooting against a clear blue sky or on an overcast grey day adds a surrealistic quality to your images. Overcast conditions diffuse sunlight, creating fewer contrasts, while sunny days produce bold, symmetrical shadows that strengthen your composition. Both lighting scenarios contribute to an engaging surrealistic atmosphere, similar to techniques used in architectural design previews.

BEFORE**AFTER**



TECHNIQUE 3

Achieve flawless skin

Give your subject AI-like perfect skin by controlling the light

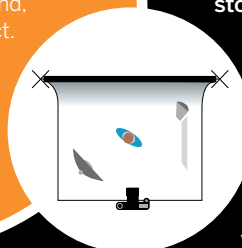
To create an authentic portrait, it's essential that you embrace the blemishes and wrinkles of your subject as natural attributes. Rather than attempting to retouch these features, celebrate them as indicators of humanity in a world often fixated on unrealistic beauty standards.

However, when it comes to achieving an animated aesthetic, perfect skin is a defining characteristic. Use artificial lighting to control how light affects your subject, minimising the harsh effects of natural light. Here, shapers, diffusers and modifiers such as softboxes are key and tools like reflectors or polyboards can be game-changers, bouncing light onto specific areas, reducing shadows and the appearance of wrinkles.

Makeup choices also play a vital role. While professional photographers might hire makeup artists, you can find great inspiration online. Some photographers skip foundation to minimise skin texture and allow natural beauty to shine. Here, themed makeup can enhance the surreal effect and contribute to storytelling. Focus on a bold colour for a cohesive look, and consider unique props, such as butterflies, to create a striking visual narrative.

LIGHTING SETUP

To achieve beautiful lighting, set up a simple yet effective arrangement. Position a light with an Octabox modifier at a 45-degree angle to your subject. Then, add a second light with a softbox in the background, placed to the side of your subject. Additionally, include a polyboard next to this light. This setup will provide even lighting for optimal skin tones while creating a subtle glow on the cheekbones.



TECHNIQUE 4

Block out reality

Shoot macro to reduce reference points

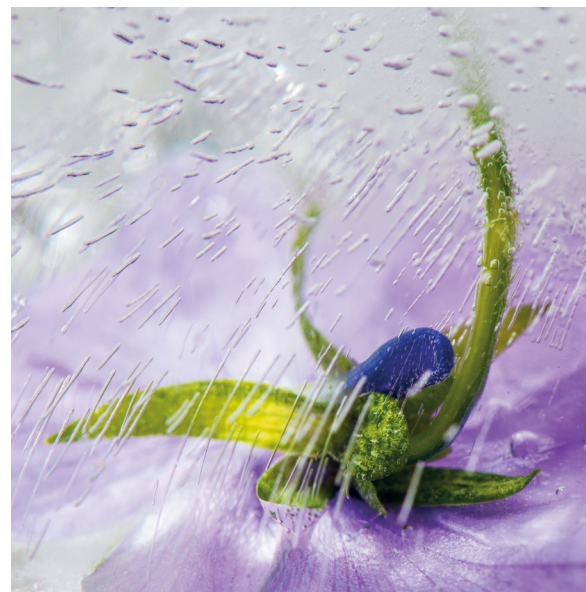
With a close-up perspective, the viewer is left with a sense of intrigue, as there are fewer definitive indicators to identify the subject. Subjects with texture offer depth and a more abstract quality that can replicate an AI-like effect – this could include flowers or even a sock. By getting creative and adding a further layer, for example, by freezing a flower, you can enhance the interest and effect of your image.

To achieve high-quality close-ups, it is advisable to use a macro lens with a minimum 1:1 reproduction ratio, such as the Irix 150mm Macro 1:1 F2.8 Dragonfly. If you are on a tighter



budget, other options such as a reversing ring or an extension tube that sits between the lens and camera body can also yield great results. Also, shoot in RAW format to give you more cropping options in post-processing.

For optimal sharpness and quality, it is recommended that you select a sharp aperture, such as f/8. Given the potential for shallow depth of field, using the focus stacking technique may prove beneficial. This method involves capturing multiple images of the subject with specific areas in focus, which can then be combined during post-processing for enhanced clarity.





© James Paterson

TECHNIQUE 5

Shift the scales

Create unusual composites that manipulate subjects optically

To transform how viewers perceive some elements of the scene, manipulating the proportions of subjects through perspective and camera angles is a highly effective technique. By placing one subject closer to the lens and another in the background, you create a striking contrast that enhances visual interest.

Moreover, engaging in the creative process allows you to devise unique visual concepts that bring together subjects that wouldn't typically coexist. An example of this is the featured photograph of a tree inside a light bulb, which defies the laws of physics. Here, we created a sense of intrigue in the viewer by incorporating a crafted miniature tree within the light bulb.

