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Digital *The world's favorite photography magazine* Camera

Issue 308 June 2026

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✓ Setup ✓ Settings ✓ Kit tips



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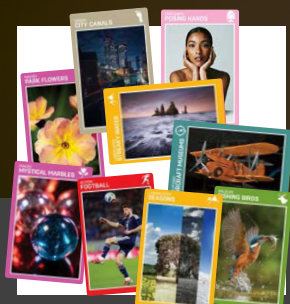
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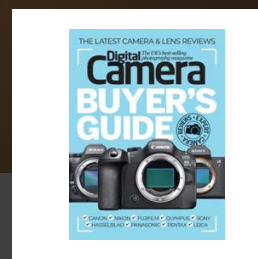
18 Actions and border effects



9 all-new photo tips cards



5 image editing tutorials



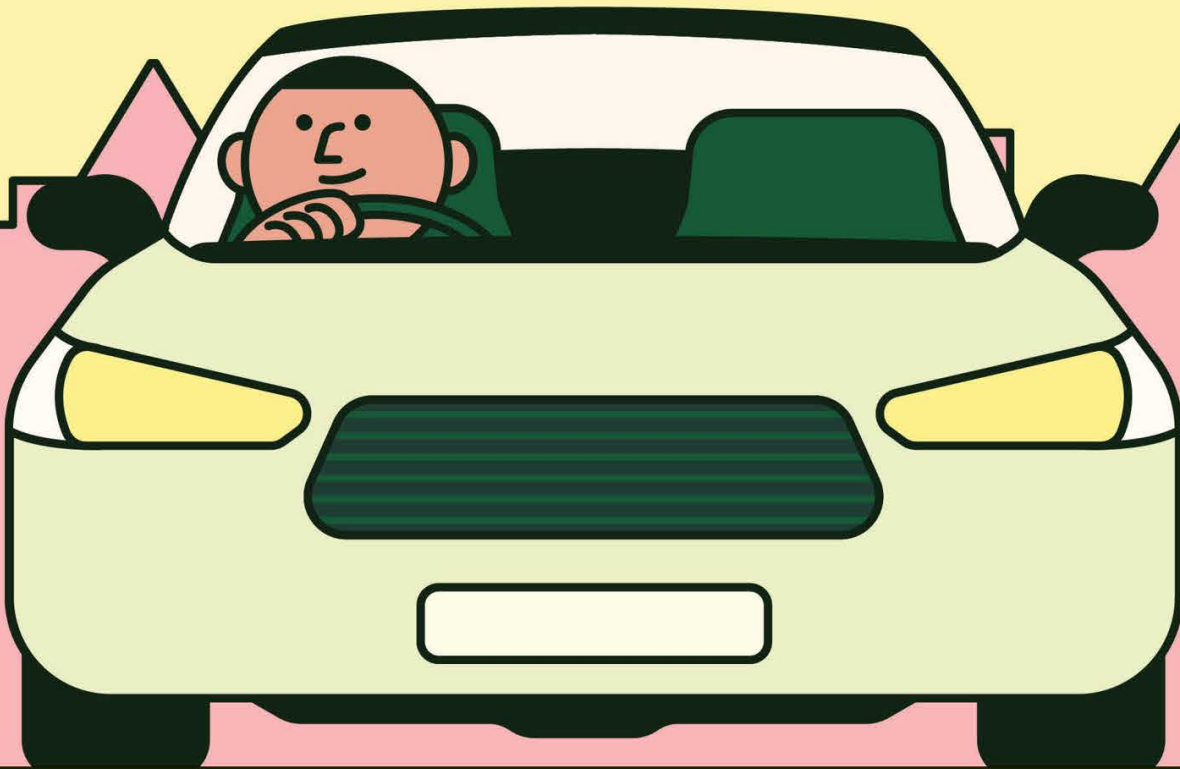
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Welcome

You don't have to venture far to be able to photograph birds, which is just as well given today's high fuel prices. There's plenty of avian action at home or in the local park, so we asked wildlife photographer Dan Mold to share his top tips for bird photography on a budget (p62). For 10 ways to become a better photographer, head to Photo Skills (p39) and glean some strategies for perfect photos of piers (p80). If you've ever wondered how hard it is to take decent football photos, then see June's Apprentice (p8) – it's an ideal warm-up for the FIFA World Cup. This month's kit reviews include Ricoh's GR IV HDF (p112) and a premium Nikkor telephoto (p118). Enjoy the issue.

Niall

Niall Hampton, editor
niall.hampton@futurenet.com

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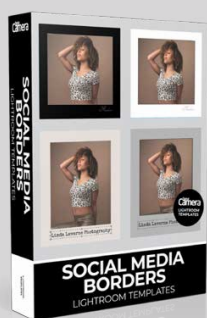


This issue's bonus gifts **Find out more on pages 6 and 110**



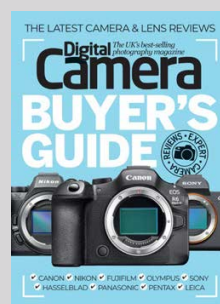
Nine all-new photo tips cards

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



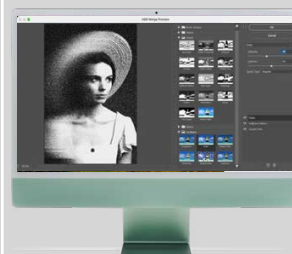
18 Actions and photo borders

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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This month's contributors

Will Cheung



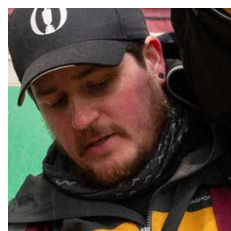
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Camera Clinic _ They're one of the many legacies from Victorian and Edwardian times, but have you paused to consider how to photograph a pleasure pier properly? Will Cheung has, and he shares his tips and insights



Dan Mold
Photographer and writer

The deputy editor of our former sister title, *PhotoPlus*, is also an accomplished wildlife photographer. Learn how to shoot better birds with Dan. **Page 62**



Raymond Davies
Sports photographer

The official club photographer of Motherwell FC, Raymond invited us to shoot a *Digital Camera Apprentice* at Fir Park Stadium. The action kicks off from **page 8**

Creo Arts / SWPA



Citlali Fabián
Photographer and visual artist

Her series, 'Stories of my Sisters', won the Creative category in the SWPA 2026 Pro Competition... and was crowned overall winner, too. Find out more on **page 120**

Steven Madow



Steven Madow
Photographer

Based in Miami, USA, Steven was well located to get close to the launch site of the Artemis II moon voyage. Get the track on his amazing close-up shot on **page 96**

Creo Arts / SWPA



Elle Leontiev
Photographer & videographer

The Sony World Photography Awards Open Competition rewards the best single images. The overall winner tells us about her first-placed shot. **Page 121**



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 80**



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The Apprentice _ A Scottish Premiership clash between Motherwell and Falkirk is this month's reader challenge – see what happened when newbie sports shooter Chantelle fared, under guidance from pro Raymond Davies



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Photo Skills _ **NEW!** We've given our photo projects section a makeover. It now features step-by-step techniques and in-depth image analysis to help make you a better photographer. Turn to page 39 to get started



Daniel Reficha

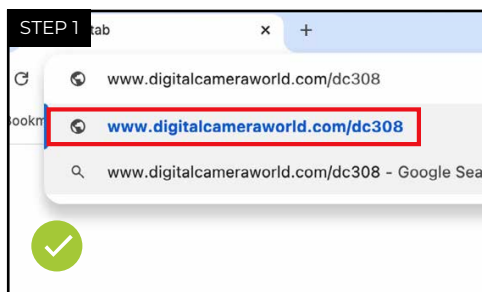
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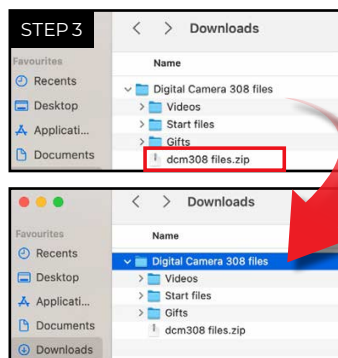
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Digital Camera APPRENTICE



The Apprentice

Name: Chantelle Cook

Camera: Canon EOS R50

Chantelle is currently studying photography at Edinburgh College. Having first used a digital camera as recently as 2023, she has quickly built up her range of photographic skills. Although she has a particular interest in commercial photography, her course and other artistic endeavours have encouraged her to broaden her repertoire.

Instagram: @letha_rangard

The Pro

Name: Raymond Davies

Camera: Canon EOS R5 Mark II

As a sports enthusiast since childhood, it's no surprise that Raymond now spends much of his time shooting football professionally. Based in Edinburgh, Raymond is the official club photographer for Motherwell FC, covering all matches and events. When he's not based at the club's home, Fir Park, he's shooting a variety of commercial work.

Instagram: @photo.radavies

www.raymonddaviesphotography.com

Pitch perfect

We invite a reader to the Fir Park Stadium touchline to capture a local clash in the Scottish Premiership, under the watchful eye of pro **Raymond Davies**

W

elcome to *Digital Camera Apprentice*, where we pair a reader with a professional photographer for a day of shooting together. This month, with a nod towards the FIFA World Cup 2026, where England and Scotland will go toe-to-toe with the top international teams, we're pitchside at the Scottish Premiership clash between Motherwell and Falkirk. Motherwell FC's official club photographer, Raymond Davies, will be mentoring *Digital Camera* reader Chantelle Cook, and today's brief is to capture the big match build-up and the best of the action as Motherwell face off against local rivals Falkirk. Despite the weather forecast predicting rain throughout, spirits are high and it promises to be an exciting shoot.

Meeting up at Fir Park stadium's press entrance, Raymond and Chantelle are already acquainted as they share a photography —▶



ABOVE: THE WARM UP

THE APPRENTICE: "Pre-match – a warm-up for the players, staff and photographers. Getting cameras ready to capture the moments."

THE PRO: "With the ball coming off a boot, the players' poses feel dynamic and full of movement. Chantelle has captured a good warm-up shot."



Raymond encourages Chantelle to shoot around events, picking out smaller moments and details.



SUPER
SHOT #1

course in Edinburgh – even as a professional, Raymond is continuously honing his skills. It also means that no ice-breaking is needed this morning, and we head straight to the pitchside for a quick orientation tour from Raymond. Having been Motherwell's official club photographer for the past couple of seasons, he's intimately familiar with the ground and knows all the best spots from which to capture action images.

As we make our way around the pitch, Raymond reminds us that composition is just as important in sports photography as in any other genre, something that can be easily forgotten in the heat of the moment, as a fixation on the unfolding action sets in. Backgrounds are of particular importance, he tells Chantelle, as large blocks of colour can make or break the impact of the subject. Equally, Raymond says an empty background is also something she ought to avoid.



Our pro's kit Canon EOS R5 Mk II

Raymond uses a pair of Canon EOS R5 Mark II bodies, equipped with BG-R20 battery grips for additional battery power throughout a game. For the match today, he is using three lenses: the Canon RF 24-70mm F2.8L IS USM for wide and reportage shots, the RF 70-200mm F2.8L IS USM for mid-range action, and an EF 400mm f/2.8L IS II USM super-telephoto. This is adapted for the RF mount, and Raymond uses it for action shots near the opposite goal. www.canon.co.uk

"The aim is to get a clean background as much as possible," he says. "However, I try to avoid empty stands and look for colour to shoot the players against. Where you choose to stand is going to affect this a lot. When you're shooting a really busy stadium, the best shots are almost always with spectators behind the players. But you just have to work around what you have and be mindful of how you frame your shots."

Access all areas

Raymond then explains the order of the day and the best places to stand as the match unfolds. Access is a lot more open than expected, and the photographers have plenty of freedom regarding where they can shoot from. Raymond encourages Chantelle to move around the pitch to find the best angles, but advises that she tries not to walk too far when the ball is in play to avoid distracting the professionals on the pitch.

The next stop is the Press Room, where photographers and journalists can find Wi-Fi, power outlets, workspace to edit images, and most critically, a supply of tea and coffee. As Raymond prepares his gear for the shoot, *Digital Camera* takes the opportunity to ask our apprentice what she hopes to get out of the day and the techniques she hopes to learn.

"I'm hoping to figure out how to approach different styles of shots. In particular, —————>

Football photos 101

Things to consider for a successful and enjoyable first football shoot



1 Arrive early

Give yourself plenty of time to get checked in, set up your gear and scout the best shooting spots at both ends of the pitch. Choosing these early prevents the need to move too much once the game is in full swing.



2 Change your perspective

Make sure you capture shots that tell a story and bring the viewer as close to the action as you can. Place the camera low down to exaggerate perspective, to give your photos a more immersive feel.



3 Label your gear

With many pro photographers around, many using the same cameras and lenses, make sure you can identify your gear to avoid confusion. It's better to have two camera bodies active so you don't have to change lenses mid-play.

Technique assessment

Top tips for setting up autofocus for rapid-fire action shots



1 Set the subject

Modern cameras have myriad subject-detection AF modes, so make sure yours is set up for the correct subject. For football images, this will probably be people or athletes, depending on the specific camera make and model that you are using.



2 Adjust AF sensitivity

Set Servo or Continuous AF mode so you don't have to refocus for each shot. Then, turn down the sensitivity of your camera to objects passing between the lens and subject, which is common during a match and can cause misfocusing.



3 Use lens function buttons

Use AF Stop buttons to pause autofocus during play. This is useful if there's a risk of focus racking to the background or the subject is going to remain at the current focus distance, increasing your 'hit rate'.



The warm-ups are a chance for photographers to prepare for the game, as well as the players.

RIGHT: JOSTLING

THE APPRENTICE: "Individual battles develop during a match, and I wanted to capture these as it mimics the team's battle for league positions."

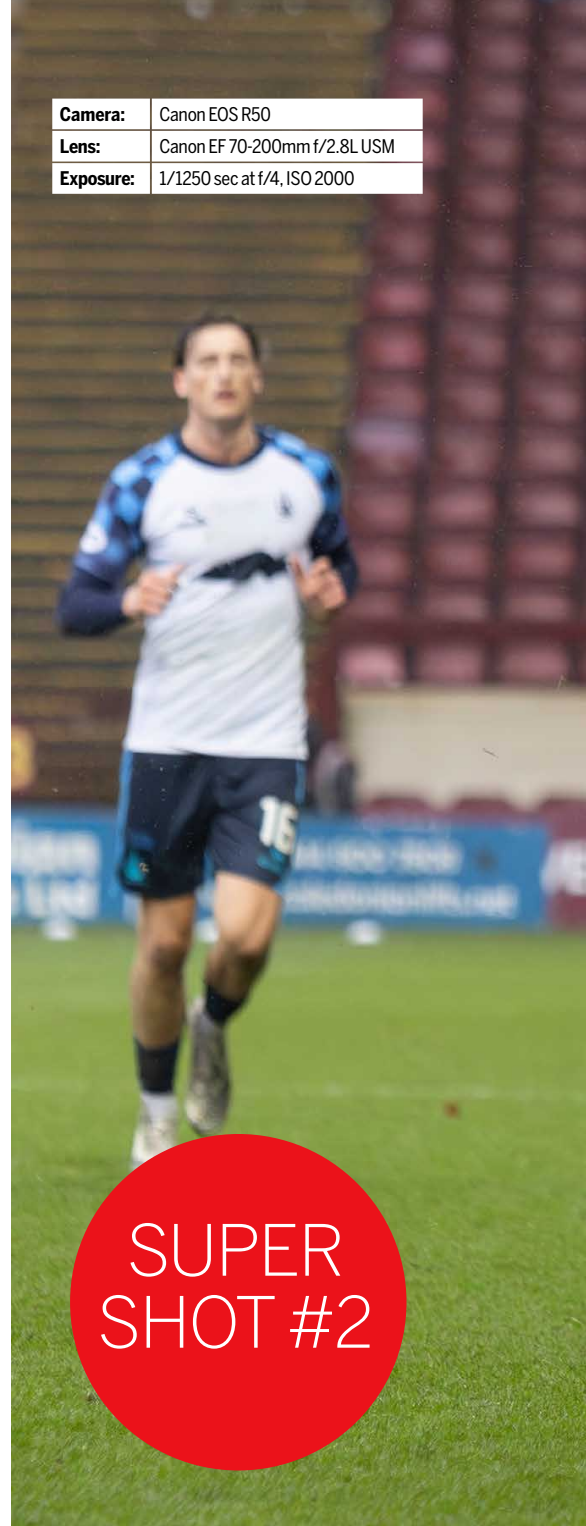
THE PRO: "Player interaction is critical for match action shots. The interlocking arms and ball close by are key to making this shot work."

I'm keen to learn how to capture dramatic images of football," she says. "I roughly know how it's done – I understand the basics – but I've never actually tried it before. So I'll enjoy learning more about the exact shutter speeds to choose and put them into practice!"

It's great that Chantelle understands the importance of knowing the game and that the required techniques will differ from one sport to another. Her main photographic interests are in commercial imagery – fashion and portraiture, in particular – so sport is quite the departure from her comfort zone. So why has she chosen today to branch out?

"I am drawn to the excitement of sports photography; you never know exactly what's going to happen next. You're right in front of the action pitchside. It's the exact opposite of studio-based photography, where everything is planned," she says. With that, it's time to head out and start shooting. Raymond leads the way to the main entrance to Fir Park, where a gathering of journalists and fans has amassed to see the players arrive. He gets to work capturing standout moments

Camera:	Canon EOS R50
Lens:	Canon EF 70-200mm f/2.8L USM
Exposure:	1/1250 sec at f/4, ISO 2000



of excitement and connection between each player and their followers, using a standard 24-70mm 'trinity' lens for some dynamic low-level perspectives.

These aren't the action-packed sports images that we're used to seeing, but as the club photographer, it's Raymond's job to shoot around the events of the day and pick out lots of smaller moments and details, and he encourages Chantelle to do the same. In particular, he advises that she look out for interactions between the team mascots and young fans who will come together for photo ops later in the morning.

Safety shots

With a busy day ahead, it's important to capture some reliable, classic images early on. The warm-ups provide a good opportunity



for us to prepare for the game as much as the players. Before kick-off, Raymond and Chantelle fine-tune their compositions from their chosen first shooting position, keeping an eye on the background as discussed. Then, in no time at all, the stands fill with spectators and the first half begins. While Raymond is able to put his 400mm lens to work, Chantelle is using a 70-200mm zoom. This means her maximum equivalent focal length (EFL) is around 320mm when paired with the APS-C format sensor of her Canon EOS R50 camera, which applies a 1.6x crop factor. The difference is not as pronounced as if she had been using a full-frame body, but ———→

A pause in action during the half-time break gives apprentice Chantelle and pro Raymond time to review and edit some of their captures.



The Apprentice with Raymond Davies



Raymond suggests lowering the camera elevation and using different perspectives to capture views that the spectators don't usually get to see.



With her Canon EOS R50 having a restricted range of programmable setting presets, Chantelle has to predict when she'll need to adjust her exposure.

nevertheless, Chantelle compensates by focusing on the action at this end of the pitch.

When watching football on a television, or even from the stands, it's not possible to get a true sense of the speed with which the players run and change direction. This kind of action calls on the photographer's timing and rapid reactions, but also the behaviour of the camera. Raymond explains that since the EOS R50 doesn't have the same level of customisation as his EOS R5 Mark II, nor the same range of programmable setting presets, Chantelle will have to work harder to predict when she'll need to adjust her exposure. When vastly different settings are required, Raymond will often save a preset combination

Camera tech People priority

Raymond shoots the same players regularly, so by saving their faces to his EOS R5 Mk II's face priority list, he can ensure that the AF system works with him to select important subjects, reducing instances of missed shots.



Chantelle compensates for her 70-200mm zoom by focusing on the action at the near end of the pitch.

of shutter speed, f-stop, and ISO and assign it to one of his camera's custom buttons.

"For panning shots, when I need a longer shutter speed, I have a preset saved that I can recall using the Star button on my EOS R5 Mark II. This is one of my least-used buttons otherwise, so by re-assigning this, it speeds up my workflow. I can instantly recall the settings, capture a panning shot and switch back to a longer shutter speed."

As a workaround for Chantelle, Raymond suggests using Manual mode for the majority of her shots, and setting a longer shutter speed for panning in Tv (Shutter Priority) mode. This will allow her to at least recall some settings at the turn of the camera's mode dial, saving a few precious seconds.

Highs and lows

The levels of ambient light on the field can be deceptively low, so raising the ISO is often unavoidable for pitchside photographers. But how low can Raymond let his shutter speed fall before his shots lose detail?

"My absolute minimum shutter speed is usually 1/1000 sec, but where possible, I aim for 1/1600 sec. With a higher megapixel camera, the small pixels are unforgiving for showing up motion blur, so I'll err on the side of the faster shutter speed." —>



Expert insight Stabiliser modes

Stabilisation is extremely handy for reducing camera shake, even at higher shutter speeds. However, when panning the camera or if using a tripod, select the correct IS mode so the lens doesn't try to correct intentional or absent movements.

RIGHT: BEHIND THE MASK

THE APPRENTICE: "Capturing moments like these with added story elements – the player's mask – can be difficult. I'm very happy I caught this."

THE PRO: "Lukas only wore his mask a couple of times and Chantelle captured a great shot of him heading the ball wearing it. A great story shot."

SUPER SHOT #3



Camera:	Canon EOS R50
Lens:	Canon EF 70-200mm f/2.8L USM
Exposure:	1/2000 sec at f/4, ISO 2000

SUPER SHOT #4



Camera:	Canon EOS R50
Lens:	Canon EF 70-200mm f/2.8L USM
Exposure:	1/2000 sec at f/4, ISO 2000

ABOVE: RIVALRIES

THE APPRENTICE: "There are many interactions between defender and attacker. Here, the defender is attacking and the attacker is defending."

THE PRO: "Context matters in photography and Chantelle has included the coaches looking on, blurred just enough not to be distracting."

There's a roar from the noisy contingent of travelling fans in one corner of the ground as Falkirk capitalise on a defensive error and the ball ends up in the back of the net. It's not going to plan for Motherwell so far, and the score stands at 2-1 to the visitors. Chantelle's shots are already full of action, and Raymond gives some pointers on how lowering the camera elevation can push the excitement further using perspective, capturing a view the spectators will never see. It also makes the players seem larger than life in the frame.

Camera tech Pre-continuous shooting

This is a relatively new camera feature that starts capturing images when the shutter is half-pressed, covering any action up to around 0.5 seconds before the main play. Enable this if you find you're just missing critical moments.



Half-time gives Raymond and Chantelle some time to review their images and for Raymond to edit some of his files. In sports photography, this all has to happen quickly, so does he opt for jpeg for maximum speed, or does he favour raw format? "For this type of shoot, I always capture raw files. It gives me

the flexibility I need during editing. Sometimes, when you need an extremely rapid turnaround, like when shooting for an agency, you'd set it up to send jpegs straight from the camera." This is also when the mascots emerge and engage with a selection of very young future footballers – a perfect

Pro portfolio

Raymond Davies



Hibernian v Motherwell

"As the club photographer for Motherwell, I capture all matchday moments, from player arrivals to post-match celebrations. These tell the story of the day, not just the action. I was previously the club photographer for Stenhousemuir FC during the 23/24 season."



Motherwell v St Mirren

Raymond uses colour to direct the viewer's attention. This image, taken at a match between Motherwell and St Mirren, shows that, even in low-contrast settings, bright colour creates a suitable backdrop for the subject or gives the scene direction.



Scotland v Greece

Successful football photography is all about understanding the game and predicting when the action will take place. "I've been experimenting with my camera's advanced AF modes. They've been useful in some cases, but I'm used to controlling it myself!"



One advantage of the persistent rain during the match is that the falling raindrops break up the negative space around the players and add depth, something our Apprentice is quick to notice and capture.



Raymond aims for a shutter speed of 1/1600 sec. "With a higher megapixel camera, the small pixels are unforgiving for showing motion blur," he says.

opportunity to capture some PR-worthy lifestyle images. Although Chantelle only has her 70-200mm lens with her, Raymond demonstrates how using a wide-angle lens can really stretch perspective and capture more of an environmental feel to these informal portraits. In accordance with football's eighth Law, the teams change ends for the second half, providing our photographers with the opportunity to switch up the background. As Raymond and Chantelle get back to work, he explains how the Auto ISO feature fits into his repertoire.

"I work in Manual all the time, so I have as much control as possible over my settings. However, sometimes, when we have strong sunlight, there can be three to five stops of exposure difference between the sun and shade. This makes correctly exposing players at each end of the pitch tricky, and Auto ISO can compensate much quicker."

At that moment, the heavens open, and around us, photographers quickly reach for their rain covers. The advantage of the rain is that the falling raindrops break up the negative space around the players and add depth, which Chantelle is quick to notice and



Expert insight

Focus Preset

Some sports lenses also feature a Focus Preset button. Raymond explains how this immediately pulls focus to a preset distance where he knows players are going to be, such as next to the goal or corner, speeding up his focusing process.



Our pro shoots raw files for more flexibility during editing. However, if a more rapid turnaround is needed, he sends jpegs straight from the camera.

capture. Falkirk get the upper hand, converting a penalty to take the score to 3-1, before Motherwell briefly threaten a fightback with a late second goal. However, the final whistle ends any hope the home team had of earning a point and the anguished expressions of the supporters make —————>

Camera skills Manual exposure

Both Raymond and Chantelle were using Manual exposure mode throughout the day, as this gave them total control over each setting. Although contrast was quite low today, on a sunnier afternoon, M mode would also prevent unexpected shutter speed changes.



RIGHT: 3v1 OR 1v3

THE APPRENTICE: "One situation, many potential outcomes. A foul? Beat them all? A penalty decision? It's a moment you don't want to miss."

THE PRO: "Moments of action matter a lot, and here Chantelle has caught Said just before he jinks the ball past Tait. A lovely group action shot."

for sad viewing – but excellent candid photos. Some photographers aren't shy about voicing their opinions on the game, but ever the professional, *Digital Camera* remains neutral.

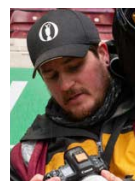
The match might be over, but Raymond's work is far from complete. He still has to capture some official portraits and post-game breakdowns. We head back to the press room, now abuzz with rattling keyboards and the hiss of an overworked kettle. We observe a series of rapid-fire press conferences with Motherwell's Danish manager, Jens Berthel Askou and selected players, although photography and video are more tightly controlled here. For Chantelle, it's a post-match interview of another type, as we're keen to hear what she thought of the day.

"Despite the weather, I really enjoyed it," she says. And how did her kit perform? "I like the R50 because it's so small and portable. I also like how the menu system is easy to use. I borrowed the lens from my college store, and I'm thinking I might get one myself." People often talk of the sports photography 'bug', and if her images and excited expression are to be believed, as we all enjoy a well-deserved hot drink, it seems Chantelle may have caught it today. ●



Apprentice verdict

"I enjoyed being so close to the action and feeling, hearing and seeing the passion of the crowd. I loved learning how to quickly switch settings. As a fan of various sports, I'm hoping to use what I learned today in other situations."



Pro verdict

"I enjoyed working with Chantelle. Sport photography is a tough industry, so it's nice to see a keen photographer add some images from a high-profile game to her portfolio. I hope she enjoyed the match and came away with a few tips to help her in future."

SHOT
OF THE
DAY!



Camera:	Canon EOS R50
Lens:	Canon EF70-200mm f/2.8L USM
Exposure:	1/1000 sec at f/4, ISO 2000

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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 24
03	Readers' letters	page 26
04	The Art of Seeing	page 28



1 FUJIFILM X-E5
"Portable design without sacrificing image quality."



2 NIKON Z5 II
"Flagship-level capabilities in an entry-level system."



3 SONY A7 V
"Redefines mirrorless camera excellence."



4 CANON EOS R6 MARK III
"High appeal to shooters in a variety of scenarios."



5 RICOH GR IV
"Exceptional image quality in a truly pocketable form."



6 LEICA M EV1
"Classic Leica design and contemporary capabilities."



7 SONY RX1R III
"Ideal for travel, street and documentary photography."

TIPA crowns its 2026 winners

Over 40 different awards were bestowed on last year's best photo products, as judged by 24 imaging magazines and websites, including *Digital Camera*

Featuring 12 categories for cameras and 11 for lenses, plus several further categories for accessories, services and technology, the TIPA Awards recognises excellence in innovation across the global imaging industry. Canon, Nikon and Sony featured prominently, with 10 awards between them, while Sigma also had another good year.

Headline wins included the **Canon EOS R6 Mark III** (Best Hybrid Full-Frame Camera), **Sony A7 V** (Best Full-Frame Expert Camera), **Nikon Z5 II** (Best Full-Frame Advanced Camera) and **Fujifilm X-E5** (Best APS-C Camera). Other cameras to receive recognition were the **Sony RX1R III** (Best Professional Fixed Lens Camera), **Ricoh GR IV** (Best APS-C Compact Camera), **Leica M EV1** (Best Rangefinder-Style Camera), **Hasselblad X2D II 100C** (Best Medium Format Camera) and **Canon PowerShot V1** (Best Content Creator Camera).

Optical excellence was rewarded, too, with three gongs for Sigma: **Sigma 35mm**

F1.2 DG II Art (Best Full-Frame Wide-Angle Prime Lens), **Sigma 200mm F2 DG OS Sport** (Best Full-Frame Telephoto Prime Lens), and **Sigma 20-200mm F3.5-6.3 DG Contemporary** (Best Full-Frame Superzoom Lens). Sony and Tamron bagged two wins apiece, for the **Sony FE 50-150mm F2 GM** (Best Full-Frame Telephoto Zoom Lens) and **Sony FE 100mm F2.8 Macro GM OSS** (Best Macro Lens), **Tamron 16-30mm F/2.8 Di III VXD G2** (Best Full-Frame Wide Angle Zoom Lens), and **Tamron 35-100mm F/2.8 Di III VXD** (Best Full-Frame Travel Lens).

In other categories, there were wins for the **Manfrotto One Photo tripod** (Best Tripod), **Affinity by Canva** (Best Expert Photo Editing Software), **DxO PhotoLab 9** (Best RAW Processing Software), **Excire** (Best Photo Management Software) and **CEWE Photobook on Photographic Paper with Memento Pocket** (Best Photo Book).

The TIPA World Awards is hosted by the Technical Image Press Association,



8 SIGMA 200MM F2 DG OS S
"AF tracking is precise, rapid and near-silent, with an amazing 6.5 stops of image stabilisation."

9 SONY FE 100MM F2.8 MACRO GM OSS
"A lens that redefines excellence in macro and portrait photography."

10 NIKKOR Z 24-70MM F/2.8 S II
"Overall, the lens provides outstanding sharpness, edge-to-edge clarity and beautiful background separation."

a global network of imaging industry publications, of which *Digital Camera* magazine and digitalcameraworld.com are proud members. To view the full list of winners, visit the TIPA website.

Find out more at: www.tipa.com



SIGMA

ART
35mm F1.4 DG II



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Focal point

Rounding up what's new and exciting this month



Lewis Buncher / EPA 2025

Event Photography Awards is open for entries until 10 June. Enter now!

Photos taken during 2025 by professional and amateur photographers are eligible. The EPA has 18 categories (see Hotshots, issue 297) and, for the first time, a special Black & White prize will be awarded. www.eventphotographyawards.com; £25 (for a set of up to five photos)

Get 25% off Photography Weekends Britain book

Penned by the award-winning travel writer and photographer William Gray, it's the first photography location guidebook to cover England, Wales and Scotland in a single title, says publisher Bradt Guides. To get a 25 per cent discount on the £18.99 cover price, go to: www.bit.ly/dcm308_weekends

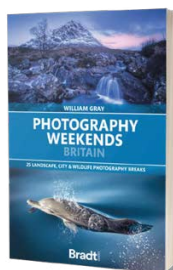
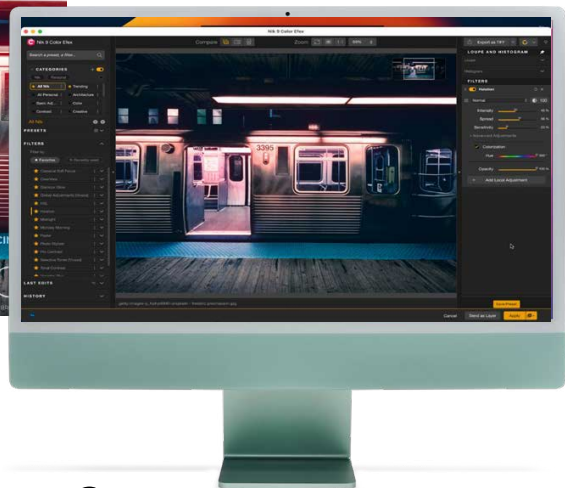
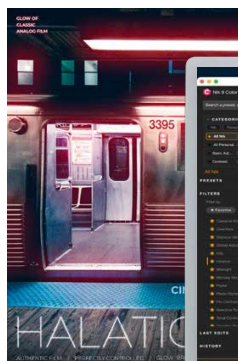
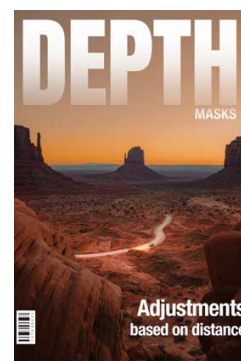
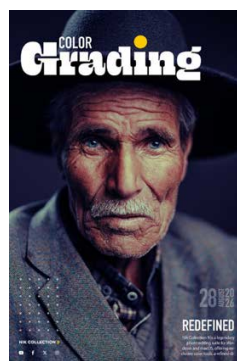


Photo 24 London 26 charity event to take place on 20-21 June

Sign up for this 24-hour photography marathon that's based around the summer solstice. Take part in photo walks, challenges and workshops, and see if you can win prizes from Fujifilm and DxO! www.thumbsup.photography; free



NIK COLLECTION 9



One major change is the introduction of AI-powered Depth Masks, allowing users to target adjustments based on distance.

DxO Nik Collection 9

The brand's 'most ambitious' update to its plug-ins suite boasts AI-powered masks, an all-new colour-grading tool for Nik Color Efex, new creative filters and more

With AI-powered masking, overhauled colour grading and new creative filters headlining the new features, DxO claims that Nik Collection 9 is the 'biggest-ever update' to the plug-ins suite. The main change is the introduction of DxO's AI-powered Depth Masks, which enable users to target adjustments based on distance or depth, and also allow the tweaking of depth masks via various sliders. Color Efex's colour grading is overhauled, while Nik Color Efex and Nik Analog Efex also grant access to three new creative filters: Halation, Chromatic Shift and

Glass Effect. Plus, both Nik Color Efex and Nik Analog Efex now include Blending Modes, providing access to 18 different modes including Darken, Multiply and Color.

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£80/\$100 (upgrade from Nik 7 or 8)



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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.



Matthew Richards

The ideal holiday lens

Q I've read that 'superzoom' lenses can often be a poor compromise, sacrificing some image quality for an extensive zoom range. Would a superzoom still be a good lens to take on holiday?

Jeanette Barclay

A I'm glad to see that I'm not the only one planning ahead and looking forward to the summer holidays! However, you're right to say that superzoom lenses, typically those with a 10x zoom range or more, have historically had a bad press. Their sharpness tended to be lacklustre, and there was often

horrible barrel distortion at the short end of the zoom range. But times have changed. Most current superzoom lenses designed for mirrorless cameras make the most of the latest advances in design and manufacturing. The result is that they're capable of excellent image quality and all-round performance. Levels of sharpness have come on leaps and bounds, and while distortion may still be a problem, that can be true even of prime lenses designed for mirrorless cameras, which also generally rely on automatic in-camera corrections. I recently used a Nikon Z 24-200mm f/4-6.3 VR for a beach wedding, and I was happy with all of the results – as were the bride and groom, thankfully.

horrible barrel distortion at the short end of the zoom range. But times have changed.

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A two-second delay after the camera's reflex mirror flips up should be sufficient for vibrations to dissipate, which is ideal for macro shots.

Get a sharper image

Q I've inherited a Canon EOS 70D and have been trying my hand at some macro photography. However, despite using a tripod, most of my shots have come out a bit blurred. Can you help?

Tom Marten

A The most likely culprit is 'mirror bounce', where the action of the camera's reflex mirror flipping up before the exposure unsettles the camera and causes vibrations that degrade sharpness. Try selecting the Mirror Lock-Up function that's available in one of the shooting menus of most Canon EOS DSLRs, and use this in conjunction with a two-second self-timer delay. The mirror will flip up two seconds before the shot is taken, giving the camera a chance to settle.

DSLR or mirrorless?

Q I want to upgrade to full-frame, mostly for wildlife and landscapes, but can't decide between the Nikon D850, Z 7 or Z 7II. Which would you go for?

Stephen Maybank

A I cut my photographic teeth on 35mm SLRs as a teenager, and moved on to DSLRs in 2004. I had no interest in mirrorless cameras until fairly recently, and would have recommended a D850 without hesitation, as I personally think it's the best DSLR ever made. However, the Nikon Z 7 changed my mind, and the newer Z 7II is even better.

Nikon's Z-system has a wider lens flange that's positioned closer to the image sensor, enabling greater freedom in lens design. Coupled with in-body image stabilisation, image quality is consistently fabulous and the only real wins for the D850 are its relatively battleship build quality and huge 1,840-shot battery life.

The Z 7II beats the original Z 7, with better autofocus tracking, dual processors, dual card slots, a faster burst rate and enhanced 4K video.



