

THE WORLD'S BEST-SELLING DIGITAL PHOTO MAGAZINE

11-17 JANUARY 2024 ISSUE 590

# Photography Week



INSPIRATION | IDEAS | IN-DEPTH REVIEWS



**REVIEW: NIKKOR Z  
135MM F/1.8 S PLENA**  
IS THIS THE ULTIMATE  
OPTIC FOR NIKON  
PORTRAIT PROS?

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**TAKE YOUR LANDSCAPES TO THE NEXT LEVEL  
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W E L C O M E

# Photography Week



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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**

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We're more than just a magazine – read on and discover the many ways you can interact with and enjoy *Photography Week*



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Cover image © Getty



## WHAT'S HOT

THE WEEK'S TOP HEADLINES IN PHOTOGRAPHY

THE FIRST LAOWA AF LENS IS A  
ULTRA-WIDE FULL-FRAME PRIME

Laowa FF II 10mm f/2.8 C&amp;D Dreamer announced for Nikon Z and Sony E mounts



© Laowa

**V**enus Optics has announced its first AF lens, the Laowa FF II 10mm f/2.8 C&D Dreamer, a full-frame ultra-wide prime lens. It will be available for Nikon Z and Sony E mounts at launch, with availability for other mounts to be confirmed.

Laowa is renowned for creating excellent glass, and this lens looks to be no exception, with the optical design comprising 15 elements in nine groups, including extra-low dispersion glass and ultra-high refraction glass to combat excess aberration and distortion. This contributes to a weight of approximately

420g depending on the mount option.

The design of the lens is sleek and modern, much like other Laowa lenses, with a stylish-looking focusing ring. However, judging by the images Laowa has shared, it appears to lack a focus distance scale/gauge to accompany the focus ring.

The lens looks set to be a good option for astrophotography and landscapes, while a generous 130.4-degree angle of view and a minimum focusing distance of just 0.12m should enable the user to get creative and push the limits whether shooting interiors or portrait

photography. Inscribed on the lens next to the focal length and the aperture rating is 'Zero-D', signifying that the lens provides zero distortion, even when used wide open.

Laowa says the f/2.8 aperture offers "outstanding low light performance", an important specification for those who shoot at night. Because this is Laowa's first AF lens, the autofocus is the most noteworthy feature, and we'll be interested to see how this performs.

The lens is expected to be available to pre-order this month; pricing hadn't been confirmed at the time of writing.



© Getty Images/ Francesco Vaninetti Photo

**UNCONVENTIONAL**

Landscape photography may seem like a formulaic genre, but with some lateral thinking it's possible to create inspiring, narrative-rich images

# COMPLETE GUIDE TO LANDSCAPE COMPOSITION

Take your landscape photography to the next level with these essential composition techniques Words Peter Fenech

**W**e photographers often joke that Ansel Adams ruined landscape photography for the rest of us. Long before the first digital camera was created, Adams produced masterful scenic images that would set the benchmark for landscape composition for the next half-century. That's a tough act to follow. However, the beauty of photography as a creative medium is that we can draw inspiration from our idols, including Adams in many cases, but still come up with original and interesting ideas to try ourselves. One of the biggest draws of

landscape as a genre is the sheer diversity of colours, textures, shapes and light conditions on offer. Every location is different – the topography varies, the arrangement of vegetation has a bearing on foreground interest, and the elevation dictates how water flows around the frame, while light refracts and scatters depending on atmospheric conditions and direction. This provides the opportunity to capture shots with a difference every time we head out, even at a location we've visited many times previously. However, with this variety comes

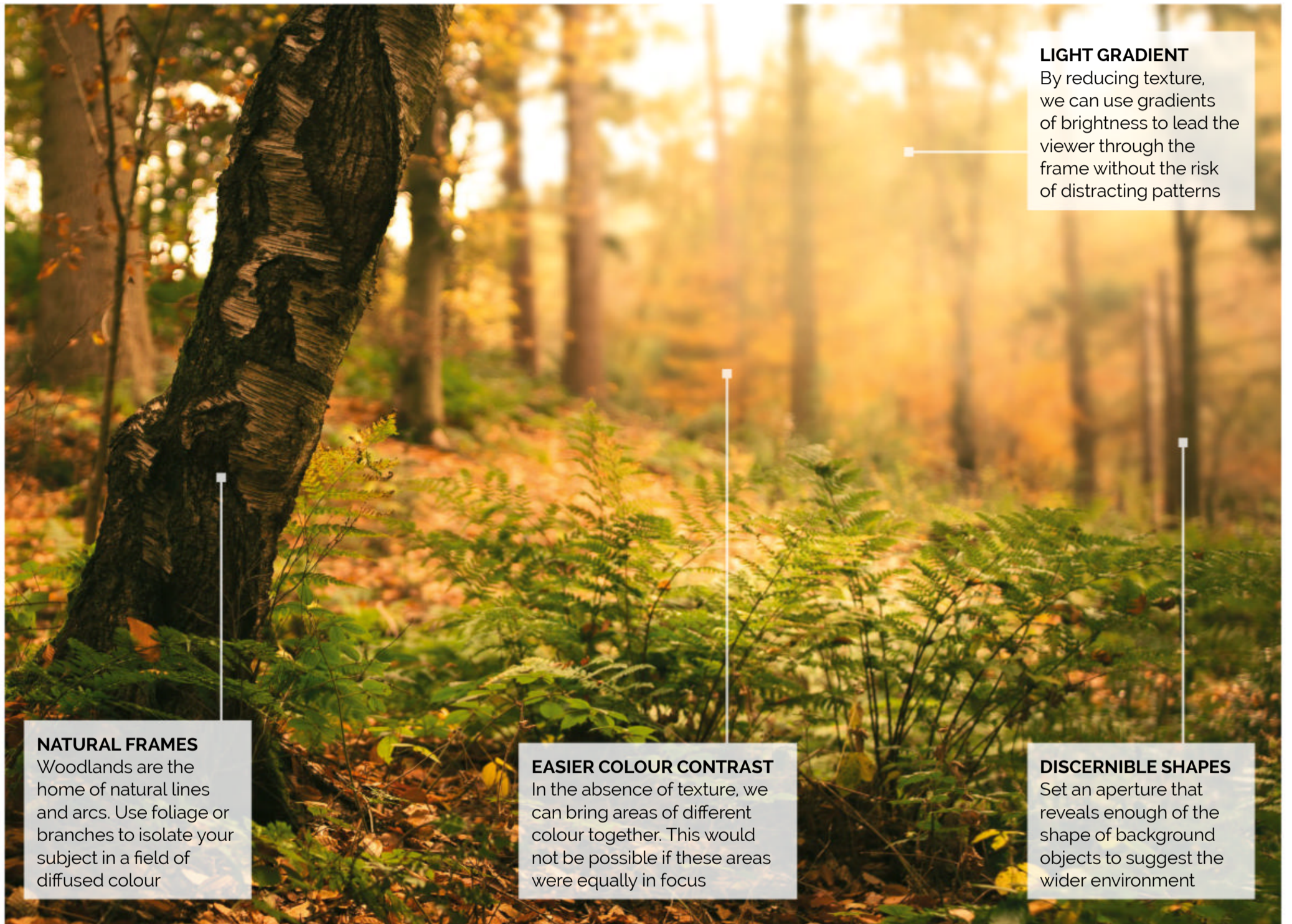
challenges. Unlike studio-based photography, or any other genre that involves predictable conditions, no single photo formula will suit every scene or all conditions. As experienced photographers, we need to recognise the need to adjust our approach to composition and exposure depending on the individual requirements of each scene. Here, we'll aim to break down the main elements of different landscape types, and explore how we can embrace their graphic properties. And, helpfully, you can use these core techniques in any scenic opportunity you might encounter.



