

THE WORLD'S BEST-SELLING DIGITAL PHOTO MAGAZINE

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ISSUE 589

Photography week



INSPIRATION | IDEAS | IN-DEPTH REVIEWS



**SIGMA 60-600MM F4.5-6.3
DG DN OS SPORTS**
WE TAKE THE STRAIN TO
TEST SIGMA'S MONSTER
SUPER-ZOOM

WOODLAND WONDERS

**CAN'T SEE THE WOODS FOR THE TREES? OUR
PRO TIPS WILL HELP YOU GET STUNNING SHOTS**

W E L C O M E

Photography week



JOIN THE CLUB...



Welcome to the world's No.1 weekly digital photography magazine.

If you're already a reader, thanks for your continued support and involvement; if you're new to *Photography Week*, you've come to the right place! In addition to expert advice, brilliant tips and step-by-step tutorials, every issue features interactive galleries of brilliant photos, how-to videos on

essential shooting and editing techniques, and in-depth reviews of the latest camera kit.

But that's not the whole story. *Photography Week* is more than a magazine – it's a community of like-minded people who are passionate about photography. To get involved, just follow any of the links below and share your shots and comments.

Jeff Meyer, Editor

JOIN THE PHOTOGRAPHY WEEK COMMUNITY AND START SHARING!



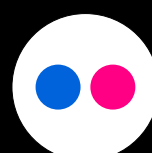
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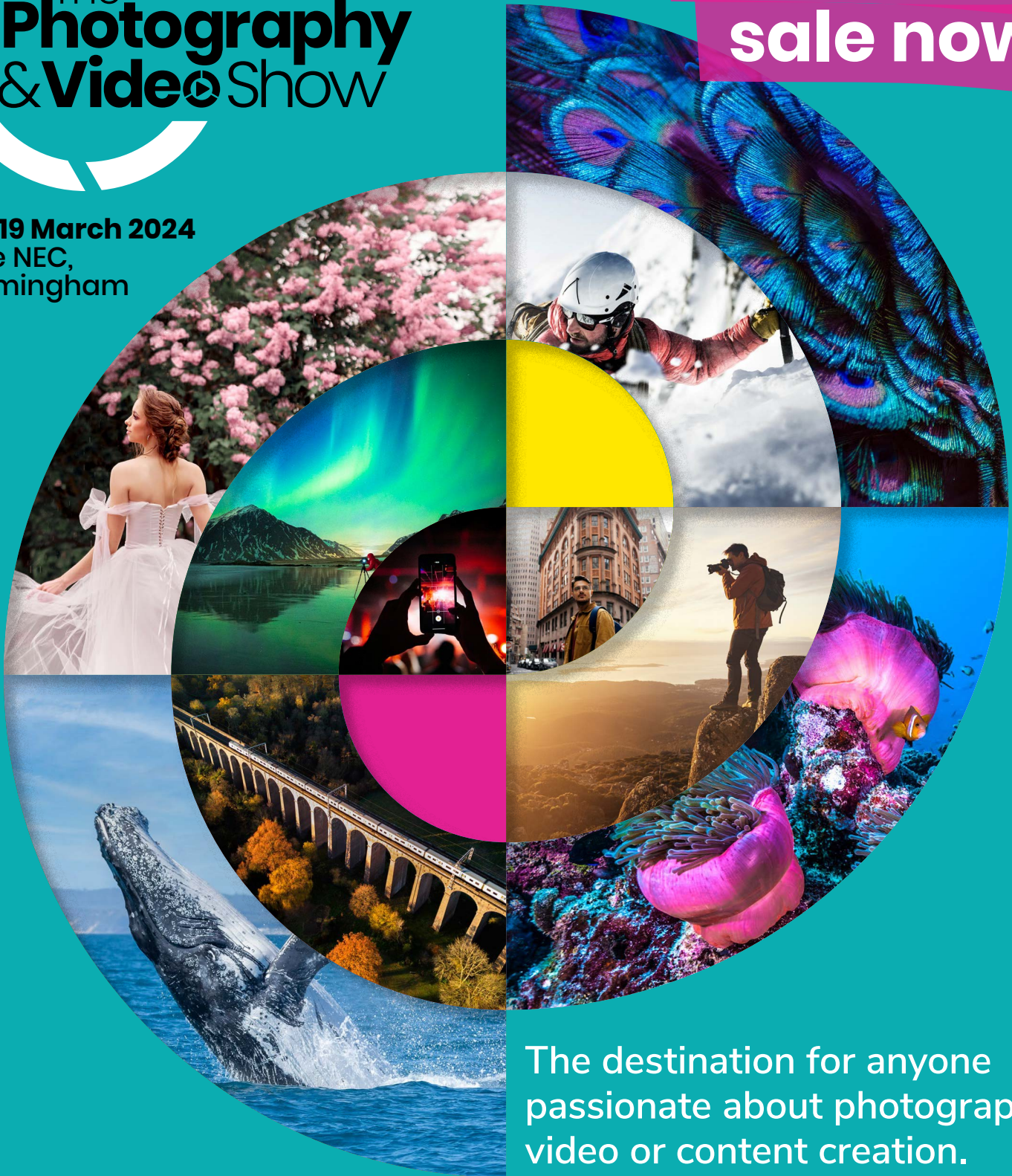
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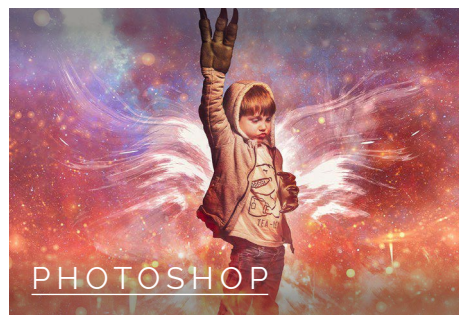
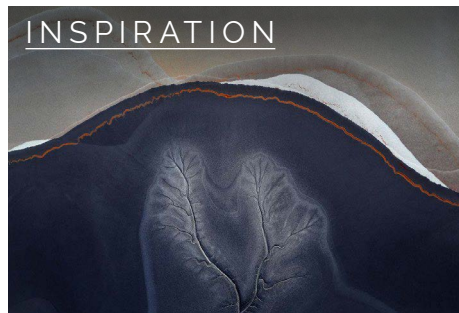
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**Professional photographers, videographers, content creators and image-making industry representatives can apply for FREE entry to the show.
All applications must be made before midnight on 15th March 2024 and will be verified against specific criteria.

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You can build the iconic Polaroid SX-70 and an SLR film camera

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Harness the power of blending modes to create a fantasy image

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WHAT'S HOT

THE WEEK'S TOP HEADLINES IN PHOTOGRAPHY

LOVE RETRO CAMERAS AND LEGO?
THEN YOU'LL LOVE THESE BRICKS!

New Lego sets let you build the iconic Polaroid SX-70 and an SLR camera



Image credit: Lego

If you're a photographer who loves retro cameras, and also a keen Lego builder, then the world's favourite brick maker has a couple of new-year treats in store for you in the shape of not one but two new retro camera sets.

First up is the Retro Camera set (#31147), which is part of the 3-in-1 Creator series. As the name suggests, the pieces included in these sets can be used to build three different models – in this case a retro SLR or video camera, or an old-school analog TV complete with aerial. It's a 261-piece set that's

recommended for Lego fans age eight years and older.

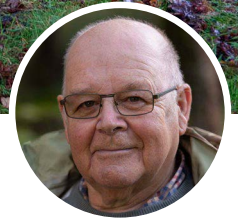
The SLR has some neat features, such as a moving lens and 'working' film-wind handle, plus a hotshoe. You also get a camera strap and two film canisters – and the film door on the back opens so that you can slot a film in. Film exposures with shots like a giraffe and butterfly on them included, too, so you're getting an impressive number of details included in what is a low-cost Lego set at just £17.99 / £20.

The other new set lets you build the cult-classic Polaroid SX-70 instant

camera (pictured above). The SX-70 was introduced in 1972, and 50 years later Lego's One Step set iteration looks every bit as stylish as the real thing.

The Polaroid SX-70 build packs plenty of cool features including a viewfinder, 'working' shutter button, and film cassette door. As well as the camera, you also get a film pack to build, together with a few instant prints.

The Lego Polaroid SX-70 One Step (#21345) costs £69.99 / \$79.99. It has 516 pieces, and is recommended for adults only, with an 18+ age range. Both sets are available to buy now.



