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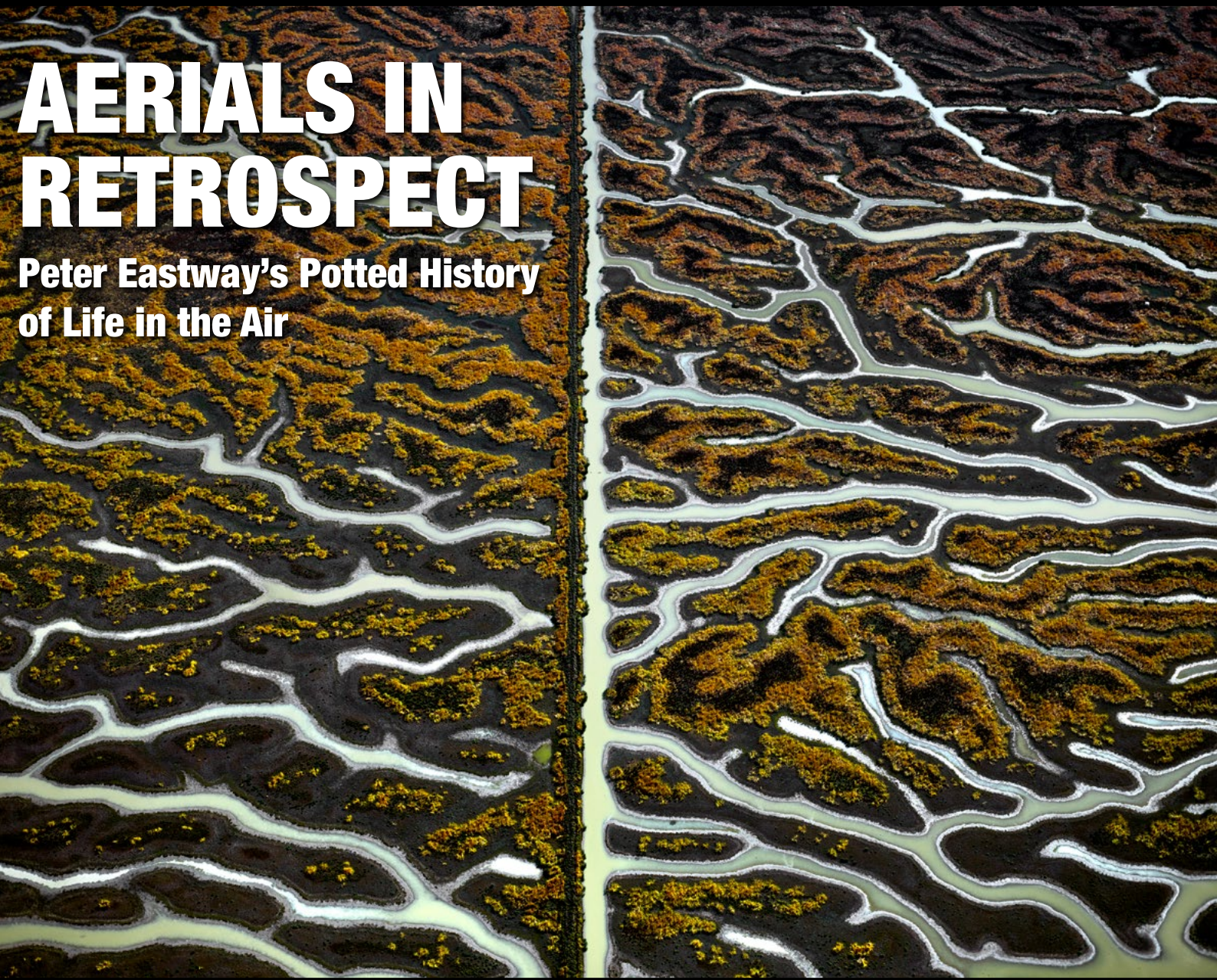
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ISSUE 119
AUTUMN 2025

Better Photography

AERIALS IN RETROSPECT

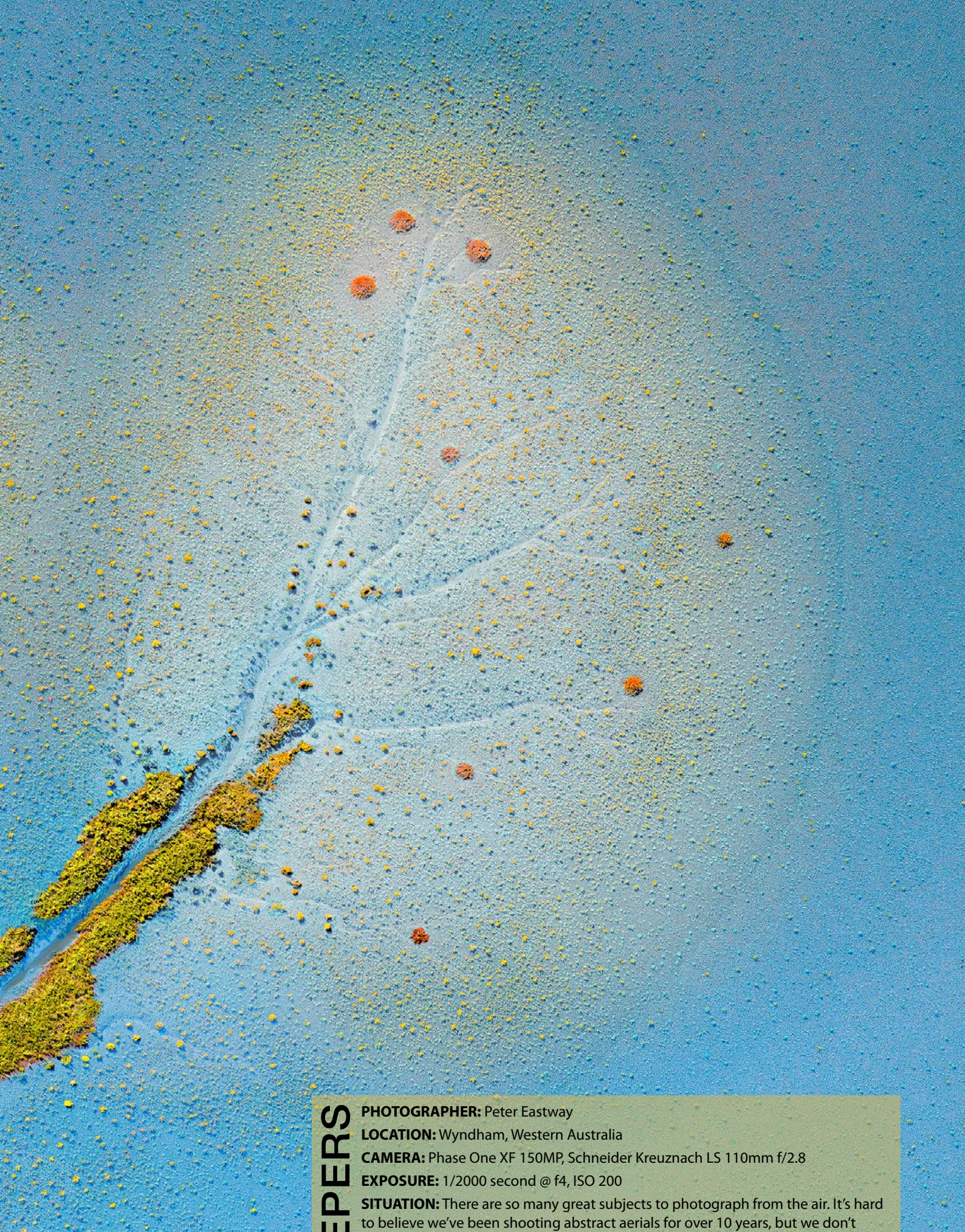
Peter Eastway's Potted History
of Life in the Air



MARCUS BELL'S BEACH SCENES • BARBARA BROWN'S VENICE ABSTRACTS

CHRISTIAN FLETCHER GOES WEST • MURRAY WHITE – DO TITLES MATTER?





KEEPERS

PHOTOGRAPHER: Peter Eastway

LOCATION: Wyndham, Western Australia

CAMERA: Phase One XF 150MP, Schneider Kreuznach LS 110mm f/2.8

EXPOSURE: 1/2000 second @ f4, ISO 200

SITUATION: There are so many great subjects to photograph from the air. It's hard to believe we've been shooting abstract aerials for over 10 years, but we don't seem to be getting sick of them. This image has been a bit of a struggle to get just the right amount of detail and clarity. It should look just fine in the magazine, the issue was enlarging it to 1.5 metres across. The fine detail of the drying sand flats is similar in scale to the pixel pitch of the sensor and that caused a few problems.

WILL YOU BE OUR PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR?

We have four categories to enter and each category offers a \$750 first prize, but to win the \$2000 'Photographer of the Year' Award, we will be judging your top four entries!

This is the only amateur photo competition in the world judged each year by the same three Grand Masters of Photography, providing a level of consistency not found anywhere else!

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Visit www.betterphotographyphotocomp.com for more information. Entry is only \$20 per image or 5 entries for just \$80.

PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR



Three Grand Master Judges

- Peter Eastway, AIPP Grand Master of Photography
- Tony Hewitt, AIPP Grand Master of Photography
- David Oliver, AIPP Grand Master of Photography

2024 Photographer of the Year:
Elizabeth Storms



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- PLUS a brief judge's comment
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2025

Four Categories:

- 1. Emotive Portraits**
- 2. Classic Landscapes**
- 3. Revealing Nature**
- 4. Your Choice Open**

HOW TO ENTER

1. The Better Photography Magazine Photographer of the Year 2025 Award is open to all non-professional photographers. A non-professional photographer does not work full-time as a photographer and has earned less than AUS \$10,000 in the past 12 months from photography.

2. Entrants retain full copyright of their images.

3. You may enter as many times as you wish. Entry is AUS \$20 (approx US \$15) per entry. There is an Early Bird discount of one free entry for every four paid entries, up until one week before the final closing date (23 June 2025) – so blocks of five entries for \$80.

4. There are four categories: Emotive Portraits, Classic Landscapes, Revealing Nature and 'Your Choice Open'. You can enter in one or more categories.

5. The judges are looking for a professional standard of presentation and a highly creative approach or treatment.

6. The images presented for judging must be photographic in origin and any post-production must be the work of the entrant. AI images and AI-generated components are not allowed. We want to see YOUR work!

7. To ensure we have recent work, entries must be from original exposures made on or after 1 January 2025. Please do not remove the EXIF data from your entry files as this may invalidate your entry.

8. Entry is online only at:
www.betterphotographyphotocomp.com.

9. To enter online, you will need to register. Competition winners may be asked to prove their non-professional status and provide raw files to show no generative AI has been used.

10. The judging process is as follows:
• Each judge will score each Entry out of 100 and the average will be presented as a score out of 100.

11. Only one entry is required to win a Category. However, to win the overall Photographer of the Year, an Entrant will need to have entered a minimum of four entries to make a 'Portfolio'. A Portfolio comprises the four highest scoring entries by an Entrant, no matter how many entries an Entrant submitted or how many categories.

12. The 5 Portfolios with the highest aggregates will be judged separately. The judges will vote for the Portfolio that best represents the Better Photography Magazine Photographer of the Year. This will be a process of consultation and discussion.

13. For each Category, the 5 entries with the highest score will be judged a second time to determine the Category winner. This will also be a process of consultation and discussion and the Photographer of the Year is ineligible to win a category.

14. Prizes: AUS \$2000 for the Photographer of the Year. AUS \$750 for each Category winner. Total prize money:

AUS \$5000. The Photographer of the Year will also have a feature article in *Better Photography* magazine.

15. By entering this competition, the Entrant (copyright owner) grants to *Better Photography* magazine and associated companies (the 'Organisers') the right to reproduce in print and online any image submitted for publicity or educational purposes in Australia and overseas.

16. If necessary, it is the Entrant's responsibility to obtain any and all permissions, including the model releases and/or copyright owner's permission if required, to have the images judged and possibly displayed and published.

17. The Organisers will interpret the application of these rules and make decisions on any questions not specifically covered by them. No correspondence will be entered into regarding any decision.

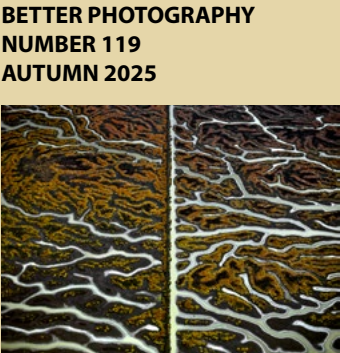
18. Entries will be accepted online from 15 April to 30 June 2025.

19. Enquiries concerning the competition can be directed to kim@betterphotography.com.

20. The results will be published online and in *Better Photography* magazine from 31 July 2025.

21. This is a summary of the rules. The complete rules can be found with the competition entry details at:
www.betterphotographyphotocomp.com.

Enter at: www.betterphotographyphotocomp.com



Cover photo by Peter Eastway.
See article on page 60.

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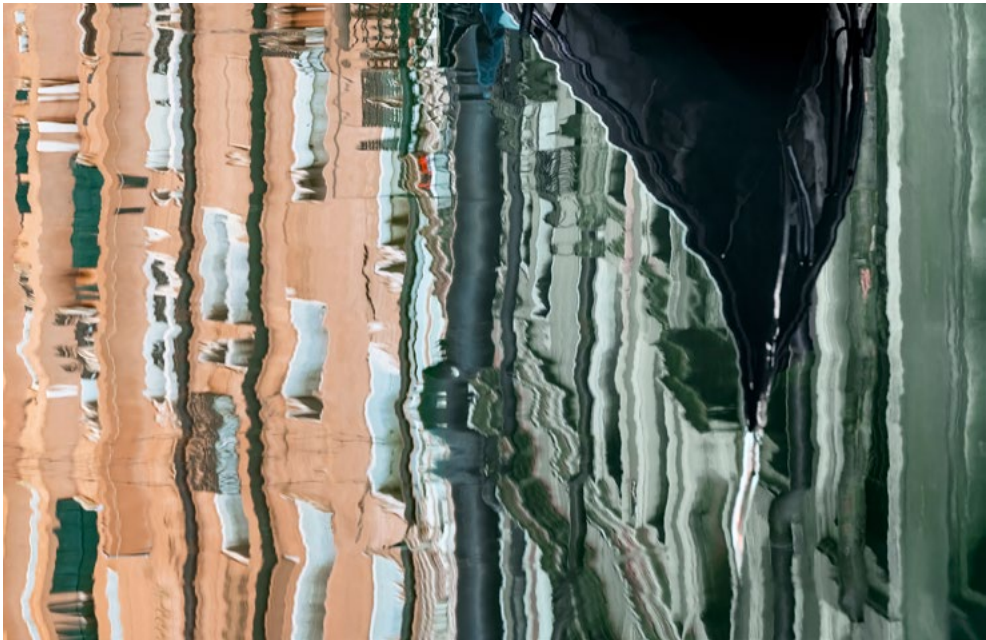


Photo by Barbara Brown. See article on page 36.



Photo by Christian Fletcher. See article on page 44.

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There are many truisms in photography that are, well, perhaps not quite true! Len Metcalf questions how we approach our photography.

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Having reported on the original Radiant Photo in the last issue, we figured we should mention that a new AI version is now available. Is it for you?

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Perhaps even more than a photographer, Ansel Adams was an environmental crusader, but what would he think about where we are in 2025?

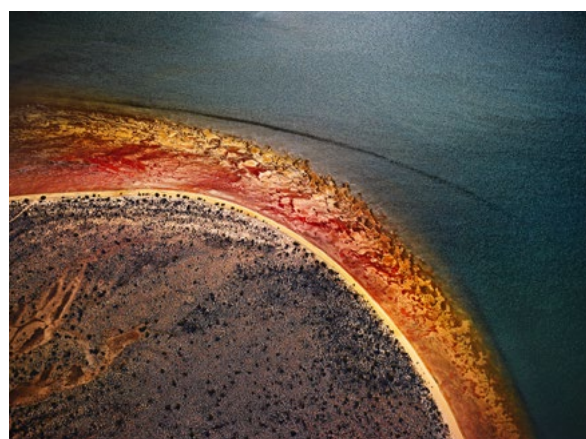


Photo by Peter Eastway. See article on page 60.

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How do exhibitions start? Why do photographers exhibit their work? We chat to Grand Master of Photography Marcus Bell about his work and his latest exhibition.

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How would you photograph one of the most photographed tourist destinations on Earth? Barbara Brown guides us through her shoot around the watery isle and shares an approach you can take to any subject.

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Christian Fletcher's West is his second volume on the state he loves best, Western Australia. And his work just keeps getting better and better.

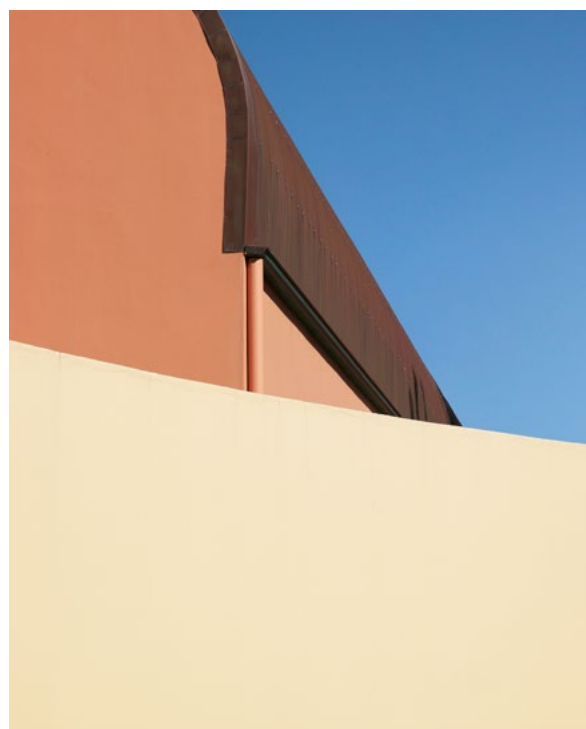


Photo by Joshua McGuigan. See article on page 54.

Canon RF 24mm f1.4L VCM

Later in the magazine we discuss different lenses – lenses that create photos with a difference.

One of the suggestions is called a 'wide-aperture' lens, meaning the maximum aperture is wider than f2.8 which can produce very shallow depth-of-field. This is great for portraiture (among other things, of course).

The classic wide-aperture lens is a 50mm f1.0, but these are always expensive and sometimes quite large. It is more usual to look for an f1.2 or f1.4 50mm lens, the latter being relatively compact. Now a 50mm f1.4 has beautifully shallow depth-of-field, but one of the reasons the bokeh is so good is the focal length – the longer the focal length, the shallower the depth-of-field. So what happens with a 24mm ultra wide-angle lens when it shoots at f1.4?

The results are still remarkable and the softness, while not as powerful, remains delightful. And it's not just stills photographers who will like a 24mm f1.4 lens – they have been popular with cinema and video professionals for years.

Canon's new RF 24mm f/1.4L VCM has fast and quiet autofocus, the latter ideal for video shooting, of course. It has an electronic floating focus system with VCM (Voice Coil Motor) and Nano USM driving two focusing groups independently. The high-thrust VCM actuates the heavy focusing lens group, while the compact, energy-saving Nano USM actuates the lightweight floating lens to deliver fast, reliable and quiet autofocus.

Designed for full-frame sensors, the RF 24mm has a minimum focusing distance of 24 cm and weighs 515 g, so a little heavier than some 24mm lenses, but look at that magnificent maximum aperture! Price is around AUS \$2600.



Fujifilm XF 500mm F5.6 R LM OIS WR

When is a 500mm lens more than 500mm? When you attach it to a smaller sensor camera! The new Fujinon XF 500mm f5.6 R LM OIS WR super-telephoto for Fujifilm's X (APS-C size) cameras offers the full-frame equivalent of 762 mm and weighs just 1335 grams.

Do you want more? The 500mm can also be used with Fujinon's Teleconverter XF1.4X TC WR, turning the 700mm lens into the full-frame equivalent of 1067mm. And you'll still be able to hand-hold the lens at these magnifications thanks to a powerful 5.5-stop optical image stabilisation mechanism.

The use of an inner focus system reduces the size and weight of the lens and by driving the focus group with a high-speed linear motor, the lens/camera combination achieves fast and silent AF with a minimum time of approximately 0.33 second. Even though shooting in the super-telephoto range, where precise focusing is required, the subject can be captured quickly and accurately.

A Focus Preset function allows the focus setting to be instantly shifted to a preset position with the SET button. And there's a useful focus limiter function that limits the range of the lens drive when focusing, so you don't waste time looking for subjects at closer distances than five metres.

Although super-telephoto lenses tend to have a heavy front lens element, this new lens with its optimum design and smaller f5.6 aperture is comfortable to hand-hold – providing low-burden, super-telephoto photography, as Fujifilm describes it!

The lens barrel is sealed in 20 places to make it dustproof, drip-proof and resistant to temperatures as low as -10°. In addition, the front element of the lens is coated with a fluorine coating to repel water and stains. Approximate price is AUS \$5399.



Home > Camera Lenses > Mirrorless Lenses > Sigma 28-105mm f/2.8 DG DN Art Lens for L-Mount

Sigma 28-105mm f/2.8 DG DN Art Lens for L-Mount

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Mirrorless Lenses

Leica L Mount

Telephoto Lenses

Wide Angle Lenses

Zoom Lenses



28-105mm F2.8 DG DN | Art

Lens Construction	Number of Diaphragm Blades	Minimum Aperture	Minimum Focusing Distance
18 elements in 13 groups	12 Blades	F22	40 cm/ 15.8 in.
Maximum Magnification Ratio	Filter Size	Dimensions	Weight
1:3.1	ø 82 mm	ø 87.8 mm × 157.9 mm 3.5 in. × 6.2 in.	995 g/ 35.1 oz.
Camera Type	Mirrorless		
Corresponding Mount	L-Mount , Sony E-mount		
Sensor Format	Full-frame [DG]		

*Values are for L-Mount

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Sony FE 28-70mm F2 GM

At first glance, you might see the Sony FE 28-70mm F2 GM as just another mid-range zoom. Sure, the GM designation suggests that it rivals prime lens quality, but many zooms do these days. So what's the point? It's the constant maximum aperture of f2.0. If you're looking for a lens with something that's a little different, the shallow depth-of-field that can be achieved, especially at the 70mm end, could do it for you!

Sony suggests that this is an ideal portrait lens and we tend to agree. Whether you're shooting groups in tight situations or a single head and shoulders, the 28-70mm focal length range is ideal.

Technically, the zoom includes three XA (extreme aspherical) elements, which Sony claims ensure high corner-to-corner resolution, even at f2 and throughout the zoom range. One ED (extra-low dispersion) and three Super ED elements reduce chromatic aberration, Nano AR Coating II cuts flare/ghosting, floating focus boosts close-focus resolution – and we've already mentioned the shallow depth-of-field, also called bokeh.

The lens measures 92.9x139.8 mm and weighs 918 g, so it's not as light as some zooms and that will be because of the f2 design needing physically larger lens elements. Four XD (extreme dynamic) linear motors and custom algorithms provide reliable focus tracking and a very quick response, essential in professional situations such as weddings and sports events. And Sony has professionals in mind, with this lens being fully compatible with the 120 fps burst capability of the a9 III.

The torque on the zoom ring can be customised, the aperture ring has a choice of clicks or no clicks and there are two customisable focus hold buttons. The lens has dust and moisture seals and fluorine coating on the front lens element repels moisture and contaminants.

Sony prices the lens at \$5299 (as at January 2025), but we've seen online prices for up to \$1000 less, so shop around!



Nikkor Z 50mm f1.4

One of the best travel lenses you can own is a small 50mm f1.4, so Nikon's new Z lens should be in big demand! The soft and large bokeh (blurred background) achieved at the f1.4 maximum aperture emphasises the main subject, making scenes appear more three-dimensional. In contrast, stopping down the aperture enables the sharp, crisp rendering of details and textures. In fact, this single lens allows users to enjoy photographing a wide range of scenes and subjects, from portraits to landscapes.

It was also designed with video recording in mind. For example, focus breathing (slight changes in framing magnification) is effectively suppressed, making it ideal for those looking to take on the challenge of video recording.

The standard 50mm angle-of-view is very similar to the magnification of the human eye and it has a minimum focus distance of 0.37 m, so you can get close to your subject when needed. In addition to the high optical performance, the Nikkor Z 50mm f1.4 is compact and lightweight, with a total length of 86.5 mm and a weight of 420 g. Plus, it is thoroughly dust- and drip-resistant, making it highly portable and ideal for travel photography – and everyday use too! RRP is AUS \$929.

So, what about the other 50mm lenses like the 50mm f1.2? Well, the Nikkor f1.2 is three times more expensive because that extra half a stop in a lens requires a lot of glass and precision manufacturing. There's no doubt the bokeh at f1.2 is smoother, but at 1090 g, it's a big weight to carry around on a travel trip – and hence why the f1.4 lens will always have a place.



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A4

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Sigma 28-105mm F2.8 DG DN

There was a time when Sigma (and Tamron and Tokina) were considered second tier manufacturers, but very often these guys are making lenses for some of the camera manufacturers too. However, they are proud companies and no doubt Sigma is very pleased with its new 28-105mm F2.8 DG DN Art lens.

The lens covers several popular focal lengths from 28mm to 105mm, including the very popular 85mm focal length for portraiture, all with an f2.8 constant aperture.

The lens incorporates HLA (High-response Linear Actuator) autofocus and excellent image quality as expected now of Sigma's Art line series. There's a lockable aperture ring with a click/declick function, as well as two AFL buttons and a zoom lock switch. Additionally, the dust- and splash-resistant design and water- and oil-repellent coating on the front element make it suitable for shooting in inclement weather.

A minimum focusing distance of 15.8 inches (40 cm) at all focal lengths is very useful for a general purpose lens like this, providing a maximum magnification ratio of 1:3.1 at the telephoto end. And inside the lens, a rounded twelve-blade diaphragm provides a soft bokeh while keeping the lens as small as possible.

Measures have been taken to minimise changes in optical performance due to differences in zoom and focus positions, including the use of a difficult-to-process, large-diameter FLD glass to suppress aberrations. In addition, the use of 5 aspherical lens elements has enabled the lens to achieve both a wide zoom range of 28mm to 105mm and a large aperture of f2.8, while reducing its overall size.

The lens weighs 907 g, with the lens barrel near the mount being made of magnesium rather than aluminum, ensuring rigidity while reducing the weight of these parts alone by two-thirds. The lens will retail for around AU\$2600 and is currently available for the Sony E-mount and L-Mount.



Leica Vario-Elmarit-SL 70–200mm f2.8 ASPH

Leica lenses are not cheap. In fact, they are among the most expensive you can buy, but with origins back to 1869, there must be something in them. And there's no doubt there is – the sharpness and clarity of Leica glass is legendary and the multicoating seems to enhance both colour and contrast to just the right degree!

And while much of its lens reputation is based on the M-series rangefinder lenses, there's no doubting the SL lenses for the full-frame mirrorless camera match them. The latest addition to the portfolio is a Vario-Elmarit-SL 70–200mm f2.8 ASPH – which along with the Super-Vario-Elmarit-SL 14–24mm f2.8 ASPH and the Vario-Elmarit-SL 24–70mm f2.8 ASPH, completes the essential zoom 'trinity' that most professional photographers rely on.

