

# MICHAEL FREEMAN'S **TOP** DIGITAL **TIPS** PHOTOGRAPHY



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## 19

## Shoot for the highlights

All exposure issues revolve around one condition—high contrast, aka a scene with high dynamic range. This is nothing new; photographers have been dealing with it forever. The most basic strategy is also not new—exposing to hold the highlights. This held true for color transparency film in particular, and especially so for Kodachrome, which was the professional choice for many, but behaved very badly when overexposed, giving unpleasant, washed out highlights. In high-contrast situations where there are few choices to balance the lighting and no opportunity to take multiple exposures, which is to say most location situations, the choice is whether to lose the shadows or the highlights. In almost every case the best strategy is to lose the shadows.

As it happens, there are more techniques for recovering shadow detail digitally in post-processing than there are for recovering highlights. As we saw, the real practical limit to the sensor's dynamic range at the low end is the noise floor. So few photons are striking the photosites that real recorded detail becomes indistinguishable from noise. Nevertheless, there are different solutions within the camera's processing and in software afterwards for smoothing out this noise. Even if the results may sometimes be artificially smooth, they can often be made visually acceptable. Unfortunately, no algorithm can deal with the total loss of visual information in an overexposed highlight. If all three channels are blown, meaning that the photosites are 100% full,

the resulting pixels are simply empty. There is a partial solution when some data survives in one or two of the three channels, as happens with, for example, ACR's Recovery, but it does not go very far.

That's the technical argument for preserving the highlights when shooting, but probably more important is the perceptual one. The eye pays more attention to bright areas in a scene than to shadows, and while a high-contrast view in which the highlights have detail but shadows are deep is acceptable (even though recognized as too dark), the converse is not. Fully opened up shadow areas with washed-out bright areas just look wrong to most people. That isn't to say that you can't make a good photograph like this—this is what high-key photography is about—but it doesn't fit with what we perceive as a reasonable record of a scene.

Having said this, you need to define what the highlights actually are in a scene, which is to say, do they matter? Few people would feel the need to capture detail in a specular highlight, such as a reflection of the sun in a car windscreen, or detail in a visible ceiling lamp. These are actually possible to preserve by employing HDR techniques, but are



1-4 Shots 1 and 2 of these Sudanese schoolchildren, were closely spaced but at different exposures—the lighter one overexposed by one f-stop—and it shows in the white headscarves. In 3 there is no clipping as the exposure is deliberately for the highlights, and clicking Auto in Adobe Camera Raw shows that there is even a little room for increasing the brightness. The overexposed shot has been processed using maximum Recovery in ACR, which attempts to claw back highlight detail. Even so, the two brightest headscarves, right and far left, are a lost cause as there is no detail to recover.



3

normally not expected to be. You can go further with this by accepting flaring sunlight flooding through a door or window in an interior photograph, or by deliberately choosing a high key treatment.

The most useful of all the camera's playback settings is the highlight warning, which takes the standard form of flashing black and white. Admittedly (and intentionally) distracting, it shows which areas are blown and unrecoverable, though usually with a margin if you use techniques such as ACR's Recovery.



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## 26

White balance  
made simple

**White balance is simply** digital jargon for getting the color of the overall lighting to look “normal.” The reason why it is needed, and why it puzzles many people at the beginning, is that our eyes do far too good a job of adapting to different colors of light when we look around us. Generally, we hardly notice the differences between daylight, incandescent light, and fluorescent light, to name just three. Yet the differences are real, and the camera sensor with its colored mosaic filter records them.

Interesting though it may be to study color temperature, it's unnecessary. Most artificial lighting these days isn't even on the color temperature scale, and is only given a Kelvin rating to make comparisons easier. What counts is how far the lighting is from white, and in what color direction. White is considered normal because that's the way our eyes have developed, and the definition of white is midday sunlight. The camera's white balance menu offers various ways of making any light conditions appear white, hence the name. The most common way is to choose from the list of lighting situations, but there are other, more specialized ways that we'll come to shortly.

