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PLUS! 43 SOFTWARE EXTRAS FOR PHOTOSHOP & LIGHTROOM



Digital Camera World

The world's favorite
photography magazine

Issue 307 May 2026

CAPTURE THE COAST

12 pages of pro techniques and insights!

✓ Camera settings ✓ Tripod setup ✓ Editing

132
PAGES OF
TOP PHOTO
ADVICE!

PAUL NICKLEN MASTERCLASS

Exclusive extracts from the
wildlife legend's new book



Camera Clinic
How to rescue
poor exposures

Hotshots
The year's best
travel pictures

Interview
"A volcano eruption
melted my drone"

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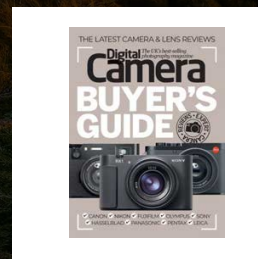
43 Actions,
presets and more



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From muddy paws to mellow naps,
scan here for pet insurance picks.



Welcome

If wildlife photography is your favourite genre, then you're in for a treat, as we've adapted two chapters from Paul Nicklen's new book (p64). Photo Skills (p41) presents 10 new projects to help make you a better photographer, and Camera Clinic (p82) focuses on fixing poor exposures. Also this month, join a seascapes masterclass on the north Cornwall coast (p8), find out how the award-winning Karim Iliya photographs and films erupting volcanoes (p118), and view the winners of our Remembering Wildlife reader photo competition (p28). May's kit reviews include the Ricoh GR IV Monochrome (p106) and Sigma's new 12mm F1.4 DC | C lens (p116). Enjoy the issue.

Niall

Niall Hampton, editor
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This issue's bonus gifts **Find out more on pages 6 and 104**



Nine all-new photo tips cards

Our latest selection of tips cards gives wallet-sized advice on how to take better photos on location



43 Photoshop Actions and presets

As seen in this month's tutorials, give your photos a new look in just a few clicks with these bonus software extras



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Contents

ISSUE 307
MAY 2026



64



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74

Hotshots Our showcase of the category winners from Travel Photographer of the Year 2025



93

Digital Darkroom Learn essential skills for editing in Photoshop, Lightroom and Affinity Photo

Photo skills

- 8 The Apprentice**
Shoot with a pro – we're on the coast in north Cornwall for a seascapes masterclass with Peter Travers
- 22 Ask Matthew**
Our agony uncle answers your photo queries on a variety of topics
- 41 Photo Skills**
NEW! Fresh inspiration on every page – choose from nine all-new projects and enter our latest photo challenge
- 64 Wildlife special**
An exclusive extract from *Paul Nicklen: A Photography Masterclass*, available now from all good bookstores
- 82 Camera Clinic**
Are your photos ever let down by poor exposures? Fret no more, as Will Cheung dispenses the necessary fixes
- 93 Digital Darkroom**
Five new image editing tutorials, plus our latest batch of software extras

Regulars

- 20 In Focus**
The latest camera kit and accessories from across the photographic industry
- 24 Readers' letters**
Our pick of the month's correspondence from readers
- 28 Remembering Giraffes**
The results are in! Revealing the 20 winners of our reader wildlife contest
- 32 Reader gallery**
Presenting the month's best images across a wide range of genres
- 74 Hotshots**
Category winners from Travel Photographer of the Year 2025
- 92 Shot of the Month**
Oculus, a unique view of London's St Paul's Cathedral, by Peter Li
- 118 Interview**
Karim Iliya chats about his recent win in the 14th season of the HIPA contest



Gear & tests

- 106 Ricoh GR IV Monochrome**
The popular street photography compact gets a black and white-only sensor
- 110 Hasselblad X2D II 100C**
Could this be the best stills camera ever made? We put this question to the test
- 114 Meike 35mm F1.8 Pro AF**
Feature-rich but affordable prime for Nikon Z and Sony E-mount mirrorless cameras
- 116 Sigma 12mm F1.4 DC Contemporary**
Ultra-wide prime for APS-C format Canon, Fujifilm and Sony mirrorless cameras



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Page 38 – never miss an issue!

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This month's contributors

Will Cheung



82

Camera Clinic _ Delivering the right amount of light to your camera's digital sensor is fundamental to photography, and getting it wrong can spoil images. Reduce the risk of this happening with expert guidance from Will Cheung

Cristina Mittermeier



Paul Nicklen
Nature photographer

One of the greats in his field, Paul Nicklen's images have helped showcase many vital conservation initiatives. We feature two chapters from his new book, from **page 64**



Peter Travers
Photographer and creator

The editor of our former sister title, *PhotoPlus: The Canon Magazine*, is the photographic mentor to reader Dave Nelson in this month's Apprentice. Turn to **page 8**



Natalia Zmyslowska
Photographer

Drawing on topics she writes about in her photography blog, our new columnist says that spring is the ideal time to slow down and reflect on the world around us. **Page 26**

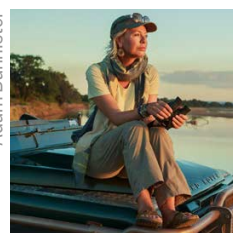
Cat Gundry Beck



Karim Iliya
Photographer and filmmaker

A stills photographer who also happens to make movies, Karim was honoured in the HIPA 'Power' awards. We find out more about Karim and his film from **page 118**

Adam Bannister



Margot Raggett
Wildlife photographer

Margot launched Remembering Wildlife in 2015, and its 11th book is published this year, featuring images sourced from issue 304's reader competition. **Page 28**



Will Cheung
Photographer and writer

A fellow of the Royal Photographic Society and the former editor of many photography titles, Will is the man behind Camera Clinic, which continues on **page 82**



8

The Apprentice _ The coast of north Cornwall is our destination this month... we pair keen reader Dave Nelson with pro Peter Travers for lessons in long exposures and composition in honeypot locations including Boscastle

41

Photo Skills _ NEW! We've given our photo projects section a makeover for 2026. It now features step-by-step techniques and in-depth image analysis to help make you a better photographer. Turn to **page 41** to get started



David Samuels



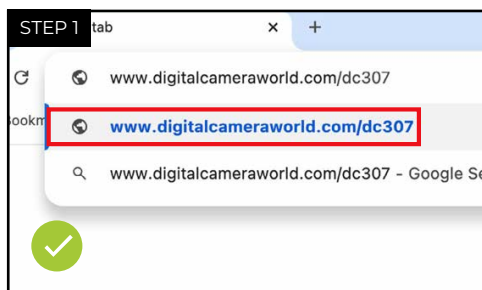
How to get your 49 digital gifts

**BONUS
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See page
104

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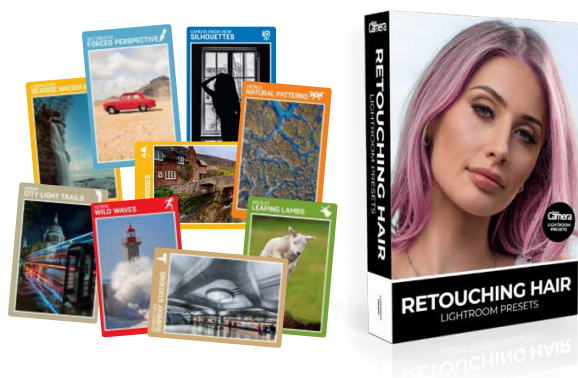
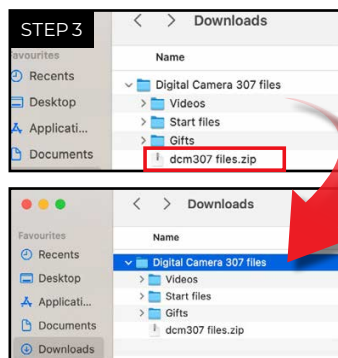
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The Apprentice with Peter Travers

The Pro

Name: Peter Travers

Camera: Canon EOS R5 Mk II

Peter is a Canon professional photographer and content creator with over 18 years experience. He's the former editor of our sister title, *PhotoPlus: The Canon Magazine*, and runs expert photo workshops in Bath and Bristol, and along the coast from Somerset to Cornwall. Contact Peter to book a workshop via his website: www.petertravers.co.uk or **Instagram:** @peter_travers

The Apprentice

Name: Dave Nelson

Camera: Canon EOS R6 Mk II

Based in Hertfordshire, Dave has been a keen photographer for many years but has only recently been able to spend more time on his passion, creating images in a range of genres. A Canon user from the start, he now shoots full-frame mirrorless.

Instagram: @davenelson34

Rock stars

We head to the north Cornwall coast for a seascapes photography masterclass with Canon pro **Peter Travers**



Digital Camera APPRENTICE



W

elcome to *Digital Camera Apprentice*, where we pair a reader with a professional photographer for a day of shooting together. The concept is simple: the pro acts as a photographic mentor, sharing their expert insights to help the reader improve their favoured genre of photography – it's like a one-to-one workshop that gets seen by a wider audience. This month, we're in Boscastle in north Cornwall, for a coastal photography masterclass with Canon pro Peter Travers. Readers of our former sister title, *PhotoPlus: The Canon Magazine*, will be familiar with Peter's skills as a photographer, as he wrote and photographed most —▶

SUPER SHOT #1



Camera:	Canon EOS R6 Mark II
Lens:	RF 24-105mm F4L IS USM at 105mm
Exposure:	1/200 sec at f/11, ISO 320

Apprentice Dave and pro Peter pick out details in the waves with their telephoto lenses.



of that magazine's Apprentice features. Now the boot is on the other foot, as he's stepping into the pro slot to act as photographic mentor to *Digital Camera* reader Dave Nelson, who has travelled all the way from his home in Hertfordshire to Cornwall.

Keen to improve his long-exposure seascapes photography, Dave uses a Canon EOS R6 Mark II, a full-frame hybrid mirrorless that's one of the best cameras in its market segment. Dave won't need the 12fps burst speed or 0.5 sec of pre-capture today, but the R6 Mark II's 24.4MP resolution will produce detailed images at sensible file sizes.

Peter has a base in Boscastle and runs photo workshops in the village and the surrounding area. Aside from its pretty harbour, Boscastle is an ideal hub for visiting other major sights in north Cornwall, including Tintagel Castle and Port Isaac. It's one of the best locations for coastal photography.



Our pro's kit Canon EOS R5 Mark II

Long-term Canon user Peter was using one of the brand's best mirrorless bodies in Cornwall, paired with the RF 24-105mm F4L IS USM and RF100-500mm F4.5-7.1L IS USM lenses. Of the R5 Mark II's extensive roster of features, its 45MP of resolution and up to 8.5 stops of image stabilisation, plus full weather-sealing, would be of most interest to landscape and seascape photographers. www.canon.co.uk

LEFT: GULL ROCK, TREBARWITH

THE APPRENTICE: "Using various shutter speeds to capture wave movement, I like how the blurring of the spray helps portray the blustery conditions."

THE PRO: "I encouraged Dave to zoom in at 105mm for a tight composition and time his shot just as a big wave crashed in front of Gull Rock."

Acting as the advance party ahead of Dave and *Digital Camera*'s arrival in Boscastle, Peter had visited some of the shoot locations and given the weather picture a final check, cross-referencing his various photography and weather apps. With introductions done over a fish-and-chips supper in Boscastle's The Wellington pub, overlooking the harbour, we're all excited for the following day's shoot.

Down on the beach

Rendezvousing in the long-stay car park at 8am, Peter drives us all to Trebarwith Strand beach, which is a 15-minute ride. As it's early, plenty of spaces are available in the car park just a five-minute walk away, and Peter has come prepared with coins as the machine doesn't accept cards or contactless payment.

A popular spot, Trebarwith Strand nestles in a valley enclosed by cliffs, and a mile or so of beach is exposed when the tide is out.

Peter's plan is to start by photographing some views of the sea from the beach with Gull Rock, also known as the 'gorilla head', in the background, plus capturing some other scenes and details, including rock pools and patterns in the sand, before wrapping up at the rocky areas at the top of the beach.

Despite the benign conditions six miles away in Boscastle, cloudy with a breeze, the weather is more lively here – the wind is whipping down the valley towards the sea and rain looks like a possibility. Dave soon discovers that wellies are preferable to hiking boots when negotiating water channels on the beach that are deeper than they first seem.

Unpacking their cameras, our pro and apprentice get ready for the first shot of the surf with Gull Rock behind. Dave attaches a Canon RF 24-105mm F4L IS USM to his R6 Mark II, which is set to Aperture Priority exposure mode, and mounts the

Seascape photos 101

You won't go wrong if you follow these hints, tips and insights

Cornwall guide			
Select a port/town			
The table below gives tidal predictions for the next 10 days for Padstow.			
Date	Time (BST)	State	Height
Thu, Dec 18th	04:05AM	High	6.7m
	10:30AM	Low	2m
	16:26PM	High	6.7m
Fri, Dec 19th	22:48PM	Low	1.9m
	04:47AM	High	6.9m
	11:08AM	Low	1.9m
Sat, Dec 20th	17:03PM	High	6.8m
	23:24AM	Low	1.8m
	05:23AM	High	7.1m
	11:44PM	Low	1.7m

1 Know tide times

Research the tide times at your locations, and you'll know which spots are best for photos at high tide and which are better at low tide. Plus, you'll be able to avoid the danger of an incoming tide putting your personal safety at risk.



2 Dress appropriately

Prepare for there being more than one season's weather in a day – essential in the UK – and wear the right gear. And with areas of standing water, even when the tide is out, a pair of wellies is more practical than a pair of ankle boots.



3 Wipe spray away

Working in proximity to the sea, water spray is something that will need to be constantly managed. Check the front element of your lenses regularly and don't let spots of water ruin otherwise impeccable photographs.

Technique assessment

Top tips for superb seascapes – and how to nail coastal exposures



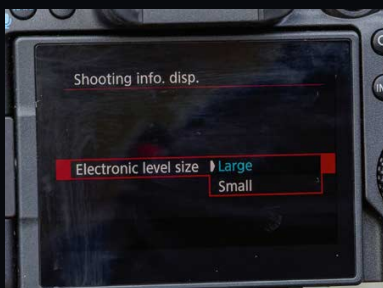
1 Exposure modes

Shutter Priority mode is handy for freezing the motion of waves, and Aperture Priority is the easiest way of setting front-to-back image sharpness, but Manual mode gives photographers full control of the exposure triangle.



2 Shoot in raw

Bring out the best in every pixel by editing files that have the full range of information captured by the sensor. You will have more latitude when editing, and you don't have to accept any values that the camera will bake into jpeg files.



3 Keep it on the level

While slightly wonky horizons can be corrected during editing, save yourself a task and get it right at the point of capture. Enable the camera's electronic level when composing shots; some models allow it to be displayed large.



Peter tests Dave's handholding posture in windy conditions. Here, a strong, wide stance is needed.



Dave and Peter find a dry spot to sit on while nailing compositions of the river at Trebarwith Strand.

camera on his tripod. Before any shooting starts, Peter casts an eye over Dave's camera setup and recommends that Dave reduces some of the clutter on his camera's rear screen, so he can see the electronic level and the brightness histogram more clearly.

Experimenting with shooting from standing and kneeling positions, our pro and apprentice settle on the latter, as it offers the best way of layering the composition – the rock placed centrally in the frame with the crashing waves and sandy beach underneath. Now that he can see the electronic level and histogram more clearly, Dave is confident framing up both horizontally and vertically.

Exposure-wise, Peter suggests Dave dials in negative exposure compensation, because the dark rock is making the waves and the water appear too bright – one stop is ideal.

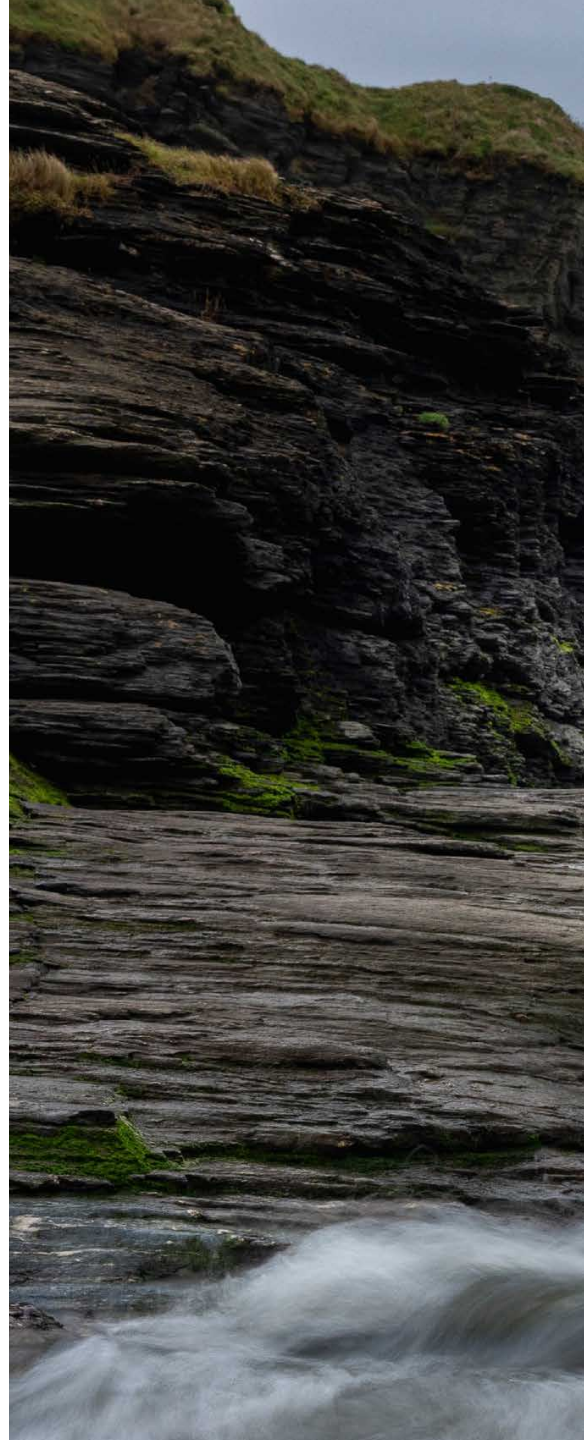
We're not the only ones to have braved the elements this morning; a steady trickle

of dog walkers has appeared on the beach. Our pro and apprentice have switched to their Canon RF 100-500mm F4.5-7.1L IS USM lenses for detail shots of distant waves, and Peter suggests that Dave tries photographing a couple in the distance, having paused to take pictures of the sea with their phones.

"Don't get a shot of them taking photos, get a shot of them walking," he advises. "Have them off to one side, walking into the frame, because it'll create more of a story."

Let's rock

Mindful of the time – it's mid-morning already, our pro wants to move onto the next scene. This is a ridge of slate rock on the edge of the beach that forms a leading line down to the sea with Gull Rock in the background. So how would Dave approach photographing this, Peter wonders? By going wide, Dave replies, which means 24mm on his 24-105mm lens.





Camera:	Canon EOS R6 Mark II
Lens:	RF 24-105mm F4L IS USM at 50mm
Exposure:	5 secs at f/18, ISO 200, 6-stop ND

ABOVE: RAGING RIVER, TREBARWITH

THE APPRENTICE: “Framed using a leading line towards the rock, it creates an image with impact. Using an ND filter tamed the rushing water.”

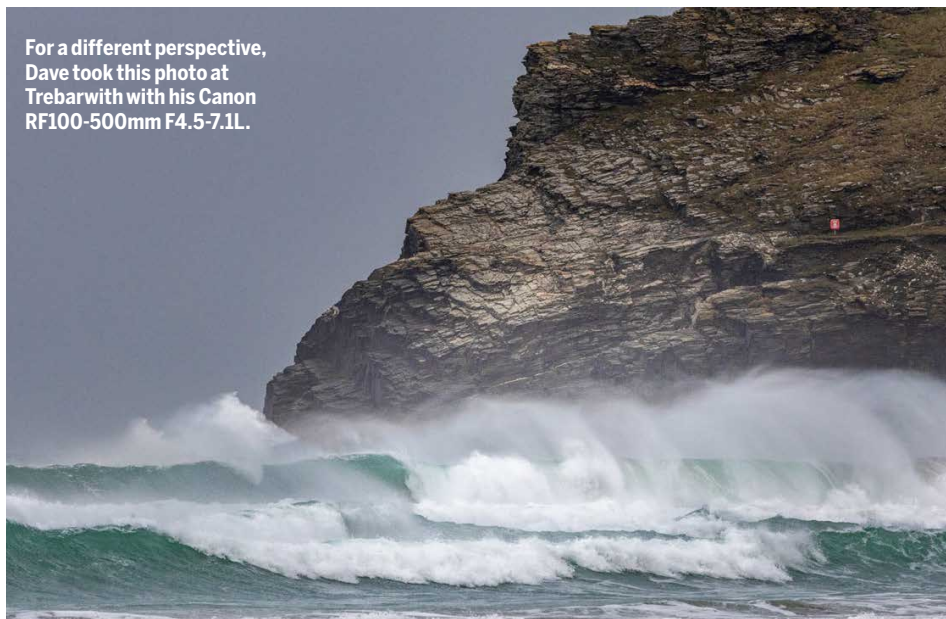
THE PRO: “Getting Dave to shoot at 50mm pulled the distant Gull Rock closer to the foreground. Five secs was slow enough to blur the water nicely.”

Giving this a go and viewing the resulting captures, Peter alerts Dave to a slight issue: Gull Rock appears small in the background and looks lost in the frame, so Peter suggests that Dave zooms in, trying 35mm to 50mm focal lengths – or going even longer.

“We went all the way up to about 85mm in the end,” says Peter afterwards. “It worked well and really simplified the scene.”

Something our apprentice wanted to improve upon today is his use of filters, so he reaches for his NiSi V3 Pro filter holder, which houses a circular polariser at the —————>

For a different perspective, Dave took this photo at Trebarwith with his Canon RF100-500mm F4.5-7.1L.





SUPER SHOT #3

Camera:	Canon EOS R6 Mark II
Lens:	RF 24-105mm F4L IS USM at 58mm
Exposure:	1.6 secs at f/20, ISO 100, 6-stop ND



Shooting the coastal cliffs above Boscastle, the emerging sun after an overcast morning led our apprentice and pro to reach for their polarisers.

Camera skills Auto exposure bracketing (AEB)

Fixing one of the perennial challenges of landscape and coastal photography – managing the extremes of dynamic range in scenes that feature both bright skies and dark land – can be done in an analogue way using filters (below), or by using AEB. This captures a series of frames – one at the 0 point on the exposure scale, and others above and below it (see Camera Clinic, p83). The bracketed files can be blended in software to create an image with a dynamic range that's closer to what the human eye saw at the time – see Super Shot #3 (p14) and Shot of the Day (p18).



front and slide-in square filters behind it. As Dave attaches a 6-stop ND and a polariser, Peter is on hand with a power tip: avoid shooting too wide when you're using filters.

"At 24mm, you'll get dark corners," he tells Dave. "But if you zoom in to 35mm and onwards, then it doesn't matter – the dark corners will have gone out of the frame."

Dave tries a series of long exposures of the scene, but he and Peter are most pleased with a 10-second one of the stream running between the slate rock (see p13). Another layered composition, a stack of pleasing colours contrasts well with the dark tones.

LEFT: SOUTH FROM BOSCASTLE CLIFF

THE APPRENTICE: "During a sunny spell, exposure bracketing was used to help capture the wide dynamic range, depicting the scene perfectly."

THE PRO: "I suggested Dave use a narrow aperture of f/20 for more depth of field. I love the light hitting Grower Rock in the top third of the frame."

Things seem to be going well, so it feels like a good time to ask Dave how he's getting on.

"I'm having a great day and have learned loads so far," he smiles. "In two hours, Peter has taught me so much about composition."

And there's more expert mentoring to come. Returning to Boscastle for a pit stop that includes Cornish pasties – what else? – we walk across fields to a vantage point affording views of the cliffs above Boscastle.

Clifftop compositions

Peter's plan is to capture the view south along the coast towards Tintagel and Grower Rock at focal lengths of 50-70mm while experimenting with shutter speeds. Dave readies his tripod and camera and gets his filters mounted for the long exposures, framing up with the jagged cliffs on the left with a pair of rocks just out to sea. The sun is starting to break through, so Dave's polariser will be even more useful. With some upright and horizontal compositions ticked —→

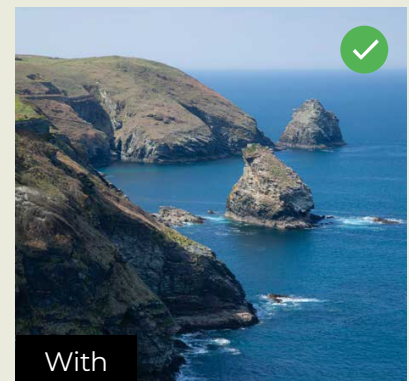
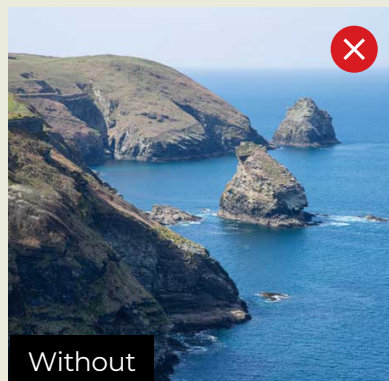
Pro kit Neutral density filters

Made from glass or resin, ND filters reduce the amount of light entering the lens and come in different strengths, quoted in EV or f/stop equivalents. ND filters attach to the lens via the filter thread if circular, or via an adapter if they're rectangular or square.



Pro kit Pack a polariser

A polarising filter screws onto the filter thread of the lens and enhances the colour of photos, makes blue skies more blue, cuts through haze and even removes reflections from water. The effects of a polariser are difficult to achieve in photo editing, so this filter is an indispensable tool for outdoor photographers. 'Circular' actually refers to the type of polariser, and not how it attaches – circular polarisers are designed to work with the autofocus systems of digital cameras; linear polarisers were used in the film days (see page 44 of Photo Skills for more tips on using polarising filters).



Peter Travers



Camera skills Use shooting aids

Compositional aids are available on both DSLR and mirrorless cameras, and it's definitely worth using them when photographing landscapes. In addition to the electronic level mentioned in Technique Assessment (page 12), grids can be displayed to aid with framing shots – 3x3 (pictured, right) and 6x4 are popular examples. Information overlays can be useful, too, and brands including Canon let the user decide which types of information can be displayed (right, bottom). We'd recommend thinning out the clutter to prioritise the brightness histogram and the electronic level.



off, Peter suggests that Dave turn his attention to the Willapark Lookout on the cliff edge. Dating from the early 19th century and once used as a summer house, it is currently a lookout post – local lore hints that the structure might once have been used to aid smugglers, as well as other nefarious deeds. Whether true or not, our story continues with a scheduled stop in Boscastle to shoot harbour scenes with the high tide.

A high point

Packing up and walking back to Peter's car, it's a short drive to the long-stay car park in the village. From here it's a five-minute stroll to the harbour, taking the path on the north side of the River Valency. Peter picks the spot for the first shot, a view towards the harbour where the water between the rocks forms a rough 'S' shape. Dave sets up and attaches his filters; using his 6-stop ND, he explores

SUPER SHOT #4



Camera:	Canon EOS R6 Mark II
Lens:	RF 24-105mm F4L IS USM at 35mm
Exposure:	5 secs at f/18, ISO 200, 10-stop ND

ABOVE: CRACKINGTON HAVEN ROCKS
THE APPRENTICE: “Balancing the foreground with the hills beyond recorded this scene beautifully. Black and white emphasises the detail and mood.”

THE PRO: “We took our time with the composition here, using sharp rocks and the fresh water streaming out to sea and through the frame.”

various exposures, including a 10-second one, which gives the water a beautiful sheen.

Peter’s original plan was to photograph some boats in the harbour with views up the valley, then get some boat close-ups and lobster pot details, but the harbour is empty. This gives our pro and apprentice more time to refine their harbour shots before we move to the climax of the day – a high point above Boscastle with commanding views of the harbour and out to sea. Even without a camera backpack and a tripod, it’s a steep 20-minute hike up a path to the clifftop.



Pro Peter makes his tripod more solid by sinking it into the sand on Crackington Haven beach (top). The pair search for the best composition (above).

Attaining the high ground, it’s instantly apparent why Peter has picked this point. The views are epic, and we’ve lucked out with the weather conditions. While there’s plenty of cloud, it’s of variable thickness, so the sun can break through in parts to liven up the scene, and Peter’s goal – of catching the sun before it disappears between a distant cliff and outlying rock – should be attainable. The colour of a clear blue sky just wouldn’t stand out enough from the sea.

The higher elevation has introduced another factor for our pro and apprentice to contend with, though – the wind. Setting their tripods low so they can shoot from a sitting position, our duo employ an established routine used by landscape photographers, weighing their tripods down with their camera bags. With their cameras mounted and filters in place, Dave and Peter discuss focus points and take test shots to determine —▶

Pro portfolio Peter Travers



Clevedon Pier, Somerset

“This stunning Victorian pier is fantastic for a silhouette seascape shot at sunset. I timed my shoot perfectly with the colours in the sky, and at high tide, so the water was under the pier.”



Willapark Lookout, Cornwall

“Shot at 200mm to focus on the coastguard lookout on this rugged headland, I composed for the horizon. At f/11, 3.2 secs were needed for a good exposure in the last light of the day.”



Port Isaac, Cornwall

“I chose to shoot wide at 24mm for this summer shot of an iconic Cornish fishing village. With the harbour entrance to the right, I waited until the RNLI boat headed out to sea to take the shot.”



The path on the north side of the River Valency gives great views of Boscastle Harbour (top). At the high point for the final shot of day one (above).

RIGHT: HIGH POINT, BOSCASTLE

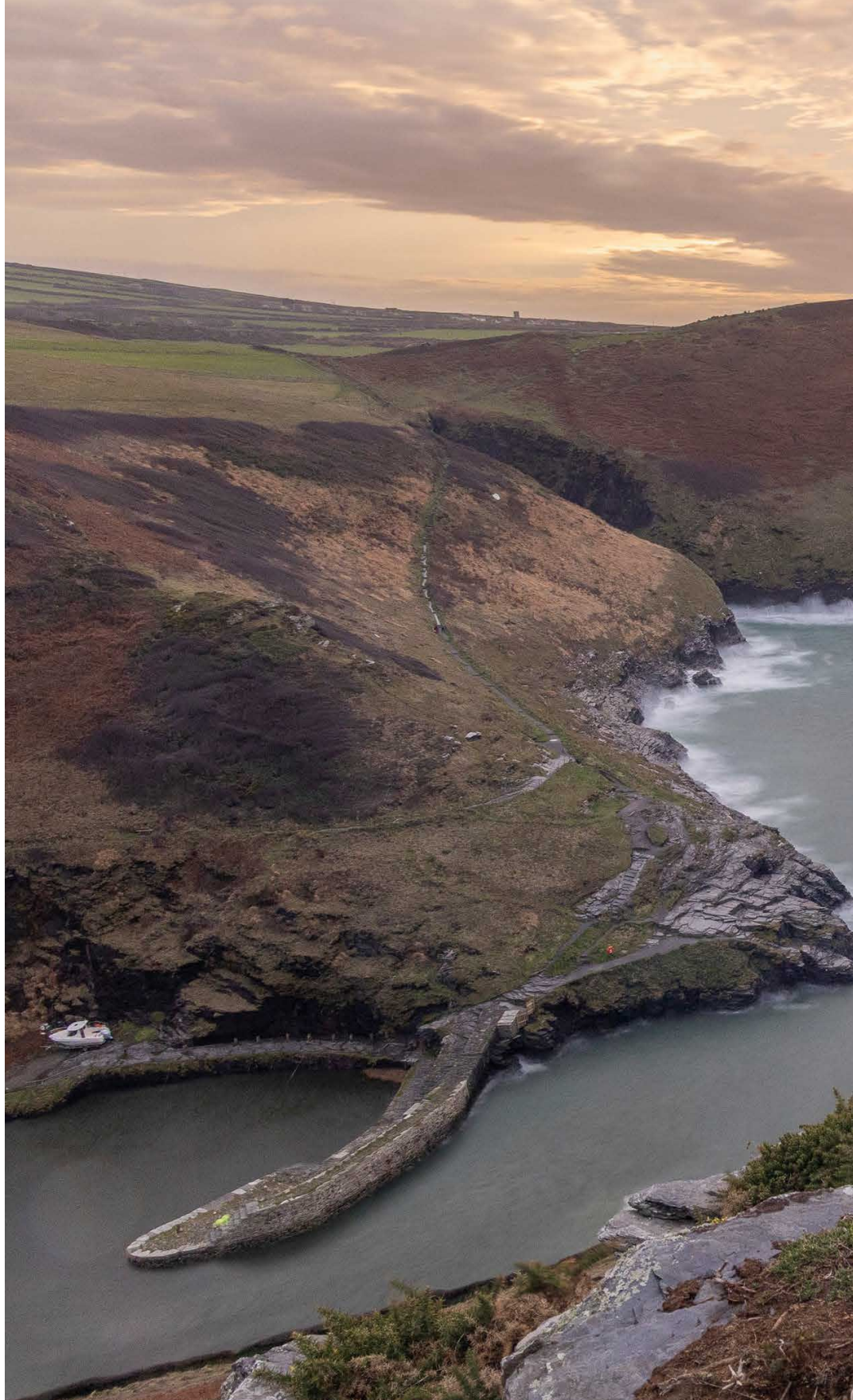
THE APPRENTICE: "Icing on the cake! This sunset brought everything together. A long exposure and bracketing created an image I'm delighted with."

THE PRO: "Our trek to the top paid off, with the sun breaking through clouds to produce beautiful warm light over Boscastle harbour below us."

exposure settings. Now it's just a case of waiting for the sun to start setting... and when it does, it is a performance to savour.

Slippery when wet

The next morning, Dave and *Digital Camera* are able to make a slight detour on their departure to create some bonus shooting time. Crackington Haven is six miles north of Boscastle and is another secluded location with a large expanse of sandy beach at low tide. One of Peter's favourite shots here is of the lines of rock to the south end of the cove, so he suggests a good place to get set up. The rock is very slippery to negotiate, and Dave's boots get another soaking from the beach's water channels, but one has to suffer for their art. Dave duly bags another cracking long-exposure image (see p16) to give this coastal photography masterclass a perfect ending. ●



Apprentice verdict

"I love being by the sea, but have never really focused on coastal photography – that has all changed after today. Peter's technical and location knowledge has set me on another path in my photography journey. Thanks to Peter and *Digital Camera*!"



Pro verdict

"Dave was a brilliant Apprentice, and despite being a fish out of water, he took to coastal photography like a seasoned seascape artist. He was keen to learn and took all the advice on board – and that shows in the shots he captured."



SHOT
OF THE
DAY!

Camera:	Canon EOS R6 Mark II
Lens:	RF 24-105mm F4L IS USM at 24mm
Exposure:	4 secs at f/9, ISO 800, 10-stop ND

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Are you looking to take your photography to the next level, whatever genre you shoot? *Digital Camera* can assist. Let us know what you'd like some guidance on, and we could pair you up with a top pro for the day! Email us with 'The Apprentice' in the subject line, let us know which camera you use and share some examples of your photos. Apprentice shoots take at least half a day, and you'll need to be able to travel to them independently.

Email us at: digitalcamera@futurenet.com



InFocus

Photography news from around the globe

01	Photography news	page 20
02	Ask Matthew	page 22
03	Readers' letters	page 24
04	The World with Nat	page 26



Nikon

Five-year warranty for new Nikkor glass

Nikon's industry-leading Europe-wide warranty far exceeds those of most competing lens manufacturers

Nikon Europe has announced an extended, free five-year warranty on all newly purchased Z-mount lenses, meaning that your new lens will be covered against faults that might occur within the first five years of ownership.

The new warranty extends the standard one-year warranty by an extra four years and is applicable in most European countries, including the UK. Any Z-series lens purchased after

1 March 2026 from authorised Nikon retailers, the Nikon Store and Nikon Plazas in Europe, will qualify. This includes kit lenses purchased alongside a camera, and teleconverters.

To qualify, you simply need to register your new Z lens within 90 days after you purchase it. The online process is straightforward, and your product will be covered for five years from the date of purchase.

