

Jim Zuckerman's

PHOTO INSIGHTS

February 2024

Lessons Learned from Extreme Cold
Window Lighting for Portraits
Anatomy of an Action Shot
Photography quiz
Photo tours
Ask Jim
Student Showcase
Back issues



Table of Contents

- 4. Lessons Learned from Extreme Cold*
- 9. Window lighting for Portraits*
- 13. Anatomy of an Action Shot*
- 17. Photography quiz*
- 19. Jim's eBooks*
- 22. What's wrong with this picture?*
- 24. Short and sweet*
- 26. Ask Jim*
- 27. Photography tours*
- 29. Student Showcase*
- 35. Past issues*
- 42. Subject index*

On the cover: 6-year old girl participating in the Jember Fashion Carnival on East Java, Indonesia. *This page:* Portrait of male lions created in AI. The next AI course Jim will be teaching starts March 2.



I have written about my feelings regarding photography contests in the past, but I thought I would revisit that topic. I'm not a fan. I understand that for some people photo contests give people a reason to go out and shoot, and many of my clients have shared with me that they find them a learning experience. Others, of course, have found contests disappointing when images win that shouldn't have, and often judges are too unpleasant and very narrow in their criticisms and critiques.

I don't like photo contests for basically two reasons. First, as someone who has judged many contests, I am frustrated because often several pictures are good enough to win the grand prize, but I'm forced to choose only one. That says to the other excellent photographers that their images didn't cut the mustard, so to speak. But, in truth, they had great pictures, too. There is something patently wrong about this when a mere whim or a subjective perspective is what ultimately makes the final decision.

If I were judging an art contest, and if all the great painters could have lived at the same time, how could I judge a Rembrandt masterpiece against a great painting by Van Gogh, Monet, or Picasso? What was I supposed to say to Pablo, Vincent, and Claude? Sorry, guys, your work just isn't as good as Rembrandt's. The idea is ridiculous.

Second, photo contests go against what I've always believed about photography -- that everyone can win. Photography is not like a sporting event when only one player or one team can win. I see this in my photography tours all the time. Everyone takes wonderful -- and very different -- pictures. We all win, and it's a great thing.

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Lessons Learned

from the

EXTREME COLD

My snowy owl workshop in Canada's Saskatchewan province last month went according to plan except for one factor: the weather. All of North America was hit by frigid temperatures, and my photo tour group, it seemed, was in the epicenter of the cold. The gauge in our van showed minus 40, but that was the limit of the thermometer. I think it was even colder than that. When the wind picked up, the only word that comes to mind to describe the situa-

tion was *brutal*. It felt like a million below!

The people in my group were exceptional. All of them echoed the sentiment that this was the worst photo conditions they'd ever experienced, but they wouldn't have missed it for anything. They loved the adventure, and it definitely will make great stories to be shared back home with family and friends.

I've photographed in a lot of cold environments



-- China, Japan, Iceland, the U.S., and previous trips to Canada -- but never was it like this. We all were able to take lots of great pictures of the owls despite the cold, but we were all keenly aware of the frigid temperatures every moment.

Here are some of the things I learned from this experience.

1. First and foremost, you have to protect yourself from frostbite. Frostbite is serious. When this occurs, the skin and the underlying tissues freeze. This condition happens usually with fingers and toes, and it can lead to amputation. At -40 degrees (the Fahrenheit and Celsius temperature scales are equal at -40), you can't have exposed skin for more than a few seconds before it becomes too pain

ful. Pain, however, as unpleasant as it is, is a friendly warning sign to take action.

We were always shooting right next to our van, and I kept the engine running with the heater on full blast. Every 2 to 5 minutes we'd climb back in the van to warm up for at least 5 minutes. This was imperative. I learned that in extreme below zero temperatures, you have to have a way to warm yourself immediately.

2. Before the tour, I sent out an eBooklet with all the information needed -- recommended list of camera gear, the hotels' contact information, dealing with the cold, etc. -- and I suggested the clients put 5 to 6 hand warmers in each pocket of their parka to warm fingers when necessary. In this kind of cold, however, I upped that recommendation to 10 warmers.





This makes the pocket hot, not just warm, and it's that instant injection of heat that takes away the pain of the cold and prevents prolonged exposure to the cold which leads to frostbite.

3. Cold depletes batteries extremely fast. I already knew this and I told the participants in the photo tour to place spare batteries in a shirt or pants pocket to keep them warm against their body. What I didn't know, though, was how fast batteries can go from fully charged to dead as a doornail.

When we took a break from the cold and went to our favorite lunch spot, I left my camera in the van. The battery was charged completely, and an hour and a half later when we'd finished lunch and had warmed up, I checked on my

camera and the battery was completely dead. This wouldn't have happened if it had been 20 degrees, but at -40 things become a little more radical. Next time I'll remember to take the camera inside.

4. Everyone in the group wore face masks to protect our skin from the cold. Without this, it was really impossible to be outside for more than 30 seconds. The face mask caused a problem, though, unique to photographers.

When I exhaled, my warm breath condensed on contact with the frigid air, and the mask held it against my facial skin briefly. That helped keep my face warm. However, the warm air escaped through the opening for my eyes and immediately fogged the viewfinder. The auto-

The Birds of Costa Rica

May 13 - 23, 2024



Resplendent quetzal



Keel-billed toucan

focus mechanism still worked, and the front glass element of the lens was clear, but seeing clearly through the viewfinder was impossible. I simply couldn't see what I was trying to shoot. I'd wipe the fog away, but with another breath, again the viewfinder was fogged.

The only solution I could figure out was to hold my breath as I composed and shot. If I was watching an owl through the camera waiting for it to fly, I'd soon have to take a breath. So, I lowered the camera away from my face, took a breath, and then held it to my eyes again while I waited for the flight action.

5. One would expect that digital cameras may very well fail in extreme temperatures. That was not our experience. In our group, not one camera gave anyone a problem when it was -40 degrees. Even the viscosity of the lubricants that make the lens aperture func-



tions didn't seem to be adversely affected by the extreme cold. In addition, the liquid crystal displays in the cameras' menus worked fine. When I filled up our van with gas, I was amazed and amused to see the LED readout of gallons and dollars had become extremely sluggish in the pump. I'd never seen that before. But our camera menus, amazingly, worked perfectly. §



WINDOW LIGHT PORTRAITS

Photographers have traditionally spent a lot of money on lighting equipment. I've spent thousands of dollars myself. Interestingly, lights are often used in various types of photographs to simulate natural light. In other words, photographers want to recreate artificially what's already available naturally.

A case in point is window light. Large soft-boxes are set up in a studio environment to duplicate the kind of light entering a window. The reason many shooters do this is because

soft, directional light typical of illumination through a window is beautiful. This precludes direct sunlight entering through a window. That kind of light is harsh and contrasty. I'm referring to the diffused, flattering illumination that compliments any type of portrait you want to do, from an elderly woman with a face full of wrinkles to a puppy.