Now, white light generally looks right, but it's easy to overdo. The white balance that works for you is whatever you like the look of. Having an overall color cast can be good for a picture—just think of a late afternoon scene bathed in golden light, which most people would prefer to a “corrected” version. If you like the effect of an overall color cast, stay with



it. If you need a whiter rendering, choose from the menu. Remember that color casts can always be adjusted later, on the computer, with only a little loss of image quality. And, there is a huge advantage in shooting Raw (see Tip #3), as this keeps the color settings separate, which means you can choose the white balance later with absolutely *no* loss of image quality. If you shoot Raw, it doesn't matter what white balance you choose in the camera at the time. Personally I shoot using the Auto white balance most of the time.



1-2 A typical white balance menu offers these choices, and they can often be refined by hue in a second-level control.

3-5 White balance choices are self-explanatory, but there is still room for personal taste. The color temperature differences between sunlight, cloud, and shade are evident here in three versions of a coastal scene on a sunny, but slightly hazy day.

6-7 Balancing for fluorescent lighting is trickier than for other light sources, as it varies and is fairly unpredictable, involving not just color temperature, but hue. It is worth experimenting with the Auto setting also. Here I shot Raw so I could precisely fine-tune the white balance.



## \* White balance in the camera

White balance is easy to select and adjust in the camera because all the color information comes from a filter in front of the sensor, *not* the sensor itself. The sensor measures only the quantity of light. The Bayer array is a checkerboard of red, green, and blue that adds the color information, and because this is done pixel by pixel, it is a simple matter for the camera's onboard processor to alter the color information digitally. To make things easy for the user, cameras offer a set of common white-balance settings. Typically these are:

- \* Sunlight (sometimes called daylight)
- \* Cloudy (which is very slightly bluer than sunlight, so the camera corrects for this)
- \* Shade (meaning open shade under a blue sky, so considerably bluer than sunlight)
- \* Incandescent (distinctly orange, so the camera corrects for this)
- \* Fluorescent (very variable, but typically greenish)
- \* Auto (the camera does its best to avoid any overall color bias)

As each of these is variable, most cameras allow you to tweak the settings.

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## Impact from color contrast

**Color in digital photography** is much more than simply getting the overall balance “right,” or as expected. Like composition, the choice and handling of colors in an image can be creative, surprising, and elegant—in fact, it can be a major component in the success of a photograph. Like composition (as discussed in Chapter 5), advice on color runs the serious risk of being formulaic and trivial. It’s certainly true that complementary colors, such as orange and blue, create a feeling of harmony when they appear together, but it is also predictable. Moreover, being harmonious and balanced is not the single goal of making images. Discord can be more striking. Intention and taste, as always, are the most important factors.

A distinct contrast between two or three strong, saturated colors, is one certain way of catching attention. It depends on finding the right combination, and on lighting. Strong light with definite shadows enhances our perception of vividness, as can be seen in both these examples, shot under medium-low bright sunlight on particularly clear days. Needless to say, any relationships between colors, such as harmonious or clashing, come across most strongly when the colors are intense like these. What you give up is subtlety, which is the subject of the following page.



**1** A Parisian postbox. A static, accessible subject like this gives the opportunity to frame exactly as you like, so as to fine-tune the proportions and location of the two colors.

**2** Children’s Day in Japan, a reason for parents to dress girls in their best kimonos for a visit to the local shrine. Red against green is a classic primary combination.

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## Subtlety from a restrained palette

**Strong colors have their** place in photography, but so too do muted pastels. It’s a matter of style. The search is still for combinations of two, possibly three colors that contrast, but muted scenes like these achieve their results by avoiding primary colors, using generally subdued lighting, and less saturation than on the previous page. Too much loss of saturation, however, tends to create dull and muddy colors, while pastel shades need to retain some purity.

The advantage of shooting softer colors is that it encourages a slower viewing of the picture. The actual colors are often more interesting because they are less familiar than pure primaries and

secondaries, and there are more opportunities for exploring color relationships. Appreciating the subtleties takes the viewer longer, and provided that the image holds the attention, the final effect can be more rewarding.

**1** Art Nouveau tiles on the façade of an old Paris café form a three-way relationship of delicate colors, made more interesting by the modulation of reflected light.



**2** An apprentice geisha, or maiko, walks down a Kyoto lane. The colors, interestingly, are essentially those of the other image, though in different proportions.