**THE PRO
NEIL BURNELL**

CAMERA: NIKON Z 7II

Neil left behind a career in graphic design to become a full-time pro photographer. His work has been exhibited far and wide, and he's won a plethora of photography accolades, including the Landscape Photographer of the Year 2020 Black and White category. When he's not hard at work on a project he's running workshops, putting together books, and selling prints. His Wistman's Wood photography is well known, so Keith has a unique opportunity to learn from one of the best: www.neilburnell.com

INTO THE WOODS

Landscape pro Neil Burnell passes on some tips for capturing magical and atmospheric images in an ancient woodland

**THE APPRENTICE
KEITH MALE**

CAMERA: NIKON D500

Devonshire-born-and-bred Keith used to shoot game. But after his best gun dog passed away he realised his new pup was gun-shy. This persuaded him to put down his gun and adopt a new type of shooting – photography. It wasn't long before he was photographing weddings, and he's since turned semi-pro. The move to Nikon came when he discovered he could pick up a D200 and flash for the price of a digital Minolta, and he's stuck with Nikon ever since.



FEATURE

TECHNIQUE ASSESSMENT

Neil showed Keith how to set up his camera to capture captivating woodland shots

ADDICTED TO BASE

Neil says... I underexpose by up to two stops and work in Manual mode. If you use exposure compensation in Aperture Priority you'll constantly have to alter your ISO, and I want to remain as close to my base ISO as possible. I enable the histogram in Live View, too, as I trust it more than the light meter.

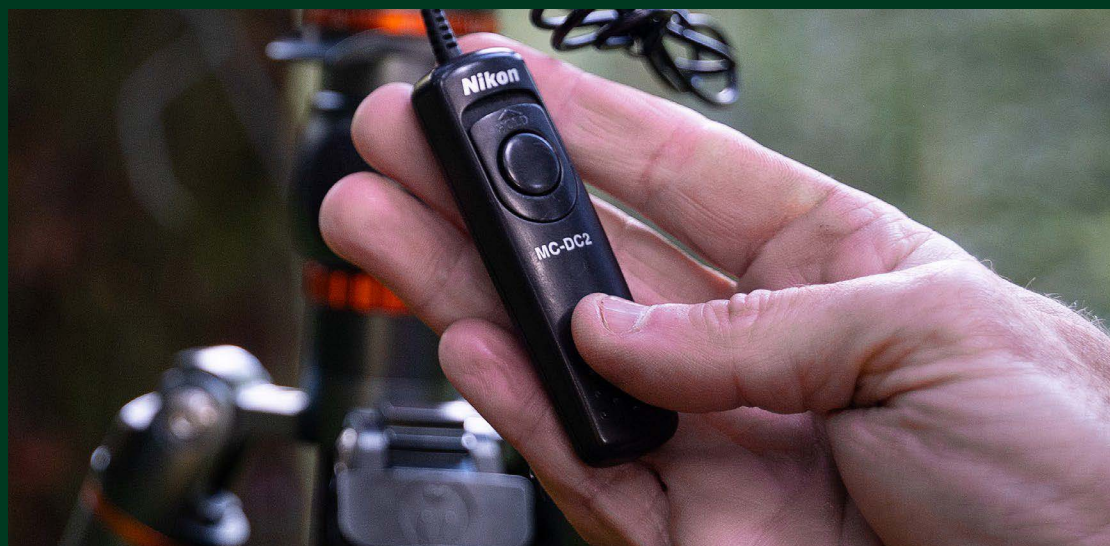


READY, PRESET, GO!

Neil says... I tend to set my own white balance presets via Preset Manual. I'll have one preset that's cooler and one that's warmer, so that I can react depending on the situation. It's important that you always shoot raw, so that if the white balance is off you can easily rectify it in post.

HANDS-FREE

Neil says... A remote shutter release might seem a little redundant when you can set a self-timer or use Exposure Delay mode, but where it comes into its own is timing. If you're waiting for a split-second break in the wind or shooting in Bulb mode, then a lockable remote shutter release is essential.



F E A T U R E



HOT
SHOT
#1

CAMERA Nikon D500 LENS 17-55mm f/2.8 EXPOSURE 1 sec, f/11, ISO100

Dartmoor is an area of England that's steeped in legend. The national park is supposedly home to pixies, ghosts and the famed Dartmoor Beast. It's the setting of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and its history is peppered with tales of witchcraft. But a small oak wood, with its distinctive gnarled trees and mossy rocks, stands out as the moorland's most eerie place.

Wistman's Wood is said to be home to a pack of bloodthirsty hellhounds, the spectre of an unfortunate terrier, and the site of many a blood ritual. There's more to this unique woodland than just spooks and scary tales, though. It's thought to be a remnant of the ancient forests that once covered the land, and houses a species of lichen that can only be found in one other place in the whole of Britain.

It was still dark when Neil and Keith met in the Wistman's Wood car park at 7am. The plan was to photograph the wood in the soft morning light, but with thick cloud

overhead and the odd spit of rain in the air, many photographers would have stayed in bed. "It's better to shoot in miserable conditions than patchy lighting," explained Neil. "Even drizzly rain can help, so long as you're using a lens hood."

As they rambled across 2km of moorland to reach the edges of the wood, Neil explained that they wouldn't be going inside. "During Covid, footfall through the wood increased exponentially. It was damaging the forest, so visitors are no longer allowed inside the boundaries."

"That must have really hampered your photography," said Keith.

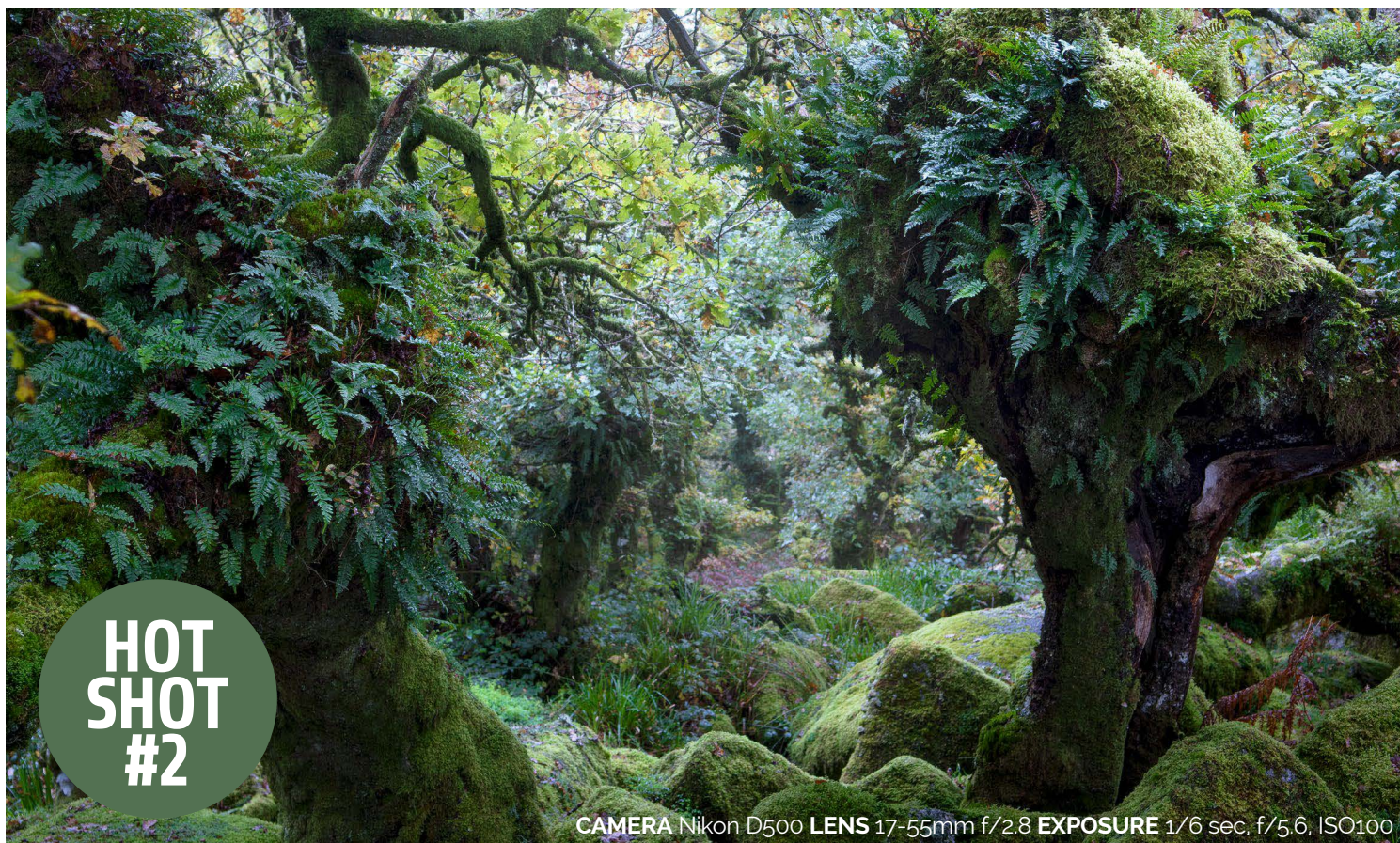
"Not really," replied Neil. "The worst thing you can do with woodland photography is head deep into the trees. You cut off the light, and are often left with a busy, chaotic scene. Foliage on the edges of a woodland or forest is more likely to catch the light, which separates it from the darkness within. So we'll be photographing Wistman's from the fringes today ▶

EXPERT INSIGHT FRAME IT HANDHELD

Neil says... It's all too easy to arrive at a location and immediately set up your tripod. But it's such a pain to completely reframe an image once everything is set up – you're likely to just work with what you've got. That's why I like to search for compositions while handholding my camera. You're free to move anywhere you like and, once you've found your composition, you can set up the tripod.



