

RESULTS: PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

\$24.95

ISSUE 122
SUMMER 2025

Better Photography

FLINDERS RANGERS Keith Seidel's Personal Project



JOHN RUTTER'S ASTRO PANORAMAS • GARY RICHARDSON'S AMAZING AFRICA

UNDERSTANDING TONAL MAPPING • USING CONTRAST IN COMPOSITION

KEEPERS

PHOTOGRAPHER: Peter Eastway

LOCATION: Chateau Lavoute Polignac,
Lavoûte-sur-Loire, France

CAMERA: Fujifilm GFX100S II, Fujinon GF100-200mm
F5.6 R LM OIS WR.

EXPOSURE: 1/60 second @ f11, ISO 200

SITUATION: On a short tour through France this year, my challenge was how to photograph popular subjects, but make them somewhat different (acknowledging Susan Sontag's harsh words that all photography is derivative). One of my loves in Europe is the churches and museums with their Renaissance (and later period) artworks. While I believe the colour in many of the originals was bright and quite primary, the patina of the ages now gives the colours a yellowed, weathered look. Although what I see today is not what the artist intended, it speaks to me. I produced a small portfolio where I colour graded my images in various ways, influenced by some of the art of Renaissance Europe.









KEEPERS

PHOTOGRAPHER: Peter Eastway

LOCATION: Prince Leopold Island, Canada

CAMERA: Fujifilm GFX100S II, 500mm f5.6.

EXPOSURE: 1/1000 second @ f5.6, ISO 1000

SITUATION: This is not the best photo of a polar bear ever taken, but it's published to acknowledge how technology has changed how we work. There are restrictions on how close people are allowed to approach polar bears, so we are shooting with telephoto lenses and cropping the image (see full-frame below). And as good as subject AF is, from a moving Zodiac bouncing around in the choppy water, focus is on the water in front of the polar bear. However, when you first looked at the photo, did you think about the polar bear or the technique? Hopefully the former and only later did you consider the technique. Most non-photographers won't care about the post-production, but after cropping the image to 4000 pixels, it was up-rezzed using Topaz to 8000 pixels, then sharpened using Topaz, then resized to 6000 pixels. Compare what was shot with the final result and it's not perfect, but not bad! Now, the next step is to remove those pesky birds – on an earlier frame, one bird is over the polar bear's head mid-jump! Can't help good luck!





Cover photo by Keith Seidel.
See article on page 34.

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Photo by John Rutter. Full story page 24.

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When visiting popular locations, the challenge is to find a fresh slant, to personalise the photographs that we make. Keith Seidel describes his approach to the Flinders Ranges.



Photo by Mike Langford. Full story page 84.

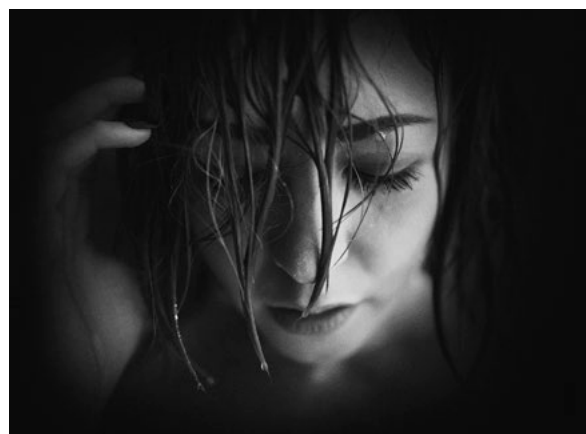


Photo by Hardijanto Budiman. Full story page 44.



Photo by Keith Seidel. Full story page 34.

Lumix S 100-500mm f5-7.1 O.I.S.

There's no doubt the most popular zoom lens among photographers today is the long telephoto. It's an ideal lens for many reasons. First, the zoom gives you a choice of long focal lengths, so you're not stuck with just a 300mm or 500mm lens. Second, these lenses are much lighter and more compact than the super-telephotos they challenge, so they're easier and more comfortable to use. And while the maximum aperture (say f5.7) isn't as wide as some of the prime lenses (say f2.8), the loss of super shallow depth-of-field is a small compromise to pay for the size savings – and higher ISO settings on cameras these days allow us to keep our shutter speeds up as well.

The latest Lumix S 100-500mm f5-7.1 O.I.S. is very compact with an overall length of just 196 mm. Panasonic says the small size is achieved by using an optimised lens element arrangement and a Dual Phase Linear Motor.

In terms of performance, Panasonic boasts for its lens high-speed, high-precision and silent autofocus, which when combined with a Dual I.S. image stabilisation system, provides up to 7.0 stops support. This is very useful for wildlife and sport photographers who cannot always afford the luxury of a tripod or monopod, meaning hand-holding still produces crisp, sharp results.

The lens has a dust, splash and freeze-resistant design and a fluorine coating on the front lens element. It also features a customisable focus ring and a function button. The focus ring can be used as a control ring, by assigning preferred settings such as aperture or other customisable parameters, while the function button allows users to assign functions such as Hybrid Zoom. And a new 'tight-smooth' ring adjusts the zoom ring's feel for optimal control, so you can avoid unintended zoom movements.

The Lumix S100-500 f5-7.1 O.I.S. is priced at AUS \$3,699 RRP.



Sony 100mm F2.8 Macro GM OSS

Many 'macro' lenses aren't actually 'macro' at all, meaning they don't focus close enough to provide 1:1 reproduction (meaning the size of the subject reproduced on the sensor is the same as the subject's size in reality). Often a teleconverter or extender tube is required to get them to macro magnifications.

This isn't a problem for photographers, rather for the marketing departments, but Sony's latest G Master macro lens, the FE 100mm f2.8 Macro GM OSS, features 1.4x magnification straight out of the box. It is also compatible with an optional teleconverter (sold separately) which then offers up to 2.8x magnification. This, claims Sony, enables impressive close-up shots while keeping a comfortable working distance. It is ideal for subjects that are hard to approach or for avoiding unwanted reflections and shadows.

The optical design includes two XA (extreme aspherical) lenses and two ED (Extra-low Dispersion) glass elements to achieve high-resolution performance from the centre to the periphery of the image, reducing chromatic and other aberrations. There are three focus-dedicated features: a "Full-time DMF switch" enables instant MF (manual focus) by rotating the focus ring, even in AF (autofocus) mode; the "Focus Mode switch" allows instant switching between AF and MF; and the "Sliding Focus Ring" enables Full MF mode, linked to the distance and magnification scales.

Four XD (extreme dynamic) linear motors make autofocus performance up to 1.9 times faster than previous models and the 11-blade circular aperture produces beautiful, ball bokeh, while carefully controlled spherical aberration ensures an ideal balance of resolution and background.

"Nano AR Coating II" is a uniform thin film applied to the entire lens surface, resulting in clear image quality that suppresses flare and ghosting, even in backlit conditions. And an integrated optical image stabilisation system, designed for macro photography, accurately compensates for shift shake (up/down/left/right), angular shake, and front/back shake, ensuring steady hand-held shots.

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Women Photographers 1900–1975

Back in 2020/21, the National Gallery of Australia housed the *Know My Name* exhibition and project, celebrating the work of women artists. And while it included some photographers, it was about artists generally.

Now in 2025, *Women Photographers 1900–1975: A Legacy of Light* celebrates the wide-ranging photographic practices of more than seventy women artists working between 1900 and 1975. Featuring prints, postcards, photo-books and magazines, the exhibition explores the role of photographers as image-makers and the ways in which women artists create an image of themselves, of others, of the times – from images of the women’s suffrage movement at the turn of the twentieth century, through to the women’s liberation movement and beyond.

From Melbourne to Tokyo, Paris to Buenos Aires, the exhibition showcases the works of trailblazing artists such as Berenice Abbott, Lola Álvarez Bravo, Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, Imogen Cunningham, Mikki Ferrill, Sue Ford, Christine Godden, Ponch Hawkes, Annemarie Heinrich, Ruth Hollick, Florence Henri, Kati Horna, Germaine Krull, Tina Modotti, Lucia Moholy, Toyoko Tokiwa, Yamazawa Eiko and many more.

The exhibition reflects a recent collecting focus on celebrating the contributions of women artists of the early twentieth century in the NGV Photography Collection. Featuring portraiture, photojournalism, landscape photography, photomontage, experimental avant-garde imagery and more, *Women Photographers 1900–1975: A Legacy of Light* presents the diverse work of women photographers against the backdrop of significant social, political and cultural events.

Opened in November 2025, the exhibition coincides with the fifty-year anniversary of International Women’s Year 1975, which established the United Nations’ annual celebration of International Women’s Day.

So, if you were looking for an excuse to visit the nation’s capital, now you have one!



Fujifilm GFX Eterna

This is a camera few readers will be interested in purchasing, but what is interesting is how the larger format sensor from Fujifilm’s GFX cameras is being used to provide superior video quality as well.

The Fujifilm GFX Eterna 55 features a large-format sensor measuring 43.8mm wide by 32.9mm high, making it the world’s tallest large-format sensor designed for a film-making camera. The sensor provides an image circle that surpasses full-frame and Super 35mm formats and as a result, film-makers can take full advantage of the large format sensor with the 4:3 Open Gate GF format, as well as choose from a range of cinema formats: Premista, 35mm, Anamorphic (35mm), and Super35.

The camera features the world’s first electronic variable ND filter compatible with a large format sensor. It enables seamless density control from ND0.6 to ND2.1 (0.015 step increments) during video shooting. And a newly adopted, optical low-pass filter with a four-point separation method optimised for the large format sensor, reduces moiré and false colours.

With two base ISO sensitivities (ISO 800 and ISO 3200), the camera automatically switches base ISO according to the lighting conditions, enabling clear images with suppressed noise even in extremely bright or dark environments.

Inside, the camera is equipped with F-Log2 and F-Log2 C, with an impressive dynamic range of 14+ stops. This allows the camera to record images with smooth gradations, leveraging the large sensor size and enhancing flexibility in post-production.

All 20 types of Fujifilm’s Film Simulations are available and the camera supports three Apple ProRes codecs (Apple ProRes 422 HQ, Apple ProRes 422, Apple ProRes 422 LT).

The camera itself weighs approximately two kilograms, ideal for small crew or solo shooting. Equipped with 3-inch LCD monitors on both sides of the body, it allows multiple people to change settings or check simultaneously.

So, there’s a little more to the GFX Eterna than is required by a stills photographer, but interesting nonetheless!



Creative Photography Workshops

Travel Photography Tours

Small Travel groups

Guides/Tutors

Mike Langford & Jackie Ranken

2026 Japan (1 Space left)

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Datacolor Spyder

The Datacolor Spyder is a colorimeter primarily designed to calibrate and profile computer monitors and screens. It comes in three flavours, depending on how many screens you need to profile and the type of work you do. The Spyder Xpress is probably all most readers will need, but the SpyderPro has all the bells and whistles if needed.

Interestingly, with so many photographers using Apple's M-chip laptops with their XDR screens, it could be useful to know that older colorimeters are not able to calibrate these new screens, so it may be time for you to check what you own!

The SpyderPro calibrates a wide range of monitors, including Wide and Standard gamut LED, OLED, Mini LED, Apple Liquid Retina XDR, high brightness displays and more; optimising colour richness, deep shadows, highlights, enhanced details and brightness. Thanks to SpyderPro's StudioMatch and SpyderTune you'll be able to ensure colour continuity across multiple monitors, whether using one or more computers.

Also featured is Datacolor's Device Preview Beta, which lets users see how their images may look on other devices without needing to use the actual devices. Instead, choose from a profile option for a smartphone, tablet or other device. This may also be used to soft proof and preview how prints will look for a specific printer model, paper and ink, and print service provider by using an ICC printer profile. Other functionalities include Advanced Display Mapping & Analysis, Gamma Curve Adjustment, Automatic Room Light Switching, Rec. 709 and Rec. 2020 gamut coverage and one-click calibration presets.

SpyderPro lets you easily calibrate your monitor in only about 90 seconds, so you can be confident that you're beginning your editing from an accurate starting point. For more information, visit Kayell Australia's website. Prices from AUS \$249 to \$575.



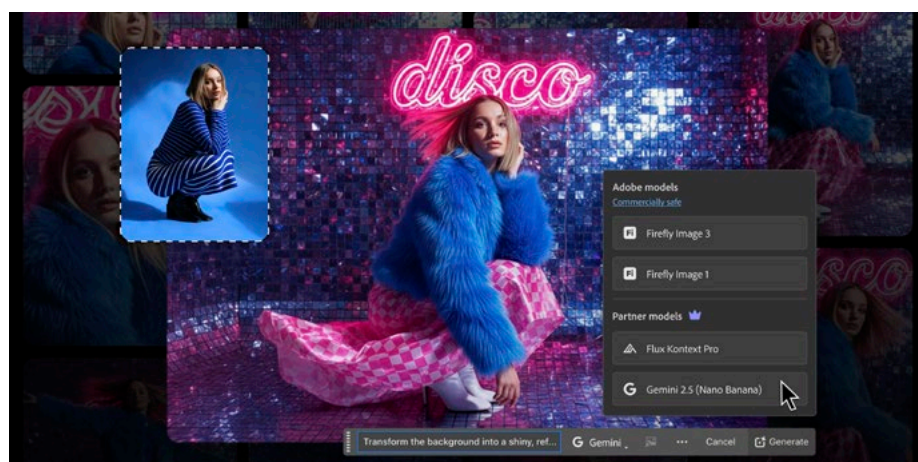
Photoshop AI

I love the way we were given access to a news release from Adobe! Adobe required us to sign in 'for our protection'. What a joke! Large corporates and their legal departments really have lost the plot!

And some photographers will think Photoshop has also lost the plot with its use of AI, but love it or hate it, AI is the way of the future. It doesn't have to be our future, but we should understand what's going on if we are to have any hope of remaining relevant!

Generative Fill has become one of Photoshop's most popular tools, because it gives us the capability to quickly generate multiple variations, choose the one that fits our vision and refine it with Photoshop's editing tools. Now Adobe is expanding that flexibility, giving us even more choice — and control — by integrating Google's Gemini 2.5 Flash Image (Nano Banana) and Black Forest Labs' FLUX.1 Kontext [pro], alongside Adobe's commercially safe Firefly image models, directly into your Generative Fill tool in the Photoshop beta app.

With these AI models, Adobe claims, you have access to the best creative AI tools where they're most helpful. What makes this integration into Photoshop especially powerful is how it combines a choice of the models with which you generate content. It's a seamless connection that helps you move from idea to impact even faster without breaking your creative flow.



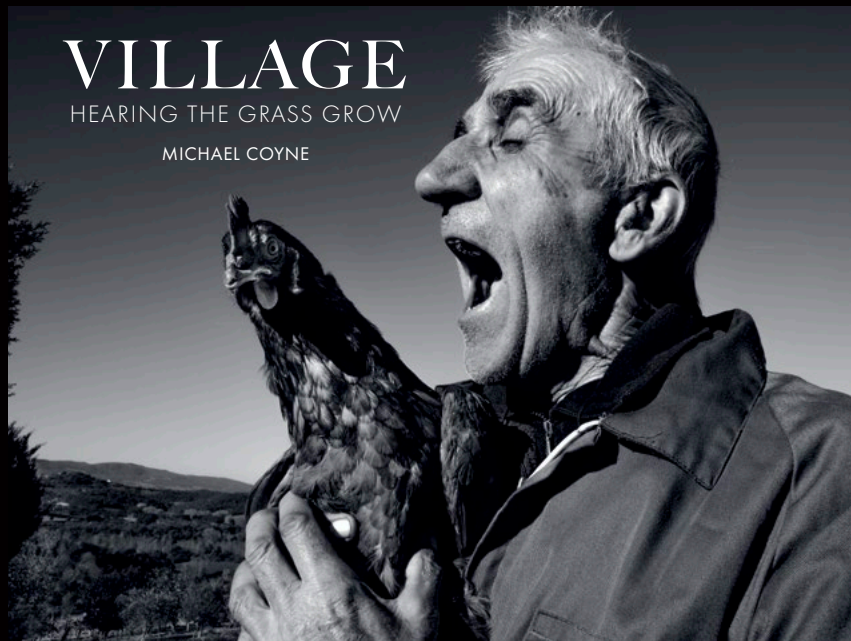
Continues Adobe, different projects require different aesthetics and diverse creative approaches. "That's why the power of Generative Fill in Photoshop is so impactful – it lets you add, remove or transform content in seconds with natural-language prompts, and its newly-expanded selection of AI models provides an even richer breadth of options, all directly usable inside the tool you already know."

Update your beta app to explore these new options. And yes, you'll have to sign in!

VILLAGE

HEARING THE GRASS GROW

BY MICHAEL COYNE



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

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

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

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—PETER EASTWAY, *BETTER PHOTOGRAPHY MAGAZINE*

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HOW TO HANDLE AFRICA

After many trips to the wilds of Africa, we asked Gary Richardson for some first-hand advice on what to take and how to approach subjects.

While Gary Richardson emphasises he's not a professional photographer, there's no doubting the professional calibre of his work. And while he's not on social media either, he would undoubtedly attract plenty of likes!

"I take photographs for the sheer pleasure of making beautiful images and turning them into prints that I may hang on my wall," explained Gary.

"Perhaps one of the greatest benefits of not being a professional photographer is that you can shoot whatever you

like without having to worry about whether you can make a living from it. The outdoors is my studio. The landscape and the flora and fauna that live within it are my subjects. The challenge of making great images in the outdoors inspires me. The weather is seldom ideal and the subjects are often in the wrong place, but that is what makes the photography interesting – how to make the best out of a difficult situation.

"Birds and animals in their natural environment can be mesmerising. There are no boundaries and they act just as they are meant to. We have wonderful zoos here in Melbourne, but the behaviours of the animals are just not the same as in the wild. Nevertheless, zoos are a great place to hone your skills before heading out on safari."

Insight

"My interest in photography began in my teens with a Kodak Instamatic camera. I graduated to a Minolta SRT-101 with a couple of additional lenses and I was hooked."

However, his photography took a back seat for several years until his passion was reignited when he bought into the Canon EOS ecosystem. He had never learnt the black arts of the darkroom, so as the revolution of digital photography progressed, he jumped in, purchasing a Canon EOS 20D not long after its release in late 2004. He was told that if he wanted to make the most out of the new technology, he'd have to shoot raw and learn Photoshop.

"Wanting to advance my photography, I joined the Melbourne Camera Club in 2008. I am a great believer that to get the most out of a club, you need to become involved.



Zimanga has a number of hides, two of which can be used overnight as the ground near the waterhole is illuminated. Elephants and Cape Buffalo are the most frequent visitors at night. 2025, Canon EOS R5, RF 14-35mm at 19mm

Opposite page: Two giraffes with their necks entwined. Not even our guides could explain the behaviour. 2025, Canon EOS R5, RF 100-500mm at 223 mm





African Fish Eagle takes flight. On a small island in the middle of the Chobe River, the eagle fortunately turned around before taking off. Using the pre-capture and animal/eye tracking features of the Canon R1, I have a series of frames all in focus as it flies past our boat.
2025, Canon EOS R1, RF 200-800mm at 324mm

In 2010, I was elected to the Board, serving for a total of eight years, including four as Treasurer and two as President. I have also been involved with the Club's Introduction to Photography Course for more than 10 years, seven years as its co-ordinator. The course teaches the fundamentals of exposure – aperture, shutter speed and ISO, as well as composition and elements of different photographic genres."

In 2022, Gary was elected an Honorary Life Member for services to the Club.

On the Road

For wildlife photography, Gary always travels on organised photography tours. "You are almost always travelling to remote locations in far distant lands. Your photography guide and local guide should know the areas of intended travel, the wildlife you are likely to encounter, have appropriate vehicles for the conditions and always have a 'Plan B'. More eyes make it more likely you will find that elusive wildlife.

"For instance, if your objective is to photograph flamingos, then you might head to the caustic lakes of the Rift Valley in Kenya and Tanzania. If you want to see the great migration, then you will head for the Serengeti in Tanzania. However, if you are

less specific and looking for a wide variety of African wildlife and birds, my pick is the Okavango Delta in Botswana.

"Having selected a region, you can then start to research providers. If you are intending to go on a photo tour, I would look at how often the tour leader runs tours in the area. If they are consistently filling tours, they are probably doing pretty well at satisfying their customers. It also implies they have great relationships with locals for accommodation and guiding."

Opposite page:

Top: Driving along an infrequently used track in the Okavango Delta, Botswana, the tracker sitting on the front of the safari vehicle caught a glimpse of movement. After jumping in the vehicle, we drove around the thicket to find this lioness with four cubs. The importance of a great tracker cannot be underestimated.
2016, Canon EOS-5DSr, EF 70-200mm f2.8 II, at 115mm

Bottom: At Zimanga Private Game Reserve, there are two cheetah brothers. Though used to seeing people, they are wild and have to make kills to survive. Our guide indicated it would be safe to get out of the vehicle and even to kneel down to take photographs. The cheetah looks like he is stalking and he is, but it is play time and he is stalking his brother. What a privilege to be so close.
2025, Canon EOS R1, RF 100-500mm at 343mm





A Red-billed Oxpecker is looking for ticks and other parasites inside the ear of a female Impala. 2025, Canon EOS R1, RF 100-500mm at 500mm

"Check what type of vehicles they use and how many photographers will be in each row of seats. Sightseeing tours will pack three into each row. As photographers using long lenses, you want no more than two. Check also whether there are any camera supports or whether a beanbag can easily be used at a comfortable height – long lenses are heavy to hold while you are waiting for the action.

"In areas like the Okavango Delta, each camp (glamping-style tents) sits in the centre of an exclusive area approximately 10 kilometres in diameter. Guides and trackers need to be qualified and it is their expertise that will enable you to get the best possible images. Remember that your tour leader will not be in your vehicle all the time.

"Game reserves and concessions will offer you a less crowded environment for your photography because they generally place strict limits on the number of vehicles that may approach an animal. This provides a less stressful environment so the animals are more likely to continue with their natural behaviour.

"4WD safari vehicles may have up to four rows of seats behind the driver, with each row higher than the previous row. And as mentioned, photo tours should have no more than two photographers per row (you need room for your gear). To photograph out of one side, one person will lean back while the other leans forward. When stopped, depending on the types of animals being observed and how close they are, you may be able to stand up (definitely not for lions). Generally, you will be shooting hand-held, although I have seen vehicles with adjustable armrests that would enable the use of a beanbag to support your telephoto lens.

"On a recent trip to Chobe National Park, most of the time was spent on specially designed speedboats. They were set up with chairs in single file that could turn to either side and were





In the world of the African Jacana, it is the male with all the parental duties. Once the eggs are laid, the female will head off to find another mate while the male incubates the eggs. When hatched, it is up to the male to see the hatchlings through to fledging. 2025, Canon EOS R1, RF 200-800mm at 600mm



You brought me a rock? In the early morning light it was not possible to get a shutter speed that would totally freeze the action of these Pied Kingfishers. Shot at ISO 25,600 and processed with Topaz Photo AI, I feel it is better to make the capture than just have it as a memory.
2025, Canon EOS R1, RF 100-500mm at 451mm

fitted with gimbals to support heavy lenses. The sides of the boat also had protective material so that if you wanted to shoot from a really low angle, you could rest your lens on the side without fear of scratches."

Wildlife Gear

For Gary's most recent trip to Africa, he used Canon mirrorless cameras (R1 and R5) and RF lenses (14-35mm, 24-105mm, 100-500mm and 200-800mm). "The 14-35mm was only used from a hide when elephants approached quite close. The 24-105mm was used in a hide and from our boat when close to elephants feeding in the Chobe River.

"However, the majority of my shooting was with the 100-500mm and 200-800mm.

"My set-up for shooting wildlife and birds is manual exposure control with auto ISO and using exposure compensation to adjust for lighting conditions. My AF settings are animal detect, eye detect, continuous focusing with whole area tracking, a 1/2500 shutter speed and high speed frame rate. This has then been recorded in a Custom Shooting Mode so it's easy and instant to set.