## 50

Compose  
for contrast

**Composition deserves more attention** than it usually gets in writing on photography, as how you organize an image is fundamental to the way it works. The decisions involved are many and complex, from choosing your viewpoint and camera angle to timing the shot so that the different elements come into the frame just so. There are no rules of composition in the sense that if you follow a formula the image will be a success, but there are principles and techniques that can be shown to have certain effects on most viewers. That is as far as anyone can sensibly go, and were you actually to follow any of these as rules, you would achieve thoroughly predictable, therefore boring, results. So, I should give advice with caution, and you should accept it cautiously. What we have in this chapter are pointers, ideas that have been proved to be useful before, and may help with a particular shot. No more than that.

The first principle, and a very broad one, is to consider contrast, in all senses. In one sense, imagery—and so photography—is all about contrast, be it contrast of tone, of subject, of placement, or of size. This principle was formalized at the Bauhaus in the 1920s by Johannes Itten teaching the famous Basic Course. Itten has had a powerful influence on modern design, and on this theory he wrote, “Finding and listing the various possibilities of contrast was always one of the most exciting subjects, because students realized that a completely new world was opening up to them.” The method he taught was

first to experience contrast with the senses, then to consider it, and finally to create an image that embodied it. This works as well for composition in photography today as it did for his art students then.

**1** This image is as much about the contrast between hard and soft as between light and dark, or between color and monochrome. Contrast can exist at a number of levels in any one image.



1

**2** Contrast of color takes prime place here, accentuated by the framing that divides the wall and the door equally.

**3** The graphic sense in this image of a Colonial brick building is of regular man-made geometry against the disorganized tracery of leaves and branches.



2



3

## 51

## Dynamic placement

If you have a single subject that stands out from its setting, it obviously has to go somewhere in the frame. Exactly where it gets placed is important, partly because some positions are more interesting or “fit” better than others, and partly because the position may say something about the subject and what it is doing. For example, if the subject is a person walking, then the image will communicate something different if the figure is at one side walking *into* the frame, or at the other side walking *out*.

A single subject against a plain background is the absolute simplest situation, and the most primitive. Even though it is relatively uncommon in real life (I include an example here), it makes a useful test case. Bearing in mind that nearly all scenes are more complex, and that every additional element or complication adds layers of graphic relationships, this is a useful way of dealing with it, but it is *not* a prescription, because any formula quickly becomes boring.

Think of a single subject as having a graphic relationship with its background. This is even before considering *what* the subject is (a person, perhaps), and what it is doing (moving, for instance). Size matters, as always, but let’s say the subject is neither tiny, nor is it almost filling the frame. The examples here show what I mean. To make it really simple, there is a range of placement from the center to the edge. Central suggests precision, rigidity, symmetry, and little interaction with the background. Maybe even uninteresting, but I hesitate to use that strong



1

a term. At the other end of the range, at the edge or in the corner, the effect tends to be extreme, highly asymmetrical, and certainly begging for a reason for it being so far out. There may well be a reason, but if not, it’s more likely to seem perverse, being different for its own sake. But the subject very much interacts with its background, which dominates the image.

The in-between zone, whether left, right, up, or down, is generally more reasonable and useful, but involves many fine shades of relationship. As you move the subject off-center (shifting the view), it sets up a contrast with the larger, but more amorphous background working *across* the frame. This is when placement becomes dynamic rather than static. If you want a sense of balance, a position that approximates the Golden Section (see Tip #52) will do it. If you want more tension, a less resolved relationship, further out or even further in will help. As I said earlier, there are no prescriptions here, and no formula—just the dynamics to think about.



2

1 Placing the lighthouse quite eccentrically reinforces its relationship with the sea. The contrast of color, size, and between hard and soft is strong, and it helps explain the function of the lighthouse.

2 What I call a “boat-in-the-water” shot, where there is almost complete freedom to place the single object anywhere in the frame.

3 A man in a cathedral. Placing him here in the frame allows the figure to “face into” the shot—a conventional and usually successful approach.



3

## 52

## Dynamic division

**The image frame** has a natural tendency to divide itself into different areas. What creates the division is the existence of different areas of color, tone, or texture that are separated by lines that are reasonably definite. This being photography rather than painting, you work with what each scene offers you, so division is a matter of recognizing the potential divisions and adjusting viewpoint, angle, focal length, and so on, to make them fit into an arrangement that you find satisfying.

