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SUMMER 2024

Better Photography



THE MAGAZINE
FULL OF IDEAS

Robin Moon's Affair with Nature • Infrared Cameras
Cole Thompson's Vision • Ian Everett on His Bike

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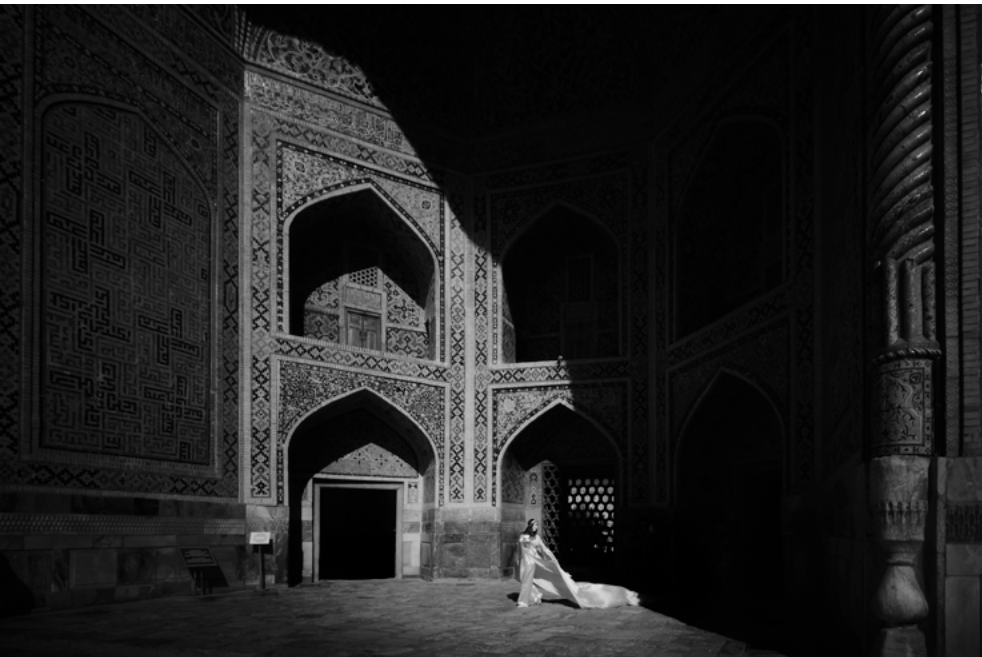


Photo by Peter Eastway



Photo by Cole Thompson

TECHNIQUES

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While using curves in Photoshop is not the most intuitive tool, understanding it is the key to so many of our editing steps that it should be avoided no longer!

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Cole Thompson: Finding His Vision 22

Peter Eastway interviews ‘amateur’ photographer Cole Thompson about photography, black and white and how to find your own Vision.

Robin Moon: The Nature Lover 32

Sony Ambassador Robin Moon has found herself travelling around the globe in search of her favourite subjects: wildlife.



Photo by Robin Moon



KEEPERS

PHOTOGRAPHER: Brian Peters

LOCATION: Aksaray Mausoleum, Samarkand, Uzbekistan

CAMERA: Canon R8, EF24-70mm f/2.8L II USM

EXPOSURE: 1/6 second @ f5.6, ISO 3200

SITUATION: It always pays to be a little inquisitive. After visiting the more famous and well-known Amir Temur Mausoleum Gur-i Amir Complex in Samarkand, we wandered out an unattended back gate into the surrounding suburbs, only to find a much smaller mausoleum less than fifty metres away. The entrance was locked. However, the caretaker appeared, offered to take us inside for an entrance fee and even provided a mattress so we could lie down and photograph perhaps the most amazing ceiling we saw in all of Uzbekistan.







KEEPERS

PHOTOGRAPHER: Ralph McConaghy

LOCATION: Imam Sarahsi Bishkek Central Mosque, Kyrgyzstan

CAMERA: Fujifilm GFX-100S, GF20-35mmF4 R WR

EXPOSURE: 1/170 second @ f8, ISO 6400

SITUATION: Like churches in Christian lands, mosques in Muslim countries are attractive for cameras and photographers. Not all churches and not all mosques allow photography and when they do, it's important to be respectful of the worshippers. This is a modern mosque, yet the huge expanse under the dome has the same presence as other, more traditional buildings. Perhaps the defining ingredient is the light and the way the shadows fall, the warm colours contrasting with the cool blues of the carpet.

KEEPERS

PHOTOGRAPHER: Lidia D'Opera

LOCATION: Bokonbayevo,
Kyrgyzstan

CAMERA: Leica M10, Summicron
28mm

EXPOSURE: 1/750 second @ f8,
ISO 200

SITUATION: We spent a morning watching the local kok-boru teams practice their moves on an alpine plain above the busy town of Bokonbayevo, on the shores of Issyk Kul (lake). Instead of a ball, they use a headless goat – but rest easy, the goat is eaten after the game and nothing is gone to waste. And whatever you think of the ball, the athleticism of the riders and their horses has to be seen to be believed. This photo was taken right at the end of the game when the players galloped full speed towards us, a move pre-planned to scare the pants off the photographers. It worked!





Tilt Shift Lenses for Fujifilm GFX

Fujifilm's GF30mm f5.6 T/S and GF110mm f5.6 T/S Macro lenses will have a lot of photographers green with envy – a medium format (or large format, as Fujifilm reminds us) lens offering some of the camera movements usually found only on technical cameras!

Both the new lenses offer a tilt function (tilting their optical axis) and a shift function (moving their optical axis), separately or together, to alter how the optical axis relates to the imaging plane, thus allowing us to intentionally manipulate areas that are in focus and their perspective. The tilt shift lenses feature image circles of around 85 mm, much larger than the image sensor and thus allowing shift adjustment up to ± 15 mm. The revolving action of the lens design allows you to change the tilting and shifting in any direction required.

The GF30mm f5.6 T/S is a wide-angle tilt shift lens with the focal length equivalent to 24mm in the 35mm film format. Fujifilm suggests the lens will meet the professional needs of landscape photography where everything within the frame needs to be in focus, from the grass in the foreground to distant mountains and in architectural photography where all the vertical lines in the building need to appear vertical in the photograph as well.



The GF110mm F5.6 T/S Macro is a mid-telephoto tilt shift macro lens with a focal length equivalent to 87mm in the 35mm film format and a maximum reproduction rate of 0.5x (meaning it's great for close-up photography). Often when shooting product photographs it is difficult to keep everything in sharp focus, but by tilting and shifting the lens, planes of product boxes (for example) can be kept tack sharp from front to back.

The 30mm has an expected retail price of \$6799 and the 110mm is \$5899. **For more information, visit Fujifilm's website.**

Sony Alpha 7CII and 7CR

Sony has two additions to the Alpha 7C series of compact full-frame interchangeable lens cameras, the Alpha 7C II and Alpha 7CR. The Alpha 7C II is equipped with the same sensor found in the Alpha 7R V, with approximately 33-megapixels, and features the latest still image, video functions and performance in a compact and lightweight design (approximately 124mm x 71.1mm x 63.4mm and weighs approximately 514 g). It is the second-generation version of the Alpha 7C series and intended for a wide range of shooting scenarios such as travel and street photography.

The Alpha 7CR is a new compact full-frame interchangeable lens camera, boasting approximately 61-megapixels, the same sensor found in the Alpha 7R V, but now housed in a compact and lightweight body (similar in size and weight as the Alpha 7C II). In addition to daily snapshots, it can obviously produce very high-quality image captures in a wide variety of settings, such as portrait, wildlife and landscape photography, providing a combination of high resolution image capture with mobility and a low weight.

The Alpha 7C II has a suggested retail price of \$3,499, the Alpha 7CR \$4,999. Both models are equipped with the same AI-processing unit and BIONZ XR processors found in Sony's newest cameras, such as the Alpha 7R V and Alpha 6700. Real-time Recognition AF recognises a wide variety of subjects with high accuracy and 5-axis in-body image



stabilisation provides a seven-step shooting advantage when capturing stills.

In terms of video performance, both models support high quality 4:2:2 10-bit video recording up to 4K 60p and both models support Sony's acclaimed S-Cinetone colour science for rich cinematic video. In addition, they have Active Mode in-body image stabilisation, AI-based Auto Framing and digital-audio interface support. **For more information, visit Sony's website.**

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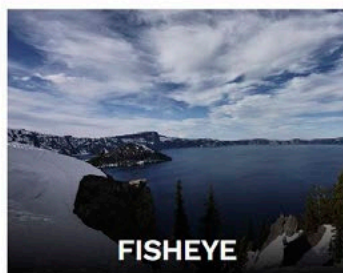
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EXPLORE SIGMA LENSES BY TYPE

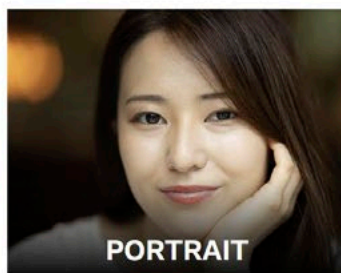
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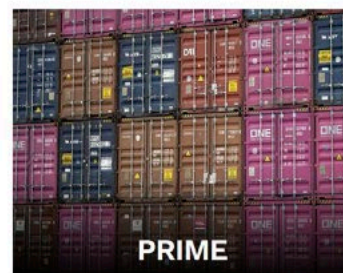
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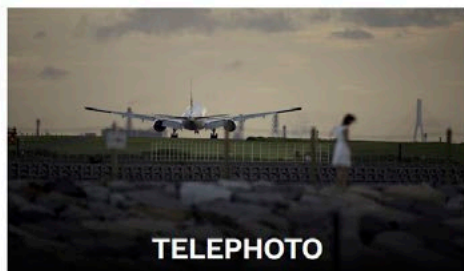
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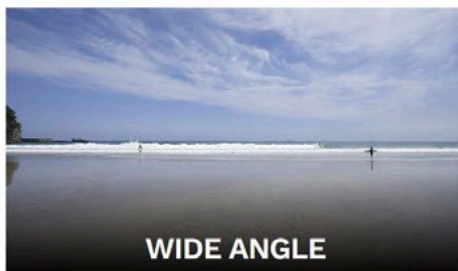
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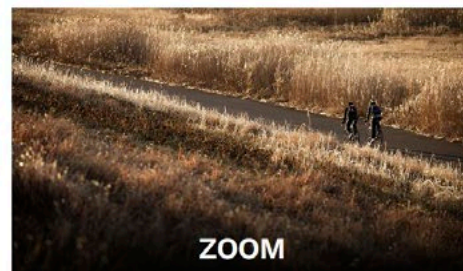
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Datacolor Spyder X2 Ultimate

Why do you need to calibrate your computer monitor for photography? The Datacolor Spyders create an ICC display profile (a small piece of computer code) that is used by your computer's video card and colour managed software to show a true colour representation of your image file within your editing software, so you can make accurate editing decisions to create the look you want. And it's not difficult to use – once you have the Spyder attached to your computer and the software loaded, you just follow the on-screen prompts and it's all done for you! Do it once a month and you're sorted!

The latest Datacolor Spyder is the X2, available in either the Ultra or Elite packages. At \$475 from Kayell, the Elite is the less expensive and is probably all most photographers need. The Ultra includes an expanded sensor designed for calibration of HDR/high-brightness monitors up to 2000 cd/m² (nits), and at \$525, it could be the better investment to future-proof your purchase or if you're interested in video. Yes, HDR is making a splash in stills photography too, but our jury is out on how essential it is going to be, especially if you're also printing your work.

The Spyders calibrate both monitors and digital projectors. The Spyder X software has been further streamlined and includes display mapping and analysis for a better understanding of the colour, brightness, contrast, gamut,



tone response and white point of your monitor. Plus it offers an integrated ambient light sensor that measures the room light throughout the day, allowing you to adjust your display's brightness and contrast. There's a lot more to Datacolor's new Spyder – visit www.kayellaustralia.com.au for more information.

Sigma 60-600mm F4.5-6.3 DG DN

Mirrorless cameras with their sophisticated autofocus and fast frame rates have revolutionised nature and sport photography, but alongside the cameras are the telephoto zoom lenses which give incredible range and performance. Lenses like 100-400mm and 150-600mm zooms have really changed things up, so imagine what's possible with a 60-600mm telephoto zoom?

Sigma's 60-600mm F4.5-6.3 DG DN is available for Sony, Canon, Nikon and Leica mounts, each lens designed to work seamlessly with its host camera. Providing full-frame coverage, the 10x zoom range has to be ideal for that next African safari, or standing on the sidelines at your kid's footy match.

According to Sigma, a newly developed linear HLA motor (High-response Linear Actuator), delivers unprecedentedly fast and precise autofocus, plus the lens offers image stabilisation of up to 7 stops at the wide end and 6 stops at the telephoto end. There are two OS (IS) modes: Mode 1 is suitable for general shooting while Mode 2 is best suited for fast panning shots, for example, in motorsports. In Mode 2, an acceleration sensor is combined with Sigma's Intelligent OS algorithm to handle panning shots, enabling effective image stabilisation even when the camera is moved vertically or diagonally and regardless of the horizontal and vertical orientation of the lens.



The lens is equipped with a dual action zoom, a dust and splash resistant structure, as well as a wealth of customisable functions. Sigma claims its optical design effectively corrects chromatic aberrations that tend to occur in the ultra-telephoto range by using a variety of high quality construction materials, including FLD and SLD glass elements.

The minimum focusing distance is 45 cm at the wide end and at the 200 mm focal length, the lens offers a maximum magnification ratio of 1:2.4, making it useful for close-up photography as well. Available from CR Kennedy and better retailers for just under \$4000.

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Canon R8

There's no doubt the new sensors on Canon's latest mirrorless cameras have satisfied any quality questions, even at higher ISO settings. And the good news is you can take advantage of this quality in a smaller, lighter body, the new Canon R8. We had one on review recently and were very impressed with both the build and image quality.

The full-frame EOS R8 features a 24.2-megapixel full-frame CMOS sensor capable of achieving the same resolution as the EOS R6 Mark II. The class-leading sensor offers a fast readout speed to unlock a number of advanced features; including a reduced rolling shutter that enables up to 40 fps continuous shooting and low noise at high ISO settings up to 102,400.

Weighing approximately 461 g (with card and battery), the EOS R8 is Canon's lightest full-frame EOS R System camera to date. Measuring 132.5x86.1x70 mm, the camera has similar dimensions to the EOS RP, but with a number of additional professional-level features, including a high resolution 2.36-million dot EVF working at up to 120 fps and UHS-II SD card support. The interface makes the camera easy to operate with a useful mode dial, featuring 12 modes across still and video shooting and a dedicated switch for moving between photo and movie capture.



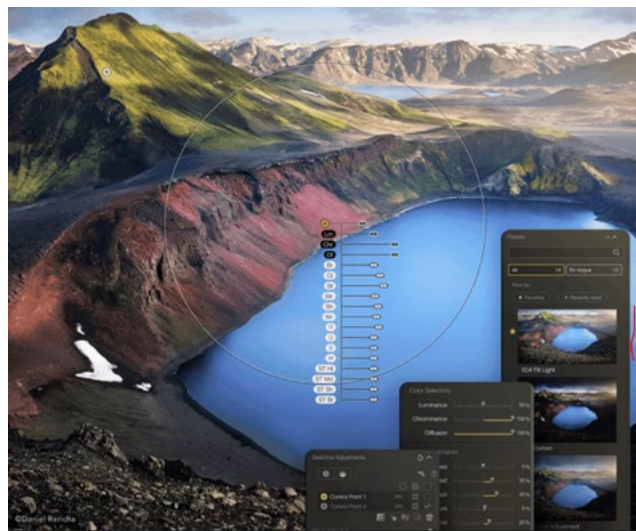
And if this is going to be a travel camera, then it's well equipped for video, capturing full width 4K 60p footage that is oversampled from 6K sensor data for sharp, detailed video content. It can also capture 180 fps Full HD for slow motion videos. To support those wanting to upskill in video, the R8 offers Canon Log 3 at 10-bit YCbCr 4:2:2 H.265 internal recording, which provides greater dynamic range and more flexibility in post-production. Alternatively, HDR PQ and HDR Movie modes can be selected to suit those with an HDR workflow, producing a clean HDMI output to compatible devices. **For more information, check out Canon's website!**

Nik Collection Reinvented

Years ago, Nik was a very progressive plug-in, assisting photographers to refine their editing in ways that were more involved in plain vanilla Photoshop. So successful was Nik that Google purchased it and, in a gesture of unexpected origins, made the plug-ins free. We surmise that Nik had some technology Google wanted to harness (or harvest) for other purposes, but didn't want to alienate the photography world. However, Nik languished under the new owner and there was little if any support. Then around six years ago, DxO stepped in to keep things going. It even solved simple issues like offering sensible screen resolutions for the interface, but essentially Nik remained much the same – a very useful set of tools, even if it felt to some old-timers that we'd bought the same product a couple of times!

And now we have an opportunity to buy it again with DxO having rebuilt the package 'from the ground up'. We have no objection to Nik asking for a further payment – if it's something you enjoy using, it's a small price to pay

The new Nik Collection still includes Color Efex, Silver Efex, Analog Efex, Dfine, Viveza, HDR Efex, Sharpener and Perspective. If you have Nik presets, these can now be quickly applied from within Photoshop without launching Nik. Usefully, Control Points have been joined by Control Lines – so a linear gradient filter in addition to the radial one, and both can be inverted.



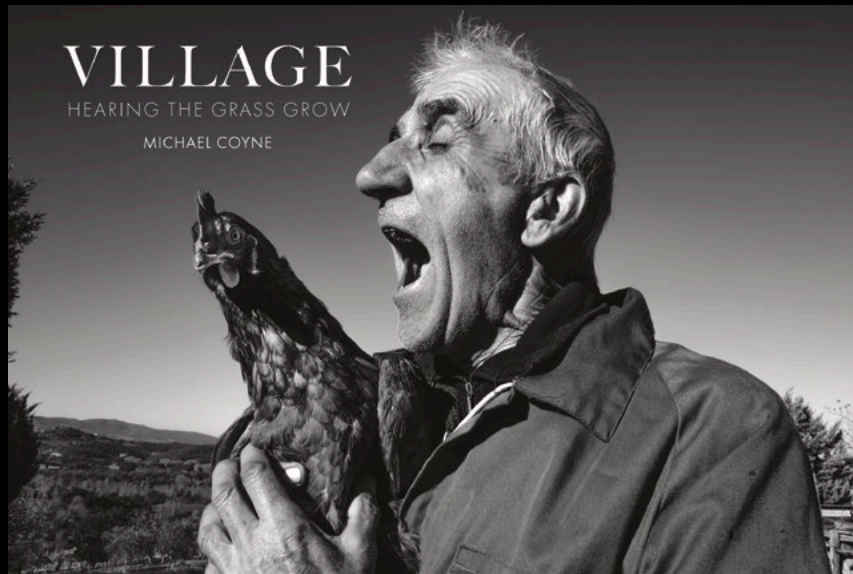
The Nik Collection is compatible with Lightroom and now Affinity Photo, plus if you download and test the new version 6, you can easily reinstall your old version if you wish to. So that seems like the best approach – download the 30-day trial and see if the upgrade is for you.

The price (without discounts which may or may not be around by the time you read this) is currently US\$149 or an upgrade price of US\$79 if you already have Nik Collection 4 or 5.

VILLAGE

HEARING THE GRASS GROW

BY MICHAEL COYNE



Around the world traditions are disappearing, languages are being forgotten and cultures washed away.

The main culprit is urbanisation resulting in the wholesale disappearance of villages and village life. It is this that Michael Coyne has made his mission to capture through his probing lens.

This stunning collection guides us through a disappearing way of life at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries.

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FUJIFILM GFX100 II

More Than Full-Frame! If you have a passion for quality, the latest

GFX may satisfy you no matter what genre you wish to shoot. By Peter Eastway.

It doesn't seem so long ago I was testing out the Fujifilm GFX100s and marvelling at its small size (compared to the original GFX100) and excellent quality. And obviously I'm not alone in my love for 'medium format' photography, or as Fujifilm puts it, 'More Than Full-Frame', because with the new GFX100 II (which Fujifilm suggests can be written as GFX100II), Fujifilm is backing the larger format with a new model that keeps in step with technological advances seen on its X-Series models.

Why Shoot Large/Medium Format?

Let's put price into the equation first. The new GFX100II camera (body only) has a 'recommended' retail price of AUS \$12,500. Add in a couple of lenses and it can easily be close to a \$20,000 investment. Compare this with, say, Fujifilm's own X-S20 as a simple outfit and it's closer to \$2,000. Then again, a top of the range Canon, Sony or Nikon outfit can easily sit around the \$10k mark, maybe more, yet this is considerably cheaper than a Phase One outfit at \$100k plus!

So, medium format does have a higher price tag, but it also offers (to date) more pixels and higher image resolution.

This is usually seen as the reason for investing in medium format, but I'd suggest the dynamic range of the sensor is equally if not more important. Full-frame DSLRs typically offer 12- or 14-bit captures, while Fujifilm's GFX100II claims up to 16-bits, equal to the Phase One digital backs. The higher bit depth produces a smoother gradation between tones and more detail in the highlights or shadows, depending on how you make your exposures.

On paper, medium format specifications might not appear to be that much better than a full-frame sensor, but the specifications hide something. I'm not expert enough to tell you exactly what is hidden and nor am I trying to sell you up

to medium format, but I do know there's a difference in the file structure, colour and tonality when you open up your work in ACR, Lightroom or Capture One. And all the medium format photographers I talk to agree that the quality is just beautiful to look at and enjoy. Perhaps they're justifying the price they've paid, but I don't think so.

So, this difference: where do you see it and does it matter? If I'm viewing a photo on social media, a website or even as a print in a magazine, rarely can I just look at a photo and say, 'Oh, that's medium format.' With good processing techniques, I simply can't tell the difference between full-frame and medium format at smaller reproduction sizes. Of course, when you make large prints, the differences become more apparent, but how many large prints do you make? And could you use Topaz Gigapixel AI to generate more pixels you'd still be very happy about?

I ask myself this regularly. After all, I carry a medium format camera a lot of the time. It's bigger, heavier and depending on the configuration I'm working with, might have no creature comforts like autofocus or autoexposure! But when I open up the files, I just love looking at the fine detail and beautiful colours. I can see a difference. That's why I'm a medium format convert because, whether I make an exhibition print or not, I greatly enjoy the experience of working with these high resolution, high bit-depth files.

Medium format isn't for everyone. And you don't have to shoot medium format to take great photos or enjoy processing them – I greatly enjoy editing my Fujifilm X-Series files as well. I love making prints from them. And you really don't need anything larger than 20-megapixels. That's the practical side of my brain.

But the artistic side which loves a highly detailed quality says yes!



... all the medium format
photographers I talk to agree
that the quality is just
beautiful to look at and enjoy.
Perhaps they're justifying
the price they've paid,
but I don't think so.



The top panel is slightly slanted toward the user so that camera settings can be checked with minimal eye movement and the sub-LCD monitor on the top deck is larger and with an updated GUI design, also for enhanced visibility. And if you're a convert to custom function buttons, there are now three new buttons added to the top of the grip within easy reach.



Sensor Improvements

The GFX100II retains the huge 102-megapixel sensor size, but the new CMOS II HS sensor boasts up to double the signal readout speed, enabling among other things continuous shooting at up to 8.0 frames per second. Add in a larger buffer and Fujifilm suggests the new camera is now suitable for sport and wildlife where capturing the peak of the action is so important.

Of course, a fast frame rate alone doesn't make it a suitable sport and wildlife candidate, but a faster autofocus speed and subject detection modes complete the features required. A new algorithm has improved the Face / Eye AF focusing and introduced Fujifilm's AI-based subject-detection AF, to detect animals, birds, cars, motorcycles, bicycles, airplanes, trains, insects and drones. A targeted subject is automatically tracked and kept in focus, leaving the photographer (and video producer) to concentrate on composition and framing.

And while there are other cameras with faster frame rates and perhaps faster autofocus speeds, remember you're also capturing medium format size files!

Stabilisation

Of less interest for action photography where fast shutter speeds are required to freeze the movement of our subject, the GFX100II has a new five-axis image stabilisation system that can produce an 8-stop advantage. For shooting in low light with stationary subjects, where the aim is to keep the camera and the photographer still, this is a huge help. With 102-megapixels, it doesn't take much camera shake to seriously reduce image sharpness, but the IBIS system helps soften the more demanding technical expertise required when using medium format equipment.

The camera is equipped with a high-magnification and high-definition 9.44-million-dot EVF with 1.0x magnification.

It suppresses parallax and distortion which can occur if you're not looking directly through the viewfinder, thereby providing better visibility. The EVF boasts a smooth refresh frame rate of approximately 120 fps so moving subjects look natural when viewfinding.

The sensor, Fujifilm claims, has a new pixel structure which boosts the sensor's saturated electrons, thereby enabling the use of ISO 80 as a non-extended sensitivity. When the sensor sensitivity is set at ISO 80, the camera can capture images with a greater dynamic range and lower noise than the previous model.

The new sensor's micro lenses have been refined to increase light use efficiency at the sensor's edges, thus improving image quality and AF accuracy.

And the IBIS system continues to be put to good use for the camera's Pixel Shift Multi-Shot function, which captures files four times the sensor's resolution. The function controls the In-Body Image Stabilisation mechanism to shift the image sensor by 0.5 pixel at a time and shoot 16 raw images in a quick succession. These files are then combined during post-production using Fujifilm's Pixel Shift Combiner software to generate a 400-megapixel image.

This is a great feature for commercial photography and the digital archiving of cultural assets - when the subject doesn't move!

Video Features

Of course, the EVF and LCD will never be enough for serious video producers, so the camera is also equipped with an Ethernet port, HDMI Type A and USB-C terminals for output to external monitors and capture devices.