As expected with these lenses, it has an f2.8 constant maximum aperture plus image stabilisation is built-in, making it very serviceable for subjects such as weddings, sport and nature.

The lens comprises 20 elements in 15 groups, including three elements with aspherical surfaces, to ensure razor-sharp, detailed images, right into the corners of the image and at all focal lengths. In addition, the internal focusing mechanism means the lens's external dimensions don't change as you zoom in and out.

Along with the 70-200mm lens, Leica is also launching its second telephoto extender, the Leica Extender L 2.0x. Compatible with both the new 70-200mm f2.8 and the existing 100-400mm f5-6.3, the extender increases the maximum reach of Leica's SL lenses to 800mm on a full-frame sensor and 1200mm when using the camera in APS mode. Of course, as is the case with any 2x tele extender, you will sacrifice 2 stops of aperture, but that's easily fixed with a push of your ISO.

Price? The 70-200mm is around AU\$5490 and the 2x extender, \$1650.



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Lens Selection

What is the Next Lens You Should Buy?

Most cameras of substance (a mirrorless or DSLR) are purchased with a versatile zoom lens, so the user has immediate access to both wide and tele focal lengths. But if everyone has one, it also means that more and more photographs are made much the same way. Is this a good thing?

To stand out from the crowd today, photographers need to go further than their standard zoom and investigate ultra wide-angles and super telephotos to capture viewpoints with a difference. They may also look for unusual optics like macro lenses, perspective control lenses and lenses with very wide maximum apertures.

Zoom or Prime?

In the 'old days', zoom lenses weren't as good as 'prime' lenses (prime lenses being single focal length lenses). Today, that's not necessarily the case and zooms can be sensational when it comes to image quality; certainly in the middle of the frame.

Where zooms can fall down is with barrel and pin-cushion distortion, meaning straight lines are slightly curved. This doesn't usually worry a landscape or portrait photographer, but could concern a travel or architectural photographer, or someone copying stamps and artworks. Of course, these issues can be corrected when processing your raw file using lens profiles.

So, whether you're buying a prime or a zoom really doesn't matter. Our advice is to buy a lens that suits what you want to use it for and we're pretty sure you'll be happy with the results. There are few lemons on the market these days.

What Brand Do I Buy?

Your brand of camera will determine the brand of lens to a certain extent. You can't put Canon lenses on Nikon cameras, for example, but independent lens makers like Tamron, Tokina, Sigma, Schneider and Zeiss make lenses that fit Canon and Nikon, Fujifilm, Sony and Pentax cameras as well.

How Much Do I Spend?

As with cameras, the more you spend on a lens, generally the higher the quality. And as with all technology, as it matures, the price comes down.

Many of the lenses we buy today are much less expensive than a decade ago and/or the quality we are getting is much higher. One of the biggest changes in quality has to do with the mirrorless camera's design (which most of us are using);

it's possible to produce better quality lenses for a mirrorless camera than a DSLR. While the differences might be slight and not noticed by some users, there's no doubt that when combined with technological advancements, most lenses today are superior to their predecessors.

Usually the 'how much do I spend' question is a three-way choice:

- the basic lens made by your camera manufacturer;
- an alternative lens made by an independent lens maker; or
- the advanced lens made by your camera manufacturer.

And generally, but not always, these three choices are in order of price and quality (sometimes the independent lenses are every bit as good as the camera manufacturers' optics).

One exception to this rule are the Zeiss and Schneider lenses because they are usually as or more expensive than the camera manufacturers' lenses and often are manual focus only.

Another generalism: if you're just producing photographs for social media and photo books, you may not notice the difference in image quality between a cheaper lens and its expensive pro alternative. The main differences will be found in the corners of the image but there is a good chance that, since your subject is usually in the centre of the frame, the quality issues will simply not be noticed. So if you're on a budget, don't worry: the lens manufacturers are really looking after you. And if you have a healthy budget, what fun you will have!

FOCAL LENGTH COMPARISON

Different camera formats use different lens focal lengths to describe the same angle-of-view. Here's a quick (approximate) guide to help you handle the comparison.

Angle-of-View	Micro 4/3	APS-C	Full-Frame
<i>E.g.</i>	<i>Olympus Panasonic</i>	<i>Nikon, Canon Sony, Fuji, Pentax</i>	<i>Nikon, Canon, Sony</i>
100°	9mm	11mm	18mm
94°	10mm	12mm	20mm
90°	11mm	13mm	21mm
80°	12mm	16mm	25mm
74°	14mm	17mm	28mm
62°	17mm	22mm	35mm
56°	20mm	25mm	40mm
50°	22mm	28mm	45mm
46°	25mm	31mm	50mm
28°	42mm	53mm	85mm
24°	50mm	62mm	100mm
21°	60mm	75mm	120mm
18°	67mm	84mm	135mm
14°	90mm	112mm	180mm
12°	105mm	131mm	210mm
8.5°	150mm	188mm	300mm
6°	200mm	250mm	400mm
2.5°	500mm	625mm	1000mm





**Leica Noctilux 50mm f0.95 ASPH –
owning this is showing off!**



**Canon RF 85mm f1.2L USM –
a big lens but so beautiful!**



**Nikkor Z 135mm f1.8 S Plena –
the professionals will be jealous!**

Wide-Aperture

The Secret to Great Portraiture – and More!

How do photographers get such beautifully blurred backgrounds in their portraits, while the subject itself is crisp and sharp?

Depth-of-field

The answer is limited or shallow depth-of-field.

A lens focuses only on one distance, but given the limitations of human eyesight, it appears that a range of distances is in focus. For instance, although you may focus on a person at two metres, the photo may 'appear' to be sharp from one metre to three metres.

This extended area of 'in focus' is called depth-of-field. Landscape photographers want lots of depth-of-field so everything in the photograph appears sharp. Portrait photographers often desire the opposite: they want shallow depth-of-field so only their subject is in focus, while the background and foreground are blurred and don't compete visually with the main subject.

Controlling Depth-of-field

The blurred effect resulting from shallow depth-of-field is called 'bokeh' and depending on the design of your lens and the aperture you select, the character of the bokeh can vary from weak to strong and with different flavours.

There are three main factors affecting depth-of-field:

- **The aperture** – the wider the aperture, the shallower the depth-of-field;
- **The focal length** – the longer the focal length, the shallower the depth-of-field;
- **The focusing distance** – the closer you are to your subject, the shallower the depth-of-field.

For portraiture, you normally want to work with 35mm to 100mm lenses and your camera to subject distance can be restricted by the framing you want to achieve, so the most practical way to create shallow depth-of-field is to use a lens with a very wide aperture.

Lens Options

The most famous of these lenses is the 50mm Leica Noctilux, an f1.0 lens which is currently incarnated as a f0.95 lens. The depth-of-field at f0.95 (the maximum aperture, meaning the widest aperture, and also called 'wide open') is incredibly shallow and the bokeh very blurred and beautiful. Part of this effect results from the glass in the lens and the shape of the diaphragm formed by the iris blades – there is a whole science surrounding this.

However, what we need to concentrate on is obtaining a lens that works like the Noctilux on our camera. Fortunately, all the camera manufacturers provide a wide-aperture standard lens. For a full-frame camera, it would be a 50mm f1.8, f1.4 or f1.2. There is not much difference in the depth-of-field between these apertures, but there can be a lot of difference in the price. If in doubt, start with the f1.8 or f1.4 lens to see if you enjoy using the lens as they are very affordable.

For APS-C sensor DSLRs, you may prefer to use a 35mm f1.4 lens, while Micro Four-Thirds cameras have a 25mm f1.4. You can also find lenses from 24mm to 135mm with very wide apertures.

Opposite: Worker, Tea Plantation, Uganda

The photograph of a tea picker was shot with a Fujinon 56mm f1.2 lens at f1.2. Notice how even her left shoulder is beginning to blur, while the background remains recognisable but indistinct.





**Fuji XF 8-16mm f/2.8 R LM WR –
A stellar zoom for the APS-C format.**



**Sony FE 12-24mm F2.8 G –
A full-frame ultra wide-angle.**



**Samyang 12mm f2.0 for APS-C format –
manual focus but quality is great!**

Ultra Wide-Angle

For an Unbeatable Sense of Depth and Space

An ultra wide-angle lens can capture simply stunning photographs if you use it creatively.

When you think about what a wide-angle lens does, it's not really designed to create impact with distant subjects. Photographers who use a wide-angle to capture an expansive landscape can be disappointed. To fit everything in, the lens needs to make everything smaller, so huge mountain ranges become little hills, no more than bumps on the horizon!

However, what a wide-angle and an ultra wide-angle can do is create a sense of depth. By including the foreground or a huge expanse of sky, they give the viewer a lot of ground to cover and, because distant objects are so quickly reduced in size, you feel as though you can move into the image a long way. The lenses are said to provide 'perspective'.

What Is A Wide-Angle?

A 'standard' lens is a 50mm lens on a full-frame sensor (approximately 35mm on an APS-C camera and 25mm on a Micro Four-Thirds model) because the magnification of the subject by the lens is approximately the same as the human eye. Lenses with longer focal lengths (higher numbers) are called telephotos, while lenses with shorter focal lengths (smaller numbers) are wide-angles.

Ultra wide-angles start at 24mm for a full-frame sensor (although different writers have different ideas about this), basically because from 24mm onwards, it's hard to hide the fact that the photo has been taken with a wide-angle lens. The change to depth and perspective is obvious in most photographs. So, if the wide-angle effect is obvious, how do you use it to your advantage?

Get In Close

Since a wide-angle lens reduces everything in size, you can exaggerate size differences by moving in very close to a foreground object. For instance, the little pieces of ice floating in the water down in Antarctica are no bigger than a shoe box, but by moving the camera in very close and positioning the horizon up high, they take on a significant size in relation to the background mountains.

So, the first trick is to include something significant in your composition and position your camera so 'that something' is big in the frame.

A second trick is to move the horizon either way up (to emphasise the foreground), or way down (to emphasise the sky).

Which Ultra Wide-Angle?

If you go too ultra wide-angle, you can end up with a fish-eye lens that curves straight lines to fit everything in. This can be very effective for one or two photos, but a bit overwhelming when every photograph looks the same.

We suggest you go as wide as possible with a rectilinear lens, which generally means down to 14mm for full-frame DSLRs, 8mm for an APS-C size sensor and 7mm for the Micro Four-Thirds system.

Opposite: Ice, Antarctica

Using an ultra wide-angle lens, equivalent to a 17mm on a full-frame sensor, these small blocks of ice are made to look huge within the frame – and there's a great sense of depth perspective too.





Nikkor Z 800mm f/6.3 VR S



Canon RF 200-800mm f/6.3-9 IS USM



Even medium format cameras like the Fujifilm GFX now have access to super-telephotos – Fujifilm's GF 500mm f/5.6 R LM OIS WR

Super-Telephoto

Crop In Close For Sport, Wildlife and Landscape

A super-telephoto lens begins at 300mm for a full-frame sensor, which is around 200mm for an APS-C size sensor, or just 150mm for a Micro Four-Thirds camera (like the Olympus and Panasonic models).

Of course, super-telephotos don't stop there and you can purchase current model lenses right up to 800mm which get you incredibly close to your subject.

Subject Matter

So, why do you want a super-telephoto? If you photograph sport or wildlife, you'll know the answer already. Often you can't get very close to your subject, either because you'd scare it away or there are fences and barriers in-between. A super-telephoto lets you fill the frame with your subject.

Lens Qualities

In doing so, a super-telephoto lens also has incredibly shallow depth-of-field, the area of an image that appears to be sharply focused. This can be a great advantage when you want to isolate an animal or an athlete against a blurred, subordinate background, but it is challenging for landscape photographers who may prefer more of their image to be tack sharp.

In some ways, a super-telephoto is easy to design, but if you want a large maximum aperture (like f2.8 or f4), then physics dictates that you need a physically large lens as well. This is why the professional telephotos are so large and heavy. It can be difficult to hand-hold a super-telephoto for long periods of time and again, if you observe the professionals who use them, many employ a monopod to help manage the weight.

And keep the lens steady. Not only does a super-telephoto magnify your subject, it magnifies camera shake (so Vibration Reduction or Image Stabilisation is a good idea) as well as errors in focusing.

The best quality super-telephotos are more expensive, but the results are sensational.

Lens Options

Both Canon and Nikon have extensive ranges of super-telephoto lenses and also super-telephoto zooms. Often you can choose between a large, heavy and expensive lens with a wide maximum aperture (say, f2.8), or you can choose a smaller, lighter, less expensive lens with a narrower maximum aperture (say f4 or f5.6).

In the film days, the wide aperture was very important as you needed lots of light to give you the fast shutter speeds to freeze the action, but these days, you can just up rate your ISO setting on your camera.

This change in technology has also meant many photographers are choosing the new zoom telephoto lenses, the zoom giving them more framing flexibility in the field. The 150-500mm and 150-600mm focal ranges have become very popular, even more so than the smaller 100-400mm.

Opposite: Baboon, Uganda

Using a Fujifilm 150-600mm super telephoto zoom at 600mm on an APS-C format sensor is like shooting at 850mm on a full frame sensor – and much safer. The baboon was baiting a nearby lion with little effect, but still was ready to run!





Nikkor 85mm f2.8 PC-E Micro - zero position

Nikkor 85mm f2.8 PC-E Micro - shift position

Nikkor 85mm f2.8 PC-E Micro - tilt position

Perspective Control

It's Not Just For Architecture, but Landscape Too

There is so much about photography that people have simply forgotten, yet some of these ideas and tools can transform your photography. For instance, the old plate and view cameras had 'camera movements', which meant they could control depth-of-field and perspective by changing the position of the lens or the film.

When more modern cameras arrived with their fixed bodies and lenses, camera movements were essentially put to one side, but eventually the camera manufacturers responded with specially designed lenses that gave back some 'camera movements' to modern photographers.

Perspective Control

The most talked about camera movement was the lens shift and it solved the problem of converging verticals – tall buildings looking like they were toppling backwards.

When you tilt your camera upwards to include the top of a building, the sensor plane is not parallel to the building facade. This means the top of the building is further away from the sensor and so in the resulting image, the top of the building is smaller than the base, resulting in converging verticals.

To avoid converging verticals, you must keep the camera back (the sensor) vertical (and parallel to the building facade). Of course, when you do this, you may no longer keep the top of the building in the frame, so you either step backwards so you can fit the building in, or you use a special tilt-shift or perspective

control lens which allows you to 'shift' the lens upwards, thus including the top of the building.

Both Canon and Nikon offer a range of these lenses. Zeiss and Schneider have also released one or two PC models over the years, as has Fujifilm more recently for its medium format GFX.

Depth-of-Field Control

Most of the perspective control lenses have both shift and tilt features.

Tilting the lens allows you to create extended depth-of-field from where your camera is positioned, right out to infinity. There is a compromise in that tall objects near the camera will have their tops looking blurred, but the ground will certainly appear in focus all the way to the horizon. This technique uses Scheimpflug's Principle and only requires very slight lens movements.

Of course, not everyone uses these lenses as they were originally designed. By using the tilt or the shift more strongly, you can create perspective distortions and out-of-focus areas that can be very creative.

And although these lenses are manual focus, they are a lot of fun and should be high on your shopping list!

Opposite: Taj Mahal, India

Using the tilt feature meant the camera back could remain parallel to the building, thus retaining the correct perspective.





Fujifilm XF 60mm f2.4 R Macro



Sigma 105mm F2.8 Macro EX DG HSM



Canon EF 100mm f2.8L IS USM

Macro

Real Macro Means Your Subject Is The Same Size!

There is a whole world just waiting to be discovered with close-up and macro photography. It isn't essential to buy a special macro lens to focus closely on your subject, but there's no doubt they give you the best results.

True Macro?

Macro lenses are designed to focus at close distances, ostensibly at a 1:1 ratio (meaning the size of the subject on the sensor is the same as the size of the subject in real life, hence the term 'macro'). However, it's true that some macro lenses only focus to half life size (1:2) and need an 'extension tube' (which sits between the camera and the lens) to work at 1:1.

This isn't really a problem because, as photographers, we're more interested in taking photographs than worrying about magnification ratios. Suffice to say that macro lenses provide focusing from infinity to macro and produce excellent image quality. They are worth the investment.

Canon, Fujifilm, Nikon and Sony, for instance, have a number of macro lenses in their line-ups, or you can look at independent lens manufacturers like Sigma and Tamron who also have some excellent designs.

Which Focal Length?

Macros lenses are generally 50mm to 60mm or 85mm to 100mm in focal length. You can also find 180mm to 200mm macro lenses. So, which focal length is best?

The 50mm to 60mm focal length provides a wider angle-of-view, perhaps allowing you to include more of your subject's environment. However, it requires you to move the lens closer to the subject and this could be an issue if you are photographing insects which might fly away if disturbed.

The 85mm to 100mm focal lengths seem to be a good balance, not too telephoto like a 200mm macro and allowing you to stay sufficiently distant from your subject.

Of course, serious macro photographers simply own all three focal lengths!

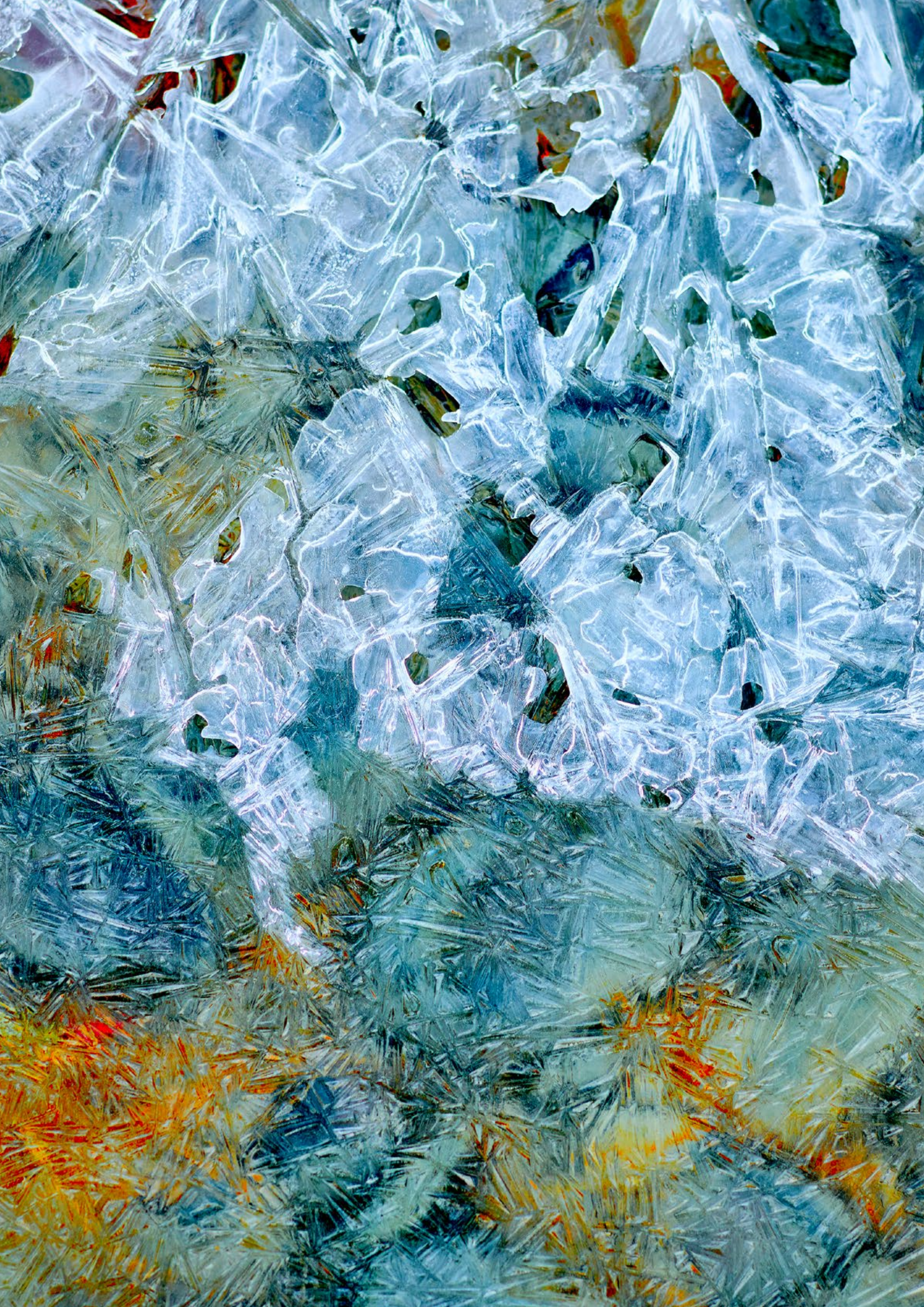
Advanced Equipment

To get really, really close, you will move into yet another world of lenses and strange camera equipment.

One feature of a macro lens is its ability to move the lens away from the sensor. The further away from the sensor the lens is positioned (inside the lens barrel, of course), the closer it can focus. So, if you attach a macro lens to extension tubes or a bellows unit, you can focus on subjects that are much smaller than your camera sensor. We'll leave that topic for another day!

Opposite: Ice pattern, Middlehurst, New Zealand

Although a true macro lens will focus to life size (or at least half life size), they are probably used just as much as 'close focusing' lenses for details found out in the natural world.





MARCUS BELL



How do exhibitions start?

Why do photographers

exhibit their work?

We chat to Grand Master

of Photography Marcus Bell

about his work

and his latest exhibition.

FEET IN THE SAND



IMAGE #12: *There are times when I witnessed stories of beautiful bliss, the best about life.*

Begins Marcus Bell, “Throughout my life as a photographer, telling stories has been the driving force. I’ve always been fascinated by the world around us and I often see stories developing right in front of me, especially when I slow down, stop and really observe. It’s like an entirely new world becomes visible. Stories play out in our everyday lives, but they can be easily overlooked. I’ve come to learn that each of us sees the world entirely differently and that’s the beauty of art, photography and how we want to communicate what we see to others.

“A little while back, I visited El Campello, a local seaside suburb far away from the busy and often overrun tourist haunts of Alicante in Spain. I was photographing a wedding and arrived early to climatise, location scout and get focus on photographing this incredible event. As luck would have it, the couple suggested staying away from the main city and looking for somewhere quiet along the six-kilometre stretch of beach.

“Stepping onto a beach and planting my feet in the sand, I felt instantly relaxed. I felt the weight go from my shoulders and it felt like I was home. And as soon as my feet hit El Campello’s sand, I slowed down and started to see story after story. I walked the length of the beach at various times of the day, observing and capturing a variety of stories. I knew straightaway that I had something very special and it would be a great project, so I worked out a rough plan based on my initial observations and then let the ideas grow from there.”

Marcus explained that all along the beach there was a mix of locals and holiday makers, all with different and diverse stories, and different ways of interacting with their surroundings. Some would exercise in groups, others would take a casual stroll either alone or as a couple.

“The more I stopped and watched, the more I saw. Interestingly, I realised that through all my years as a wedding photographer, I had developed exactly the skills I needed for this project. There were times I needed to blend in, others when I needed to work with purpose and appear I was supposed to be there, a balance that worked the majority of the time.”



‘Feet in the Sand’ on display at The Maud Street Photo Gallery, Brisbane.



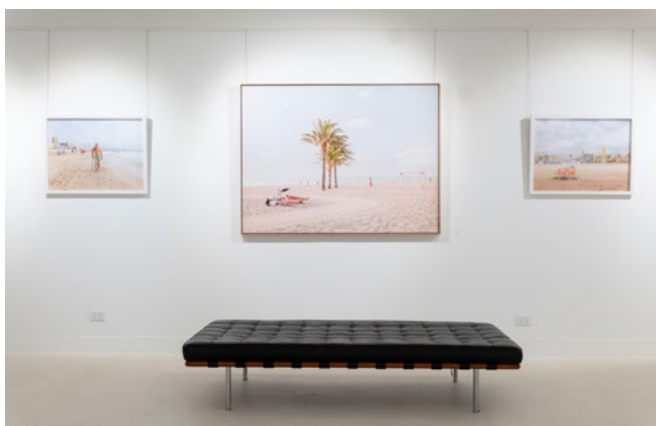
IMAGE #11: *I love the beauty and playfulness of this scene, yet I find it ironic that with the young kid being dragged down to the sea, the lifeguard's gaze lies above the drama unfolding before him. I see this in everyday life all the time, where there is something unfolding right in front of us, but we are so occupied by other noise that we can't see it.*

Disguised As A Wedding Photographer

Marcus laughs as he recollects a famous quote to which he gives a little twist: "Probably the greatest trick I ever pulled was convincing the world I'm a wedding photographer."

"Don't get me wrong, I absolutely love photographing weddings and I'm proud of my achievements, but I have never approached weddings as a wedding photographer. I had the good fortune to be taken under the wing of Doug Spowart when I started out and one of the key things Doug introduced to me were the works of the founding members of Magnum. I became obsessed with documentary photography.

"To fulfill this craving in Brisbane, with a non-existent number of world events in the '90s, I flew under the disguise of a wedding photographer so I could document stories. However, I soon realised weddings actually offer a treasure trove of opportunities to capture the world. It was a bonus that couples wanted to pay me for something I loved doing. Whilst the reward wasn't a 10-page spread in *LIFE* magazine like the heroes who inspired me, the connections with the people I photographed ended up being more rewarding than I could have ever imagined. I still love shooting weddings and being invited into the lives of the families I get to photograph. So far my cover hasn't been blown!"



The white gallery walls were a perfect backdrop for 'Feet in the Sand'.



Close view showing the framing style with the floating print.





IMAGE #5: So much of life is out of our control. For instance, we may spend the year waiting for our holiday at the seaside, yet when it arrives, the weather is less than ideal. There were times when the wind was blowing an absolute gale, yet I noticed people bunkering down, ignoring it and just getting on with life. #5 is a great example, the palm tree fronds are nearly horizontal, yet this lady had incredible resilience, determined to enjoy the beach against all odds. This lady represents people I've met throughout my lifetime, who are so strong willed, determined and focused that no matter how hard things get, they persevere no matter what. They see the long game and fight for every inch. What I also notice is the empty beach around her, I notice the people that don't show up. In life, it's so easy not to do something, especially when things get tough. It's much easier to simply give up, so in this photo, I notice who's not there just as much as who is. While at first glance we see a determined lady at the beach, the situation in fact represents much more about life.