How definite or obvious this is depends on how clear the lines or areas are, and the simplest and most common of all is a level horizon. This is the equivalent in division of a single subject in placement. Indeed, dividing the frame and placing subjects in the frame are intimately linked. One sets up a contrast between a point and an area, the other between different areas. Also, the “lines” of division in the frame can be implied rather than distinct, and a clear example of this is on the previous pages. Placing a single subject automatically suggests a division of the frame horizontally and vertically, by implication.

As with placement, a useful approach is to think of the divided areas in dynamic interaction with each other. Setting one against another, larger against smaller, gets things going in an active sense—or dynamic, as I use the term. The most common divisions, though by no means exclusive, are horizontally and vertically. A horizon line, if you choose to include it in the picture, gives a simple horizontal division. A tree in the foreground, say,

would add a vertical division to this. Perceptually, the eye can manage only a few divisions at the same time; if there are several or many, the result is seen as a pattern or texture and the sense of distinct zones becomes lost.

As with dynamic placement, think of the proportions of any division as creating a contrasting relationship between the areas. Bisecting the frame is the equivalent of placing a subject right in the middle. The effect is formal and symmetrical, and suggests that the differences on either side of the dividing line, whether color, tone, content, or whatever, are not being allowed to express themselves. This may, of course, be exactly what you want. A highly asymmetrical division, with the line close to one edge, is evidently extreme, and calls for a reason. The more balanced divisions are between one-third/two-thirds and 40%/60%. The Golden Section, the best-known “harmonious” division in art, which succeeds perceptually by having an internally satisfying ratio (smaller to larger area the same as the larger area to the entire frame), is approximately 1.6:1. But you may want to avoid harmony, in which case a more extreme division is the way to go.

**1** Cropped like this, the central structure in a museum has the potential to make an interesting division. The shot needed figures to complete it, and the black-and-white artwork on the wall tipped the balance to give more space to the right-hand section.

**2** Two small sculptures arranged in a found location—a rusted industrial door. The framing makes use of the rectangular divisions within the door, but by locating the sculptures low and to one side they are given more of a sense of weight.



## 53

## Simplify

**This is by no** means a universal principle, as “simple” can also easily be boring, but it has a special place in photography. This is because the world in front of the camera is generally a messy place, and as composition is mainly about bringing some organization to this visual chaos, cleaning up the image frame works predictably much of the time.

It works because our minds respond to order and getting rid of clutter. Gestalt theory, enjoying a new surge of popularity because of its usefulness in modern communications such as interface designs, has a number of well-established “laws” of perception. One of them is the Law of Simplicity, which states that the mind likes visual explanations that are simple. Simple arrangements, simple shapes, simple lines, and so on. It probably goes a long way to explain the appeal of minimalism.

In composing a photograph, simplification relies heavily on choosing a camera viewpoint and focal length that crops out the unwanted bits. And, of course, on being able to see a simple arrangement in the mind's eye first.



1

**1** Farmland does not normally bring to mind simplicity, but the stone barns and walls of this part of Yorkshire have a geometric purity. A long lens to crop in and framing to counterpoint the cubic buildings and diagonal wall make the most of this simplicity.

**2** Minimal to the point of hardly looking like a home, this austere and striking entrance is decorated with a single sofa in the form of a pair of elongated red lips. Framing to include the upper doorway and balcony accentuates this, and establishes that this is a real interior.