F E A T U R E



HOT
SHOT
#2

CAMERA Nikon D500 LENS 17-55mm f/2.8 EXPOSURE 1/6 sec, f/5.6, ISO100

– the challenge is to make it look like we're right in the thick of it."

Into the thicket of it

The woodland was now in full view, nestled within the West Dart Valley. "A lot of people are surprised by its relatively small size," said Neil. "In some places you can see straight through. The trick is to make it look like the trees continue on as far as the eye can see. We actually want to convey a sense of claustrophobia, if anything." As they reached the perimeter, they carefully set their bags down. "Don't get your tripod out just yet," said Neil. "A tripod can restrict you from finding the optimum composition. You can be much more fluid when you handhold the camera and look through the viewfinder."

The pro identified two scenes with good photographic potential, and Keith spent a few minutes framing the first scene through his Nikon AF-S DX 17-55mm f/2.8G ED-IF before setting up his tripod. When he asked Neil's opinion, the pro pointed to the top portion of the frame in the rear LCD. "Bringing sky into the frame makes for a bit of an

eyesore – see how it pulls the viewer's eye away from the subject?"

Keith heeded Neil's advice and tilted the camera downwards. "That's much better," said Neil. "Technically, we can still see through the trees, but we're lucky here, because Wistman's Wood is set within a valley, so much of the sky is obscured by the bank on the other side.

"In fact, I only shoot with a 24-70mm and a 70-200mm here, so your 17-55mm lens's equivalent 26-83mm (approx) is ideal. Go with anything wider and it's very difficult to crop out the sky, which leads me into my next point. You want to frame the base of the tree, especially when it's so dominant. A connection to the ground looks nice – the image can look awkward otherwise."

Neil pointed to a nearby tree that dominated the scene. "People try to find leading lines or shoot through foreground interest, but I find that simpler compositional techniques work best. Wistman's, in particular, is naturally chaotic, and if you're not careful you can amplify that. I like to pick out shapes and create depth

using separation. This can be as simple as shooting with a shallower depth of field, or using the available light, so that the tree in the foreground is subtly illuminated but the forest behind is darker."

Keith shifted his shooting position slightly to frame the base of the tree. "What about exposure settings?" he asked.

"When I'm shooting on a tripod I'll aim for base ISO," said Neil. "If it's particularly windy, I'll up the ISO to increase the shutter speed. Once I've captured a sharp shot, I'll bring it back down again to see what I can get." Keith dialled in his D500's base ISO100 and set an aperture of f/2.8.

"Good," said Neil. "Hopefully that'll provide a bit more separation." The pro then set a 10-second self-timer to help prevent camera shake. "Notice how spongy the ground is," he said as he gently rocked from side to side. "That can cause a tripod leg to wobble, so plant your feet and keep still when you take a shot."

Keith used single-point AF to place a focus point on the base of the nearest tree. He then dialled in his shutter speed. "You're nearly ▶



F E A T U R E

► there," said Neil. "Now let's underexpose the shot a bit; this will add to the mood and help tame brighter patches."

Keith took a shot, and they reviewed the image on the Playback screen. "You should be happy with that," said Neil. "Take a few more shots at different apertures, and we'll select our preferred depth of field in post."

Hot Shot #1 was shot at f/11, with the darker foreground tree providing enough separation from the lighter trees behind.

Woodland Window

The next potential scene was only a few feet away. Two prominent trees stood next to each other, creating a frame within a frame around a view that led deep into the forest.

"A trick for finding suitable subjects is to look for relationships between trees," said Neil. "And I particularly like the relationship formed between these two."

Keith removed his D500 from the tripod and started looking for compositions. Neil pointed to a protruding branch: "That wasn't there before," he said, "move the camera slightly closer to crop it out."

Once he was happy with his framing, Keith set up his tripod and invited Neil's opinion. "I like the central composition," said the pro. "Let's tilt the frame upwards just a tiny bit, so that we capture less of that grey rock in the foreground; otherwise, it's going to dominate the frame."

"Won't that introduce too much sky?" said Keith as he looked up at the canopy.

"You're not wrong," said Neil. "In this instance, we're caught between the canopy and the rock. We can clone a few gaps in the canopy in post and darken a few choice areas too. But perhaps the most suitable fix will be a 16:9 crop, so that both the canopy and ground are largely removed."

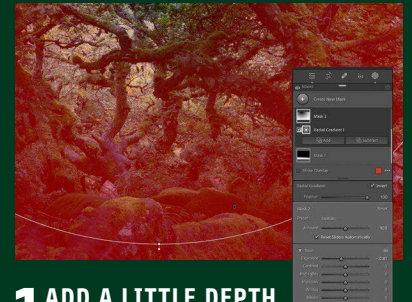
"I wouldn't worry too much about having a straight horizon, either. The trees are so twisted and disorderly, and the ground is covered in so many sizes of rock, it's near impossible to tell if the horizon is straight."

Neil suggested that Keith widen his aperture to f/5.6 to help pull the foreground trees out of the busy background. "That makes it harder to keep the main trees in focus," ►



Neil and Keith use the D500's rear screen to check the composition via the histogram

HOW TO: EDIT WOODLAND SHOTS



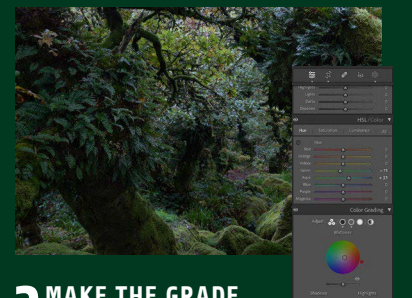
1 ADD A LITTLE DEPTH

Neil says... I usually emphasize light entering the woodland by using masks in Adobe Lightroom. Here, I used an inverted Radial Gradient to darken everything but the top-left portion of the image by subtly lowering the exposure. This helps to create a greater feeling of depth within the image.



2 CROP SHOP

Neil says... The oak trees in Wistman's Wood are so short it can sometimes prove impossible not to frame either bits of canopy or overly large amounts of ground. Cropping images to 16:9 is a good compromise, because it prevents those unwanted elements from dominating the frame.



3 MAKE THE GRADE

Neil says... I tweak the Color Temp slider so it's cooler, before using the HSL tab in the Color Mixer panel as well as the Color Grading panel. Colours are subjective; the more you play with the sliders, the more you'll get an eye for what suits your images and taste.





HOT SHOT #3

CAMERA Nikon D500 LENS 17-55mm f/2.8 EXPOSURE 1/80 sec, f/2.8, ISO100

► said the Keith as he moved his AF point around.

"It's made even more difficult because the two trees aren't on the same plane," said Neil. "We need to maximise your depth of field. Think of the area you want sharp, and focus roughly in the middle, so you maximise the sharpness in front and beyond that point of focus."

As Keith adjusted his focus, a gust of wind whipped through the gnarled woods and rustled its way through the ferns and leaves. "That's going to blur if we shoot a one-second exposure like the last shot," said Neil. "Let's raise the ISO and freeze the movement, but first, switch to manual focus so your focus is locked."

Keith raised the ISO until he reached 1/125 sec and took a few shots. "Now we've got those images in the bag, let's push our luck," said Neil as he handed Keith a remote shutter release.

"A self-timer won't help us here, as we'll need to precisely time the shot for when the wind dies down," he explained. "As soon as it does, fire the shutter."

Keith attached the remote shutter

release and returned to ISO100. After a few minutes, there was a break in the wind just long enough to capture Hot Shot #2.

Faces in the trees

As the sun began to rise higher in the sky, Neil called time on Wistman's Wood and the pair headed off to a nearby pine forest. As they were walking down a lane en route, they noticed soft light illuminating a clearing full of silver birch trees.

They approached two trees, with a third fallen just in front of them. "I like the relationship here," said Neil. "There's a bit of a family dynamic, and the tree on the left has some very human-looking features."

Neil quickly found a composition and set up his tripod. "Separation isn't just about lighting and depth of field," he said as he beckoned Keith over to his position. "See how – when you stand here – there are very few trees intersecting with the ones in the foreground?"