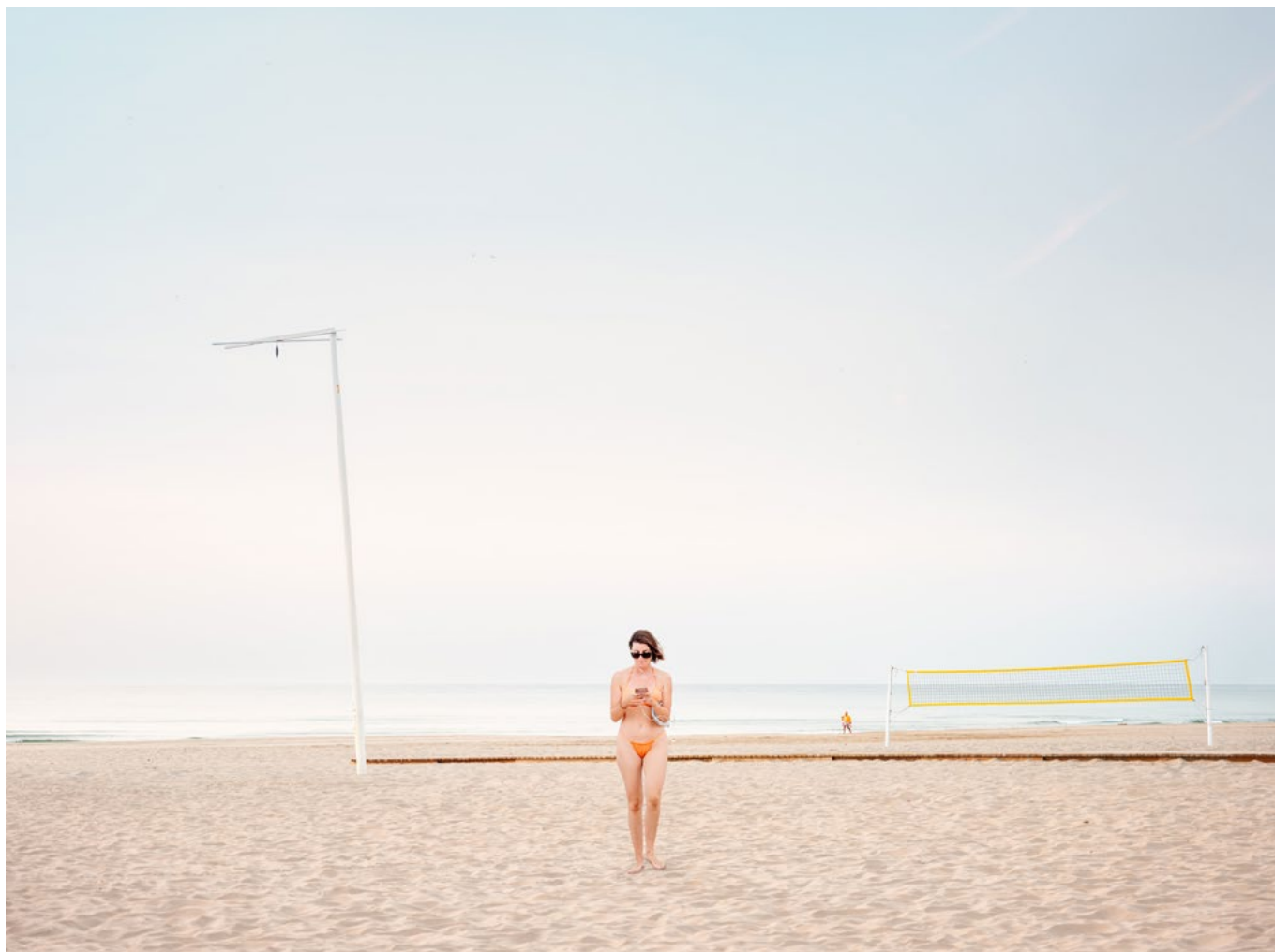


IMAGE #3: *There were many stories that reflected how devices have entered our lives, how we are consumed and chained to our phones, even when we are supposed to escape to the beach.*

On the Beach

Marcus says that when he was taking the photos for this exhibition, he was struck by how some people were really enjoying the moment, spending time with family and friends; perhaps as a couple or simply by themselves, appreciating a quiet escape from everyday life.

"But then there were others who came to the beach with so much gear, it was like they brought all their baggage with them. Some people couldn't take their eyes off their phones, so they weren't really at the beach at all! It was like they were simulating time out and relaxation.

"A few years ago, people started talking about the metaverse. 'It's going to be the next big thing,' they said, encouraging people to buy real estate in a new virtual world. But what if this new world is building walls around us, slowly without us noticing? Are we becoming so connected to our devices and the digital world that we no longer notice the environment around us, let alone that feeling when we place our feet in the sand? Will our real world become the metaverse, or at least will life become so blurred we lose sight of what's real and what's not?

"Although the images for *Feet in the Sand* were taken on a beach in Spain, each photo tells a universal story. The series transports us from the northern summer to any familiar coastal setting around the globe. You'll recognise the lives of the people within the images, either by seeing yourself or people you

know who have shared similar moments and emotions – joy, reflections, loss, love."

Beyond the Picturesque

"Feet in the Sand" explores the contrast between the calm of nature and the encroachment of modern life. "It's a dichotomy that emerges as humans co-opt spaces of natural beauty for their own pleasure, reminding us that the beach doesn't release people from the monotony of urban life."

In Marcus' eyes, the beach exposes the absurdities we create between the natural and constructed worlds. In this way, *Feet in the Sand* challenges viewers to see beyond the picturesque and to experience the beach not just as a physical space, but a symbolic one where personal stories and emotions are laid bare. "Early on when I was learning about art, Jeffrey Smart was the one artist who I connected with the most. It may have been the photorealistic qualities in his artwork, yet when you see a Jeffrey Smart in person, you see that it goes way beyond that.

"Only when I saw *The Traveller* by Jeffrey Smart in person at the Queensland Art Gallery, did I realise that his detail and tonal range surpasses what a photograph can produce. You then add his perspective, composition and most importantly, his story telling narratives. I hoped that if I could achieve even a smidgen of those qualities, I would be on the right path to what I wanted to achieve.

"My sense of space is derived from my early foray into



IMAGE #17: *At first glance, it's like the older couple are admiring the symbolism of youth walking through the frame, like a reminder of great times in the past, a life they once had. It could also been seen like a meme where the gentleman is checking out the young lady while his wife is annoyed at his gaze! But in fact, it's more likely that both of them are in disbelief, of what society has become, where on this beautiful stretch of beach she's is more connected to the device she's holding than the beautiful surroundings she's in.*

landscape photography, which to be honest, back then I sucked at. I loved the large scale, but the turning point was when I started to put the couples I was photographing into the scenes. I was able to use the grandeur of scale because I finally had a centre of interest which I could direct around the frame. In the *Feet in the Sand* series, I hope you will see a sense of space, using perspective to guide the viewer around the frame.

"I learnt a long time ago not to take photos for competitions or social media. As hard as it is sometimes to stay on course, being true to yourself is the most valuable thing you have. No one can be exactly you. When I did get into wedding photography, I was told by so many people that you can't photograph weddings 'like that', followed by 'you're not going to last if you do'. It was lucky I didn't listen because who knows what I would be doing now!

"The same goes with the projects I immerse myself in. They might not make immediate sense right now, but who knows? Hopefully people will connect with my work, but I still feel I have so much to learn and that with each new project, I'll keep on learning. That's why the exhibition was so important. It would be much easier not to do it, but where would I be if I didn't? I'm already onto the next two exhibitions and hopefully each will be better than the last.

"Creating an exhibition is not that different to posting an image on social media. It's easier not to, but if you don't, you're

robbing the world of a different perspective. It's a hurdle we all struggle to get past, but it's worth it."

Loving Leica

"Like many photographers, it's easy to chase the latest and greatest equipment. I'm totally guilty, but what saved me was a friend who introduced me to vintage lenses, way before vintage was a thing. He showed me how even a \$20 plastic

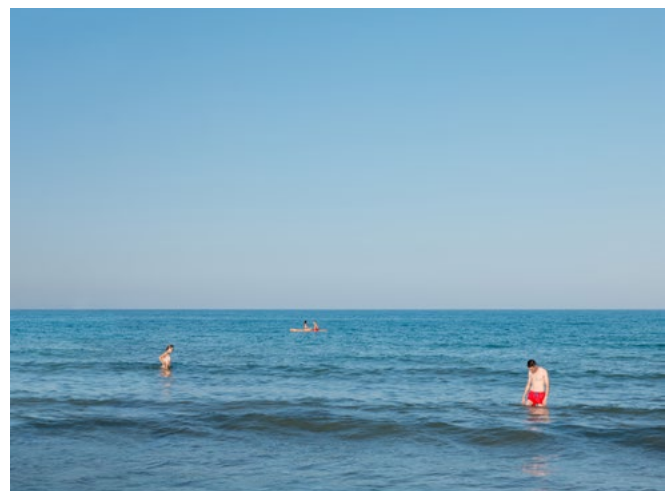


IMAGE #22



IMAGE #23

lens could produce the most amazing results and this started my passion for both old and new glass. And it's not just the lenses, but different sensors can also have an impact on the creative process. It's like a painter: the type of paint they use, the brush size and shape, the technique etc. Each lens and sensor combination has a different characteristic, so after re-learning everything I thought I knew, I ended back with Leica cameras, ironically where I first started my wedding career.

"These days I have the latest that Leica offers, plus what I feel is the best Leica has offered over the past 60 years or so. It's one of the things I love the most about Leica; they are a company that not only wants to push the envelope producing state of the art gear for today's photographer, but they equally value what they have created in the past, even a lens that was first produced 50 years ago.

"For this project I wanted to utilise the colour pop that Leica offers with their digital sensors, using the Leica SL2s with the 24-70mm f2.8."

Marcus is producing prints up to 160x120 cm, so he needs to upscale the SL2s's 24-megapixel files. "As the images are so clean to begin with, I am able to use an enhanced raw file from Lightroom, then further upscale using Photoshop. At times I used Topaz Photo AI. Each image needed to be assessed carefully, as upscaling affects different subjects in different ways. For instance, some areas would have a chequered thatch pattern where fine detail encountered problems, but there was always

an alternative way to process the file. That's why using a high quality monitor is so important. I've always trusted Eizo to show me exactly what I'm editing and I use the CG318-4K model.

"Currently, my Achilles heel is my aging MacMini M1! My working files hover around the 3GB to 8GB size as I like to work with smart objects and embedding the raw file into the layer stack. The prints are then made on Ilford Smooth Cotton Rag.

"In most cases, I use a minimal impact approach to editing, mostly bringing out the detail, colours and ensuring the tonal range is showing the depth that I know the camera can achieve. One of the techniques I use is to reduce the blacks, using the Black slider in either Lightroom or Adobe Camera Raw and then balance the result with the other sliders so as not to lose too much contrast. The technique allows for an immense amount of detail to be extracted."

Interestingly, while capture and post-production always work together, Marcus revealed that he overexposed most of his images for this project by 1.5 to 2 stops (EV). Normally he shoots with a little underexposure to ensure he maintains detail in the highlights. "However, for this project overexposing the blacks gave me the look I wanted and fortunately the highlight detail the Leica SL2s retains is amazing. Mind you, there were one or two shots where I went a little too far, but it just meant more work in post to fix them. All in all, I really enjoyed shooting differently to what I normally do, plus the location really lent itself to it."



IMAGE #21: *I noticed the lady in the police hut was distraught and could get a sense that her world was caving in around her. Yet beyond the hut, life continued to go on as normal, without an ounce of thought for others who may be in distress. How often we see this play out in our lives. We can get so caught up in our own lives, that it's easier to put our blinkers on to avoid helping others.*

The Exhibition

For his *Feet in the Sand* exhibition, Marcus offered three editions. "I knew the images would scale really well and decided on three sizes, the largest 160x120 cm in an edition of five, followed by a 140x105 cm in an edition of seven and then a 80x60 cm in an edition of ten. Working out edition numbers is a matter of balance. I knew from experience there would be some images that probably wouldn't sell, but are really important to make the project work as a whole. Then there are others that are really popular, which gets you thinking you should put these into a larger edition so you can sell more of them! However, I reminded myself it is the project as a whole that's important and you never know, as the popular ones sell out, the others may become more popular as a result."

Marcus has had multiple exhibitions of this project, with the first at the Leica Gallery. "I was able to work with Nick Rains who did the initial printing. He's incredible and the prints he made were simply amazing. For the second exhibition, I wanted to go much larger and sought out the help of Liam at Brilliant Prints. I had a vision to float the photographic prints within a frame, a style which is normally reserved for canvas prints, but I wanted to use no glass so people could get up close and see the quality of the images and the Ilford paper. As a result, they could feel more connected to the image, but it also meant that there was nowhere for me to hide - every detail would be there for people to pixel peek.

"There is so much involved in putting up an exhibition – I wish there was a manual. In some ways, producing the work ended up being the easiest part (although in reality, it's also a huge hurdle to overcome and commit to). I now understand why artists are planning 12 months in advance, as working with a gallery and marketing the exhibition is a large task. Like anything, the more you put into it, the greater the rewards. Plus each time, I'm learning more and more – and writing notes to ensure I can better plan for the next one."



IMAGE #20



SEEING VENICE



**Image 4 – Reflections
in Venetian Canal**

DIFFERENTLY



How would you photograph one of the most photographed tourist destinations on Earth? Barbara Brown guides us through her shoot around the watery isle and shares an approach you can take to any subject.

I recently had the pleasure of photographing Venice. My previous visit to the city was nearly 40 years ago and my foggy memory was of decaying buildings submerging into primeval sludge. Not the most complimentary description. Venice is one of the most photographed cities of the world, with hundreds of images posted on social media each day. This is not how I wanted to portray Venice. Ok I probably needed a couple of contextual images, but that was not where my heart lay.

My first foray into the alleyways with my camera and telephoto lens was more about colour, form and texture. To me the initial look, is about getting a feel for the place. Stop and see beyond the obvious. The walls of the 500-year-old buildings couldn't fail to draw you in. But how to eliminate the people and extraneous items? Some photographers would see them as the story, and document the city as the tourist mecca that it is. But I'm not about people, nor am I about what everyone else sees. I have finally accepted that I see differently and am proud that I do. Here was my challenge: to portray the beauty of Venice

Above: Dancing Gondolas
Left: Red Boat



Image 1 – Morning Deliveries

through a different lens. How was I going to capture the essence of my Venice, against the backdrop of one of the world's busiest tourist drawcards.

Is it possible to see Venice differently and did I achieve it? How many times have we read or heard that in photography light, colour, texture, lines, patterns all combine to form a composition, which hopefully is balanced and pleasing to the eye. But to me the photographer needs to contribute more than just good camera technique.

An image that demands attention has soul, and that soul needs to come from the person behind the camera. The photographer needs to reveal a little of themselves with every press of the shutter.

In the past, the concept that an image needs to tell a story, has caused me concern. I can appreciate that a documentary photograph of the war in Gaza will have impact and tell a story. What story does a simple image of a reflection in a Venice canal tell. What does it divulge about me and why was I attracted to the scene?

Seeing Differently

Seeing differently doesn't happen overnight. The need to develop and accept my own style and tell my story, has been an integral part of my photographic journey. Don't be afraid to try something new, play with compositions, go off and do your own thing. Listen to others, learn how they see, but don't become their replica. Search online for examples of photographic styles, investigate genres that resonate with you. Experiment.

Simplicity

My personal style emphasizes simplicity and minimalism in design. My photographic compositions typically feature a limited number of elements with emphasis on negative space to create strong balanced compositions. The aim of my photography is to convey the beauty and serenity of everyday items/scenes through clean uncluttered visual language. I enjoy elevating overlooked subjects that are often viewed as having no intrinsic value.

Place a frame around what you see and work from there. Is it simple enough? Are there any distracting elements on the edge?



Image 2 – Burano Canal



Image 3 – Umbrella hanging on Door in Burano

Portrait or landscape? Is the composition balanced, if not, can I make it balanced? Is there a point of interest or something I can work with? Do the elements within the frame interact with each other? What is the story?

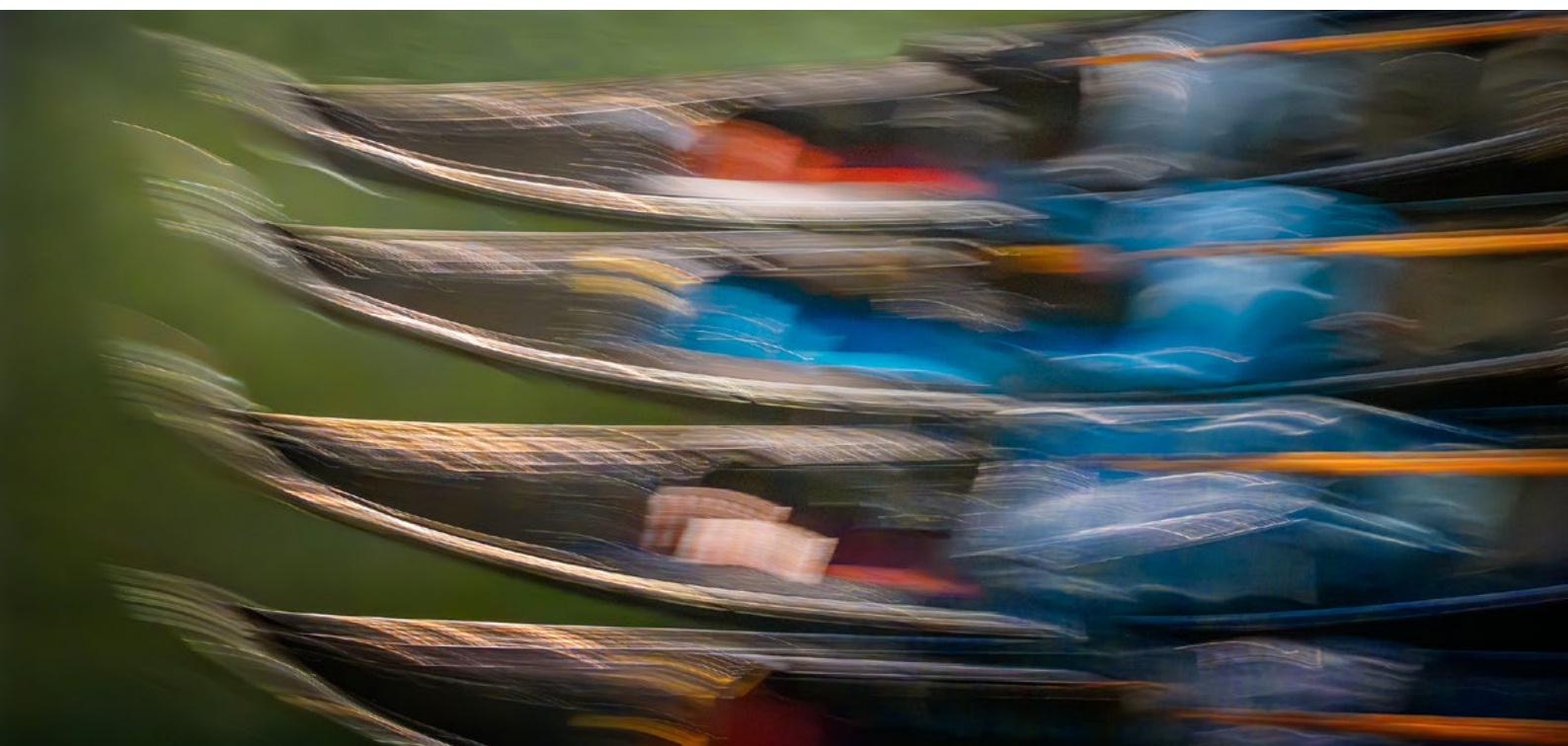
Walking the Venetian cobblestone streets and alleyways during October (the number of people belies that it is not peak tourist season), the drizzle and rain made serious photography difficult. No tripods here. Dodging umbrellas, tripping over the ubiquitous wheeled suitcases being dragged up bridge steps did not make for enjoyable photography. However, I came across a deliveryman on his early morning rounds. This is the behind the scene life in Venice. With no roads, deliveries are made using a mixture of boats and hand-drawn trolleys. While the composition is a little more complex than I usually prefer, the background story is strong, and the simple trolley is the hero of the photograph (Image 1).

Basic Elements

The island of Burano is known for its colourful houses and canals lined with small motor boats and painted reflections. How to evoke the same picture, but with simplicity? I looked beyond the obvious, to reduce the scene to its basic elements: colour, shape, form and line. This image I think says that. The colour is certainly Burano, the boat is Burano and the reflections are Burano, but there is simplicity. There is connection between the elements, the mooring rope says I am waiting to be used, the colour indicates the gaiety that is Burano. (Image 2)



Image 5 – Venetian Abstract



Gondolas at the end of the day



Image 6 – Between the Gondolas

It rained during my visit to Burano, and I didn't have an umbrella. Then I came across an umbrella hanging on the knob of a front door. For many months of the year that umbrella is unimportant and would probably be discarded within a hall closet but on this day, with rain and thunderstorms forecast, it became very important. It was there waiting to be used, or drying out after being used. To me the umbrella summed up the two hours I spent photographing Burano: the vibrant colours and the rain. I changed the colour of the wall from the original vibrant mauve to a softer, less obvious yellow. This change allowed the umbrella to become more pivotal to the story, (Image 3).

Of the 4 days I was in Venice, there was only one afternoon that the heavens didn't open up. I was of two minds as to whether to face the crowds or enjoy some downtime. Boy am I glad that I went out. Instead of looking outwards at the various buildings, I looked downwards. The colour and shape that is Venice was staring back at me in the form of colourful reflections.

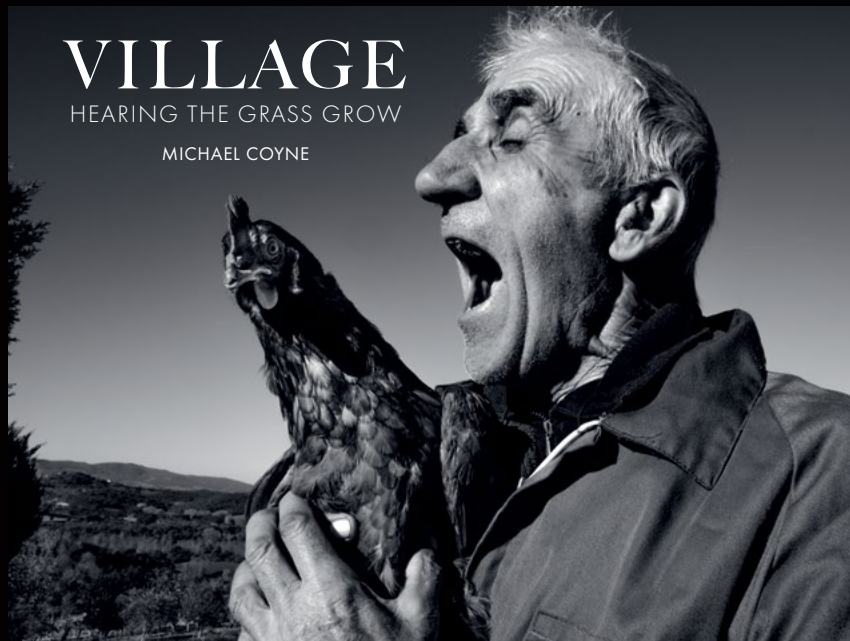
After working the reflections for several hours, I was "seeing" the choreography and was able to predict the dance movements as a gondola went past. The technique for good reflection shots is similar to aerials, a very short exposure time to freeze their motion. The downside is a high ISO and associated grain. Also, focussing is difficult as the movement causes problems, (Images 4 and 5).

I then moved to where the gondolas were docking to collect their passengers. It wasn't the well-travelled passengers who caught my eye, it was what was happening on the water between the gondolas. The colours of the buildings that formed the canal walls were trapped between the dark reflections of the underside of gondola hulls, interspersed with the blue of the sky. I was in seventh heaven. But as the light changed, so did the reflections, and my ecstasy was only temporary. Those images talk to me of the colours and story of Venice far more than any contextual shot. Don't get me wrong, I am not denigrating other styles of photography, each to their own. I know what I like and I am going to shoot it to my heart's content, (Image 6).

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.

"MICHAEL COYNE'S MOST RECENT BOOK IS A MASTERPIECE OF DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY."

-PETER EASTWAY, BETTER PHOTOGRAPHY MAGAZINE

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WEST

PHOTOGRAPHER: CHRISTIAN FLETCHER

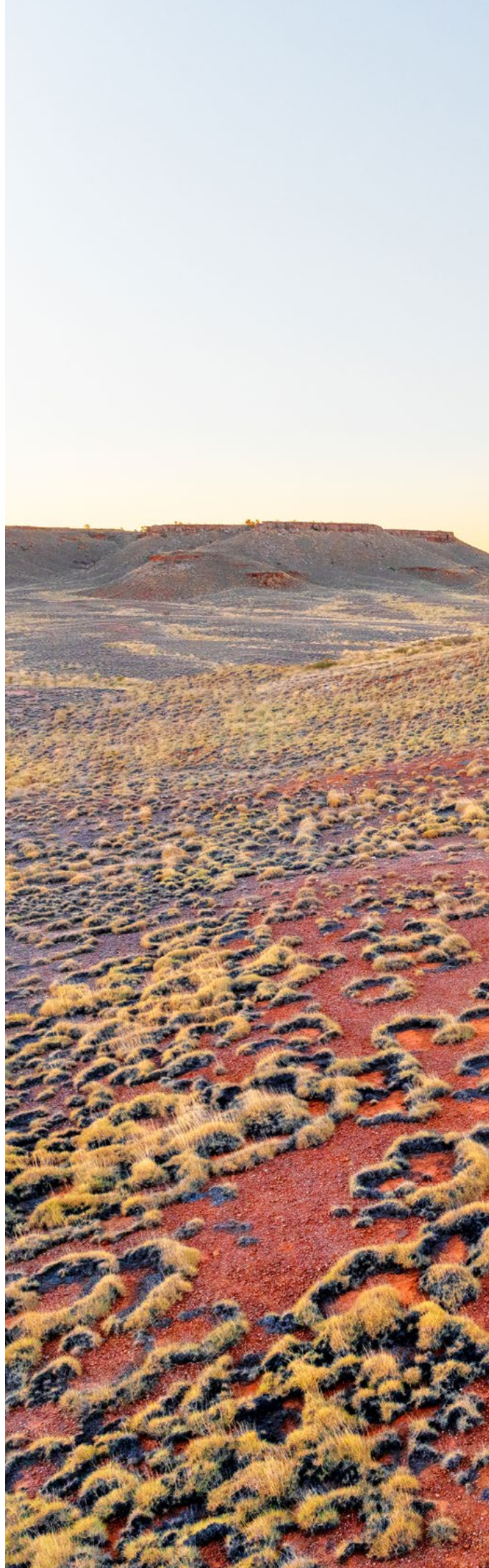
Christian Fletcher's *West* is his second volume on the state he loves best, Western Australia. And his work just keeps getting better and better.

Within the pages of *West Volume 2*, photographer and author Christian Fletcher lets his readers into a little known secret:

"I would like to be a painter. Every so often, I have this fantasy that I will give up photography and pick up a brush. It all starts well until I realise how long it takes to make marks and brush strokes that are meaningful. I end up with a mess that looks so amateur it could have been painted by a two-year-old. I then decide I don't want to be a painter after all.

"This is a cycle that happens at least once a year. I love the look of oil paintings, especially the old masters and the Heidelberg artists of the late 19th century. For that reason I am always searching for photographs that look like something that was painted."

