

Peter Eastway's

PORTFOLIO REVIEW

PHOTOGRAPHY FEEDBACK

James Anderson

Understanding Your Portfolio Review

Thank you for the opportunity to review your portfolio. It is a role I take very seriously because as a photographer myself, I know how much a review can help – and possibly offend!

The idea behind this Portfolio Review is just that – a review of your photographs which comprises a critique and some suggestions to improve. I'm not going to re-work your files to perfection, rather I'll give you some broad directions that I believe will improve your work. Then, you can rework or re-shoot the photos if you wish. In this way, I hope the Portfolio Review is instructional.

Don't expect a critical report for every image! If your photographs are really good, I'll say so. Sometimes reviewers feel a necessity to suggest something, no matter how good a photo is, but I think it is equally important to congratulate photographers for photos I wish I'd taken myself. No doubt many photographers will be hoping I have nothing to suggest because that means they are on the right path!

I am acutely aware that any commentary on a photographer's work will be taken personally.

All I can promise is that I am providing this feedback with the best of intentions. If a comment or my sense of humour offends you, please be assured it has been unintentional.

For most of my professional life, I entered the annual professional photography print awards and attended the judging in person. I'd listen to five distinguished judges discuss my photograph - and sometimes it was tough to take their criticism. Sometimes I strongly disagreed with it!

Then I became a judge myself and suddenly I was the one on stage, having to say something learned and not make a fool of myself. I didn't always succeed, but as I learnt more about the system, I understood that the judges are only giving out opinions and the entrants could choose to accept or reject them.

This Portfolio Review is just my opinion.

I have no desire to grandstand, I just want to give you some honest direction in the same way those judges and my mentors have helped me.

Sometimes opinions miss the mark and should be discarded, but if I'm honest, generally the commentary I've received about my photography has been fair and considered. I might not always agree with it, but I have always learnt something from it.

In the same way, I hope you will gain some small benefit from my opinions on the following pages.

Peter Eastway

Camera Data: ILCE-7RM5, FE 16-35mm F2.8 GM @
28.0 mm, f8.0 @ 1/125 sec, ISO 320

COMMENTARY

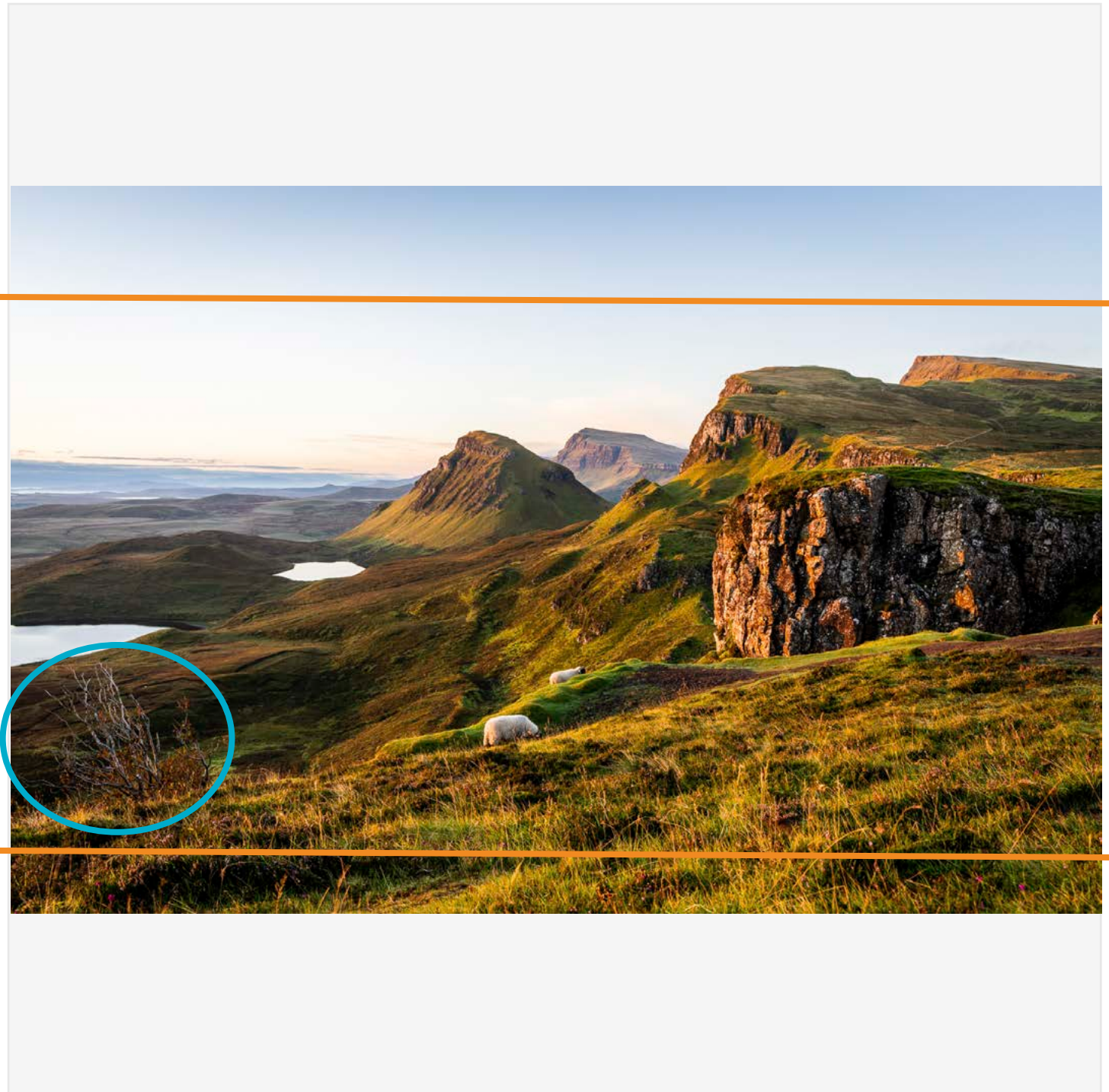
A great location, beautiful clean light, great colour. The layering effect of the mountains gives a wonderful sense of depth

