



Close-Up

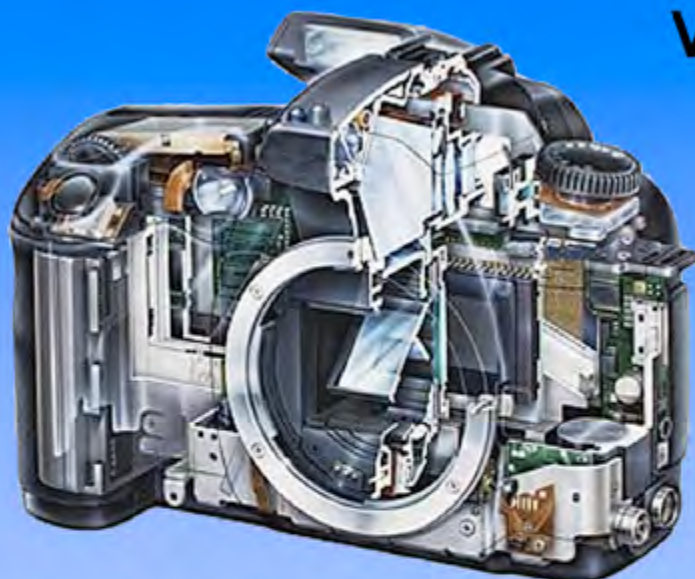
Inside:

**Seeking a Stronger Way of
Seeing
Shaping Nature and People
Competitions
Lightroom: Develop Module
Member Profile: Blake Ford
When Autofocus Fails
Do it in the Dark
and more...**



"Ready to Play" by Gordon Griffiths

February 2015 Volume 68 Number 2



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Victoria Camera Club

Close-Up is the magazine of the Victoria Camera Club,
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Mailing address: PO Box 46035, RPO Quadra, Victoria, BC, V8T 5G7.
Deadline for submissions for the March 2015 issue is February 5th 2015.
Editor, Richard James, e-mail to newsletter@victoriacameraclub.org
for submissions or to advertise in *Close-Up*.

Established in 1944, the Victoria Camera Club is a group of people who share the love of photography. We come together to appreciate each other's images, to learn, both from the feedback on our own images and from the images of others, and to exchange tips on how and where to take effective photographs. Our focus is on continuous learning. Our media include both film and digital and our expertise ranges from novice to master.

Events

We hold a number of events including:

- Three meetings a month from September to April (excluding December)
- Field trips
- Workshops
- Special Interest Groups (SIGs)
- Competitions within the club and externally

Meetings begin at 7:30 PM at Norway House, 1110 Hillside Avenue, Victoria, BC.

Membership

Annual fees include all workshops (except studio shoots and special events), meetings and all field trips unless travel/accommodation is involved. Annual fees are: Individual, \$85; Family, \$128; Student, \$43.

For current event information and locations please go to the website victoriacameraclub.org where you can also read or download the colour version of *Close-Up*.

For additional information: please contact the appropriate Committee Chair:

Membership: membership@victoriacameraclub.org
Workshops: workshops@victoriacameraclub.org
Field Trips: fieldtrips@victoriacameraclub.org
Meetings: meetings@victoriacameraclub.org
Website: webmaster@victoriacameraclub.org
Close-Up: newsletter@victoriacameraclub.org
or call Lloyd Houghton, President at 250-580-7154.

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Member Discounts: VCC members can take advantage of discounts offered by several retailers in Victoria. Details are on the members only page on our website.

The Victoria Camera Club is a member club of the Community Arts Council of Greater Victoria (CACGV), Canadian Association for Photographic Arts (CAPA), and the Photographic Society of America (PSA).



Calendar

Our workshop and field trip program is too extensive to list in *Close-Up*. Please go to the calendar page on the website (www.victoriacameraclub.org) for the latest details of all our workshops, field trips and meetings.

Thursday, February 5th; Competition Night

The January competition results will be presented. One of the judges will review selected images. The February theme is "Weathered."

Thursday, February 12th; Presentation Night

Join us for a feature presentation by an invited guest speaker. Please visit the website for details, victoriacameraclub.org/pages/kalendar.php.

Thursday, February 19th; Members' Night

Presentation of members' images, field trip slide shows, prints or short technical topics.

Featured Workshops in February

Basic Digital Photography for the Novice

Image Stacking

Featured Field Trips in February

Christ Church Cathedral and Chinese New Year

Meeting, field trip and workshop visitor policy: Visitors are welcome to attend any three events in a two month period subject to the availability of space and a \$20 per session fee for workshops.

Cover image: "*Ready to Play*" by Gordon Griffiths. This photo was taken in the band staging area at the 2014 Victoria Day parade. Good candid and street photo opportunities occur at this venue. The bands gather in two parking lots to prepare for the parade. After tuning their instruments and warming up, the band members went into the mall for coffee leaving their instruments on the concrete sidewalk. I photographed these instruments (with permission) as the students had left them.

The early morning sun provided great light and reflections on the instruments. Significant post-capture processing was done to this image. Several adjustments were made in Adobe Camera Raw. A preset in the Topaz ReStyle plug-in filter and a vignette were added to the image. I then lightly applied a paint filter to add interest to the scene. Finally, I cloned out the sidewalk curb that ran through the centre of the image.

President's Message

In the last issue I suggested that you might like to put together your list of top 20 images for 2014. By the time you read this I will have completed that task for myself. I've sorted out 12, I had to in order to get my 2015 calendar to the printers. If you did this for yourself, I'd love to hear what the process told you about your year.

For me, it made me realize that the year had produced some better work than I'd thought. I had a little moan to a friend that I didn't feel that I had much to be pleased with from a personal photographic point of view and that I was feeling quite hollow about the year. The reply was to ask if I was tired or hungry which, if so, might explain such piffle, a delightful word that I hadn't heard in a long time. Anyway, knuckling down to produce the calendar soon showed that I must have been tired or hungry!

Sometimes we need friends to bring us down to earth, or up to the surface. Down to earth when we get so emotionally involved with our latest masterpiece that we don't see some pretty obvious areas for improvement. Up to the surface when we start to get unnecessarily down about our work.

I have been thinking a bit about creativity lately. It has been impressed on me yet again that creativity is a trip, not a destination. It is easy to get caught up in some new work you've seen, buy the book or go on the workshop or watch YouTube a few times, and then give up in disgust because you're not getting results that are anything like what attracted you to the work in the beginning.

The reality is that the masters who showed you their process have taken a long time to get to where the technique is second nature to them. They didn't arrive at the work you've just fallen in love with, their destination, without working long and hard at mastering all of the nuances of the technique, their journey. If you want to get to the same destination, you're going to have to go on a journey too. While learning from the master will shorten the journey for most people, the journey still has to be taken. It is unrealistic to expect to achieve anything like the mastery you've seen in the expert without doing the hard yards yourself. Doing that takes time, and you'll only do that when you have a strong desire that is matched with dedication and persistence.

Don't give up. Hang in there and enjoy the journey.

Lloyd Houghton, President.

by Don Peterson

In photography, composition is what separates snapshots from photographs. Strong composition can make a great image of a mundane subject and weak composition can ruin an image of an exceptional subject. Unfortunately, badly composed images can seldom be fixed in post-processing so getting things right in the camera is critical.

But, how does a student of photography learn about composition and put that knowledge into practice? Fortunately there is a wide range of resources available on this subject including books, articles, videos, workshops and courses. You will find that some of them focus on the basic “rules” of composition while others delve deeply into the art and science of composition. It is important for every photographer to gain at least a basic understanding of composition as it will definitely help you to create better photographs.

But, this article does not set out to summarize or expand upon the technical aspects of composition. Rather, it aims to demonstrate that as photographers gain more experience their approach to composition becomes more intuitive, more personal and less formulaic.

The famous American photographer Edward Weston said, “*Composition is merely the strongest way of seeing.*” Weston believed that instead of relying on rules photographers must use their own emotions (“strongest”) and their own photographer’s eye (“seeing”) to create successful photographs.