Right: Warrawagine Station, Pilbara

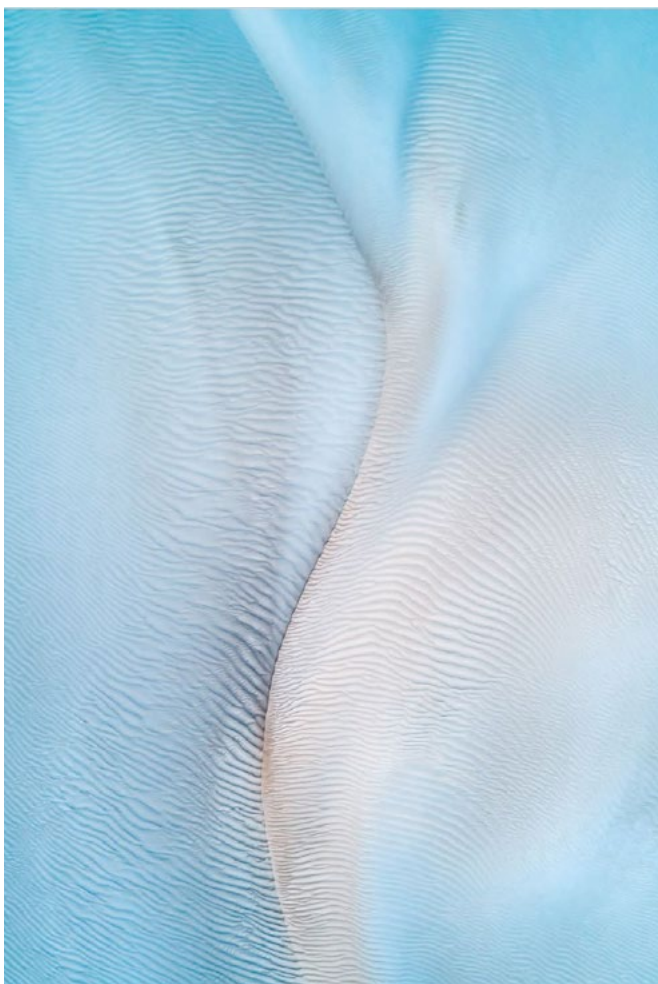






Above: Gwalia Ghost Town, Goldfields

Left: Sand dune, Cervantes



Insight

Christian moved to Western Australia's South West in 1990. "I never looked back. It was the height of winter and I remember the drive into town. There was a drizzling rain and it was cold. At the time, the population of Dunsborough was about 700 people. I was sitting in a cafe looking out to the street and I said to myself, what have I done? I thought I had moved to the end of the earth.

"In some ways it was the end of the earth. It was 260 km south of one of the most isolated cities in the world. It is closer to Antarctica than it is to Sydney and it felt like it. When we get a southerly breeze in the South West, it comes straight from Antarctica. There is no land mass in the way, it comes in cold and fast. It can be bleak and if you were to arrive during winter, the impression of the place would not be great.

"Luckily, summer wasn't too far away and the surf in the region is some of the best WA has to offer. I was into surfing back then, so I started to enjoy my time and did what jobs I could to fund a pretty relaxed lifestyle. I was just starting my photography career, but it wasn't a priority at that stage. I was still learning and developing my style.

"The South West is probably the region most Western Australians would love to live in. It is still relatively unpopulated, but there is enough so that you don't miss the things you get in the city. It is green and lush. There are lots of natural forests and rolling hills punctuated by farmland and a few small towns. The coastline is mostly untouched and free of



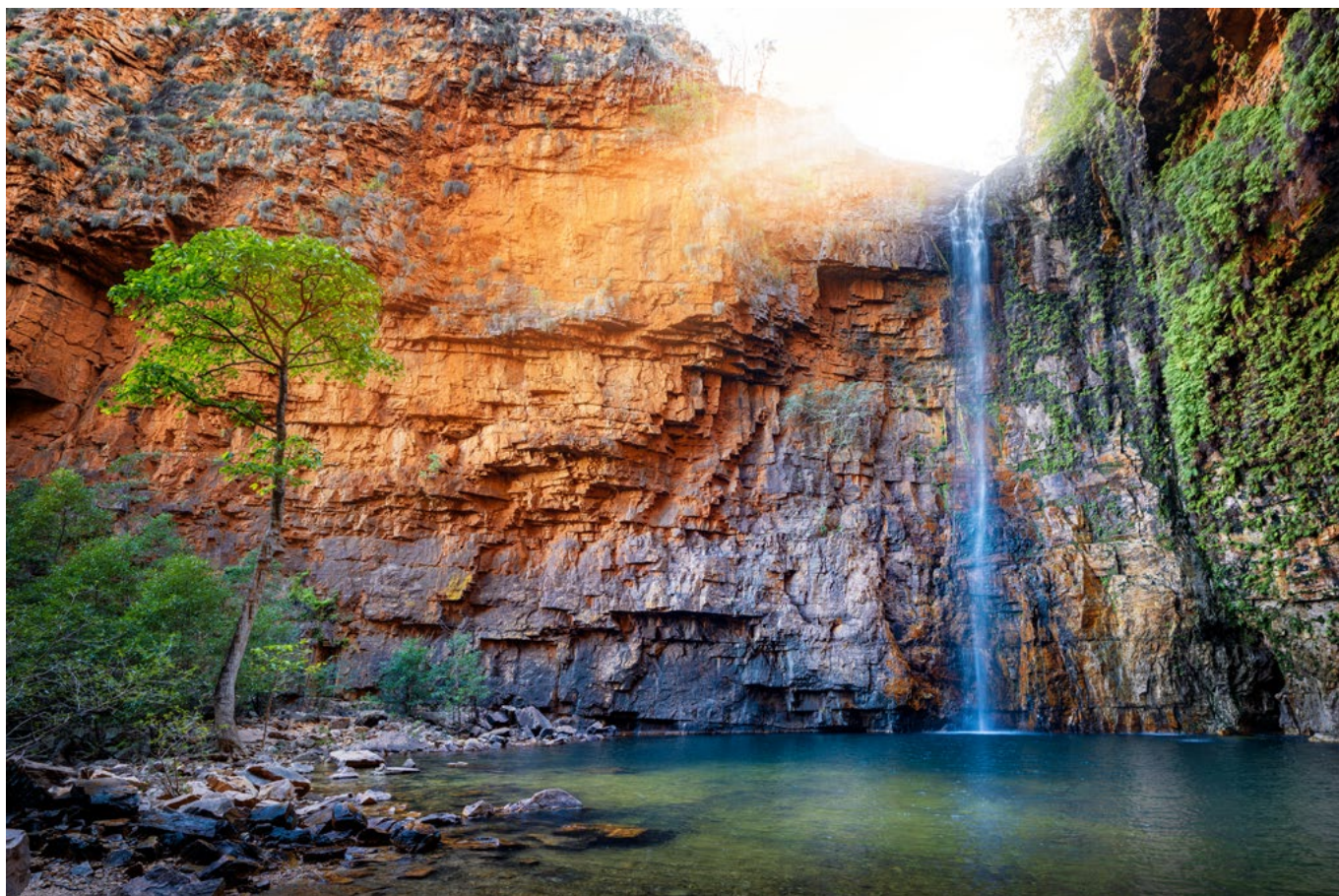
Purnululu National Park

Have you ever had one of those situations when you have to do something, but you're not entirely sure it's a good idea? I had to face one of these situations on our recent trip up to the Kimberley. My wife wanted to go to Purnululu National Park and I had some trepidation. I've been there in the past and I knew the track was notoriously bad. I'd even seen a car that was bent in half and was being lifted out on the back of a truck. So we were towing our brand-new camper trailer down this track, which could possibly destroy it and I was feeling a little bit stressed.

We went through the first river crossing, which was fine and then came to the second. Stop the clock! We have to go through that? The second was wide and deep and as we were driving through, the sensors on the car were beeping because they were underwater. There were a few expletives coming from both of us as we picked the best line to navigate the creek, trying not to hit anything big and not to damage the underside of the car. This was in the first 5 km of the track. We had 55 km to go.

With each turn on the road there seemed to be another difficult section to avoid, another creek to cross and more corrugations. In total, we had to cross twenty-seven creeks before we got to the campsite. But once we were there, the drive in was a distant memory.

Purnululu has two distinct sides; the western side and the eastern. At the east you have the classic beehive dome formations and on the western side you have the canyons and the sheer red rock faces. What people don't realise is the park is surrounded by other ranges and in fact, just outside the National Park there is another beautiful range that most people wouldn't stop and explore. Some of the twenty-seven creeks that we crossed were amazing. The banks lined with shady trees, the water clear and fresh, it is a paradise.



Emma Gorge, El Questro, Kimberley

development. It is rugged and pounded by huge surf and gale force winds. As a photographer, you are spoilt for choice as the natural beauty is everywhere and usually it is free of anyone. Finding a beach of your own is one of the joys of living here. And the best thing is you can choose from about seventeen different coffee shops or more than two hundred wineries. Why would you leave?"

Today, Christian has a modern, two-storey gallery in the heart of a bustling Dunsborough and probably 99 per cent of the houses nearby have at least one of his photos hanging on the wall. While the mainstay of his business is selling framed prints, not everyone who enters his gallery will buy a print, but they will love his work and so perhaps a book of his photos is the answer. Books certainly sell well and his latest publication, *West Volume 2* was published just in time for Christmas last year.

Equipment

Christian's first camera was a Nikon 801s which was all he could afford at the time, but within six months he realised he couldn't achieve the quality he had seen in others' work.

"Somehow I had to come up with eight thousand dollars for a medium format Bronica camera. That was a lot of money back in 1990, especially for a bum photographer! Later in my career, I was taken by the panoramic format and invested in the Fuji GX617 camera. I was shooting Fuji Velvia film and I created lots of great landscape images that I still sell today.

"Then came the start of the digital journey. My first was a Canon D60, 6.3-megapixels, wow! That's all I have to say. I paid a lot for the body in 2002, but it was the start of something great.

I continued with Canon for a while, getting an EOS 1Ds Mark 2 and then the classic EOS 5D Mark 2.

"At the same time, I had heard of a fancy medium format camera Peter Eastway was using, a Phase One. I remembered asking Pete if I should get one. He told me the quality difference was like going from a 3MP compact point and shoot to a 5D. At that point I knew I had to have one.

"I have to say there still isn't a camera system, in my opinion, that matches the Phase One. It was, however, not a friendly camera to use. It was actually frustrating and as my eyes got worse, it was harder to get focus. Depth-of-field was an issue, as was low light and a lack of high ISO shooting. Hand holding the camera was sketchy at best and the weight of the system was annoying.

"I am saying this because I didn't move across to the XT body and the smaller lenses which may have been a better experience for landscapes. However, around the same time I was falling out of love with my Phase, Nick Rains introduced me to Leica and I became an ambassador for them.

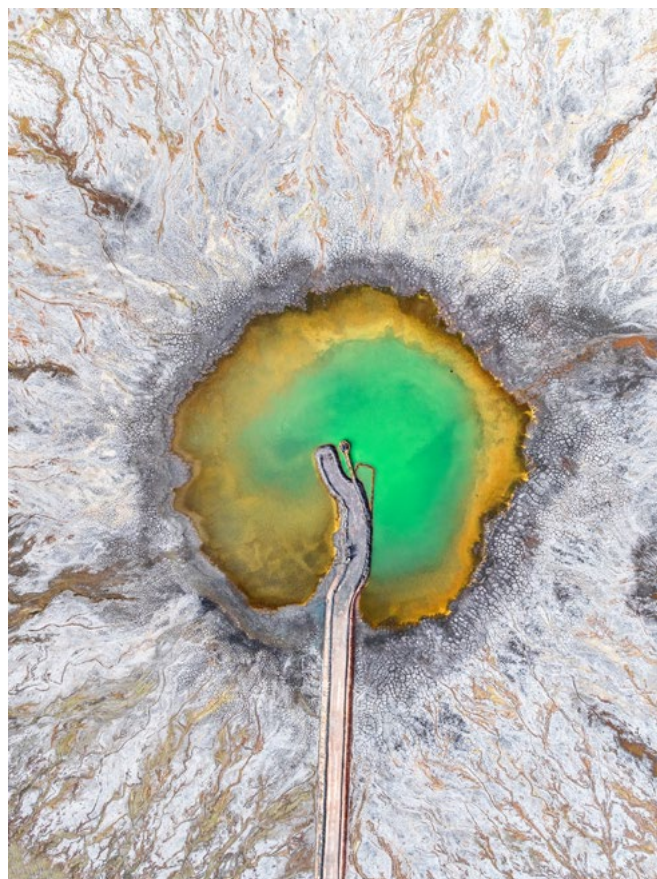
"If you are looking for a beautiful shooting experience, you can't go past the SL system. I started with the SL2 and am now using the SL3. It is a joy to use, intuitive and the quality is excellent. It is a camera I can use for every occasion and accessorises well with a Gucci camera bag!"

Post-Production

Over the years, Christian has also been a great ambassador for Photoshop and editing his photographs, whether for an exhibition print or publication in a book. But is editing your



Tidal Creek, Wyndham



Tailings Pond, Goldfields. Two images of the same subject with quite different interpretations.

photographs a problem when dealing with the public – do they accept that Photoshop has been used?

"I think it is okay to use as much post-production as you want. As long as you are honest with the people who buy your work, I have no problems with it.

"In the past, when buying a print, people would ask if I had used Photoshop and it seemed to be a problem for some. These days no one asks, I think they just expect it. I tell them editing in Photoshop is just like an artist selecting different colours for different paintings. These tools are created to enable photographers to craft their own particular vision of a subject, so they are not restricted to the basic image a camera produces.

"Editing photographs is a way to create a style. If we didn't use post-production, generally speaking, all our work would look the same, disregarding the compositional aspects. I will use composites if the work needs it. I place in new skies, birds, machinery, animals and people if it helps create a stronger composition.

"When I edit, it is all about making something beautiful to hang on a wall. Sometimes the work you need to do is very little, if you get unbelievable light. When I sit in front of a raw image, I decide if it needs to be lighter or darker, more dramatic, or soft and ethereal. Once I start working through my bag of tricks, the image usually dictates in what direction it should go. A lot of the time I am thinking of the post-production as I am taking the photograph. Every image is different and my style and tastes change on a regular basis. I get bored creating the same looking images."

In the Air

Christian and his brother Michael introduced the ND5 group (which included Les Walkling, Tony Hewitt and Peter Eastway)

to landscape aerals. While everyone had photographed aerals before, it was the Pilbara Project that set their aerial interest flying. And Christian still loves shooting aerals, although these days he is almost as likely to use a drone as a plane or a helicopter.

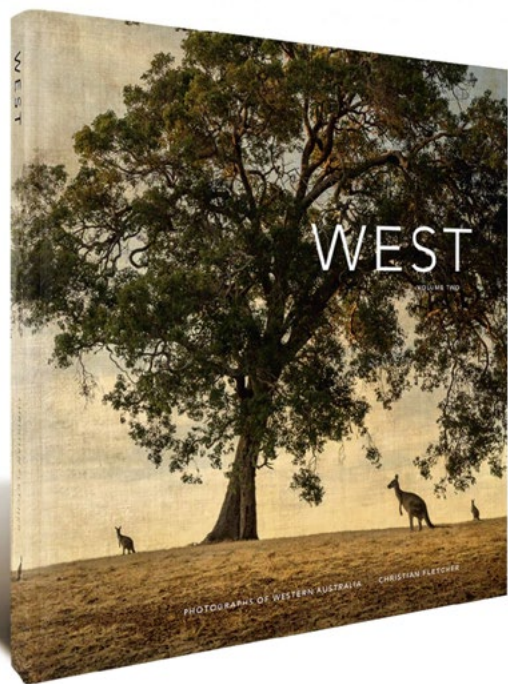
"Aerial photography has exploded in popularity over the past decade. I am guilty of the simple pleasure of flying to all the good spots. The magic of aerial photography is it is a viewpoint that we don't often see. From above, the scene is abstracted, the beauty of symmetry on show. Be it natural landforms or scenes altered by man, it is remarkable what secrets are revealed once you change your view. In the past I was shooting from light aircraft and helicopters. There are advantages and disadvantages to both, but I would generally choose something with wings. In a Cessna you have more time to think about dying when the engine quits. If you get lucky, you could find a nice field of freshly mowed grass to put it down. In a helicopter there is a thing called the Jesus Nut. This connects the rotor blades to the rest of the craft. If it comes off... well, you can understand why it is called what it is.

"That aside, I am not afraid of shooting from the air as I have flown planes in a previous life and was also a paraglider pilot. There is always a risk, but generally it's pretty small. Then, you may ask, why are there so many videos of planes crashing? That's all I seem to watch on YouTube. Luckily, some smart people invented drones and now the biggest danger is hitting a 747".

Opposite top: Cable Beach, Broome

Opposite bottom: Boab trees, Derby

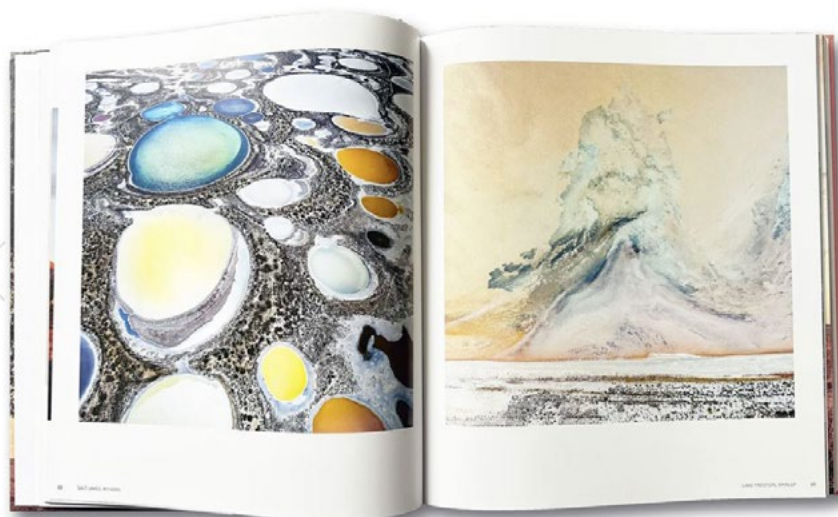




Just kidding, they don't let you do that! One of the pitfalls of shooting from an aircraft is as soon as the engine starts you are paying for it. This seems to make you forget everything about your camera and how it works! It normally takes a few minutes before I settle down and get into the right rhythm.

"Now, I mostly use my drone. I have had two disasters so far but both were equipment failure not pilot error. I could never admit to my wife it was my fault, so it was definitely a problem with the drone. I have always been a remote control nerd and the drone allows me to combine that with photography. It isn't quite the same as flying a plane as the drones fly themselves, but it is still nice to do a high speed fly-by of the tower. Think *Top Gun*!

"The drone has revolutionised what I can shoot. How lucky are we to be able to place a camera in literally any position! It is an economical way of shooting aerials and in some ways, it gives you more creative freedom. I do like images shot directly down onto the landscape below, but more so these days I am using my drone to get high enough to open up a foreground so



it doesn't look shot by a drone. I will always take it with me and use it on most shoots. The quality is good enough to make big prints that people love."

And for Christian with his gallery in Dunsborough, big prints are his bread and butter. However, as photographers walk around his gallery, they will see a mixture of jaw-dropping subjects full of mood and emotion sitting next to what might be considered a midday snapshot with boring light. Who makes the decision about the prints that hang on the gallery wall?

"There is only one boss in our gallery and she decides what goes on the walls," laughs Christian, referring to Jen, his wife and business partner. "Well in most cases she will have a say, but I do get to direct what hangs in the space mostly.

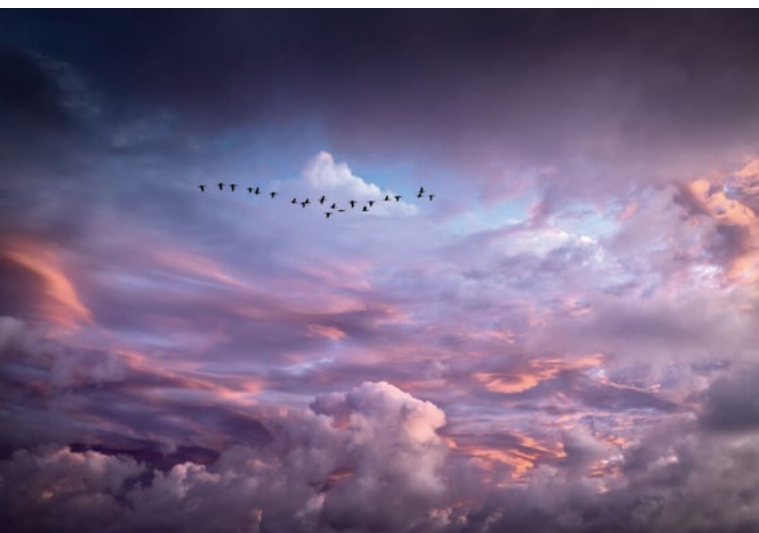
"However, as artists we can be biased in our choices and it is good to have other opinions and voices to help in the decision making. If you are too close to a piece, your judgement will be clouded. I have lost count of the times I have had something framed and a year later, I have to face the reality I got it wrong! I will never admit it though!

"When I am out on the road I will shoot everything and anything. I am always scanning scenes as there are so many opportunities that cover my different styles. From the contemporary banal urban scenes to the pretty landscapes. If it crosses my path I will shoot it.

"Some photographs are made to go in books so they are all relevant, to the project. I tend to be a little less fussy when it comes to populating a book as any single photo sits within a large collection, so the odd dodgy one isn't too big of a crime and, if the reader doesn't like it, is quickly forgotten once you turn the page."

We promised Christian that in return for allowing us to publish some of his photographs that we'd tell our readers all about his book. And we're delighted to do so. It really is a great publication, perhaps a textbook for photographers looking to improve their own work, with lots of ideas for locations, technique and composition to inspire you.

The cost is AUS \$60 plus postage anywhere in the world. Technically, it measures 265x295 mm, hardcover, 184 pages and weighs 1.4 kilograms! To order, visit his website: www.christianfletcher.com.au



Storm clouds, Mt Duckworth

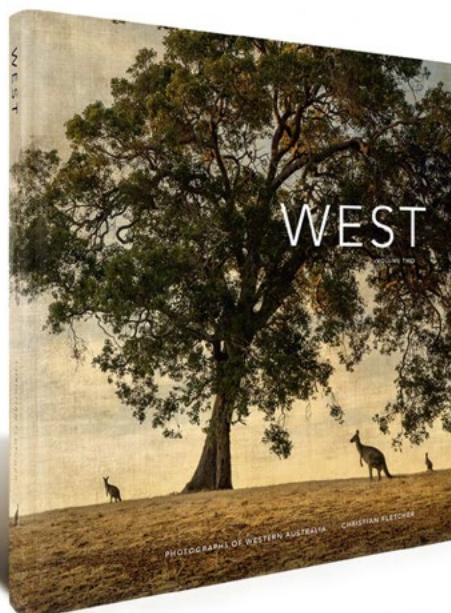
WEST

PHOTOGRAPHS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
BY CHRISTIAN FLETCHER



Illustration by Shay Fletcher

To purchase a copy of West Volume 2, visit
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"WEST Vol 2" by Christian Fletcher is a 184 page case bound coffee table book. It features photographic images from Western Australia. This outstanding quality hard cover book is the latest from Christian with his best images and stories behind the work.

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Architectural Minimalism

PHOTOGRAPHER: JOSH McGUIGAN



Manly S.L.S.C2

Simple shapes, simple lines and a simple colour palette combine to create a portfolio of elegant architectural artworks – with a camera.

I am drawn to architectural features in public buildings that I see on my daily travels,” explains photographer Joshua McGuigan. “Usually it is a window, a door or an object that casts a bold shadow”.

Insight

“It took me many years of capturing photos lazily on my phone before I consciously understood what type of aesthetic I am drawn to and why. Generally, it was a clean composition upon a flat ‘canvas’, so to speak. It also took a while for me to understand how to achieve such a look, as it isn’t always as simple as merely standing front-on to a subject.”

“Sometimes I just happen to stumble across a great shot by chance, other times I deliberately go out at a particular time of day (usually late morning or early afternoon) and to a particular suburb I hope will be fruitful. And of course, sometimes I’ll see a great shot, but I am unable to capture it on the spot, so I jot down the time of day and the address and try to replicate the conditions on another day.”

Unlike landscape photography where we like the early and late sunlight because of the way it side-lights the landscape, when it comes to buildings which are essentially vertical in nature, the later, higher sunlight is effectively side-lighting the buildings. It is called top lighting, but it’s not so much the angle of the





Manly S.L.S.C 3

sunlight as the way the light moves across our subject. So if you struggle to get up before sunrise for a photography shoot, maybe architectural work like this will better suit your metabolism!

Josh says framing and composition is all about drawing the viewer's eye to what he finds most important within a scene. "This can be achieved by cropping and adjusting the frame in post-production and even removing some elements that may be unintentionally distracting. I often use a good zoom lens to take out most of these distractions in-camera and to help negate any sense of standing perspective (where the photo has been taken from)."

While Josh works professionally as an architectural photographer, this work is more documentary in nature as his clients demand. In comparison, his minimalist abstracts come from his passion for photography – and no doubt his love of architecture as well.

"I think it's important to define your niche, so to speak, as it helps the audience understand what they're getting when engaging your services. But at the same time, it can be a bit too convenient to put 'labels' on art. Ideally, I hope people derive some sense of visual joy when looking at my photos. It is really a case of 'art for art's sake'. No hidden meaning, no political message, just something pleasing to look at, even if cramped within the confines of a smartphone screen.

"I find simple, minimal compositions very pleasing to the eye. A clean composition makes it easier for the viewer to home in on a particular feature or detail. From an architectural viewpoint,



Mosman Minimal

architects, builders and engineers all put their blood, sweat and tears into achieving buildings with straight walls and lines. I think it is only natural that architecture is portrayed in this way photographically, with the horizontals and verticals being inline and straight. This approach to architectural imaging goes back to Renaissance-style paintings, where a true-to-life viewpoint was considered more appealing to the eye, especially when everything matches up visually."