"While the high speed frame rate has been included in the Custom Shooting Mode, I can easily vary the frame rate to low speed or single frame through a customised button. My cameras are also set up for back button focus and the Set button to activate exposure compensation adjustments.

"Additionally on the R1, I have a second Custom Shooting Mode which enables pre-continuous shooting. This enables you to capture action such as a bird taking flight by half pressing the shutter, then fully pressing the shutter as soon as the action takes place. The camera records frames for 0.5 second before the shutter is fully pressed. This could be up to 20 frames.

"Most of the time, I shoot wide open (the widest aperture) with the 100-500mm and 200-800mm for two reasons. Shooting wildlife and birds, you need fast shutter speeds to freeze the action (1/2500 second), so being wide open allows you to keep the ISO as low as possible and hence noise to a minimum. The second reason is to allow the background to be soft and achieve visual separation for the subject.

"I know there are many critics of these lenses as wide open at the longest focal length are f7.1 and f9 respectively, but I do not find this to be a problem."



Two Impala bucks face off to see who will have control of the herd. 2025, Canon EOS R1, RF 200-800mm at 800mm

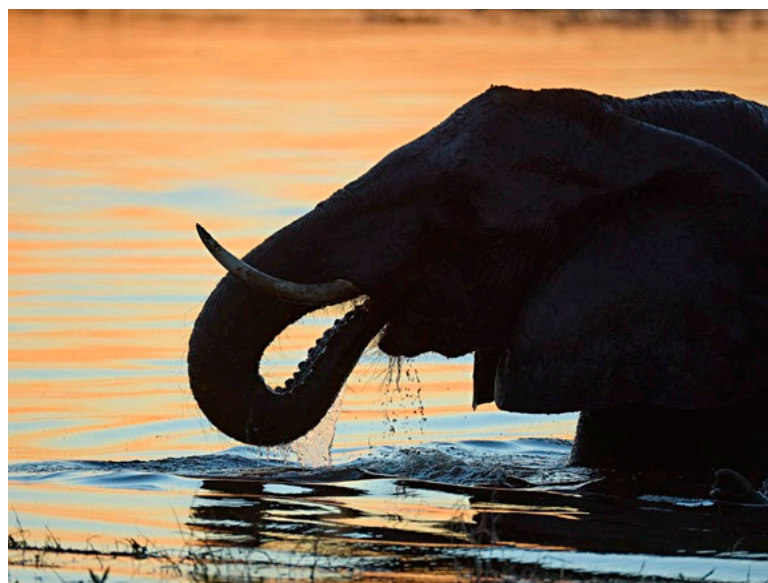
One touted advantage of a prime lens, which is both larger and heavier but has a wider aperture like f4, is that the depth-of-field is shallower and the background more blurred. However, the difference with super telephotos is not as significant as you might think, as Gary has calculated.

"Using a 500mm focal length at a subject distance of 25 metres and an aperture of f7.1, the depth-of-field (DOF) is 1.05 metres, whereas at f4 using a prime lens, the DOF would be 0.6 metres. At 800mm focal length, 25 metres subject distance at f9, the DOF would be around 0.51 metres whereas an 800mm prime at f5.6, the DOF would be 0.32 metres." So while there's a difference, you still capture beautiful separation with the modern zoom lenses. (DOF calculations from PhotoPills based on a R5 camera.)

So, why do some photographers still spend a lot of money on these large prime lenses? Are they that much better optically?

"My zoom lenses are very sharp, much lighter than primes and provide the flexibility of focal length. For me, that makes them the best solution for my wildlife photography."

Gary processes his images in Capture One and Photoshop and prints to an Epson P800 on Canson paper when home.



Every evening on the Chobe River, it was something of a ritual to go looking for sunset silhouettes, particularly of elephants. Here the bright orange sky of an African sunset is reflecting on the water as the elephant pauses to drink. 2025, Canon EOS R1, RF 200-800mm at 800mm



This bloot of hippopotamuses was not in a good position for a photograph. Being early morning and clear sky, strong backlight made it very difficult to get detail in their faces. Shooting and processing for a high key black and white image was the answer. 2025, Canon EOS R1, RF 200-800mm at 800mm

Finding the Animals

Continues Gary, "Having some understanding of animal behaviour certainly helps you prepare for what may happen next. For example, when a lion yawns, it is actually waking up and is likely to stand up soon thereafter. Another example would be that many birds relieve themselves immediately before taking off.

"Good guides will help you recognise and learn these behaviours while you are on safari. Recognising these signs can help you get great shots.

"On a safari tour in Africa, you will always find a great variety of animals and birds, even in your camps. The question is, will you always find what you are looking for?

"The simple answer is no. It depends on where you are and what you are looking for. Of the "Big Five", elephants and buffalo are generally in herds and widely distributed. But if you are in Namibia, you will not find buffalo. Leopards are solitary animals and often rest in trees or thickets, making them very hard to find. Rhinos are endangered and their numbers are low, also making them difficult to find. Lions are somewhat easier to find as they live as a group in a pride, however, the males are more difficult to find as they are away from the pride patrolling their territory most of the time.

"Guides and trackers are invaluable in locating elusive animals. If you are in a game reserve or a concession, the guides from other vehicles will maintain contact and inform your guide of worthwhile sightings.

"In my experience, game drives are generally early morning from sunrise for a few hours, or a few hours up until sunset. This is when the animals are most active and when the light is less harsh. Many guides are themselves good photographers, so

they will often strive to get you into a position where the light is favourable. That said, the animals may be facing the wrong way or it is just not possible to get into a better position. It is then that you need to think outside the box. For example, with strong back lighting, change your thinking to how do I shoot for a high key image."



On the edge of Lake Clark N.P. Alaska, this female brown bear with her three new cubs was trusting enough of the group of photographers to lie down in the grass of the open meadow. This magical moment is what has inspired me to pursue nature photography with a passion. 2009, Canon EOS-1D Mark III, EF500mm f4 + 1.4TC



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JOHN RUTTER'S ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY RABBIT HOLE



Menindee1

**There's no doubt John Rutter's
photographs of the Milky Way above a
quirky landscape are simply stunning,
but there's an incredible amount of skill
and imagination needed to make each
photograph really sing.**



There is a distinct sense of wonder and admiration for the night-time panoramas created by John Rutter. And based on the huge number of awards John has received, photography judges around the world agree. John's work combines the highest technical standards with an artistic flair that keeps his viewers fully engaged.

Insight

Begins John Rutter, "I did a bit of photography at school, but left it for a few years. I mean, I was always around photography in some way, but it wasn't until I started travelling with my wife that I picked up a camera again. I wanted to capture the places we travelled to – so thanks to her!"

Another benefit of travelling with his wife came from a trip to Volcanoes National Park in Hawaii. While he was capturing the glow of the volcano down in the crater, he also took a wider view that included the night sky above and when he looked closer, he could see the Milky Way. "At that time, I didn't really know what I was looking at, but it spiked my curiosity enough to jump into the rabbit hole of astrophotography. It wasn't long before all I was shooting was astro. I was out there every night and it hasn't stopped for the last ten years!"

While John has dabbled in most areas of astrophotography, he loves panoramas the best. "I tried to capture single images of the night sky, but I couldn't get away from the techniques required. To get the best results, you really need to capture high resolution files with a medium focal length lens and stitch them together – and of course, this technique goes hand in hand with travel to a remote location that has 'dark' skies."

While a lot of astrophotographers use an ultra wide-angle 14mm lens which may require just four or five images stitched together to include the full arch of the Milky Way, John often uses a 40mm lens and maybe 20-odd exposures. "I really enjoy looking at my files on the computer screen. I like to keep zooming in and seeing that detail in the sky, even though I am unlikely to print the file to the full size of its resolution. Still, I love looking at it on the screen!"

What makes John's photos so successful is his combination of night sky and foreground, both of which are dependent on the right location. So, what exactly is John looking for when he's out scouting? "First and foremost," explains John, "it needs to be dark. I am a bit of a dark sky snob these days. If there's any light pollution, I don't waste my time with it because it compromises my vision for what I want. I know a lot of photographers look for



John Rutter on location!

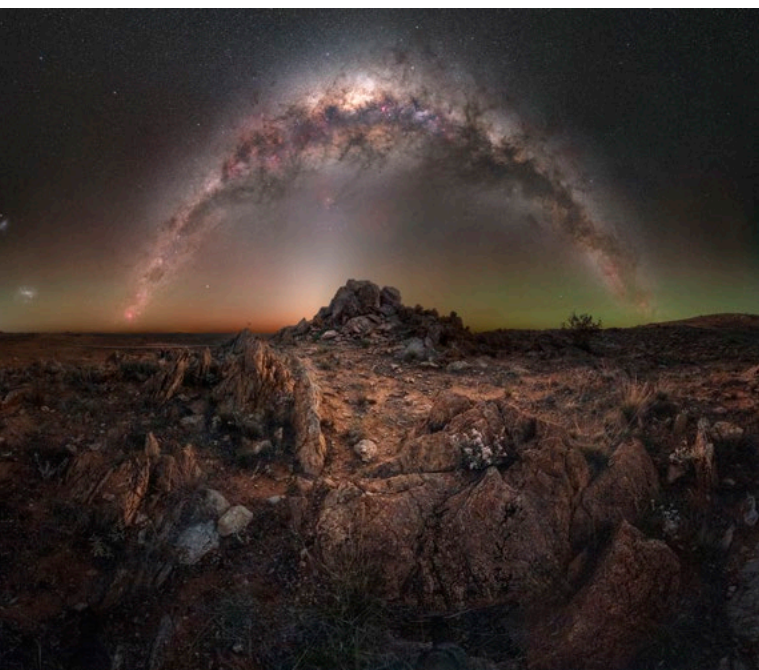


Bus

creative elements to place in the foreground and then deal with the sky as it is – and this approach can work really well. However, I prefer to find the dark sky first and then go and look for the foreground interest.”

These days, it’s easy enough to find where the darkest skies are using the internet and phone apps (e.g. darksitefinder.com) and generally the locations are going to be miles from anywhere. “Remote locations are country scenes, so I’m working in Australia’s outback, especially country NSW, and looking for subjects like old abandoned houses, cars and trees.

‘I live in the Upper Hunter in New South Wales, near Muswellbrook, so I’m already halfway there. If I can shoot from my backyard, I will, but there are some great shots to be found around Coonabarabran which is considered a dark sky capital and only a couple of hours away.”



Barrier

Daytime Planning

John usually scouts his locations during the day. He knows where the dark sky areas are and by using an app like PhotoPills, he can work out where the Milky Way will be in the sky at a particular time in the night and when it will line up with an item of interest in the foreground. He then makes a plan to come back and shoot it, so he is not wasting his night-time looking for an angle.

“PhotoPills is a great app because I can set it for any time during the year. It means I can do a scouting trip now and while a subject might not line up tonight, it could be perfect in six months’ time. I build myself a calendar for future shoots.”

“A lot of the locations I want to shoot from are on private property, so if I find something with potential, I first have to ask the farmer’s permission.”

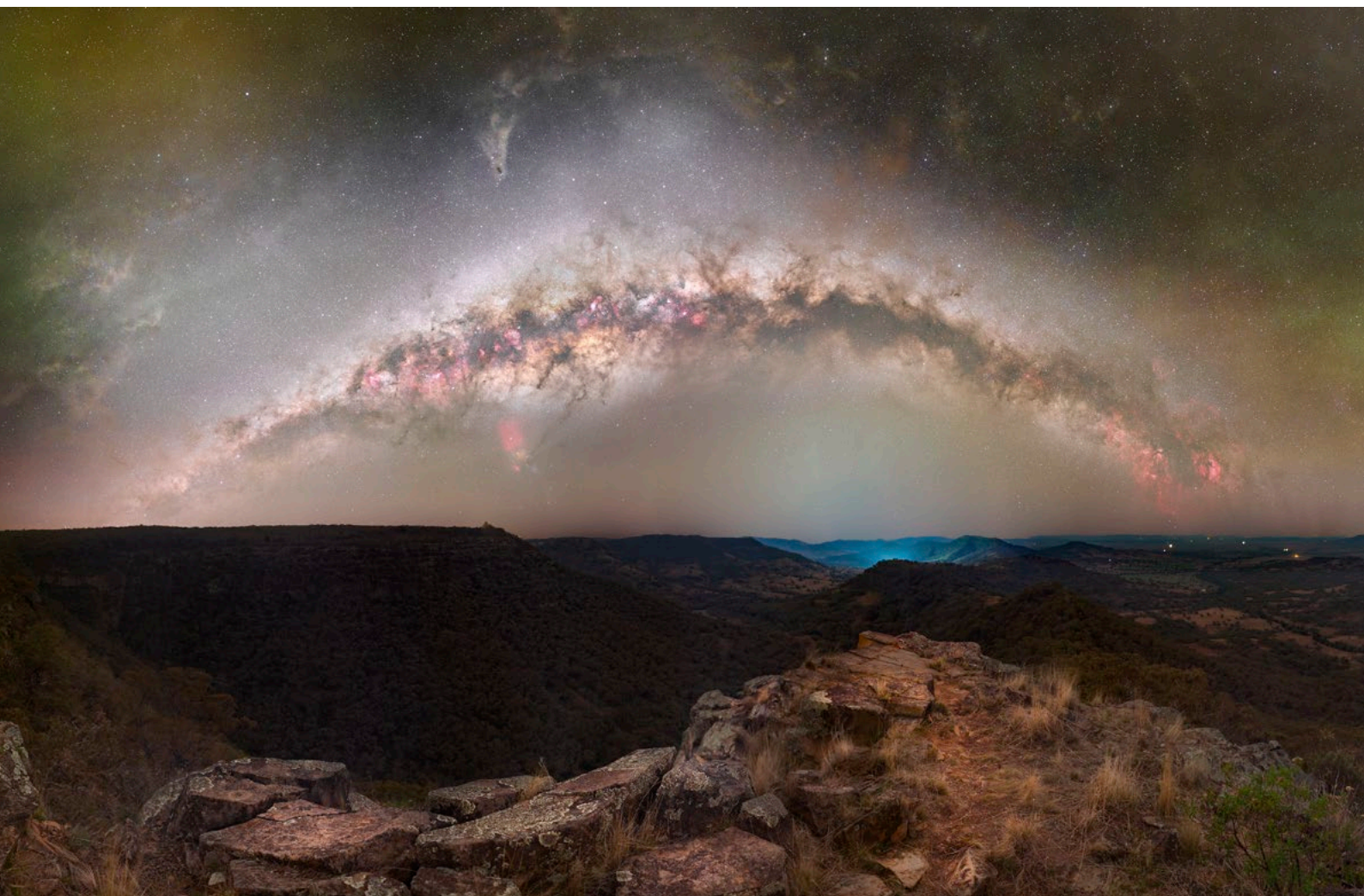
John smiled when asked what the farmers think of him when he walks up to their front door! “At first, most of them are a little confused about what I really want, but then I show them a few of my photographs and most of them love the idea. I also provide them with a copy of the print or maybe a bottle of wine, building a relationship. Often these farmers have properties of 10,000 acres or more and there can be lots of locations to shoot from.

“And the farming community is really cool because everyone knows everyone else, so often a farmer will ring up his neighbour and say he has a bloke here taking photos, could he take me around their property!”

While many astrophotographers suggest some times of the year are better than others, John says it’s not such an issue for his panoramas. The only time he can’t shoot is when the moon is full, but any time the moon is not in the sky he can shoot.

“We do have a ‘Milky Way season’ when the core of the Milky Way is visible in the sky, from January to the end of October, but even when the core isn’t visible, there are other parts of the Milky Way worth photographing such as Orion and the Orion Belt. I’ve taken big panos of both these parts of the sky and when you compare them, they are completely different, but they both include the characteristic arch.”

Weather also has a big impact, the most obvious problem being a cloudy sky, but some clouds can be helpful,



Pinnacles



Breeze Orion

while strong winds definitely are not.

"I'm using a tracking mount on a tripod to take my sky images. The tracking mount ensures the stars don't trail and remain sharp, so wind becomes a factor if it moves the camera during the exposure. I've done all sorts of things to minimise the impact of wind, such as using weights on the camera and tripod, hiding behind a car, even using my open jack trying to shield the camera, so wind is definitely a problem for stability."

John adds that moisture and humidity are not a problem for his wide-angles. "You can get clearer pictures with less humidity and at higher elevations, but it's not such an issue for my panoramas. And unless you have complete cloud cover, it's still worth shooting. With two to three minute exposures, clouds can often just blow through and the stars can glow through them for some really cool looks."

The Process

Most of John's shoots involve long drives out west. "I often have to camp and I have a 4WD with a rooftop tent which makes it easy." And his photo of dead trees out at Menindee Lakes is a long way west!

"This location was interesting! Even though there are thousands of dead trees along the foreshores, I spent quite a few hours walking around, trying to find trees that would work. My idea was to have a central tree propping up the Milky Way arch, with the other two on the sides acting as support. Once I found them, the rest of the day was spent relaxing and getting my equipment ready. I like to be on location before the sun goes down, so I'm not trying to fiddle around in the dark and feeling the pressure of time passing.

"The Menindee photo is taken shortly after the sun set, so the yellow light is zodiacal light, meaning the location is completely dark, but the sun is shining back into space, lighting up the interplanetary dust above the horizon. It's a very cool effect that can happen twice a day for a short period, so you



Above: Breeza Canola

Below: Silverton Ruin





have to be ready to shoot as soon as it's completely dark."

John took the photograph on a modified Sony A7S III with a 24mm f1.4 Sigma Art lens – and the exposure was at f1.4. Although he's shooting wide-open, John says the 24mm Sigma has no problem with corner softness. "That's why I use specific lenses and I find Sigma is really good with corner performance when used wide-open. A lot of the lenses I use for astro work are made by Sigma."

John explains there were 22 shots for the sky, 11 across in two rows, plus another 11 photos for the foreground. So 33 exposures in total, stitched together. The exposure was one minute at f1.4, ISO 800. You can see this is where the wide aperture really comes in handy – to achieve the same exposure with an f2.8 lens, you'd have to use ISO 3200 which would generally have increased noise and grain.

"My philosophy about ISO is to use a setting as near to the second native ISO as possible. This protects the colours in the stars and while with a cursory glance we think stars are white, they actually have blues, oranges and reds! If you crank your ISO up too high, which is what a lot of photographers do so they can see the image on the LCD screen on their camera, you lose the colour due to the reduction of the sensor's dynamic range at higher ISO settings. My approach is to use a lower ISO setting, use longer exposures and pull the highlights down in post-production."

Many cameras have dual native ISO settings, one for general, brighter photography (and usually around ISO 100),



Mini

and a second for low light. The camera uses separate circuits to optimise the image being captured and for John's Sony model, the second native ISO is 640. And ISO 800 is very close to this. For more information, John suggests Youtube is your best friend!

Dealing With Trees

Creating night sky panoramas sounds easy, but it's not! When it comes to photographing trees against a sky, it can be very difficult because the exposures of the sky are taken with a moving tracking mount. The trees are photographed with the tracking mount turned off (otherwise the foreground would be blurred during the

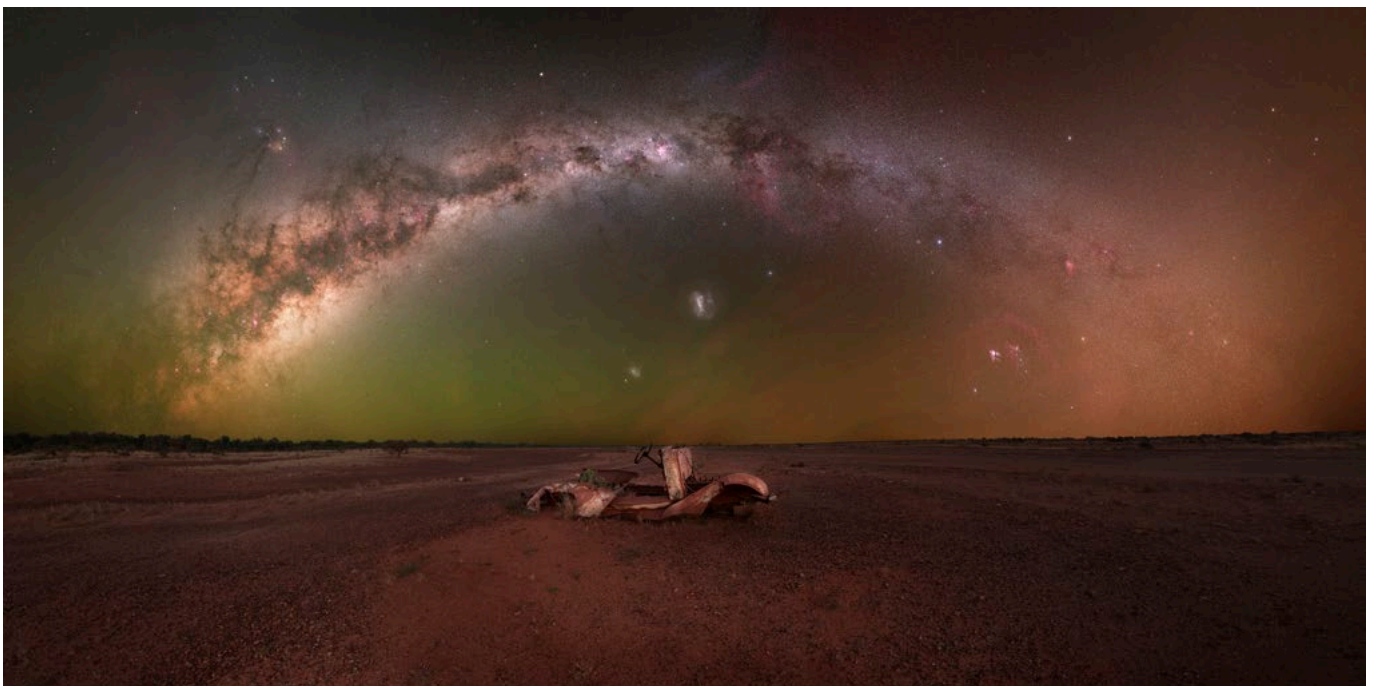


Mungo Orion

exposure), so the question becomes, how do you merge the sky exposures with the stationary landscape below?

"I shoot the sky from the horizon upward, including the blurred trees (due to the tracker). Then I turn the tracker off and shoot the trees and foreground separately. Now I create two panoramas, one of the sky and one of the landscape. I drop them into Photoshop as layers, bring the opacity down and line them up. The Menindee trees were easy because they don't have leaves!

"It's another wonderful rabbit hole! It is very, very difficult to shoot trees against a night sky. The easiest approach is to shoot the sky first and then move the camera back 10 metres or so for the trees, meaning the trees are now slightly smaller in the frame, thus making the retouching process easier. If you don't want to move the camera, you end up struggling to line up the trees and removing the blurred areas with the clone tool. Either way, it is very time consuming."



Whitecliff



Tyrell Fence

"I use PT Gui for my panoramas. Some panoramas work perfectly straight out of the box, others need a little messing around."

Star Trackers

A tracker moves the camera at the same speed as the Earth rotates, so you can take long exposures of the sky without them being blurred or 'trailing'. Making a tracker that exactly replicates the movement of the Earth is not easy and there are a number of different units on the market. John uses the SkyWatcher Star Adventurer. "It's quite a big unit and while smaller trackers can also be good, it's horses for courses. If you're going to put a larger camera and lens on top, the tracker needs to be built to support it. The Sigma 40mm f1.4 is a big, heavy lens, so it needs stability and hence a bigger tracker."

Perhaps surprisingly, John doesn't worry so much about his tripod – as long as it is large enough and strong enough for the job. It doesn't need to be lightweight as he's not carrying it long distances, but it does need to be very stable. "And I ruin my tripods, so I like the inexpensive models – I'm currently using an ArtSize."

"On top of the tripod, I use two-way heads with an indexing panorama plate. The first two-way head gets the tracking base level and the panorama plate with click stops makes it easy to turn the camera the required distance in-between exposures. The second two-way head lets me point the camera up or down as required."

On the panorama plate, he sets the adjusting pin to the number of degrees required to turn the camera half the field of view. And with the click stops you can hear or feel them in the



Dragon's Lair

dark, making the process of capturing the panorama seamless. "The easier you can make it for yourself to work in the dark, the better."