TECHNIQUE 6

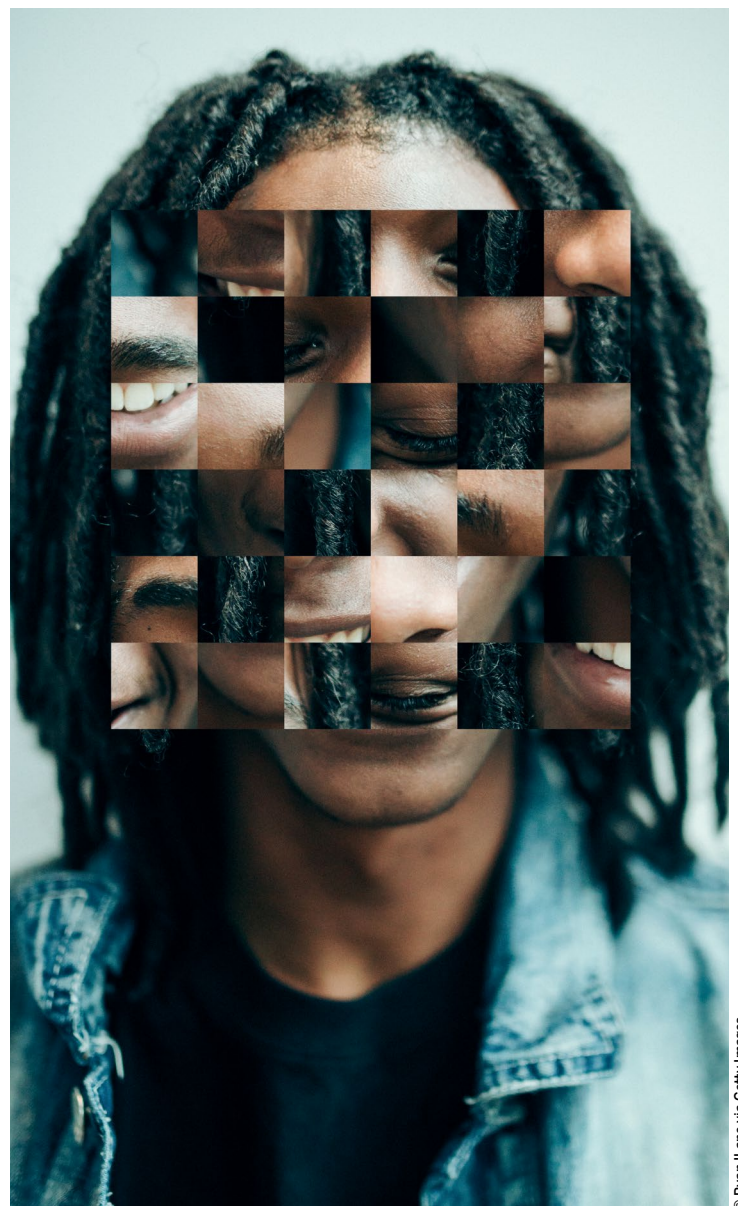
Create a photomontage

Get creative by constructing a conceptual image using elements from different shots

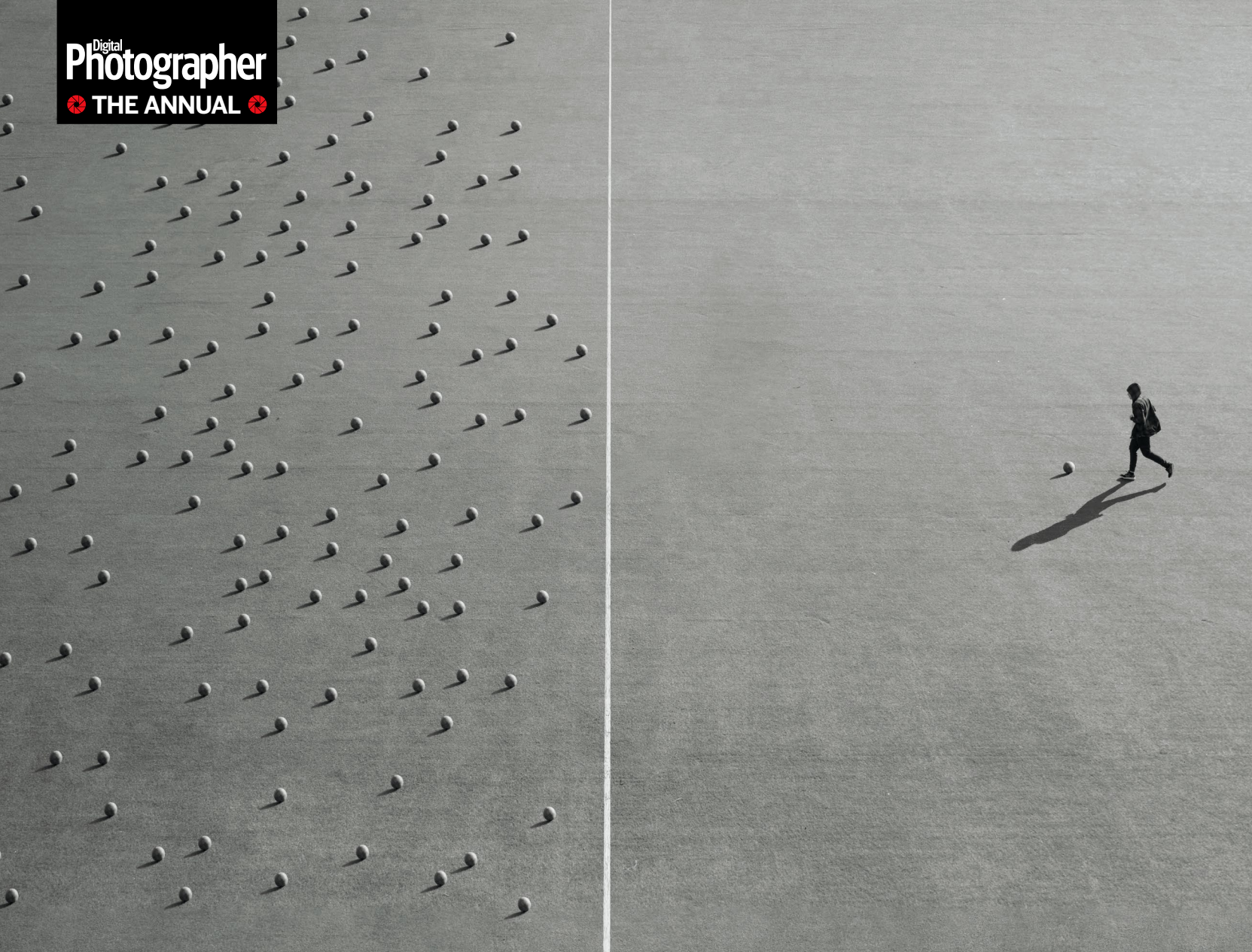
When it comes to photomontage images, the era of digital photography offers limitless opportunities to merge subjects into a single striking frame, empowering you to push boundaries and experiment. Start by developing a concept that will define the message of your visual project. While you may have an initial vision in your mind, the creative process is dynamic and often leads to surprising and better outcomes.