The new sensor has been tweaked for even better recording specs, supporting 8K/30P video and 4K/60P 4:2:2 10-bit video internally. Furthermore, the new modes can be



recorded in a number of different formats, including Premista, 35mm and anamorphic (35mm) with the mount adaptor.

A tracking AF function for video lets you touch the LCD screen to specify a subject to be tracked while filming in the AF-C + Wide / Tracking AF mode. The camera will continue tracking the selected subject, even when multiple subjects are in the frame. Also new is the F-Log2 capture setting with dynamic range expanded up to 14+ stops.

The GFX100II can output up to 8K/30P 12-bit video in raw data via HDMI. It can also record video in the Apple ProRes raw format when used with the NINJA V+ monitor by ATOMOS, and in the Blackmagic raw format when used with the Video Assist 12G monitor by Blackmagic Design. The camera supports timecode sync with ATOMOS AirGlu BT, enabling seamless timecode synching with multiple cameras.

The GFX100II is equipped with dual card slots supporting CFExpress Type B and SD cards. The use of a CFExpress Type B card with its fast write speed supports the full video performance of the GFX100II.

An external SSD can be connected via USB-C to record stills and video data directly in any mode or format, including 4K/60P and 8K/30P. The camera also supports the cloud service "Frame.io Camera to Cloud" so that Apple ProRes Proxy files and a variety of other video files can be uploaded directly to Frame.io, thus dramatically streamlining the workflow from shooting to editing.

And videophiles might remember the problems with heat a number of cameras experienced when shooting 8K video. It seems physics hasn't changed and 8K remains a very hot experience, so Fujifilm has introduced a Cooling Fan FAN-001. It can be attached to the rear side of the camera body and receive power completely cable-free to extend the duration of continuous video filming at high temperatures, without concerns of heat-related malfunction.

A lot of the camera's new video capacity is beyond the needs of most readers of this magazine, but as you can see, Fujifilm is doing everything it can to enhance both stills and video.

Fully Rounded

Aesthetically and ergonomically, there are a number of improvements, such as a new Bishamon-TeX texture to aid the camera's grip and give it a nice, secure hold. The top panel is slightly slanted toward the user so that camera settings can be checked with minimal eye movement and the sub-LCD monitor on the top deck is larger and with an updated GUI design, is also for enhanced visibility. And if you're a convert to custom function buttons, there are now three new buttons added to the top of the grip within easy reach.

The original GFX100 was a relatively large camera due to the battery compartment which acted as a vertical grip. The new GFX100II offers an optional VG-GFX100 II vertical battery grip, making the camera a lot easier to use in the vertical orientation. The grip is dust- and weather-resistant and capable of operating at temperatures as low as -10°. It can hold two large capacity batteries NP-W235.

Photographers used to love the different viewfinders available on many medium format cameras, a feature lost on the GFX100S but now back again with the EVF-TL1. By mounting this existing accessory between the camera body and the EVF unit, the mounting angle of the viewfinder can be changed to 0° to 90° when shooting horizontally and from -45° to +45° when shooting vertically. This greatly increases the range of camera positions that can be accommodated comfortably.

So, there you have it! Another great camera to tempt you – and if you are swayed by the medium format argument, you won't be disappointed.

COLE THOMPSON *Finding His Vision*

Peter Eastway interviews 'amateur' photographer Cole Thompson

about photography, black and white and how to find your own Vision.

Why do I photograph? That's a very important question. My friend and I, John Barclay, do a YouTube video blog (The Cole and John Photo Show) and we recorded one where I talked about my Five Steps to More Meaningful Photography and the first step is: What's your motive? Why do you photograph?

Over the years my reasons for photographing have changed. When I was young, I wanted to be the next Ansel Adams. I wanted to be famous (in my mind, girls went for rock stars and photographers), but as I got older here's what I realised: I'm not a good writer. I don't do poetry. I am not a musician. I don't express my feelings well... but I can express myself through my photography. And that's why I do it, to express myself.

I'm an amateur photographer, in the classical sense: someone who is self-taught, who doesn't do it for a living, but rather for the pure love of it. Unfortunately, the distinction between amateur and professional these days is doing a poor job versus doing a good job. I'm a classical amateur because I photograph for the love of creating, not because I do poor work! There's something inside of me that needs to be said and it's through my Vision, or the way I see the world, that I express myself."

Old School

"My photographs don't look like reality. If you go to my website (www.ColeThompsonPhotography.com), you'll see a series of 'Eye versus Vision' images, showing you first what my eyes saw (the raw file) and then what I saw through my Vision (the final image). It's so difficult to describe Vision with words and I hope these before-and-after images help people understand Vision



Self Portrait at 20 Degrees

a bit. What my eyes see is just the starting point and when I'm done, the final image expresses my Vision. And the two look quite different.

I'm of the old school: Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Wynn Bullock, Paul Strand, Paul Caponigro and others. I started looking at their work when I was 14 and I fell in love with a certain type of image; dark images, contrasty images, unusual images and now that's part of my Vision."



Auschwitz No 4



Windsurfing

"Vision is the way I see the world and sometimes that may mean I create images that others don't understand or appreciate. And sometimes I ruffle feathers with my photographic philosophies. For example, I don't find value in photo critiques and I find that some camera clubs do harm when they promote competition, rules and techniques over Vision. And I'm so 'black and white' that my friends say to me, 'Cole, not everything is black and white!' But to me it is, I just don't appreciate colour.

I worry about the future of black and white photography because kids are being constantly bombarded with billions of colour images on tiny screens. With time, will we lose our appreciation for black and white and for the photographic print? Will we lose our appreciation for photography as an art form and as a way to express oneself?

A high school photography class is where many of us fell in love with black and white and we can still remember the first time we saw a print come up in the developer. It was magic and we were hooked for life! Where will kids today fall in love with black and white? Most school darkrooms are gone and I'm concerned that photo classes may now be focusing students on the wrong thing: Photoshop skills so they can put their friend's face on a gorilla for social media likes. Are these classes teaching how photography and black and white can be used as an expressive tool? What is the future of fine art photography if we're not recruiting young 'fine art' photographers? Who's going to teach these students that there's more to photography than posting on social media?"

Photographic Celibacy

"I do not believe in the saying that good artists borrow and great artists steal. I think that's horrific! An image that I create must be my idea, it must be created through my Vision and it must be created for myself and not for others. Not created for a judge, not created to impress and not created for likes. And if I can't do that, then it's not honest work and I won't pursue it.

Now, here's another thing I do that ruffles feathers: I practise Photographic Celibacy. I do not look at the work of other photographers. And the reason I don't is because I'm trying to find my own Vision. When I see an image that I love, I'm prone to copying that look or image and that won't allow me to create honest work. I want my ideas to be mine. If somebody had said to me, 'Hey, look at my single cloud photo' and I ran with their idea, then my Harbinger series would have been dishonest.

I saw this great quote by Neil Young: 'During my formative years, I had to avoid all his records, because I am such a sponge, if I listened too much, I would start being that. I admired what Bob Dylan did so much, the lyrics and the way he sang and the melodies, but I knew that would disturb what I was doing.'

That's exactly me, I'm a sponge and so I avoid looking at others' work. I recognise that many photographers take an idea they've seen and make it theirs, but I don't want to create that way. I want my ideas to be as original as possible.

Let me give you an example where I was both original and not original at the same time. I submitted a portfolio to *LensWork Magazine* called the *Dunes of Nudes*. I go to Death



Rushing Waters

Valley every year and I shoot close-ups of the dunes in a very high contrast, sensual way that reminds me of portions of the human nude. I submitted my portfolio to *LensWork* and the response was, 'I've seen this 100 times before.' I had never seen others do it and so in that sense, I had created something completely original and yet it wasn't original in the larger sense. And I'm okay when that happens because I am creating honestly and not 'borrowing' the idea from someone else."

The *Ghosts of Auschwitz-Birkenau* is a series of emotive black and white images portraying the ghosts who still linger at the death camps. You can see them on Cole's website. The images have been widely published and exhibited at Holocaust museums and people kept encouraging Cole to shoot another series using the same technique, to take advantage of that project's success and momentum – like the ghosts of 911 or the ghosts of Little Big Horn. He resisted for quite some time, but eventually he relented, pursuing a project about the castles of England. He loved the old castles he had seen when watching *The Tudors* mini-series and so he took his daughter and a white bed sheet to England to create ghosts.

"We created all of these ghost images amongst the castles and called the series *The Ghosts of Great Britain*, but when I came home and processed them, I realised that I hated them. The project had not been born out of inspiration or passion. Rather, it was a marketing gimmick trying to take advantage of the previous portfolio's success. I ended up throwing away every image but one (Old Wardour Castle). My wife suggested that I might want to keep the project because others may love

it, but my standard is that I must love it, otherwise it can never be successful.

I have a friend who was entering three images into a book that Brooks Jensen was putting together (www.lensworks.com). She was asking me what images she should submit and I said, 'Well, it depends on what your goal is. Let me ask you this: would you prefer to submit three images that you weren't particularly in love with, but you thought they would get in, and they did... or submit three images that you really loved, but they didn't get in? Which would you prefer?' Because it's all about what you're trying to achieve.

One of the most important things I've learned in my 55 years of photography, is to define what your goals are and what success means to you, as early as possible. For too long I never questioned what success meant to 'me' and I woke up one day and realised that I had been chasing the wrong things. My definition of success today is: to create images that I love."

Finding Your Path

"When COVID started, I found myself speaking several times a week via Zoom to photo clubs all over the world. I loved it, but it was also sobering because I would see all these photographers who were where I was twenty or thirty years ago. They don't believe they're creative, many are gear heads, they're into the fads and they judge their work by how many ribbons they win.

But then there are always a few people who are tired of the fads, the critiques, the competitions based on the



Harbinger No 1



Harbinger No 11



Harbinger No 22



Harbinger No 27



Harbinger No 37



Harbinger No 41

personal likes of the judges. They want more, but they don't know what that "more" is. Well, it turns out that I'm a preacher and I'm preaching the gospel of finding your Vision and making photography something personally expressive and meaningful. And I hope to give people a path, a way to do that.

So, what is that path?
Find your Vision. Understand that your Vision is simply how you see when you ignore all the other voices that are in your head. Forget the judges' comments, your mentors' way of doing things, the rules and the common wisdoms of what makes a great photograph. The common wisdoms such as:



Harbinger No 23



Harbinger No 13



Harbinger No 38



Harbinger No 36



Harbinger No 53

there's good light and bad light, don't centre your subject, follow the rule of thirds, don't block up your shadows and meter to the right.

Forget all of that! Shoot how you see and feel, even if others don't appreciate your work, because if you love your work, that's more important than all the external opinions and



Harbinger No 54

accolades. Finding and following your Vision is the path to personal expression and satisfaction.

I never considered myself a creative person, but once I found and followed my Vision, I found myself becoming creative. I gravitated to photography in part because I thought I could master the technical skills and thus compensate for



Auschwitz No 14

my lack of creativity. Then in 2004, I went to a photo review at Santa Fe, hoping to be discovered.

I saw the last reviewer of the day. He looked at my work very briefly, brusquely pushed it back to me and said, 'It looks like you're trying to copy Ansel Adams.' I said proudly, 'I am. I love Ansel Adams!'

And he then said something that would change my photography forever: he said, 'Ansel already did Ansel. What can you do that expresses your unique Vision?'

Now I had no idea what Vision was. I'd heard the word used and I generally understood the context of how it was used, but I couldn't tell you what it was. Is it a look? A style? A technique? Is it a creative talent that you're born with? Do some people have it and others don't?

This set me on a two-year journey to find out what this Vision was and did I have one. And when I found it, it changed my life, not just my photography, but my life. I learned to see for myself. I learned to think for myself. I learned to live for myself.

This is what I tell people: find your Vision. Forget about the latest cameras, the best lenses and shooting at the optimal aperture for maximum sharpness. None of that is the key ingredient in expressive photography. They may be important in certain types of photography, but if you're expressing yourself as an artist, those things can be relatively unimportant and a big distraction. Cameras, gear and techniques are tools that should be used to support your Vision, they're not toys."

Six Simple Steps

"I don't really like to talk about techniques and one of the downsides of showing my before-and-after images is that people want to know my techniques. And while I'm willing to share them, I do worry that I'm sending the wrong message,

that my images are a product of technique. Sometimes I'll say: 'Look, if I tell you how I did it, do you think that you could create that image? You might be able to imitate mine, but could you create your own?'

What I'm trying to show with my before-and-after images is that what I see through my Vision is vastly different to what I see through my eyes. A great image isn't the result of a great technique, it's the result of a great idea, which is a part of your Vision.

Most of the time when I create a series, I'm having to learn a new technique to execute my Vision. A lot of people say, 'I've got to master all of the tools in my toolbox before I can execute my Vision.' And I say, 'No, you may never get there, because there are too many tools and techniques to be learned. My rule is to learn a new tool only when it's needed to execute my Vision.'

When I created the *Ghosts of Auschwitz-Birkenau* series, I was there as a tourist, not a photographer. I hadn't planned on photographing there and I certainly didn't know how to create ghosts. But once there, I had this idea burst into my mind and I just had to create the images. I completed the series in an hour and 45 minutes, because that's how long we had until the bus left. I had to quickly learn some new skills while shooting and then learn more new skills to process the images. The same is true with many of my projects: the idea comes first and then I learn the techniques needed to execute the Vision.

And as far as post-processing is concerned, I have a simple six-step process for editing my images in Photoshop. They are so simple and rudimentary that I would never let my photographer friends see me work because I was too embarrassed. Here I was using very basic techniques when they were using very complicated processes and all sorts of Photoshop magic that I didn't understand.

Here's my simple approach to post-processing black and white images:

Step 1: I bring in the raw colour image into the raw converter and play with the sliders until the image looks as close to my Vision as possible.

Step 2: I use Photoshop's black and white converter and playing with the colour sliders, I change the contrast of the colours as they convert to black and white.



Linnie No 4 – before



Linnie No 4 – final

Step 3: Use the Levels dialog to check if you have a true black and a true white. If you don't, you can fix that here by moving the black and white sliders in. And I also play with the middle slider.

Step 4: I do lots of dodging and burning! Dodging and burning is what I did for 35 years in the darkroom, but now I dodge and burn with a pen and tablet and I can take my time.

Step 5: Adding contrast helps the print look as good as it does on the monitor.

Step 6: Clone my sensor spots (I'm not good about cleaning my sensor).

That's it! It's simple and basic. I love it when people watch me process an image and then say: 'Wow, that's easy, I could have done that.' And what I want to say is, 'Yes, but you didn't! You

might understand the technique, but you didn't have the Vision.'

Photo Projects

Looking over Cole's website, his photographs are presented in tidy collections and projects, but he says he didn't always work on projects.

"I was a 'photographic grazer' and went wherever the grass was greener! I created some good single images, but the idea of doing a project didn't appeal to me. My attention span was too short.

However, that changed when I submitted my work to *LensWork Magazine* for the very first time. The submission guidelines asked for 15 to 25 images on a single subject and then added: 'DO NOT SEND US YOUR GREATEST HITS.'



Plate of leaves – final

“And I thought to myself, well, they’ve never seen my greatest hits! And off they went.

My submission came back right away with a note that said, ‘Pick one image and send me 15 on that subject.’ That was the kick I needed to begin my first project and after that I was hooked. Now I can’t imagine going back to grazing. Now when I don’t have a project, I feel lost.

I’m currently giving presentations on ‘Vision, Passion and Projects’ and I teach that the key to a successful project is Vision and Passion. You can’t be like one of my friends who believes that every idea has already been done and so he was going to be unique by including a frozen chicken in every image. A contrived approach to being unique will not be successful, because it would lack the power and conviction of a project pursued out of Vision and Passion.”



Plate of leaves – before



Jim Bridger Power Plant – final

“A woman contacted me and said she’s got this idea for a project, but she worried it might not be worthy as a fine art subject. They were little garlic shoots, just coming to life, shot in black and white and with high contrast. They were magnificent! I replied that because she was passionate about this project, then not only was it appropriate, but it was something that she **MUST** pursue.

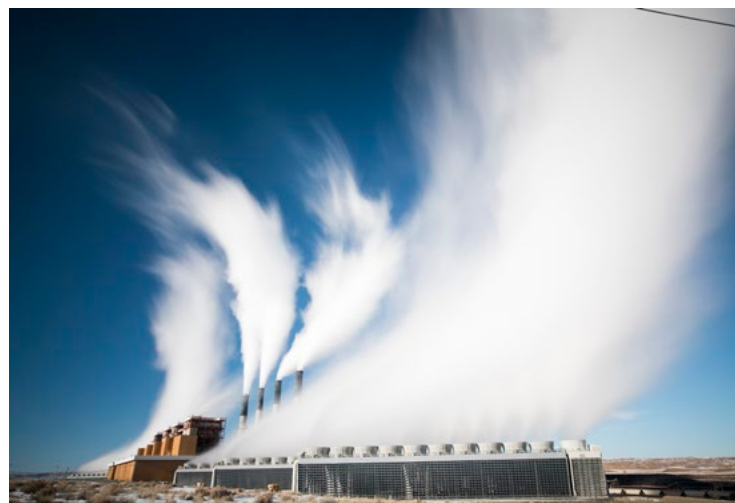
Other people come to me and say they are stuck on their project, they can’t get excited about it or motivated to complete it. I suggest that they have the wrong project. If you’re passionate about your project, you’re chomping at the bit to work on it!”

Vision and Passion are the key to being successful (if your goal is to express yourself and to love your work).“

Conclusion

“When I started as a photographer, I had a lot of rigid rules. But when I found my Vision and sought to create rather than document, I realised that now there are no rules! All that matters is my Vision and how I’m going to manipulate the image so that it looks like what I’m seeing in my head. My final image doesn’t need to conform to reality, nor should it.

I call myself a ‘fine art photographer’, but the truth is I don’t care for the term because no one really knows what ‘fine art’



Jim Bridger Power Plant – before

is. But it’s a useful term because at least it lets people know that I’m not a pet or wedding photographer (or a pet wedding photographer).

I prefer to call myself an artist who uses photography to express myself.”

ROBIN MOON

The Nature Lover

Sony Ambassador Robin Moon has found herself travelling

around the globe in search of her favourite subjects: wildlife.

Interview by Peter Eastway



A relative newcomer to the world of photography (when you compare her to crusty old darkroom workers like the editor), Robin Moon has asserted herself as an accomplished photographer with a series of awards in photography competitions around the world.

Tim Moon, her husband and partner in crime, shares their passion for photography on many levels, from helping to run the Mosman Camera Club to hosting photography tours and workshops. And it would be fair to say they are not only competitive photographers, but competitive with each other!

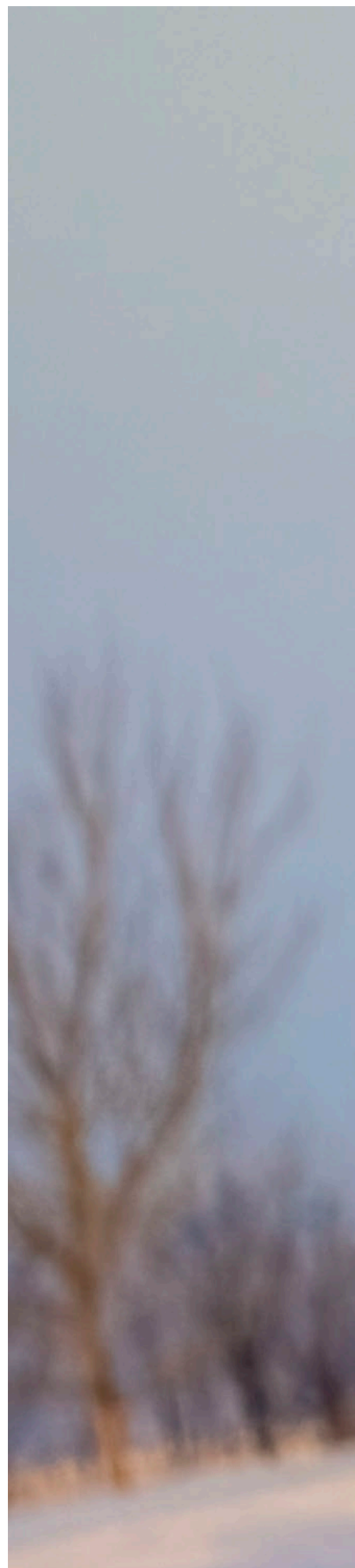
Robin describes her beginnings in photography back in 2014, when she and Tim holidayed in Italy. "I started to get cranky that Tim's lovely Nikon with its beautiful f1.2 lens was taking better photos than my iPhone. I had no idea why!

"Back in Hobart, where I was working at the time, a colleague suggested I buy the Sony a7r with a 16-35mm f4 lens. On the first night I owned it, I shot a simply 'amazing' aurora. I look back at those photos now and realise I had captured Tiger Tails, picket fences and the rare 'Steve' Phenomenon overlaid on the Milky Way. I had no idea what any of those things were at the time. And I had no idea about camera settings – I had literally cut and pasted settings from a social media page. Of course, I was the only person to think my picture was amazing with its out-of-focus stars and wonky horizon, but that was a pivotal moment for me. If I could create those colours and composition, then what other adventures awaited? The die was cast and I was insatiable to learn and experiment.

"During my years as a beginner photographer, I equated hours of editing time with outputting a well-produced image. Funnily enough, it didn't work for me and when I balanced myself against my naturally gifted husband who had always had a camera in his hands from his childhood days and architectural career, I worried that I was never going to be a competent photographer."

Right: Snowy Owl

In Native American folklore, the Snowy Owl is a symbol of wisdom, guidance and protection. On the wide open prairies of Ontario, Canada, finding them to photograph involves tramping many kilometres in the soft dawn light, a process which at least warmed me up. Sony a1, 200-600mm, 1/2000 second @ f5.6, ISO 400. See text for details.





“Then in 2017, I came fourth overall in a competition. However, Tim in his first ever major competition, had won overall first place! Comparisons were made about my progress and far from laughing them off, I was actually furious. From that moment, I decided I needed to separate my photographic approach from Tim’s if I were to flourish in the sport.”

Discovering Nature

On a trip to Iceland with Tim several years ago, Robin finally put her foot down when driving to the next waterfall without stopping to photograph the charismatic Icelandic horses by the side of the road! “I flipped my lid, so we stopped with Tim warning me it wasn’t really safe to do so on the small shouldered road, but I was adamant. The horses were bunkered down in a howling gale, but I climbed through the fence anyway and walked up to them. They were desperate for some company and I found them really easy to engage with and thus photograph.

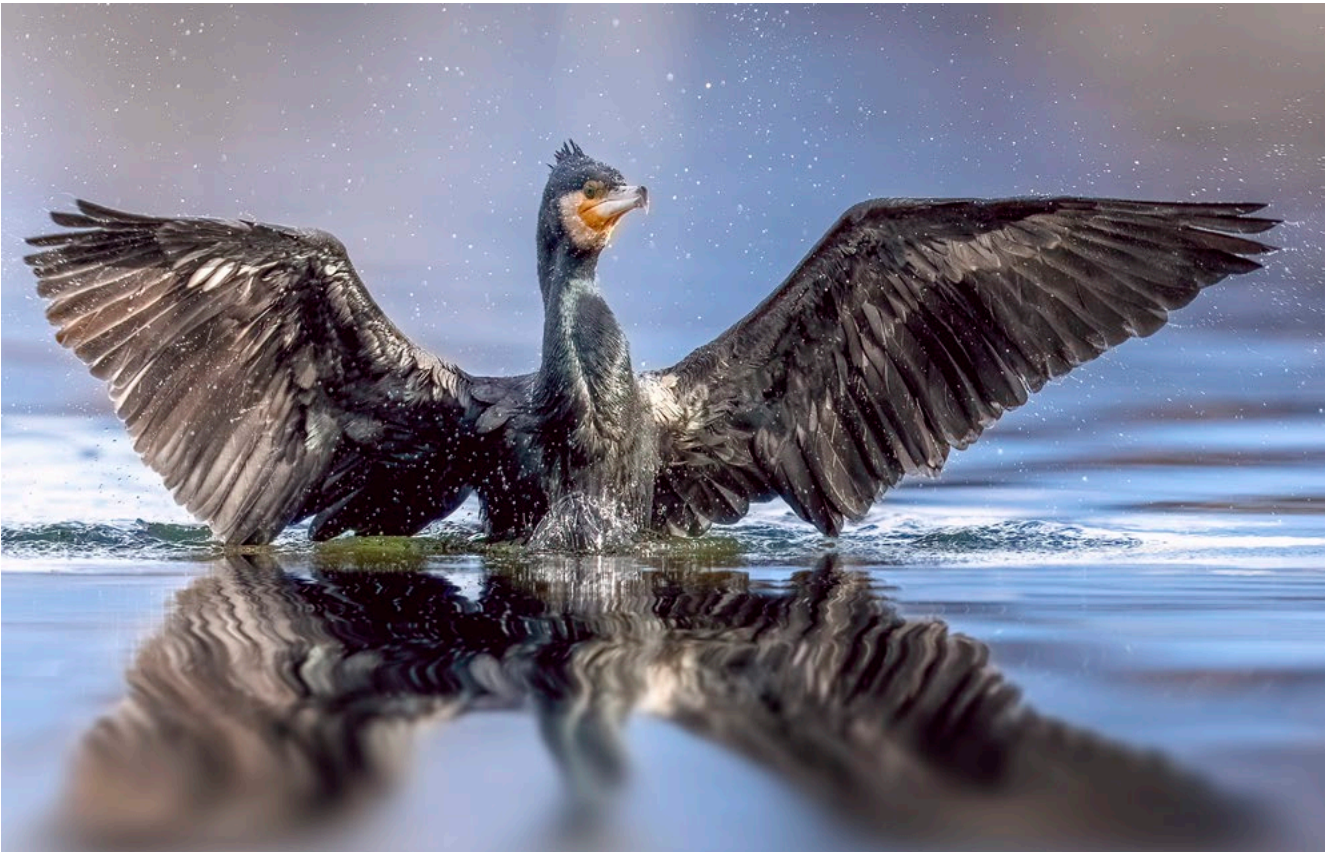
“In fact, it became immediately obvious that this is what I should be photographing. I’d been an animal lover all my life and unlike landscapes which required me to work hard, photographing animals was easy and automatic. It was from this trip that I photographed an Arctic Lynx in snowy Norway and was ecstatically runner-up at the Sony Alpha Awards in 2018. That cemented my confidence in which direction my creative eye should go.”