Find out more at: www.nikon.co.uk



1 ALL Z-SERIES LENSES QUALIFY...
Purchases have to be made after 1 March, from authorised Nikon retailers.

2 ...AS WELL AS KIT LENSES...
Kit lenses are included – the likes of a Z 24-50mm f/4-6.3, for example.

3 ...AND TELECONVERTERS
The TC-1.4x and the TC-2.0x (pictured) are also covered by the new warranty.

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Lumix TZ300/ZS300

A one-inch sensor and 24-360mm equivalent zoom could make this new compact a compelling alternative to shooting on your phone

Panasonic has just announced a new pocket-sized compact camera that packs extraordinary reach for its size. The new Lumix TZ300 (also known as the ZS300 in the USA) looks to bridge the gap between creator-focused compacts and bulkier premium bridge zoom cameras.

The Lumix TZ300 combines a 20.1MP one-inch BSI CMOS sensor with a Leica-certified 24-360mm equivalent 15x zoom lens with an f/3.3-6.4 aperture in a body small enough to slip into a pocket or bag, and targets travellers who still want a large-sensor camera with genuine optical reach, rather than having to rely entirely on a phone. Other features include 5-axis stabilisation, autofocus Macro with close focusing down to 3cm, and 4K 30p and 120fps Full HD video capabilities.

Find out more at:

www.panasonic.com; £869/\$899



Panasonic



This new compact camera is available in two finishes: Dark Silver (top) and Black (above).

New colourway for Billingham bags

Navy FibreNyte/Chocolate Leather is available across 13 of its popular bag designs, including the Hadley Small Pro, Hadley Pro 2020 and Capsule 1

British bag manufacturer Billingham has been a staple of the photo industry since 1973, and its iconic bags blend style, practicality and durability. While its Navy Canvas finish was popular, the brand retired it last year to make space for Navy FibreNyte, a synthetic, even more hard-wearing and colour-fast material. The Navy FibreNyte fabric is engineered

for resilience in challenging conditions, says Billingham, while the full-grain Chocolate Leather accents add warmth and character.

Each bag maintains Billingham's signature features: three-layer waterproof FibreNyte material, solid brass fixings, top-grain vegetable tanned leather and a five-year manufacturer's guarantee.

Find out more at: www.billingham.co.uk



Focal point

Rounding up what's new and exciting this month



Travel Photographer of the Year 2026 now open for entries

If you enjoy our gallery of category winners from TPOTY 2025 (see p74) and would like to enter the contest, go to the link below. Entries close on 12 October, with finalists announced on 21 November. **www.tpoty.com**



Outdoor Light-Painting Photography book goes on sale

Created by artists and photographers Eric Paré and Kim Henry, this 178-page book is an inspiring field guide to the genre. The authors cover everything from kit tips to techniques and post-processing. **www.illexinstant.com; £26/\$30**

Samyang AF 35mm F1.8 P FE now available for Sony E-mount

Promising image quality, portability and creative flexibility, this new prime is designed to be a practical everyday lens with a compact, lightweight design and reliable autofocus performance. **www.holdan.co.uk; £342/\$265**



AskMatthew

All your questions answered. Send your questions to digitalcamera@futurenet.com



Matthew Richards

Matthew Richards is a photographer and journalist who has spent many years using all manner of photo gear.



Puffins and other birds can be notoriously difficult to track in flight, not just due to their speed, but also the erratic nature of their flight path.

Getty

Follow that puffin

Q

I've been struggling with autofocus and tracking puffins in flight on my Nikon Z 6II camera. Do you have any suggestions for keeping them sharp?

Kevin Winter

A

It sounds like you could benefit from one of the upgrades featured in the Nikon Z 6III, compared with its Mark II predecessor, namely a specialist bird-recognition autofocus mode, among other advanced options. Without that option available, I'd recommend using the AF-C

(Continuous AF) mode in conjunction with the Dynamic-area AF mode. This autofocus mode is designed to cope with erratically moving subjects. You can select the AF point that's used initially, but if the bird strays to a different area of the image frame, the camera automatically switches to surrounding AF points to continue the tracking.

You might also find it useful to use the camera's AF-On button at the top right of the rear panel, rather than applying a light press to the shutter-release button. This can make it easier to initiate autofocus by separating the two functions with independent buttons. Finally, use a fast continuous drive mode and take a burst of shots to maximise your chances of getting a few keepers.



Handled by 3 Legged Thing, VSGO makes a wide range of cleaning tools and full cleaning kits. Visit the website and choose the best fit.

Spring clean your camera

Q It's been a wet and wild winter, but now the sun's out, I'm in the mood for spring cleaning my camera. Are there any specialist kits for this?

Angie Hayman

A There are lots of kits on the market, from lens cleaning wipes and cloths to swabs and solutions for cleaning your camera's image sensor. It depends on whether you want to give your gear a cosmetic tidy-up or a more thorough clean, including removing dust particles from your sensor. One of my favourite brands is 3 Legged Thing (3leggedthing.com), which specialises in tripods and camera supports. The company also handles a particularly good range of cleaning tools, made by VSGO. There is a wide range of options, from tricked-up blower brushes to sensor cleaners and full kits of cleaning tools.

A bag within a bag

Q I'm looking for a bag that I can use for basic stowage of my DSLR, a spare lens and a couple of accessories, as well as using it within a larger bag or backpack. Any ideas?

Mark Freeman

A There are various 'bring your own bag' options on the market, but I swear by the Lowepro GearUp Creator Box Large II. It has all the usual quality and robustness that I associate with Lowepro, as well as movable and removable dividers to tailor the fit and protect your kit. It works well as a basic bag in its own right, but is also particularly suitable for popping into a backpack, larger bag or suitcase when you're travelling. Various sizes are available.

The Lowepro GearUp Creator Box Large II is perfect for a DSLR or mirrorless camera, plus a few extras. If you shop around, you can find it for around £30 (\$50).



Second-hand superstar

This 'trinity' zoom has been superseded by a Mark II version, but the original is a terrific buy

Q I've bought a pre-owned Nikon Z 7 camera and want to get a similarly high-quality standard zoom lens for it. What do you think is the best second-hand option?

James Roberts

A **Matthew recommends...**
Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S
A stellar pro-spec standard zoom lens for Nikon Z owners that still rivals anything else on the market.



Launched in 2019, the Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S took Nikon standard zoom lenses to a whole new level of quality and excellence.

Released (year): 2019
Price new: £2,099/\$2,547
'Excellent' £1,059/\$1,550
'Good' £975/\$1,250

Several years ago, I bought a Nikon Z 7 brand new and, like you, was looking for a standard zoom lens to do justice to all of those 45.7 megapixels in terms of resolution of fine detail and all-round image quality and performance. I settled on the Nikon Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S and was immediately impressed by everything about it.

Highlights include epic optical quality that includes ED (Extra-low Dispersion) elements, high-tech ARNEO and Nano Crystal Coatings. The multi-focus stepping motor AF system is fast and entirely reliable, and handling exotica includes a customisable Lens-function button, tertiary control ring and even an OLED info display.

1 OLED display
The OLED info display comes complete with a DISP button so you can cycle through various options, such as aperture setting, focus distance and depth of field markers.

2 L-fn button
The L-fn button falls neatly under the thumb and can be assigned to tasks like AF-On and AF-Hold.

3 Customisable control ring
The programmable third control ring can be configured for adjusting parameters like aperture and exposure compensation.

Elements/groups: 17/15
Aperture diaphragm: 9 blades
Stabilisation: Via camera body
Min focus distance: 0.38m
Max magnification: 0.22x
Filter size: 82mm
Dimensions (L x D): 126 x 89mm
Weight: 805g

Readers' Letters

Have a burning question about the future of photography? Want to discuss a feature or a tutorial in the magazine? Send us your letters...

★ Star letter prize ★

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Andrew Roberts

Star letter: Learning from your piers

Responding to your 'Under the boardwalk' project in the Spring issue (306), please see my photo taken under Deal pier (above), on a morning at low tide, with my Canon EOS 80D and Canon EF-S 18-55mm lens at 39mm, using a 10-stop neutral density filter.

I often take casual photos along Deal seafront, but this one was planned. I made sure it was low tide, because it's the only time you can get under the pier, and opted for a symmetrical composition with a 10-second exposure to blur the water.

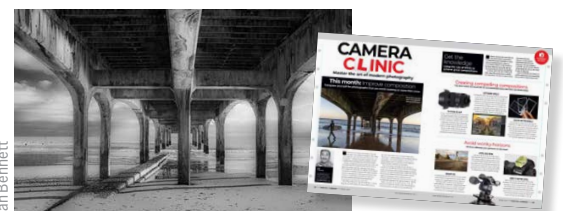
This gave me an aperture of f/16 and a good amount of depth of field when focusing one-third of the way into the scene. I edited it in black and white using Nik Collection 8's Silver Efex and finished up in Affinity Photo 3. *Andrew Roberts, by email*

See more of Andrew's work: Search for 'Andrew The Photographer' on Photocrowd.

Digital Camera says: Making the image symmetrical was key here, Andrew, as well as the milky blur of the water and B&W conversion.

Pier pressure

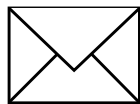
When the April issue (305) arrived, I nearly fell off my chair. It didn't come with a disclaimer that I'd see one of my most recent images in print, so how did *Digital Camera* get hold of it? At second glance, it obviously wasn't my photo, but someone else knows Boscombe Pier! This is my version (right); I was slightly disappointed with it until I moved the sliders randomly in Lightroom, making it mono out of curiosity. It caused a stir in social media circles, so I intend to go back to the pier and try again... now armed



Ian Bennett

with Will's composition tips and the new skills I'm learning from *Digital Camera*. *Ian Bennett, by email*

Digital Camera says: Will knows some of the best locations for photos, Ian! When you shoot the pier again, let us know how you get on.



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Facebook page: [Digitalcameraworld](https://www.facebook.com/Digitalcameraworld)



Peter Li

@pli.panda

London-based photographer who captures jaw-dropping images of the interiors of churches and cathedrals from around the world (see Peter's Shot of the Month on page 92).

Jake Poe

@jakepoe photography

Beautiful black and white landscape photography from Yosemite National Park in California, the USA, and beyond, captured on digital as well as on film.

Benjamin Steele

@roamwithbenjamin

Fantastic landscape images from around the British Isles, taken with a Canon EOS 90D or a DJI Mavic Air II.

Jeffery Cassiers

@jeffery_cassiers

Wildlife photographer from Belgium, featuring some stunning bird shots.

Anil Gedik

@anilgedik

A collection of beautiful, mainly black-and-white Leica captures from Istanbul, Turkey, among other places.



Lee Howdle

NEXT ISSUE: Read about Lee Howdle's landscape images in his book, *Seasons in the Peak District*.



Join the community on Instagram

Our growing community is where you can see our readers' amazing work, plus get regular updates for challenges, Rate My Photo and subscription offers. We also showcase the highlights of our latest issue.

Instagram: [@digitalcameramag](https://www.instagram.com/digitalcameramag)

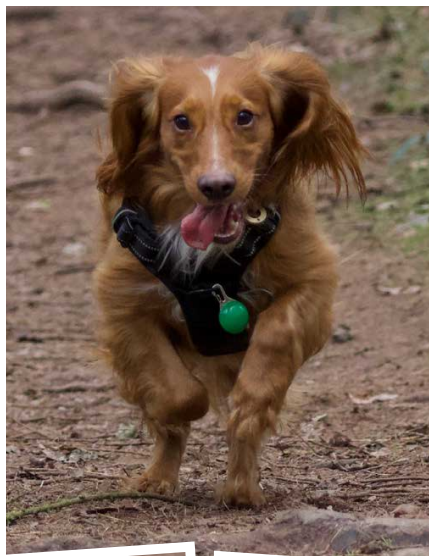
Let loose the dogs!

Inspired by the April issue (305) of your magazine, I have been practising taking photos of running dogs. I still have lots to learn, as I only started photography seriously a few months ago. These photos were taken with my Canon EOS 2000D and Canon EF 100-400mm lens.

The shutter speed for all three was 1/1,000 sec, whereas the aperture for two of them was f/5 and f/4.5 for one that used a 100mm focal length, rather than the 164mm of the other two.

Karen Ferriday, by email

Instagram: @klf1409



Karen Ferriday

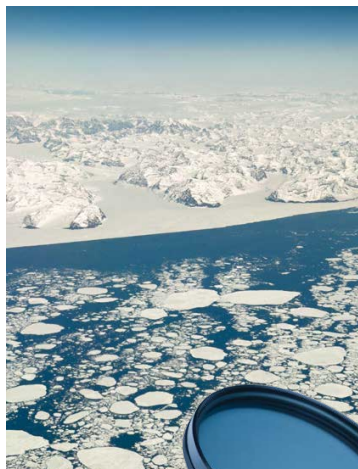


Digital Camera says: The first one (main) is our favourite as the focus is spot on, the dog has two legs in the air and its tongue is hanging out, so it's quite expressive. The fast shutter speed has frozen the action on all three as well. The other two are good attempts, but in one of them (right), the dog is slightly out of focus as the point of focus is the tree trunk behind it. For the next one (far right), the dog isn't quite as sharp and it's a little too dark. A great effort overall, though.

Flying high

I'm lucky enough to be taking a flight over Antarctica in November, and I've recently upgraded my camera to the Nikon Z 6III and taken a photography course to prepare for this once-in-a-lifetime experience. I hope to take some great shots, but know that snow photography can be challenging, so what would be your top tips for successful photos of large white expanses of ice and snow taken through the windows of an aircraft cruising at about 6,000 feet? **Peter Davis, by email**

Digital Camera says: Two things are going to be immediate problems. Firstly, the reflections off the inside of the cabin window and secondly, the reflective nature of what you're shooting. For the first point, either press your camera up against the window and try to shield it, or use a circular polariser to cut out the reflections. Secondly, all that snow will cause underexposure, so try dialling in +1EV exposure compensation. Also, the autofocus might struggle, so turn it off and use manual focus instead.



Getty

If you are taking photos from an aircraft cabin window, consider using a polariser to cut down on reflections.



Natalia Zmyslowska

The world with Nat

Spring is a time to slow down and reflect on the world around us, says **Natalia Zmyslowska**

A

s the daylight hours lengthen, I often head out early with my camera, whether I have a plan or not. Later on, the world grows louder and busier, but for now, mornings remain

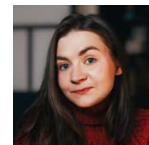
quiet. The city stretches awake, paths lie empty and the light stays soft.

Late spring can make even ordinary places feel special. The grass seems to glow and colours look fresh without being too bright, which gives everything a sense of renewal. Photos of a squirrel holding a nut or sunlight making patterns on the pavement remind me that being honest and paying attention bring meaning. A photo matters most when it shows what's really there, not just when it's dramatic.

Photography helps me slow down and really look at things. Without my camera, I might just walk past them, but with it, I notice how the light falls, how soft the background looks, the open spaces and those moments when animals suddenly show their personalities. For me, the camera is more than just a tool. It teaches me patience. I wait quietly and let scenes unfold on their own, rather than trying to control them. Often, the best photos appear when I've spent time blending in and following my curiosity.

The best photos often come from places I know well, not distant spots. When I pay attention, local parks reveal surprising beauty. What matters isn't dramatic scenery, but an honest

Pay attention and even places like your local park can reveal surprising beauty.



Natalia Zmyslowska
www.theworldwithnat.com
[@theworldwithnat](https://www.instagram.com/theworldwithnat)

Camera: Canon EOS R
Lens: Sigma 150-500mm F5.6-6.3 APO DG OS HSM
Exposure: 1/800 sec at f/6.3, ISO 1600

gesture, rhythm, light, timing and the willingness to stay present, even if uncomfortable. Being committed to the moment makes a photo meaningful, even if it means getting muddy or kneeling in wet grass for the shot.

If you want to capture this feeling, try to keep your frame simple. Give your subjects space and watch what they do, not just how they look. Don't rush your first shot. Stay in the moment. The photo you remember most often comes when you stop hurrying. Let yourself be surprised; let curiosity lead you. In photography, slowing down and really looking makes a difference. Over time, these moments become a collection. It shows not just what you saw, but how you experienced the world. ●



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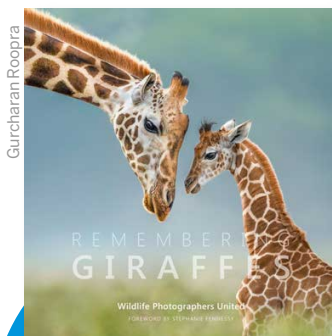


*The Introductory Discount is available from the start of the policy until its first review/renewal date.

COMPETITION RESULTS

Remembering Giraffes

THE RESULTS ARE IN! Feast your eyes on the 20 images chosen to appear in the latest Remembering Wildlife fundraising book in the series from Wildlife Photographers United



BUY THE BOOK!

Pre-order
Remembering Giraffes
for £59.50/\$80
(Standard Edition). Go to:
<https://shop.rememberingwildlife.com/>

Remembering Giraffes will be the 11th title in the charity book series started by wildlife photographer Margot Raggett MBE in 2016.

Prompted to take action after witnessing elephants being poached in Kenya, she asked her fellow wildlife photographers to contribute to a fundraising book.

Between them, *Remembering Elephants* and its successors – *Remembering Rhinos*, *Remembering Great Apes*, *Remembering Lions*, *Remembering Cheetahs*, *Remembering African Wild Dogs*, *Remembering Bears*, *Remembering Leopards*, *Remembering Tigers* and *10 Years of Remembering Wildlife* – have sold more than 60,000 copies and raised over £1.25m (\$1.62m) for 82 conservation projects across 35 countries.

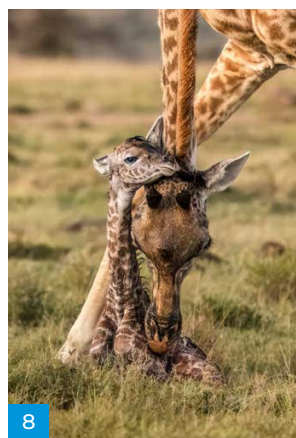
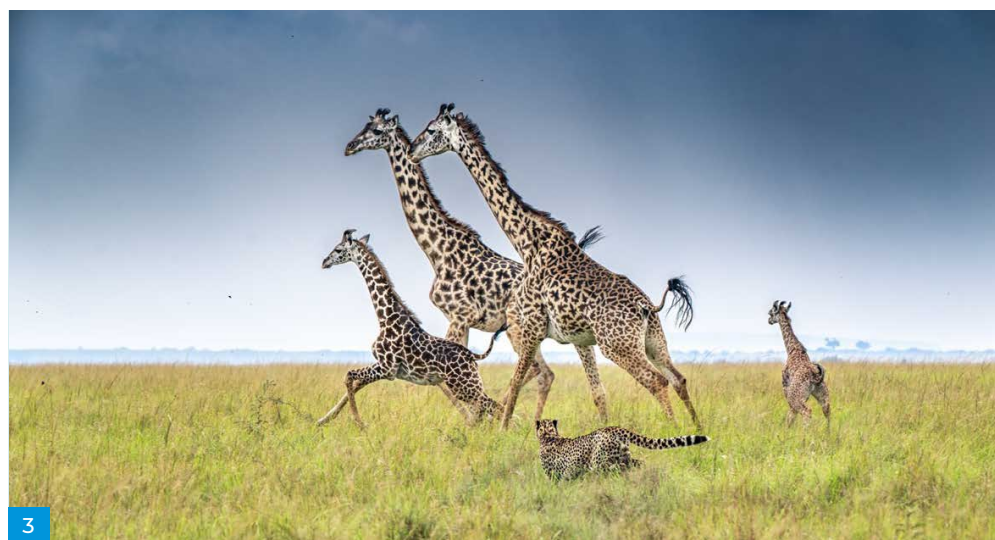
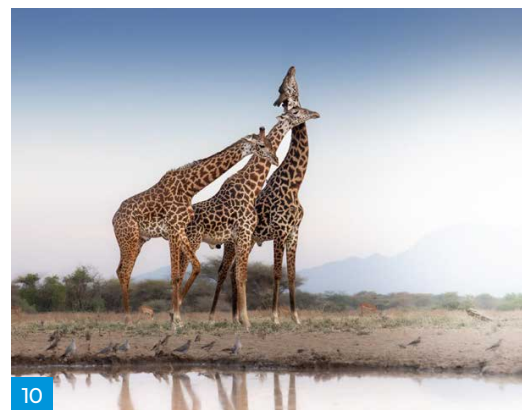
Due to be published on 12 October, *Remembering Giraffes* features stunning images of all four species of giraffes, donated by many of the world's

leading wildlife photographers, including Wim van den Heever and Daryl Balfour, two of this year's guest judges. The work of up to 80 wildlife photographers will be included under the 'Wildlife Photographers United' banner – plus 20 readers of *Digital Camera*, who answered the call to enter images in our March issue (304).

About the winning images

To be selected to appear in *Remembering Giraffes*, readers had to submit images of all extant species of giraffes, living in their native habitat and taken in the wild (no zoos, sanctuaries, rehabilitation centres, tracked animals or baited hides). The judges were looking for striking images that were true to the original scene and with minimal editing.

***Remembering Giraffes* is on sale on 12 October, with an official launch event at London's Royal Geographical Society on 14 October. Find out more at: rememberingwildlife.com**



OPPOSITE PAGE

1 'Stepping Over'

by Laura Romin

Location: Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya

7 'Under Mother's Guidance'

by Tom Way

Location: Mara North Conservancy, Kenya

THIS PAGE

2 'Duel at Dawn'

by Mark Nissenbaum

Location: Hoanib, Namibia

8 'A Tender Moment – Newborn Giraffe'

by Eric Albright

Location: Olare Motorogi Conservancy, Maasai Mara, Kenya

3 'Giants on the Move'

by Ivan Glaser

Location: Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya

4 'A Giraffe Impression'

by Paul Joynson-Hicks

Location: Ruaha National Park, Tanzania

9 'Gold Dust'

by Ranganathan Mukkai

Location: Solio Game Reserve, Kenya

10 'The Language of Touch'

by Mark Fernley

Location: Shompole Conservancy, Kenya

11 'Fire!'

by Vicki Santello

Location: Mara Triangle, Kenya

6 'A Mother's Love'

by Thomas Nicholson

Location: Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya

12



13



14





15



16



17



18



19



20

OPPOSITE PAGE

12 'Into the Sun'

by Uli Hergesell-Bulian
Location: Amboseli National Park, Kenya

13 'Stormy Giraffes'

by Uli Hergesell-Bulian
Location: Amboseli National Park, Kenya

14 'Motherhood'

by Nili Gudhka
Location: Mara Triangle, Kenya

THIS PAGE

15 'Front Row Seat'

by Tomasz Szpila
Location: Serengeti National Park, Tanzania

16 'Tiptoeing on Nature's Canvas'

by Philip J Briggs
Location: Amboseli National Park, Kenya

17 'Giraffe Splash'

by Zita Quentin
Location: Shompole Conservancy, Kenya

18 'Storm – A New Life is Born'

by Terri Innes
Location: Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya

19 'Drawn by Light'

by Nadine Villabruna
Location: Solio Game Reserve, Kenya

20 'Second Chance'

by Georgina Goodwin
Location: Olderkesi Conservancy, southern Masai Mara, Kenya

Reader gallery

Digital Camera readers show how they've been getting creative, submitting images across a range of genres

1 'Otter' by Ian Harris

"This photo was taken at Kilver Court in Somerset. I like that it captures the otter exhibiting natural behaviour, and you can just about see the fish in its back teeth, being chewed. I also like how the plants in the background give a pleasing green and yellow backdrop to the image."

Instagram: @ihphotography58

Digital Camera says:

We loved the low angle, which puts the viewer right into the otter's world. The slight blur around the mouth area illustrates that the otter was having its breakfast at the time. The background colours are lovely, too.





2 'Day of the Dead' by Paul Kausik

"This image tells the story of the vibrant and joyful essence of Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebrations in Los Angeles. It feels both festive and artistically rich at the same time. The bright colours, intricate face paint and elaborate costumes catch the eye and showcase the impressive craftsmanship." Instagram: @kausik_paul_kp

Digital Camera says: Great shot! You've managed to capture the colour and chaos of the event by focusing on a central figure and overcoming the tricky conditions.

3 'Demolition Palette' by Mark Pemberton

"My home city of Coventry is going through major redevelopment as the city centre south phase continues at pace. This is what's left of the art installation colour palette by the world-renowned artist Morag Myerscough, commissioned for the City of Culture in 2021. This was shot on a Fujifilm X-T5 and a 15mm lens with the Nostalgic Negative film sim." Instagram: @pemberton_mark

Digital Camera says:

It's shocking that an art installation is simply being ripped down in the name of progress. Thankfully, you managed to capture its final days. Well spotted!



4

'Transporter Bridge' by Alec Gillies

"This is the historic transporter bridge over the River Tees. Having checked the forecast, I knew the conditions would be ideal, with very little wind. That meant calm water for great reflections and less movement in the boats, which can be a nightmare when taking long-exposure shots. A bonus was the cloud movement, which provided the dramatic streak effect in a 30-second exposure."
Instagram: @the_rollers_there_and_then

Digital Camera says: This is a superb capture with stunning colours on the bridge and boats. Those skies make the shot, though.





5 'Elegug Stacks' by Edward Lee Davies

"This was shot at Elegug Stacks on the Pembrokeshire Coast in Wales. I was trying to achieve a dramatic sunset shot using my new 14mm lens. I've always loved photographs where there are colourful flowers in the foreground leading to the main subject, and I was trying to emulate that style here."

Instagram: @ed_photography_wales

Digital Camera says:

Using a big foreground to lead into the scene is a popular technique, and you've managed to make it work by getting everything in focus.



6 'Zebras and Reflections' by Rene de Heer

"I spent a week at the Mashatu game reserve in Botswana, with two nights at the Lala Limpopo hide. This is on the edge of a small waterhole, which is frequently visited by all kinds of mammals. These two zebras visited after midnight, had a quick drink and disappeared."

Instagram: @rene_deheer

Digital Camera says: The two animals are arranged perfectly, and the reflection adds to the visual interest.

7 'Street Portrait' by Rich Bell

"This shot was taken in Digbeth in Birmingham, where Nick was modelling during a portrait lesson. I shot this with my Canon EOS R6 Mk II with a 35mm lens, and this black and white edit was my favourite."

Instagram: @richieb__1981

Digital Camera says: There are lots of tricky competing light sources here. You've overcome this to capture a really gritty and sharp portrait.

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The image shows the cover of the May 2026 issue of Digital Camera magazine. The cover features a lighthouse on a cliff and the headline 'CAPTURE THE COAST'. It also mentions '12 pages of pro techniques and insights!' and 'Camera settings Tripod setup Editing'. Below the headline, there's a section for 'PAUL NICKLEN MASTERCLASS' with 'Exclusive extracts from the wildlife legend's new book'. At the bottom, there are sections for 'Photo Skills' and '9 tip cards'. To the right, a circular badge says 'SUBSCRIBE AND HAVE YOUR BEST-EVER PHOTO YEAR!'. Below the magazine cover, there are images of a smartphone and a tablet displaying the magazine's digital content, including the same cover and a 'FREE! WITH THIS ISSUE' section.

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PHOTO SKILLS

Tips, tricks and techniques
to improve your
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IN THIS ISSUE

10 skills for you to learn this month

01 Mystical macro marbles	page 42	06 Going underground for architecture	page 53
02 City light trails with Davyd Samuels	page 46	07 Tim Allen shoots strangers on the street	page 54
03 Spring flowers with Craig Blackley	page 47	08 Rate my photo: Danny Roberts	page 56
04 Rural footbridges with long exposures	page 48	09 Why this shot works: Mark Hale	page 58
05 Peter Briggs captures stormy waves	page 52	10 Photo Challenge: Insects	page 60



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01

MACRO

Losing one's marbles

Wendy Evans gets all abstract with a set of magical marbles and a project you can shoot at home

While you can file playing marbles at school in the same memory drawer as conkers and riding around on your Raleigh Chopper, they do make a great subject for an abstract macro project. Don't worry about braving cobwebs and setting off your dust allergy by scrabbling around in the loft looking for a packet you stored there in 1979, though. For some reason, they remain cheap and plentiful on Amazon, as well as in some toy shops. The big question is what type to use. You can get ones with interior swirls and colours, but they can be distracting and less abstract than clear ones. So my suggestion is to try ones devoid of interior flourishes, but these can range from completely transparent to ones with a range of colours. You'll also need some coloured, reflective card and perhaps some additional lighting to introduce colour and highlights, as well as help with reflections.

It's worth starting with the clear marbles first, arranging them on your reflective card, then placing another piece of card at the back to bounce light back into the scene. Unpack your macro lens and focus on one of the marbles at the front of the scene that leads into the rest. You should leave some empty space in the foreground because the light reflections will appear there as well.

Camera: Nikon Z 8 with Sigma 105mm
Settings: 1/15 sec at f/18, ISO 200, Centre-weighted metering

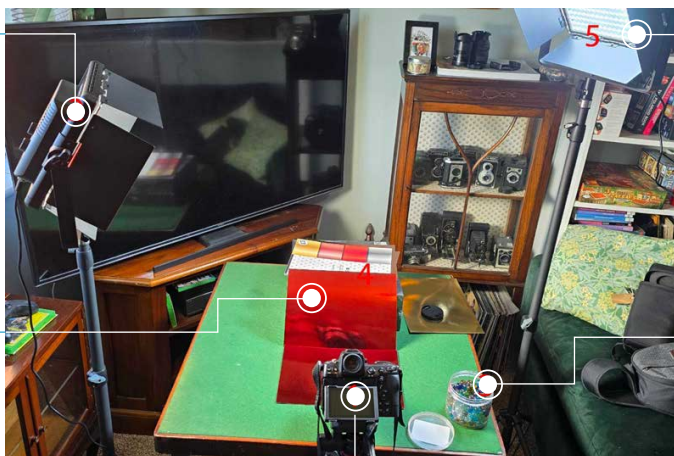
How to set up your marble display

Key light

This is the main light, which is set to a colour temperature of 5600K, like the camera. Yes, there's window light, but it's not as dominant as this one. I decided to leave the curtains open so that the shape of the window was reflected in the marble, and also because it registered as a bluer colour.

The background

For some shots with clear marbles, I used this red, reflective card and set the colour of the light on the right to red as well. Then I tried the light with blue. The other combination was to use gold card for a more neutral effect, blue-coloured marbles and a blue light to the right.



Camera position

I used a simple setup for this macro shot, so it's just a case of getting in close enough. The challenging element is arranging the marbles so there is a key marble with others in the background and space for reflections.

Secondary light

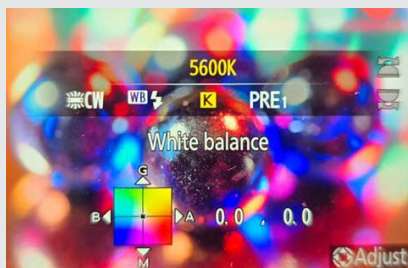
I used an additional light source here to add more highlights and reflections. On some shots, I chose a red light, and on others, blue. As the key light was set to 5600K, I also made sure the white balance on the camera was manually set to 5600K, so that this colour would register.

Box of marbles

It's up to you what you use, but clear or coloured marbles without an interior pattern tend to give a more interesting, abstract result with better reflections. Try different types, though, to see what works best. You could also combine different coloured marbles with the colour of the secondary light.

Step by step Marble macro

It's all about the colours, depth of field and the types of reflections and highlights you can create



01 Setting up for colour

If you're intending to use coloured lighting in your photos, then you need to pay attention to the white balance setting on the camera so that it doesn't attempt to filter it out. The key light was 5600K, so to get the colour of the secondary light to register, the camera's white balance was set manually to 5600K.



03 Metering options

With bright highlights on the marbles, one option was to use Highlight Metering, then restore the shadows in editing. Centre-weighted metering created larger hotspots, but when the camera focused on the marble, the hotspots became more blurred.



02 Release or timer

After a few shots, it became evident that a narrow aperture would be required, which meant a low shutter speed. Even though the camera was on a tripod, it's better to use an app or a release cable to fire the shutter. Here, we set the self-timer to five seconds, giving enough time for any movement to cease.



04 Camera settings

In the end, I used manual focus as the AF tended to pick out the reflections, rather than the surface of the marble. I used Aperture Priority mode so I could cycle through various apertures and set ISO 200 to reduce the risk of camera shake, even though I was using a timer.

Aperture selection

How much depth of field do you get?

The answer to that question on a 105mm macro lens is 'not very much'. At the widest aperture, which worked out at something like f/4.8, there was only a few millimetres of depth of field. As you can see in the example below, that meant that the edges of the key marble were out of focus and the clear marbles in the background virtually disappeared. Selecting f/11 produced more depth and made the background visible, but still not enough for an entire marble, which was about 10mm in size.



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I've had this tripod for over three years and, because of its size and sturdiness, it has helped improve my photography, especially when combined with a Benro GD3WH geared tripod head.



Davyd's top five tips for long exposure light trails

- ✓ **A sturdy tripod**
A sturdy tripod is essential to help eliminate any kind of camera shake while taking long-exposure photographs. Adding a geared tripod head instead of a ball head will also help.
- ✓ **Use a remote shutter**
Using a remote shutter will help reduce camera shake as you will not be physically touching the camera's shutter button. You can also use the self-timer function on your camera, which will delay the shutter release and let the camera settle after you have pressed the button.

- ✓ **Shoot in Manual**
Switch your camera to Manual mode: this will give you full control over your settings (shutter speed, aperture and ISO), which will allow you to experiment and get the result you want.

- ✓ **Use ND filters**
Neutral density filters will reduce the amount of light that enters your lens and enable you to take long exposures during daylight.

- ✓ **Experiment with Bulb mode**
Bulb mode lets you control the length of your exposure, especially if you want to go over 30 seconds. Use Bulb mode with a remote shutter and ND filters to experiment with 1-2 minute exposures.

02 URBAN Davyd Samuels explains how to shoot a stunning long exposure photo with light trails



Davyd Samuels is from Redditch, Worcestershire, and bought his first DSLR in 2014, changing to a Sony A7 IV mirrorless in 2021. "I started

mainly shooting landscapes and photos from my travels, but now also photograph motorsports and wildlife," he says.

"I've seen many long-exposure images from this location, so while I was in London, I decided to have a go at capturing one myself. I waited until after the rush hour, when there were fewer people around, giving me a better chance of

getting into the position I wanted. I set up my tripod and camera and fine-tuned the composition. Luckily, the British weather gave me the added bonus of the reflections on the wet pavement," Davyd says.

"Then it was just a matter of waiting for a bus to come along. In London, there are plenty, but unfortunately, the traffic lights meant a lot of experimenting with shutter speed and ISO to get the exposure I wanted. After a bit of editing to clean up the pavement, this photo is the end result."

Instagram: @davyd_samuels_photography



Craig Blackley

03 MACRO Spring bloomers

Ever thought about photographing flowers? Grab a macro lens and find out how, with **Craig Blackley**

Late spring is the season of new beginnings, offering eye-catching and colourful displays galore in gardens and parks. All you need to create intriguing close-ups of flowers is a camera, a macro lens and, perhaps, a torch. The main elements that you need to think about are composition and shutter speed. Composition is crucial in terms of placing your subject in an area that is pleasing to the eye. For example, you could decide to fill the frame with your subject, or use the rule of thirds technique to be creative with space.

Most importantly, set the shutter speed to the equivalent of the focal length or try doubling it. This will help to avoid any camera

shake when shooting handheld, so that you capture crisp detail within the image. That's how I shot this lovely Polyanthus Primrose.

Camera: Fujifilm X-T50 and Fujifilm XF30mm F2.8 R LM WR Macro lens (45mm effective)

Settings: 1/140 sec at f/4, ISO 400, +1EV

Instagram: @photographybycraigblackley

The difference a torch makes

This image reveals a significant difference between shining a torch onto a flower and what it looked like without, under flat and grey lighting overhead. The advantage of using a torch is that the scene looks like it was taken on a bright, sunny day. It also added a warm, inviting tone to the flower.

Step by step Get close up

01 Use a torch

Once you've chosen your flower, position yourself and shoot from a variety of angles and distances. Shooting handheld also gives you more creative freedom. Experiment with the torch light, from low, high or mid-range.



02 Focus point

Use your camera's rear screen for greater control when composing. Here, I used an aperture of f/4 in Aperture Priority mode to ensure that the detail of the flower was in focus. Using single-point focus, I tapped on the touchscreen.