Other similar comments would include:

Edward Weston also said: “*Now to consult the rules of composition before making a picture is a little like consulting the law of gravitation before going for a walk. Such rules and laws are deduced from the accomplished fact; they are the products of reflection.*”

Ansel Adams also said: “*Simply look with perceptive eyes at the world about you, and trust to your own reactions and convictions. Ask yourself: “Does this subject move me to feel, think and dream? Can I visualize a print, my own personal statement of what I feel and want to convey, from the subject before me?”*

The balance of this article takes a case study approach to relate how I (a moderately experienced amateur) went about composing a photograph. For the study I chose a fairly common subject, a small building in

a landscape. Specifically, I decided to photograph a place called “Leaf Cottage” that is located near Ford’s Cove on Hornby Island where I live part time. This cottage was designed and built in the 1970s by a locally renowned creative builder by the name of Lloyd House. Apparently when Lloyd visited his client’s property for the first time to contemplate cottage design he noticed a maple leaf float down and land upside down on the ground directly in front of where he sat, and this became the inspiration for the design of Leaf Cottage.

I have visited this site many times and admired the unique building design and its setting but I had never produced a photograph that I felt captured either the quality of the building or the spirit of the place. Could doing a case study on composition for this article help me finally produce a compelling photograph? I hoped so!

A few days before I planned to visit the site, I began to visualize possible ways of composing an image. Visualization is a key first step in creating any kind of art and thinking about composing a photograph may begin days in advance or just a second or two before you press the shutter. But there were also practical matters to consider. It was December so I knew the building would be deeply shaded except during late afternoon so I would need to visit towards evening on a bright day. Also the site was enclosed by forest on three sides so my kit would need to contain appropriate equipment including shorter lenses like my 16-35 mm f4 wide angle zoom and a 50 mm f1.4 normal lens along with my tripod and ball head.

Arriving at the site I first put down all my gear and slowly walked over the property looking at the building from all angles and carefully assessing the light (direction, quality) and how it played on the shapes and surfaces in the scene. I noted very deep shade in the trees and behind the house and bright highlights on the grass and the white plaster on the front of the building. All the while, I tried to keep my vision for the photograph in mind; there was a specific story and mood here that needed to be captured. My walk around confirmed that the best opportunities seemed to lie on the North and West sides of the property due to the direction of the light and the physical limitations imposed by the encroaching forest.

I made my first set of images with the sun to my back facing the front quarter of the cottage. There were compositional elements there that I liked, a subtle leading line created by the footpath through the grass, the strong contrast between the dark forest trees in the background and the lighter shades on the walls of the building and the grasses in the foreground. As I was

planning to produce a monochrome print the wide range of tones available in the scene were a real plus.



Image 1: Nikon D800E, ISO 100, 1/15th sec, 16 mm @ f16

Unfortunately, on reviewing the images taken from this first location I found the compositions suffered from one fatal flaw: they looked very ordinary, much like any number of other images I have seen of this cottage. More importantly, it had failed to capture clearly the distinctive design elements that made this building so unique.

So, I moved further up the slope, adjusted my lens for a wider perspective, lowered my tripod and composed a second set of images. By changing position I was hoping to better show how the cottage was nestled into the landscape while still featuring the distinctive design of the structure. On review I was encouraged as the results were definitely better than my first attempts but still fell short somehow. I still hadn't captured the essence of the building or the spirit of the place.



Image 2: Nikon D800E, ISO 100, 1/5th sec, 16 mm @ f16

I remember at this point taking a few moments to reflect on what Lloyd House may have visualized when he walked the property almost 50 years ago contemplating how to best place the new cottage in the landscape (his composition!). I then realized that I needed to climb higher up on the hill behind the cottage in or-

der to gain an overview of the entire scene. Surely the builder would have done this very thing while visiting the property for the first time so many years ago!

I managed to scramble further up the slippery slope and find security for my tripod on a large chunk of conglomerate rock. With camera and tripod secure I peered through the viewfinder and there was the leaf-like roof structure under the over-hanging trees, the ancient orchard in the background and the mountains of Vancouver Island in the far distance. All the elements I needed to compose the image I had visualized were there!

While I knew I had found the right position from which to make my final photograph, I still needed to determine the most compelling composition. To do this, I took a number of test images while varying my focal length (to consider both narrower and wider perspectives) and made slight adjustments in the direction and height of the camera on my tripod. I then carefully reviewed each test shot on the LCD before deciding on a fairly wide (26 mm) perspective. In post-processing I made minor cropping and other adjustments before converting the image to monochrome in Nik Software's Silver FX Pro.



Image 3: Nikon D800E, ISO 100, 1/15th sec, 26 mm @ f16

I hope this case study has illustrated that creating a satisfying image of a subject you care about depends on strong composition and this takes time, thought and patience. It has also detailed a personal and intuitive approach to composition that may or may not be helpful to you. But, regardless of your personal approach one thing is clear: by learning and practicing composition you will produce more satisfying photographs. Composition is indeed a stronger way of seeing.

by Richard James

What is the difference between a painter and a photographer? Simply put, painters can include, or exclude, anything in the real scene before them and create an image as “seen in their mind’s eye.” Photographers have two choices, to record exactly what is before them as a documentary image, or to modify, include or exclude whatever they wish. In other words, the only difference is that photographers can, if they so choose, include every visible detail of a scene, much more so than painters. Both painters and photographers can select what to include and how to interpret a scene.

The following quotations are taken from a display at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinberg, Ontario. They describe approaches to two major artistic genres: landscape photography, and the depiction of people.

“In transforming land into landscape, the artist’s response is governed by personal experience as well as by preferences in forms, colours, and stylistic approach for creating a ‘view.’ The image is then constructed by blending a mixture of natural details with fabricated elements, as an expression of stated or unspoken artistic intentions.”

“Viewer’s ideas in ascribing meaning to landscapes are also constructed and are based on a selection of elements in the image they perceive as significantly engaging. Their interpretations are influenced by their personal experiences, attitudes, and receptiveness to encountering the work.” (mcmichael.com/eyesonquebec/shapingnature.html)

“Jean Paul Lemieux painted many different types of people: the general public, archetypes (clergymen, nuns, and harlequins), generic figures (nudes), and specific individuals (portraits and self-portraits). In some works he recorded people in their own environment, to communicate who they were and the circumstances of their lives. In others, he depicted the figure almost as an inanimate object randomly existing in the universe. In either case, he meant to express something about human life and its limited time on earth. ... Although Lemieux’s figures may represent actual people, they don’t appear that way; rather, they seem rigid and emotionless, set against nondescript landscapes. Occasionally, their demeanour and clothing help to define them. The desolate backgrounds stretching out endlessly behind them also describe the world they inhabit and are evocative of a mood, often sombre and serious. ... The sublime and immense landscape stands

in contrast to the smallness of humankind, its fragility and ephemerality.” (mcmichael.com/eyesonquebec/jeanpaullemieux.html)

Both descriptions illustrate the painter’s ability, and intentions, to render realistic scenes that only selectively show the entirety of the subject, or add compositional elements from different scenes to generate the message in the artist’s image.

Now let us advance into the realm of photography. In its early stages, photographers were bound by the limits of the technology to produce only literal images (documentary) as the photographic processes, i.e. daguerreotype, produced the final image directly on the initial plate.

With the development of plate processes where the exposed plate (and later film) was processed to produce a negative image and then used to produce a final positive image on paper etc. much more flexibility was introduced. For example, in 1857 Oscar Gustave Rejlander produced a composite picture from 32 negatives *“The Two Ways of Life,”* while in the 1930s photographers such as Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Minor White etc. were producing complexly modified images portraying their subjects as they interpreted them. Ansel’s 1941 image *“Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico,”* for example is far from a documentary image, yet is a world renowned example of photography at its best. Examples of the evolution of this image can be seen at andrewsmithgallery.com/exhibitions/anseladams/arrington/arrington_adams.html.

As Ansel Adams expressed his philosophy, *“I think of the negative as the ‘score,’* (cf. the painter’s sketchbook) *and the print as a ‘performance’ of that score, which conveys the emotional and aesthetic ideas of the photographer at the time of making the exposure.”*

Now let us move into the 21st century. We have passed the “slides vs. prints” discussions of the late 20th century and are dealing with the digital age. Or are we? Are there not still signs of the dichotomy between slidemakers who could barely change what came out of the camera, and printers who could, and did, truly create their interpretation of the image in the (traditional, wet) darkroom by, yes, manipulating the image!