SUGGESTIONS

At the time of capture, could you have walked forward a little to hide the little bush on the left - it's not a big problem, but it's there. It could also be removed with cloning or AI.

With the sheep, it's hard to whistle at them to get their attention, but their posing/positioning is non-descript and very central - if you had the time to wait for them and if they obliged, positioning them further to the right on the grass would work better in terms of leading the eye around the composition.

In terms of framing, would a more panoramic crop improve the image? If so, you'd need to watch the sky top left and darken that down as well, in fact a little more tone in that section of the sky would help anyway.



Camera Data: ILCE-7RM5, FE 100-400mm F4.5-5.6 GM OSS @ 175.0 mm, f8.0 @ 1/160 sec, ISO 50

COMMENTARY

Some moody weather moving in! Exposure is excellent, keeping the subtle details in the clouds and your choice to keep the trees very dark creates a sense of depth and works well.

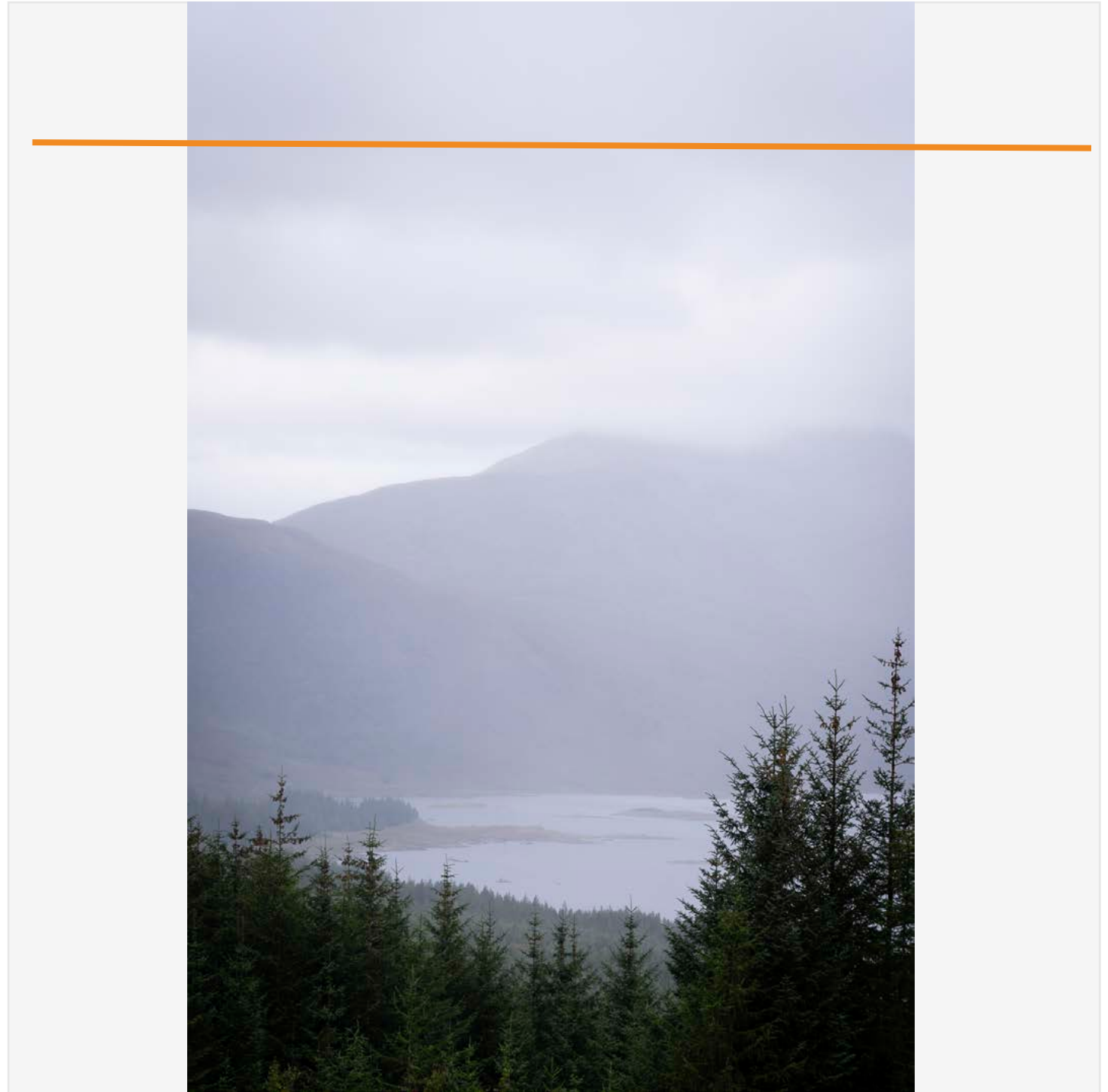
SUGGESTIONS

But what do you want me to look at? There is a view through the trees, but nothing specific to latch onto. Now, in the context of a photo book where you're setting the scene - no problem! The photo will have some purpose. But as a standalone image, the viewer may wish to find something in addition to the trees.

There is a lot of sky in the photo - is it all needed? Would cropping off the top assist matters?

Part of the attraction of the scene is the softness in the distant hills, but maybe with a little clarity or dehaze applied locally with a brush or mask, you could create a bit more definition and something more to consider?

Similarly, lightening up the water a tad more, perhaps adding a bit more contrast and colour saturation could also give viewers a reason to look into the interior of the scene.



Camera Data: ILCE-7RM5, FE 16-35mm F2.8 GM @
35.0 mm, f8.0 @ 1/15 sec, ISO 400

COMMENTARY

A very impressive location and some wonderful backlighting - which means embracing the bright white sky. Generally speaking, I try to avoid a detailless sky, but in this case I think it works well and becomes a part of the photo's style.

SUGGESTIONS

Is there a way you can direct the eye to something, rather than just leaving the viewer to roam around?

The white rocks attract the eye, but being so close to the edge of the frame, are probably more distracting than attractive? Do you crop this area out or retouch it?

One line that works very strongly in the composition is the horizon - do we assist it by cropping top and bottom, so the shape/format of our frame is longer and encourages a left to right progress?

Then, to emphasis the pointed rock in the middle, do you subtly/slightly de-saturate the surrounding foreground and background, and give them a little less contrast as well - does this create a stronger centre of interest?