03 Exposure dial

If you need to brighten the flower slightly, use your camera's exposure compensation dial, if it has one. Otherwise, use the dedicated button and control dial. I turned the exposure dial to +1, to made the image brighter.



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04

LANDSCAPES

Take it to the bridge

Wendy Evans explains how to shoot quaint footbridges designed for nothing larger than people

B

ack before bridge-builders had to worry about cars and HGVs, the only question facing any stonemason looking at the crossing for a stream, or small river, was, 'Can they get a wagon through this?' If the answer was yes, then all that was needed to prevent those on foot from getting wet was a stone bridge with a couple of arches, no wider than a few farmhands or a portly baker with a tray of freshly-baked bread. Finding such bridges today usually entails heading off the beaten track to some picture-postcard village that only lottery winners or stockbrokers can afford to live in. This one is in Allerford, Somerset.

So what are the key challenges facing intrepid photographers? Aside from the unpredictable weather (and yes, it rained), the biggest issue when composing the image is usually access. It's always a good idea to pack some wellies or a change of clothes in case you decide that the only place to shoot from is in the middle of the stream. Please be careful, though!

From there, it's a question of what you want to do with the water. If you want to capture drops of water splashing about, then a fast shutter speed is required. If you'd prefer a creamy flow, like a freshly poured pint of Guinness, then filters and a low ISO will be the order of the day.

Camera: Nikon Z 8 with Nikkor 18-35mm f/3.5-4.5G lens at 21mm

Settings: 3 secs at f/8, ISO 32 with graduated ND filter, ND4 filter and Cokin circular polariser





Assessing the scene What to look for when setting up the shot

01 Long-exposure water

The water is smooth and creamy, thanks to the combination of accessories and settings required to create a long exposure.

02 Leading lines

The lines lead in from the bottom left into the middle of the photo, where the bridge is. As we read from left to right, it's more natural than leading in from the bottom right.

03 Angled bridge

The right side of the bridge connects that side of the photo to the left side and is angled so that the view is still heading towards the back.



04 Focal point

The focus point is about 4m away from the camera. At 21mm and an aperture of f/8, the depth of field extends from 1.26m in front of the camera into infinity. That first 1.26m was mostly out of sight because it was below the camera anyway.

05 Using filters

Filters help bring out the detail in the sky and the background. Despite the miserable weather, the sky was brighter than the foreground, so an ND grad was used to balance it out.

Step by step Working the scene

Creating smooth water with long exposures



01 Compose the shot

While your composition will depend on how accessible the location is, some views work much better than others. This was an initial setup from the other side of the bridge, but it doesn't really work as the bridge cuts the photo in two.



02 Deploy the filters

An ND4 filter was used to reduce the light by two stops, then an ND grad was used to balance the bright sky with the darker foreground. The final filter was the circular polariser that cut through the reflections on the water surface and reduced the light even more.



03 Enter the settings

Shooting in Aperture Priority mode, I set the aperture to f/8 for the sharpest part of the lens and to limit the light coming in. With Centre-weighted metering, shots were overexposed, so I dialled in -0.3EV exposure compensation using a button and the dial.



04 Final combinations

I used a single focus point on the bridge, taking shots from various positions and with a few different settings. These are the final ones for the main shot on the previous spread: a 3-second exposure to blur the water, f/8 aperture, and the equivalent of ISO 32.

Polariser effects

Decide on what you want to enhance

See through it

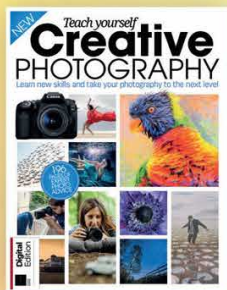
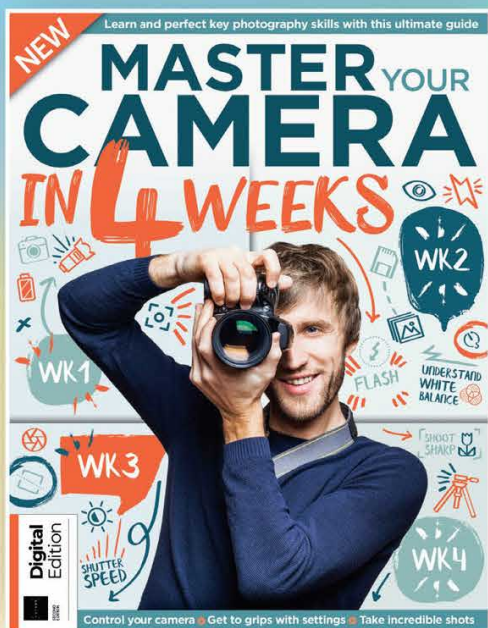
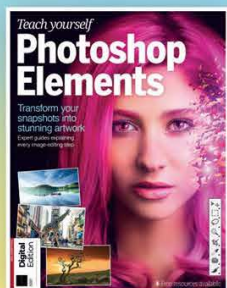
Slot a circular polariser into a filter holder system (unless it's magnetic) and rotate it until it cancels out the light you want to exclude. One direction will enhance cloud definition, the other will remove reflections on water. A polariser also reduces light by one to two stops, which is what we need.



Make it reflective

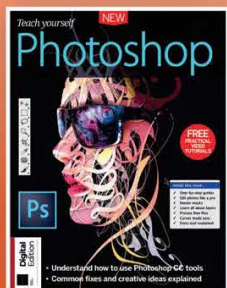
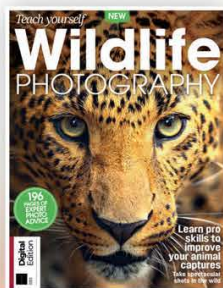
Here, the polariser has been rotated by 180° degrees in the opposite direction, giving more reflections in the foreground. More noticeably, there are also streaks of white water coming from under the bridge, making the image look more dynamic.





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05

ACTION

Peter Briggs gives us his advice on capturing stormy waves with a fast shutter speed



This image was shot at Greyhope Bay, Aberdeen, looking onto the South Breakwater Pier and Lighthouse, which is part of the Port of Aberdeen.

I love how this cinematic shot feels and holds everything at once – the incredible force of the North Sea, the stillness of the lighthouse and that hint of loneliness that feels really powerful, but not fragile.

I am always aiming to bring a cinematic, romantic feel into my images, but with these shots, I also wanted to capture the drama and raw power of the North Sea in my home city of Aberdeen. My hope is that when people look at my images, they feel something – and maybe pause for a moment longer than they expect to take it all in.

Capturing the shot during this extreme weather, my first concern was trying to find a safe place to get a great composition.

I'd also recommend keeping a lens cleaner handy, so you can continue to keep your lens drop-free. It's needed on days like this.

Camera: Nikon Z f and 24-200mm f/4-6.3 lens

Settings: 1/500 sec at f/13, ISO 1600

Instagram: @peterbriggsphotography

Peter's five tips for crashing wave captures

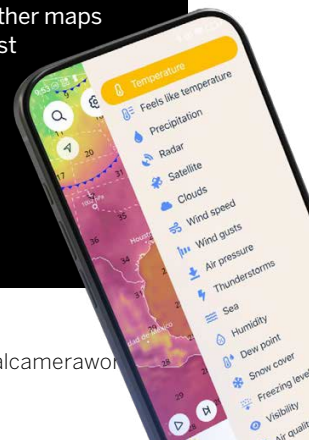
- ✓ **Fast shutter speeds**
Use a fast shutter around 1/500 sec to freeze the impact, shooting in bursts so you capture that split-second peak when the wave folds and breaks. Slow your shutter if you want softer, smoother images.
- ✓ **Depth of field and ISO**
Set your aperture to f/9–f/13 for greater depth of field, keeping foreground spray and distant structures sharp while waves shift unpredictably across the frame. Keep the ISO on Auto to handle rapidly changing light.
- ✓ **Composition**
Try to include a fixed subject or leading line, but don't stress perfection. Capture the moment first; crop later to maximise the impact.
- ✓ **Keep safe**
Observe the rhythm of incoming sets of waves, stay safely back, and work with the wind direction. Longer lenses keep you secure while still giving strong, dynamic compositions.

- ✓ **Photo editing**
Keep your edits selective rather than global. Target key areas individually, such as the wave, subject, background or sky. Adjust the texture, contrast, shadows and clarity, letting the natural drama stay front and centre. If the ISO is too high, use denoise in post, if necessary.

Use a weather app How to watch for waves

One of the best phone or watch apps for high-precision local and global forecasts is Ventusky, which has more than 80 weather maps with a wide range of fast data at your location, including wind speed, wind gusts, clouds, thunderstorms and sea conditions.

Find out more at:
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06 ARCHITECTURE

Going underground

How to capture scenes in the low light of subway stations, with Wendy Evans

There's a whole world to explore when you head to a subway or Metro station, whether it's people, trains or architecture. Taking photos is a challenge, though, thanks to the low light and restrictions on tripod use (unless you have official permission). You should also avoid copyrighted symbols, such as Transport

for London's roundel. Shooting in busy locations means having your camera set up with your preferred metering option and an understanding of how slow a shutter speed you can work with before camera-shake rears its ugly head. If you want to grab candid photos of people, then a portrait lens or anything from 35-85mm is a good option, but

if you're mainly focusing on the architecture, then a wide-angle lens will be required. Try to avoid having any vertical structure right next to the camera, though, as these will be significantly distorted.

Camera: Nikon Z fc and Nikkor Z DX 16-50mm f/3.5-6.3 VR lens

Settings: 1/60 sec at f/4.5, ISO 640

Step by step Optimise the settings

Set up your camera for the low light underground



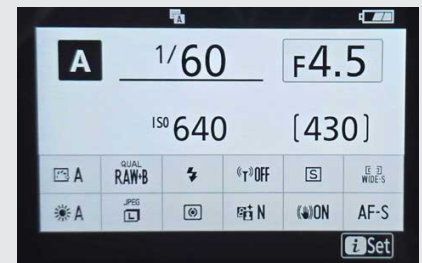
01 Frame it up

With a wide-angle lens, it can be difficult to judge whether things are level and whether key objects are on the intersections of the verticals and horizontals when trying to use the rule of thirds. Help yourself by going into the menu system and turning a framing grid (with 3x3) to On.



02 Increase the ISO

You can't throw the aperture completely wide open, as you'll have a shallow depth of field, even with a wide-angle lens. Set the ISO to something appropriate for how little light there is at the aperture you are going to use. Ensure that you're getting a fast enough shutter speed.



03 Get ready to shoot

For this shot, the camera was used in Aperture Priority mode and the aperture was set to f/4.5. The focus point was the pillar on the right because I wanted to make sure the lettering on the wall was sharp. This gave enough depth of field so that everything else was in focus.



07 STREET Strangers on the street

Tim Allen discusses his project photographing people he'd never met before



Tim is an environmental portrait photographer from East Sussex. His 'Strangers When We Meet' series involves chatting to a stranger, then taking their portrait. His book of the project raises funds for St Michael's Hospice in St Leonards.

Why did you have the idea for a zine about street photography?

'Strangers When We Meet' started on Boxing Day 2022, when I paid a visit to Hastings in East Sussex with my ancient Canon EOS 5D. My dad was in my thoughts, as he wasn't as mobile as he used to be and didn't get to do one of his favourite things quite so often, which was going for a walk and chatting to the people he met.

How did the charity aspect come about?

Sadly, a few days after that first trip, Dad suffered a stroke and just three weeks later, he died. After a break, I decided to continue the project in his memory and later moved to Hastings after retiring. In 2024, I linked with a local hospice and a year later, I designed and published a book of my favourite portraits, with all of the sale proceeds going to them.

Was it just strangers on the street, or did you photograph other people?

So far, I've met a variety of people, both local residents and people visiting the area. As well as approaching strangers directly, I've also asked for participants on Instagram, which has led to several memorable encounters. I have photographed the four most recent mayors of Hastings and the

German comedian Henning Wehn, who was keen to support my fundraising. The book also includes eight portraits of staff members who work at the hospice.

Were there any inspirations for the style and how you approached your subjects?

As a big fan of 'Crossing Paths' by Niall McDiarmid, I decided to try to shoot portraits for myself, whilst also remembering some of the stories that I'd heard to tell Dad.

Have you finished the project, and are there any plans for another?

The project is ongoing, but I plan to publish a second volume when I've met and photographed enough new people.

Instagram: @timallenphotogram

Website: timallenphoto.co.uk



Opposite page (left): #200 TYGERMYLK. Hastings, May 2025.

Opposite page (right): #103. David. St Leonards, January 2024.

Above: #225 Molly Mural. St Leonards, August 2025.

Get the zine

Strangers When We Meet

With 69 photos over 56 pages, the zine is available from timallenphoto.co.uk, and 100 per cent of the sale proceeds go to St Michael's Hospice in St Leonards. It costs £8, which is a minimum donation to the hospice, though you can contribute more if you wish. Postage and packing is £2.50, or the book can be collected locally in the Hastings area. timallenphoto.co.uk



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Tim's five tips for shooting portraits of strangers

1 The approach

It's easy to miss a great opportunity through hesitation and nervousness. If you see somebody you think is a perfect subject, think positively about how great the portrait could look and not reasons why they might say no. If you don't ask, there's a 100 per cent certainty that you won't get a portrait.

2 Be positive

Try not to get too downhearted if you do miss a potential opportunity, as there will always be somebody else along soon. If you're not really feeling up for it that day, don't try to force things. Stop and try again another time instead.

3 Your objectives

Once you've approached somebody, explain what you're doing quickly and clearly and if they say no, don't worry about it. I've often found that, even if an approach doesn't lead to a portrait, a lovely conversation can still happen and, for me, that's almost as important as a great photo.

4 The camera and lens

Get to know your camera and lens as well as you can so that you can concentrate on the shot and not the technicalities. I prefer to use the same focal length every time for ease of composition, which in my case is a 50mm equivalent.

5 The big challenge

It's important to try to enjoy the challenge, and the better you get, the more you'll appreciate the end results. When I started, I didn't expect to even get five portraits; however, I now have over 200 in my portfolio and hope to take many more over the coming years. Remember, though, concentrate on the quality of your images, not quantity.

08

STREET

Rate my photo

An intriguing, idyllic portrait by **Danny Roberts** comes under the microscope

I took this image on a quiet afternoon, drawn to the stillness of the scene and the strong storytelling potential. The lone figure, framed by his bicycle and the soft, distant skyline, felt reflective and timeless. I aimed to create depth using foreground layering and a shallow depth of field. Using Lightroom Classic during editing, I enhanced the warm tones, softened highlights and subtly refined contrast to emphasise mood and atmosphere.

Camera: Sony A7C II

Lens: 85mm F1.4

Editing: Adobe Lightroom Classic

Instagram: @momentsbydanny_

✓ Vintage colours

The colour palette is lovely. It has a range of muted colours that suit the subject matter perfectly. Over-saturated colours here would be jarring, so this is perfect.

✓ What's the story?

The image is full of intrigue. It's clearly the old man's bicycle, which has an old-fashioned feel to it with the wicker basket on the front. Complete with his Panama hat, the image gives off 1950s vibes. Then there's the fence and a hint of people beyond it. Is the man sitting here watching his grandchild play sports? Is he just there reliving his youth? The image leaves us wanting to know more.

✗ Overexposed regions

The top of the hat and the highlights of the sunshine on the frame of the bicycle and mudguard are all overexposed and have lost detail because of it. In tricky conditions, it's often better to underexpose and bring out the shadows from your raw image afterwards.

✗ Elements not working

There's half a disembodied foot in the bottom right of the photo, which could have been cloned out. Also, the top half of the image, which is mainly sky, doesn't really add much.

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Danny Roberts

Given the fairly square structure of the contents, it might have been better to crop it to an actual square, still including some space above the posts (see panel, right). As it is, the format is an odd one, being not quite 3:4.

✗ Editing errors

Unfortunately, an image that could have been an absolute banger has been undermined by editing oversights. Danny used Lightroom Classic to soften the background, which leads us to question which aperture was used – with an 85mm f/1.4 lens, that shouldn't have been necessary. Instead, by using Lightroom's Lens Blur tool, the tops of the posts have become distorted with a weird brown halo effect.

The tool has created issues elsewhere in the frame, including some missing spokes on the front wheel, which were included in the selection to perform the background blur. This even extends to the hat, where the left side and the top, in the sunshine, have been blurred, while the rest remains in focus. There's also a hard, black selection line around the rim on the right of the hat and remnants of jpeg artifacts and over-compression all around the bicycle that haven't been removed. If you shoot in jpeg format, make sure you save the files at maximum quality to avoid this.

Crop for success

This is the image cropped to a square format, still leaving a little room for the sky above the posts. This better suits the structure of the image, which has horizontal lines with the bench and nets, and vertical lines with the net posts, bench support and spire in the background. There are two depths to the photo: the figure on the bench and the out-of-focus background.



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IMAGE ANALYSIS

1 WOW FACTOR

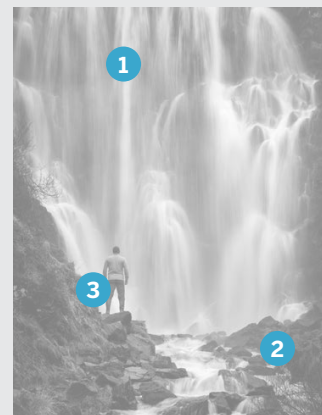
It's a spectacular waterfall, and using a slow enough shutter speed of 1/6 sec means that movement is registered in the flow of the water.

2 DEPTH OF FIELD

To make the foreground interest work, it has to be in focus, which means deciding where to focus with your chosen aperture and lens.

3 SENSE OF SCALE

Not only does the figure add scale to the waterfall, but Mark is also perfectly located in terms of composition, being on the bottom third key point.



09 LANDSCAPES Anatomy of a 'fall

Mark Hale won last month's 'Waterfall' challenge with this wonderful capture



This photograph was taken during a February trip to Assynt in Scotland with a group of friends from the Stirling and District Camera Club. The weather that day was relentlessly wet and windy, so we set out in search of locations that offered at least some shelter while still providing strong compositional opportunities.

Clashnessie Falls proved ideal. The walk from the parking area beside Clashnessie Bay takes only around 15 minutes, and when

we arrived, the waterfall was in full, thunderous flow thanks to the heavy rain in the days before. I made several images here; some using the river as a leading line, others taken closer in to capture the texture and movement of the water.

The sky that day was a flat, featureless white, so I decided to zoom in to exclude it from the frame. It quickly became clear that the scene needed a sense of scale. I remembered that, beneath my waterproof jacket, I was wearing a bright yellow fleece. I focused on the rocks where I planned to

stand, set my aperture, shutter speed and ISO, switched on the self-timer and dashed into position, taking great care not to slip on the slick, rain-soaked rocks.

I held as still as I could until I was sure the shutter had fired, then dashed back to the camera, which was firmly anchored on a sturdy tripod. By this point, I was absolutely drenched from the spray, but the final image made it more than worthwhile.

Camera: Nikon D850 with 24-70mm lens

Settings: 1/6 sec at f/13, ISO 64

Instagram: @markhale_photography

HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN



URGENT APPEAL



Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine is not just a humanitarian crisis for the Ukrainian people; it's a child protection emergency.

Up to 100,000 children warehoused in Ukraine's vast orphanage system – a network of over 700 buildings – risk being forgotten. Left to face the dangers of war alone as staff flee. As families are torn apart or forced from their homes, many more children are at risk of being separated from the love and protection they desperately need. Worse still, they are at risk of trafficking, or being placed in overcrowded, understaffed and poorly resourced orphanages in border countries.

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10 MACRO Insects challenge

This month, we want to see your best flying and crawling bug photos

W

elcome to our monthly reader photo challenge, where the winning image will feature in the magazine and you can claim bragging rights. For

May, the theme is 'Insects', but how you approach this is up to you. Do you opt for a tricky shot of something flying, hovering or crawling around in the dirt? Whichever

approach you take, you'll have to be precise with your focusing and control the depth of field. So let's see your best bug life shots!

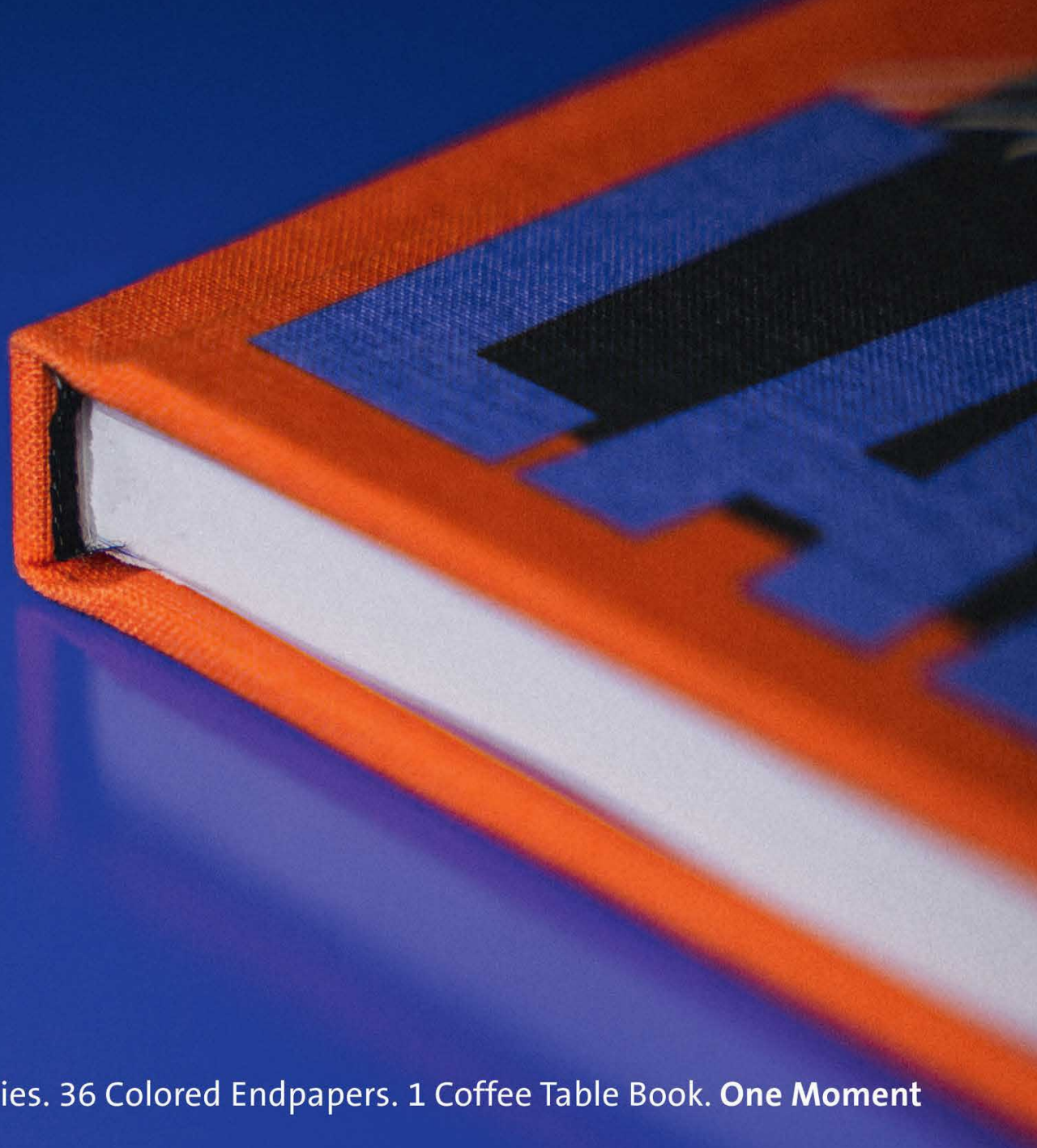
Enter via email or Facebook

Email digitalcamera@futurenet.com with 'Insects' as the subject. Please attach your entry as a high-resolution file (rather than links) and include a brief description of how

you took the image. Remember to list your social media account and/or website, so that we can give you due credit if you win. Enter the challenge by 21 May and, remember, only one image per reader, please.

The winner will be announced in the July 2026 issue (309) of *Digital Camera*, which goes on sale on Friday 19 June.

Email your entry to: digitalcamera@futurenet.com
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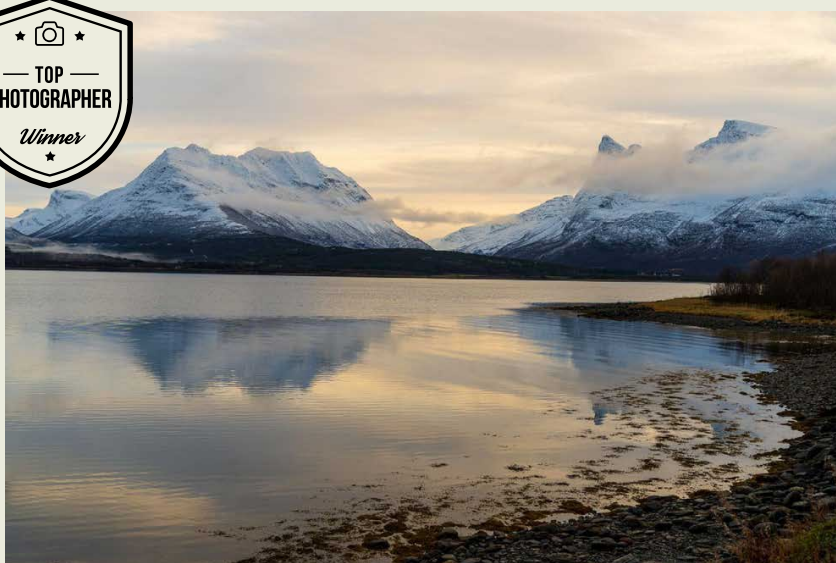
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Bernt-Inge, Norway



Roy Egloff, Switzerland



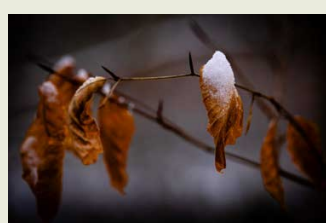
Michael Shmidt, Israel



Ivan Miksik, Czech Republic



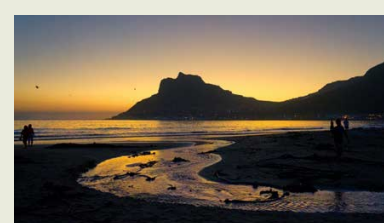
Sean Mason-Farmer, United Kingdom



Eric Vandenheede, Belgium



Katya Narozhnova, Cyprus



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Martin Filčík, Slovakia



Huw, United Kingdom



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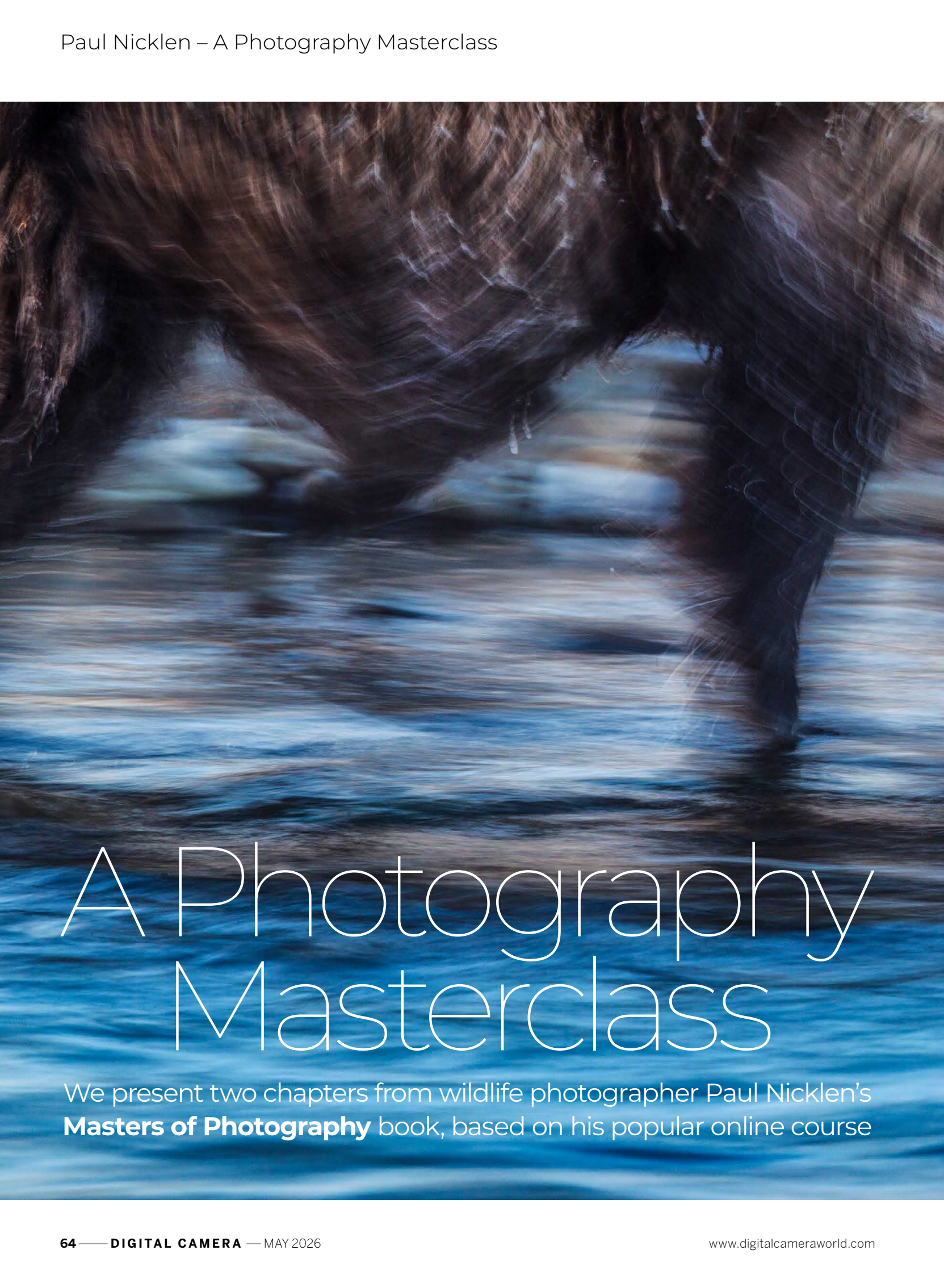
Jamil Badalov, Azerbaijan



Maresa Sinclair, United Kingdom



James Farley, United States



A Photography Masterclass

We present two chapters from wildlife photographer Paul Nicklen's **Masters of Photography** book, based on his popular online course



Left: A grizzly bear with slow shutter, Alaska, USA, 2018.



Cristina Mittermeier

Paul Nicklen **Wildlife** photographer

Nicklen is a Canadian photographer, filmmaker and marine biologist who uses his camera to reveal the nature of the changing polar regions due to the effects of a warming planet.

He has documented the beauty and plight of our planet for over 20 years as an assignment photographer for *National Geographic* magazine.

Paul is the co-founder (along with his wife, Cristina Mittermeier) of SeaLegacy, an organisation that highlights ocean conservation issues to the global community.

His new book, *Paul Nicklen: A Photography Masterclass* is based on Paul's online Masters of Photography course.

paulnicklen.com

Instagram:
@paulnicklen

Paul Nicklen



Paul Nicklen

Grow as an artist

Hone your creative vision and find your style

Developing an individual approach to image-making or a personal style is an ongoing process. It's a lifelong endeavour. No one picks up a camera and is the finished article. In fact, I don't think it's possible to reach a definitive place with your photography; the way one makes pictures is always evolving. But that is something to embrace.

By embarking on a life in photography, you are making a commitment to yourself to keep doing the work – developing your eye (Chapter 8) and knowledge (Chapters 7, 10 & 11), nurturing your self-belief (Chapter 5), regularly checking in with your reasons for doing what you're doing and remaining focused on your goals (Chapter 3).

“By going exploring and sketching, you will set yourself on a path of discovery”

One of the most useful things I learned at the beginning of my career was how *National Geographic* magazine edits photography (Chapter 16). It's a model I use to this day. Let's say I had shot 10,000 images on an assignment. An editor would narrow down the images to around 1,000 'top' images. We'd then look at the images together and whittle them down to 500, 200, 100, a top 50, and then 25 to 35 standout images.

Find your style

Those images would make it into the final story 'tray'. (We called it a 'tray' because we used to use Kodak carousel slide projectors that were fed by a rotating tray of slides.)

I mention this because having insight into the editing process and style will help you learn about your style, your way of shooting, and identify those of your images that will hopefully live on forever. Aside from the 'home run' images, to use a baseball analogy, it's also a chance to identify 'second base' and 'third base' hits – the solid B and C-level images that serve as a supporting cast. These are the images that capture key journalistic

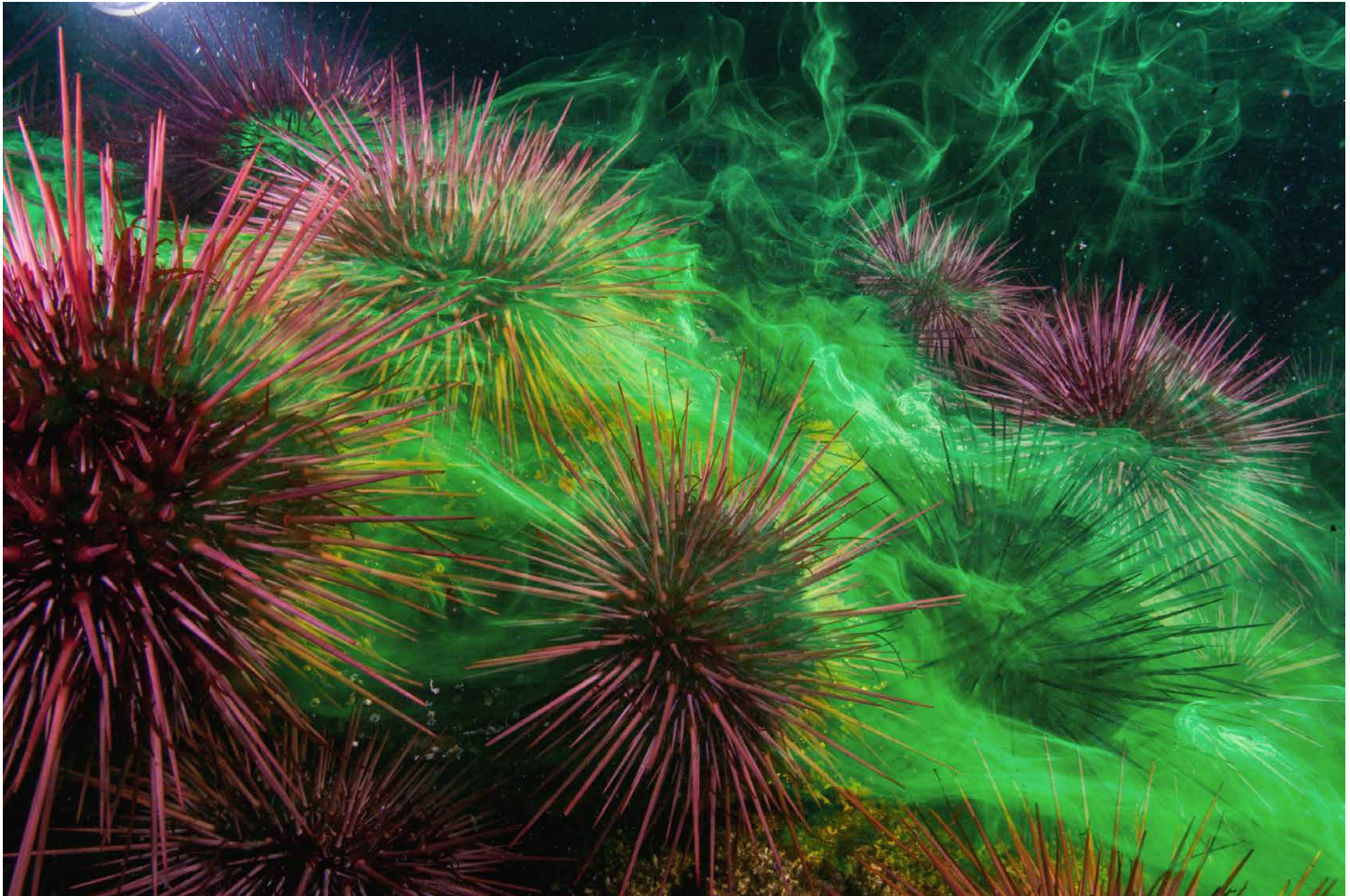
Above: A coconut octopus clings to a shell, Indonesia, 2025.

storytelling moments, images that are perhaps not as powerful as those 'big hitters', but that help to tell the story. They're like legs on a table that give the whole story structure.