# FEATURE

## CAPTURE BUSY SCENES

Find order amid the natural chaos of detail-rich landscape locations such as woodlands



### NATURAL FRAMES

Woodlands are the home of natural lines and arcs. Use foliage or branches to isolate your subject in a field of diffused colour

### EASIER COLOUR CONTRAST

In the absence of texture, we can bring areas of different colour together. This would not be possible if these areas were equally in focus

### DISCERNIBLE SHAPES

Set an aperture that reveals enough of the shape of background objects to suggest the wider environment

### LIGHT GRADIENT

By reducing texture, we can use gradients of brightness to lead the viewer through the frame without the risk of distracting patterns

Woodlands and forests are wonderful locations to explore in search of landscape images. They are highly atmospheric places, due largely to the micro-climates you'll commonly find when surrounded by respiring trees. Mist, carpets of flowers and vibrant colour, especially in the autumn months, mean there's always some reason to take out your camera.

With lots of detail comes the risk of overly 'busy' images, however. One of the staples of a landscape image is a clear subject, which can be difficult to define amongst the tangle of branches, shrubs and colourful mosses and lichens, all of which compete for attention. A mistake you'll often see in forest photography is a focal length

that's too wide, and which includes excess detail around the edges of the frame. The regimented trees will also feel static when shot straight-on; there's no symmetry, yet no identifiably unique elements suggested as the main focus.

The goal should be to create a sense of false isolation. We need to find a detail that represents the colour and texture of the location, decide on this as the main actor on our stage, and then use camera elevation, focal length and background to exclude most other details. Think 'within the frame', concentrating on how each object within the viewfinder complements the others. If something doesn't add colour contrast, juxtapose the main subject in texture, or act as a form of leading line,

it should be removed, either by shifting the frame or zooming in.

If you can't remove an element through re-composition, either because you don't have an appropriate lens or because there's simply not enough room in the scene to shift your framing, try making it a secondary element. Background leaves might have to be within the frame boundary for practical reasons, but you can change how they are represented through depth-of-field control. Not all landscapes require front-to-back sharpness; indeed, it's become something of a trend on social media to limit focus in scenic shots. The professional approach to busy landscape photography is: if you can't move a detail, make an asset of it.



# FEATURE

## CAPTURE BUSY SCENES

CONTINUED

### COMPOSE WOODLANDS

#### CAMERA HEIGHT

Here, we can make the most of optical distortion by angling the lens up from a low position to create a sense of scale in the trees

#### EXCLUDED GROUND

Exclude the forest floor for clean compositions – this is often the busiest part of the scene and contains the most distractions

#### BRANCH DIRECTION

Look for a composition in which tree branches are pointing into the scene, creating a line for the eye to follow

#### EMPTY SPACES

Avoid large gaps in the canopy. If too much sky is showing, use a longer focal length to avoid breaking up intentional patterns and colour

© Getty Images/Baac3nes



© Johannes Plenio

### COLOUR OVERLAP

Sometimes it just isn't possible to create a clean frame in a particular location. If there's lots of high-frequency or densely packed detail, we must look for other ways of arranging it into some kind of order. If the texture is rather homogenous,

create some separation by ordering colour in the frame. Position yourself so that you can capture layers of colour, indicating depth in the scene and giving your viewer a path to follow through the mass of competing shapes and patterns.

### KIT OUT YOUR KITBAG

#### FAST PRIME

A 50mm f/1.8 on a full-frame camera body or a 35mm f/1.8 for a crop-sensor body will capture a more natural view of the woodland landscape, helping you resist the temptation to go too wide in your framing.



#### ND FILTER

A 0.6 ND filter will allow you to blur distracting details with a longer exposure, and this can also create eye-catching abstract images. Combine this with an aperture of around f/11 for shutter speeds of 0.5 to 2 seconds.



#### MINI TRIPOD

Use a mini tripod, full-size legs with a reversible and removable centre column, or a bean bag to facilitate stable low-level compositions that omit forest-floor vegetation. Check that your model can support a full load in low configuration.