So what makes a successful nature photographer? Robin suggests you definitely have to be comfortable with your camera so you can concentrate on your subject and not your settings. “I mainly shoot using manual exposure control,

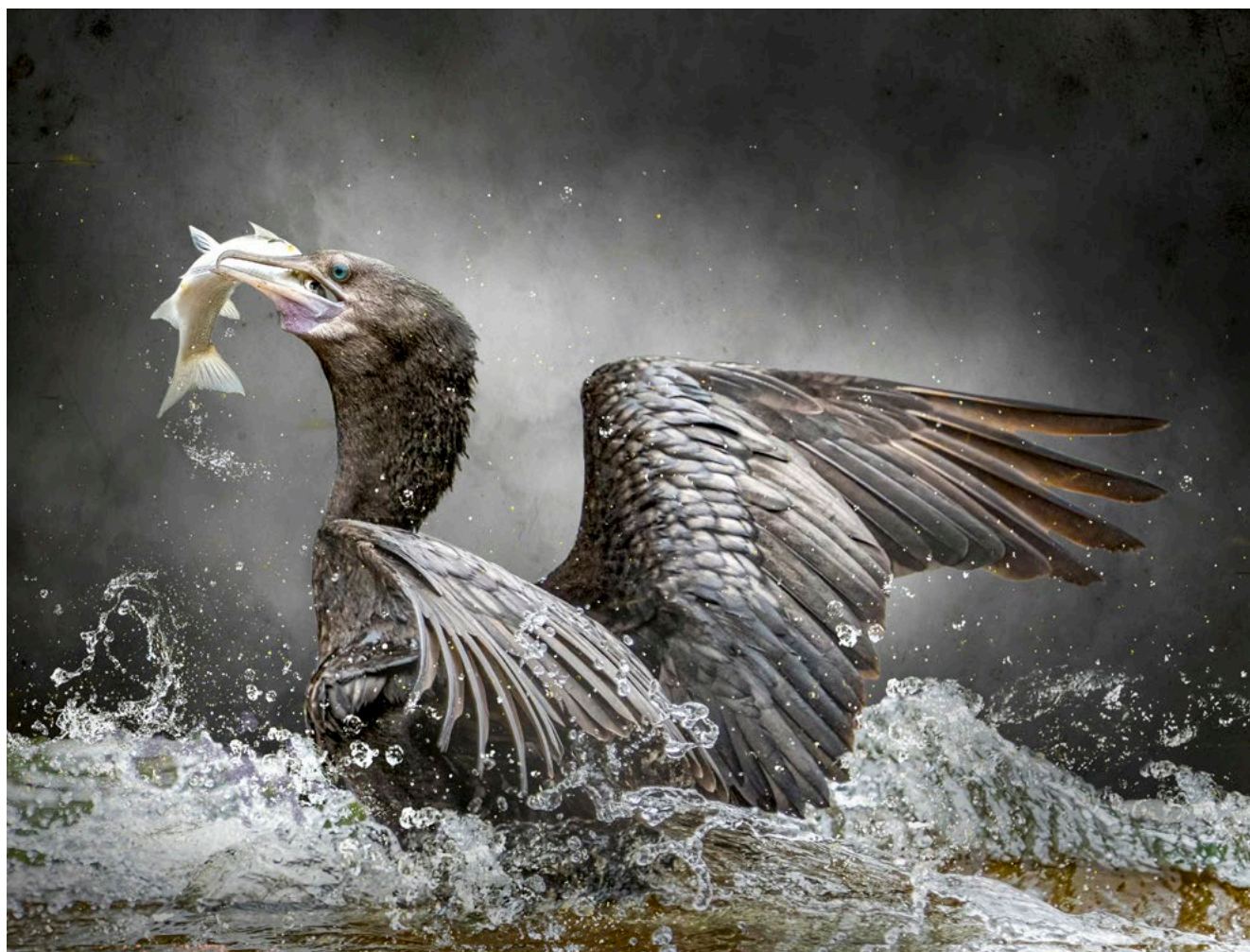


Pony tongue

adjusting the settings without really thinking about it. “However, nature and wildlife photography is all about capturing the moment, so being an animal lover and understanding random behaviour, I’m pretty adept at predicting what’s going to happen. “And understanding animal behaviour allows you to optimise your time in the field. For instance, knowing that crested terns will come into feed and bathe when the tide



Evening flappery



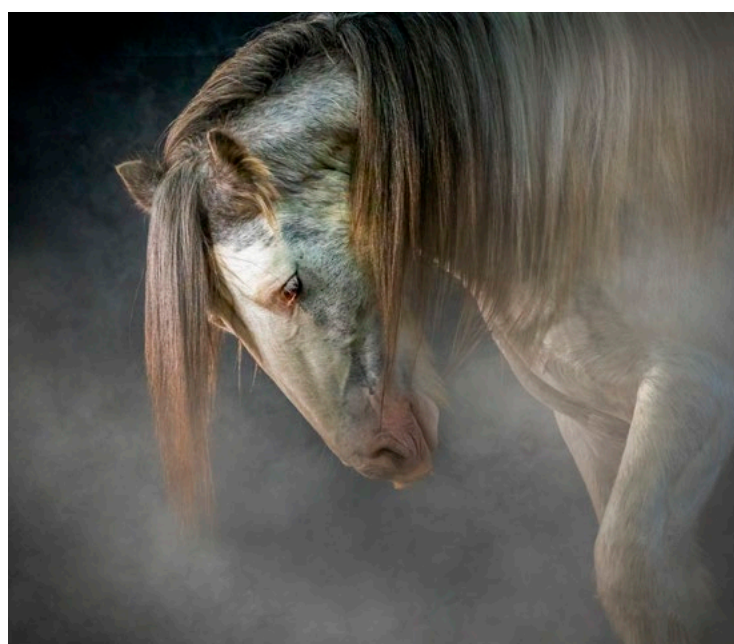
Mullet's last glance

turns, means you can use a tide chart to determine the best time to go. Sure, you can just turn up to a location, but there mightn't be much animal action if it's the wrong time.

"Plus you need lots of patience. I'm a bit of an introvert, so I love the idea of sitting quietly and being observant. Half the pleasure of nature photography is simply immersing yourself in the outdoors.

"My favourite subject is animal behaviour. Whales in particular are astounding as we unravel their social capabilities and their desire to interact with us. While swimming with them, in both Tonga and Australia, I have developed some 'crazy-good' snorkel singing abilities – skills I am sure the whales have been suitably impressed with as they lock eye contact with me or roll over to show me their beautiful moves.

"Birds with their unpredictable behaviour are always satisfying. When you capture a shot that has taken you some time to work out how to do it, well, there's a great deal of pleasure there. I'm thinking of the tiny Azure Kingfishers given they are rocket fast, very skittish and always require the full reach of your zoom lens. Being a kinaesthetic learner – where you learn hands-on rather than through verbal instruction – means the process of manipulating the camera in manual exposure control is part of the pleasure while trying to predict and capture bird behaviour."



Drum Stallion

The Drum breed is derived from a mixture of Clydesdales, Shire and the Gypsy Cob. This large fellow had a gentle demeanour that was not fazed by the smoke or lights. He indulged me by searching for delicious snacks at his feet, so I could capture the arch of his neck and his glorious mane. Sony a1, 70-200mm, 1/1600 second @ f2.8, ISO 400.



Kea Dance

Owl in the Snow

One of Robin's most successful photographs to date is of a Snowy Owl wheeling over a white expanse in the Ontario prairies. Among other awards, it earned her the 2023 Digital Photographer of the Year in the Australian Photographic Prize.

While the winning photograph took just a split second to capture, Robin invested more than 20 hours over a week in seriously sub-zero temperatures to create the opportunity.

"I was all bundled up wearing a heated fisherman's vest with a battery pack over a ski suit. I could last outside for up to four hours, the most important thing being to keep my torso warm. Interestingly, the warm torso translated to reasonably warm fingers, allowing me to remove my gloves occasionally in those sub-zero temps. Gloves, of course, are the bane of every sub-zero wildlife photographer, reducing the ability to efficiently interact with camera controls.

"I was visiting my sister who lives in Pennsylvania and lives near an annual Snow Geese migration refuge area. She



Rainbow lunch

happens to be a professional portrait photographer, so after we had captured the Snow Geese in their southern migration environment for a few days, we decided to travel further north for more adventures.

"While I love photographing all types of birds, after my Antarctica trip it's difficult to go back to seagulls. Given my age and late start in the photography world, I have realised there's no time to lose for seeing how and where I can further stretch my skills and with that aim, I take great pleasure in observing and dissecting the wildlife work of more experienced photographers (such as Marsel van Oosten and Ami Vitale). It doesn't escape me that I connect best with those whose work shows an intimacy in their storytelling. Winning the awards has given me the confidence to push my boundaries a little further. Although prizes are lovely, I find more reward in the realisation that I can put more trust in my instincts and abilities. There's no more time for just beaches, as the snowfields provide me with my current love of crispy clean, high key subjects."



Eight frames from the sequence Robin shot to capture the Snowy Owl – see page 33.



Snow Geese Migration

Snow Geese migrate south from their Arctic homes each year in search of unfrozen lakes. In the heart of rural Pennsylvania, USA, up to 200,000 of them return to the same lake to gather and rest overnight. At sunrise, they lift off as one, circle the skies and depart for fields in search of food. The noise is quite otherworldly – a cacophony of honks and calls creating a distinct and deafening natural symphony. Sony a1, 200-600mm, 1/2000 second @ f8, Auto ISO.

“Local farmers act as tour guides, leading small groups of photographers to nearby haunts for Snowy Owls when they venture south in the middle of winter, looking for mice, voles and lemmings.

“The owl’s eyes are locked onto the camera because of the clicking of the shutter,” Robin explained. She was using a Sony a1 with a 200-600mm f5.6. Her shutter speed was 1/3200 second at f8 with auto ISO.

“An aperture of f8 provides a safe zone because it has a little more depth-of-field. It also helps provide front to back focus on your subject. However, once I have the safety shots, I like to move to f5.6 or f4 because I also love the effects produced by shallower depth-of-field.

“Shutter speeds for birds are usually from 1/2000 to 1/3200 second and I use the a1 to shoot at 30 frames per second. If I have to push the ISO up to get the fast shutter speeds, I can live with the extra noise, but I can’t deal with a blurred subject. And the right frame with perfect wing and body position can make or break a successful nature photograph.”

Robin spent five days ‘hunting’ her subjects, two hours in the morning light and two hours in the late afternoon. “The light on the snow is beautiful and luminous, but of course the main reason for shooting at these times is that the owls are most active.”



Snowy Owl at dawn



Looney Tunes

Adelie penguins with their googly eyes were my favourites to photograph in Antarctica. This little fellow walked right up to my feet and gave me an earful of feisty attitude before retreating to a beached ice floe to snack on some ice. His stance inspired me to combine a couple of images and present his hilarious behaviour like the old Disney cartoons. Adelie numbers are on the decline, believed to be in part because they are now jostling for space on the retreating ice with their hardier cousins, the Gentoo penguins. Sony a1, 100-400mm, 1/2000 second @ f8, auto ISO.

Robin, her guide and the other photographers would track the birds across the fields, sometimes walking several kilometres. "You would see a bird sitting in a tree or on a fence post, so we'd walk over towards it. Eventually it would take flight and that would be the moment to shoot. Then we'd follow it once again and repeat the process. In knee-deep snow, it was a tough walk!

"There is no pattern. The owls would go one way and then another, so I spent a total of 20 hours in freezing conditions to get the images. I wanted shots with eye contact. I've seen other beautiful photographs of the owls with their wings across their faces, but I wanted to see the face as well. I knew the angle I wanted."

With no small degree of persistence, Robin finally found herself in position, with a thicket of trees in the background and low, soft morning light. "When I took the photos, I knew I had one of the shots I'd come for."

And at 30 frames per second, she had plenty of frames to choose from. "Sometimes 30 frames per second is overkill, but it all depends on the subject. Laughingly, I realised this one day when I captured 11 almost identical images of a humpback whale breaching at full vertical. So for photos of whales who are actually not that fast as they fling their bulk into the air, 10 frames a second was all I needed, but for kingfishers, 30 fps is important! I'm getting better at choosing the best frame rate but, I always prefer to look at my results on a big monitor before deleting any of them."

In post-production, Robin cropped the image square and rotated it to make the wing level. "While I loved the blurred trees in the foreground, sometimes you have to make some



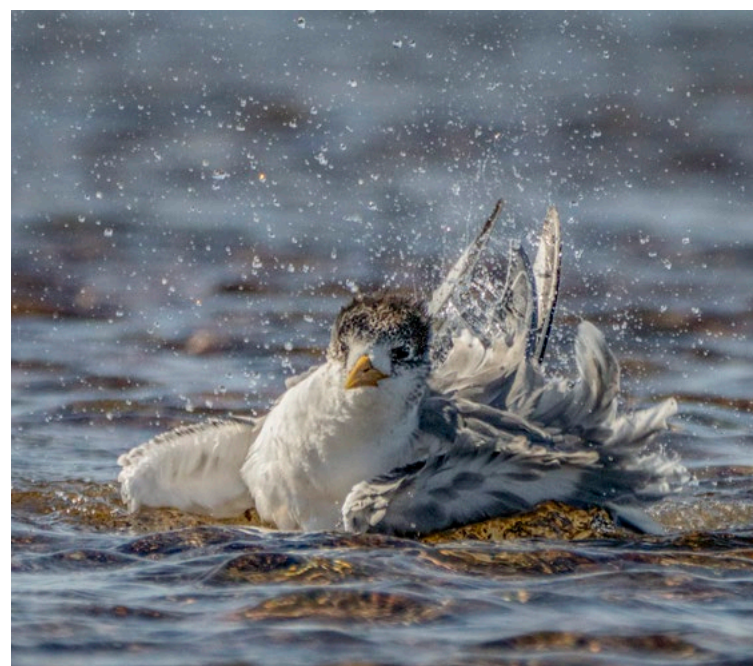
Penguin Portal

hard choices and more important for me was to concentrate on the owl looking at me."

Robin uses both Lightroom and Photoshop for post-production, but she finds herself working in Lightroom more often than not, especially given the excellent masking now available and the ability to cull or keep bulk images from the high frame rates she takes. And, she adds, Topaz Lab's DeNoise AI and Sharpen AI provide an excellent way to lift good images into excellent ones.

A Woman in Photography

Robin explains that initially she was concentrating on technique – both in-camera and post-production – and using competition results as an affirmation of her growth as a photographer. "Along the way, I've learnt that competitions



Crested Tern bathing



Danco Curves – Gentoo penguin at Danco Island, Antarctica

can be full of variables outside your control and so less weight should be given to poor outcomes. However, competitions have taught me that small details can make large differences and as I'm a big picture person and not into small details, that was quite a learning curve for me.

"I've won two major prizes this year and both were with photos where I was entirely in control of the narrative. For me, it means that my best photography comes from being immersed in a moment and letting the creative, emotive brain take over. Even if I set out with a particular shot in mind and the results turn out quite differently, there's a simple joy in discovering a random moment has been unexpectedly captured. Birds are particularly good for providing this.

"And winning these awards against a pool of Australia's most talented and experienced photographers has been a watershed moment for me. Photography can be a very male orientated domain and my early days were spent standing beside people on a rock shelf early in the morning, receiving unasked for instructions about gear, technique and composition. For many of us, that can be quite intimidating when your journey is just beginning.

"Now I'm more settled and proud that I can represent a genre of Well Ripened Women taking up photography as a way of decompressing from life. I recently ran a women-only workshop which sold out in a flash, so I believe there is a need for the newly retired or time-accessible woman to be allowed to unleash her creative potential at her own speed and with her own (often aged) gear. I really enjoy working with the late-in-life learner because mastering even basic steps gives them much joy. I'm a big advocate for knowing that happiness in your work can be found at whatever level you are. If you

think, as I did, that your wonky horizon with out-of-focus stars is the most wonderful image ever, that belief is essential for providing you with the confidence to keep learning.

"When I'm teaching people through my Sony or Wanderlust Imagery workshops, it matters little what camera a student has if they are happy with its quality. As a Sony Digital Imaging Advocate, if you need help deciding what camera



Cormorant with Puffer fish



Bondi Dance

A female Humpback whale and her offspring cavort in the swell outside Sydney Harbour's Heads. On their southern migration, these hungry mums may not have fed for over six months and are eager to get home for a krill feast in Antarctica. They stop close to shore to let the babies rest or to teach them breaching and tail slapping skills. These behaviours are tools for removing barnacles or scaring prey, or just for having fun on a windy day.

will suit you best, that's where I come in, knowing that the most expensive camera is not always the most appropriate. A simpler and more portable tool may provide a less stressful, but just as satisfying experience. It all depends on where your head is at. Sony's decision to add an older woman as an ambassador shows a level of insight and wisdom for reaching a richly rewarding portion of the market and I'm very proud to be associated with them.

"The choice of my original Sony a7r body was purely based on the camera fitting comfortably into my hand, something the bigger DSLRs couldn't provide. I'll never waiver from my current set-up, the Sony a1 with lenses like the 100-400mm GM lens. It provides a super-fast frame rate, super-fast focusing and the results are really sharp. I'm also more than a little bit in love with their prime telephoto lenses, (400mm f2.8 and 600mm f4), but the portability and weight of the 100-400mm for travelling takes precedence in lens choice.

"I can come home from a birding morning with over 1000 raw 50mp files, but there's both tension and pleasure in finding (or worrying about missing) the hero image. Minimal editing (bouncing between LR and PS) means cleaning up distractions

and allowing the subject to stand out. Compositing images is purely used for playtime these days as I move further towards the skill of capturing a 'clean' image in-camera.

"Now that I'm older and wiser, I realise I can save myself much angst by slowing down and considering all aspects of my composition before I press the shutter button. That slow down might only mean a millisecond, but it can make or break the opportunity when producing pictures for a nature competition where little alteration is allowed. If what I have captured is well taken, there is usually minimal work to be done in the editing process. Editing basics include correcting the white balance, defining the highlights and shadows, considering the best crop and applying a little selective de-noise or sharpening. If any of these basics need too much tweaking, I will probably discard the image.

"Getting the capture correct is essential."

For more information, see Robin's website here:
www.wanderlust.sydney

You can also see her on SnapHappy TV.



Barnacle Bill

In the warm clear waters off Vava'u in Tonga, an adolescent Humpback whale spun around in front of me to ensure I captured his best side. Curious and charmingly cheeky, these gentle intelligent mammals enjoy engaging with us as much as we do with them. I was in no danger from his close proximity – whilst I flipped around on a restless sea, he had full control of his weight, space and momentum, a skill I was grateful for. Sony a7r4, 12-24mm, 1/4000 second @ f8, auto ISO, Aquatech housing.

GEORGIA

HEART AND SOUL

Ian Everett describes his remarkable journey through exotic Georgia

– and how he managed to shoot and ride a bike at the same time!

I enjoy the incentives and opportunities photography provides to explore, learn and photograph new locations. Juggling the nuances of place, space and time into interesting compositions which tell a story or simply excite the eye, is what I try to achieve with my photography.

My main areas of interest lie in urban and semi-urban content, how the 'hand of man' impacts on natural landscapes, and seascapes, particularly waves and storms. I am drawn to forgotten or more remote places where the passage of time and change is evident.



Ian on the road with his bike and his camera attached to his backpack strap, ready for action.

The chance to capture something different or in a way which embodies a 'space in time' perspective is compelling and adds structure and purpose around what might otherwise be a simple observation.

I also enjoy exploring post-capture techniques for my better shots, but often I find that I never really finish an edit because what I thought was the definitive solution two weeks ago becomes a 'what the hell was I thinking' moment now.

Creatively, my biggest inspiration and motivation is travel. Travel inspires photography and vice versa.

Georgia – Heart and Soul

For the past 12 years, I have travelled by motorbike through a number of countries including India (Rajasthan), China (Tibet), Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Mongolia and in May 2023, Georgia. I ride in a group which is more motorbike orientated than photography, so there are challenges involved in getting good shots when opportunity presents and without causing delays.

I like to travel this way as the routes gravitate to roads and tracks less travelled by tourists and so the photography is varied, surprising and often unplanned. This was the case in Georgia. Stumbling onto photographic gems like the Enguri

Angel Rays – Church Of The Trinity, Tbilisi

An early morning walk-in off the street revealed the stunning natural light flooding into the church, creating sunrays from the substantial candle smoke (no need for Photoshop!). I wandered around until worshippers left or were hidden from shots. There were so many angles to choose from, but this off-centred and 'crooked' composition seemed the most dramatic. I blended three bracketed images in Lightroom, then edited to enhance the colours and contrast and slightly enhance the sunrays. I wasn't too concerned that there were some highlights blown out at roof level as I felt this added to the impact. I also used the transform tool to straighten the walls distorted by the wide-angle lens. FUJIFILM X-H2. XF 16-55MM LENS AT 16MM. ISO 3200 f8.0 AT 1/10. THREE IMAGE BRACKET [1.33EV].





Drying Out – Sanatorium Metalurgi

While walking the sanatoria, we were careful not to intrude into those areas which are home to the many Georgians displaced from Abkhazia by the Russians. The Sanatorium is their home. This room was near the entry and being used as a communal drying area, giving a small insight into the day to day lives of the residents. I did feel uncomfortable photographing it, but made an exception given the more communal nature of the space and reality it portrayed. I avoided any photographs of the residents or personal spaces. I bracketed the exposure and using layers, brushed in the window from the underexposed image in Photoshop. I used a couple more layers to get the light and colours to match, plus brushed in the extra lighting on the floor. Again, it was about re-creating what I saw and felt, without losing the authenticity through the edit. FUJIFILM X-H2. XF 16-55MM LENS AT 16MM. ISO 200 F5.6 AT 1/60.

Dam both excited and terrified me, as the time to get the right shot was so often limited by a tight schedule. The ability to react fast with the camera was critical.

I tried to capture a mix of the urban, rural and natural landscapes of Georgia and intertwine the key elements of religion, heritage and culture to allow me to construct a better narrative when I returned. Ensuring the images would tell a story was a key consideration in both the capture and the edit.

I knew Georgia would be a very special experience with its complex history, cultural diversity, stunning natural assets and varied built forms. What I found particularly alluring was the chance to explore Soviet architectural relics in their still dishevelled state. I am drawn to the abandoned, forgotten and bypassed with my photography and Soviet structures in countries like Georgia top my photography list.

The project seeks to reflect the 'heart and soul' of Georgia.

On High – Kazbecki

Occasionally when reviewing shots I wonder what I was thinking. This was a quite spectacular scene and we lingered for some time, but for reasons unknown, I only took three shots of the Gergheti Church as it perched precipitously on its hill. Fortunately this long shot from the carpark using the 100mm did hit the mark and I was very lucky with the clear weather, so not all was lost by my seniors' moment. I edited the road out so as not to distract from the impact of the church. FUJIFILM GFX-100S. GF 45-100MM LENS AT 100MM. ISO 10 F5.6 AT 1/640.

Producing the Images

Getting images while on the road was a challenge as these are not dedicated photography tours. Most travellers are motorbike enthusiasts first and foremost. That's not to say others didn't take photographs, but typically it was a





The Tree – Sanatorium Metalurgi

This small tree – alive until recently – presented as another stark element of decline in this sanatorium. It is quite well known and I was excited to stumble across it as I wandered through this edifice. It was late in the afternoon and bright outside, but the light through the windows added to the silhouette of the tree and overall mood. In post, I played with profiles and LUTs to give a soft orange/pink glow, toning down the greens outside and muting the oranges inside. Balancing the exposure outside was not an option, but ultimately unnecessary as I sought to achieve a light and summery mood. I cloned out a couple of coke bottles and the odd rock, but overall a faithful rendition of reality. FUJIFILM X-H2. XF 16-55MM LENS AT 16MM. ISO 200 f5.6 AT 1/60.



Otherworldly – Bathhouse 8

Bathhouse 8 is one of the more recognisable Soviet structures in Tskaltubo. Apparently visited by Stalin himself, it is easy to imagine the healing mineral waters bubbling out of the centre well and spilling into the individual baths. If only the walls could speak. When we entered, there was no one else present. The tourist hoards had yet to arrive in Tskaltubo. I waited behind until there was no one there and sought out an angle that would capture one of the bathing rotunda against the backdrop of the green walls. FUJIFILM XH2. XF 16-55MM LENS AT 16MM. ISO 250 f5.6 AT 1/80. THREE SHOT BRACKET BLEND.



'Escher' Stairs – Sanatoria Medea

The widest camera lens I took was a 25mm full-frame equivalent. Not quite wide enough here. At 14mm equivalent, the iPhone 14 and shooting in raw was just right and always a very handy backup for interiors. The file wasn't great due to inevitable blowouts near the window and colour made it look worse, but I wanted to salvage the image as it was so typical of the stairwells in the sanatoria. I decided to go with black and white to reduce the difficulty in editing and to make use of the blown out window as a feature – being the main source of light for the rest of the composition. IPHONE 14.

secondary purpose for them. For me, it was about riding and photography equally.

Because of this equipment, bag choice and the ability to quickly access and re-stow gear at each (brief) stop was a critical planning consideration. It was also important to fully understand the camera's settings so I could respond quickly to the changing situations throughout a day. From a sweeping Georgian alpine landscape to the interior of a small church to a bunch of bikers on a corner, can all happen in a very short space of time, so fumbling with settings is not an option. Know your camera. Similarly, lens selection was important as lens changes needed to be kept to a minimum when on the road due to the time constraints and because I couldn't carry every piece of equipment I had on the bike anyway.