Second-hand superstar

Full 1.0x macro magnification comes with a smart range of features in this Sigma lens

Q I'm after a good, full-frame compatible macro lens to use with my DSLR, preferably with optical stabilisation. I'm not fussed whether it's an 'own-brand' lens or not. What would you recommend?

Mark Bayliss

A **Matthew recommends...**
Sigma Macro 105mm f/2.8 EX DG OS HSM

One of the last survivors of Sigma's pre-global vision line-up, this lens has stood the test of time



I've enjoyed this lens over the years, first on Nikon DSLRs, and now on Z-system mirrorless cameras, via an FTZ mount adapter.

Released (year): 2011
Price new: £359/\$469
'Excellent' £229/\$399
'Good' £209/\$359

Made in Canon EF, Nikon F, Sigma and Sony/Minolta A-mount options, this Sigma lens delivers full 1.0x magnification at its closest focus distance of 31.2cm.

It enables huge enlargements of tiny bugs and other small objects, revealing almost microscopic levels of detail. Not just for close-ups, the lens also works perfectly as a telephoto prime, with its f/2.8 aperture rating and four-stop optical stabiliser. On a full-frame camera body, the focal length is a good fit for portraiture. On an APS-C format body, the crop factor gives an effective focal length of 157.5mm, which can be useful for shooting sports and wildlife, aided by the fast and whisper-quiet ring-type ultrasonic autofocus system.

1 Internal focus
With an internal focus mechanism, the physical length doesn't extend at shorter focus distances, so the front end doesn't encroach on the subject.

2 Optical stabilisation
The four-stop optical stabiliser comes with two switchable modes: one for static shooting and the other for panning.

3 Autofocus range limiter
Given the long focus range, the limiter switch locks distances either side of 45cm, which avoids hunting in tricky conditions.

Groups/elements: 16/11
Full-frame compatible: Yes
Effective focal length (APS-C): 157.5mm
Min focus distance: 0.31m
Maximum magnification: 1.0x
Autofocus: Ring-type ultrasonic
Diaphragm blades: 9
Filter size: 62mm
Dimensions (L x D): 126 x 78mm
Weight: 725g

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...

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Goran Anastasovski



Issue 90 of *Digital Camera* began Goran's journey in 2009. He has since gone on to have work published by leading magazines and newspapers including *National Geographic*, *Forbes* and *The Times*.

Star letter: **DC** changed my life

My name is Goran Anastasovski, a wildlife and documentary photographer from North Macedonia. I'm writing to you not just to share my work, but also to say 'thank you'.

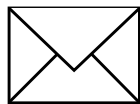
Back in October 2009, one of my photographs was published in *Digital Camera*'s Hotshots section. At that time, I was still at the beginning of my journey. I had started photography in 2006, but like many beginners, I was uncertain, searching for direction and motivation. Seeing my photo published in *Digital Camera* changed everything. That moment gave me belief, confidence and a sense that what I was doing truly mattered. I often say that if it weren't for your publication, I might not have continued with photography in the way I did.

Since then, my work has been featured in international media such as CNN, *National Geographic*, *Forbes*, *The Times*, *Daily Mail*, *The Telegraph* and many others. My images have reached millions of people worldwide, often telling emotional and powerful stories about animals and their connection with humans. I wanted to share this with you because sometimes a single opportunity can shape an entire life and career.

Goran Anastasovski, by email

Instagram: @gorananastasovskiphoto

Digital Camera says: That's fantastic news, Goran, and we're glad we helped. Seeing your work in print for the first time is always special, and even better that it led to greater things.



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



Kyle Rudderow

@kyle_rudderow

Nikon photographer from Pennsylvania, USA, with an amazing collection of visually stunning landscapes, astrophotography and wildlife captures.

Michael Duckworth

@_mikey_dee_

Brilliant black and white street and urban photography shot mainly around the UK.

Breeda Kiely Morgan

@breeda_kiely_morgan

Fine art, landscape, travel and nature photographer from Ireland, with beautiful landscape and wildlife scenes. **Read about Breeda's amazing swan photo on page 35**

Steven Madow

@stevenmadow

Orlando-based photographer, with stunning captures of rocket trails, NASA rocket launches and other images from his home state of Florida. **See Steven's Shot of the Month from the Artemis II launch on page 96**

Ashleigh Summerhayes

@asummerhayesphotographyuk

Photographer from Cornwall, UK, who takes magical macro and landscape captures, showcasing the beauty of Cornwall with her Canon EOS R8.

NEXT ISSUE: Water animals, photo filters, brutalist buildings, using props and more, in the Photo Skills section.



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Carina Brooker



Zooming tulips

After reading about blooming zoombursts in Spring 2026's Camera Clinic (issue 306), I was inspired to try the zoom burst with tulips. I took these photographs during a visit to Tulleys Farm near Crawley, West Sussex. It was a bright, sunny day, which made capturing the tulips in this way difficult, as the longer shutter speed was making the tulips look overexposed.

Fortunately, the sun disappeared behind the clouds, so I took the opportunity to try again, this time with much better results.

I use a Sony A7 III camera, and on that particular day, my lens was a Sony FE



70-200mm F4 Macro G OSS II. I love taking photos of anything and everything from flowers and wildlife to the Red Arrows, steam trains, light trails, the moon and sunrises. I love learning new things, especially where my camera is concerned.

Carina Brooker, by email

Instagram: [@cb_photography50](https://www.instagram.com/cb_photography50)

Digital Camera says: Thanks for these zoomburst images – great work! The one with the more pronounced zoom (left) is dramatic, but perhaps you could have centred it on one tulip, such as the pink one in the other shot.



Mad for marbles

Thank you for the project about photographing marbles in the May magazine (issue 307). It gave me a decent project to attempt for the tabletop photography evening at Parkwood Camera Club in Rainham, Kent. The marbles date back to my primary school days in the 1950s and were in a box in my loft.

I placed the marbles on a reflective freeze pack and set up a main light from the side. My camera is a Nikon D7100 and, after little success with my go-to Tamron 16-300mm macro lens, I borrowed a Nikon AF Micro-Nikkor 60mm f/2.8D lens from a colleague. My attempts aren't quite as good as the ones you produced, but I'm pleased with them.

Jeff Thomas, by email **Instagram:** [@jeffjt1950](https://www.instagram.com/jeffjt1950)



Jeff Thomas

Digital Camera says: Good work there, Jeff, and we're pleased that you were inspired by our Photo Skills project. The image with the three marbles (above, right) is as good as anything we shot, and the focus on the main marble and the detail in the bubbles are both spot on.



Benedict Brain

www.benedictbrain.com

Camera: Fujifilm GFX 100RF with 35mm fixed lens (full-frame equivalent: 28mm)

Exposure: 1/1000 sec at f/7.1, ISO 250

www.benedictbrain.com

Flash lifts a Welsh conifer from its mountain backdrop on the Watkin Path, Eryri, April 2026.

friend from my Derby days in the 1990s, when we studied photography together. Tim's talk was a masterclass in the art of looking sideways at a landscape that you think you know well. By morning, the group was scattered along the path, each of us trying to find our own version of this awe-inspiring landscape, thankful that the rain had given us a break.

For me, the perfect workshop is when I see everyone photographing something different; their own response to the place rather than the instructor's. Some participants were crouched in the grass, and one was photographing a reflection in a puddle. I was seduced by this rather magnificent conifer tree. From underneath, it created an unusual foreground, leaving the famous Welsh mountains as something glimpsed rather than shown.

My old tutor, John Blakemore, another Derby touchstone, spent years photographing trees and the landscape. His pictures taught me that you don't have to accept the conventional landscape view; that a photograph of the landscape can be a metaphor for something else and resonate in a variety of ways. Likewise, Richard Misrach, working in the American desert, in his excellent book, *On Landscape and Meaning*, showed me how bringing your own light into a scene can shift the dynamic, a technique I have been embracing for years now.

Blakemore, Williams and Misrach were somewhere in mind when I reached for my Godox flashgun and used it to lift the branches out of silhouette and into something slightly surreal. There's something liberating about ignoring the postcard vista. ●

The art of seeing

On a 'Mountains and Metaphors' retreat in North Wales, **Benedict Brain** ignores the panorama and lets a conifer steal the scene

I was running my 'Mountains and Metaphors' retreat in Eryri (Snowdonia), and we'd spent the morning on the Watkin Path trying to ignore the obvious picture. Most photographers who walk

in these mountains come back with some version of the same panorama. However, we were after something else.

A nudge in that direction had come the night before, from Tim Williams, a North Welsh photographer and an old

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1 **'Dog Walker in the Fog'**
by Sean Corlett

"I headed to my local forest for a walk, knowing that the fog would mean some atmospheric shots. While I was walking through the trees on the fire track, I noticed a woman and her dog approaching me and managed to fire off a couple of frames. I was certainly in the right place at the right time!"

Instagram: @seansshots_ion

Digital Camera says: Having the figure at the end of the track provides scale and a focal point, while the fog and light make for a magical atmosphere.

2

'After Watch' by Curtis Cain

"Capturing this image presented several challenges. The bright morning sunlight created harsh highlights, while the shadows from the surrounding trees added complexity to the scene. Achieving the right colour balance to manage these contrasts, while preserving the detail and beauty of the common buzzard, required careful adjustment and precision."

Instagram: @cphotography97_

Digital Camera says: This capture is almost perfect – a defiant pose with superb detail and background lighting.

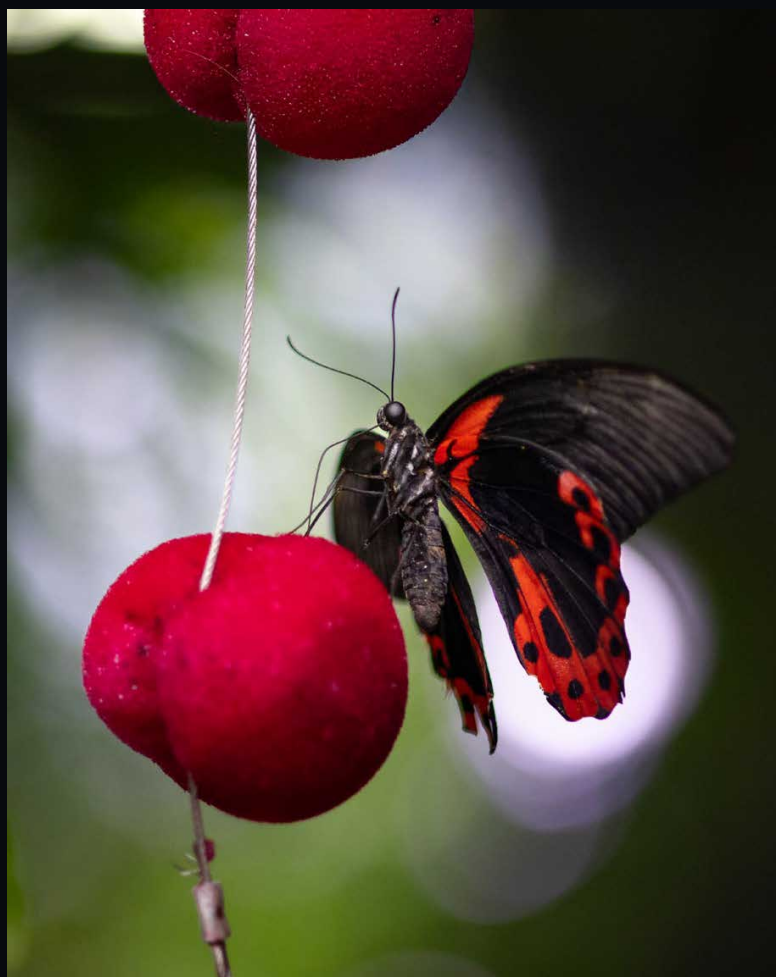




3 'Nice Carnival' by Tamas Simonyi

"The Nice Carnival in France is not as widely known as the Rio or Venice carnivals, yet it is equally spectacular. There are plenty of ancillary events, including concerts, exhibitions and a carnival village that caters for families. A fireworks display rounds off the carnival, followed by the public swim in the sea on the first day of March. The photos from this series were taken on a Nikon Z 6III with a 200-400mm f/4.5 telephoto and a Viltrox 35mm f/1.8 prime." **Instagram:** @tamas.simonyi

Digital Camera says: At a glance, you could be mistaken for thinking this is an abstract shot or an image of a bunch of flowers – until you see the face.



4 'Victoria Butterfly Gardens' by Sawyer Pugh

"My biggest goal with this photograph was to capture an image of a butterfly that contained lots of detail, especially in the eyes and wings. The butterfly's quick movement required a fast shutter speed, so I had to lower the aperture to f/2 to keep enough light on the sensor." Taken with a Canon EOS R100 and Canon RF 85mm F2 Macro IS STM lens. **Instagram:** @sawyerpughphotography

Digital Camera says: There's a lovely composition here, with the butterfly's red colour matching the fruit. And that background is beautifully out of focus, too.



5 'Vintage Hot Rod' by James Harwood

"I am a keen motorsports photographer and last year I finally managed to make the trip over to Wales to attend the VHRA (Vintage Hot Rod

Association) races on Pendine Sands, near Carmarthen. The older vehicles, such as this one, are easier to track with the camera, as they aren't quite as fast as the modern machines."

Instagram: @james106938

Digital Camera says: Usually, you'd compose an image with the car on the left, road ahead, but with a panning shot, that's hard to do. However, the slight angle here adds to the narrative of the car heading away and works well.

6 'Llyn Ogwen' by Rob Hunt

"I like how the stream leads your eye from the bottom right of the frame diagonally left, before turning and taking you to Tryfan and Llyn Ogwen. The lake mirrors the direction of the stream and takes your eye to the mountains in the distance. Also, the land on the right side of the frame balances Tryfan on the left." Taken with a Lumix G9 II and Leica DG Vario-Elmarit 8-18mm f/2.8-4 ASPH lens.
Instagram: @roberthunt7

Digital Camera says:

It's a moody and evocative landscape with the stream providing foreground interest.



7

'Winter Visitors' by Breedá Kiely Morgan

"The colour palette in this image really appeals to me, and I like the interaction between the two swans. Their alignment and direction give a sense of connection and quiet companionship. The softness and gentle haze throughout the frame really elevate the image. It feels less like a documentary shot and more like a fine-art piece, which is one of my favourite genres." Taken with a Canon EOS R5 and Canon RF 100-500mm F4.5-7.1 lens at 500mm.
Instagram: @breeda_kiely_morgan

Digital Camera says: This is a simple, yet well-composed shot that encapsulates a mood of peace and tranquillity. We love the ethereal, painterly lighting from the haze in the background, too.



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The image shows the cover of Digital Camera magazine, Issue 308, June 2026. The cover features a blue tit bird in flight, a reader challenge photo of a footballer, and a moonshot of the Artemis II mission. The magazine is also shown on a tablet and a smartphone, highlighting its digital accessibility. A circular badge in the top right corner says 'SUBSCRIBE AND HAVE YOUR BEST-EVER PHOTO YEAR!'.

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Niall

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Editor, *Digital Camera*

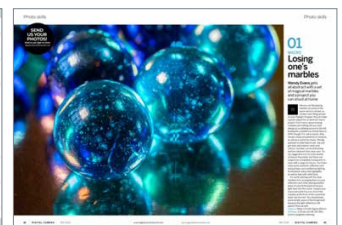


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PHOTO SKILLS

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10 skills for you to learn this month

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01

LOCATIONS

The need for speed

Top Gun Wendy Evans explains how to shoot aircraft at a military aviation museum

Where do iconic military aircraft go when they become obsolete and are no longer needed for frontline operations? Those that aren't scrapped or broken down for spares end up in military museums. Which is where you come in, along with a camera and an interesting challenge. As is the case in most museums, there isn't generally much light, although there are harsh spotlights everywhere. The exhibits are often crowded together in tight spaces, making it difficult to get a clean shot.

Let's start with the first decision you may have to make: whether or not to use a circular polariser. The advantage is that it can be rotated so that reflections on glass windows are cut out, allowing the interior to be recorded. They can also reduce reflections on paintwork, though this is more marginal. The downside is that you're giving up one or two stops of light, which means that the ISO will need to be pushed higher.

The good news is that images of the entire aircraft will need a wide-angle lens, which gives you plenty of depth of field, and correspondingly, means you can use a wider aperture. The exception to this is where you want to zoom in to capture individual details, so a wide-angle lens with a reasonable telephoto reach is the lens to bring if you don't want to cart around a bag of primes.

Here, we used a 24-85mm zoom for our visit to the Fleet Air Arm Museum, which is part of the National Museum of the Royal Navy and located at RNAS Yeovilton, near Yeovil in Somerset.

Camera: Nikon Z 8 with Nikkor AF-S 24-85mm f/3.5-4.5G ED VR

Settings: 1/30 sec at f/5.6, ISO 1000



ROYAL NAVY FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM

Many thanks to the FAA for providing access to the site for this project. The museum features over 90 aircraft, including Concorde 002 and the Carrier Experience.

Price: £21 (adult), £17 (child, 3-15)

Address: RNAS Yeovilton, Ilchester, Yeovil, Somerset BA22 8HT

Find out more: www.nmrn.org.uk/visit-us/fleet-air-arm-museum



Step by step Work with the light Dial in the right settings for the environment



01 Use a polariser

Because of all the reflections and glare, I decided I would go with a polariser and take the hit on the available light. This one from Cokin simply slips into the holder and can be rotated to minimise the reflections.

02 Let's get sensitive

It's a museum, you're not in a rush, so you can take time to evaluate each scene and set the ISO accordingly to your needs. Don't use Auto ISO; set a baseline, which was around 800 for this visit, and then tweak it for each shot.

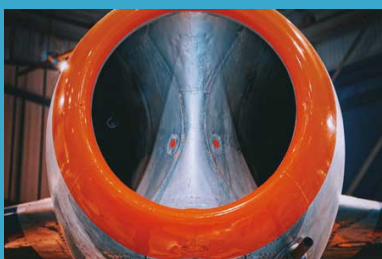
Get close up

Find interesting details

No macro needed: You probably won't need a macro lens here, because most of these elements you are looking to isolate aren't that small. Here, two exhaust pipes look like the eyes of a 1950s robot. The focus was on the end of the exhausts at a 65mm focal length, rather than the engine.



Finding shapes: If you use the telephoto part of the lens, you can isolate individual elements with interesting shapes, like this intake for a jet engine. When extending the focal length, there is less depth of field, so be precise with focusing on the important elements. This is at 85mm, f/4.5 and 1/25 sec, so image stabilisation has helped here.



Take it further Get creative with multi-image exposures

Create a sense of movement by capturing multiple images from different positions and combining them into one image using a specific blend mode in your camera

Go into the main menu

On your camera, press the Menu button and navigate to the Photo Shooting section, or whatever the equivalent mode is called on your particular model. Scroll down to Multiple exposure and select it to go into the options.

Set up the parameters

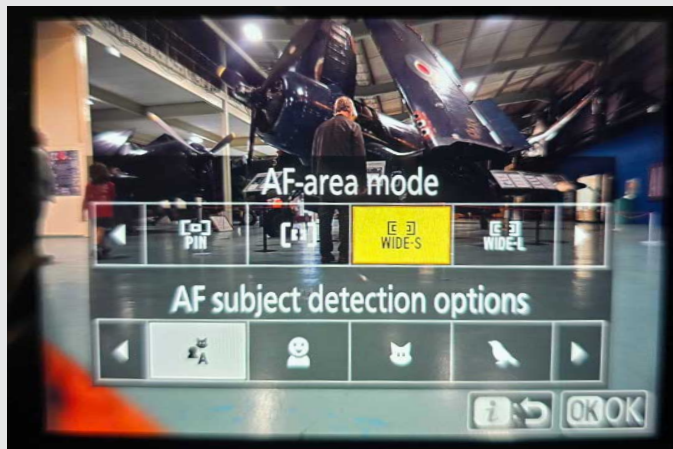
Turn the Multiple exposure mode to On, then decide whether you want just one image or a series and set accordingly. Set the number of shots to 3, which offers a good balance between creativity and visibility, and set the blending mode to Light.



Create a shortcut

Instead of having to dive into the menus each time you want to create a multiple exposure, assign it to a spare button on the camera, for example one of those on the front that you don't know what it's assigned to. Now you can quickly switch to the Multiple exposure mode and select the number of images to use.





03 Focusing time

I used a fairly large focus box, but not a huge one. Nothing is moving here, so you don't need an oversized focus box for tracking. As you won't get the complete depth of field, focus on the nose of the aircraft you are photographing.



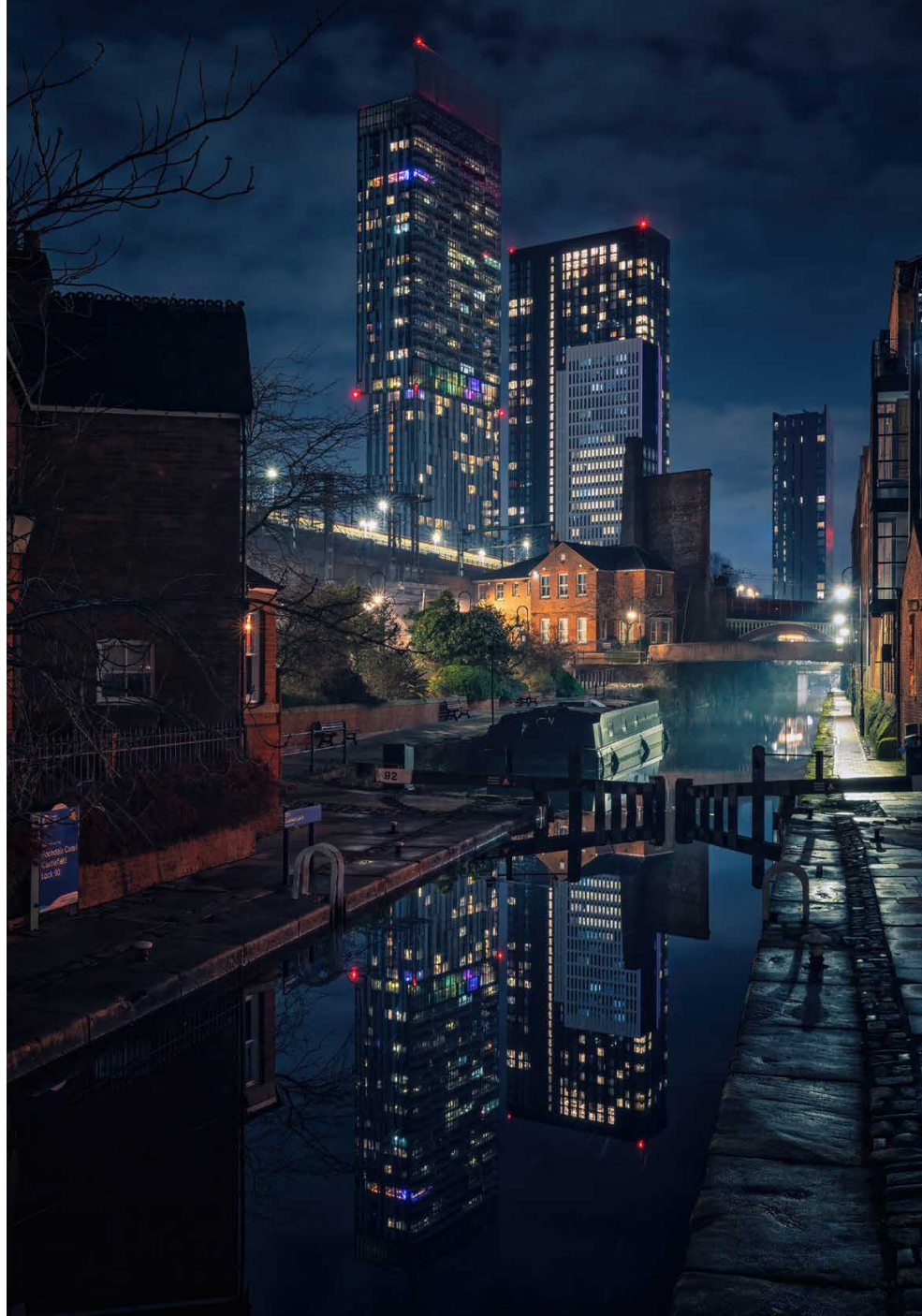
04 Working settings

I shoot in Aperture Priority mode. For most photos, that meant getting down to 1/25 sec and shooting at f/3.8 with ISO 800. For the main photo, there was somewhere to balance the camera and slightly zoom in.



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Top kit

Benro Tortoise 35C tripod

An excellent, sturdy tripod that means I can ensure my night images remain sharp when I'm using a long shutter speed.

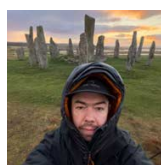
Canon BR-E1 wireless remote shutter

A remote shutter release allows hands-free camera operation and eliminates any shake when you press the shutter button.

Mike's five tips for cityscape night photography

- 
Location scouting
 Visit locations in daylight to understand compositions, light sources and access points. Identify safe standing spots and potential obstructions so you are familiar with the place in the dark.
- 
Choose a suitable time
 Blue hour offers a different tone before night sets in properly. Avoid quiet canal areas if you are alone. Stay aware and prioritise safety by taking a friend.
- 
Expose for highlights
 Lights clip easily at night, so expose for highlights. Protect neon, street lamps and windows by underexposing or try Highlight metering. Shadows can be lifted later, preserving detail, contrast and mood.
- 
Use a tripod and timer
 Use a sturdy tripod to keep frames sharp during long exposures. Activate the two-second timer to eliminate vibration from pressing the shutter. This ensures crisp architecture and clean light trails.
- 
Post processing
 Refine contrast and clarity without overdoing it. Make White Balance cooler to enhance the night atmosphere and tones. Reduce noise and keep colour separation.

02 URBAN Mike McMahon shoots post-industrial urban landscapes using canals to reflect city lights



Manchester-based aerial and landscape photographer Mike McMahon specialises in cityscape and landscape imagery. "This shot was captured in Castlefield, right

in the heart of Manchester city centre. It's a location I return to time and time again," says Mike. "The area is layered with industrial history, modern infrastructure and constant movement, but on this particular night, it had something rare: complete stillness.

"When I arrived, the lock was glassy and completely still, producing the cleanest, most striking reflections I've ever seen at this spot. The water mirrored the surrounding architecture almost perfectly, turning a familiar scene into something spectacular," he says.

"After a few test shots to fine-tune the exposure and composition, everything fell into place. With the camera settings locked in, I focused on timing – waiting for trams to pass along the elevated tracks above the city. The movement introduced subtle light trails and a sense of life against the calm foreground.

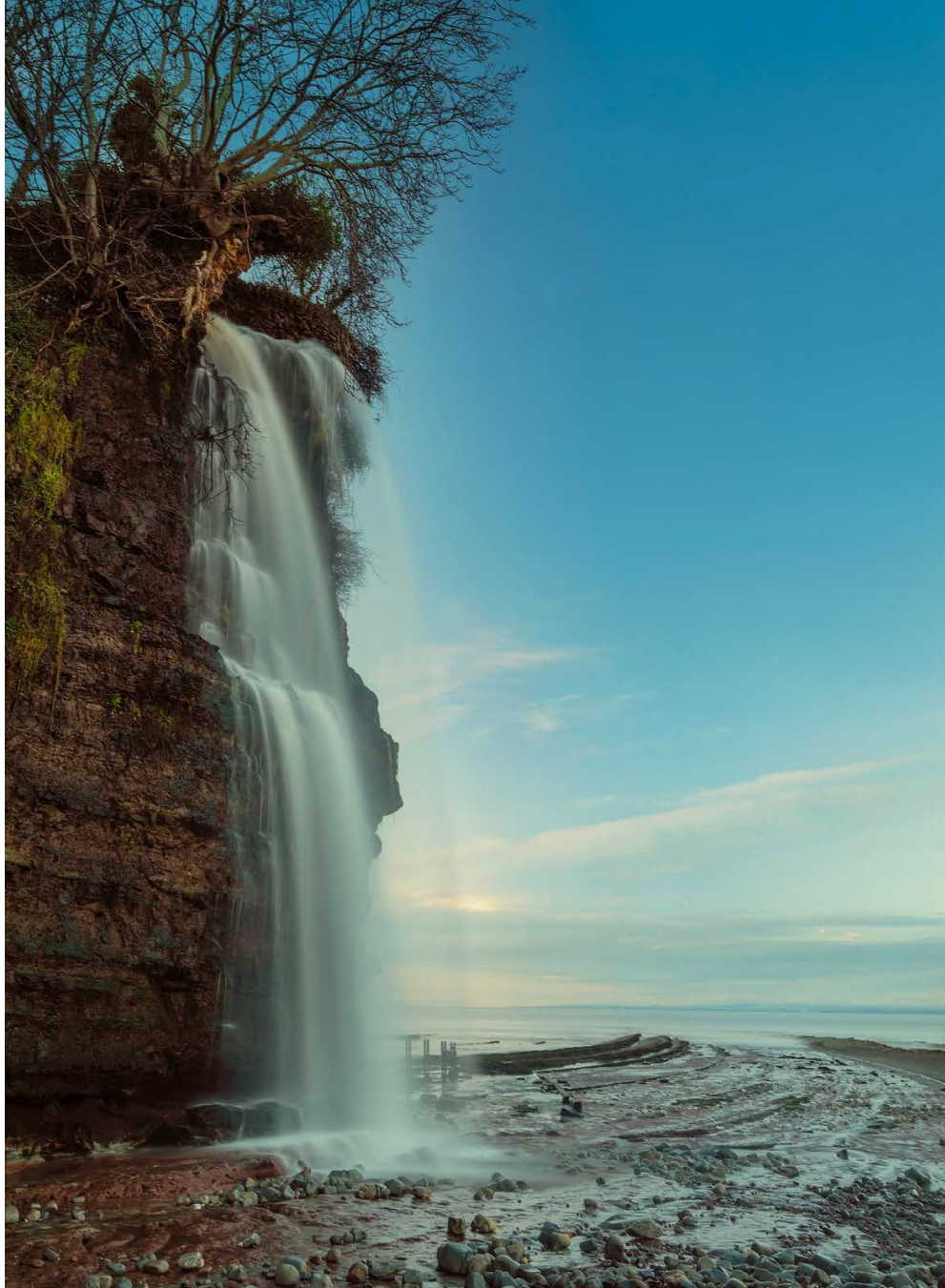
"The contrast between motion and stillness is what makes this image work for me. It captures Manchester at rest, yet unmistakably alive. It manages to blend patience, timing and atmosphere into a moment that I had waited a long time for."

Camera: Canon EOS R6 with Canon RF 15-35mm F2.8L IS USM

Settings: 25 secs at f/11, ISO 100

Instagram: @skyhighphotographyuk

Website www.skyhighphotography.co.uk



Wendy Evans

03 LANDSCAPES Coastal waterfalls

Wendy Evans explains how to capture a rare coastal waterfall, such as St Audrie's Waterfall in Somerset

Most waterfalls can be found in gloomy woods or tumbling over granite, with impressive mountains in the background. However, there is another type of waterfall where the river heads towards the coast, only to hit a rocky cliff top and fall dramatically onto the beach.

For the photographer, this creates two immediate problems, both of which involve the lighting. Firstly, being out in the open means more light and even at sunset, it will require filters to slow the shutter speed down so that you can get a soft, silky water effect. The second is the contrast. The best way to shoot this kind of waterfall is vertically, so you can maximise the drama of the height, but doing

that means that one side of the photo will be bright (the sky) and the other will be much darker (the land part). Coastal waterfalls are fairly rare, but there are ones in England, Wales and Scotland, as well as a few famous international waterfalls listed below.

Camera: Nikon Z 8 with Nikkor AF-S 18-35mm 3.5-4.5G, ND grad, ND4 filter
Settings: 13 secs at f/16, ISO 32

Notable coastal waterfalls: St Audrie's (England); Hayburn Wyke (England); Speke's Mill Mouth (England); Tresaith Waterfall (Wales); Mealtfalls (Isle of Skye, Scotland); Múlafossur (Faroe Islands); Cascada del Ézaro (Spain); and Ketubjörg (Iceland).

Step by step
 Improve your chances of getting a good coastal waterfall shot

01 Short telephoto Generally, if you are shooting from the beach, then unless the tide is in, you'll be able to compose the shot to your satisfaction. A short telephoto lens will give you the most flexibility. To frame this shot, a focal length of 21mm was used. If the composition doesn't work, then walk around to the other side of the waterfall.



02 Filters aplenty I shoot in Aperture Priority mode and adjust settings with the aim of getting a long exposure. To help with that, I used an ND4 filter to reduce the light, a low ISO rating and a graduated ND filter. Rotate this so it covers the sky portion of the scene, not the top half.



03 Focus and shoot An f/16 aperture produced a shutter speed of 13 secs, but it isn't the sharpest part of the lens. I focused on the cliff by the waterfall itself. At a 21mm focal length and with the waterfall about 15m away, the depth of field extended to within about a metre of the camera, which was out of sight.



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04

CREATIVE

Make your own diffusers

Wendy Evans gets busy with bubble wrap and hosiery for a bespoke diffusion effect

You're probably aware of that old film-era wheeze of rubbing Vaseline over your UV filter to create a hazy, diffuse effect in your photos. Why not take that basic idea further and experiment with putting other custom diffuser elements in front of your lens? Only without getting everything sticky this time. The two ideas I've used here are bubble wrap and hosiery. One creates an interesting out-of-focus vignette effect; the other adds a layer of diffusion and tints it according to the colour of the hosiery.

All you need is a rubber band to hold your diffusing element over the lens so that you aren't trying to hold it still while taking the photo. Whether you use a wide-angle or telephoto lens changes how it registers, but be aware that there's an element of hit and miss in this. How the light falls onto the lens affects the final result as well.

Camera: Nikon Z 8 and Nikkor AF-S 24-85mm f/3.5-4.5G

Settings: 1/800 sec at f/4.5, ISO 100

Step by step Creating custom diffusion

Using the bubble wrap in different ways for varying effects



01 Attach the wrap

There are two ways of doing this. The first method is to put the bubble wrap completely over the lens, which gives a very diffuse effect. Also, when facing into sunlight, it shows up much more in the image. The second idea is to attach the wrap, but then poke a hole through the middle of it, so that the middle area of the frame will be clean and sharp.



02 Set up the camera

The only parameter here to really be concerned with is the aperture, which was set as wide as possible for the main photo on the previous spread. It doesn't have as much effect as the focal length, but it's still better to go wide. That means that the out-of-focus area behind where the bubble wrap covers is even softer. The key element is to experiment until you find an effect you like.



03 Wide-angle effect

For this image, the aperture was set to f/8, so you can see how much more of the scene is in focus. The key point is that with a 24mm wide-angle lens, the bubble wrap is now more apparent and the effect appears to be like looking through a pane of broken glass. Use this effect for more deliberate framing of the photo so that the viewer is looking into the image.



04 Blur it with telephoto

With the focal length now at the telephoto end – 85mm – the bubble wrap is much more opaque and indistinct, and the gap in the middle forces attention onto whatever is in focus in the main area. So with just a change of focal length, you have two different ways of framing the subject. This outcome is most similar to that old Vaseline trick.

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People power Try a soft-focus portrait capture

These projects can also be used for taking soft-focus portraits. With a little trial and error, you can achieve great results without the expense of having to buy all manner of soft-focus filter attachments for your camera.



Creating diffuse effects

A second and rather different set of effects can be created by using hosiery over the lens. No, your gran's thick woollen tights won't do – you will need to use a fairly low denier so that you are able to see through and record the image. Changing the colour and the thickness of the hosiery will have different effects, as you can see below...

Attaching to the lens

One option is to pull the hosiery tightly over the lens, which makes it easier to see through and reduces the effect. Hold it in place with an elastic band as before, making sure you can still use the zoom. The other option is to use a little slack, which creates waves and patterns in the image. Also, if you're using any kind of coloured hosiery, you might want to set the white balance manually, otherwise Auto White Balance may attempt to counter it.



Which tights? Three different results from different coloured hosiery



01 Using a tan colour

For this shot inside a chapel, a tan colour was used, which has given the image a diffuse and warm glow. It perfectly suits the light coming through the window and the building's gloomy interior.

02 Bring the gloom

For this image, facing into the bright light, a nearly black fabric was used. This has created more of a pinhole effect with the colouring and opacity. It has also significantly reduced the contrast.



03 What about white?

White-coloured hosiery was used on this exterior shot of flowers, which has made the image softer and more diffuse in what was very bright, harsh light. Try to match the colours of your tights to those of the main subject in the frame.





05 LANDSCAPES

Daniel Řeřicha explains how to capture the retreating sea and give it a sense of movement



Czech photographer Daniel Řeřicha specialises in minimalist images of landscapes, in which he works with strong ND filters and long exposure times.

"This image was captured at the iconic Reynisdrangar sea stacks on the southern coast of Iceland," Daniel explains. "Shooting from this location is now a rare privilege; due to recent storms and subsequent landslides, the black pebble beach where I stood is currently closed to the public."

"I was fortunate enough to capture this scene during a summer white night, when the sun only briefly dips below the horizon. Instead of pitch-black darkness, the landscape is shrouded in a dreamy, eternal twilight. The sky began to catch some colour a few minutes before the sun started its ascent back above the horizon."

"The key to the image was getting a low vantage point, so I set my tripod low to the ground to emphasise the

foreground, composed of the textured dark pebbles and the dynamic Atlantic Ocean. Before capturing the final shot, I took a few trial exposures to determine the optimum shutter speed for the water blur. I wanted the retreating wave to retain its energy with a soft, aesthetic sense of motion.

"However, the most crucial element was patience while waiting for the right shape of the receding tide. The moment the water began to pull back, I triggered the shutter using a remote release – this helps eliminate camera shake and ensures that my long-exposure images are pin-sharp."