Down the Rabbit Hole

When you get into astrophotography, it seems to be a never-ending spiral into more and more complexity. For instance, a technique to reduce the noise in the night sky is to make multiple exposures of each frame – and then you stack these



Menindee 2

frames together using layers and blend modes to reduce the noise. Many photographers use special software to do this, but it can mean your 33-frame panorama becomes 330 frames (or thereabouts)! But let's not go there. Instead, once John has stitched his panorama together, how does he process it?

"I'm doing all the basic things you do with any other image. The first thing is to get the colour balance right – I like a neutral colour balance. There are two ways I use. Normally, I grab the vibrance and saturation sliders and take them to 100 per cent, then I mess around with the temp and tint sliders for the white balance to get an even mix of colour. The vibrance and saturation sliders are then returned to normal. Or you can add a curve and use the eye dropper tool to set the grey point on some point in



the sky with no nebulosity – this way is not as subjective as the first, but I normally use the vibrance/saturation technique.

"With the colour, I am looking for reality, but reality is a very controversial issue in astrophotography. For instance, the sky is not actually blue at night-time. I'm a big fan that you do whatever you want to with your photos, but for me personally, I want to make the colour balance as accurate as I can..

"Once colour is right, I use all the usual exposure and contrast tools and then I look again at the colour in terms of saturation and vibrance. Obviously I'm using lots of layers and masks to selectively adjust the image in different areas – in fact, after the initial colour balance, there is very little I do globally."

Looking at John's photographs, many of them have some very interesting colours. These are achieved by using specially adapted cameras and filters. "I use a Hydrogen Alpha (HA) filter a lot. All my cameras are astro-modified to start and then I use a special filter which clips in front of the sensor. It only lets hydrogen alpha light through, so my images, especially the ones which include Orion, have a crazy pink. I think it adds another element to the photos. I shoot the sky and foreground as normal, then I put the filter on and shoot the sky again in HA. In post-production, I can layer the HA images with a luminosity blend mode and control where I want the HA effect to show up. It takes a couple of hours sitting in front of the computer."

Do you remember that rabbit hole John mentioned earlier?

"Essentially, I aim to get one photo per night. Sometimes I have to stay up all night to get it, but I can sleep during the day. It's what makes me tick. The image is the most important thing, but being out there and enjoying the night sky is a big bonus."



HOW TO WIN PHOTO COMPETITIONS

An eBook & Movie Compendium by Peter Eastway

FAIPP HonFAIPP HonFNZIPP APPL GMPhotogI MNZIPP



I have judged many photo competitions and there are lots of little things that entrants forget to do. If only I could let them know *before* they entered, they could do so much better!

Well, as a judge I'm not allowed to ring up and help entrants, but I can offer to you what I have learnt over the last thirty years that will give you a great headstart.

Of course, no one can give you an iron-clad guarantee that you will read my eBook or view my movies and then win the next photo competition you enter – and I explain why in the eBook.

However, what I can guarantee you is that

if you read my eBook and watch the accompanying movies, you will greatly improve the quality of your photography.

You see, whether you're aiming to win a photography competition or just take a better photograph, the advice is very similar.

And I know that the techniques and approaches I've developed over the years will help you capture and produce better photographs.

My eBook and movie package is called **How To Win Photo Competitions**, 2nd Edition. It's hard to believe I wrote the first edition over 10 years ago!

The eBook begins with a little about me. Why? Well, it's easy enough to write a book about winning photography competitions, but I will gently suggest it's much better if the author has experience, not just in winning competitions, but in judging them too.

Over the years, I've been lucky enough to win quite a number competitions, plus I have a lot of international experience as a judge and competition organiser.

Add in my role as a magazine editor for 30 years and I hope I'm able to communicate my message extremely well.

The 'compendium' comprises four eBooks and a series of movies:

- Your Competition Approach
- Capture Techniques
- Processing Techniques
- Feedback Examples
- Feedback Movie Examples

The eBooks can be downloaded for reading and the movies can be streamed online.

(*Better Photography* subscribers will have seen the Feedback Examples already, but the Feedback Movie Examples are completely new.)

The eBook has lots of photographs and illustrations to explain exactly what I'm talking about and the new movie examples use real competition entries from real photographers.

The compendium is easy to read on a computer, laptop or iPad and it comes with a money-back guarantee. No, we won't refund your money if you don't win the next photo competition, but we will refund you if you're not completely satisfied.

This package has been carefully thought through and presented to give everyone a chance at winning a photo competition. Follow the directions and you'll be surprised at what you can achieve as a photographer!

– Peter Eastway

For more information, please visit:

www.betterphotographyeducation.com

INTERPRETATIONS

KEITH SEIDEL IN THE FLINDERS RANGES

Right: Photographed at the Aroona Valley, which was Hans Heysen's favourite location in the Flinders.





When visiting popular locations, the challenge is to find a fresh slant, to personalise the photographs that we make. Keith Seidel describes his approach to the Flinders Ranges in South Australia, found over many visits to discover the nuances of light, landscape and location that make the Flinders so popular with painters and photographers alike.

The ever-changing light and moods of South Australia's Flinders Ranges have excited painters and photographers for generations; seducing them into repeated visits to better record and capture those elusive moments when light, mood and the landscape combine to produce something magical. For me, it has been twenty visits over fifteen years that have shaped my response in ways that I could not have envisioned on my first visit in 2011.

Most of my visits were leading workshop groups to a mix of national park icons and less familiar, yet equally interesting locations found on pastoral lease holdings. Without the station holders' generous access to places that are not generally accessible to the public, my body of work would not have been possible. Gaining their trust took time; yet each local contact provided a greater feel for the region, its landscape and current land uses.



Mayo Gorge, Mt Little Station. Infrared capture.



Moralana Scenic Drive, Merna Mora Station. Infrared capture.





"Moralana Dawn". The sun rises over Wilpena Pound, taken from Merna Mora Station, on the Moralana Scenic Drive.





River red gums photographed at Arkapena Station, looking toward Rawnsley Bluff (Wilpena Pound).

Designing the Project

In 2025, I felt the need to make sense of my accumulated work. The extent of the challenge was evident from the diversity and sheer number of files I had collected. Initial culling led to a collection of around four hundred photographs. This was a relatively easy, if time-consuming start. The next step required a framework for the work to exist within. Whilst location was one possible unifying theme, it soon became apparent that if I wanted visual continuity, neither an anthology approach nor a single retrospective collection would cut it.

Three visually distinct collections are the result. Each offers a different interpretation of the landscapes of the pastoral country north of Hawker and either side of Wilpena Pound. To provide these collections with a point of difference, I made a conscious choice to not include many of the iconic locations I had photographed within the national parks. This allowed me to focus on the landscapes shaped by a pastoral history that extends back to the 1850s.

The photographs needed to work together as if in an exhibition and be few enough and varied enough to maintain viewers' interest. Near duplicates and similar photographs were culled relentlessly. Where a location appeared several times, the photographs chosen had to be noticeably different from each other. Letting go of personal favourites was a difficult necessity in a process that eventually resulted in around 30 photographs

for each collection. They comprised a mix of processed and partly processed photographs, plus several raw files that had been previously ignored.

Each photograph was processed and finessed to fit into its collection; each collection was then refined through further deletions and additions. Along the way, many edits were made and left behind – a testament to the changeable life that many of these photographs took on in the digital darkroom before I was ready to let them out into the world. The photographs were 'finished' only when I was happy with both the individual and collective results. They were then compiled into a photo book layout for presenting to the world.

The first collection contained black and white photographs, including traditional and infrared captures, that give emphasis to light, tone and contrast. My use of infrared photography clearly added an extra dimension to this collection. Using an 850mm converted DSLR (beyond the visible light spectrum), the resultant clarity of reflected infrared wavelengths and strong contrast suits the arid environment of the Flinders Ranges. In the field, the IR-converted DSLR enabled the flexibility of shooting hand-held, rather than being restricted to a tripod with an IR filter and slow shutter speeds. As a lover of black and white landscape photography, this IR freedom is sheer pleasure.

The colour photographs were separated into two visually distinctive groups.

One is a collection of photographs that make use of bold light and/or colour. The saturation and contrast expected of outback landscapes is present – the strong reds and yellows

Opposite: River red gum on Merna Mora Station, looking toward Wilpena Pound.



Late light at Merna Mora, looking toward Wilpena Pound.

of the earth are set against rich blue skies or vivid sunrises and sunsets. Golden hour light features prominently here. Whilst this collection was, in appearance, the most predictable starting point, the photographs needed to stand on their own. I did not want them to look like postcards or tourist posters. With some I allowed a 'Velvia' sensitivity as acceptable, but I was not interested in taking the saturation any further. Here again is where the curation process proved essential. My early decision to exclude photographs of tourist hotspots in the national parks (without a pastoral past) was especially important to this collection. Consequently, most of the chosen photographs benefit from a reduced sense of familiarity.

I consider the second colour collection to be the most interpretative and personal exploration of the subtle beauty of the Flinders Ranges. It was also the hardest to curate, with many favourites not making the cut. This side of my photography evolved over time and started to come together from 2016 onwards, five years after my trips to the Flinders Ranges began. It has taken many years to master and refine the post-processing techniques that I now use. Muted colours, moody light, creative layers and selective edits are combined to produce the subtle and at times painterly results that found their place in this collection.

Within the final selections of photographs for each collection, I can recognise that which I saw, felt and intended

when pressing the shutter. This is the Flinders Ranges as I have come to see it.

Explaining the Background

I have learnt that capturing the changing moods of the Flinders Ranges requires time and a willingness to read the light, the weather and the seasons. Time and patience behind the camera are a start, but never enough.

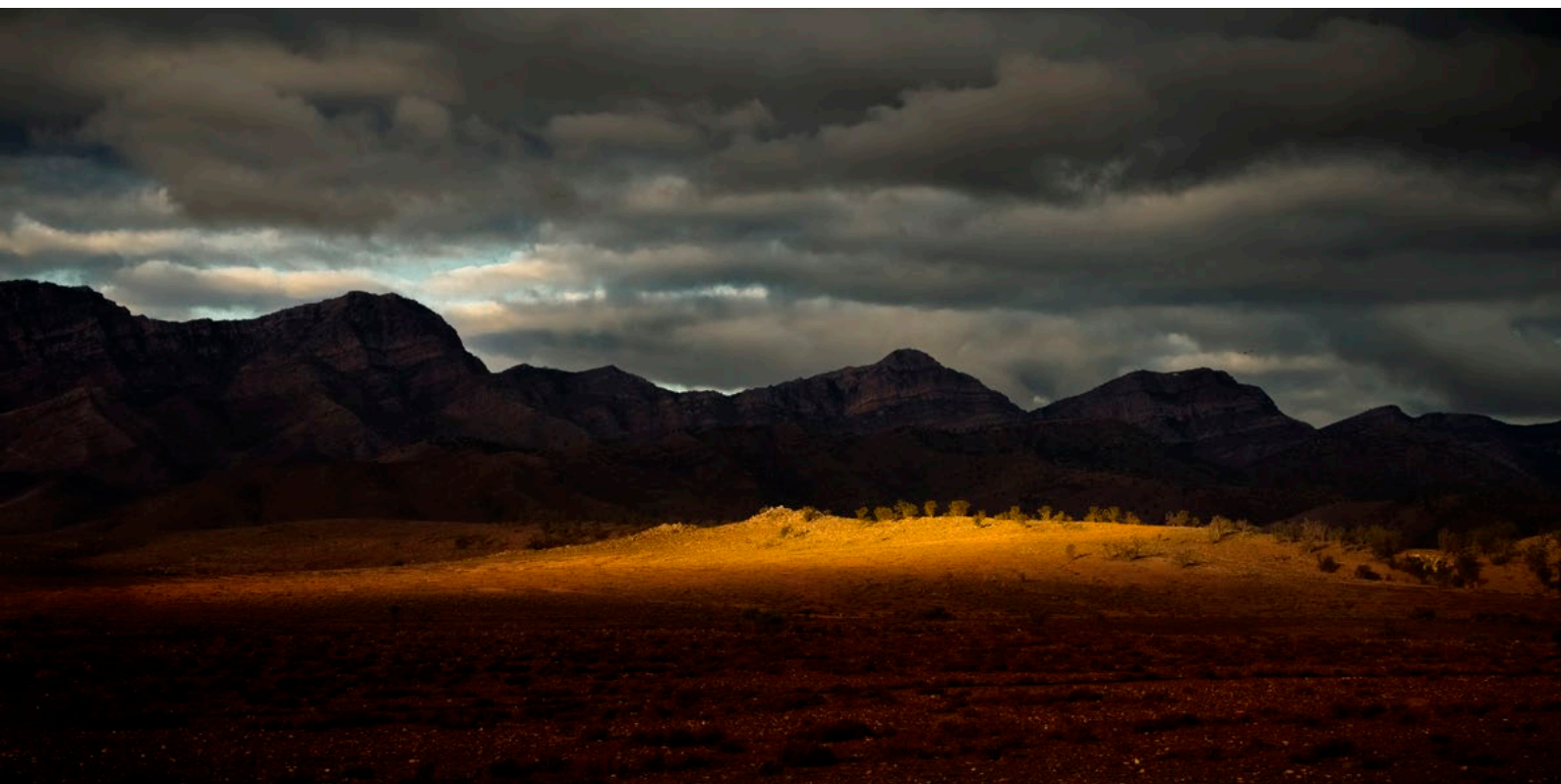
I have spent many hours observing the interplay of light on the landscape across the days and weeks of each visit. I have seen the verdant green of occasional wet years and the dusty red browns of extended drought. I always stay at the same pastoral station that abuts the south-western slopes of Wilpena Pound, away from the national park and tourist crowds. That base, along with time spent scouting for and driving between locations, provided space and time to absorb the character and moods of these landscapes. It is only now that I can look back and see how important that use of time was to my later photographs.

Every location I photograph in the northern Flinders Ranges is overshadowed firstly by the exquisite paintings of Sir Hans Heysen; and secondly, the photography of Harold Cazneaux.

Opposite: "Light on the Land". Merna Mora Station, looking toward Wilpena Pound.



Windmill and Wilpena Pound, in late light just before sunset. Photographed on Merna Mora Station.





Wilpena Pound, sunrise photographed from Merna Mora Station, on the Moralana Scenic Drive.

Heysen's body of work in the Flinders was his most renowned. It is the result of eleven visits between 1926 and 1949. That Heysen leaned to watercolour as his primary medium was a choice that enabled him to capture the Flinders' subtleties of colour, light and shadow. In many ways, his was a photographic sensibility, using the time it took him to sketch a scene to observe and understand the land and the light that would come to life when painting in his studio.

It was Heysen who introduced Harold Cazneaux to the beauty of the Flinders Ranges, leading to one of Australia's greatest photographs, *The Spirit of Endurance*. Made in 1937, it became a photographic icon long before the days of social media and Instagram. At the time, Cazneaux was intent on capturing the "Australian" landscape and would often use a single tree as a counterpoint in his composition. Notably, the positioning of river gums was also a key compositional construct for many of Heysen's paintings of the Flinders Ranges.

Between them, Heysen and Cazneaux made Australia's arid interior visible to the nation's consciousness. Theirs was an exploration of light, shadow and composition. As a photographer, I have benefitted from having the time to see the Flinders Ranges and express the region's subtleties as I choose to, just as Heysen and Cazneaux did. I have begun to understand my subject – the pastoral landscapes of the Flinders Ranges. I know that I have more to learn, more photographs to make and the time to do so.

Are there hints of Heysen and Cazneaux in some of my photographs? Unavoidably yes, through homage and inspiration. Their works are always in the back of my head, reference points to deviate from as I seek to interpret these landscapes from a contemporary perspective. I have chosen not to walk in the footsteps of Heysen and Cazneaux, but to leave my footprints alongside theirs - and the many others who have

been captivated by the enduring beauty of the Flinders Ranges.

If you want to see and photograph the Flinders Ranges, head on over. And if you do, please make sure that you give yourself plenty of time.



Merna Mora Station. Water is the key for pastoralists in this arid environment; bore water is supplemented by the intermittent rainfall of the region.



Peter Eastway's

PHOTO PROCESS

CREATIVE & TECHNICAL ATELIER

Photo Process is a series of video tutorials that shares a wide range of techniques, concepts and processes that I use every time I take a photograph. These processes have evolved over 40 years of photography.

When teaching photography, I find many students have great ideas, but don't know how to implement them. Or they have great technical skills, but nothing to use them on! While I can help solve their immediate problems, the solution is relying on my skills, not theirs. And unfortunately it's not possible to transfer all of my knowledge and experience in a few hours or even days.

I'm also asked, how do I seem to immediately know what to do when I'm faced with a subject? Why do I always seem to have a solution? The answer is my 'database' of skills and influences collected throughout my career. It's my professional experience.

So how do I share this experience? The aim of **Photo Process** is to collect these skills, influences and experiences into a single location so they can be easily shared with photographers searching for their own answers.

It's a knowledge bank of what I use when I create my photographs, so if you like how I work, the answers are in **Photo Process!**

When you join **Photo Process**, you receive:

- Access to the **Photo Process** section of the website with over 80 video tutorials in categories – Capture, Composition, Post-Production, Influences and Output. is a lifetime subscription, so there's no hurry to view all the content.
- A comprehensive portfolio review by Peter – you can submit up to 10 images for critique, feedback and appraisal. The written report will be presented as a PDF.
- A personally printed, signed and embossed A2 print by Peter on Canson stock using archival pigment inks from Epson – and you can select the photograph you'd like printed from his website (www.petereastway.com). The print is unframed and postage is included.

For full details, visit the Better Photography Education website and follow the menu to Photo Process

www.betterphotographyeducation.com

2025 BETTER PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

By Peter Eastway

Talking with our judges, Grand Masters of Photography David Oliver and Tony Hewitt, we agreed that the standard of our 'amateur' competition was every bit as good as the professional competitions out there. Our entrants have skills and imagination that dissolve the distinction between pro and amateur.

And at the top of the competition this year is Hardijanto Budiman, the *2025 Better Photography Magazine's Photographer of the Year*. To win the overall award, the five highest scoring portfolios (each portfolio comprising four entries) are assessed and judged a second time by our panel. Congratulations, Hardijanto!

This year, we had 864 entries and a record number of Golds and Silvers – 45 Golds and 441 Silvers. In fact, we had more Silvers than Bronzes – which gives you an idea of how high the standard has become.

When entering our competition, there are two processes at work. The first is the 'standard' of the entry – Bronze, Silver or Gold. The judges have decades of experience assessing photographs and, in their mind, they know the scores they need to award for a Bronze, Silver or Gold. There's no limit to the number of these awards they can deliver – if your entry reaches their standard, that's the score you get. This score feedback is incredibly valuable for photographers looking to improve their work.

If your entries show skill or imagination in one area, we'll award a Bronze as an acknowledgement you're on the right track. However, to reach Silver, you really have to be doing everything right and a Silver in our photography competition is very likely to receive a Silver in professional awards as well. And as for Golds – well, we're quite comfortable saying that as judges, we'd like to have taken those photos ourselves!

The second process is a comparative one. When we hand out the five major prizes, the judges are comparing the top scoring entries against each other. Which landscape photograph is 'the best'? Which portfolio of four entries should win the Photographer of the Year? To get to this stage, you have to have a top scoring entry, but this gives the judges a second chance to ensure they are in agreement (not that we're always in agreement)! It's important for all entrants to realise that this second process is a matter of personal opinion and bias, no matter how experienced the judges are and no matter how objective we try to be. And that's why we suggest entrants aim to earn Silvers for all their entries, as this is a truer reflection of your skill than winning a category or the overall prize!

Not that we wish to diminish the winners at all! In addition to the Photographer of the Year, we have four categories and the winners are:

Classic Landscape: Jim Picot, 'Floating Boat'

Emotive Portraiture: Lucas Onnis, 'Solitude'

Revealing Nature: Oliver Lahrem, 'Die Küchenschelle'

Open: Mouneb Taim, 'Living With War'

Each category winner takes home AUS \$750 and the Photographer of the Year \$2000!

WINNER

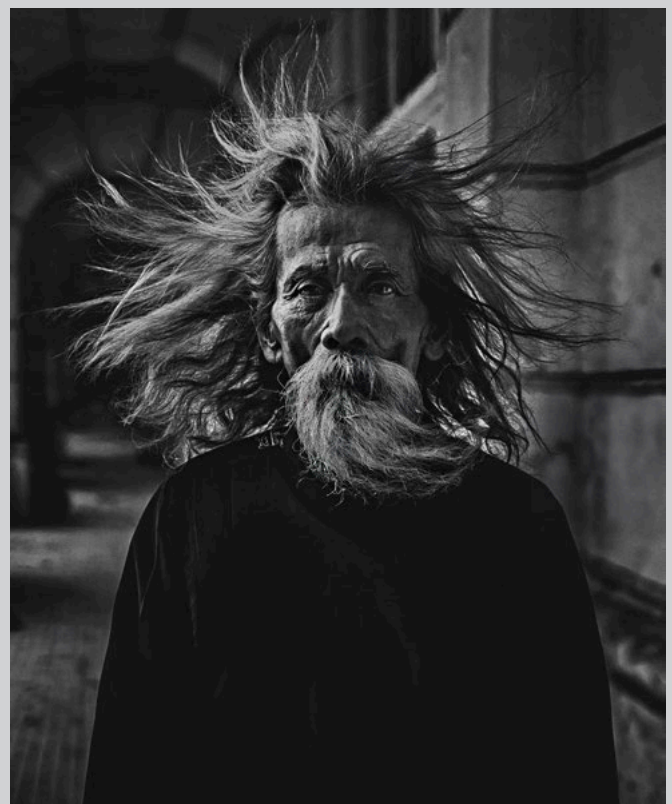
Hardijanto Budiman

Hardijanto Budiman is no stranger to our winners' circles! A self-taught photographer for the past 25 years, he says his life is overflowing with the creation of his works of art.

"Since I was a boy, I have really loved drawing and painting. Art gives me the freedom to create anything I want, either in fantasy or reality! I also love everything about Surrealism and it really influences a lot of my work.

"My ideas and inspirations flow just like water. For me, photography is the best medium to express my passion in art and my works reflect the journey of my life! It's all about the expression of the imagination, emotions and experiences of my life."

Hardijanto uses Nikon Df, Nikon D850, Nikon Z5 and Nikon Z7 cameras. His favourite lens is a Nikkor 24-70mm zoom and he uses Photoshop for post-production.



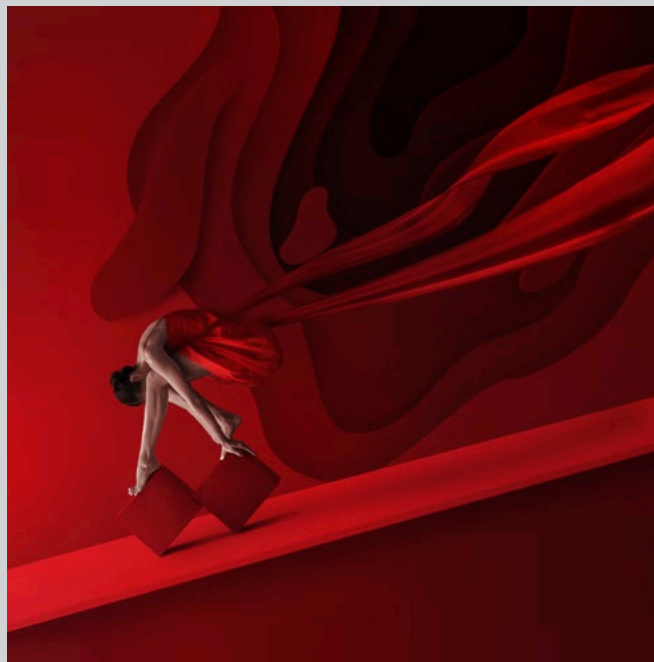
This Summer Let The Wind Blow. The old man's name is Rosid, 82 years. He was a senior artist in Indonesia. This photo was taken a few months before he passed away.