As you select the image elements to bring together, remember that shape, texture and colour are crucial. Focus on specific characteristics that will enhance your visual message or be bold and blend contrasting elements to create compelling visual and contextual stories.

In post-production, place your photographed subjects or elements strategically on single layers. This not only allows for experimentation but also enables you to see how each component influences the overall look of the photomontage. Experiment by adjusting the opacity and colour of each specific element, for instance, by applying a gradient. You can also work on a single image and use its elements to create a surrealistic interplay by replacing or mirroring it.



© Ryan Lane via Getty Images



Create B&W surreals

Ali Zolghadri on photography techniques that leave the viewer questioning their own perception of reality

Above
Visual interplay
By duplicating image elements, Ali created a riddle for the viewer while incorporating a message

Ali Zolghadri



Ali is a fine art and minimalist photographer from Iran who is known for his authentic surreal imagery. With over 80 international

photography awards, he has established a reputation for unique vision and creativity and his work has been featured internationally in print and exhibitions. Ali serves as a jury member for international photography competitions and mentors emerging talents. His contributions to the art world have earned him the prestigious UAE Golden Visa.

Instagram: @alizolghadri

Balancing realistic scenes with surrealistic elements requires precision and storytelling. By photographing real components and blending them seamlessly, you can create an illusion that feels grounded yet also imaginative. This is where my fine art and minimalistic work connect, as I am dedicated to creating surreal imagery without the use of AI-generating programs. My focus lies on emphasising the authenticity of the creative process, blending reality and imagination solely through photography and post-production using tools such as Photoshop.

What I love most about this style is the challenge of visualising surreal concepts and translating them into physical scenes to photograph. It allows me to create a visual language that feels personal, genuine, and emotionally impactful. Here, the biggest challenge lies in achieving the balance between

realism and surrealism. Every element in my compositions is photographed and combined manually, ensuring the viewer questions what is real yet feels immersed in the narrative.

My approach starts with a clear concept, which I sketch or plan before photographing. For one image, I photographed elements including trees, a figure and sky textures separately, ensuring proper lighting and angles. In post-production, I combined these to create a dreamlike, cohesive composition. Therefore, the photographic stage is crucial. I carefully plan and capture every element in real life, ensuring proper lighting, textures and perspectives to maintain realism in the piece.

However, editing is equally significant – it's where the individual components come together to form a cohesive and surreal image. It allows me to refine details, adjust tones and enhance the narrative.

On the right lines

Include graphic elements to enhance the surrealistic approach

By incorporating lines, either natural, architectural or added in editing, and using symmetry, you can create a sense of flow and coherence in your photograph while emphasising the surreal narrative. This can evoke emotions and create

harmony and balance while drawing the viewer's attention to the main subject or focal point. When doing so, carefully position lines to ensure they complement the minimalistic aesthetic and enhance the overall narrative of the image.



LESS COLOUR – MORE IMPACT

Black and white strips away distractions, allowing you to focus on contrasts, textures and emotional depth. It enhances the minimalism and surrealism in the frame, creating a timeless feel.

Pro Advice

Ali's top tips for creating imagery that blurs the lines

Create a strong concept

Think about the story or feeling you want to convey. A clear concept will guide your entire process.

Master lighting

Lighting can make or break a surreal image. Experiment with shadows, highlights, and contrasts to create depth.

Plan your composition

Pre-visualise your shot. Use sketches or mood boards to determine the placement of every element before photographing.

Learn post-production techniques

Editing is where your ideas will come alive. Invest time in mastering tools like Photoshop to blend elements seamlessly.