"The result is a composition where the receding foam creates leading lines towards the stacks, capturing both the raw power of the Atlantic and the serenity of an Icelandic night."

Camera: Canon EOS R5 and Canon EF 16-35mm f/4 IS USM, Leofoto tripod, VFFOTO CPL filter

Settings: 1.3 secs at f/10, ISO 100

Instagram: @danielrerichacz

Website: www.danielrericha.cz

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Daniel's five tips for long-exposure waves

- ✓ **Consider your vantage point**
Set the tripod low to the ground to emphasise the textures of the pebbles and rocks in the foreground.
- ✓ **Keep images extra sharp**
Use a tripod and a remote shutter release to avoid any camera shake during the typical 1/3 sec exposure.
- ✓ **Compose your shots**
Perform several trial captures to find the perfect balance between the shutter speed and the motion of the waves. The idea is to convey the sense of movement, not freeze the water or make it too blurry.
- ✓ **Leading lines**
Use the retreating sea foam to create natural leading lines to guide the viewer's eye toward the background rocks.
- ✓ **Wide-angle lens**
Focus on the rocks in front of you to ensure they are sharp. Use a wide focal length – this was at 16mm – and a narrow aperture like f/10 to create enough depth of field.

06

PORTRAITS

Helping hands

Wendy Evans has some handy tips for styling portraits

One problem for portrait subjects is what to do with their hands. The simplest approach is to view them as an extension of the arms, aligned at the same angle and direction; the question is then about what arm shapes you make with the pose. Keeping the hands flat to the body is an option, as is giving the subject something to hold. We will look at this next month (issue 309).

Be aware of using a wide aperture and placing the hands in front of the subject, as they will be out of focus. If using a wide-angle lens, avoid having their hands nearer the camera than the body or face, as they will be distorted. Finally, you can use hands to add to the drama. Somewhat overdressed in a post-apocalyptic setting, our subject used her hands for a more expressive pose while also framing her face.

Camera: Nikon D300 and Nikkor 50mm
Settings: 1/200 sec at f/2, ISO 100



Wendy Evans

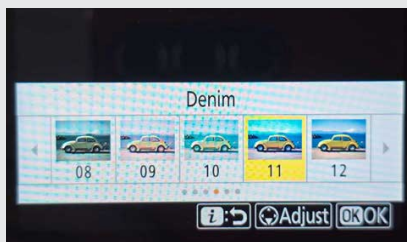
Step by step Settings and options

Ramp up the style for your next portrait shoot



01 Set it up

The standard portrait setting is to use a wide aperture, so f/2 in Aperture Priority mode was used here to make the background out of focus. In daylight, that means a fast shutter of 1/2000 sec. Any faster and you may need an ND filter to restrict the light coming in.

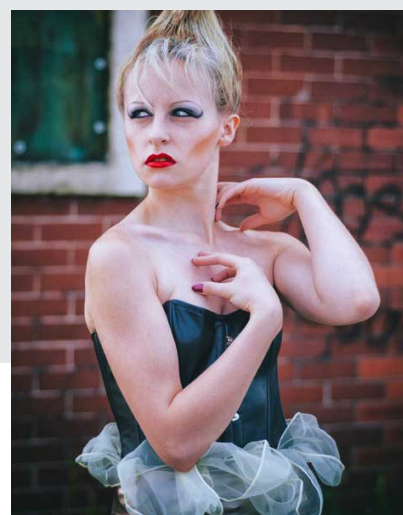


02 Get creative with colour

If you have a concept for your portrait session, it's worth dipping into camera settings and trying some custom colour recipes to use with the raw files. Fujifilm cameras are good for this, but most modern cameras support recipes in one way or another.

03 Alternative poses

The theme of this shoot was ludicrous fashion of the post-apocalypse elite, so why not lean into that – or whatever your theme is – and create ever more hand and arm shapes and poses. The shoot was meant to be over the top, so the poses reflected that.





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07

LANDSCAPES

Hitting the photographic peaks

Lee Howdle explains the photography behind his book, *Seasons in the Peak District*



Lee Howdle is a self-taught professional landscape photographer from Nottinghamshire. He spends much of his time photographing his favourite national park, the Peak District. Lee's sunset shot at Bamford Edge won the 'Breathing Spaces' category in the International Garden Photographer of the Year contest in 2022.

What was your thought process and inspiration for the book?

I produced *Seasons in the Peak District* to bring together a carefully curated collection of my photography, captured across a range of conditions, with snow, sunrise glows and atmospheric mist. The book offers a more complete way to showcase my photography.

What is it about the Peak District that's so good for landscape photography?

I love the ever-changing atmosphere and variety of landscapes. Iconic spots like Mam Tor, Bamford Edge and The Roaches offer breathtaking views and strong compositions.

What camera did you use to take the shots?

I shoot with a Canon EOS 5D Mark IV and Canon EF 16-35mm and 24-105mm lenses

– they're flexible for both wide scenes and tighter compositions. I also have a Sigma 70-300mm in my bag, which is ideal for wildlife and zooming in on subjects sticking out of the mist. I also use a DJI Mini Pro 4 drone, which allows me to explore different perspectives and reveal the shape and scale of the Peak District from above.

When I capture scenes on my camera, I tend to shoot at ISO 50 to 200. This means the captures aren't grainy and the detail in the photograph is precise. I tend to shoot at f/11, so that it keeps the picture sharp.

What technical challenges did you face when shooting for the book?

Managing light can be one of the hardest techniques in landscape photography. I found myself getting frustrated at not being able to capture the scene for how it was. I learned that the best way to manage this is by using reverse grad filters or bracketing through different exposures.

How do you approach finding a location to shoot your landscapes?

I find locations by exploring beyond sunrise, taking the time to wander and discover new compositions. OS Maps and PhotoPills are great for identifying ridgelines and subjects.

In your opinion, what's the best time of day to shoot landscapes?

I prefer sunrises more than sunsets. Walking to the location wakes me up and nothing beats knowing that there's mist in the valleys. It drives you on to reach your destination.

Is there any additional kit you use?

I use a few apps that are handy for planning locations for sunrises and sunsets. Among these are PhotoPills, which is good for finding out the specific direction in which the sun rises on any given day. There's also OS Maps, which tells you where the public footpaths are – I've been on the receiving end of a few rants from farmers when I've accidentally taken a shortcut through their fields.

I also use Ventusky, which is a great app that shows you the cloud coverage. It helps you work out whether it's going to be a great sunrise. And finally, I use Clear Outside, which is my go-to app for predicting where the mist will form. It's pretty good at stating humidity, dew point and wind speed – all the key elements to take into consideration when looking for cloud inversions. Apart from that, I use Cokin reverse grad filters to capture sunrises, especially when the light is strong.

Instagram: @leehowdle

Website: leehowdlephotography.co.uk



Lee's five tips for shooting Peak District landscapes

1 Keep one eye on the weather

Planning ahead for the weather is essential. Use the apps I mentioned to monitor cloud cover, dew point and humidity, all of which can help predict atmospheric mist and the ideal conditions for landscape photography shoots.

2 Arrive in good time

Knowing your location is vital. Arrive at least an hour before sunrise or sunset to prepare. Avoid rushing and missing the best light and compositions.

3 Don't stand still

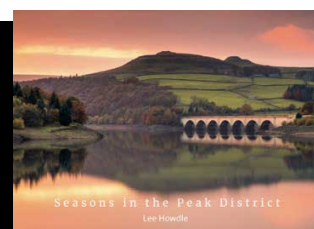
When shooting, find strong compositions and capture multiple exposures for sky and foreground. Move around your spot and vary tripod height to create more dramatic perspectives.

4 Simple editing

Keep your editing process simple and natural. Stay true to the scene you witnessed and avoid over-saturating the colours. Steer clear of using artificial or obvious AI effects in your images.

5 Stick to the paths

Respect the countryside by sticking to the footpaths. The Peak District is Britain's oldest national park and has many thousands of visitors every day. Preserve it by treading lightly and responsibly, and don't ruin it for others.

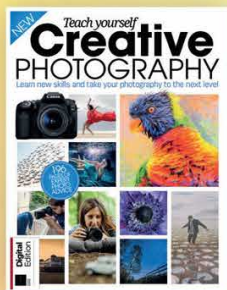
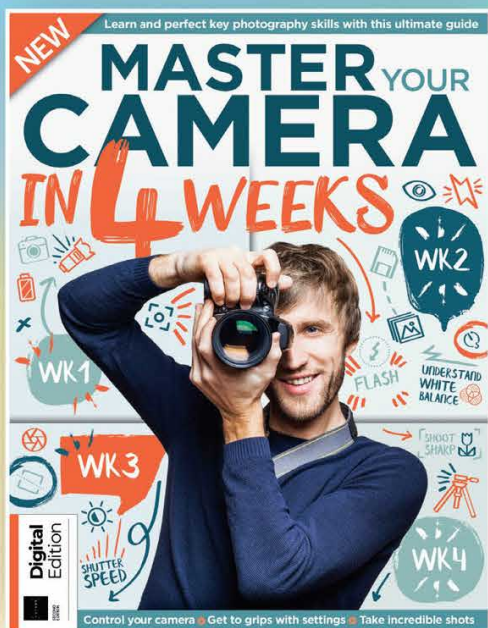
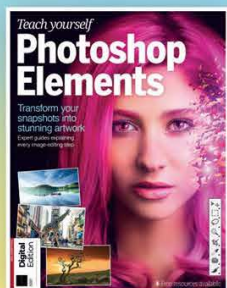


Get the book Seasons in the Peak District

The easiest way to buy *Seasons in the Peak District* is through Lee's website: www.leehowdlephotography.co.uk. Priced £12.99, it is also available from book retailers including Waterstones.

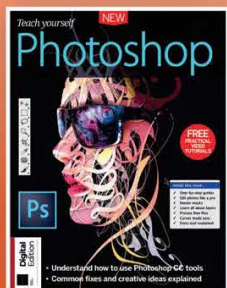
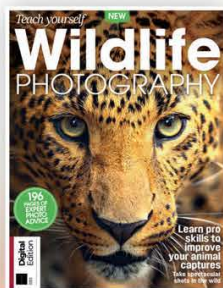
Join a workshop

Want to discover the best spots in the Peak District and learn how to get the best out of your camera? Individual and group workshops are available at: www.leehowdlephotography.co.uk



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Dave Newman

08 WILDLIFE Rate my photo

Dave Newman's diving kingfisher comes under scrutiny

In this image, I captured a kingfisher emerging from the water with a freshly caught fish, freezing a split second of precision and power. I positioned myself near a known hunting perch. I tracked the bird from the dive, into the water and then back out, and used a fast shutter speed to freeze motion. The goal was to reveal the bird's hunting skill, timing and the dramatic beauty of its everyday survival instincts. This is my best kingfisher capture to date.
Camera: Sony A9 with Sony FE 400mm GM F2.8 OSS
Settings: 1/8,000 sec at f/2.8, ISO 800, -0.3 exposure compensation
Instagram: @daves_spherical_photography

Overall impact
It's a tremendous shot that has bags of impact. Having the kingfisher coming straight back out of the water like a missile, and with a fish in its beak, makes this perfectly timed capture. Getting this shot was all down to Dave's fieldcraft in knowing where the bird was likely to perch and dive from, and where it would emerge, then using his technical skill to capture the action at the perfect moment.

Eye contact
The slight tilt of the head trades symmetry for a more engaging photo. Being able to see the bird's eye gives the image more of a connection; a symmetrical bird may not have made as good a shot.

Frozen water and spray
The fast shutter speed of 1/8,000 sec means every droplet of water is frozen, giving the splash an interesting shape. The trade-off for that shutter speed is that the ISO had to be increased to 800, but the resulting noise was dealt with in software.

Beautiful background
The wide-open aperture of f/2.8 means the background is a series of pastel coloured bands, with lovely muted colours, allowing full focus on the bird.

Depth of field
The advantage of f/2.8 is the background and keeping the ISO to 800 with that fast shutter speed. The disadvantage is that there is little depth of field. The focus point seems to be the head and neck area, which is sharp, but some feathers are out of focus, as are the feet and tail. Would a narrower aperture have achieved more depth of field? Possibly, but it would have impacted either the shutter speed or the ISO.

Vertical composition

Dave has already cropped this image to get closer to the bird, but another option may have been to crop it into a vertical orientation to emphasise the upwards movement. He could have tried to capture it vertically, but that would run the risk of not getting it in the frame when it was moving quickly, so shooting in landscape orientation was probably the better choice.



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09

ARCHITECTURE

Sinister City Hall

Simon Tregidgo was the winner of last month's 'Architecture' challenge with this imposing shot



UK-based wildlife, landscape and events photographer Simon Tregidgo took this image of London's former City Hall

building one morning in late January. "I was given the day off at my company, so I decided to explore London with my Sony A900 and a few lenses," he says.

"Despite living in London for a few months, I hadn't seen it as a tourist. I was keen to get a shot of Tower Bridge, so I worked that area for a while before being drawn to this bannister by City Hall. It didn't work as a foreground to the bridge, but it made a great leading line to City Hall, while also blocking out all the other noise around and isolating the building. The sky was typically British, being overcast, so it gave the image pleasingly soft lighting.

"Taken at 35mm, this was a 1/30 sec exposure at f/13 and ISO 400. It's an older photo that I recently revisited, processing it with the dedicated black and white editor, the brilliant Nik 6 Silver Efex, to blow out the sky and add contrast to make it a bit moodier."

Camera: Sony A900

Settings: 1/30 sec at f/13, ISO 400

Instagram: @sim.o.tre



Simon Tregidgo

IMAGE ANALYSIS

1 LEADING LINES

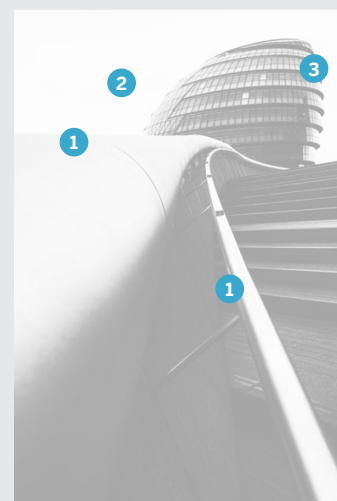
The barrier and handrail both make fantastic leading lines that guide the eye from either the bottom right or bottom left, curving up to the City Hall building. Even the steps appear to be climbing up towards it.

2 STARK CONTRAST

The sky is featureless, but increasing the contrast and making the image as stark as possible adds to the menace and the narrative of a sinister place.

3 KEY PLACEMENT

The City Hall building itself is perfectly placed at the top of the photo. It's also facing away from the scene, which adds to the unsettling atmosphere.



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10 WILDLIFE Mammals challenge

Let's see your best shots from this group of animals in this month's challenge

W

elcome to our monthly reader photo challenge, where the winning image will feature in the magazine. For the June issue, the theme is 'Mammals',

so to be more specific, that means no birds, fish, reptiles or insects. The animal can be tame or wild, a pet or livestock, and it can be alive, dead or even stuffed. However, it has to be recognisable as a mammal, so no photos

of a ham sandwich please! What can you come up with? Will it be cute and fluffy, dynamic and dramatic or sad and evocative? We look forward to seeing your entries, but please read the competition rules below first.

Enter via email or Facebook

Email digitalcamera@futurenet.com with 'Mammals' as the subject. Please attach your entry (sending a high-res version,

rather than links) and include a description of how you came to take this particular image. Remember to list your socials and website, so we can give you due credit if you win. Enter the challenge by 18 June and remember, only one image per reader, please.

The winner will be announced in the August 2026 issue (310) of *Digital Camera*, which goes on sale on Friday 17 July.

Email your entry to: digitalcamera@futurenet.com
or enter at: www.facebook.com/digitalcameraworld



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Nagy Attila, Germany



Gary Hunter, United States



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Will, United States



Mauro Pozzoli, Italy



Sandeep Kumar Yadav, India



Zennifer, United States



Jackie Singer, United States



Morgan M Harris, United States

G

uruShots is billed as the world's leading photo game. It's an online platform conceived to give global exposure to people who love taking photographs. GuruShots members start as 'Newbies' competing with other photographers to win challenges, increase their ranking on the site and progress to the coveted 'Guru' status. Challenges are voted on by Gurus and the wider GuruShots community, and there's a fresh challenge every day, such as 'Epic Landscapes' and 'Vivid Landscapes'. Winners receive prizes from GuruShots' partners, including Adobe Stock, Lowepro and Kodak.

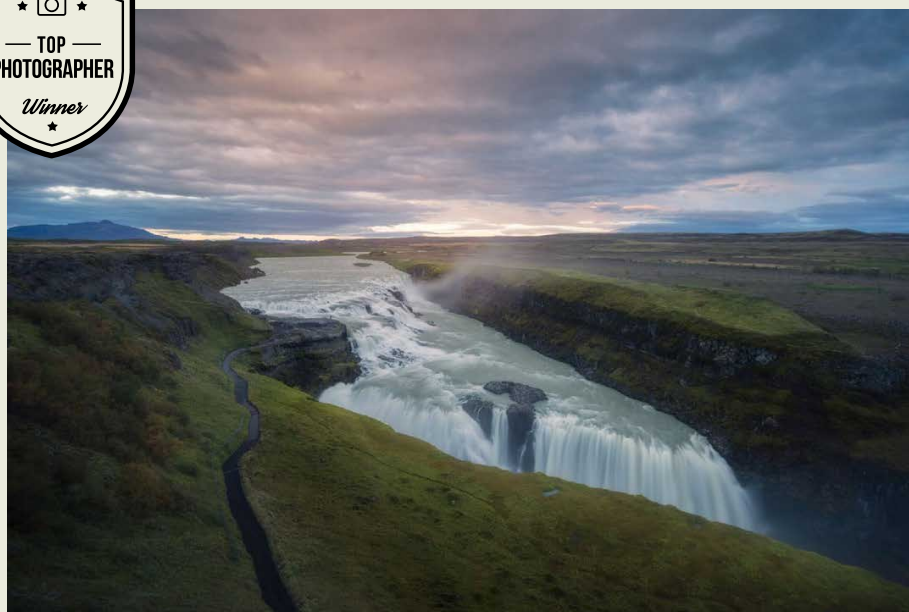
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WINNERS: Vivid Landscapes



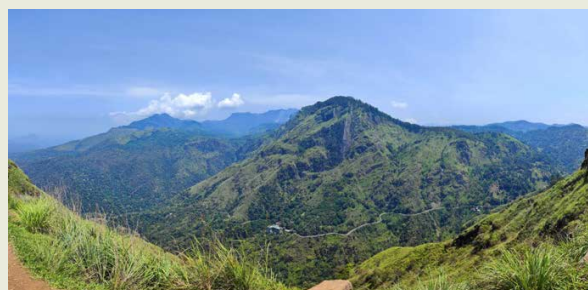
TOP PHOTOGRAPHER
Jón Þórðarson, Iceland



Masood, Germany



Erik Csosza, Switzerland



Nataly Gureeva, Russia



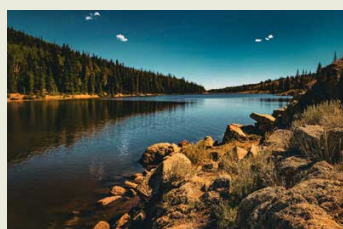
Michael Shmidt, Israel



Irakli Gvishiani, Georgia



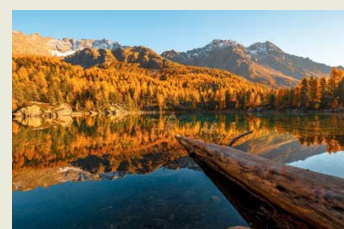
Roy Egloff, Switzerland



Teneil Ridgeway, United States



Gregor Kobilica, Slovenia



ND, Switzerland

HOW TO SHOOT BETTER BIRD PHOTOS

Great wildlife photography starts at home, says **Dan Mold**, who explains how to take top bird pictures in your backyard

If you have even the slightest interest in nature, then wildlife photography makes for one of the most exciting and rewarding genres of photography to get stuck into. However, it's no secret that taking pictures of wild animals can not only test your patience but also drain your bank account. Animals rarely play ball, and the expensive telephoto lenses that pro photographer use often cost five figures yet alone four.

But you don't need to go on an extravagant safari to Africa to take

award-winning wild animal photographs – in this feature, I'll be staying closer to home, showing you how to take brilliant portraits of birds in your back garden with affordable camera kit. Don't worry if you aren't fortunate enough to have a garden space; I will also show you how to get great bird portraits at places ranging from your local duck pond to a nature reserve.

Check search engines like Google and social media pages like Facebook groups to find wildlife spots and communities close to you. One of my bird photography hides close to home is exclusive to members who

sign up annually. This is free to do and provides me with a key and code to get in, so I can use the hide freely. So research your local wildlife community pages and ask around to see what's available – you might be surprised at what's on your doorstep. RSPB members also get free entry to over 170 nature reserves in the UK, which can be well worth signing up to, in addition to the society's free magazine.

So while we're all currently feeling the pinch, let's explore how you can take your bird photos to the next level without breaking the bank... —————>

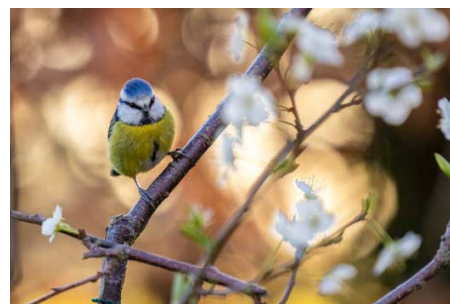
WHAT YOU'LL LEARN



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Get the right gear
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PART 2
Visit accessible wildlife spots
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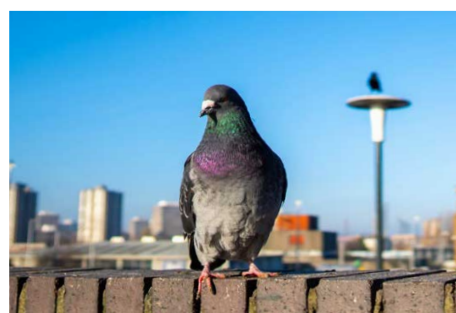
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Make a makeshift hide
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PART 4
Use pre-capture
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PART 5
Urban birding
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Catch the perfect moment

Use your camera's high-speed burst rate so you can fire off a rapid succession of shots when the moment strikes, boosting your chances of bagging a winning image. This might be called 'Drive' mode on your camera – by default, it will be set to single shooting, which only fires the shutter once as the shutter button is pressed. However, you'll want to use High Speed Continuous Mode, which continues to fire off shots for as long as you hold the shutter button down. Make sure your shutter speed is fast enough, around 1/2000 sec or even faster, by opening up the aperture. Go into the menu and select the mechanical shutter option to avoid rolling shutter distortion.

GET THE RIGHT GEAR

Start with our kitbag essentials for back garden bird and wildlife photography

There's a cornucopia of gear, gadgets, gizmos and equipment when it comes to shooting wildlife photography, so I've condensed it down to the core kit that won't blow your budget. Of course, if budget is no option, then go for more premium and advanced items, but here, I'm listing the essentials that are worth considering if you're just starting out.

If you're into birding, you are already likely to have a pair of binoculars, which are a must-have. Items such as trail cameras can be fun to experiment with, but they aren't essential when you're first starting out.

If you are on a tight budget, it may also be worth considering buying expensive items, such as lenses and camera bodies, pre-owned from retailers to save money. One outlet we recommend is MPB.com, which operates in the UK, the USA and Europe.

FIVE ESSENTIAL PIECES OF KIT

01 TRIPOD & GIMBAL HEAD FROM £200/\$150

It pays to invest in a solid set of sticks, as you are likely to load it up with a bit of weight if you're using a large telephoto zoom or prime. I use a Manfrotto 055 tripod (right), which is rock-solid, paired with a gimbal head – a must-have for balancing unwieldy tele lenses on a tripod. Gimbal heads used to be a specialist item, but there's a good range of affordable options from the likes of Neewer and Selens. The K&F Concept aluminium tripod costs just £73 (\$80).



02 CREATIVE CAMERA FROM £400/\$580

Having a large, full-frame sensor isn't essential for bird photography, and in many scenarios,



the crop factor from the smaller APS-C or Micro Four Thirds sensors is preferable as they effectively add extra zoom to your image. Budget-friendly APS-C cameras are a good choice, but look out for features like a high megapixel count to assist cropping. Pre-capture, a fast burst rate and an animal face tracking autofocus mode are welcome.

03 BUDGET TELEPHOTO LENSES FROM £289/\$200

The human eye can see around 50mm focal length in terms of field of view, so a telephoto has a focal length above this and will zoom in, taking you closer to the action. This is particularly important for making sure small creatures like birds can fill a decent portion of the frame to retain detail and avoid cropping in too much. My choices on the budget end are lenses such as a 70-300mm or even a more powerful 150-600mm, if you don't mind carrying a larger and heavier optic to and from your locations.



04 SPOTTING SCOPE FROM £79/\$55

If you're into birdwatching, you may already have a spotting scope that helps you see and track wildlife far away. For photography purposes, this is preferably replaced with a long lens, such as a 150-600mm.

Those on tight budgets might be interested to hear that spotting scopes can be adapted for use with DSLRs, mirrorless cameras and even smartphones. However, for the best image quality, we recommend investing in a telephoto lens.



To get a frame-filling shot of this juvenile kingfisher, I used a 300mm lens with a 1.4x teleconverter (see panel, right). This image was shot on a Nikon D500 APS-C body, which gave me an effective 35mm focal length of 630mm.



05 OUTDOOR CLOTHING FROM £100/\$100

Invest in clothing that will keep you warm in winter and cool in the summer, plus a decent pair of hiking boots to keep your feet comfortable on long nature walks. If you have the budget, we'd recommend clothing from Paramo (below) for its Nikwax technology. This doesn't have the crinkly noise you might get from other waterproofs, and which could scare off a skittish subject.



Paramo



PRO TIP LENS HIRE

Wildlife pros often use lenses with prices that make your eyes water. While optics like a 300mm f/2.8 or 600mm f/4 may be out of budget for most casual shooters, it doesn't mean we can't miss out on the fun. For important shoots, research lens rental services, so you'll be able to bag professional-quality photos for a fraction of the price. For example, a Canon RF 800mm F5.6L IS USM costs around £/\$19,000, but it can be hired from £240 (\$491) per day.

BUDGET BIRDING MUST-HAVES

FAST MEMORY CARDS FROM £49/\$35

Bird photography usually requires shooting at fast burst rates, so it pays dividends to invest in fast memory cards so that you're not introducing a bottleneck that slows down your camera's ability to clear the memory buffer. Not all SD cards are equal, so look for super-fast SDXC cards, or even better, CFexpress cards if your camera is compatible with these better and faster solutions.



BEAN BAG FROM £22/\$28

If you're going to be shooting from a hide or floor-level on a regular basis, you might find yourself better off by purchasing a bean bag like this one from Chasing Birds. This costs £22/\$28, which is much more affordable than a professional tripod and head. It comes in a range of colours and is shaped to hug the barrel of the lens to add stability.



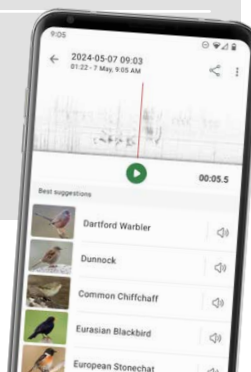
RSPB MEMBERSHIP FROM £2.59 PER MONTH

A Royal Society for the Protection of Birds membership costs as little as £2.59 a month for under 18s and £5-6 for adults. Benefits include free entry and parking at over 170 RSPB sites, plus the RSPB magazine every three months. In the US, an annual membership to the American Bird Conservancy starts from \$40.



MERLIN BIRD ID APP FREE

Budget-friendly kit doesn't get much better than being free, so why not download the Merlin Bird ID app by Cornell Lab, available for Android and iOS? The app records the bird songs and sounds around you and helps identify the birds you want to photograph.



TOP KIT TELECONVERTERS

Before you click 'buy' on the telephoto lens you've been thinking about purchasing, consider whether you might be better off using a teleconverter with an existing lens instead. A teleconverter, also called an 'extender', is a device that fits between your lens and camera body. It has glass elements inside to magnify the focal length of the lens it's attached to – make sure the lens is compatible with teleconverters.

The trade-off is that you lose some light. On a 1.4x converter, a 300mm f/2.8 lens becomes a 420mm f/4, while a 2x teleconverter, often called a 'doubler', will turn it into a 600mm f/5.6. Teleconverters cost around £/\$500, so it could be a far more affordable and portable option than buying a new telephoto lens.

2 VISIT ACCESSIBLE WILDLIFE SPOTS

Use these inspiring ideas when you next visit your local pond

GET LOW

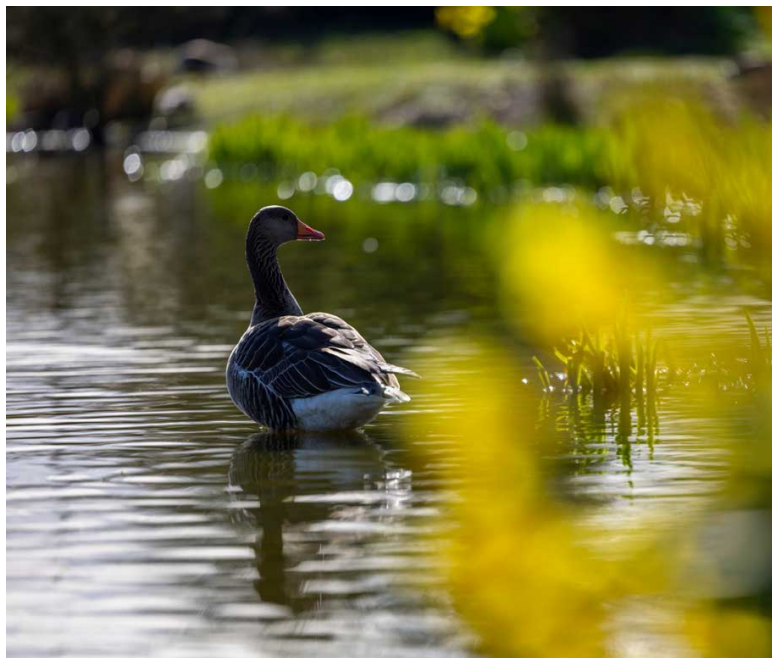
LOWER YOUR PERSPECTIVE AND SHOOT THROUGH FOLIAGE TO ADD DEPTH AND COLOUR

1 Lower your camera
Rather than constantly shooting at head-height, another option is to drop your camera low down, so that it's eye-level with the birds. This pushes the background further away and makes it easier to blur with a shallow depth of field.

2 Use a camera with a flip-out screen
Rather than physically lying down to get to eye-level, which is likely to result in you getting covered in muck,

I prefer to use the flip-out rear screen on my camera. That means I can hold it down low and still compose my wildlife shots easily.

3 Shoot through colourful foliage
Duck ponds can often look a little dark and muddy, so to inject some colour, try framing up with some vibrant flowers or foliage close to you. Shoot through them with a wide aperture, which will turn them into a blurry wash of colour in the foreground.



Dan Mold



TAKE OFF!

CATCH SHARP SHOTS OF BIRDS IN FLIGHT

Birds in flight with their wings majestically stretched outwards make brilliant images. Here's how you can nail this essential shot to add to your wildlife portfolio

1 Aperture Priority mode
The key to freezing birds in flight is to have a fast shutter speed, so to do this, go into Aperture Priority and open the aperture to a wide value (low number), such as f/2.8. Budget lenses may only open as far as f/5.6 at 300mm.

2 Watch the shutter speed
The key to sharp shots of birds in flight is to use a shutter speed of at least 1/2000 sec – take a test shot and boost your ISO value until you get at least 1/2000 sec or faster.



Dan Mold

3 Turn on image stabilisation
If your lens and camera have image stabilisation, make sure these are turned on as they can help reduce shake when handholding your camera.

4 Use Animal Eye detection AF
If your camera has Animal Eye detection autofocus, set your AF mode to this. It will do the best job at tracking the birds and making sure they're pin-sharp.



Dan Mold

SPLASHDOWN!

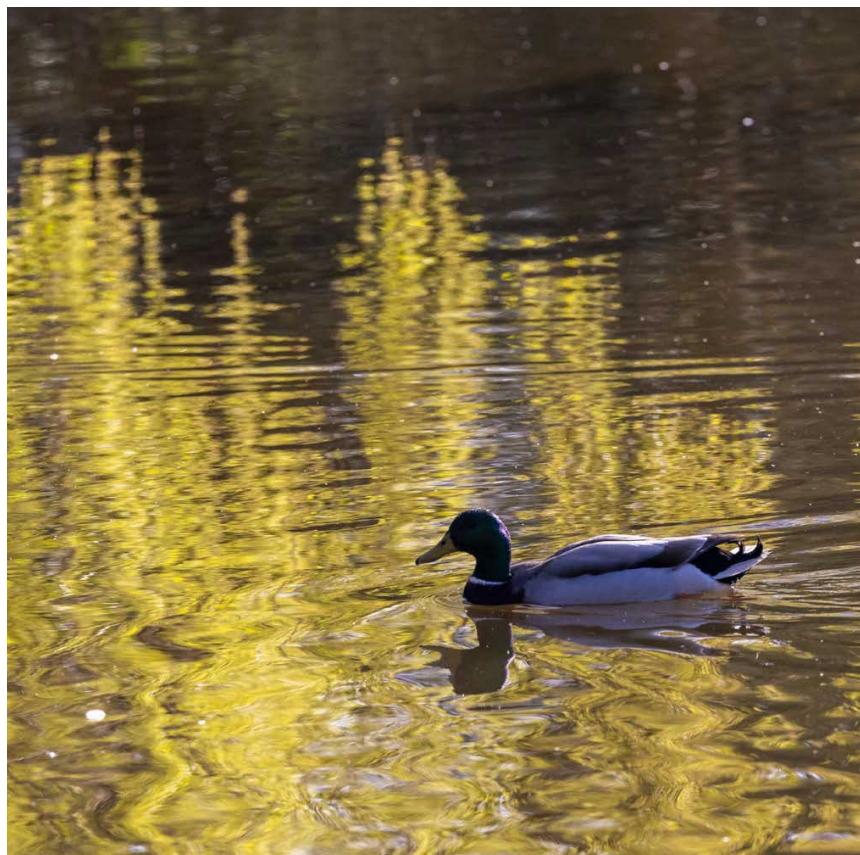
CAPTURE LANDINGS ON WATER AND FREEZE THE ACTION

1 Long focal length lens Typically, many birds will attempt to land in the middle of a pond, far away from you. In this case, I recommend using a focal length of at least 300mm, though lenses like a 100-500mm or 150-600mm will be even better for these shots, and a cropped sensor body will help you get closer.

2 Fast shutter speed Aim for a shutter speed of at least 1/2000 sec or faster by opening your aperture and boosting the ISO. I like to shoot these types of shots with backlight, so I also underexpose to turn the water black and keep the splashes nice and bright for contrast – it looks great in black and white, too.

3 Lighting On sunny days, use the fast shutter speeds required to freeze the birds and water splashes. Move around the pond to see where the light is coming from and choose whether to back, front or sidelight birds. Backlighting provides a halo of light around the subject for extra definition.

4 Fast burst mode Anticipate birds coming in to land by checking the skies to see if they are circling. As they land, make sure you have set your camera's fastest burst mode, so you can take a burst of shots and increase the likelihood of getting a winner. Choose mechanical shutter to avoid rolling shutter.



Dan Mold

REFLECTIONS

LOOK FOR COLOURS REFLECTING ON THE WATER SURFACE TO ADD EXTRA COLOUR TO YOUR PHOTOS

Pond water can often look dark and dirty, so look for interesting reflections to add colour

1 Consider the time of day Ignore the general advice not to shoot in harsh midday sun – this can provide ideal lighting for all sorts of opportunities at the bird pond. Strong midday lighting creates colourful reflections, and these will be much weaker when the sun is behind a cloud.

2 Find your colourful reflection Look for a duck pond with large colourful trees next to it. Here, I used this enormous willow tree to turn the pond water a vibrant shade of green, though even brick buildings in city centres can provide a good hit of red and orange. Walk around the pond until you find a sweet spot where the colours are reflecting nicely.

3 Patiently wait and take the shot Now it's just a case of patiently waiting for a duck to pass through this area. Dial in your camera settings ahead of time, so that you don't miss the shot. Ducks can be persuaded to pass through where you need them with food such as seeds and chopped grapes.

3 SET UP A HIDE IN YOUR GARDEN

Sharpen your wildlife photography skills by perfecting bird portraits at home

Whether you live out in the sticks or in a concrete jungle, you'll find birds across the country. Even common birds such as robins, finches, sparrows and blue tits can be colourful and make for brilliant wildlife portraits with a simple setup.

You definitely don't need to hire out a wildlife hide for shots like these, and the brilliant thing about setting up a space in your garden is that you can build it with

photos in mind – so you can decide where the light comes in, what's going to be in the background and the food you're going to use to attract certain birds.

For this project, I recommend a long lens such as a 150-600mm, as this will help you get a frame-filling shot of particularly small birds, and also shoot from further away. Once the birds have become used to you being there over a few evenings of shooting, though, they should become less skittish.

PRO TIP WINDOW CLICKER

Birds don't tend to mind people behind glass if they're used to us being there. Try opening your window and shooting out of it, or if shooting through the glass, make sure it's thoroughly cleaned on both sides and put your lens up close to the glass to reduce reflections. Using a lens hood and removing any UV filters will also help.