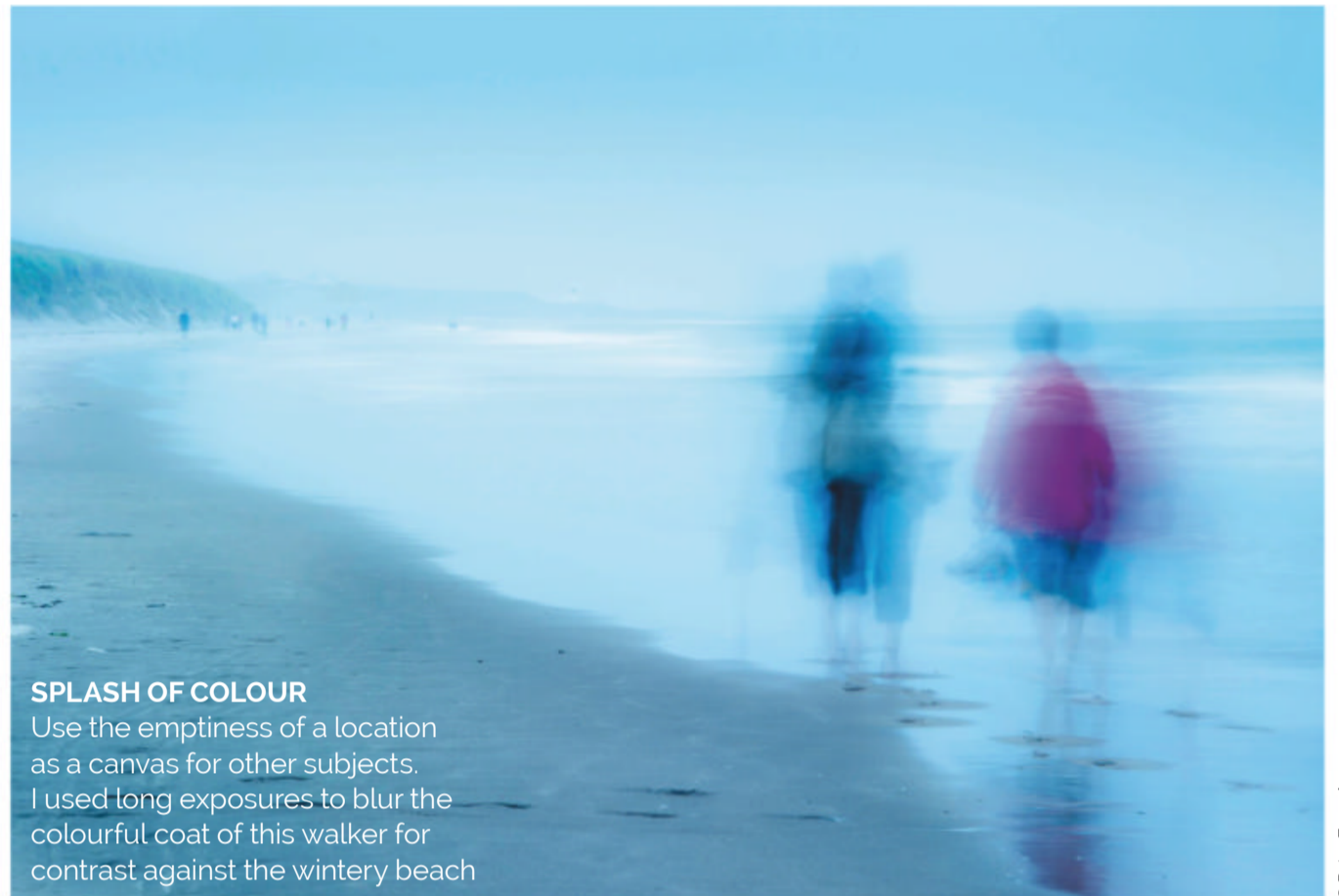
# FEATURE

## WORK IN MINIMALIST LANDSCAPES

Control your composition for effective shots in detail-sparse locations

**M**any photographers look for and appreciate painterly lighting in their images. However, in many respects, this is where the similarities between photography and other types of art end. There are some key differences between the compositional approaches for a photograph and a painting. For example, a photographer is accustomed to starting with lots of detail in the world around them, which they must cut back and order into a clean frame. A painter, meanwhile, starts with a blank canvas on which they must build up the detail. Therefore, while busy landscapes are certainly a challenge to get right, it's often the less populated scenes that cause the most confusion.

This confusion is often introduced by the shape and direction of the landscape. Scenics are usually quite long, with the majority of detail arranged laterally. Where all of the detail is bunched up towards the horizon, it can produce ugly, empty foregrounds that do not serve to improve the overall composition and create a disconnect with the viewer – giving a feeling that the 'main event' is hidden at the back of the picture. Meanwhile, if the horizon



### SPLASH OF COLOUR

Use the emptiness of a location as a canvas for other subjects. I used long exposures to blur the colourful coat of this walker for contrast against the wintry beach

© Peter Fenech

is broken by a sudden tall object, controlling negative space either side becomes the biggest consideration.

If you're in doubt as to the best approach to tackle this issue, use a longer focal length. Any problems arising from an imbalance of the interest in a scene will be exacerbated by using a wide lens. A setting of

100mm or greater has a better chance of bringing scene elements together, minimising negative space and isolating the intended subject. You will then have better control over aspects like symmetry, which can be used to hide the detail weighting in the frame by making any empty areas feel natural and intentional.



### FLAT AND TALL SUBJECTS

Capture scenes punctuated with imbalanced Y-axis detail

Lighthouses and coastal stacks, as just two good examples, take up a small percentage of the frame. This type of landscape is often defined by lots of empty sky, with the majority of the interest weighted at the bottom of the composition. One solution is to use portrait orientation (image 1), which is a clear method of reducing space at the edges. Alternatively, you could opt to make a feature of the negative areas, using a 7/8ths division, where the tall subject is shot from a lower angle and its isolation on the horizon line, placed so as just to be a sliver along the bottom, focuses attention (image 2). Finally, you could use the foreground texture to contrast against the flat sky or use the shape of the topography for its graphic properties, making the tall subject feel like a continuation of the land (image 3).



F E A T U R E

# WORK IN MINIMALIST LANDSCAPES

## CONTINUED

### HEATHLAND STUDY

While subtle colour is visible, this misty scene is almost monochromatic. In these cases, texture becomes far more prominent, so I chose to contrast the grass with the diffused trees