Are we still to be hidebound by the concept of “the camera never lies?” If the great painters of the past, and present, have free reign to express their creativity in projecting their interpretation of the scenes before them, then why should photographers not do so as well?



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I think that by now, you have a hint of what is to come.

We have clearly established the similarity between painters and photographers and their ability to add and delete components from images. So why is this a big problem in photography?

We see that the “Great Masters” of photography, from the earliest days, always manipulated their images. Whether it was in the exposure/development stage, or by dodging and burning in making the print does not matter. Great images are made “en plein air” as well as in the studio, or in the darkroom, but all require adjustment to represent the artist’s vision.

Is the difference that it was somehow “OK” to do this in the traditional darkroom, but not in the electronic darkroom (Photoshop or Lightroom etc.)? Did anyone accuse Ansel Adams, in a derogatory tone, of “manipulating his images?” Why do we use such derogatory tones in saying “it’s been Photoshopped?”

Image editors are nothing more than a darkroom, although considerably more powerful and flexible, with new tools to assist us with things that were never done before. Is this the problem, is it simply a reaction to change?

If we dispense with the darkroom, then photography becomes little more than a mechanical reproduction of what the camera saw, with all its limitations and deficiencies. Literally, it becomes “pure documentation.” The only artistic component can be the often limited, or impossible, ability to “arrange” the scene before the camera and not even crop the image afterwards (a la slide film).

We should state that this is a very legitimate requirement in some restricted fields, forensic photography, scientific documentation, and news reportage for example, where truth must be absolute. But in the general world of artistic expression, this is not the case.

In various photographic genres we have “rules” that say you can or cannot do this. We have arbitrarily grouped images into categories such as “Creative,” “Nature,” or “Open,” and then said that images cannot be compared across these boundaries.

If you exclude images from other categories because they meet the arbitrary rules of one category what are you doing? Even worse, the boundaries are not even clear or precise. When does dodging and burning (for example), even though it is permitted, disqualify an image from “Nature”?

Why is “the hand of man” banned from “Nature” when so many forms of life have clearly adapted to living with man (and vice-versa)?

Consider this; it is virtually impossible to create a true “Nature” landscape on any part of Vancouver Island that is accessible because almost all of the terrain has been modified by man. The “hand of man” has harvested the original multi-aged, multi-species timberlands and replaced them with uniform aged, single species stands of trees, which are continually being modified by logging.

When does an image that has deliberately been blurred (by whatever means), for example, cease to be a landscape and must be considered “Creative”? Compare the landscape paintings of the “Group of Seven” painters (www.group-of-seven.org, Wikipedia etc.) to photographs. We can obtain the same effects of partial abstraction with various photographic techniques. The results would hardly be called “Nature” in some photographic circles, yet they represent the natural environment in the same way as the painting in that style would.

Remember Ansel Adam’s philosophy: the negative (RAW image) is the score, the print (or projected image) is the performance. How you get to the performance is the key.

A jpg image created in the camera has been manipulated in ways specified by the camera manufacturer, based on the settings that you, the photographer, have chosen, hopefully with some forethought for each different scene as different settings may be required based on the subject, lighting and interpretation that you wish to show.

The jpg image is derived directly from the RAW image recorded by the camera sensor. Whether you manipulate the image solely based on camera settings, or with greater consideration and interpretation in your digital darkroom is not particularly relevant. The only caveat here is that “in camera” conversion is strictly limited compared to the freedoms in your digital darkroom.

Please do not take this to mean that an image shot as a jpeg and taken straight out of the camera is invalid, or “not good enough.” That is not the intention. Simply put, jpg images are harder to modify and too easy to create without enough thought as to their interpretation.

So, the bottom line is that any digital image has been manipulated, just as any traditional image made in the wet darkroom has been.

Theme: In-flight

by Dan Takahashi

The March competition intention for “in-flight” is objects in flight which can be flying, floating, drifting, falling, thrown, tossed or anything not being on the ground.

Some examples could be planes, feathers or bubbles, balloons, leaves, balls etc. It could include hang gliders, birds, dogs leaping or a photograph taken during a flight.

Birds, butterflies and dragonflies are one of the toughest and thus most interesting subjects to photograph. They are fast and relatively small, so they are much harder to track with a camera. The action occurs very fast and you only have a fraction of a second to capture those precious moments. To be successful you should know your subject's habits and behaviours, and your gear, very well.



By capturing well-composed and well-lit objects in flight photographs we can express the spirit of flight.

Always consider composition when photographing objects in flight. Leave space in front of the subject to give room for the motion and the photograph will look better. Should your subjects have eyes, keep them in focus.

Good lighting plays an important part for successful flight photography. As in any other kind of outdoor photography the golden light of morning and evening is best. However, if you are shooting towards the sky these times can be extended and still have nice lighting. Sun at your back is the best.

Just get out there! The best bit of advice is to simply get out there and try. Rarely will one pick up one's camera and master flight photography on the first go.

November 2014 Competition Judges

We extend our sincere thanks to the judges for the November Intermediate and Advanced competitions, Wes Bergen, Dave Hutchison and Francois Cleroux. We would also like to thank our in-house Novice Judges this month Pam Irvine, Suzanne Huot and Paul Ross. All images and judges' comments are available here: victoriacameraclub.org/vcccompetitions.

Wes Bergen: Wes has been photographing for over 45 years. Working in B&W and colour prints as well as slides, he has used medium and large format cameras as well as 35 mm and digital cameras. Wes is a member of the Lions Gate Camera Club and has held executive positions including two terms as President. He has also been a member of CAPA for almost as long.

Wes has taught Photoshop courses and has written for Lions Gate Camera Club's *Photolog* and CAPA's *Canadian Camera* magazines. He is a judge and presents workshops at local photography clubs and seminars.

Dave Hutchison: Dave took up serious photography about 10 years ago. Capturing animals in motion was the beginning of a profound journey venturing into remote locations to record wildlife and landscapes. Dave has been a resident of Sidney, BC, since 1993. The coast and its vast stretches of wilderness have provided a unique setting for his nature and wildlife photography. He strongly believes in the promotion of nature conservation and the idea of bringing nature home, allowing access that doesn't normally happen.

Dave is accredited in “Nature” with the Professional Photographers of Canada. Visit Dave's website at www.davehutchison.ca.

Francois Cleroux: While in high school in Vancouver he worked for several local newspapers, the Province and Vancouver Sun, several magazines, the BC Lions and the Vancouver Whitecaps sports teams. He continued his photography in the world of fashion. He retired from commercial photography after working for Minolta Canada at the 1986 World EXPO. He continued for three more years doing volunteer work with several wildlife organizations. He has spent the last five years working on artistic projects including *Muse* as Art, *Fine Lines*, *Reflections of a Woman*, *Seascapes* and *Coastal Spirits*. He is a CAPA Certified Judge, tutors photography and blogs on his website at www.EyesOnPhoto.com.

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Advanced Digital Nature - 1st "Common Tern Entering Dive" by Mike Wooding

Judge's comments: A unique and striking image! Excellent sharpness and exposure. The background is perfect.



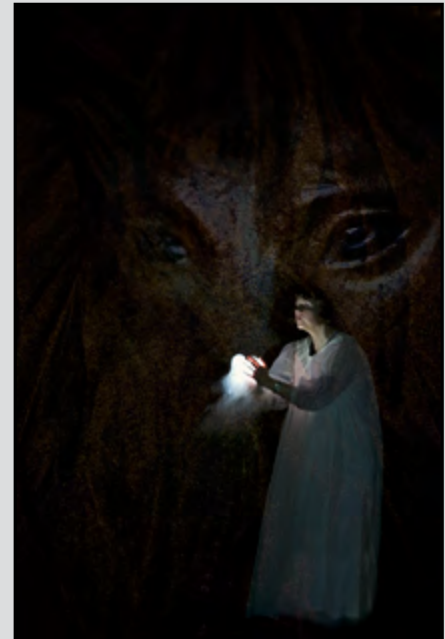
Advanced Digital Theme - 2nd "The Shining" by Rob Raymond

Judge's comments: The path and leading lines make for a compelling image especially when they lead to the sun. Often the sun can be overpowering and even blinding within an image but it works very well here subdued by the filtering of the grasses. Compositionally the balance created by the sun's reflections on the fence boards works very well. The overall balance of the whole image is also well done and cropped. Great exposure and sharp. Nicely done!