PRO SHOT

Blue tit in the blossom

I placed seed near the branch where I wanted the birds to land and strategically positioned cherry blossom in the foreground and a sunlit hedge behind, to add extra bokeh and loads of depth from the front to back of the frame.

PRO ADVICE

Use neutral-coloured kit

Try not to use equipment with flashy colours and reflective bits of metal if you can help it, as this will attract more attention from wild animals. Go for non-reflective kit if you have the choice, and consider putting black tape over reflective metal parts, such as tripods, or a camo cover over your lens to make it less distracting (see panel bottom right).



Dan Mold

HOW TO TAKE GARDEN BIRD PORTRAITS



SET UP YOUR STICKS

1 Fortunately, I have a couple of bird feeders in my garden, so birds are used to visiting for food. I set up some photogenic sticks and branches close to them to give them a place to rest on between flying to the feeders and back.



ADD BAIT TO THE BRANCHES

2 I screwed a pot to the back of the branch where I wanted the birds to land to pose for pictures. I added some moss to the top of the branch to make it look more photogenic and used a mix of nuts and seeds, though different birds will prefer different food.



Dan Moid



STAY OUT OF SIGHT AND WAIT

3 You could choose to shoot from a pop-up tent, but these are often expensive. Here, I set up two light stands with some cheap camo material draped over them and poked my lens through so that the birds couldn't see me. A stool was added for comfort.

PRO ADVICE MUTE 'NOISY' LENSES WITH A SOFT CAMO COVER

A camouflage cover for your lens may sound like a bit of an odd suggestion for this feature, considering that

we're trying to keep the budget down. However, we think they're well worth the money – not only do they help your lenses blend in by creating fewer eye-catching distractions and helping you get better photos, but they also protect your kit from knocks and bangs and help keep your optics in tip-top condition. When you come to upgrade and trade them in, that means you'll be getting top-dollar for your lenses, so a cover from companies such as LensCoat can pay for itself.



Shutter button half-pressed



Dan Mold

4 PRE-CAPTURE FOR HIGH-SPEED ACTION

Many mirrorless cameras can record before you fire the shutter

Ever framed up on a bird that's perched on a branch and tried to photograph the exact moment it takes off? When the action happens, you click the shutter, but go to check your images on the rear LCD display and you discover you've missed the moment. It's a situation most

wildlife enthusiasts have come up against at one point or another, but the good news is that many newer mirrorless cameras have the ability to record a number of frames before you take the shot. This is usually referred to as 'pre-capture', though different camera brands have different names for it. In principle, they work in a similar way,

helping you to catch the moment even if your trigger finger wasn't fast enough initially.

On my Canon EOS R6 Mark II, this feature is called Pre-shooting, and so long as the shutter button is half-pressed, the camera will buffer up to 15 frames (about 0.5 secs), which is ideal for high-speed moments, such as capturing a bird taking off from a branch.

SPLIT-SECOND TIMING



1 Get set up

Frame up on your subject and half-press the shutter button to pre-focus on the bird – whether it's sitting on a perch or a feeder that you're waiting for the bird to depart from. For maximum stability and to keep your framing consistent, it's best to set your camera up on a tripod or rest it on a beanbag, as seen here.



2 Activate your camera's 'pre-capture' mode

Leading camera brands have different names for 'pre-capture' – Pre-Release Capture on a Nikon, Pro Capture on OM and Pre-Shot ES for Fujifilm. You will almost certainly be required to activate your electronic shutter for the faster readout speeds needed to shoot with pre-capture.



3 Take the shot

When you think the action is about to happen, make sure you are focused, then half-press the shutter button to start filling the buffer with the pre-capture frames. Once the action happens, you can then fully press it down, keeping it held down until you have captured all of the motion in that sequence you wanted.



Shutter fully pressed

5 BECOME A BIRDER IN BUILT-UP AREAS

Turn your pigeon shots from pedestrian to prize-winning

Pigeons, seagulls and crows don't tend to get a lot of love from photographers, with more 'attractive' birds like robins, goldfinches and kingfishers stealing the glory. But there's no reason why these common birds that populate city centres can't be the subject of a great wildlife photography portfolio.

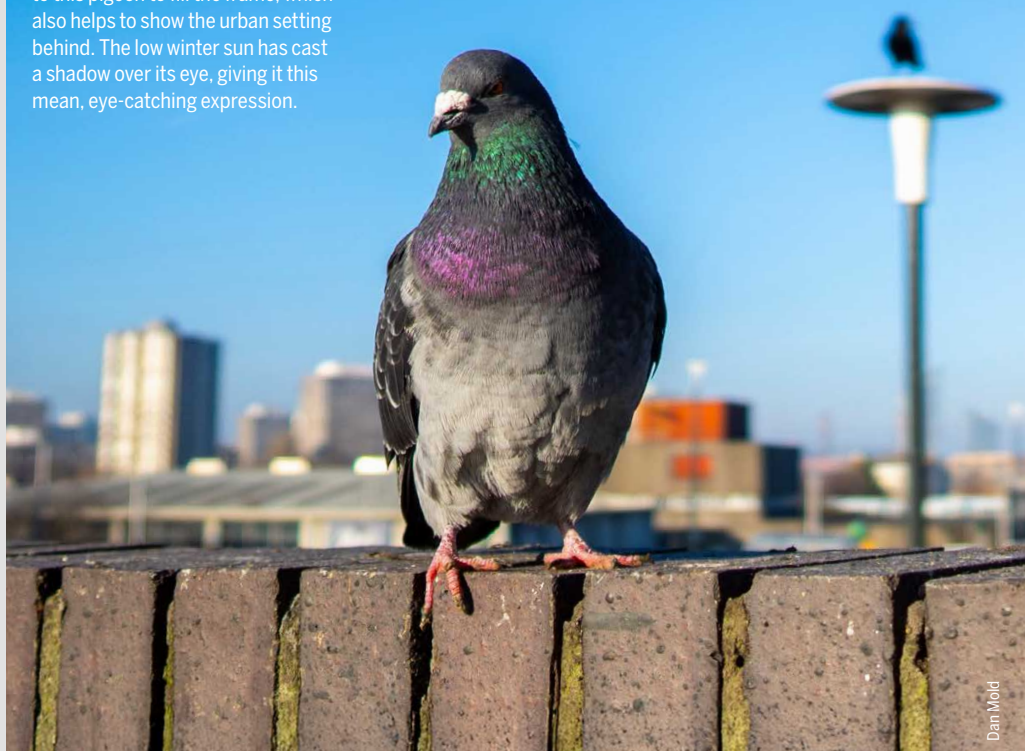
If you're looking for a creative challenge that will push your wildlife photography further, I suggest focusing on these often-overlooked common species of birds. Anyone can take a great photo of a vibrant kingfisher, but to make widely seen birds the star of the show, you'll have to force yourself to get creative with lighting, facial expressions, humour or human interaction.



Common birds like pigeons instantly help make travel shots feel relatable. This street shot shows a cyclist causing pigeons to fly out of the way in Cambodia.



Shooting with a wide 16mm focal length, I had to get my lens up close to this pigeon to fill the frame, which also helps to show the urban setting behind. The low winter sun has cast a shadow over its eye, giving it this mean, eye-catching expression.



Dan Mold

PRO ADVICE SHOOT IN BLACK AND WHITE

Common birds such as pigeons, crows and gulls aren't the UK's most colourful birds – that spot would probably be taken by kingfishers, goldfinches and the colonies of ring-necked parakeets in London. But a lack of colour is no bad thing; it's the perfect time to think about shooting in black and white. Instead of relying on a pop of colour to guide the viewer's eye, you'll need to think about composition, shape, form and contrast. For these scenarios, I love to shoot in the harsh midday sun or with low sun in the golden hour before sunset to elongate shadows and make more interesting contrast.



Dan Mold



Turn on your camera's Monochrome Picture Style so you can view the scene devoid of colour on the rear screen. Shoot raw files and you'll retain the colour data if you wish to use it later on.

Hotshots

The Sony World Photography Awards 2026
Professional Competition winners

**WINNER, CREATIVE & OVERALL WINNER:
SWPA PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR 2026**

This page: **'Maestra Lety Gallardo' Citlali Fabián (Mexico)**

From the series Bilha, Stories of My Sisters

Lety Gallardo is a musician, director and founder of the first regional women's band, Mujeres del Viento Florido. She has become a girls' rights defender, promoting inclusion in a field dominated by males. Here, Lety directs her favourite Oaxacan musical composition, *Dios Nunca Muere* (God never dies).

Opposite page:

TOP 'Luna Maran' Citlali Fabián

Luna is a Zapotec filmmaker, educator and activist. Her latest film, *Chicharras* (Cicadas), co-produced with her community, narrates the defence of indigenous territory, communal organisation and women's political participation.

This image represents Luna surrounded by cicadas, creating waves of change with their communal song.

BELOW 'Yasnaya Elena Aguilar' Citlali Fabián

Yasnaya is an Ayuujk linguist, writer and activist who advocates for language diversity and indigenous rights. Here, Yasnaya is represented with her grandma and great grandma, the pillars of her education and her guides to seeing the world.

The 'ää' represents the seeds she has planted to protect and preserve her native language, creating waves of change with their communal song.

i



© Citlali Fabián, Mexico. Photographer of the Year, Professional Competition, Creative, Sony World Photography Awards 2026



© Citlali Fabián, Mexico, Photographer of the Year, Professional Competition, Creative, Sony World Photography Awards 2026



© Joy Saha, Bangladesh. Winner, Professional Competition, Architecture & Design, Sony World Photography Awards 2026

i

WINNER: ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN 'Elevated Homestead Layout'
Joy Saha (Bangladesh). From the series Homes of Haor

A homestead built on raised terrain in Ashtagram, in Bangladesh's Haor region. Here, homes are built on naturally raised mounds that become islands during the monsoon. Its structures, livestock and small garden areas are designed to remain functional during monsoon flooding.

i

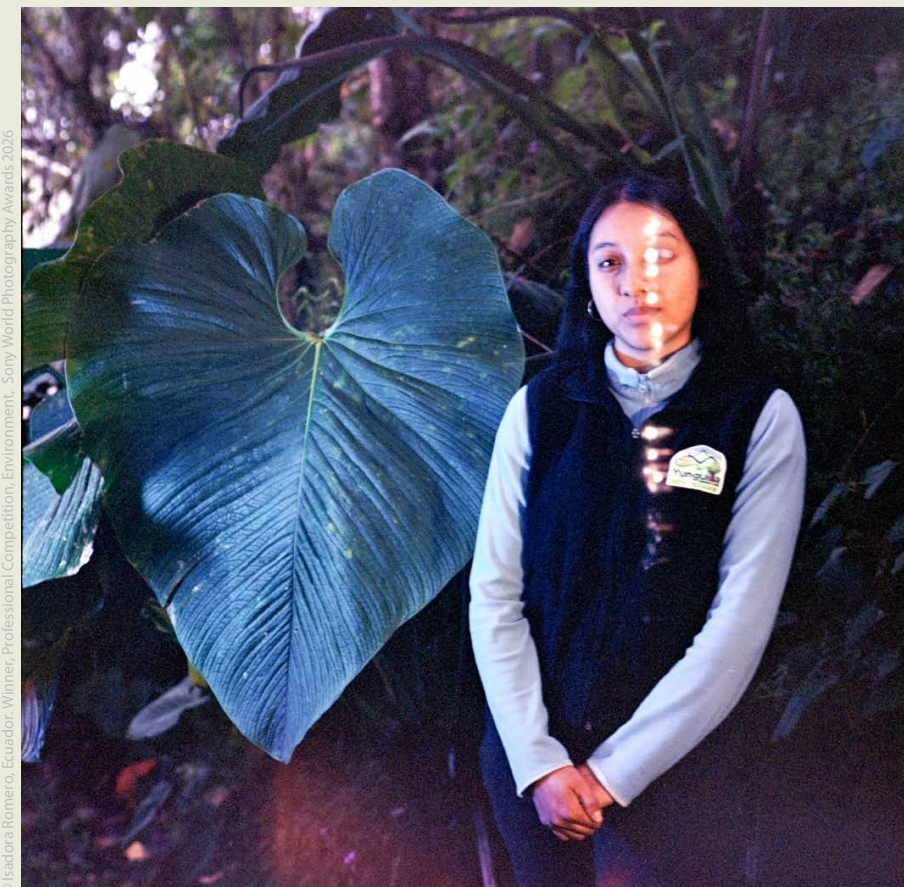
WINNER: DOCUMENTARY PROJECTS
'Untitled'

Santiago Mesa (Colombia)
From the series Under the Shadow of Coca

Daniel, a young coca leaf picker (raspachín), carries a sack of coca leaves that had been harvested earlier in the day in the rural region of Putumayo in southern Colombia. Raspachínes are paid in cash, and work is consistently available, making coca harvesting one of the region's few reliable sources of income.



© Santiago Mesa, Colombia. Winner, Professional Competition, Documentary Projects, Sony World Photography Awards 2026



© Isadora Romero, Ecuador, Winner, Professional Competition, Environment, Sony World Photography Awards 2026

i

WINNER: ENVIRONMENT
'Untitled'

Isadora Romero (Ecuador)
From the series Notes on
How to Build a Forest

Yessenia Morales is a community leader in Yunguilla, in the Andean region of the Ecuadorian Chocó – a landscape marked by layered histories of settlement and relationships with the forest.



© Seungho Kim, Republic of Korea, Winner, Professional Competition, Perspectives, Sony World Photography Awards 2026

i

WINNER: PERSPECTIVES 'The Partnership' Seungho Kim (Republic of Korea)
From the series Sunny Side Up: A Portrait of the Most Average K-Parenting Today

In 2023, South Korea's birth rate hit a record low of 0.72 children per woman, while more than six million households own dogs. Choosing between a child and a pet has become an ironic reality. Here, Seungho Kim shows the harmony between his golden dog, the original guardian of the house, and his child is as warm and savoury as a sunny-side-up egg sizzling in a pan.

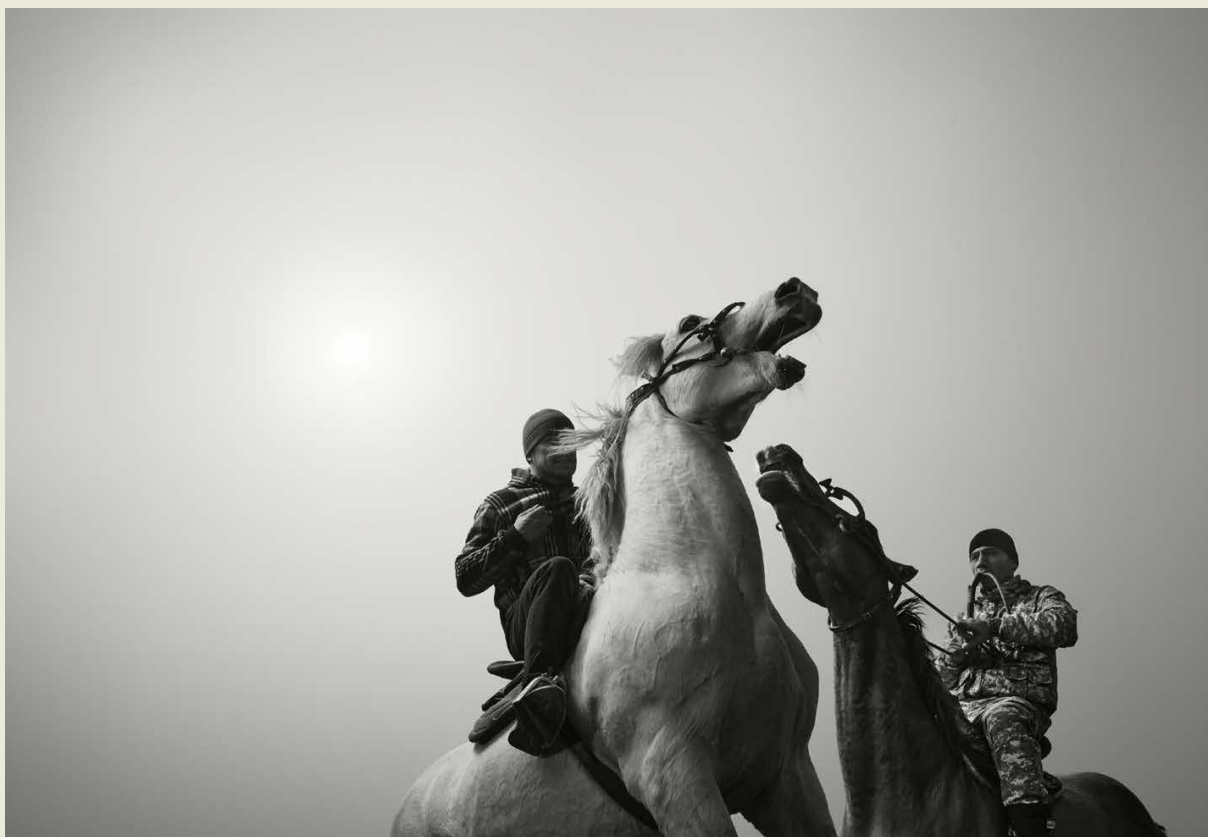


© Jean-Marc Caimi & Valentina Piccinni, Italy, Winner, Professional Competition, Portraiture, Sony World Photography Awards 2026

i

WINNER: PORTRAITURE
'The Faithful' Jean-Marc Caimi & Valentina Piccinni (Italy)
From the series The Faithful

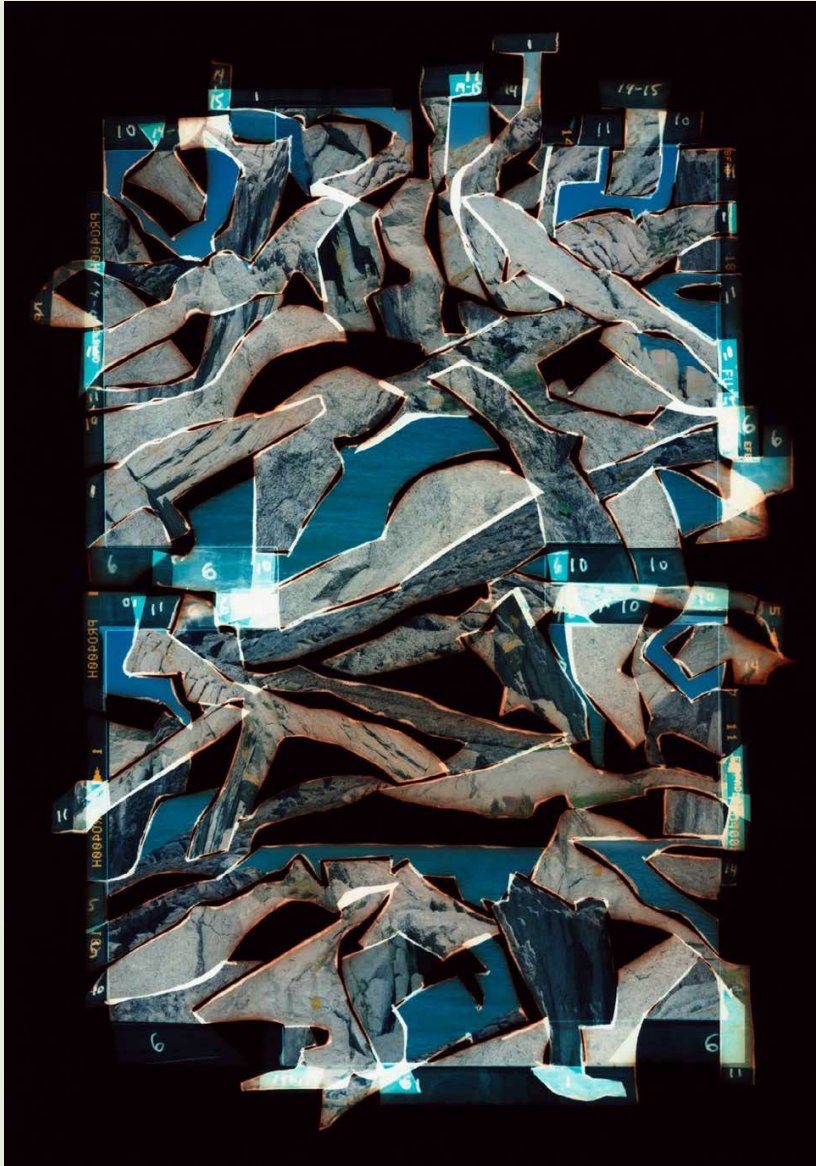
Between the death of one pope and the election of the next, crowds gathered in St. Peter's Square, Vatican City, for an event that functions simultaneously as sacred ritual and global spectacle. The photographers explain that pilgrimage took on the traits of fandom, as rosaries, flags and prayer gestures were performed with full awareness of the attendant cameras and media. Individual devotion unfolded 'within a choreography shaped by mass attendance and global broadcast.' The portraits in this series capture that 'doubled consciousness': believers performing acts of faith within a mediated public space, where personal conviction merges with stadium-scale performance.



i

**WINNER: SPORT 'Against the Reins',
'Marengo' and 'Abdulqadir' Todd Antony
(New Zealand). From the series Buzkashi**

Buzkashi (literally meaning 'goat pulling' in Persian) is the fierce, ancient sport of Tajikistan. It is similar to polo, but there are no teams and no boundaries. The ball is the eviscerated, headless carcass of a goat and the aim is brutally simple: seize it, hold it, break free. The game was born among the nomadic horse cultures of Central Asia, where strength and horsemanship were measures of identity. For centuries, chapandaz (riders) have hurled themselves into this churning mass of hooves and bodies, fighting for honour and a moment of clear sky among the dust.



i

WINNER: LANDSCAPE

'Untitled' Dafna Talmor (United Kingdom)

From the series Constructed Landscapes

Stemming from the photographer's personal archive, this series employs hand-printed and collaged colour negatives that are reconfigured into abstracted landscape representations. Purposefully undisclosed locations – sites that may otherwise be loaded with personal and political connotations – have been collaged and repurposed, transforming them into spaces of greater universality. Alluding to idealised and utopian spaces, these staged landscapes reference the histories of photography, from Pictorialist combination printing processes to contemporary discourse, conflating the 'real' and the imaginary. In doing so, the work embodies a plurality of viewpoints, playfully defying photographic traditions and Western pictorial conventions that embody singular, fixed and idealised views.



i

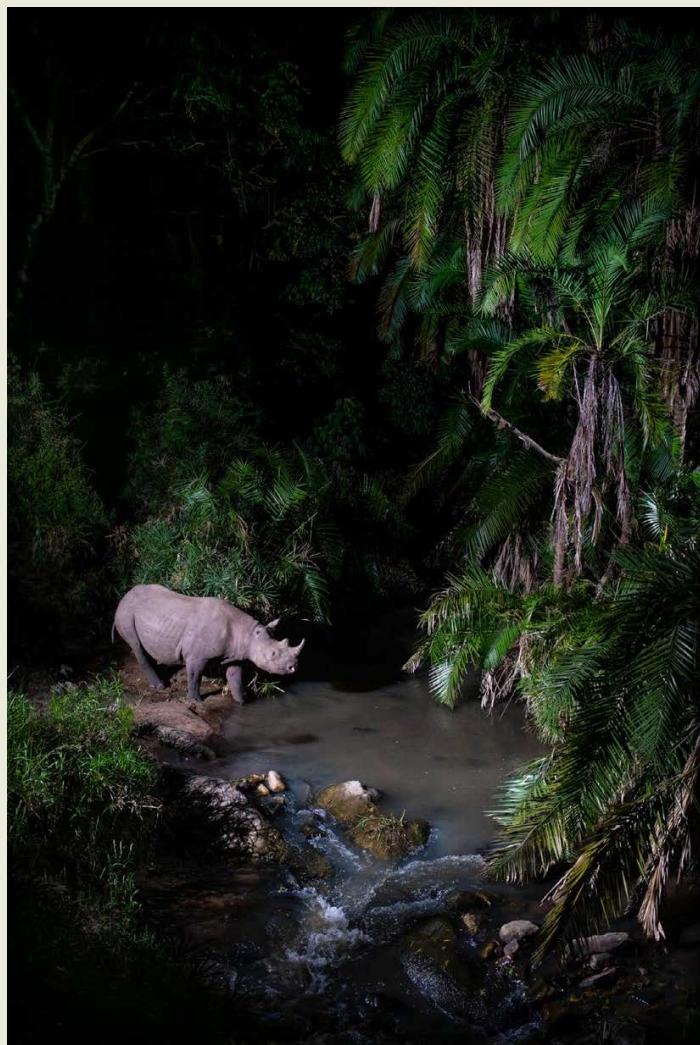
WINNER: STILL LIFE

'Rubber Duck'

Vilma Taubo (Norway)

From the series Talking Without Speaking

Talking Without Speaking is a series of photographs of everyday objects that have become symbols of protest. Each object can be connected to a specific historical period, a rights struggle or a particular country. Some have been intentionally brought to the streets to support a particular cause, while others have unexpectedly found their place in the public sphere, revealing their symbolic power over time. This duck is from the pro-democracy protests in Thailand in 2020.

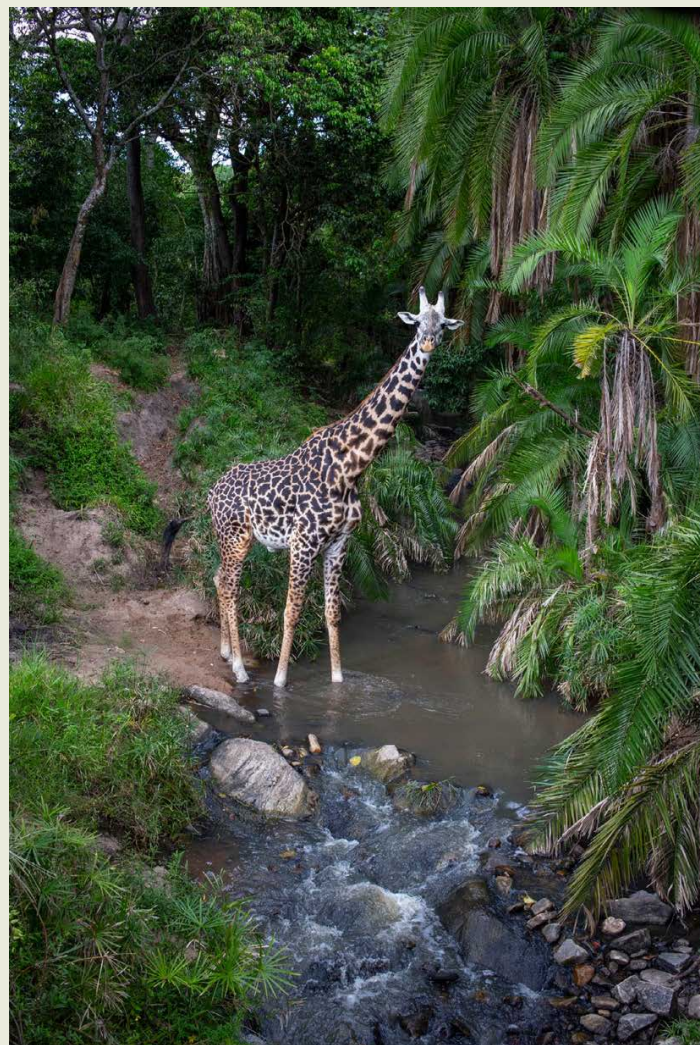


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WINNER: WILDLIFE & NATURE
'Black Rhino' Will Burrard-Lucas (United Kingdom)
From the series Crossing Point

An Eastern black rhinoceros moves through a forested river crossing in Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve at night. A remote camera trap was installed in collaboration with rhino rangers to monitor how animals use secluded corridors linking feeding areas and water sources. The location was chosen to show the striking scenery of an area largely closed to tourism.

'Giraffe' (above, right). A Maasai giraffe (*Giraffa tippelskirchi*) navigates the narrow river crossing after dark. Although they are usually associated with open savannah, giraffes also move through enclosed forest corridors, adapting their behaviour to habitats rarely seen by visitors.



© Will Burrard-Lucas, United Kingdom. Winner, Professional Competition, Wildlife & Nature, Sony World Photography Awards 2026

 **Sony
World
Photography
Awards**

About the competition

Produced by the World Photography Organisation, the internationally acclaimed Sony World Photography Awards is now in its 19th year. For both established and emerging artists, these free-to-enter awards offer world-class opportunities to gain exposure for their work. Having opened in London, SWPA will be displayed in other major cities around the world. View galleries of SWPA's four competitions on the awards website: www.worldphoto.org

CAMERA CLINIC

Master the art of modern photography

This month: Piers

How to capture the wonder of these landmarks that dot the coastline



Piers make great images, so head for your nearest resort and give them a try.

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

Piers have been landmarks around our coastline since the early 19th century. The oldest is Ryde Pier on the Isle of Wight, which opened in 1814 and remains a busy transport hub. Piers were originally conceived as landing stages in the shallow waters of our coastline, but they quickly became popular tourist attractions.

If piers as a photography subject is new to you, it makes sense to funnel down your ideas and creative approach before venturing out with the camera by doing a little research. See the opposite page for more on locations.

It's worth stressing that every pier is unique. You might harbour the notion that every pier is a grand, strutted structure sitting proudly over a shimmering sea, but some piers are more photographically interesting than others. For example, Southsea's Clarence and South Parade piers couldn't be more different in terms of photography

potential. The Clarence is short and wide and runs along the coast, while South Parade is a traditional pleasure pier stretching out into the Solent. It's a similar contrast with Lowestoft's two piers. The Claremont isn't big, but it's strutted and stands in the sea, while South Pier is concrete and more of a challenge to capture creatively.

If your preference is for the traditional, the world's longest pleasure pier is Southend Pier, which is 1.3 miles long and has its own railway, while Clevedon is England's only Grade 1 listed pier. Blackpool is blessed with three lovely piers, Weston is grand, and let's not forget the popular Brighton Palace Pier. All these piers – and many more – are wonderfully photogenic and you could easily spend a day shooting them, enjoying different light and tidal conditions. With the summer season in full swing, it's the perfect time to explore piers through your lens.

Get the knowledge

Piers have been a fixture of coastlines for over 200 years

England has more surviving seaside piers than anywhere in the world, with 50 straddling the waves. In the rest of the UK, there are seven piers in Wales and four in Scotland. These figures come from the National Piers Society – for details of surviving and lost piers, together with historical information, see piers.org.uk. Over 100 piers were built in the Victorian era, many designed for pleasure, but they

have since experienced mixed fortunes with fire, storms and declining popularity. The good news is that piers are enjoying a resurgence of interest from the public and developers, with several having been revamped or in the process of being restored. Among photographers, piers remain as popular as ever, so enjoy them while you can.

Lenses for capturing perfect pier photos

Piers make scenic subjects so a selection of focal lengths will cover all opportunities



TAKE IN THE WIDER VIEW

For pictorial photography, shorter focal length lenses mean sweeping foregrounds, big skies and lots of depth of field. The wider the lens, the more extreme the look, but it also means making the most of piers gets more challenging. A wide-angle zoom is the most versatile option and something like a 17-28mm on full-frame makes good sense, but don't rule out even wider lenses such as a 12-24mm.

PICK OUT DETAIL

Perfect for isolating detail or for picking out the pier within the broader landscape, a 70-200mm telezoom is a solid choice, but you could go even longer, so a 70-300mm or 100-400mm comes into consideration. The perspective flattening of telephoto lenses is more apparent the longer the lens. While that's appealing, it can be demanding in terms of shooting technique, particularly at the coast, where it gets breezy.



YOUR STABLE FRIEND

During the day, light levels at the coast are usually particularly good, so a tripod is not essential. Of course, it's a different story if you are planning to shoot long exposures or the pier at night. A quality travel tripod is a sound choice, offering good stability and versatility in a portable package. Salt water and sand are not tripod-friendly materials, so if you do shoot from a sandy beach, make sure to rinse off the legs afterwards.



Filters for controlling light

For the best results, you will need to tame strong, high-contrast lighting by using filters



POLARISE IT RIGHT

The polariser is often mentioned in Camera Clinic, and for good reason. It's simply the most useful filter any photographer can own and is worth the cost. At the coast, a polariser can enhance skies and saturate colour, but it can also cut water reflections, so it has multiple benefits. But while a polariser is a powerful tool, it's not a miracle worker, and it only delivers its best in the right conditions.



CONTROL THE BRIGHTNESS

A graduated neutral density (ND) filter balances bright skies and darker foregrounds and is either round or rectangular. ND grads come in different strengths, typically from 1 to 4 stops. With many brands, there's a choice of transition styles, usually soft, medium and hard. For piers, a 2- or 3-stop medium grad is a good option. Both suit general scenic photography, too.



CUTTING DOWN LIGHT

Exploring long exposures on bright days needs a strong neutral density (ND) filter. A 10-stop ND is a popular option, but in good light, the longest shutter speed possible might not be enough to have much effect, even if you use a low ISO and small f/stop. In this situation, what you need is the stronger 15 or 16-stop ND, which also allows the use of wider f/stops, so sensor dust spots are less of an issue.

Photographing pleasure piers to perfection

Coming in many shapes and sizes and suiting a multitude of techniques, piers are a compelling subject



TAKE THE MONO WAY

Built in 1869, Clevedon Pier's original purpose was as a ferry landing stage. Now it's the UK's only Grade 1 listed seaside pleasure pier. I've visited the pier several times, but this shot taken in 2016 is still one of my favourites. It was a happy coincidence that *The Balmoral* was in service that day (she is currently laid up at Bristol Harbourside), and she added an extra dimension to my pier shot. I had earlier enjoyed a visit on the pier and saw the signs for the boat trip, so I headed for a good vantage point on shore ahead of *The Balmoral*'s arrival. It was a grey day, but it suited black and white, so I brought out the sky for a moody look.



Will Cheung



THE JOY OF BLUR

During the winter months, starlings put on a spectacular flying display before roosting on Brighton Palace Pier. Murmurations take place around dusk when there's little light, which limits shutter speed options. That's not an issue with static objects, but here we have birds in flight, so rather than attempting to get sharp photos of the birds, I let them blur. I was shooting handheld, so I focused on the pier's helter skelter and took shots at different speeds. I started with 1/60 sec at f/4 (inset), and my favourite shot was 1/4 sec at f/16. The camera's image stabiliser did a great job, so the pier detail is sharp while the birds are blurred.



Will Cheung

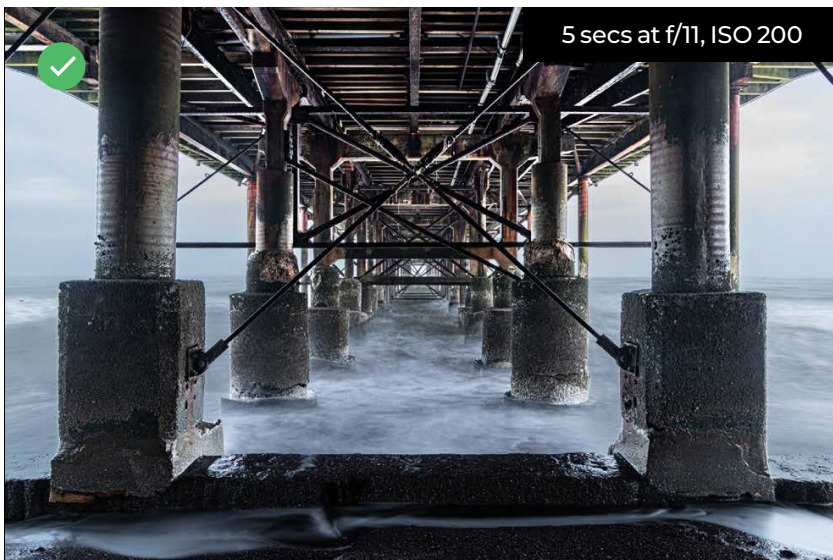


ENJOYING THE DARK SIDE

The underside of piers can be great places for photography, but take care. I took these shots under Teignmouth Pier, and the dull day meant a slow shutter was possible without needing ND filters.

The sky was overcast, but it still had detail, so I used settings that underexposed the pier's structure and didn't burn out the highlights. This was easier with the overall low contrast of the day.

In editing, the plan was to bring out the shadow detail and use the highlight slider to pull back the sky. It worked, but even more impressively, the shadows were brought out in processing, with more detail visible than I could see at the time with the naked eye.



Will Cheung



How to make the most of piers

Every pier is unique so tailor your approach to the subject

If piers are a new subject, you may expect them to follow a common design template – a raised structure jutting out into the sea adorned with amusement arcades and food stalls. Plenty of piers conform to that stereotype, and if that's what you want to shoot, Brighton, Eastbourne, Southend and the three Blackpool piers, among

others, will be up your street. Each has its own character, so spend time to capture them at their best. But getting good photographs out of piers that have seen better days, and which may lack appeal from a photographic perspective, is much more challenging. Succeed, though, and the results could be satisfying.

Nine techniques to take your pier photos to the next level



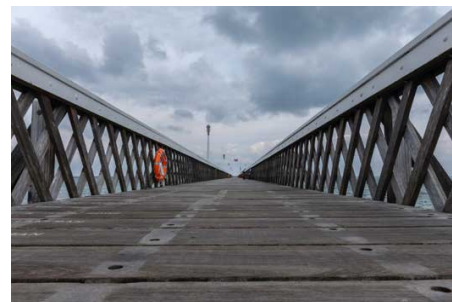
SHOOT LONG

Fit the camera on a tripod and add an extreme ND filter to take your exposures into many seconds to blur water, the clouds and people. On bright days, a 10-stop ND is not enough, so add a polariser or a 3-stop ND or, better still, use a 15- or 16-stop ND.