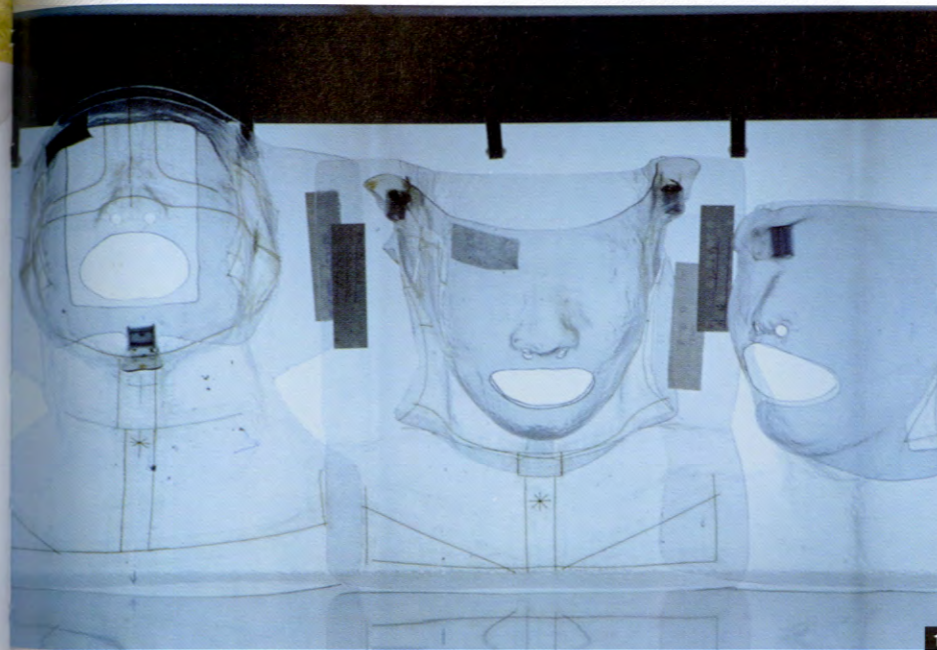
2

## 54

## The essence in detail

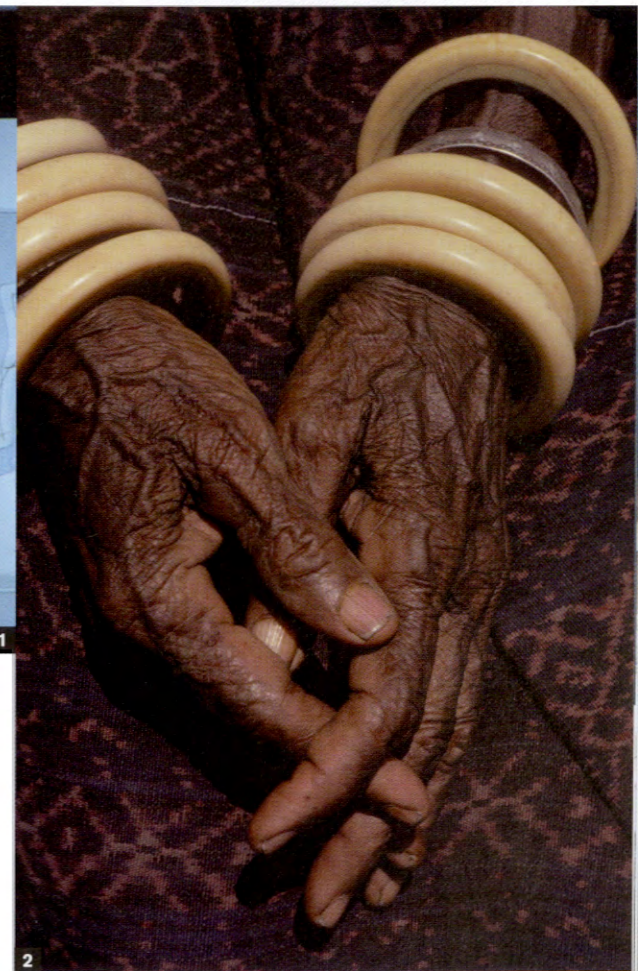
**1** Masks of some kind, clearly, but they obviously call for an explanation. In fact, they are positioning masks for the laser treatment of cancer patients—and for the photographer a way of illustrating the procedures in an oblique fashion.

**2** These are the hands of an old woman in East Flores, Indonesia. My driver and I had stopped on a long drive, and at first I was thinking of making a portrait, so we chatted. I then saw these amazingly textured hands. Set against her tie-dyed dress, with a stack of ivory bracelets for contrast, it was an irresistible shot.



1

**Scale is one of** the things that you can play with as a way of increasing visual variety, and of extending the coverage of a subject. At the small end of the scale, sometimes you can find that less is more, meaning that a detail can encapsulate what is essential in the larger subject, and often present it more forcefully. The thing about details is that they are often overlooked, and as the photographer's job is usually to direct the viewer's attention towards something or a way of seeing something that they had not thought of, details can be very successful in photography. This is the world of close observation, catching parts of subjects that many others would not have thought of or paid attention to.