The great thing about window light is that it's always available in the daytime, as long as you have a window or doorway, and it's always free. In addition, exposure is never a problem



because you have plenty of time to take a light reading and tweak the exposure if necessary. Because the light is not contrasty, camera meters will consistently produce accurate exposures.

You can never go wrong with window light in portraiture. Without fail, it is consistently complimentary. As with any subject matter, though, backgrounds are just as important as the subject in making an image work. If the background is distracting -- for example, in the shot of my great Pyrenees, Princey, at right -- the window frame, the brick and the distant house are all distracting. To solve that problem, I hung a piece of black velvet behind him to instantly simplify the background. Now all of our attention is directed to the subject without being diverted elsewhere.

Size matters





Large windows produce softer light. When a photographer is shooting in a studio and doesn't have a large window to work with, a large softbox is used specifically to simulate large windows for the ultimate in light diffusion.

By contrast, a smaller window or door narrows the light, thus introducing contrast. The portrait of the young Himba woman in Namibia, above, shows a more contrasty light because the door to her hut was small. In fact, I had to crouch pretty low to enter. The interplay of shadows and highlights is one of the main reasons I like this shot.

Similarly, the Kazakh woman at left was illuminated by a small window. This portrait is quite contrasty. The black background in this shot occurred because the shadowed background was several f/stops darker than the subject, thus it went black due to the effect of relatively limited dynamic range. §

Ethiopia Photo Tour

Jan, 21 - Feb. 3, 2025



anatomy of an ACTION SHOT

My cocker spaniel, Teddy, is a very happy dog and loves to express his *joie de vie* by running. So, my wife and I set up this shot. My wife stood right behind me with a doggy treat and called to Teddy enthusiastically, and immediately he burst through the snow directly at the camera.

The challenge in a shot like this, of course, is focus. If an animal or bird moves from left to right or vice versa, like the shot of Teddy on the next page, the distance between the sub-

ject and the camera changes relatively little. But when the subject comes right at the camera, the distance changes rapidly and milliseconds mean the difference between sharpness versus blur. There are two ways to address this: 1) You can trust the autofocus mechanism in your camera to keep the moving subject in focus, or 2) you can pre-focus on a predetermined plane on Teddy's path and start shooting just before he reaches that point in the hope of getting one or two frames sharp. I took this picture 8 years



ago with a Canon 7D Mark II, and at the time I didn't trust the AF focus to react with the kind of speed needed. Therefore, I prefocused on a specific point and started shooting at 10 frames per second (the fastest I had at the time). My shutter speed was 1/2000th of a second.

Other factors to consider are the focal length of the lens, the frame rate, and the focus point arrangement.

Depth of field is a function of focal length, and with a telephoto lens (I used a 400mm for this shot) it's shallow. That means the critical point of focus has such little depth that only a super fast frame rate will catch that critical point when the subject is sharp.

When I took this picture in 2016, 10 frames per second was fast. I had been used to 6 fps. By today's standards, though, where cameras now of-

fer 20 and 30 fps, the 8 year old cameras seem archaic. In these types of situations, always opt for the fastest frame rate your camera offers.

The focus point arrangement is important because if there are a lot of distracting elements in the background, you want to choose a small cluster of points in the center of the frame so nothing in the background interferes with critical focus on the subject. If a subject like Teddy is on a relatively clean background, such as a snow field shown below, or a snowy owl is against an uncluttered blue sky as in the shot on the next page, then you can use most or all of the focus points to insure at least some of them will lock onto the subject.

Technology has enabled us to capture pictures like never before. I still remember when cameras were fully manual. It was like shooting with one hand tied behind my back. §





PATAGONIA PHOTO TOUR

October 15 - 26, 2024



Photography Quiz

1. It is always a mistake to compose a picture with the subject positioned dead center.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. The complimentary color of magenta is:
 - a. Blue
 - b. Cyan
 - c. Green
 - d. Yellow
3. A hand held incident meter, when used in incident mode, reads the light
 - a. Reflected from the subject or scene
 - b. Falling onto the subject or scene
 - c. Using the RGB color spectrum
 - d. All of the above
 - e. None of the above
4. For maximum sharpness when shooting out of the window in a commercial airliner, the lens axis should be
 - a. Perpendicular to the plane of the window
 - b. Oblique to the plane of the window
5. From f/2 to f/11 is how many f/stops:
 - a. Three f/stops
 - b. Four f/stops
 - c. Five f/stops
 - d. Six f/stops
6. Back in the day, Kodak Tri-X was what kind of film?
 - a. High speed color negative film
 - b. Fine grained color slide film
 - c. Fine grained black and white film
 - d. High speed black and white film
7. To accurately see the rich colors of sunrise or sunset on the LCD monitor, you need to be using:
 - a. Auto white balance
 - b. Daylight white balance
 - c. Cloudy white balance
 - d. None of the above
8. The best month to photograph the center of the Milky Way (i.e. the brightest area) is:
 - a. November
 - b. December
 - c. January
 - d. April
9. The sharpest lens aperture is:
 - a. One or two f/stops down from wide open
 - b. F/22
10. When converting a color digital image to black and white, you always lose:
 - a. Sharpness
 - b. Contrast
 - c. Saturation
 - d. Noise

UPCOMING PHOTO WORKSHOPS



Winter Wildlife Workshop

Photograph beautiful North American mammals plus a snow leopard in natural environments. Mountain lions, red foxes, arctic foxes, bobcats, lynx, wolves and more are in their full winter coats. This is a very special workshop.

February 6 - 11, 2025



Snowy Owl Workshop

Close up encounters with these beautiful birds of the North. Capture bird in flight shots in a snowy environment. Jim guides you in camera settings and technique to take the best pictures possible.

January 9 - 13, 2025



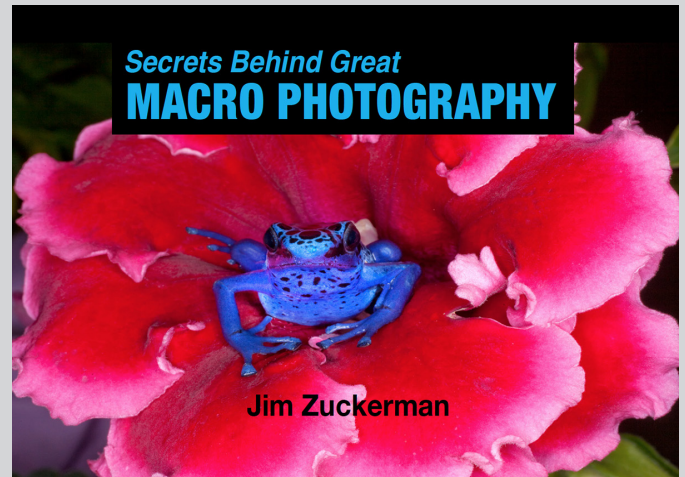
Carnival in Venice

Photograph amazing costumes in a Medieval environment, inside a 16th century palace and in an iconic gondola. The photography as well as the experience is amazing.