Camera and Lenses

With all this in mind – and in addition to the boots, helmet, jacket and wet weather gear – I took the following photo kilos with me to Georgia.

I carried two related bodies, my Fujifilm X-H2 and GFX100s. My go-to became the X-H2 with the XF 16-55mm f2.8 zoom which – weather permitting – travelled at 100km/hr or sideways on gravel while attached externally to my backpack via a Peak Design clip. It was a good way to test out weatherproofing! This allowed the GFX to sit more safely inside the pack with either the GF45-100mm f4 or the GF100-200mm f5.6 affixed – depending on the route ahead.

The convenience and smaller size of the X-H2 (and superb image quality) made it perfect for travel in all situations. The two Fujifilm bodies have basically the same controls which made the changes to settings easier to recall instinctively and less margin for error.

This combo worked well, but I will include a wider angle zoom on the next trip and have less focal length overlap.

Accessories

The need to travel light means jettisoning stuff. So no filters or laptop, but I did pack a lightweight Gitzo Traveller which I used once for some night shots. Improvements to dynamic range, programs for reducing noise and in-camera/lens stabilisation, means there is less need for a tripod these days, though it is a hard habit to break.

With no external data storage as a backup option, I just shot with one of the two memory slots serving as the backup. This went well until I accidentally packed all my cards together in my suitcase on the return flight! Best laid plans and all that.

The bikes we hired (KTM 390) did not have storage options. Whilst a support van carried the suitcases, I needed to carry whatever photographic equipment I would need on me. The great choice dilemma. I have previously travelled with a variety of backpacks, slings, shoulder bags and even converted tank bags. Each have their pros and cons in terms of protection, capacity security and accessibility.

In Georgia, I took a Think Tank Rotation 180. It has a 'detachable' lower cell which can be rotated out on the waist strap for quick access and a large top cell for extras. The strap comfortably supported the Peak Design clip even when it held the GFX. Importantly, I didn't need to take the bag off when I stopped to shoot. I had ready access to two cameras.

I also took a small Tamrac shoulder bag which I used with the X-H2 when walking around town. More discrete and comfortable, if necessary it fitted neatly inside the upper cell of the backpack. It was a versatile and functional combination.

Image Capture

Shooting was typically a mix. It included basic travel shots of the group to share and more artful material I hoped might form the basis of my project. There was always something to shoot and I didn't have time to be overly fussy. I was, however, always careful to check I had the correct settings – almost always!

Before the trip, I had decided that to simplify hand-held shooting, I would always use one of three ISO range pre-sets. Either 100 – 400, 100 – 1600 or 100 – 3200, depending on lighting conditions and setting aperture-priority with a minimum shutter speed. As a default it worked well and reduced the margin for error if I had little time to think. I did vary the minimum shutter speed depending on the lens focal length.



Entry Statement – Sanatoria Imereti

FUJIFILM X-H2. XF 16-55MM LENS AT 20MM. ISO 125 f5.6 AT 1/100. THREE SHOT BRACKET BLEND.

Walking through the sanatoria, you are constantly craning from side to side, looking for the best shots with the most impact or mood. After entering the front door of Imereti, we came across this chamber which even without the reflection would have been captivating. The water just added to the decrepitude of the place. Reconciling the outside light with the inside at this time of day was going to be a challenge. Whilst the three-shot bracket (I should have taken five) helped with exposure, colour harmony was a challenge, as inside it was a pukey combination of old yellow/green and magenta red paint. It just did not reproduce well, even with adjustments to hue. I don't shoot a lot of black and white, but here it united the image visually, allowing the viewer to focus more on the space and features. Quite a bit of dodging and burning in Photoshop.



Defence Tower – Mestia

FUJIFILM X-H2. XF 16-55MM LENS AT 22MM. ISO 800 f10 AT 20 SECONDS

High in the Caucasus Mountains in Mestia, we were treated to a wild electrical storm and torrents of rain through our first night. It was a chance to unpack the tripod and try some long exposures. The hardest part was getting a longer exposure without the lightning, as I really wanted to capture the rain coming off the tower lit only by the local lights. Again, black and white emphasised the form and starkness of the scene, uncomplicated by dubious night-time colours.



Room for the View – Signaghi

Late afternoon winding our way through the hills, when this view unfolded on the bend. Fortunately, I had time to get the GFX out and make the most of the opportunity. The light was perfect, breaking through over the town at just the right time. The edit was quite basic with a favourite colour profile applied in Lightroom and a few tweaks to colour balance, saturation and contrast. I played with crop options and settled on this 16x10 format where the town balances on the edge of the hill overlooking the open Alazani Valley space to the right. FUJIFILM GFX-100S, GF 45-100MM LENS AT 78MM, ISO 100 f5.6 AT 1/250.

The main issue didn't involve shooting itself, but simply organisation. It was important to review the route, attractions and weather the night before to ensure my set-up on the bike was right. That included clothing, the equipment to carry (not everything fitted into my backpack) and contingencies for rain to ensure protection and access. I didn't always get it right, but I certainly had a camera on hand regardless of conditions.

Fellow Travellers

It was important not to disrupt the tour flow or cause delays simply to get a shot. I often travelled at the rear of the pack so I could stop briefly and then catch up. On (only) one occasion did I miss a turn for which I suffered various good natured slings and arrows over ample 'cha cha' that night. I also took a helmet which allowed me to photograph without removal and I often rode minus gloves to avoid the tedious on and off again with those.

Despite causing a few minor delays to stop en route and photograph, I minimised these through organisation and found that at the end of the trip all was forgiven as the crew always asked if I got good photos and would I share them – which I gladly did. Standard practice now. In addition, the company I travel with uses my photos in their promotional material.

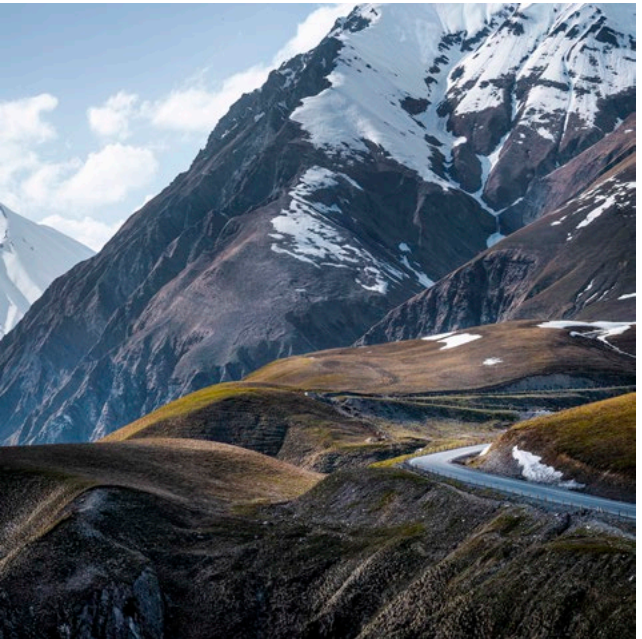
Post-Production

I edit on a Mac Pro with an EIZO monitor and print with an Epson P906 printer. As a combo I couldn't ask for more, although teaching myself the intricacies of printing and colour management will forever remain a task.

I work exclusively in Lightroom for the overall edits and

Pass – Gudauri

This section of the Military Highway through the Caucasus is usually quite busy, so after dodging trucks for a couple of hours on the bike, I then had to wait to get this shot of a curve in the pass minus the same. The sun was getting lower by the time we stopped, so the light patterns on the undulating hills complemented the sweep of the road with the mountain peak serving as a dramatic backdrop. I cropped the image to remove the mountains on the left and to achieve a square format. Time was spent in Photoshop to accentuate the light and shadows near the road and contrast to the foreground. I also worked on the colours to bring out the yellows over the greens which worked better with the sunlight. FUJIFILM GFX-100S, GF 45-100MM LENS AT 100MM, ISO 100 f5.6 AT 1/640.





The Plateau – Apnia

This shot, more than any other, defines my Georgia experience, the memory it left with me and my preferred photographic style. It was a cold, windswept early morning when we rode up to this mountain plateau via a rocky and winding mountain track. The old St Demetre Church was the first building I saw as I topped out and I quickly scouted for an angle to do it justice. I wanted the church to be set in its open, lonely and slightly bleak context. The square crop and big sky approach were a perfect combination for providing the feel I wanted. The editing focused largely on the crop, desaturating the image, neutralising colours and removing the odd foreground rock. FUJIFILM X-H2. XF 16-55MM LENS AT 20MM. ISO 125 f11 AT 1/250.

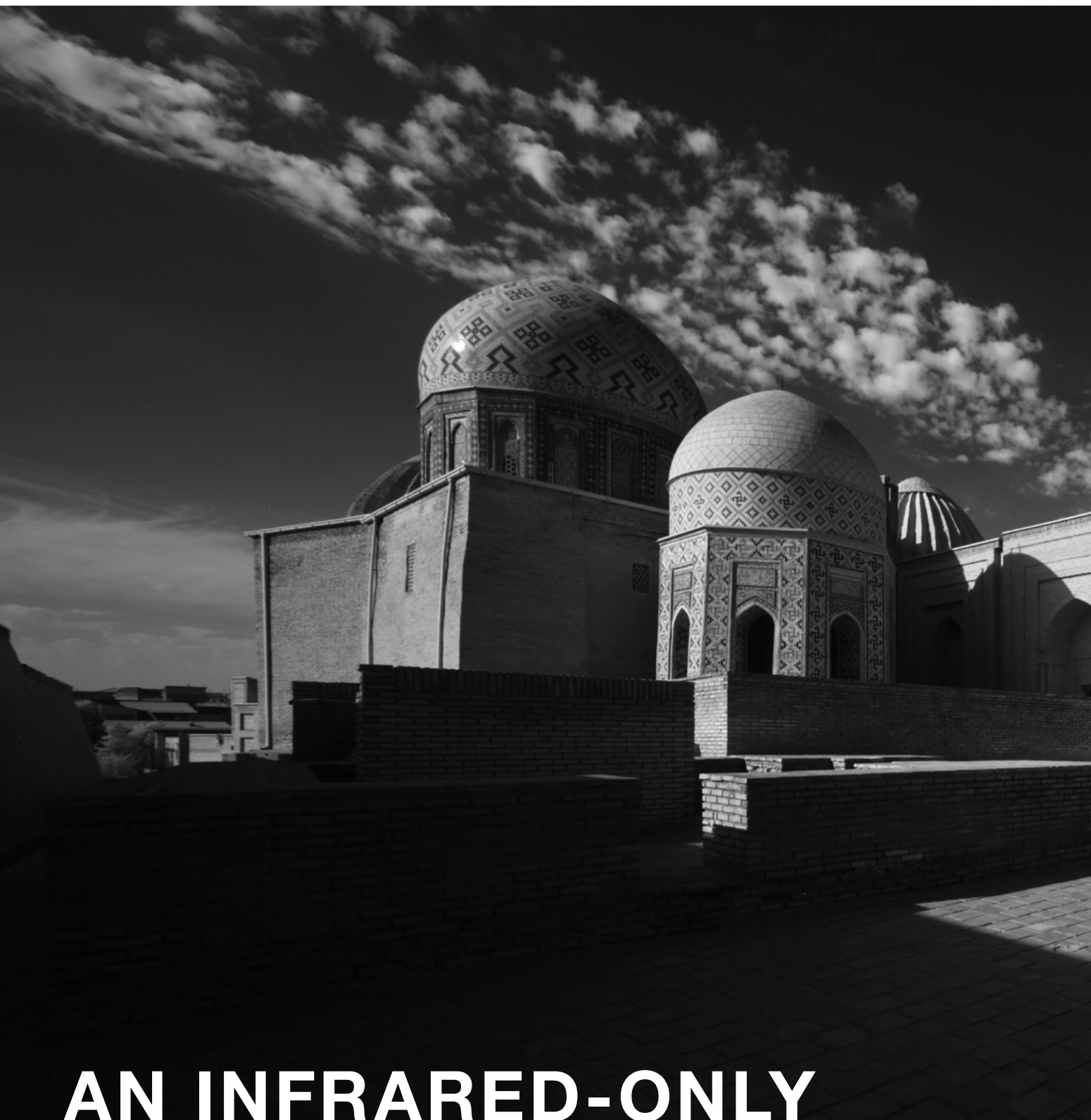
then take the best images into Photoshop to finesse. Although Lightroom offers increasingly more features to make selective edits, I find that Photoshop is still more nuanced and versatile. The De-Noise function in Lightroom is a game changer that has allowed more ISO flexibility when shooting, which is a huge bonus for my travel photography.

Once in Photoshop, I will crop and transform as required, apply an LUT or two to build the right feeling, then use selective editing to build the lights and darks, contrast, sharpening and saturation. For sharpening, I use either Topaz

AI or a sharpening combo developed by Christian Fletcher which seems to work better than anything.

While I do aim for authenticity, I am not afraid to tidy up an image and push the adjustments to create the feeling I had when I was taking the photo.

Once editing is complete, I test print at A3+ on my Epson P906. My three papers of choice are the Hahnemuehle Photo Rag, Canson Edition Etching and Canson Platine. Once happy with the image, I upload it as a JPEG to my website at www.ianeverettphotography.com.au.



AN INFRARED-ONLY CAMERA



The classic dark sky with puffy white clouds is relatively easy to achieve with infrared. Cemetery, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

**When the sun is high in the sky, put your colour camera away
and pull out an infrared model for a remarkably different
view of the world. By Peter Eastway.**



Over the years, a number of *Better Photography* contributors have written articles about infrared and the remarkable results that can be achieved. And it's so much easier to shoot infrared today than it was in the days of film.

Infrared film was tricky to use because infrared radiation could seep through the film canister and fog the emulsion. This meant loading and unloading your camera in a changing bag and even then, if you stored the film in too hot an environment, fogging could still result. And life didn't get any better when it came time to develop the infrared film in the darkroom – not only did you need to load the film in complete darkness, the lights had to remain off until you had developed and fixed because the developing tanks could also leak infrared radiation!

Of course, you don't need infrared film or a special infrared camera. All you really need is an infrared filter on your existing camera to achieve some great results, but there's generally a challenge with exposure: the IR filter is so dense that not a lot of light gets through to the sensor and so your shutter speeds can become impossibly slow. It can also make viewfinding very difficult as the filter can appear opaque to the naked eye (but this isn't an issue with mirrorless viewfinders).

An alternative to the filter is to have your camera adapted to shoot infrared, with the benefit being you can shoot at 'normal' shutter speeds and, in general, it's just as easy to shoot infrared as the visible spectrum.

Why Infrared?

Infrared comes in a number of flavours – colours and wavelengths. The colour infrared doesn't interest me personally, but it can certainly create a different result. I have steered away from it so far as it felt like I was using a technique for technique's sake – I have yet to find a subject that suits it.

The infrared I'm shooting is black and white and its most obvious features are the rich, black skies produced in landscape and architectural photos – or perhaps it's the almost-white trees and grasslands that look like they are covered in snow.

Unlike visible light photography, infrared thrives in midday sunshine. Without sunshine, infrared produces a relatively flat, lacklustre image (which can still be resurrected in post-production), so you need to pick your times, your weather and your subject. But it's easy – just look through the viewfinder and see if you like what you see.



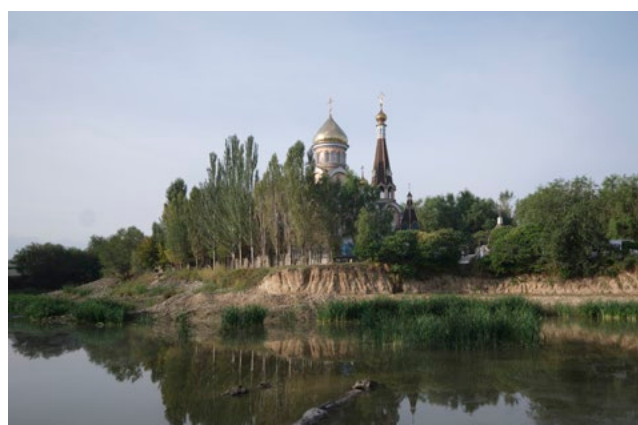
On overcast days, there can still be quite a bit of infrared radiation, but the resulting files are flatter and require a little more work. Kaindy Lake, Kazakhstan.

Shooting colour and infrared on a recent trip to the Silk Road gave me the best of both worlds. When travelling, you can't always spend as much time as you'd like at a location, or stay until the light improves or changes, so infrared provided me with an alternative way of viewing my surroundings.

Is it a one-trick pony? Will I get sick of shooting infrared? Possibly, but what I see in infrared is a simple way of creating that 'Ansel Adams' look, with rich dark skies and puffy white clouds. Sometimes the white foliage is a bit of a distraction, but you can choose to enhance or diminish this in post-production. I guess I've been shooting infrared on and off for over 40 years, so I'm thinking I will stick with it for at least a while.

What Camera?

Probably the ultimate infrared camera is one fitted with a Phase One Achromatic back (black and white only) and an infrared filter. With 150-megapixels and 16-bit capture, the tonality is simply superb, but the cost means most of us will find it hard to justify. But after borrowing the IQ4 Achromatic



The difference between the colour image, the conversion to black and white of the colour image and a black and white infrared image (top). You can see how the infrared picks up the cloud structure which is almost invisible in the colour image and how the foliage is lightened due to it emitting infrared wavelengths. Photographed in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

back and shooting infrared, I felt I wanted to explore this genre a little more. What were my options?

Many of my friends have grabbed an old camera and had it converted. I'm not sure this was necessarily the best approach 10 or so years ago, because the older cameras invariably had inferior sensors. However, in more recent times, our 'older' cameras still produce such good quality files that it makes sense. Having upgraded to the 40-megapixel Fujifilm X-H2, my 'old' X-T4 was a prime candidate. My only reservation was the X-T4 was a 26-megapixel capture, but then I thought, why not shift my approach; surely I could use Topaz Gigapixel AI to create a larger file size, if indeed it was even necessary.

Camera Clinic in Melbourne has been around since Adam was a boy – well, certainly as long as I can remember. Laurie Roger’s son Wayne now runs the business and a new arm called Imaging By Design handles the infrared camera conversions (you still go to the Camera Clinic website to get there – go to <https://www.cameraclinic.com.au/index.php/en/infrared-modifications>). The cost to convert a mirrorless camera is \$595 and it can take a few weeks. You can also convert a DSLR for the same price, but shooting with a DSLR introduces focusing issues that aren’t a problem with a mirrorless camera. I recommend you convert a mirrorless camera for this reason – but of course you can do your own research for a DSLR. Wayne’s website has lots of useful information on it.

Technical Stuff

Most cameras can be converted for infrared. The price at Imaging By Design includes an IR filter of your choice, fitting, calibration and focal adjustment to a lens and focal specification you choose. Most of my infrared photos have been shot with a wide-angle zoom, so this is the lens I specified, but I have successfully shot using a 150-600mm telephoto zoom without any problems.

During conversion, the camera is dismantled in a clean booth and the band pass filter is replaced with the IR filter. So, we’re still using an infrared filter, it’s just that instead of covering the lens, it covers the sensor. Then the autofocus and auto exposure systems are adjusted to match the filter. The camera is cleaned, reassembled and tested.

The most common filter used in conversions is the Wratten 87 and, according to Imaging By Design, it gives the best overall performance for digital cameras. You can also choose a Wratten 87A, 87B, 87C, 88A or 89B which give a greater or smaller wavelength range. I just went for the standard Wratten 87.



The rendition of foliage with light tones can be intriguing and interesting, but is it a technique you want to emphasise or use all the time? Mosque, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

So, why is focusing such an issue? Infrared wavelengths are longer than visible light, so a lens designed to focus visible light won’t focus infrared light the same way – the distances are all different. In the old days, most lenses had a small red index mark etched onto the barrel of the lens, indicating the adjustment needed to correct the visible light focus setting to infrared. With the introduction of autofocus and digital cameras, this index mark rarely appears.

With a mirrorless camera, the autofocus system is focusing off the sensor, so after an adjustment during the conversion process, it can be calibrated to focus with IR.

With a DSLR, focusing uses a different system, so you will always be focusing manually. Yes, you can use Live View to



The classic black and white landscape still requires plenty of post-production (in terms of dodging and burning in), but the result has a strong, perhaps haunting feeling to it. Gravestone, Jeti-Oguz, Kyrgyzstan.



Infrared can have unexpected results. Here, the dress being worn by a young Instagrammer reflected lots of infrared, giving the dress a white appearance.

manually focus and check what you're recording, but in normal shooting modes, it will be a matter of shooting and then checking your focus and making adjustments. There's nothing wrong with this if you're shooting landscapes and have time on your hands to play with things. And eventually you will work out what adjustment you need to focus on infinity and, by using a small aperture, depth-of-field should solve most of your focusing problems. But it's not as easy or convenient as using a mirrorless camera!

Just as our cameras are designed to work with visible light, so are our lenses. However, our lenses can still be used for IR, but you may find some internal reflections (flare) present on your image. With both my wide-angle Fujifilm lenses (10-24mm and 8-16mm), flare was evident. The reason is that the multicoating on the lens is designed to eliminate visible light reflections, not infrared reflections, but the solution is relatively easy in post-production.

For my lenses, the flare showed as a bluish hot spot. At wider apertures it was larger and fuzzier; at smaller apertures it was clearer and crisper. However, by converting the image in Lightroom or Capture One etc., and darkening the blue slider, the flare was effectively removed and no longer a problem. However, it was a little disconcerting when I first viewed my images.

Lenses from different manufacturers may or may not have the same problem – because the manufacturers use slightly different multicoating formulae. However, there may be some rare lenses where the problem is not solvable – use another lens.

File Processing

To get the rich, black infrared look usually requires you to be bold with your processing. None of this subtly pushing the

sliders – give them a good whack and then bring them back if necessary!

Although infrared is monochrome, the files your camera captures may have a colour cast over them, so the first step is to convert the images to black and white.

You can simply desaturate the files with the saturation slider, or you can use the black and white panel and play with the channel sliders. The channel sliders may have minimal effect, depending on your camera sensor and lenses (i.e. whether there is any colour in the file), so treat the conversion to monochrome as a simple step one.

Step two is to use the exposure, contrast, highlights, shadows and black and white sliders to create the contrast and retain detail.

You can get a great looking image just by playing around, but you may find that the settings that give you a really deep, black sky block up the subtle details in the landscape. If this is the case, selective editing is the answer and both Lightroom and Capture One have excellent tools for this purpose, or of course you can drop into Photoshop for full control.

In many ways, processing is much the same as for a black and white image using the visible light spectrum. You'll quickly find that the bright sunny day exposures are easier to work with, but don't give up on overcast days or even interiors where there isn't much infrared to work with. You'll still have a black and white image that can be pushed and tweaked into a wonderful result.

However, a good quality monitor is essential as I found that getting just the right tone can be a very sensitive affair. The best results are precisely correct!

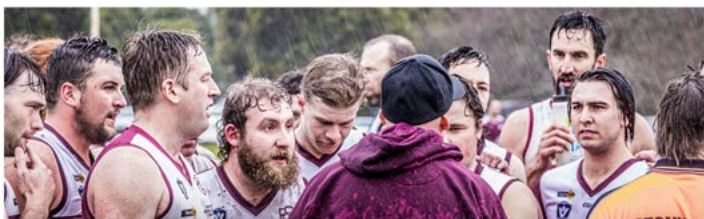


BEHIND THE BALL

Could a photography project be the answer for you? Ken Spence takes on a football community with his camera – and loves the experience!



Ken's exhibition at the Meeniyan Art gallery



Coaching



“It never ceases to amaze me what I can learn about people and communities, just by holding a camera up to my eye.” The above comment in the visitors’ book at a recent exhibition I held is a case in point.

The exhibition was at the tail end of a project to document a season of the Stony Creek Football Club. Stony Creek is a very small community in Victoria’s South Gippsland region – so small in fact, that the township itself doesn’t even have a pub or a general store. As a member of the Camberwell Camera Club in Melbourne, I, like many other club members, had taken on the challenge in 2022 of creating a body of work on a topic over an extended period (refer to *Better Photography* magazine: Issue 112) and this was to be my project.

“Just makes me wanna pick up a Sherrin football – love it! You’ve really nailed your brief, honouring our local community. Absolutely fantastic.” RM

Initially, I was most interested in capturing the excitement, skills and physicality of the football games. However, as the season progressed, I began to realise that the Stony Creek football team was much more than just a sporting team. It was a community, a family and a symbol of the resilience in this rural area.

Through my lens, I witnessed the strong bonds of friendship and support that existed between players, coaches and fans alike. I saw how the team brought people from different walks of life together and united them under a common goal.

It was this sense of community engagement and respect, that truly captured my attention and inspired me to continue documenting the team’s

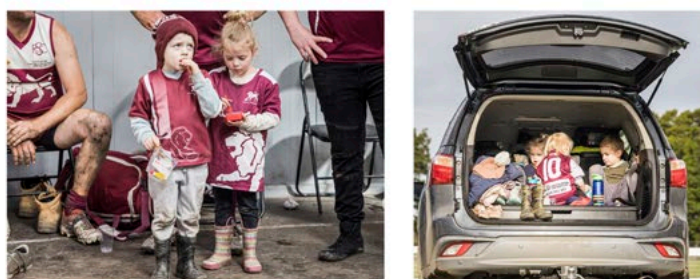


Ken discussing some of his photos with the audience



Courage





Families



Ken and the club's president, Mark Le Page

season through some very wet, windy and cold Saturday afternoons.

For the exhibition, I grouped a selection of my photos into ten separate posters, each focusing on a different aspect of the club. Sure, there were posters about the on-field action under titles such as Skill, Courage, Tough and Winning & Losing. But the off-the-field related posters such as Team, Supporters, Behind the Scenes and Family, contained images that perhaps more accurately reflected the true community reach of the club.