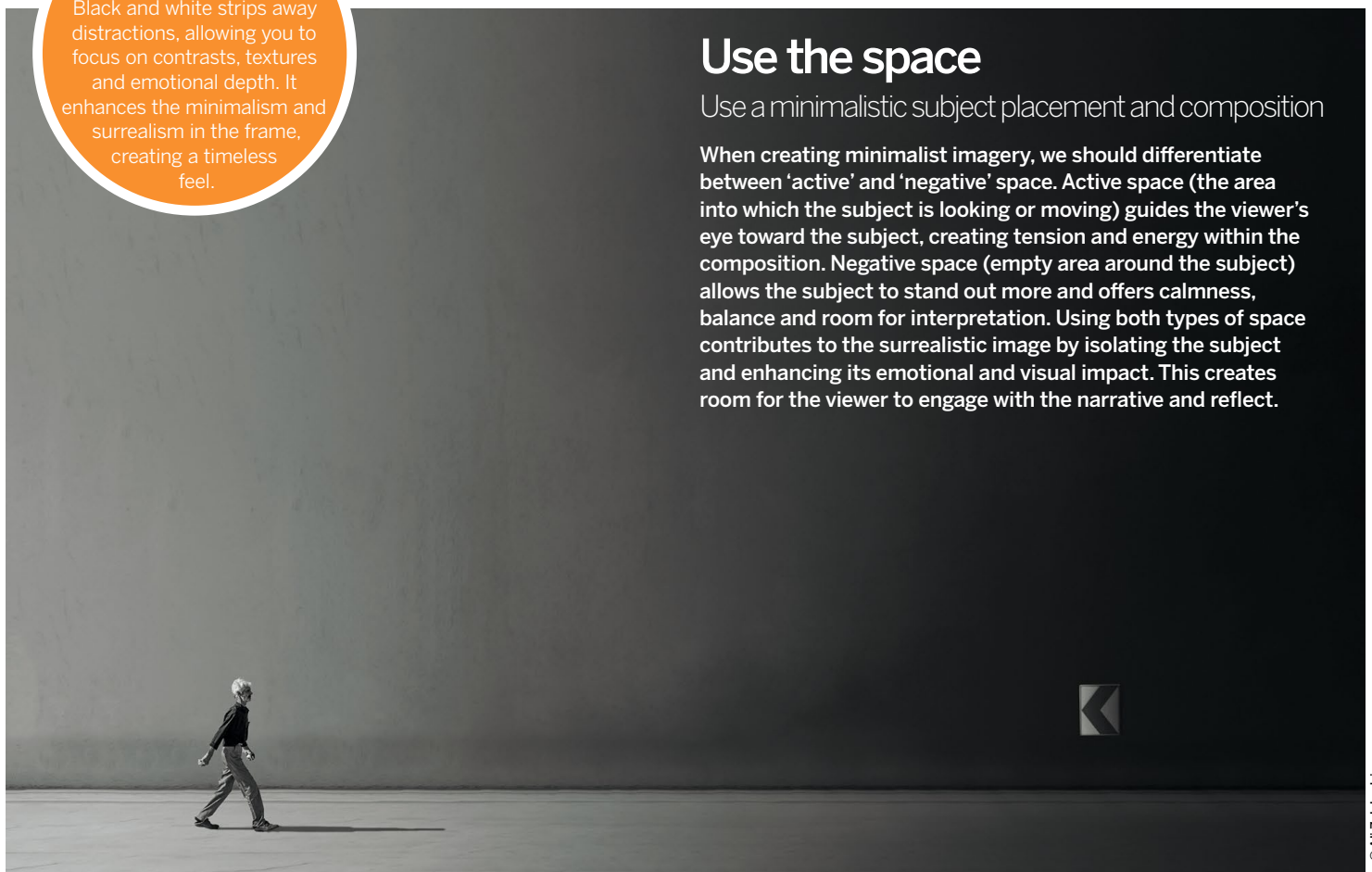
Be patient and persistent

Creating surreal photography without shortcuts like AI takes time but embrace the process and keep refining your craft.

Use the space

Use a minimalistic subject placement and composition

When creating minimalist imagery, we should differentiate between 'active' and 'negative' space. Active space (the area into which the subject is looking or moving) guides the viewer's eye toward the subject, creating tension and energy within the composition. Negative space (empty area around the subject) allows the subject to stand out more and offers calmness, balance and room for interpretation. Using both types of space contributes to the surrealistic image by isolating the subject and enhancing its emotional and visual impact. This creates room for the viewer to engage with the narrative and reflect.



COLOUR

Enhance the blue and pink hues in the sky to evoke a sense of the supernatural, contrasting with the golden-orange tones of the dry, sunlit hills. This interplay of colour adds depth and tension to the composition.

Welcome to 'Magic Realism'

Michael Bross on playing with perspective to create a perception of reality

Magic realism is a literary genre that blends realistic narratives with subtle surreal or fantastical elements and it has inspired my approach to photography. My work combines realistic compositions with a dream-like atmosphere to evoke a sense of

the extraordinary in the everyday. While I value both photography and editing equally, I believe that without a strong initial capture, editing loses its purpose. That said, post-processing is essential to my process, as it allows me to conjure a sense of magic that might otherwise

remain hidden. I do most of my shooting at sunrise or sunset when the light is at its most dynamic and shadows create intriguing depth.