Camera Data: ILCE-7RM5, FE 16-35mm F2.8 GM @
16.0 mm, f9.0 @ 1/400 sec, ISO 400

COMMENTARY

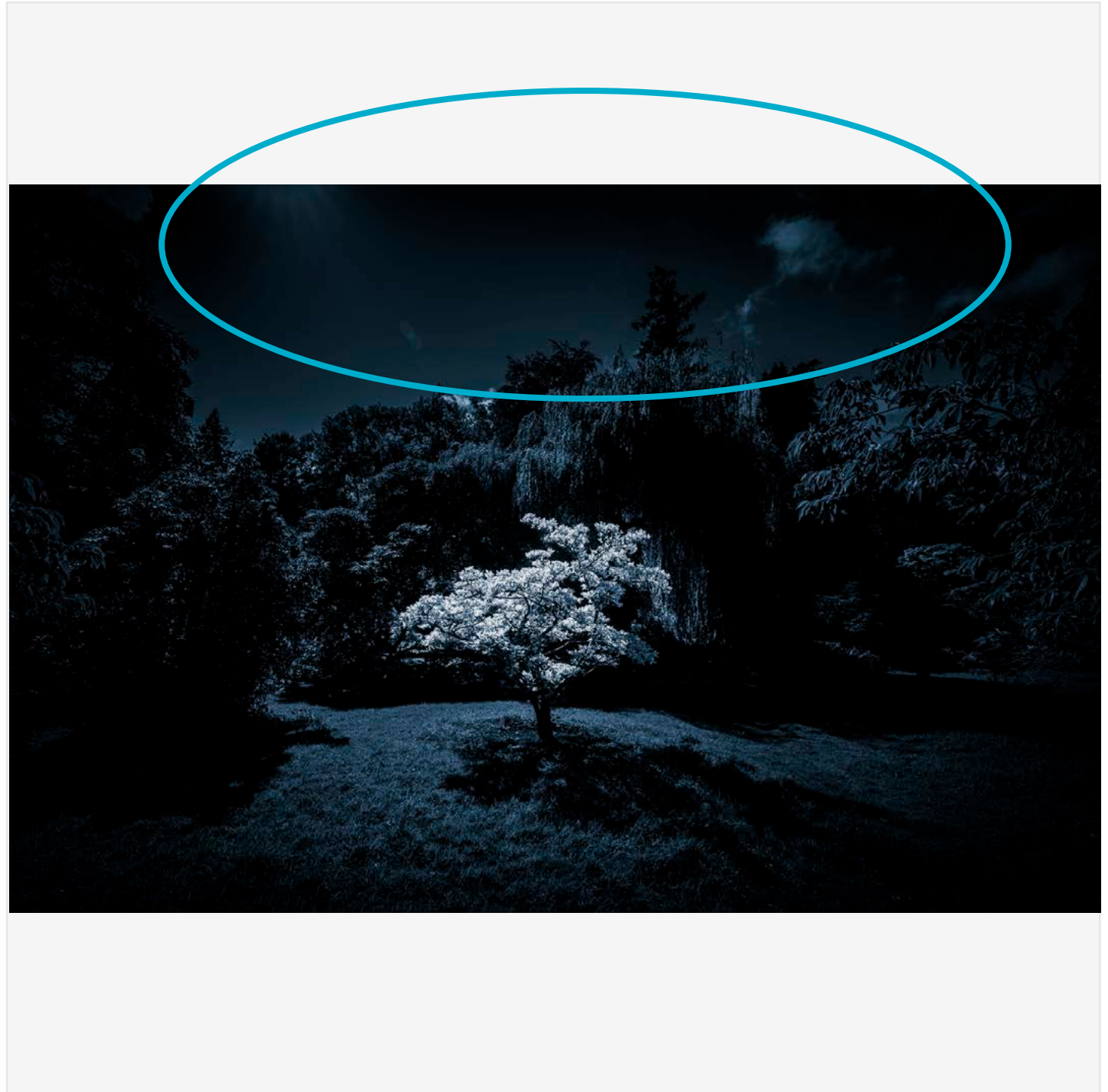
Fantastic! Very strong. Simple composition. Great use of light and tone. Wonderful shadows create a sense of unknown and mystery. Love the overhead back lighting.

SUGGESTIONS

Not much to suggest here...

You have a hint of the sun up the top, which perhaps should remain to explain why the tree is being lit. However, there's also the little white cloud to the right, plus a hint of lens flare underneath. Have a look at the photo without any of these distractions, or maybe just include the cloud or the sun, but not both. The lens flare can go!

And explore the Auto Levels or Auto Curves to see if redistributing the tones will help - I think you can lighten up the central tree even more.