February 23 - March 1, 2025

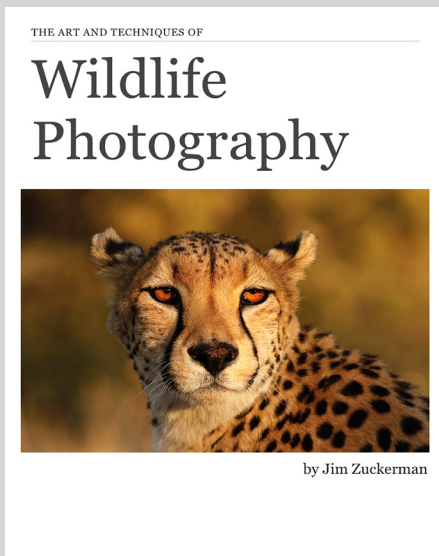
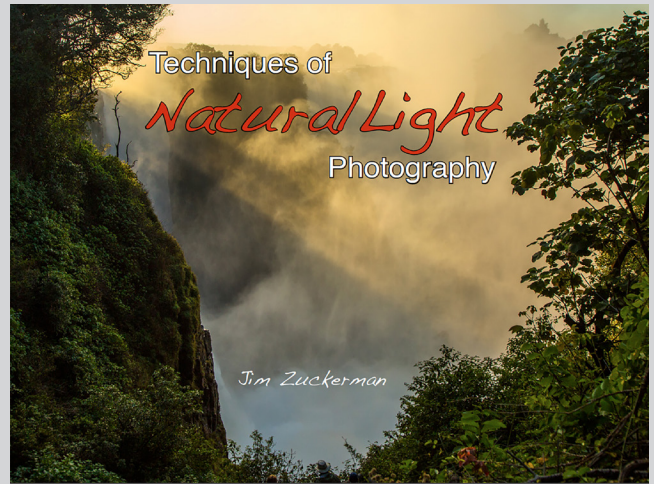
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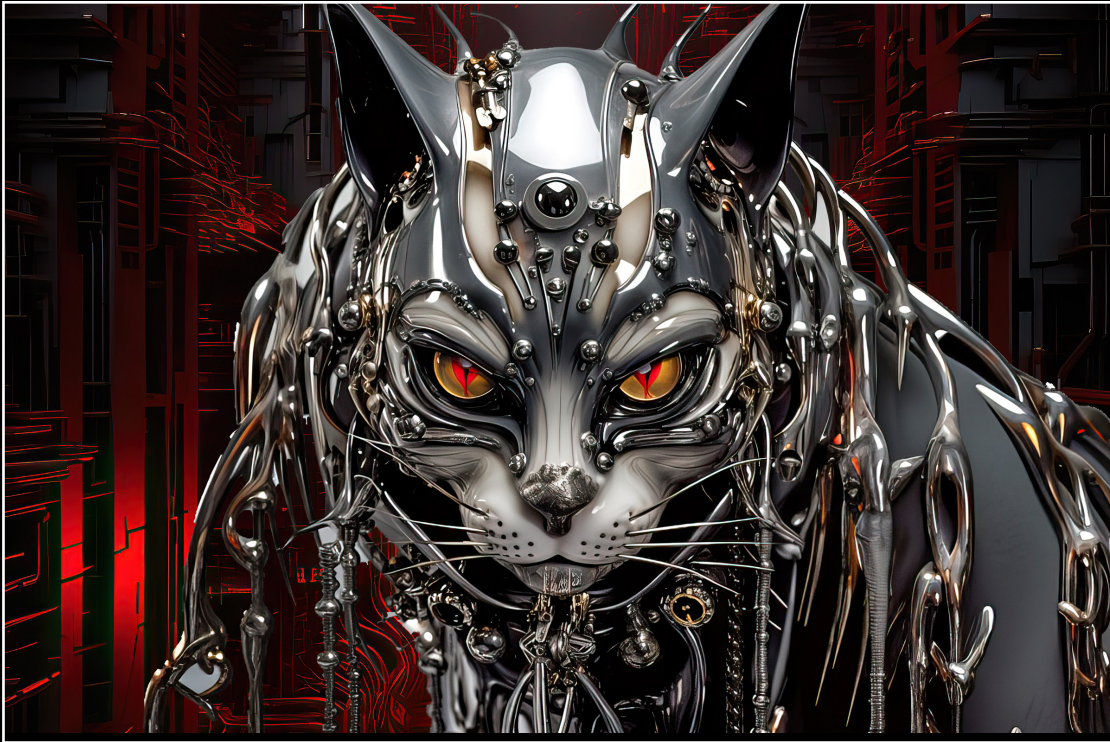
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ONLINE AI COURSE

Blow your mind with how creative you can really be!

Starts March 2, 2024



What's wrong with this picture?



Obviously this is not what you would call an artistic image. The blocks of rock aren't exactly worthy subjects, and the miscellaneous tourists in the background are something I'm sure none of you would ever consider photographing.

In spite of that, the reason I took this picture was because I needed a foreground element to block picture components that ruined another shot. On the next page, you can see one of the magnificent banyon trees in the great Cambodian ruins of Angkor Wat. I used Photoshop to select the ancient blocks of rock from the picture above, and I pasted them as a foreground into the shot of the tree. Why did I have to do that?

The Cambodian government, in their infinite stupidity, decided to build a large wooden platform at the base of the tree. It totally ruined the classic shot of this



spectacular place. Why did the government do this? They built the platform so tourists could stand on it and take selfies of themselves in front of the famous ruins. If you think I'm exaggerating or am simply wrong, you'd be mistaken. I couldn't have made up something so idiotic. Lines of people wait patiently to photograph, not the ruins, but themselves standing in front of the ruins. There are a lot of words I could use to describe this narcissistic behavior, but I will refrain from using them here (in an attempt to be somewhat dignified.

So, I used the ancient blocks to completely block the newly constructed platform with its unattractive wooden railing around it. Now the scene looks like it has for centuries following the Thai invasion in 1431 when this site was abandoned. §

SHORT AND SWEET

1. The Photoshop plug-in 'Flood' adds water to any image you want. It's very versatile in creating unique and visually compelling pictures. Here I photographed a model in the desert of Death Valley in California, and I added the digital water complete with a realistic reflection.



2. Photographing an animal from the side in which the 'film plane' (i.e. the plane of the digital sensor) is parallel with the subject is one good way to gain complete depth of field on the subject so we can see and appreciate all of the wonderful detail. I shot this iguana in Costa Rica with an $f/4$ aperture.



3. Drones are so stable now that you can shoot at twilight or at night and still get sharp pictures. You can adjust the camera settings in the software. Even several frame sequences for HDR are possible! I took this picture in December of my neighbor's house using a DJI Air 2S drone with a 20 mp camera.