© Peter Fenech

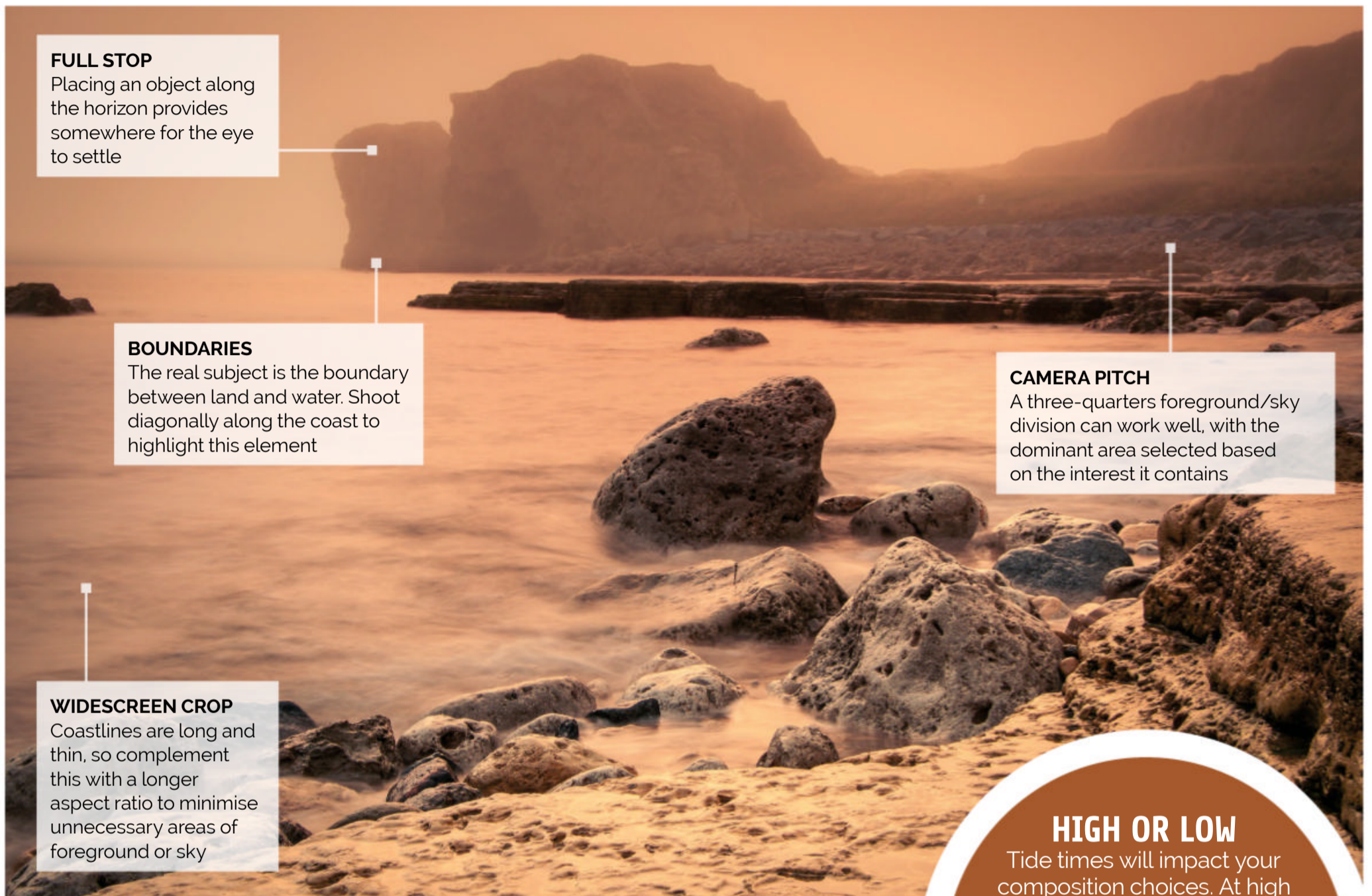
### ADAPT ASPECT RATIO

If you can't make the scene fit the frame, make the frame fit the scene. Many photographers are still locked into the idea of shooting for traditional print sizes, which can be limiting. Straying too far from 10x8 or 8x6 might not be advisable for future-proofing reasons, but consider whether a frame shape other than the standard 4:3 or 3:2 output of modern sensors might better suit your current subject. If you don't want to change the ratio in-camera, consider applying a paper or card mask to your LCD to help you preview the final composition.

# FEATURE

## WORK WITH WATER

Use still or flowing water to add balance and energy to your landscapes



© Peter Fenech

### FULL STOP

Placing an object along the horizon provides somewhere for the eye to settle

### BOUNDARIES

The real subject is the boundary between land and water. Shoot diagonally along the coast to highlight this element

### CAMERA PITCH

A three-quarters foreground/sky division can work well, with the dominant area selected based on the interest it contains

### WIDESCREEN CROP

Coastlines are long and thin, so complement this with a longer aspect ratio to minimise unnecessary areas of foreground or sky

### HIGH OR LOW

Tide times will impact your composition choices. At high tide, lots of foreground detail is lost to the sea, but a wider lens can be used to capture incoming and receding wave patterns. Low tides might require a longer focal length if there are large, empty areas of beach or dry rocks

If you live in the UK you have the good fortune to live fairly close to the ocean wherever you are. Furthermore, all of that rain we complain about has the effect of keeping our lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, becks and brooks filled for the majority of the year, so when it comes to shooting landscapes with water, we're spoiled for choice. Once you're accustomed to working bodies of water into your landscapes, shots without them can seem oddly dull. This is due to the reflective properties of water, which bounce much of the light from the sky back into the scene, filling in shadows and applying washes of reflected colour.

Reflections add a symmetry that can produce a feeling of balance in otherwise sparse frames. Even the smallest of puddles can fill in a gap, such as an area of dull concrete or muddy foreground, neither of which would likely be considered attractive, and draw together

all zones of the composition. Be aware that reflected images can take the eye away from the 'real' subject, so use caution in how much space each takes up in the shot. You will also have to balance the exposure for both the reflection and the real surfaces, since the water will absorb a percentage of the light and underexpose the duplicated detail. Start with +2/3 EV exposure compensation.

Meanwhile, moving water can give scenes a more dynamic feel, emphasising that there's a living landscape in your pictures. As stills photographers we're at a disadvantage compared to videographers in that we can only capture a single moment; a longer exposure of a moving subject breaks that wall, and simulates the passage of time, something that surprisingly few photographers think to apply to a landscape.

The inclusion of moving water comes

with its own considerations, such as exposure length and placement of the water to divide up the shot. With long, thin streams and rivers, avoid splitting the composition down the middle or into disparate areas. Having a stream run straight through the frame can create a visual barrier between the viewer and the subject, which looks uncomfortable. First, find a good place for the main subject, then pivot around this until any water either leads to this object or wraps around it, creating a frame in which everything feels joined up.



# FEATURE

## WORK WITH WATER CONTINUED



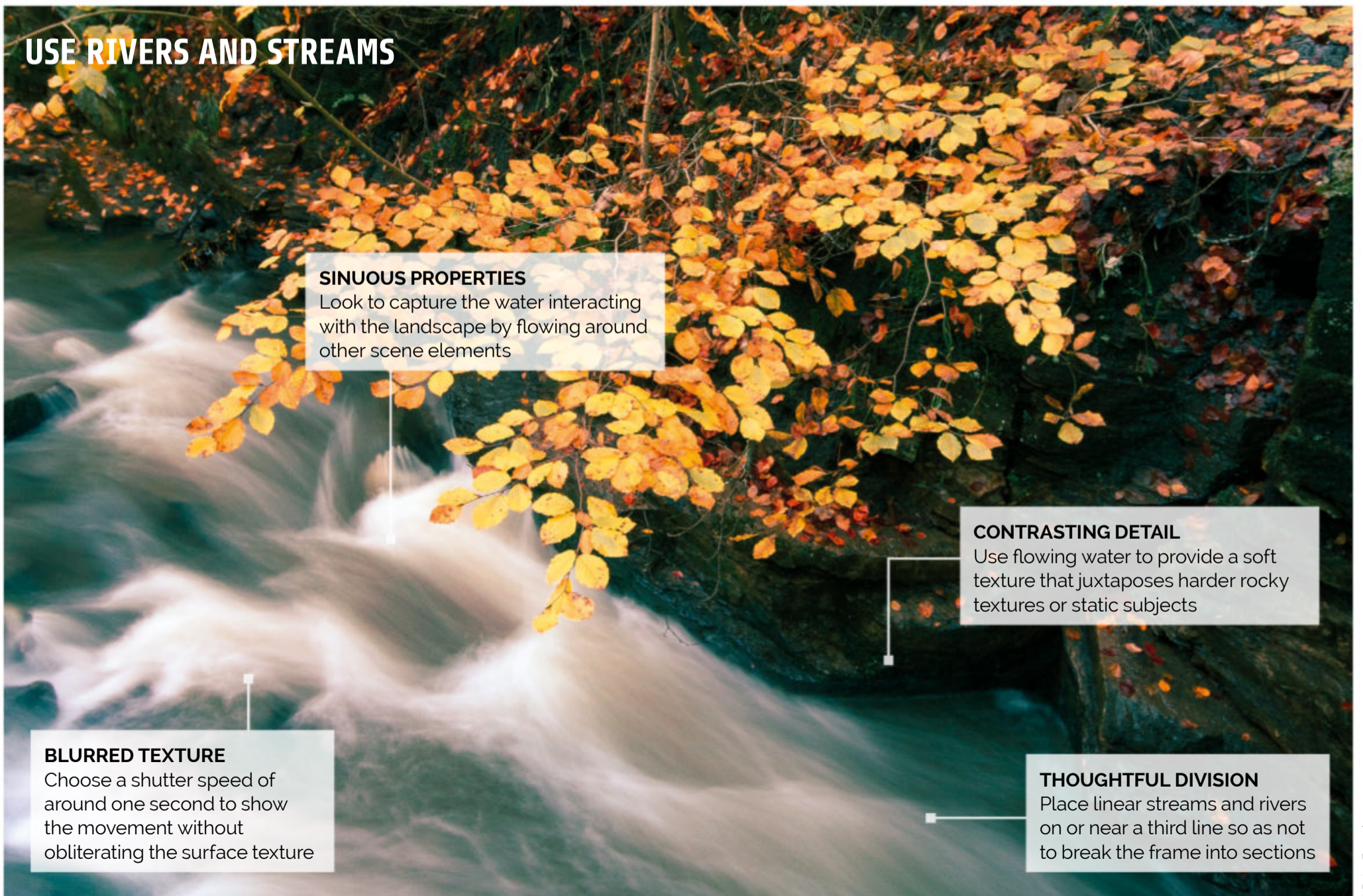
**TRANSITION PLACEMENT**  
Control relative contributions of the real and reflected detail with the position of the image split