The exhibition was held in June 2023 at the Meeniyar Art Gallery, located in a nearby country town. At the opening event, there was certainly some emotion and misty eyes in the room. All I had done with this series of photos was basically to hold a mirror up to the club community, to show them what together they have created, both on and off the field and how proud they should be.

Stony Creek may be a small dot on the map, but its football club has a big heart that was clearly visible through my viewfinder.



Gallery doors are open!



Winning & Losing



JUDGING A MAJOR ART PRIZE

What would you be looking for if you found yourself judging an art prize?

Len Metcalf shares his experience with *Better Photography*.

It has been an incredible honour and privilege to be one of the judging team for the Mullins Conceptual Photography Prize. Not only was it an incredible experience, I found the whole process very educational. In this article, I will endeavour to share with you what I learnt.

I could take the click bait approach and call this article 'How to win art competitions', but I don't really think that is an article that I am able to write. Instead, I can expound how we, and in particular myself, approached the judging process and what I am looking for. I doubt I can explain what another judge is looking for. Here is my opinion.

No Such Thing as Best

I have in the past at art competitions, given the audience a lecture on the objective and subjective. I make it very clear that when I judge a competition, I am only ever giving my opinion. There is no such thing as best. All I can do is tell you what I like and why. I tell the audience that it shouldn't agree with me and that they should each have their own favourites. It is highly unlikely that my decision would be in line with the masses. I have very strong opinions about anything that is judged by the masses. I believe we end up with mediocrity when we do that. Just look through Instagram and see what is popular and what gets the most likes. My point is illustrated perfectly.

So what am I seeking when I am judging an art competition? The following points relate to all of the visual arts, so please consider your photography as artworks.

Titles and Statements

The title of an artwork needs to help the artwork. This is a bit like putting a signature on an artwork; it should enhance

the artwork, not detract from it. It shouldn't be a distracting element. It should inform and add contextual meaning or emotion. It needs to become an integral part of the artwork. 'Untitled #1' seems to feel like a cop-out when comparing your work with others where their titles add depth to the artwork. Titles that are purely descriptive of what we are already seeing rarely add any depth to the artwork.

An artwork needs to match the artist's statement. The artist's statement is an opportunity to add something meaningful to the artwork. Writing artist's statements is an art in itself. If you are not so good at writing them, then get someone to help you. They need to be well thought out and clearly communicate your intentions, thoughts and feelings. They need to add to the artwork. An explanation of what the artwork is, is rarely sufficient. The story of its creation is rarely as interesting as adding meaning to it.

Learning to write meaningful artwork statements is something that is worth researching, getting feedback on and mastering. It is something I ask my students to do regularly, starting by talking about their art, then extending it to the written word. The statement that goes with the artwork shouldn't just be a quick afterthought. It needs to be well written and complementary. It is your opportunity to extend the work. It is too easy to leave this opportunity untouched or substandard, but if the statement has no connection to the artwork, you will find it detracts from the work.

The Real Deal

Enter artworks that actually exist. It isn't okay to enter a prize that will require you to send the artwork to them for the exhibition without printing and framing it prior to entering



Artworks from Len's recent photography tour to Takayna / Tarkine lutruwita / Tasmania. "Gaia blessed us with gorgeous weather, including rain and plenty of mist. After the past few dry years, it was lovely to see it wet, green at its best." Len is working on a book of his artworks from the area.

it. I personally made this mistake for the Olive Cotton Portrait Prize. Someone had seen the photograph on social media and had suggested I enter it. As I could enter it easily, I printed out an A4 print and posted it away as my entry. When I was selected as a finalist for the exhibition, I printed it at A2 and was horrified to notice it wasn't critically sharp where I had thought it was. I tried to disguise it with some grain across the whole image, but really I had made a huge mistake. I should have decided on the printed size, printed it and checked it, before putting in my entry. This point is very important for competitions that are for physical artworks. Putting in a digital entry without checking it will work as a print just doesn't cut it.

A concise entry is valuable. It has been noted that many artists flood the competition with their work. I was recently listening to one entrant who uses this as a tactic to win, claiming to happily submit a hundred entries in the competitions that are most relevant to their business. I noticed that when this happened to me, as a judge, I pulled away from that person's work, particularly when the work was incredibly similar.

This is probably due to the nature of the competition that I was judging. When the artists aren't identified, then I probably wouldn't notice as easily. Some artists submit works of art that have only subtle variations, but again, this makes the work weaker in my opinion.



Some awards ask you to send a photograph of the physical entry, as a digital file, prior to requesting the real thing. Document (photograph) the physical artwork fully. If your work comprises more than one piece, include a photograph of it installed on a wall or in situ. Make sure you include images of each of the individual pieces. Include images of the frame and display. Photograph it from multiple angles. If it is multimedia, show a close-up of the brush strokes, the paper, and details. Put some effort into documenting properly. I am amazed how poorly some of the entries were, snapped with old phones in poor lighting.

How Big Should It Be?

Artworks need to work at all viewing distances. Test your artwork at various distances. Walk away from it, come up close to it. Does it still work at all viewing distances?

Some artworks really catch your attention from a distance, but when you get up close to them, you feel let down because of their lack of interest. Others fall apart at a distance. The measure of a good artwork is that it works in various sizes. It works in all sizes. The measure of a great artwork is that it captivates you from a long way away and sucks you into it, getting more exciting as you get closer. Remember that if you are entering a physical artwork into the competition, it will be judged on the wall against the other artworks. Works of art may look amazing as digital reproductions, but can fall apart on the walls of an art gallery.

Too small, too big, just right. Small artworks are a genre in themselves. I wonder if some artists print their work very, very small because they can't afford to print them larger? Jokes aside, it is hard to make a very small artwork work, particularly one that also works from a distance.

When you go big, you need to ensure that the artwork is interesting when you get up close. This is all about getting the sense of scale just right. A truly great artwork works at all scales. That is why putting them on the wall, while you are still contemplating the editing of your artwork, is so valuable. You can change the viewing distance as you walk past and notice

how it changes. I noticed some artworks are over-enlarged, hoping for impact, but you can tell when it is too big as it loses your interest as you get closer to it. Look for that 'just right' size.

The Presentation

Artists consider how their work is displayed. Work that doesn't consider how it will be exhibited comes across poorly. Framing and presentation is just as important as the artwork itself.

Great artworks can let the viewer down when presented poorly. Framing, or not framing, is a choice, but presentation is crucial to your success. Like the signature, the title and the accompanying statement, the presentation needs to enhance and improve the artwork. Having distracting or substandard framing will lower the impact and emotional response of your artwork. If you are a finalist in a major prize, consider the expense of having the glass changed to non-reflective glass. Why not give your work the best possible presentation? Presentation isn't an afterthought.

Artworks need to be seen in person. It was an incredibly interesting experience seeing the artworks digitally and selecting an exhibition and then finally seeing the artworks in person. It is incredibly difficult for judges to judge physical artworks through our computer screens. So much is lost in translation. Consider this in your presentation and give the judges as much written and visual information as possible. Work hard on your entries.

Unique and Creative

For me, being a creative artist myself with thousands of hours of art and photography study behind me, which equates to having seen thousands and thousands of photographs, I need to see something new and interesting as a judge. If your work is a rehash or a copy of someone else's work, the judges will inevitably notice. I certainly will. I am looking for the 'unique you' in your work, not a regurgitation of someone else, nor what you think I will want to see. Being authentically you needs to show in your artwork.

Artworks need to extend the artist. Award-winning artworks need to push yourself as much as they push the audience. If the piece doesn't extend your own practice further as an artist, why would it impress me as a judge? In some competitions, your name is included in the judging process, while in others it is hidden from the judges. If we know you and your work and the artwork doesn't push yourself out in new directions, you really need to ask yourself why are you entering into the competition?

Artworks need to be new. I find it fascinating that artists put the same artwork into every competition they can find. Perhaps this is a tactic for winning. But if your work has already been seen in an exhibition or as a finalist, or even as a winning entry, it won't get much interest from me as a judge. Many of you will say that this is wrong, I am sure, but I am probably much more of a humanitarian who likes to share the love around. Rather than abject objectivity, I can't help but apply my own subjectivity. A winner of a significant art prize shouldn't be the same piece they used in another prize.

Art competitions are subjective. They aren't objective. Judges don't agree, or if we do, it isn't very often. It is rare. I know many judges try hard to be objective. They write



lists of things that they are objectively checking, much like competency based training. Years of experience has taught me to go with my emotional response to the artwork. It is the same with assessments. As a university professor, I had to learn to mark essays. I soon learnt to go with my feelings. To acquire that ability, I cross-referenced my judgement with other assessors and compared marks for the same piece. Once I realised that my judgement was equally valid, I started to fine tune my emotional response to the work. A lifetime later, I use the same skills to judge art competitions. I follow my feelings, apply a critical eye and make sure the two match.

The Test Of Time

I have my own techniques for judging and the one that works for me best is to give myself time away from the artworks and see which ones surface in my memory with fondness. Which

ones speak to me over time. And if I have the time, I will revisit the works over a few days or even weeks if it were permitted, slowly sorting through which ones stand out, which ones surface again and again.

Impactful and Emotional

An amazing and awe-inspiring artwork just reaches out and grabs you. I have quoted Simon Sharma previously in articles, but it is worth saying again. "Great art has dreadful manners, the hushed reverence of the gallery can fool you into believing masterpieces are polite things; visions that soothe, charm and beguile, but actually they are thugs."

He is saying that we don't consent to the onslaught of great art, it just works on you and soon you are left overwhelmed and exhausted. It is incredibly consuming. I don't believe that great art has to reach out and grab you, I



Takayna/Tarkine, lutruwita/Tasmania is a critically endangered area that covers the north eastern corner of the island. Less than ten per cent of this untouched wilderness is preserved from logging and mining. The rest is up for grabs and is subject to ongoing environmental projects to educate people to its significance and to enshrine it as a World Heritage Area. Only one other location that meets so many of the criteria for inclusion is on the register. There are over eighty species that are threatened and endangered with many being on the critically endangered list, like the Swift Parrot, the world's fastest parrot, and the Orange Bellied Parrot. The Orange Bellied Parrot dropped down to only 16 individual birds in 2016. This number has been growing. These parrots live off the flowers of trees like the mighty Blue Gum (the giants of the forest), which is still being logged extensively.

think it is also allowed to creep up on you and each time you view it, you see more. You have deeper conversations with it. It continues to intrigue you. Poor art, on the other hand, leaves your mind quickly and you are left without much at all. So what is this quality when we quantify it? Well, it is emotionally and intellectually engaging. It asks questions, rather than having specific answers. It begs conversations.

Universal Languages

Great art talks to each of us differently. Artworks that have only one correct way of reading them are often the boring ones. As I said above, artwork needs to ask questions. The conversations it engages with people need to be as different as the people viewing them. Great art needs to have wonderfully stimulating conversations with the viewer. An emotional response alone isn't enough for your artwork to stand out from the crowd. It needs to stimulate your mind as well. It has to start an ongoing conversation. Great art has many conversations with its viewers, not just a single, universal one.

Technically Perfect

Unfortunately, artworks are often let down by technical imperfections that harm our enjoyment. Unintentional errors detract from the viewing pleasure.

For instance, a colour cast that isn't intended. An artwork that is carefully colour graded for that special emotional response doesn't detract, it enhances. That missed focus, where something is sharp and then the main bit isn't. It might be a lack of contrast, or a white dot of dust on the print. It might be that miscut on the mount, or the sloppy frame or presentation. You need to master processing and printing your work to the highest standards.

Without knowing how good you can do something, you will undoubtedly fail if your technique shows. I actually use this in the judgement of my own works. Is the technique I am using overpowering or so obvious that it detracts from the artwork? I often notice that when it all becomes too obvious, I start to shy away from the artwork. It could be as simple as pushing the clarity or contrast too hard, or being overzealous on another slider. It might be that you have over-sharpened it and we can see the halos and sharpening too easily. Make sure your work is technically up to standard. It needs to be just right to win.

Aesthetic Beauty

I think that aesthetics is the most important element in an artwork. I am an aestheticist. I judge artworks by their emotional content and aesthetic beauty.

Do you ever stand in front of an artwork (read photograph), whether it is in a book, a print or on a screen, and feel that it is just beautiful? Many people struggle to put into words what this inherent beauty is, but at least they know it when they see it. Judging a competition is often like this. Particular artworks move you, they engage you. But this is nothing without a strong sense of aesthetics behind it. We can rationalise it with words like balanced, full of harmonies and discords that work. If you haven't worked out what aesthetic beauty is yet, perhaps you need to learn about what that is for you.

Everything has to be strong to win. Having directed all of the elements, it really comes down to artworks that work on every one of these points. If we have four finalists at the end and we are trying to decide which ones to knock out, it will inevitably be the ones where something in the aforementioned points is lacking in the artwork. Something where it doesn't quite make it, while the winning one ticks all the boxes.

Practice Makes Perfect

I encourage you to enter lots of competitions, if it is your thing, to get better and better at it. I know I don't enter enough. It was often the expense that stopped me in the past, being a poor artist, buying more film was always my priority. Later I procrastinated way too much and then there is the disappointment of people not seeing the beauty you see in your own work that stopped me entering. Perhaps I am a sore loser. It is something I need to work on and improve.

However, I do know that by entering regularly, you get better at it and in competitions where there is feedback, you can work on what is suggested.

Make sure you enter competitions for the right reasons. It's fun. It is meant to be fun. Take it all too seriously and it no longer is.

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WORKSHOPS AND TOURS

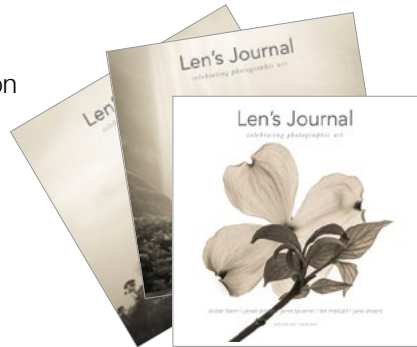


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PRACTISING APPROPRIATE TECHNIQUE

We all have a bag of different techniques, but Mike Langford

suggests that technique alone is not enough – we need to use an appropriate technique.

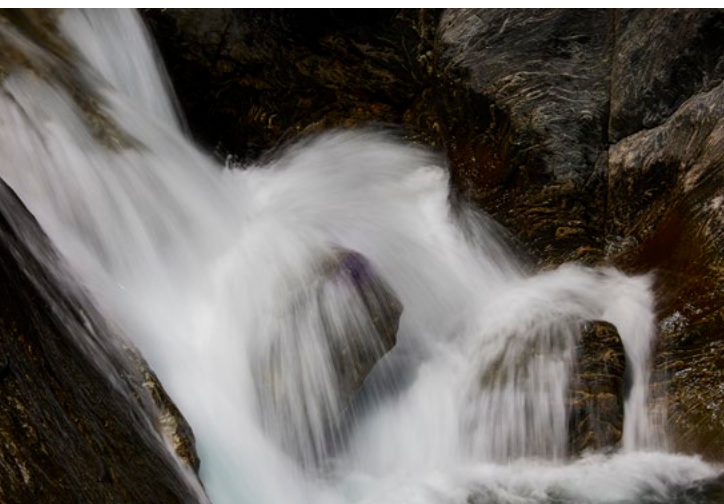
Photographic techniques give us ways of using our camera skills to create a different style or look to our photographs. As such, they are just techniques that we should regularly practise so we can get better at using them.

Applying these photographic techniques appropriately means you need to consider what your subject is and if the technique you are thinking of using is appropriate for the visual communication of your idea.

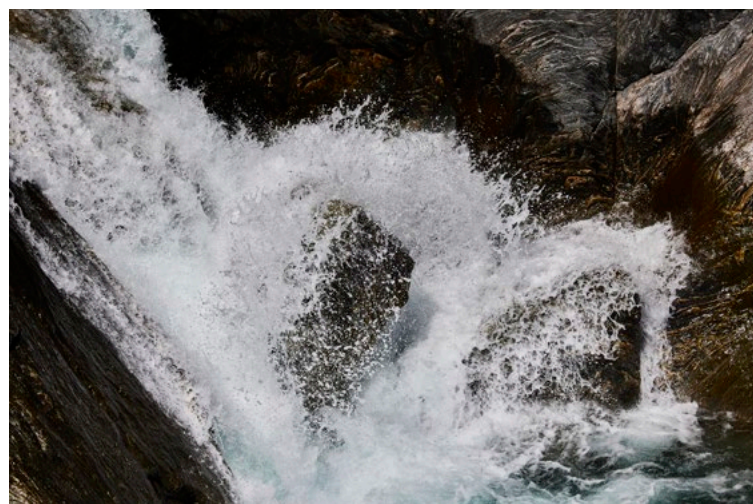
Here is a set of techniques you can consider practising so when you need to use it, you're ready to go!

Slow Shutter Speed

A slow shutter speed for a river, (below left) or moving water generally, is a good technique if the objective is to give the river a soft and romantic look, but it is important to keep some structure in the whites of the water so that we can still see that it is water that we are photographing.



Slow Shutter Speed: Canon EOS 5R, Canon RF 100-500mm f4.5-7.1 L IS USM @ 135mm, ND 8 filter, tripod, f8, 1/6 second, ISO 320.



Fast Shutter Speed: Canon EOS 5R, Canon RF 100-500mm f4.5-7.1 L IS USM @ 135mm, f8, 1/3200 second, ISO 320.



In-Camera Movement: Canon EOS 5R, Canon RF 100-500mm f4.5-7.1 L IS USM @ 500mm, f29, 1/8 second, ISO 100.

Make sure that the technique you have chosen to use is appropriate to how you feel about the subject.

Fast Shutter Speed

In this instance, using the same subject, my objective was to make the river, (opposite page right) look like it felt at the time, which was fast and exciting. As this was my new objective, a slow shutter speed would have been totally inappropriate. In comparison, by using a very fast shutter speed, I was able to freeze the movement of the water, making it look the way I wanted to communicate it, which was highly volatile and exciting.

In-Camera Movement

In-Camera Movement (ICM) is a slow shutter speed panning technique that requires a lot of practice to get right, but more

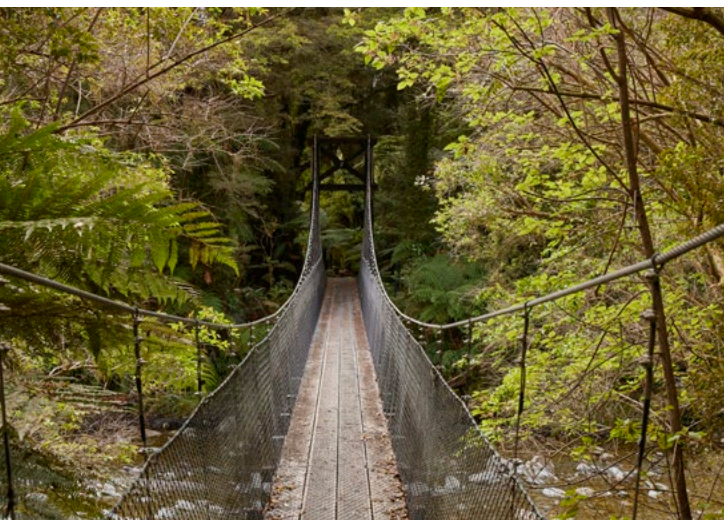
importantly, the technique needs to be appropriate for the subject. Camera movement for the sake of camera movement can be just a technique and nothing more. Rather, this technique generally works best to help illustrate movement or the implied movement of a subject.

When being applied, the technique needs to show movement, but not too much movement so the subject of the image can still be recognised as a key feature.

Here, a very slight ICM technique has been applied to a breaking wave (above).

Converting to Monochrome

On the following page, you can see how the scene looked in the raw capture, which was accurately correct in that it showed how the location really looked, but it was not at all like how it felt to me.



Coverting to Monochrome, Raw Capture: Canon EOS 5R, Canon RF 24-105mm f4 L IS USM @ 50mm, f11, 1/50 second, ISO 320.

When I make my images in-camera, I usually set my camera settings to monochrome picture style with high contrast, as this allows me to see through the viewfinder the line, texture and tone of my composition more easily, without the colour being a distraction.

On this occasion, the swing bridge scene (below) almost looked infrared through the viewfinder. By slightly overexposing the scene and adding a red filter to the monochrome picture style in the camera, I was able to suggest an infrared look that made the scene look soft and dream-like, which is how it felt.

Blurring the Background

There are several techniques in use in this photograph (top right) that I consider appropriate to the image.

Firstly, the choice of soft colour tones and high contrast, which have allowed these herons to feel almost romantic in their bush setting. Second, and more importantly, is the use of an aperture of f11. Not only is the aperture the sharpest for this lens, the limited depth-of-field separates the subject from the background. Remember that the longer the focal length, the narrower the depth-of-field becomes. So, at 500 mm the depth-of-field is actually quite narrow, even at f11, leaving just the herons and the egg in sharp focus. The third technique I added in post-production is a quite heavy vignette which brings the focus back into the centrally placed subjects.

Choosing a Background

Using a fast shutter speed to capture a moving subject is a great technique to use if you wish to show the subject clearly with lots of detail. However, the subject's movement isn't actually shown, but rather implied, as we know that (in this example, bottom right) it is a heron flying, even though we can't see the movement.

The difficulty with most 'frozen' subjects is that the background can also become sharp and obvious. To stop this becoming a distraction, I try to find a location or an angle where the background is the opposite tone of the foreground or subject. This allows the subject to be tonally separated from its surroundings. I regularly try to shoot something light against a dark background and vice-versa – something dark against something light in the background.



Coverting to Monochrome: Canon EOS 5R, Canon RF 24-105mm f4 L IS USM @ 50mm, f11, 1/30 second, ISO 320.



Blurring the Background: Canon EOS 5R, Canon RF 100-500mm f4.5-7.1 L IS USM @ 500mm, f11, 1/1000 second, ISO 500.



Choosing a Background: Canon EOS 5R, Canon RF 100 -500mm f4.5-7.1 L IS USM @ 500mm, f11, 1/1000 second, ISO 500.

COMPOSITION, CREATIVE LICENCE & FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Roby Lazar questions if our photography is designed to reflect our own artistic creativity, or do we compose our images to appeal to what others may find acceptable?

When displaying your photographs, hopefully the viewer will not apply their own preconceived biases to your images. Rather, they should see and understand your work as an expression of your creative ideas and application of techniques. But does this happen in practice?

How often have we presented a photograph only to find our viewers do indeed apply their own critical biases in order for our image to be highly rated – even if such an assessment

is based on an arbitrary observation that, in reality, may have little or no relevance to the photograph?

When we embark on any of our explorations in photography, is it the expectation of the journey or the satisfaction of the arrival that is of greater importance? Does it matter whether people view our photographs the same way as we do?

Today, it should be commonly accepted that we are free to develop and shape our images as we explore which photographic path we chose to follow.

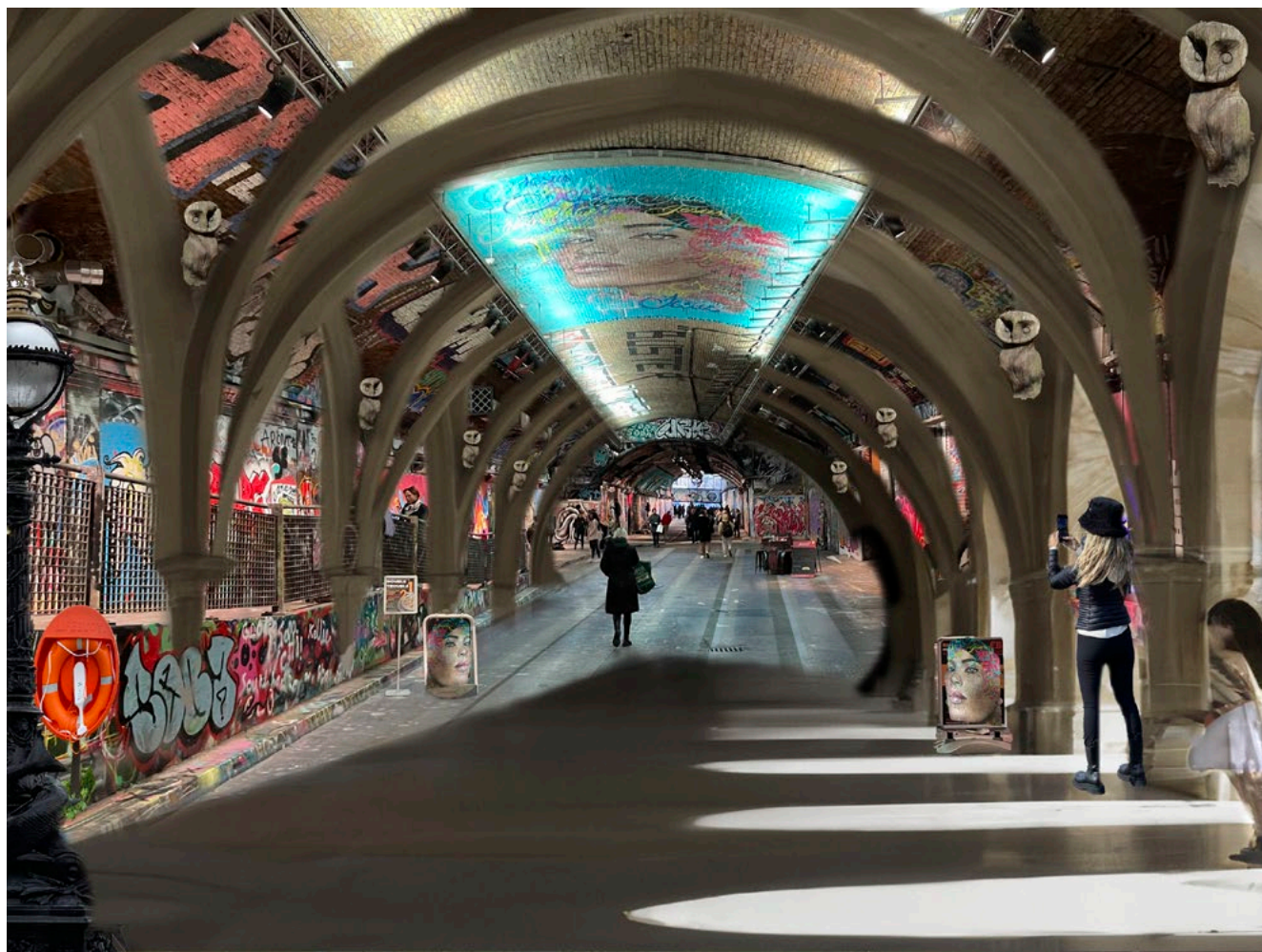
Important Aspects

Composition is the placement of objects, shapes and tonal arrangements in relation to each within a frame. The objects and shapes may remain within the outline of the frame or they may want to reach out and extend beyond the physical frame. Optionally, the composition may invite elements of the real world to 'journey' into the frame and experience the happenings that have been developed in your capture.