Why Does It Hurt So Bad? *This is my friend Naomi. During the photo shoot, I directed her to pose like she's deep in sorrow and she has perfectly expressed that sadness very well.*



Bathroom Stories. *This imaginary photo is one of my experimental projects based on surreal art in Photography. The concept is all about human behaviour when we are in the bathroom. Maybe we don't realise that the most private and intimate place in the World is the bathroom! You can be anything you wanna be or do anything you wanna do, when you are alone in the bathroom!*



Red Soul. *Inspired by beautiful Flamenco dancing, I chose red as the dominant colour to be attractive and eye-catching. The photo was taken in my studio with one softbox and one strip light and post-processing with Photoshop.*

CLASSIC LANDSCAPE WINNER

Jim Picot, 'Floating Boat'



Jim Picot says he's always been a landscape photographer, although he did shoot weddings on the side many years ago! "I've been fully retired for over seven years now, but I started photography way back in 1976 and my first camera was a Ricoh SLR. However, I wasn't consistent as a photographer until 1999, when I started using medium format film cameras like the Linhof 617 and Noblex Pro150 and Hasselblad X Pan (a 35mm panorama format). Since then I've used various SLR cameras (Nikon, Canon, Pentax) and I started using drones 10 years ago."

The winning image was shot with a DJI Mavic Pro 2. "It was taken at Davistown, NSW, an amazing place to shoot when there is no wind. You can find perfect reflections and it's one of my favourite locations. The boat also has a great history, originally from Sydney."



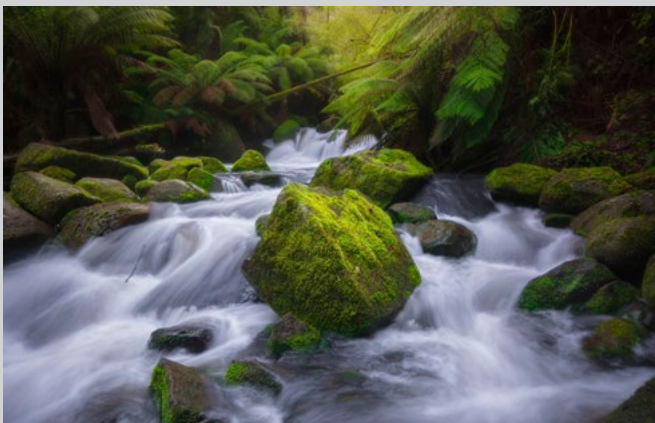
Barry Shaw



Glen Thomson



Uwe Schellscheidt



Michael Stringer



Jo Andrews

REVEALING NATURE

Oliver Lahrem, 'Die Küchenschelle'



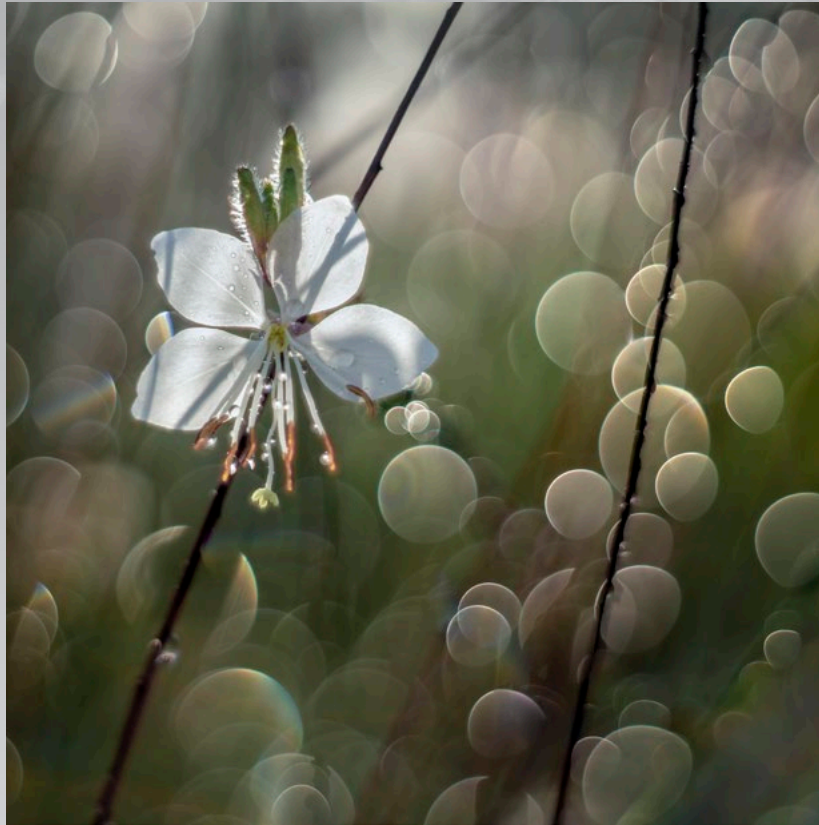
Oliver Lahrem lives in Seligenstadt, which is in the German state of Hesse. "I'm 54-years-old and was a landscape gardener until I had an accident at work. Nature is very important to me and my job had allowed me to work creatively with nature.

"Travelling and photography are probably my greatest passions. Photography, in particular, helped me out of a crisis after my accident meant I could no longer practise my profession.

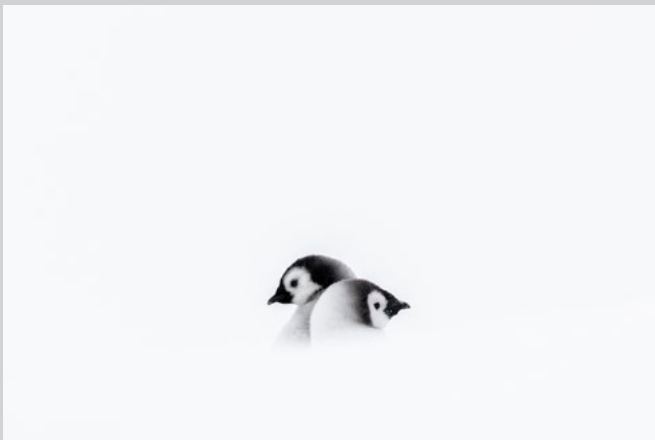
"As a landscape gardener, I designed my garden to be very close to nature and insect-friendly. Here, I also photographed the pasqueflower. For me, this is the most beautiful spring flower. It was the first bloom of the year and particularly large. I wanted to photograph them standing alone, as the fine-haired leaves are also very beautiful, so I draped a light background at the location."

Oliver used a Nikon Z7II with an FPZ adapter and a Sigma 105mm f2.8 macro lens, on a tripod.

"I work with the Nikon NX Studio software and try to correct only the bare essentials, such as shadows, highlights, and contrast. In photography, I attach great importance to the capture itself."



Grant Galbraith



Rob Weir



Earl Robicheaux



Hira Punhjabi



Joy Kachina

EMOTIVE PORTRAIT

Luca Onnis, 'Solitude'



Born and raised in Rome, Italy, Luca started taking photographs late, at the age of 30, simply because he wanted to remember a trip he was about to take. "I soon discovered that I do not like to make 'postcards', but that I like to narrate places and situations through the filter of my emotions. I get curious, passionate and study more and more.

"Just when travel photography began to give me satisfaction and recognition, my heart told me that portrait photography is the right medium to express myself through. I did nothing but study the great masters and their photographs. I learnt and refined my technique, I put myself in the hands of one of the greatest contemporary Italian professional photographers, and my expressive language began to develop.

"I discovered that telling others through my emotions is not enough for me. I feel the need to tell myself through others. When I feel strongly and there is so much of me in one of my portraits, I know in my heart that the photo has succeeded."

The subject is Ilaria, an actress, and the location is a photo studio in Rome.

"When I first met Ilaria, I immediately contemplated what I could convey through her. Her large, expressive eyes made me think about capturing a sense of solitude. I then prepared the set using a wet, scratched plexiglass and a single flash with a softbox.

After instructing her on how to pose, the shot came together!"

Luca used a Nikon D750 with a Sigma 105mm f2.8 macro lens.

"Post-production on this image was very simple. The scratches and water drops on the plexiglass made any skin retouching unnecessary. I simply converted the image to black and white, adjusted the tones and slightly darkened the lower part of her back."



Dikye Ariani



Michael Dorohovich



Svetlin Yosifov



Graeme Gordon



Viet Van Tran

OPEN CATEGORY

Mouneb Taim, 'Living with War'



"My interest in photography began during the conflict in Syria, where I was born and raised. As a child witnessing war, I felt compelled to document not just destruction, but daily life – the resilience of people, their struggles and small moments of hope. Today, I continue this focus, capturing stories across both the Middle East and Europe, particularly around displacement, migration and social justice.

"The photo features a young man I call 'The Peace Musician', a humble volunteer who plays music for children in war-torn areas and refugee camps. Despite living in difficult conditions himself, he brings joy to others through music. I felt it was important to document his initiative, which is largely unknown and to highlight this act of humanity in the midst of suffering. The image shows him singing to people among the ruins and tents, offering a message of peace."

Mouneb used a Nikon body with a 24-70mm lens. "I do very minimal editing. In this case, I only made slight adjustments to the brightness and shadows – nothing more. I prefer to keep my images as close to reality as possible."



Adrian Donaghue



Alison Faigniez



Andrew Davoll



Craig McGowan



Ian Everett



IN SEARCH OF



Minimalism is a popular topic and our

esteemed contributor Nick Melidonis

adds his thoughts to the equations.

About 30 years ago when I became a landscape and travel photographer, I enjoyed planning and travelling to some of the world's most beautiful and wildest locations in search of 'epic' landscapes. This often involved trekking long distances in inclement weather with a large tripod and a backpack full of heavy cameras and lenses. In those days before mobile phones and the internet, every journey was an adventure.

These days, I am finding I have to rethink lugging heavy gear as well as the physical challenge of difficult terrain, so I am turning to simpler compositions from what would be to most people, very ordinary subjects; the challenge being to see them in a new and hopefully creative way.

I've written a couple of articles for this fine magazine over the years about keeping it simple, so let me share a few things I've learned about minimalism and how we can embrace this very satisfying genre.

What Is Minimalism?

Minimalist photography grew out of the extreme abstract painting and sculpture of late 20th-century artists. With simple geometric patterns, strong lines or painted colour fields, minimalist artists created work that didn't refer to anything in the real world, but instead stood only for itself. Minimalist photographers adopted this focus on simplicity and limited compositional elements and then applied these principles to what they saw in the real world.

Minimalism is often described as the practice of reducing elements down to their purest form in photography. That means removing distractions, simplifying what is in your viewfinder and allowing just enough detail to create a sense of balance and emotion.

Left: Lone tree and balloon, Masai Mara Africa, 2010. Early morning on the Masai Mara in Kenya, I was waiting for my balloon ride when I saw this beautiful image of dawn breaking over a lone tree and a balloon already aloft, just two subjects.

MINIMALISM



The old boatshed on Mounts Bay Road in Perth is a river icon, but difficult to shoot without wading through busloads of tourists. I managed to sneak a 4-minute-long exposure image using a 10-stop and 2-stop ND filter, then removed the horizon line, making a pleasing minimalist image.

The dictionary defines minimalism as, “A style in art, design and theatre that uses the smallest range of materials and colours possible, employing only very simple shapes or forms.” If we look around us, we will find minimalism permeates all areas of life, from design and architecture, to music and the visual arts. To my mind, minimalism is about stripping away distractions to focus on the essential forms and elements in front of me. Reducing a landscape to its essentials, its fundamental shapes and lines, you capture its essence, its character and its mood. It’s not an exercise in ignoring complexity, rather it’s more about finding clarity and meaning within it and eliminating ‘white noise’.

Finding Minimalism

Can we create minimalism from chaos? One genre I’ve been drawn to in recent years is fine art black and white architectural photography and I’ve spent many trips capturing the stunning architecture found in cities like Dubai, KL, Singapore and my own city of Perth. By reducing the image to just the lines, patterns and shapes of the towering buildings, while ignoring the chaotic traffic and people below and converting these areas to an almost black image, I then slowly ‘paint in’ patches of light to the buildings with the incredible masking abilities found in Lightroom and Photoshop. I can reduce the scene to its essentials and turn a busy, vibrant urban view into a study of minimalism.

Another example included in this article is capturing the chaotic swoops and fly-pasts of corellas over our large camping site during a recent trip to the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Amongst the busy campsite comprising caravans, tents and 4WD vehicles, I was firing images on continuous shutter at around 1/15 second as the birds flew past our site. This blurred the surroundings, reducing it to colourful shapes or just blue sky, but by following the birds, revealed interesting less-blurred shapes.

These attempts taught me that minimalism is as much about intention and control of elements like tonality, clarity and choice of colour or black and white, as it is about removing elements within the composition. It’s about guiding the viewer’s eye and shaping the story.

But how do you approach minimalism in your landscape and travel photography? What I will attempt to do in this article is to offer a series of tips and tricks in no particular order that worked for me. This is not a complete list and you will no doubt add many more elements of your own.

Weather

Weather plays a pivotal role in my search for minimalism. I often seek overcast conditions, as they provide soft, even light, reduce harsh shadows and desaturate colours, perfect for minimalistic landscapes. As we all know, we can find subjects to shoot in all weather conditions, but places such as forests and waterfalls



The mighty Tonle Sap Lake in Siem Reap Cambodia turns into an inland sea during the wet in December and I spotted a lone boatman making his way against a background of a tropical storm building up.

are nearly always better shot under soft conditions rather than harsh sunlight. Contrasty patches of light and dark aren't overly pleasing to the eye and not easy to post-process.

Location

Choosing the right location is key to minimalistic photography. Certain environments naturally lend themselves to minimalism. Coastal beaches, where wide open sands and receding tides create a clean canvas. Patterns in the sand, the movement of water over rocks and man-made structures and the interplay of light and shadow allow for endless minimalist compositions. Deserts are special with their expansive dunes and endless skies in capturing both scale and simplicity.

Bodies of water like lakes, rivers, estuaries and seas provide reflective surfaces and long exposures allow you to smooth motion and create a calm ethereal mood. Isolated subjects like a solitary beach hut, a wooden post, a jetty or a lone tree can become a compelling focal point. Examples like these can add narrative depth to your minimalist images.

A Powerful Composition

Composition, as in most other genres, is crucial to creating meaningful minimalism. An appealing placement of your central or main subject creates ease when our eyes read the image. If not, our eyes are going to wander around the image looking for an anchor or somewhere to rest. Without that central hook, our eyes wander over and over again until we lose interest. Even though overused, I often work with the rule of thirds, or even a smidge tighter when I'm composing minimalistic images. This technique helps bring the eye from left to right, or top to

bottom and creates a balance without perfect symmetry. This is crucial even if your subject is the smallest element in the frame, as it needs to become the most significant subject once the eye comes to rest on it.

Leading lines guide the eyes through an image and can contribute to the viewer's sense of isolation, separation, distance and scale. With little other information to go by, leading lines are often necessary.

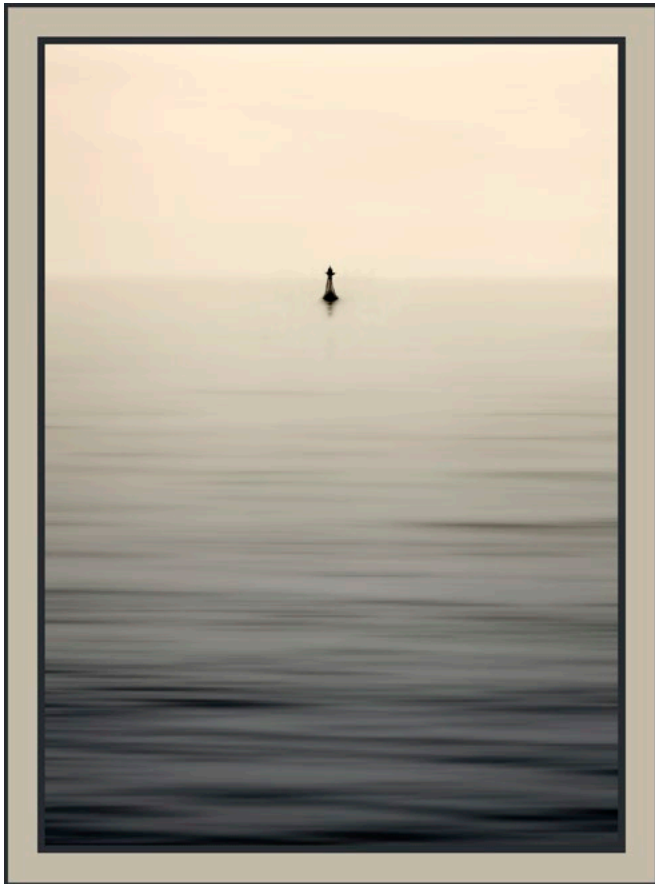
Ask yourself if everything in the frame is essential? Take an element away and see how you like it. Many minimalist artists spend quite a bit of time in post-processing removing as many distracting or unnecessary objects as they can; to leave just the bare essentials.

Shapes can work well to create a sense of the abstract in your composition. Also try using repetition, symmetry and geometry to compose a subject or draw attention. Strong, unique shadows can also captivate and pull a viewer into the image.

Long Exposure Photography

If you search online, you will find quite a few very good photographers who have made long exposure photography a genre. In the UK, people such as Gary Gough and Pete Bistro spring to mind and the Greek School of artists such as George Digalakis and Helena Georgiou.

Long exposures are a great way to get that minimalist look. What you normally need is the right subject matter, a tripod and some neutral density (ND) filters to slow the exposure down. In the example of the boathouse in this article, I used a ten stop and a 2-stop filter combined to give me an exposure



I saw a tiny bell buoy in the harbour of Rafina in Greece while waiting for a ferry. I printed this for an exhibition on *Water* as well many years ago. The tiny buoy against the water made for a very simple, but I thought striking, composition.

of around 4 minutes. Removing the horizon and having a contrasty subject against a light ethereal background makes for a pleasing image.

A long exposure will also eliminate the texture and tones of water which further enhances the minimalist effect. You can try this technique with dead trees in salt lakes, waves over coastal rocks, lighthouses, jetties and river markers to name a few.

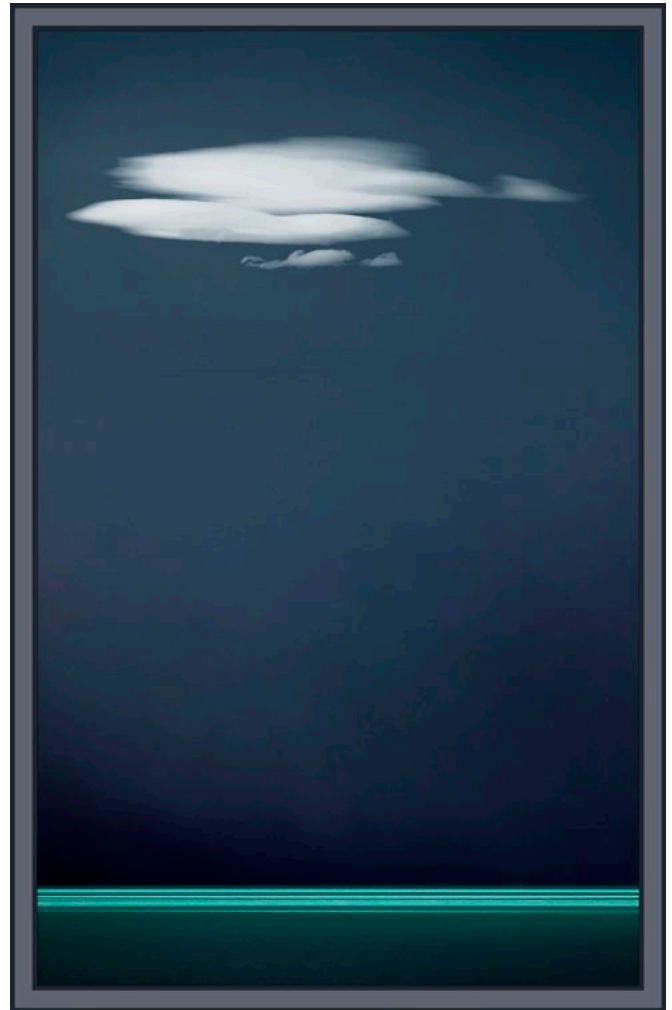
Negative Space

Often the use of the term negative (or empty) space is contrary to what the term implies. Negative space is the element that determines how freely the eye moves about in the image and directs the eye to a place to rest. Negative space can be smooth, textured, coloured, black and white, sharp or diffuse. We're surrounded by such large, open, blank canvases in everyday life, for example: an overcast sky, a blurred stretch of water, an expanse of snow, a thick fog, an open wheat or canola field, a featureless blank wall.

Negative space in minimalist photography has visual mass. The key to the amount and placement of negative space is the art of a balance between its impact together with your subject. This expanse creates breathing space for the subject, but not so much as to lose its prominence entirely. That said, not all images require expansive negative space to make an impact.

Simplicity, Scale, Colour

Keeping it simple doesn't mean keeping it boring. In fact, a minimalist approach requires disciplined and careful thought,



On a visit to New Zealand many years ago, I witnessed a beautiful display of a glowing horizon on the colourful glacier Lake Pukaki and a lone lenticular cloud which I thought made a good minimalist composition. If I had to shoot it again today, I would make the cloud smaller and background larger to give the composition more room to breathe the (part of an exhibition together with the next image put together many years ago on *Water*).

observation and the creativity of working within certain boundaries. You need to explore how much information to keep and how much to remove from the image before it loses all impact.

A sense of scale is created by putting together objects in your scene that show the size of something by its relationship to other components of the scene: e.g., a lone person standing inside an enormous central space in a building. The person in that scene is giving the image a sense of scale.

In minimalist photography, colour—or the lack of it—can add focus, stir up drama or provide serenity. Bring your creative vision to life by experimenting with a range of different palettes and hues.

Many minimalist photographers use soft hues and just a hint of colour so it doesn't dominate the composition. A simple dab of colour can be the element that draws the eye. I often use just one or two colours and when I do use them, I try to make sure that the negative space does not compete with them, but rather complements them.

Turning your picture to black and white is a classic technique for minimalist photography because it removes distractions that can be caused by jarring colours.

Often, the best light for minimalist black and white photos is high-contrast light, so the very dark and very light elements play against each other. You can shoot in the middle of sunny days to maximise that contrast, great for when you don't have an overcast day or flat conditions for other subject matter.

With a shallow depth-of-field, you can keep the viewer's attention on the subject by blurring the background. You can achieve this by widening the aperture or you can increase the distance between the camera and the subject and then zoom in on the subject. This will result in a blurrier background. If there are lights behind your subject, a shorter depth-of-field can create a bokeh effect, turning points of light into blurred circles or shapes depending on your shutter shape.

Post-Production

The latest editions of Lightroom and Photoshop have introduced a vast selection of post-processing techniques to make our job of editing our creative ideas so much easier. I'm amazed these days at the vast selection of masking tools (really selection tools). Rather than waste a lot of time trying to isolate the subjects I want in my 'mind's eye' in a creative composition, I'll do the best I can in the initial capture and just like a painter, I have the tools available to isolate just the elements I need to create my masterpiece.

Hopefully, this has given you some ideas to play with in your search for minimalism. If the thought of the effort needed these days to capture the 'grand landscape' is too challenging, find elements around your own home to create special minimalistic images.



Corellas flying through our camp site in the Kimberley region of Western Australia made a great Intentional Camera Movement (ICM) photo as I panned their flight on a continuous shutter at 1/15 second. I finished up with nearly 50 of these images, most of them with a pleasing result.