When it comes to refining your approach to photography, I implore you not to overthink things, not to force yourself into a box, especially when you're starting out. Go out there and let your style find you. Shoot from every angle, find subjects in your backyard or close by; go out and 'sketch'.

Sketching with a camera is one of the greatest things you can do. I like to draw my ideas for images on paper, but I also love to go into a situation, hold my camera to my eye and 'sketch' in a less literal sense. That's when I start to let myself go. I let myself be free and see the world through my camera without distractions from what is outside the frame.

Over time, you'll start to see images that repeat themselves or a style or a technique you've used, where you start to say, 'That is



Paul Nicklen

mine, it's my own'. By going out and exploring, sketching and not overthinking, you'll set yourself on a path of discovery, and you'll find your style. But you need to shoot tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of images before you start to see your style unfold.

Clear story

It's important you don't get disheartened if somebody doesn't 'get' your style straightaway. For my first few assignments at *National Geographic*, none of the editors understood my style. I am in love with wildlife and nature. I want my images to be either extremely full frame – where you're looking at the eye or into the mouth of an animal that is taking up the whole frame – or to convey a sense of place – where the animal is just a speck in the distance against a big, beautiful landscape. Those kinds of images really speak to me, but they are not necessarily what the editors at *National Geographic* are looking for. What will work as a large fine art print on the wall may not work in the pages of a magazine. A strong journalistic image tells a clear story with context and consequence – it's about truth revealed, —>

Above: Urchins and scientific dye, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada, 2005.

Right: Sunflower sea star, Quadra Island, British Columbia, Canada, 2004.



Paul Nicklen



Above: An Arctic tern glides through the frame, Svalbard, Norway, 2007.

Opposite page: The Herd, Lençóis Maranhenses, Brazil, 2024.

not just beauty captured. Fine art, by contrast, invites interpretation and emotion, often leaving the narrative open.

So, don't get discouraged if your style doesn't immediately fit with what an editor wants. Right now, I'm really enjoying going back through the two million or so images I shot for *National Geographic* over the last 20 years and mining those images for beautiful moments that work as fine art prints. Most didn't work for the magazine, but that doesn't mean they are without merit. I shoot in a very creative, artistic way – images that convey a sense of place; beautiful, moody imagery that might work in a fine art situation, but not in a journalistic context. I always made sure I shot what the magazine wanted; that's what I was hired to do, but I never abandoned my style.

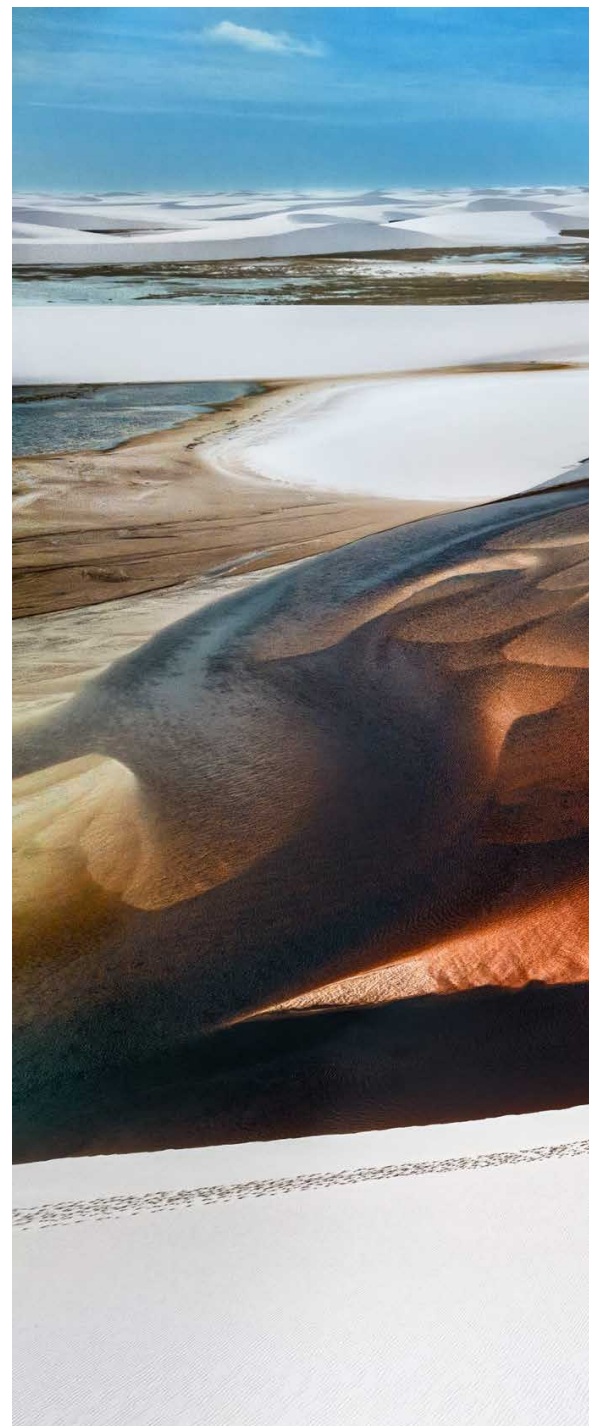
In the zones

My style is me, it's who I am, it's how I shoot. You have to hold on to that, to believe in what you are doing and chase those little voices out of your head (Chapter 5). A technique I often use to push myself creatively and grow as an artist is something I call my '20-60-20

philosophy'. It is a way to get the shots I need, but also to experiment, to be bold or daring in the way I'm shooting – to break the rules – which I hope will, in turn, lead to images that are a bit different.

When I'm in the field, I'm in the moment, I'm in the zone. I want to spend the first 20 per cent of my time getting sharp images, in focus, properly exposed – something that the editors at *National Geographic*, or whoever I'm shooting for, want. Even if it's just for myself, I want to get a core body of workable images. Essentially, you're not putting too much pressure on yourself to make every image a home run. So that's the first 20 per cent of your time – just getting something usable on your cards.

After that first 20 per cent, which I move through quickly, I spend the majority of my time in the 60 per cent zone, where I'm in the moment, using my skillset as an artist, using whatever techniques I've learned. I might be using rear sync flash to shoot motion blur, which demands precise timing and control over ambient light and the subject's movement – too much light and



the blur overwhelms the subject; too little and you lose the motion altogether. Or I could be taking complex shots where the chance of success is still there, although somewhat reduced.

Bear in mind

Crucially, I'm pushing myself to the outside edges of my ability, using all my developed skills, all my experience with a camera. One mistake I see a lot of photographers making is putting on the same lens and photographing the same bear over and over in the same way. It might be a 600mm lens and a bear that's 45 yards (50 metres) away. At the end of the day, they will have shot the same picture many

“A strong journalistic image tells a clear story with context and consequence – it's about truth revealed, not just beauty captured”



Paul Nicklen

times; same angle, same focal length, same depth of field or same framing of the subject.

‘Hail Mary’

Once I have exhausted that 60 per cent and I’m feeling great about the shoot, thinking I’ve captured some really creative, artistic stuff – incidentally, that 60 per cent zone is where the majority of my best work comes from – after that, I’ll spend the remaining 20 per cent of my time in the last zone where I just try some ‘Hail Marys’. I might be tired, the sun’s getting low, and things aren’t really working anymore, but nonetheless, I’ll keep going for a while longer on the off-chance that something will happen.

I’ve been underwater in eight knots of current off the British Columbia coast, where all I could do was try something and hope for the best, as there was little chance of getting anything in focus. I didn’t have a tripod to steady the camera, of course, and it was pitch-black, but I could see my dive buddy lighting up the scene with his powerful dive flashlight. What did I do? I took a 20-second handheld exposure. That’s a ‘Hail Mary’, where the chances of success are slim to none.

In fact, what came from that moment was incredible, something I could never have predicted: I could see light coming off the flashlight and bending over rocks, travelling with the current. This gave me the idea to use

organic dye to track and trace the currents in the ocean. It resulted in an image that ran in *National Geographic*.

I wouldn’t have got the idea of using the dye unless I had seen the light bending across the rocks. The best part about spending time in the last 20 per cent zone is that you grow as an artist. You are developing skills that are going to help you later in your photographic journey. And maybe, in time, the techniques that you’re testing in the last 20 per cent zone move into the 60 per cent zone, they become part of your regular skillset, and you find you are shooting successful images that push the limits of creativity. That is how you grow as an artist. And that is what this is all about.



Above: A walrus rests on sea ice, High Arctic, 2005.



Paul Nicklen

Out in the field

Quickfire tips

When it comes to working in the field and setting myself up for success, I've tried a lot of different approaches, some of which I'd like to share with you in the hope they might help you too.

Left brain, right brain

When I'm shooting, I always remind myself of the left brain, right brain theory: that there are two 'sides' to our brains – the left 'analytical' side and the right 'creative' side. When you're using the latter, you're seeing the world in shapes, colours, patterns, diagonals, converging lines and so on. You're not thinking too much; you're lost in the creative process.

Creative space

I'm using my creative brain when I 'sketch' with my camera. It's just my eye, my lens and the scenery in front of me. Working like that, you're exploring ideas, trying things out. You might be learning about the area where you're shooting, in the knowledge that you will come back later that evening or the next day and shoot some more. Or you might sit and wait for the stars to come out, or put your camera on a tripod and do a beautiful time exposure. There are a bunch of different things you can do when you're in that creative space, but you need to allow yourself to come into an area and start to feel, and sketch, and not think too much. Giving yourself permission to experiment is key.

I encourage you to do the same when you are scoping out new locations and setting up a shoot. You've spent time thinking about camera menus, got to know your kit inside out, practised switching dials and changing settings, and so on, so when you're surrounded by beautiful towering Douglas firs in the rainforests of British Columbia, you're able to get lost in the artistic and creative process. Keeping the camera stable is an important area of field work, too, of course. When I was using Fujifilm Velvia 50 film, everything was about tripod, tripod, tripod.

Today, working digitally, I bring tripods with me on expeditions, but I find I am using them less and less. And I certainly don't obsess about using one. It helps if you have quick reactions. An animal might be walking towards me, —▶



Paul Nicklen

Above: Cold Pursuit, Yukon, Canada, 2010.

and I can be down on my stomach quickly, shooting a low-angle shot, looking up at and elevating that animal in the frame. In that scenario, if I'm able to properly support my camera and lens on the ground, a tripod isn't necessary.

Camera support

If you are using a tripod, make sure it has a ball head that you like working with. There are some complex tripod heads out there, and using them can be fiddly and frustrating. You could also consider purchasing a video tripod head, so you can move fluidly between video and stills, which gives you options. Video heads are made for motion. They are more fluid and allow for smoother pans and tilts – essential when tracking a bear through tall grass or following a whale breach.

There are many ways to support your camera, though, you just need to think creatively. Beanbags can be useful for stability, or even a nearby branch or mound of earth. Think about how you are holding your

camera to minimise movement. I like to rest the tripod plate in the palm of my hand and use the rest of my arm and shoulder for extra support. I can pull my arm into my chest, and everything's quite stable. Holding the camera in that way gives me control over my focus and the ability to zoom, and I don't rock the camera. I might be shooting at 1/8 sec with a 16-35mm lens and getting good results.

Different focus

I also like to use back-button focus, especially when photographing moving animals – a wolf, for example. This is where the autofocus function is assigned to a separate button on your camera instead of the shutter release button at the front/top of the camera. The AF-ON button on advanced digital cameras is designed for this purpose.

By separating the functions of shutter release (taking the picture) and autofocus (AF), the camera will not be constantly refocusing every time you press the shutter release. This avoids unwanted refocusing and defocusing as you take pictures and gives you more accurate control over where your point of focus is. Give it a go. Try it in a few different scenarios. Before long, I'll

wager that all your cameras will be changed to back-button focus.

I'm also a fan of the silent shutter. I was slow to come round to mirrorless cameras until I noticed the noise that my camera was making in the field. I was clacketing away at 10 frames a second. When you're around wildlife, being able to shoot silently is a game-changer.

Another piece of advice I give to mentees is something I'm sure you've heard before, but it's worth saying again: always be ready and prepared. A good habit to get into, I find, is to set your camera to your standard 'home' settings at the end of a day's shooting. When I put my cameras away at night, I leave them at ISO 400, f/8 and on back-button focus, so when I pick up my kit first thing, I'm ready to go. I keep the batteries charged and have an extra set of batteries to hand. I always keep fresh memory cards in my cameras.

Imagine you're walking along a river, not expecting to see much, and suddenly the most incredible moment unfolds in front of you. A spirit bear or a wolf walks out into the scene, for example. You grab your camera, but it's set to a five-second exposure, or the 'wrong' focus setting, or the 'wrong' ISO – you might be on ISO 3200, but you really want



Paul Nicklen

to be on ISO 400. You will lose time, or even worse, miss the moment entirely. So, getting into the habit of coming back to those 'home' settings is important.

Get organised

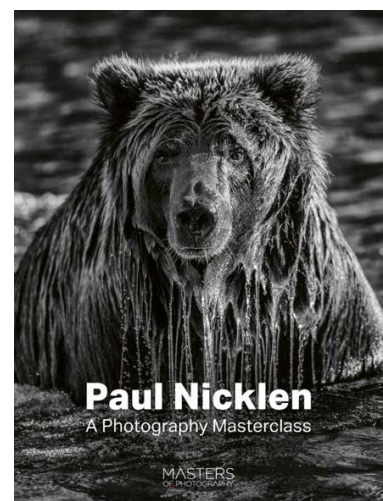
I always keep my lenses and camera bodies in the same spot in my kitbags, so I know where they are and can grab them quickly and easily, and there are always tripod plates on the long lenses – you don't want to be searching for those. Keeping your kit organised and accessible is key.

If you get into good habits, when a scenario is unfolding, you'll be able to respond more efficiently. You don't want to be locked up in your left brain trying to find the lens you need or trying to find a memory card or a battery. It's easier and frankly more fun to be ready, and will likely lead to a rewarding experience.

Above: 'Emerging', Nunavut, Canada, 2006.

A final quickfire tip is, when you're out shooting and you're achy, tired and feeling weak, I encourage you to keep a bottle of 'Try Acting' with you. It's something we always take with us on a shoot. When somebody on the team starts to complain that they're cold, hungry or tired, one of us will pipe up and say, 'Take some Try Acting' – it's a tongue-in-cheek reminder to tough it out.

Being a photographer sometimes means pushing through your own personal boundaries of discomfort. You won't always be comfortable when you're working in the field, but when you stick it out and get a shot that you're proud of, the success will taste even better. ●



Paul Nicklen: A Photography Masterclass is published by Frances Lincoln, with *Masters of Photography* (ISBN: 978-1-83600-981-8) and is priced £18.99/\$25. www.quarto.com

“Being a photographer means pushing through discomfort. But get a shot you're proud of and success will taste even better”

i

**OVERALL WINNER:
THE TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHER
OF THE YEAR 2025**

'Whirling Devotion'

Athanasios Maloukas (Greece)

The city of Konya, Turkey, is known as the 'Ceremonial Heart' of the Mevlevi Sufi order. As the 'Sema' dance unfolds, two dervishes whirl in rhythm, framing the imposing figure of the Şeyh (sheikh) at the centre of the ritual.

Through gracious movements and quiet motion, his presence reflects and adds more drama to a simple image.

Camera: Canon EOS R5, 15-35mm lens

Settings: 0.13 sec at f/10, ISO 200

Hotshots

Our showcase of category winners from the Travel Photographer of the Year Awards 2025







Mitchell Kanashkevich / tpoty.com

i

WINNER: CULTURES, HERITAGE & BELIEFS PORTFOLIO **Untitled** **Mitchell Kanashkevich (Australia)**

During morning mass in Abuna Yemata Guh in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, a young deacon holds a scripture book for the priest in the dim, flickering light of the interior. Known as the 'Church in the Sky', Abuna Yemata Guh's location, history and hidden rites still draw the faithful.

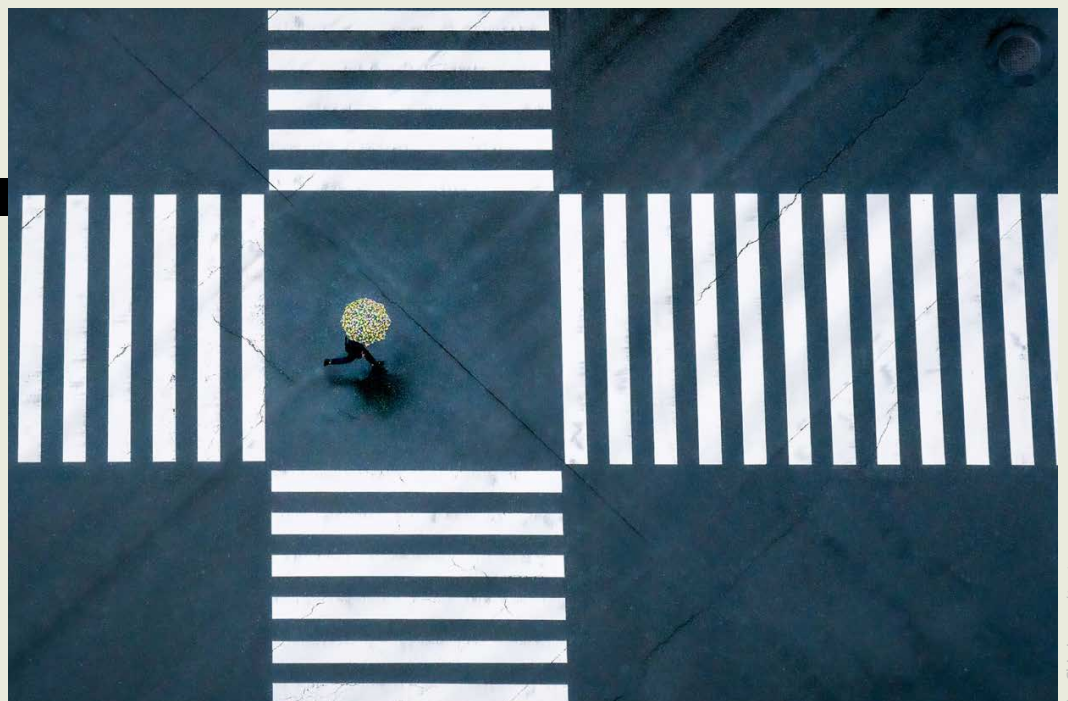
Camera: Canon EOS 5D Mark II and 16-35mm lens. **Settings:** 1/40 sec at f/2.8, ISO 3200

i

**WINNER: ONE SHOT
– SLOW TRAVEL**
Untitled **Teo Chin Leong**
(Singapore)

A lone corporate worker hurries across a large road junction in Tokyo, Japan, the only human in the frame. Despite being a metropolis of over 14 million, this series depicts both the hectic pace and overwhelming loneliness of living in a large city.

Camera: Sony A6500 and 55-210mm lens. **Settings:** 1/400 sec at f/6.3, ISO 200



Teo Chin Leong / tpoty.com

i

**WINNER: LANDSCAPE
WEATHER & CLIMATE
PORTFOLIO**

Untitled Paul Sansome (UK)

During a week of touring northern Iceland, there had been no good quality light for landscape photography at all. This day in Nordurfjordur, Árneshreppur, started like all the others, with a blue sky and sunshine. However, within 10 miles, we drove into a bank of sea fog and a session with such beautiful light filtering through onto the calm sea. The fog thinned and then thickened, revealing and hiding different elements of the landscape.

Camera: Canon EOS R5 and 100-500mm lens. **Settings:** 1/800 sec at f/11, ISO 400

Paul Sansome / tpoty.com



i

WINNER: ONE SHOT – GREEN TRAVEL **Untitled John Edwards (USA)**

I captured this image shortly after sunrise in the Sukhothai Historical Park in Sukhothai, a quiet region of northern Thailand. I noticed how perfectly the Buddha figure was reflected in the still water. To convey the spirit of the moment, I inverted the photograph and turned the reflection into an illusion, with the sky above the Buddha becoming a tapestry of floating flowers and drifting plants. My intention was to create an image that mirrors the peaceful, dreamlike feeling of this sacred location, where the green textures and beautiful flowers of our world can be transformed into a new and unexpected reality. Fittingly, the name of the park translates to 'Dawn of Happiness'.

Camera: Nikon D850 and 24-70mm lens. **Settings:** 1/100 sec at f/6.3, ISO 100

John Edwards / tpoty.com



WINNER: ADVENTURES & EXPERIENCES PORTFOLIO**Untitled Sara Bardotti (Italy)**

On the Yamal Peninsula in Russia's Siberia region, the moment that the fish touch the ground, the cold claims them. There's no struggle, no sound – just the swift silence of nature's rhythm. It's not cruelty, but necessity.

Out here, survival is swift and reverence is quiet. The exhausted fishermen do not celebrate. They simply nod, as if acknowledging an ancient pact between man and the lake. As a witness wrapped in layers and awe, I felt the weight of that exchange settle into my bones.

Camera: Nikon D750 and 24-70mm lens.

Settings: 1/160 sec at f/2.8, ISO 2000



**WINNER: ONE SHOT – TRAVEL
IN MONOCHROME**

Untitled Dana Allen (USA)

A massive bull elephant showers himself in dust in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania.

Camera: Sony A1 II and 200-600mm lens. **Settings:** 1/750 sec at f/6.7, ISO 1000



Dana Allen / tpoty.com

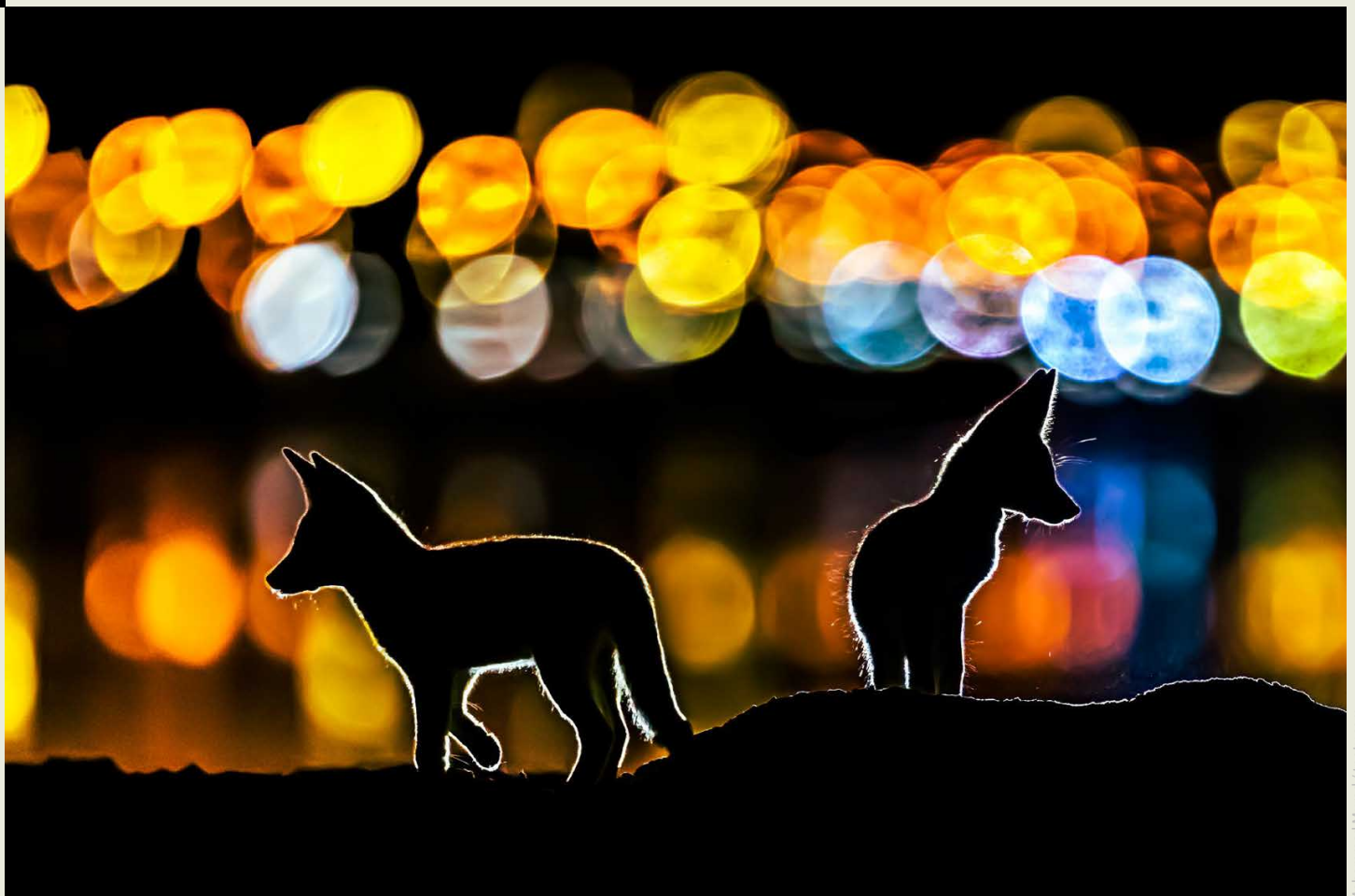
**WINNER: WILDLIFE, SEALIFE,
BIRDLIFE PORTFOLIO**

Untitled Mohammad Murad (Kuwait)

Framed by streetlights reflecting off the sea in Kuwait City, two Arabian red fox cubs explore the night outside their den. The colourful glow comes from car and street lights along the shoreline of the Doha district, while the rim light is created by two small continuous flashlights I placed near the spot where their mother hides food. For more than two months, I visited the den four nights a week, staying for a few hours after sunset. At first, I kept a 20m distance, but the cubs slowly grew comfortable – two even licked my camera and feet. With five cubs and their mother living so close to houses, I felt responsible for them. In Kuwait, foxes are often hunted, so my presence was as much about protection as it was photography.

Camera: Canon EOS-1D Mark II and 500mm lens.

Settings: 1/50 sec at f/4, ISO 3200



Mohammad Murad / tpoty.com

Rahsan Firtina / tpoty.com



i

WINNER: ONE SHOT – TRAVEL PORTRAITS Untitled **Rahsan Firtina (Turkey)**

Photo of a man sitting in the foreground, lost in thought, while retired colonels play table tennis behind him in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Camera: Sony A7R V and 28-70mm lens. **Settings:** 1/320 sec at f/2.8, ISO 400

Mark Julian Edwards / tpoty.com



i

WINNER: PEOPLE'S CHOICE Untitled **Mark Julian Edwards (UK)**

As the bus prepared to pull away from the bustling bus station in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, a young boy leaned toward the window, his gaze fixed somewhere beyond the crowds. I wondered what hopes or questions were stirring in his mind. The bus itself seemed worn by time – its chipped paint and dented panels telling their own stories – yet the boy's expression carried a quiet energy, as if he couldn't wait to see what lay ahead on the road.

Camera: Canon EOS 750D and 50mm lens. **Settings:** 1/320 sec at f/1.8, ISO 500

Travel
Photographer of the Year

About the competition

Travel Photographer of the Year showcases photographic talent from around the globe. Amateur and professional photographers from 160 countries submitted more than 20,000 images in TPOTY 2025, and the winning and placed entries combine to form a truly outstanding collection of contemporary travel photography.

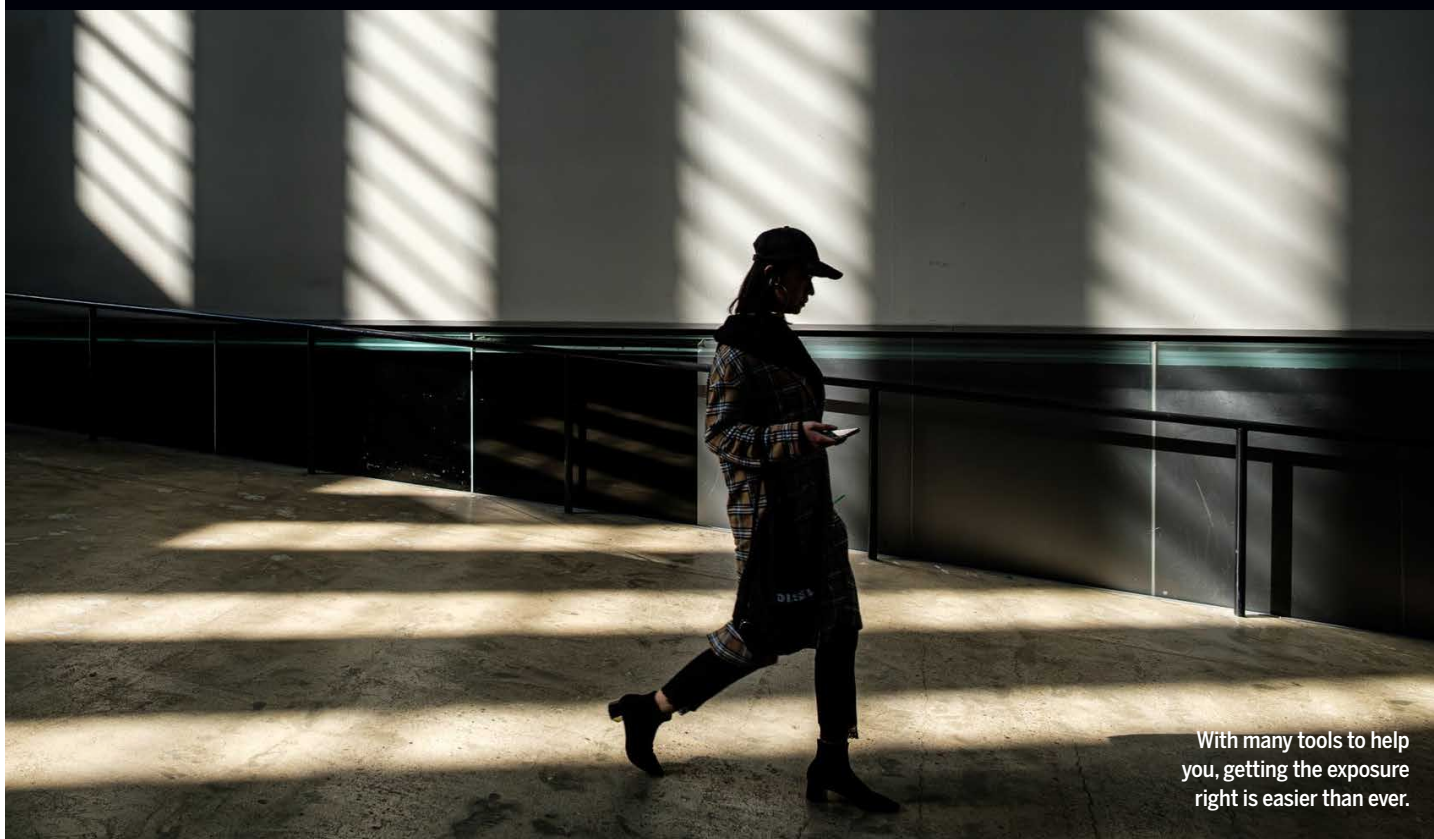
The awards are judged anonymously by a 16-strong international panel of imaging experts, who give their time and expertise freely to judge the awards. The People's Choice award was decided by members of the public voting on the TPOTY website. The winning entries can all be viewed in the Winners' Gallery on the TPOTY website.

tpoty.com

CAMERA CLINIC

Master the art of modern photography

This month: Excellent exposures
Hints and tips for getting the right amount of light to the sensor



With many tools to help you, getting the exposure right is easier than ever.

Will Cheung



Will Cheung

An imaging journalist and freelance photographer based in London, Cheung has a wealth of experience over several decades.
www.williamcheung.co.uk

Getting the right amount of light to the film or digital sensor has been challenging photographers since the medium's beginnings. Too much light and the pale, overexposed result has no detail; not enough light and the dark, underexposed result has no detail either.

Over the years, camera makers have worked hard to develop sophisticated metering systems, which means that, in theory, duff exposures should be a thing of the past. With a choice of exposure modes and ways of measuring light, we have all the tools at our disposal. However, even expert photographers can sometimes struggle with challenging situations. The problem is often nothing to do with the technology, but rather how it's applied in all the unique, often challenging, situations that we face.

Achieving correct exposure is a matter of balancing how much light passes through the lens and how long

the shutter is open. ISO also has a role in the process, but the lens's f/stop and the camera's shutter speed control the amount of light reaching the sensor. The settings used are determined by the exposure meter. The exposure meter uses an advanced sensor that can measure light in various patterns – Multi-zone, Spot, Centre-weighted – and sets what it considers to be the correct exposure.

The sensor is calibrated to interpret scenes as 18 per cent grey reflectance, which is the mid-point between white and black. Exposing at this point means highlights and shadows are recorded together with all the tones in between. Generally, this works fine and can be relied upon for consistently accurate results, plus if the exposure does go awry, there are several features on hand to sort things out. Looking at the intricacies of exposure control is the remit of this month's Camera Clinic.

Get the knowledge

Is there such a thing as 'correct' exposure?

With all this technology at your fingertips, it might surprise you that bad exposures still occur, even though the failure rate is low and cameras get it right most of the time without much user input. Most scenes we photograph are simple with good light and a full tonal range, but it's when the situation is more interesting, with the potential of powerful pictures, that problems can occur.

Backlighting, for example, can transform a scene, but with the sun facing the lens, the risk of disappointing results is high. Typically, the subject might be too dark, or the highlights might be blown out and unrecoverable, but with some application of the camera's tools, getting around challenging light isn't too difficult. It's just knowing what to use.

Three camera features explained

Exposure is crucial for successful images, and modern cameras are equipped to help out



EXPOSURE MODES

The four exposure modes found almost universally in cameras can be summed up as PASM. P is for Program AE, which is a true auto mode and sets both aperture and shutter speed. Aperture Priority AE (A) and Shutter Priority AE (S) are semi-auto modes where the user sets the aperture/shutter and the camera determines the other. In Manual mode (M), the user sets both settings using the meter readout as a guide.

LIGHT MEASURING PATTERNS

Every camera has a choice of light-measuring patterns. The default is Multi-zone (Matrix metering on Nikon), where the camera takes readings from around the frame and calculates the exposure. Options include: Spot, which measures a one or two per cent area; Centre-weighted, based on the middle 60-80 per cent; and Partial, where 10-20 per cent of the frame is measured. Some cameras have highlight modes designed to ensure that bright areas aren't blown out.



LIVE VIEW

There are many differences between DSLR and mirrorless cameras. For exposure, mirrorless can show the effect of metering, white balance and picture settings in real-time. Better still, dial in exposure compensation and you can see the effect instantly, making changes if needed without having to take the shot and check the preview. On many cameras, there is the option of using zebras, so blown-out areas are identified in real-time.

Three features to fine-tune exposures

Aim for exposure perfection with your camera's help



AUTOEXPOSURE BRACKETING (AEB)

AEB sets the camera to take several shots with different settings when using an autoexposure mode, so you have photos with different exposures. How many shots depends on the camera – 2, 3, 5 and 7 are most common, though some models offer 9. The difference between shots is usually 0.3, 0.7, 1 or 2 f/stops. When using AEB, set the camera to continuous shooting if it doesn't do it automatically.



AUTOEXPOSURE LOCK (AEL)

The AEL offers a quick way to lock an exposure reading. The control can have its own dedicated button, be assigned to another function button or set to partial depression of the shutter release (shutter button autofocus is best deactivated). Using AEL means aiming the camera down or filling the frame with the subject, engaging the lock before reframing and taking the picture.



EXPOSURE COMPENSATION

This feature works in autoexposure modes, and the amount of compensation available is usually +/-3 or 4 stops in 0.3 stop increments. The compensation required depends on the situation, but +/-1 or +/-2 should cope with most conditions. Exposure compensation can also work in Manual mode. Here, the metering indicator changes, so you adjust the aperture or shutter for the correct exposure.