When refining the composition, you can position the figures and objects in relation to each other. They can be overlapping, totally separated or situated next to each other. Or you could place them to give a sense of depth and scale. The positioning of the horizon line in relation to your subject can also be very important. Think about placing a subject either well below or above the horizon, rather than having it cut in half by the horizon line.

By using different positions for your compositional objects, there is the opportunity to control the viewer's interpretation of what you have created. Shape, figure and space positioning are important for both the composition and the viewer's understanding of the creative and spiritual elements that the photographer has worked into the image.





Adding Depth of Meaning

After incorporating design elements into an image, it is useful to step back and critically examine what you have done, asking yourself some important questions. Does the composition work for you as a visual narrative? Does it flow and link the various elements within the frame? Does it follow rules or guidelines that you are happy with and does the final image look right to you?

How you answer these questions can depend on for whom the image has been created. Was your image a special commission for someone else? Was it constructed to appeal to a particular audience? Did you complete it as an expression of what you want to illustrate? Or perhaps your approach has been inspired by artistic and photographic ideas from other sources?

There aren't right or wrong answers, but what is of prime importance is that you create your photographic image as you wish to.

Whether we're framing with our camera or positioning elements as layers in post-production, we aim to place our compositional figures and objects in the optimum position. To assist in this process, it can be useful to divide your image into thirds, but don't see this rule as mandatory. You may be better off positioning your subjects and objects in reference to what is already in the image – where there are strong colours or dark tones that can interact with these elements. If the final image





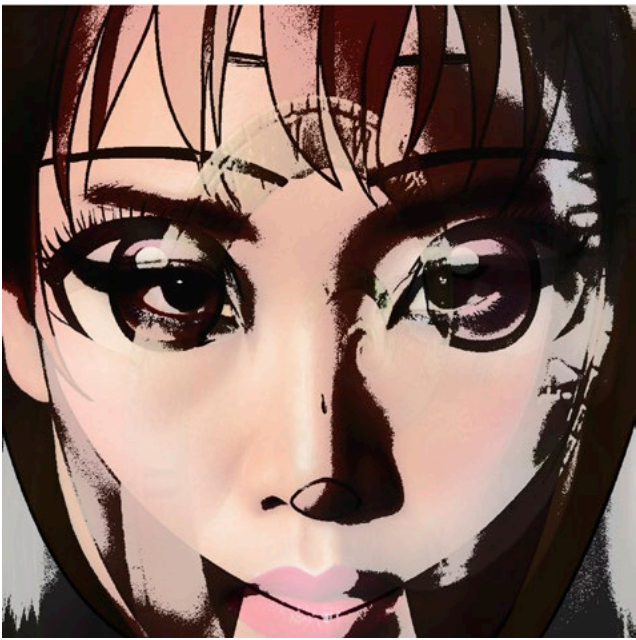
does not look right, then adjust the position of the element(s) to your satisfaction.

Building a Composition

There are many ways to construct a composition. If you compose in-camera, you have an opportunity to look at your settings and subject as you see them through the viewfinder, deciding before you press the shutter what angle is going to give a viewer the best understanding of the narration.

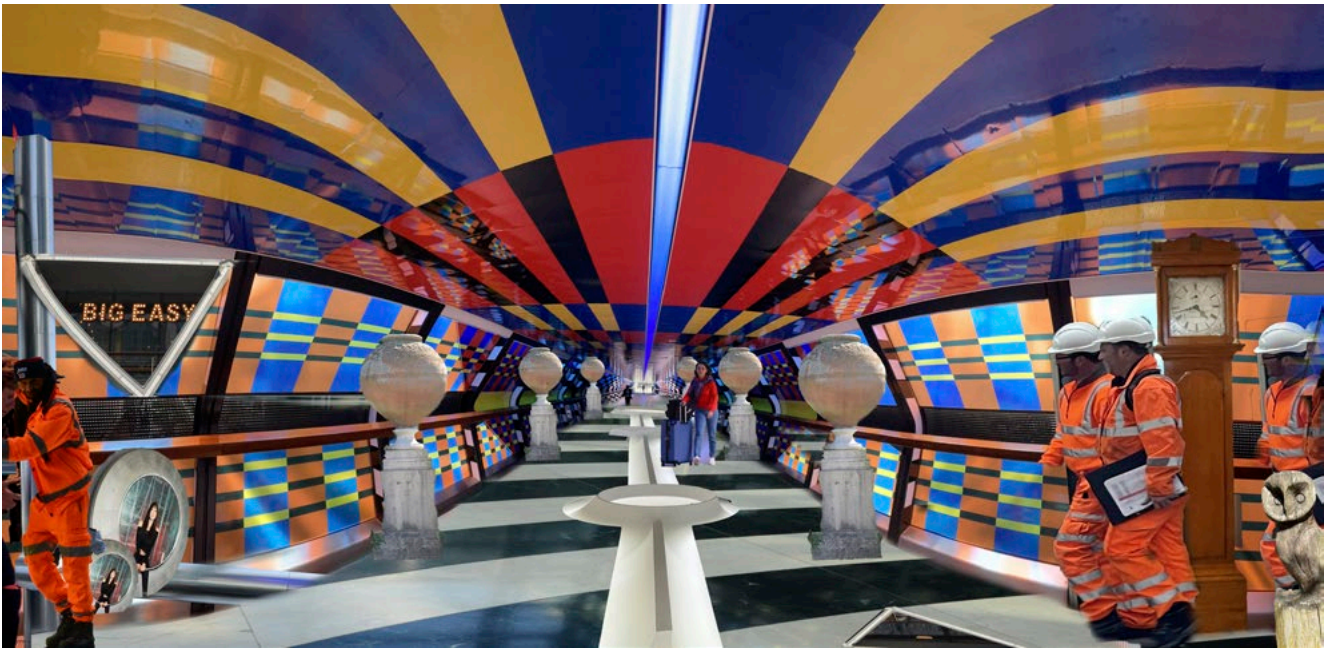
Optionally, when I am working on a composite, I usually start with a base background and then progressively add my own (copied and pasted) elements (subjects and objects), according to where the composition is headed.

The placement of figures and objects will often be determined by the background itself. Smaller objects can create the impression of middle distance or be placed in the background to emphasise depth and scale. These elements can be separated or overlapping. I also think about positioning objects off centre, about one third from the top and/or from the side. This is a useful starting guide for locating objects in the image, but if this placement does not work, feel free to rearrange the shapes as you wish.



Repetition of objects can create impact and interest, perhaps three or five of them, with each repeat being smaller than the previous one. Perhaps you could reverse a shape or figure? I find these two techniques very useful to give the viewer a slightly different perspective and understanding of the composition.

When constructing your image, why not try a colour change somewhere within the composition to alter the impact on the viewer? Or the use of shadow could add to a sense of depth in your composition. I feel that if you have a person or object entering or leaving the frame (despite what some say about disliking figures being cut off by the edges), it can create a sense of three-dimensionality that will encourage the viewer to think about what may be happening beyond the frame. This can be reinforced with the idea of a general flow of objects through the photo, via the placement of directional lines, positioning of different sized shapes or using colour and tonal variations.





Sometimes I like to introduce an alternative understanding by inserting unrelated objects that take the viewer beyond the conventional. The work and philosophy of master artists from the Dada and Surrealist schools of art have been very helpful for me in understanding how to construct a different composite image, one that goes beyond thinking outside of the Cube.

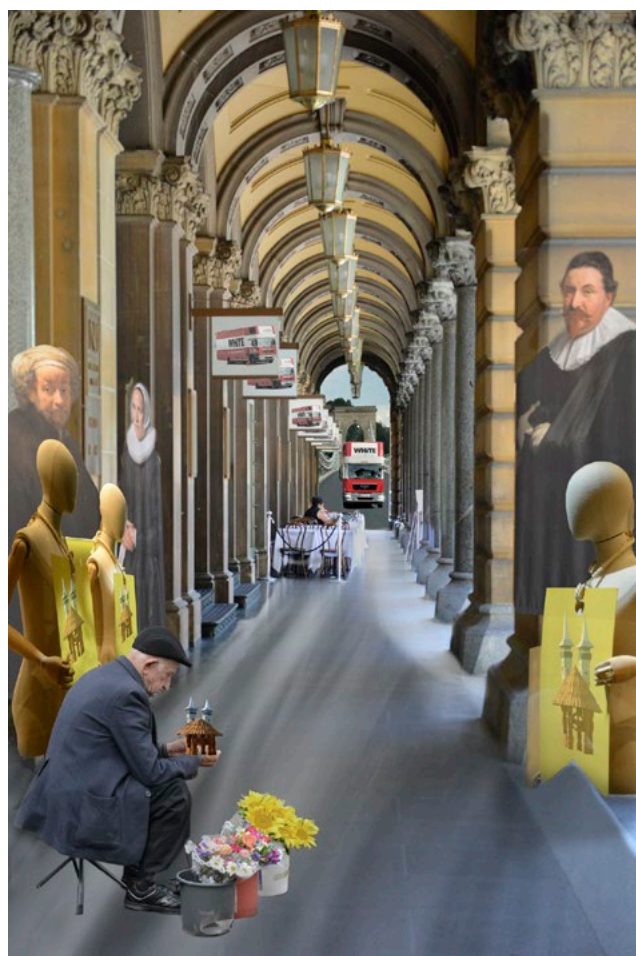
Following the Rules

How flexible is your approach to photography? Some photographers religiously adhere to what I call the Aardvark Syndrome, or what was called the “dealer-critic system” of the post-1945 art period.

This approach ensures that the image contains elements that are ‘suggested’ or ‘expected’ to be included by the existing ‘establishment’. If you wish your photo to be meritoriously reviewed by critics in order to gain advancement, then you have to follow their suggested photographic guidelines in your workflow.

I prefer to exercise a degree of freedom in my compositions, but when appropriate, it’s very useful to be open to suggestions that may constructively enhance an image. Everyone will see something different.

A good composition could be said to be one that you are happy with. The aim of the photographer will be either to ensure that the viewer is comfortable when viewing the



composition, or for the photographer to challenge the viewer with a photo that questions the norm with an unconventional presentation; or via a confronting subject that compels the viewer to see and think outside our proverbial Cube.

We all have to start thinking differently. For instance, why not combine your DSLR or mirrorless images with photos that you capture on your phone? And more recently, I’ve used AI images to construct different compositions.

Enjoying the Journey

It seems to me that your decision to locate an ideal shooting position and, later, to edit your captures, comes down to a choice: either you follow this path or that path. Is it the journey and the chance of obtaining some great captures, or is the main part of your photographic adventure going to be the arrival at your destination? Are you taking photos to make others happy, or are the photos primarily for you?

Whether you aim to specialise in a particular area or prefer to photograph general subject matter, it is always interesting to experiment with new application styles and techniques. There are many creative styles that you can experiment with and much will depend on to what extent you adapt and adopt the suggestions and ideas of others in your photographic exploration. Will you be an independent traveller or follow the more established paths?

That is the question!

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO MAKE A BOOK

Michael Coyne spent years producing his current book, *Village*.

Read how the project progressed and unfolded – and some of the skills acquired along the way.

Most working photographers would like to produce a book of their work. It gives them a chance to showcase their photographs and possibly tell stories about the making of and background to many of their better known images. Or like me, they have a theme, an idea that they want to share with the world.

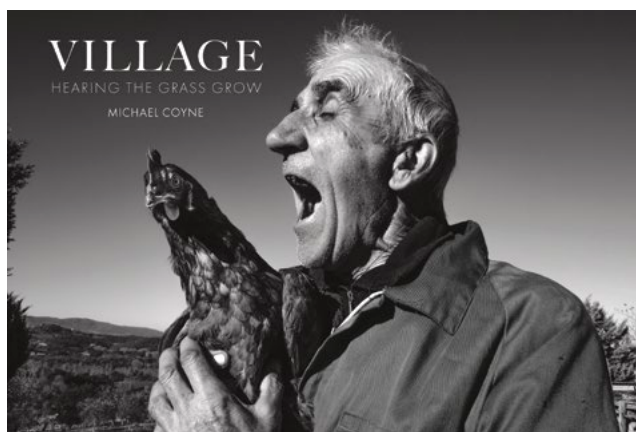
For approximately twenty-three years, I've been fascinated by the shifts and changes of rural life and the migration of many people to the cities. One example is China. When I started the book, 80% of the population lived in the countryside. Now 70% of Chinese live in cities.

What fascinated me was why people left the support of their villages, homes and families for an uncertain future. I was also interested to see what effect this mass movement of people had on the rural areas.

There are no easy answers to any of these questions, though globalisation and climate change are major factors that have compelled people to seek a better life in the cities.

When people leave rural areas, it results in a loss of customs, cultures and languages. Communities also lose young professionals including teachers, medical staff and people to look after the crops or animals. The topic of rural depopulation is wide and varied. I wondered if it were possible to satisfactorily illustrate this issue with photographs.

Another big question for me was how do I finance this project, to allow me to travel to enough continents and countries to show that the shift in rural life is a global phenomenon?



Before starting any type of book project, you need to have a clear idea of your goals and objectives. It's important to focus on the outcome and not the obstacles; if you want to do something, there is always a way.

I tried every way possible to raise the necessary money and found solutions for getting visas to countries that often ban people from the media.

I managed to get a grant for part of the project and I accepted assignments and did workshops in many of the countries I wanted to visit, staying longer so I could work on my book.

To work in remote areas around the world, you need to have contacts – people who know the locals, speak the language and can introduce you into communities. Without



A praetorian guard of geese in Fethard, Tipperary, Ireland.

these contacts, it's impossible to understand or be able to photograph the intimate daily life of rural people.

The production of this substantial project has brought with it numerous obstacles, issues and challenging moments: I was arrested in China, shot at by the Israeli military, attacked by West Bank settlers and found myself wandering around the highly radiated area of the Japanese nuclear disaster in Fukushima. In the Philippines, I met with Islamic fundamentalists who kidnap Westerners for a living and, on another occasion, was confronted by a trigger-happy gangster with a loaded shotgun. I was attacked by an armed gang in Papua New Guinea and caught in no-man's land between the military and the opposition rebels in Thailand. Working in rural Ireland involved being attacked by a praetorian guard of geese and dancing a jig in the local hall.

Most of these events classify as stepping out of my comfort zone, but possibly none more so than standing up to my knees in horse manure while photographing on a farm in England!



Demonstrators carry a coffin for one of the people who was killed during a clash with the Thai army. Many of the RED demonstrators were villagers who supported the previous government. Bangkok, Thailand.



Small prints were used to help in the layout process. Yes, it can be done on a computer, but it seems so much easier to just move a few prints around on a table.

After each trip, I would return to my office and make a wide edit of the images, selecting and printing what I felt reflected the aims of the documentary. Eventually, I felt that I had enough images to tell my story.

When photographing a major project, I always believe it's a good idea to have a photographic editor look through the work and make suggestions or observations. When shuffling through thousands of files, it's often easy to miss some very worthy pictures. An expert can help clarify your thoughts and pick up something you may have missed. During the editing of the pictures, I consulted several visual editors whose advice was invaluable about which images had strength and the most impact.

My first action was to lay the prints in piles along the passageway next to my office and select the most powerful photographs. The next step was to sort the images into

countries and edit them so there was at least one picture from most of the countries I visited.

Then I collated the images into three piles. The first pile contained the images that I wanted to use, the second pile contained the images that I possibly wanted to use and the third pile contained the images that I thought were interesting, but not quite graphic enough.

I then began to work with a brilliant book designer who had great ideas on how to connect the images to allow the book to flow and make it visually interesting. Her first action was to display the selected images on a table so we could see if they fitted together.

The text also went to two editors before the designer neatly fitted the words into the book as prominent chapter breaks.

Because this project had been ongoing for many years, the images had been shot on different types of cameras, including film and digital. To make all the files similar, we hired a digital expert to rework a few of the images. Nothing in the images was altered, shifted or changed except for the tone, density and removal of colour.

Before printing the book on the offset machines, it was necessary to change all the files to CMYK and the printer's specifications. So we hired a person who knew how to get the best quality and tones out of my images and had worked with the printer many times before.

For three days I remained at the printing workshop, from 6:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., checking the pages as they came off the presses.

After many years of researching, making contacts, travelling, photographing, editing and reading proofs, I finally had a finished book.

This book about villages would not have happened without the help, support and assistance of the many people: the researchers, assistants, technical experts, drivers, bodyguards, guides, interpreters, designer, writers, editors, printers, IT experts, villagers, farmers, friends and family.

It takes a village to make a book about a village.



Using a large table to decide the order of the photographs for the book with the designer.



Farm worker stands on a pile of horse manure. Gutting Power, Gloucester, England.



An aid worker drives through Namie, a Japanese village that was badly affected by the 2011 tsunami/earthquake and radiation from the nearby damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. Fukushima, Japan.

A MOMENT OF MAGIC

Do you push to capture photographs you want to find, or are you happy to sit back and let Nature and serendipity lead the way? Murray White reflects.



ADRIFT WITH THE SHADOWS

One of the most desirable outcomes with a monochromatic image is to reveal the transition of tone in a manner that may not be apparent to our eyes at the time of capture. In this case, a cloudy day had assisted with the smooth tonal rendition of this rock formation and its reflection in the water, but in the moments prior to capture, I became aware that the water movement itself would also play into the tonal spectrum and with less than predictable results. As it turned out, the gentle undulation of flowing water was rendered invisible everywhere, except in the halo-fringed shadows. Sometimes we need to make room for fate when gathering all of the visual resources.

How fortunate are we as photographers to be the recipients of potential pleasure at every stage of the photographic process? We anticipate the shoot, plan our strategies, capture the images, process our results, exhibit our keepers and share the creative spirit. Many of us experience an incremental feeling of satisfaction as we navigate our way through all of these enjoyable actions.

However, from within the entwined excitement of our multiple endeavours, it is worthwhile trying to identify which stage of the photographic process holds a particular appeal for you. If we were to progressively assign an enjoyment percentage to each sector of our craft, which aspect would get your greater weighting? Clearly there is no right or wrong response to self-assessment such as this, but appreciating what it is that makes photography special to us, can bring the incentive to further explore that connection and perhaps help us focus more effectively on our underlying motives.

Developing Vision

We each will have a unique take on what it is that sets our hearts racing – that particular moment or activity which elevates our photography from being a pleasant pastime to an immersive addiction. Some will enjoy the excitement of the capture, many will find satisfaction in the strategic processing of images, others may look forward to having their results critiqued, or even to just reminisce about their visual experiences. In many cases, our images themselves are not indicative to others of the enjoyment experienced, but exist as a personal legacy to our developing vision. They could be seen as visual receipts from a self-managed transaction, where we have exchanged creative control in return for an observable token, anchoring us to that place and moment in time.

In some ways, that private moment speaks more of our vision and base motivations than the resulting image and



A MOMENT OF CALM

Over the years, I have found that predicting how changing lighting and various climatic influences will interact with a particular landscape is so far outside of my capability, that I now no longer even bother trying! Yes, it is true that on occasion I am happy to wait for cloud cover to move or light rays to become more defined, but in general, my happy space is made all the more satisfying when I work with the agenda set by Nature. By carefully watching a scene unfold rather than projecting my desire for a particular outcome, I feel that more opportunities rise to the surface in the moment than are sunk by what may be seen as unhelpful external factors.

its presentation, or even its subsequent manipulation. For many, the formulation of an image is primarily driven by our personal sense of the aesthetic rather than by what may bring broader public appeal as a photograph. For most practitioners, a digital capture or print is a fundamental outcome when we consider photography as an art form, but there is also an inner awareness to be found in the contemplative moments leading up to that ubiquitous click of the shutter. And for me, this is the most rewarding time of all.

As a monochromatic landscape photographer with a gnawing appetite for film and cameras that by popular measure should belong in a museum, I am perhaps more locked into this visual preamble than those who prefer less rigid genres and shoot using more convenient methods. The dwell between concept and capture for contemporary reportage or wildlife photography, for example, will be on occasions exceedingly quick. Those who pursue sport or even portraiture can shoot multiple frames in the heat of the moment, leaving scarcely a pause between bursts to catch their breath.

Yet even these individuals must co-ordinate within that brief window of time, the many variables necessary to capture their vision. They will work with the elements present, apply knowledge gained from historically similar situations, formulate a plan on their feet and importantly, breathe new life into their considered interpretation as a form of self-expression. That moment in time, when we collate the raw materials and envisage how they may interact, serves in large part as a breeding ground for the flourishing of imagination and the flow of a creative process.

A Deeper Appreciation

It is within this nebulous act of joining the visual dots that our artistic direction can be seen to evolve in a manner similar to that required of an orchestral conductor. Our role is to assign purpose to our composition, remain flexible to the influence of fate and recruit those elements that will further the performance. In some ways, music is analogous to photography as it is also at its most eloquent when its



SPIN CYCLE

When I first framed this composition, it was done as a vertical format to emphasise the changing direction of the water flow over these falls, without visual intrusion from the captive spinning ball of foam now defining the lower left corner. My original thought was that this subject would benefit from a distraction-free movement into and out of the image. But by being open to other possibilities at the time of interpretation, I decided to capture this horizontal alternative, which I think directs our eye to return to the visual starting point in a continuous clockwise direction – much as the cycle of these cascading waters would seem to express. My experience has been that the elements of Nature present in the moment, can play into the image's final architecture in a more positive way than we may initially believe.

expression is felt to be an authentic response to the moment. However, in the case of music, the original experience itself is typically seen as the desired result, while for photography our expectation is that a physical image, rather than only a memory, will live on beyond its genesis.

I have in the past wondered whether I may derive almost as much pleasure from photography, regardless of there being film in my camera or not. By definition, the process of photography suggests that a tangible picture will result from the activity, but as my initiation to the craft was the by-product of a travel passion, the images always seemed secondary to the journey. For me, the mechanics of taking a photograph only served to verify and visually extend the environmental experience, although I must admit that time spent behind the lens did seem to intensify my observations and encourage a deeper appreciation of landscape.

In a sense this is still the case, but in recent years, the 'travel' component has become rather blurred in its scope. Today, like many other landscape photographers, I look more at how the natural world communicates its purpose, interacting with both us and itself, rather than to which GPS co-ordinates it may belong. The pure process of exploring largely untouched wilderness, or at least undeveloped landscapes, is especially satisfying, together with the gradual formulation of a visual plan that will isolate or emphasise those relational aspects most definitive to me.

Indeed, our environment bubbles away as a cauldron of numerous inputs, with each having an influential role in the final mix. Structural components are a given (albeit subject

to our individual interpretation), climatic impacts are variable with weather conditions not always as forecast and of course, we must juggle that ever-changing light. At any given time, the 'mix' will play out in a particular way, which may or may not feed into any preconceived concept we may hold. In addition, many (perhaps most) elements are visually interrelated. For example, wind can influence shadows by direct action on foliage, or through a slower process of moving clouds. Slower still is tidal behaviour or the apparent movement of the sun – and each of these actions can bring about a domino effect to the complex matrix of other inputs.

Moments of Transition

It would seem that Nature conspires with her armoury of environmental warriors to influence every landscape photograph as if playing a strategic game of abundance and attrition. Factors seemingly beyond our control ebb and flow with random and sometimes incongruous timing. Wind or rain can spell photographic defeat just as other elements fall into line. Yet for every perceived failure another possibility is revealed – these are the situations that we deal with and what make our experiences (and therefore our images) unique.

These moments of transition are where creativity thrives; they are a gift, not a hindrance. We have all had those times



MELANCHOLY

I am continually amazed by the possibilities that Nature offers us, even within the seemingly most obscure locations. Not everybody will be open to the anthropomorphic features of the foreground rock here and even I found its neighbouring formation strangely synergistic, existing as it does in such close proximity and with almost a supportive demeanour. It is in the observation of these personally satisfying juxtapositions that I find much enjoyment, despite the image itself likely to be seen as compositionally deficient, or at least visually messy by many viewers. But when looking into our viewfinders, for whose pleasure should it be?



DESIRE

While this image is structurally quite busy, its saving grace is the serene atmosphere generated through the lack of wind and the presence of a natural element not often praised by us fair weather photographers – rain! In the late afternoon light, a 30-second exposure has smoothed the drizzle-peppered lagoon surface and softened what could have been quite jarring shadows. Would I have taken this photograph had it not been raining or worse still, windy? Probably, we all live in hope, but moments like this can reinforce the concept that Nature provides a package deal and we need to assess the interaction of her elements in a holistic sense. In many cases, when we identify an image of interest to us, it is because we have taken the time to observe how each piece of its visual constitution has blended with effortless unity.



THE REMAINS OF TIME

I see these tiny washed up shells as more than just a convenient visual pathway into this image, although when I first looked at photographing this scene, it was conceptualised without the background wave action. My initial response was to capture a more abstract rendition, but on closer examination in the process of assessing all of the inputs, I realised that these markings form a sequential tracing of previous wave behaviour, directly representing the passage of time. This understanding prompted me to then include the background surf as the entity responsible, hopefully drawing a link between a visual element and its pictorial narrative.

when the light fades, the wind picks up or a tripod leg begins to sink on an incoming tide. It would be easy to say that today is not the day for photography – we should return when conditions are more amenable to the image we had planned. Yet in my experience, these are the very times that magic can result from perseverance. Instead of dwelling on why we are unable to make images, perhaps we can look to the landscape in a more appreciative way and tease out those inputs that manifest more effectively at this moment in time.