**STRETCHED CANVAS**  
Use reflections to extend the borders of the scene, filling in gaps in negative space

**ELEVATION**  
Make foreground reflections bigger by lowering the camera, which also closes the gap between the two images

**CAPTURE STILL WATER**

© Peter Fenech



**USE RIVERS AND STREAMS**

**SINUOUS PROPERTIES**  
Look to capture the water interacting with the landscape by flowing around other scene elements

**CONTRASTING DETAIL**  
Use flowing water to provide a soft texture that juxtaposes harder rocky textures or static subjects

**BLURRED TEXTURE**  
Choose a shutter speed of around one second to show the movement without obliterating the surface texture

**THOUGHTFUL DIVISION**  
Place linear streams and rivers on or near a third line so as not to break the frame into sections

© Peter Fenech



# COMPOSE FOR CONTRAST

Adjust your framing to account for the direction and intensity of light at different times of the day



## IMAGE SPECS

- Exposure settings: 1/125sec, f/16, ISO 100
- Metering mode: Evaluative metering
- Focal length: 24mm

© Johannes Plenio

## GOLDEN HOUR CONTRAST

Times close to sunrise and sunset offer the best light quality, but shadows can be especially directional when the sun is visible. If you're shooting directly towards it, place the sun disc on a third or close to the intended subject to draw the eye to that part of the frame. Be conscious of long shadows running perpendicular to leading lines, as this can reduce their effect; where possible, use these shadows themselves as leading elements.

**L**andscape composition is about more than simply choosing a spot from which to shoot a scene. The glory of landscape as a genre of photography is that, as the light changes throughout the day and across the four seasons of the year, the terrain alters in appearance. The direction, intensity and brightness of light impact how texture, shape and colour look in an image and, as such, we must adjust our camera techniques to match.

Contrast is, by definition, the difference in luminance or colour of one object or area of a photo from another. Absolute black and absolute white might represent

the greatest contrast of exposure, but these are rarely seen together in the same frame. Similarly, colours on opposite sides of the colour wheel provide the greatest colour contrast but, in a natural environment, these opposing colour values are rarely observed in abundance.

Beyond the difference in characteristics between one zone and another, it's important to remember the distinction between global and local contrast. A bright area might be visible in the same frame as a dark spot, but if they're located far apart, such as on opposite sides of the composition, the viewer might not perceive the image

as high-contrast. Place these two areas beside one another, however, and the image seems far punchier.

Learn how to recognise where best in the frame to place your light sources and the shadows they cast in the landscape. You can then create more intelligently structured shots that tap into the viewer's expectations and elicit the greatest emotional response.



# COMPOSE FOR CONTRAST CONTINUED



**IMAGE SPECS**

- Exposure settings: 1/800 sec, f/3.2, ISO100
- Metering mode: Spot metering
- Focal length: 110mm

## OVERCAST LIGHT

Generally, overcast skies either show up as a dull grey or, potentially worse, as solid white. This light is ideal for capturing saturated foliage colours, so consider a longer lens to bring trees together and limit the sky to a maximum of 25 percent of the frame. Where possible, avoid portrait format or, alternatively, use a more square aspect such as 4:3 or even 1:1. This reduces the excess space at the frame edges and at the top and bottom.



**IMAGE SPECS**

- Exposure settings: 1/25 sec, f/14, ISO100
- Metering mode: Partial metering
- Focal length: 17mm

## MIDDAY DEPTH

Top-down lighting, as found around midday, will make foregrounds appear flat due to a lack of contouring. Try shooting from a low position, or arrange yourself so you can place objects at visibly different distances from the camera to re-introduce a sense of three-dimensionality. Alternatively, find something to frame the scene and filter the light, such as a tree canopy, using a tall frame and wide lens to incorporate the light source and simulate directionality.

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G A L L E R Y

# XPOSURE

THE WEEK'S MOST INSPIRING READER PHOTOS



## BREAKING THE RULES

**DOM HAUGHTON**

"I decided to ignore the 'rules' and shot straight into the bright sun, capturing the rays in all their glory. I'm not bothered about burnt-out highlights in shots like this, because that's what we really see when we look towards the sun."