THE MONO WAY

Reducing colourful scenes to shades of grey is a powerful technique. To help visualise the result, set the camera to shoot monochrome so you get a mono preview. Shoot in raw format so you have a colour file and do the mono conversion in editing.



DYNAMIC AND WIDE

Piers are blessed with strong lead-in lines and a wide-angle lens can make the most of them. Shoot at f/11, focus one-third of the way into the scene, and there should be enough depth of field for sharpness from the foreground into the far distance.



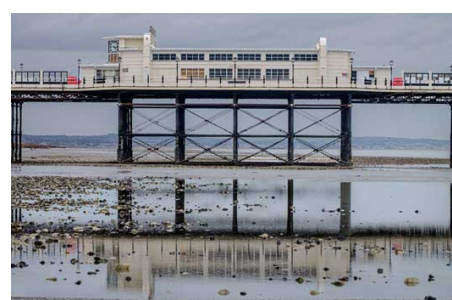
TAKE A CLOSER VIEW

Look for textures, patterns and shapes. Most standard zooms and telezooms will deliver quality images. Set a small f/stop to give plenty of sharpness. Use a wide aperture if you prefer selective focus and a well-diffused background.



SUNRISE AND SUNSET

What works best depends on the pier's orientation, but striking images can be had at the extremes of the day. Pre-dawn and twilight also work well with the potential of intense colours and long exposures to blur water and clouds. Don't forget the tripod.



LOW WATER

Piers look their best with a watery foreground, but don't rule out shooting at low tide. Wear suitable footwear and wander out for shots looking back at the pier. Beware of the turning tide, though. Some piers don't reach the sea, but are still worth shooting.



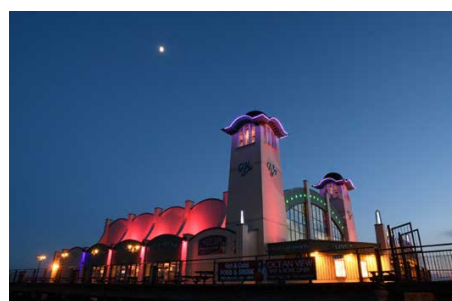
MOON OVER THE WATER

The moon presents a photo opportunity, so it's worth checking out its phase, position relative to the pier and rise and setting times. For detail in the moon's face, shoot soon after moonrise when it's low on the horizon and the light is softer.



PEOPLE POWER

Including a figure or two in your compositions can add a focal point as well as a sense of scale. The skill is to include people who look right. Whether you prefer a single person or several, don't clutter up your shot too much so that it looks messy.



NIGHT WORK

Your photography doesn't have to stop once the sun goes down. Many piers stay open until late into the evening, so there's still lots of colour to enjoy. If you don't have a tripod, set a high ISO, make sure the image stabiliser is on and shoot handheld.

Pros and cons

Making the most of these super structures

Try these techniques for outstanding pier photos

The wonder of pier photography is its huge potential and all manner of creative approaches work. But whether you're intending to capture scenics, long exposures or people, make sure you're properly geared up. Shooting at the coast in calm conditions is simple, but can be demanding if the weather takes a turn for the worse. Check forecasts and stay safe.

✓ Tidal control

Check the tide times before embarking on your shoot. The opportunities differ depending on how much water is around, and while many piers look their best when the tide is in, there's also lots of potential for shots when the tide is out.

✓ Time it right

If you want 'people' shots, peak times will give the richest pickings, but if your aims are purely scenic, then quieter times make more sense. Start early or late, or avoid high season.

✓ Crunch the detail

The obvious approach is to capture the pier's wider views, but don't forget to explore the details. Close-ups of the pier supports, the wood decking and rust make for interesting images.

✓ Be prepared

Look after yourself on your trips to the coast. Carry water to stay hydrated and for

personal comfort, pack a hat, sunglasses and sunblock. For your photo gear, take a small rucksack cover with you to protect the camera if the weather takes a turn for the worse, and a lens cleaning kit. Add protection filters to your lenses if the wind is whipping up sand, grit and sea spray.

✗ Watch the front

On breezy days, there is often a lot of sea spray in the air, so you should regularly check that the lens front remains clean. This is especially important if you are using slot filters, which are larger and more exposed than the lens front.

✗ Banish wonky horizons

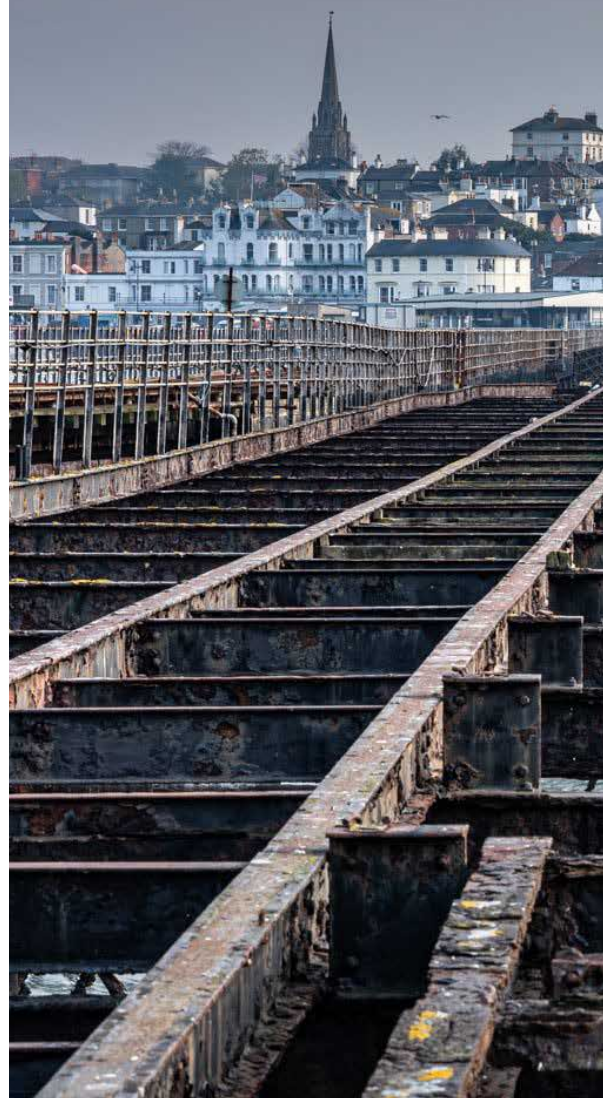
Slanting horizons at the coast is not a good look. Of course, the flaw can be corrected in editing, but it's better to try to avoid the problem happening in the first instance. Most cameras have viewfinder gridlines and a virtual level to help. Or fit a bubble level into the camera's hotshoe.

✗ Steady on your feet

If you're using a tripod, make sure it's stable. That's easy enough on a solid promenade, but it may need more thought on the beach. On a pebble beach, check where you place the tripod's feet, so they won't slip during a long exposure. If you're shooting on sand, push the tripod feet in for maximum stability. When shooting close to the water's edge, set up out of reach of the incoming waves to avoid any risk of the camera shifting.

Level horizon

Use viewfinder gridlines or a bubble level in the hotshoe.



Camera know-how Darker skies

Control the sky's brightness with a graduated neutral density filter

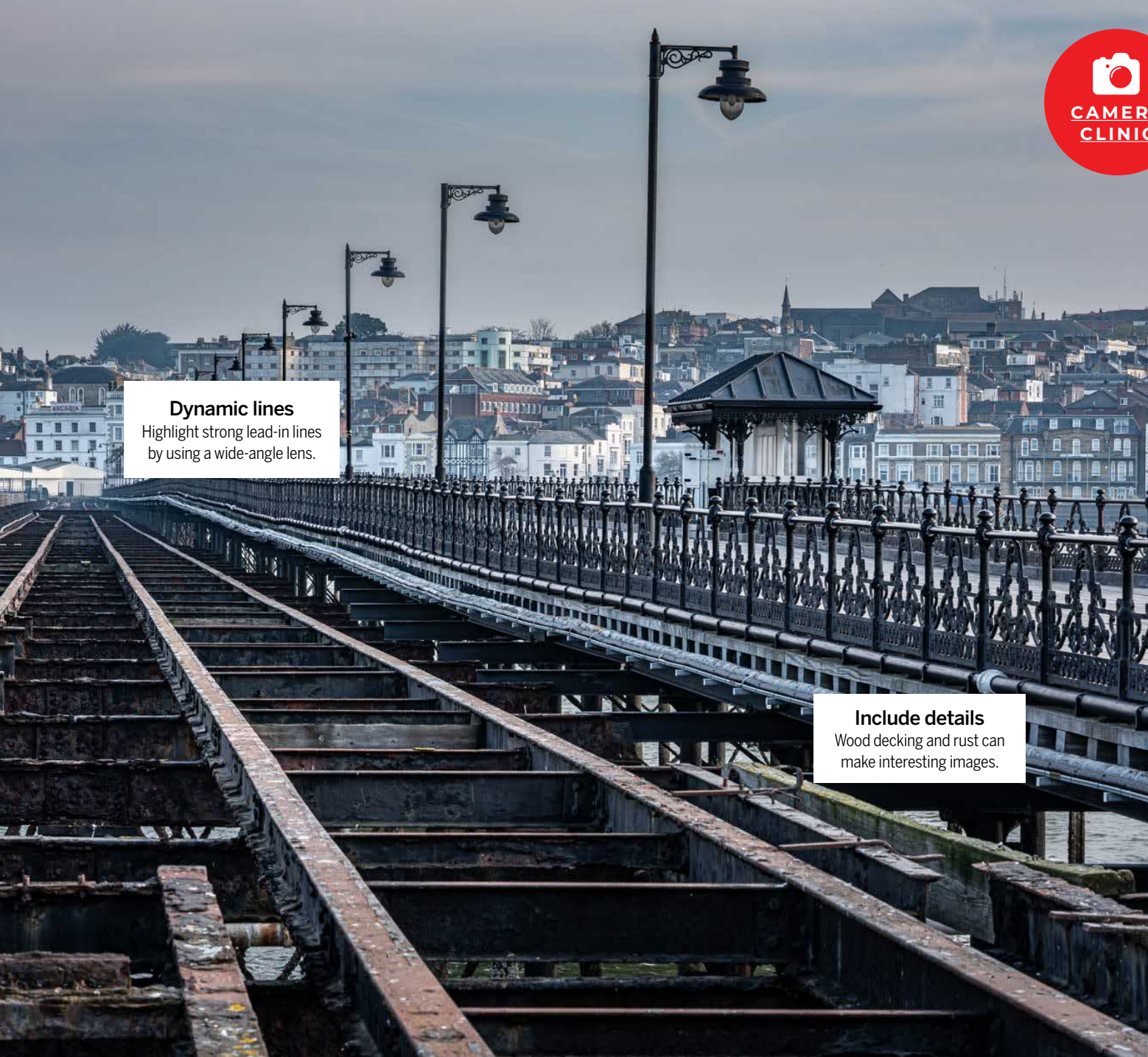
Using an ND grad filter when shooting at the coast will cut down the amount of light from the sky reaching the sensor. However, the camera's meter will detect that and may increase the exposure to compensate. As a consequence, the extra exposure will nullify the filter's effect.

In manual exposure mode, use the initial meter reading and don't adjust any settings once the filter has been added. With the auto modes, take note of the exposure settings and if they change when the grad is added, adjust the exposure compensation to return the settings to what you noted.



An ND filter darkens skies, but check the camera doesn't increase exposure.





Dynamic lines

Highlight strong lead-in lines by using a wide-angle lens.

Include details

Wood decking and rust can make interesting images.

Will Cheung

Lens tech Explore the dark side

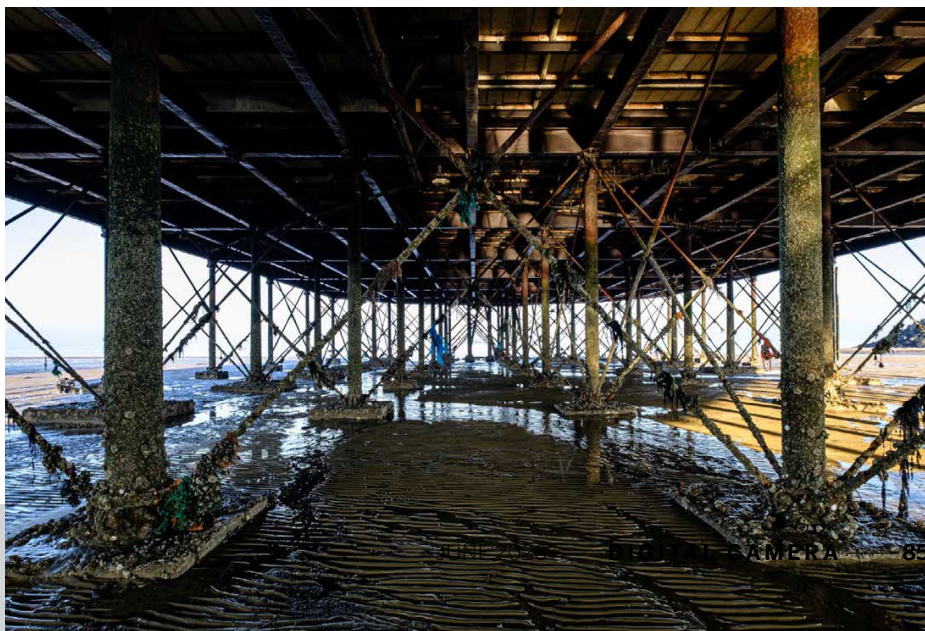
Head under the pier for an alternative view, but the ideal exposure can be a headache

Tricky lighting may require a more balanced exposure.

Not every pier offers the opportunity to check out its underside, but many of them do, so it's worth exploring if you have the chance. Obviously, you should take heed of any safety warnings and check the tide to ensure you don't get caught out.

Exposing correctly for the pier's underside can be tricky, and you are likely to need longer exposures, which in turn might require a tripod for sharp shots. That may mean that brighter parts of the scene will suffer from burnout – even shooting in raw format may not guarantee that highlights are recoverable.

There are several options: frame the shot so the highlights are less prominent; shoot an exposure bracket and merge the results in software; or use a more balanced exposure to record highlights and then recover the shadows in editing.



Shoot photos like a pro

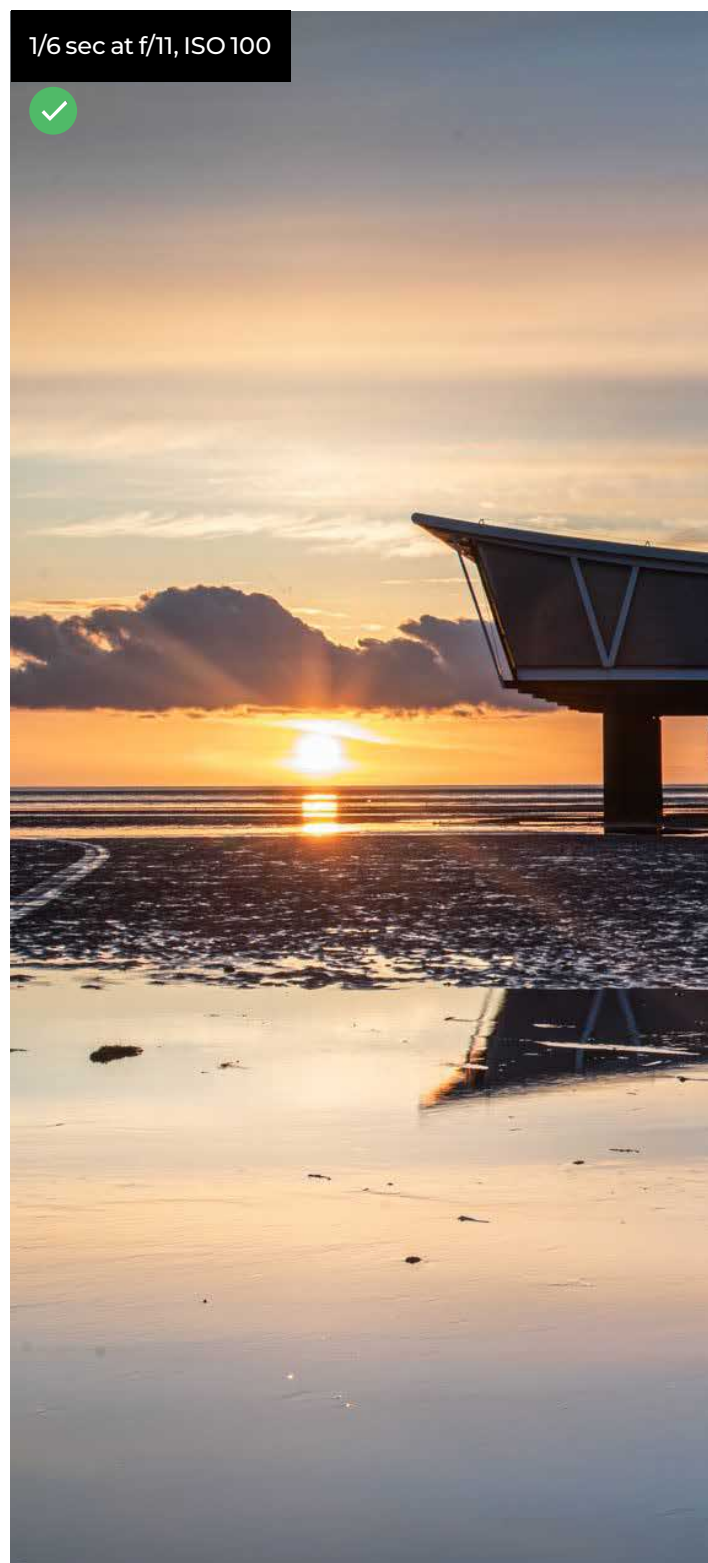
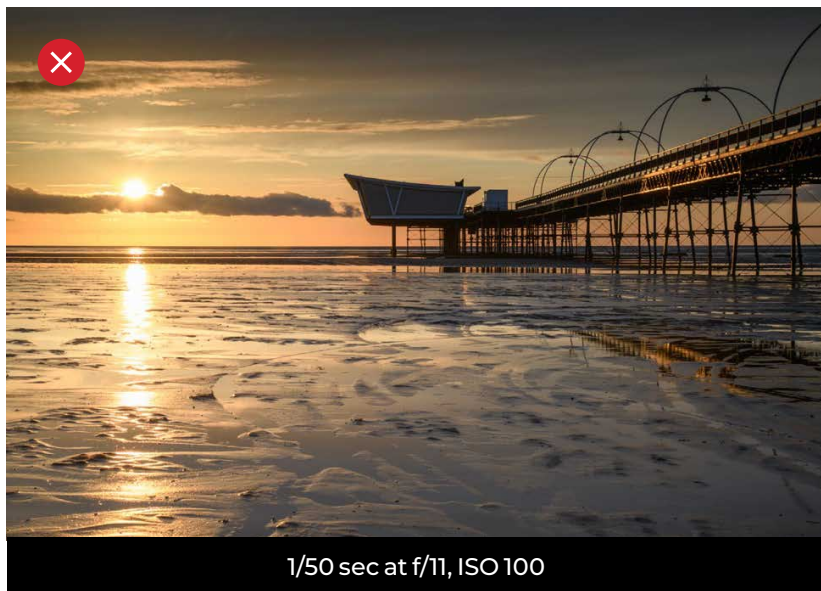
Hints and tips to give your pier photos a creative spin

While it's true that every pier has its own unique individual character, it's also true that most piers are essentially raised structures on struts built over the water – and that's why your creative input is so important. This input might take the form of your lens choice, opting to shoot at different times of the day or using filters to get a super-long exposure time, such as an extreme ND filter.

Of course, it's natural that you will explore the subject, looking for the best angle, and will probably cover all the obvious options. But if your pier shots look too similar, you could think out of the box using different kit or techniques that are new to you. Finally, let's not forget the creative possibilities of editing software – converting your colour originals to monochrome is always worth trying.

Great ball of fire

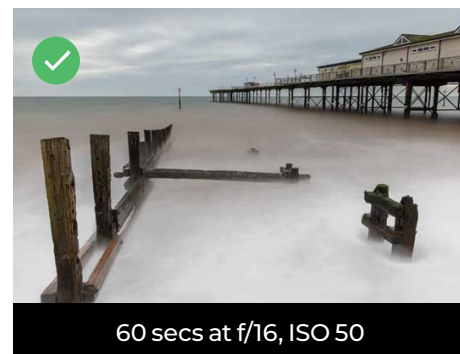
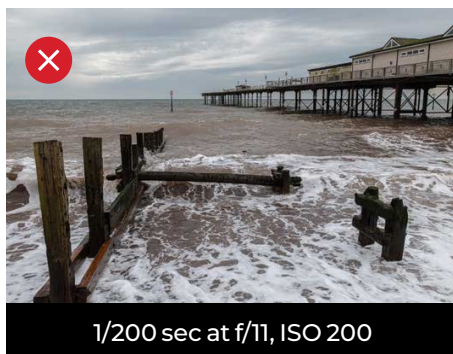
The best time to include the sun in your composition is either early in the morning or late in the day, when the light is less intense. However, when doing so, remember to use the monitor to frame up your shots, instead of the viewfinder, to reduce the risk of eye damage. Meter to one side of the sun or use positive exposure compensation, for example, +1 or even +2, to preserve the detail in the clouds. If you're lucky, you might even manage to capture the ball of fire as it disappears behind the horizon.



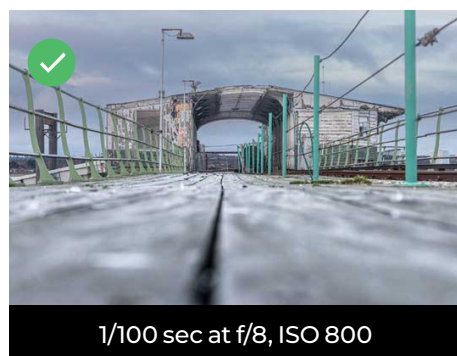
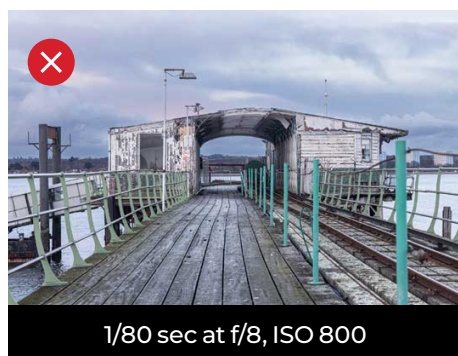
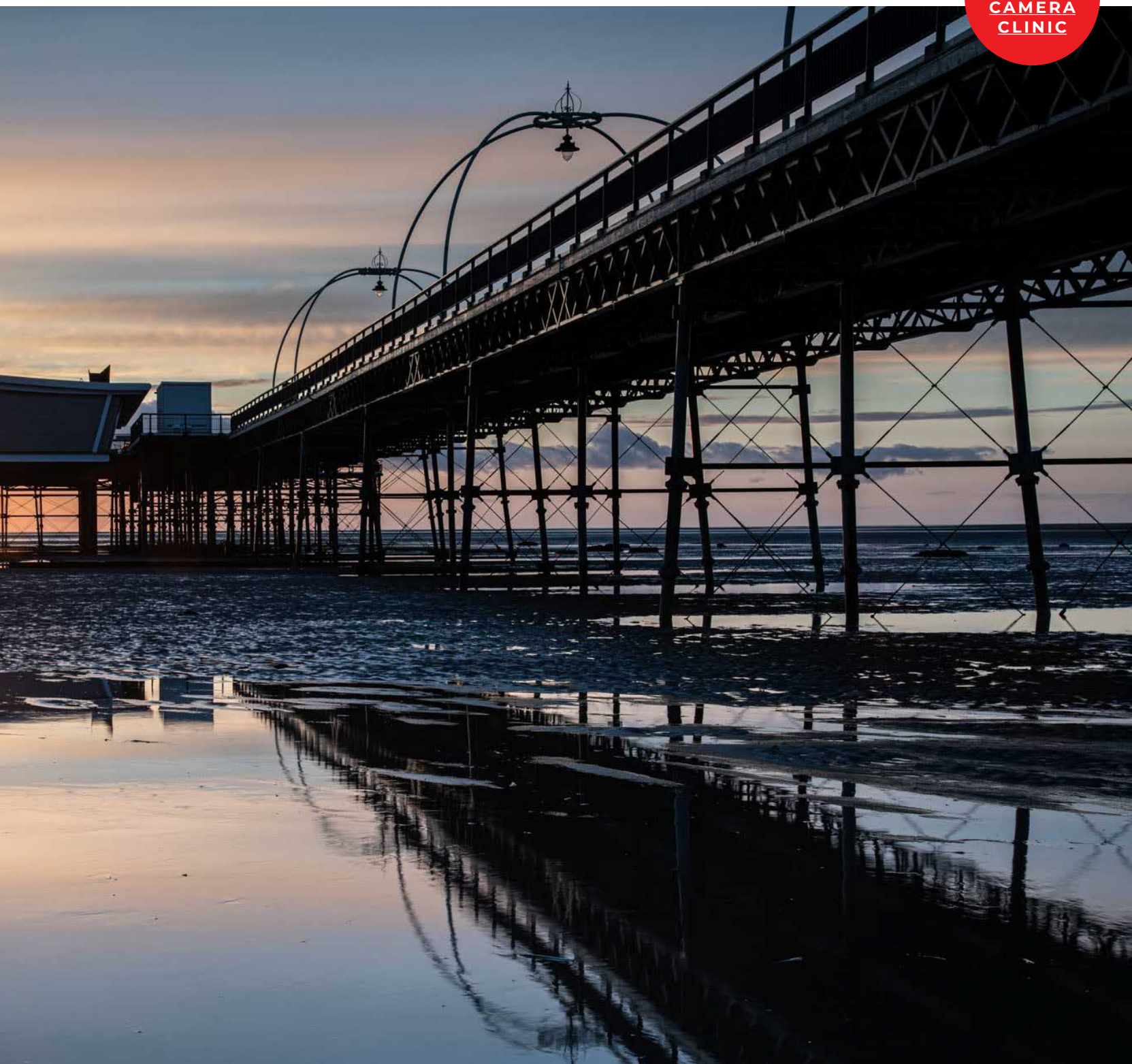
Take it long

Super-long exposures only really work if there's movement and detail in the sky. Totally blue sky or plain grey cloud days aren't generally worth trying with long exposures. Water is always on the move, so it will blur well with a long shutter speed.

Extreme long exposures on bright days can be problematic with contrast, with the white clouds burning out, so try to take shots when the sun is shielded by clouds.



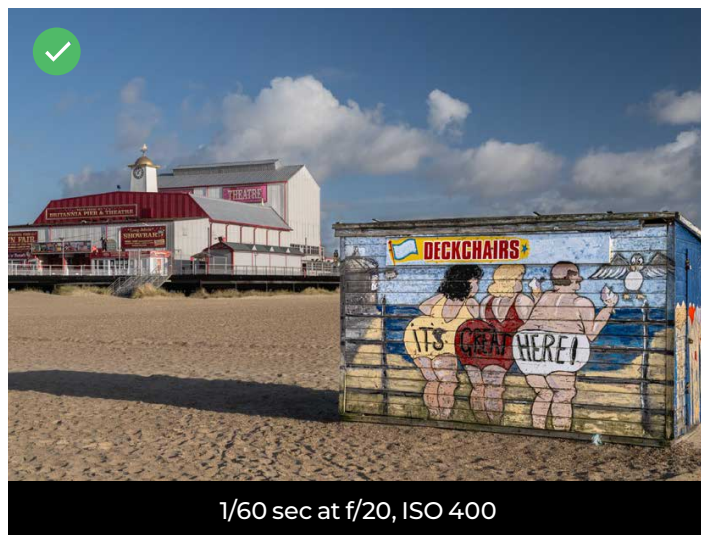
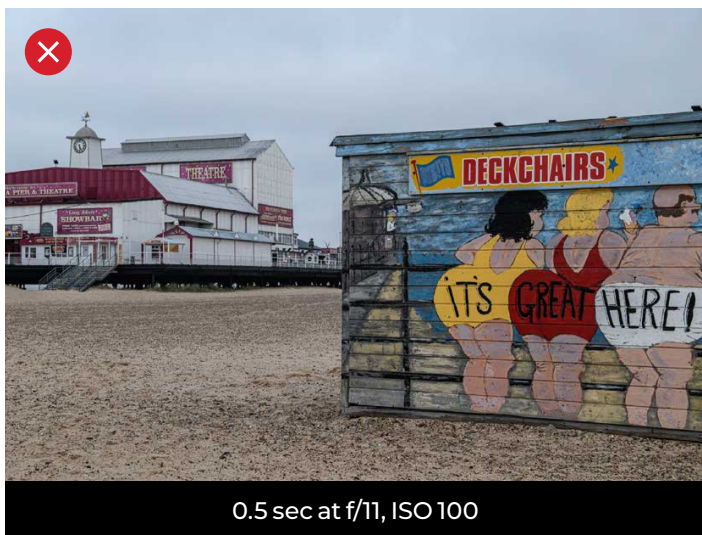
Will Cheung



Will Cheung

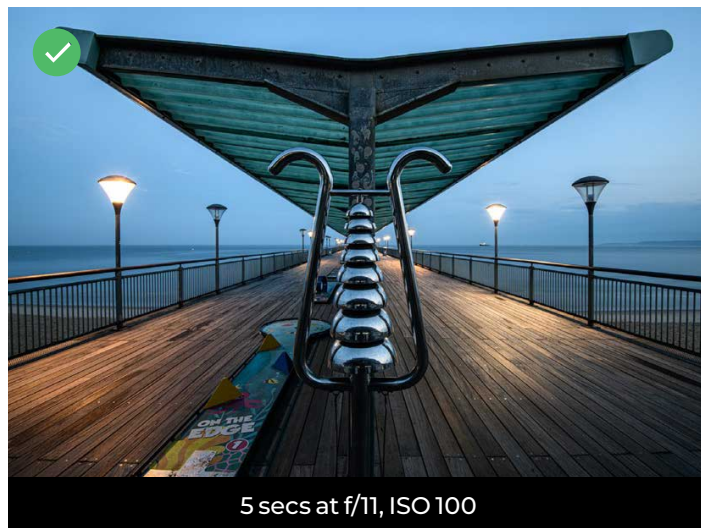
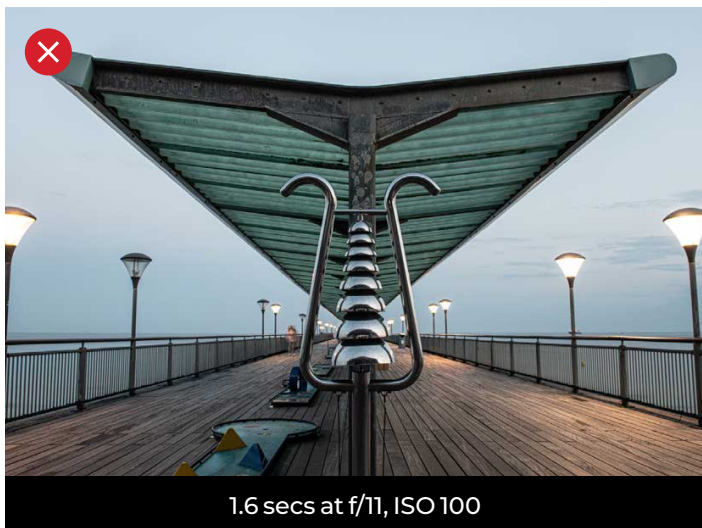
Height matters

Changing camera height makes a difference when shooting strong compositional lines with wide-angle lenses. Shooting at standing height gives a powerful result, but kneeling or even resting the camera on the floor can produce an even more potent result. Working at a low level with adjustable monitors can be tricky and seeing the composition can be awkward in bright light, so shield the screen with your hand for a better view.



The light is right

Piers are no different from any scenic subject, so don't be surprised if you need to return to shoot them in more attractive lighting. There's also the consideration of the tide, although that doesn't apply to these images of Great Yarmouth's Britannia Pier. Favourable conditions don't necessarily have to involve the sun, because there's often drama and mood when there's cloud around. However, there's no denying that sunlight does give photos zip.



Enjoy twilight hour

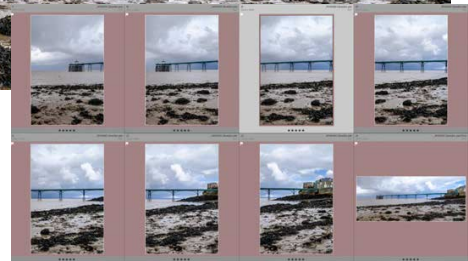
If you've stayed for sunset, you might as well allow an extra hour and enjoy the wonderful hues of twilight. A spectacular sunset isn't a prerequisite for a photogenic twilight, though, and you can get plenty of dramatic colours on cloudy days. Sky colour intensifies as twilight progresses, so carry on shooting while there is sky tone. Once the colour has vanished and the sky is black, that's the time to pack up.

Camera tech

Shoot a pier panorama

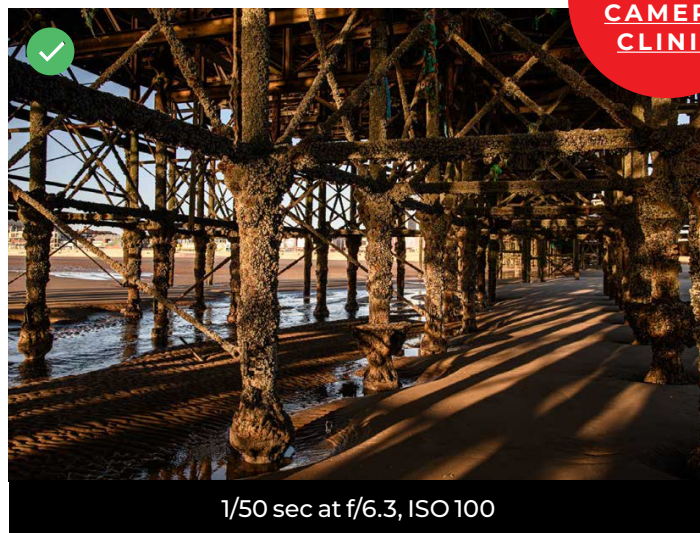
Taking in the wider view of a pier can be rewarding, but it's also a fun challenge

Many piers are long, thin structures, so the panorama approach works well. You could fit a wide-angle lens to get the whole pier in the frame and then crop to give a long, thin image. That works fine in principle, and with a high-resolution camera, the file should still be big enough for a good-sized print. However, taking the multi-image panoramic approach gives large files and doesn't need special kit, plus it's a fun technical exercise. You'll need software with a merge feature, such as Adobe Lightroom or Affinity by Canva. Shoot a sequence of upright shots, starting from the left, moving the camera enough to give some overlap from frame to frame. A 50mm lens is fine, but use manual exposure and a white balance preset for frame-to-frame consistency.





1/90 sec at f/6.3, ISO 200



1/50 sec at f/6.3, ISO 100

Explore the structure

Piers are incredible feats of engineering, and the structural detail is worth a closer look. The pictures won't be the prettiest you'll ever take, but it's another facet of piers to try. Your standard zoom will focus close enough for larger areas, but to shoot the nuts and bolts (literally), you might need a lens with macro abilities. The key difference here is the lighting. Shooting away from the setting sun (right) gave a lovely warmth, while shooting into the light was too stark.



1/100 sec at f/10, ISO 200



1/100 sec at f/10, ISO 200

Use figures for interest

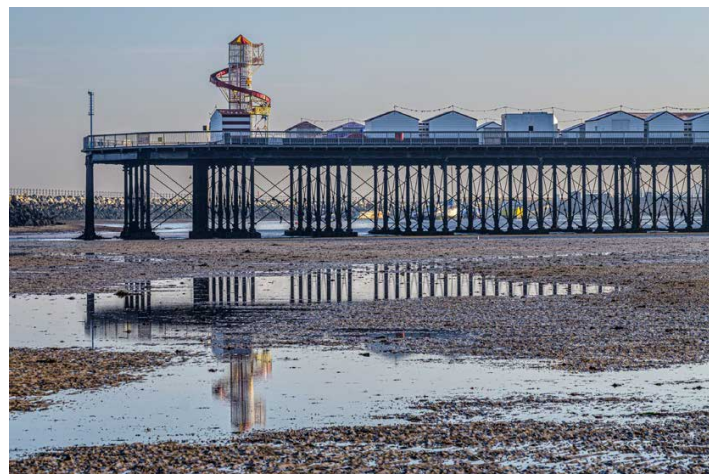
Pier scenics often benefit from people interest to add scale. My preference is for one or two people, although you have to work with what presents itself. This pair of shots features Blackpool's Central Pier with Blackpool North in the distance. Initially, there was a group which worked well to add scale and foreground interest, but when they moved on, I waited for someone to emerge on the Central Pier, and that was my preferred image.

Pro tip

Plan your pier photoshoot

Before setting off to shoot a pier, check the tide

■ Ideally, you should allow enough time to shoot piers at both high and low tide, but hanging around the location for six hours or more isn't always practical. It's also true that some piers aren't photogenic when there's no water around, but you'll never know if you don't see for yourself. As an approximate guide, though, being on site 60-90 minutes before high tide and then staying for around the same length of time after the tide has peaked is the sort of period you should aim to allow for your photography. That gives you plenty of opportunity to try different techniques and explore several camera positions. Check the tide times on websites, such as: www.tidetimes.co.uk and <https://easytide.admiralty.co.uk/>



Hotshots

Moonshots

A celebratory selection of photographs from NASA's recent successful Artemis II voyage around the moon



'Peeking at the Earth'

6 April 2026: As the Artemis II crew came close to passing behind the moon and experiencing a planned loss of signal, they captured this image of a crescent Earth setting on the moon's limb. The edge of the visible surface of the moon is called the 'lunar limb'. Seen from afar, it almost looks like a circular arc – except when backlit, as in other images captured by the Artemis II crew. In this photo, the dark portion of Earth is experiencing nighttime, while Australia and Oceania are in daylight. In the foreground, the Ohm crater is visible, with terraced edges and a flat floor interrupted by central peaks, formed when the surface rebounded upwards during the impact that created the crater.