To a thoughtful landscaper, the absence of ethereal light is no more a deal-breaker than any other missing link, if we are receptive to the alternative options and allow Nature to set the agenda. Rain is your friend if a saturated tree trunk or rocky feature will now reveal the glow of their passive skin. Embrace the wind for how it creates blurred highlights and captivating surface textures on water. Direct sun may not often flatter a forest scene, but look at how well it can define the ripples of a sandy beach.

Capitalise On Change

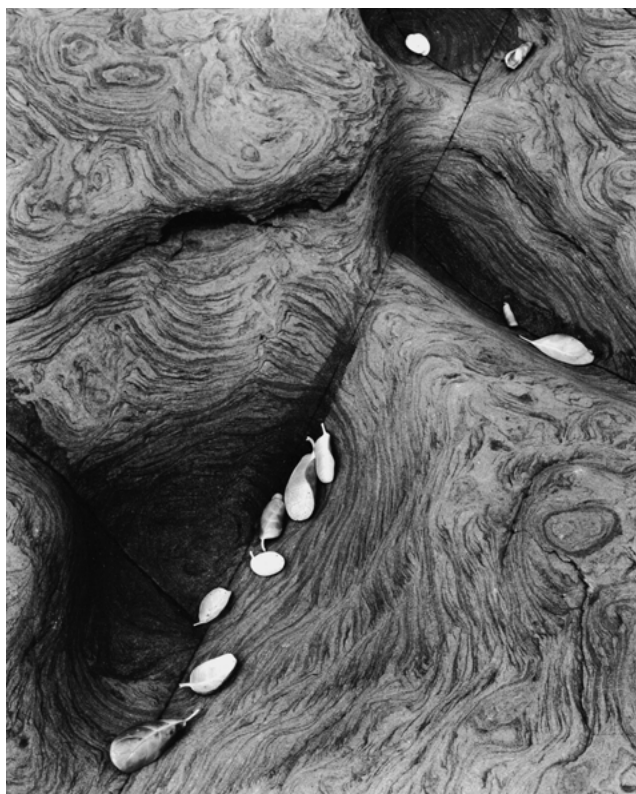
Our ability to adapt to the unexpected and capitalise on change is a skill that not only provides mental stimulation at a time of uncertainty, but will condition our creative minds to look for other possibilities over the longer term, even when seemingly none are needed. For example, we may be fortunate enough to find a natural scene where everything

has fallen into place – the foreground and background share a consistent flavour, leading lines offer a convincing visual pathway and stable lighting has generously provided a broad window of opportunity.

Understandably, few photographers would turn their back on the visual situation presented, although there remains a creative irony to its capture. We may identify an obvious composition, but by doing so, we can overlook other potential images that don't make use of these stereotypical elements. I guess that we all sometimes suffer from a form of tunnel vision, where we remain fixated on those overt players that we more readily identify and feel compelled to consider nothing other than cosmetic variations of the same theme, for fear of losing our remarkable find.

Those photographers who are willing to work with material that falls outside of routine aesthetics, could choose to apply an alternative strategy, by delving deeper into those visual elements that take a secondary role in landscape. It requires discipline to ignore the noise of dominant elements, but in doing so, allows a more detailed assessment to be made of the location. More subtle relationships can be identified within the landscape and it is possible that a totally new interpretation may be formulated.

Of course, it could also be that the most visually arresting composition is found following a relatively brief investment of time. Such captures provide more than just an efficiency



FALLEN INTO LINE

I prefer to let Nature call the shots with regard to subject existence and its visual authenticity. Having said that, I think that it is photographically essential that we at least try to extract a meaningful interpretation from the countless random juxtapositions that we observe. These leaves remain as found and as such may not form an aesthetically satisfying arrangement in a purely visual sense. But perhaps, like the unique fingerprint engraved into the foundational rock beneath them, these otherwise bland elements can be appreciated simply for being part of this place and time.



UMBILICAL

Rainforests are a destination that beckons photographers with the promise of potentially adventurous images, but often only after the photographer has dealt with equally challenging hurdles. And so it was on this occasion, when sunny skies had peppered the tree canopy and much of the understorey with lighting hot spots. However, this buttressed tree and curled vine sat quietly in a sheltered pocket, and while not reflective of the boisterous action above, seemed to speak of the mystery lurking closer to the forest floor. Sometimes our secondary responses to a landscape can reveal a deeper appreciation if we are willing to work with all of the elements present, not just those most obvious.

dividend; they breathe an immediate life into the location and remain a tribute to this wonder through the photograph itself. On the other hand, deeper contemplation of our natural environment can (and does) reveal a complexity where numerous inputs often interact in subdued but no less compelling ways. The observation of Nature, as each segment of its being clicks into an almost preordained puzzle, is in my view the most precious moment we can share with our landscape.

And if we want to, we can take a photograph as well.

THE WEB

I woke this morning to widespread fog and was instantly convinced that the mist would somehow be a significant feature of the image I would take. But as I walked from camp along the river, the environment intervened, elevating other features to the starring role and limiting the fog to that of an extra. I had thought to focus on some of these intricate tree roots and their reflections, but the foreground was hampering access. After some contemplation I found this image, which to me best sums up the location. While it includes visual snippets of what I thought would be the morning's outcome, the final composition brought together a number of elements, hopefully all interacting with a structural sense of purpose at this moment in time.



Telling Stories with PHOTOS

Nick Melidonis explains how with a little thought and planning, photographs can be used to tell stories with [more] meaning.

With the post-COVID explosion in travel both at home and abroad, many of us have a renewed enthusiasm and passion to take our cameras out in search of creative images.

Some of us look for great light and locations to take a grand landscape, to immerse themselves in street photography or to seek locations to capture a defining moment in a great wildlife image. Satisfying as these single images are, why not also set out on some of your shoots with the specific aim to tell a story?

It's said a picture is worth 1000 words, a truism if ever there was one. While all images tell stories, some do it far better than others. Photos that tell a story in depth are more than 'pretty pictures'; they engage the viewer as well. If you belong to a camera club, I'm sure you'll find those images that are well constructed, but also have a strong narrative and always stand out from the rest. If we create images not only for our own enjoyment, but also for the enjoyment of others, then it is necessary to make those visual stories the strongest possible. An image that does not contain a strong story



Over my many years of capturing images of Greece, I often shoot a photo essay of local events like Greek weddings. In the following series depicting a wedding in the tiny island of Folegandros, we see the bride's party parade through the narrow streets on the way to the church high up on the hill overlooking the town.



Interesting cameos wait for the documentary photographer around the event. In this image we see some of the guests’ children enjoying some playtime outside the taverna.

loses its distinctiveness and is visually relegated to the ‘ordinary’ category.

Whether observing or creating an image, both photographer and viewer utilise their imaginations to produce their own interpretations. Imagination tends to produce the strongest images when it employs strong emotional responses. We all have and use emotions and a strong, well composed image can pull these emotions from us. It is well said that if the image doesn’t ‘tug at the heartstrings’ it fails as a visual communication. This is the magic of an image that tells a story. As creators of visual works, our challenge is to turn our photography into the art of transforming a single image, or a series of images, into a story that can speak to the hearts, minds and imaginations of the viewers.

Over my many years of capturing photographs, I was always drawn to enduring magazines such as *National Geographic* where I enjoyed a well-crafted story illustrated by a series of powerful images that together produced the visual emotions and context for the narrative.

Great photo essay photographers such as Sebastiao Salgado and W. Eugene Smith have left powerful legacies for photojournalists.

The great photo agency, Magnum, also produced many past and present legends in storytelling, sometimes with just the single photograph like Cartier-Bresson. Often, today’s newspaper photojournalist must quickly and skilfully capture a story unfolding in front of him or her and try to capture the story with one powerful image.

So how can you capture a story in just one image, and how does narrative unfurl in a long-term photographic project or essay?

Comments from Magnum Photographers

I reviewed some of my early readings about photojournalism by Magnum’s photographers, along with their comments and suggestions on capturing the story.

Firstly, the use of a single image to tell a story. Magnum co-founder and street photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, explained what underpins his approach to the single image. “Sometimes there’s a unique picture whose composition possesses such vigour and richness and whose content so radiates outward from it that the single picture is a whole story in itself.”

Producing an image that does this well requires that we create a composition that first draws the viewer’s attention to the story and then allows them to be influenced by the pictorial narrative.

This starts with the need to keep the composition as simple and as visually uncluttered as possible. In a recent article in *Better Photography*, I wrote on the importance of keeping our compositions simple and to include only the elements needed for the narrative; eliminate everything else. For a quickly unfolding story in front of us, this can take some skill although we can later decide where to crop. Eliminate just enough visual information and the viewer will try to determine what happened before and what happened after the picture was created.

Single photo stories may require numerous images all taken around the same theme and then creative editing to produce that one image that sums up the event or story. This could mean spending a whole day or more shooting until you are satisfied the image contains the essence of the story and the emotions surrounding it.



In the small Greek islands, tradition states that the priest officiating at the wedding must arrive and depart the church on a donkey. In this image, the priest is heading back to the main village square and in the distance behind him you can see the guests following as a group.

Current Magnum photographer Matt Stuart who shot the Grenville disaster in London states, "There is often one picture that I find that you can pull from something if you absolutely have to and my daily grind is to try and get one picture from the day of what happened. Working in Magnum and having more of a drive to get the picture than ever before, I find that I am getting pictures quicker and I've learnt to be a better photographer already."

If street photography or event photography attracts you, why not dedicate a day or several days of shooting with a single idea or event in mind (a music festival, protest march, Anzac parade etc.), and then edit your work to capture that one decisive and powerful image that sums up the story? Remember to simplify the elements to only include what tells the story.

Magnum photographer Patrick Zachmann's approach is the polar opposite of Stuart's. Zachmann takes a long-term approach to building a story and his curiosity for his subject guides his exploration, incorporating cinematic ploys in his documentary work, interwoven with narrative strands of fiction. It is through getting to know his subject matter over a long time period and entering into it from multiple angles and perspectives, that Zachmann's multi-layered storytelling comes through. This is not dissimilar to assignments undertaken by *National Geographic* photographers. If you enjoy identifying a story to tell with days, months, or years of shooting, then the photo essay is the way for you. This requires more planning and Magnum's Matt Black has these five tips.

Magnum Tips for Long-term Photographic Projects

Let us assume you are embarking on a long-term photo essay. The approach of a professional storytellers may be of use to you.

Have a Mission Statement

Projects can be about anything and everything, but the reason for undertaking a specific long-term project needs to be clear. Having said that, I have embarked on long term projects that have been or about to be exhibitions. These originated with a loose theme in mind when I started and then I reviewed years of images and decided which images I needed to finally tell the story I chose. Regardless, they need to have a unified central theme to sit as a body of work and to have some continuity. Once you have the selection of images, as with Magnum's suggestions, be clear as to the story you want to tell.

I can relate three examples of this. The first was a series of images I titled, 'Fishermen of Kerala' which was the subject of one of the articles I recently wrote for *Better Photography*. On a shoot for Singapore Airlines on Ayurvedic Retreats in Kerala, India, I spent the early mornings and late evenings in-between the shoot photographing a nearby fishing village. This produced some very satisfying images over a week in a documentary style which I later edited into a collection depicting their daily ritual of catching fish to feed the village.

Another was a retrospective exhibition of my shoots to Greece during my Greek tours along with earlier shoots through the Greek Islands and mainland Greece. This produced thousands of images that was a snapshot of the changing face of Greece and its people over four decades.

And I have been photographing the kingdoms of Angkor in Cambodia for 17 years now and I have a body of work depicting the people and the rich tapestry of the monuments of the Khmer Kingdoms that will be the subject of another exhibition. Once I review all the work, I will finalise the themes and set about editing it as a body of work.

Ask questions

Magnum's Matt Black's way of working involves asking lots of questions from several sources as a tool to get to the crux of a



The aftermath of the wedding and the celebrations that continue throughout the night can be a rich source of images of the wedding participants. In this image, I captured the priest relaxing in the square and seated next to him are some of the elderly guests chatting about the event and catching up on the local gossip.



After the wedding, celebrations continue until dawn at a local taverna. Traditionally, the whole village is invited and usually included is my tour group.

story, to engage with his subjects and understand the issues affecting them.

Be a Good Producer

When undertaking a long-term project, photographers should never overestimate the importance of proper research and production. Shannon Simon for Magnum, explains how good production ensures access is granted and the research is up to date. "Having a framework, rather than going out without a sense of what you are doing, is invaluable. If you are more creatively-minded, and don't think in terms of logistics, get a friend or colleague to help you. Persistence is what will get you in the right place to do what you want to do."

Collaborate

Finding informed people to help you form creative partnerships can help a lot in your quest to gain access to sites and people and even coming up with ideas for the project. In my early years of shooting in Cambodia, I met and befriended John McDermott, an American photographer with three galleries in Siem Reap. He helped me locate temples in remote jungle areas and gave me valuable information on conditions for shooting infrared images, as well as joining me on some early tours I ran there. My long-time friend and tour agent in Cambodia helped me with translations and communicating with the Khmer people, especially in the closely-knit village communities, the inhabitants of the floating villages of the Tonle Sap Lake and the monks in Wats and Pagodas.

Be Prepared

When it comes to storytelling in travel and documentary photography, each place and its people will have specific tales to tell. It can be very useful to learn a little bit about the local culture, cultural practice, events and behavioural patterns of the subjects you are going to photograph, along with some

history behind the locations you will encounter.

Never assume that everything will happen smoothly and that everyone will behave just the way you expect them to. Be prepared to tackle various issues that may arise at any time and have contingencies regarding equipment, access to locations, weather and people you expect to meet.

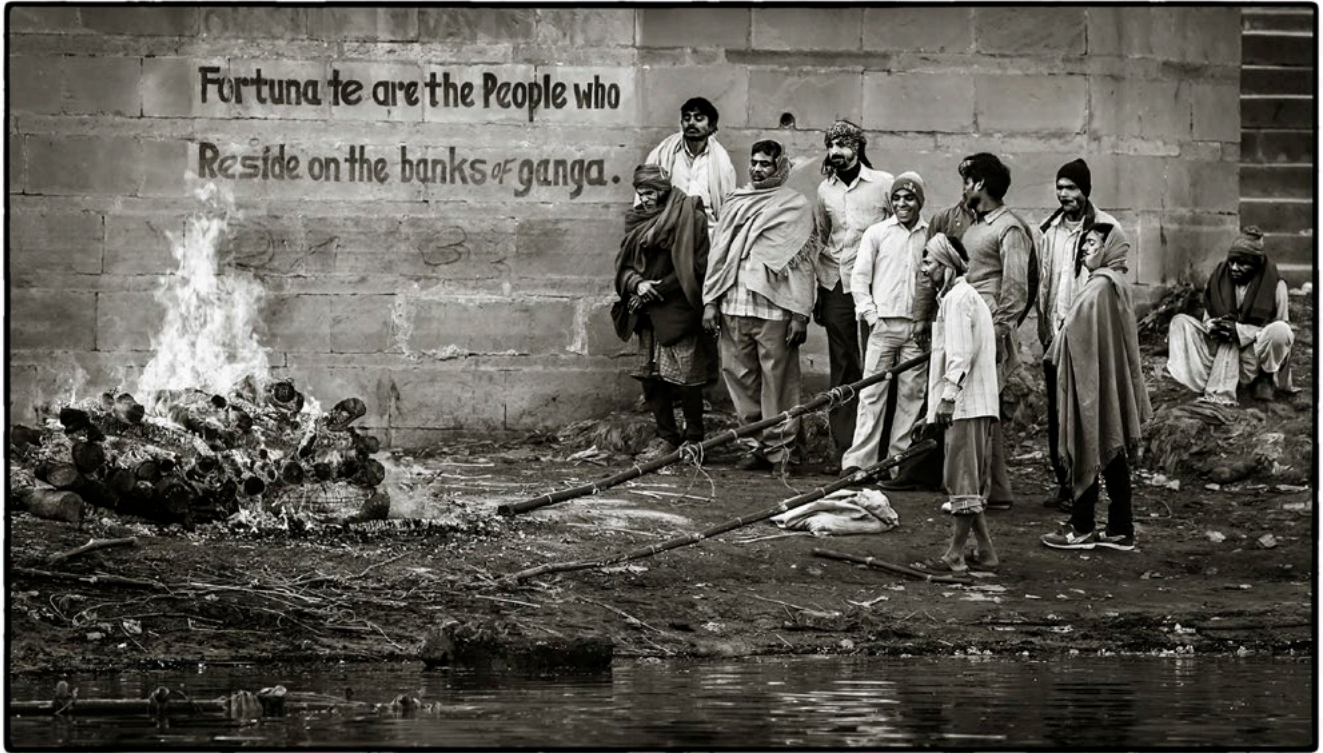
Further Tips in Creating Visual Stories

Open and Closed Stories. In addition to choosing whether you want to tell stories with single or multiple images, you should also decide what kind of story you want to tell. You have two options – open or closed stories. Open stories are quite interesting because they give a lot of freedom to both photographers and their audience. This means that the viewer's past emotions and experiences will affect the way your story is seen and interpreted. On the other hand, a closed story doesn't leave a lot of room for open-ended interpretations. It should be organized and told in a rather straightforward way so that everyone can come to the same conclusion.

Follow your instincts. Take photos of as many things as you feel fits the story. Overshooting can be helpful for photojournalism. You never know what you'll need, so the more coverage you have, the better.

Vary Shots as in a Video Production. One of the mistakes new photographers make is that they find they need to put every possible element of a story or scene into each photograph. This leads to photos that can be quite cluttered, that have too many focal points and that confuse the viewer. Shoot your variety of photos as if you're shooting a film or video. Examples are an opening shot, establishing shot (places the story in a city or location), wide shot for context, medium shot for the main players or location, close-up for detail, ultra close-ups e.g., hands working machinery.

Only use the Best Images. From your lead photo to the



During my many visits to Varanasi and the Ganges in India, I was always fascinated by the ritual of cremations. I have shot many photo essays of cremations, but to capture it all in a single image is not easy. This image is one of my favourites and shows a small group of poor families sharing a cremation due to the high cost of buying wood and as the bodies can only be handled by 'untouchables'. I hired a boatman who quietly floated past the Ganges shores and gats (steps) where I enjoyed shooting the numerous stories unfolding. I couldn't believe my luck that in this image of a cremation, the words 'Fortunate are the people who reside on the banks of Ganga (Ganges River)' were inscribed on the wall. It refers that to be near the holy river, is beneficial to your spiritual life and, if you pass away, you can be cremated right away. The quicker you can be cremated near the Ganges, the easier is the passage of the soul to the next life. It was not unusual to see taxis with bodies strapped on top hurtling through the streets of Varanasi towards the Ganges' banks.

final photo, you should be creating a visual narrative with impact. However, if you use too many images, you risk diluting the impact of your message. Only include the key photos necessary for your storyline.

Be Ruthless in your Photo Editing. Your editing process should be blunt and to the point. If a shot is beautiful, but doesn't work in your essay, don't use it. However, don't edit images on the same day you shoot them. It'll be easier to be objective if you let a little time pass between shooting and editing.

Examples of Photo Essays

Day-in-the-life: These kinds of photo essays tell the story of a day-in-the-life of a particular subject. They can outline the day of a policeman or capture an artist's day in a studio or a musician or group rehearsing before a concert. A day-in-the-life photo series can be emotionally evocative, giving viewers an intimate glimpse into the world of other human beings.

Historic sites or local landmarks: Taking pictures of historic landmarks offers a variety of approaches—the use of interesting angles, lighting and weather conditions. The use of drones can also provide interesting perspectives.

Behind-the-scenes: Behind-the-scenes photo essays are great ways to capture what goes into events from start to finish. With this type of photo story, you can see the working parts of a production and how it all comes together.

Local events: Local events like fundraisers, art shows and festivals are great to document as a photo essay. Examples

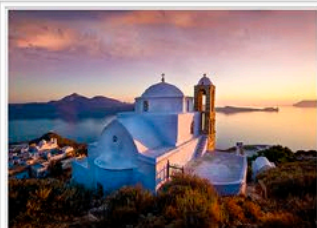
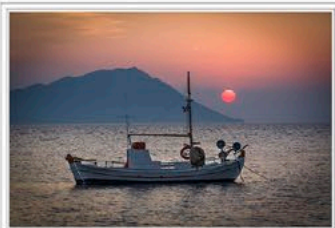
of images for a concert can include: a photo of a ticket stub, setting up the concert stage sound equipment, food stalls etc; people arriving and shots of audience both as wide angles and close-ups of them reacting to the performance, images of the performers from different angles, shots of any incidents such as St Johns staff attending to an audience member or security keeping people from the stage, the aftermath of the concert with an empty stadium with rubbish strewn around, pulling down the concert venue and so on.

Personal events: This photo essay can document a wedding, birthday party, family member's birthday or your passion for a particular hobby or sport.

Over the centuries, people have gathered around mealtimes, in local town squares, at family gatherings and many other places to share their stories. These stories have shaped the culture and folklore of people, races and communities. It is lamented in this era that maybe the art of storytelling has been lost in the digital world of the 10-second grab.

Perhaps there is some truth in this – but I also wonder if perhaps it's just the way we tell stories that has changed. A modern medium for storytelling in our time is digital photography with billions of photos taken each day.

Photographs can convey emotion, information, ideas, messages, feelings, passion and narrative, all of which are important elements of storytelling. Your images have the power to tell the world your story.



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THE CURVE

PHOTOSHOP EDITING

While using curves in Photoshop is not the most intuitive tool, understanding it is the key to so many of our editing steps that it should be avoided no longer!

By Peter Eastway.

Let's face it, using Photoshop is not as easy as using Lightroom. The Lightroom interface is full of sliders which make it very easy to apply edits – move the slider one way or the other and see what happens.

You can do the same in some of Photoshop's tools, of course, but then there's that one tool that perplexes all of us when we begin: the curve – or curves.

Now, who in their right mind would call a tool 'curves' when you start with a straight line? The mind boggles, but after you've used curves, you'll understand the nomenclature better.

The premise behind this article is to give you a head start with curves. Opposite is the curve dialogue panel with the important aspects indicated. It is confusing when you begin, but there are ways that will make its use more obvious (explained over the page).

Note, this is just an introduction. For instance, with an RGB file, you can work with a composite image (full colour), or you can work on individual channels (red, green and blue). I haven't touched on the latter here - I've just kept it simple.

Years ago, I gave a presentation to a university course on how I used curves. I explained that I move the curve 'until it looks good' on the screen. The lecturer was appalled that I worked this way, but there is method in my madness.

First of all, you need to have a good quality monitor, such as an EIZO. And your monitor should be regularly calibrated, so it is showing you the most accurate rendition of your photograph that is possible. Now when you adjust the curve, you can immediately see what's happening to your photo and, as I said, I move the curve until the photo looks good.

However, I'm also using the histogram to keep an eye on what I'm doing. I'm not working in a complete vacuum.

One little trick not discussed on the following pages is the

automatic curves that can be applied. They are called the Auto Color Correction Options and you need to hold down the Alt or Option keys when you click on the Auto button to reach them.

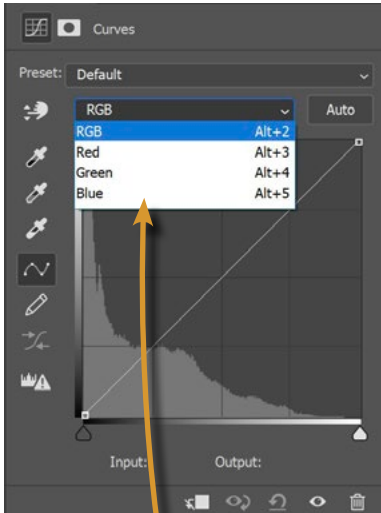
What Photoshop is doing here is stretching out the pixels in your image (their numerical values, not their size) so they fill up the available space between black and white. When you throw colours into the equation, there are several different models Photoshop offers, each with slightly different mathematics. I never worry about which one I use, I just test for the one that makes my photo look its best.

I use the Auto Color Correction Options a lot. Even if I'm predominantly processing my files in Lightroom or Capture One, after exporting a 16-bit TIFF, I will open it in Photoshop, add a curve adjustment layer and open the Auto Color Correction Options. It's amazing (or embarrassing) that what I think looks great in Lightroom or Capture One can be improved so much in Photoshop. Not always, but very often.

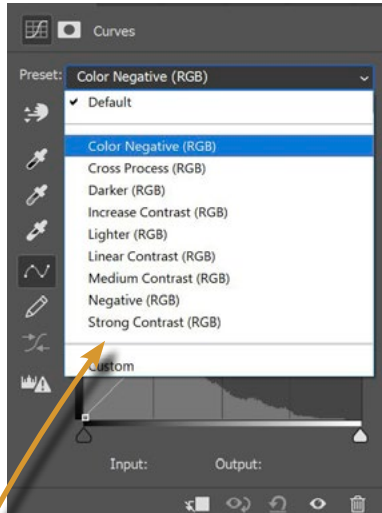
Note, I could do the same in Lightroom or Capture One. I certainly try to do the same, but when I bring the image into Photoshop, I'm amazed at how often it improves the overall colour and/or tonality. So I don't fight it, I just work this way.

I've been using curves for over 30 years and experience allows me to use it quickly and efficiently. I can do similar adjustments with the exposure and contrast sliders in Lightroom or Capture One, but the results are not quite the same – the sliders use generic settings, while in curves, I can customise the adjustments more precisely.