4. What makes or breaks pictures of birds in flight is their wing position. It all comes down to striking graphic design. This is a Japanese crane I captured in Japan, and I had hoped to capture this kind of wing extension for a visually compelling shot. I usually use a shutter speed of $1/3200$ for my flight shots. §



Coast of France and the Loire Valley

April 4 - 13, 2024



ASK JIM

Every month, Jim answers a question from his online students, from people who participate in his tours and workshops, or from subscribers to this magazine. If you have a question you'd like Jim to answer, please drop him a note at photos@jimzuckerman.com.

Q: Jim . . .When I use an adapter on my Canon R5 to use older lenses, am I losing quality? In other words, are the images taken with the older lenses plus the adapter less sharp?
Judy Neely, Butte, Montana

A: No, you don't lose any quality or sharpness at all because there is no glass in the adapter. It is essentially a spacer with the appropriate machining so the older lenses can be used. I have the same adapter and use it with full confidence my pictures will be sharp. I took the picture below in Morocco with a 24-105mm lens plus the Canon adapter, and it's as sharp as any of the R mount lenses without the adapter. §



Partial List of Photography Tours 2024 - 2025

HOLLAND & BELGIUM
Apr/May 2024



WHITE HORSES, FRANCE
May 2024



COSTA RICA BIRDS
May 2024



INDONESIA
Jul/Aug 2024



ICELAND DRONE TOUR
Aug/Sept 2024



AUTUMN in COLORADO
Oct 2024



PATAGONIA
Oct 2024



LOUISIANA SWAMPS
Oct 2024



AUTUMN FOLIAGE in JAPAN
Nov 2024



WINTER WILDLIFE
Jan 2025



SNOWY OWLS, CANADA
Jan 2025



GREAT GRAY OWLS, CANADA
Feb 2025



Great Gray Owls, Canada

February 16 - 21, 2025



Student Showcase

Each month, Jim features one student who took beautiful and inspiring images on one or more of his photography tours or workshops. It's really fascinating how photographers see and compose such different images even though we may go to the same places. Everyone takes great photographs on Jim's trips.

Louise Wolbers, Gold Coast, Australia *Winter Wildlife Workshop*



© Louise Wolbers

Student Showcase, continued



Louise Wolbers
Photography



Louise Wolbers
Photography

© Louise Wolbers

Student Showcase, continued



© Louise Wolbers

Student Showcase, continued



© Louise Wolbers

Autumn in JAPAN

November 20 -29, 2024



HOLLAND & BELGIUM

April 24 to May 2, 2024



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Nov. '12



Dec. '12



Jan. '13



Feb. '13



Mar. '13



Apr. '13



May '13



Jun. '13



Jul. '13



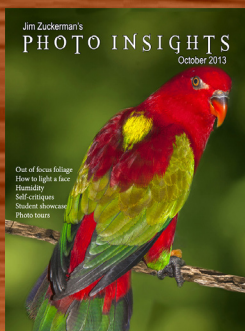
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Sept. '13



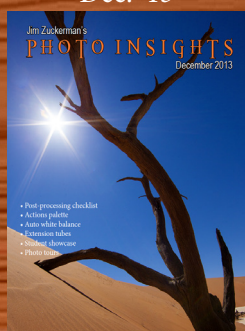
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Nov. '13



Dec. '13



Jan. '14



Feb. '14



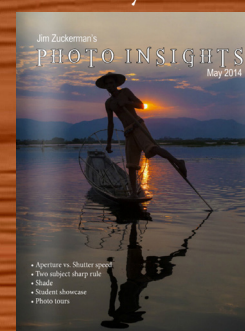
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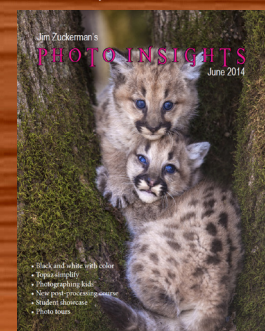
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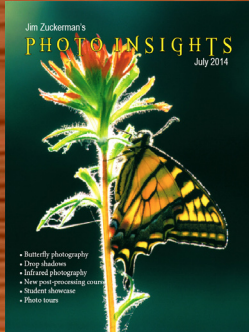


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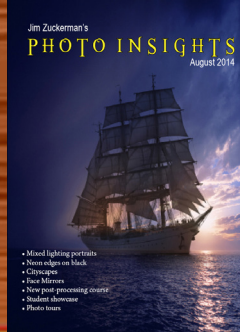


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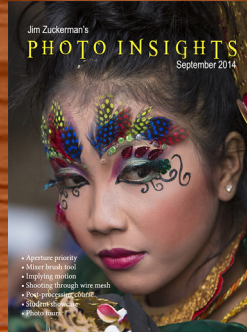
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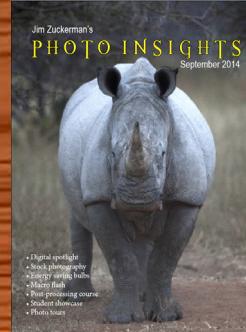
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Dec. '14



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Feb. '15



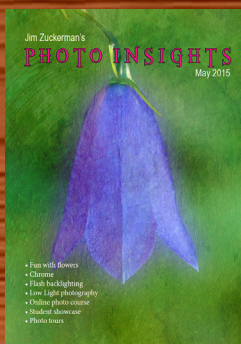
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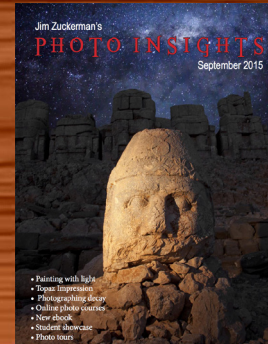
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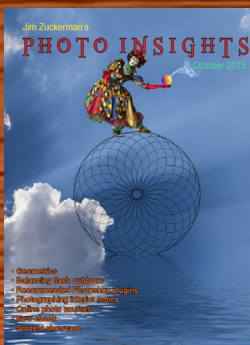
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Oct. '15



Nov. '15



Dec. '15



Jan. '16



Feb. '16



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Mar. '16



Apr. '16



May '16



Jun '16



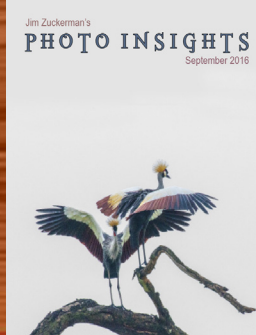
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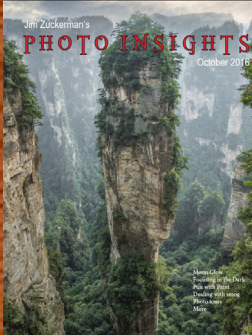
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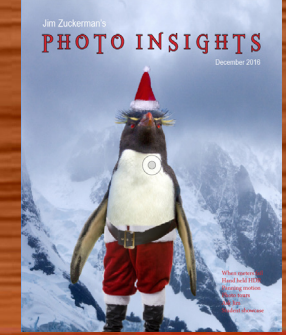
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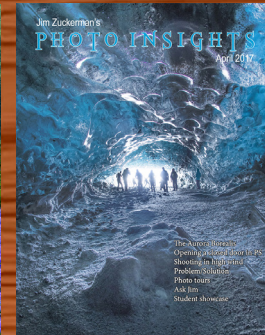
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Apr. '17