Advanced Digital Open - 1st "The Breakwater" by Gail Takahashi

Judge's comments: Very strong composition, accentuated by the conversion to b&w. Excellent contrast and tonality, especially in the clouds. The small silhouettes of people in the distance help the image



Advanced Digital Creative - 1st "What Trickery is This?" by Lee-Anne Stack

Judge's comments: An excellent very creative image that is well put together. Although not sharp this image does not need to be sharp. Good use of negative space. Could be called "Conjurer" and would make a great book cover. Well done!



Advanced Nature Print - 1st "Pacific Tree Frog"
by Hanna Cowpe

Judge's comments: Great job of getting the frog in focus. Also, the background is very well suited to complement and enhance the main subject.



Advanced Monochrome Print - 1st "Havana Games"
by Clive Townley

Judge's comments: Great perspective and placement of the players. I love the overall composition and mood. Thank you for sharing the "story."



Advanced Open Print - 1st "Queen's Lantern"
by Doug McLean

Judge's comments: I love the use of colour and reflection. Effective use of depth of field. Love the metallic paper used too.



Intermediate Nature Print - 2nd "Ablutions"
by Ian Crawford

Judge's comments: Great job of getting the head and eyes in focus, difficult to do. I also like the placement of the subject for the composition.



Intermediate Digital Open - 2nd "Around and Around we go!" by Normand Marcotte

Judge's comments: A very powerful image, both in lighting and composition. Technically flawless.



Intermediate Digital Theme - 2nd "Toward Sunset" by Judy Bandsmer

Judge's comments: A nice scene filled with great mood and emotion. The 'odd' composition not using the rule of thirds and not having the subject dead center adds to the complexity of this simple image as does the placement of the sun flare. Mood is further enhanced by the choice of the colours being off and the added vignette. All well done. The scene is a great one.



Intermediate Digital Creative - 2nd "Swooping over Muir Creek" by Pam Irvine

Judge's comments: A great choice of shutter speed and aperture combined with a fairly fast pan has rendered a great image. The bird's wings would be completely different if the shutter speed was just a little faster or a little slower. The great curve shape of the wings looks beautiful because of some of the sharpness in them caused by having the birds in focus to start with. Compositionally the panorama works well and the black/green/tan layers split in thirds works great.



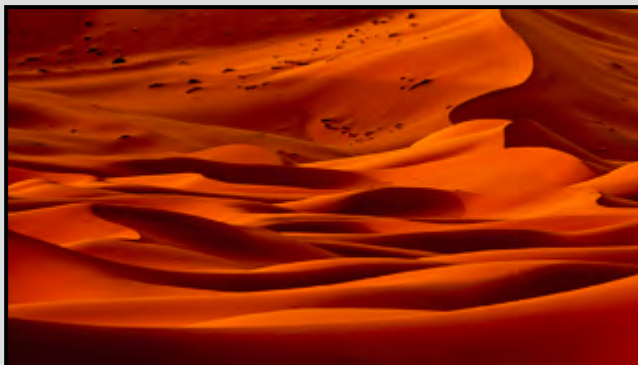
*Intermediate Open Print - 1st "REO Speedwagon"
by Steve Lustig*

Judge's comments: The post-processing used in this image is well suited to the subject and character. Well done.



*Intermediate Monochrome Print - 2nd
"Black Street Band" by Harold Hildred*

Judge's comments: Love the character in this image. Capturing all the members of the band really tells a story.



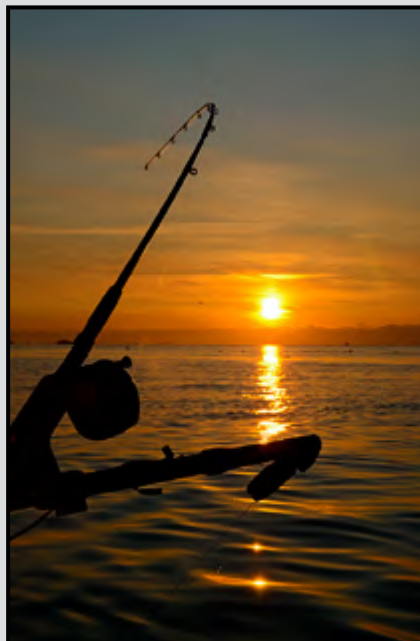
*Intermediate Digital Nature - 2nd
"Sands of the Sahara" by Steve Barber*

Judge's comments: Gorgeous lighting, colour and detail! Very strong composition in the right half of the image.



*Novice Digital Nature - 1st
"Down the Hatch" by Doug Cronk*

Judge's comments: Excellent image. Lighting and focus are great. Catchlight in the eye and a berry in the beak make the bird come alive. Good depth of field.



*Novice Digital Theme - 2nd
"Morning Light" by Marla Zarelli*

Judge's comments: Beautiful rich colours. The graceful curve of the fishing rod is mirrored by the downrigger at the bottom. The catchlight on the fishing line and at the top of the rod are beautiful. Graduated colour from dark blue through the orange at the horizon is great.



Novice Digital Open - 1st "Gaudi in Barcelona" by Carol Christensen

Judge's comments: The colours and textures of the buildings are gorgeous. Focus is tack sharp and exposure is good.



Novice Open Print - 2nd "Parched" by Merlyn Maleschuk

Judge's comments: Simple yet effective still life. Great textures captured in the glasses and the wood.

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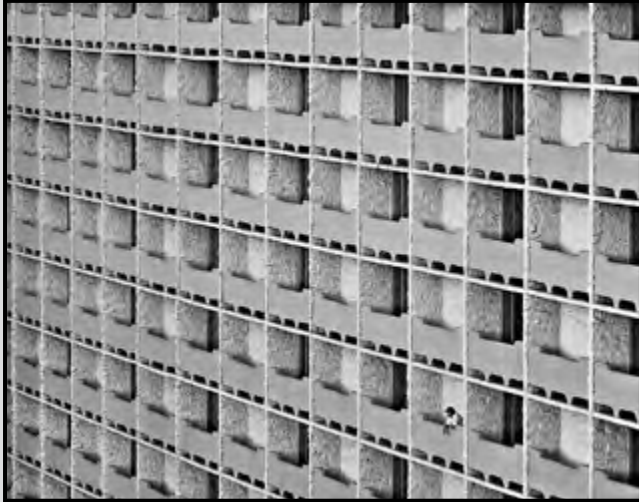
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Image by Joel Grimes

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In 1961 I tried to make colour prints. It took 9 trays of chemicals and 3 hours to develop one print. If I heated the tray to 80 degrees by means of a heating pad, I could cut the time to 45 minutes, but the fumes burnt my throat and most of the time the colours weren't right. Now I move sliders in Lightroom, the print's colours are right, and I have infinitely more control. And so much more control means I can do so many things that developing a digital print often takes me a lot longer than 3 hours.



After high school I gave up photography for 40 years. When I got interested again I started with a darkroom but almost immediately discovered Photoshop 6. I quit the darkroom and bought a film scanner.

Digital photography with its constant changes has fascinated me ever since. I'm self-taught, mostly from books. My self-learning has been devoted to processing and printing the image after capture. I've never studied things like composition.

For many years my main activity was competing in club competitions, and I won a number of year-end competitions in every print category. One year I won all 3 print categories: nature, black and white and open. It was a much smaller club then. I couldn't do that now.

I also competed in a show that used to be put on by the Nanaimo Art Gallery in conjunction with the Nanaimo Camera Club. Every year I'd win an honorary mention and a first or second in the theme category. One year the VCC entered a nature competition put on by the Smithsonian Institute and my photo was one of seven club images to be hung in the Smithsonian. All of that was a great thrill, but eventually I lost my interest in competing.

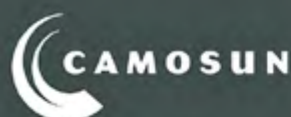
My greatest enjoyment in photography is working on a print I think is good. For me, that means a print that is not just good aesthetically and technically, but one that speaks to some aspect of the human condition. I may be the only one that thinks my print is good, (one such print got the lowest mark the judge could give) but when I do think that, it's a real high.