Perfect examples of great exposures

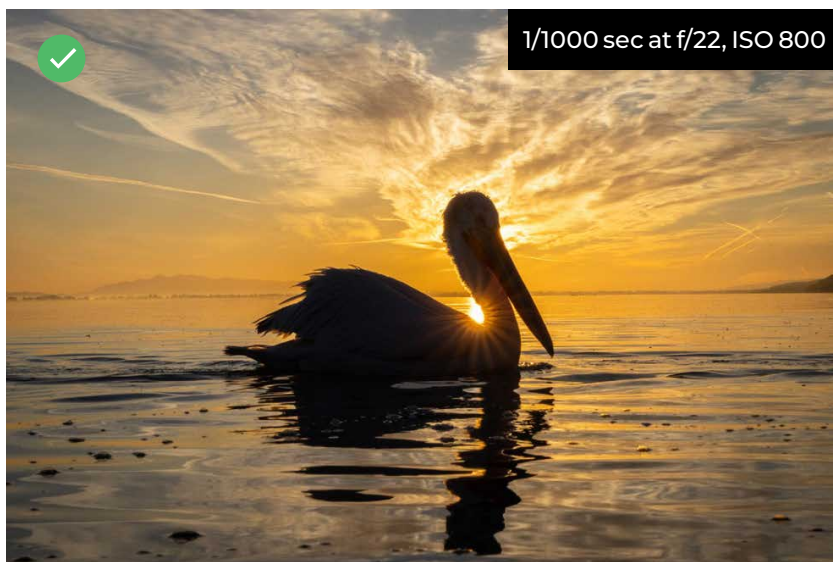
Controlling how much light reaches the sensor is vital in your pursuit of fabulous images



SUCCESSFUL SILHOUETTES

Bold subjects make for impactful silhouette photos, but you need to be careful. Firstly, for eye safety, never look at the sun through the viewfinder. Instead, frame up and focus using the monitor. The next point of care is how you frame up the shot. Having the sun visible in the picture will result in a glaring, often ugly, highlight, unless it's diffused by clouds or atmospheric haze.

Retrieving such intense highlight detail is not possible even if you shoot in raw format, so shield the sun behind the subject or something within the scene, such as a tree. This technique has another benefit in that you will avoid flare spots and ghosting.



Will Cheung



STEAMY SENSATION

Mostly dark scenes can fool the camera into overexposure, with the scene looking lighter than you want. The inset image shows this, but the main photo was underexposed by one f/stop from the camera's meter reading to retain the mood of the scene.

Shooting in Aperture Priority AE mode, setting -1 stop, means the aperture stays the same and the shutter speed changes. In this case, the original shutter speed was 1/100 sec while the main image was exposed at 1/200 sec. The shorter exposure retained the tone of the engines and accentuated the backlighting. While both shots are good, my preference was for the darker image.

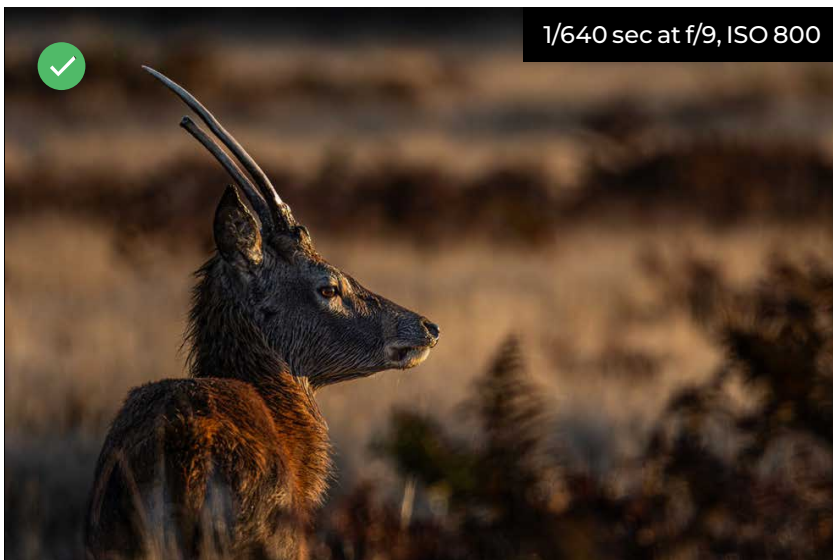


Will Cheung



STAG IN STUNNING PROFILE

The early morning sidelight on this young stag had potential, and it was just a matter of hoping the creature would look sideways for an eye catchlight. While I was waiting with the long lens on a monopod, I dialled in -0.7 stops of underexposure to make sure I retained the mood of the scene. When the creature obliged, I took a burst of three shots before the animal turned away. In a predominantly dark scene with a few bright patches, cameras tend to overexpose slightly, so underexposing by -0.7 stops was about right. In such situations, where the moment you're after is fleeting, using auto bracketing is not advised.



Will Cheung



Banish poor exposures forever

Techniques, hints and tips to solve tricky exposure situations

Your camera tackles awkward exposure situations with a selection of modes, different ways of measuring light and fine-tuning features such as compensation. But it can't deal with what's in your head, so you need to take control.

Practise with your camera so you get an idea of how it performs in particular lighting, and can pre-empt

what it might do.

If your camera, for instance, is prone to underexposing with highlights in the shot, dial in some positive compensation before taking the first shot. The result might not be spot on, but your accuracy will improve. Thinking about exposure a little deeper will help your success rate.

Nine demanding exposure scenarios and how to conquer them



MR BLUE SKY

Any subject against a bright sky will come out underexposed unless you give the shot extra exposure. In auto mode, dial in +1 or +2 stops of exposure compensation or shoot in Manual mode and take a meter reading off the grass or road.



GO BOLD WITH A SILHOUETTE

Shooting a silhouette works best with bold, strongly backlit subjects. Here, we aimed the lens at the window and used AE-L to lock the meter reading before recomposing the shot. Using the subject to shield the light source lessens the risk of flare.



SHADOW OF LIGHT

For landscapes, bright sunny days are best avoided, but in urban settings, you get patterns, shadows and photogenic plays of light. Here, expose for the lit areas and let the shadows look after themselves because pools of darkness can add interest.



MAKES YOUR WHITES EVEN WHITER

Overexposure ensures white subjects stay white, but how much depends on the subject and the lighting. On bright days, too much overexposure is a problem, but on dull days, dialling +2 or +3 stops can work. This pelican was overexposed by +3 stops.



LIGHTER, BRIGHTER FACES

For portraits, a little extra exposure can make a huge difference to flesh tones and give a more flattering, softer appearance. You don't have to be too generous – 0.5 stops is usually enough for pleasing flesh tones and to hide any flaws in the subject's complexion.



EXPOSE FOR MOODY SKIES

Rapidly changing weather can give superb lighting, but it evolves rapidly, so shoot quickly. Take a meter reading from the lit region and that will keep a dark sky moody, or bracket exposures if you are unsure. Here, a graduated ND filter can help.



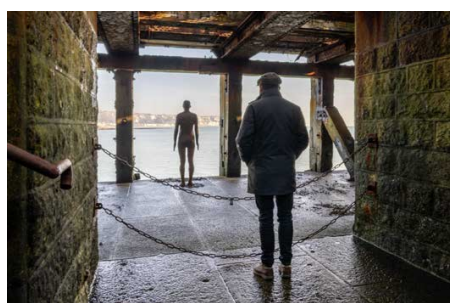
SPECTACULAR SUNSETS

With the sun in shot, the camera will likely underexpose and you'll get a golden ball against a dark sky. For the best results, shoot when the sun is close to the horizon and meter from a patch of bright sky or clouds to the side of the ball of fire.



INTO THE LIGHT

Shooting into the light gives drama, especially if there's detail and texture in the scene, but underexposing can mean detail loss. Angle the lens down, using AE-L, before recomposing the shot. Or use exposure compensation of +0.5 or +1 stop.



TRY HDR IN EXTREME CONTRAST

This scene, under Folkestone Pier, had a wide dynamic range from deep shadows to full sunlight. Auto bracketing was set to five frames at +/- 1 stop, and the sequence was merged in software. Burst shooting eliminated camera shift between frames.

Pros and cons

Poor exposures are often due to user error

The key is to learn from your exposure mistakes

Cameras are remarkably capable, but they only do what they are programmed to do. While mistakes can still happen, more skill and control will keep errors to a minimum. Making the most of the camera meter, knowing when to use AEL, bracket or apply exposure compensation comes with experience.

✓ Avoid grey highlights
Burnt-out highlights have a veiled, grey look and are devoid of detail. They are difficult to avoid with light-toned or white subjects in contrasty light. Underexposing the scene to retain detail in the highlights and correcting it in editing can help.

✓ The histogram: don't obsess
Checking the histogram after every shot takes time and also disrupts the flow of photography. Check the first shot to make sure the settings are correct and get shooting.

✓ Learn to bracket wisely
Shooting extra frames at different exposure settings is a good backup. Autoexposure bracketing gives extra frames above and below the camera's meter reading, but often you don't need both. Many cameras have two-shot bracketing, giving one correct and one over- or underexposed.

✓ Enter the multi-zone
Multi-zone light measuring patterns are the default for good reason. Looking at light levels from different parts of the scene and then processing that data before delivering what the camera considers the correct exposure is remarkable technology, so don't be afraid to use it.

✗ Take care with a spot meter
Spot meters, where the camera assesses a tiny part of the scene, are a great feature, but take care where you point it. The spot metering area is usually a small circle at the centre of the viewfinder, but that isn't always the best part to meter from. Aim it at the subject or a mid-tone and use AEL to memorise the reading before recomposing the shot.

✗ Go manual or not
There's much to be said for taking manual control of aperture, shutter speed and ISO, but it can get you into trouble unless you're fluent in adjusting the settings. A semi-automatic mode (Aperture- or Shutter Priority) is a better choice in many situations and for most camera users.

✗ Err on the dark side
If you're in any doubt about an exposure, go under rather than over. Overexposed or blown highlights are extremely difficult to correct.

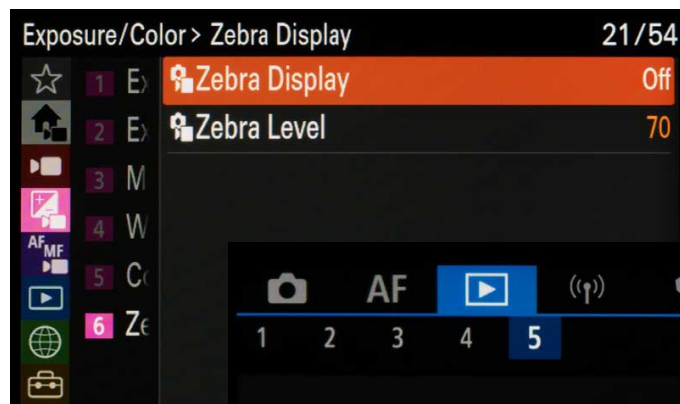


Camera know-how Zebras or blinkies?

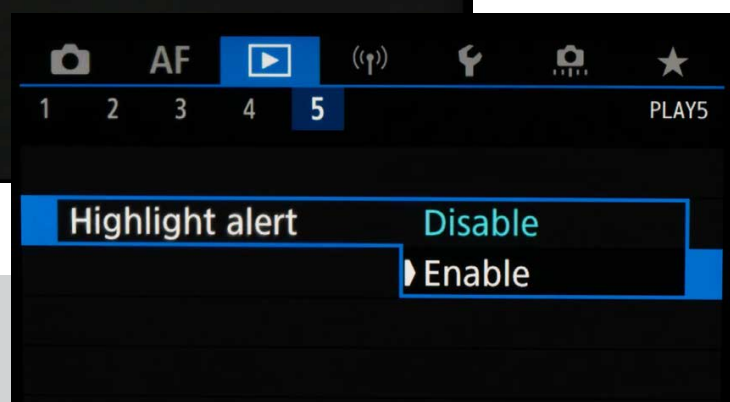
Avoiding the horrors of overexposure with the camera's help

Underexpose a raw file by four stops and some detail can still be recovered, while there's little hope with overexposed photos, even if it's only by +2 stops. With jpeg files, tonal recovery is limited. Overexposure is not a good thing, but the camera is equipped to help. Most have highlight alerts, often called blinkies, where overexposed areas will flash a solid red or black. It's an unmissable warning on an image preview, but zebras give a live warning.

Zebras is a black and white stripe pattern that appears over the live image to indicate blown highlights. A zebra setting of 70 or 80 will show highlights on flesh tones, while a higher level can be set for white subjects. If zebras appear, adjust aperture, shutter or ISO until the pattern vanishes.



Zebras is a black and white striped pattern that gives a live warning of blown highlights. Adjust aperture, shutter or ISO until they vanish.



Light measuring tip

Expose for the subject.

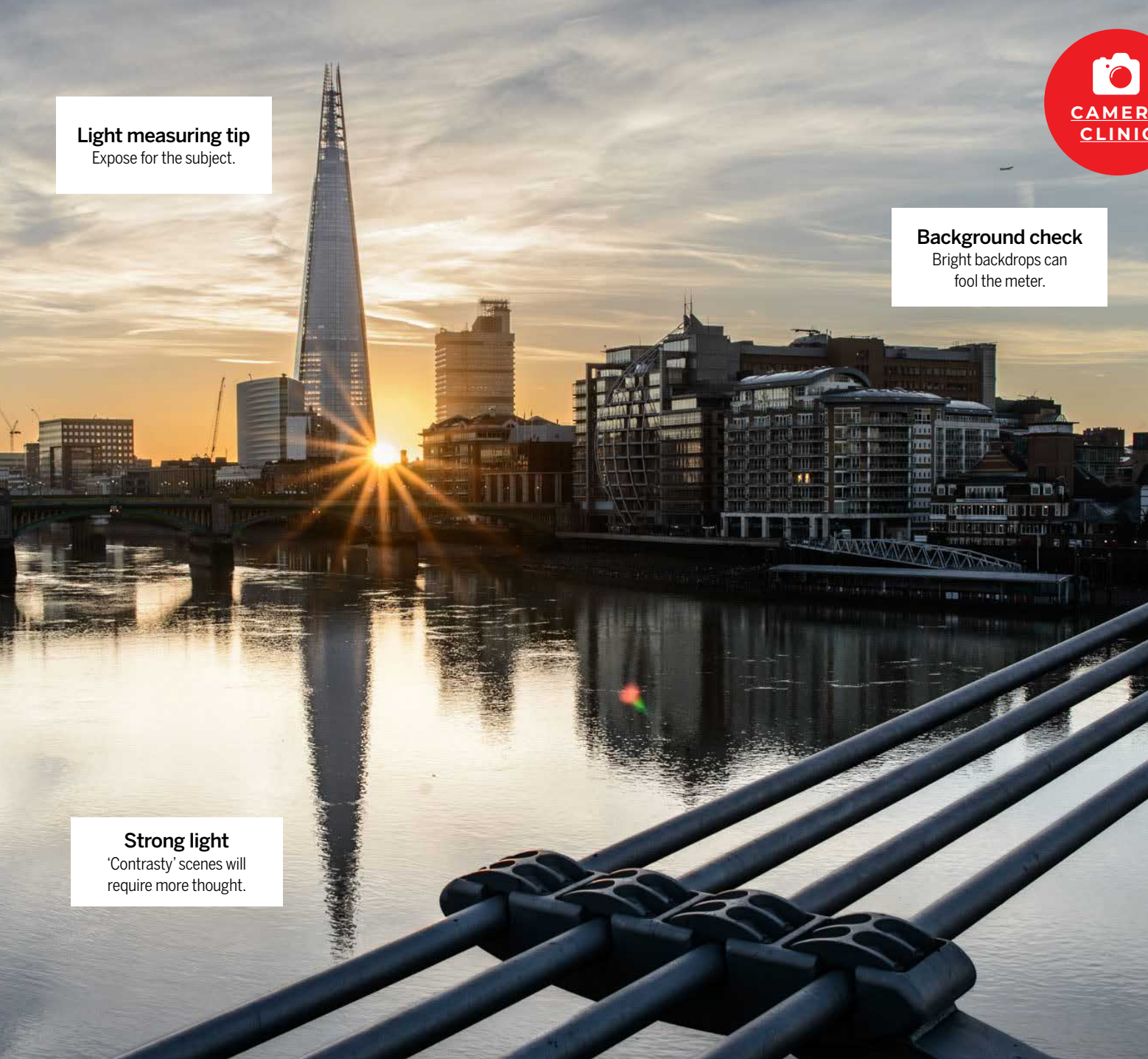


Background check

Bright backdrops can fool the meter.

Strong light

'Contrasty' scenes will require more thought.



Will Cheung

Lens tech Flare attack

Watch out for ghosting, especially when shooting towards the sun

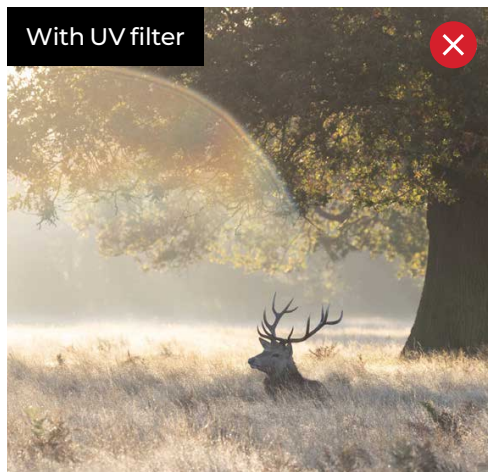
When shooting towards the sun, take care with exposure and avoiding flare.

Modern lens coatings are excellent at defeating flare and ghosting when the sun is in the frame. That said, flare can still happen even when a hood is in place and the lens spotlessly clean, so look for issues when you are shooting towards the sun.

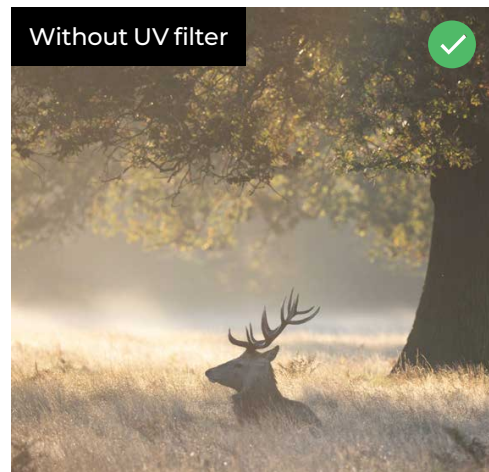
When you're shooting a backlit scene, another possible flare contributor is a lens protection filter. If in doubt, take it off before you start shooting. Budget filters on telephoto lenses are especially risky, so if you're shopping for a protection filter, bite the bullet and buy an expensive one.

Small flare spots can be cloned in editing, but large areas of ghosting are especially difficult to resolve successfully.

With UV filter



Without UV filter



Shoot photos like a pro

Keep calm and hone your exposure skills for perfect results

With the advanced metering systems in our cameras, poorly exposed photos should be a thing of the past. However, if the camera does get it wrong, there's the back-up of raw files and their incredible exposure latitude, which means major errors can be corrected in editing.

In fact, many photographers deliberately under- or overexpose their original raw files

and rely on editing to correct the files. The amount by which a raw file can be corrected depends on the camera format, the scene and the lighting, but errors of +2 stops and -3 stops can often be remedied in software. Any more than that and image quality tails off, especially with overexposure, where highlights can look particularly odd.

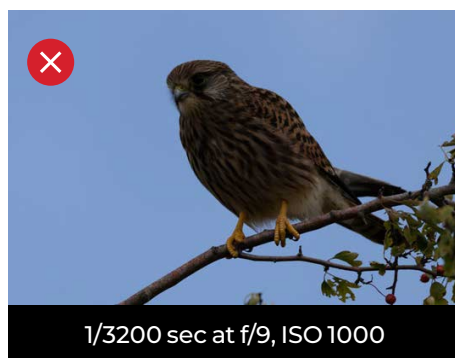
Sunrise spectacular

Including the sun in the picture can be powerful, but it must be done with care. The priority here is to avoid potential eye damage, so use the camera monitor to compose the photo. However, you must also take care when choosing the correct exposure. Here, I was after a semi-silhouette of the lamps while keeping detail in the sun. Not enough exposure and I'd get a silhouette; too much and the sun would blow out, and recovering it in editing would give an unsatisfactory result.

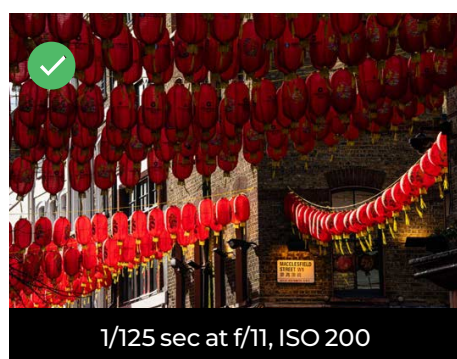


A bird in the bush

Any subject in front of a bright sky can end up being drastically underexposed, and an extra +1 or +2 stops is needed to cure the problem. In this case, an extra +1.67 f/stops was applied to get detail into the kestrel's plumage. Shoot in raw, and the file can be corrected in editing, but that comes with the risk of greater noise and detail loss, so getting it right in-camera is the best option.



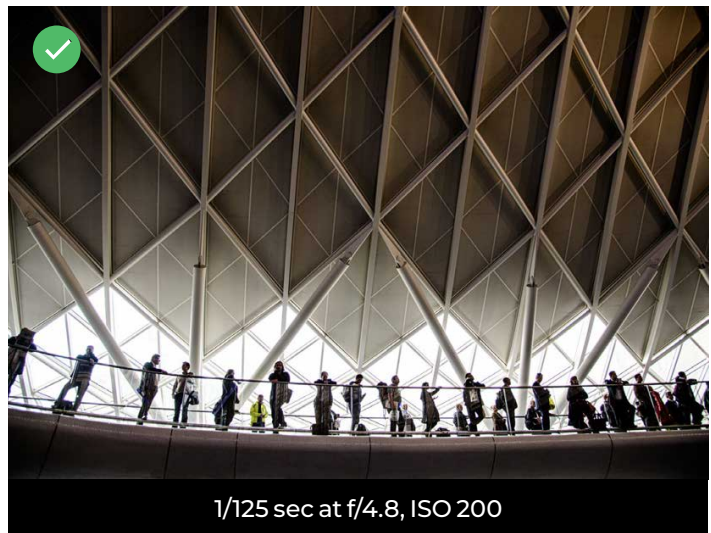
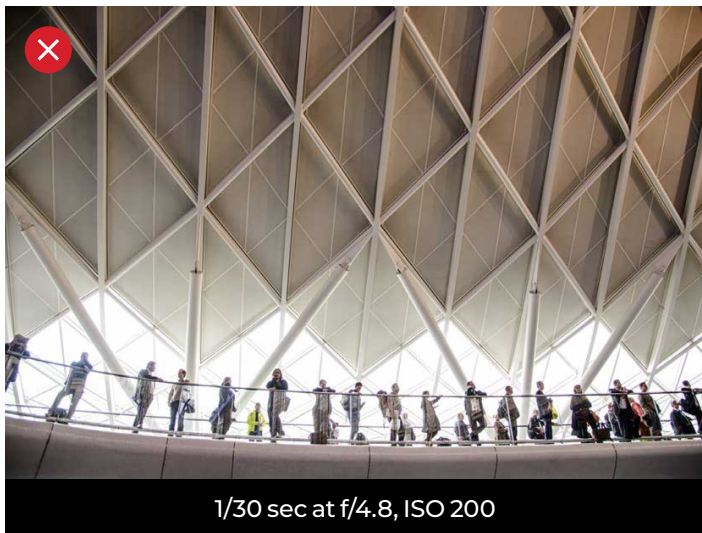
Will Cheung



Will Cheung

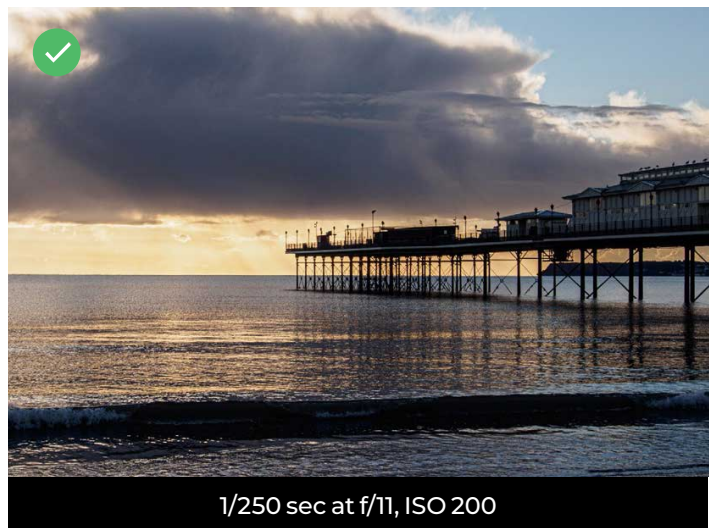
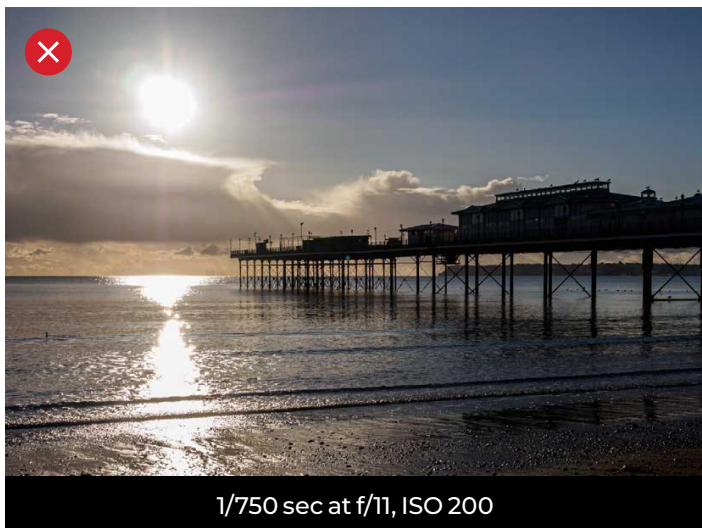
Expose for mood

Using a telephoto zoom lens, I picked out this scene in London's Chinatown. I loved the pattern made by the lanterns, in particular the line of lit-up ones on the right. The sun was shining, but the predominantly dark scene caused the first shot to be brighter than I'd hoped. Using -1 stop compensation, I shot the scene again, and the slight amount of underexposure compared with the original meter reading produced a better result.



Going dark

Faced with a dark scene, the camera assumes that you want it lighter and sets the exposure accordingly. In many circumstances, that's useful, but it can't second-guess your intentions nor understand that you want to take a silhouette shot. That's solved by dialling in some exposure compensation – in this case, -2 stops. Shooting an exposure bracket or switching to manual metering are other technique options.



Get the cloud on your side

While we all enjoy photographing our subjects when the sun's out, including the sun in the frame is rarely wise. Generally, this approach only works when it's low down in the sky and becomes an orange ball of fire. Sunlight is particularly intense and produces high levels of contrast, so it's almost impossible to recover the strong highlights. Waiting for some cloud cover, as above, or for the sun to drop down lower is advised.

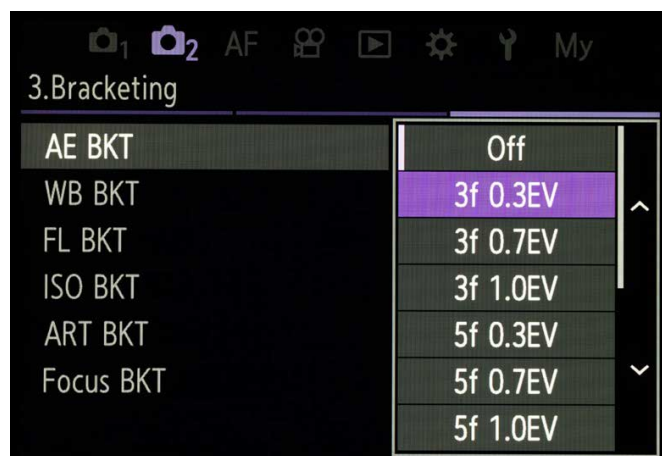
Camera tech

Manual exposure bracketing

Taking extra exposures of the same scene makes sense

Auto bracketing is a useful feature when you're shooting in AE modes, and it's worth using because it's fast and easy, but you can save frames by bracketing manually. In many cases, it's a waste shooting frames below and above the camera's meter reading, as you will only need one or the other.

If you want the insurance of extra exposures, just use exposure compensation and quickly dial in the extra exposures that you want. If compensation is set to a control that's been placed conveniently for the right thumb or forefinger, the process is quick, especially when you get used to it. If you're shooting handheld, there will be a slight shift in between frames, so use a tripod if you want perfect registration.





Staying in the black

Shooting a dark scene or subject without giving the exposure any thought can give disappointing results. Camera exposure meters are calibrated to interpret scenes at 18 per cent grey reflectance, so when confronted by a dark or black subject, the meter delivers an exposure that records the scene as grey. Underexposing the scene by -2 stops, which is what was applied here, will keep the black tones looking dark.



Make the most of mist

Fog and mist add an ethereal feel to scenic shots, but to maintain the light, airy feel, dial in some overexposure. The camera's meter considers a misty scene and interprets it as an 18 per cent grey reflectance shot. If it's exposed accordingly, the result will be a flat, dull scene. Adding exposure compensation makes a huge difference in maintaining the mood of the original. In this example, +2 stops was used.

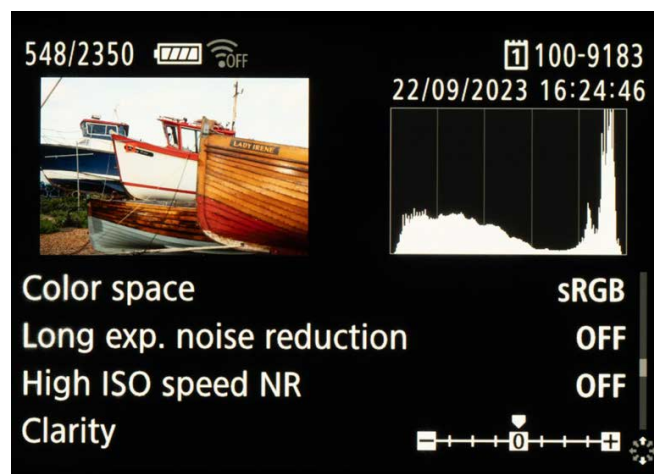
Pro tip

Exposing to the right

A technique for top image quality, but should you use it?

Exposing to the right (ETTR) side of the histogram is a sound technique in principle. Digital sensors record more data in the brighter tones compared with shadows, and ETTR is about exploiting this. However, it's vital that the histogram does not have highlight data bleeding off to the right. With the need to keep an eye on the histogram, it's not the best technique to use in fast-moving situations when you're concentrating on the composition. However, if shooting a scene, whether checking the live histogram or looking at previews, take time to think and adjust the exposure settings to move the histogram towards the right.

Is ETTR worth it? For the majority of photographers, the simple answer is 'no'. But if you're aiming to produce seriously large prints, then ETTR helps.





Peter Li



Peter Li
Photographer

Location: London, UK

Title: Oculus

Camera and lenses: Nikon Z 8, Nikkor Z 50mm f/1.8 S and Nikkor Z 14-24mm f/2.8 S, plus a third-party 10mm lens for full 180° vertoramas

Instagram: @pli.panda

Website: www.plipictures.com

This breathtaking view of the dome of St Pauls Cathedral, captured from beneath, is a bracketed 10mm full-frame HDR shot.

reveals intricate architectural details and spatial relationships that are often overlooked. By reimagining historical spaces through this layered lens, Peter invites the viewer to slow down, look deeper and rediscover these medieval wonders, not just as monuments but as living vessels of light, symmetry and time.

"Oculus is a look-up view of the dome of St Paul's Cathedral, photographed from beneath the Whispering Gallery," he says. "The final image is created from five bracketed exposures. I often bracket interior scenes to manage the extreme dynamic range found inside cathedrals."

Peter is a Nikon user and his main camera body is a Z 8, paired with Nikkor Z 50mm f/1.8 S and Z 14-24mm f/2.8 S lenses. For the creation of full 180° vertoramas, he will also use a third-party 10mm lens to capture the wider field of view required.

"When photographing panoramas, the process becomes more complex," he says. "A typical 90° vertical panorama usually requires four to five bracketed sequences, resulting in roughly 20-25 individual frames. For a full 180° vertorama or full span of the cathedral space, the final image can be constructed from around 45 photographs."

For most of his vertorama work, Peter uses a reverse ball head with a ring mount that allows the camera to rotate vertically; this is essential for capturing the frames needed to construct the final panorama. Image editing is done in Lightroom and Photoshop, and for assembling complex vertoramas, he will often use PTGui, specialised software for creating and stitching panoramas. ●

Peter's prints can be purchased from his website. He also runs workshops on creating vertoramas, guiding participants through camera setup, HDR editing and colour grading. See his latest work and learn about upcoming workshops by signing up for his newsletter at: www.plipictures.com

Shot of the month

Peter Li explains the process behind his breathtaking collection of architectural work

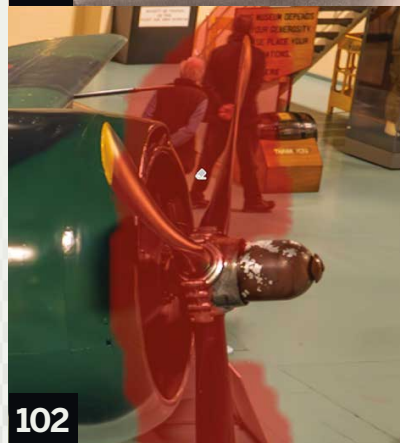
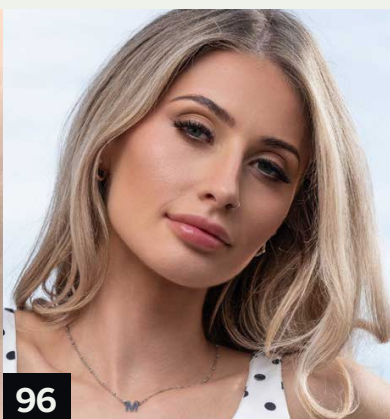
An architectural photographer based in London, Peter Li's photography journey began in 2013 when his first daughter was born. He started to document the milestones of a growing family with his camera, and his daily commute soon evolved into a creative playground. Peter's discovery of architectural photography, following friends recommending the genre to him, saw it

gradually develop into a lifelong pursuit, both professionally and personally.

Peter describes his photography as exploring the space between realism and fantasy. His series 'Omniscience' captures the grandeur of cathedrals through meticulously blended panoramas, composed from dozens of images stitched together. This process allows him to construct perspectives beyond what the human eye can perceive in a single glance, he explains, offering an expanded visual experience that

Digital Darkroom

Transform your photos with our easy, effective guides



PAGE 94
Photoshop
Save time and effort in your editing workflow with Photoshop Actions

PAGE 96
Lightroom
Simple ways to retouch hair in your portraits using masking tools

PAGE 98
Photoshop
Boost atmosphere and mood with creative darkening effects

PAGE 100
Affinity Photo 2
No colour gels, no problem! Create your own lighting effects

PAGE 102
ACR/Photoshop
We look at how the latest AI upgrades can help edit your shots

MEET YOUR TRAINERS Edit like a pro with their expert insights



Dan Mold
As the deputy editor of our former sister title, *Photo Plus*, Dan Mold has over a decade of experience in writing Photoshop tutorials and guides.



James Abbott
Specialising in landscapes and portraits, James Abbott is an advanced Photoshop user and has created hundreds of tutorials.



Sean McCormack
A photographer and writer based in Galway, Ireland, Sean McCormack is the author of books including *The Indispensable Guide to Lightroom CC*.



Wendy Evans LRPS
The author of over a dozen books on the subjects of photography, CGI and Photoshop, Wendy Evans has used Photoshop since version 3.0.



Before



After



Lights, camera, Photoshop Actions

Dan Mold explains how to supercharge your editing process, with 30 free Actions to try

Anything you can do to speed up the editing process means spending less time in front of your computer screen and more time doing what you love most – getting out there and taking pictures with your camera. One of the easiest ways of doing this in Photoshop is through Actions. These are essentially a saved list of commands that allow you to replay saved edits at the press of a button. Actions can reduce the time and effort you put into making complex edits, and using them makes you feel like an editing pro.

To supercharge your post-processing skills, we've curated 30 Photoshop Actions that will help you do everything from colour-grading your photos to boosting contrast with Curves and adding vignettes and borders to ensure your subject is the main focus of your frame.

You'll find your 30 free Actions with this month's digital download (see page 104 for further details), so make sure you download them, read this step-by-step guide and watch the accompanying video tutorial to see how to use them in real-time.