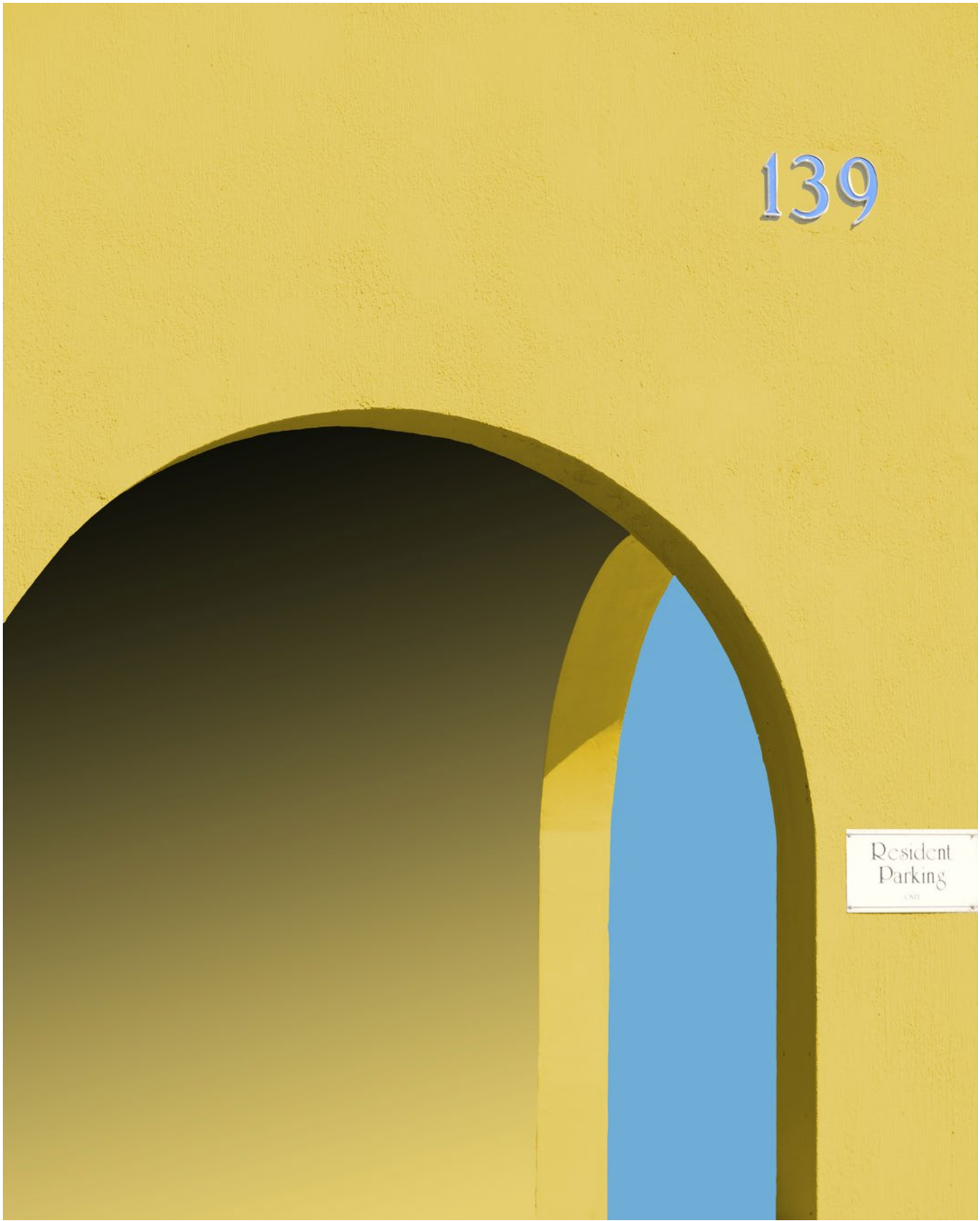
Mechanics

"As a famous uncle once said, 'The best camera you have is the camera you have with you,' so when I was starting out, I used my phone camera, similar to most people of my generation. Phone cameras can be great given the right circumstances. When it comes to my minimal prints, the lighting at a particular time in the day is very important to how the shadows are cast and the overall tone of the image. So, if I happen to stumble across a great shot, the best option is to capture it then and there, as you may never see those exact circumstances again.

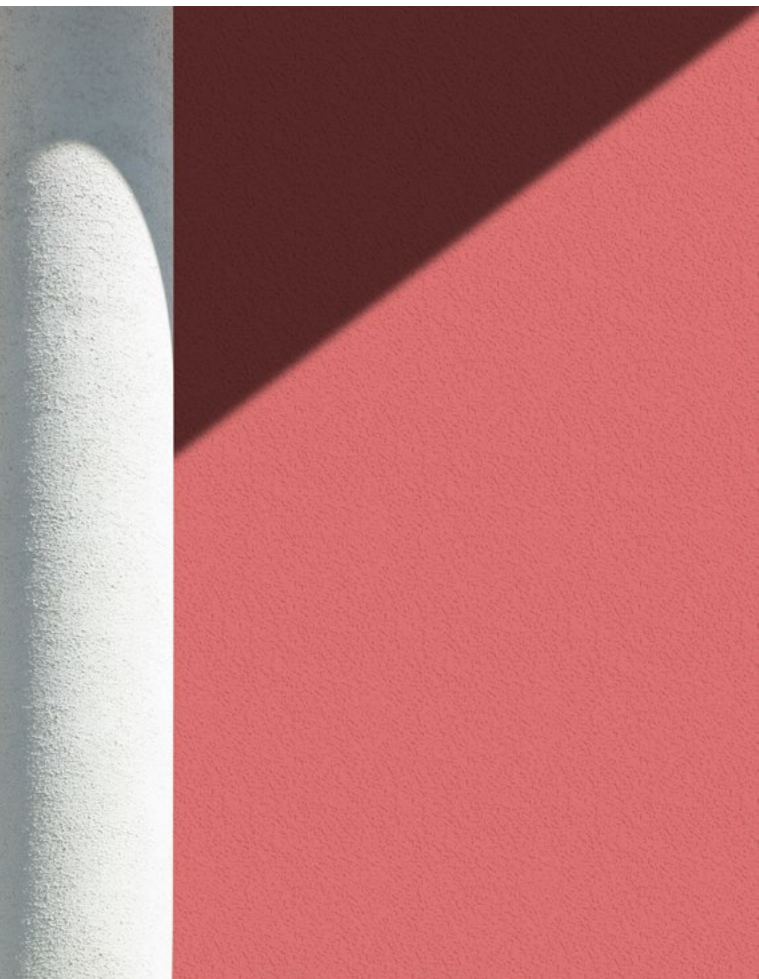
"On the occasions when I plan to go out and take photos, I used a Samsung NX1 mirrorless camera, but since starting my own photography practice, I have saved up to purchase a Canon EOS R5 mirrorless system.

"I mainly use Photoshop to edit the minimal images, but Lightroom is quicker and easier when working on photos in bulk for my freelance work."

Josh says the amount of editing required really depends on



Dee Why Minimal



Eveleigh Minimal 1

each photo. For some images he merely increases the saturation and calls it a day, while others can involve a lot more legwork to get the desired look he's imagining.

"The first thing most people notice about these images is that the colours aren't necessarily true-to-life. This is where the naked eye and a camera can vary. I often try to replicate what I saw when taking the photo, but the camera can often soften or dull down some colours. So, in most cases, the primary colour was already present in the scene, but has either been adjusted to emphasise a 'flatter' look enhanced to make it more vibrant and solid.

"There can be a lot of preparatory work to create a 'flat canvas' to work on. This is achieved by cropping and straightening the horizontals and verticals. I have also been known to remove some objects altogether that may be visually distracting, such as a sign or a piece of rubbish."

Part of the appeal of Josh's work is his use of flat fields of colour, but these aren't always as he finds them. For instance, he may adjust the sky to create a flat look by removing clouds and colour streaks. He laughs, "If you've ever edited a blue sky before, you'll realise that there are many shades of blue!

"Because colour and tone are such important aspects of my work, the capture time is very significant. In an ideal situation, I like to capture these shots mid-to-late morning with a clear blue sky. Such conditions make things easier from a post-production point of view, but if shot under less than ideal conditions, they can usually be fixed. For example, shooting in the afternoon glow will affect the white balance, which



The Rocks Minimal

changes the colours and overall mood of the image. While this can be fixed in post, I aim to shoot when the conditions are as natural as possible."

Output

Like many emerging creatives of his generation, 27-year-old Josh started by posting his images on Instagram. "In essence, this process acts as a judging platform to see if your photos (and oneself) can survive the torments of online opinions. Overall, the images generated a decent following and people seemed to show interest in them, which was a great surprise.

"In a way, the restrictions of Instagram have shaped the way in which my photos are captured and displayed. Being a vertical medium, Instagram has a preference towards content with a portrait orientation, as opposed to landscape.

"Due to this, I tend to take most of my photos vertically and export them within a 4x5 ratio frame, based on Instagram preferences. And even though I'm not posting so regularly to Instagram, I've continued with this approach to keep a degree of consistency in the portfolio."

Josh's next step is to explore the world of print sales, so if any readers are interested, his contact details are below!

Contact Details

Website: jmc-studio.net

Instagram: @jmc.studio



Eveleigh Minimal 2

The Art of Aerial Photography

Peter Eastway looks back at the evolution of the popular abstract aerial.

Abstract aerals have become a landscape genre in their own right. They are clearly recognisable, often with an intriguing puzzle to decipher or a detailed pattern to enjoy. And while we're used to seeing landscapes from around six feet above ground level, the view from 500 or 5000 feet above can be both novel and unexpected.

Now, point your camera down a little more to remove the horizon and your subject's context. Tighten up the crop on an interesting pattern or shape and with some post-production, your aerial can be transformed into a commanding abstract.

Of course, how much abstraction is introduced is highly variable. Sometimes, a subject like a sand dune takes on an abstract character, simply because of the aerial viewpoint. On other occasions, you can composite a number of images together to create something completely otherworldly.

Love them or not, the aerial abstract is incredibly popular and while it's quite askance to traditional landscapes, I find that the same attention to detail and technique is required.

Insight

It's been interesting to watch the abstract aerial take its place in landscape photography over the past 10 years. The approach was

firmly established well before drones became popular, affordable and reliable, so earlier work was shot just like the traditional aerial photographers, out of an aircraft window or door. But while in the past almost any aerial was inherently interesting because of its altitude, the more recent abstract compositions with their enhanced contrast and saturated colours have taken the genre well outside the traditionalist's field.

Richard Woldendorp (1927-2023) was an aerial photography pioneer, working from the 1960s to 2023. In Australia, he sold hundreds of thousands of lavish coffee table books full of amazing aerial photographs and while his work was considered semi-abstract at the time, today we would think most of his work very literal.

As one of my mentors, I invited Richard to a 2013 print exhibition which included some of my aerial abstracts. He was very polite as he took me aside in a fatherly fashion and congratulated me on my sense of framing and composition, but really, the colour was 'just too strong, too unrealistic'.

I smiled because I know aerial abstracts are not for everyone, but if you can accept that photography is a language which can be used for both fiction and non-fiction, for poetry and science, then nothing more need be said. Aerial abstracts are an artform



Shark Bay Exhibition, 2023

The visitor centre at Denham, Shark Bay still exhibits a truncated selection of prints from the Shark Bay Inscription – 2016 exhibition by the ND5 group of photographers.



Sand Dune, Lake Frome, 2022

Sand dune, Lake Frome, South Australia. The long, low lines of the sand dune sitting atop a salt lake takes on an abstract shape from 2000 feet above.

first, a record of the landform below a distant second.

The exhibition was titled *Shark Bay Inscription – 2016* (we were working ahead of the 400-year anniversary of the Dutch discovering Australia) and presented by ND5, a collective of four Australian photographers and a video producer. We had been shooting a series of projects around Western Australia since 2008, gradually developing separate tastes for increasingly abstract aerials.

Shark Bay as a destination is large, flat and desolate, but when you take to the skies, the environment below is a honey-pot of colours, shapes and patterns. Importantly for us, the images were photographed with medium format digital backs and printed large, from one to two metres. The traditional approach to landscape detail remained fundamental, so that as our viewers came closer to inspect the print, they wouldn't be disappointed. However, unlike a traditional landscape, they would often struggle to resolve the abstract nature of the overall composition and it was only when they looked closer that the literal subject matter was revealed.

Using medium format back then certainly required extra effort, but everything is relative. I can remember lugging a huge 8x10" view camera and tripod up a steep sand dune last century, dreaming of the day technology would invent a small camera



Peter Eastway in front of his 2013 print of Quoin Bay, Dirk Hartog Island, Shark Bay.



Water Textures, Shark Bay, 2023

Textured sands below, rippled water patterns above.

Port Hedland Train Tracks, 2013

When people see photographs of the Pilbara, many don't believe that the intensity of the colour is real, but after you've been there, you realise it can be difficult for a photograph to match the intensity and saturation of reality!

the size of a 35mm SLR camera, but able to capture the same 8x10" resolution and detail. Shooting with one of these old cameras out of an open window in a light plane was never going to happen, but when Phase One and Hasselblad introduced medium format cameras that could be taken out of the studio and into the field, the world of high resolution landscape photography was transformed. One need never again be disappointed in a print's technical quality, no matter how closely viewed.

Today, with lots of mirrorless cameras using 50+ megapixel sensors and software like Topaz Gigapixel AI able to up-rez our files, medium format might not seem to be necessary, but for me, a medium format file is not just about resolution, but dynamic range and a different feeling of depth as well. However, that's a separate topic and a lot of my friends and students are producing stunning, jaw-dropping abstract aerials with mirrorless cameras. Pixel envy is not an issue.

Our Shark Bay exhibition has been incredibly successful, both financially and aesthetically. It seems the general public loves a good aerial abstract and our work is still displayed in the visitor centre at Denham. It seems the abstract nature of the subject matter allows more people to read something into the shapes and colours, making a personal connection for them even though they had never visited the locations. And as we know, selling landscape photography is as much about creating a connection with the buyer as producing a technically perfect print.







Receding Tide, Derby, 2023

Root patterns are created by the tides, the white dry sands contrasting with the darker wet sands.

The photographs from the exhibition also won us numerous awards in both print and book competitions, so much so that in Australia at least, there was a flurry of activity as photographers from as far away as the other side of the continent journeyed to Shark Bay. Locations like Useless Loop and Monkey Mia became almost household names within the local photographic community.

There have been photographers in other parts of the world exploring a similar path to ours, but it was around this time that abstract aerials really made a splash in Australia, New Zealand and the USA, certainly in the professional print competitions. I like to think our ND5 group had a little influence on the great work that has followed.

Today at Shark Bay, the aircraft charter company tells me there are more photographers than general sightseers taking joy flights from their airstrip.

Helicopter or Plane?

Most of my abstract aerials are taken from an aircraft, somewhere between 1000 and 5000 feet, depending on the subject below. Often, the choice between a helicopter or a plane is one of economics. For a lot of remote locations, a large chunk of the budget can be spent just getting the aircraft to the location and this makes a helicopter more expensive because its hourly rate is usually double that of a light plane. In my next life, I intend to come back as someone wealthy enough to buy my own helicopter and pilot!

A helicopter is probably the preferred aircraft, simply because it is more comfortable, it can fly more slowly than a plane (which means you have more time to frame your shots), and you can hover over a location for as long as you like or can

afford. With the doors off and a bit of a roll, you can easily point your camera straight down and often for abstract aerials, it's a plain view that works the best.

Light planes probably have a longer range than a helicopter and while they can't be slowed down the same way, you just adapt your shooting approach. You might need to take two or three runs over a subject to get it right, but at the price, it's comparatively affordable.

While shooting with doors off is great, it's not always possible. Sometimes you have to make do with the aircraft that are available. The main issue isn't shooting through the glass window, it's controlling the reflections – a large flexible rubber lens hood which can be placed in contact with the window solves this.

Another option is to shoot from a balloon. You don't have as much control over where you're going, but it's a great aerial platform and there are no windows to worry about.

The main challenge for most of us is the hourly rate and you can quickly spend several thousand dollars on an aerial shoot. Travelling with friends really does have advantages! Or maybe that drone is looking like a less expensive option?

However you manage to get into the air, the technical issues are much the same whether you're shooting pictorial aerials or abstracts.

The Capture

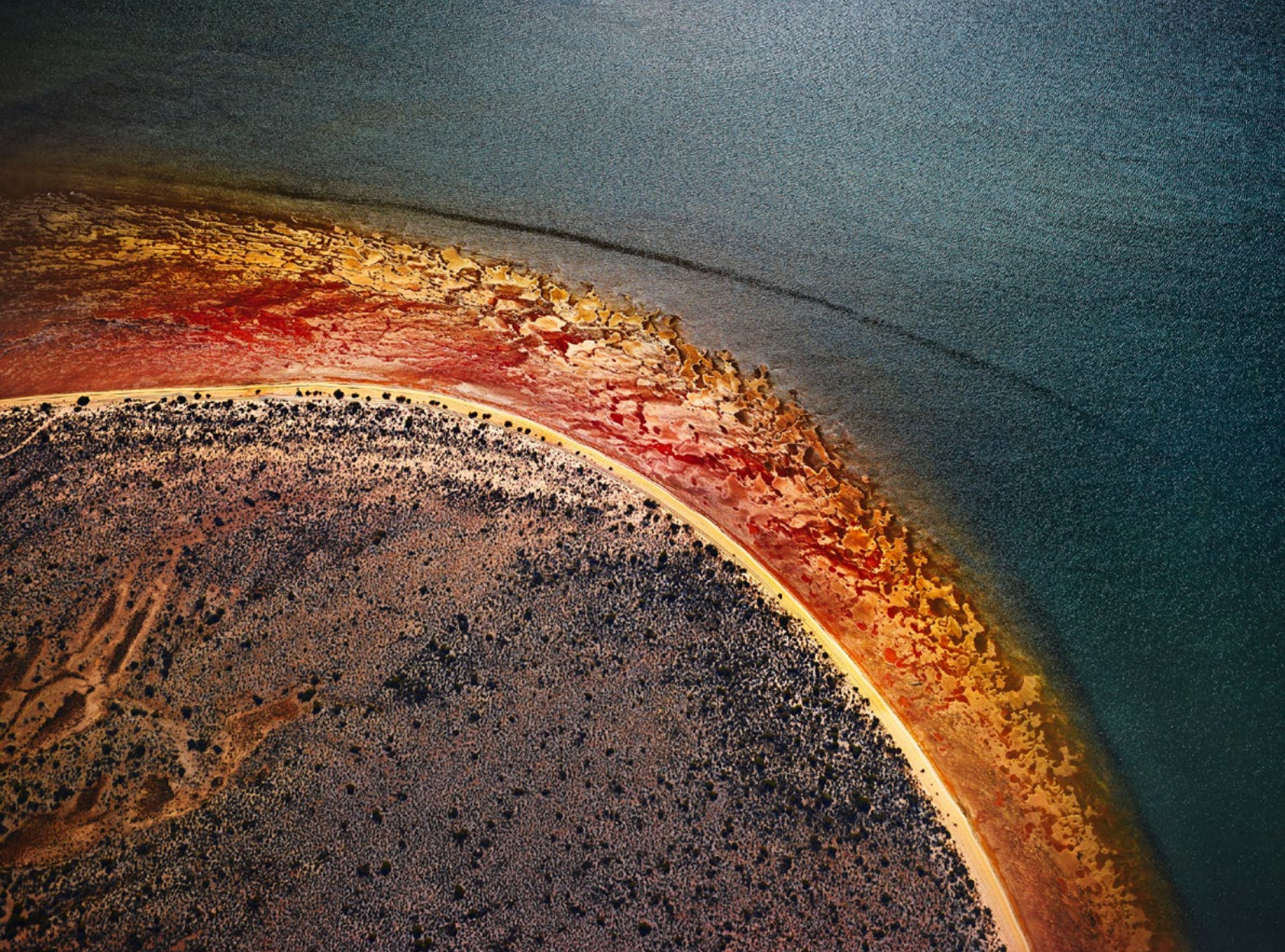
Capturing a high resolution aerial is straightforward. Generally, you can set your camera to a wide area autofocus pattern with shutter-priority exposure mode and you'll be guaranteed of some technically great shots.

However, even with the incredible automation we have, when judging photography competitions I still see quite a few aerials where the focus has been missed, just by a fraction, or perhaps there's a little motion blur. Whatever the cause, the fine detail that is a hallmark of an impressive abstract aerial has turned to mush and my guess is it's because of one of two reasons: the shutter speed was too slow or the autofocus system struggled to get a fix.

Understanding the fast shutter speed is easy. A light aircraft produces a ton of vibrations which create camera shake and then there are the pockets of air and gusts of wind that throw you around, usually when you're pressing the button to take the perfect image. Over the years, we've worked out that a minimum shutter speed of 1/2000 second is required. Yes, we can get sharp images with slower shutter speeds even down to 1/125 second, but our success rate was much lower and so to avoid later disappointment when editing the shoot, I set my shutter speed first and then work out the aperture and ISO accordingly. If one of my photos isn't sharp, it's unlikely to be camera shake.

Autofocus can also struggle when there are large detailless land areas below. You mightn't have a problem photographing over a town or a city because there's so much contrast to work with, but deserts and coasts (which are great fodder for abstract aerials) are often so flat and lifeless, the autofocus system doesn't work. It's a bit like trying to focus on blue sky.

I'm sure a reader more technically minded than me could provide a better explanation, but simply speaking, our autofocus systems require a degree of contrast in the subject in order to determine the correct focus setting, but when you're flying over



Lharidon Bight, 2013

"What I love most about medium format is its ability to retain a huge tonal range". Shark Bay, Western Australia.

smooth, contiguous sand or water at speed, there often isn't the contrast necessary for the autofocus system to grab onto.

Once you're aware of the issue, it is possible to fix it in a number of ways. For instance, you can point your camera somewhere else that has contrast (e.g., up along the horizon), use the focus lock and recompose on your subject below. Because the distances are so great and assuming you're not using a super-telephoto, it doesn't matter where you focus, it's all going to be at infinity. Unfortunately, with things happening so quickly from an aircraft, this approach might not be quick enough.

Another option is to work out precisely where the infinity focus point is on your lens and set the focus manually – once set correctly, you'll rarely need to change focus for abstract aerials if you're shooting from 500 feet or higher.

With the Phase One SLR cameras, focusing in the air has been a decade-long challenge. The earlier cameras simply couldn't autofocus quickly enough and the only option we had was to focus manually. However, when you're shooting with 100- or 150-megapixel sensors, you can't just turn the focus ring to where you think infinity is because, if you're out by just a fraction, so is your focus. I can remember doing some tests with Phase One where one of the technicians suggested scratching an index mark on the barrel of the lens, but as we discovered, aligning the lens to the left side, the middle or the right side of that thin scratch mark produced a noticeable difference in the

resulting focus. The higher the resolution you work with, the more precise you need to be.

On the current Phase One XF camera, there's a feature that allows you to set the lens at infinity. Rather than using the autofocus system to determine the focus point, the camera remembers the number of rotations the focus gearing requires to precisely set the lens at infinity. It has been a game changer for me and even when shooting over areas with very little contrast, I know my photos will be precisely focused.

So, what about modern mirrorless cameras? Will you have problems shooting aerials? I find that by using a wide area autofocus pattern, the AF system works so quickly it is rare that it can't find something with sufficient contrast to focus on.

And what about that perfect composition where focus was just missed or there's a touch of blur? I confess to taking a lot of photos like that over the years, but now with Topaz Sharpen AI, it's amazing what can be saved.

The technical approach to aerial photography continues to change, but it seems that for now, the more pixels you have, the better your image will look when you print at larger sizes.

The Aesthetics

One of the ND5 group's first exhibitions, called *The Pilbara Project*, was curated by an American museum director. He had a different vision to most of us and while it was great to work with him, I learnt that colour was not his thing.



Useless Loop Salt Mine, 2013

You can't fly over these salt mines without pointing your camera down. It's become a signature destination for Shark Bay.

As background, many people don't believe the intensity of the colours found in photographs of the Pilbara – not until they have been to the Pilbara themselves. It is full of strong reds and ochres and, after rain, the greens and yellows are equally the most vibrant I have seen.

On this project, I certainly responded to the colour, for both my traditional and aerial prints, but our curator was not happy with me. He suggested that bright colours and high impact contrast might be suitable for my magazines and even in books, but it had no place on a gallery wall.

I quickly discovered how rigid certain areas of art can be. Yet what struck me a few days later as I walked around the Art Gallery of Western Australia, is that the painters whose works were on the walls didn't worry about too much colour at all. In fact, many of the contemporary works built their power on a bold, highly saturated colour palette. Why shouldn't photography be permitted to do the same?

I write this because I know there are a lot of biases in photography. Rather than biases, let's think about preferences. I don't ask photographers to like my work, rather to accept that my way of seeing is just as valid as any other. I possibly worry too much about the naysayers, given how successful this genre

has become. And of course, an abstract aerial doesn't have to be colourful to be successful!

But I love colour. I don't need the entire image to be full of saturated hues, but often there will be one or two splashes of "200%" colour saturation that hold the eye and give the image its impact.

Many of my unprocessed raw files look rather dull and boring, but within what appears to be a monotonous stretch of sand or water, you can find a myriad of shapes and patterns that without careful post-production would remain invisible to the eye. There's an element of serendipity which I love because I'm never quite sure what I will discover, buried deep within a raw file.

While the finished result might bear little resemblance to reality, my approach is directed by what is already there. It doesn't have to be, but I like to work this way – it's a preference. As I process the image, details and patterns will reveal themselves as exposure and contrast are adjusted and from there they can be further enhanced and directed with selective adjustments.

It's difficult to explain in words this visual exercise, so I hope a couple of before and after examples will show how important post-production is in delivering the final result.

I process my raw files in Capture One or Lightroom. In earlier years, Capture One gave me a result much closer to my aesthetic than Lightroom, but currently I can produce very similar results with both of them.

Sometimes, the image can be fully resolved in Capture One or Lightroom, but usually I will take a processed file across to Photoshop where I use the Auto Curves dialog to stretch out the colours and tones, correcting any unwanted colour casts I may have introduced during editing.

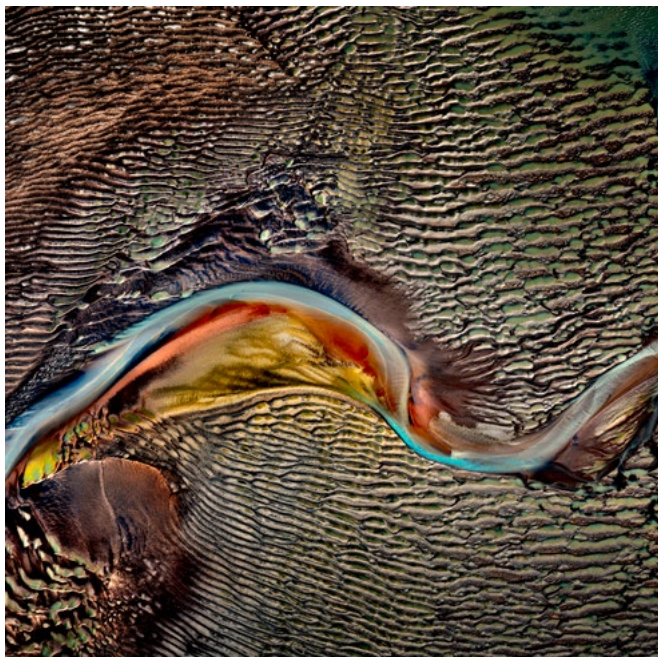


The raw file before processing, but with standard profile curve applied.



Useless Loops Dune, 2013

Many people see a phoenix or a seahorse in the shape of the dunes.



Derby, Tidal Flats, 2023

Pareidolia. A bird's head in the tides flowing over shallow sand bars.

It would be interesting to create a step-by-step approach, but every image is so different. However, for me the key to abstract aerials is managing the colour and contrast, but only after I have cropped and transformed the composition. In the air, I might shoot 10 or 20 frames of the same subject which allows me to choose one with the strongest framing potential. I'm happy to rotate and use perspective controls in post-production, simplifying the composition.

Most of my abstracts are single capture, but not always. I use multiple exposures, composites, stitches and cloning to achieve the desired result, but what I enjoy most is opening a raw file and seeing where it leads me. Sometimes when I press the shutter I know exactly what I want the final photograph to look like, but just as often, the image takes me somewhere else and the finished print ends up being quite different to what I originally imagined. And that's the fun with abstract aerials.