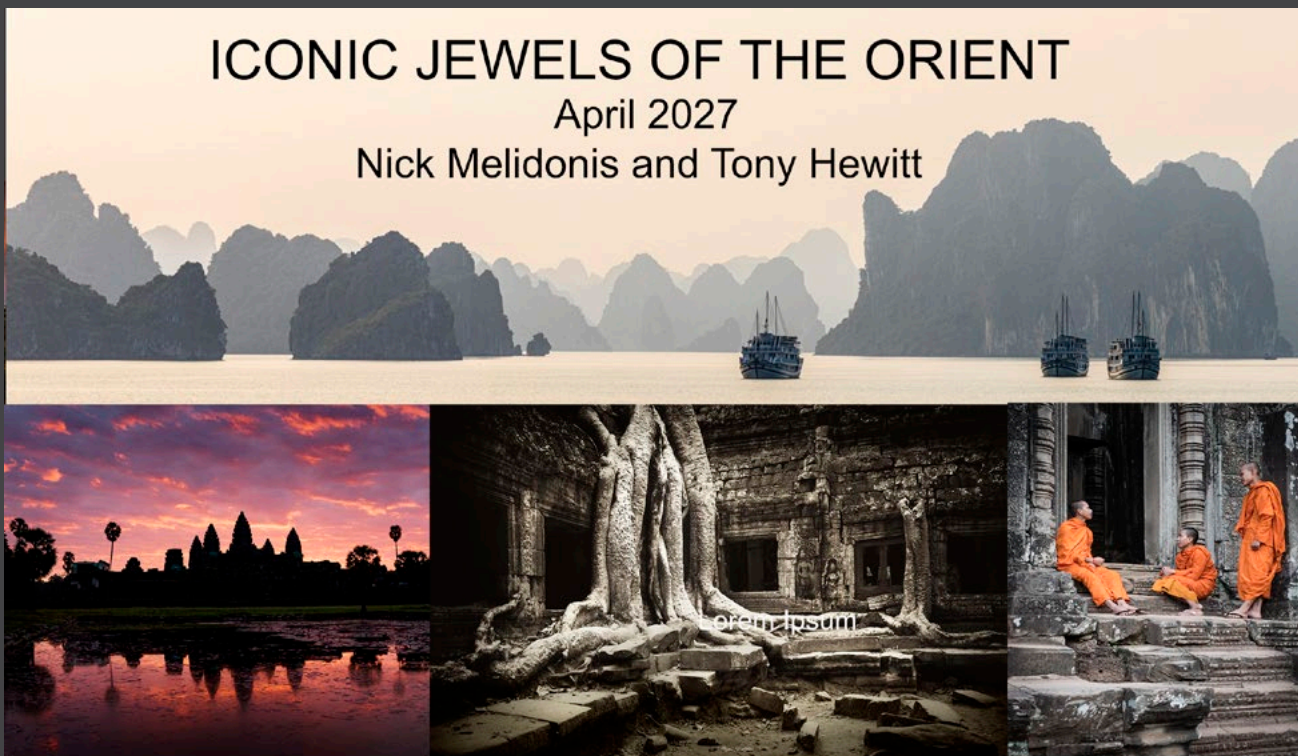
One technique I'm really enjoying in minimalism these days is ICM (Intentional Camera Movement) and I'll chat about that in the next issue of *Better Photography*.

May the pixels be with you.

ICONIC JEWELS OF THE ORIENT

April 2027

Nick Melidonis and Tony Hewitt



For over two decades, Nick Melidonis, one of Australia's foremost photographers has been introducing Greece and the Greek islands to hundreds of travellers. Now the adventure continues with renowned photographer Tony Hewitt and Nick on a special hand picked tour of some of the jewels of the Orient. This boutique tour includes stunning photography, culture and cuisine to some World Heritage areas like Halong Bay and the Lost kingdoms of Ankor with Ankor Wat as well as Hanoi and vibrant Siem Reap. Join Tony and Nick on a trip of a lifetime on this special tour in late April 2027

For a full itinerary, see Tony's website, tony@tonyhewitt.com

Are You Using Your Camera's Custom Functions?

I'm sitting in a car, travelling the roads of Italy, enjoying the countryside. Tall, thin trees, ploughed sculpted hills, an isolated farmhouse on a distant ridgeline. I'm thinking lots of depth-of-field, perhaps even an ND filter to blur the puffy white clouds as they idle above the horizon.

Suddenly, a flock of birds escapes from a stand of trees, wheeling and screaming across the azure sky. The light reflected off their feathers changes instantly as the flock heads first one way and then switches to another. I no longer need depth-of-field, I need a fast shutter speed and autofocus to lock onto the birds as they spiral towards the heavens. I fumble around with my camera settings, changing the shutter speed and exposure mode and... the birds are gone. I took too long. I should have been ready for birds when I was looking at farmhouses.

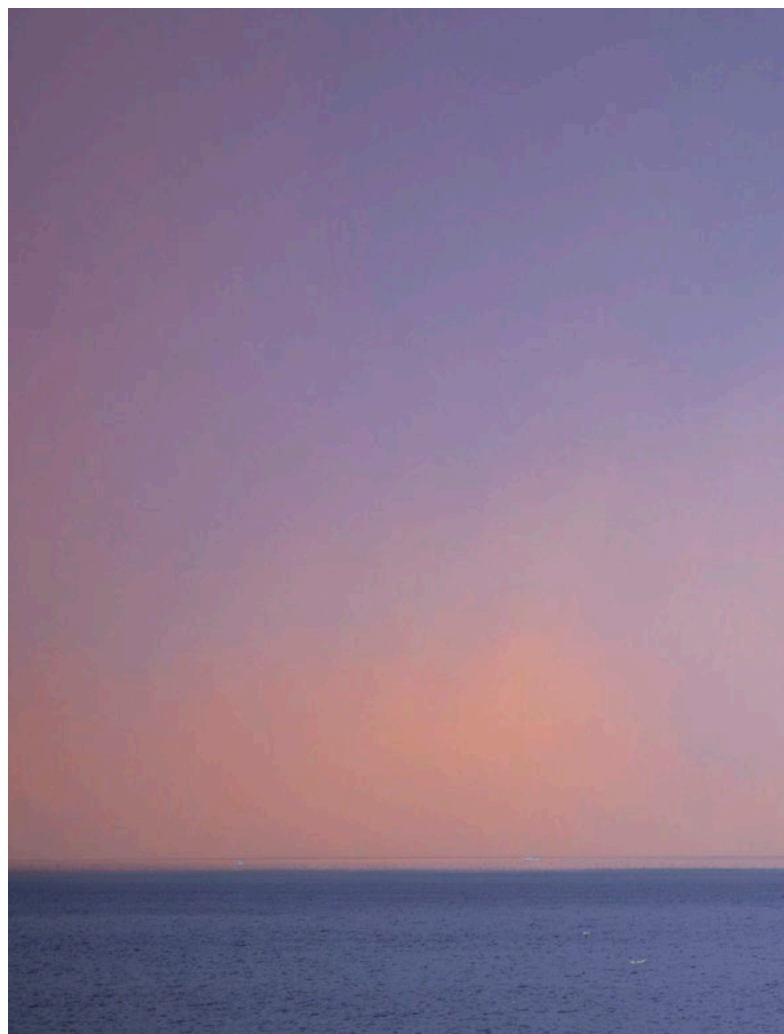
I'm sure you've been in a similar situation when your camera settings simply aren't right for the subject at hand. If only there were a quicker way to set up your camera – and there is. A custom function.

Custom Functions

I'm currently working with a Fujifilm GFX100S II and it can save up to six separate custom functions. Even better, the custom functions are on the exposure mode dial, so just by turning the dial I can automatically retrieve a group of saved camera settings.

Most cameras offer at least three custom functions and usually there's a button on the camera somewhere that can be pressed to activate them.

There are two main reasons for using custom functions: convenience and speed. If you do a lot of work in a particular



genre, then saving the required camera settings to a custom function button makes a lot of sense. Why do things manually when there's an automatic option provided? Similarly, when things happen quickly, even if you have your camera already turned on and ready for action, being able to set up your camera with the press or switch of a single button will save precious time.

To use custom functions, read your camera manual first. You may have to find it online, but as the methodology of custom functions varies from manufacturer to manufacturer and sometimes model to model, it's best to read the manual!

There are also a few things to consider, depending on the features available to you. For instance, a custom function can remember any changes you make to the settings for next time, but I find this problematic. I like the idea that I can turn off the camera at any time and then, by turning it back on, I have my default settings once again.

Useful Settings

So, what can you set? What should you set? And you should also remember that what's not included in your custom function won't be set at all, so it will stay the same when you select the custom function.

Exposure mode is useful – aperture-priority, shutter-priority or manual. I like to use aperture priority for shooting landscapes and portraits because I get to choose how much depth-of-field is required, whereas for wildlife and aerals, I choose shutter-



This landscape was actually shot with a custom function for animals. I needed a fast shutter speed because I was hand-holding a telephoto lens from a moving ship, so knowing what your custom settings are designed for doesn't mean you can't use them for something else. Icebergs, Antarctica.

priority because I need to set the shutter speed to eliminate either subject or camera blur.

When you select an exposure mode, you'll also select an exposure setting, either the aperture or the shutter speed depending on the mode. For portraiture, I might have the lens's maximum aperture set for shallow depth-of-field, while for

aerials I will select 1/2000 second shutter speed to avoid camera blur.

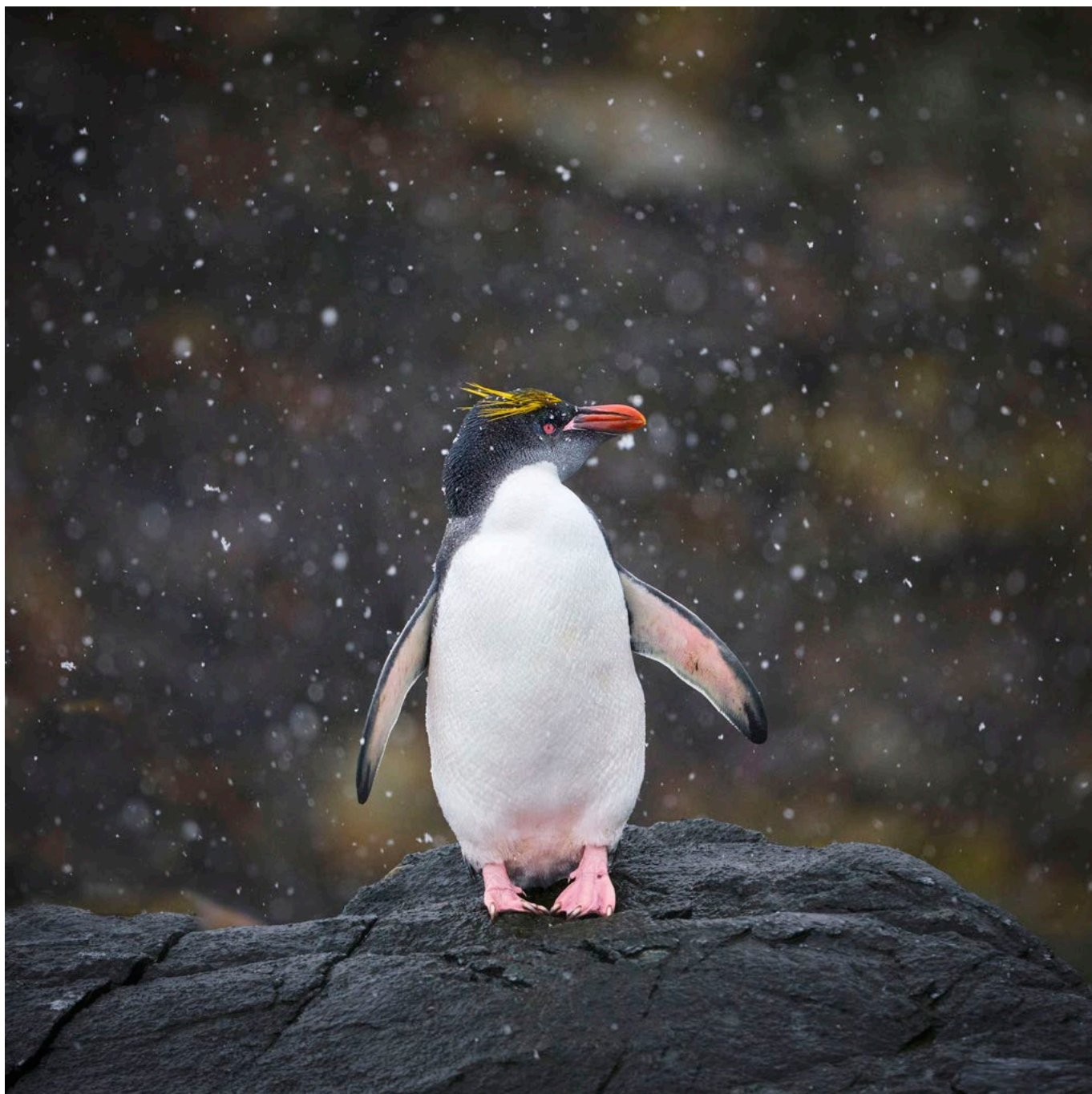
It's important to note that just because I choose f1.7 or 1/2000 second for a custom function, once I activate the custom function I can change the settings immediately. So if I have 1/2000 second for shooting birds, I might push this up to 1/4000 second for particularly small and fast moving subjects. The custom function is just my starting point and I can easily return to that starting point by first switching to a different custom function and then returning to it.

Sometimes the light you're shooting in is going to have a big impact on what can be achieved. For instance, I like to shoot at 1/2000 second for my aerials, but in the early mornings or late afternoons, the only way I can achieve such a fast shutter speed is to set a higher ISO. However, I'd prefer to shoot at lower ISO settings – which is very possible in the middle of the day when there's more sunlight to play with. My solution is to set up Auto ISO so the camera will first use the widest aperture and then set higher ISO settings as required.

What if I didn't want to use the widest aperture with a fast shutter speed? Sometimes the widest aperture isn't quite as sharp in the corners of the frame as a slightly smaller (larger f-number) setting. In this case, select manual exposure mode and use (for example) 1/2000 second at f4 (instead of f2.8) and



Most cameras have a custom function feature where you can set from three to six or more separate groups of camera settings. This is the Fujifilm GFX100S II.



Subject autofocus has transformed the way we shoot many subjects and while my camera had no trouble finding the bird's eye in this frame, it did get confused from time to time with the falling snow! So I shot lots of frames to ensure I had a sharp one. Macaroni Penguin.

add in Auto ISO. The Auto ISO is essentially maintaining the exposure and this will work just fine as long as the ISO can be set low enough for bright situations, not just high enough for low lighting. However, remember we're using a custom function to give us a starting point, quickly and efficiently. If the starting point isn't exactly right, we can easily adjust our aperture to deal with a lot of light.

Autofocus Issues

When switching between genres, I find I need to change focusing mode as well. When shooting birds and wildlife, the distance between me and my subject is likely to change regularly, so I set continuous autofocus control. When I'm stationary, for landscape for instance, I set single shot.

The main difference between my animal and bird settings is the subject focusing. The Fujifilm distinguishes between animals and birds, but other cameras may have a different way of dealing with wildlife. So for C1 (Custom Function1) for animals, I set a 1/1000 second shutter speed with Animal recognition, and C2, for birds, I use 1/2000 second with Bird recognition. For C3, I have human eye recognition turned on, using aperture-priority.

Most cameras also have autofocus tracking settings which can be applied and don't forget whether you're using a single AF gunsight or a wide area to find your subject. And for wildlife, I also remember a high frame rate for continuous shooting.

We all have our ways of shooting different subjects and a custom function can remember most of our settings. I have settings for animals, birds, people, travel, long exposures and landscapes. What subjects will you set?



When shooting aerals, my most important setting is a shutter speed of 1/2000 second to ensure there is no blur resulting from vibration in the aircraft. Salt mining ponds, Shark Bay.

COMPOSITION CONTRAST

**Understanding and using the 'rules' of
contrast is part art and part following
a well-beaten path. Our joint experiences
in society mean we share certain
basic traits, but there's plenty of room
left for individuality – and using contrast
is no exception.**

There are lots of types of contrast, so when someone suggests using contrast when designing a composition, it's not very specific advice. Contrast comes in many different shapes and flavours!

However, when we study the art of photographic composition, contrast is a key concept. Along with balance, contrast is about using differences to draw attention to areas or elements within the frame. Contrast itself is often the feature that gives a photograph its interest and impact.

When studying composition, I think it is useful to take a relaxed attitude. For instance, just because someone says to use contrast doesn't mean you have to in every photograph. And sometimes using contrast might disregard another rule that talks about leading lines or repetition – it's okay, this isn't an exact science.

The ideas and concepts behind composition are what comes naturally to many artists and has been learned by others. We view so many thousands of images every day that we have developed a taste for some and not for others. Composition helps us analyse what it is in the photos we enjoy so we can apply a similar approach to our own photography.

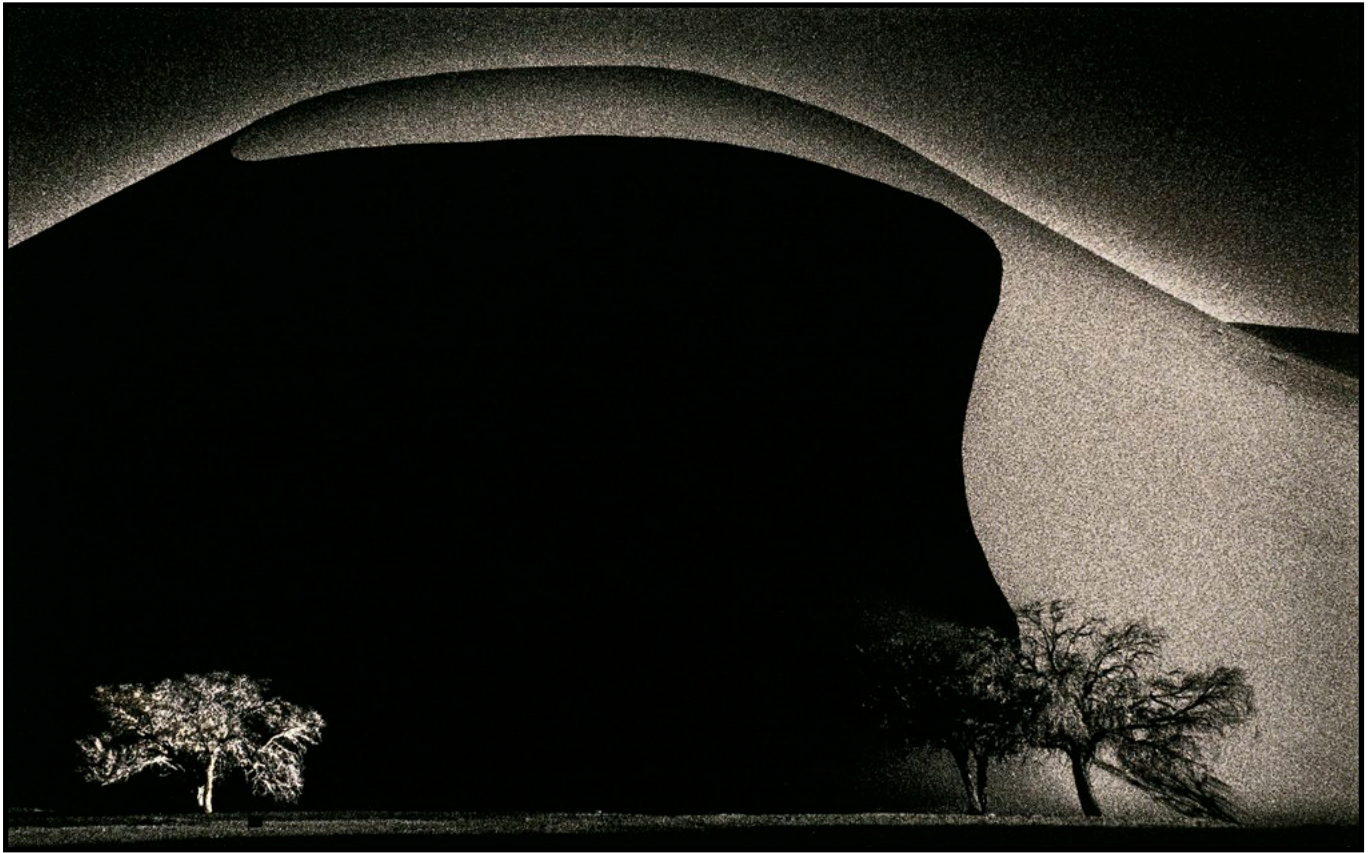
And contrast is a great starting point, but what type of contrast?

A photo of black and white tiles on a floor creates the ultimate contrast of tones, but this is just one form of contrast.

In addition, there's light and dark (tone), warm and cold (hue), human and non-human (iconography), small and large, tall and short (subject selection) – and so on.

While a written explanation of composition is useful, showing examples is possibly better. On the following pages are some of my more popular photographs with a few suggestions as to how and why contrast has helped to give them more presence and strength.

*This article is based on Peter Eastway's **Photo Process** educational program found on the www.betterphotographyeducation.com website.*



Most people would call this a high contrast photograph because of the strong blacks and whites within the frame.

Certainly contrast has been used to create the impact. The shadow of the sand dune has been darkened down, the highlights of the tree on the left lightened up to enhance the tonal contrast between the two. The decision to use a contrasty tonal range when creating the photograph is an example of using contrast to strengthen our compositions, but it's not the only way that contrast can be used. Alternatively, a low-contrast version of this photograph might work just as well, the composition being carried by a sense of balance and subject placement with the trees. You don't have to use contrast to make a strong photograph. This is just an example where extra contrast is part of the compositional mix.



A stand of vibrant green fir trees in the middle of a seemingly arid, mountainous landscape stands out because of the contrast of subject and the contrast of colour. We look at the lush foliage (enhanced in post-production) and compare it with the baked browns of the surrounding hills – we know intellectually that there is a difference between the two – a contrast of subjects. In addition, the photograph uses a contrast of colour to reinforce the contrast of subject types.



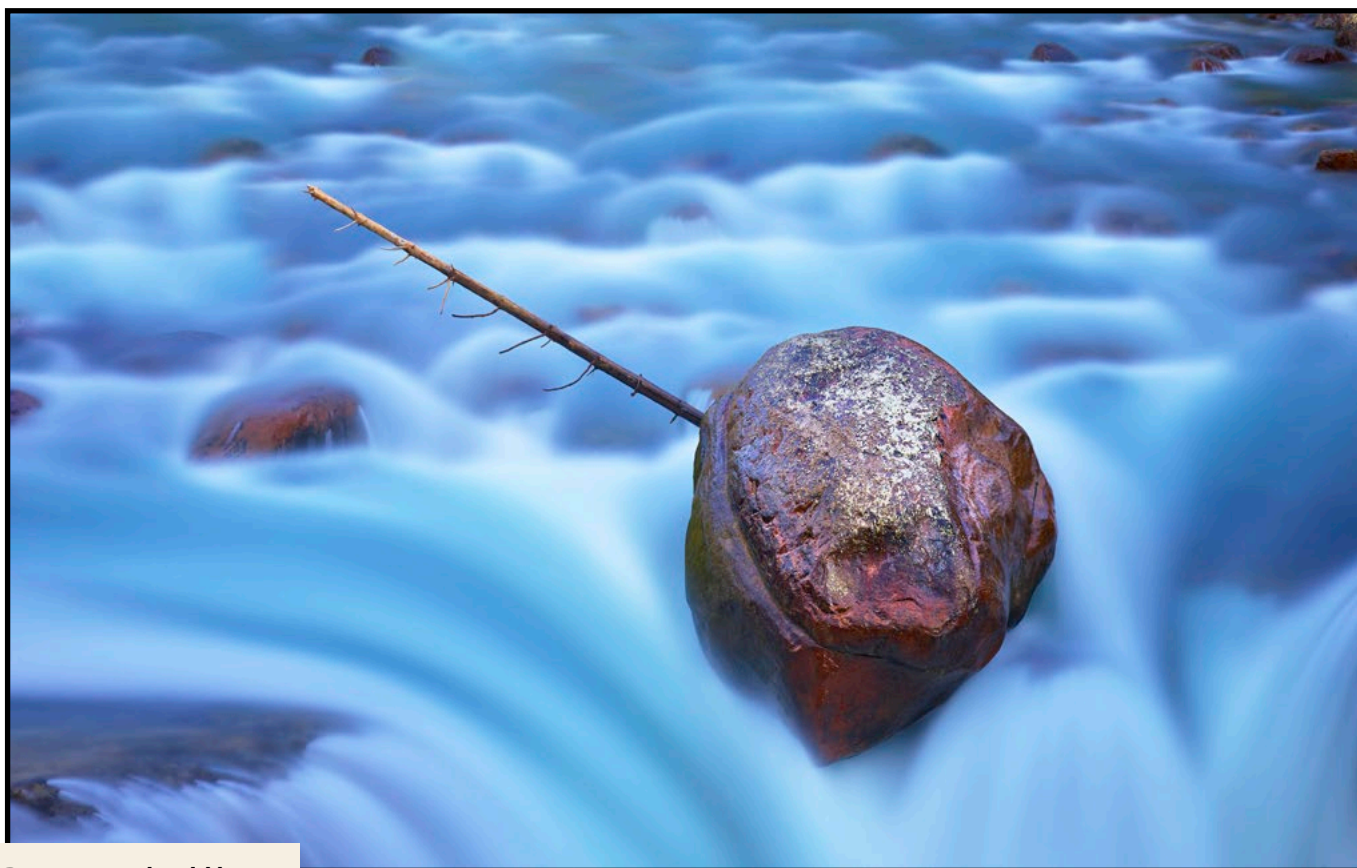
Impact is created with the choice of high contrast lighting. The strong sunlight coming through a window above the subject creates bright highlights and deep shadows which have been accentuated with post-production.