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



# GALLERY

THE WEEK'S MOST INSPIRING READER PHOTOS



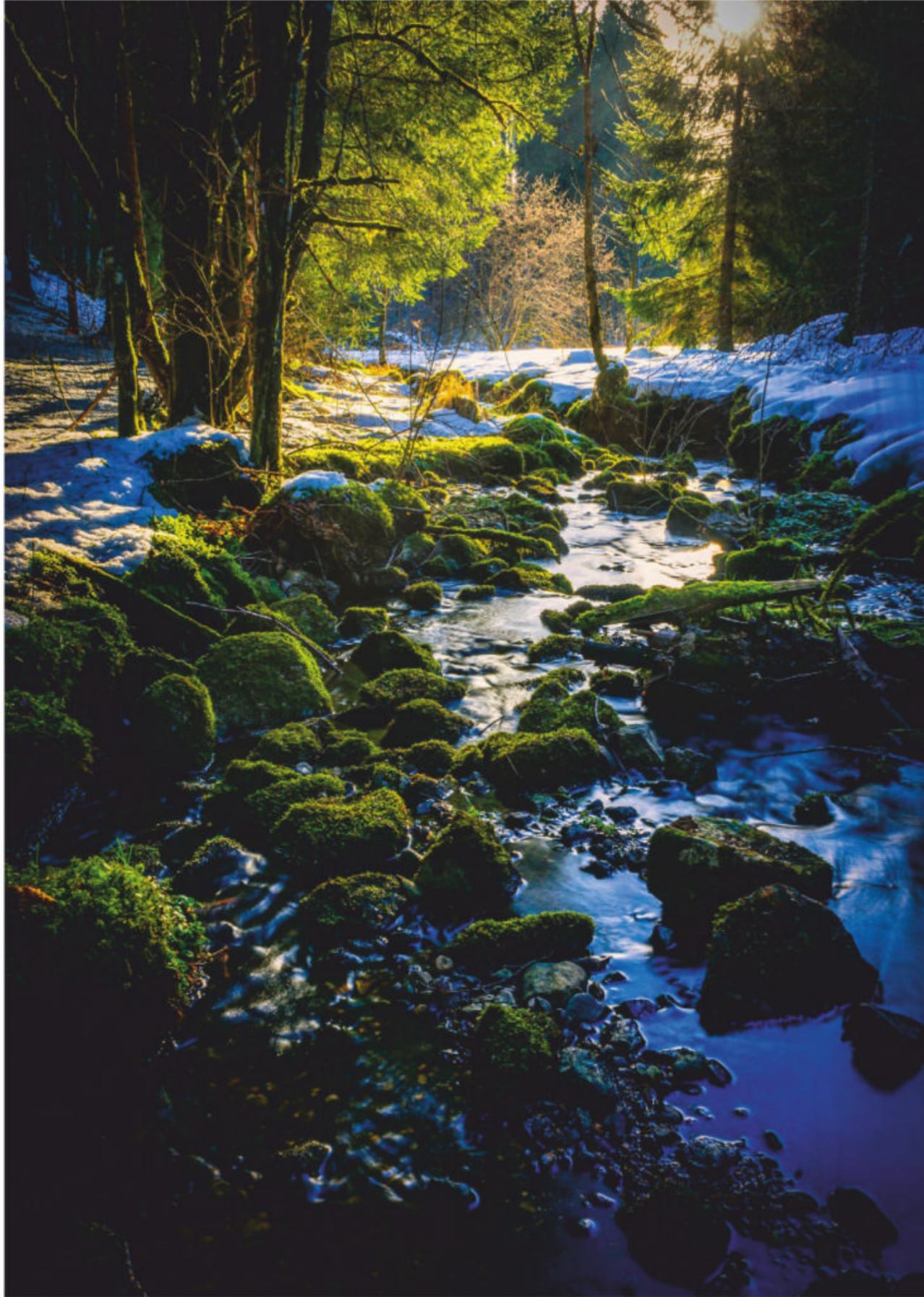
## SOUTH BANK

**DAVID FEUERHELM**

"The Shard at night, photographed from the north bank of the Thames near London Bridge. This is a composite of six images."  
<https://bit.ly/3flC9Hi>

# G A L L E R Y

THE WEEK'S MOST INSPIRING READER PHOTOS



## RIVER

**JEAN-YVES BESSELIEVRE**

"I shot this woodland river scene with my Sony  
A7 Mark II and FE 28-70mm F3.5-5.6 lens."

<https://bit.ly/3N9H0NS>

# GALLERY

THE WEEK'S MOST INSPIRING READER PHOTOS



## FROM THE NEW TO THE OLD

**KEITH TODD**

"A still life of keys dating from the past to the present."

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



FACEBOOK

<http://bit.ly/39py9lg>



FLICKR

<http://bit.ly/2VIgsJ0>

## PHOTOGRAPHY WEEK WANTS YOUR PHOTOS!

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



Photo by Delaware Army National Guard



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Beggs

Images courtesy US Army



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jessica Elbouab



Photo by 1st Sgt. Michel Sauret

## PHOTOS FROM THE FRONT LINE: THE US ARMY'S IMAGES OF 2023

Stunning gallery captures military life, from explosive action to heart-warming moments

**T**he US Army has shared its 'Year in Photos' gallery for 2023, featuring 78 fascinating images that capture every aspect of military life, from the action-packed to the intimate.

The selection of images, taken by US Army photographers, reflects the incredible variety of service life and experience, and includes dramatic shots of soldiers in training and on active service overseas, colourful images of parades and sports

events, and moments of both sadness and celebration shared with colleagues and family members.

The range of locations featured reflect the US military's presence worldwide as well as at home, ranging from Australia to Alaska, and from Finland and the Baltic states to the White House.

Click the link to see the full gallery of images, along with photos from previous years, and read the stories behind them.



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

S K I L L S

# CRASH COURSE

ESSENTIAL PHOTO SKILLS MADE EASY



## SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT

Adam Waring combines a wide-angle lens with a shallow aperture for a portrait that captures the subject in the context of their surroundings



Wide-angle lenses are usually associated with landscapes, and most often used in conjunction with narrow apertures for a greater depth of field, but lenses like the Nikon Z 24mm f/1.8 S beg the question: why would you need such a wide aperture on a wide lens? And while prime lenses traditionally offer superior quality compared to a zoom, a 24-70mm f/4 standard zoom is already as sharp as most people could wish for.

One answer is that portraits generally have a shallow depth of field, so that you can concentrate the viewer's attention on the subject. So a fast and wide prime is perfect for environmental portraiture, where you want to show the subject in the context of their surroundings, but still blur the background with a shallow depth of field to prevent it from becoming a distraction. It's particularly effective when there's something of interest in front of the subject, as well as behind

them, as this enables you to create a layered effect that suggests depth.

We headed to a local wood at the onset of winter, and shot with the low sun behind our subject to enhance the seasonal feel. This plunged our subject into shadow, which we compensated for with a blip of flash – but shooting through our foliage to add depth with on-camera flash would have meant the leaves were harshly lit, as they're closer to the camera than the subject. Read on to learn how we solved this problem...



## HOW TO SHOOT ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAITS



1

## INTO THE WOODS

Shooting into the sun means the background is much brighter than our subject, who as a result becomes lost amid the surrounding woodland. We could counter this with a flashgun, but had we attached our flash directly to the camera hotshoe then anything closer to the camera than our subject would be bleached out, and the foreground foliage would become an annoying distraction.

2

## FLASH OF INSPIRATION

The solution is to shoot with an off-camera flash positioned to the side of our shooting position. We used the Hähnel Viper flash trigger; a transmitter slips into the camera's hotshoe while the flashgun slots into a receiver. We used a Joby GorillaPod to secure the flash to a tree to save having to carry a light stand – alternatively, you could have an assistant hold the flashgun.



3

## JUST A BLIP

While our flash trigger allows full TTL control, setting the flash power manually combined with a little trial and error is often simpler. We only needed a blip of flash here, as we only wanted a subtle burst of light to bring out our subject from the background, rather than overpowering them with harsh light; we settled on 1/64 power.