In editing, my goal is to maintain the image's foundation in reality while also introducing a moderate infusion of the otherworldly. I aim to

LIGHT AND SHADOW

Focus on capturing long shadows that intertwine with the evening's low-angled sunlight, creating a dynamic interplay of light and dark. These shadows introduce an element of mystery, enriching the narrative within the frame. By chance, two people were climbing the hill with the tree while I was shooting, instantly providing a reference of scale that added depth and context to the composition.

FOCUS AND TIME

This image was captured in the Diablo Range, near San Francisco, during early autumn. After eight months without rain, the hills take on a striking golden hue. There's a profound beauty in this arid landscape and so I use its distinct character to shape the story of my work.

Michael Bross

Originally from a remote town in Pennsylvania, USA, Michael Bross is now based in California, where he has been living for the past 24 years.

As a photographer, his main interest is in shooting natural and urban landscapes. Previously a recognised composer of soundtracks for popular video games, he now leads a design team in the field of augmented reality.

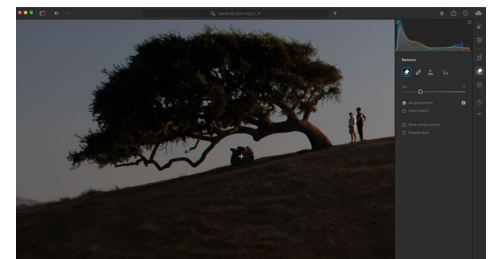
Instagram: @bross.works

Website: www.bross.works

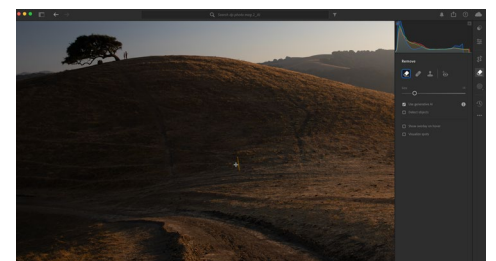
The retouching process explained

Michael's post-processing workflow allows him to fine-tune the effects

Under the Remove tool in Lightroom, I use the Generative AI feature to eliminate any distractions from the photo. The original capture is shown in these screenshots before post-processing. For each removal, I adjust the selection size so it's slightly larger than the object itself, extending just beyond its edges to ensure a seamless edit.



1 Stone Chair The first distraction is the chair positioned under the tree. As the tree is a primary focal point, the chair detracts from its prominence and so it was removed to maintain focus on the main subject.



2 Pipeline Marker The second distraction is a pole marking an underground pipeline located near the middle of the composition. While less noticeable than the chair, its placement made it obvious enough to warrant removal for a cleaner, more cohesive image.

4x © Michael Bross

balance these styles without straying too far into the realms of fantasy.

AI tools play a role in my workflow for minor, light-touch adjustments. These tools are particularly effective for removing distracting elements and seamlessly filling

the space with natural replacements. Although the edits are subtle, they significantly enhance my efficiency, allowing me to focus on the finer details that bring my compositions to life. For me, every detail matters in creating images that resonate.

Pro insight: gaming the system

We talk to **Miles Astray**, the photographer who tricked the industry by entering a real-life photograph into an AI competition – and winning



Pictured
FLAMINGONE
Renaissance Island,
Aruba. 2022

Hey Miles, can you tell us a bit about your journey and what inspired you to enter the 1839 Awards with your real-life image 'FLAMINGONE'?

I'm a writer and photographer, blending both on my website, inspired by my travels over almost 13 years. I embrace a nomadic lifestyle, immersing myself in local cultures to get a feel for the place and document whatever I stumble upon in words and pictures.

My photography follows a documentary approach and my writing is non-fictional, but there is often a poetic element to my work. It's not necessarily photojournalism but an artistic combination of the two mediums, focusing on the realities of diverse cultures and the human condition, exploring our commonalities and differences – so there's a philosophical, anthropological and psychological element to all of this. My goal is to authentically depict these realities, even though it inevitably involves a degree of artistic interpretation.

I entered the 1839 Awards to counter the trend of AI-generated images winning photography competitions. I wanted to highlight the value of human creativity and to show that Mother Nature and reality still do it best. I'm thrilled that my photograph won two awards, reaffirming the importance of genuine artistic expression.

You described your submission as a 'jab at AI and its ethical implications'. Can you elaborate on what you meant?

It highlights how easily AI-generated content can deceive viewers. Recently, we've seen AI-generated images winning photography competitions because the juries were unaware of their origins. This raises ethical concerns about authenticity, especially as the digital landscape becomes increasingly saturated

Miles Astray



A multi-disciplinary artist whose work intertwines writing and photography into a form of art activism, Miles embarked on a "slow and immersive"

journey around the world in 2012. He has since crafted a unique voice that transcends traditional genres and styles.

Instagram: @milesastray

Website: milesastray.com

with photorealistic AI images. The technology has seen exponential development in the past few years, allowing anyone to create convincing visuals. This abundance of false imagery blurs the line between reality and fabrication. My satirical entry into an AI competition – a genuine photo mistaken for AI-generated – underscored this issue by tricking both the jury and the public.

The aim was to spark a discussion about the importance of transparency in identifying the source of images, emphasising that without proper labelling, discerning what's real from what isn't becomes increasingly challenging.

Why do you think your photograph resonated more with the public and jury than the AI-generated images in the competition?