Camera Data: ILCE-7RM5, FE 16-35mm F2.8 GM @
35.0 mm, f8.0 @ 1/640 sec, ISO 400

COMMENTARY

A strong sense of depth with foreground rock, middleground and background.

SUGGESTIONS

We don't always have a choice of the time of day we shoot when travelling, but the overhead light, while not unattractive, does little to enhance the landscape.

The composition is good with the rock in the foreground, leading the eye to the church and from there into the background ... and what?

Should the church be the final destination?

By cropping the sky you can bring the focus back to the middleground. And when it come to exposure, the buildings are almost pure white in places - look at the raw file and set the exposure for the buildings first, then use the shadow slider to lighten up the rest of the scene - or you may need to use masks to control exposure locally.

Also, a slight crop on the right to remove the tree!



Camera Data: ILCE-7RM4A, FE 100-400mm F4.5-5.6 GM OSS @ 400.0 mm, f5.6 @ 1/1000 sec, ISO 160

COMMENTARY

The composition works really well - placing the waterfall on the far left and creating all that space on the right tells a story - the huge expanses of Svalbard.

SUGGESTIONS

Does the photo have more impact when darkened down. Exposure is such a precise issue, especially with snow and ice. Looking at the original, the waterfall is there, but merges with the background ice.

By darkening down the image overall, and then lightening the waterfall and nearby surroundings back up, plus a little contrast, the waterfall has more presence.

You can play around with the exact amount of exposure to your taste.



Editing Notes

My adjustments have been made to a small 8-bit file - which has limitations. The adjustments are only an indication of what can be achieved. If you edit the file yourself, naturally you'll start with the raw file and do the masking properly.



Camera Data: ILCE-7M3, FE 85mm F1.4 GM @
85.0 mm, f1.4 @ 1/100 sec, ISO 250

COMMENTARY

Portraiture is more than just camera angle, lighting and posing - it is also expression, gesture and mood. I think you have captured some great theatrical mood, but a few things to consider for future shoots.

SUGGESTIONS

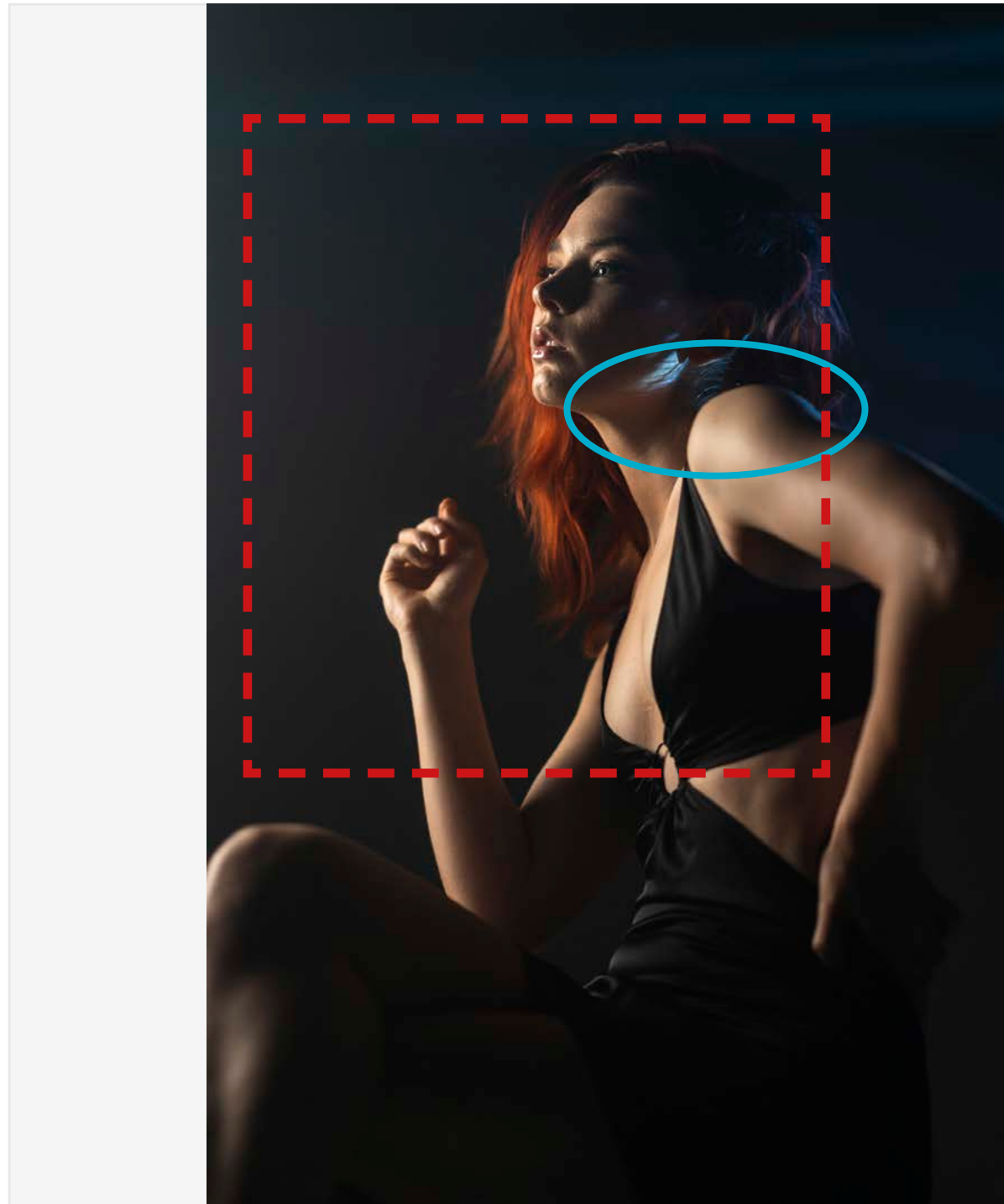
The kicker light under the ear - why is it there? I mean, I know why, but what is it actually achieving - the light needs to be moved to (I assume) highlight the hair and the arm and perhaps more of the face as well.