## QUICK TIP

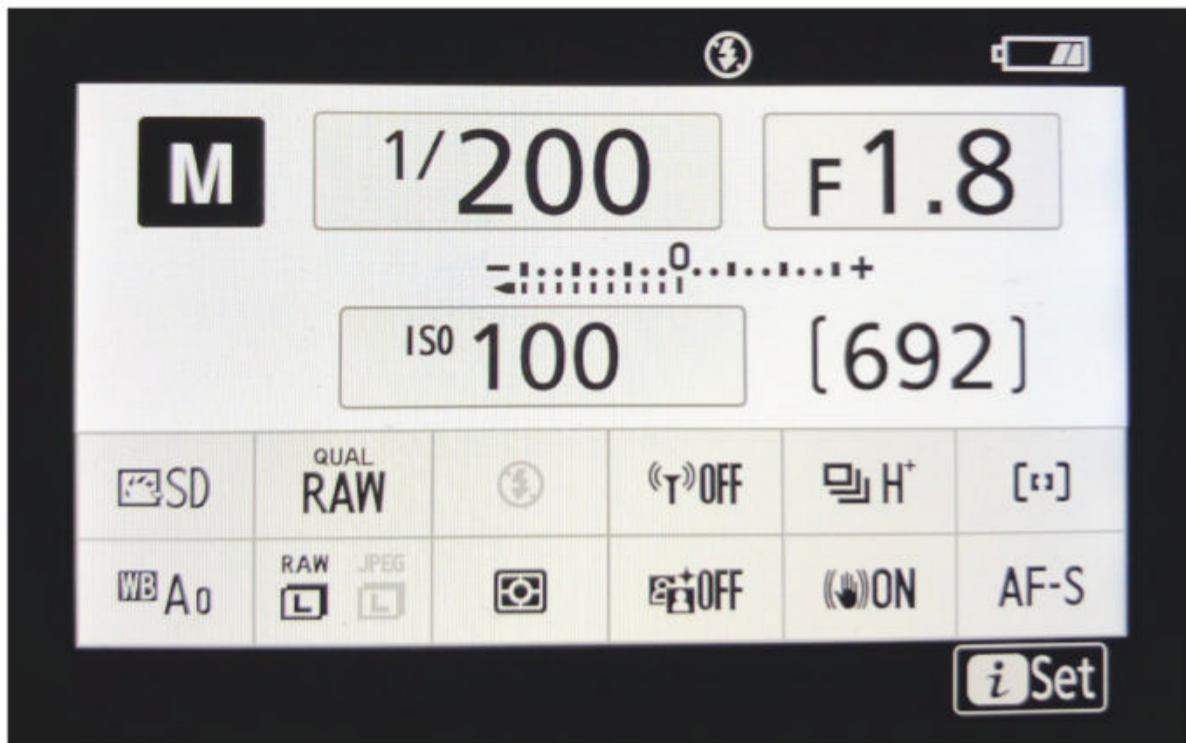
The day of our shoot was quite a mild and pleasant, but we nevertheless dressed our model in a winter coat, woolly hat and wellies to help complete her autumnal

look – a T-shirt and trainers just wouldn't have had the right feel. We also asked her to look up, rather than directly at the camera, for a more wistful pose.



# S K I L L S

## HOW TO SHOOT ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAITS



4

### MANUAL WORK

When balancing flash against ambient light, it's often a good idea to set your exposure manually. As the light behind our subject was so bright, we wanted to underexpose the background, safe in the knowledge that we could adjust our flash output to control the light on our subject. We shot at f/1.8 to create the shallow depth of field, with a shutter speed of 1/200 sec and ISO100.

5

### THE NARROWER VIEW

We also tried a shot at 1/200 sec and f/4, increasing the ISO to 400 to compensate, to illustrate the effect that taking such a shot with the 24-70mm standard zoom would have. As you can see, the level of blur both in front of and behind our subject isn't as pronounced as in our main image, and the more sharply rendered foreground leaves in particular are quite distracting.



6

### TAKE IT OR LEAF IT

As a finishing touch to further accentuate the shallow depth of field, our assistant threw a bunch of leaves up in the air, between the model and camera. We focused on our model's face – which is critical when shooting at such a shallow depth of field – and fired a burst of shots using the Continuous High mode. This way we could pick a shot which had a good number of falling leaves without any obscuring the face.

E D I T I N G

# PHOTOSHOP

LEARN ESSENTIAL EDITING SKILLS FAST!



HOW TO...

## TAKE CONTROL OF DETAIL

Get to grips with one of the best tools for boosting detail and enhancing portraits

**T**he Texture slider is one of the best tools in Camera Raw and Lightroom for controlling detail in your images. On the face of it, the Texture slider is very simple: you drag it one way to bring out detail, and drag the other way to tone detail down. But in combination with other Camera Raw or Lightroom tools like the Adjustment Brush and Range

Masking, the Texture command becomes seriously powerful.

While its name may imply that this tool is best for enhancing textures, it can be just as effective when doing the opposite – a negative value can create a wonderful softening effect that's useful for de-emphasising overly busy parts of your frame, or for speedy skin softening in portraits.

In this video tutorial we'll show you how you can get the most out of the slider by applying it locally. This can be done in either Camera Raw or Lightroom, which have almost identical controls. We've used the Texture slider to soften the skin over the face and enhance the details in the fur hood, but you'll find it useful for all kinds of editing tasks.



## LENS TEST

EXPERT OPINION ON THE LATEST KIT



# NIKKOR Z 135MM F/1.8 S PLENA

Practically perfect in every way, the Plena is both super-sharp and deliciously blurry

[www.nikon.co.uk](http://www.nikon.co.uk) [£2,699/\\$2,497](#)

**T**he Nikon Z 135mm f/1.8 S Plena has a tough act to follow. We were impressed by the Z 85mm f/1.2 S, but the Plena takes everything to a whole new level. Naturally, it doesn't have such a fast aperture rating (which would be impractical), but the longer focal length still enables a tight depth of field. We love the way the lens is perfectly suited to tight head-and-shoulders portraiture, but also to still-life photography, and any situation where you want to compress perspective with a medium telephoto focal length while isolating the main subject by blurring its surroundings.

#### Key features

The performance of the Plena is top drawer, thanks to an impeccable design that puts its glass at the top of the features list. The optical path incorporates 16 elements in total and includes four ED (Extra-low Dispersion) elements, one aspherical element and one SR (Short-wavelength Refractive) element. Nikon's ED glass is renowned for delivering excellent sharpness, contrast and colour accuracy, even at wide apertures, while reducing chromatic aberrations. The newer SR glass further reduces chromatic aberration at the blue end of the

**1** At the front, the lens has an 82mm thread for attaching filters.

**2** A pair of programmable function buttons are located on the lens barrel.

**3** As well as a manual focus ring there's also a secondary customisable control ring.

spectrum, while the use of an aspheric element can also reduce aberrations, as well as the physical size of a lens.

Building on the quality of the glass itself, the lens features ARNEO coating, which is particularly effective



## LENS TEST NIKKOR Z 135MM F/1.8 S PLENA

Fast glass can be less than sharp towards the edges of the frame, especially at the widest aperture, but the Plena dispels any concerns with spectacular sharpness and contrast across the entire frame, even at f/1.8



© Matthew Richards

Bokeh is a big selling point of this lens – it renders highlights as near-perfect circles



© Matthew Richards



© Nikon

at minimising ghosting and flare, as well as Meso Amorphic Coat, which is even more effective at minimising reflections from light entering the lens from just about any angle. The overall design is tailored to deliver scintillating levels of sharpness across the whole frame, along with beautiful bokeh. A particularly well-rounded 11-blade aperture diaphragm helps to maintain top-quality bokeh when stopping down.