2



## 55

## Shapes organize

**How strongly shapes appear** in an image depends on how they contrast (mainly tone or color) with their settings. Of course, subjects have a shape, but the shapes that have the most graphic interest in an image are those that occur a little less obviously. Subtly formed shapes that are implied and understated are some of the most useful of all; they help to order an image into a recognizable form and allow the eye the satisfaction of discovering them by making a little visual effort. Although it might seem that there is infinity of shapes, there are only three basic ones: the rectangle, triangle, and circle. All others, from trapezoids to ellipses, are variations on these. Each is intimately connected, both graphically and expressively, with the kinds of line that enclose them. Rectangles are the product of horizontal and vertical lines; triangles are built from diagonals; and circles from curves. While the principal design value of lines is to direct the eye, shapes organize the elements of an image. They can enclose, they can separate subjects into groups, or they can exclude. And organization is at the heart of composition.



**1** The curves of seating partitions, together with the strong color, do an effective job of dividing the frame and enclosing the partial figure of the man.

**2** The key frame of quite a long series of images of the preparations for a parade in Vietnam. At just this moment, the girls had their hats held in unison to shade their faces from the midday sun, while the wind caught the hem of one dress to create an unusually precise combination of a triangle and two circles.



## 56

## Basic triangles

**1** With a lot of people in the shot (and this grouping, in a Brazilian *favela*, just kept growing as more children wanted to be included), a rough triangle like this, created by having some sitting on the floor in the foreground, others sitting on chairs, and others standing, was an easy solution.

**2** I had already taken several shots of this bathing scene in India. For one microsecond it all came together in a structured triangle. Unpredictable, but I saw what was happening and caught the moment quickly.



**The triangle is the** simplest and most common graphic shape. It needs only three points reasonably separated, or three edges that converge on each other. Shapes organize, as we saw on the previous page, and the triangle organizes the most easily. For example, if there are three faces in the frame, they will usually be focal points of attention. They almost naturally tend to read as the points of a triangle. In a still-life composition with several objects, this is one of the most straightforward ways of arranging them,

although it is often better to avoid complete precision. Inverted triangles work just as well.

Accentuating the triangular structure in an image is mainly a matter of framing so as to remove from view other distracting points and lines. This could involve altering the viewpoint (for instance, lowering the camera might hide some ground-level details from sight, while moving or zooming in can tighten the composition), or in the case of a studio shot you could rearrange the objects.

## 57

## Diagonals move

**Diagonals introduce dynamism into** an image. They activate the frame, and also, valuably, suggest movement along them.

In the camera, most diagonals are created by viewpoint and perspective. The horizontals and verticals of buildings, streets, and other manmade things converge when shot from an angle. The stronger the angle and the shorter the focal length, the more convergence and so the more powerful the diagonal movement. In architectural shooting, photographers usually go to lengths to *correct* this entirely natural effect of lens optics, because our eyes tend to compensate for it when we look in real life, but for a more dynamic composition, stay with the diagonals. They can even be exaggerated, by widening the zoom, and by tilting the camera.



1

**1** This Japanese courtyard could have been photographed square on, but a wide-angle lens from one corner gave a more dynamic composition, heightened by the last-minute appearance of a sliver of sunlight that adds another diagonal to the scene.

**2** Angling the camera off the horizontal makes even more use of the graphic effect of diagonals, as in this close portrait of an animation artist at work.

**3** Oblique views of right angles produce zigzags; a chevron effect of multiple diagonals. The angles are joined, so the impression of movement along the diagonal is maintained, but with a sharp kink. It always helps to offset distinct lines like these with other elements—in this case, two figures conveniently at each apex.

**4** With its wide angle of view, a short focal length almost automatically creates converging diagonals when the viewpoint is close and strongly angled.



2



4



## 58

## Curves flow

**Curved lines have much** of the same potential for movement, direction, and a general sense of action as diagonals. They are softer, however, with a sense of flowing. They are also rather more difficult to find in scenes, because they cannot simply be created in the same way as diagonals by using a wide-angle lens and a strongly angled view. Being rarer, they are that much more interesting, and as with all the other basic graphic elements—points, lines, and shapes—they work best in a photograph when they are not obviously manufactured. You don't get points for just photographing a curve that someone else, such as an architect or graphic designer, has already produced. This example shows what I mean—not insistent, in no way very obvious, but it adds structure and interest to an otherwise potentially ordinary shot.