Watch your lens hood or the 'flags' in the studio - you're getting flare from the left of the frame. If intentional, then strengthen it to make it more obvious.

Where do you want the viewer to look? Her right forearm and chest are brighter and stronger than the face - darken with lighting or editing.

Framing - the knee and elbow are very tight - would you be better cropping in much more tightly?

Camera angle - we're looking up which may be considered modern, edgy or confrontational, but there are many other angles to explore which I think would achieve a more accessible portrait - easier on the eye. Try a higher viewpoint.



Camera Data: ILCE-7M3, 50mm F1.4 DG HSM | Art 018 @
50.0 mm, f1.4 @ 1/100 sec, ISO 1600

COMMENTARY

Strong dramatic lighting. I love the central composition and the use of smoke to create atmosphere and mood.

SUGGESTIONS

Studio lighting is a great way to create mood, but it can be very unforgiving because what is great light on the face can be distracting elsewhere. While the light on the left shoulder doesn't need to be eliminated - it gives a great sense of the person - it should be controlled in the studio by using a gobo or a flat (something you place between the light and the subject to shade the subject), or in post-production.

The highlights are almost blown out - I think either you go for pure white, or you retain detail. Try processing the file again and keep a little tone on the nose and cheeks, then process from there.

Finally - expression. The model's expression is indeterminate - is she happy, interested or wondering when it will all be over? The role of the portrait photographer isn't only technical, you should interact with the model to elicit an expression or response. For instance, asking the model to drop her chin and stare down the camera may have created a more obvious expression.



Camera Data: ILCE-7RM4A, FE 100-400mm F4.5-5.6 GM OSS @ 400.0 mm, f5.6 @ 1/500 sec, ISO 400

COMMENTARY

While some photographers might prefer the polar bear positioned elsewhere in the frame, I think it works well on this occasion because the bear is looking directly into the camera. The composition makes sense.

SUGGESTIONS

This is a great example of how important exposure is. I'm looking at your file on a high end EIZO monitor that is regularly calibrated, so I am very confident that what I am seeing is 'correct'. If your monitor is set up differently, you might not be seeing what I'm seeing, but let's assume it's close enough...

Looking at the bear in your photo, it is very light on the top of the head and body - to my mind, it's too light and the subject is confused against the snow in the background.

Simply by darkening the image overall, you can bring back that detail into the bear, and then work on the rest of the image to lighten it back up a bit.

Below is a very quick example of what I mean, showing how using exposure and some local lightening and darkening on the background can make the photo more powerful still.



Editing Notes

My adjustments have been made to a small 8-bit file - which has limitations. The adjustments are only an indication of what can be achieved. If you edit the file yourself, naturally you'll start with the raw file and do the masking properly.