#### Build and handling

As we've come to expect from Nikon's S-line lenses for its Z-system cameras, build quality feels robust and solid. For a full-frame-compatible lens that combines a 135mm focal

length with a fast f/1.8 aperture, it's not overly large, and it weighs just under a kilogram. As such, handling feels comfortable and refined, even for lengthy periods of handheld shooting.

Although the autofocus system is fast and ultra-precise, there's a wide manual focus ring if you prefer to be in control. As usual with Nikon Z lenses, you can customise this to take on other functions while in autofocus mode, or to enable the usual full-time manual override. A secondary control ring is also on hand, which is useful for stepless aperture control when you're shooting video, or for adjusting the likes of exposure compensation or ISO.

As this is a lens that's designed

for portraiture the customisable L-fn (Lens-function) button is duplicated so that it falls under the thumb in either landscape or portrait orientation shooting. Typical uses include AF-On and AF-Hold.

The lens's combination of focal length and aperture can only result in a large front element, and it has a 82mm filter attachment thread, although that's no larger than you'll often find on standard and telephoto f/2.8 trinity zooms.

#### Performance

While the features, specifications, build quality and handling of the Plena are all impressive in their own right, everything comes together to make this lens more than the sum of its parts. True to Nikon's claims, autofocus is fast and incredibly accurate; it does slow down in tricky conditions, such as low-contrast scenes or close-ups, but this helps to ensure that the excellent reliability is maintained.

Fast glass can be notorious for being less than sharp, especially at



## LENS TEST NIKKOR Z 135MM F/1.8 S PLENA

© Matthew Richards



The quality of its bokeh is where the Plena lens comes into its own. The bokeh's smooth silkiness is gorgeous, with a natural-looking roll-off in the transition between focused and defocused areas.

© Matthew Richards



Chromatic aberration is another common problem with fast lenses, but the Plena excels with negligible colour fringing around high-contrast edges.

the widest aperture and towards the edges and corners of the frame, but the Plena dispels any concerns with spectacular sharpness and contrast across the entire image frame, even

## S P E C S

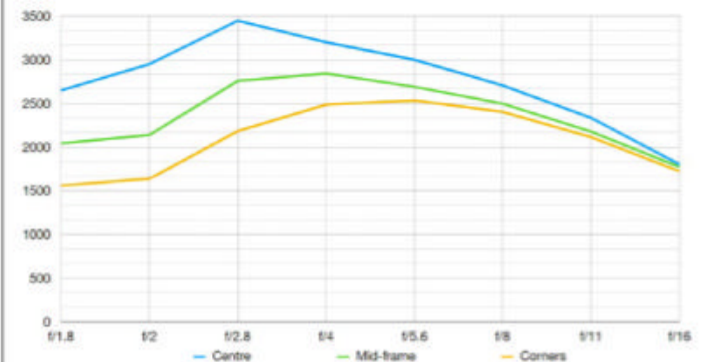
**MOUNT:** NIKON Z FULL-FRAME: YES  
**CONSTRUCTION:** 16 ELEMENTS IN 14 GROUPS  
**ANGLE OF VIEW:** 18.2°  
**DIAPHRAGM BLADES:** 11  
**MAX APERTURE:** F/1.8  
**MIN APERTURE:** F/16  
**MIN FOCUSING DISTANCE:** 0.82M/2.69FT  
**MAX MAGNIFICATION RATIO:** 0.2X  
**FILTER SIZE:** 82MM  
**DIMENSIONS (L X D):** 139.5 X 98MM  
**WEIGHT:** 995G

at f/1.8, and sharpness gets even better if you stop down. Longitudinal or 'axial' chromatic aberration is another common problem with fast lenses but the Plena excels here too, with negligible colour fringing around high-contrast edges just in front of or behind the plane of focus.

Naturally, it's not just about sharpness. For this type of lens in particular the quality of the bokeh can be even more important to discerning portrait photographers, and this is where the Plena comes into its own. The smooth silkiness of the bokeh is gorgeous, with a natural-looking roll-off in the transition between focused and defocused areas – and that's not all. Bokeh discs (typically caused by defocused small areas of light) are devoid of the dreaded onion-ring effect, and remain amazingly well-rounded even out towards the edges and corners of the frame, rather than taking on the more common cat's-eye shape in appearance. Bokeh discs also have a soft outline, despite the lens lacking an apodisation filter, as featured in some lenses that are built for bokeh. And the 11-blade aperture helps keep a nicely rounded shape for bokeh discs when stopping down a little.

Matthew Richards

## SHARPNESS



It's a testament to the Plena's design that wide-open sharpness is so excellent right across the entire image frame. Stop down to apertures between f/2.8 and f/11 and the lens is scarily sharp from edge to edge and from corner to corner.

## FRINGING

0.24

There's remarkably little axial chromatic aberration, even wide open at f/1.8, while lateral chromatic aberration (more commonly noticeable towards the edges and corners of the frame) is also extremely minimal. And that's without any automatic correction being applied.

## DISTORTION

1.01

There's a slight touch of pincushion distortion, but it's of such a low order that you generally won't notice it in real-world shooting, compared with taking shots of test charts. Either way, automatic in-camera correction is available.

## VERDICT

The dictionary gives one definition of the word Plena as 'the condition or quality of being full' – and this Nikkor lens is certainly full of goodness. It's packed with top-quality glass, high-tech coatings, a super-fast autofocus system and a really well-rounded 11-blade diaphragm. Build quality is robust and handling is refined, and the clincher is that it delivers exquisite image quality, making it one of the best Nikkor lenses of all time, and one of my personal favourites.





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## ADVERTISING

UK Commerical Sales Director

Clare Dove

[clare.dove@futurenet.com](mailto:clare.dove@futurenet.com)

Head of Market

Matthew Johnston

[matthew.johnston@futurenet.com](mailto:matthew.johnston@futurenet.com)

Account Sales Director

Matt Bailey

[matt.bailey@futurenet.com](mailto:matt.bailey@futurenet.com)

## MARKETING

Head of Acquisitions

Helen Harding

## LICENSING

International

Licensing Director

Rachel Shaw

[licensing@futurenet.com](mailto:licensing@futurenet.com)

Editor Jeff Meyer

[jeff.meyer@futurenet.com](mailto:jeff.meyer@futurenet.com)

Art Editor

Alvin Weetman

Production Editor

Mike McNally

Reviews Editor

Gareth Bevan

Lab Manager

Ben Andrews

## REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS

Mike Harris, Marcus Hawkins,

Rod Lawton, James Paterson,

Matthew Richards

## SENIOR CREATIVE TEAM

Content Director

Chris George

[chris.george@futurenet.com](mailto:chris.george@futurenet.com)

Senior Art Editor

Warren Brown

## SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Senior Vice President – Games,  
Entertainment, Tech & Sports

Kevin Addley

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Chief Financial and Strategy Officer Penny Ladkin-Brand  
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244



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