"It's much cleaner, isn't it?" said Keith. Neil nodded: "Exactly."

Keith moved his tripod into

position. "It would be nice to frame the facial features on the left tree, but they're quite high up the trunk," said Neil. "Yes, if I tilt the camera upwards I get too much canopy and sky, and begin to cut off the fallen trunk," said Keith.

Neil began extending the legs of his own tripod: "Let's put your camera on here," he said. "This is why I always opt for the tallest tripod I can find. If we raise the height of the camera we can angle it down slightly to compensate for the sky and hopefully still frame the features that we want to."

Since the trees were roughly on the same plane, Neil felt they could get away with a wide-open aperture to help the main subjects pop against the busy woodland behind. But as the pair inputted their exposure settings, the sun broke through the clouds and highlighted the trio of trees.

Spitting rain had left the leaves with a glossy surface and the sunlight was causing notable glare. Neil's solution was to attach a polarising filter to cut the reflections. "I tend not to use polarisers if I can help it," he said. "I'm not bothered ►





HOT SHOT #4

CAMERA Nikon Z 7II **LENS** 24-70mm f/2.8
EXPOSURE 1/200 sec, f/6.3, ISO320

▶ about using one to enrich the colours, since my style is quite muted anyway. But in this instance, the glare is distracting enough that we need it."

Keith took a shot, but Neil wasn't happy with the lighting. "That sunlight's a bit much," he said, "let's wait for a bit of cloud cover."

A few moments later, the light diminished. "Even though the light has been diffused again, notice that it's still subtly highlighting the mosses on those trees," said Keith. "And it looks beautiful."

As Keith prepared to capture the penultimate Hot Shot, Neil darted in front of the camera to gently lift an intrusive branch away from the frame.

"You've got to be very gentle when you do this, but if there's no danger of snapping the branch it's a good trick, when paired with a self-timer, if you're shooting alone."

Hot Shot #3 was in the bag.

Having a pine time

The photographers followed the main pathway into the pines. "If you head deep into a forest, it quickly becomes too dark, but if you stick

to a large path like this, the light filters through the break in the trees," explained Keith.

When they eventually left the path, they only moved a few metres into the trees, so they could still retain a good amount of light. "If the light is directly behind you, a pine forest like this can look a little flat," said Neil as they faced towards a backlit section of woodland. "It's looking very nice, but it's a bit harsh. I think it's going to be a bit of a waiting game again."

No sooner had he finished speaking than the light dimmed. The pro handed Keith his Nikon Z 7II: "You'll be able to see the rear screen better," he said. "Hold it above your head and down onto the trees, so you can cut out the canopy."

"But what about all the green in the foreground?" enquired Keith.

"The undulating ground, mosses and shadows from the pines are creating plenty of interest, so I think it works," said Neil. "Bump up your ISO to 320. Good, 1/200 sec should do it. Now, focus on the base of the main trunk, excellent Keith. That's Hot Shot #4!"

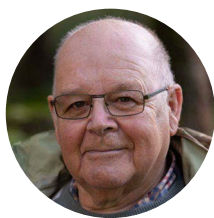
EXPERT INSIGHT THE RIGHT LIGHT



Neil says... Lighting is arguably the most important factor when capturing woodland photography. All I do in post is emphasise the light that's already there, so it needs to be spot on. I always avoid harsh lighting, as it tends to filter through the canopy and dapple the forest floor, which is distracting to the viewer. Instead, I look for very subtle, soft lighting, which works perfectly for my muted colour palette and style. People think I just visit Wistman's when it's misty and shoot a load of images, but I actually spent two or three years predominantly scouting it out, so that when the right conditions happened, I knew exactly what I wanted to photograph. When the mist does come, I might only capture two or three images before it disperses. On only one occasion has it stuck around all day, and even then I only managed about eight keepers. It really is about taking your time.



F E A T U R E



KEITH'S COMMENT

I really enjoyed my day. Neil's attention to detail was incredible. Learning to slow down and consider every single aspect made a huge difference, especially when it involved waiting for the right light.



NEIL'S VERDICT

It was great to get Keith to see an area he's known his whole life in a new way; he took to composing each scene very quickly, and I hope he's inspired to head out when it's cloudy and damp in the future!



F E A T U R E



ESSENTIAL GEAR

The kit Neil relies on for capturing great Woodland shots



1 TALL TRIPOD

Neil says... I always opt for the tallest tripod I can get my hands on. This is because I often find myself wanting to shoot down at the woodland from a high angle, because it helps to avoid framing the sky through the canopy. Another reason to use a tall tripod is that you've got no reason to extend the centre column. This is best avoided, as it's the least stable part of any tripod and can introduce camera shake.

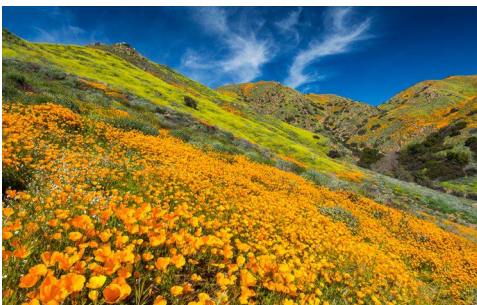
2 KEEPING IT STILL

Neil says... You might assume you don't have to worry about camera shake when you're using a tripod, but it's incredible how even the tiniest movements can soften an image, and the slower the shutter speed, the greater the risk. A sturdy tripod that's tall enough so you're not tempted to

3 L-BRACKET

Neil says... If I tutor someone who doesn't own an L-bracket, they buy one. My 3 Legged Thing Zelda fits seamlessly onto the Z 7II, and any Arca-Swiss compatible tripod head clamps onto it, so no more tripod plates! You simply turn the camera on its side to mount it vertically, while still maintaining the centre of gravity.

PRO PORTFOLIO NEIL BURNELL



EMPIRE

Empire was the shot that has given me the chance to pursue my dreams and become a full-time landscape photographer. It's from my series *Mystical* and was inspired by childhood memories of this magical woodland. It was always in my mind to return and create my vision of how I see the scene.



LOST WORLD

Woodland photography can be quite daunting, and conditions and light play a big part. With this scene, I had to change the angle and focal length to frame the golden tree. It might seem simple, but it wasn't. It came down to a matter of inches to get the composition I was after.



PILLARS

Sometimes the light and conditions just fall perfectly for what you want to achieve – this was one of those moments! From an area of Bellever Forest that has now been felled, Pillars is by far my favourite image from this wonderful wood. Shot using my Nikon Z 7 and a 24-70mm f/2.8.

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G A L L E R Y

XPOSURE

THE WEEK'S MOST INSPIRING READER PHOTOS



LAST RAYS

NEIL SHAW

"The last vestiges of the day's sun falling on what has become a very popular run of beech trees in Derbyshire, England."

<https://bit.ly/465WxJa>

GALLERY

THE WEEK'S MOST INSPIRING READER PHOTOS



BOURSE DE COMMERCE, PARIS

STAVROS ARGYROPOULOS

"In this photograph I wanted to emphasise the architectural contrast between the two buildings. Taken with an iPhone 14 Pro Max."

<https://bit.ly/3NnfmGH>

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GALLERY

THE WEEK'S MOST INSPIRING READER PHOTOS



BLUE VASE

BRUCE ROBERTSON

"Another weekly photo challenge - this one was complementary colours. I wanted a quite high-key image to accentuate the vase and flowers, which were colours roughly on opposite sides of the colour wheel."

<http://bit.ly/3TLgvAm>

G A L L E R Y

THE WEEK'S MOST INSPIRING READER PHOTOS



FIRST FROST

EVA COUET

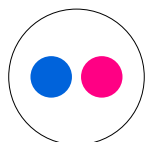
"This is a macro image of a wooden fence and frost-covered foliage."

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Taken a portrait you're particularly proud of? Shot a sensational sunset you'd like to show off? Then join the *Photography Week* Facebook community and share your best photos today! You'll get feedback from fellow readers and the *Photography Week* team, plus the chance to appear in *Xposure*, or even on our cover!

I N S P I R A T I O N

IT'S COOL, THAT

THE BEST THING WE'VE SEEN THIS WEEK



Tony Hewitt, Winner, Photographer of the Year



Peter Meyer, 2nd place, Photograph of the Year



Matt Meisenheimer, 3rd place, Photographer of the Year



Thomas Vijayan, Winner, Snow & Ice

Images © The photographer and courtesy International Landscape Photographer of the Year

CONTEST CAPTURES THE DIVERSITY OF EARTH'S AMAZING LANDSCAPES

International Landscape Photographer of the Year reveals stunning winning images

The International Landscape Photographer of the Year Awards has celebrated its 10th birthday by announcing the stunning winning images from its 2023 contest. More than 4,000 entries were received from professional and amateur photographers, showcasing breathtaking landscapes and natural features around the globe.