May '17



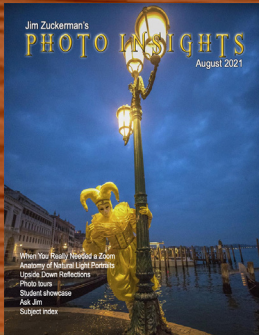
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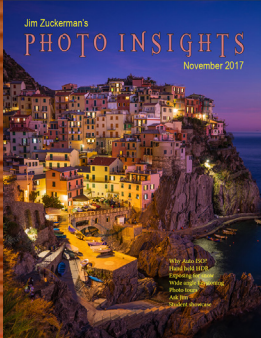


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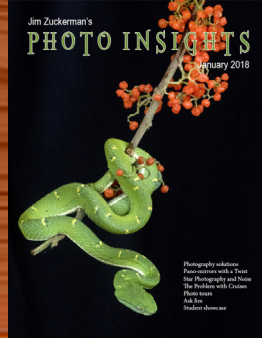
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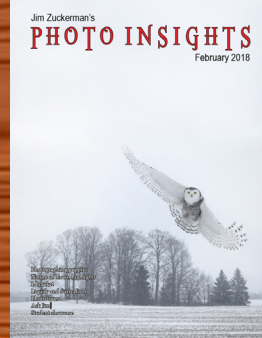
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Feb. '18



Mar. '18



Apr. '18



May '18



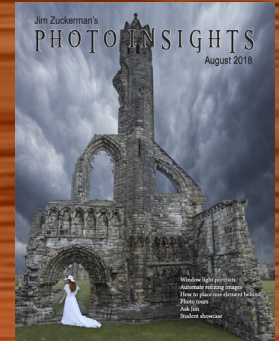
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Jul '18



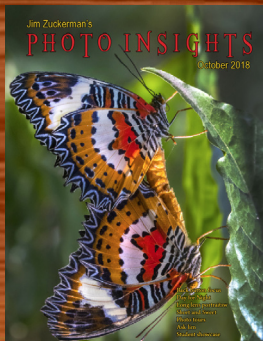
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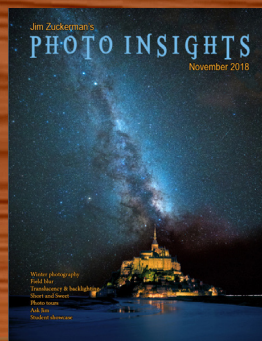
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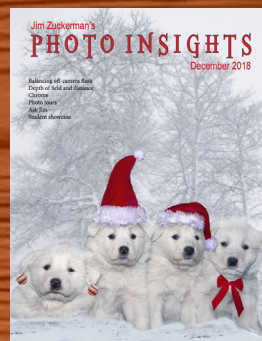
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Nov. '18



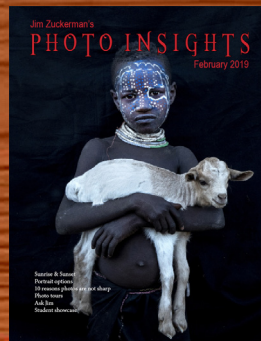
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Jan. '19