I'm using a standard 80mm lens most of the time, the equivalent of a 50mm on a full-frame sensor. If I want to fit more in, I ask the pilot to fly higher. Do I want a tighter crop? Then fly lower. However, I use moderately wide-angle and telephoto lenses as well, just to mix it up.

So, what about drones? In most places around the world, there's a ceiling on how high you can take a drone, which can be limiting. Then again, working within these limits is just another creative challenge and I've seen some sensational abstract aerials taken from only a few hundred feet off the ground. And the image quality?

Well, if you process the files carefully and use the Topaz suite to sharpen and up-rez your files, it's amazing what you can produce.

No, it's not the same as shooting with medium format from an aircraft, but who said it has to be the same? It's a different aesthetic and one I also enjoy. Monogamy isn't a prerequisite for photography.



Dunes, Shark Bay, 2023

Late afternoon light on a section of sand dunes near Useless Loop.

The Print on the Wall

I worked on a book project with Mikkel Aaland and some of the Adobe Lightroom programmers – yes, a book project, so it was quite some time ago! Mikkel told me how he had met Ansel Adams in person. He asked Ansel what would he do if he were starting his career again and Ansel replied that there was this new thing called 'electronic imaging' coming along and that he hoped he'd be around long enough to enjoy it.

The photographers we look upon as our mentors and heroes are usually remembered because they were doing something new. They were trailblazers and so when it comes to our photography, I think we should give ourselves permission to try something new.

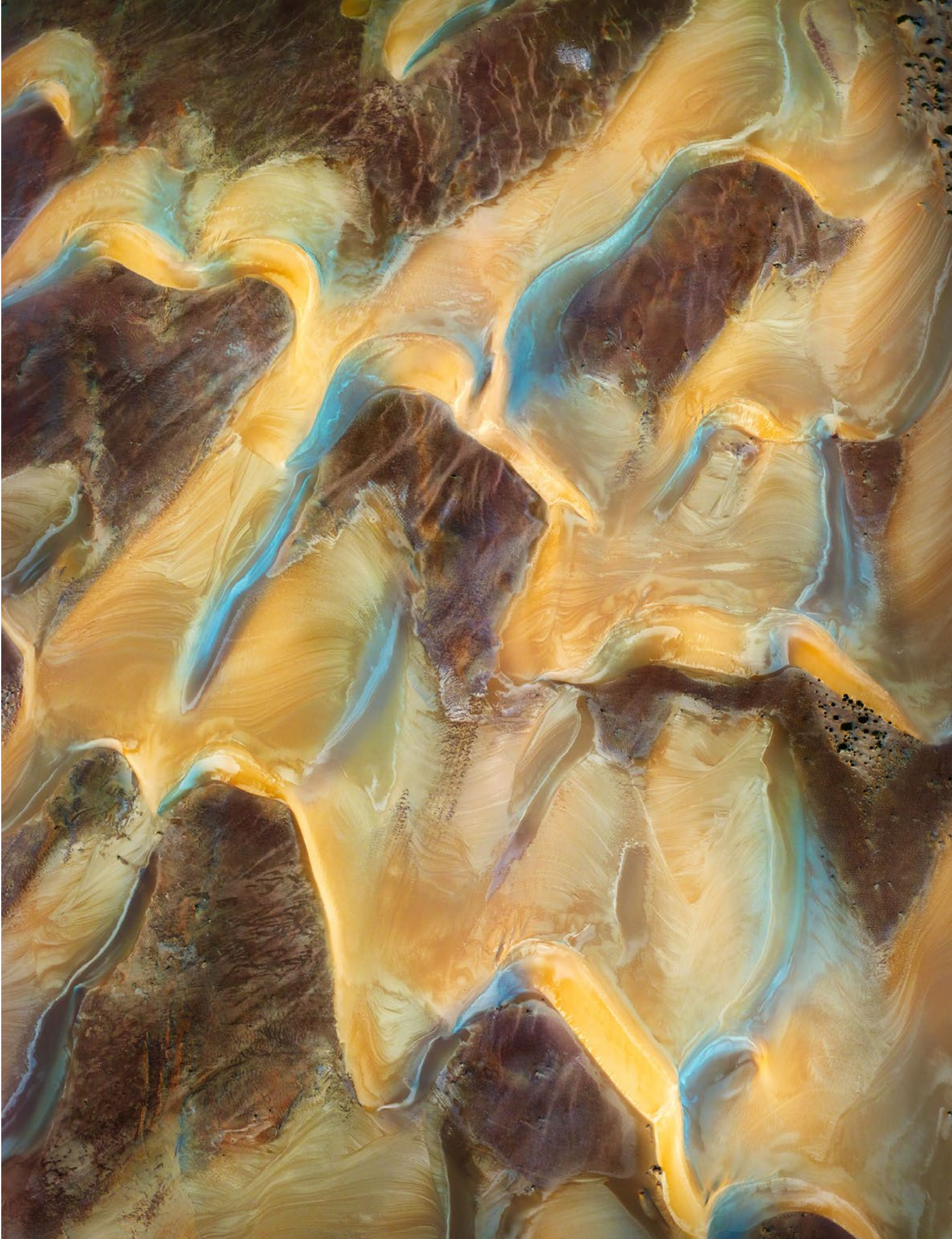
Then there was another quote by legendary Australian artist John Olsen who said, "Just because something is new and different, doesn't mean it's good!"

So, where am I going with this train of thought? Our 2013 exhibition was a little bold at the time, because instead of the full gloss finish that landscape photographers used almost universally, we printed on matte paper, we mounted on aluminum and we didn't use frames or glass. The concept was that there should be literally nothing between the viewer and our work.

Would we present our work the same way today? We already mount on GatorBoard because it's lighter than aluminium (but the edges are not as nice and so a frame will help) and there are many new options, such as printing directly onto aluminium (ChromaLuxe). I've had quite a few clients print my work as face mount acrylics, so there's no shortage of reflections, but with the right lighting, the result looked great!

For me, a lot of the impact of an abstract aerial comes from its size and the ability to walk up closer to the print, never feeling that you are getting too close. You need to have sharp detail from corner to corner, just like the classical landscapes we all love.

But from there, we need to remember that we are creating abstracts.



Hartog Dunes, 2013

Presented as a 1500x1000 mm print in the 'Shark Bay Inscription – 2016' exhibition. The base image is composited with wave textures brushed into the darker areas of the dune.

Fair & Balanced

Michael Coyne questions whether a photographer's work should be truly balanced and not biased in one way.



An American survivalist displays the collection of weapons that are kept at his home in case someone attacks him. Oregon, USA.

I watched the beads of sweat trickle into his eyes. He pulled up his shirt, wiped his face and bent over to hoist another bale of hay onto the trailer. The temperature was in the high thirties and the humidity was off the scale. The African American farmworker had been labouring all day along with his fellow workers, loading and stacking hay bales under the hot Louisiana sun.

I was documenting rural life in the United States for my international Village project (<https://village-hearing-the-grass-grow.square.site/>), trying to capture the zeitgeist of this diverse and populous country.

This is not America

But one picture is not the story. This is not America; it is one piece of information from one part of the country and I needed to reflect a more balanced view of the 'States' with a wider set of images.

Too often photographers select photographs that reflect their prejudices of a person, place or event and don't try to capture the totality of what they are seeing. Good photojournalists and documentary photographers try to be objective and give a fair and balanced view, telling all sides of the story.

Capturing images of an elderly man smoking a pipe, a woman leaning on a walking stick or a child running around in ragged mismatched clothes, is rarely the whole picture. In fact, these type of clichéd images are more like a camera club tick-list than what can be achieved by a photographer stepping out of their comfort zone and seeing what is happening around them.

Guns are a big part of the American culture; we saw that on display at a Trump rally leading up to the 2024 presidential election, to mention but one of many of gun-related incidents that regularly occur here; events seemingly so routine as to be almost mundane. I photographed a man in Oregon who had a wide collection of weapons including two deadly crossbows, which he claimed were needed for survival purposes.



Dancing to the sound of Cajun music at Fred's Lounge Mamou, Louisiana, USA.



African Americans loading hay bales onto a trailer. Arnaudville, Louisiana, USA.



A Latin American man poses against the side of his sugar cane truck. Arnaudville, Louisiana, USA.

Ethical Dilemmas

The United States is built on a large migrant population, so it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge their presence. Many migrants are illegal and they fear the local authorities. They have no papers, no legal rights and work for small amounts of cash.

I met three Latinos resting by the roadside while waiting for their truck to be repaired. Using my limited Spanish and with their few words of English, I learned that they definitely did not want to be photographed. But the third member of the group, a young man, indicated that he would be happy to pose as long

as he couldn't be identified. The man pulled a cap low down onto his face, creating a shadow and posed against the side of his sugar cane truck.

Quite a few of the photographs I shoot involve an ethical dilemma, so it is important that I think about the potential consequences of my picture taking. Is this man an illegal migrant? Will he be safe? Will I get him into trouble with the authorities? These are important questions because I have no right to put this man's life or livelihood in danger. In this situation the young man indicated he felt safe and comfortable.



A resident of the Yad Mordechai Kibbutz working in a packing centre for locally grown potatoes. Southern District, Israel.

America can also be joyful. Early one morning, we arrived at Fred's Lounge in Louisiana where I captured images of people drinking breakfast Bloody Marys, laughing and dancing to the beat of Cajun music – all part of fair and balanced reportage.

Balance in Conflict

Mention Israel or Palestine and people have an opinion, one way or the other. When you see death, destruction and distressed people, it's hard not to feel shocked. Is it possible to show balance in the context of a brutal ongoing conflict?

Being present at the following scenarios allowed me to show life in Israel and the Palestinian territories through a variety of lenses.

Whooping and yelling as they ran, West Bank settlers scrambled through a Palestinian olive grove, smashing and trashing the trees and infrastructure until they were stopped by the local police. The settlers then turned their ire onto the law officers, pushing and shoving, trying to claim bags of olives the Palestinian farmers had just picked.

This was quite a different scene to the Israeli farmers I photographed on different kibbutzim, tending to their cattle and harvesting truckloads of new potatoes and carrots. This farmland was right next to the Gaza strip and frequently attacked by rockets. These kibbutzim were also in the areas where Hamas attacked Israel on 7 October, 2023, not long after I had left the region.

I slept in a Bedouin camp in the Jordan Valley, rising to the sound of the sheep, goats and chickens who had shared my sleeping quarters. In the early morning, I found the patriarch staring at an Israeli military plane which was circling overhead. Even though the Bedouin camp was in the West Bank and his family had grazed their animals on this land for many generations, Israel considered this area part of their military zone. The patriarch had good reason to worry. On a number of occasions, the Israeli military had shot his animals from helicopters and trashed his home and animal pens.

I photographed a Palestinian woman in the West Bank whose home had been bombed by the Israeli military. She now lives in a cave beneath what was once her house.

Some photographers seek the sensational, looking for an award-winning gritty image that will enhance their career without stopping to think about the people whose lives are being adversely impacted by the newsworthy event they are documenting.



Jewish settlers clash with Israeli authorities after attacking Palestinian farmers over a dispute about olives trees. The West Bank, Palestine.



A Bedouin tends to his flock of goats and sheep as an Israeli reconnaissance plane films his activities. The Jordan Valley, Palestine.

Just to be clear, there are also a number of successful, high-profile photographers who do care about people who are the victims of major tragedies and events. These

photographers reflect on what is happening in front of them and try to show their viewers a true, fair and balanced series of photographs.



A Palestinian woman lives in a cave because the Israelis bombed her home. Khirbet Susya, Jordan Valley, Palestine.

Title Fight

Do you need titles for your photographs, or are they superfluous for a visual language? Murray White leads by example!



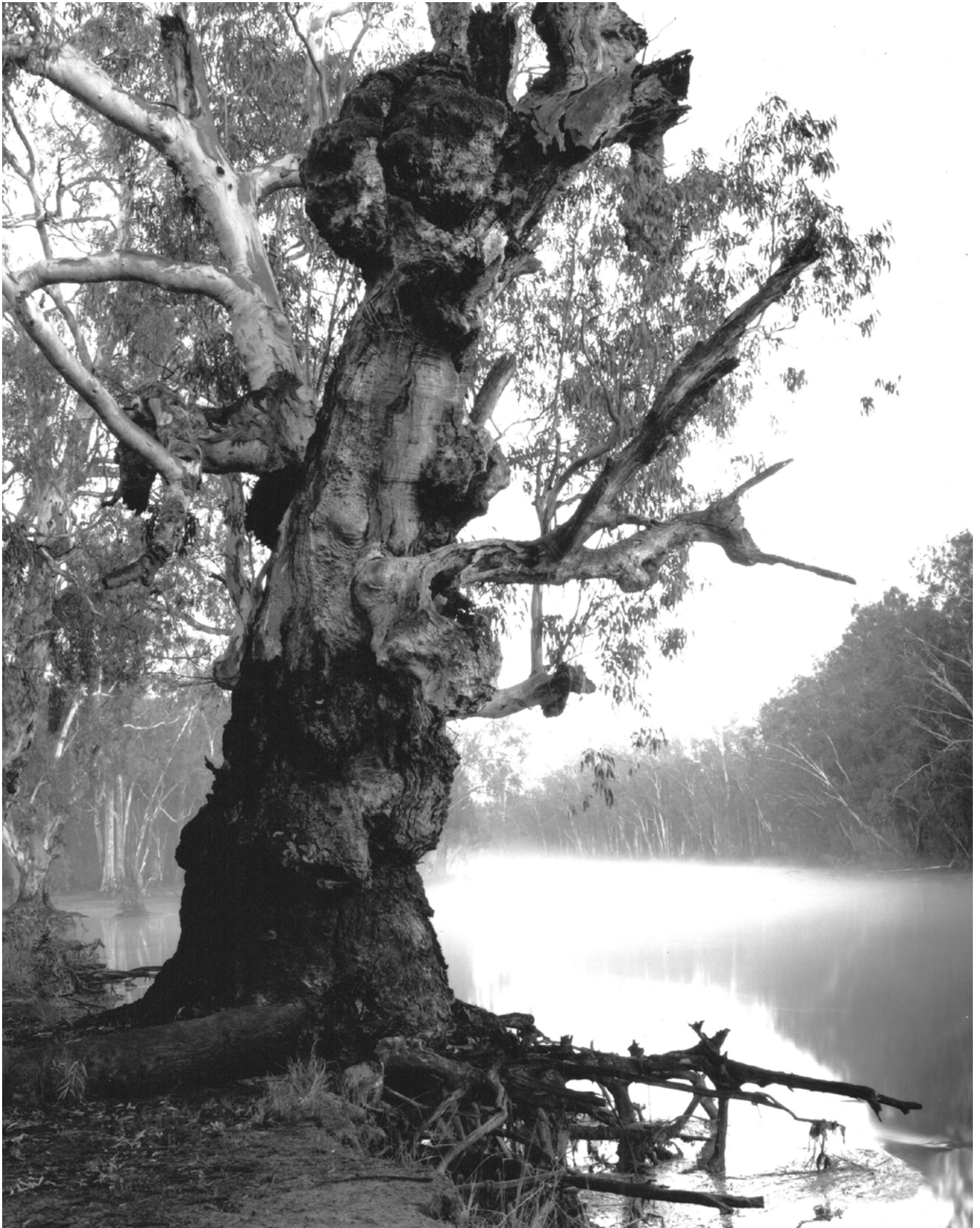
Consider for a moment a photographic print depicting blue sky and white clouds only. Without associated words, what would this image mean to you? Maybe if displayed in a windowless office, it would offer a welcome escape to the outside world, a visual reminder that plaster ceilings and artificial light remain an inferior alternative to inspiration born of the real thing. That same print hanging in a preschool centre could offer younger, more fluid minds, the opportunity to explore a jungle of wondrous shapes and possibilities. Perhaps to those in palliative care, it could represent a concept beyond just its pictorial content.

It would seem perfectly reasonable to me that such a print of the natural world (perhaps every environmental print) is able to elicit a response without the need for further information. Indeed, a title or caption may only succeed in muddying the waters of comprehension if we are required to reconcile what we see, feel and understand of every image, in every setting. Do we really need to know what type of cloud is depicted, or where or when it formed as we wander past, our thoughts drifting along on their own parallel journey?

Such passing encounters are commonplace in today's visual landscape where anonymous images lurk in every corner of our

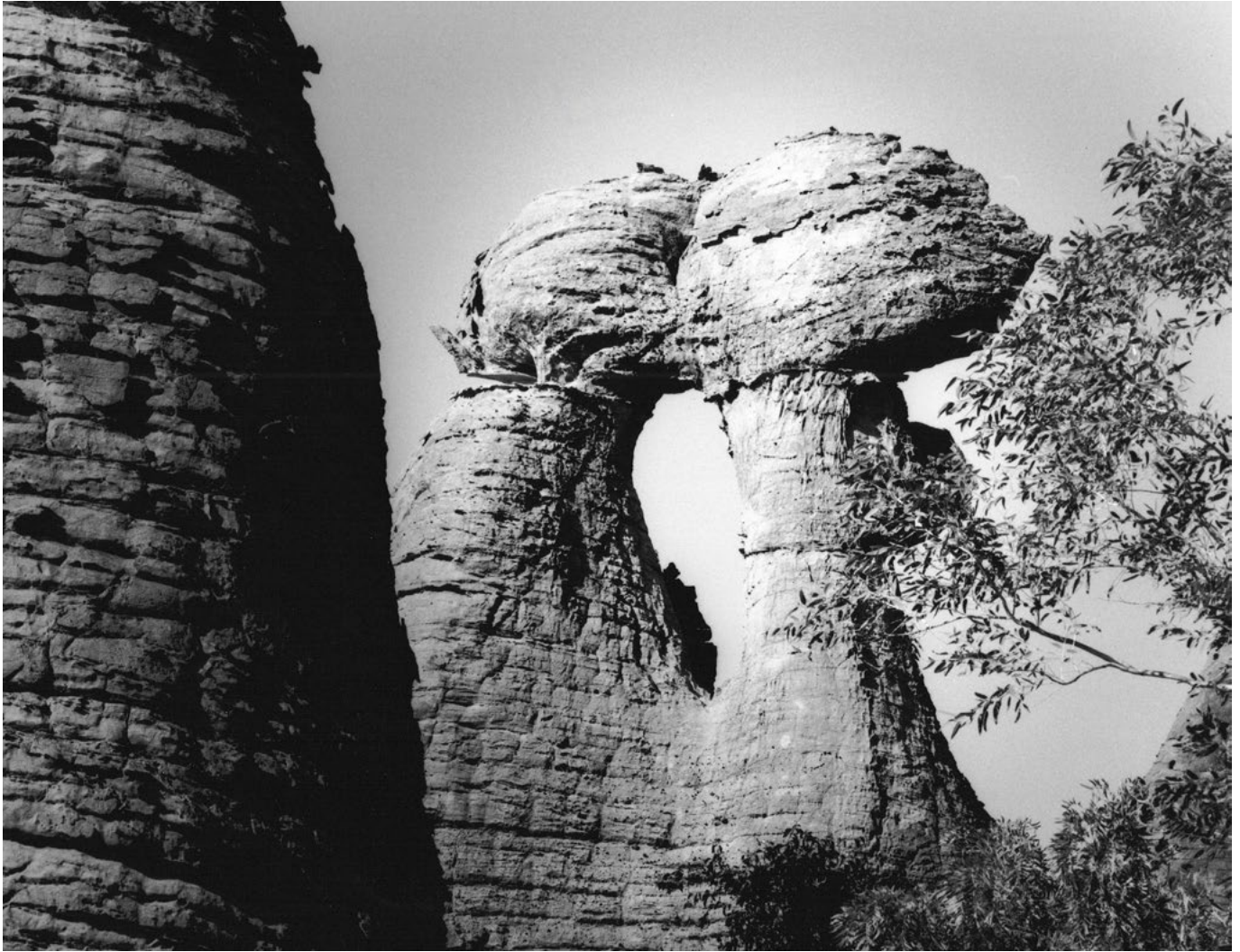
Clockwork

This title reinforces the geometric, almost mechanical nature of these fractured rocks. By choosing a title that unambiguously demonstrates our photographic intent, we provide guidance to a viewer, not of any absolute or indisputable quality (that is always a matter of opinion), but of the potential we witnessed at the moment of capture. A viewer may not agree with the visual direction implied, but can use that suggestion to further their understanding of the subject and potentially arrive at an assessment quite unlike that which would accompany an untitled print.



The Minder

Certain subjects lend themselves to anthropomorphic studies and this redgum with its animated limbs and pensive facial features soon aroused my interest. I felt compelled to set up my camera with the intent of revealing this underlying relationship. However, to others unfamiliar with my interpretation of this real-world setting and without the guidance of a coercive title, the resulting print could easily revert to just a moody river scene and character-rich tree. It could be argued that the photograph has failed if it requires an additional level of assistance to be viable, but on the other hand, what could anybody interpret of an untitled complex image in just a three-second swipe?



The Kiss

Identifying landscape settings that mimic human behaviours is one of my favourite pursuits and although not all subjects are immediately obvious to all viewers, a sympathetic title can help build that possibility. In this case I chose to remove any doubt of my intention, even though a more subtle title like 'Goodbye' could allude to multiple layers of concept through the image (like the eroding rock formations themselves) and perhaps be a more meaningful title to some. I guess with any title, we make a judgement on potential interpretations and select from a continuum between one with universal understanding and one that will draw more uncertain responses.

lives. They are integral to the work place, our digital environment and countless leisure activities. Even roadside signs seem to pre-empt our arrival with an image of that destination which we will ultimately see first-hand. The photograph, once revered for its ability to convey a message, a metaphorical thousand words, is now routinely reduced to an inconsequential three-second grab as we travel past at 100 kph, or swipe it from our screens with an equal haste.

Depth of Purpose

We seem to be invaded by images, but to say that the multiplicity of these encounters on a daily basis is devaluing their significance, is only partly true. Virtually all photographs are capable of conveying at least some depth of purpose, but in the absence of a driver to motivate deeper analysis, they will likely remain tainted by the broad brush of superficiality we have come to expect. Good images, even great images, are left to drown in an ocean where viewer assessment is hindered by visual exhaustion and rudderless navigation.

And here potentially lies one of the advantages of effectively titling and captioning our work – we can encourage our viewers

to consider a particular path of understanding that demands their participation. By offering a thoughtful title, we are saying that this photograph was not created as a visual Swiss army knife that can be all things to all people, but is a specific response to a particular subject, identified by the photographer – and the reason for its existence.

Now that reason need not be the subject of a thesis or involve deep intellectual stimulation. We could simply be looking at a textural study, a moment of light or the intersection of shapes. What is important is that there is intent to present that particular aspect of the world to others. We all see the landscape in our own way and will continue to do so even if influenced by a narrowly focused title, but as viewers ourselves, we have little to lose and perhaps much to gain by investing some time and effort in trying to understand the photographer's motivation.

Focusing on Intent

Intent is the cornerstone of artistic creativity, as it is with many other endeavours in life. Would you employ a builder who found the architect's plans and specifications a little limiting? Is



Defiant

Titles of emotive strength personalise the subject matter of a print, allowing us to project our own sensibilities into the scene. Contrast this approach with a more benign assessment like 'Tree and Clouds' or even 'The Windswept Coast', where we would only be reinforcing the visually obvious, not the underlying message. I find that human emotions projected onto natural features are particularly powerful because we can relate to the situation on terms we understand and perhaps expose in a print those same latent feelings that are rarely seen as characteristics of our landscape.

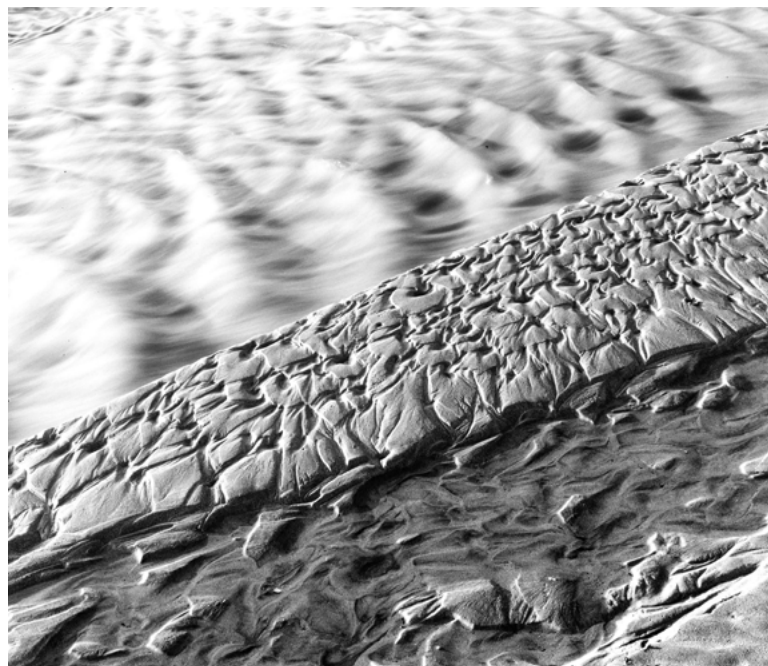
it reasonable in the absence of tomato that a chef would slice salami onto a vegetarian pizza?

I'm sure that many creative solutions have been the result of random experimentation in the past, but does it follow that aimless photography or an open-ended approach to concept is necessary for an artistic outcome? I think not and titling our work is one way we can reinforce that commitment to aesthetic purpose.

However, a photograph's title does not always shed more light on intent – at least not directly. Consider our sky and cloud photograph again. We could deliberately leave it untitled or offer

Life in the Fast Lane

Phrases familiar to us tend to personify our landscape, helping make it a more inclusive visual identity. Without a caption, this image could easily remain rooted in a study of texture and tone -- an entirely valid photographic expression, but one perhaps not truly indicative of the complexity we must grapple with. This title raises another aspect of the scene, where movement and variations of this attribute may further a viewer's understanding of the photographer's intent. I believe that a specific focus on this aspect of the title can enrich what may have been lost with a generic title such as 'Ripples' or 'Sandy Etchings'.





Fantasia

Even those not old enough to remember the anemone-like glass fibre lamps of the '70s may still respond to this subject and word association. This juxtaposition of wiry needles and the chunkier sandstone background still implies a sense of 'fantasy' and remodelling of the word seems to me entirely in keeping with this exotic subject. By deliberately using a vague title, seemingly unrelated to the subject, we can encourage the viewer to build on the visual elements and extrapolate their own interpretation of the setting.

a hint of purpose with a title such as 'Skyscape in October' or 'Clouds and Sky'. While each of these titles may seem somewhat ambivalent of intent or appear to lack artistic commitment, there can be subtle differences from a viewer's perspective.

'Untitled' may suggest that the photographer specifically desires an individual and organic response – it is their intent that this subject should not be constrained by any coercive mechanism. It's up to the viewer.

'Skyscape in October' may suggest multiple studies and therefore implies a very specific arrangement where rejection and discriminating selection have found meaning in this particular capture, however puzzling that purpose may be in reality. Stating the obvious is 'Clouds and Sky'; for me perhaps the least creative option, although possibly chosen to suggest a sense of something substantial hidden in banality. All of these options are valid choices, but in truth such modest titles are less likely to promote assessment of the photograph's deeper intent, irrespective of its aesthetic merit.