I chose that particular photograph because it has a surreal element to it. A flamingo is already a fascinating animal, especially in terms of its colour and overall appearance. In this specific shot, the head is not missing but rather hidden, which makes it appear headless.

THE CAMERA BEHIND THE IMAGE

"I shot the image with a Nikon D750 DSLR, my go-to camera for travel. While I own an analogue camera, digital photography fits my nomadic lifestyle better. This robust, portable, full-frame camera strikes a great balance. I've tried models with smaller sensors, but image quality can suffer. The Nikon offers the technical features I need while still being compact and easy to carry."



Pictured
SELFIED
Renaissance Island,
Aruba. 2022

I thought this unusual aspect might evoke the type of imagery often associated with AI.

I believe that people had an emotional connection with my image – it resonated with them, which contributed to it receiving more public votes and winning the People's Choice Award. In contrast, the other images I saw were fairly photorealistic – perhaps even more so than mine – and so they looked pretty real. But then, I found them to be a bit generic whereas my photograph, with its unusual elements, stood out emotionally and captured people's interest more effectively.

How did you create the surreal effect in the 'FLAMING ONE' image? Did you follow a vision, or did you take a documentary approach?

Actually, it was the latter. It was mostly sheer luck. I'd planned to see flamingos at a beach in the Caribbean where they roam freely. I went there to observe them up close, which was an interesting experience in itself. That morning, the first flamingo I encountered was just going about its routine, using its beak to scratch its plumage. It was a lucky moment; I was simply taking pictures, and then it suddenly assumed that position. Fortunately, I was able to capture it at just the right moment.

What are your thoughts on the trend where photography aims to achieve the visual style of AI imagery?

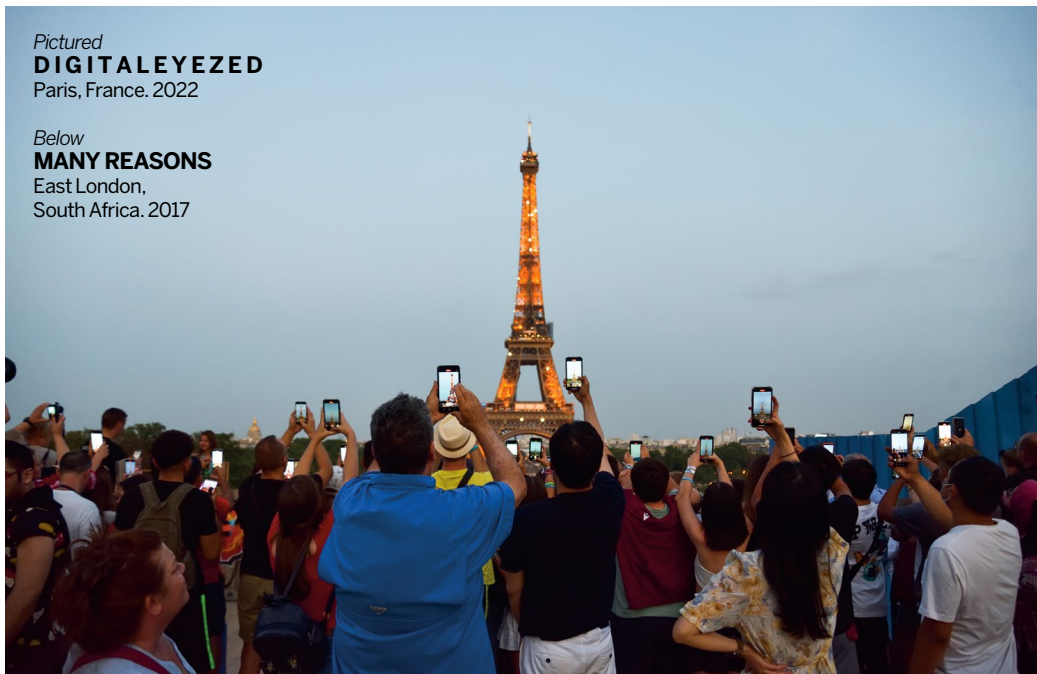
With 'FLAMING ONE', I have created an image with a surreal appeal, but for me personally, it has never been my ambition to create images that look AI-generated. However, I think that's an interesting boundary to straddle between reality and imagination, also from an artistic point of view.

One of the most amazing aspects of reality is its sometimes unbelievable nature. Nature surprises us with incredible creatures, like flamingos, and capturing them at the right moment can yield astonishing results, sometimes even making them appear headless. This interplay between reality and our human interpretation of it fascinates me. That's why I'm currently organising a travelling exhibition titled 'Can't make that up', (pictured below) featuring images that encourage viewers to question their view of reality.



Pictured
DIGITALEYZED
Paris, France. 2022

Below
MANY REASONS
East London,
South Africa. 2017



Interesting! Can you tell us more about what's in this exhibition?

I intentionally selected images with surreal elements from my body of work. During the exhibition's inauguration, we encourage attendees to question the authenticity of the images by telling them that one might be AI-generated. They then share their opinions on Post-it notes before we reveal which images are actual photographs. This interactive approach creates interesting reactions, with nearly every photo receiving at least one vote for being AI-generated. It's interesting to see how people react psychologically and how this uncertainty affects their perception of the entire collection.