We are not limited to using one type of contrast in our compositions. Sometimes its use is more complex. And often the use of contrast is not planned, rather it's something you respond to (as in this documentary capture). The light is contrasty with the bright highlights and deep shadows. The women in black contrast with the lady in purple. The blue of the sky contrasts with the oranges of the brickwork. Often, using contrast is a matter of recognising what we have already captured and working with it further in post-production.

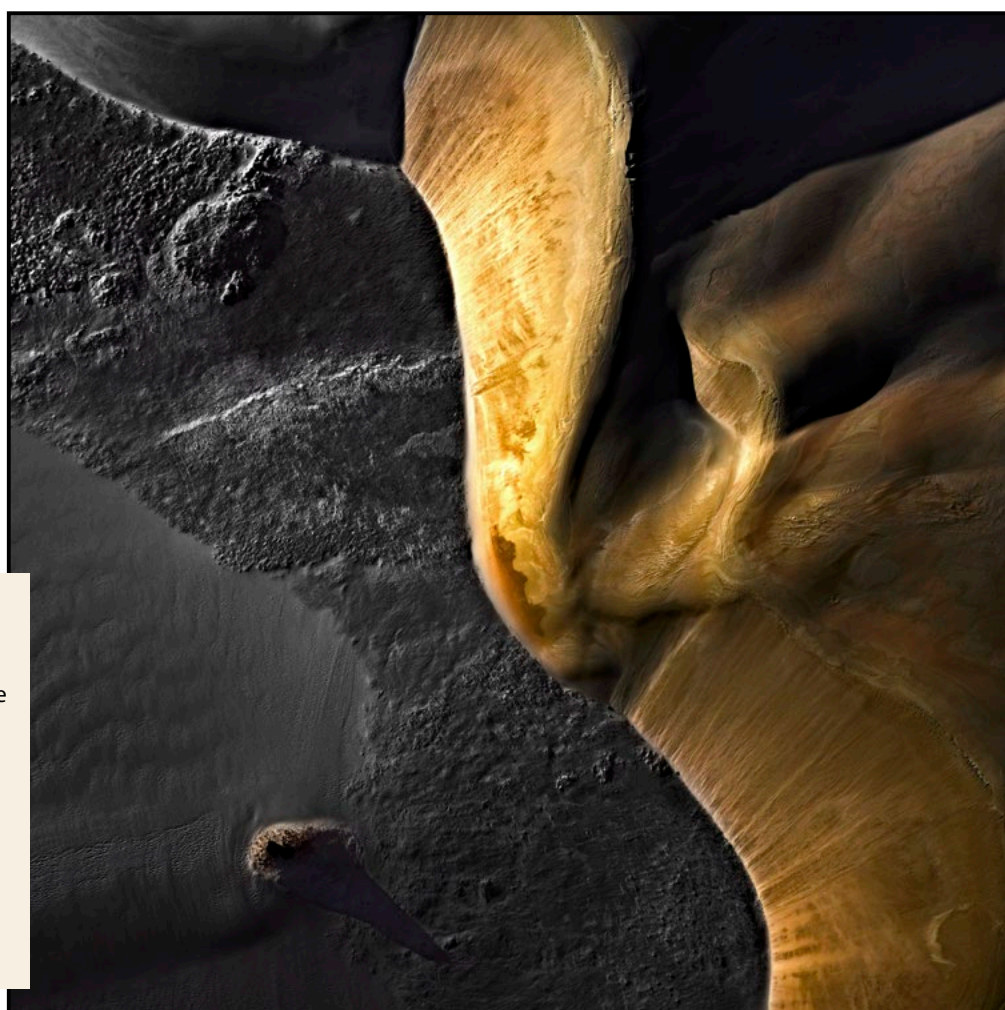


The contrast in this photo is based on hue (colour). The warm oranges in the sunlight contrast with the icy blue frost and shadows surrounding the trees. Again, post-production has enhanced the existing contrast.



By now you should be getting the hang of this.

It begins with the choice of subject (a hard rock) and using a long shutter speed to contrast the flow of water running past (soft). The subject contrast is reinforced with colour contrast (warm versus cool) and of course the sharp focus versus blurred subject of the camera technique.



Some contrasts are obvious, others less so.

Here the light and dark sands of a Shark Bay dune are contrasted, both tonally and in colour. However, there's also a contrast between the vertical and horizontal lines of the frame with the diagonal curves of the dunes. We'll talk about diagonals again.



There are several types of subtle contrast at work here – can you pick them? Colour contrast (warm versus cool). Texture contrast (lots in the salt, none on the sheen of water). And even the curve of the foreshore contrasts against the edges of the square frame. Are there others?



The rules of composition – or the tenets is perhaps a better description – are flaky at best. Is the contrast between the soft, blurred clouds and the sharp, hard mountains the main reason this photo is successful, or are there other things at work? The answer doesn't matter. The benefit comes from analysing the photos to see and understand why they work.

TONAL MAPPING

To be honest, tonal mapping is just a fancy way to describe dodging and burning-in using selective editing. Yet whatever you call it, it's a key step to get your photos looking their very best. By Kathleen Baxter.

What is 'tonal mapping'? Essentially, it is the process of 'mapping' out your photograph into smaller areas or sections and deciding which areas need to be changed – to be lightened, darkened, or the contrast or colour adjusted.

The term 'mapping' might sound a little grandiose, so let's call it 'dividing' or 'organising' our photograph into distinct areas. With a simple composition, you might only have two or three separate areas to map. For more complex or involved photographs, there could be twenty or more areas that need attention.

So, why do we use 'tonal mapping'? It helps us analyse our images, to determine where changes are needed to improve the way people 'read' or view our photographs. Remember, photography is a form of communication. Our role as photographers is to communicate effectively.

So, as an example, we have a simple landscape with a very bright sky. A bright sky may take attention away from the landscape below, making it more difficult for our viewers to read the landscape itself.

Tonal mapping would separate the sky and the landscape – the photo would be mapped into two sections. Then the

tones in the sky could be changed to better suit what we want to achieve – perhaps we'd darken down the sky so that it was better balanced with the landscape. In addition, we may lighten up the landscape as well.

The result is that we have adjusted the tones in our image, based on our mapping.

So, it's really just a fancy way to describe the old-fashioned dodging and burning-in that some of us did in the darkroom – and most of us use Photoshop or Lightroom to do today. Using masks in Lightroom to darken the sky or lighten your subject is an example of tonal mapping.

So, how do you create the map? That's the easy part! You just outline important parts of the photograph. The outline can be precise (the shape of a building) or indistinct (an area of darker rocks on a pebble beach). The mapping isn't as important as the process of looking and analysing the photograph, determining what areas of the photograph could be improved with some attention.

Tonal mapping helps decide what areas of a photograph need assistance. It doesn't tell us what those changes should be – that's up to us to experiment with!

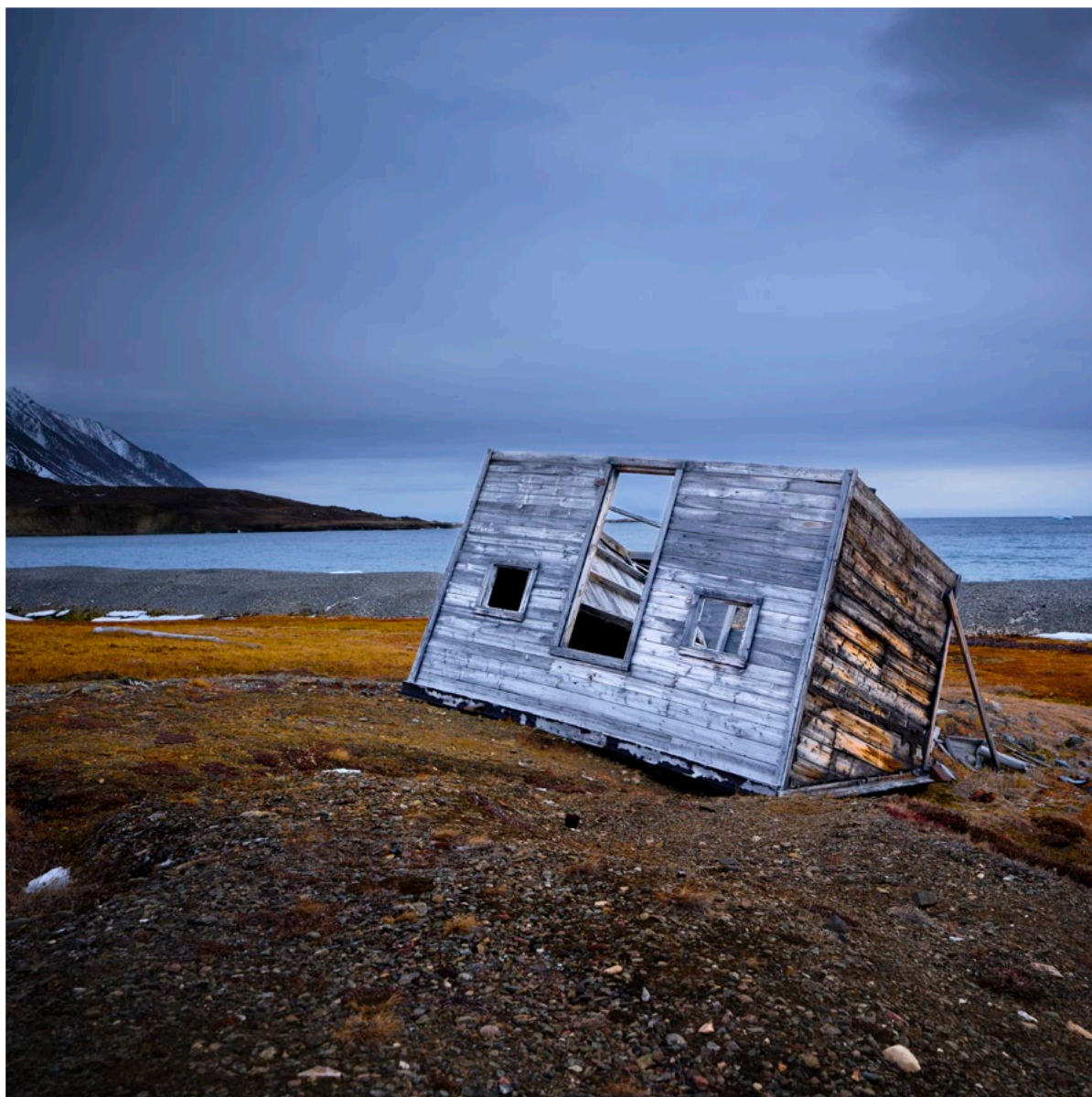
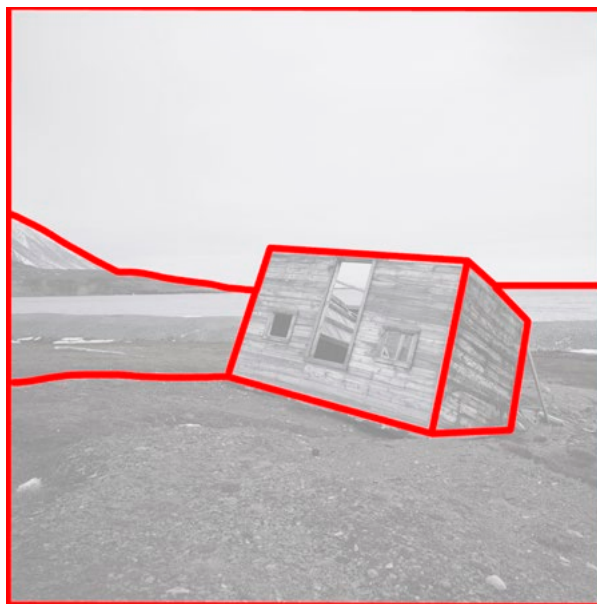
(Photos by Peter Eastway.)

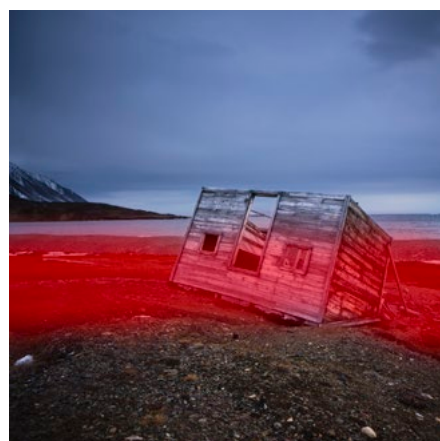
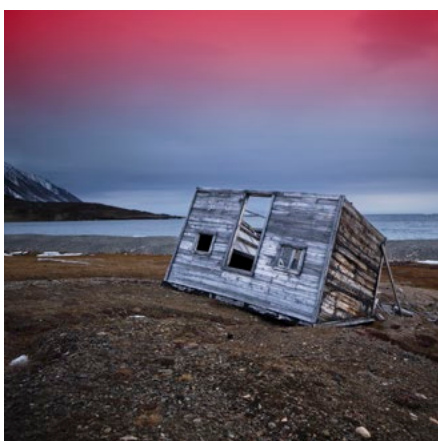


At its simplest, tonal mapping is the process of looking at your photograph and dividing it into areas that can be separately lightened or darkened.

Here, the photo has been 'mapped' into two distinct areas – the sky above and the landscape below. The sky is considered very light in tone, overpowering the small hut below. The solution is to darken the sky so it no longer dominates the hut – the tonality of the sky has been darkened according to the 'map'.







The 'tonal map' itself is really just a concept: How do we break up the photograph into different subject areas and then lighten or darken them in a way that makes the main subject stand out? As you can see from the actual masks (maps) used to edit the photograph here, they are loosely based on the simple tone map, but we don't have to stick to the tonal map precisely.



Tonal mapping can be as simple or as complicated as it needs to be, but the process of 'mapping' your photograph into segments is not the end of your editing, it's merely a means of identifying the areas that need to be changed.

Experienced photographers will look at their files and automatically see what areas need to be darkened or lightened. However, until you gain that experience, the idea behind mapping is to give the process of lightening and darkening a photo some structure.

It's very easy to be so enthralled with our best photographs that we might not consider 'what else' could be done to make them even better. We can be blind to other opportunities, so the process of mapping the photograph (even if just in your mind) will pose questions: should this area be darker? Should this section be lighter? Is the overall tone suitable?

You can see on the previous page how the photograph of the upside-down hut has been mapped into its main areas.

Now compare the mapping with the actual masks used to edit the photograph (shown above in red). Some of the masks are the same as the mapping, others are not.

Tonal mapping is not a failsafe formula for improving our photographs, rather it's a way to prompt changes and ask ourselves questions.

Many photographs are tonally incomplete. For instance, the subject might have a similar tone or colour to the background and so it doesn't stand out – the photograph does not communicate the subject effectively.

A more effective rendition would be to change the tones in the subject so they are lighter or darker than the background; or maybe you leave the subject as it is and lighten or darken the background.

Tonal mapping is the concept. The trick to better photographs is to adjust the tonality within your photograph to better communicate – and to look better!



We're not too sure about the purple house colour, but it does serve to make a point!



The 'tonal map' itself is really just a concept: How do we break up the photograph into different subject areas and then lighten or darken them in a way that makes the main subject stand out while the background is supportive, not dominating. As you can see from the actual masks (maps) used to edit the photograph, they are loosely based on the simple tone map, but we don't have to stick to the map precisely.



Our discussion has begun with tonal mapping, but there's no reason when we map our photographs to limit our edits to tonal values. There's much more to consider than just the brightness.

When you're assessing your images so they better communicate your ideas or feelings, selective editing encompasses all aspects of the image, including contrast, colour, hue, sharpness and so on. The idea behind 'mapping' is to identify the areas we can work on.

For instance, in the photo here, the dog is very small and is difficult to see against a similarly toned background, so this is one area to map. The house, on the other hand, is already very obvious in the way it stands out against a lighter sky, but its

colour is similar. A hue change can make the house even more obvious to the viewer. Okay, so maybe we have gone a little overboard, but you can see that each mapping area can be adjusted in a variety of different ways.

So, tonal mapping will help us identify key areas in our photographs that may benefit from further attention.

It doesn't tell us what to do, but by asking ourselves a few questions about each area, we can explore and investigate the image. Should an area be darker, more colourful or have less contrast? As we run through the options, very often we'll answer our own questions and recognise what changes work, and what ones do not.

FILL THE FRAME

**Michael Coyne discusses the new book
by Andrew Chapman and his approach
to composition in documentary
photography.**

A farmer sits quietly on a fallen log at the edge of his drought-ravaged property, his weathered hat held limply in his hand. Paddocks stretch out behind him, flat and dusty, barely a blade of grass to be seen. A short distance away, a bush graveyard reinforces the presence of death lingering in the stillness.

This powerful photograph captures not only the plight of the subject, Charlie Farrar, who lost 3000 head of sheep in his district's worst drought on record, but also sums up the precariousness of farming in rural Australia where once grassy paddocks can be reduced to dirt and dust, while livestock search in vain for food that isn't there. Great photojournalism has the ability to capture the truth of a moment with clarity, emotional impact and narrative depth.

Andrew Chapman has long had an affinity with the 'bush'. His work chronicles the people, landscapes and livelihoods synonymous with rural life, but often unseen beyond this context. However, photographs are capable of forging powerful connections across locations and demographics and his images of shearers and woolsheds, recorded in the backblocks of Australia, have been shown to audiences far and wide and



celebrated for the passion and empathy on display.

Andrew speaks of the passion that resides in him as a photographer: "What is the X-factor that makes someone a photographer? We are so immersed, it's hard to think of anything else."

This immersive perseverance saw Andrew produce a comprehensive record of Australian political life. His images capture unscripted moments that reveal the nuances of political experience, often highlighting overlooked or under-represented perspectives. He conveys realpolitik at its quirkiest with his image of Labor leader, Kim Beasley surrounded by media, at the Sydney Fish Markets.

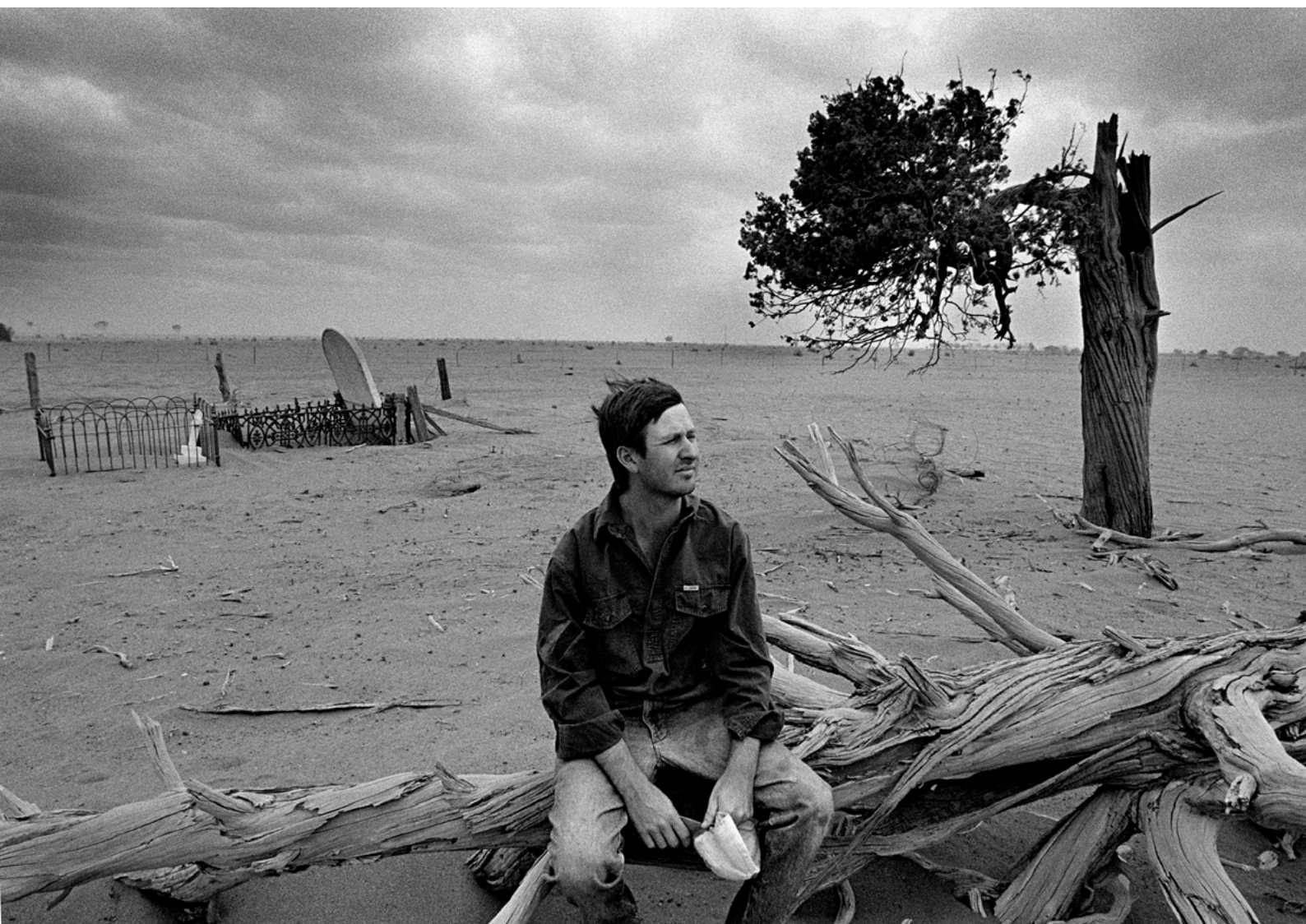


Opposition Leader Kim Beazley holds court with the nation's media at the Sydney Fish Markets during the September 1998 Federal Election Campaign.



Saturday Night at a High St Prahran Pub in 1974. Corner of Upton and High St Prahran. "I was just sitting at my table having a beer with a couple of mates and took this poignant image of a regular, out on a Saturday night. A packet of 'Alpine' menthol fags, a glass of beer and a life once lived."





Charlie Farrar faces into the wind, overlooking “Mossgiel” Station’s devastated graveyard during the district’s worst drought on record.

Andrew has shown his capacity to upend adversity by turning his lens toward the operating theatre. His own experiences with life-saving medical intervention led him to document the science, skill and teamwork on display as surgeons work with intense focus and precision. These images offer a glimpse of expertise and exacting care, reflecting Andrew’s personal experience and paying a tribute to the power of modern medicine. Through thoughtful composition and sensitivity to context, these documentary photographs inform and connect viewers to a world beyond their immediate experience.

I have seen Andrew’s images in publications over many years. I understand and appreciate what he is doing with his photographic work. He is warm, friendly and very much a ‘people person’. These are very important traits for a documentary photographer because you have to be aware of what’s going on with the people you are photographing.