Camera Data: ILCE-7M3, FE 16-35mm F2.8 GM @
23.0 mm, f5.6 @ 1/100 sec, ISO 200

COMMENTARY

Great subject and location! Love the old shipwreck and the rugged mountains behind tell the story of wild seas against an unforgiving coast.

SUGGESTIONS

You have lots of space in the photo, but does it assist the subject or confuse it? For instance, if the photo were horizontal, then this angle would have more of the coast and shore which perhaps tells the story. With the vertical framing, I feel there is more sky than is necessary - and perhaps more foreground as well. Would a square crop strengthen the framing?

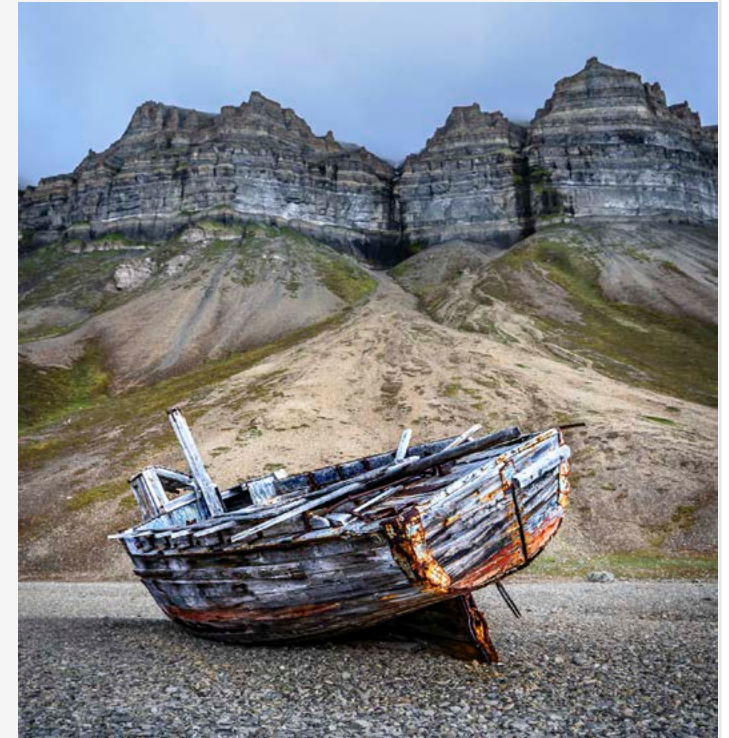
Next, how can we get the boat to stand out from the background. A few tools can be used.

I added a contrast layer and decreased the contrast on everything except the boat - so the boat is more contrasty than its surroundings.

I then darkened the foreground and sky just a little to contain the eye

I also darkened the scree slope behind the boat.

I added some colour saturation to the entire image - it mostly affected the rust on the boat which works well, but you could reduce the saturation on the grasses.



Editing Notes

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Suggested Tutorials For Further Research

There is a lot of material in Photo Process and while most of it will assist most photographers most of the time, the question remains: Where to start? Which tutorials should you watch first?

Based on this portfolio review, the tutorials indicated here are recommended for further research.

Capture

- ☒ Aerials
- ☒ Cameras & Lenses
- ☒ Colour Spaces and Colour Profiles
- ☒ Depth-of-Field
- ☒ Filters
- ☒ Light
- ☒ Focus Stacking
- ☒ High Resolution
- ☒ Long Exposures
- ☒ Tripods
- ☒ Understanding the Histogram
- ☒ Testing Apertures

Post-Production

- ☒ 32-Bit Processing 1
- ☒ 32-Bit Processing 2
- ☒ 3DLut Creator
- ☒ B&W Conversions
- ☒ Blacks
- ☒ Blend Modes 1
- ☒ Blend Modes 2
- ☒ Blend Modes 3
- ☒ Clarity
- ☒ Curve Problems
- ☒ Curves
- ☒ Filing and Catalogs
- ☒ Lab Color
- ☒ Levels
- ☒ Linear Curves
- ☒ Luminosity Masking
- ☒ Monitors
- ☒ Raw Processing
- ☒ Selections & Masking
- ☒ Selective Colour
- ☒ Shape, Sparkle & Pop
- ☒ Sharpening 1
- ☒ Sharpening 2
- ☒ Vignetting
- ☒ White Balance