Do you believe your submission has influenced the public's perception of AI in photography?

I hope that's the case. At the moment, there is a lot of attention on the topic. I wasn't the first to address it and, actually, my stunt was

inspired by artists who had won photo contests with AI imagery. Like Boris Eldagsen, who won the creative category of the Sony World Photography Awards in 2023. We connected over this topic and became friends.

We need to pay close attention to this technology now and establish guardrails while discussing its implications and how we want to shape the future with it. It's highly disruptive and has a significant impact. The initial outcry about Boris's win was a wake-up call and my stunt served as a reminder about a year later.

We must continue this discussion. AI is truly a game-changer. I feel like we missed an opportunity with social media, which also started as a digital revolution that nobody regulated. It was just a fun way to connect with friends and share pictures, but it quickly evolved to become instrumental in eroding democracies and influencing elections. We must see to it that the societal risks of AI, like the dissemination of misinformation, don't outweigh its benefits.

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

GLOSSARY

We explain the essential jargon you need to demystify modern photo technology



Photography is both an art and a science and, as such, there are lots of confusing technical terms to get to grips with. Luckily, we don't often need to think about this jargon, except perhaps when buying a new lens or investing in new tech. However, understanding how your camera works and what these terms mean can improve your appreciation of the medium, help you make better buying decisions and shoot better images as you progress. Here are some of the ones we wish we had known from the beginning.

Acutance

The subjective perception of the sharpness of a photographic image, as defined by the contrast between edges, independent of pixel resolution.

Additive colour

Colour created by mixing light from different light sources, starting with black, red, green and blue light, which produces the visible spectrum of light that is captured by our eyes.

Aspect ratio

The shape of an image frame, defined by the proportional relationship between the width and the height of the image sensor.

Aspherical element

Any lens element, the surface profile of which does not form part of a sphere. Used to reduce aberrations, especially in wide-angle lenses.



Chromatic aberration

A fringing effect, which appears as a separation of colours in an image. It is most notable at high-contrast edges and is caused by imperfect convergence of light by the lens elements.



Focal plane

The position of the light-sensitive surface within the camera body, often the photosite-containing CMOS sensor surface and indicated by this symbol.

Bit depth

The pixel capacity for storage of bits (digital storage units created per captured photon of light). Greater bit depth means that more colour information is captured.

Chrominance

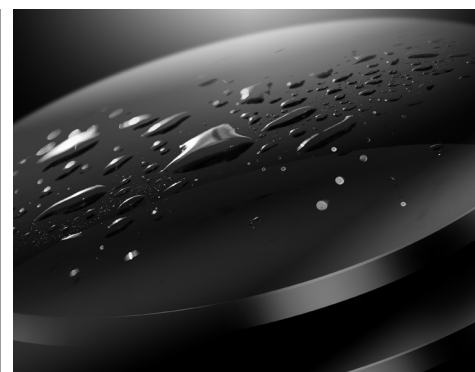
The characteristic of light that causes the perception of colour when compared with a reference of the same brightness, but different hue and saturation.

Circle of confusion (COC)

A disc around a point caused by a cone of light created due to imperfect focusing at a specific location. Across a whole image, a wider COC manifests as blurriness.

CMOS

Complementary Metal-Oxide Semiconductor. This is the preferred sensor type used in the majority of modern digital cameras and which replaced the Charge Coupled Devices (CCD) of older models.



Fluorine coating

A special lens coating incorporating negatively charged properties and applied to glass elements to repel dust and water, allowing easy cleaning.

Colour Filter Array

A mosaic of coloured filters fixed above a camera's sensor photosites that enable the capture of colour information in a digital image.

Coma

The distortion of points of light within an image, usually in a conical shape at the edges of the frame and often at its strongest at the maximum aperture.

Demosaicing

A digital image processing algorithmic process by which digital cameras create full-colour images using the incomplete data collected by the sensor and Colour Filter Array.

Diffraction

The blurring effect introduced by the interference of light travelling through a lens aperture by the diaphragm blades. Diffraction is worse at small apertures, eg. f/16 or f/22.

Flange depth

The distance between the lens mount of a camera body and the sensor plane. This can vary between mounts, sensor-lens designs and camera brands.

Focus breathing

A noticeable shift in the field-of-view of a lens when changing focus position, even if focal length remains constant. This is problematic for videography or when focus-stacking.

Ghosting

Flare or haze effects in the image frame, often caused by internal reflections in the optical system contacting the sensor multiple times.

Gobo

From 'go-between', this is a light modifier, usually black or opaque, that is placed between the light source and subject to alter the properties of the emitted light.

HEIF

High-Efficiency Image File format. A file format that is smaller than a jpeg format file but offers superior image quality.

Histogram

A graphical representation of the tonal information, with highlights on the right and shadows on the left. A centred data peak means a balanced exposure.

Hyperfocal distance

The focus distance at a set aperture that provides the widest depth of field, using the equation $\text{Hyperfocal Distance} = \frac{\text{Focal Length}^2}{\text{Aperture} \times \text{COC}}$.