Camera: Nikon D5 and Nikon 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6

Settings: 1/800 sec at f/7.1, ISO 400



NASA

'Eyes on Earth'

3 April 2026: A sliver of Earth is illuminated against the blackness of space in this photo taken by an Artemis II crew member through an Orion spacecraft window on the third day of the mission.

Camera: Nikon D5 and 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6 **Settings:** 1/500 sec at f/16, ISO 500

'The Rings of the Orientale Basin'

6 April 2026: In this view of the moon, the Artemis II crew captured an intricate snapshot of the rings of the Orientale basin, one of the moon's youngest and best-preserved large impact craters, on its first shift during the lunar flyby observation period.

Camera: Nikon D5 with 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6 lens

Settings: 1/1000 sec at f/8, ISO 400



NASA



NASA

'The Planets Shine Bright'

6 April 2026: The sun is eclipsed by the moon in this image from Orion. The glow around the moon is called zodiacal light, caused by interstellar dust reflecting sunlight. Unlike eclipses viewed from Earth, the Artemis II crew saw the sun hide behind the moon for nearly an hour. From Earth, the moon and sun appear about the same size, so even small changes in their alignment quickly bring the sun back into view, making totality much shorter.

Camera: Nikon Z 9 and 35mm f/2 **Settings:** 1 sec at f/2.0, ISO 1600



NASA

'A Setting Earth'

6 April 2026: The lunar surface fills the frame in sharp detail, as seen during the Artemis II lunar flyby, while a distant Earth sets in the background. This image was captured just three minutes before the Orion spacecraft and its crew went behind the moon, losing contact with Earth for 40 minutes before emerging on the other side.

Camera: Nikon Z 9 and 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6

Settings: 1/800 sec at f/7.1, ISO 400

Moonshots

'Over the Moon, Bea'

6 April 2026: During its journey around the far side of the moon, the Artemis II crew captures the moon's curved limb.

Camera: Nikon D5 and 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6

Settings: 1/800 sec at f/7.1, ISO 400

NASA





Shot of the month

Steven Madow explains how he used sound activation to capture this extraordinary blast-off image of the Artemis II rocket launch

Based in Orlando, Florida, Steven Madow grew up in Maryland (where a TV would be rolled into his classroom every time the Space Shuttle launched) and moved to Florida in 2007. A commercial photographer with clients that include Visit Orlando, Orlando City Soccer Club and Visit Florida, Steven's heart is split between landscape photography and rocket launches – though his favourite thing is combining the two. He exclusively shoots on Lumix cameras and has been lucky enough to build a partnership with the brand over the years.

NASA's recent Artemis II mission fired up the imagination of people across the world, and Steven's close-up photo of the rocket blasting off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida caught our eye, especially when we discovered that the photographer's camera was sound-activated. So we asked Steven to tell us about his setup and how the sound-activated process works.

"I had 14 Lumix bodies in play: seven remote cameras on the launchpad and seven at the press site," he explains. "The close-up engine image was captured with my Lumix GH5 paired with a Leica DG Vario-Elmarit 50-200mm f/2.8-4. I kept my favourite handheld body, the Lumix G9 II, with me at the press site. I'm a big fan of Micro Four Thirds for this kind of work. The Panasonic/Leica glass (the 100-400mm in particular) gives you extreme reach in a package you can actually carry, and the natively wider depth of field at a given aperture is a huge advantage when you're collecting light in challenging conditions."

Steven describes rocket launch photography as "a fun mental puzzle every time." As photographers have to prepare their kit without knowing the exact launch day or time, exposure settings have to cover conditions that could range from the midday sun to pitch-black night. The trajectory and exhaust plume behaviour, which can significantly influence compositions, are also factors to contend with. Then there

are Florida's famous thunderstorms – lightning kills more Floridians than all other weather hazards put together – and the awesome power of the rocket during ignition and blast-off. No wonder Steven stakes every leg of his tripods into the ground.

The rocket is extremely bright, so Steven built his exposure settings around taming the white plume while protecting the blue sky in the raw file. This required 1/8000 sec at f/16, ISO 100, and f/16 was chosen over f/22. "This was partly to preserve highlight latitude in the sky, and partly because the camera was going to sit exposed at the launch pad for a few days... f/22 is brutal for showing every speck of dust on the lens," he says.

On this historic day, however, the noise produced by the rocket played a vital role in Steven's image-making, as he used sound triggers (used for lightning and time-lapse photography) to initiate his captures.

"I use MIOPS sound triggers, and have developed a specific recipe for them over many launches," he says. "In sound mode, there are two key settings: sensitivity and delay. Sensitivity is hotly debated among launch photographers, but even at the lowest setting, a rocket will trigger the sensor from more than 1,000 feet away.

"For wide shots that benefit from giving myself optionality while editing, I've developed a method to shoot bracketed



Steven set up the sound mode on MIOPS triggers so that his cameras could activate shots taken near the rocket launch area.



**Steven Madow
Photographer**

Title: 'Artemis II Brings the Fire'

Location: Orlando, Florida, USA

Camera and lenses: Lumix GH5 and Leica DG Vario-Elmarit 50-200mm f/2.8-4

Settings: 1/8000 sec at f/16, ISO 100

Instagram: @stevenmadow

Website: stevenmadow.com

The sheer power of the Artemis II blast-off is felt in this capture, which became a viral hit.

exposures. With some tweaks to the sound trigger, I can shoot bracket after bracket during launch and end up with a lot of data for the edit. Lots of this has been trial and error (and many failures) over the years."

So with everything fired up and ready to go, with the rocket about to burn through 700,000 gallons of fuel, how does Steven prevent overexposing his images?

"There are a few ways," he says. "First, I bracket aggressively for wide shots. The five-shot sequence centred at -1 EV gives me real latitude to recover highlights. Second, for close-up shots of the engine, I manually expose for the engine itself, and hope to pull shadows from the raw. I also lean on notes and metadata from other photographers who have shot the same rocket before. For Artemis II, my friend Michael generously shared his Artemis I raw files and settings, and that helped me dial in the [exposure] floor. And finally, I shoot raw files every time so I have maximum flexibility for pixel recovery and final print grading." ●

Steven Madow attends fine-art festivals, where he meets fellow space fans and photography people in person. Follow the festival site or Instagram account for the schedule. Steven's prints from Artemis II and beyond are available from his website: www.stevenmadow.com





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nda Laverne Photography

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PAGE 100

Photoshop

Add vintage 35mm film frames to your images for a retro look.

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Lightroom

Use the Print Module to create borders and text for your images.

PAGE 104

Photoshop

With AI tools, selecting the subject in your shots has never been easier.

PAGE 106

Photoshop

Fed up with perfection? Create a poorly scanned photocopy effect.

PAGE 108

DxO PhotoLab 9

The first in a four-part guide to the latest version of PhotoLab.

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



You've been framed!

Dan Mold explains how to use your free film frames in Photoshop to get that retro look

R

etro is back in fashion, though some would even argue it never went away. So this month I've been searching through my old negatives and slides on the hunt for vintage vibes. What I've come up with is a pack of 10 film frames, all from various brands of 35mm film. In this tutorial, I'll show you how to insert your pictures using Photoshop and then retro-ify them by adding dust, scratches and hazy colours to mimic the look of film.

You'll find all 10 film frame pictures in the Gifts folder with this month's download (see page 110), and I've also supplied a cityscape of Canary Wharf, taken from Horizon 22, London's highest free viewing platform, to give you an image to experiment with. Read through the step-by-step guide and watch the accompanying video to see how I pull off the effect in real-time, then bring in your own photos and have fun making them look like they were taken on an old camera. If you can't afford the steep rise in the price of film over recent years, this is a great way to make sure you don't miss out on all the retro fun.

Shoot your own frames

If you have an old box of film negatives and slides kicking around, why not add these to your collection? Try looking for different film brands and formats, such as the tiny Super 8 or huge medium format, to add variety to your film reels. A dedicated film scanner will cover some of the surrounding frame and sprocket holes and possibly obscure some of the text, too. Instead, I recommend placing your negatives on a lightbox with a pane of glass over it to keep them flat, then take a photo with a macro lens from directly above.

Download your files

www.digitalcameraworld.com/dc308
Download your files and video tutorial from the folder titled 'Photoshop_Film Frames'.



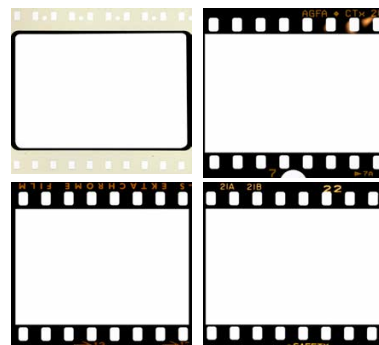
10 retro film frames for Photoshop



9-minute video tutorial



Project files and instructions





1

Open an image

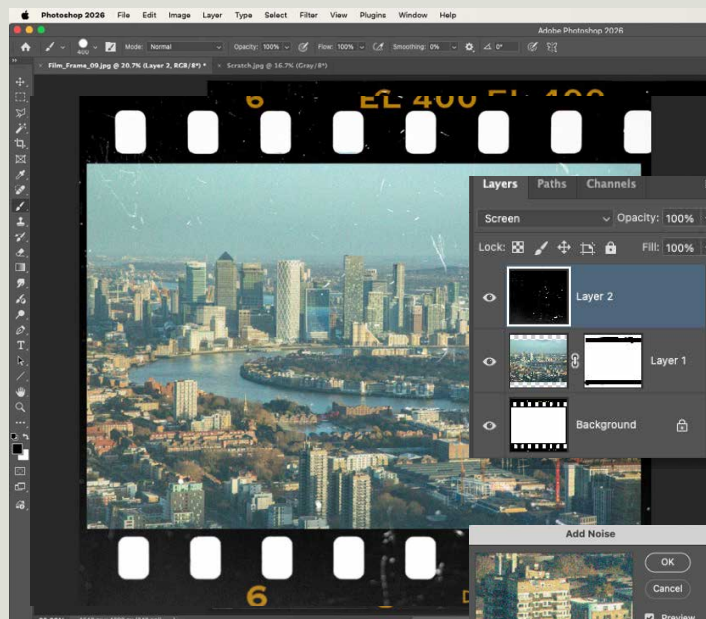
Open one of the frames from this month's download and then load up the Canary_Wharf.jpg image. Hit Ctrl/Cmd+A to select the photo of London, Ctrl/Cmd+C to copy it and Ctrl/Cmd+W to close it down. Now hit Ctrl/Cmd+V to paste your picture into the frame. Hit Ctrl/Cmd+T to put it into Free Transform mode and then pull the corner handles of the bounding box to make it bigger or smaller (hold Shift to keep the aspect ratio the same). Now click and drag your picture to move it around and make sure all of the white window in the frame is covered, before hitting Return to set it in place.



2

Blend it in and mask it off

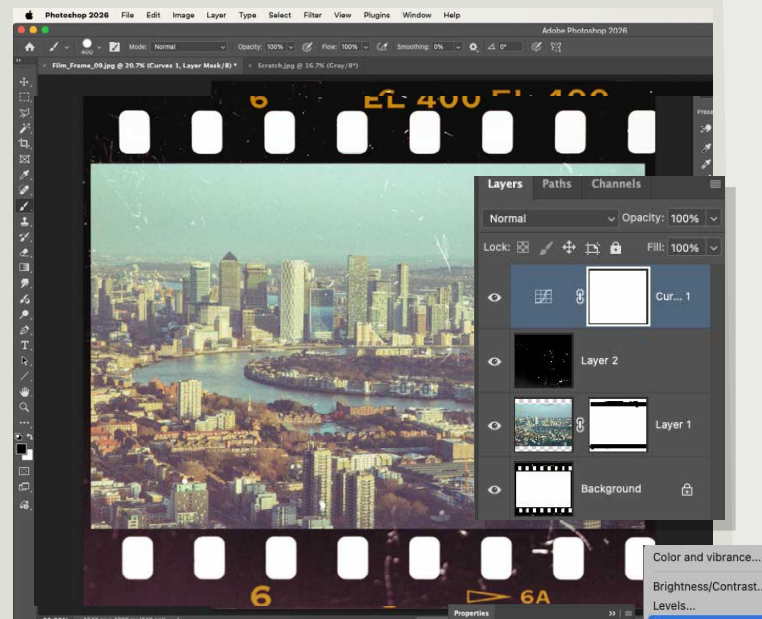
Head over to your layers panel (Window > Layers) and change the blending mode of your photo layer from Normal to Multiply to see your image appearing through the white window of the film frame and not on the black border. However, if the image is still appearing through the white sprocket holes, either run your Eraser Tool over these areas, or add a Layer Mask and use a hard black Brush Tool to paint over the offending parts.



3

Add noise and scratches

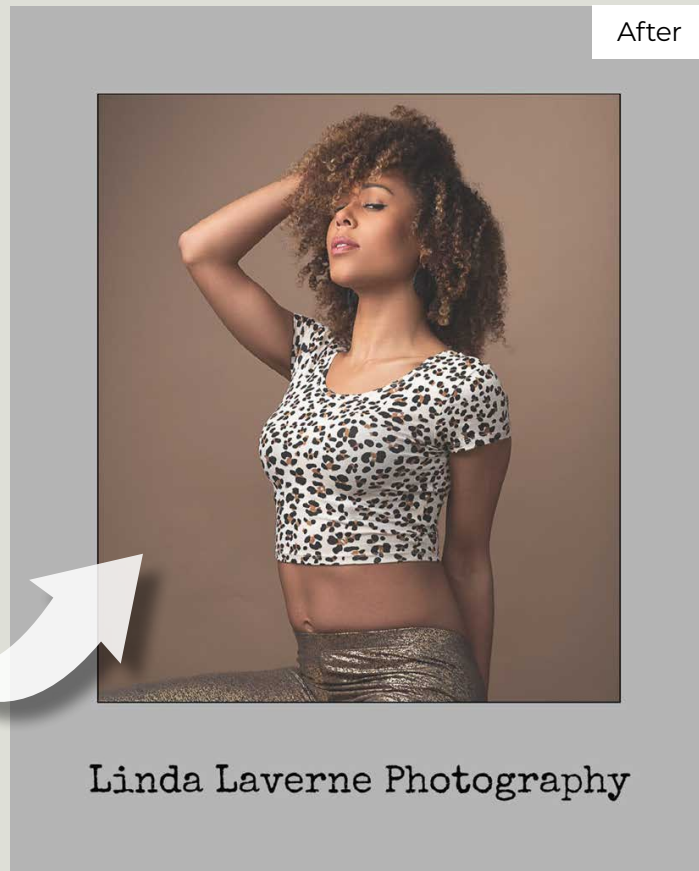
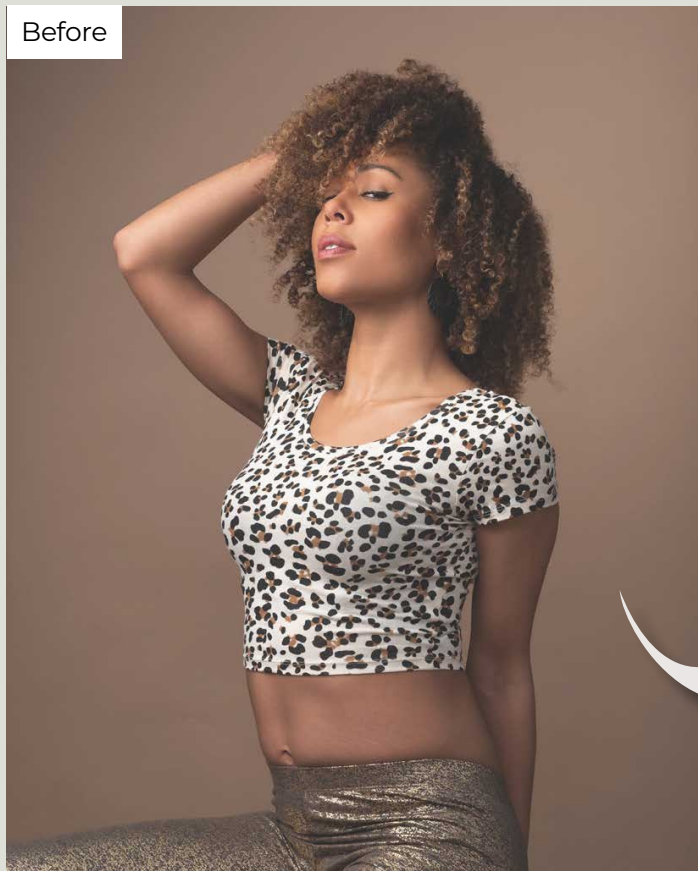
Go to Filter > Noise > Add Noise and drag the Amount slider until the amount of noise looks good for your image. Here, I chose 40 per cent for this shot. Make sure Distribution is set to Uniform and Monochromatic is unticked, then hit OK to apply it. Now open up the start image called scratch.jpg and paste it in, just like we did in Step 1. Change the Blending Mode to Screen and resize it so that it covers your entire film frame.



4

Mimic film colour

To mimic retro film colours, click on the Create new Adjustment Layer icon (this looks like a half-black, half-white circle in the layers panel) and pick Curves from the list. Drag the black point of the RGB curve upwards to wash out the blacks and reduce contrast. Then drag the mid-point of the red curve upwards, create an S-curve on the green curve and pull the mid-point of the blue curve down, so that it looks similar to the example above (see inset).



Get your images Insta-ready

Sean McCormack uses Lightroom to create social media borders

Lightroom Classic's Develop Module is amazing. The power that masking alone provides is phenomenal – and it's simple compared with using Layers in Photoshop. But if you want even the most basic of designs or layouts, you have to look elsewhere. At that stage, you might think it's time to open up Photoshop, but you'd be wrong. While the Develop module has no layout features, Lightroom's Print Module does.

What kind of layout are we talking about? You can guess from the title that it's a border, and while there is a way to cheat the effect in Develop, doing it this way means you get to include text with the layout. Unlike watermarks, this text isn't limited to being on the photo and can be placed anywhere in the layout.

You may be thinking, 'But I don't want to print this, I want a file'. Well, that's the beauty of this approach, as one of the options is to output it as a jpeg file. You set the dimensions using a little maths. If you make a five-inch by four-inch file at 300ppi, you get a 1500 pixel by 1200 pixel file. You could use 100ppi and a 15-inch x 12-inch file for the same output. Let's go!

Download your files

www.digitalcameraworld.com/dc308
Download your files and video tutorial from the folder titled 'Lightroom_Social Media Borders'.



Four Photoshop
border print
templates



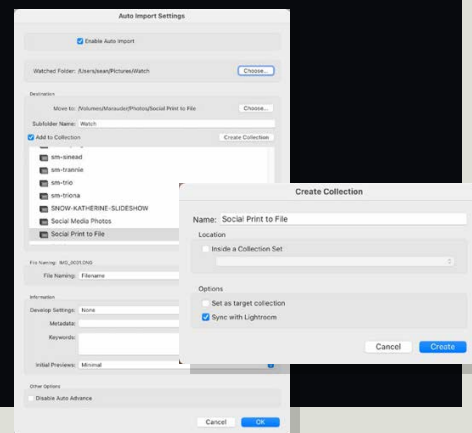
12-minute
video
tutorial

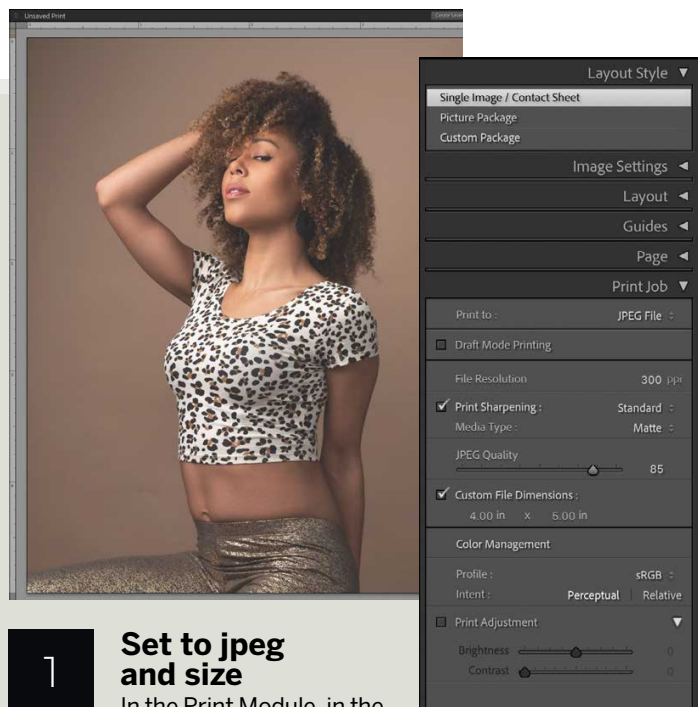


Project
files and
instructions

Auto import

Lightroom won't automatically track these files, so instead, go to File > Auto Import to create a Watched Folder. Choose or make a folder – it should be empty. Choose a destination folder managed by Lightroom. You can also create a collection that syncs to the cloud. When you click Print, choose the watched folder.

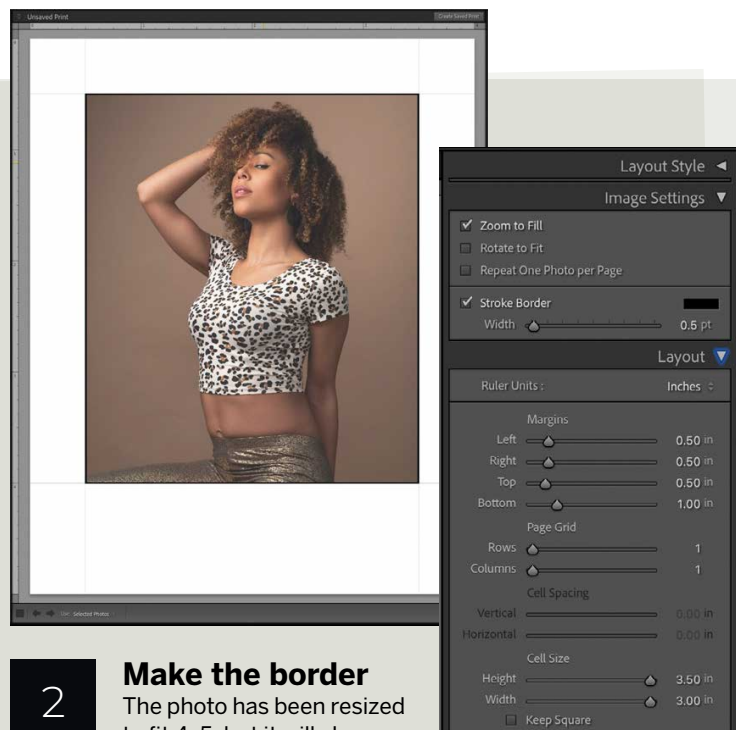




1

Set to jpeg and size

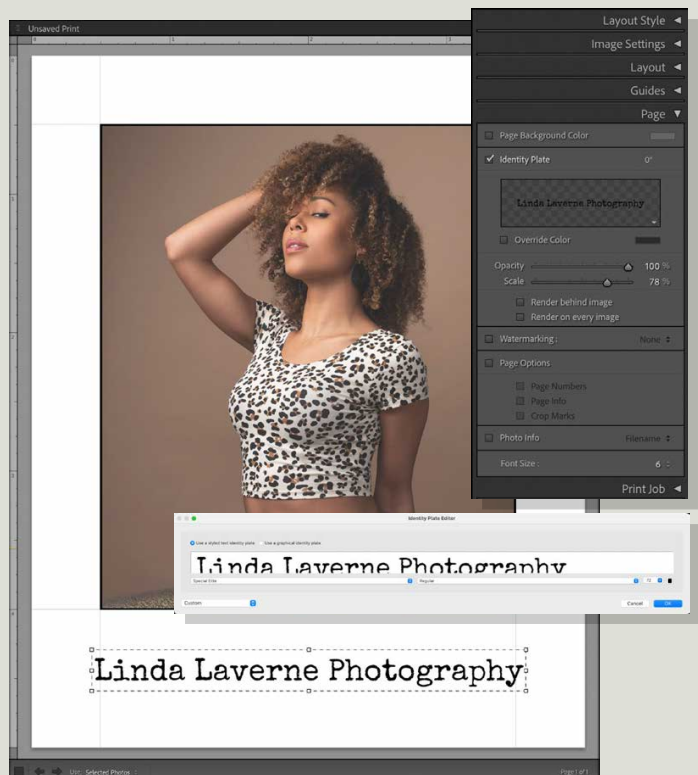
In the Print Module, in the Layout Style, choose the Single Image/Contact Sheet option. Go down to Print Job and in the Print to: section, choose JPEG File. Change to Selected Photos in the Toolbar (T). To size the photo, set File Resolution to 300ppi. With Custom File Dimensions on, set it to four inches by five inches for an Instagram-friendly ratio. This will give us a 1500 x 1200 pixel output.



2

Make the border

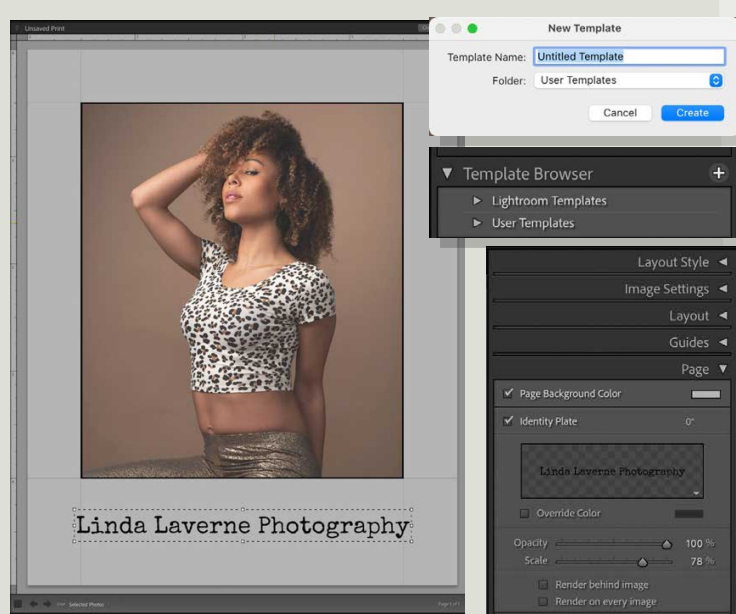
The photo has been resized to fit 4x5, but it will change as we make a border. In Layout, set all the margins to 0.5 inches, then change the bottom margin to one inch. This allows room for text under the image. Turn on Zoom to Fill to fill the available cell space. Click and drag on the photo to control the cropping. Finally, turn on Stroke Border with a black swatch and set it to 0.5pt for separation.



3

Textual feeling

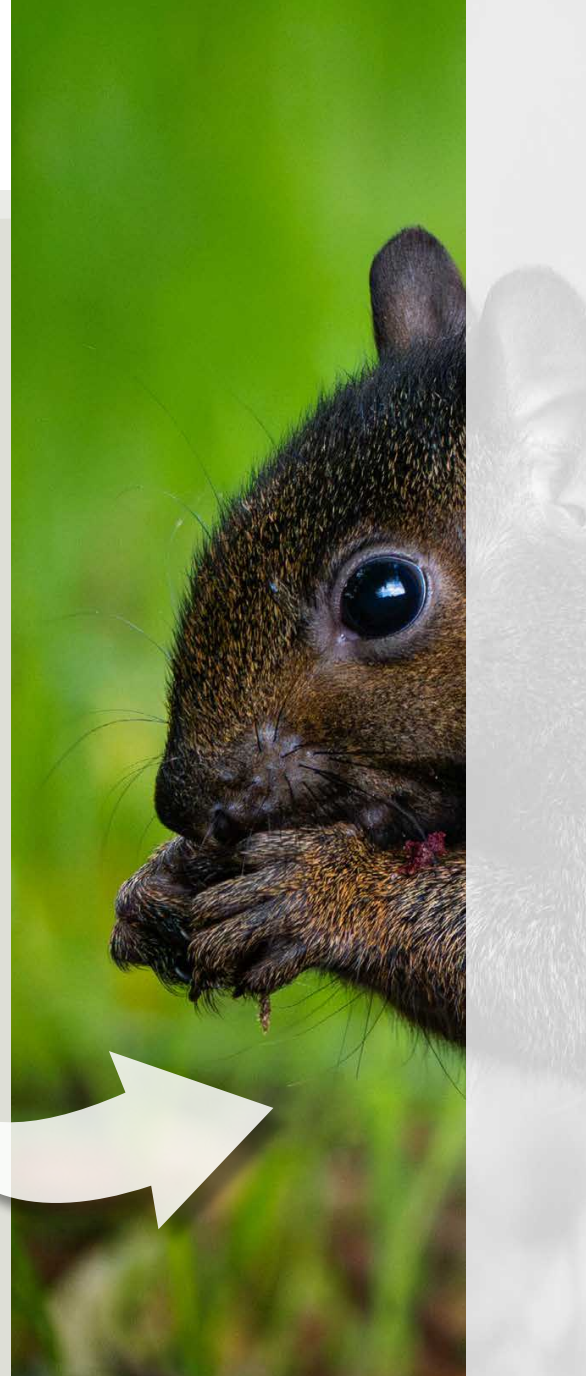
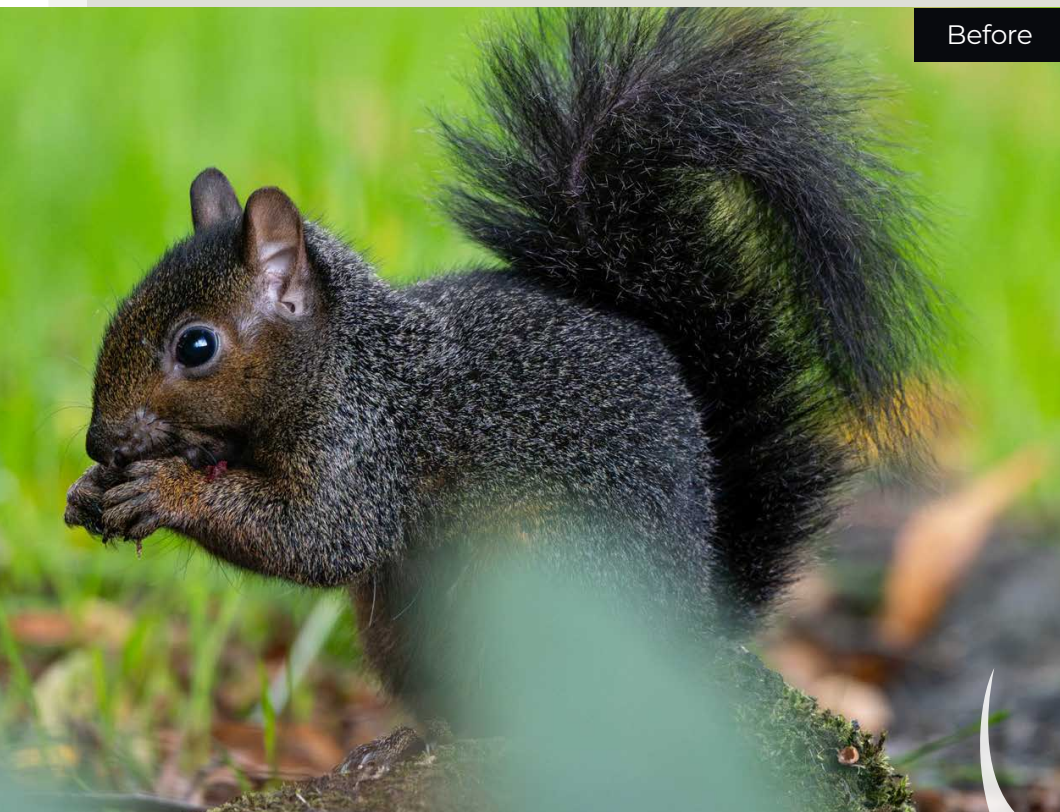
You may want to add a logo or some text under the photo. You could use Photo Info in Page, but you have no control over fonts. Instead, you can use the Identity Plate. Click on the arrow in the window and choose Edit. Enter your text and choose the font and colour, then hit 'OK'. To centre the text, pull the side handles out to both sides, then use the middle ones to resize it.



4

Finalise settings

If you want a different colour background, turn on Page Background Colour and choose the colour. In Print Job, make sure that the Profile is set to sRGB with Perceptual Intent. Sharpening should be set to Medium and Glossy. Print Quality should be 85 or higher – 100 gives the best quality, but is also a larger file. To reuse the layout, click + in the Template Browser on the left and give it a name.



Use AI for speedy subject selection

Take advantage of Photoshop's AI superpowers to save time when applying creative techniques, says **James Abbott**

Photoshop has seen an injection of AI-powered features over the past few years. Love or loathe them, some are incredibly useful and can save you time.

One such feature allows you to select the main subject in a matter of seconds, which can then be the foundation of targeted effects that focus on the subject or the background. This feature isn't always perfect and works best when the main subject is well defined, like the shot of a black squirrel we're using here.

As always, we have created Photoshop Actions to apply the four techniques covered, but there's a slight difference in how they work. Photoshop Actions are usually created in such a way that they can be applied when any Layer is active, but these actions require the Background Layer to be active. This is simply so that the Select Subject AI feature will work.

Download your files

www.digitalcameraworld.com/dc308
Download your files and video tutorial from the folder titled 'Photoshop_AI Editing'.



Four
Actions for
Photoshop



6-minute
video
tutorial



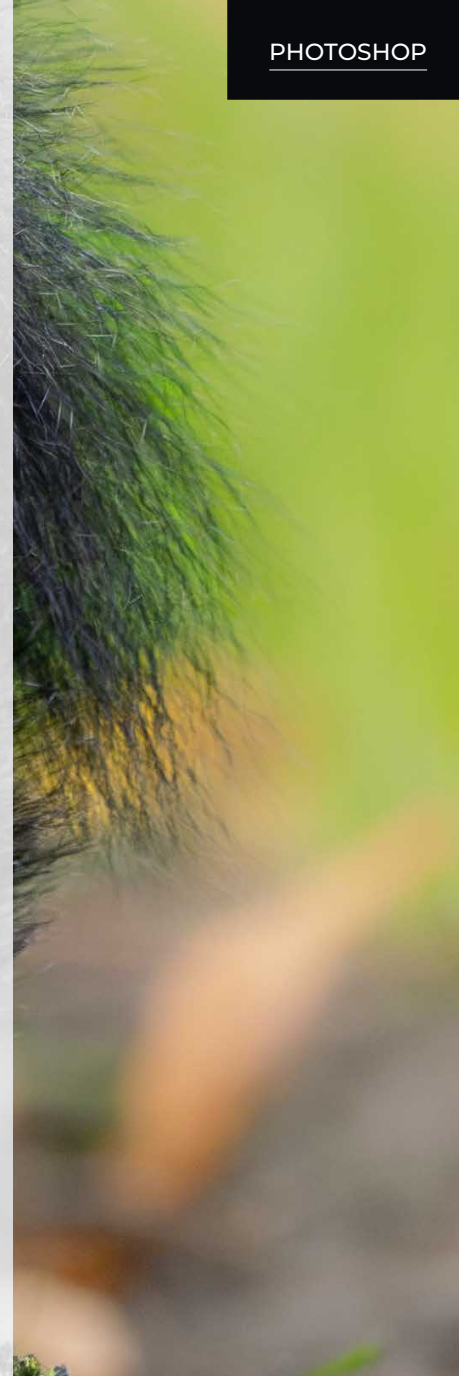
Project
files and
instructions



1

Create a targeted vignette

With the Background Layer active, go to Select > Subject. Go to Select > Select & Mask. Now, set Feather to 500px and Shift Edge to +40 per cent and hit OK. Press Ctrl/Cmd+Shift+I to invert the selection. Click on the Create new fill or adjustment layer icon on the Layers panel and select Curves. When the dialog opens, place a point on the curve, then drag down and to the right to darken. Change the Layer's Blending mode from Normal to Luminosity.



2

Sharpen the subject

Go to Select > Subject, and once the selection is active, press Ctrl/Cmd+J to copy the selected area (the subject) to a new Layer. Now, go to Filter > Other > High Pass and when the dialog opens, set the Radius to 4.0 pixels. Close the dialog, then change the Layer's Blending mode from Normal to Overlay to add transparency and reveal the sharpening. You can reduce the Opacity of the Layer for a weaker effect, or for a stronger effect, increase the Radius in the High Pass Filter.



3

Boost subject contrast

Go to Select > Subject, and once the selection is active, click on the Create new fill or adjustment layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and select Black & White. Change the Blending mode of the Layer from Normal to Overlay, and this will produce a slightly desaturated boost of contrast. If you'd prefer no desaturation, use a Levels Adjustment Layer instead. You don't need to make any adjustments to the Layer because the Overlay Blending mode adds the contrast.