**1-2** I needed a position for a portrait of this Shanghai artist, Liu Jian Hua, in his messy warehouse workshop. The least cluttered place was up on this balcony, which already had one of his works lying on the floor; a distorted sculpture. This series of sculptures features curved distortions, so why not build that into the shot? I positioned him behind and asked him to look over the balcony, which put a curve into his stance. At one point he looked in the other direction, and quite unexpectedly this made the curve more interesting.

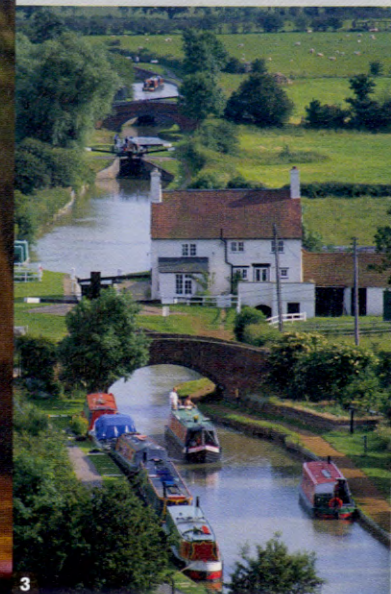


## 59

## Vertical virtues

**Most photographs are taken** in a horizontal format, mainly because that's the way most cameras are designed (you might argue that manufacturers make them that way because most people like to shoot horizontally, but the net result is the same). Shooting in a vertical format means turning the camera on its side, and there's a natural resistance to this, yet logically it gives you much more scope and variety in composition. Professional photographers usually make an effort to shoot vertically as well as horizontally because of the demands of their clients; most printed pages are vertical. If you don't do so already, try to trigger the choice—would this be better vertical or horizontal? It soon becomes so natural to consider this that you hardly notice the decision.

Vertical subjects, or vertically organized groups of things, are the most obvious reason for shooting this way, but there are more interesting reasons. One is to force the viewer's eye—and attention—up or down a scene, and as the canal shot here illustrates, this has a special relevance for telephoto lenses used in landscapes and other scenes that have depth. There are more subtle reasons that include playing with the contrasting relationship between graphic elements. The eye scans more naturally from side to side, so there is a little more perceptual effort in dealing with the top and bottom of a vertical image, as shown here.



**1** The most obvious use of a vertical framing is when it simply fits the subject, as with full or three-quarter length human figures. Here, we see a Burmese dancer at a local festival.

**2** A 2:3 vertical frame exercises the viewer's eye more than a horizontal, and that can make it interesting to work with in making a composition. In this late afternoon view of an adobe wall in New Mexico, placing the top—with its shaped sliver of blue sky—right at the top, makes more of the contrast than it would have done in a horizontal view.

**3** Vertical shooting has a special use with long focal length lenses, particularly with landscapes and cityscapes. With the right kind of scene, a vertical frame makes the most of depth within the scene. This shot of a canal winding through fields makes the case strongly, channeling the viewer's eye up and down the image.

## 60

## Look for rhythm

**Rhythm in an image** is the visual equivalent of the beat in music. It involves pattern and repetition, but more than that, it has a sense of direction and cycle. In images like the two examples here, the eye finds a kind of satisfaction in being carried through the scene in a rhythmical way. As in the other uses of lines and shapes, this doesn't have to be overstated, and is usually a result of the photographer spotting the possibility rather than planning it in advance.



**1** Ranks of Thai soldiers in exuberantly designed ceremonial uniform make the kind of repetitive pattern that always establishes a strong sense of rhythm. To make the most of this, a very long lens (600 mm) was used from an angle. Framing to make sure the rhythmic pattern continues past the left and right frame edges was also important.

**2** Another form of repetition, the design enlivened by the girl wiping down these Thai paper umbrellas drying in a workshop yard. As with the shot of the soldiers, the key to success is filling the frame with the pattern, so the eye thinks that it might be endless.



## 61

## Try motion blur

**In low-light photography** in particular, a lot of effort goes into avoiding motion blur—the streaking and smearing caused by either the camera moving or the subject moving. After all, the default quality for photography in general is sharp images. Nevertheless, motion blur can be a desirable quality, depending on taste and on whether you can get it to work in a dependable way. Of course, if you have a nighttime shot in which lights move against the dark background, that quickly becomes very predictable. But darker things moving against light and complicated subject movement can produce unexpected results, even if you do this a lot. And deliberately blurred movement is a technique best use sparingly.