More adventurous titles such as 'The Sky's the Limit', 'Cloud Forest', or even just 'Clouded', arouse emotions, promote pictorial



Sliced

Single word titles rather than more verbose options often allow greater scope for a viewer to interrogate the image because of their broad definition. Although I selected this title to suggest this rock has been cut (instead of being the subject of a mirror image), the term has also impacted on how we may interpret the wave action behind: is this blade-shaped entity responsible for the 'cut'? In many cases a title is not obvious at the time of exposure, (especially in images with less than predictable moving entities), but emerges as the result of visual assessment at a later point, when we have more opportunity to view the composition with an open mind.

ambiguity (as opposed to visual indifference) and influence any number of individual variations of these interpretations. In a way, a photograph coupled with a nebulous written concept, partly breaches its pictorial boundaries and allows an alternative meaning or unexpected possibility to be considered by the viewer. That new dimension beyond what is visible, is I think a worthy goal in photography as it marries the authenticity of our capture with another level of interpretation and that combined complexity may interest a viewer.

Paradoxically, titling an image can sometimes extend the scope for viewer exploration – a quality often revered by those who claim that no title is more capable in this respect. Deliberately ambiguous titles can travel into surprising territory, unlikely visited by the casual viewer who typically views photography as reality by proxy (well, that was before AI anyway). 'The Snowdrifts' or 'Symphony of Blues' are examples of less restrictive destinations where our skyscape could find considerable breadth of meaning if the subject warranted that approach.

Interrogating the Image

Of course, not all subjects and settings benefit from cryptic titles, especially if the pictorial reality implies a more traditional or indeed representational format. However, a title that alludes to the deeper essence of a print, rather than its architectural facade, suggests that the photographer has considered the subject matter more thoughtfully (at least after its capture), and made a clear assessment of its visual or emotive significance to them.

This process of interrogating the image for a title holds considerable value beyond just captioning the scene to grab a

viewer's interest – in my opinion it is a critical step in our own photographic progression. By studying our prints in the search for a title, we are actually becoming more intimate with our own way of seeing.

And rather than routinely stating the obvious by naming an image based purely on its elemental structure, we have a perfect opportunity to reconcile what our capture may or may not be saying in an intuitive or metaphoric sense as well.

As the image maker, we should be well placed to make that judgement, but there will be times when our critical assessment seems to lead nowhere – we may then surrender from the task, and 'Clouds and Sky' (or similar) becomes our fallback position. If our capture is particularly powerful, perhaps that outcome is justified, but equally perhaps, could it be that we have failed to look closely enough or objectively enough?

In my experience, a powerful capture is capable of expressing a powerful purpose; we may just need to sift a little more chaff from the wheat to reveal a more meaningful title, or of greater importance, be able to convey the idea behind the photo's composition.

Indeed, the disciplined process of looking through relatively impartial eyes at our completed work and unearthing its foundational substance (together with a suitable title), can feed into the creation of subsequent captures in a positive way. That critical assessment skill, responsible for identifying purpose retrospectively, can be and should be applied at the composition stage.

We may not formulate a title at this point – and in reality that is unnecessary – but by looking beyond a pictorial scene



The Sound of Three

Effective titling allows us to introduce a concept not always immediately apparent to the viewer, but one of significance to the photographer. In this case the delicate sound of the falling water was one of its most defining features at the moment of exposure. But rather than overtly assign a visual characteristic or even acknowledge presence of a waterfall in the title, I have chosen a slightly more indirect path that requires viewer involvement. I believe that by offering a specific direction into the image, a viewer may be inclined to linger within the subject matter to reconcile the title with their own understanding and be willing to respond in a more enlightened capacity.

and drilling into its substance, we may identify a more effective concept.

And perhaps concept is the ultimate measure of photographic expression here.

When Edward Weston and Ansel Adams photographed 'Pepper No. 30' and 'Clearing Winter Storm' respectively, they seem to have chosen titles that contribute little more than convenience value in a cataloguing sense. I look in awe at their photography and the underlying qualities of these captures that overwhelmingly speak more of vision than objects alone. However, photography of the 1930s was a finite resource. It did not and does not readily get lost in the noise of countless other contemporary images.

Certainly, concept and vision are still key to an impressive print almost a century later, but perhaps within today's massive visual repository, a revealing title may help us all to find the lock.



Jailhouse Rock

Catchy titles like songs and movies are not necessarily flippant plays on words, but can provide memorable phrases to maintain viewer participation in your image. Sometimes in the process of critically analysing our own work, we can find interpretations that were not immediately apparent when we clicked the shutter. In this instance, the harsh side lighting on a natural rock wall has created strong shadow lines reminiscent of the bars in a colonial prison cell (not that I am especially familiar with colonial architecture, or the inside of prison cells for that matter).

Authentic & Satisfied

Jackie Ranken explains how she – and you – can be both authentic and satisfied with the photographs you create.



'Bolo Hauz Mosque' Bukhara, Uzbekistan

Using a Neutral Density Filter attached to the lens. Two-image in-camera multiple exposure using the Bright Mode. Notice the difference between the criss-cross effect on the organic shape of the tree, compared to the straight lines of the building. What do you like and what don't you like? Making these decisions will guide your own exploration of this technique. CANON EOSR5 F4, 0.4 SECOND, ISO 250. RF 24-105 F4 L IS USM (FOCAL LENGTH 39MM)



'House' Khiva, Uzbekistan

Using a Neutral Density Filter attached to the lens. This house in the old city of Khiva has become quite abstract. It's not so much about a place and more about the light in that space. The curved line from the washing hanging in the light links the white tones of the doors and windows. The colours are muted with just a hint of pink from the washing. CANON EOSR5 F10, 0.5 SECOND, ISO 320. RF 24-105 F4 L IS USM (FOCAL LENGTH 50MM).

In a world increasingly saturated with imitation and superficiality, being true to yourself has never been more important—especially in your photography. Authenticity isn't just a buzzword, it's a guiding principle that allows your art to reflect who you are and the subjects and techniques that attract your attention. Taking the time to feel your way through the development of your photography is important. It's not about rushing to emulate trends or chasing validation, it's about embracing the journey of discovering your own creative voice.

Developing a personal style in photography doesn't happen overnight. It's a gradual process, an accumulation of every decision you've made throughout your life. Your experiences, preferences and unique way of seeing the world all shape your style. Just like taste, style is an acquired skill. You don't need to know every genre of photography to understand what you prefer; similarly, your photographic style will naturally emerge as you make choices about what resonates with you. What you love might not appeal to someone else—and that's okay. Art isn't about pleasing everyone; it's about expressing yourself.

You don't have to be an expert in every aspect of photography to create meaningful work. What truly matters is your attitude towards the craft. Photography is more than a

technical skill; it's a means of connection. It's an opportunity to learn, grow and engage with others who share your passion. The friendships and community you build along the way can be just as rewarding as the images you create.

Take your time. Experiment. Make mistakes. Embrace times of discomfort when you're pushing yourself to learn new skills, it's not always easy. My advice is to practise a photography technique each day for three to four weeks; putting in the time like this should make the process easier and more intuitive. By making decisions that are your own, you will get the feeling of ownership.

They say it takes between ten to fifteen attempts to acquire a taste for something new and the same principle applies for mastering a skill or cultivating your artistic voice. Here are some strategies to help you embrace the journey of growth and discovery in your photography:

- **Practise Repeatedly:** Consistency is key. The more you engage with your craft, the more comfortable and confident you'll become.
- **Maintain a Positive Mindset:** Approach your practice with curiosity and openness. Celebrate small victories and learn from challenges without being too hard on yourself.



'Miri Arab Madrasa' Bukhara, Uzbekistan

This image is here to trick you. It's not a multiple exposure. It's just one image where I have moved the camera from the bottom to top (the dark tones bleed into the light tones and vice versa). It was part of a double exposure that didn't work for me, but I liked the single image on its own. That's the idea, celebrate what you like and then get onto the next project or idea. CANON EOSR5 F11, 0.6 SEC, ISO 320. RF 24-105 F4 L IS USM (FOCAL LENGTH 24MM).

- **Start with What You Love:** Mask the difficult aspects of learning by focusing on subjects that excite you. Whether it's landscapes, portraits or abstract details, passion will carry you through the hurdles.
- **Reconnect with Your "Why":** Remind yourself of what drew you to photography in the first place. Is it the joy of capturing fleeting moments? The challenge of telling stories visually? Keeping your "why" at the forefront will sustain your motivation.
- **Embrace Lifelong Learning:** Whether you're young or old, it's never too late to acquire new skills. In fact, learning something new keeps your brain sharp and your perspective fresh. Photography offers endless opportunities for growth, no matter your age or experience level.

Remember, photography is a deeply personal journey. Your work doesn't need to conform to anyone else's standards, but it is good to receive feedback about your work. Choose your expert guidance carefully – what you want is someone who is sympathetic and listens to your goals. If what they say resonates with you, then that's a good sign. If not, then try someone else who is more aligned to your aspirations.

Photography isn't just about the final image; it's about the moments of discovery and connection along the way. By staying true to yourself, you'll create work that's not only beautiful but also deeply meaningful—to you and to those who look at it.

When you allow your authenticity to shine through, you'll not only find happiness in your work, but also inspire others to find their own happy place. The images that I am sharing in this article are examples of an in-camera technique that I have been experimenting with and enjoying for some time. It's a mixture of ICM (In Camera Movement) and the use of the 'Bright' Multiple Exposure Mode. (For more information see *Better Photography Issues 117 and 118*).

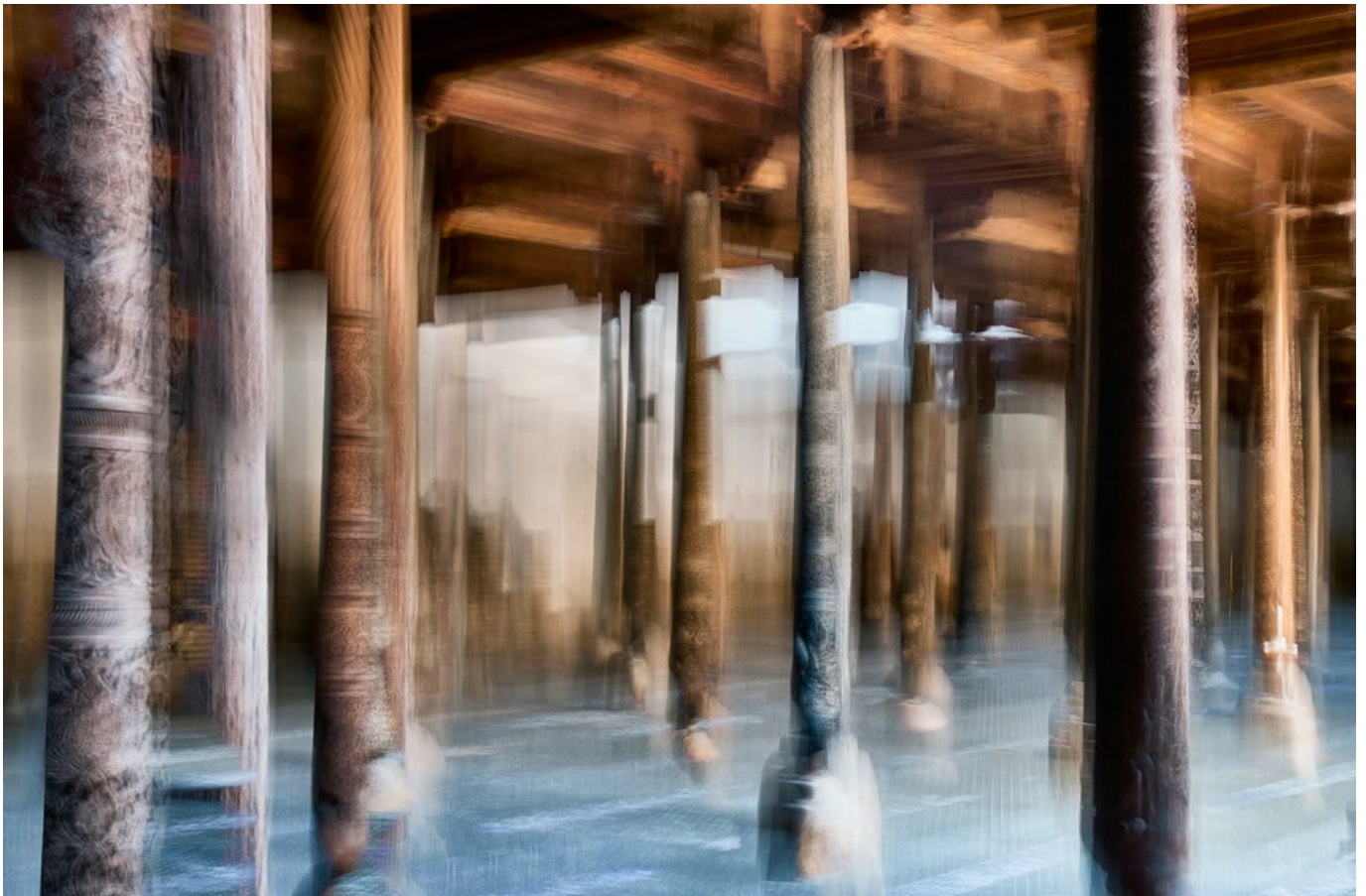
On our recent photography tour to Uzbekistan, I was excited to explore these techniques further on the built landscapes of ancient cities. Uzbekistan is a country of extraordinary architecture and cultural beauty.

Mike Langford and I are taking another small group of ten photographers there in October – why not join us? Visit <https://www.qccp.co.nz/uzbekistan-photo-tour>



'Mosque' Shakhrisabz Uzbekistan

Two image in-camera multiple exposure using the Bright Mode. Creating movement is much easier in naturally dark spaces. I was careful to keep away from any bright light. The pastel like marking effect makes me think of a drawing. Sitting quietly in the corner sketching. Meditating. CANON EOSR5 F16, 0.3 SECOND, ISO 400. RF 24-105 F4 L IS USM.



'Juma Mosque Khiva' (10-18th Century) Uzbekistan

This room has 213 differently shaped and decorated columns that support the roof. Notice when using the bright multiple exposure mode how the light tones sit over the dark tones. I feel the repetition of the columns is emphasised by the movement of the camera. The image is more about feeling than details. CANON EOSR5 F10, 0.5 SEC, ISO 320. RF 24-105 F4 L IS USM (FOCAL LENGTH 50MM).

KNOW YOUR Journey

**Mike Langford describes his recent familiarisation trip to China,
explaining some of the challenges and how he dealt with them.**

Travel is an experience like no other. It starts months, if not years in advance and lingers on in your life forever afterwards.

If you are anything like me, you start with just an idea of where you would like to go, followed by a huge amount of research on why, how and when. This must be a good thing, as it means the experience lasts much longer and you get to live it as much (if not even more) than the physical travel component itself.

I know people who love to spend their time planning and researching, without being able to afford to go and do it. For me that would be very sad, as it's the doing that is the ultimate experience.

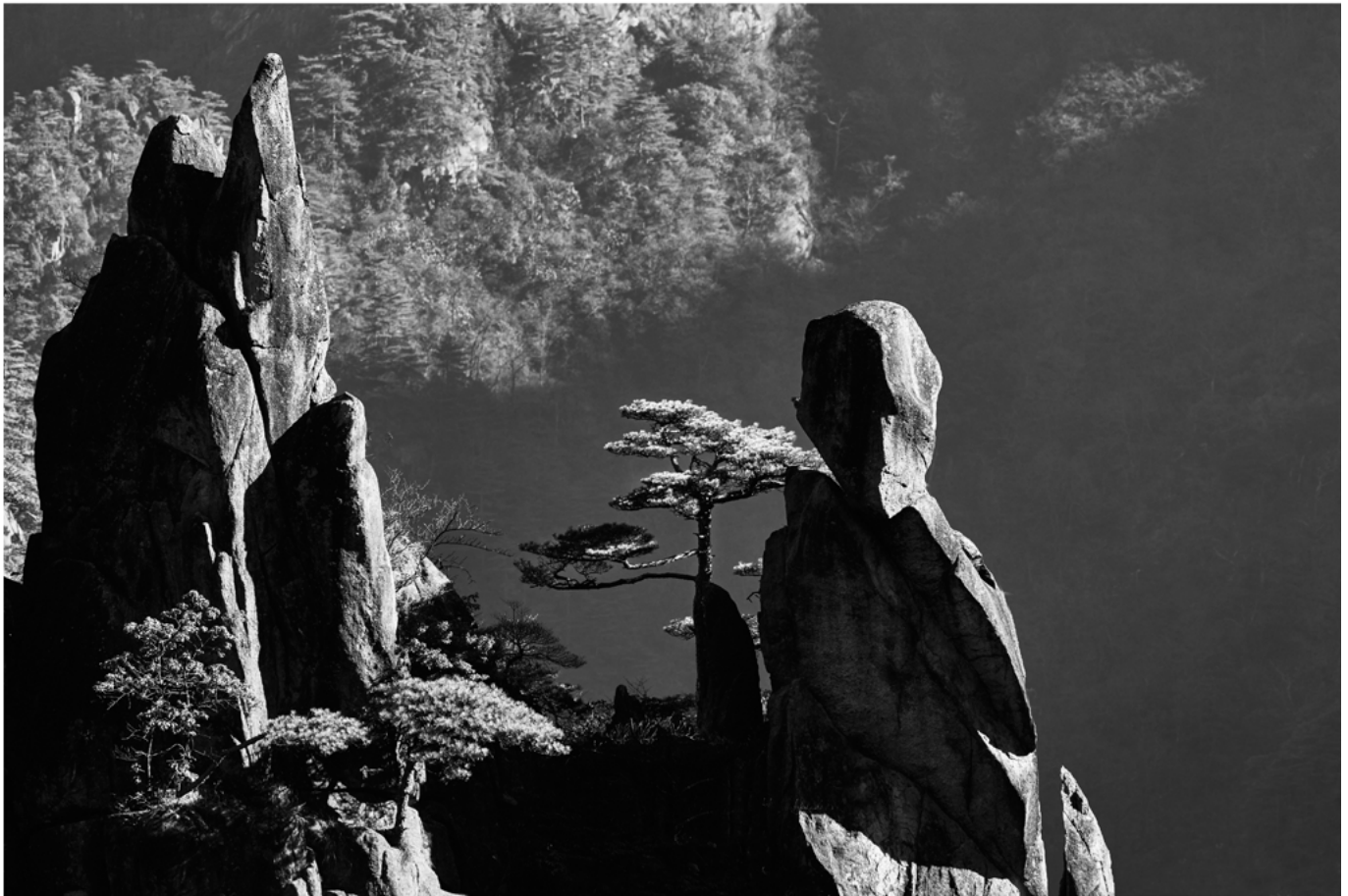
Knowing the journey is made even better by extensive research and planning beforehand. Not everyone gets off on the planning stage and for those who are like that, there are the travel agents and tour planners who will get it sorted and make it happen.

For Jackie and me, we usually like to work it all out first and then hand it over to someone to make the bookings on our behalf, but occasionally, when I'm doing a research trip like this recent one into Eastern China, we like to do everything ourselves.

Initially, we had contacted a tour company and asked for a two-week tour from Shanghai into the Huangshan Mountains and back to Shanghai. This resulted in a tour that looked very



A thirty-minute early morning climb up from our hotel revealed a layered view looking east from the Huangshan Mountains. Most of the photographs you see of this area have clouds in the valley below, but all we had were bright blue sky days. *f/11, 1/1000 second, ISO 320, Canon EOS R5, Canon RF 100-500 @ 270mm*



A study of rocks and trees, Huangshan Mountains. This is what we came for, but without the cloud and mist that it's known for. Hopefully, the next time we visit with the group we will get more mood. *f/11, 1/250 second, ISO 320, Canon EOS R5, Canon RF 100-500 @ 428mm*

expensive, but also that didn't tell us much. It had us spending half the time in either Shanghai or Huangshan city (Tunxi) and then doing day trips out from Huangshan to various sites, including the Huangshan Mountains and some old villages.

What we really wanted to do was to spend most of the time either in the countryside in the old villages or on the mountain itself, just photographing. As a result, it became obvious that we needed to do our own research to find out what was there and to understand the whys and wherefores of the journey at hand!

Research

The internet is a great place to start. We used both Firefox and sometimes Safari, searching for the Huangshan Mountains and then spent the next month going down rabbit holes of transportation, hotels and activities.

It's incredible how suddenly your internet starts coming up with its own links as well, including people referred to as 'influencers' who consistently tell you everything about nothing, but somehow try and look beautiful at the same time.

This is when you realise that having a travel agent to make the booking for you comes in handy, as trying to do this yourself doesn't have a backup plan like the travel agent has.

Anyway, we ended up on google.com and like most sites, it gives you three or four options through which you can book third party agents who take their percentage and then tell you that they can't confirm the booking until fifteen or thirty days out, even though you have already prepaid for it. In the case of the high-speed train tickets between Shanghai and Huangshan, this was confirmed just fifteen days prior to the journey.



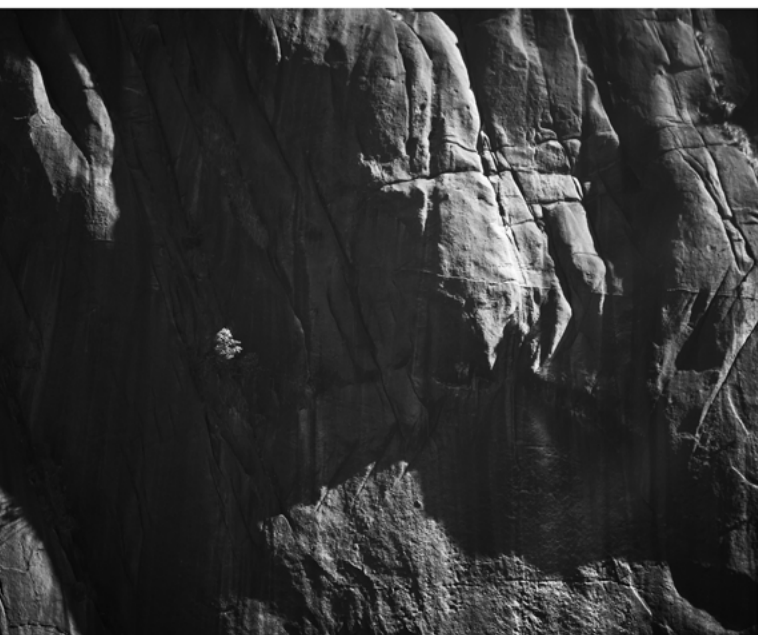
I saw this girl leaning on a porch railing and thought it would make a great photograph. Only later did I find out that she was being photographed by a professional photographer from the opposite angle, which is why she was posing there. I also had a look at what would have been behind her from the other angle and much preferred my own! The Chinese people we encountered throughout the trip were always interested in who we were and where we came from and happy to help or be photographed; which made the trip so much more enjoyable as well as rewarding. *f/11, 1/160 second, ISO 320, Canon EOS R5, Canon RF 24-105 @ 105mm*



The Yungu cable car taking people up onto the mountain from Tangkou. This was the way we ended up going, but not the one we wanted. From the top of this cable car it was then a two-hour climb to the hotel on the other side. *f/11, 1/100 second, ISO 320, Canon EOS R5, Canon RF 24-105 @ 53mm*

Booking hotel accommodation was equally difficult, even when using Expedia, Tripadvisor, Booking.com etc., all of who were vying for the same booking. Here we found that a hotel we were looking at had either since closed down for the season or that it was nowhere near where we wanted to be, even though it said it was in the descriptor details that it was nearby. (Google maps are a great way of checking that!)

As it was, we had decided that staying up on the mountain for a couple of nights would be the best option, as this would give us two chances at both sunrises and sunsets; whereas staying off the mountain meant we would get none. Unfortunately, we couldn't book this until just one month out from our actual stay, as that's when the bookings opened and



I was travelling off the mountain in the early morning on the cable car nearest the hotel when I noticed the light illuminating a tiny pine tree growing out from the cliff. I loved the shadow from it appearing on the left hand edge of the frame. *f/8, 1/640 second, ISO 640, Canon EOS R5, Canon RF 24-105 @ 83mm*



The last of the setting sun as it disappeared into the smog below. I really liked the idea of leaving the cliff face on the right as a silhouette which allowed the pine trees to stand out against the lighter background. *f/11, 1/80 second, ISO 800, Canon EOS R5, Canon RF 100-500 @ 186mm*

not before. I think that is a China thing, as even our travel agent couldn't book this in advance.

Then there was the problem of how to get to the hotel up on the mountain as there were only two access points, both via cableways: one requiring a two-hour climb and the other a fifteen-minute climb. We decided to try and do the second option as we needed to carry our laptops, camera bags, tripods and toothbrushes, as there was no way we could also carry our checked-in luggage up there. And if we were to take a photographic tour group, we wouldn't expect them to do that either.

How to get to the cableway was another problem that wasn't fully resolved at the time of our departure, as local transport also proved to be very difficult.



The early morning silhouette of the rocks and trees against the blue sky simplified what would have otherwise been a very busy and complicated image. I love not showing the detail in the shadows as it makes the image as a whole more interesting. *f/11, 1/1000 second, ISO 320, Canon EOS R5, Canon RF 100-500 @ 159mm*

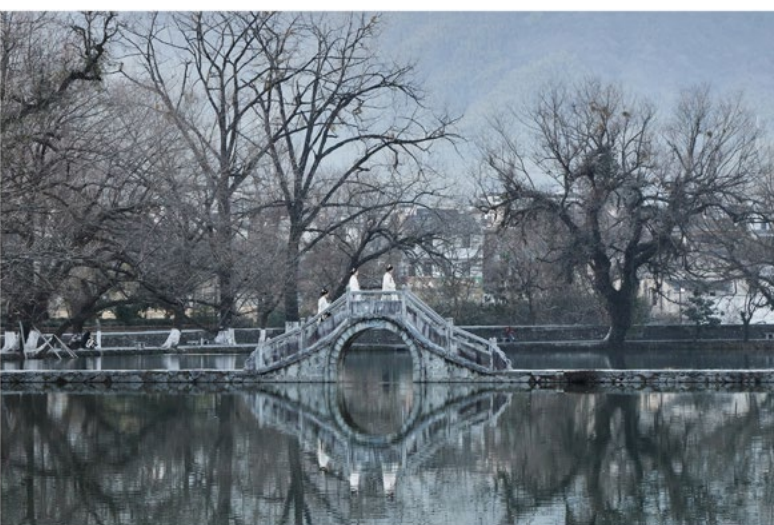


Sunset on the west side of the mountain (obviously). I was watching the angle in which the sun was moving and managed to position myself so I could capture it just as it passed through the branches of two pine trees. *f/11, 1/200 second, ISO 320, Canon EOS R5, Canon RF 100-500 @ 500mm*

The Experience

Initially, our focus was on spending most of our time on the mountain, as that was what had attracted us to this region in the first place. It was the perfect extension to the first part of our proposed photo tour, which was further south around Guilin and the amazing Yangshuo Mountains. As we had already completed our recce of this area a couple of years earlier, we just needed to learn for ourselves what the Huangshan Mountains (also known as the Yellow Mountains) had to offer.