Feb. '19



Mar. '19



Apr. '19



May '19



Jun '19



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Jul. '19



Aug. '19



Sept/Oct. '19



Nov. '19



Dec. '19



Jan. '20



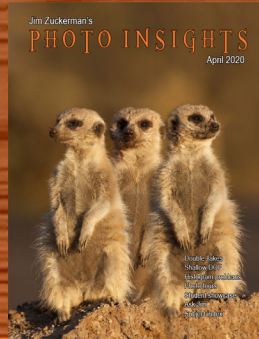
Feb. '20



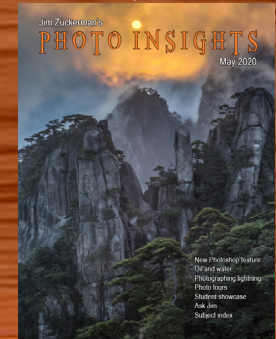
Mar. '20



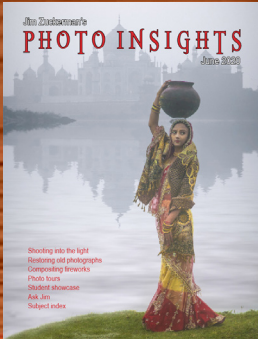
Apr. '20



May '20



Jun. '20



July '20



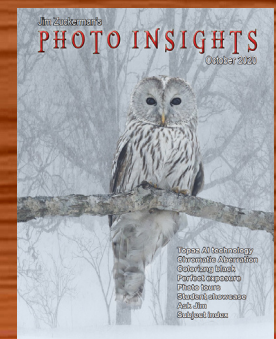
Aug. '20



Sept. '20



Oct. '20



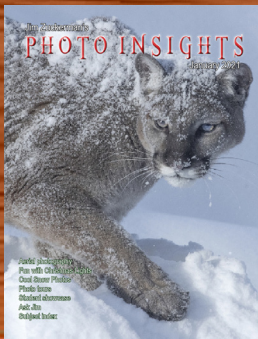
Nov. '20



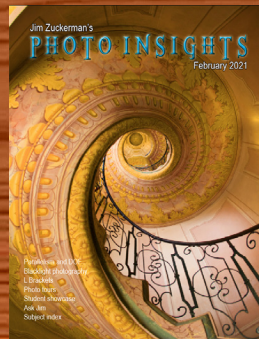
Dec. '20



Jan., '21



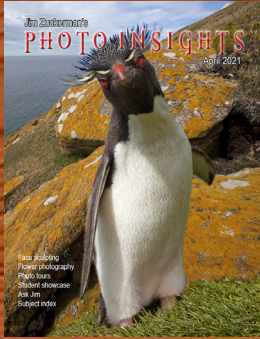
Feb., '21



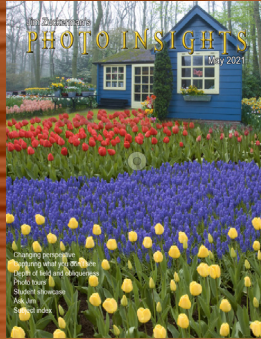
Mar., '21



Apr. '21



May '21



Jun. '21



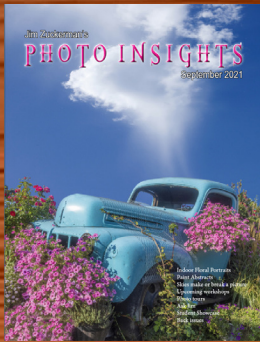
Jul. '21



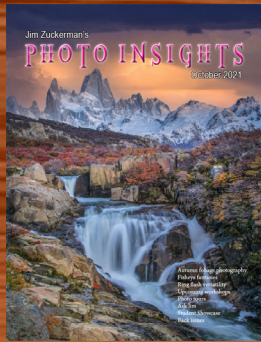
Aug. '21



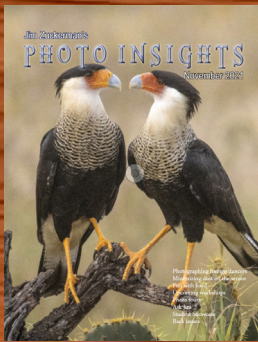
Sept. '21



Oct. '21



Nov. '21



Dec. '21



Jan. '22



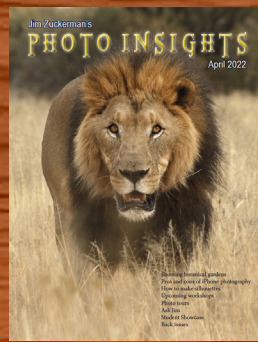
Feb. '22



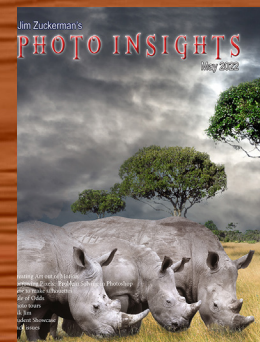
Mar. '22



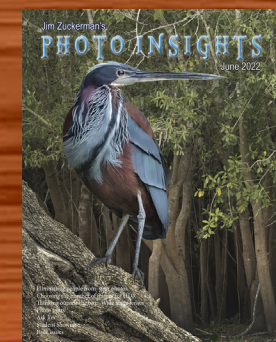
Apr. '22



May '22



Jun. '22



Jul. '22



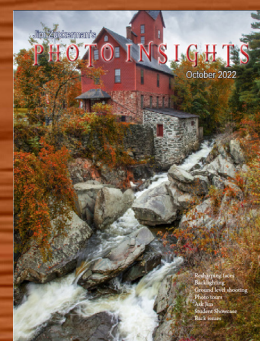
Aug. '22



Sept. '22



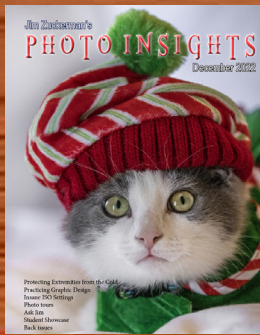
Oct. '22



Nov. '22



Dec. '22



Jan. '23



Feb. '23



Mar. '23



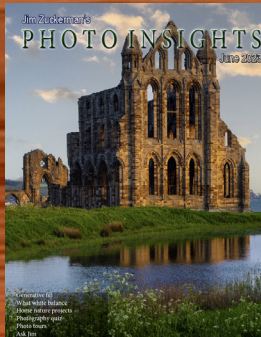
Apr. '23



May '23



Jun. '23



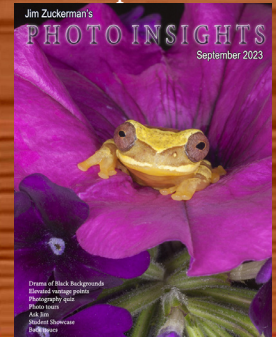
Jul. '23



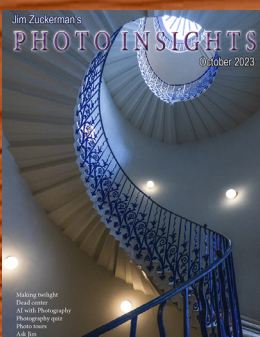
Aug. '23



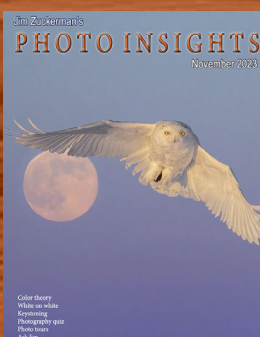
Sept. '23



Oct. '23



Nov. '23



Dec. '23



Jan. '24



Subject index for past Photo Insight issues

1/3 focus law	Jul. '15
3D sphere	Mar. '16
90 degree finder	Mar. '13
Abstracts in soap	Feb. '15
Abstracts, Shooting	Mar. '19
Aerial photography	Jun. '13
Aerial photography	Jan. '21
African safari	May '16
AI plus Photograpjhy	Oct. '23
Airplane windows	Mar. '16
Alien landscapes	Jan. '13
Anatomy of 8 photographs	Jan. '16
Anatomy of an Action Shot	Feb. '24
Angled perspectives	Jan. '19
Aperture vs. shutter speed	May '14
Aperture priority	Sept. '14
Aurora Borealis	Apr. '17
Auto white balance	Dec. '13
Autofocus, when it fails	Apr. '15
Autofocus failure	Aug. '15
Autofocus failure	Jan. '17
Autofocus challenges	Apr. '18
Auto ISO	Nov '17
Auto White Balance	Mar' '21
Autumn Foliage	Sep. '18
Autumn Color	Sep. '20
Autumn foliage photography	Oct. '21
Back button focus	Oct. '18
Backgrounds, wild	Nov. '12
Backgrounds, busy	Apr. '13
Backlighting	Apr. '16
Backlighting	Oct. '22
Birds in flight	Aug. '13
Birds in flight	Jan. '14
Birefringence	May '18
Birds in flight	Mar. '16
Birds in flight, camera settings	Jan. '23
Bird Photography	Jun '19
Black backgrounds	Aug. '23
Blacklight photography	Feb. '21
Black velvet	Mar. '14
Black and white conversions	Mar. '17
Black and white solarization	Sep. '17
Black and white with color	Jan. '20
Black and white plus color	Mar. '23
Blown highlights	Feb. '18
Blue monochromes	Jan. '22
Black Plexy	Aug. '22
Blur, field	Nov. '18
Blur technique	Oct. '17
Bokeh	Jun. '15
Botanical gardens, shooting	Apr. '22
Butterfly photography	Jul. '14
Camera buying guidelines	Dec. 21
Camera settings for landscapes	Feb. '23
Camera setting priorities	Jun. '17
Canon R5	Mar. '21
Capturing lightning	Jun. '13
Capturing what you don't see	May '21
Catchlights	Jul. '16
Changing perspective	May '21
Cheap flash stand	Apr. '13
Children photography	Jun. '14
Choosing a telephoto lens	Dec. '20