Download your files

www.digitalcameraworld.com/dc307
Download your files and video tutorial from the folder titled 'Photoshop_PS Actions'.



30 Photoshop editing Actions



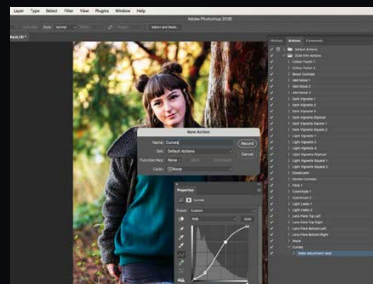
5-minute video tutorial

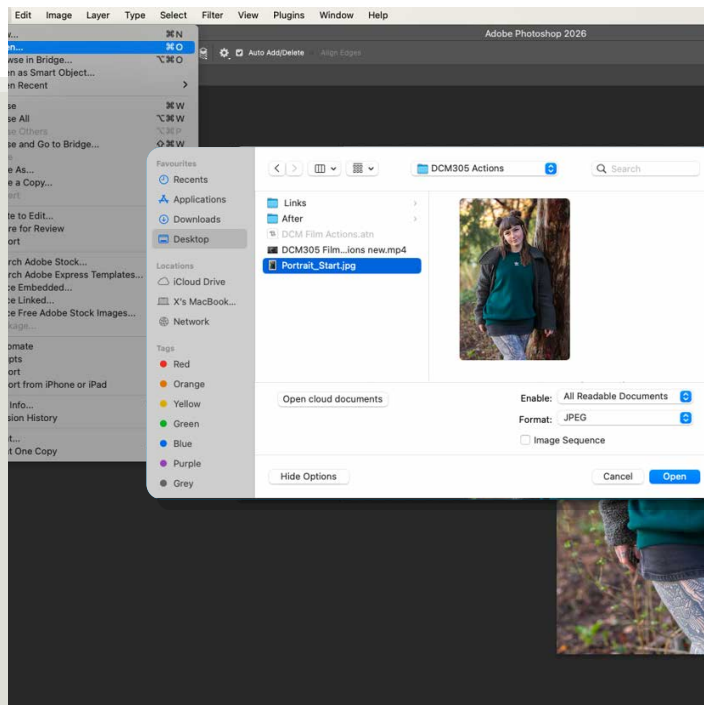


Project files and instructions

Make your own actions

Head to Window > Actions to bring up the Actions panel. When you are ready to begin recording your edits, click the Create new action button and you'll be prompted with a panel. From here, you can opt to give the action a more descriptive name and choose where you'd like to save it. Once you've selected a location, hit Record to start. You'll see the record icon turn red, showing that it is recording, so run through the edits you want to save and hit the square Stop button to finish. Now you can run the action through other pictures to quickly apply your edits.

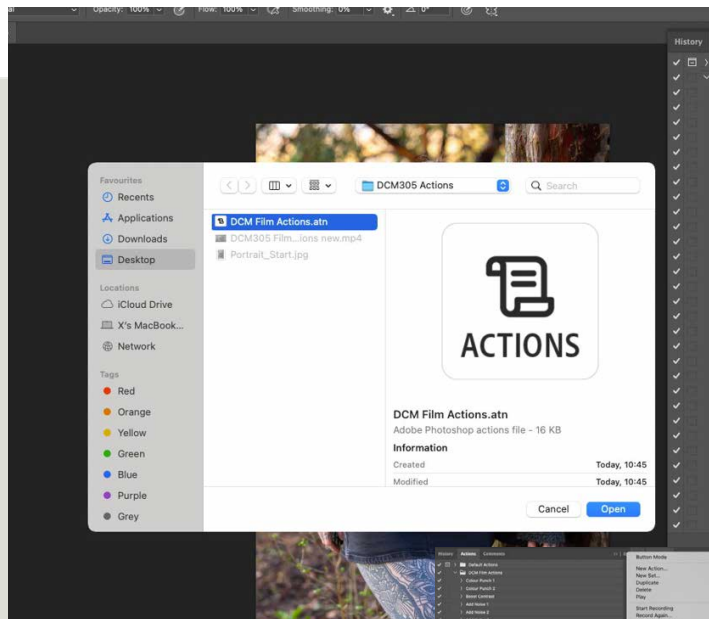




1

Open your image

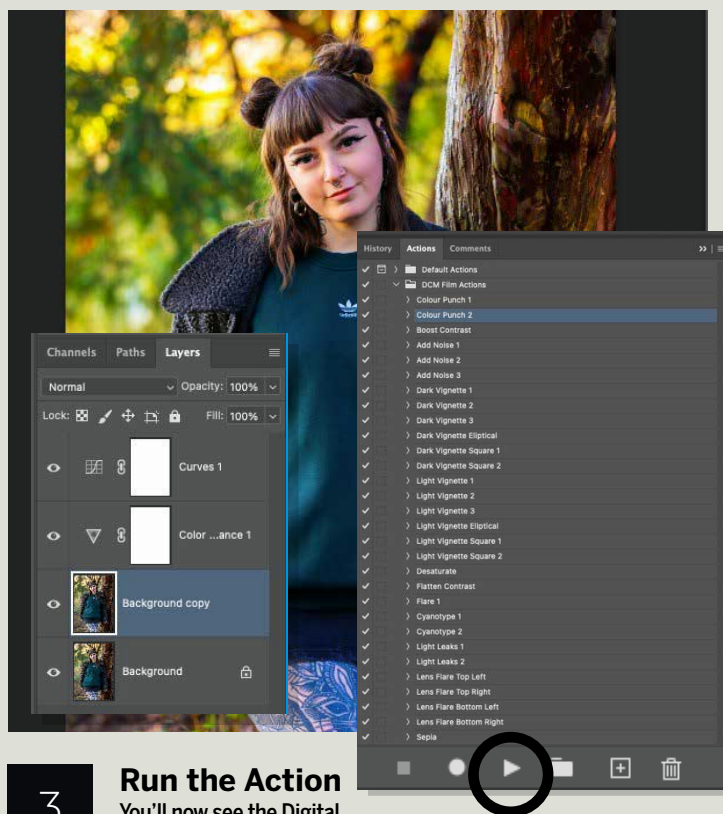
Open up Photoshop or Elements and head up to File > Open, then navigate to the image you'd like to work on. The Actions we've supplied here are for adding a retro film-inspired aesthetic to your photos, so select an image that is likely to work with one of those, or use the Portrait_Start.jpg image provided with your free digital software download.



2

Load in the Actions

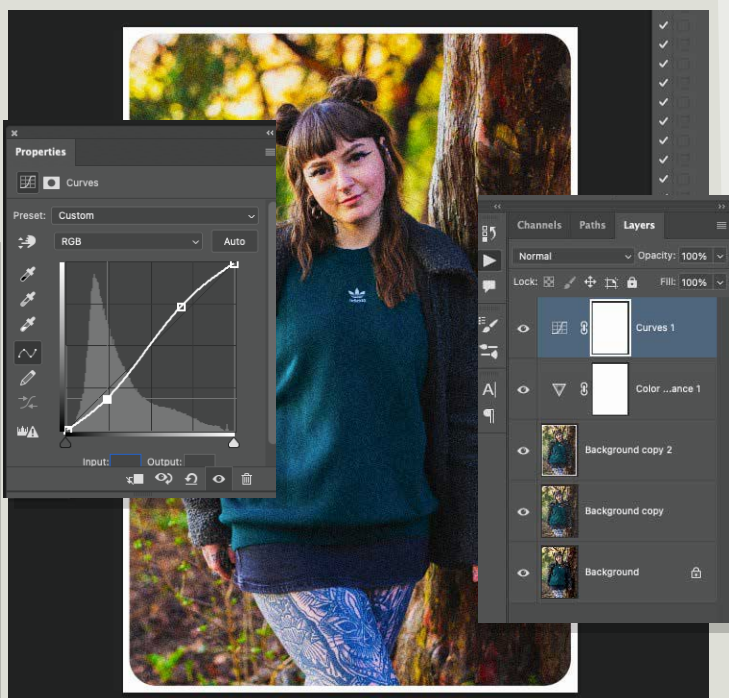
Follow the link at the bottom left to download this month's free digital download. This is also where you'll find the 30 free Photoshop Actions provided this month. In the Actions panel (Window > Actions), click the three-line icon in the top right to see the fly-out menu and click Load Actions. Navigate to the Action pack in your free download and click on it to import the Actions into your library.



3

Run the Action

You'll now see the Digital Camera Magazine 30 Filmic Actions folder in your Actions panel. Search through the Actions here and click on one that you like the look of and that will work well for your chosen image. Now click the Play icon at the bottom of the Actions panel to run it. If you decide that you don't like the effect, go to File > Revert to reset the image to its starting point.



4

Refine the effect

When you run some Actions, such as Colour Punch 1, the Action will create various layers and adjustment layers in your layers stack. Head over to your layers panel (Window > Layers) and you'll be able to refine the effect by clicking on various adjustment layers, or adding a Layer Mask to them to refine the effect to just your subject. When you have finished, head to File > Flatten Image to merge the layers together. Once that's complete, you can now run another Action if you wish.

Before



After



How to retouch hair

Sean McCormack uses Lightroom's masking tools for a new hairdo

As someone who doesn't have an awful lot of hair on the top of my head, hair becomes a little more important in my retouching practice. A trip to Turkey might be the only thing that solves my issue, but fortunately, Lightroom Classic (and the Lightroom desktop version, too, for that matter) can aid you in your quest to make people's hair look better.

The problem with doing that, generally, is that selecting hair manually is a nightmare. There are over 100,000 hairs on the average head, so that's a lot of hair to go astray and mask in your selection. Fortunately, one of Lightroom's recent updates added the ability to use AI to make that selection automatically. While it isn't perfect, there are several additional tools available in masking to help you refine it further.

As it's part of the standard Masking toolset, it also means you have full access to all the contrast and colour controls you would need to make everything from simple and subtle to outrageous changes to your subject's hair. You can add detail, help with shine and enhance colour with a few sliders, without needing to go to a more complex workflow using Photoshop.

Download your files

www.digitalcameraworld.com/dc307
Download your files and video tutorial from the folder titled 'Lightroom_Retouching Hair'.



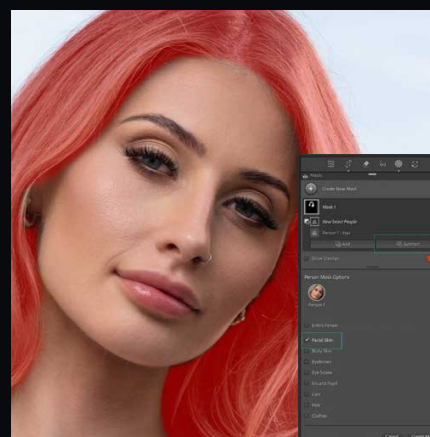
Nine
Lightroom
Presets



8-minute
video
tutorial

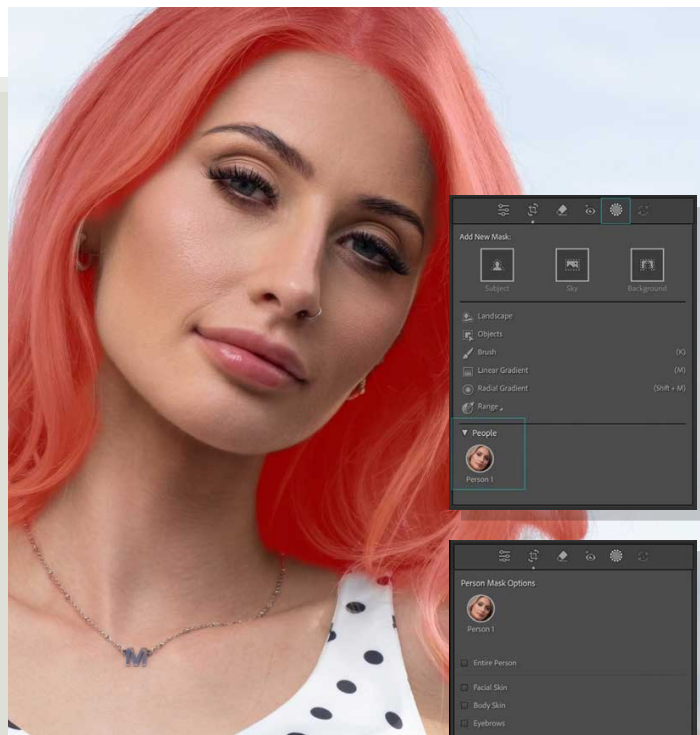


Project
files and
instructions



Refine the mask

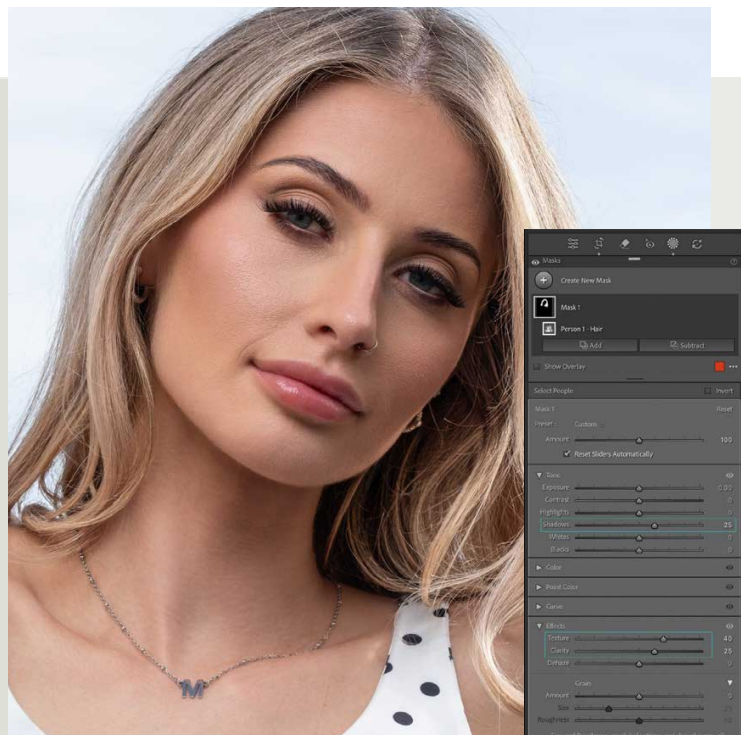
If you feel that too much of the area has been selected by the AI hair mask, you have a few options. If there is some spill onto the facial skin, click on the mask and choose Subtract. Again, choose Select People. This time, choose Facial Skin, which will clean the mask up.



1

Get that hair

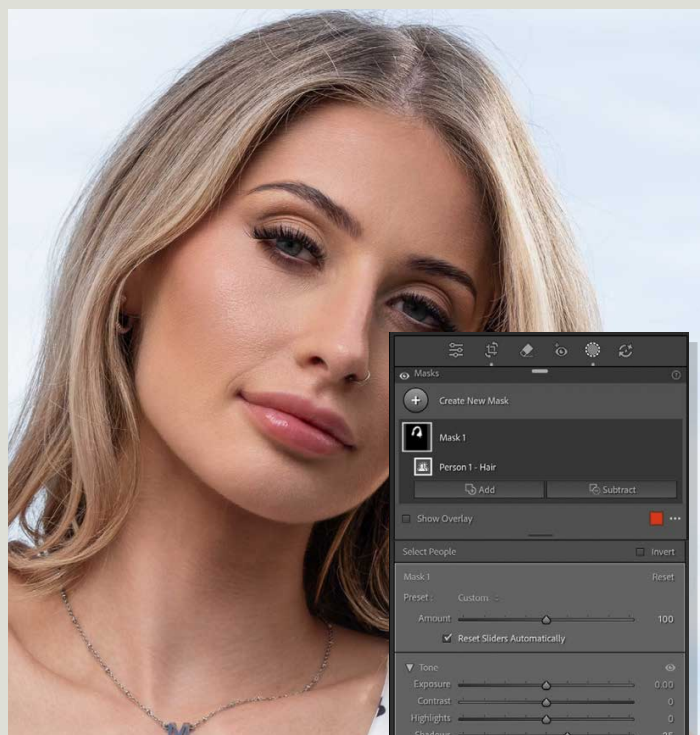
Click on the Masking icon below the Histogram to begin. At the bottom of the options is People, which will start detecting each person in the photograph. Select the person whose hair you wish to edit, and from the mask options, choose Hair. If you're doing a full retouch, you could select all the masks you need with 'Create Separate Masks' turned on.



2

Show every strand

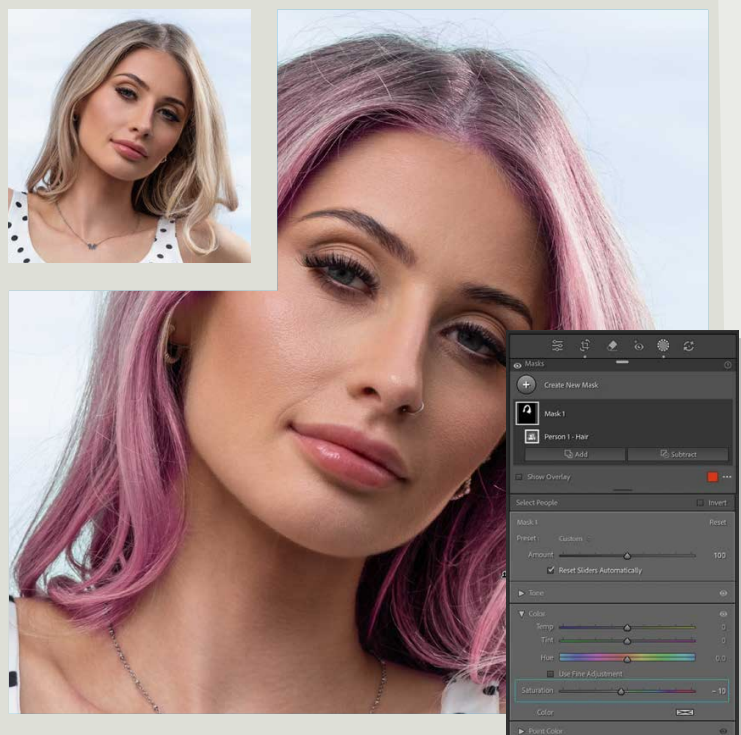
Bring out the detail in the hair by increasing the Texture slider to 40. To add definition, bring Clarity up to 25. This may darken the hair in the process, so if your subject has blonde hair, you may need to lighten those shadow areas. Try setting the Shadows to 25. For dark hair, make sure you have separation between the strands. Finally, set Sharpening to 15 to really highlight the strands.



3

Shine control

Hair should shine naturally, but shouldn't be blown out – unless your subject is backlit, in which case, that's expected. Generally, skin tone prioritises the exposure and then the hair. Here, the skin tone is balanced, so it only needs a small reduction in the Whites slider to tame the shine, -15 in this case. The Highlights slider affects too much of the hair, so avoid this for shine.



4

Colour me beautiful

If you like, you can go wild on hair colour, for example, by making the hair pink or purple by using the Hue slider (see above with Hue -45). You can use the Temp and Tint to correct colour cast issues. Here, the contrast changes have introduced a boost in saturation, making the blonde a little yellow. To combat this, reduce the Saturation slider to -10 (see inset). If you want a silver look, try -50.



Darken down

Inject mood and atmosphere into your images using Photoshop's Multiply Blending effects, says **James Abbott**

Capturing photos a stop or two underexposed is a popular technique. The problem is that underexposure at the point of capture clips shadow detail and can increase noise if you lighten the photo in editing. The better option is to capture normally and without losing highlights, and darken in processing. Capture as much detail as you can and get creative with the exposure later – then you have the best of both worlds.

It's much more effective to darken a correctly exposed photo than it is to lighten an underexposed one. Plus, we can apply plenty of techniques simultaneously by focusing on the Multiply Blending mode for darkening; this is all done with one or two simple Layers. The power of these techniques really does come down to the combination of Adjustment Layers and a single Blending mode.

Download your files

www.digitalcameraworld.com/dc307
Download your files and video tutorial from the folder titled 'Photoshop_Darkening Effects'.



Four
Actions for
Photoshop



Five-minute
video
tutorial

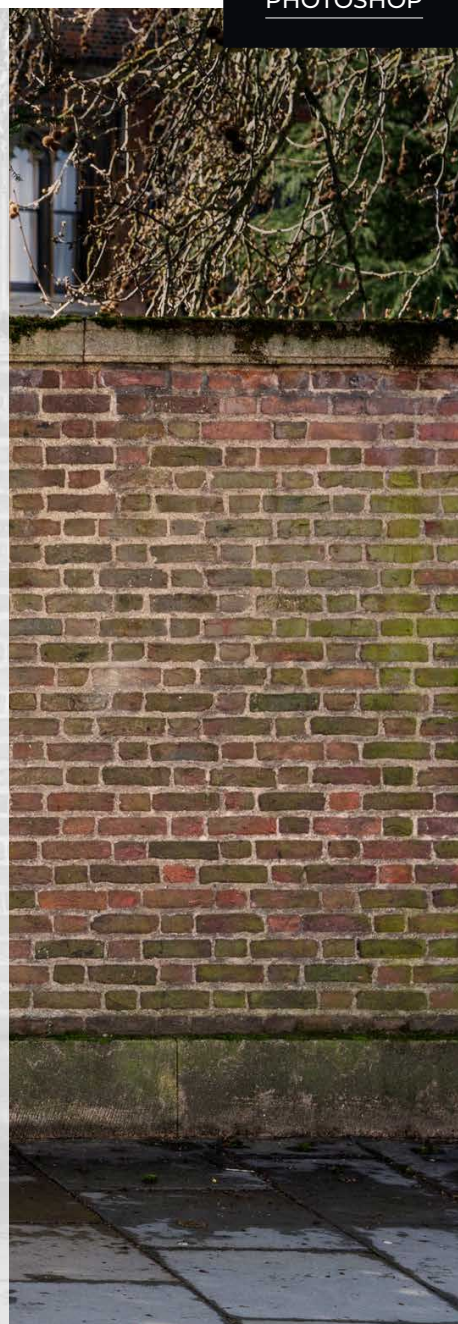
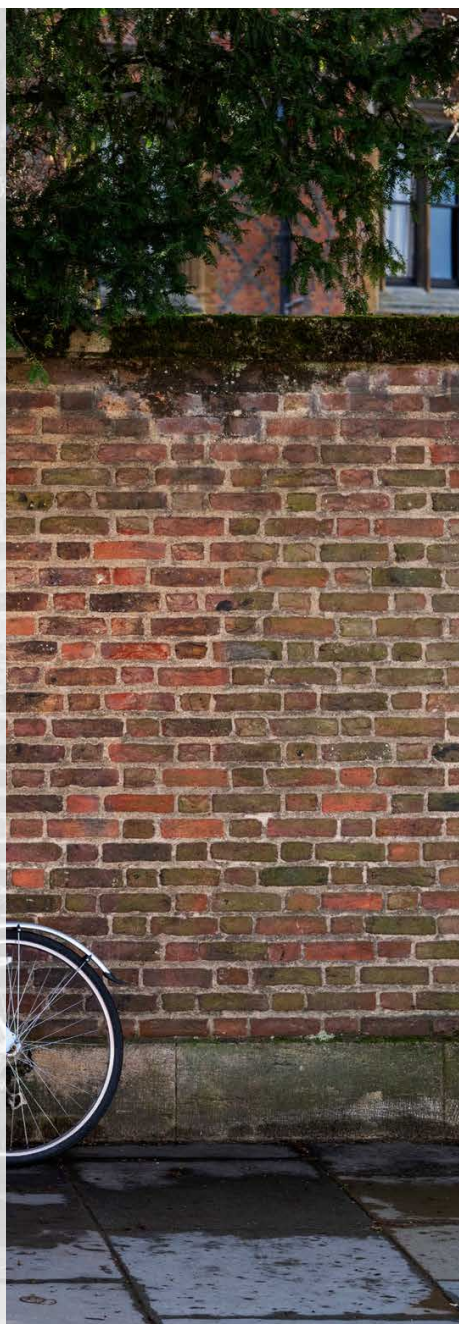


Project
files and
instructions

1

Cross-processed darken

Click on the Create new fill or adjustment layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and select Curves. When the dialog opens, click on the dropdown menu set to RGB and select Red. Place two points and drag out to create a strong S-curve. Do the same with the Green channel, and for the Blue channel, create a strong backwards S-curve. Close the dialog and change the Blending mode to Multiply before using Opacity to control the strength. Here, it was set to 50 per cent.



2

Dark bleach bypass

Click on the Create new fill or adjustment layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and select Levels. Set the white point to 200 and close the dialog before setting the Blending mode to Multiply. Next, create a Black & White Adjustment Layer and close it. Set the Opacity of this Layer to 40 per cent. Hold shift and left-click on the Levels Layer so both are selected, then press Ctrl/Cmd+G to group. Adjust Opacity to control the effect if you like, though here it's at 100 per cent.



3

Standard darkening

For this technique, we're going to keep things as simple as possible by darkening the image using a Curves Adjustment Layer as a vessel for the Blending mode. Create a Curves Adjustment Layer and immediately close the dialog box when it opens. Next, change the Blending mode from Normal to Multiply and set the Opacity to the desired amount. Here, it's at 50 per cent. The advantage of this approach is purely speed and simplicity, while it also provides control using Opacity.

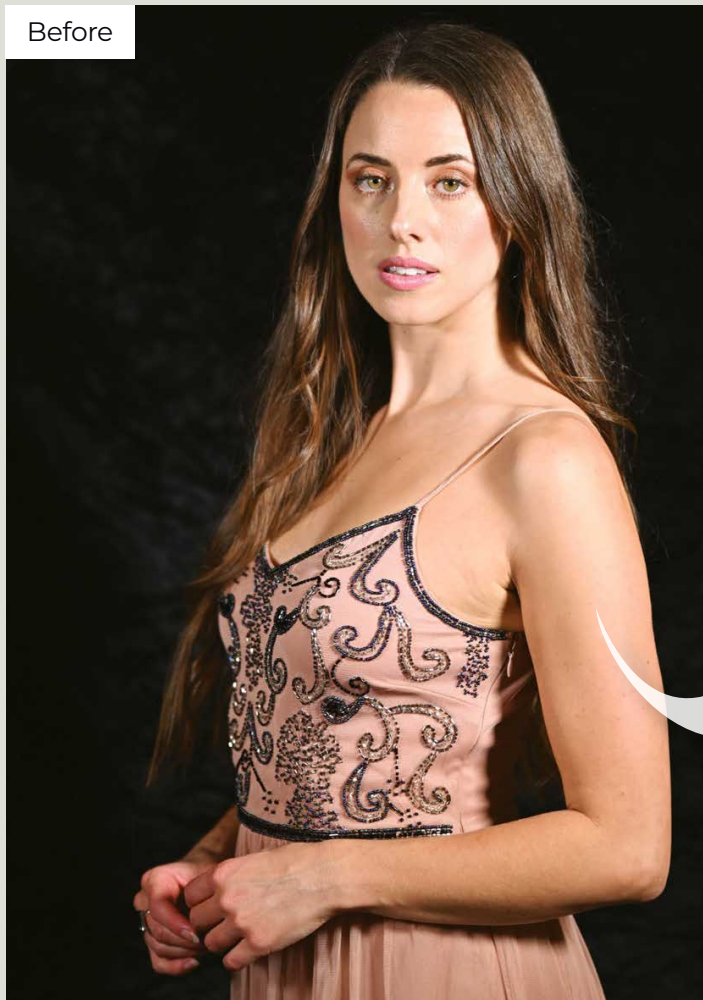


4

Dark colour toning

Click on the Create new fill or adjustment layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and select Photo Filter. When the dialog opens, select Sepia from the dropdown menu that's set to Warming Filter (85) by default. Set Density to 85 per cent and close the dialog. Set the Blending mode to Multiply and the Opacity to around 50 per cent. The Density of the photo Filter can be adjusted, but 85 per cent produces a visible toning effect, with the overall effect like a colour grade.

Before



After



Wendy Evans

Create a colour gel portrait effect

No coloured lights for your portrait shoot? **Wendy Evans** explains how to recreate the effect in Affinity Photo 2

Download your files

www.digitalcameraworld.com/dc307
Download your project files and video tutorial from the folder titled 'Affinity_Coloured Lights'.



No software extras this time



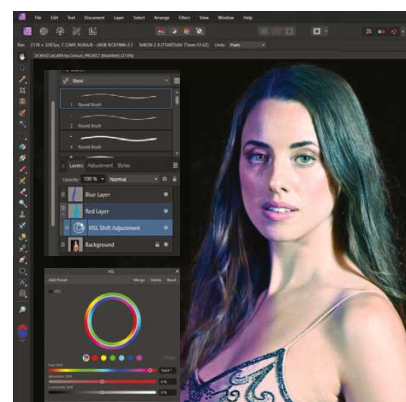
4-minute video tutorial



Project files to follow along

In the olden days, if you wanted coloured effects in your portraits, you added gels to flash units. Then along came customisable LED lights that could give you any colour you wanted, and these are now affordable.

However, if you don't have those (or you want to retrospectively apply coloured gel effects to older images), then it's easy enough to do so in Affinity. The two blend modes for the paint layers we are using are Overlay and Soft Light. The Overlay blend mode produces a stronger effect with more contrast and saturation, while the Soft Light is more subtle. You can mix the two and also reduce the opacity of the layers as you see fit.



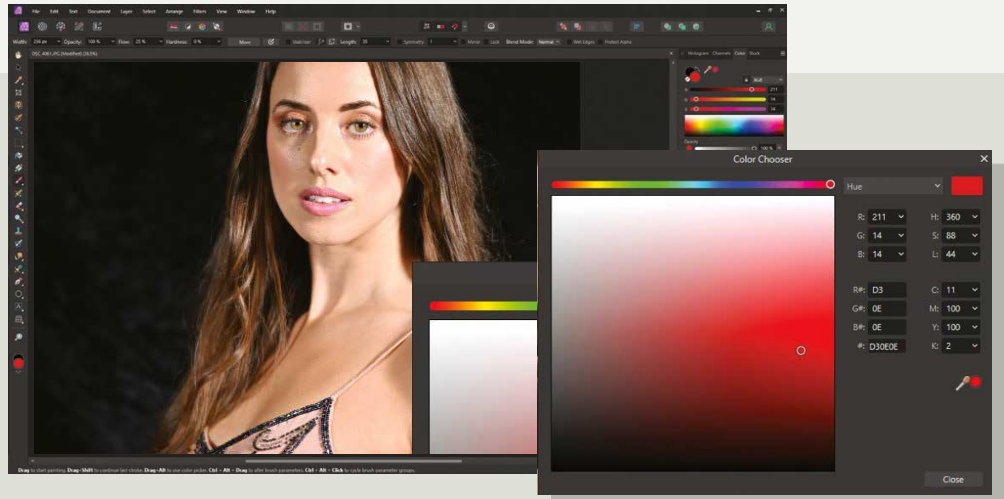
Alternative colour ideas

Having created the paint layers, it's then easy enough to experiment with other combinations simply by adding an HSL adjustment layer. Create this in the Layers palette and drag it on top of the Red layer to make a group, so it doesn't affect the other colour layer. Then simply adjust the Hue shift to change the colour.

1

Add a paint layer

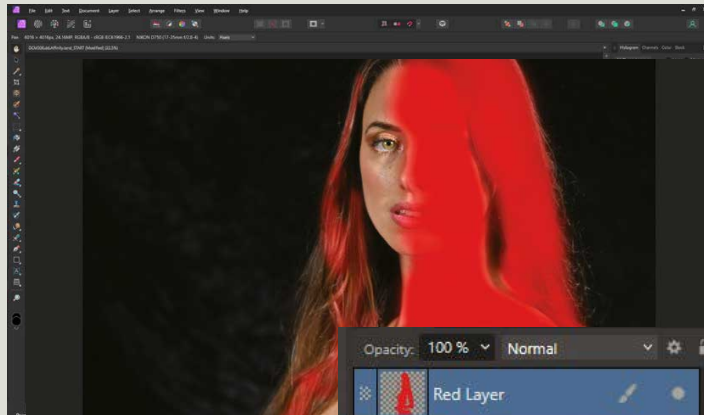
Load your image and click on the Add Pixel Layer icon, and rename it as 'Red Layer'. Select the Paintbrush tool and in the Brushes palette, click on one that has a soft edge. Here, I've selected 256 Round Light Brush, which has 0 per cent Hardness. Click on the Set Foreground icon in the bottom left and pick a red colour.



2

Start painting

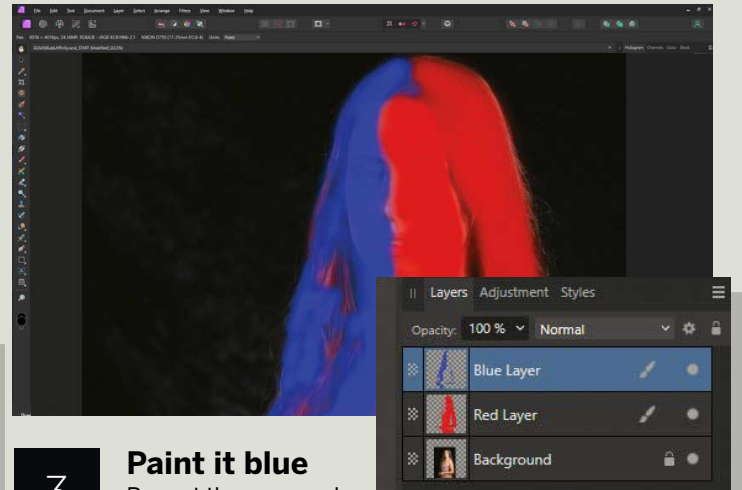
Zoom in and start painting. For a more realistic look, add the two colours where the light falls in the photo. Here, there's a light to the right, so I have painted red where that light falls. There is going to be some overlap, so in those areas, reduce the brush opacity to 50 per cent. If you make mistakes, use the Erase Brush Tool (E) to remove them.



3

Paint it blue

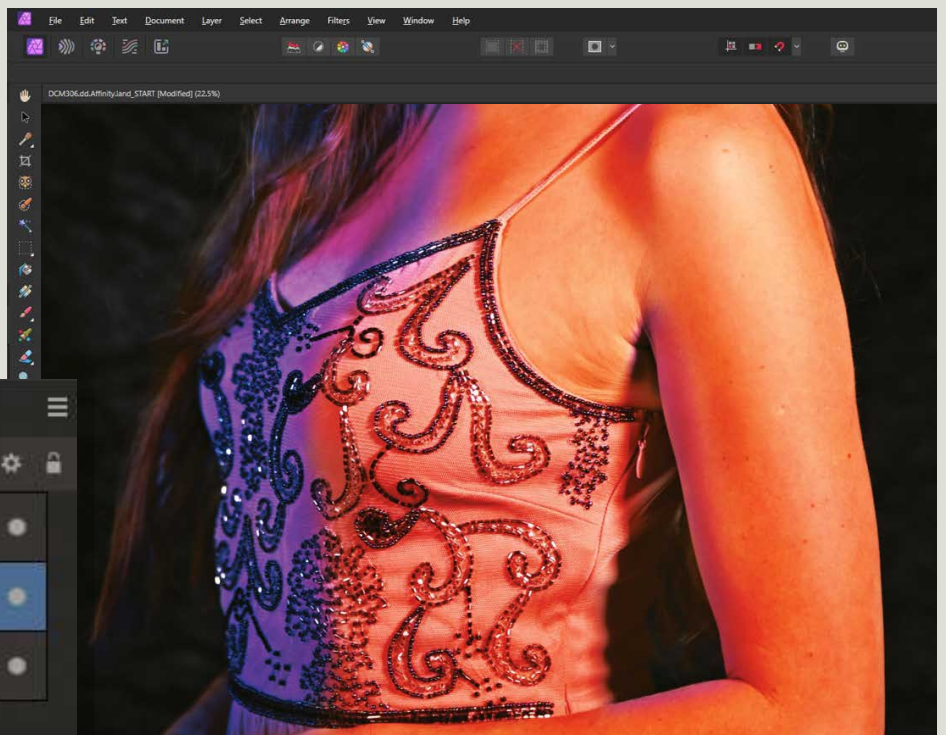
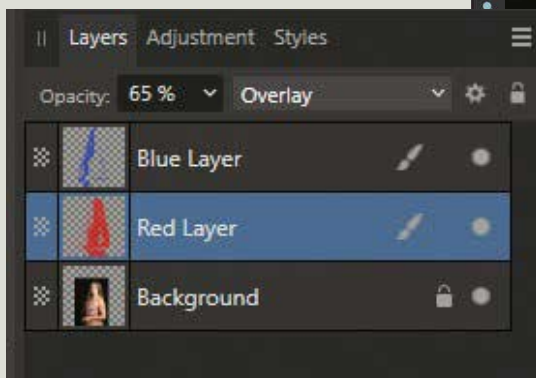
Repeat the process by adding a blue Pixel layer, then swap to the Background colour selector and choose a blue colour. When you need to switch between the two, click on the icon to swap them over. Reduce the brush size for smaller areas and remember to add 50 per cent blue to areas where the colours would naturally overlap.