Prizes are awarded for Photographer of the Year, based on a portfolio of at least four

images, Photograph of the Year, and in a variety of Special Award categories. Australian photographer Tony Hewitt earned the coveted title of Photographer of the Year with a selection of abstract aerial photos of river beds and shorelines around Western Australia.

Click the link to see more winning and commended images at the competition website. You can also order hardback books featuring images from previous contests.

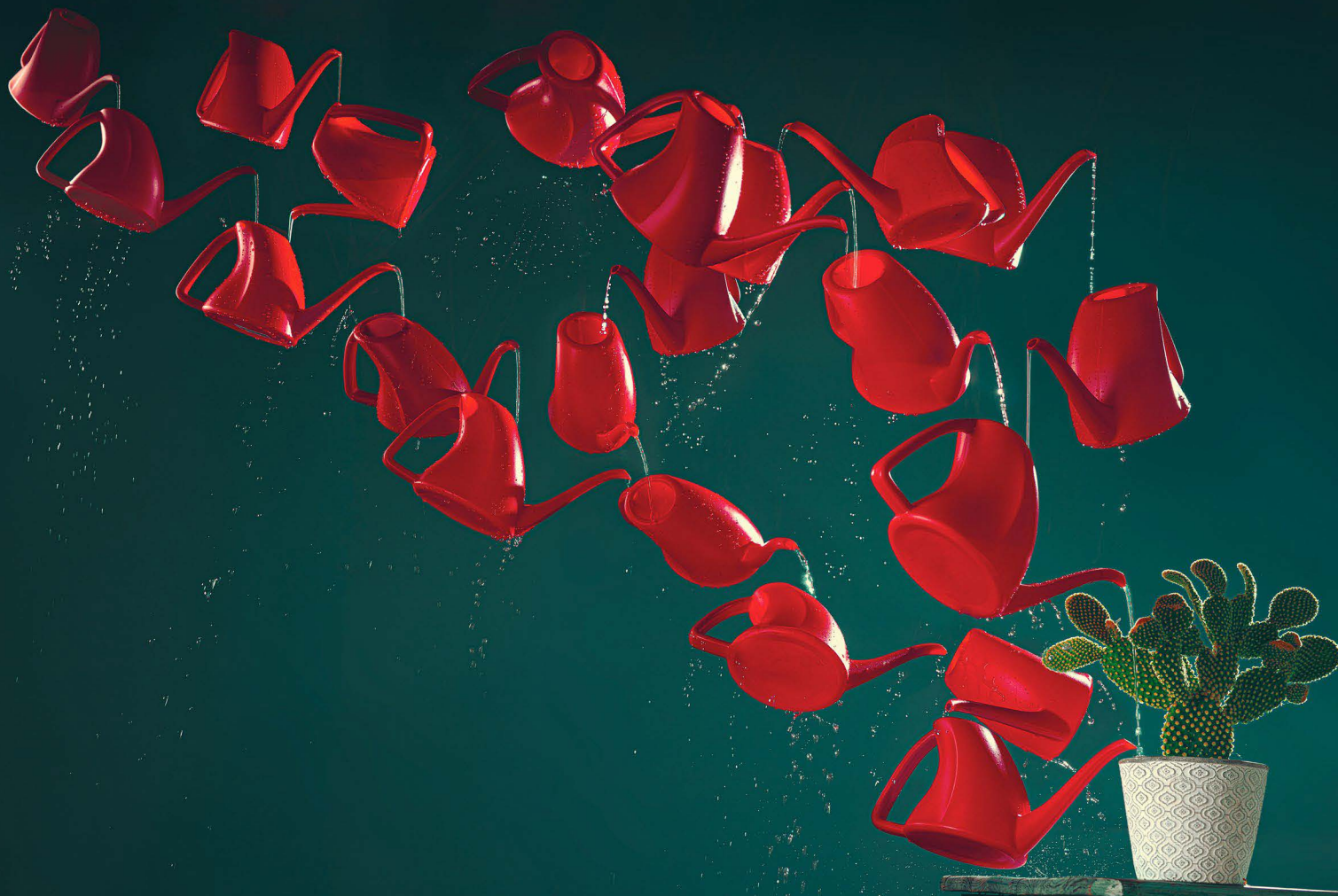


SEE MORE IMAGES
<https://bit.ly/3RSlosm>

S K I L L S

CRASH COURSE

ESSENTIAL PHOTO SKILLS MADE EASY



DO THE CAN-CAN

James Paterson shows you how to create a stunning and gravity-defying still-life with watering cans

If you want to bring an extra level of dynamism to your still life or product photos, why not try playing with gravity and motion like this? With a combination of shooting skills, precise placement and a little Photoshop magic, images like this are within the reach of anyone with a camera. As for the lighting, we used three flashes to light our scene here, but if you want to keep things simple you could forego the flash altogether and use

the ambient light from a window. Over the next few pages, we'll go behind the scenes to see how a gravity-defying still life can be achieved. From the lighting setup to the careful posing to the simple post-processing, we'll look at each stage in the workflow, and explain key photography skills that can prove invaluable for all kinds of creative projects.

Our budget here didn't stretch to 21 watering cans plus five assistants to pour the water, so instead we shot

our set of just three watering cans in stages over several frames, using a tripod to keep the frames in alignment. This is one of the advantages of having control over the lighting, the positioning of the subjects and the framing: it gives us the freedom to shoot our image in several stages, making sure one part of the frame is perfect before moving on to the next. Once the set of images are captured, it's a fairly simple task to bring everything together in Photoshop.



S K I L L S

HOW TO SET UP THE STUDIO

Get set up for creative still-life photographs lit with flash

1 CAMERA SETTINGS

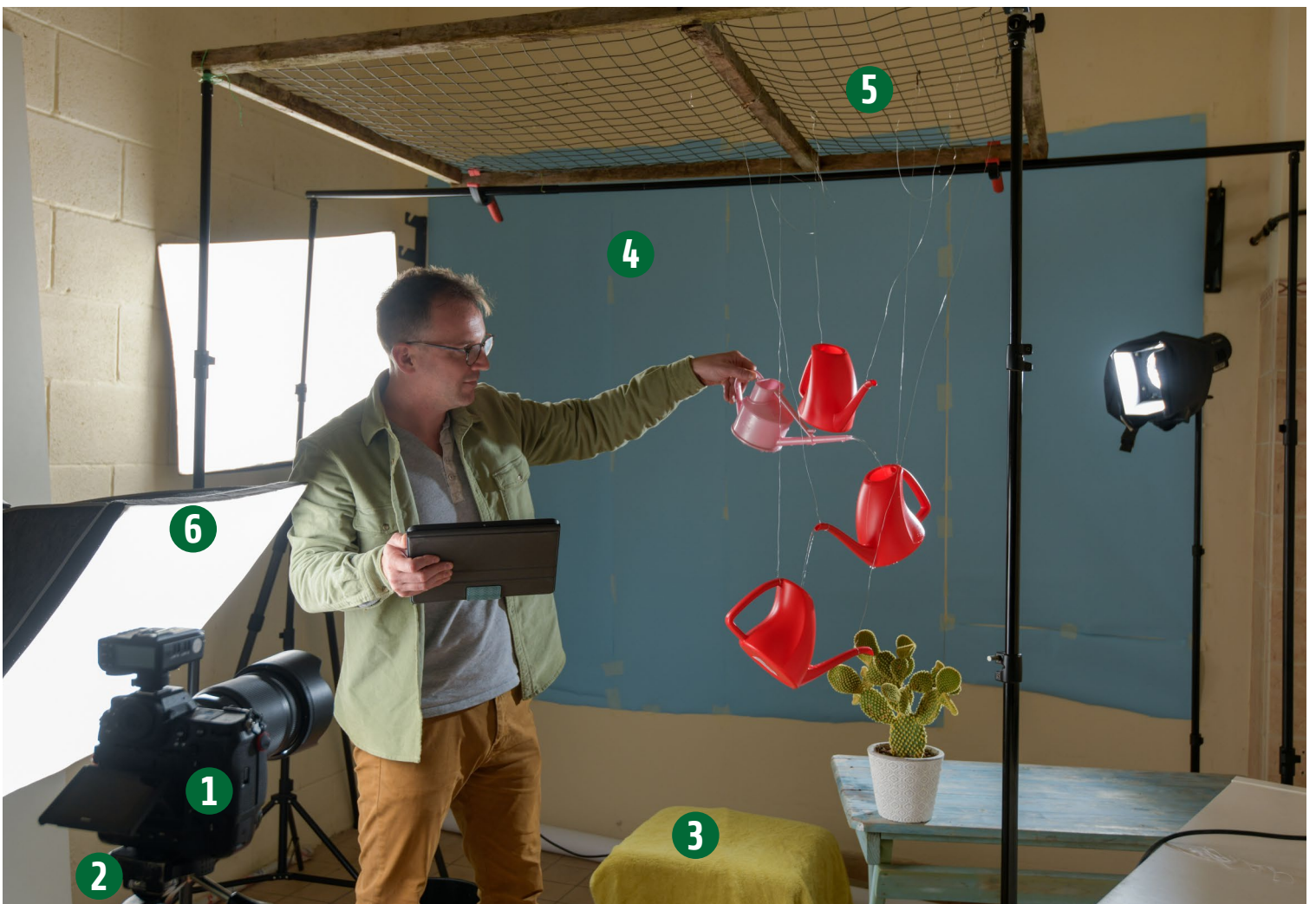
When using off-camera flash it's usually best to set your exposure to Manual mode with ISO100. First, set the shutter speed to 1/200 sec and aperture to f/8, then take a test shot and either adjust the power of the lights or the aperture until the exposure looks right. Here we had our camera set to 1/200 sec, f/5.6, ISO100.