Chromatic aberration	May '13
Chrome	Dec. '18
Cityscapes	Aug. '14
Cityscapes	May '16
Clone tool, fixing an issue	Sep. '17
Clone tool technique	Jul. '20
Color theory	Nov. '23
Composites and Light	Dec. '17
Compositing images	Apr. '19
Compositing, 7 steps	Jan. 22
Composition, different approach	Jan. '15
Content-aware, New	Aug. '20
Content aware move tool	Jan. '23
Contrast vs. exposure	Jul. '15
Converting to black and white	Mar. '22
Correcting keystoneing	Jun. '21
Creating a star field	Jan. '14
Creating Art out of Motion	May '22
Creating a Sketch	Dec. '17
Creative blurs	Jan. '14
Custom functions	Jul. '23t
Dark backgrounds	Nov. '19
Dawn photography	Jan. '17
Dawn photography	Feb. '17
Dead center	Jan. '13
Dead center	Oct. '23
Dealing with smog	Oct. '16
Decay photography	Sep. '15
Define Pattern	Sep. '18
Depth of field	Aug. '16
Depth of field confusion	Jan. '20
Depth of field and distance	Dec. '18
Depth of field and obliqueness	May '21
Depth of field, shallow	Apr. '20
Depth of field vs. sharpness	Nov. '20
Double takes	Apr. '20
Drone photography	Mar. '23
Drop shadows	Apr. '19
Dust, Minimizing	Aug. '19
eBook, how to make	Jan. '13
Elevated vantage points	Aug. '23
Eliminating people from photos	Jun. '22
Embedded in Ice	Oct. 17
Energy saving bulbs	Sep. '14
Equidistance and telephoto lenses	Apri. '23
Exploring the power visuals of AI	Mar. '23
Exposing for the sun	Sep. '16
Exposure, the sun	Jul. '13
Exposure technique	Sep. '13
Exposure, snow	Jan. '14
Exposure triangle	Nov. '14
Exposure, to the right	Apr. '15
Exposure compensation	Sep. '16
Exposure compensation	Mar. '21
Extension tubes	Dec. '13
Extension tubes	Jul. '23
Face sculpting	Apr. '21
Face sculpting	Feb. '22
Festival photography	Sep. '20
Fill flash	Sep. '13
Filter forge	Feb. '13
Fireworks	Jul. '13
Fireworks, Compositing	Jun '20

Subject index for past Photo Insight issues

Fisheye lenses	May '13
Fisheye lenses	Feb. '15
Fisheye fantasies	Oct. 21
Flash backlighting	May '15
Flash, balancing exposure	Oct. '15
Flash, balancing off-camera	Dec. '18
Flat art	Sep. '16
Flexify 2	Mar. '20
Flood fixes problems	Nov. '19
Floral Portraits, Indoors	Aug. '21
Flowers	May '15
Flower photography	Apr '21
Flowers in harsh light	Jul. '16
Focus on the eyes	Dec. '20
Focus points	Mar. '15
Focus points	Sep. '20
Focus stacking	Mar. '17
Focus stacking	Aug. '19
Focusing in the dark	Oct. '16
Foreign Dancers, Photographing	Nov' 17
Foreign models	Jun. '13
Fractals, generating	Sep. '13
Fractals	Jul. '19
Framing	May '17
Framing	Jan. '24
Freezing ultra action	May '17
From Terrible to Beautiful	Aug. '19
Fun with paint	Oct. '16
Fundamental ingredients	Apr. '13
Fundamentals That Make Great Photos	Jan. '19
Fun With Christmas Lights	Jan. '21
Fun with Food	
Graphic Design	Jul. '20
Garish imagery	Dec. '15
Generative fill	Jun. '23
Getting money for used gear	Jan. '22
Getting the blues out	Dec. '23
Great subjects	Apr. '15
Great ceilings & HDR Panos	Jul. '19
Green screen	Mar. '13
Ground level shooting	Oct. '22
Grunge technique	Feb. '13
Heavy Lens Debate, The	Feb. '23
HDR, one photo	Apr. '13
HDR at twilight	May '13
HDR, realistic	Jun. '15
HDR, hand held	Dec. '16
HDR, hand held	Nov '17
HDR, hand held	Jul. '18
HDR panoramas	Jun. '16
HDR, choosing the number of frames	Jun. '22
High wind	Apr. '17
Highlights	Apr. '14
Highlights, overexposed	Feb. '15
Histograms, Why I Don't Use	Jun '19
Histogram problems	Apr. '20
Home nature projects	Jun. '23
Hotels with a view	Mar. '20
Humidity	Oct. '13
Hummingbird photography	Apr. '13
Hyperfocal distance	Jul. '13
Image resizing	Aug. '18
Implying motion	Sept. '14

Impossible DOF	Feb. '16
Impossible DOF	Jan. '17
Indestructible camera bag	Dec. '14
Infrared photography	Jul. '14
Insane ISO settings	Dec. '22
Interiors	Oct. '15
iPad: Loading photos	Aug. '17
iPhone photography, pros and cons	Apr. '22
Jungle photography	Dec. '14
Kaleidoscopic images	Jan. '15
Kaleidoscopic images	Aug. '20
Keystoning	Nov. '23t
Keystoning, correcting	Aug. '15
L Bracket	Feb. '18
L Bracket	Feb. '21
Landscape photography	Dec. '12
Landscape photography	Apr. '14
Landscape photography	Nov. '16
Layer Masks, The Power of	Feb. '22
Lessons Learned from Extreme Cold	Feb. '24
Light fall-off	Feb. '14
Light painting	Dec. '21
Lighting a face	Oct. '13
Lightning photography	May '20
Liquify	Feb. '18
Liquify Distortions	Sept/Oct. '19
Lenses, Essential	Aug. '23
Long lens portraits	Oct. '18
Long Lenses for Flowers	Jul. '20
Low light photography	May '15
Luminar 4	Jan. '20
Macro flash	Nov. '12
Macro flash	Sep. '14
Macro flash	Aug. '15
Macro flash	Aug. '22
Macro photography and DOF	Feb. '22
Macro trick	May '19
Managing soft focus	Jul. '21
Mannequin heads	Apr. '16
Metering modes	Nov. '16
Meters, How They Work	Jul. '18
Meters, when they fail	Dec. '16
Metering situations, Impossible	Jul. '19
Middle gray	Nov. '15
Milky Way, Shooting the	
Minimizing dust on the sensor	Nov. '21
Mirrors	Jan. '19
Mirror images	May '23
Model shoot	Jan. '17
Moon glow	Oct. '16
Mosaics	Jun. '17
Mundane to Ideal	Nov. '19
Museum photography	Mar. '13
Natural Light Portraits	Aug. '21
Negative space	Jan. '16
Neon edges on black	Aug. '14
Neutral Density filters	Jun. '18