There is an old test for any work of art: what was the artist trying to do; how well did they do it; was it worth the doing? People will differ, especially on the last question, but that doesn't matter to me if I think my print is good. Okay, it matters a bit.

Last year, for the first time in years, I entered a print in the year end club competition and it won in the open category. It was also shown at the Sooke Fine Arts show where it sold immediately. That's the print at the bottom of this page. To me it's not just an image of two farms. It's also a metaphor for isolation and cooperation, and for power and vulnerability. That's what it says to me based on my life experiences. For someone else it may mean nothing.



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Tripod Upkeep

by John Roberts

There are a few things about tripods that some people do not always think about. One is the need for maintenance in order for your tripod to work flawlessly every time you go to use it. And be honest here; you just read that and said, "I have to do maintenance to my tripod?" The answer is yes, you really should be doing a few little things to your tripod so it will not do something unexpected or fail when you need it the most.

The first thing to remember are the screws. During the winter, or in the summer, you should either be tightening or loosening the screws a little bit, especially the ones where you adjust the leg height. In the winter, the metal (or carbon fibre) will shrink a little due to the cold, and if you do not tighten those screws a little bit, the leg might not tighten fully when you clamp it closed. This may cause a bit of slippage of the leg. This in turn will either cause the image not to be 100% stable or, at worst, one leg may start to collapse causing the whole tripod, if left unattended, to go over and come crashing to the ground with your camera on top.

Here in Victoria, this is not a huge concern, as the weather does not get down to -20°C or below where this does matter. But I know there have been some members who have visited the Antarctic, and also been on Polar Bear trips to Churchill, Manitoba, where it does get cold enough for this to be a concern.

Likewise in the summer, when the legs will expand a bit due to the heat, you have to back off that screw just a little to allow for the heat expansion. If the screws were left tightened from the winter when you last used it, and now the temperature has gone from -20°C to $+30^{\circ}\text{C}$, that clamp on the leg will not budge, and allow you to open the leg to use the tripod.

For those of you with turn locks on the legs, this maintenance changes a bit, but not by a lot. If I have not used the tripod in a while, I will just set it up and put it away to tighten or loosen the locks as needed.

These have been two extreme accounts of what may happen to your tripod if this semi-regular maintenance is not done. Your needs may differ, but I like to just give my tripods a quick go over at the beginning of each season. I will clean out the grit with a toothbrush, or tighten/loosen the screws as needed. So there you have it, just a few tips to help you maintain your tripods.

Lens Maintenance

Lenses require very little maintenance other than keeping the front and rear elements, and any filters, clean of dust or smears, and keeping water and dust out of the lens barrel.

Keeping the glass clean is simple; use a blower brush to remove any loose dust. Then use lens cleaning fluid with lens cleaning tissues for any oily smears or stuck-on dust.

Keeping dust and water out of the lens barrel itself needs a little more thought and preparation. I strongly advise using a waterproof lens and camera cover if you are regularly using your equipment where water is flying around, such as spray from a waterfall, the sea or simply rain. In desert-like conditions blowing dust is something else that you want to keep out. It has a habit of creeping in everywhere through any crack or cranny. The temporary, cheap, solution is to use a small vegetable bag, from a grocery store, with two rubber bands.

If you can't avoid changing lenses in wet or dusty conditions, then to keep rain or dust out of the camera while you're changing a lens, keep the lens mount facing down and on the side of your body away from the wind.



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by Cindy Stephenson

This article provides a short orientation to the Develop Module and additional detail on two key features of this module: the Basic Panel and the Adjustment Brush.

The Develop Module looks a lot like the Library Module. There is a preview window, and panels around all four sides. On the left, below the Navigator Panel, there is a set of presets, such as “aged photo,” “heavy grain,” or “vignette 1.” If you hover over one, you can preview its effect in the Navigator Panel. If you click on it you can apply the change and view it in the centre preview window. If you then decide you don’t like it, click control/command + Z to undo it.

Snapshots (below Presets) allow you to save your photo at various stages of your work. If you like a photo at a certain stage, and you want to make sure you can get back to this point, save a snapshot of it.

There is a History Panel showing you all the steps that you have taken since importing your image into Lightroom. Unlike Photoshop, your history can accumulate as many steps as you do, and it stays around forever. In Photoshop, once you close your file your history is gone and it also maxes out at about 20 steps (settable).

You can click on any step shown in history, going as far back as you want to go, to see your image at that point. If, while going back, you make any additional changes, those older steps will disappear.

All of your Lightroom develop work is non-destructive. Lightroom never touches your original file. All you are doing when you are working is creating a set of instructions that Lightroom saves in its Catalog. Your work is saved automatically and you never have to worry about ruining your photo, so feel free to experiment.

On the right hand side are all your develop settings. At the top is the histogram, a chart of the tones and colours in your photo. Below that is the tool drawer: crop tool, spot removal tool, red eye, graduated filter and adjustment brush. Below that is the Basic Panel. There are several other panels below the Basic Panel which I encourage you to explore once you are comfortable with the Basic Panel.

The Basic Panel for Global Changes

The changes you make in the Basic Panel are called global changes, in that they affect your entire image. This is where, for example, you make adjustments to

the white balance, lighten or darken the exposure, and change colour saturation. This is probably the most important panel in the Develop Module, in that it can take you 95% of the way, or possibly 100% of the way, to a photo you’re going to be happy with.

In the Library Module, choose the photo you want to work on by highlighting the folder they’re in, select an image by clicking on it, and then type “D” for develop. I prefer to work from top to bottom in the Basic Panel.

White Balance: you can use the white balance presets via the drop down menu to adjust white balance. You may notice that you have a lot more options to choose from if your image is a raw file, as compared to jpeg. (This alone was enough to convince me to shoot in raw!)

Exposure adjusts the overall luminance of the image: click on the slider and see how your histogram changes. Contrast will make your image “punchier.” It works by brightening the brights and darkening the darks. Lightroom has highlight recovery built in, but the highlights slider can help you to further manage that. If you blow out one or two channels in the exposure, you may be able to get them back using this slider. Whites and blacks, these sliders control how bright the absolute lightest tones are and how dark the absolute darkest tones are.

When deciding how much to adjust, you can always go up to +100, see what it looks like, and then back off until you are happy. You can reset any of the sliders to the default by double clicking on the name of the slider.

Clarity adds local contrast and makes things look more three dimensional and sharper. Vibrance and saturation control the intensity of colours. Increasing saturation affects all colours equally. Vibrance is better at protecting skin tones. It increases the saturation of mid-range colours while protecting highly saturated areas and skin tones. If you are working with portraits, or with a photo that has some areas of medium saturation and others nicely saturated, use vibrance rather than saturation.

Once you’re done, you can look at the before and after version of your photo by clicking the “\” key.

The Adjustment Brush for Local Changes

It’s best to make all of your global changes first, but once you’ve done that, you may want to make changes to specific areas of your image. Say for example, you want to brighten or darken a particular area of your image. That’s where the adjustment brush comes in.

It looks like a paintbrush, and is located in the tool drawer below the histogram, on the far right.

Click on it to activate it, and a panel below will open containing sliders that you can use to create different effects. Double click on the word “Effect” to reset all the sliders. Position the adjustment brush on your image, and you’ll see it has an inner and an outer circle. The inner circle is fully affected by the sliders; the outer circle is a fading or feathering of the effect. You can adjust the size of the inner and outer circles by the “Brush” sliders located below the “Effect” sliders. Size adjusts the size of the inner circle and feathering adjusts the size of the outer circle.

Brush the area of the image you would like to affect, then adjust any of the “Effect” sliders to view the outcome. If you want to lighten up an area for example, slide the exposure slider to the right.