Historically, these mountains were the birthplace of the traditional Chinese landscape paintings where mountains floated serenely above a sea of clouds and pine trees clung tenaciously to minute cracks in giant granite cliffs. Some of the most inspiring photographs I had seen of the mountains were by our friend Michael Kenna in his book *China*.



This is a much-photographed bridge over the Hongcun Village lake on which many of the Chinese tourists like to be photographed. These three girls had earlier asked us if they could have a photograph of us with them which we duly obliged. Dressing up in traditional clothing and being photographed against the backdrop of the village is one of the things the Chinese tourists like to do here. *f/11, 1/50 second, ISO 320, Canon EOS R5, Canon RF 24-105 @ 81mm*



A shot looking over the lake in the World Heritage Hongcun Village. We ended up spending three nights here, constantly finding new things to photograph. On the right hand side of this image is a family that has dressed up in traditional costumes being photographed. *f/5.6, 1/500 second, ISO 320, Canon EOS R5, Canon RF 100-500 @ 123mm*

However, the more we researched, the more the ancient villages at the base of the mountain came into our focus. As a result, we ended up spending the first two nights in the ancient village of Hongcun, which was where some of the scenes of the Chinese film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* were filmed. The town is an epic Chinese period piece dating back to 1131 and a photographer's dream. Giving ourselves two early mornings and two evenings ended up being a really good call, as dozens of tour groups would arrive from the nearby city of Tunxi each day, usually arriving around 10:00 a.m. and gone by 16:00. We decided that we would stay another night in the village after photographing on the mountain as this meant we could also leave our bags there.

Getting onto the part of the mountain where our hotel was for the two nights proved to be impossible, as much was lost in translation, despite translating from English to Chinese via our iPhones on 'Google translate'. It seemed to be all everyone knew was how to get onto the mountain via Tangkou, which was at the opposite end of the mountain from our hotel. So that's what we ended up doing! We caught the bus to the bottom of the Yungu cable car and then at the top, climbed for two hours to our hotel at the northern end of the park. Fortunately, we had packed light and only had our camera and computer bags over our shoulders for the climb.

It was only once we were on the mountain and in the hotel, that we worked out how to get to the other cable car which was only a fifteen-minute climb away. We solved the quick access mystery which is how we will do it in November with our group.

As expected, we never found the Michael Kenna trees that had inspired us to visit and instead of valleys filled with fluffy white clouds as in the paintings, we just had sky blue days with not a cloud in sight. Despite this, the mountain offered more than we could have hoped for photographically and it confirmed that our proposed photography tour later in the year will be a success.

So was it worth the trip? As tour leaders, it gives us peace of mind that we know where we're going and, having been there, we can't wait to get back again and capture more photographs!

Axioms

for Photographers

There are many truisms in photography that are, well, perhaps not quite true!

Len Metcalf questions how we approach our photography.

An axiom is a statement that is taken to be true, to use as a starting point or as a premise for further learning. It can also be an established rule or principle, or even a maxim which is widely accepted on its intrinsic merit. Generally, an axiom is unprovable. Another way of saying this is postulation.

Some of us, when we see or read an axiom, discount or disregard it because it does not fit in with our way of seeing and working. But what if we took the time to consider that it may be true and even tried implementing it, experimenting with it and seeing if we can learn from it or even use it?

So the challenge for you, dear reader, is to take these axioms, pretend they are true and experiment with them to see if any of them can serve you. These are all assumed true by myself, after years of photography and art making. I refer to many of them



regularly and most of them I have personally worked into my creative practice.

Less is More

There are so many ways to interpret this axiom. The most common is with composition, as we are so often reminded to leave more out of an image, or to get in closer and fill the frame. Minimalism is often seen in so many great works. One of my favourite uses of this axiom is that by limiting my colour palette I so often end up with stronger and more powerful images. We are reminded that what we leave out of a photograph is just as important as what we include.

My favourite way of interpreting this axiom is with lenses and equipment. Often on a workshop or photo shoot, you





will see me with just a 'nifty fifty' equivalent lens, a wrist strap keeping my camera safe and the camera securely held in my hand. You will notice my legs and body getting a workout as I move around, working the backgrounds, the subjects and the light. We could extend this axiom to include another: your legs make the best zoom lens. How about you spend a day with just one lens, one camera and by lightening your load, see what happens?

Another way of interpreting and applying this axiom is with post-processing. I personally find much joy in working harder at the taking end of image making and less at the processing end. I keep my workflow simple, short and easy to use. I use an import preset in Lightroom to make all of my personal adjustments and then I can hopefully finish most of my processing with a few clicks with tone curve adjustments. If a photograph needs hours of post-processing, I start to question its worth to me.

The Process is More Important than the Product

I find this axiom one of the hardest to internalise, but I have been working on it for a long time. I know it to be true for me, yet for some reason it is easy to lose sight of. The perfection we visualise for the final print or art object often takes us away from the enjoyment of making it in the first place. We see this when we are critiquing our work and endlessly fiddling with small improvements.

One approach that works for me is trying to keep my work underworked rather than overworked, in an effort to keep the work from looking unnatural or too perfect. I do wonder with the uptake of AI (artificial intelligence) in advertising (marketing) and general life, whether the human hand with all its mistakes will now be revered as pure art and beauty. Much like the huge uptake of film-based photography in recent years. The imperfections will become celebrated. Well, I hope so anyway.

The big reason I want to embrace this axiom is to relieve my own stress levels and anxiety with my art. If I can continually remind myself that the making is the enjoyment and the product at the end is just a beautiful by-product of a beautiful process, I make better art. It is really that simple. When I concentrate on the making, the product takes care of itself.

Another related axiom that is worth mentioning here is that the more effort we put into fulfilling a particular vision, the poorer the product. Effort has an inverse relationship to quality. Perhaps we will return to this one in a future article?

Intuition is Where the Most Passionate Art Emerges

This axiom started with, 'Art starts where words stop', but I couldn't quite get my head around that fully, so I modified it to something way more important to me. My best art comes from being in an intuitive, feelings-based flow state, rather than from my conscious intellectual words-based mind. It is often a combination of both. If I get too heady and thought-based, I notice the quality of my work drops.

If we want to make passionate engaging photographs, then we need to access that in ourselves, otherwise it is passionless.

The reason I pulled away from focusing on the words aspect, is that creating and playing with conversations, meanings and words is a very important aspect of photography making. It is widely understood that creativity comes from deep in our subconsciousness, our higher selves, the part of the brain that deals with emotions, images, music and abstract thinking.

Inspiration Comes Whilst Working

Luckily, I learnt this early on in my creative career. I noticed that I would be so blocked up looking for the perfect photograph that I wouldn't take any images. This was driven by the high price of large format colour transparency film. Forty years ago it would cost me \$20 to press the shutter. The cost of film weighed heavily on me, so I was incredibly frugal. Three or four exposures on a good day and none on most days.





The blockage was that I was looking for perfection and I became scared to take creative risks. I remember being in a gorge in Tasmania when I took a photograph that I wasn't sure would work. It was the first one on a three-week trip and for the first four days, I hadn't taken an image. The moment I let go and started, the inspiration for art making started to flow. Gently at first, building over the next few weeks. The big lesson here was to just start and stop procrastinating. 'Just start' is the axiom I personally use. Perhaps we should add another one right now. 'Keep it simple'. I personally like to keep my sayings and thoughts as short as possible and to the point.

Today, I start with my iPhone and eventually the pain to reach for my camera becomes so intense that I can't help myself. The phone gives me an excuse to take bad photographs, to experiment and to explore. It has become my way to 'just start'.

I have also found it is better for me not to have overly

imagined the image or artwork before starting. Working with a loose idea and discovering the best way to put together the pieces at hand, with the light at hand and in a way that follows my emotional feelings for beauty and story, creates beautiful and emotive art. When I follow a set plan, my work becomes boring and forced because it does not follow the bits we couldn't have imagined, that we are only just noticing now whilst creating.

Play Like a Child

Children are the most creative beings we know. We spend a lifetime as artists and photographers trying to return to that incredible ability to play, explore and learn. We were naturals at so many creative things. As we age, we become more self-conscious and the need to take risks to learn diminishes. Creativity in modern society is not as celebrated or encouraged



as much as it should be. It is squashed by intellectual thinking. We live in a world of rules and regulations. The school system is designed to produce university lecturers with PhDs, rather than fully rounded human beings able to live within meaningful communities.

We have also been taught to put aside our connections with nature. Obviously this is not the case for everyone, but when you really sit down and look at it, we have around 5 - 10% of the creativity we had as a child. As a creative person, I see it as my mission to return to the creativity that I had when I was younger. But how? Fear of failure is one thing that gets in our way. Being overly cerebral is another. Being scared of what we might look



like is yet another. Perhaps we are concerned that our work must be good or even brilliant.

Make bad art. Make mistakes. Play with joy and a sense of fun. Make so many failures that one day, the biggest mistake and failure is actually a moment of brilliance. How many masterpieces are actually possible in a lifetime? When we are looking for lots of great images from just one shoot, we put way too much pressure on ourselves to perform at optimal levels. Let's give ourselves a break and chill a bit more.

Let's have some fun and forget about the end product for a bit.

Light is the Raw Building Block of a Photograph

No matter how you look at it, we photograph light. Light is usually reflected off objects, but sometimes the objects emit their own light too. Basically, light is our primary medium. When my photography starts to drop in quality, it is usually because I have stopped paying attention to the light and how it illuminates my subjects. When I am immersed in monochromatic photography, I am looking for contrasts that are caused by light. I am always analysing the quality of light and trying to find ways to use it to my advantage.

Sometimes, I make light the subject of my photography. When this happens, I find a lovely creative world of the unexpected because, to make something beautiful with it, you first have to see it. With photography we are always starting with reality and then abstracting away from it.

The better photographs have beautiful tonal composition, even when they are in colour. Work the light to your advantage and use it to help you. When we fight against the light, we end up with poorer work.

And this is just the beginning. In the notes at the end of his article, Len listed another half dozen axioms to challenge us into creating better photographs! In the meantime, enjoy his accompanying photos from down along the Great Ocean Road in Victoria – and consider joining Len and the editor on a photo workshop there this June! Details on our websites.



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Radiant Photo V2

Having reported on the original Radiant Photo in the last issue, we figured we should mention that a new AI version is now available. Is it for you?

By Peter Eastway.

One of the challenges we all face is processing hundreds if not thousands of photographs. Most photos don't need a lot of work, but you often have to adjust the exposure or contrast to get a good starting point – a point that allows you to decide if the photo is a keeper with potential or a discard not to be worried about further.

Photoshop, Lightroom and Capture One all have automatic exposure and processing controls, but they are relatively blunt instruments. Yes, they will spread the exposure values out mathematically, but this isn't always the best solution. In comparison, Radiant Photo takes a different approach and, in the vast majority of cases, it produces a very serviceable result with one pass of its magic engine.

I confess that what I liked about Radiant Photo V1 was that I didn't have to do anything except process the files. I can use Radiant Photo V2 in the same way, but now there is more scope for refining how I process the file (use the menu more) and I can purchase additional 'workflows' which are designed for specific subject types - such as landscapes, portraits, pets etc.

So what's new about Version Two? I guess the headline difference is the use of AI technology – assistive AI, not generative. Elia Locardi is very keen to point out that Radiant Photo respects the integrity of the image. It's not going to add things to your photo that weren't there originally. AI is also being used to 'learn' your preferences, so in theory, as you make adjustments to your photos, it's working out your style and it will change the way it processes your work accordingly. I haven't tested this aspect as yet, but suffice to say, every app developer is jumping on the AI bandwagon.

If you purchase the vanilla version of Radiant Photo 2, its core engine is already detecting the type of photo and processing accordingly. The photo on the next page was detected as a portrait and, knowing this, default settings were applied. If the

next photo were a landscape, those settings would be adjusted. Exactly what's happening behind the scenes is the company's private IP, but if we like the results, that's really all we need to know. I have found Radiant Photo to be a great help in giving all my files an initial edit, so I can better assess their value for future endeavours. And in the majority of cases, the results are great for reproduction anywhere – it's just that most of the photos I publish have been 'interpreted' in some way and Radiant doesn't do that. That's not its purpose.

However, if you specialise in a genre of work, you can purchase additional workflow as mentioned. A workflow in Radiant Photo parlance is the set of controls it uses to edit a photo, based on the genre and the way it sets up the initial edit. When processing the lady on the next page, I could see subtle differences between the Core workflow and the portrait workflow, plus there was a different set of menu items to choose from if I wanted to edit further.

You're not limited to the proprietary black box technology. Radiant Photo gives you an extensive range of editing adjustments – enhance, colour, skin tone, exposure, light diffusion, depth – but if you're using these, you're really back to editing your file just like you are in Lightroom or Capture One. Radiant Photo would suggest it does a better job, of course, but I'm not so sure. When it comes to editing my photos, I have more experience with Capture One and Lightroom, so I guess I am more familiar with the way they work, but when I refine the image in Radiant Photo, things change on the screen as well, but in ways with which I am yet to be as familiar.

As with the first version, you can download and trial Radiant Photo 2 and I recommend you give it a go. It can be a huge time saver when you're back from a trip or photographing a family event. And if you're working professionally, even more time savings are made!

Visit www.radiantimaginglabs.com



Original raw photo, processed with no adjustments from Capture One.



Photo processed in Capture One with automatic adjustments for white balance, exposure, contrast and brightness and high dynamic range (highlights and shadows). While there might still be a hint of tone in the subject's hair, I feel this rendition is too light and too contrasty. It's not acceptable.



Photo processed in Radiant Photo using the Core workflow. It's a far superior result in many subtle ways. There's more detail in the hair and the background is softer – which suits me as I have used a 56mm f1.2 lens intentionally to throw the background out-of-focus. It is very usable without further editing.

This is the American Earth

Perhaps even more than a photographer, Ansel Adams was an environmental crusader, but what would he think about where we are in 2025? By Peter Eastway.

Although Thomas Jefferson argued that no one generation has a right to encroach upon another generation's freedom, the future's right to know the freedom of wilderness is going fast. And it need not go at all. A tragic loss could be prevented if only there could be broader understanding of this: that the resources of the earth do not exist just to be spent for the comfort, pleasure or convenience of the generation or two who first learn how to spend them; that some of the resources exist for saving, and what diminishes them, diminishes all mankind; that one of these is wilderness, wherein the flow of life, in its myriad forms, has gone on since the beginning of life, essentially uninterrupted by man and his technology; that this, wilderness, is worth saving for what it can mean to itself as part of the conservation ethic; that the saving is imperative to civilisation and all mankind, whether or not all men yet know it."

So wrote David Brower in his introduction to Ansel Adams and Nancy Newhall's book, *This Is The American Earth*.

It was published in 1960!

I purchased the book second-hand because it was referenced in a talk or a podcast – I can't remember exactly, but it was commended for its importance as an example of how photography can be used to push an issue.

While most of the photographs are by Ansel Adams, there are reproductions by Margaret Bourke-White, Henri Cartier-

Bresson, Eliot Porter, Edward Weston and Minor White, among others. And I think today that the black and white reproduction might need to be in colour to get its message across – or perhaps being in B&W might make a point of difference?

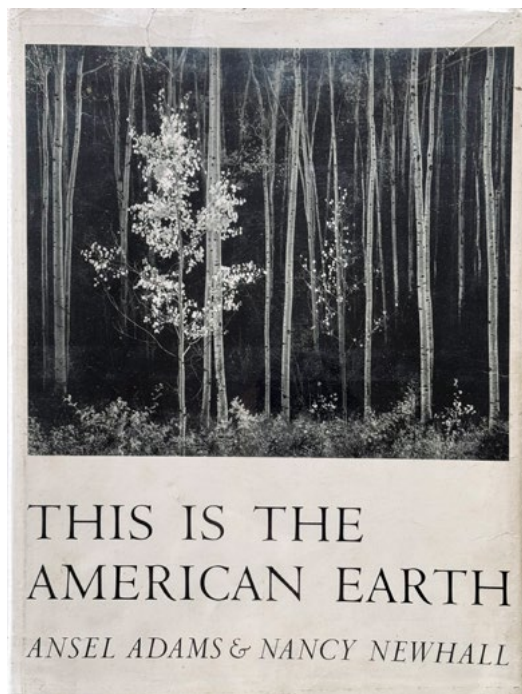
Or maybe such a book today would make no difference at all. Just like *This Is The American Earth* has made no difference?

I actually have no idea whether the book was successful in changing the course of history because we can't say what the world would be like without it. Perhaps this book was gifted to a top oil executive who was so impressed, he quashed several environmentally damaging projects and the world today is a better place. When you publish works like this, it can be difficult to point to a specific outcome. Peter Dombrovskis' photo of Island Bend is definitely associated with saving Tasmania's Franklin River, but I'm not sure if there's such a definite outcome for Adams and Newhall's book.

This might be an unfair observation. Certainly we can all visit some remarkable national parks in the USA and I do believe that without people like Ansel Adams lobbying government

in the background, they would not have happened. *This Is The American Earth* might not get pointed at a specific outcome (from my limited perspective), but it is characteristic of how Adams spent his life in the service of mankind. And it all helps.

It's 65 years since the book was published. It's easy to look at the reproductions and think that this area here is a little dark or



Cover of *This Is The American Earth*



The Acropolis by James Robertson. Notice how the verticals are true and the extra impact this creates. The lack of tourists obviously helps as well!

that is a little contrasty, but it's not just the photographs that were taken in the 1950s, it's the printing presses as well. Without in any way denigrating Ansel Adams' skills in the darkroom, I have seen better reproductions of many of his images. So while we can lament the progress of man on the one hand (when we look at what we've done to our environment), we can applaud it on the other (photographic reproduction is sensational these days).

Most of the photographs are documentary in nature and they are accompanied by quotes and extracts that put man's progress into perspective. Some of the chapter headings are instructional: New World, The Machine and a New Ethic, The Mathematics of Survival, The Crucial Resource.

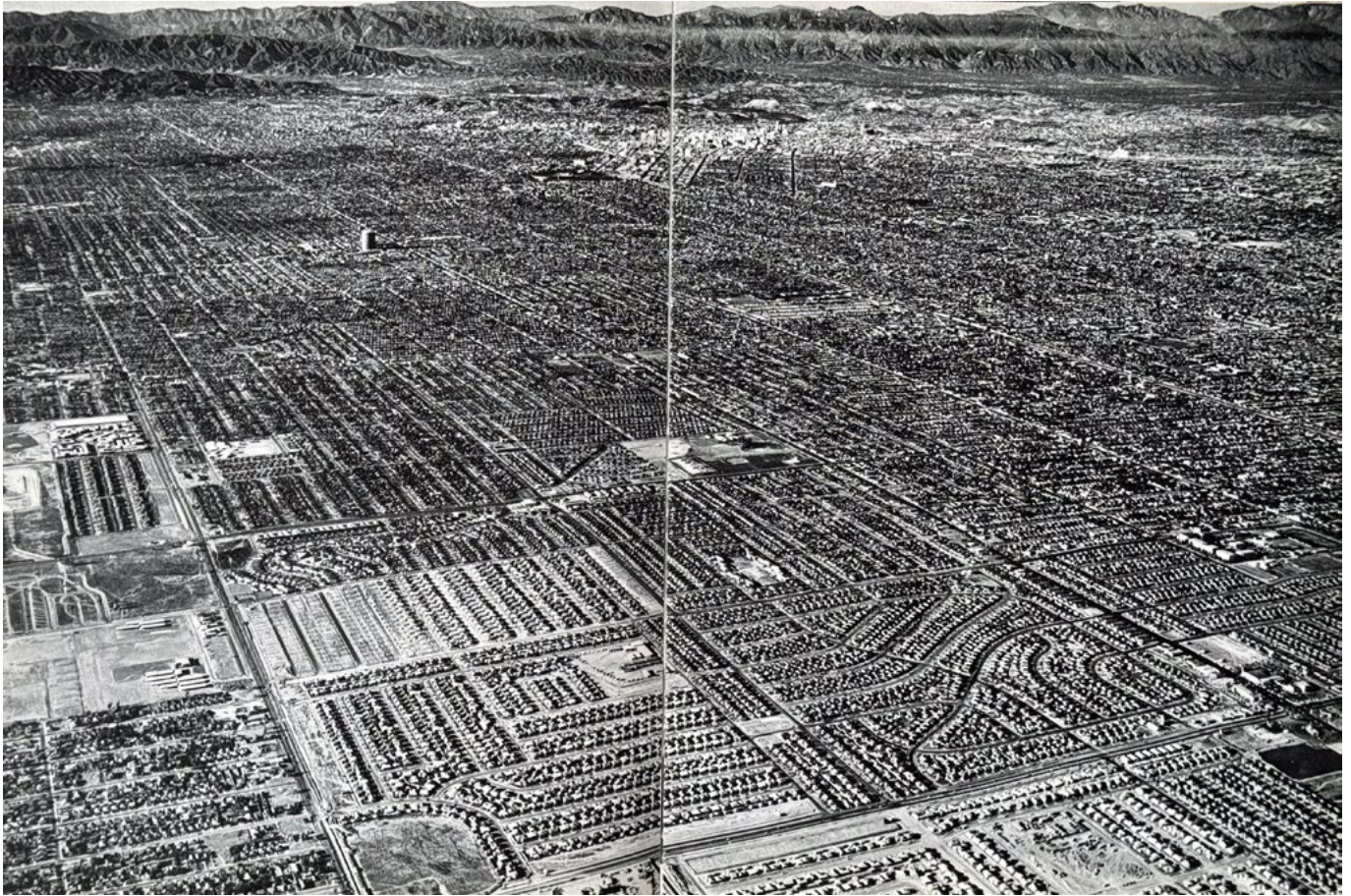
I'm looking at William Garnett's photos of housing developments in Los Angeles, from the empty building blocks to the finished developments. One double page photo of LA from the air, covered in single-storey houses in geometric rows is massive in scale. It's a remarkable abstract in some ways, humbling in others when we photographers think of ourselves as 'discovering' the impact of aerial photography.

Initially, I am looking through the book as a photographer, reading the captions and photo credits, considering the framing and composition, the use of light and tone. The photographs are magnificent. Could I do better? Technically, most of us can;

aesthetically, we're all following these greats in so many ways. Sure, our photos can be better, stronger and have more impact, but only because we have learnt so much from photographers like Ansel Adams.

A photograph of the Acropolis in Greece by James Robertson strikes me as particularly elegant. The print quality isn't so great, but then again, it was photographed in 1850. Yes, I have that right – over 100 years before the book was published. Yet despite its age, what strikes me is how elegant the composition is because the verticals are just that. Modern day photos looking up to the Acropolis suffer from converging verticals and, certainly when it comes to temples, the elegance and grandeur is lost. Not so with the old view camera and a rising front as used by Mr Robertson.

Most people today would look at this photograph and have no understanding of how it was made, nor realise why it is so impressive. Everything we do is at the push of a button – and I like that when it comes to washing dishes, but when it comes to photography, the 'dumbing down' of the user as the technology gets 'smarter' is of questionable merit. Okay, I actually have no argument with the technology and I can't blame people with less interest in photography than I have for using what is very convenient. Hell, I used my iPhone to photograph these pages for the book review!



Los Angeles by William Garnett. Image cropping the horizon off and looking down a little more, it's almost an abstract.



But what are we missing out on by having a lesser understanding?

And what have we missed out on by ravaging the Earth beyond its capacity to provide? I'm not a doomsayer. I love life and what we have in the world, but I do think that some areas could be different. Most of us do, of course, especially us white middle-aged (senior-aged) males who think they know everything and I'm probably coming across as no different!

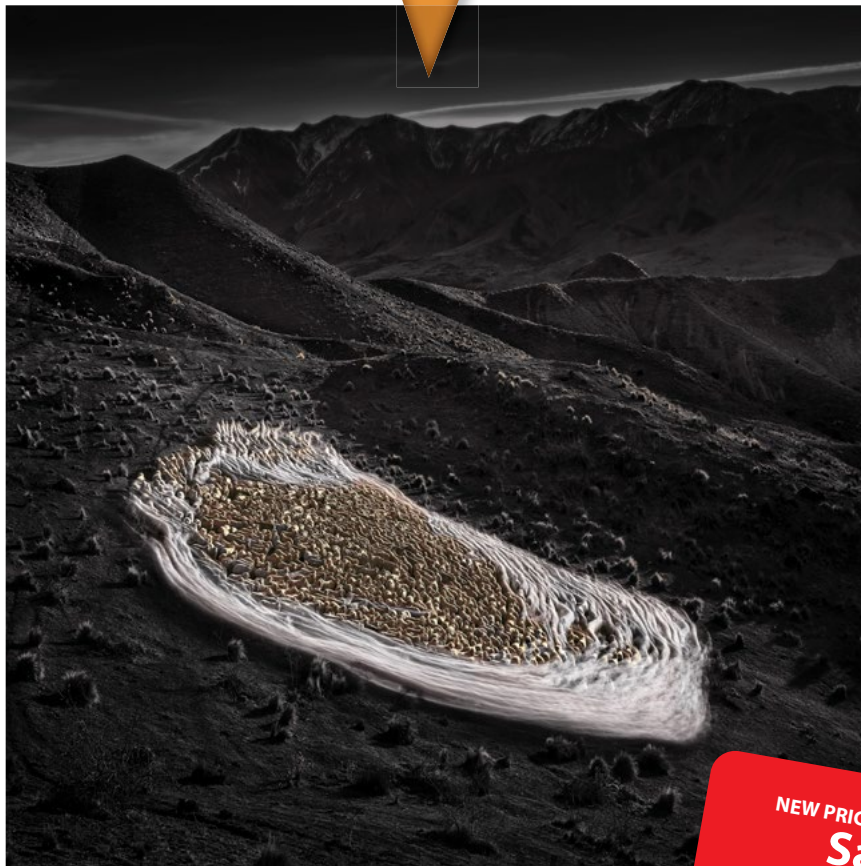
Let's look at our average life expectancy and suddenly there's no argument that where we are now has its advantages, so the question becomes what should we do about our future?

Which brings me back to my first thoughts when I read the words in *This Is The American Earth*: Ansel Adams was trying to change things 65 years ago and I'm not sure the people who made the decisions listened closely enough. We seem to have the same challenges today that we had back then, only it's much more obvious that our environment is struggling.

What would happen if we published a book like this today? Okay, so maybe a book is a little old school, perhaps we need to create a website or an interactive movie? But even then, how would we create interest in it? Do we need an Instagram influencer to spread the word for us?

I have no answers as I close the book, thinking it's a good thing I'm a photographer and not a politician.

Burnt Stump and New Grass, Sierra Nevada by Ansel Adams. I love the use of texture and how the shadow on the tree sits behind the grasses. Great framing.



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In *The New Tradition*, photographer Peter Eastway presents a series of 100 photographs that traces the progression of photography from film to digital. For some images, he explains how the photograph was taken and the steps involved in post-production. For others, he simply presents a story, an experience or an opinion on an aspect of photography. So, methods and fables. This is a book written for photographers who are interested in the art and craft of photography – and who are enjoying the ride as technology continues to open up new opportunities for creative

expression. *The New Tradition* has been lavishly produced, sparing no expense in its preparation, printing and binding. Measuring 300x300 mm with 272 pages, the hard cover tome is destined to be a classic in photographic literature! If you like what you see, give yourself a great gift for your future and purchase a copy of *The New Tradition*.

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