2 TRIPOD

We arranged our three red watering cans, then poured water into the top one so that it would trickle into the opening in the lower can. Once captured, we could move the lowest can and string it up in a higher position, then repeat the process. A tripod is essential to keep all the frames in alignment.

3 TOWELS AND BUCKETS

Messing around with water when using high-powered studio flashes can be a recipe for disaster, so we made sure to keep our equipment and wires well away from the water, with plenty of towels on hand to mop up splashes between shots, and several buckets placed to catch the falling water.



4 BACKDROP

A plain backdrop is usually the best choice for still-life work, as it places the attention on the subject. We taped a roll of blue paper to the wall – the masking tape is easily removed later in Photoshop. A dark backdrop like this helps the water drops to stand out (they would be less clear against a lighter backdrop).

5 WIRE GRID

A wire mesh frame is held aloft with four light stands. We used an old frame from the garden for this, but any similar grid-shaped object will do. With our watering cans strung up on wire and hooks, the grid allows us to quickly move the hooks until each can is in place exactly where we want it.

6 LIGHTING SETUP

We have a three-light setup here using portable studio lighting units. Two lights are fitted with softboxes and placed to the left side. Directional lighting like this helps to emphasise contours on the watering cans. A third flash is placed to the right and behind, fitted with barn doors to stop light spilling onto the backdrop.



S K I L L S

HOW TO TAKE THE SHOT



1

CAMERA AND LENS

Prime lenses tend to be sharper than zooms, which makes them ideal for studio still life and product photography, where optimum sharpness and quality can make a huge difference. A pin-sharp lens such as the Nikon Z 50mm f/1.2 S here is ideal for studio still-life work, especially when paired with a high-resolution camera such as the Nikon Z 9.

2

WATERING CANS

All sorts of objects could work for a creative still life. We used three red watering cans, each suspended with thin hanging wire and hooks. Gaffer tape also came in handy to attach the wires to parts where they could not be tied – the thinner the wire, the easier it will be to remove it later in Photoshop.



3

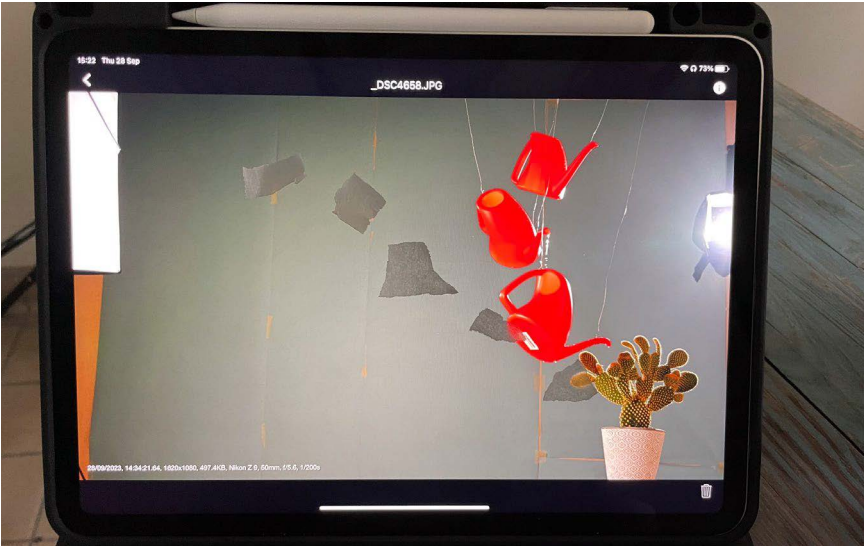
POSITION THE OBJECTS

The key is in posing the objects in the most pleasing way. Our positioning is a bit like a jigsaw puzzle – each time we moved a can, we needed to ensure its position matched up with the previous arrangement. We moved two cans at a time, leaving the third in position.



S K I L L S

HOW TO TAKE THE SHOT



4

USE A TABLET

Connecting your camera to a tablet can be hugely useful both for arranging the still life and firing the shutter – a larger screen makes it easier to judge the composition and fix the lighting. We stuck bits of masking tape to the screen to plan out where the watering cans would go.

5

BACKLIGHT THE WATER

Water drops stand out best when they're backlit for an extra sparkle. Our bare flash placed behind and to the right creates the backlit effect, and it also creates an attractive halo around the edges of the cactus. When backlighting like this, be aware that lens flare may fog the image, so keep the flash out of the frame.



6

POURING THE WATER

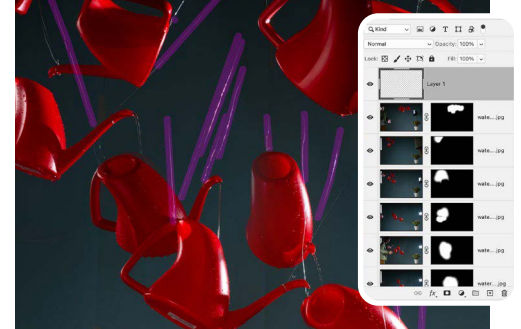
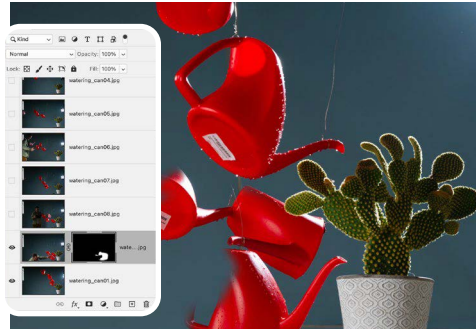
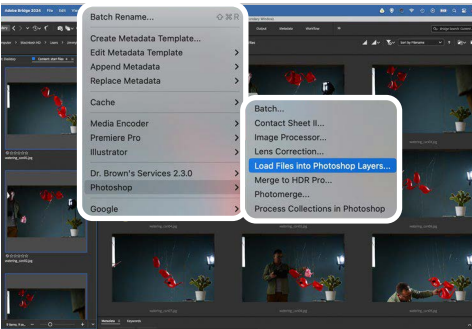
With everything set up, we could pour water into one can, then capture it trickling into the next. It's impossible to keep completely out of the frame when doing so. So when we are in the frame it's important not to block the lights, as this will alter the overall effect and make it harder to combine the shots later.



SKILLS

HOW TO COMBINE FRAMES IN PHOTOSHOP

Learn how to bring a set of still life photos together and remove wires with Photoshop



1 LOAD INTO LAYERS

Open Adobe Bridge and Cmd/Ctrl-click to select all the images that you want to combine, then go to Tools > Photoshop > Load Files into Photoshop Layers. Once open, go to the Layers panel and drag the layer you want to use as a base to the bottom. Alt-click the eye icon on this layer to hide all the others.

2 PAINT LAYER MASKS

Highlight and reveal the layer above, then hold ALT and click the Add Layer Mask icon to add a full black mask. Grab the Brush Tool, hit D, then paint with white over areas you want to be visible. If you need to hide anything, hit X and paint with black. Continue revealing and masking the layers, one at a time.