4

Shadows and highlights

Now set the Blue layer to Overlay, at 75 per cent and the Red layer to Overlay blend mode at 65 per cent. If there are any areas that don't blend well, try adding more of the other colour and use a 20 per cent Erase brush to soften the colour that stands out too much – as happened here with the blue colour on the inside of the arm. Then merge the layers and save.





Before



AI to the rescue

Wendy Evans takes a look at some of the new AI-driven features in Adobe Camera Raw and Photoshop 2026

Even if you're against the use of AI in creative pursuits such as writing and music, there's no doubt that it can help when editing your images. Tasks that would have taken many hours to do manually can now be completed much quicker by letting the AI brain in the Adobe cloud do them for you.

There are some features in the latest version of ACR and Photoshop that make use of AI and are easy to find, for example, Generative Expand, but there are also a few that are tucked away in Camera Raw, so let's start by looking at those. Load your raw image into Photoshop to prompt Camera Raw to begin, then perform your usual colour and lighting adjustments.

Download your files

www.digitalcameraworld.com/dc307
Download your video tutorial from the folder titled 'Photoshop_AI Features'.



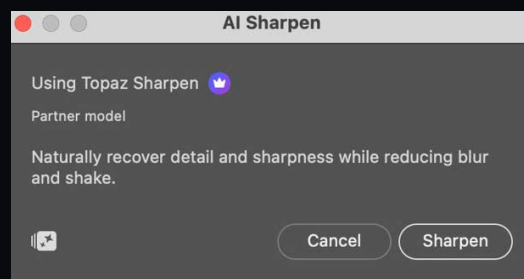
No software
extras this
month



3-minute
video
tutorial



No project
files this
month



AI Noise and Sharpen

Once you've clicked on Open to get the raw image out of ACR and into Photoshop, you'll find a couple of new options under the Filter drop-down menu, namely AI Denoise and AI Sharpen. These both use partner software, which is currently supplied by Topaz, to perform the routines. Select one of these, then click on either Denoise or Sharpen to apply it.



No denoise

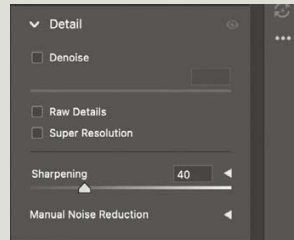


With denoise

1

Take out the noise

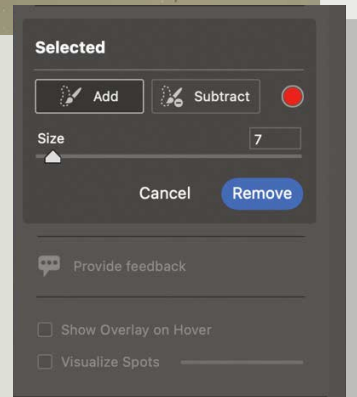
In the usual Edit panel on the right of ACR is the option to perform noise reduction. There are also new options inside Photoshop, but let's go to Detail and put a tick in the Denoise box here, then adjust the slider to control the amount. If you whack it up to 100 per cent, it runs the risk of making everything look like it's made of plastic, so go a little lower.



2

Removal options

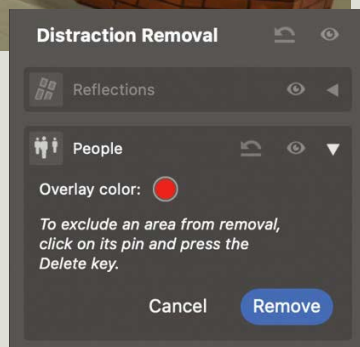
Now click on the third icon down on the right for Remove (B). There is a spot removal tool and a series of options under Distraction Removal. Firstly, use the Generative Remove tool and put a tick in Generative AI. Paint over the area to remove, wait for it to be selected in red and a new dialog box to appear. Then click on Remove.



3

Variations and reflections

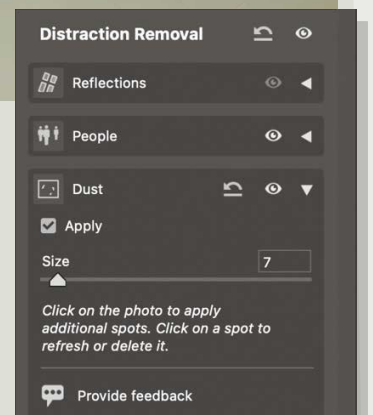
If you're not quite happy with the results, click on the arrow next to Variations to see three different attempts at it. For smaller blemishes, it's quicker to use the brush without Use Generative AI ticked. The next tool to try is the one to remove Reflections. Click on Apply and move the slider to control the effectiveness. This works best with reflections on glass windows.



4

People and Dust

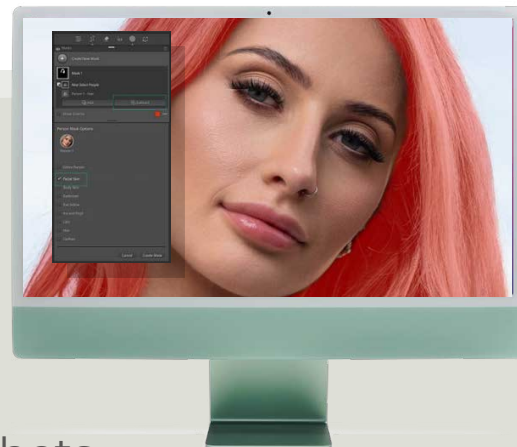
Click on People and ACR will highlight ones it finds to remove in red. If you don't want that person removed or the AI has made an error in selection, click on the pin over the mask and press Delete. If you're happy, click on Remove. The final option here is to click on Dust and then Apply. Click on spots on the image to remove ones that are missed.



THIS MONTH'S SOFTWARE EXTRAS

43 Photoshop Actions and presets

As seen in this month's tutorials, give your shots a new look with our collection of software extras



This month, we are giving away 43 software extras with our Digital Darkroom tutorials. Once installed in Adobe Photoshop, Lightroom or Camera Raw, these Actions and presets will transform your images. Rather than manually adjusting your shots, they will get you there in just a few clicks. This month's giveaways include

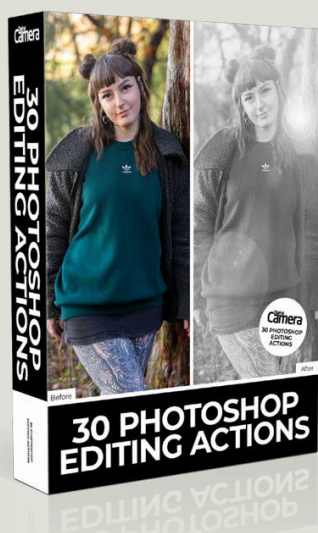
nine Retouching Hair presets for Adobe Lightroom to help you edit hair in portraits, including turning it blonde and taming shine, plus colouring it green, blue, pink or purple. We're also giving away 30 Photoshop Actions to give your shots a range of filmic looks in a few easy steps. And finally, we have four Actions that will darken your images for a more moody look.

How to use your software extras

Once you have downloaded the 'dcm307-files.zip' file to your computer, extract it and put the folders where you can easily access them. These folders contain the software, project files and a PDF with installation instructions.



**DOWNLOAD
FILES & VIDEO AT**
www.digitalcameraworld.com/dc307



30 EDITING ACTIONS

Software: Photoshop
(Version 25.5 or higher)

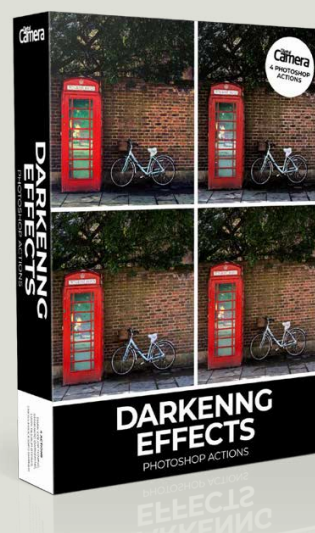
Our Editing Actions giveaway includes 30 Filmic Actions for Photoshop that will help you do everything from colour-grading your photos to boosting contrast with Curves and adding vignettes and borders to ensure your subject is the main focus.



NINE RETOUCHING HAIR PRESETS

Software: Lightroom

Selecting hair manually for editing can be a nightmare, but Lightroom's AI speeds up the process. These nine presets include various effects to help you edit hair in portraits, including: Blonde, Blonde to Silver, Define, Tame Shine, Blue Strong, Blue, Green, Pink and Purple.



FOUR DARKENING EFFECTS ACTIONS

Software: Photoshop
(Version 25.5 or higher)

Use these four Photoshop Actions as a quick and easy way to add some mood and atmosphere to your shots. These four darkening effects include: Cross-process, Dark Bleach Bypass, Standard Darkening and Dark Colour Toning.

Download all three packs from: www.digitalcameraworld.com/dc307

KitZone

New gear, buying tips and the world's toughest tests



106 **Ricoh GR IV Monochrome** _ The first black and white-only GR compact



110 **Hasselblad X2D II 100C** _ Is this the best stills camera ever made?



114 **Meike 35mm F1.8 Pro AF** _ Affordable optic for Nikon Z and Sony E-mount



116 **Sigma 12mm F1.4 DC C** _ Ultra-wide prime for APS-C mirrorless bodies



A

camera for the cognoscenti of capturing candids, the Ricoh GR series has a loyal following. This year's update saw the addition of three new models: the GR IV (reviewed in issue 304), the GR IV HDF and the GR IV Monochrome. The latter is given a lab and real-world test this month, hot on the heels of our Leica Q3 Monochrom review (issue 306). There are significant differences between these two cameras, not least sensor size and price, but they both offer users the experience of shooting street photography in the way that

the pioneers of the genre would have done – without the distraction of colour. Turn the page to see what we make of this new Ricoh.

The recent Artemis II moon mission saw many mentions of Hasselblad – the camera used to shoot 1968's iconic 'Earthrise' photo – and the brand's latest model is obviously light-years away in technical terms. Read our review to discover why the X2D II 100C is getting so much love from the pros.

Also this month, we test two new third-party primes: a 35mm for Nikon Z and Sony E-mount bodies, and an ultra-wide-angle from leading brand Sigma. **Niall Hampton**



250-page gear Buyer's Guide
Find out more on page 6

The awards bestowed by the Digital Camera lab...



Given to the top product in a group test



For products that receive five stars overall



Given to products that offer superb value for money

Ratings explained

★★★★★ Best in class
★★★★☆ Excellent
★★★☆☆ Good
★★★☆☆ So-so
★★☆☆☆ Poor

All products reviewed in KitZone are tested independently by photographers with years of experience, using lab and real-world testing

Compact Ricoh GR IV Monochrome



1
The GR IV Monochrome's APS-C sensor has a resolution of 24.74MP, 1MP less than the GR IV.

2
As with the GR IV, the fixed 18.3mm lens is equivalent to 28mm in full-frame terms.

3
Extra street subtlety smarts see the GR logo rendered in black, rather than white on the GR IV.

Ricoh GR IV Monochrome

£1,599/\$2,199

It can't shoot colour, but this compact is an excellent choice

www.ricogr.eu

Specifications

Lens: Fixed 18.3mm (28mm equiv) f/2.8

Sensor: APS-C BSI CMOS Monochrome, 24.74MP

Image processor: GR Engine 7

Autofocus: Hybrid phase/contrast AF, Snap Focus (fixed distance)

Stabilisation: 5-axis, up to 6 stops

ISO range: 160-409,600

Max burst: 4fps estd

EVF: None (optional OVF)

LCD: 3-inch fixed touchscreen, 1.037m dots

Max image size: 6192 x 4128px

Video: Full HD 1080p at 60/30/24fps

Storage: microSD + 53GB internal memory

Size (W x H x D): 109.4 x 61.1 x 33.7mm

Battery: DB120 (approx 250 shots)

Weight: 262g (incl battery and memory card)

Most cameras don't usually like to advertise what they can't do, but with the Ricoh GR IV Monochrome, it's contained right there in the name: this camera can't shoot in colour.

Admittedly, when I picked up the Ricoh GR IV Monochrome, it was my first experience of using a camera with a dedicated monochrome sensor, and I wasn't sure what to expect. What I found was all of the compact design that the GR series is known for, but with less image noise, a highly flexible dynamic range in post-production and epic drama stemming from the built-in red filter.

The first time I took the GR IV Monochrome out for a shoot, my initial thought was, "This is a camera with attitude." Overall, I spent two weeks with the Ricoh GR IV Monochrome, a rental which was provided by www.lensrentals.com, and it was particularly difficult to part ways with it.

The Ricoh GR IV Monochrome costs more than the version that can see in colour – and by quite a bit. The camera has a list price of around £1,599 in the UK (\$2,196 in the USA), meaning that there's a £400 price bump for the Monochrome version in the UK and nearer \$600 for the US.

That price is certainly nothing to sneeze at, but there are relatively few choices when it comes to cameras designed exclusively for black and white photography. The biggest brand making Monochrome cameras is arguably Leica, which makes the GR IV Monochrome look cheap by comparison.

Build and handling

The most impressive part about the Ricoh GR IV series is how much advanced imaging tech is packed into a camera that looks like a basic point-and-shoot. Of course, the GR IV Monochrome isn't a basic camera by any measure, but to anyone who



4

There's no viewfinder, but the rear screen allows rapid selection of focus points.

5

To activate and deactivate the camera's built-in red filter, toggle the Fn button.

6

The plus/minus rocker from older models returns. Use it to make exposure tweaks.

7

Power up the camera and the fixed lens reaches its shooting position quickly.

8

Developed for the GR IV series, a Ricoh GF-2 flash unit will attach via the hot shoe.

9

A new DB-120 battery gives better performance than the unit in the Ricoh GR III.

doesn't keep up with the photo industry, it may just look like I'm just shooting with a simple compact camera.

The Ricoh GR IV series is arguably the most pocketable of large-sensor compact cameras, and the Monochrome version follows that same design. All three members of the GR IV series have a similar, but impressively small build. I shot with the Ricoh GR IV Monochrome and the GR IV HDF at the same time – the only way I could tell the two apart is by looking at the shortcut button on the back, which is for a red filter on the Monochrome and for a diffusion filter on the HDF. Either that or looking for the darker GR logo on the front of the Monochrome.

This compact camera weighs just 262g, including the memory card and battery. The camera is just 109.4mm wide. Even including the small grip, it's an impressively slim 32.7mm, if you have the camera powered off. The lens extends out a bit from

the body with the camera on and ready to take photographs.

That makes the camera highly pocketable, which is impressive considering it's hiding an APS-C sensor inside. Although, of course, there's some risk to stashing a pricey camera inside a pocket instead of a dedicated camera bag. Which brings me to my next point: the Ricoh GR IV Monochrome isn't weather-sealed. That's one of the sacrifices made to create such a tiny camera. While a sealed camera would be larger, that makes it a bit less flexible for a camera that you carry nearly everywhere – except in the rain or dust.

Weather-sealing isn't the only sacrifice for the small size. My two biggest annoyances were that there's no viewfinder and that the memory card is in the microSD format. Photos are composed instead with the fixed, non-tilting LCD screen. It's a bright screen, but it can be more difficult



Hillary Grigonis

The GR IV Monochrome marks a milestone for Ricoh – it's the first time that a monochrome sensor has been used in a GR series camera.



Hillary Grigonis

Its fixed 18.3mm lens (equivalent to 28mm in full-frame) has a focal length that's wide enough for shooting street and landscape photography.

RED FILTER COMPARISON

WITHOUT RED FILTER



WITH RED FILTER



Hillary Grigonis

A classic tool for black and white photography, red filters absorb blue and green but allow red light to pass through, creating phenomenal contrast.

Compact Ricoh GR IV Monochrome

Hillary Grigoris



With 'colour' profiles programmed in, the user can choose whether they want a standard look, or switch to either softer- or higher-contrast looks in-camera.

to see in bright sunlight than an electronic viewfinder. The control layout feels well thought out for such a tiny camera. There are two dials to control manual settings, a locking mode dial, and a plus-minus toggle by the thumb for ISO or exposure compensation. There's a dedicated shortcut button for the red filter, while others like macro mode and burst are built into the arrow keys.

Like the advanced camera that it is, there's still a hotshoe slot at the top and a tripod mount at the bottom. The size doesn't leave much room for ports, but there is a well-hidden USB-C port and a small button on the opposite side for the camera's video mode.

Performance

The Ricoh GR IV series is known for its big sensor in a small design – it is really designed

for fast action. Ricoh doesn't even list the burst speed among the official specifications, but it comes down to about 4fps. This certainly isn't a sports camera, but if you understand what the Ricoh GR IV Monochrome is, which is to say that it's more for documentary and street photography, then the camera hits the mark.

I've used earlier GR III series cameras, and while the GR IV Monochrome's autofocus speed isn't going to break any records, there is a noticeable improvement. The face and eye detection work well, albeit there is no animal eye detection. Autofocus locks on fairly quickly in good light, although indoors in low light, there's a noticeable lag in the darkest corners. However, the focus will lock on if you place the focus area on a high-contrast area, such as the edge of the object.

The continuous autofocus will drop a few frames, and in fact, is tucked under the area modes rather than a separate setting. Similarly, in video mode, the autofocus is slow to transition, but at least it's fairly smooth. Again, though, this camera wasn't built with action photography in mind.

So let's get to what the GR IV Monochrome was built for: black and white photographs. The Ricoh-Pentax brand is no stranger to colourless sensors – Pentax's K-3 Mark III

Rival cameras



Leica Q3 Monochrome
£5,800/\$7,790

A camera for crafting images, it offers outstanding picture quality and a joyous shooting experience. Reviewed: issue 306



Pentax K-3 III Monochrome
£1,949/\$2,197 (body)

Sharp images with low noise, but real filters have to be used to modify the black and white rendition. Reviewed: issue 292



Ricoh GR IV
£1,199/\$1,499

The strongest GR model yet, it improves every component of the GR series. A brilliant, pocket-sized photographic tool. Reviewed: issue 304



Ricoh GR IV Monochrome versus GR IV HDF

One of the reasons to eliminate the colour filter array rather than using in-camera colour profiles to capture black and white is to allow more light to hit the sensor. And one of the benefits of that is a decrease in the amount of noise. To test that theory, I tried the GR IV HDF at the same time I rented the GR IV Monochrome and took similar photos across similar conditions. I also took a few shots in a black and white colour profile on the HDF as well to directly compare with the Monochrome.

At ISO 12,800, the noise coming from the GR IV Monochrome is much lower and smoother, whereas the noise on the colour GR IV appears coarser. Noise is noticeably much cleaner on the Monochrome than the GR IV HDF, and while there is still noise at

high ISO levels, it's a far more pleasing noise that doesn't distract from the photo, even when zooming in. It could even be the closest I've got to pleasant noise on a digital camera rather than film.

I expected ISO 12,800 to look better on the Monochrome, but I was blown away by the difference in bright light. The base ISO on the Monochrome is slightly higher at ISO 160, where the HDF can shoot down to ISO 100, but the black and white camera is cleaner even at these low ISO settings. The Monochrome's smoother noise gives photos the appearance of being slightly sharper than the colour camera. On the DNG files, I was able to lighten the shadows more in editing than the images shot on the HDF, suggesting more flexibility in editing, as long as you don't need to include colours.



GR IV AT ISO 12,800



GR IV MONOCHROME AT ISO 12,800

Monochrome – but this is the first time that a monochrome sensor has come to the GR series. The sensor is designed specifically to pair with the camera's built-in lens, which is an 18.3mm (full-frame equivalent: 28mm). That's a decent, wide focal length for street photography and landscape captures, but you'll see some of that wide-angle distortion if you snap portraits with it.

While the aperture is bright at f/2.8, wide-angle lenses aren't really known for their ability to produce bokeh. Images shot at f/2.8 still have some nice background separation, and points of light are rendered as smooth bokeh balls. For the best bokeh, though, the GR IV Monochrome does have a macro mode, which offers some impressive flexibility for a compact camera.

While the GR IV Monochrome can't see colour, the camera still has several 'colour' profiles built in. That means you can choose whether you want a more standard look or

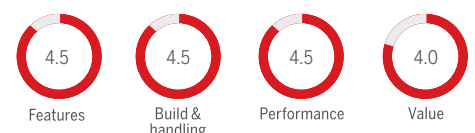
switch to a softer or higher-contrast look right in the camera. One of my favourite features is the built-in red filter – it's a longstanding tool for black-and-white photography that absorbs blue and green light, but still lets red light hit the sensor. The red filter creates phenomenal contrast, particularly outdoors, where blue skies will suddenly appear dark and dramatic.

Because it only blocks some types of light, you can use the red filter as a sort of makeshift neutral density filter that will allow you to take long exposures during the daytime. Of course, that can also be a downside, especially if you want to use the red filter indoors.

Between the different colour profiles and the red filter, the GR IV Monochrome can capture a flexible range of light. That makes it capable of shooting both dramatic, high-contrast scenes, as well as softer, low-contrast scenes. *Hillary Grigonis*

Digital Camera verdict

4.5 ★★★★★ Outstanding



The Ricoh GR IV Monochrome was my first experience with a colourless camera – and there was a bigger difference in image quality than I expected. Image noise tends to be less distracting and less noticeable than on the colour GR IV, and it's also possible to recover more shadows in editing. The built-in red filter is a great way to add contrast on a camera that doesn't have traditional filter threads.

Like the rest of the GR series, the GR IV Monochrome is impressively small. It's a pocketable camera that comes without having to sacrifice sensor size or aperture, though you do have to forego a viewfinder and weather-sealing. Also, this camera isn't built for action – and there are better options out there for fast bursts and snappy autofocus.

There's quite a price difference between the GR IV and the Monochrome, and if you can overcome the idea of paying more for a camera that does less, the GR IV Monochrome is one of the more affordable black and white cameras. It's a niche camera, but for anyone after a pocketable design that produces mono shots with lovely noise, it's an excellent choice.

“If you understand that the Ricoh GR IV Monochrome is for documentary and street photography, then it hits the mark”

Medium-format Hasselblad X2D II 100C



Digital
Camera
GOLD
AWARD

1
Virtually identical in dimensions to its predecessor, the X2D II 100C is 55g lighter.

2
A discreet new window next to the front handgrip houses the new LiDAR emitter.

3
There's a new autofocus lamp on the X2D II 100C, which doubles as a self-timer countdown.

Hasselblad X2D II 100C

£6,400/\$7,399 (body only)

This juggernaut could be the finest stills camera ever made

www.hasselblad.com

Specifications

Lens mount: Hasselblad X System (0.78x crop)

Sensor: back-side illuminated CMOS medium format, 100MP

ISO range: 50-25,600

Autofocus: Hybrid phase detect (425 PDAF zones) with LiDAR

Image stabilisation: 5-axis, 10 stops

Max image size: 11,656 x 8742px

Max burst: 3fps

Video: None

Viewfinder: 5.76 million-dot micro OLED

Screen: 3.6-inch tilting OLED touchscreen (90° upwards, 42.7° downwards), 2.36 million dots with HDR display

Memory: Integrated 1TB SSD, CFexpress Type B (up to 512GB)

Connectivity: USB-C, shutter control port, hot shoe

Battery/ shots per charge: 3400mAh/ 327

Dimensions (W x H x D): 148.5 x 106 x 75mm

Weight: 730g (body only); 840g (incl battery)

The way the Hasselblad X2D II 100C blends technology and tradition is quite remarkable. This camera is still tangibly steeped in heritage, providing a pure and luxurious shooting experience and embracing advancement in the most sensitive and unobtrusive ways.

Unlike many mirrorless cameras with clever features, you aren't bombarded with menus and options and clutter that feel more like using a computer than a camera. Instead, the technology in the Hasselblad X2D II feels invisible – it only exists to make taking photographs feel even more frictionless.

While the likes of Canon and Sony show off their features like an excitable teenager, the Hasselblad X2D sits there with quiet confidence, knowing that it's going to give you the finest shooting experience and the best results.

Industry-best colour science, with 100MP of resolution and 15.3 stops of dynamic range. Industry-best 10 stops of in-body image stabilisation.

Industry-first integrated LiDAR autofocus. Industry-first end-to-end medium-format HDR. These are the Hasselblad X2D II's rippling muscles, but this camera isn't trying to impress you with its specs, because it knows that results are all that matter – and those results speak for themselves.

Build and handling

While the X System cameras all look and feel pretty much the same, it has been fascinating to experience the evolution in handling since the original X1D in 2016. For example, the X1D II introduced drag-and-drop focus placement, so you could use the rear screen as a virtual joystick while shooting through the EVF – but it was still fixed. So the X2D brought a tilting screen so the camera could be used at waist level, but part of it was obstructed by the viewfinder.

The X2D II shakes things up by introducing a physical joystick (and a customisable button beneath it) along with an improved rear screen that extends back so that the EVF is no

Hasselblad X2D II 100C Medium-format

James Artaius



The Hasselblad X2D II 100C captures dimension, texture and form that other cameras simply aren't capable of. Exposure: 1/350 sec at f/4, ISO 50.

James Artaius



The X2D II 100C's 16-bit images boast an unrivalled 15.3 stops of dynamic range, with expanded highlight latitude. Exposure: 1/90 sec at f/8, ISO 50.

James Artaius



Hasselblad colour science is the best around, says our reviewer. Hasselblad X2D II 100C and XCD 35-100E. Exposure: 1/250 sec at f/4, ISO 50.



4

The X2D II 100C gets an improved rear screen that tilts up 90° and down 43°.

6

A physical joystick (and a new, customisable button beneath it) has been added.

8

Both top plate buttons can be customised by the user – 35 options are available.

5

A contrast ratio of 2,000,000:1 enables true HDR images to be viewed.

7

The X2D II 100C's front exposure dial is newly customisable when clicked.

9

The signature orange-gold shutter button from previous iterations has been retained.

longer blocking the view when shooting top-down. While it's the same 3.6 inches and 2.36 million dots as its predecessor, it now boasts 1,400 nits of brightness and, unlike the X2D screen, is calibrated to the D65 industry standard, giving more accurate on-screen colour.

The joystick is a welcome addition, but my only criticism is that it feels a little too low down. My thumb searched around to find it, as it wasn't where it should be. Handling refinements include new magnetic closures on the USB and memory card doors, and a new autofocus lamp that doubles as

a self-timer countdown. The Hasselblad X2D II is virtually identical in size to its predecessors, though it's 55g lighter. The body has gone from the black of the X2D to a graphite grey, which is slightly darker than that of the X1D II, and also ditches the white Hasselblad logo.

This is a truly beautiful camera, and also the most comfortable camera around. The ergonomics are perfect, and everything feels nicely balanced, whether you're using one of the compact XCD P(ortable) lenses or a longer and heavier E(xclusive) trinity equivalent.



Medium-format Hasselblad X2D II 100C



James Artaius

The light in this woodland setting was very challenging, but the camera didn't lose track of the model's face. X2D II 100C and XCD 90V and Moment CineBloom filter.

Performance

There are two main headline improvements for the Hasselblad X2D II 100C, but while one of them might cause jaws to drop, the other one might raise a smile. Starting with the former, this camera boasts an astonishing 10 stops of IBIS (in-body image stabilisation). For context, the previous high for IBIS was 8.5 stops, achieved by the Canon EOS R5 Mark II and OM System OM-1 Mark II. Stabilising a tiny Micro Four Thirds sensor is one thing. Even a full-frame sensor. But

getting 10 stops of stabilisation on a medium-format sensor is nothing short of witchcraft. For more context, the Fujifilm GFX 100 II has eight stops of IBIS, which is still frankly ridiculous, but the X2D II is on another level. Want to shoot streaky car headlights at night? Fancy photographing waterfalls at super-slow shutter speeds? No problem. If you aren't a regular Hasselblad user, you might struggle to get similar results to smaller systems right off the bat. I say this as an OM System user, as it's inherently

easier to hold and steady a camera from a smaller and lighter system.

If you're an experienced X System shooter, however, then you can achieve some wild results here. And it's not just about things like crazy-long exposures; it's also about using lenses like the new Hasselblad XCD 35-100E with a narrower f/4 aperture. Again, it goes back to the friction-free shooting experience – the tech is in service of helping you take great photographs.

As is the autofocus system... and this may induce a wry smile, because the X2D II 100C introduces continuous autofocus to a Hasselblad camera for the first time. DSLRs have been doing it for decades, and yes, a \$7,000 camera should have C-AF. But that's not all: the X2D II also introduces subject recognition and LiDAR autofocus – another first for a mirrorless camera system.

The subject recognition isn't as extravagant as on other cameras, but it covers the essentials: human, dog and cat, and vehicle. I'm genuinely impressed at how well the detection and tracking work, particularly paired with the C-AF. Even as primarily a portrait photographer, shooting subjects with the X2D II is a joy. The vehicle AF was able to recognise and follow moving cars, vans, lorries and a motorbike, while the dog and cat AF never once struggled, even with moving subjects. Was it as effective as

Rival cameras



Fujifilm GFX 100S
£5,499/\$5,999
 Medium-format in a DSLR-style body, the GFX 100S's dynamic range is incredible, and image quality is superb.
Reviewed: issue 241
 ★★★★★



Pentax 645Z
£7,700/\$9,700
 A well-built camera, with excellent ergonomics for its size, and supported by a lens system with 16 optical options. **Review:** www.bit.ly/dcm307_645z
 ★★★★★



Sony A7R IV
£3,499/\$3,499
 Raises the resolution bar for full-frame sensors, but the A7R Mark IV is a subtle, incremental improvement rather than a leap forward. **Reviewed: issue 223**
 ★★★★★

Hasselblad X2D II 100C Medium-format

James Artaius



Both photos were captured with an X2D II 100C and the XCD 35-100E, a new lens that's close to a full-frame standard zoom. Exposure (left): 1/125 sec at f/6.8, ISO 50. Exposure (right): 1/180 sec at f/2.8, ISO 200.

James Artaius



Relatively light for a medium-format body, and with 10 stops of stabilisation, the Hasselblad X2D II 100C can be used for less formal photography styles. XCD 35-100E. Exposure: 1/90 sec at f/3.5, ISO 50.

an EOS R1 or a Sony A1? No, but the the X2D II isn't supposed to be a sports camera. And it's still pretty good, making it an incredibly agile and responsive medium-format camera – a far cry from those X1D days.

In addition to the algorithms, the improvements are also due to an increase in the number of focus points (up from 294 to 425) and the implementation of the new LiDAR system. This is the first time I've overtly felt DJI's fingerprints on a Hasselblad since it bought the brand, but it's welcome. DJI's LiDAR (Light Detection And Ranging) tech has been used in its drones, as well as the DJI Ronin 4D (a 6K cinema camera) and external autofocus modules used for the Lumix S5 II and S5 IIX cameras. Combined with the deep learning and additional focus points, the result is a system that enables

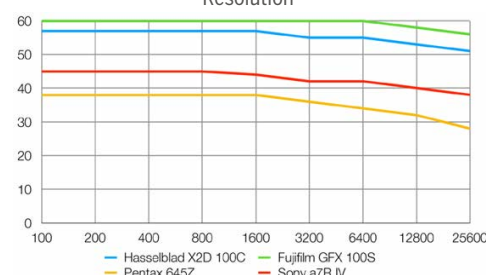
the X2D II to perform with almost any subject in almost any lighting situation.

The X2D II gives you a true, end-to-end HDR workflow – from the improved and HDR-optimised rear screen to the new Phocus Mobile 2 app, which allows you to display and edit true HDR images on your iPhone or iPad (iOS 18 and above) and apply Hasselblad's noise reduction on raw files.

For our lab data comparison (right), we compared the X2D 100C to its main 100MP medium format rival, the Fujifilm GFX 100S. Pentax's most 'recent' medium-format camera, the Pentax 645Z, is also included for reference. And because you no longer have to go medium format to get high resolution, we see how the medium-format cameras stack up against the 61MP full-frame Sony A7R IV. **James Artaius**

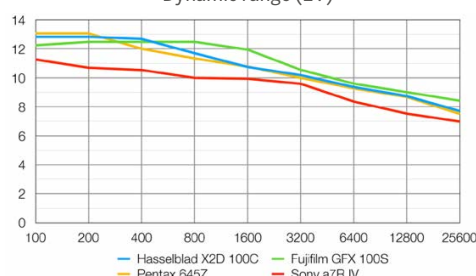
“The Hasselblad X2D II 100C boasts ten stops of stabilisation. On a medium-format sensor, that's nothing short of witchcraft”

Resolution



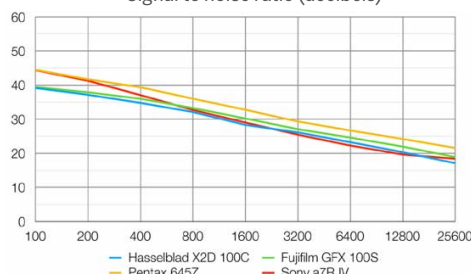
All four cameras rank in line with their sensor megapixel counts. The GFX 100S resolves more detail than the X2D 100C. Above ISO 3200, Fujifilm's images are less noisy, meaning fine detail is better retained.

Dynamic range (EV)



The three medium-format cameras are matched, but the Hasselblad's dynamic range drops after ISO 400. We disabled Sony's DRO (D-range optimiser) feature for this test, so the A7R IV doesn't perform well here.

Signal to noise ratio (decibels)



The two 100MP cameras are closely matched, though the GFX produces slightly cleaner images. The Pentax 645Z proves there's still no substitute for a large sensor with a 'lower' megapixel count for low noise.

Digital Camera verdict

5.0 ★★★★★ A best-in-class product



With 10 stops of IBIS, 15.3 stops of dynamic range, deep learning autofocus and LiDAR system, the Hasselblad X2D II's tech is impressive, but ultimately, what matters are its photographs and the experience of taking them – both of which are glorious. Out of camera, colours and dimensionality are unrivalled. A far cry from the iterative updates of many 'Mark II' cameras, the X2D II boasts a bounty of upgrades over the X2D, both in terms of handling and performance. The Hasselblad X2D II has no weaknesses; it's simply the ultimate photographic camera.

Prime lens Meike 35mm F1.8 Pro AF



The lens is supplied with a petal-shaped hood (left) that's reversible for compact stowage.

Meike 35mm F1.8 Pro AF

£319/\$379

Fancy features, strong build quality, and a budget price tag for this Nikon Z and Sony E mount prime lens

www.meikeglobal.com

Everybody loves a 35mm prime, right? It's certainly one of my favourite types of lenses for walkabout, travel and street photography, delivering a natural but moderately wide perspective with a full-frame camera. I feel that this Meike strikes a good balance between a fairly fast but not overly rapid f/1.8 aperture rating, enabling a pretty compact size and light weight. On the face of it, the lens also looks excellent value for money.

So who is Meike anyway? The company is based in Hong Kong, currently comprising 30 technicians and 200 production personnel, running multiple production lines, a dust-free workshop, and a test lab for lens manufacture, headed with the slogan 'Realise your vision'. Like other Chinese lens manufacturers, the overall aim is to deliver quality goods at bargain prices. As such, the full-frame compatible Meike 35mm F1.8 Pro AF lens that I'm reviewing here aims to be one of the best – if not the best-value – options for Nikon Z cameras and Sony E-mount cameras.

Build and handling

What do you really expect from a 'pro' lens nowadays? The badge seems to be bandied about fairly liberally and is generally best taken with a pinch of salt. Even so, this Meike prime lens looks the part, to some extent at least. Sure, it 'only' has an aperture rating of f/1.8 rather than f/1.4 or even f/1.2, but as I'm concerned, that's generally fast enough. I prefer a compact and lightweight build for a 35mm lens, especially if I'm using it for the likes of street photography and walkabout shooting, and the Meike certainly obliges in this respect.