4

Soften the background

With the Background Layer Active, go to Select > Subject. Go to Select > Select & Mask. Now set Feather to 500px and Shift Edge to +40 per cent and hit OK. Next, press Ctrl/Cmd+Shift+I to invert the selection. Next, click on the Create new fill or adjustment layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and select Clarity and dehaze. When the dialog opens, drag both the Clarity and Dehaze sliders to -40. This will soften the background in terms of detail and colour.

Before



After



Badly scanned girl

Craig Blackley gives his pristine portraits the look of a poorly scanned photocopy by applying filter effects in Photoshop

A lot of time and effort goes into editing portrait images, whether it's removing blemishes, eliminating strands of hair or general skin retouching, to name just a few common processes. We've all spent countless hours trying to create a perfect photo and still not been satisfied with the result. So forget all that digital perfection and turn your photo into something that looks like it got stuck in the photocopier machine in an 1980s office.

The key aspects are blurring part of the image and applying the filter effects. The settings we used here are simply suggestions, and you can create different styles by tweaking them for your own images.

Download your files

www.digitalcameraworld.com/dc308
Download your files and video tutorial from the folder titled 'Photoshop_Scanned Print'.



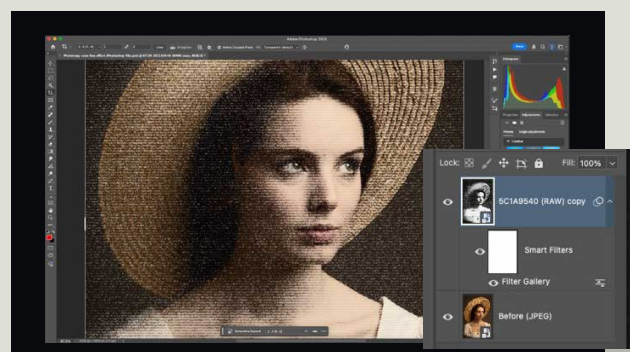
No extras
this time



5-minute
video
tutorial

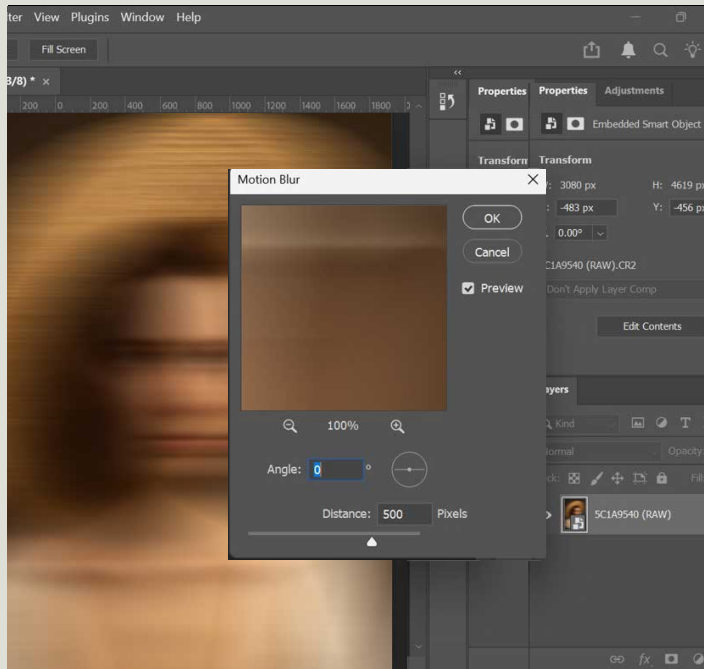


Project files
to follow
along



Colour variation

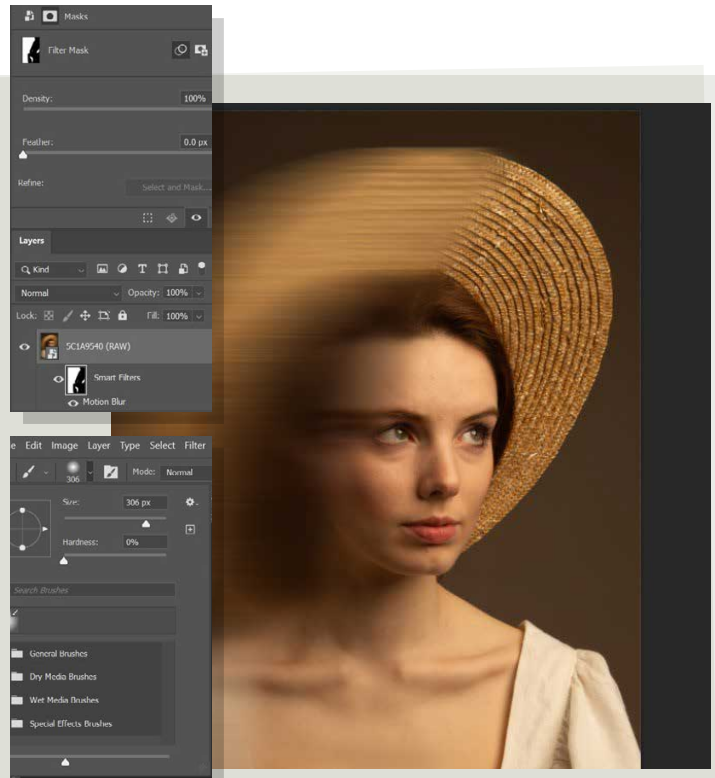
If you want a colour version of this with more of the original photo detail showing, then simply grab the original image and drop it into the layers palette. If you put the image on the top, reduce its opacity to 50 per cent. If you put it at the bottom of the layers, then reduce the black and white layer to 50 per cent opacity. It makes no difference which way round you do it.



1

Apply Motion blur

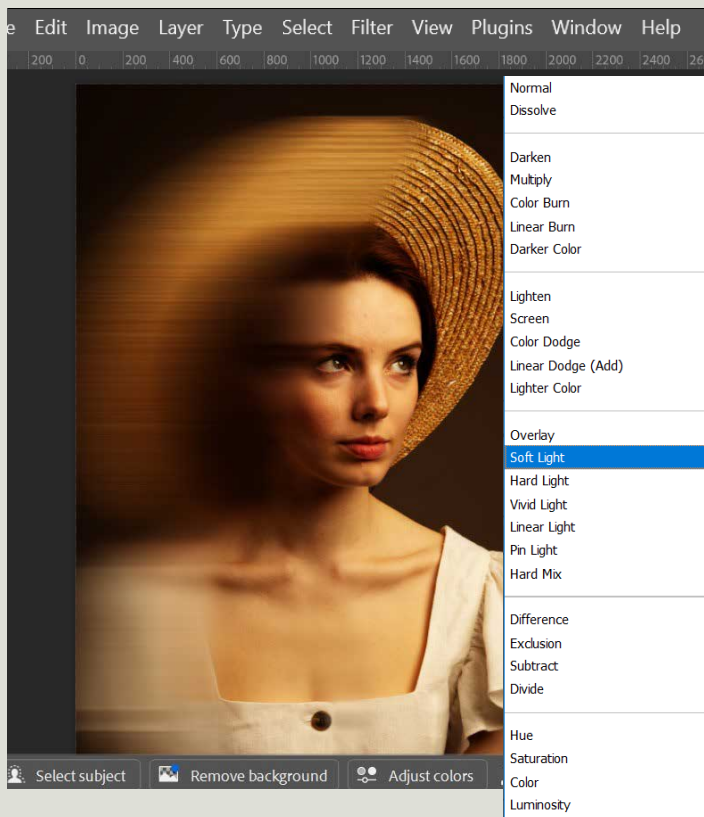
First, create a blank new file, then import your chosen image and resize it accordingly to fit the frame. Delete the background layer, so that you're just left with the image layer. Once that's done, go to **Filter > Blur > Motion blur**. Make sure that the angle is set to 0 and adjust the distance to around 500px.



2

Mask with the Brush tool

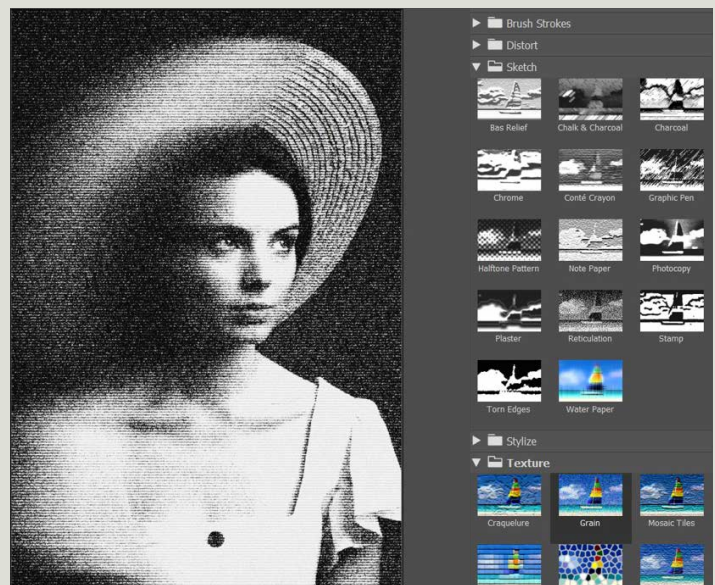
Below your image layer, you will see a Smart Filters mask and a Motion Blur parameter icon. Select the Smart Filters mask, then select the Brush tool with the foreground colour set to black. Paint over the area to keep it in focus. Reduce the brush opacity to 30 per cent and brush over the transition area between the two halves.



3

Contrast and blend

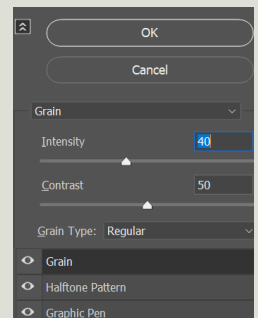
Right-click on the image layer and select **Duplicate**. Change the blend mode of this new layer to **Soft Light** and reduce the Opacity to 50 per cent. This makes it richer with more contrast. Then select both layers, right-click and choose **Convert to Smart Object**. This produces just one smart object layer again.



4

Filter effects

Go to **Filter > Filter gallery**. Select the **Sketch** folder and choose **Graphic Pen**. Adjust the stroke length to either 1 or 2 and set your light/dark balance to around 50. Then click on the plus icon at the bottom of this window to add a new filter and select the **Halftone Pattern**. Choose **Line Pattern** and increase the size to 3, then set the contrast to 15. Click on plus again, then select **Texture > Grain**. Set the Intensity to 20 and the Contrast to 80. Flatten the layer to finish.



Discover the world of PhotoLab 9

Wendy Evans kicks off a four-part series introducing the latest software from DxO with this handy guide to the new interface

There's a new version of DxO PhotoLab in town, so in this four-part series, we are going to look at some of the features that make it worth incorporating into your editing workflow.

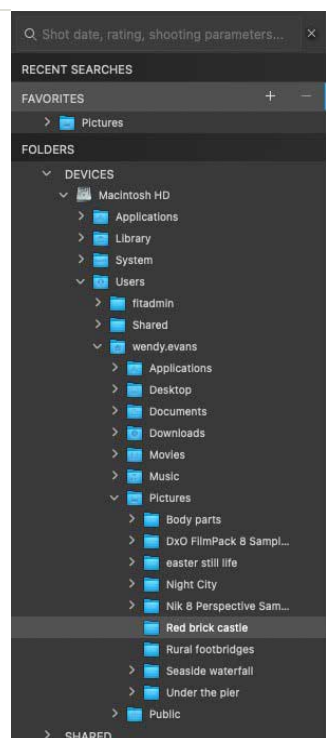
One of the most interesting new elements starts right in the file browser, or on the timeline if you've moved on to the Customize

tab. Select a bunch of images that are similar, such as slightly different compositions of the same shot, right-click and select Stacking > Create Stack to group them all together in one stack, cleaning up the timeline and making it easier to then sort through the rest of the images. If you have put multiple images into the stack, you can also move them around and sort the contents.

1

PhotoLibrary and Customize

These are the two main tabs of the workspace. Use the Library to sort images and potentially compile them into stacks. The files can be displayed in lists or as thumbnails. Clicking on one of these brings up the metadata on the right-hand panel.



2

Histogram and Navigator

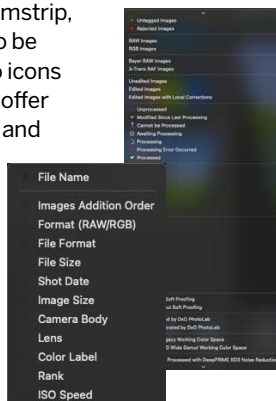
The Histogram can show the individual colour channels or the RGB image, but the two most useful elements are the clipping warnings for highlights and shadows at the bottom of the palette. The Navigator is useful when you are using a tool in the main window, rather than the Hand tool, to move.



3

Filmstrip, sorting and tagging

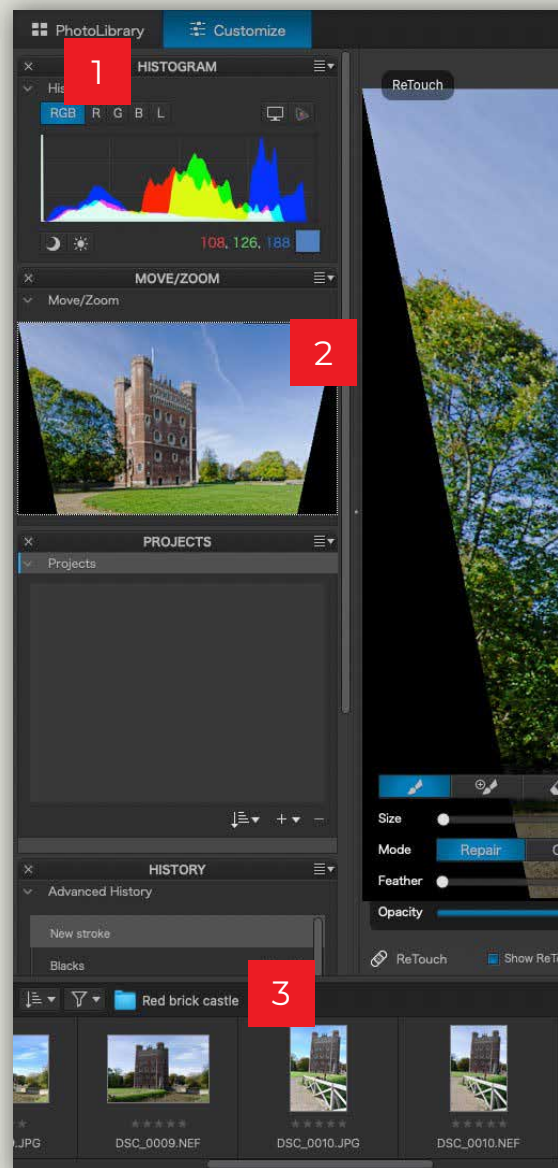
Once in the Customize section, you still have access to the list of files by using the Filmstrip, though this can also be minimised. The two icons to the left, above it, offer a variety of tagging and sorting options. You can also rate your images, making it easier to find the better ones from a particular shoot or genre you are looking for.



4

Lighting

The icons in this strip cover the main editing categories, starting with Lighting. There are palettes for basic exposure, then Smart Lighting, ClearView Plus, the Tone Curve and Vignetting correction. Smart Lighting can be applied uniformly or you can select an area to weight it to.



7

Geometry

Here, you'll find distortion correction, such as pincushioning and barrelling. It's based on the lens correction module that has been loaded with the image, though you can tweak it. There are also tools for straightening the horizon and correcting the perspective.

5

Colour

Here, you'll find all the colour adjustments, including White Balance and colour rendering. There is LUT Grading, an HSL colour wheel with a channel mixer and even a colour curves function. The system uses DxO's Wide Gamut colour space, which can be matched to the output.

6

Detail

This is where all the noise reduction options and a number of other functions are. Noise reduction modes include Standard, to see the results automatically on screen, DeepPRIME 3 and DeepPRIME XD3, which offers the best quality, but takes the longest time to process.

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Get a 15% discount on all DxO software until 31 Dec 2026

Includes DxO PureRAW 6. To get the discount, go to:

www.dxo.com
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DCW15



8

Preset image adjustments

If you want quick fixes, lens corrections and a few effects, head for the Presets. On their own, they aren't too exciting, although there are some decent HDR options. However, if you have purchased the FilmPack8, this panel will come into its own.

9

Nik Collection and Exporting

Click here if you want to explore the optional Nik Collection. In this section, you'll find plugins for Analog Efex, Color Efex, Dfine, HDR Efex, Sharpener for Output, Presharpener, Silver Efex and Viveza. Next to it is the Export option to use after editing a raw file.

10

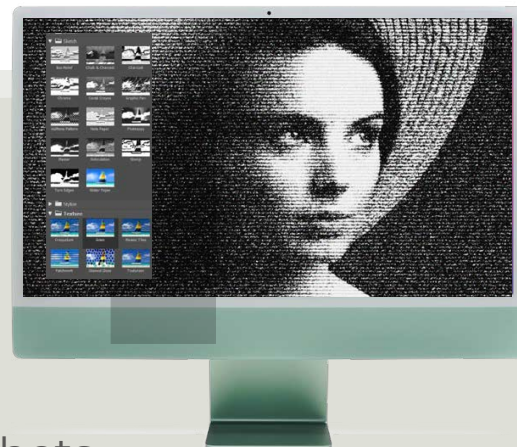
The Toolbar

Most of these tools appear in various palettes, with the addition of the new Loupe and the Hand tool. The Loupe gives live previews of the magnified area and is useful for noise reduction. There are also crop, straightening and perspective correction tools.

THIS MONTH'S SOFTWARE EXTRAS

18 Actions and border effects

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 a total of 18 software extras to go with our Digital Darkroom tutorials. Once installed in Adobe Photoshop, Lightroom or Camera Raw, these Actions and borders will transform your images. Rather than manually adjusting your shots, they will get you there in just a few clicks.

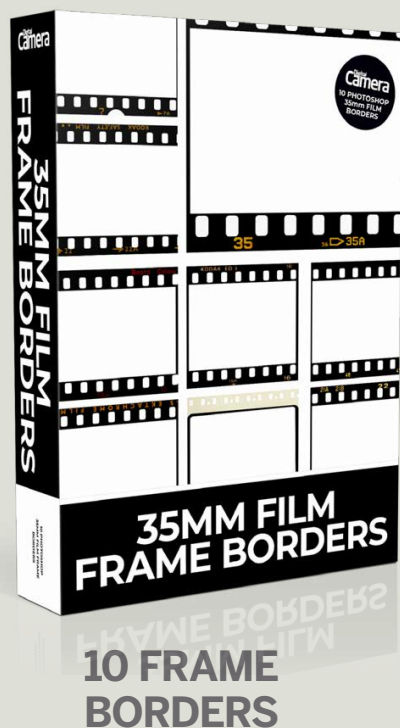
June's giveaways include 10 filmstrip borders for an authentic 35mm retro finish – these can be used with any software that supports layers. There are also four social media print borders for Lightroom and four Photoshop Actions to brighten up your subject. The Lightroom borders are produced using the Print Module; the film borders are jpeg format overlays.

How to use your software extras

Once you have downloaded the 'dcm308-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.

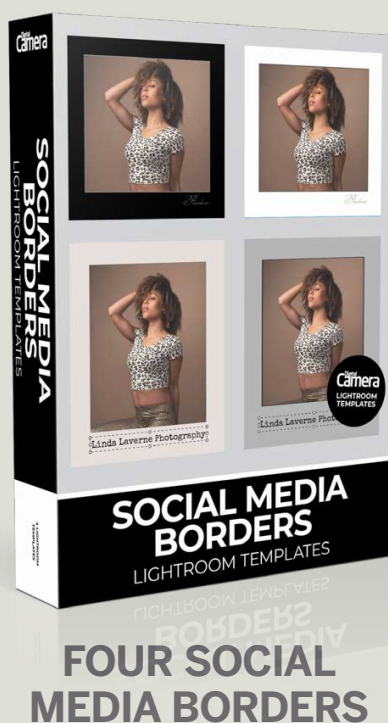


**DOWNLOAD
FILES & VIDEO AT**
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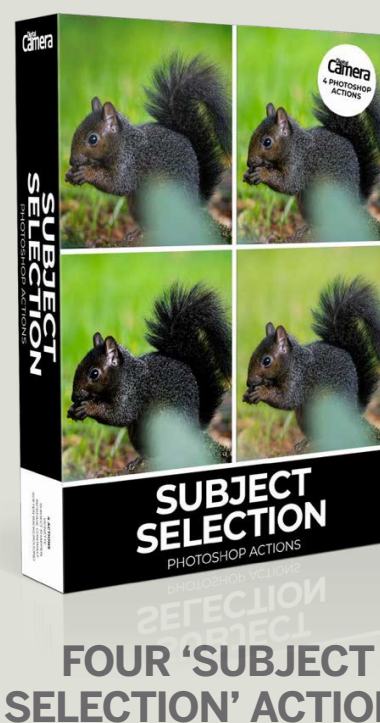
Software: Any/Photoshop
(Version 25.5 or higher)

Give your images a retro feel with this collection of 35mm film frame borders. They are in jpeg format and can be used with any software that supports layers.



Software: Lightroom

Using Lightroom's Print Module, you can export jpeg images with additional borders, graphics and text. Here, we've supplied four borders to get you started.



Software: Photoshop
(Version 25.5 or higher)

Use these four Photoshop Actions to select the main subject using AI tools, then either apply a vignette, sharpen, contrast or soften the background.

Download all three packs from: www.digitalcameraworld.com/dc308

KitZone

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



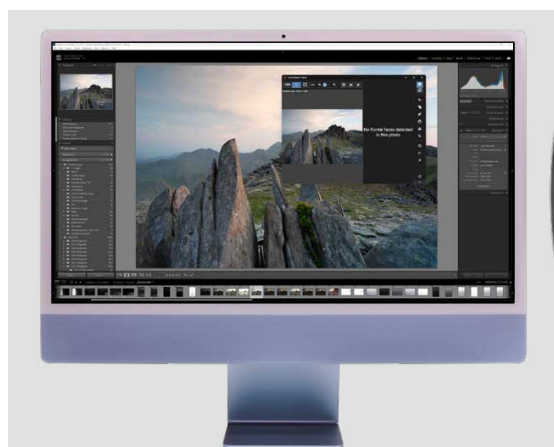
112

Ricoh GR IV HDF _ New compact that gives pictures a filmic twist



114

Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra _ Latest flagship camera phone under scrutiny



117

Excire Search 2026 _ AI-powered photo search tool plugin for Lightroom Classic



118

Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II _ A best-in-class telephoto gets updated



You wait a couple of years for a new Ricoh GR compact, then three models arrive in quick succession. Following the GR IV and its GR IV Monochrome sibling (reviewed in issues 304 and 307, respectively) comes the GR IV HDF – the same as the GR IV, but the neutral density filter has been swapped for a highlight diffusion one. This gives photos a filmic look at the touch of a button, creating softer blooms of light and tapering the sharpness of images. Turn the page to see how the Ricoh GR IV HDF performs.

Another product that uses software smarts to perk up images is the Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra camera phone, the brand's latest flagship – it's on test from page 114.

Also reviewed this month is Excire Search 2026, an AI-powered plugin for Lightroom Classic that makes searching large photo libraries a breeze. Turn to page 117 to see how it shapes up. And finally, Nikon recently released an updated version of a premium trinity lens from 2020, which our review noted was a class-leading, unimprovable optic. So has the Big N managed to make it better? See page 118. **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 HDF



1

It's pocket-sized but the Ricoh GR IV HDF still manages to pack an APS-C sensor.

2

Across the three GR IV variants, that sensor has been bumped to a resolution of 25.74MP.

3

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

Ricoh GR IV HDF

£1,299/\$1,599

Compact size and advanced imaging capabilities, combined with film-like looks at the touch of a button

www.ricogr.eu

Specifications

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

Sensor: APS-C BSI CMOS, 25.74MP

Image processor: GR Engine 7

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

Stabilisation: 5-axis, up to 6 stops

ISO range: 100–204,800

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

Battery: DB120 (approx 250 shots)

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

Weight: 262g (incl battery and memory card)

There's one filter that occupies the end of my favourite lens more often than not, and that's a warm diffusion filter.

However, due to the lack of traditional filter threads, compact cameras are limited in their use of filters. Until now, with the arrival of the Ricoh GR IV HDF.

The GR IV HDF's specs are almost identical to those on the GR IV, but the key difference is the inclusion of a built-in highlight diffusion filter (HDF) that can be turned on and off. These are a useful tool for a film-like look, spreading light out into softer 'blooms' and softening the sharpness of the modern camera.

I spent two weeks testing the GR IV HDF (provided by www.lensrentals.com) and that built-in filter makes it feel even more like a film camera than the original.

Build and handling

The variants of the Ricoh GR IV are near mirror images of each other. The GR IV

HDF has the same compact size and weighs just 262g with a battery and microSD card installed. Despite housing an APS-C sensor more often found in mirrorless cameras, the GR IV HDF is just 32.7mm deep. While it looks like a basic point-and-shoot, it has a hotshoe slot, a dial for manual and auto modes, and two wheels for adjusting exposure settings. The grip is shallow, but more comfortable to hold than a smartphone.

At the back, controls for exposure compensation sit under the thumb, while the HDF filter is turned on and off by pressing the Fn button and the menu arrows double as shortcuts for ISO and macro mode. Ricoh has crammed plenty of features into such a small camera, though I did miss having a viewfinder.

These sacrifices are largely worthwhile to have a big sensor and bright lens in something that looks more like a point-and-shoot than a mirrorless camera. The GR IV HDF isn't cheap, though, and that's reflected in the build

Ricoh GR IV HDF Compact



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 HDF 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.

quality. The camera's body feels metallic and there's a subtle pebbled texture to the grip. Weather-sealing has been left out, so while the camera is small enough to go anywhere, it's best to avoid rain or dusty conditions.

The GR IV HDF is ideal for street, travel and documentary photography, but it isn't a sports or action camera. Its maximum frame rate of 4fps is a return to the speeds of 15 years ago, though the Ricoh GR series was never the fastest. As on the GR IV, Snap Focus mode simplifies the practice of zone focusing. Tap the screen to focus, and a green marker shows the range of distances that are in focus, based on your focus point and aperture settings.

Performance

With the same lens and sensor as the original GR IV, image quality is identical, with the exception of that built-in filter. The HDF replaces the ND filter on the GR IV, which is used for long exposures.

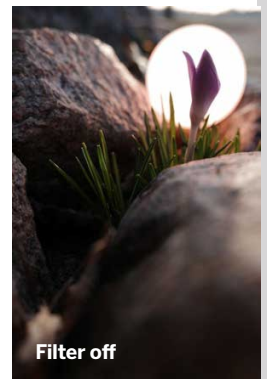
With the filter activated, images are a little less sharp and light sources spread out more to create a film-like look. Swapping the colour profile to 'Positive Film' offers warmer, richer colours than the more neutral standard profile. Otherwise, image quality is on par with the GR IV. With a built-in lens tailored specifically for that sensor, sharpness is excellent, even at the widest aperture and in the corners.

The wider lens is excellent for street photography and landscape captures, though I spotted some wide-angle distortion when trying more classic portraits. There's still some background separation – not the kind you'd find with a longer focal length, but an impressive bit of pop for a pocketable camera. High ISO performance is solid, thanks to the APS-C sensor and the conservative resolution. Shots at ISO 64,000 are usable, and while noise is noticeable, shots taken at ISO 12,800 weren't throwaways either. **Hillary Grigonis**



Hillary Grigonis

With filter



Filter off

The camera's built-in highlight diffusion filter spreads light out into softer 'blooms' for a film-like look.



Hillary Grigonis

The 18.3mm f/2.8 (28mm full-frame equivalent) lens is ideal for street and landscape captures.

Digital Camera verdict

4.5 ★★★★★

Outstanding



Features



Build & handling



Performance



Value

The Ricoh GR IV HDF is the most film-like camera in the series, thanks to its built-in diffusion filter that creates soft blooms of light, paired with the positive film colour profile. The GR IV HDF has everything that we loved about the GR IV, but adds that diffusion filter for a softer look and blooms of light.

Like the original, it's important to understand what the GR IV HDF is and is not before considering a purchase. It's not an action camera, nor is it a camera that can shoot every genre with ease. However, the compact design and capable sensor make it an excellent camera for documentary-style images, street photography and travel. Images are sharp, noise is well controlled and there's some lovely background separation, considering this is a compact camera with a wide-angle lens.

The final question is whether or not to go with the original Ricoh GR IV or the HDF. If you're a pixel peeper and crave super-sharp images, you can save yourself a little cash by opting for the original. But if you love the softer, more film-like look, then the price difference is worth it. The cost difference is around the same as buying a high-end diffusion filter, only you don't need to remember to pack it.

Camera phone Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra



Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra

£1,279/\$1,299

Brand's latest flagship is a 9/10 phone with an 8/10 camera

www.samsung.com

On paper, Samsung's 2026 flagship is a camera upgrade and a downgrade, with faster lenses but a smaller 3x sensor. Alongside the Apple iPhone 17 Pro and Google Pixel 10 Pro, the Galaxy S26 Ultra is a powerful player, packing impressive specs and plenty of shooting modes. Set against the best from Oppo, Vivo and Xiaomi, though, the camera struggles to stand out. But can features such as Privacy Display and the new AirDrop support help it shine?

Features

Starting with the camera, the most notable changes in the S26 Ultra's specs are an aperture upgrade for the primary 200MP camera, which now has a faster f/1.4 lens (down from f/1.7), and the 5x periscope telephoto. There's also an on-paper downgrade: the 3x bridge camera between the primary and periscope has a smaller, albeit newer, sensor, and both the primary and 5x cameras don't focus as near as the S25 Ultra, so it's generally weaker for macro.

The Galaxy S26 Ultra immediately feels familiar, but Samsung has softened the harder edges of the S25 Ultra, giving the phone a slightly gentler, more cohesive look. It still feels every bit the flagship, with premium materials, matte-finished sides and an integrated S Pen that remains a genuine differentiator. Anyone upgrading from a Galaxy S25 Ultra or even an S24 Ultra should feel right at home.

Samsung's 6.9-inch display is excellent: a Dynamic AMOLED 2X running at 3120 x 1440 with a peak brightness of 2,600 nits and

1 The S Pen is water- and dust-resistant, and doesn't require charging or pairing.

2 The harder edges of the Galaxy S25 Ultra have been softened on the new handset.

3 Size-wise, the S26 Ultra measures 78.1 x 163.6 x 7.9mm and has a 6.9-inch display.



Those cameras (from top): Ultra-wide (f1.9, 50MP), Wide (2x, f1.4, 200MP), Telephoto (5x, f2.9, 50MP). Right, lower: Telephoto (3x, f2.4, 10MP).



When shooting at 5x, if the subject is too close, the S26 Ultra will switch to the 10MP 3x camera.

a pixel density of roughly 498ppi (the iPhone 17 Pro Max uses a 6.9-inch OLED at 2868 x 1320, 460ppi, and claims up to 3,000 nits outdoors). The real standout, though, is Samsung's new Privacy Display, a hardware-based system that dynamically controls wide and narrow pixels to reduce off-angle visibility in public spaces. This works exactly as advertised and can be set to specific apps, making it a true point of differentiation.

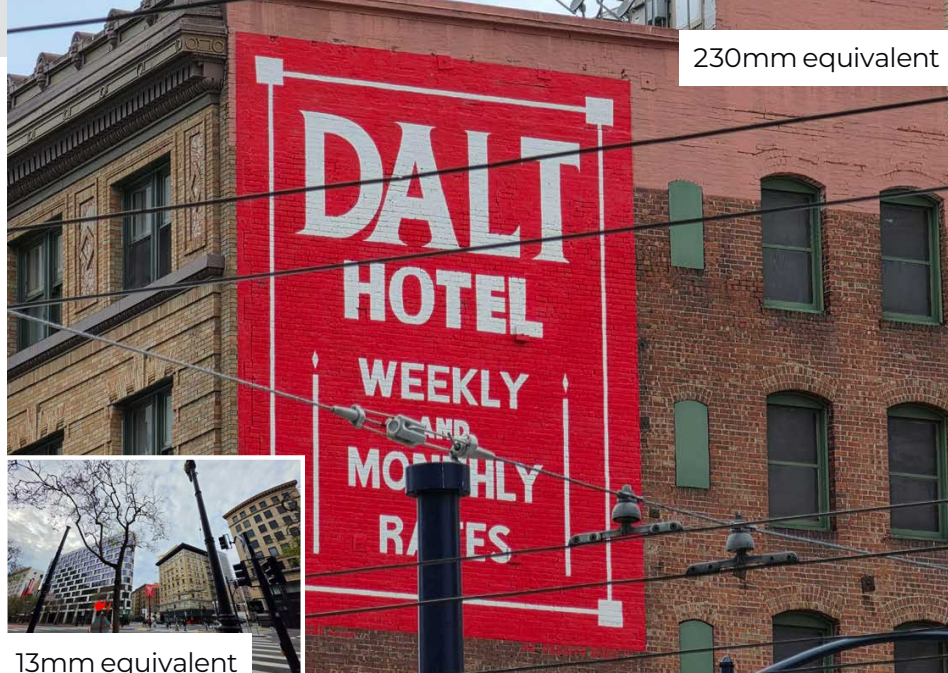
One caveat for photographers is the rear camera layout. While there's no MagSafe or Qi2 built into the phone, the large camera array can still make cases that add the feature incompatible with wallet-style accessories and many MagSafe chargers and mounting accessories.

Camera specs

Samsung's quad-camera formula has held strong since the S23 Ultra, with an ultra-wide, primary, 3x, and periscope camera.

The S26 Ultra's primary camera is a 200MP 1/1.3-inch sensor, the same physical size as the iPhone 17 Pro Max's main sensor. But with its faster f/1.4 lens, it captures a shallower depth of field and should do a fine job in low light, even if it can't match the 1-inch sensor size of the new Xiaomi 17 Ultra.

The ultra-wide camera is a 1/2.52-inch sensor and f/1.9 combo, a solid spec for an often-neglected element in the smartphone camera mix. It's also very wide at 13mm equivalent, so it can capture plenty of detail.



230mm equivalent

13mm equivalent

Shots captured on two different lenses on the Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra: the ultra-wide (at 2.2mm, 13mm full-frame equivalent), and the super-telephoto (at 18.60mm, 230mm full-frame equivalent).

That 50MP resolution means it benefits from pixel binning to capture native 8K video.

But the 10MP 3x camera remains a weak point. Because it uses a small 4:3 sensor, it lacks sufficient native 16:9 resolution for full-detail 4K capture, which shows up as softer results, especially in low light. This year, Samsung has actually shrunk the sensor, dropping the pixel size from 1.12 microns to 1 micron, resulting in a tiny 1/3.94-inch size. It is a newer sensor, so it could still offer improvements, but its spec is still an across-the-board head-scratcher.

Finally, the 5x periscope camera with a 115mm equivalent focal length combines a faster f/2.9 lens with the same 1/2.52-inch sensor as the S25 Ultra, which should help in low light, when capturing moving subjects, and compensate a little for hand shake. All things considered, the hardware mix isn't necessarily exciting, but it's still competitive with Apple and Google camera phones.

Samsung loads up the S26 Ultra with its latest computational photography smarts, but at a base level, its photo processing remains very Samsung. Colours are handled with the same characteristic boosting, sharpening is aggressive in Auto mode and pinching in on shots reveals the mottling characteristic of Samsung's specific brand of noise suppression.

Shooting modes are mostly unchanged, with modes including Portrait, Photo, Video, Pro, Pro Video, Food, Panorama, Slow Motion, Hyperlapse, Portrait Video, and Expert RAW, which can be downloaded from the Galaxy Store. Photos are captured at 12MP by default, with a 200MP option available for the primary camera, and 50MP options for the ultra-wide and 5x cameras.

Expert RAW, Samsung's downloadable bracketing RAW capture mode, gets an added feature for 2026: Virtual Reflector, which simulates a reflector to create more balanced exposure in shadows. This gives

you a live preview and seems to perform best with faces. It doesn't work with the front camera, but it's a novel on-device tool.

In addition to Expert RAW, you can download Camera Assistant through the Galaxy Store, which is a must: you can customise which zoom shortcuts appear on-screen, turn off auto lens switching and enable handy video tools like audio monitoring via Bluetooth headphones.

Camera performance

Samsung's camera UI is very flexible. You can rearrange and remove shooting modes that appear on-screen when you fire up the camera, and Quick Launch is on by default, so a double-tap of the power button quickly gets you into the camera.

The camera is fast in bright light, so you can shoot without waiting. Like with most phones, when the lights drop, computational photography extends the shutter speed, and a steady hand means you'll get a much sharper shot. This is especially true of the 3x and selfie cameras, which have the smallest sensors and the slowest lenses.

In Auto mode, the Samsung offers filters. Pro mode allows contrast, saturation and more to be adjusted, but doing so will sacrifice some of the dynamic range and processing benefits of Auto mode. The Galaxy S26 Ultra's Pro photo and video modes are fully featured; enthusiast photographers and videographers will enjoy Expert RAW, plus APV video on top of Log.

Photo quality

The S26 Ultra's 200MP primary camera remains the star of the show because it gives Samsung a lot of latitude to work with. In default 12MP mode, it's reliably sharp across the frame, with enough micro-contrast to make textures pop without you having to fight focus or motion blur in decent light. Good for scenarios including

Camera phone

Specifications

Rear cameras: 200MP wide;

50MP ultra-wide; 50MP/10MP telephoto

Zoom range: 3x and 5x (optical); 2x and 10x (optical quality zoom), up to 100x (digital)

Front camera: 12MP

Display: 6.9in OLED: 3120 x 1440px.

Peak brightness: 2600 nits.