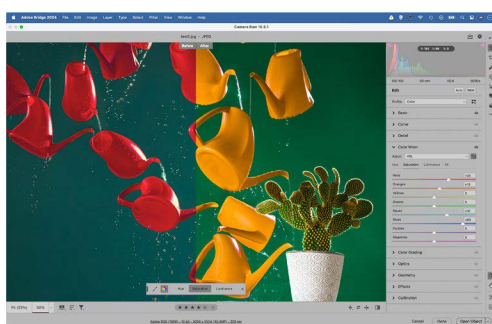
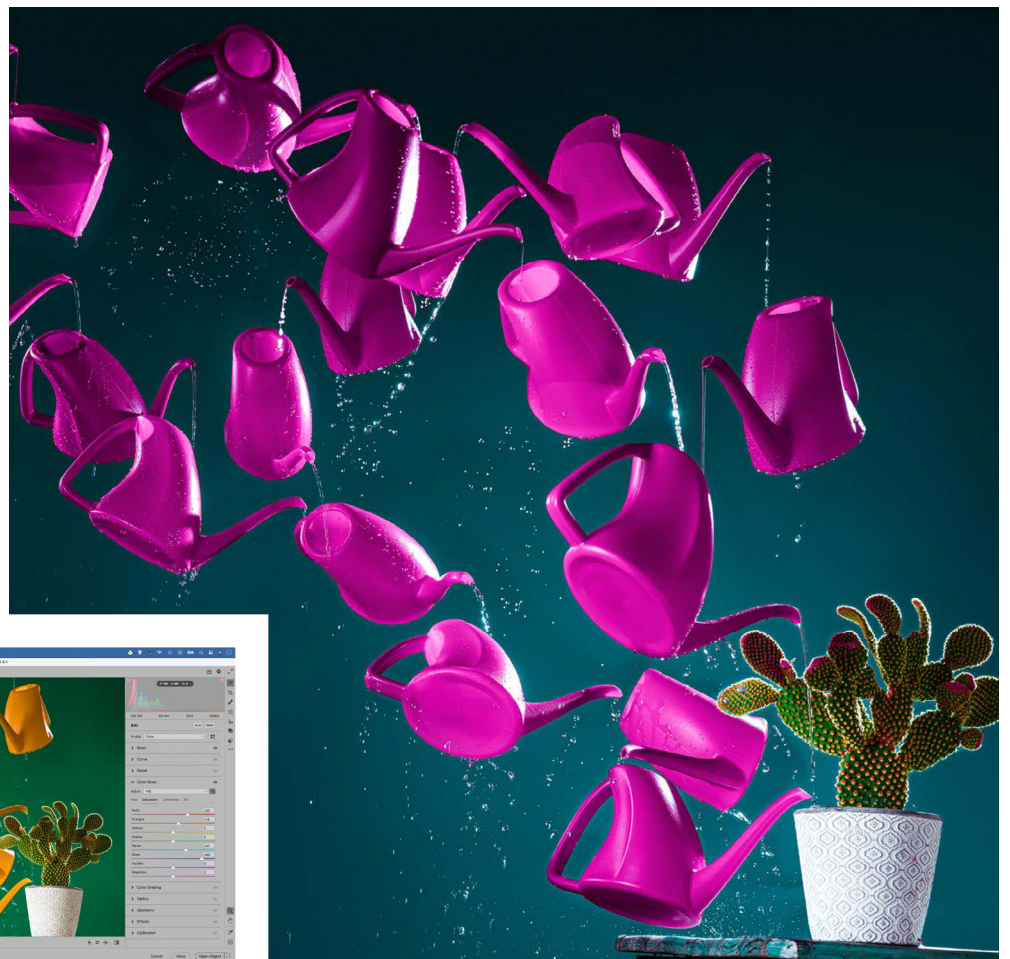
3 REMOVE THE WIRES

Make a new empty layer at the top of the stack. Take the Remove Tool, check Sample All Layers in the tool options bar, and paint to remove all the wires, tape and anything else until the image looks tidy. You can click once, hold Shift and click again to make a straight line, useful for removing wires.

EXPERIMENT WITH COLOURS

Use the Color Mixer Panel in Camera Raw and Lightroom to make quick Hue changes

One of the advantages to using red and blue as our two main colours here is that they can be easily altered to other shades if we want a different look. There are lots of colour-changing tools in Photoshop, but perhaps the easiest to use is the Color Mixer panel. Available in Camera Raw and Lightroom (and also through Filter > Camera Raw Filter in Photoshop) the panel lets you target eight different colour ranges and change the Hue, Saturation and Luminosity of each. Set it to Hue, then grab the target tool and drag left or right over colours in the image to instantly alter them. Then right-click and select either Saturation or Luminosity to tweak the results.



E D I T I N G

PHOTOSHOP

LEARN ESSENTIAL EDITING SKILLS FAST!

HOW TO...

TURN KIDS INTO SUPERHEROES

James Paterson shows you how to add special effects to your portraits and master Photoshop blending skills

Why not use the power of Photoshop to give the kids a superhero makeover? By utilising layer blending modes, which enable us to combine images in all kinds of creative ways, and a range of free stock images, it's easier than you might think to create a shot that could pass for a movie poster.

The most useful blending mode for this project is Screen, which adds together the brighter parts from each image, cancelling out dark areas. It means we can start with a black background, then build up our layers on top.

By using Screen we can blend images of fireworks, flames and stars to build up our special effect with ease. We downloaded our shots from www.pixabay.com: search for 2585843, 3860177, 5456206, 1285364 and 3129573.

We'll also make use of the Select Subject command to cut out our subject. We've provided a portrait for you to practise with, but you can of course shoot your own image – all you need to do is capture a person (a child or otherwise) in a heroic pose, placing them against a plain backdrop so they're easier to cut out. You could even take this project a step further by adding a movie-style title or other graphic elements to the scene.



G E A R

LENS TEST

EXPERT OPINION ON THE LATEST KIT



PDF NEWSPAPERS and MAGAZINES: WWW.XSAVA.XYZ

SIGMA 60-600MM F4.5-6.3 DG DN OS SPORTS

A versatile standard-to-super-telephoto zoom, but mind the weight

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The Sigma 60-600mm F4.5-6.3 DG DN OS Sports for Sony and L-mount cameras has some history behind it. In 2001, the so-called 'Bigma' was born, a unique lens for SLRs with a 50-500mm zoom range, and an updated version, weighing 1,840g, was launched in 2010. This was eclipsed in 2018 by the Sigma 60-600mm f/4.5-6.3 DG OS HSM Sports, weighing 2.7kg. Sigma chose not to add Sony E and Leica L mount options for mirrorless cameras, instead redesigning the 'DN' mirrorless version, which is still a hefty 2,485g.

A similar contender for Sony shooters is the Tamron 50-400mm F4.5-6.3 Di III VXD. This one kicks

off with the natural perspective of a 50mm focal length but doesn't stretch as far into super-telephoto territory, topping out at 400mm. On the plus side, the Tamron is about four inches shorter in physical length and less than half the weight at 1,115g, meaning it's more manageable for carrying around and for handheld shooting. It's also less expensive, but the Sigma is a more prestigious lens with greater refinement in its handling, as well as giving a 50 percent boost in maximum telephoto reach.

Key features

Top of the features list is Sigma's 10x zoom range, making it a sort of

1 Top of the features list is Sigma's trademark 10x zoom range. The lens's complex optical path features 27 elements in 19 groups.

2 The lens has three customisable AF-hold buttons, which fall neatly under the thumb in both landscape and portrait orientations.

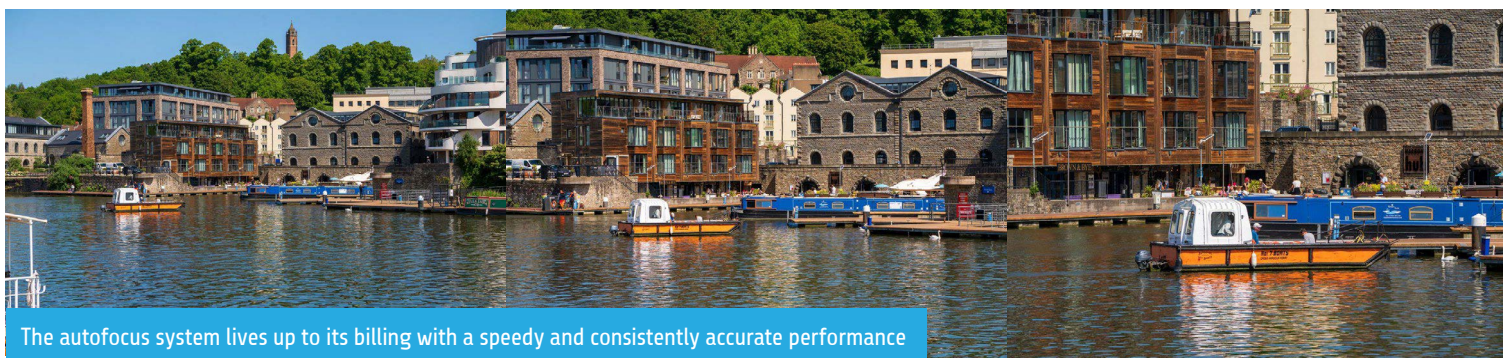
3 At the rear is a rank of switches for AF/MF focus modes, and an autofocus range limiter that can lock out both ends of travel.