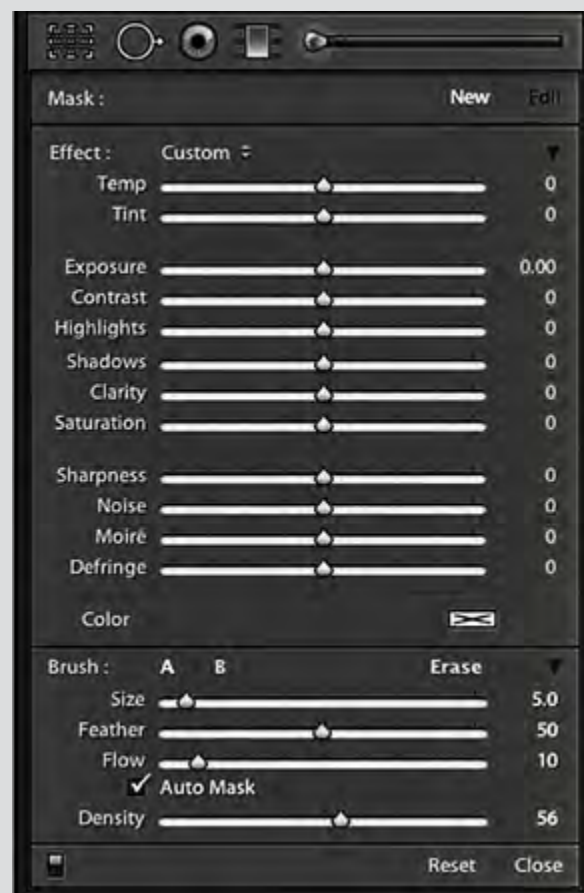
If you click on the “Show Selected Mask Overlay” box (below the centre Preview Panel) you can see what you have changed. If you have affected too large an area, click on erase, adjust the size of the brush and feathering, and erase the part you don’t want. Your mouse has a “-” which means you are using the erase feature. To get back to the regular brush, click on Brush “A.” If you want to, you can paint with the overlay showing.

You can have it set so that when you take your mouse out of the photo, the adjustment pin goes away; that’s through “Show edit pins.” There are various options. I prefer “auto” as the pin disappears when you take your mouse out of the photo, and it makes it easier to evaluate your changes.

Say you want to make a second adjustment to a different part of the photo. Click on “New” and reset your sliders by clicking on “Effect.” If you want to add light to the shadows in a particular part of the photo, adjust the shadow slider to the right a bit, then click on the brush and paint the area. You can then fine-tune it by adjusting the shadow slider to get exactly what you want.

If you want to replicate that adjustment in another part of the photo, paint the area, to add a bit of light. Then hit the on and off switch to see the difference (the little square box at the bottom of that panel).

Your photo will now have two adjustment pins. If you click on either, you will see the painted area for that adjustment. When the pin is black it’s active. You can then make further adjustments via the sliders, but only to the area covered by the active pin.



The Tool Drawer (top row) including the adjustment brush on the far right. Below are the sliders available when you activate the adjustment brush. Below that are the control settings for the brush. (Lightroom 4.)

If you decide you don’t want to make those areas dark after all, click on the pin to make the adjustment active, and hit the delete key on your keyboard.

I’ve just scratched the surface when it comes to the adjustment brush, and there are many more practical applications, such as softening skin, blurring backgrounds, whitening teeth etc. The club offers workshops on Lightroom: the *Introduction to Lightroom* workshop focuses on Importing Images and the Library Module; the *Advanced Lightroom* workshop focuses on the Develop Module. Each workshop runs over several evenings. There are also relatively inexpensive videos you can buy so you learn at your own pace.

I find that doing a little bit each day is a great way to learn. Remember that all of the work you do in Lightroom is non-destructive so feel free to experiment. If you have questions, feel free to email me at cindystephenson@telus.net.

Dragon Fly On Antenna

by Pearson Morey

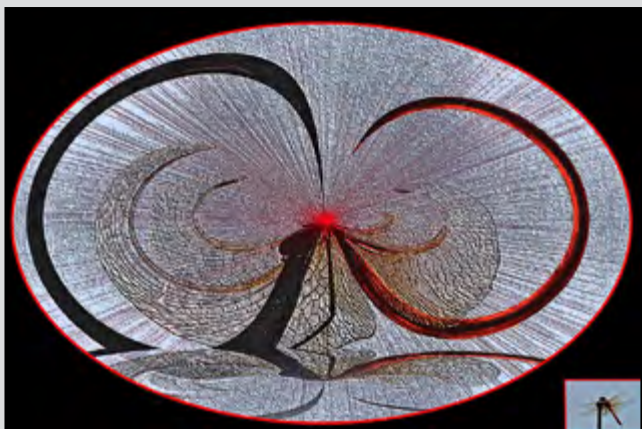
Inspired by the demonstration of the “Polar Transform” technique of creating transformational abstract images by Jim Swift at a club meeting, I tried this technique at home. As I didn’t take notes, I could not reproduce the delicate results he had achieved. I began to experiment, adding different filters, rather than more polar distorts. After some fascinating results, I kept experimenting and trying new ideas. I find simple pictures work best and may crop to eliminate any distracting elements.

I use several photo editing programs to get the results I want: Photoshop Elements 13 (PSE), Paint Shop Pro 7 (PSP), Roxio Photosuite (RPS), Nik and Microsoft Picture It 9 (MSPI9).

Beginning with PSE, I use Filters > Distort > Polar Coordinates to transform the picture a few times while rotating the image. Then I “Save As” before switching to PSP to try its Filters (Effects). Try different effects, and once you get the effect you like, “Save As” before trying different effects in RPS or Nik. Usually, I end up in MSPI9 to add the finishing touches and to insert the miniature of the original image in the corner.

I have also been experimenting with cropping to lessen the amount of information that I am working with, or I might add some detail by cloning in areas that are sparse in detail.

My methods have not been true to the original concept, but I find it exciting to transform pictures to all these new forms and colours. It is an enjoyable exercise that creates anticipation as to what the next click will bring, a dud or an image that is totally out of this world. You can see more of my images at www.pbbase.com/vcc/digital_creations.

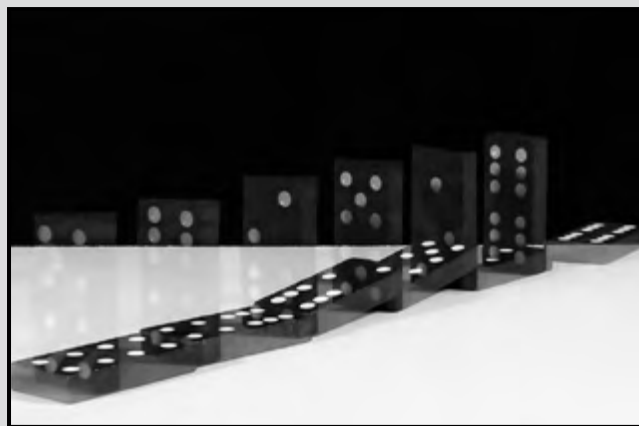


Time Travel

by Simon Henson

The concept was to show both the upright and fallen Domino tiles in a single capture, without the use of motion blur to connect them.

This became a dance about time: the length of time it took a given number of Domino tiles (in this case six tiles) to fall from upright to flat, how long the shutter remained open to capture the whole event, and how much time after the shutter opened, before the tiles were set in motion.



The black and white colours and the rectangular shape of the Dominoes became the design elements for the finished photograph.

After many failed and sometimes hilarious attempts the following method proved successful.

A Nikon D300 with a 105 mm f2.8 lens was mounted on a tripod. Shooting in RAW format, the exposure was set at 2 seconds, f22, ISO 200. Natural light came from a single window.

The aperture was stopped down to just before the point of diffraction for the 105 mm lens. The ISO was set low to provide the optimal shutter speed for capturing all of the “action” without overexposing the image. A split second of open shutter was required before the tiles were triggered to collapse and after they came to rest, thus capturing both ends of the event with reasonable detail.

Post capture editing was minimal. The limited colour palette was converted to B&W in Lightroom, the contrast was adjusted to hide the reflected light that bounced off the background cloths, and final cropping created the finished composition.

Tuesday Shoots

by Wayne Swanson

February 10: In-Flight

Check the float plane flight schedules, watch for birds soaring overhead, or find someone testing the winds with a kite. Whatever you see will involve some aerial action. Think motion for this shoot.

Will you use a fast shutter speed to stop the action? Will you pan to blur the background, but keep your subject sharp? What lens will you use? If you use a longer lens, you will need to use a faster shutter speed. Will you want to keep everything in focus? If you stop down, you increase the depth of field but decrease the amount of light to your sensor. Did you consider what ISO to use?