1 Nano-structure multi-layer coatings are applied to minimise ghosting and flare.

2 There is a complex optical path comprising 12 elements arranged in 10 groups.

3 A lightweight, compact build is ideal for street photography and walkabout shooting.

4 On the lens barrel is an aperture ring with calibrated markings at one-third f/stops.

It measures a compact 93 x 74mm and weighs in at a mere 400g. That makes this optic easy to live with.

Behind the front element of the lens, you will discover a fairly complex optical path comprising 12 elements arranged in 10 groups. These include two aspherical elements, which are claimed to minimise aberrations and improve image quality, along with three ED (Extra-low Dispersion) elements with the aim of enhancing clarity and reducing chromatic aberrations. Nano-structure multi-layer coatings are also on hand to minimise ghosting and flare.

Naturally, sharpness in practice boils down to the performance of the autofocus system just as much as the quality of the glass. The Meike scores highly here, with a fast and virtually silent system that's based on the combination of NanoDrive and a linear stepping motor. As well as being designed to keep up with fast-paced action in stills photography, the lens also boasts minimal focus breathing when shooting video, and is advertised as having sufficient resolving power for capturing 8K footage.

Towards the rear of the lens barrel is an aperture ring with calibrated markings at one-third f/stop increments from f/1.8 down to the narrowest aperture of f/16. Beyond this is the Auto position, for controlling the aperture from the host camera body. The aperture ring is good news up to a point, but it lacks a switch for locking the ring in its Auto position, and there's also no switch to enable a click/de-click facility, the latter of which would be more ideal for video capture.



Despite the moderately wide-angle focal length, you can get a tight depth of field at the widest apertures.



The Meike is sharp in the centre of the image frame, even when shooting wide-open at f/1.8. However, at the edges and corners, sharpness is relatively disappointing, and it pays to stop down to at least f/5.6.

The aperture itself is based on a 9-blade diaphragm, which is pretty well-rounded.

Unlike many own-brand 'budget' lenses from camera manufacturers, the Meike is supplied complete with a hood. It's an efficient, petal-shaped hood at that, with the typical bayonet fitting that's reversible for compact stowage. As usual, the hood is actually dual-purpose. It helps to reduce the amount of stray light entering the lens from oblique angles, therefore reducing the danger of ghosting and flare. It also provides physical protection to the front element of the lens, reducing the risk of it picking up scrapes and knocks.

As I'd fully expect in a 'pro' lens, the Meike features a metal rather than plastic mounting plate. Not only that, but it has a rubber weather-seal gasket around its circumference to minimise the ingress of moisture and dust. There's also a USB-C socket, which you can use to apply firmware updates if and when they become available.

Performance

How sharp do you like it? I tested the Meike with a high-res 45.7MP Nikon Z 8, which puts a spotlight on the resolving powers of any lens. I found that the Meike was super-sharp in the central region of the image frame, even when shooting wide-open at f/1.8. That's

reinforced by the consistent accuracy of the autofocus system. In the region between the middle and edges of the frame, sharpness is still very good wide-open and excellent at apertures between f/2.8 and f/8. However, at the extreme edges and corners, sharpness is relatively disappointing at wide apertures between f/1.8 and f/2.8, and it pays to stop down to between f/5.6 and f/11 for best results in this respect.

Away from the centre of the frame at f/1.8, colour fringing can also be a little noticeable and becomes slightly worse as you stop down through the aperture range. That said, the actual amounts of colour fringing certainly aren't severe, and are easily within the remit of automatic in-camera corrections featured in both Nikon and Sony bodies. The same goes for vignetting at wide apertures and barrel distortion throughout the range, the latter of which you'll see in the lab results.

As with any fast lens, the quality of bokeh is often considered to be equally important as sharpness and other attributes of image quality. The widest aperture of f/1.8 enables a fairly tight depth of field, despite the moderately wide-angle focal length of 35mm, especially when shooting close-ups. Bokeh is good and smooth, with a natural roll-off between focused and defocused areas within images. **Matthew Richards**

Prime lens

Specifications

Mount options: Nikon Z (FX), Sony E (FE)

Full-frame: Yes

Autofocus: Yes

Stabilisation: No

Lens construction: 12 elements in 10 groups

Angle of view: 64.8°

Diaphragm blades: 9

Max aperture: f/1.8

Min aperture: f/16

Min focus distance: 0.35m

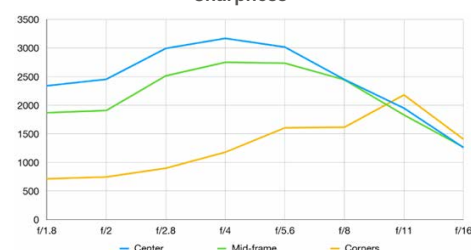
Max magnification ratio: 0.13x

Filter size: 58mm

Dimensions (L x D): 93 x 74mm

Weight: 400g

Sharpness



Sharpness

Centre-sharpness is good at f/1.8 and excellent in the f/2.8 to f/5.6 range. However, edge/corner-sharpness is relatively lacklustre at wide apertures and you need to stop down to f/5.6 for the edges to be really crisp.

Fringing

1.05

There's slight colour fringing away from the centre at f/1.8, and it gets worse at the edges as you stop down. On the plus side, it's not bad and Nikon's and Sony's automatic in-camera correction fixes the issue.

Distortion

-2.88

Barrel distortion can be noticeable, but automatic in-camera correction takes it out of the equation. Unlike many lenses, in-camera correction isn't 'forced on', and the Meike is usable with correction disabled.

Digital Camera verdict

4.0 ★★★★★ Excellent



One of the things that I most like about the Meike 35mm F1.8 Pro AF lens is that it's reasonably compact and lightweight, yet it's also robustly built, along with the inclusion of weather-seals. Centre-sharpness is impressive throughout the aperture range, even when you are shooting wide-open at f/1.8, although the sharpness around the edges leaves something to be desired at apertures wider than f/5.6. Overall, the image quality is particularly pleasing, and that is backed up by a fast and consistently accurate autofocus system. While it's a bit of a stretch for the manufacturer to label it a 'pro' lens, the Meike is certainly an appealing prime lens at a very attractive price.

Prime lens Sigma 12mm F1.4 DC Contemporary



Sigma 12mm F1.4 DC Contemporary

£519/\$579

An epic viewing angle for APS-C format
Canon, Fujifilm and Sony mirrorless

sigmauk.com

Sigma has a history of fast, f/1.4 prime lenses for crop-sensor cameras. There's a trilogy that springs to mind in the diminutive shapes of the 16mm, 30mm and 56mm f/1.4 DC DN Contemporary lenses. I first saw these in Canon EF-M mount, but they've since become available in a wide range of Canon EF-M, Canon RF-S, Fujifilm X, L-Mount, Micro Four Thirds, Nikon Z DX and Sony E options. The new 12mm lens adds ultra-wide-angle potential to the mix, ideal for landscapes and cityscapes, architectural interiors, selfies, vlogging, travel, astrophotography and more besides. However, the mount options are relatively limited, so far only covering Canon RF-S, Fujifilm X and Sony E, with an effective focal length of 18mm in full-frame terms (19mm for Canon).

Build and handling

The first thing that struck me about the design of this ultra-wide-angle prime is how compact and lightweight it is. It's noticeably smaller and barely more than half the weight of the metal-bodied Viltrox AF 13mm lens. Much of that weight loss is partly due to Sigma's typical use of TSC (Thermally Stable Composite) components, which are tough but lightweight. The Sigma measures a mere 69 x 68mm and weighs in at just 225g in Sony E-mount guise. It's a real featherweight contender and only marginally heavier in other mount options, so far including Fujifilm X at 235g and Canon RF-S at 250g.

1 The front element has a fluorine coating to repel moisture and greasy fingermarks.

2 For such a small lens, the Sigma's manual focus ring is fairly large and comfortable.

3 A petal-shaped hood helps reduce flare and physically protects the front element.

4 The lens mount has a hard-wearing metal plate, which features a weather-seal gasket.

This ultra-wide-angle prime is lightweight and compact, the Sony E-mount weighing just 225g.

Although it's a small lens, the Sigma has a large and comfortable manual focus ring. As usual these days, it's electronically coupled to a stepping motor-based autofocus system and operates with smooth precision. Again, typical of the breed, there's no focus distance scale, but this is often substituted by an in-camera display. There's also no AF/MF focus mode switch, which isn't ideal, but considering the super-small design of the lens, it's something that can be overlooked.

Behind the focus ring, there's a smaller, dedicated aperture ring in the Fujifilm X and Sony E mount versions of the lens. I've also tested the Canon RF-S mount edition, which has a customisable control ring instead. It operates in click steps and is assignable to many and varied functions, via in-camera menus. None of the different versions of the lens features a click/de-click switch, so there's no option for stepless and silent aperture control.

Whereas many own-brand APS-C format lenses from the likes of Canon and Nikon have plastic mounting plates, the Sigma has a hard-wearing metal plate. This also features a weather-seal gasket as part of the overall dust-resistant and splash-resistant design. The electronic communication contacts are gold-plated.

Up front, the forward element has a fluorine coating to repel moisture and greasy fingermarks. There are 14 elements in total, arranged in 12 groups. These include two SLD (Special Low Dispersion) elements and three double-sided aspherical



The wide viewing angle and fast aperture make this lens particularly suitable for architectural interiors.



In terms of performance, colour fringing is well controlled and lateral chromatic aberration is negligible. Although barrel distortion is pretty extreme, the Sigma lens relies on automatic in-camera corrections.

elements. The SLD elements help to enhance contrast and clarity, and reduce chromatic aberrations, while the aspherical elements help to enhance image quality and reduce the overall size of the lens.

Multiple coatings are applied, and the overall design aims to minimise ghosting and flare. As I'd expect, a bayonet-fit, petal-shaped hood is also supplied with the lens to further reduce ghosting and flare, while also offering physical protection to the front element. Unlike with some ultra-wide-angle lenses, I'm pleased that the hood is removable, enabling the attachment of filters via a modestly sized 62mm thread.

Performance

Understandably, the lens is designed with performance in mind, as well as being compact and lightweight. Given that the wide viewing angle and fast aperture make this lens particularly suitable for astrophotography, it's good news that the lens is sharp right out to the edges and corners of the frame, even when shooting wide-open at f/1.4. A further bonus is that there's minimal sagittal coma flare, so pinpoints of light, such as stars and nighttime lights in cityscapes, retain a true-to-life appearance instead of taking on irregular shapes, like with 'batwing coma'.

Autofocus is snappy for stills and smooth for video, while being near-silent in operation. There's also minimal focus breathing, further enhancing performance for video capture. Switch to manual focusing, and the focus ring operates smoothly and precisely. The minimum focus distance is a paltry 0.17m, so you can get in really close to small subjects and shoot them against an expansive backdrop, courtesy of the ultra-wide viewing angle. The f/1.4 aperture plays into your hands if you also want to blur the background with a tight depth of field for close-ups, although the focal length makes it hard to get anything other than a large depth of field at more regular shooting distances.

Another tick on the performance checklist is that colour fringing is well controlled. Lateral chromatic aberration is negligible, even out at the edges and corners of the frame, and that's without relying on automatic in-camera correction. I can't say the same for barrel distortion, which is pretty extreme. As with many 'compact' lenses designed for mirrorless cameras, this Sigma relies heavily on automatic in-camera correction for distortion. As is often the case, distortion correction can't be disabled in the camera's menu system. **Matthew Richards**

Prime lens

Specifications

Mount options: Canon RF-S, Fujifilm X, Sony E

Full-frame: No

Autofocus: Yes

Image stabilisation: No

Lens construction: 14 elements in 12 groups

Angle of view: 99.6°

Diaphragm blades: 9

Max aperture: f/1.4

Min aperture: f/16

Min focus distance: 0.17m

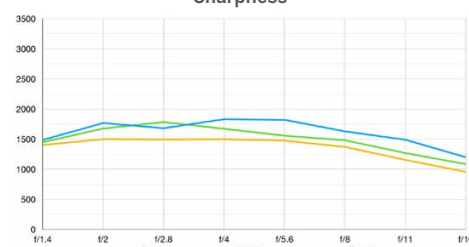
Max magnification ratio: 0.12x

Filter size: 62mm

Dimensions (L x D): 69 x 68mm

Weight: 225g (E-mount)

Sharpness



Sharpness

Wide-open at f/1.4, levels of sharpness are already good across the entire image frame, and even better at f/2. Sharpness is also impressive across the whole frame and throughout the entire aperture range.

Fringing

0.69

There's a little colour fringing towards the edges and corners of the frame. However, this will generally go unnoticed, even when left uncorrected in-camera or at the editing stage.

Distortion

-5.19

Native barrel distortion is severe, but I've seen far worse from other compact and lightweight lenses for mirrorless cameras. Either way, automatic in-camera correction is on hand to take care of distortion.

Digital Camera verdict

4.5 ★★★★★ Outstanding



For a prime lens, the Sigma 12mm f/1.4 is incredibly versatile. Ideally suited to landscapes, cityscapes, and architectural interiors, it's also great for selfies and vlogging, where its ultra-wide-angle perspective captures large areas of the surroundings. Its compact and lightweight build also makes it ideal for travel and street photography, for which the weather-resistant construction is a bonus. Meanwhile, the bright f/1.4 aperture adds astrophotography to the list. The image quality and all-round performance are excellent. Overall, it's a brilliant ultra-wide-angle lens for Canon, Fujifilm and Sony APS-C format mirrorless cameras. Can we have a Nikon Z-mount version, please?

Right: 'Tree of Life'. A fresh lava outflow spills over the larger pool, forming new land in the shape of a tree.

Karim Iliya

The 2025 HIPA Drone (Video) winner recalls capturing his footage of a volcano erupting in Iceland. **Niall Hampton** finds out more

Cat Gundry Beck



Karim Iliya
Photographer
and filmmaker

Based in Iceland and Hawaii, Karim has a fascination with the natural world and is also a whale swimming guide.

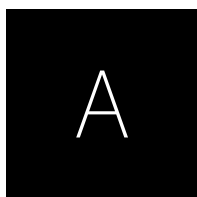
He uses his photography and video to tell stories about people, animals and places, and to help protect the Earth's ecosystems.

Having worked in over 50 countries, he has won numerous awards and has been featured in *National Geographic* magazine.

Karim also co-founded Kogia – a non-profit free media library, fellowship programme and studio aimed at protecting marine life.

Instagram: @karimiliya

Website: karimiliya.com



Although primarily a stills photographer, Karim Iliya also makes films. And one of these films, titled 'Blood of the Earth', so impressed the judges at the 14th season of the Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum International Photography Award (HIPA) that Karim went home

with the trophy for the Drone (Video) category. For 'Blood of the Earth', Karim's intention was simple: he wanted to show how beautiful volcanoes are, not least because most people don't actually get to experience them. His film was also a good fit with 'Power', the theme of HIPA's 14th season.

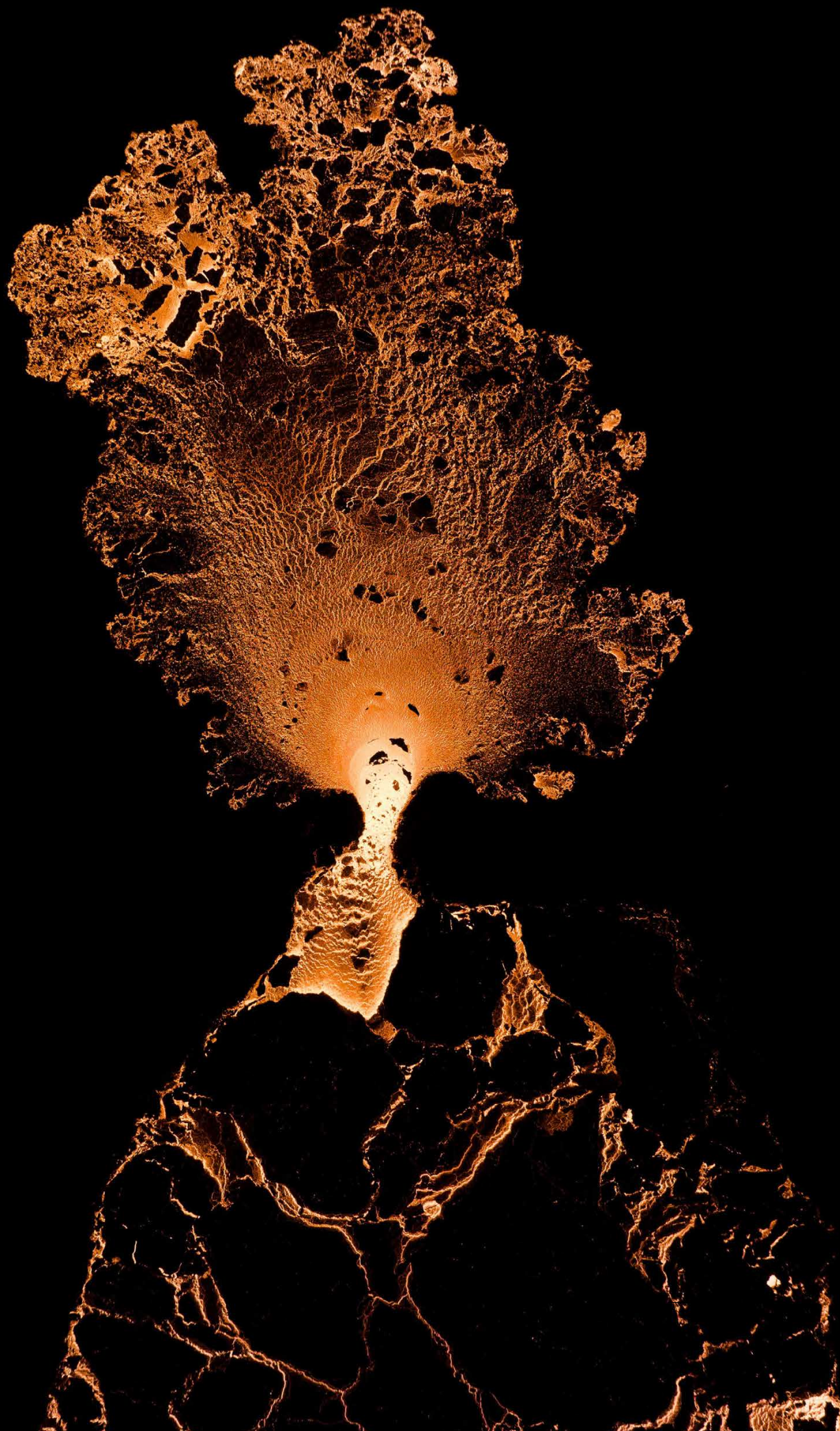
"People often think of volcanoes as places that are destructive and violent and terrifying," Karim explains, as we meet after the HIPA awards ceremony held in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, last November.

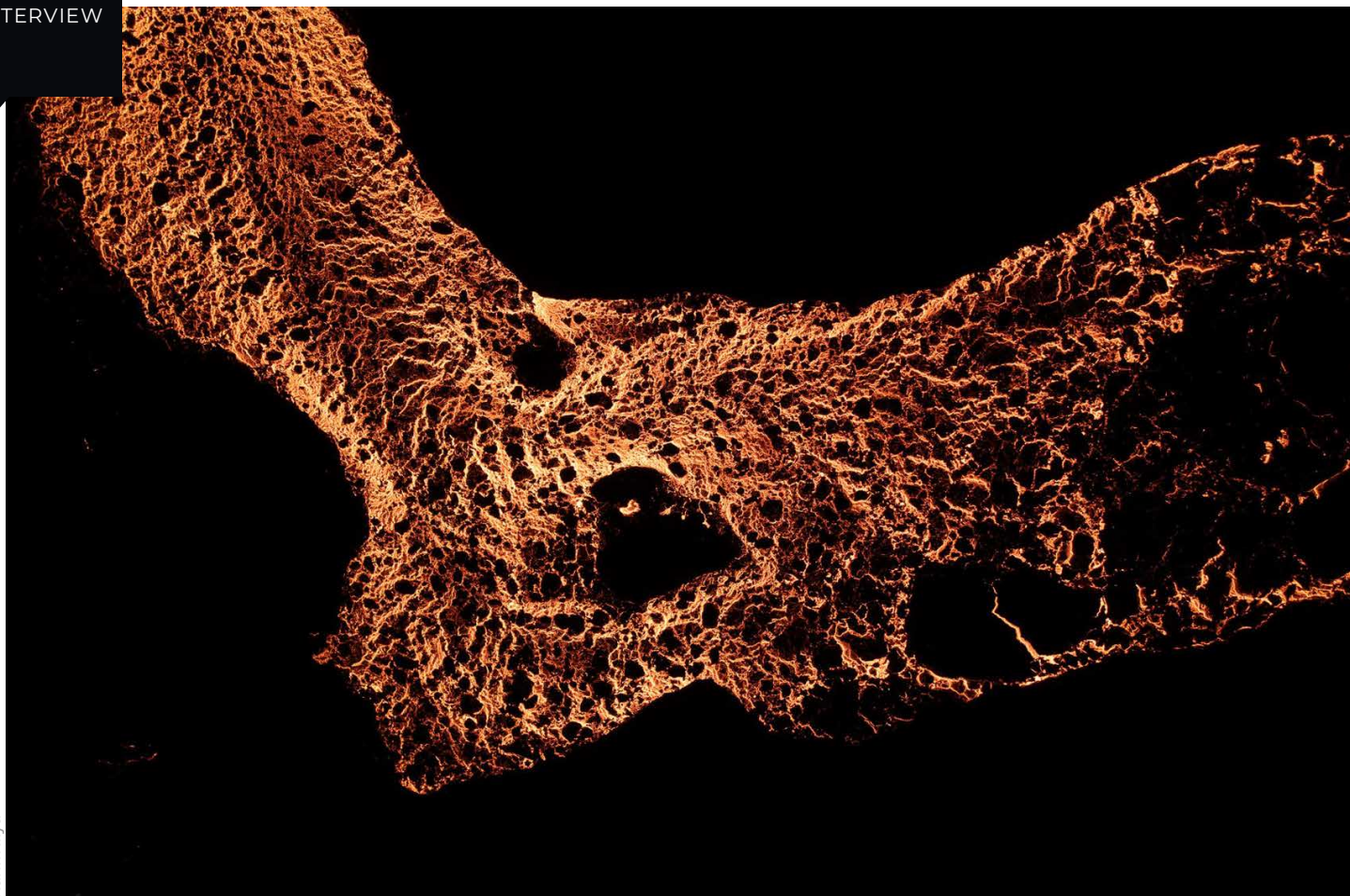
Raised in the Middle East and Asia, Karim is now based in Iceland, but has travelled around the world to witness the majesty of volcanoes, both dormant and erupting. His 'Blood of the Earth' film documents the volcanic eruption at Fagradalsfjall in Iceland in 2021. So let's find out more about Karim and his award-winning video...

What kind of still photographs do you take?

I focus on the natural world, so I spend a lot of time underwater photographing humpback whales and other sea creatures, and little corals. I also photograph Arctic foxes and different natural phenomena like the northern lights, as well as my daily life and the daily life of people around the world, different communities and cultures and places. I'm fascinated by all kinds of topics.

When I was a kid, people told me that I should focus on one thing only in my photography. Thankfully, I ignored that advice.





Above: Volcanoes are both creators and destroyers, reshaping the very land we stand on and serving as the lifeblood of our planet.

Below: 'In the shadow of a Dragon'. "I took this photo of my wife Björk, an Icelandic woman," says Karim, "standing before the very thing that created the island she calls home."



So now I like to photograph anything from bugs and creatures to people and volcanoes, and anything else that's out there. My daily camera is a Fujifilm X100VI, which I use for documenting my life and the people around me. It's my favourite camera, and I shoot thousands of photos on it.

The X100VI is wildly popular – did you upgrade from a previous X100 model or come to it fresh?

I had the X100V, then upgraded to the X100VI when it came out because it had video stabilisation and better eye autofocus. It was difficult to get hold of, so I had to pre-order it as soon as I saw it was coming out. That was already five days too late, so I had to wait months and months before it arrived. I'm glad that people are using the X100VI and loving it, even though its popularity makes it hard to buy.

The X100VI is fantastic for capturing daily life, but it's not my professional workhorse camera. For going underwater or photographing wildlife, I use interchangeable lens cameras – a Canon EOS R5 and an EOS R3 with a variety of lenses. I'm not stuck on the one camera system. It's just that most of the time, whatever camera you started off with is the one you get used to. They're all fantastic, though.

Let's talk about Blood of the Earth. Where was the footage shot, how did you put the film together and what were you trying to achieve?

I'm fascinated by volcanoes. They are places where you can see geology taking place in real time, which is quite

rare. For example, witness a volcano, and you can see that if you heat up rock enough, it glows in the dark. A volcanic eruption started in Iceland in 2021, and it was called Fagradalsfjall, which means 'beautiful valley mountain'. I travelled there as quickly as I could. Originally, I had booked a three-week trip to Iceland to photograph and film this volcano, but I ended up extending my stay for three months. Then I met an Icelandic woman and decided to live there. Over the course of the volcanic eruption, I filmed as much as I could with a drone, and eventually put together a short film to try to show off the volcano. It's hard to tell a story when you're just using a drone, and specifically on the topic of a volcano, because people think of them as places that are destructive, violent and terrifying.

What I wanted to do was to show how beautiful volcanoes can be. 'Blood of the Earth' was shot using a drone. But the first one I sent up, a large portion of it melted. The sensors melted and the front element of the camera, too, so I had to take that off. After that, I figured out that I would have to stay in areas that weren't quite as hot. With volcanoes, there's so much to film and so much to see, and it's constantly changing, so you're looking for new things. But how do you find something different that someone hasn't seen before?

The drone gives you a three-dimensional perspective that you can't see with your eyes. However, in the end, I spent a lot of time looking with my eyes anyway, because it's not quite the same looking at a screen and filming as it is to be there to feel the heat, to see it and experience the feelings that come from it.



Karim Iliya

How many hours of footage did you capture for Blood of the Earth?

Perhaps around 50 hours or so in total, but this was from many trips to the volcano over the course of many days, and different eruptions that occurred in the same volcanic area during that time. I would go to the volcano with the intention of spending a couple of hours there, and suddenly, 11 hours had passed.

How long did it take you to edit the film?

The edit was fairly quick, mostly because of the time constraints. But there are moments that you film and that you remember that are completely different and interesting. So in the editing process, I just went through the footage and grabbed the moments that I knew needed to be there. Then I looked for some shots to connect them together, ones that fed into the story so that people could feel the power of the volcano.

Which software do you use for editing?

For still photos, I use Adobe Lightroom, but I only do minimal editing. Typically, I'll spend no more than 30 seconds editing a single photo – just making basic changes such as cropping, adding a little bit of contrast and adjusting the highlights and shadows.

In my work, I try to keep things as natural as possible. I believe that we live on such a strange planet with so many interesting places and things that you could never imagine in your wildest dreams, so I try to show those as accurately as I saw them and depict them in a way that keeps that natural form. —>



Karim Iliya

Above: Lava pours across a landscape at an active volcano in Iceland.

Left: 'Blood of the Earth'. Above Iceland's Fagradalsfjall volcano, glowing lava spews in violent bursts, reshaping the nearby landscape.

"I'm fascinated by volcanoes. They are places where you can see geology taking place in real time"

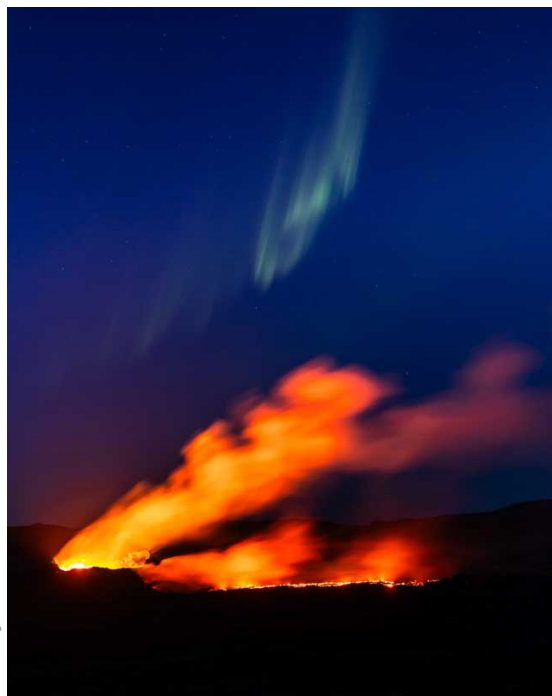
Karim Iliya



Above: This drone image shows how close the volcanic eruption comes to nearby infrastructure and civilisation.

Right: Long exposure of a volcanic eruption beneath the northern lights.

Karim Iliya



It's the same principle when editing video. I hardly do any edits out of the camera, other than cutting the starting and ending of shots, and a little bit of colour grading, if required. For video, I use DaVinci Resolve because I find the workflow to be a little bit easier.

Which drones do you use?

I use the DJI Mavic 3 Pro. This film was a combination of the Mavic 2 Pro and Mavic 3 Pro. At some point, I'll swap over to the Mavic 4 Pro – whichever DJI drone is small and portable and able to do the job.

What do you like about DJI camera drones in particular – are they just well-made?

Yeah, it feels like they're the only real company in the industry that is pushing and innovating. I know there are some other brands coming out now, but I haven't had much experience with them. I'm quite familiar with the DJI system and have found it to be generally reliable – the drones are good in low light and have an excellent battery life. They're well-built and can handle quite a bit of wind, which is ideal because the weather conditions in Iceland can be horrendous, with the high winds, snow, hail and rain. I've just found that DJI drones can handle the elements, and it's all worked out so far.

When you gather footage, do you shoot it using all the same settings?

It depends on the day and the scenario. I know a lot of people are into the technical aspects... for example, you should have this white balance setting, this should be

“I prioritise capturing the moment rather than worrying about settings – your eyes will tell you what looks good”



Karim Iliya

correct and you must use flat colour profiles. But I've always gone with what I see and whether it looks good or not. Sometimes, my ISO will be too high, but I prioritise capturing the moment and getting the footage, rather than worrying about what gear I've got or what settings I'm using. Your eyes will tell you what looks good visually. Sometimes, certain settings are fairly straightforward and will stay the same, and I'll change other settings depending on what's going on.

It's all about what you see, after all, so presumably you don't want to change that too much?

I try not to change too much. I can be taking a photo, and sometimes, the camera has a hard time capturing the scene accurately, so I'll try to bring it back to something closer to what I saw. Two instances where this can often occur are with underwater and night photography. Cameras tend to struggle with noise in the darkness and they also struggle with capturing the blue tones when shooting underwater. Often, when raw photos are quite flat, you have to put a bit of contrast in the shadows and highlights.

But in general, I try to work as much as possible in-camera to change the settings to get things how I like, so I don't have to do so much in post-processing. That's the luxury of digital – you can get instant feedback and see how your photo looks. If I want it to be brighter or darker, or I want the background to be more blurred or I'm going to try a lower angle... there's a twig in the shot at a weird angle, I'm going to make adjustments. That's the huge advantage we have these days.

Because of the extreme variations in conditions and light, volcanoes must be difficult to capture.

Yes, it's hard. You have to pick and choose what you want to photograph because, unless it's perfect twilight time, it's difficult to get everything you want. You have to deal with silhouettes and very bright light.

Given the Drone (Video) winner and the Grand Prize winner, there must have been a volcano-lover on the HIPA judging panel...

I guess so. Volcanoes are fascinating places, so it's hard not to love them. The things that little kids often love are dinosaurs, whales, trains, volcanoes and construction. Volcanoes are in the category of 'cool' things.

Where else in the world do you go to see volcanoes?

I've been to Guatemala to see an eruption – that was the first volcano I saw. There are volcanic eruptions in Hawaii as well, where my family is, and I've been to volcanoes that weren't erupting at the time but are in the process of doing so, like Etna [in Sicily, where the Grand Prize-winning photograph of 'Power' was taken]. I'm actually in the process of making a film about volcanoes, a project spanning 20 years.

Can you give our readers three general tips for shooting volcanoes with a camera drone?

The most important thing is to be prepared physically. You have to take the right camera equipment and safety equipment, plus be aware of how volcanoes work. The priorities are safety, food and water. —————>

Above: Members of an Icelandic search and rescue team stand and watch as lava flows across the landscape.



If you're somewhere like Iceland, you'll also need to take warm clothes, rain gear and a gas mask – everything that you'd need to survive in those conditions.

The second thing would be to aim to capture as much variety of light as possible. I like the sunset and twilight time because you get to see lava glowing in the dark. Of course, working through the night means navigating yourself back in the darkness, so again, that comes down to your equipment and preparedness.

The third tip you need for capturing volcanoes is to move around and look at it from different angles, because you get such a different perspective when your viewpoint is constantly changing. If you move just 100 metres over, or a kilometre further back, you can get something totally different. As we saw with the winning photo ['Etna's Paroxysm' by Gianluca Gianferrari], getting as close to the volcano as possible isn't always the objective. You can do really interesting things, but essentially, it's just getting there and going in well prepared, but also being open to whatever comes because [volcanoes] are constantly changing and you never know what to expect.

Which other projects are you working on, and how will winning a HIPA award change things for you?

I have a number of projects going on. I run a non-profit that does nature conservation media, using photography and filmmaking to help people doing conservation work by providing them with free photos and videos that they can use. It's called Kogia. We also

run fellowships where we teach young people how to use cameras. We give them camera gear to go off into the world and come up with ideas to help the next generation of storytellers.

Then I've got some personal projects going on. I've tried to spend a lot of time just filming in my own backyard – local birds and wildlife, foxes and things like that – and some projects in more distant places. The wonderful thing about winning a HIPA award is that you meet a lot of fantastic people at the ceremony, and you can build those connections.

The prize money is also wonderful and allows me to go out and continue doing what I'm doing. Often, the thing that nature and wildlife photographers – and photographers in general – need more than anything is the money to go and do their projects. I put [any money I make] back into the work that I do. If I have money, then I'm going out, I'm filming more, photographing more, telling stories and trying to continue the work that I do. So the HIPA prize enables me to continue doing my work, and it invigorates me to keep pursuing and pushing the boundaries of what is possible. ●



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The theme of the 15th season of The Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum International Photography Award (HIPA) is 'Family' and the competition is open for entries until 31 May 2026. www.hipa.ae

Above: A man stands at the edge of an active volcano in the twilight, staring into the fires that come from deep within the earth.

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with Chris George

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- ☐ A Nikon D850
 - ☐ B Nikon D4
 - ☐ C Nikon D4s
 - ☐ D Nikon D5

- 2 Which of these manufacturers does not make a camera that only shoots in black and white?**
- ☐ A Ricoh
 - ☐ B Pentax
 - ☐ C Sony
 - ☐ D Leica

- 3 What is the magnification ratio of a lens that can give images that are up to half life size?**
- ☐ A 2
 - ☐ B 1:2
 - ☐ C 2:1
 - ☐ D 1/2

- 4 Which famous war photographer was pictured bathing in Hitler's bathtub in 1945?**
- ☐ A Lee Miller
 - ☐ B Robert Capa
 - ☐ C Margaret Bourke-White
 - ☐ D Dickey Chapelle

- 5 Which of these is not part of the exposure triangle?**
- ☐ A Shutter speed
 - ☐ B Aperture
 - ☐ C Focal length
 - ☐ D ISO

- 6 What is the new name for Kodak's range of Portra colour print films?**
- ☐ A Ektacolor
 - ☐ B Portracolor
 - ☐ C Kodacolor
 - ☐ D Maxcolor



Wikipedia

- 7 "For me, the subject of the picture is always more important than the picture." Who said this?**
- ☐ A Annie Leibovitz
 - ☐ B Alfred Eisenstaedt
 - ☐ C Garry Winogrand
 - ☐ D Diane Arbus

- 8 Which of these companies recently launched the first-ever 360° drone?**
- ☐ A DJI
 - ☐ B Antigravity
 - ☐ C Ricoh
 - ☐ D GoPro

- 9 Which of these is not a modifier for a studio flash head?**
- ☐ A Snoot
 - ☐ B Honeycomb
 - ☐ C Brolly
 - ☐ D Spigot

- 10 Which Hollywood actor is holding the camera in this photo?**
- ☐ A Al Pacino
 - ☐ B Gary Oldman
 - ☐ C Nicolas Cage
 - ☐ D Sean Penn



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