There are many precedents among the old masters of photography, including Ernst Haas's series in the 1950s on rodeos, bullfighting, and racing. Not everyone likes this kind of image, but if you do, and I do occasionally, it tends to work because of the way in which colors and tones are washed and swirled together. It all has to do with relative movement in the frame, and so the effects vary with the exposure time, whether and how you move the camera, the focal length of the lens, and how the subject moves. In addition, the arrangement of colors and tones in the scene to begin with is of major importance. The best approach is to experiment, which with digital photography and immediate playback is very easy.



**1** I panned from right to left to follow the movement of the two figures walking. With a long focal length lens (400 mm) and a 1/2 sec exposure there is motion smear over almost everything, but some details are almost sharp, the end result being a scene that is just about readable.

**2** Walking forward while shooting with a wide-angle lens (efl 27 mm) and a 1/3 sec shutter speed creates a kind of tunneling effect.

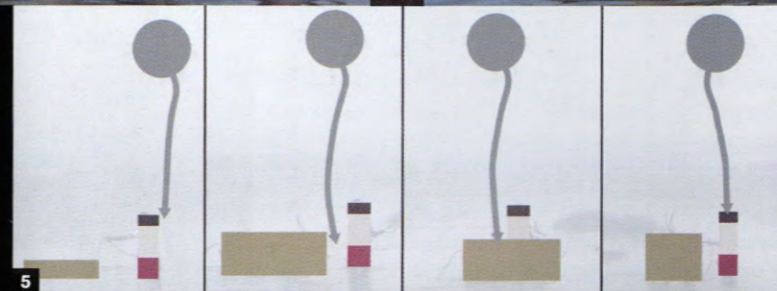
**3** A medium-long focal length (efl 135 mm) and a slight pan at 1/20 sec. Slight motion blur adds a sense of movement, without detracting significantly from the detail of these two women shopping in a Yunnanese market.

## 62

## Alignments

As we've seen, whenever lines and shapes put in a distinct appearance they give some structure to an image. In the same way, when subjects in the frame appear to line up or share some kind of graphic connection, this too gives cohesion.

Actually, there are many pitfalls here, not least the suggestion that a photograph *should* have this kind of alignment. To do this regularly would become a mannerism, but on occasion, when it becomes possible or you see the potential, it may be worth exploring. Like any obvious technique, it can just as easily come across as a trick instead of a nice compositional move. Here are two examples, not dissimilar in that they juxtapose a figure with some feature from its background. Obviously, there are many other possibilities that would occur to different photographers; there is a strong element of personal taste involved. You may not even like the idea at all, as it treads a fine line between neatness and contrivance.



1-5 This is the series of four images as shot and in order. There are always detailed choices once you have the general idea, often to do with small changes in camera position. Small shifts change the

relationship between the elements, and there is an argument in favor of each of these versions, which is why I shot several. The diagrams make this clearer. By a small margin, I think I prefer the fourth.

6 In this shot of a man squatting on a boardwalk at the edge of a lake, there is obviously no connection with the high-rise building in the distance. Yet the volumes and the tonal contrast make a neat connection, quite separate from the actual circumstances.



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## Ad hoc supports

**Use a little imagination** to make use of whatever steadying surface or aid is around. Provided that you can frame a reasonable shot, pressing the camera against any solid surface is almost the equivalent of using a tripod. It could be a railing, wall, streetlamp, vehicle roof, or even the ground. Some form of cushioning is the one accessory that you need to bring to the occasion, such as a soft shoulder bag, well-folded jacket, or even a shoe. Shown here is a plastic bag filled with rice, but you could just as well use polystyrene packing chips. Press the camera down on the cushion.

**1** Traveling light often means leaving your tripod at home, but that doesn't mean you can't support your camera to avoid camera shake. Here I just pressed it into my camera bag, using it like a bean bag.

**2** A quick DIY version of the bean bag. All that is really needed to give fairly solid support to a camera is a sealed bag filled with any aggregate that can be compressed to hold its shape while under pressure. This is a food bag filled with uncooked rice.