There are a lot of factors involved in getting a well-exposed photo of something that is moving in flight. Here is your opportunity to experiment with some different settings. Have fun with it.



Birds in Flight by Blair Ross

February 24: SOOC (Straight Out Of Camera)

Remember the good old days when you put up your camera, checked the light meter, adjusted the focus, set the aperture and then snapped the picture. You didn't know how it would turn out, so you made sure everything was perfect first. With digital cameras, we can afford to be a bit sloppy in the setup because we can adjust our exposures on the computer later.

For this shoot, we're going back to the good old days. You won't be allowed to edit your images. You got it. We want it just as it comes out of your camera. You may have to move closer to your subject to crop your image. If you shoot RAW, you should change your camera settings to JPEG or JPEG/RAW. We don't care what your subject is, but it's important to get the right exposure the first time.

Weekend Shoots

by David McLean and Donna Robertson

The Chinese New Year Parade

February 19th is New Year's Day in the Chinese calendar welcoming in the year of the Sheep. The New Year parade will be held on Saturday, February 21st, 2015. The excitement of the parade can be a feast for your senses: the colours are vibrant, the fireworks are loud and adding the smell of the gunpowder from the fireworks, could lead to sensory overload.

While one cannot capture the sounds and smells of the parade, you can surely capture the colours and your interpretation of the atmosphere. You will see the dragon dance, as the colourful dragon winds its way down the parade route; the dancers in their beautifully decorated outfits, other participants in their colourful costumes and the parade viewers along the parade route in their equally colourful attire.

The parade will happen, rain or shine, so you should hope for the best, but be prepared for the worst. Starting with the worst, your options are: 1) wait for next year's parade, or 2) have a plan to keep yourself warm and your camera dry. The best weather would be for a slightly overcast day with little or no wind, then the light would not be too harsh, and the smoke from the fireworks would not dissipate as fast, leaving (hopefully) an evenly exposed photograph with the smoke from the fireworks adding to the atmosphere.

In shooting the parade you can elect to shoot the broader scene, or you can focus on the details. You can focus on the parade itself, or you can focus your attention on the onlookers. Consider focusing on the dragon, the dancers, or on the other parade participants. Narrowing your focus to details of faces, costumes or fireworks is another alternative. Many of the onlookers have as colourful attire as the parade participants.

Another consideration is taking a more abstract approach and setting a longer exposure in order to convey the movement and action of the parade. You can use camera movement (horizontal, vertical, rotation or zoom) to create an abstract photo, or you can use a longer shutter speed to create blur and convey motion. The shutter speed used will depend on the level of light, the speed of the subject and the degree of motion, or blur you wish to capture.

by John Coenraads

Sometimes when I look out of the window in our family room to the scene in the valley below, I observe an interesting optical effect. It occurs when the slats of the vertical blind are turned so that they are partially open and form a series of vertical bars. Looking through the blinds, the eye will sometimes focus two adjacent slats on the same spot on the retina as if they are one. (The slats have very little texture to distinguish them.) When the two sight lines through the slats are projected outwards, they converge at a point over the valley. And this is what I perceive: the slats of the blinds suddenly look like immense pillars hanging over the valley. This illusion never ceases to delight me, and that is what we call it when the eye/brain gets things so spectacularly wrong, an illusion. When your camera gets things wrong, sometimes for similar reasons, we call it a failure of the auto-focus (AF).

It is good to be aware of these situations where AF becomes confused, i.e., experiences an “illusion,” so that problems can be anticipated and corrected. Here are some situations where manual focus or, at the least, AF lock may be needed. (From Digital Camera World)

1. Low contrast (sky, uniform textures)
2. Low light (night, interiors)
3. High reflectance (reflections in a pool)
4. Overlapping objects (bird in a bush)
5. Geometric patterns (bricks, rows of windows)
6. Differing brightness (subject half in shade)
7. Small subjects or fine detail (fungi, field of flowers)

AF cameras use a small electric motor to drive one or more lens elements back and forth until focus is achieved. But how does the camera “know” when an image is in focus? Auto-focus uses one of two ways of determining when the image is “in focus,” contrast detection or phase-difference detection.

Contrast Detection: If your camera is a mirrorless model, or a DSLR in Live View Mode, i.e., the mirror is up, the contrast detection method is used to focus. When an image is not focused, dark and light regions blur and blend reducing the sharpness of edges. By moving the lens through the focusing range and stopping when maximum contrast is observed, correct focus is achieved.

Contrast detection fails when the scene lacks contrast, e.g., the scene consists mostly of sky or fog. In that case, manual focusing methods will have to be used. Contrast detection also does not do well when tracking a moving subject. As the subject moves out of focus, the camera

sees only a loss of contrast with no indication whether the subject is moving away or closer. Only by “trial and error” movement of the lens can focus be re-established. Although contrast detection is more accurate, a faster method uses phase-difference detection.

How does the camera detect when maximum contrast has been achieved? It is remarkably simple: it looks at the histogram. When an image lacks contrast, many pixels will display similar brightness, leading to a narrow hump in the middle of the histogram. As contrast increases, the histogram spreads out representing more pixels with dark and light values. Simple, and ingenious.

Phase-Difference Detection: When the mirror in a DSLR is down, it reflects light up into the view finder while also reflecting a small portion of the light to the AF sensors. Two small portions of the image, coming from opposite sides of the lens, fall on pairs of sensors (figure 1). If that part of the image is in focus, the two small images will coincide, i.e., they are in phase, to use physics speak (a). If not, the two images do not coincide (b) and from their separation, the camera can compute in which direction, and how far, to move the lens to achieve focus.

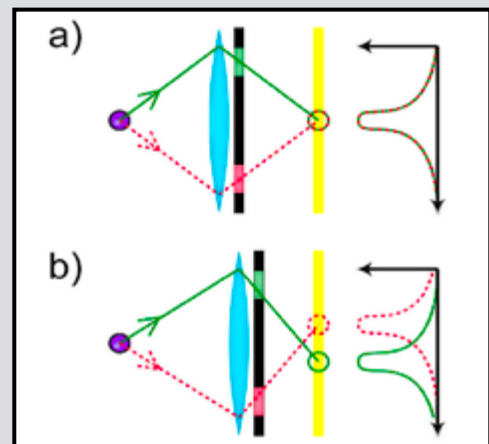


Figure 1: By detecting when portions of the image coincide, the correct focus can be determined. Source: Cmglee; Creative Commons.

Clearly this focusing method is well suited to tracking a moving subject since the camera can compute at all times how far, and in which direction, to move the lens. This ability to track a moving subject, making it ideal for action photography, is called “AI Servo” in Canon-talk while Nikon calls it “Continuous Focus (CF).” Phase-difference detection also requires that the subject exhibit some minimum degree of contrast if manual methods are to be avoided.

Multiple Autofocus Sensors: Modern cameras have multiple AF sensors. For phase-difference detection the sensors are oriented either horizontally, vertically or combined in a “cross pattern.” Horizontal sensors are sensitive to vertical lines, vertical sensors are sensitive to horizontal lines and cross type sensors react to both. Where the subject has areas of predominantly horizontal or vertical lines, this can lead to AF failure if the wrong sensor type is trying to read that part of the subject. The location of these sensors is visible in the viewfinder. A particular point can be selected manually through some combination of dials and buttons, or control can be given to the camera which will pick an AF point using various algorithms, such as “the nearest object is probably the main subject.”

There is one significant problem: the location of the sensors shown in the viewfinder is approximate and the sensor may extend outside of the marked area which can cause problems. In general, there will be a vertical rectangular area centred on the centre of the image which has mainly cross type sensors with horizontal or vertical sensors arranged around it. There are usually fewer or no sensors towards the corners of the image.

When the contrast detection method is used, any portion of the image sensor can act as the AF sensor. The desired area is selected using camera controls to move the AF point. Or the camera can select the best point which may include the ability to recognize and select faces!

If AF failure happens, there are a few potential solutions: focus manually, move the active phase-difference detect focus point so that you are using a sensor type that matches the subject orientation; or, move the camera to align an appropriate focus point with the subject, then re-focus, and use focus lock before the camera is repositioned to give the correct framing. Sometimes you still end up where auto-focus simply will not work. This is not the camera’s fault so it is referred to as “subject failure.”