Leanne Bruhn is feeling nauseous as she recovers from a live donor kidney at Monash Medical Centre. She was part of a daisy-chain transplant procedure involving nine recipients and nine donors at different locations around Australia and New Zealand.

You have to listen to them and watch what they’re doing and understand the context of their actions.

Andrew’s photographic portraits show his ability to connect with people. They capture far more than just a likeness. Early in his career, in 1974, Andrew created a portrait of a woman in a bar, on a Saturday night, in Prahran. The cigarette, glass of beer and hands resting on her bag capture a reflective moment. The lighting is natural and honest, highlighting textural details. The composition is thoughtful, but not forced, allowing the viewer to feel as though they’re witnessing something real and unrehearsed. At a young age he was showing his skill as a photographer.

Fill the Frame draws the viewer in, inviting us to observe, feel and interpret. The photographs inform and evoke memories. They connect us to the subjects and events depicted. And most importantly, this retrospective also connects us to the creator. Of Andrew’s many photographic skills on display, it is his talent as a visual storyteller that sparks the imagination and speaks volumes without a word.

You can purchase Andrew’s book from Ten Bag Press for \$185. Visit their website for more details: <https://tenbagpress.com.au/products/fill-the-frame>

CREATIVE CUT & PASTE

Jackie Ranken describes her recent adventures in Photoshop with a different way to create multiple exposures – outside the camera!

This Photoshop instructional article explores selection tools and layers to cut and paste parts of a landscape, either over itself or combined with other landscapes. The idea is to give yourself permission to make an imaginary landscape; to step outside the in-camera box you may be trapped in and simply play with new ideas that you might end up loving.

When I searched for 'cut and paste techniques' online, most of the results were for children's playtime activities. In a way, that's exactly what I'm suggesting too: creating a space in life for play, for the simple joy of it.

In Photoshop, the cut and paste technique is obviously different from scissors and glue. It's more about using your mouse and the software's selection tools with intent and control. If you already have Adobe Lightroom, you also have access to Photoshop, so why not download it (or a similar program) and give it a go?

Many people find Photoshop intimidating because of its complex interface and the fear of getting lost. So, let's keep things simple. My goal is to help you understand layers, imagining them as sheets of glass on which photographic elements are cut out, arranged and overlapped. Where one photograph sits over another, it obscures what's beneath.

If you are new to Photoshop, you'll need to make the time to practise. I've posted a few videos on my Patreon page that demonstrate the process: patreon.com/jackieranken.

Alternatively, you can explore Photoshop's built-in tutorials. Click the small magnifier symbol at the top right and type 'cut and paste'. You'll find an abundance of lessons and inspiration.

If you are more experienced, then take this as a challenge

to push your creativity into unknown territory. Do things in Photoshop that you have never done before.

The Rectangular Marquee Tool

Open an image.

Select the Rectangular Marquee Tool. Click and drag across your image to make a selection (the "marching ants").

Use the shortcut Command + J (Mac) or Control + J (PC) to cut and paste your selection onto a new layer. You've now created your first layer. It'll appear in the Layers Panel.

Next, choose the Move Tool (the cross icon at the top/left of the toolbar). Move your selection to another area that feels right.

Now return to your background layer and repeat the process to make more selections and move them to other places.

Cut and paste merrily to your heart's content, experimenting with direction and size. Notice how each selection becomes its own layer.

Tips

- Turn layers on/off by clicking the eye icon in the Layers panel.
- Reorder layers by dragging them up or down.
- Adjust layer opacity for subtle blending.
- Keep things simple at first.
- When you start to feel your enthusiasm diminish, save that version with a new name and make a new version from the same image.

This is really just the beginning. You can try all sorts of variations, like flipping selections. To flip selections, use the technique above to create a new layer first, then click on it to



Image 1: Southern Alps – Zebra Snow

make sure that it is highlighted in the Layers panel. Then click Command + T (Mac) or Control + T (PC). This activates the transform tool. You will see little square anchors around your box. Then, Right Click with your mouse and select Flip Vertically. While you are there, notice all the other options you have to change the shape of your selection. Scale, rotate, skew, distort, warp... it's a regular playground!

You can also try the following options:

- Elliptical Marquee Tool: select circles and ovals instead of rectangles.
- Lasso Tool: for freehand selections – you don't have to use geometric shapes.
- Polygonal Lasso Tool: for straight-line selections.

Let's take a look at the three examples reproduced here.

Image 1: Southern Alps – Zebra Snow

I used the Rectangular Marquee tool three times to make three vertical selections, which made three distinct layers that I could manipulate individually. To help the eye to flow across the scene, I flipped and moved the selections, endeavouring to line up the contours of the mountain ranges. Adding a little contrast strengthened the main peak and ultimately made the landscape look a little like the pattern of a zebra. So I called it that and moved on.

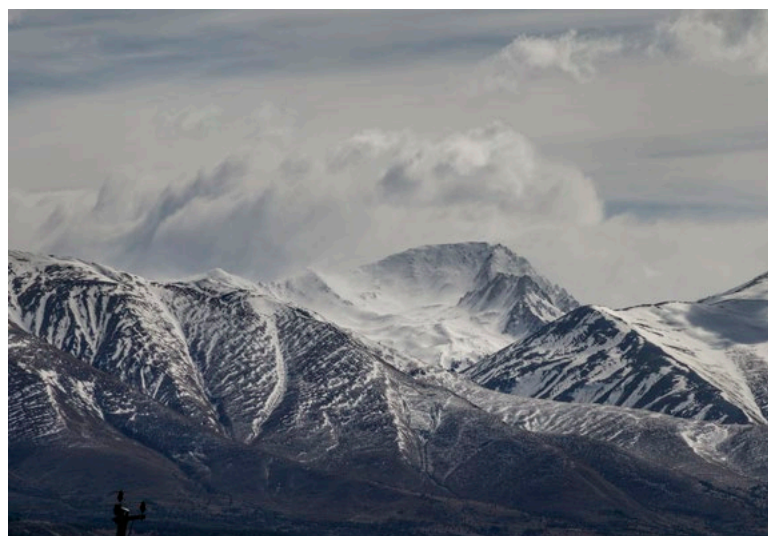


Image 1: original

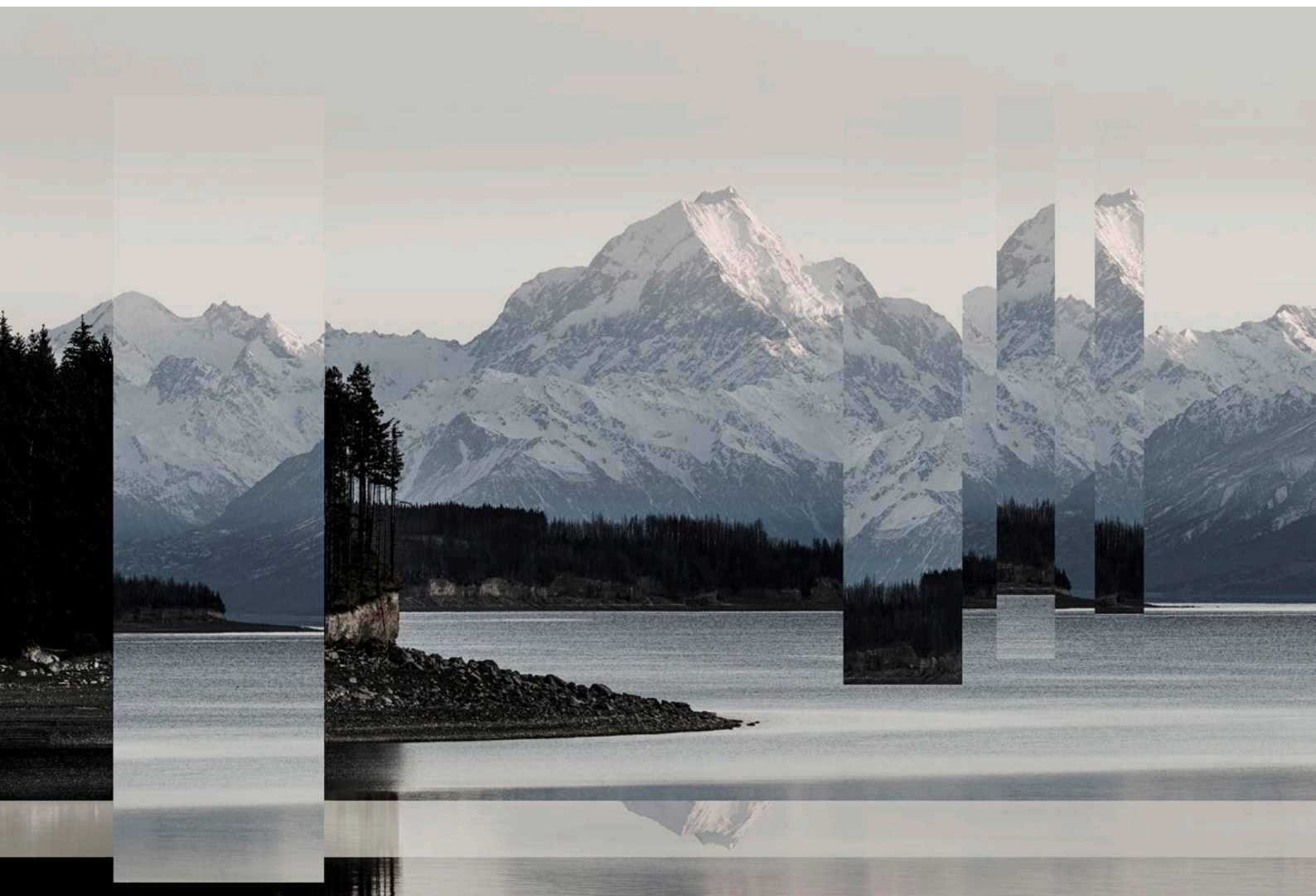


Image 2: Aoraki/Mount Cook with reflection

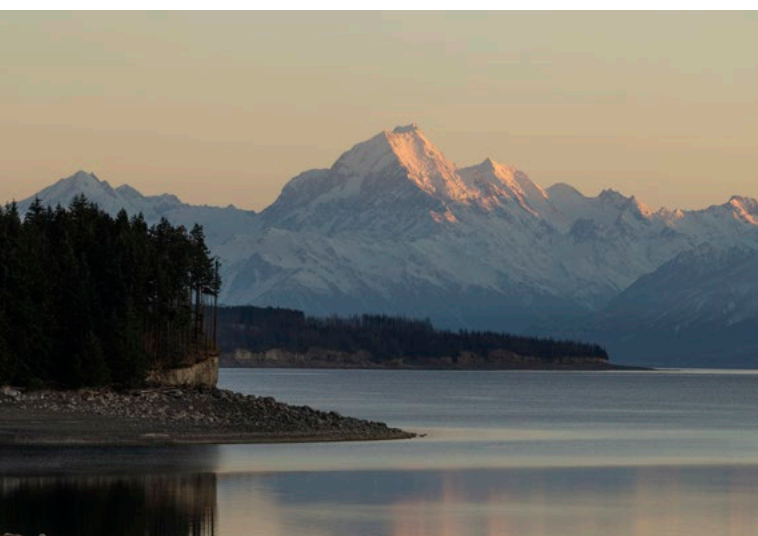


Image 2: original

Image 2: Aoraki/Mount Cook with reflection

I have used the Rectangular Marquee tool. Four vertical selections and one horizontal selection.

Notice the horizontal reflection of the peak of Aoraki/Mt Cook at the bottom of the frame – I think that this makes the

image much stronger and more interesting than the original. This horizontal band of light also creates a rhythm with the horizon line and the sky. The vertical stripe on the left breaks up the dark block of trees and pulls an interesting part of the background into the foreground.

Image 3: Southern Alps with squiggle

I have used the Rectangular Marquee and the Lasso Tools to make a squiggly selection that looked a little like a bird in flight. These shapes give interest to an otherwise empty sky. The shapes make the viewer look twice to try and understand what they are. The thin horizontal selections break up the heaviness of the mountain side.

Creative Practice and Mindset

Practise consistently. Be patient. Be kind to yourself. The best way to improve your understanding of the technique and how to use it effectively is to practise daily, learning from both mistakes and successes. The more you practise, the more intuitive you become and editing starts to feel natural, fluid and free.

When you approach your work this way, perfection is not the goal, discovery is. Sometimes the results feel awkward, sometimes they flow beautifully, but every attempt adds to your creative vocabulary.



Image 3: Southern Alps with squiggle

Don't get paralysed by the process, just do it and move on. Revisit your work after a week or two; you may see it with fresh eyes.

And try working quickly and without judgement. Set a timer for five minutes and make a cut and paste image. Don't over-polish – just follow your curiosity. Later, revisit your image and consider how they might grow into a series. Record those ideas in your visual diary.

A Final Thought

Intuition is like a muscle – the more you trust it, the stronger it becomes.

Believing in yourself, even when the outcome is uncertain, is what leads to discovery and creative growth.

As you play, notice any words or feelings that arise. These can be guides to where your image might want to go. For instance, I thought that my Southern Alps was beginning to look like a Zebra, so I called it that.

Write down ideas as they arise as this can be a source for inspiration later.

Be mindful not to stretch your technical knowledge too far mid-flow as this can create stress and shut down intuition. If you need to learn a new Photoshop skill, set that aside for a dedicated practice session.

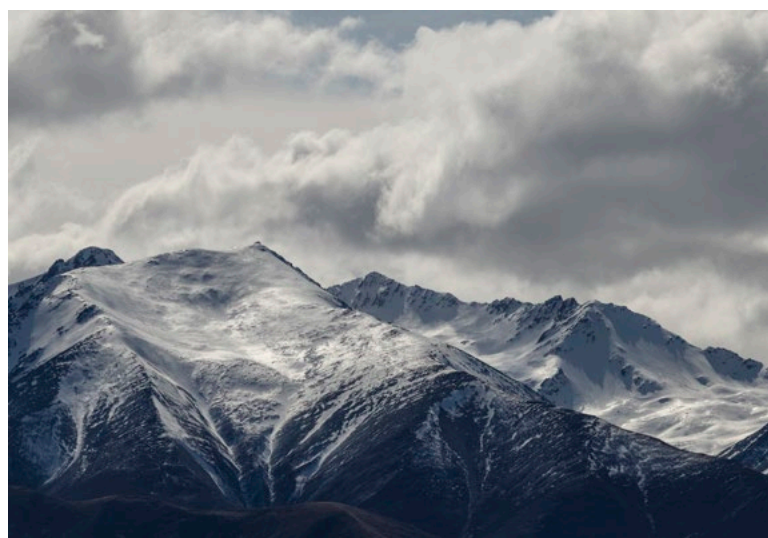


Image 3: original

Learn it until it feels natural, then bring it back into your creative play.

One mindset is analytical, the other is creative. Balancing both is where the magic happens.

LET YOUR IDEAS DEVELOP AS YOU GO

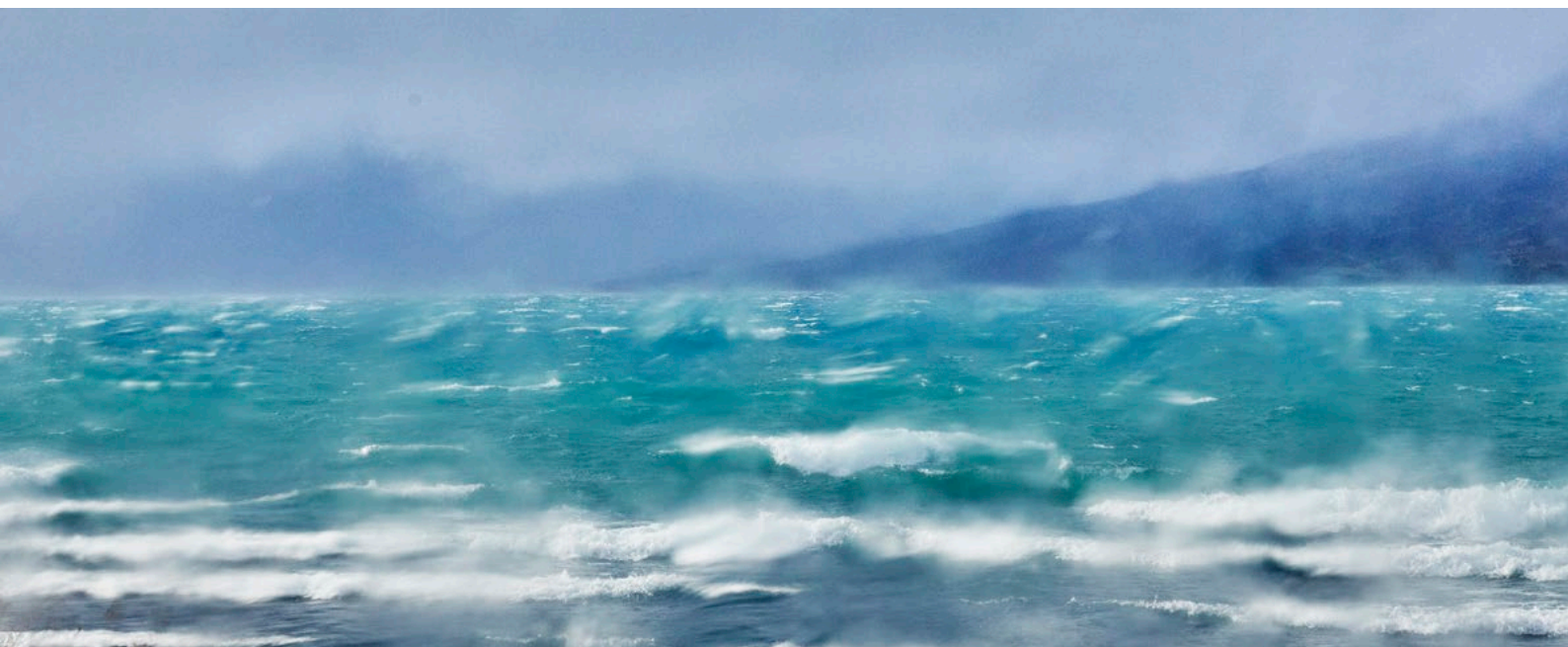
When do those amazing photos happen? Often when you're not expecting them, so take Mike Langford's advice and always have your camera with you, even if you are just going to get provisions!



Ohau Storm 1

f22, 1/80 second, ISO 320. Canon R5, Canon RF 24-105 F4L IS USM @ 67mm

Focused on the curved windscreen of the car, while photographing into the incoming rainstorm. I needed to have the aperture at f22 to keep the curvature of the windscreen all in focus.



Ohau Storm 2

f11, 1/320 second, ISO 320. Canon R5, Canon RF 24-105 F4L IS USM @ 105mm

Focused on the background waves, making the out-of-focus water drops on the windscreen become soft and blurry. Using a shallower depth-of-field with f11, allowed the out-of-focus elements on the windscreen to create a soft layer through which to shoot.

On a recent trip back from Queenstown, this philosophy rang true when Jackie and I noticed a storm developing up the Ohau valley. As always, we had our full photographic kits and tripods with us, so we decided to leave the main highway and drive up a side road to have a closer look.

We regard little side trips like this as doing our photographic scales, in that it keeps us photographically attuned, both with our equipment as well as with our minds and eyes.

Having a camera with you all the time means at least you have the possibility of doing something photographic when a situation presents itself.

As it had on this occasion! The sky and atmosphere looked really exciting from the turn-off, but the further we went into the mountains and towards the lake, the worse it got. Instead of an atmosphere with beautiful light, like what we saw from the main road, the light just became flat and wet.

We continued on anyway and ended up at the lake's edge in a howling wind with horizontal rain. These weren't the best conditions to be standing outside, trying to take a photograph, especially since the best angles were in the same direction as the on-coming rain!

So instead of getting out, we parked the car facing into the wind at the edge of the lake and set about trying to photograph from inside, where it was warm and dry and we could think more clearly.

There were several different ideas to play with from this position.

The first was to try and keep the windscreen devoid of rain by using the windscreen wipers, which didn't work at all as there was constantly rain falling on the windscreen.

The second idea was to use a big depth-of-field and to focus on the raindrops on the windscreen. To achieve this I needed an aperture of f22 as I wanted the whole of the windscreen in

focus, but I still wanted a fast enough shutter speed to freeze the raindrops there. This ended up being a shutter speed of 1/80 second and an ISO of 320.

Even though this was reasonably successful, I found the image to be a little busy and visually confusing, so then I tried yet another idea which was to use a shallower depth-of-field (f11) and to focus on the waves in the background instead of the rain on the windscreen. This allowed me to increase the shutter speed to 1/320 second, which froze the movement of the waves even though they have a very soft look to them, but this is as a result of the out-of-focus raindrops on the windscreen. It's this out-of-focus effect which diffuses the highlights on the whites of the waves, which I quite liked.

I set the white balance to 5000K, which is a slightly 'warmer' setting than neutral daylight, but means the camera adjusts the colours to compensate by making them cooler colours – and this made the image feel cold and stormy. [Editor: Mike says this makes it sound confusing – and it is! But essentially he is tricking the camera into making the colours bluer or cooler than they are.]

I also felt that colour added to the feel and emotion of the scene, much more than black and white would have. In post-production, I decided that a panorama crop best suited the image as it eliminated all the foreground elements that were distracting, as well as cropping half of the sky off as this didn't add anything more to the image either. These crops allowed the eye to focus on the essence of the scene, which was the volatile looking lake surface and dark broody mountains beyond.

Having achieved at least something inside the storm, we decided that the atmosphere of looking into it was possibly better than being in it. We headed back towards the main highway and away from the storm.

Right at the outer edge of the storm, there was another storm coming in from the south in the form of a cloud front that



Southerly Front

f11, 1/640 second, ISO 320. Canon R5, Canon RF 24-105 F4L IS USM @ 39mm

Viewing this event in black and white through the camera's viewfinder at the time of photographing, made seeing this composition very easy as it eliminated the distraction of the colours that didn't add anything to the image anyway.

was travelling at speed across the basin. This looked great in black and white, as it separated out all the tones in the clouds as well as highlighting all the textures in the foreground grasses.



Rainbow 3

f11, 1/640 second, ISO 320. Canon R5, Canon RF 24-105 F4L IS USM @ 39mm

Rainbow photograph as seen in the camera from the JPEG capture in black and white with high contrast and a red filter. For me, this black and white interpretation allows you to see something that is quite commonplace in a very new and different way.

Minutes later, there was a rainbow that attracted my eye, mainly as I was seeing the scene in black and white, as I had my picture style set to Monochrome with high contrast and a red filter; which made the rainbow look very surreal. I've never really been a fan of photographing rainbows, but in this instance, I found it really interesting. I continued with this idea, but after moving to a different location where I could include the curve of the road as a foreground, which leads the eye towards the black and white rainbow. I find that by using the monochrome picture style with high contrast and a red filter makes my landscapes look stronger and more dynamic, as it breaks the tones down into shapes, lines and textures. This also makes it easier to see the composition within the landscape.

A few weeks later, after having posted this photo on Facebook, I decided that I would partially listen to some of my critics who thought that photographing a rainbow in black and white was just plain weird. Indulging in their jibes, I decided to process the raw file again, this time in colour and then in Photoshop place the colour image underneath the black and white one. Then erasing the black and white rainbow on top that then revealed the colour file underneath. This made it look very weird, but at the same time, it was a fun way of thinking about it.

Having fun with your photography is what keeps you going forwards – and way beyond where you may have first stopped.

Normally, I would disregard what people say about my photos on Facebook, as I make them for myself and put them



Rainbow 1

f11, 1/640 second, ISO 320. Canon R5, Canon RF 24-105 F4L IS USM @ 39mm
This image was made from the raw colour file before moving to a point where there was a foreground road, so you can see what it was like in colour.

up just to share them with friends and other like-minded photographers who follow me. If you don't think about posting images in this way, then it would be very easy to lose your own identity and way of thinking and seeing, which is ultimately who we are as photographers.

Let's face it, we don't make these photos for other people



Rainbow 2

f11, 1/640 second, ISO 320. Canon R5, Canon RF 24-105 F4L IS USM @ 39mm
Photo taken from the camera raw to show the colour rainbow.

unless we are being commercially employed. We make them first and foremost for ourselves and then sometimes we share!