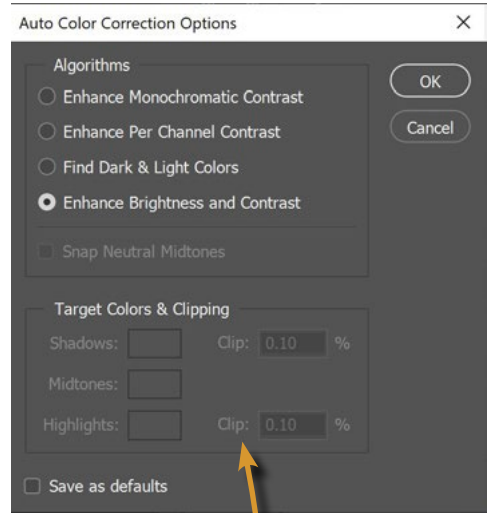
So, if you're interested in curves, grab a glass of wine or a cup of tea and sit down with some of your best photos and play. Time in front of the screen is how you will master curves – and this article will give you the head start you need.



While the curve dialog by default is a composite, it can use the colour channels separately.



The Preset drop-down panel can be a great place to start when learning how to use curves.



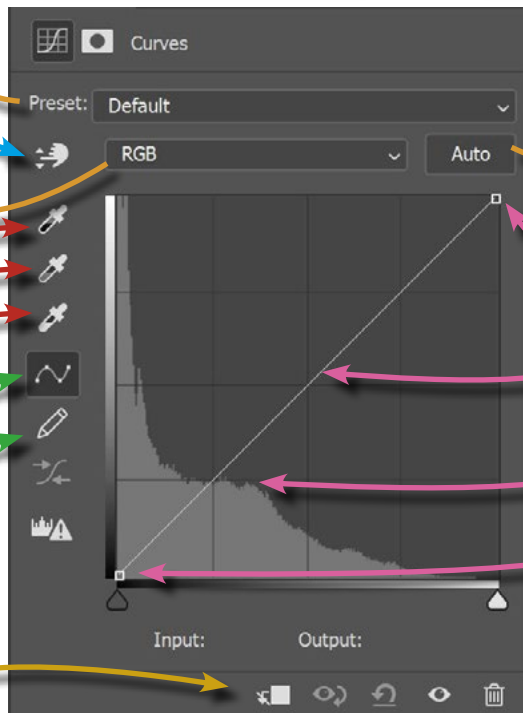
SECRET: Hold down the Alt/Opt key and click Auto – it opens up this powerful panel which offers seven different ways to automatically distribute your colours and tones. Choose one!

Use the hand tool to click on the image and drag to adjust the curve. Great for picking the right place of the curve to work with.

Use the black, grey and white pickers to click on the image and set the value, automatically redistributing the rest of the image. I don't use these often.

Keep the top icon active to alter the curve with edit points. The next icon lets you draw the curve, but I don't use this often.

I always use curves as an adjustment layer in Photoshop. These controls are primarily for the layers panel.



White Point

The Curve - which is a straight line to begin with.

Histogram shows the tonal values in the photo.

Black Point

The triangles are black and white point sliders - very useful!

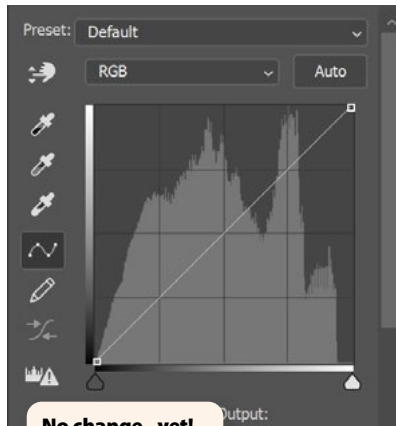
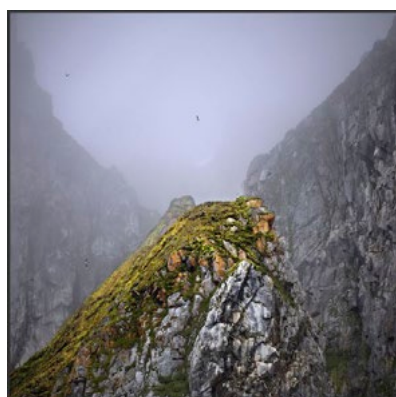
CURVE PRESETS

Photoshop can give you a hand to learn how to shape and apply curves.

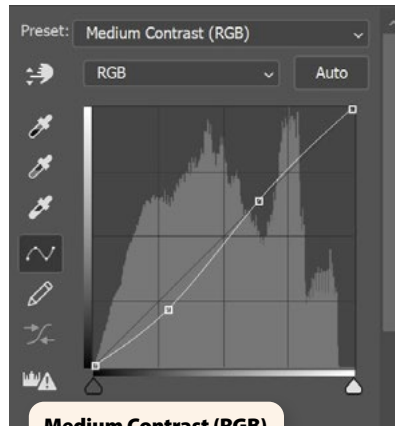
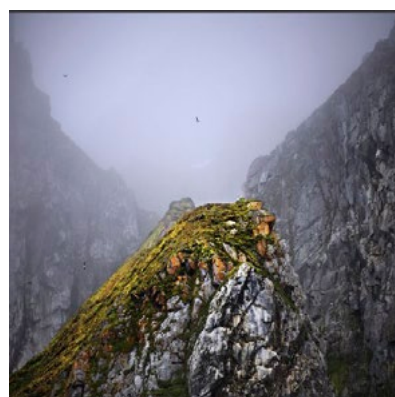
If you're new to curves, use the Preset drop-down menu to see how a curve can lighten, darken or add contrast to your photograph. There are also some other presets to experiment with, but lighten, darken and contrast (there are three flavours of contrast) are the most common adjustments I use when editing a photograph.

When you look at the curves associated with the changes, note that usually there are only one, two or three 'edit points'. Although you can have up to 16 edit points, rarely will you have more than five and usually one to three will do it.

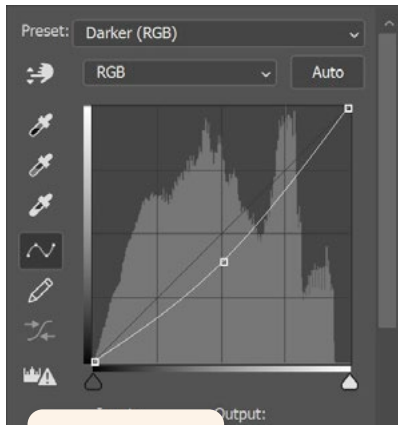
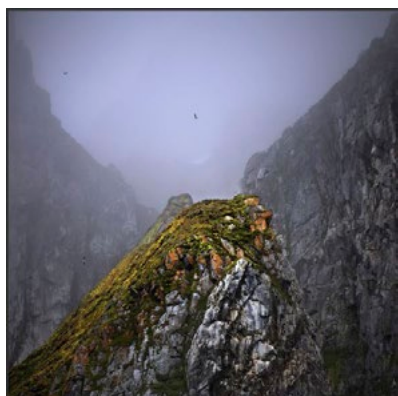
To add an edit point, click on the straight line, then click and move the point to change the shape of the straight line into a curve. You can adjust the presets as well.



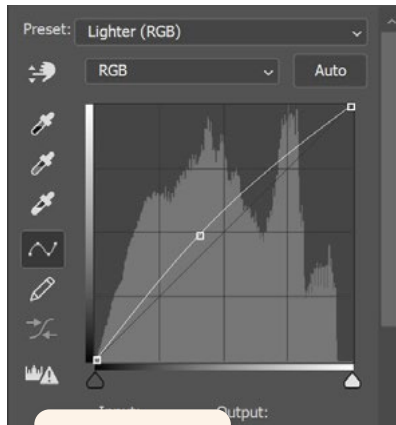
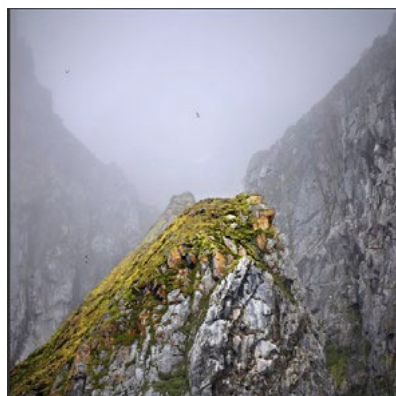
No change - yet!



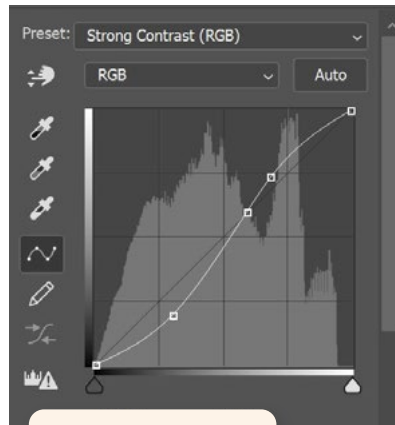
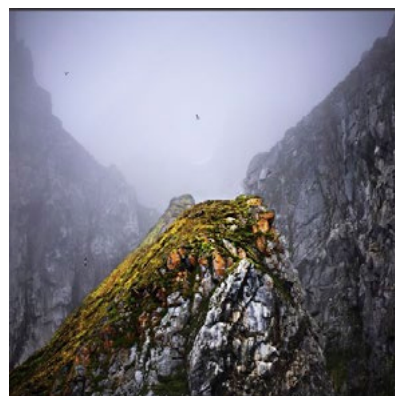
Medium Contrast (RGB)



Darker (RGB)



Lighter (RGB)



Strong Contrast (RGB)

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EDITING CONTRAST WITH A CURVE

Let’s follow the process of making a quick curve adjustment.

Let’s assume we want to change the contrast in our photograph.

To increase contrast, we need to steepen the curve line. The easiest way to do this is to grab the white point (top right) and move it to the left, then grab the black point (bottom left) and move it to the right. See the curve example on the right and notice how the contrast has been increased in the image.

However, also notice what has happened to the blacks and whites: they have both been clipped, meaning areas are now pure white and pure black. That’s not the outcome we want in this image.

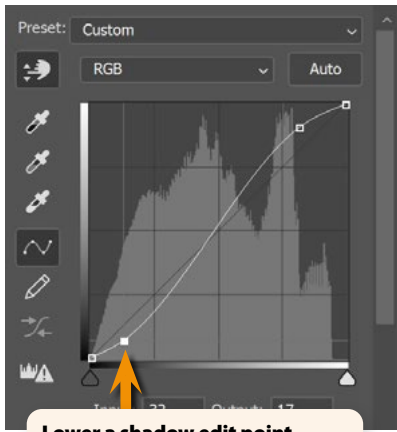
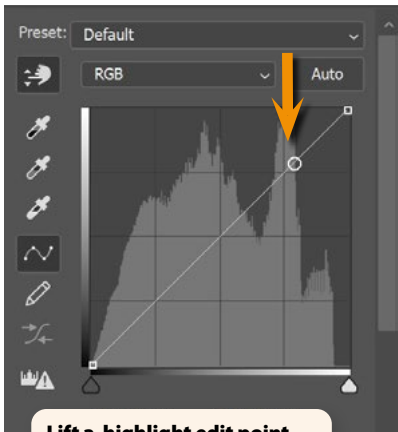
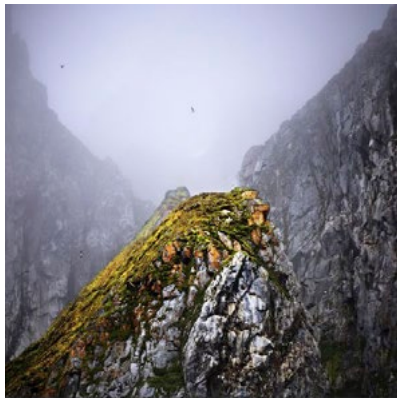
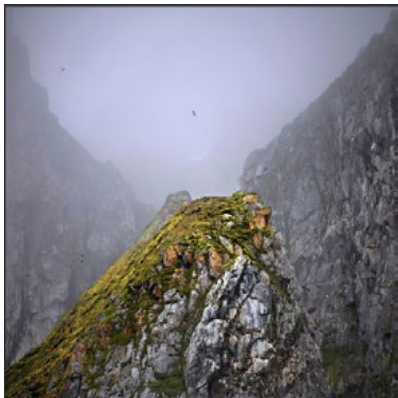
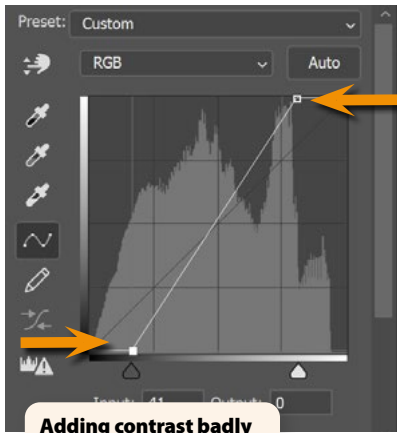
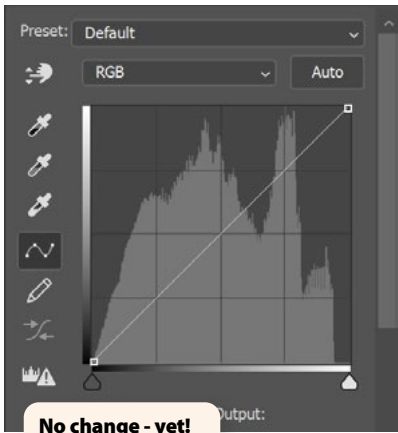
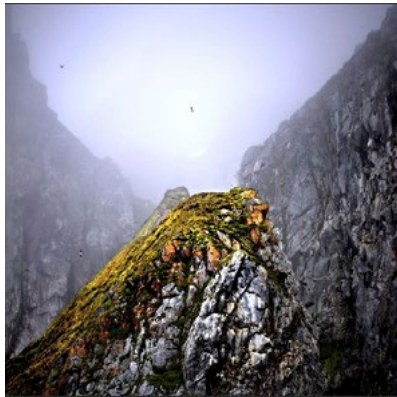
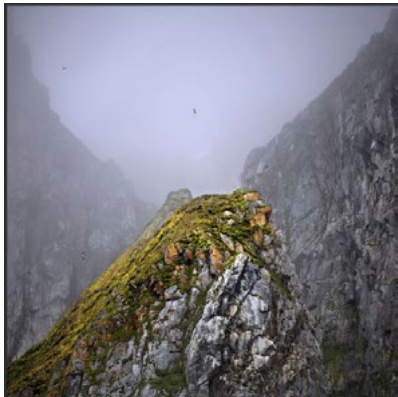
We need to be more subtle in our approach, so let’s go back to our starting point and leave the white and black points where they are.

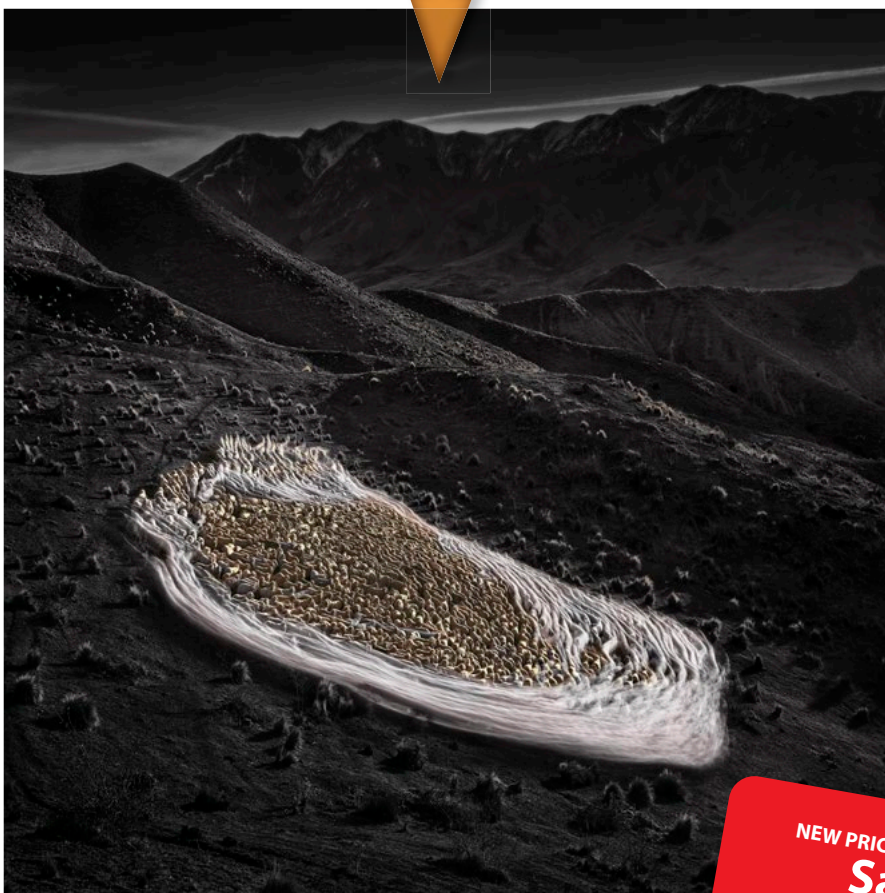
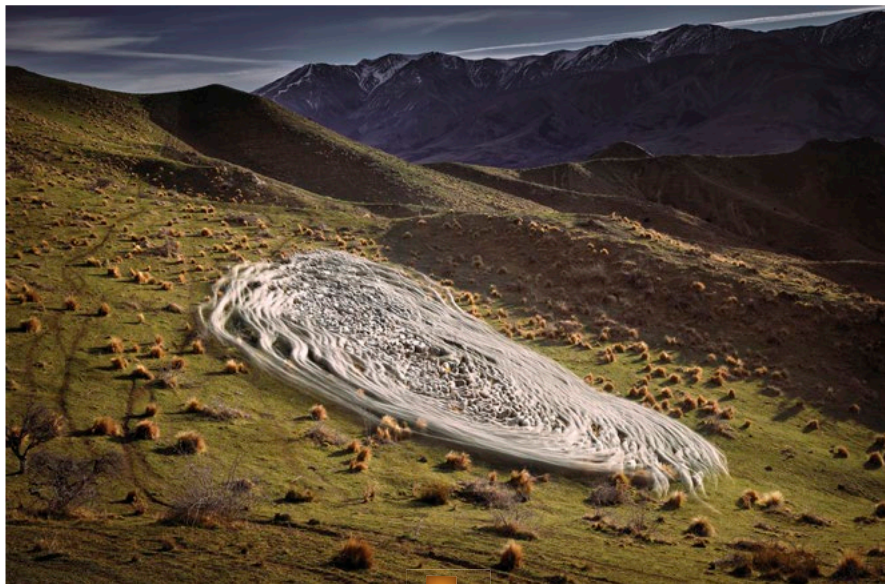
Click on the hand icon and move its icon over the photo to a light tone, say in the sky. You will see a white circle on the curve line, indicating where on the curve the pixels under your cursor sit. Click once and an edit point is added to the curve line. Click on the edit point and drag it upwards to lighten the photograph.

If the hand icon is still active, move it over a dark area in the photograph and click again. A second edit point is added. Click on this edit point and drag it downwards to darken the photograph.

With these two edit points, what you’ll notice is the light tones are lighter, the dark tones darker and there is more contrast. You’ll also notice the curve line between the two edit points is steeper than the 45-degree starting line and that the top and tail of the curve line flatten out. This is a classic ‘S’ shape curve and what we’re generally looking for when changing contrast.

How far do you push the edit points? Until the photograph looks good on your screen – that’s why you need a good quality monitor.





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EVERY PHOTO IS DIFFERENT

Every photo needs a slightly different approach when editing with a curve.

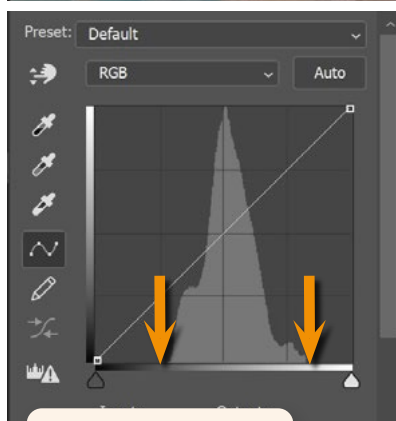
Note the histogram underneath this photo – there are no blacks and no whites because of the very low contrast. Here’s one way to edit it.

First bring the black and white points in to the edges of the histogram. This gives a good range of tones.

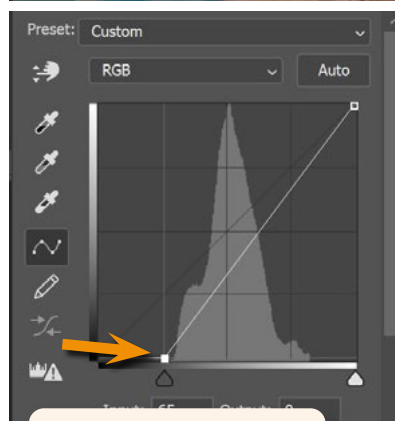
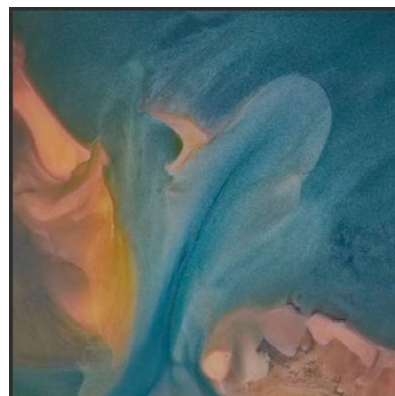
Next, change the overall lightness of the image by adding an edit point in the mid tone-highlight area and lifting it upwards. Great.

Finally, let’s add more contrast and give the image a ‘grounding’ by intentionally clipping the blacks. Use the black point triangle and move it further to the right. This gives the edit more drama and impact.

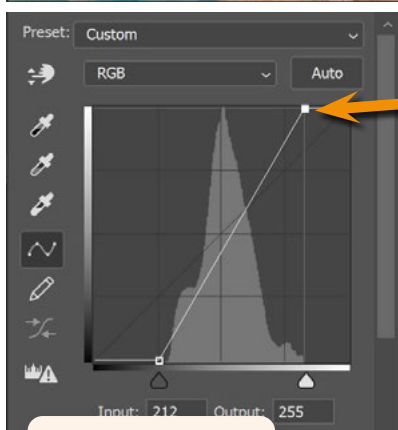
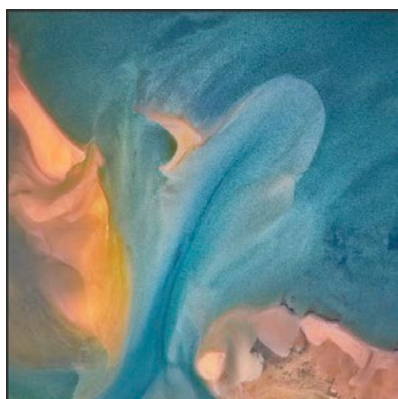
The trick to using curves is to experiment and play – see what happens.



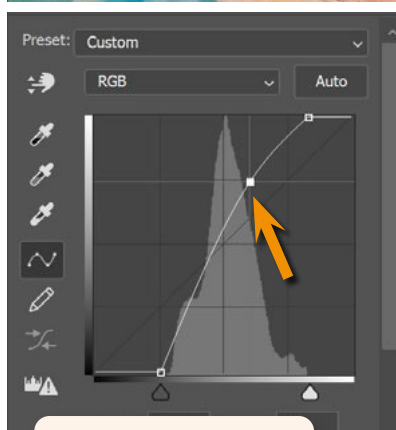
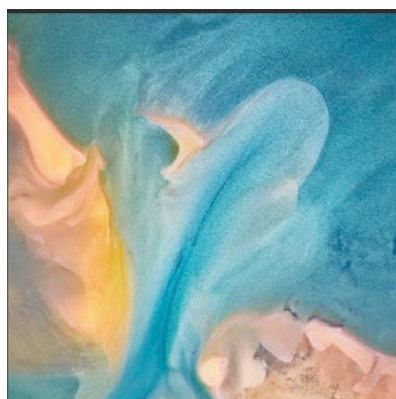
Note the histogram



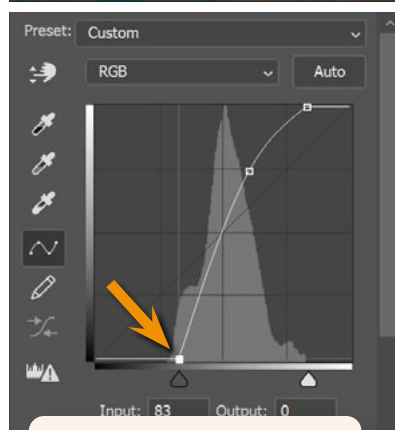
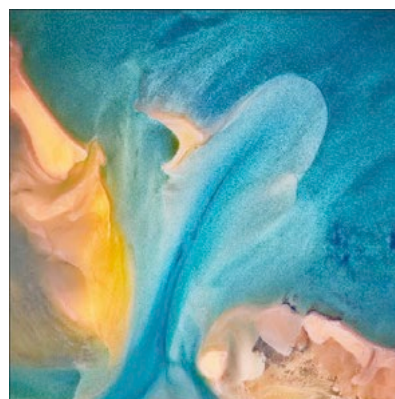
Move black point



Move white point



Lighten image overall



Intentionally clip black point

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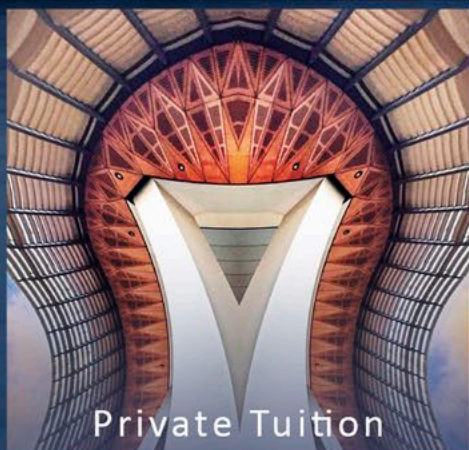
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