Reflections: When photographing a subject reflected in a mirror, the camera needs to focus at a point behind the mirror equal to the distance from the mirror to the subject in front. The AF mechanism should have no problem getting this right since the image in a mirror is usually bright and clear. Of course if the mirror is the subject, e.g., a chrome hubcap, then manual focus may again be necessary.

But no camera is going to be successful shooting an image involving still water such as a pond. Consider the dilemma it faces, or should I say quadrilemma

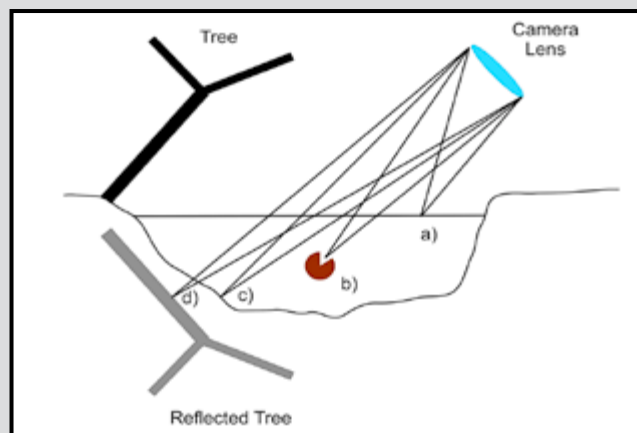


Figure 2: The confusing situation that is presented when photographing still water.

since there are four possibilities when it comes to where it should focus. (Figure 2).

Is the subject the surface of the water itself, or the leaf floating on the water (a)? Or the fish underneath the water's surface (b)? It could be the pond bottom (c) or even the reflection of a tree (d). Depending on the lighting conditions, or the use of a polarizing filter, you are setting your camera up for AF failure. Here Live View comes in handy since you can magnify that portion of the image representing your subject and focus more precisely than by relying on any AF smarts your camera may have.

When Darkness Falls: Auto-focus will fail if there is not enough light to work with. In that case a focus assist light can be used to light nearby objects sufficiently for AF to do its job. If flash is used, short bursts will do the same job. If a neutral density filter is used for long exposures, the AF assist light will not help and you have to do all focusing before screwing on the filter.

AF needs a minimum aperture, typically f5.6 - f4.5 to work. A larger aperture lets in more light, so focusing is normally done with the lens wide open. If a tele-extender is used with a long lens, the effective aperture can easily be reduced to f8 or less and AF may cease to function altogether or “hunt.” Also, at a maximum aperture of f8 the whole scene may be more or less sharp at normal shooting distances and the contrast detection method will have difficulty determining at what point the image is sharpest. The phase-difference method will also have trouble in this case but for a different reason. The phase-difference method essentially uses triangulation to measure the distance to the subject with the lens aperture forming the base line. When the base line is too small, the ability to accurately measure the distance drops dramatically.

Doing It in the Dark

by Nancy MacNab

When the dark, dull, dreary days of December, January and February arrive, do you put your camera away and settle in for a long winter's nap? Or do you grab your camera and tripod, your remote release, hat and gloves, and head out to photograph?

The usual reaction is, "That's a crazy idea!" However, this is a great time to try your hand and lens at night photography and star trails, light painting and using your flash. When it gets dark early, it's easier to find the time to try these.

To state the obvious, with low or unevenly lit scenes at night, you are going to have to use a slow shutter speed. In turn, this means that holding your camera steady is going to be difficult without a tripod, although a fence or wall in a convenient position can be used in a pinch. Counting on finding a fence or other solid object in the right position and at the required height is going to limit your opportunities, so it is best to use your tripod, unless you are shooting deliberate camera motion.

While you can stroll around downtown, camera in gloved hand, in the hope of finding your image, it is easier if you start off with a specific location in mind. This can be a building that is lit at night (the iconic Parliament Buildings), moving traffic, a completely dark location in the country to shoot the stars, or something else entirely. Finding the location in daylight allows you to check for an appropriate foreground and background, an interesting subject, ensure you will have access at night, and check for any dangers, such as a pile of construction material left on the path, or holes or other obstacles.

If you are going to shoot the stars, then you will need to find a location with minimal light pollution. The above criteria regarding location still apply, in addition to taking along a flashlight or headlamp, preferably with a red light so it doesn't affect your night vision as much.

If you are dealing with moving lights, then you need to decide how you want to show them: as pinpricks or as streaks? Having your stars show up as dots rather than lines requires a faster shutter speed than star trails. Be prepared to experiment and vary all three of the exposure variables: ISO, aperture and shutter speed.

Light painting involves using a small flashlight to add light to specific parts of an image taken at night. Different col-

oured lights can add interest to the scene. The longer the light illuminates a specific part of the image, the brighter and more visible that part will be. Again, experimentation is essential if you want to get the image you want.

Photographs showing deliberate camera motion are easier at night because your shutter speeds are automatically longer. The danger is that they can be so long that the subject is unrecognizable. You will need to take lots to find the one that works.

Moving vehicles provide a moving stream of lights that can make interesting photos. An overpass with a sidewalk provides a convenient perch to shoot from above, or a curve in the road will allow you to shoot vehicles both approaching and driving away. You can also try shooting from within your vehicle, although this is best done when you are a passenger, not the driver! We don't want to cause any accidents!

Now is the time to practice including people in night scenes, so you can get that iconic photo of your partner in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. If you can set your flash to fill flash, or reduce the power of your flash, you will be able to see the person's face rather than a silhouette, and still show that the photo was taken at night.

This year some stores were selling short strings of battery operated Christmas lights for use on small trees or wreaths, in addition to strings of lights for bicycles. Both will make great additions to your bag for night photos. Some shoes now have built-in lights (remember the report of the burglar wearing those as he raced off into the night? It was very easy to follow him!) Sparklers on a birthday cake, a blacksmith at his forge, or using a small flashlight to write a message are some additional ideas.

To learn more about photographing at night, take one of the workshops offered by club members. Night photography involves a lot of trial and error, so it helps to have a more experienced photographer there to assist when you can't figure out why your camera won't work (e.g. remember to remove the lens cap!), or to suggest an appropriate exposure setting.

So don't put your camera away just because it's dark out. Instead, use this time to add some night photos to your collection so you're prepared for the holiday campfires and evening outings. That way you will be prepared and confident that you will get the great night shots that you want.

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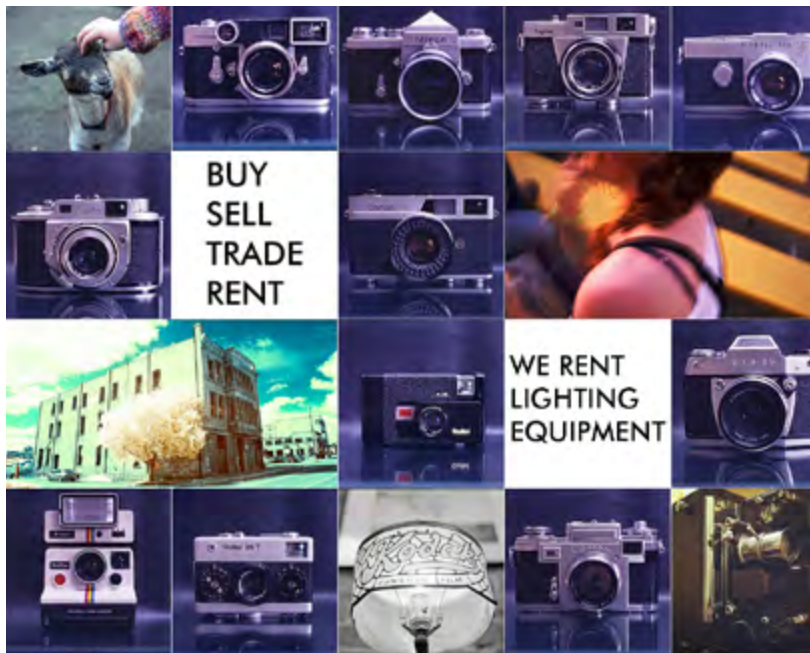
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