If anyone is interested in finding out more about my black and white way of thinking, go to our website <https://www.qccp.co.nz/shop> and check out my new book, 'It's all here in Black and White'.



Rainbow 4

f11, 1/640 second, ISO 320. Canon R5, Canon RF 24-105 F4L IS USM @ 39mm
The Photoshop version with the rainbow displayed in colour.

SLOWLY DOES IT

Do you need a tripod? Possibly not, but should you or could you use one anyway?

Murray White explains how a tripod works for him.



THE DRIFTING

Landscapes made in an orthodox fashion are not always my 'thing', but as a bush enthusiast, I regularly visit places that enable such a vision. This morning's walk along the Howqua River was slow and thoughtful, with those High Country sounds and fragrances contributing to my overall sense of this place. This image is one of two that I made in a couple of quieter moments. However, for me the pleasure was mainly found in the experience and the possibilities presented, rather than just the photographic record of it.

Other than my iPhone, I do not currently own a camera that can be used hand-held. As limiting as this may sound, it is not a restriction that bothers me, because a tripod is an integral part of my landscape photography practice and has been for forty plus years. The interesting thing is that up until recently, I have regularly used medium format film cameras that could be hand-held, but in the vast majority of photographic situations, they never were. There is some irony that my long-term camera, a Mamiya 7, which has gathered an almost cult-like following among analogue enthusiasts, partly because of its Leica-esque control and portability, was always deployed in the same slow and methodical way as my view cameras.

Not Just Speed

In a contemporary world of image stabilisation and almost unlimited ISO capability, what has been going on in my head? It is a valid question (and full disclosure may be a little scary), but the answer is not just reflective of my low film speeds of choice and generally static environmental subjects. In fact, tripod use for me became synonymous with the enjoyment of a more tactile process and a desire to explore the possibilities of a slower approach to landscape photography; rather than being used only as a mechanism by which unintentional camera movement can be avoided.

I guess we all develop a photographic methodology over time, mostly in response to the key requirements of the genres that interest us. For example, a birdlife photographer will rarely use a tripod, but will typically work with long lenses. A street shooter may prefer a wider focal length lens and a more nimble camera, while architectural enthusiasts may choose to do their work when the streets are quiet.

These are all functional decisions that allow us a better chance to nail that elusive image: that eagle in flight, the intimacy of a bustling marketplace or the peaceful grandeur of an ornate church. What they don't necessarily do is prepare our minds for an alternative assessment, or allow the experience to be as fulfilling in a developmental sense as the image itself. In a way, we can become fixated on acquiring the final product



THE STAMPEDE

When I came across this subject, the sun was just beginning to peek over a nearby saddle and was beginning to create a high contrast setting, which at the time I felt held limited visual value. It ran through my mind to grab something, anything, in an attempt to make a hasty image rather than walk away with none (after all, I had invested time to get here in the first place). Instead, I chose to slowly walk further down the hill and back into indirect light. Time was on my side once again and I was able to interpret this new part of the setting in a more leisurely and hopefully more thoughtful way.



WAVES OF STONE

I have found that the subjects of most value to me have been the ones that I have come across unexpectedly, rather than the iconic hotspots, to which ironically I have in the past tended to allocate more time. This beautiful rocky outcrop only appears at low tide and was found by chance, but to me its presence and structure remains memorable long after the camera was put away. Sometimes just being in a location that connects with us is reward enough and perhaps over time, that respect we feel is then reflected in our future work.

by relying upon the capability of a specific tool or technique, without correctly appreciating that only time enables a deeper process of seeing.

If we allow a preconceived outcome to become the sole driver of our photography, then we may well find success in that ambition, but will it come at the expense of a broader contentment?

Quite the Reverse

I know in my case that habitual reliance on a tripod has been responsible for countless missed photographic opportunities and in some ways, it has pushed me into a creative corner. However, for me the tripod has not behaved as a tool of exclusion; quite the reverse, it has become a metaphor (not only a mechanism) for a more meaningful pace of inclusion. The humble tripod forces me to slow my workflow and interrogate more fully the landscape, just as an explorer may seek understanding of a foreign land.

Of course, this same philosophy is equally accessible to those who choose to hand-hold their camera – exploration is a mindset, not an indispensable piece of apparatus. And it's a mindset that is easily spooked. I'm sure we have all scrambled around madly at sunset, trying to capture our pictorial masterpiece before, after and while the sun's hypnotic rays are touching that visual nerve. I know that I often feel a little foolish when reacting with some urgency to a phenomenon that, in reality, has been happening since the birth of our solar system.

While today's cloud and sunlight combination may be captivating, perhaps even unique, its fleeting presence in no way demands that it must be recorded. There will be other sunsets, there will be other compositions. The perceived loss of



TRACKS

Seaweed was plentiful on this morning's walk, but what is it that makes one clump more photogenic than another? Just considering this question as I walked, I think, opened my mind to what it could be that seaweed may say in a visual sense. So when I came across this clump quietly echoing the sandstone fracture lines, I felt confident that this particular subject did indeed deserve closer attention. Spending time in contemplation is never wasted, even if the product of that thought doesn't emerge immediately.

one particular atmospheric arrangement can be compensated manifoldly if we look with interest at what is actually unfolding, instead of trying to pre-empt the outcome we may wish for. Our photography will collectively benefit from a less frantic approach if we use our eyes instead of a viewfinder to see and awareness of the moment rather than expectation to provide guidance.

Nature has a limitless capacity to excite our vision, but without a deliberate resolve to use our cameras to only record those most inspirational of moments, we run the risk of witnessing the world via a reactive, although possibly meaningless series, of snapshots. Seeing becomes fragmented and a deeper understanding, optional. Like fast food, there is a short-lived enjoyment, but a longer term regret – not only for our health, but for our loss of agency and that basic human desire for immersive experience.

See and Feel

A slower approach can allow the experience to dictate the terms; the journey to specify the direction. For example, if we point our camera at a tree because our eyes have recognised a tree, we will see and feel and witness a tree. But point it at the colour of its bark, or the shape of its limbs, or even the sound of its leaves and truly concentrate on that quality without questioning its origin and this ubiquitous tree can take on a new meaning. And the longer we invest in that transaction, the more alternatives we are likely to find.



CHASING THE LIGHT

Beach sand erosion is hardly a novel subject for most, but when we pare back its recognisable form into, in this case a basic shape, a broader relationship may be interpreted. By focusing my attention on the dart-like outline of these structures, over time I considered how else they could be presented. I eventually positioned my tripod to incorporate an area of highlight in the composition in an effort to suggest a more kinetic concept between the elements, rather than simply allow the patterns of water drainage to limit a viewer to that possibility alone.



TAKING FLIGHT

These three raised domes of stone looked quite dramatic in the drizzle that accompanied me on the day. There were certainly many options for photography around this site, but by allowing myself the time to slowly assess the various possibilities for meaning, I became more aware of how the algal trails could feed into my composition. There was a need to be quite precise with my camera position as even a very small shift would impact quite noticeably the surface sheen that I felt should remain as a visual expression of this subject.

Time distills simplicity from the complex, yet paradoxically, also allows the simple to evolve into the complex. However, it is not really time itself that is the progressive force; this visual transformation is due to our vision and brain reacting to unexpected possibilities, because we have deliberately excluded those traditional characteristics of a particular entity. Perhaps our minds are forever 'switched on', always looking for reason and resolution even when we force ourselves to focus on the most basic of structures. And time multiplies that interconnection.

I find elements of the natural landscape to be particularly fascinating in this respect. It could be said that our environment (and by extension, our environmental photographs), only exist or are seen to exist as various combinations of rocks, plants, water and earth. In a simplistic way, this alchemic description is true, but a closer, slower observation will, over time, reveal subjects of extraordinary worth in both a visual and interpretative sense. Nature seems to have a way of presenting the mundane in the most sophisticated of ways.

My approach to landscape involves firstly behaving in a courteous manner, because I have come to consider it a privilege to explore an entity that in the past I have sometimes taken for granted. Part of this familiarity process sets the scene for how I may choose to photograph those subjects of most appeal. I am especially grateful when I stumble upon locations where the influence of humans remains subdued. In these settings, I find a slower approach not only personally rewarding and respectful to the environment, but a natural and understandable reaction to its organic beauty.

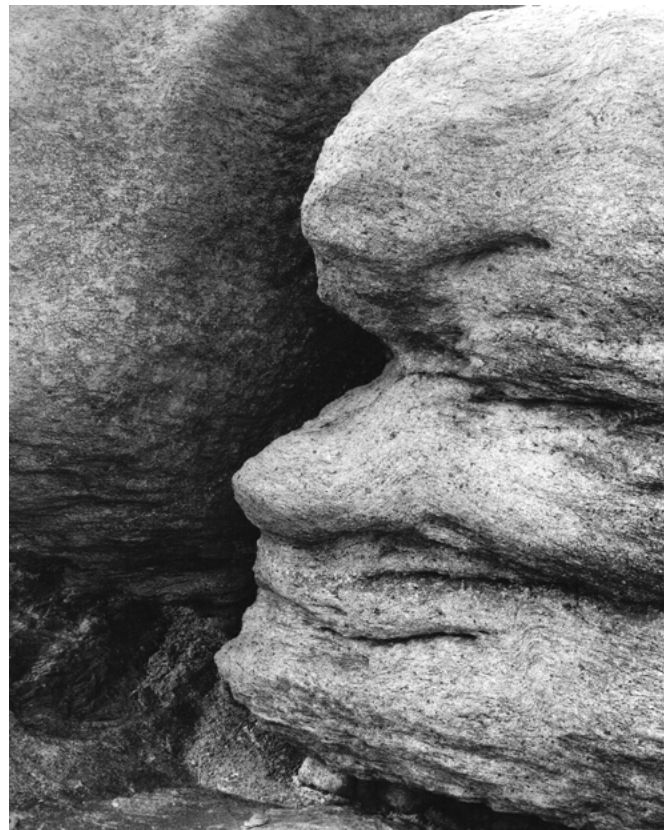
Sense of Significance

The process of getting to know our immediate surroundings and living in the moment as we explore the visual opportunities

before us cannot be overstated. I think it entirely appropriate to touch, smell and listen with as much interest as we may bring, looking for inspiration. In fact, I regularly find more to occupy my mind in a holistic sense than can fit in any photographic format. I believe to experience Nature in an intimate way will feed into a growing authenticity and individual flavour within our subsequent images.

Bear in mind too, that those iconic landscapes we often feel an urge to experience out of an externally promoted sense of significance, will not in themselves strengthen our personal vision, or even our folio content. To me, visualising the photographic possibilities hidden in the least recognisable settings, is a vastly more rewarding activity than trying to foist a new slant on a familiar location. Of course, both challenges taken seriously will involve the allocation of time, but the latter is typically spent trying to reinvent the wheel, while the former can be a more satisfying process of finding a wheel in the first place.

For most people, the experience of photography is a process and outcome that is enjoyed at a pace consistent with their individual method of practice. There is a place for a swift response to Nature's sometimes frantic behaviour, just as there is a need to sometimes quietly absorb its complexity. The concept of slowing down is a term that is relative to nobody but ourselves. It is a term not measured by time in the conventional sense, but relates to an immersive style where the process can eventually seem more valuable than the product we originally set out to find.



CONTENTMENT

Anthropomorphic studies require time and contemplation almost by definition (and certainly in practice). By looking at elements of our landscape not as definable objects, but as features to explore in a visual sense, we can often find more creative ways to express our vision. This sculpted rock did not immediately stand out from the jumble around it, but over time something about its shape caught my eye. A slower assessment of its possibilities proved worthwhile, in my view.



OPPRESSIVE

The cloud action at this location made a compelling statement, but out of respect I felt it warranted a sympathetic response on the ground. It took some time to locate a subject which to me interacted in a collaborative manner and during that period of reaction the clouds had continued to evolve. I guess the element of luck played into my hand, but if not, what was the alternative? Find any tree and be forever unhappy with the pairing? Or choose to respond to the setting itself, with flexibility and exploration front of mind?

WALKING

Part 2

Len Metcalf continues his suggestion to combine walking with photography – here are some tips, tricks and more thoughts.

Ansel Adams is often quoted as suggesting you take the heaviest camera you can carry. I'm no longer youthful or strong enough to carry heavy loads, so I spend a lot of time considering which camera to take and there are considerations other than weight, like size, accessories, lenses and weather sealing.

When doing walks longer than half a day, I start taking the weight considerations incredibly seriously.

Ultra-Light Camera

On trips in the past, I took my Ricoh GR III. This was an



Len Metcalf and son walking and camping with their cameras!

exceptionally light camera to walk with. I could recharge it off the same power bank that I used for my phone and torch. The camera fitted into my chest pocket and was therefore very easy to access while walking. However, the lack of a viewfinder and having to use the rear screen to compose was rather difficult in bright sunny conditions. Another big disadvantage is that the camera isn't weather sealed. It is actually famous for dust ingress and I have never really bonded with its wide-angle lens. The fixed focal length is a 28mm equivalent, so when I discovered my son's love for this focal length, I quickly swapped cameras with him and got one of my other cameras back.

Recently I have bought a Ricoh GR IIIx which has a 40mm equivalent lens. I find I am using this camera much more than the wider-angle version. Still, the biggest disadvantage of this camera is not being able to use it in the rain. When you are bushwalking, you inevitably get wet and that includes your hands. So, taking a camera that I can't use in my favourite weather conditions seems rather pointless. Instead, this camera goes on strolls, to art galleries and is always in my day pack. It also serves as a back-up camera on longer trips.

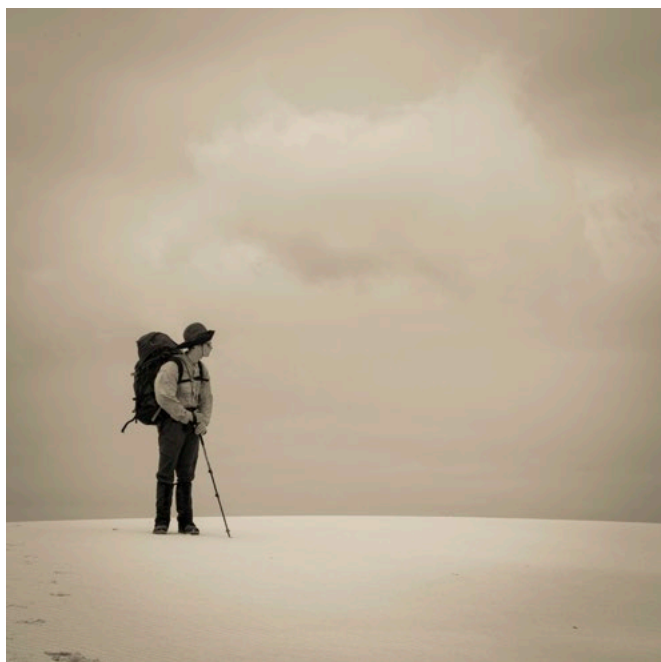
Another popular choice for bushwalkers has been the Sony RX100 series. It is pocketable, has a zoom lens and is rechargeable from a portable power bank. Again, this camera isn't weather sealed and needs to be kept away from water.

Umbrella Sheltering

Perhaps at this point it is a good idea to mention a new phenomenon that has arisen in the ultra-light hiking community: using umbrellas while walking. A number of companies are now producing ultra-light umbrellas specifically designed to work with a backpack, so perhaps the weather sealed camera isn't such a problem after all.

These umbrellas strap onto the shoulder straps of your pack. Obviously this is not a good idea in windy conditions or in tight bush or forest. However, I have been using an umbrella to photograph under for the last forty years and it is my go-to method of photographing in the rain. My ultra-light umbrella stays in my camera pack as well.





Lightweight Camera

I decided I needed a dedicated walking camera and chose an Olympus EM5 Mk III paired with the OM System's 20mm f1.4 lens or the 12-45mm f4 zoom. Both give me a very lightweight set-up that takes photographs as good as my main camera system. The OM system also has very good weather sealing.

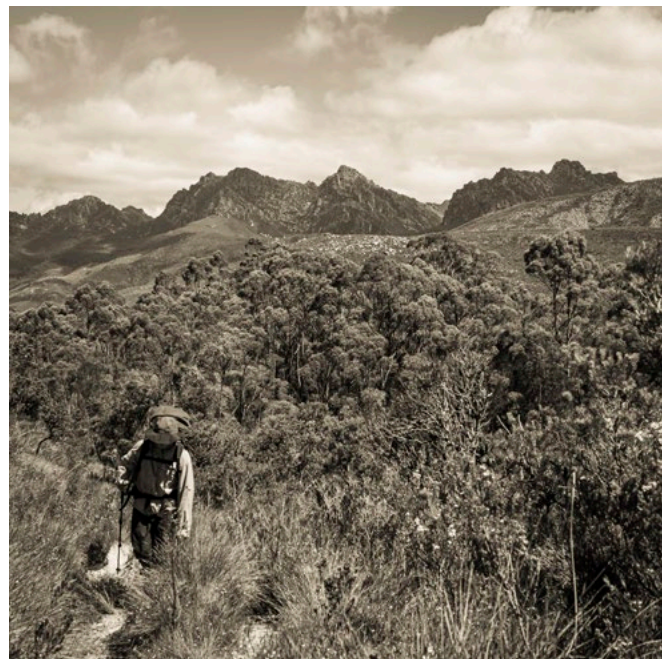
On one walk, I decided to use a camera clip and attach the camera to my shoulder strap. That was fine, though fiddly to use, until I crawled under a fallen tree, bashed the camera on the ground and ripped the base off the camera. Luckily, I had some blister tape and was able to seal the camera and keep using it. Actually this camera is still taped up and still being used.

After that incident, I started attaching my camera to straps that in turn are attached to the shoulder straps on my pack. This has turned out to be a fantastic solution to carrying my camera.

Now I can lift it up and photograph without unhooking it or unpouching it. Instant access to my camera at any time. When it's raining I just point the camera downwards to avoid getting rain on the lens. I always use a lens hood and this helps keep the rain off the lens, too.

Over the years, I have modified this set-up. I use it on some walks in conjunction with a neck strap, so I can easily walk with the camera when I don't have my pack on. I built my own clips and adjustment straps. Eventually, I returned to using micro metal clips and clipping them into a cord or the rings that hold the straps. I designed a system that uses quick release buckles too.

There is one thing to avoid here and that is using the shoulder strap as a neck strap for carrying your camera. This gives you unavoidable neck pain and is not good for your body. So my modified system is specifically designed to put the weight of the camera onto the pack again.



Lately, I have been walking with my OM System's OM1 Mk II. Despite it being a little bit heavier than the EM5, I find I prefer using it and so that bar of chocolate, which is the difference in weight between the two, gets left behind.

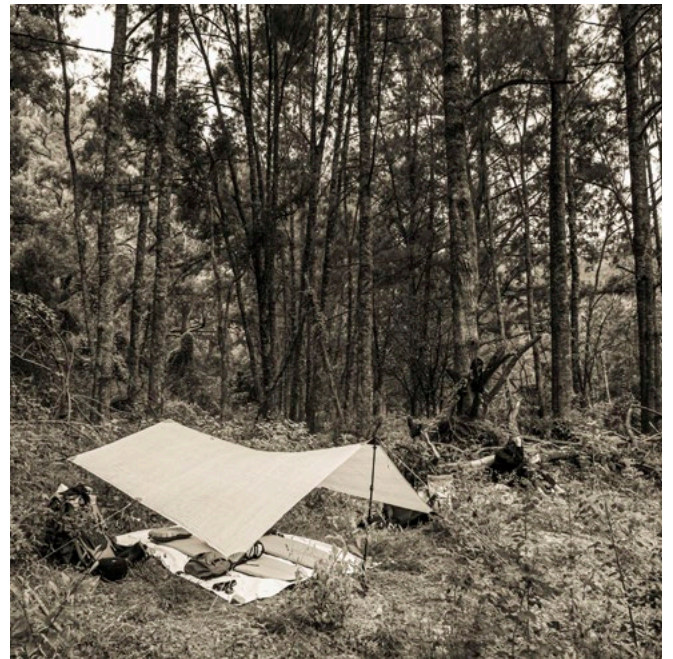
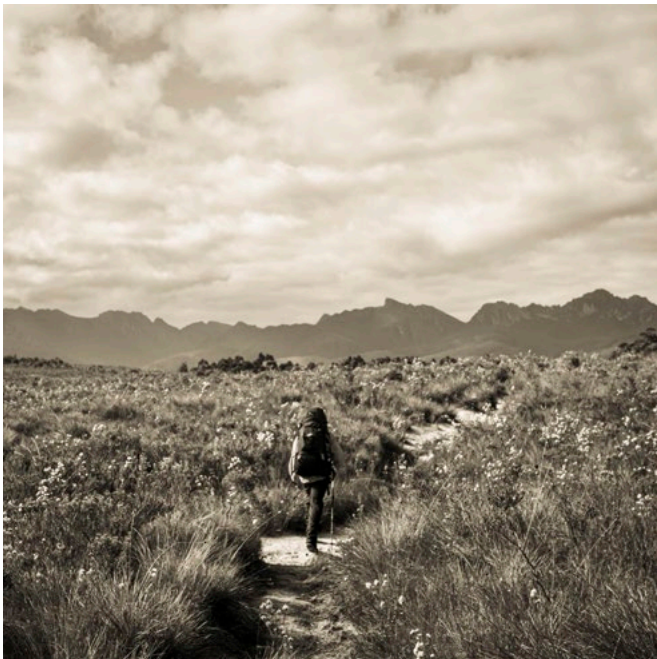
Heavier Cameras

For many years, I hiked with large format cameras, light meters, spare lenses, tripod and film. I agonised over camera models, trying to get my pack weight down lighter and lighter. I even had a backpack made with a huge opening so I could get to my camera bag. In many ways, I am so pleased those days have now gone and I am carrying lighter packs. But I do miss the discipline of 4x5, the transparency film and importantly, composing upside down and back to front.

So, I believe you can bush walk with any camera as long as you are prepared for the consequences.

Considerations and Advice

- Develop a system that gives you very quick access to your camera gear, so you can stop walking, take a photograph and move on again, without taking off your pack or opening it. This leads to you taking more photographs, rather than deciding it is all too hard to get your camera out and take the shot! I noticed that my photography slows down depending on how hard it is to access my camera. Having it there and at the ready works best for me.
- Consider rain, dirt and dust – and either choose a camera / lens system that has really good weather sealing, or buy a weather sealed camera bag. There is a guy in Europe who makes ultra-light waterproof camera bags and they are also available in ultra-light hiking stores. In the old days, Lowepro used to be our go-to for such bags, but today cottage



industries are making much lighter camera bags with full weather sealing. I went for the weather sealed rugged camera and skipped the camera bag.

- Pack a dry bag specifically for your camera, so in wet weather, you can seal it up and not worry about it. Having an IPX1 weather sealed bag construction which is splashproof, dustproof and freezeproof certainly made my bushwalks with my camera a much less stressful proposition.
- Consider the weight of your lenses and camera combined. I only take one lens and it's usually a 50mm full-frame equivalent. I like a lens that almost focuses to macro magnifications too. I personally prefer a sharp prime than a zoom.
- How will you power your camera? I ended up with digital cameras that have USB charging. It can be lighter to carry a power bank than a battery charger, so now I carry one spare battery and a power bank. Don't forget to make sure you

have the appropriate cable!

- I also carry a few lens wipes, the ones with cleaning fluid in them, and a microfibre lens cloth. I used to carry a tripod, but have started to leave that behind as my pack got heavier.

Taking it Further

If you would like to go bushwalking with your camera but you don't know where to start, you could also join a bushwalking club. Or if you would like someone to go with or even take you, I have started running bush walks for photographers of all levels. Whether you'd like to learn about equipment, safety or technique, or just be taken on a walk for a few days, please feel free to reach out and ask. I have recently run a ski touring trip and I will be adding canoeing with your camera soon. You can see what I am offering at <http://lenmetcalf.com/walk-with-len>.

Getting out with the camera is good for the soul.

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