'superzoom meets super-telephoto' lens. It has a complex optical path with no less than 27 separate elements in 19 groups. These include



LENS TEST SIGMA 60-600MM F4.5-6.3 DG DN OS SPORTS

In practical terms, sharpness is boosted by the optical image stabilisation. The new-generation OS2 system is worth up to seven stops at the short end of the zoom range, and an impressive six stops at the long end



The autofocus system lives up to its billing with a speedy and consistently accurate performance

three SLD (Special Low Dispersion) elements and two top-grade FLD ('Fluorite' Low Dispersion) elements.

While the optical design promises excellent sharpness and contrast with minimum aberrations, the autofocus system goes for super-fast performance with consistent accuracy. It features Sigma's latest HLA (High-response Linear Actuator) motor, which enables smooth autofocus transitions when shooting video, and near-silent operation.

Given the aperture range of f/4.5-6.3, camera shake is an issue

at the long end of the zoom range. Cameras with in-body image stabilisation tend to offer little benefit at long focal lengths, so Sigma's OS2 optical stabilisation system with a newly developed algorithm is a key feature of the lens. If you need even greater telephoto reach, the lens is compatible with Sigma's 1.4x and 2x teleconverters, with the inevitable one or two f/stop reduction in aperture, respectively.

Build and handling

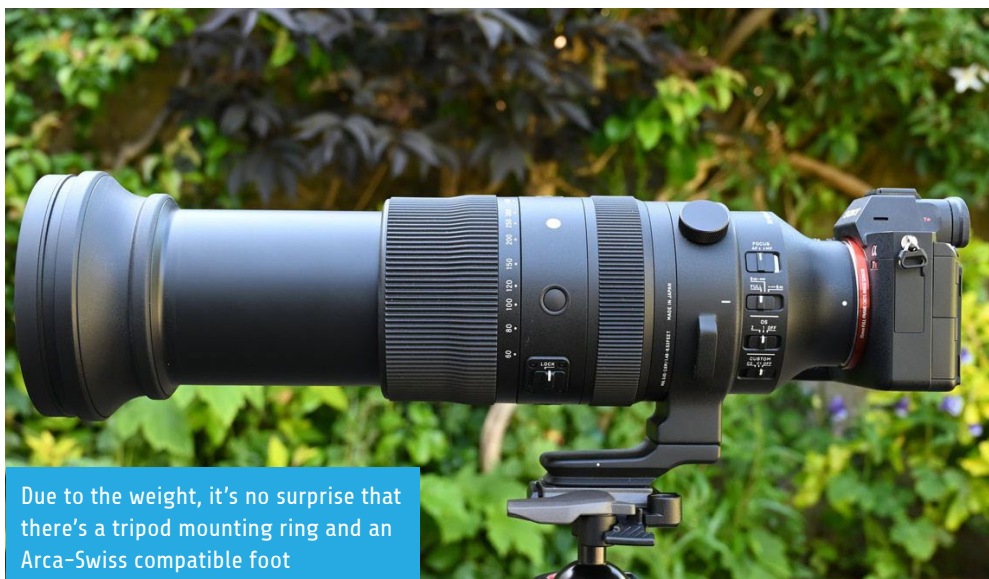
The Sigma feels robust and well built,

something that's helped by its multiple weather seals. The construction is based on a mix of magnesium alloy, carbon fibre-reinforced polymer and Sigma's TSC (Thermally Stable Composite), which has a low coefficient of expansion and contraction during temperature changes.

The zoom ring and electronically-coupled focus ring work with smooth precision, but the lens extends greatly as you go through the zoom range. Focusing is fully internal, so the front element neither rotates nor



LENS TEST SIGMA 60-600MM F4.5-6.3 DG DN OS SPORTS



Due to the weight, it's no surprise that there's a tripod mounting ring and an Arca-Swiss compatible foot

extends through the focus range. The minimum focus distance is 0.45m at the short end of the zoom range and 2.6m at the long end, with a maximum magnification ratio of 0.42x at the 200mm mark.

Given the physical extension of the lens at longer zoom settings, it's useful that the zoom lock switch can be engaged at any position, rather than just the shortest setting. The lens also has three customisable AF-hold buttons around its circumference, which fall neatly under the thumb in both landscape and portrait orientation shooting.

Towards the rear is a rank of switches for AF/MF focus modes, and an autofocus range limiter that can lock out either the long or short end of travel, either side of 6m. Below these are a dual-mode Optical Stabilisation switch with off, static and panning options, and a Custom switch

S P E C S

MOUNT: LEICA L, SONY E (FE) **FULL-FRAME:** YES **LENS CONSTRUCTION:** 27 ELEMENTS IN 19 GROUPS **ANGLE OF VIEW:** 39.6-4.1° **AUTOFOCUS:** YES **MAX APERTURE:** F/4.5 **MIN APERTURE:** F/22-32 **MIN FOCUSING DISTANCE:** 0.45M (W) 2.6M (T) **MAX MAGNIFICATION RATIO:** 0.42X (AT 200MM ZOOM) **FILTER SIZE:** 105MM **DIMENSIONS (L X D):** 280 X 119MM (APPROX) **WEIGHT:** 2,495G

with access to two custom modes.

Due to its weight, it's no surprise that the lens comes with a sturdy tripod mounting ring featuring an Arca-Swiss compatible foot, which slots into like-minded tripod heads, without the need for an additional quick-release plate. If handheld shooting is your thing, you can remove just the foot, leaving the ring and stub attached.

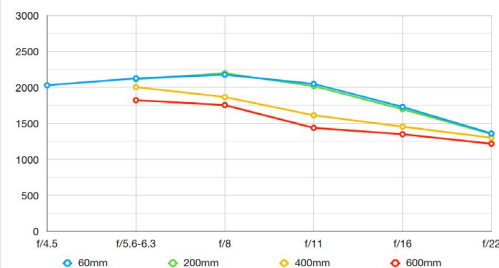
Performance

The autofocus system is super-speedy and consistently accurate. In our tests, the lens delivered excellent sharpness and contrast, even at the widest apertures, which is key, given the not overly fast aperture range. Sharpness is boosted by the new OS2 optical image stabilisation system which is worth up to seven stops at the short end of the zoom range and six stops at the long. Mode 2 stabilisation works in diagonal panning orientation as well as landscape and portrait.

Though not 'fast glass', the lens produces a tight depth of field, especially at longer zoom settings. Bokeh is smooth, and remains so when stopping down, helped by a nine-blade aperture diaphragm. There's resistance to ghosting and flare, thanks to the application of Sigma's Super Multi-Layer Coating. Colour fringing is mostly negligible, and pincushion distortion is minimal. Overall, performance is excellent, although it's a hefty beast for shooting at standard focal lengths.

Matthew Richards

SHARPNESS



Sharpness is excellent, both throughout the entire zoom range and right across the whole image frame, right into the corners – a real achievement given the oversized 10x zoom range. The lens did full justice to the big megapixel count of our Sony A7R III testing body.

FRINGING

SHORT 3.47 LONG 1.42

Colour fringing is absolutely negligible even at the extreme edges and corners of the image frame at most zoom settings, and still minimal where it creeps up a bit around the 200mm and 600mm settings.

DISTORTION

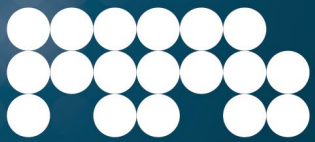
SHORT 2.29 LONG 0.83

Pincushion distortion is extremely minor at the shortest zoom setting, and still fairly minimal in the 200-600mm range. It's certainly not obvious at any focal length, even with automatic in-camera correction disabled.

VERDICT

Made for action, sports and wildlife photography, this lens's zoom range stretches from a standard 60mm through to a super-telephoto 600mm, ensuring you won't miss that vital shot while changing lenses. It's big and heavy, but handling is refined, and the super-fast autofocus and effective optical stabilisation ensure a great hit rate. Image quality is excellent, making the lens worth its weight.

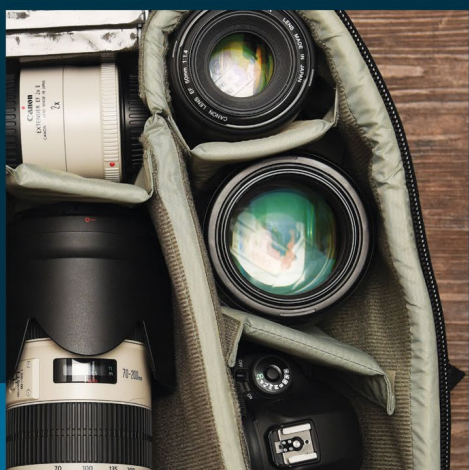




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A P P S

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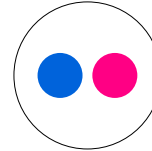
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