Subject index for past Photo Insight issues

Neutral Density filters and water	Mar. '22
Night photography	Feb. '14
Night Safaris	Jun. '18
Night to Twilight	Dec. '17
Noise reduction	Feb. '17
Off-camera flash	Jan. '24
Oil and water	May '20
Organization of photos	Mar. '18
Out of focus foregrounds	Jan. '20
Paint abstracts	May '13
Paint abstracts	Aug. '21
Painting with light	Sep. '15
Panning motion	Dec. '16
Pano-Mirrors with a twist	Jan. '18
Parades	Sep. '13
Parallelism	Nov. '19
Parallelism and DOF	Feb. '21
Perspective, Super Exaggeration of	Dec. '21
Photo shsaring	Apr. '23
Photo terms	Nov. '22
Photographing Christmas	Dec. '23
Photography to Art	Dec. '17
Photography solutions	Jan. '18
Photoshop, content Aware	Nov. '12
Photoshop, sketch technique	Apr. '13
Photoshop, replace background	Apr. '13
Photoshop, actions palette	Dec. '13
Photoshop, layer masks	Feb. '13
Photoshop, the clone tool	May '13
Photoshop, soft foliage	Oct. '13
Photoshop, mixer brush tool	Sept. '14
Photoshop, b & w with color	Jun. '14
Photoshop, drop shadows	Jul. '14
Photoshop, creating texture	Feb. '14
Photoshop, face mirrors	Feb. '14
Photoshop, liquify	Mar. '14
Photoshop, face mirrors	Aug. '14
Photoshop, digital spotlight	Sep. '14
Photoshop, enlarge eyes	Nov. '14
Photoshop, darken the periphery	Dec. '14
Photoshop, mirror images	Dec. '14
Photoshop, beam of light	Apr. '15
Photoshop, polar coordinates	Mar. '15
Photoshop, chrome	May '15
Photoshop, actions palette	Nov. '15
Photoshop, cut and paste	Nov. '15
Photoshop, geometrics	Oct. '15
Photoshop, plugins	Oct. '15
Photoshop, multiple selections	Apr. '16
Photoshop, sharpening	Apr. '16
Photoshop, Flood plugin	Apr. '16
Photoshop, Desaturation	Aug. '16
Photoshop, making a composite	Aug. '16
Photoshop new tool	May '20
Photoshop, place one element behind	Aug. '18
Photoshop, the pen tool	Feb. '16
Photoshop, canvas size	Jan. '16
Photoshop, using the earth	Jun. '16
Photoshop, define patterns	May '16
Photoshop, paste into	Nov. '16

Photoshop, b & w with color	Feb. '17
Photoshop, open a closed door	Apr. '17
Photoshop, palettes	May '17
Photoshop, My favorite plugins	Jan. '20
Portrait options	Jan. '19
Portrait techniques	Nov. '15
Portraits	Mar. '13
Portraits, mixed lighting	Aug. '14
Portrait Professional	Nov. '19
Portraits, Lens choice	Sept/Oct. '19
Portraits, side lighting	Sep. '17
Portraits, window light	Mar. '15
Portraits, outdoors	May '17
Post-processing checklist	Dec. '13
Post-processing: Contrast	Aug. '17
Practicing graphic design, Part I	Dec. '22
Practicing graphic design, Park II	Jan. '23
Practicing graphic design, Part III	Feb. '23
Pre-capturing technology	May '23
Predictive Focus	Sep. '18
Problem/solution	Apr. '17
Problem Solving in Photoshop	May '22
Problem with cruises	Jan. '18
Protecting extremeities from the cold	Dec. '22
Protecting highlights	Dec. '12
Puppies	Jan. '15
Puppy photography	Feb. '18
Reflections	Feb. '13
Reshaping faces	Oct. '22
Restoring old photos	Jun '20
Ring flash, advantages	Jul. '21
Ring flash versatility	Oct. '21
Rule of Odds	May '22
Safari	May '13
Safari strategies	Jul. '15
Seeing as the lens does	Nov. '14
Seeking Cool Snow Photos	Jan. '21
Selective filtering	Mar. '18
Selective focus	Jun. '15
Self-critiques	Jul. '13
Self-critiques	Oct. '13
Self-critiques	Nov. '20
Sensor cleaning	Jun. '18
Sepia and dark contrast	Jun. '15
Sepia, Traditional look of	
Shade	May '14
Shady side	Jun. '18
Shadows define the shot	Dec. '23
Shadows, Paying Attention to	Mar. '18
Sharpness problems	Mar. '14
Shooting in Inclement Weather	Nov. '22
Shooting through textured glass	May '23
Shooting through wire mesh	Sept. '14
Shooting into the light	Jun '20
Side lighting	Jan. '24
Silhouettes	Jun. '13

Subject index for past Photo Insight issues

Silhouettes, How to make	Apr. '22
Silhouettes, Exposing for	Sept/Oct. '19
Silvered landscapes	Mar. '20
Sketch, How to Make	Jun '19
Skies make or break a picture	Aug. '21
Sky replacement	Nov. '20
Sky replacement strategies	Aug. '22
Snow exposure	Nov '17
Snow exposure	Nov. '19
Soap abstracts	Aug. '23
Soft light	Jan. '13
Smart phone photography	May '19
Stained glass	Mar. '17
Star photography	
Star photography and noise	Jan. '18
Stock photography	Sep. '14
Sunrise & sunset	Jan. '19
Tamron 150-600mm	Apr. '14
Ten reasons photos are not sharp	Jan. '19
Texture, Adding	Mar '19
Texture Mapping in 3D	Jul. '21
Topaz AI Gigapixel	Mar '19
Topaz glow	Jan. '15
Topaz glow	Sep. '17
Topaz Impression	Sep. '15
Topaz Remask 5	Oct. '17
Topaz Simplify 4	Dec. '12
Topaz simplify 4	Jun. '14
Topaz Studio	Apr. '18
Translucency & backlighting	Nov. '18
Travel photography	Feb. '13
Travel portraits	Mar. '14
Travel tips	Apr. '14
Travel photographer's guide	Jun. '17
Tweaking exposure on the fly	Apr. '23
Twilight photography in the rain	Apr. '19
Twilight, Creating	Oct. '23
Tripods	Mar. '18
Two subject sharp rule	May '14
Two subject focus rule	Jan. '20
Two subject focus rule	Jun. '21
Urban heights	Jun. '21
Ultra distortion	May '18
Unusual Panos	Nov. '22w
Upside Down Reflections	Aug. '21
Warm fingers in winter	Nov. '15
Water drop collisions	May '18
What NOT to do in photography	Apr. '18
When You Needed a Zoom	Aug. '21
White on White	Dec. '20
White on White	Nov. '23
White vignette	Aug. '15
White balance	Feb. '15

Quiz answers

1. b
2. c
3. b
4. a
5. c
6. d
7. b
8. d
9. a
10. b

Your score

90% - 100%: You could have been a pro

80% - 89%: Your glasses probably need a new prescription

70% - 79%: Just don't quit your day job

< 70%: You should really be using an iPhone

Subject index for past Photo Insight issues

White balance, custom	Mar. '16
White balance, What	Jun. '23
Wide angle conundrum	May '19
Wide angle lenses	Mar. '13
Wide angle portraits	Nov. '14
Wide angle lenses	Jun. '17
Wide angle lenses: Outside the Box	Jun. '22w
Wide angle keystoneing	Nov '17
Wildlife photos with wide angles	Mar. '15
Window light	Dec. '15
Window light portraits	Aug. '18
Window light portraits	Feb. '24
Window frames	Feb. '16
Winter photography	Dec. '12
Winter bones	May '13
Winter photography	Dec. '15
Winter photography	Nov. '18
Wire Mesh, Shooting Through	Jul. '18
Workflow	May '13



An artistic rendition of a lion created in AI.

PHOTO INSIGHTS

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