Composition

- ☒ Angle of View & Perspective
- ☒ Armature
- ☒ Balance
- ☒ Contrast
- ☒ Direct Attention
- ☒ Dynamic Tension
- ☒ Formats
- ☒ Golden Mean
- ☒ Horizons
- ☒ Leading Lines
- ☒ Lines
- ☒ Negative Space
- ☒ Panoramas
- ☒ Pattern & Texture
- ☒ Points
- ☒ Shapes
- ☒ Size of Display
- ☒ Timing
- ☒ Viewpoint
- ☒ Visual Weight

Influences

- ☒ Alexey Brodovitch
- ☒ Caravaggio
- ☒ Gregory Colbert
- ☒ Eddie Ephraums
- ☒ Franco Fontana
- ☒ Caspar David Friedrich
- ☒ Kahn & Selesnick
- ☒ Michael Kenna
- ☒ Sheila Metzner
- ☒ Grant Mudford
- ☒ Irving Penn
- ☒ Nicholas Roerich
- ☒ Rocky Schenck
- ☒ Hiroshi Sugimoto
- ☒ Grahame Sydney
- ☒ Pete Turner

Output

Gallery Prints

- ☒ Image File Quality for Gallery Prints
- ☒ Processing for Prints
- ☒ Colour Spaces & Colour Profiles (repeat)
- ☒ Papers & Inks
- ☒ Soft Proofing
- ☒ Sharpening
- ☒ Print Finishing

Photo Books

- ☒ Publishing
- ☒ Planning
- ☒ Images
- ☒ Text
- ☒ Design
- ☒ File Preparation
- ☒ Layout Ideas

Some Feedback Explanations

There may be one or two times when I use terms or make suggestions that are not immediately obvious, but I find that once you understand what they are all about, they really are a great way to describe 'what to do'. If some of these have been used in your **Portfolio Review**, hopefully this additional information will be helpful.

Tonal Range

While there is no rule that says your photo should have a full range of tones from black to white, and every shade of grey and colour in between, most photographs most of the time benefit from a full range of tones. Sometimes the tonal range in a photo, especially after editing, can be limited, perhaps lacking blacks or whites, or having too many dull midtones. One technique to make photos look clearer and more interesting is to use a wider range of tonal and colour values. When reference is made to a photo's tonal range, it's code for asking yourself, are you using all the available tones, or is the photo too dark, too light, or too flat (not enough contrast)?

Tonal Mapping

'Tonal mapping' simply means darkening and lightening different parts of the image (dodging and burning in). Rather than adjusting all of the image at once (a global change), you adjust sections one at a time (selective changes). For example, do you need to make your subject lighter or darker, or with more or less contrast? For example, if your subject is correctly exposed, do you need to darken or lighten its surroundings so it stands out better? Or if your tonality is pretty good overall, could you 'interpret' it further to create a more striking image? Selectively lightening and darkening different areas in the image (mapping them) can emphasise things differently - and this may create a better, stronger photo.

Tonal Control

Tonal control refers to the choices you have made when you set the contrast and exposure. However, often a photograph will communicate and look better simply by making different choices. Have a look at your photo again: could it be improved by darkening down some light areas or lightening up some darker areas? This is also called dodging and burning (which is based on the old darkroom techniques) and is the same technique as Tonal Mapping.

Midtone Contrast

The midtones are the middle greys (and colours). The blacks and the whites may be correct in your photo, but it's how the tones and colours in between translate - we want to see life in there! Strong photographs have a sparkle about them. Sometimes this can be achieved by lightening up the midtone values and giving them a little more contrast. This can often be achieved with an 'automatic' curve or exposure adjustment, or with a manual curve, or even with the exposure and contrast sliders.

Clipping The Blacks

To give a photograph more presence and impact, one technique is called 'clipping the blacks'. Normally when we do a curve adjustment, we want only the darkest values to be pure black. However, if there aren't many blacks in your photograph, its tonality can seem a little flat or muddy. The trick is to make more of the nearly black tones completely black. This is called 'clipping the blacks' because we are moving the black slider in the curve dialog to the right, 'clipping' the very dark greys so they reproduce as black. If you're not expert with the curve dialog, you can also use the levels dialog, or in Lightroom, use the Black slider and move it to the left.

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