IBIS

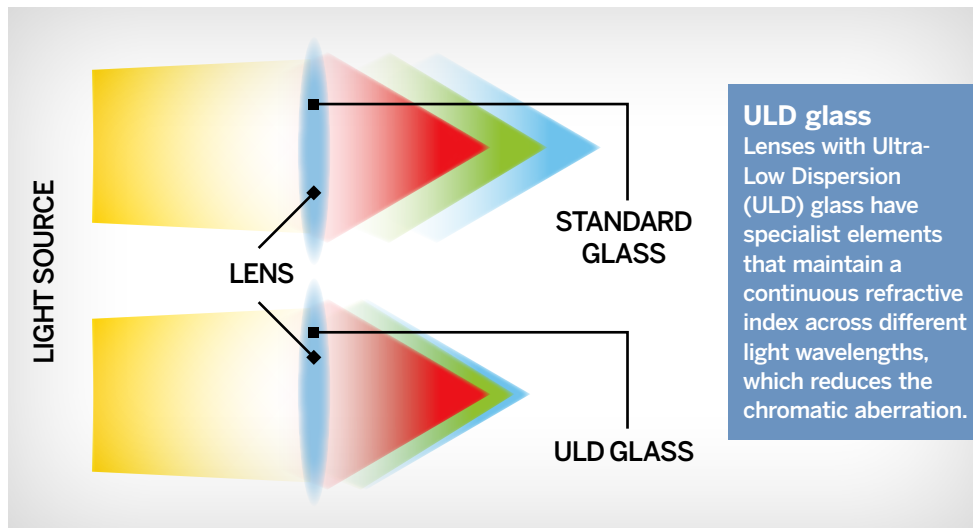
In-Body Image Stabilisation. A system of compensation for camera movement that features the image sensor mounted on a gyro.

Luminance

The apparent brightness of a light source or surface, as measured by the intensity (units) of light emitted from an object.

Parallax error

The variance in perspective between a viewfinder and the sensor, seen as shifts in the apparent distance between objects across a panorama and caused by rotational movement. This can be a challenge when blending the images



TTL metering

Through-the-lens metering is a way of calculating the exposure in flash photography by measuring the ambient light and adjusting the flash output to obtain a correct subject exposure.

Moiré

An aberration caused by a digital sensor failing to correctly resolve ultra-finely detailed repeating and overlapping patterns. Manifests as wavy patterns that don't exist in the scene.

MTF chart

Modular Transfer Function. A graphical representation of the optical performance of a lens, plotting the resolution and contrast from the frame centre to the edges.

Resolution

The ability of a camera and lens to render two points or lines in an image as separate, influencing apparent sharpness and detail.

Signal gain

The amplification of a signal generated by the sensor on contact with light. As ISO is increased, the gain is turned up to simulate an equivalent sensitivity at a given exposure.

Specular highlights

A spot of light on a reflective surface that offers a strong visual cue for the shape of an object. These are often encountered as eye catchlights in portraiture.

Subtractive colour

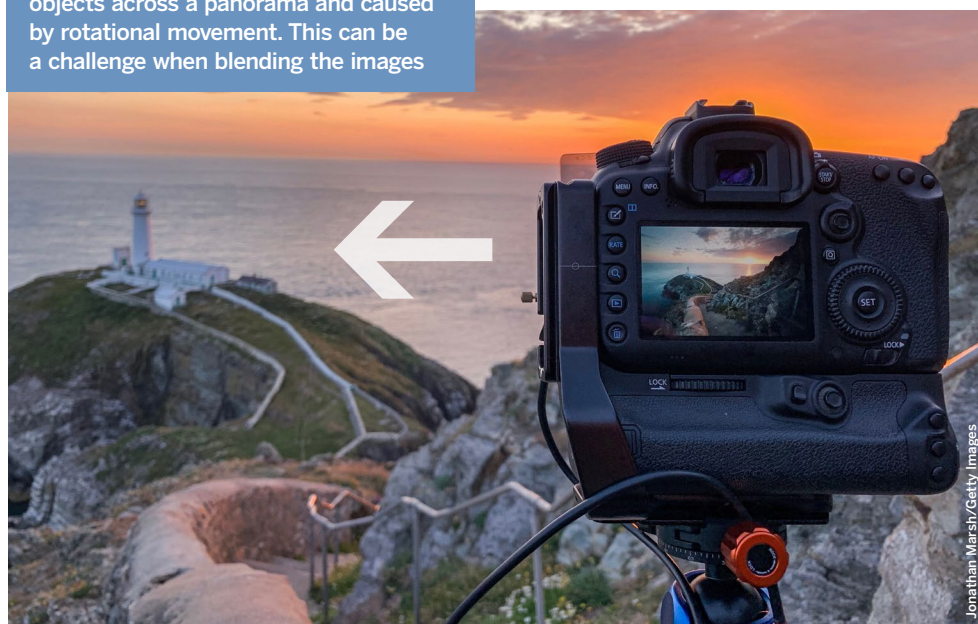
The creation of visible colour through the selective removal of wavelengths from white light, often through absorption by pigments printed on a physical surface.

Ultrasonic motor

A type of fast and quiet piezoelectric autofocus motor that makes use of ultrasonic waves to vibrate a stator ring pressed against a rotor.

Zone System

A numerical system for calculating exposure in any lighting conditions. Created by Ansel Adams and Fred Archer, it ranges from Zone 0 (pure black) to Zone 10 (pure white).



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