Adaptive refresh rate: 1-120 Hz.

QHD+ Dynamic AMOLED 2X Privacy Display

Chip: Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5. Octa-Core

Stabilisation: Advanced Horizontal Lock

Video resolution: 8K at up to 60fps,

4K at up to 120fps

Water resistance: IP68

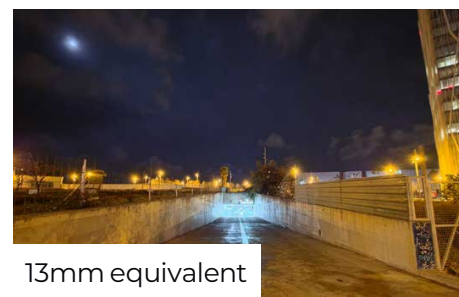
5G: Yes

Capacity: 256GB / 512GB / 1TB

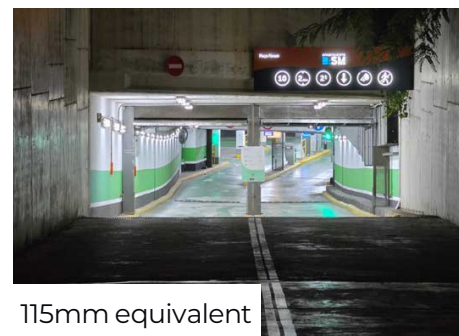
Battery: 5000mAh

Dimensions (W x H x D): 78.1 x 163.6 x 7.9mm

Weight: 214g

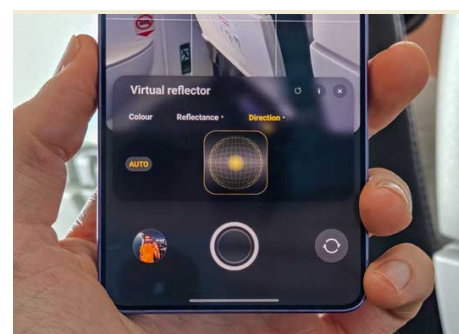


13mm equivalent



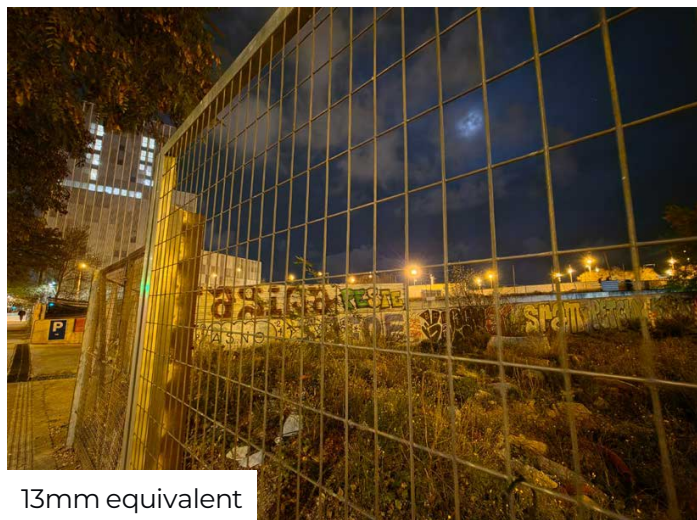
115mm equivalent

The S26 Ultra performs better when shooting at night than previous Galaxy iterations.



The Virtual Reflector feature simulates a reflector to create more balanced exposure in shadows.

Camera phone Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra



13mm equivalent



115mm equivalent

The improvements in night photography on the Galaxy S26 Ultra are immediately noticeable. Samsung seems more comfortable letting darkness look like darkness, unlike with older Galaxy versions. That Samsung punch has been retained, but it's toned down just enough to make night scenes cleaner.

landscapes, food, quick street shots and indoor portraits, it rarely feels out of its depth. And when you do want to crop in, there's still meaningful detail.

Night photography is also better than on previous Ultras. The S26 Ultra still brightens scenes aggressively, but it's less heavy-handed with the sky. Samsung seems more comfortable letting darkness look like darkness, unlike with older Galaxy iterations. Night scenes feel cleaner and more believable, with fewer strange colour shifts where street lighting meets the sky.

The ultra-wide is another solid shooter. Samsung's f/1.9 lens paired with a 50MP sensor means it pulls in a lot more light than many ultra-wides, and that helps in situations like shooting indoors, at dusk and in mixed lighting. It also gives you a touch more subject separation than you'd expect, making close-up shots feel less flat. And because it doubles as a macro camera, it's versatile. Detail holds up well, focusing is quick, and it won't totally distort your shots.

Samsung's 5x periscope remains a strong option, especially if your comparison set is the iPhone and Pixel, although there are compromises when shooting macro. The primary and 5x cameras double the nearest focus distance, resulting in significantly weaker detail for close-up shots.

The S26 Ultra moves smoothly between cameras in photo mode. Switching focal lengths feels less like jumping between four

different cameras and more like moving through a single system. Exposure and white balance still aren't perfectly matched in all situations, but the transition is fast and fluid.

HDR is also generally handled well, especially with backlit subjects. The S26 Ultra is happy to lift shadows, but it doesn't always turn the scene into that over-processed HDR look where everything is equally bright and equally flat.

Samsung's AI processing improvements are mostly incremental, but they do add up in day-to-day use, especially when zooming in. The phone feels a little better at resolving fine detail without turning everything into a crunchy mess, and it's slightly more controlled about how it cleans up noise in darker scenes. The selfie camera has been levelled up by software. Skin tones are warm and typically Samsung, but they're less hit-or-miss, especially under indoor lighting.

On the downside, colour is the S26 Ultra's biggest weakness. Skin saturation is pushed hard and regularly swings too far into red, especially indoors and in mixed lighting. It's a very Samsung look, but 'people' shots can feel more stylised than lifelike.

Colour accuracy also varies between the S26 Ultra's cameras, and is most obvious once the light drops. Go from the primary to the ultra-wide or telephoto, and you can see shifts in white balance and overall tone. A scene that looks neutral on one lens can look warmer or more saturated on another.

Noise reduction is another recurring issue. Samsung cleans up grain so aggressively that it creates a mottled texture, particularly in shadows and night scenes. At a glance, it looks fine, but as soon as you crop in, fine detail gets smeared and then sharpened back up, leaving your images looking a little synthetic.

That processing pipeline ties into the phone's default warmth. The S26 Ultra often

prioritises a warm, punchy look over realism, which can be flattering in some scenes, but it also means neutrals drift and skin tones get an extra push toward orange and red.

Bright light sources can also bloom and bleed at night, softening parts of the image and making high-contrast scenes look less clean than they should. Finally, contrast is still dialled up too high in Auto mode. It makes shots look bold when viewed on the phone's screen, but it can crush subtle tones and exaggerate the already heavy saturation. **Digital Camera World team**

Read more:

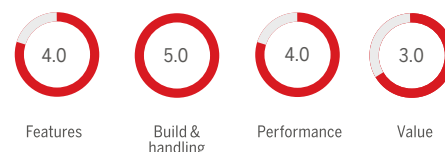
Video quality: www.bit.ly/dcm308_s26video

Battery life: www.bit.ly/dcm308_s26battery

Digital Camera verdict

4.0 ★★★★★

Excellent



The Galaxy S26 Ultra is one of the most complete flagship phones of 2026. Its excellent Privacy Display is a genuine point of difference, the software support is class-leading and performance is consistently strong. Add in a premium design, long-term software support and faster charging, and the S26 Ultra feels thoroughly future-proofed.

For photographers and videographers, there is plenty to like, but the problem is that the camera hardware doesn't stand out. As a result, camera phones from Oppo and Vivo are currently delivering more impressive pure photo quality. But the S26 Ultra may still be the best Android flagship overall for buyers who want a brilliant screen, polished performance and a camera system that is versatile, ambitious and very capable.

The Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra is available in six finishes, including Cobalt Violet and Sky Blue.





System requirements
Operating system: macOS 11 or newer and Windows 10/11 (x86 and 64-bit)
Memory: Minimum 8GB RAM required. 16GB recommended, especially for large catalogues
Processor: Multicore 64-bit processor with AVX support required.
 Note: older AMD processors (AMD Phenom II X6 1100T, AMD Athlon II X4 640) are not supported. Intel Core 2 Duo processors are not supported. The Windows version is not optimised for Snapdragon or ARM processors.

- 1** Excire Search 2026 is available with a perpetual licence, so no annoying subscriptions.
- 2** Your data isn't shared, and no data centres are required for data processing.
- 3** Excire Search 2026 also finds videos, but Lightroom isn't the ideal software for video.

Excire Search 2026

£199/\$229 (Perpetual licence)

AI-powered image searching plugin for Lightroom Classic

<https://excire.com>

Developed by the German company Excire, Excire Search 2026 uses local artificial intelligence to analyse the content of your images, building a searchable database that's on your computer and not in the cloud. The software's features include intelligent search, automatic organisation and AI-assisted culling.

Features

Excire Search 2026 integrates directly into Lightroom for a seamless workflow. The software uses advanced AI to analyse image and video content automatically. It recognises faces, objects, scenes, colours, lighting conditions, emotions and movement, allowing users to perform intuitive searches. Six search modes underpin this capability, including prompt-based text search, similarity search, people and face search and keyword search without having to manually tag photos

beforehand. As well as not needing to manually tag photos, Excire can automate keyword tagging directly into Lightroom's catalogue, identifying duplicates and near-duplicates, and enabling deep filtering by both content and metadata, making navigating even large photo libraries fast and efficient.

An impressive and useful feature in the 2026 version is AI-assisted culling. This groups images by scene, people or capture sequence, then evaluates them using criteria such as sharpness, facial expression and overall aesthetics. Face sharpness detection allows quick technical checks, while best-shot detection highlights the strongest images instantly. The user controls which photos are ultimately deleted.

Performance

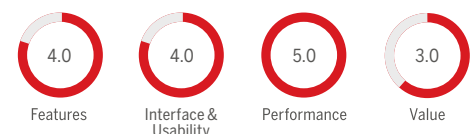
Once your Lightroom Classic catalogue has been manually initialised, the plugin is easy to use overall, but the photo culling feature is slightly more

complicated, so referring to video tutorials is useful. The plugin works locally with no connection to data centres, making it GDPR-compliant. The speed at which Excire Search 2026 performs searches is impressive, especially when considering there were over 70,000 photos in the catalogue I used during testing. **James Abbott**

Digital Camera verdict

4.0 ★★★★★

Excellent



Excire Search makes finding images in Lightroom Classic catalogues easier, and though it isn't cheap, the licence is perpetual. One downside is that you have to manually initialise new photos upon import; it'd be better if this was done automatically.

Zoom lens Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II



Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II

£2,999/\$3,200

Sequel to revered 'trinity' optic improves upon its predecessor in almost every way

www.nikon.co.uk



There's a huge difference in weight between models, with the Mark II version around 362g lighter.

a huge difference. I'm not sure what kind of enchantment Nikon has put on the Mark II, but it's effective. I can only assume that the biggest weight-saving measure is the Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II's 18 elements in 16 groups. The old lens had more elements (21 in 18 groups). Here, you get one ED (Extra-Low Dispersion), one Super ED, two aspherical, one aspherical ED, one fluorite and 1 SR lens element, with Meso Amorphous and ARNEO Coat, as well as a fluorine-coated front lens element. In other words, the Mark II might contain less glass, but Nikon has improved the quality.

The lens feels as solid as you'd expect an S-Line Z lens to feel, and although the internal-zoom mechanism sacrifices a bit of camera bag space, it boosts the optic's premium feel. Another big upgrade is a clickable/de-clickable control ring, toggled via a physical 'on/off' switch. This means photographers can enjoy a bit of tactile resistance when using it to change, say, their aperture, while videographers can keep things slick, smooth and silent.

That's not all the control ring has to offer. Nikon has put it in a more sensible position this time. The Mark I's control ring sits behind the fixed tripod collar, almost butted up against the camera. As far as ergonomics go, it couldn't be in a worse place, so I was pleased to find that the Mark II's control ring has been shifted in front of the tripod collar in a more comfortable position.

The collar and foot deserve a mention, too, in that they're both completely removable, whereas before, you could only remove the foot. Getting it on and off is fiddly, but the fact that it's removable is another bonus for handheld photographers who want to save space or weight. And this lens is so light, you could get away with mounting the camera to the tripod in a pinch. I'm also pleased to report that the foot is Arca-Swiss compatible for quick tripod attachment and release.

One area where the Mark II's design could be considered a downgrade is that, like the Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S II, it has ditched the OLED information screen. I loved the original S-Line 'trinity' lens's little OLED screens; it certainly adds to the premium feel, but in a practical sense, I don't think I have ever needed to use them.

The Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II is the second Mark II release in the Big N's 'next-gen' holy trinity, after the outstanding Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S II. The question is whether or not the Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S needed an update at all, given that our review called it "probably the best 70-200mm zoom in the world. Ever." But that was nearly six years ago, and a lot has changed in the world of optics. For starters, Z-mount represents a more formidable line-up of optics than it did in 2020, sitting pretty at around 50 lenses and a completed Z-mount roadmap. The market is arguably more competitive, too, with cheap lens manufacturers redefining the price-to-quality ratio, which has kept the big boys on their toes.

The Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II feels like a bit of a statement. Nikon has taken a winning formula and tried to make it even better, leaving us all wondering whether the changes are warranted. To put this premium Nikon telephoto zoom through its paces, I visited WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre and the Hawk Conservancy Trust to see how it performs with the challenging subject of birds in flight.

Build and handling

The Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II is optically superb, but so was its predecessor. As such, the biggest real-world difference between these two optical titans isn't their image quality, but their design and handling. At a glance, you'd have trouble telling them apart. Their dimensions aren't that different, and given that both lenses are internal zooms, they aren't small by any means.

However, when you pick up the Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II, you'll soon notice the difference. Its predecessor weighs 1440g with the tripod collar and 1360g without, whereas the Mark II version weighs in at 1180g and 998g – that's up to 362g lighter, which is

1

With 18 elements in 16 groups, there is a weight-saving reduction from the Mk I's 21 in 18.

2

Nikon has shifted the control ring to a better position in front of the tripod collar.

3

The collar and foot are both removable; before, you could only remove the foot.



Birds are a headache for the best camera and lens combinations, but our experience with the Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II was entirely positive.

You'll find a pair of L-Fn buttons on the barrel, along with duplicates so you can access them no matter what angle you're holding the lens, as well as a focus limiter and A/M (AF/manual) switch at the base of the lens. I should also mention the HB-119 lens hood, which has a stamp-sized sliding window so you can access variable ND filters without removing the hood. That's less important for photography, but it comes in handy when shooting video.

Performance

When the original Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S was released, I was blown away by its imaging performance. And the Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II is comparable, if not better. Optically, both of these lenses are so good that attempting to split them feels superfluous. There's an abstract feeling you get when using an outstanding lens, and to put that feeling into context, it's confidence. Armed with this lens, I felt confident.

I put the Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II through its paces by photographing one of the world's most challenging subjects, birds. These feathery blighters are small, fast and erratic, a headache for even the best camera-and-lens combination. But my experience using the Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II with a Nikon Z 8 was overwhelmingly positive.

I can't tell if the Mark II acquires focus 3.5x faster than the Mark I, as Nikon claims, but what I can tell you is that Nikon's proprietary Silky Swift Voice Coil Motors (SSVCM) acquire focus quickly. I've no doubt that this lens is throttled by the Z 8's ability to acquire AF, which bodes well for the future. The lens also comes with Nikon's proprietary image stabilisation, Vibration Reduction, which is capable of up to six stops of compensation when used with a Nikon camera that boasts



Nikon's proprietary Silky Swift Voice Coil Motors (SSVCM) technology quickly acquires focus.



Sharp shots are easy to come by using Nikon's Vibration Reduction image stabilisation tech.

Synchro VR. This essentially means that the lens's optical image stabilisation and the camera's IBIS combine to offer maximum stabilisation. During my time with this lens, sharp shots felt easy to come by.

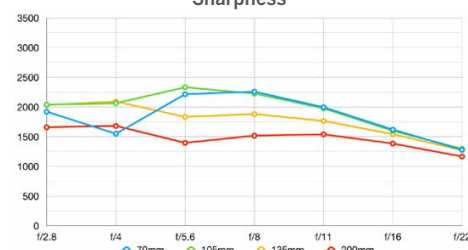
As you'd expect from an S-Line Nikon lens and a high-resolution Nikon camera, the full-frame images that I captured are of stunning quality. And one area where the Mark II has the Mark I visibly beaten is the quality of its bokeh. The Mark II has an 11-bladed aperture, whereas its predecessor only has nine. The result is noticeably smoother and more spherical bokeh. As always, the Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II was sent to our lab for more formal testing, where it performed well. **Mike Harris**

Zoom lens

Specifications

Mount options: Nikon Z (FX)
Full-frame: Yes
Autofocus: Yes
Image stabilisation: Yes
Lens construction: 18 elements in 16 groups
Angle of view: 34-12°
Diaphragm blades: 11
Max aperture: f/2.8
Min aperture: f/22
Min focus distance: 0.38m (W) 0.8m (T)
Max magnification ratio: 0.3x (at 70mm)
Filter size: 77mm
Dimensions (L x D): 208 x 90mm
Weight (incl tripod collar): 1180g

Sharpness



Sharpness

The Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II is impressive: around 10 per cent sharper in the centre of the frame than the original. From f/4 to f/11, all focal lengths are sharper than the Mark I. Corner sharpness is also strong, but more comparable to the original lens.

Fringing Short 0.49 Long 0.46

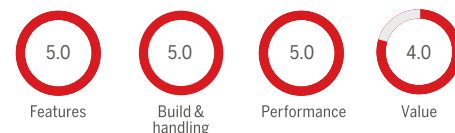
Lateral chromatic aberration is borderline visible in the corners, but that is with in-camera corrections disabled. At 135mm, fringing is impressively minimal.

Distortion Short -1.86 Long 0.81

Centre sharpness is incredible, outperforming its predecessor. Even without in-camera corrections, it performs well with colour fringing and distortions.

Digital Camera verdict

5.0 ★★★★★
 A best-in-class product



It's hard to believe that Nikon could improve this much upon an already winning formula. The Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S II is much lighter than its predecessor, optically superior where it counts and boasts an all-around better design. A removable tripod collar increases the weight-saving potential, closer focusing makes it even more suitable for close-up photography, and appointments such as a click/de-click control ring and variable ND window on the lens hood boost its suitability for video. Add to that whip-fast AF and an Arca-Swiss-compatible foot, and the 'best 70-200mm zoom in the world' just got even better.

INTERVIEW

Spotlight on...



Kim Bunermann speaks to some of the photographers recognised at the SWPA ceremony

R

egarded as one of photography's most prestigious global contests, the Sony World Photography Awards has

showcased some of the most powerful and inspiring images over the past 19 years since it was launched in 2007.

For the 2026 awards, more than 430,000 images were submitted from over 200 countries. The shortlisted photographers in the Professional, Open, Youth and Student competitions flew in from across the globe to see who would be crowned winners at the awards ceremony held in London, UK.

Having opened at the capital's Somerset House in April, the Sony World Photography Awards exhibition will be displayed in other major cities around the world in the coming months.

To view galleries of the images, including the winners and shortlisted entrants, visit the official awards website at: www.worldphoto.org



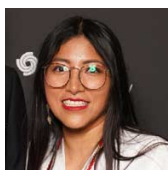
© Citlali Fabián, Mexico, Photographer of the Year, Professional Competition, Creative, Sony World Photography Awards 2026

Above: 'Mitzy Violeta Cortez', from the series 'Bilha, Stories of my Sisters'. Mitzy is part of Indigenous Futures, a network that discusses the climate crisis from the perspective of Indigenous peoples. She has participated in forums, including COP26 and COP30. In this portrait, Mitzy is represented with her ancestors and future generations as a united front in the defence of their territory.

Citlali Fabián

First place, Creative category and Overall Winner, Professional Competition

Creo Arts / SWPA



In one of the most closely watched announcements in photography, the World Photography Organisation crowned Citlali Fabián the Photographer of the Year

2026, and the overall winner for her series entitled 'Bilha, Stories of my Sisters'.

Citlali is a photographer and visual artist from the Yalalteca indigenous community in southern Mexico. Her work uses photography to examine questions of identity, belonging and the realities of contemporary life in indigenous communities. For Citlali, photography should be about questioning how stories are made. "I believe it is important to continuously experiment with the medium and to question how we, as visual creators, can expand the possibilities of storytelling," she says.

"Through photography, I explore what indigenous identity means today, as well as the challenges we face in relation to territory, migration and community bonds. These are always intertwined with my own personal experiences," she explains.

"As a person from the Global South [those developing or underdeveloped nations located mainly in Africa, Latin America or Asia], one of

my main goals is to strengthen agency in the representation of the people I collaborate with. For me, it is essential that those people who have historically been underrepresented feel heard, respected and actively involved in the way they are portrayed."

This is where Citlali's award-winning series, 'Bilha, Stories of my Sisters', comes in. The project starts with a feeling that many around the world can relate to: growing up without clear role models and trying to imagine a future that doesn't always feel visible. For this series, Citlali worked with activists and artists from indigenous communities across southern Mexico, especially in the Oaxaca province, bringing together different voices without flattening them into a single narrative.

"I am committed to sharing their stories, but doing so with the care and dignity they deserve," explains Citlali. To achieve this, she incorporated illustration into her photographic work, exploring new ways of image making.

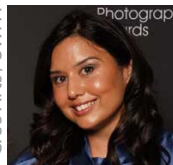
"This approach allows me to add layers of meaning and create visuals that more closely reflect what my collaborators share with me," she explains. As well as the photographic work, the project is also being developed as a children's book. ●

www.citlilifabian.com

Elle Leontiev

First place, Open Competition, Portraiture category
and Overall Winner, Open Competition

Creo Arts / SWPA



A volcanologist standing barefoot on a volcanic rock bomb, with ash and sulphuric gas billowing behind him – it's a striking image captured in one of the most hostile environments on Earth.

The photograph earned Australian photographer Elle Leontiev the Open Photographer of the Year title. Shot on the South Pacific island of Tanna in Vanuatu, the portrait captures Phillip Yamah, a self-taught volcano scientist, in front of Mount Yasur.

Working in extreme conditions, Elle took the shot in 20 minutes, as acid rain started to fall and thick ash clouds moved in. The result is a powerful portrait, captured with a Sony A7 III and Sony FE 14mm F1.4 GM, that brings together Phillip's life work and connection to the land – all in a single frame.

Elle says she had always dreamed of visiting Mount Yasur. "I'd seen so many images of it, for example, in *National Geographic* magazine, and knew I had to experience it."

She connected with a local family living in a treehouse settlement directly beneath the volcano. "They experience daily earthquakes, with ash and sulphuric acid falling over their village. It's a harsh, visceral environment, but it's also full of life."

On her visit to the settlement, Elle met a self-taught volcanologist called Phillip, whose ancestral roots lie on the island and who has an intuitive understanding of the volcano. She spent a week with him and his family, immersing herself in their lives.

"Phillip uses his in-depth knowledge to guide researchers and visitors, without much formal recognition of his own." He was mentored by volcanologist Tom Boyer, and together, they have contributed to ongoing research into Mount Yasur's activity, with the hope of supporting future scientific discovery. The distinctive lava suit that Phillip is wearing in the portrait was gifted to him by visiting researchers. When Elle saw him, she knew that she had to create an environmental portrait that would honour his work.

"We went out onto the ash plain on a day when acid rain was falling and smoke was billowing from the volcano. The air was thick with sulphur; it was a challenging environment to work in." With huge clouds of ash heading towards Elle and Phillip, the whole shoot was restricted to around 20 minutes, but in that moment, everything came together. His stance, barefoot on the volcanic rock,



showed Phillip connecting with the landscape.

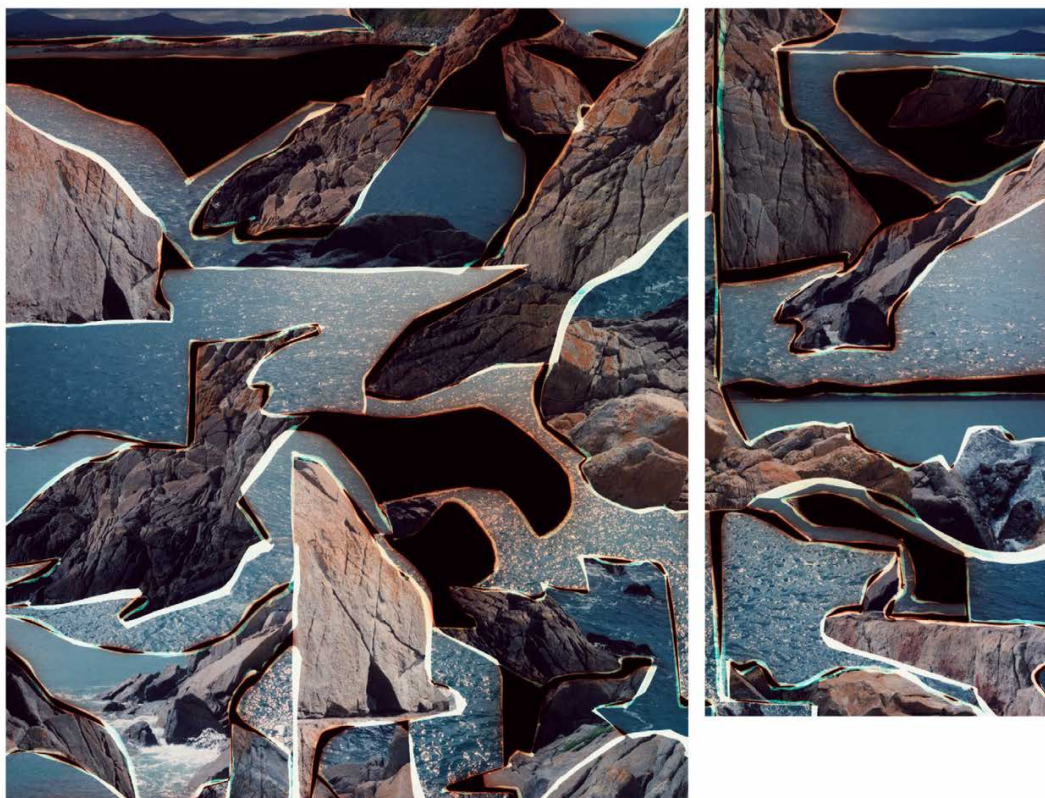
"You don't often get to photograph someone's life's passion, their story, their home, their roots and their ancestral ties all together in one photo," says Elle, "and I think that's what makes it so powerful." ●

www.elleleontiev.com

Instagram: @elle_tieva_

Above: 'The Barefoot Volcanologist'. On the ash plains of Mount Yasur, on the island of Tanna, Vanuatu, Phillip, a self-taught volcanologist, stands barefoot on a volcanic rock bomb. Wearing a lava-protection suit gifted by visiting researchers, the volcano smoulders behind him, sending a plume of gas and sulphur into the sky. Phillip grew up beneath the active volcano, and this portrait captures him in his element.

© Elle Leontiev, Australia, Winner, Open Competition, Portraiture, Sony World Photography Awards 2026



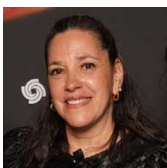
© Dafna Talmor, United Kingdom, Winner, Professional Competition, Landscape, Sony World Photography Awards 2026

Above: 'Untitled', from the series 'Constructed Landscapes'. Stemming from the photographer's personal archive, this series employs hand-printed and collaged colour negatives that are reconfigured into abstracted landscape representations. Purposefully undisclosed locations – sites that may otherwise be loaded with personal and political connotations – are collaged and repurposed, transforming them into spaces of greater universality. Alluding to idealised and utopian spaces, these staged landscapes reference the histories of photography, from Pictorialist combination printing processes to contemporary discourse, conflating the 'real' and the imaginary. In doing so, the work embodies a plurality of viewpoints, playfully defying photographic traditions and Western pictorial conventions that embody singular, fixed and idealised views.

Dafna Talmor

First place, Professional Competition, Landscape category

Creo Arts / SWPA



Cutting into photographic negatives to create entirely new landscape compositions is at the heart of London-based artist Dafna Talmor's

practice. She transforms familiar scenes into fragmented abstract compositions that challenge how the landscape is viewed.

Dafna's ongoing series, 'Constructed Landscapes', has now been recognised internationally, winning the Professional Competition Landscape category at the Sony World Photography Awards. Built by making physical changes to the original negatives, the project turns destruction into a form of image-making. The process itself, and what drives it, is best explained by the artist.

"I was taking photographs while travelling, trying to capture landscapes that were somehow meaningful to me. However, after a few years, I became frustrated with the material," says Dafna. "The images had no

meaning beyond my own personal interpretation, and I felt that they didn't go anywhere much beyond that. So I found it more interesting to try to turn that frustration into something productive.

"That search for something more liberated me, so instead, I took the negatives and used a scalpel to make interventions directly onto them. I know that negatives are something that many photographers wouldn't normally dream of interfering with, but I used them to reimagine the landscapes I had encountered into an abstract concept.

"The work that has been recognised is from the most recent sub-series of the 'Constructed Landscapes' series, from a private commission I was invited to respond to for a particular landscape.

"But I always think the point is to resist specificity and instead create a kind of utopian space, to think about the fragmentation of landscape and the multiple perspectives that we experience when we encounter it.

"For me, a single image is never quite enough to convey the experience of standing in front of a landscape – we usually scan around and view it from multiple perspectives. It's about bringing those perspectives into a single image by using multiple fragments of negatives to reconstruct the landscape.

"In this case, it was a private commission, so I was invited to respond to a specific area. I don't mind disclosing the location, but in terms of the work, even the titles tend to be made up of codes, which I feel are as much an abstraction as the images themselves.

"The images try to mirror that intention, but also to grasp the contradictory impulses of photography, because although the work is rooted in a particular place and location, it is also about resisting that specificity.

"I am constantly grappling with not only these contradictions but also the limitations of photography – but in a way, that's the very thing that drives the work." ●

www.dafnatalmor.co.uk

Will Burrard-Lucas

First place, Professional Competition, Wildlife & Nature category

Creo Arts / SWPA



One of the world's leading wildlife photographers, Will's work has appeared in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *National Geographic*, and has been recognised in competitions, including GDT European Wildlife Photographer of the Year and the Sony World Photography Awards. In addition to his books, *Land of Giants*, *The Ethiopian Wolf* and *The Black Leopard*, Will also founded the Camtraptions remote camera trap brand.

His triumph in the Sony World Photography Awards was for 'Crossing Point', a series of images captured in the Maasai Mara, Kenya. A collaboration between the Safari Collection, Narok County Government and the Maasai Mara Reserve Rhino Unit, the project focuses on the unit's work in monitoring the reserve's rhinos, including endangered black rhinos. A key part of this is understanding how rhinos use the reserve and the areas they choose as safe havens. Rhinos are elusive creatures, often preferring dense vegetation, and rangers can spend weeks searching for a single animal without success. Setting up camera traps that trigger automatically when an animal passes seemed the ideal solution.

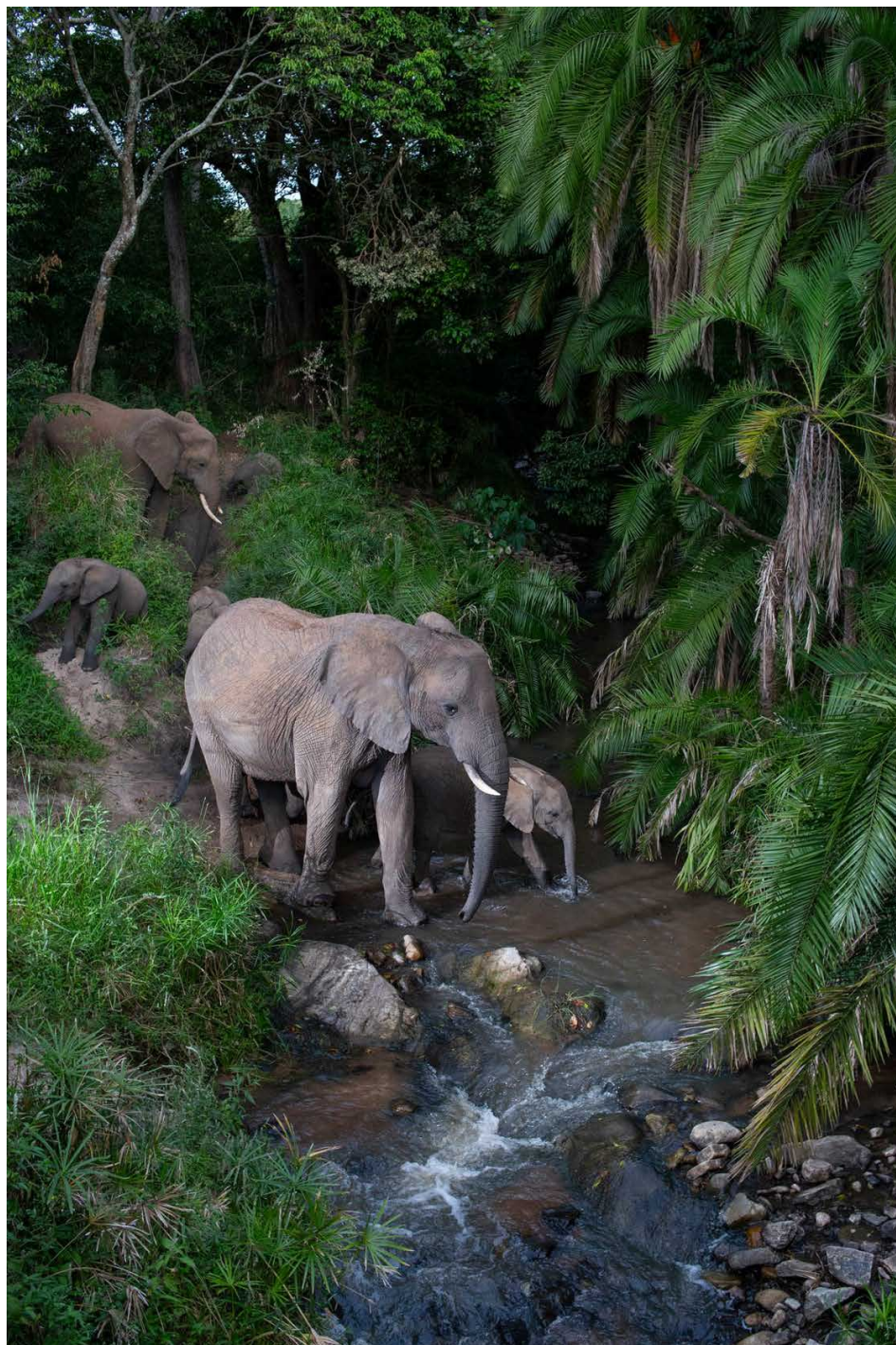
"As someone specialising in camera trap photography, I was able to train the rangers to use these systems to monitor rhinos," says Will. "It also gave me the opportunity to install camera traps in parts of the reserve that were carefully designated and protected. The Maasai Mara is known for its open plains, not forested environments, but the rangers identified potential locations where rhinos might pass, so I installed a camera trap system to photograph these elusive nocturnal animals. When working in these conditions, especially at night, lighting is critical, so I approached it much like a studio portrait photographer would – setting up off-camera lighting and carefully building the scene. I use a sensor to trigger the camera when an animal is in position, so I can pre-visualise the shot, set the composition and control the lighting." The camera ran for over six months, and 'Crossing Point' was submitted halfway through. "We documented eight different rhinos in the first month, including ones the rangers hadn't seen for over a year," says Will.

"With high-resolution imagery, individuals can be identified by ear notches and other markings, so rangers could confirm their presence and improve population estimates.

"I use a sensor to trigger the camera when an animal is in position, so I can pre-visualise the shot, set the composition and control the lighting." The camera ran for over six months, and 'Crossing Point' was submitted halfway through. "We documented eight different rhinos in the first month, including ones the rangers hadn't seen for over a year," says Will.

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"With high-resolution imagery, individuals can be identified by ear notches and other markings, so rangers could confirm their presence and improve population estimates.



"I'm thrilled that this series was recognised, as it was a true collaboration. I took strong visual images, the rangers gained a powerful monitoring tool and the wide biodiversity of the Maasai Mara showed that it's more than just a safari destination. It's an example of how wildlife photography can be more than taking pictures of animals." ● <https://willbl.com/>

Above: 'Elephant and Calf', from the series 'Crossing Point'. An African savanna elephant and her calf cross the river together under the cover of darkness. Safe corridors like this are essential for breeding herds, allowing young animals to move between feeding areas and water while avoiding disturbance.

© Will Burrard-Lucas, United Kingdom, Winner, Professional Competition, Wildlife & Nature, Sony World Photography Awards 2026



Above: New York City, USA, 1975.

© Joel Meyerowitz, New York City, 1975, Courtesy Huxley-Parlour Gallery and Howard Greenberg Gallery

Joel Meyerowitz

Recipient of the Outstanding Contribution to Photography award

Joel Meyerowitz



Regarded as one of the pioneers of colour photography, Joel Meyerowitz adopted the medium after working as an art editor in advertising

in New York. In a career spanning six decades, Joel has published more than 50 books and his work has appeared in 350 exhibitions in galleries and museums around the world.

Known for his distinctive style of street photography, Joel likes to capture playful images of his subjects going about their daily lives. He is the latest recipient of the Outstanding Contribution to Photography title, joining others greats, including Sebastião Salgado, Susan Meiselas and Martin Parr.

During the media event at the Sony World Photography Awards ceremony, Joel offered some insights gleaned from spending seven decades behind the camera...

"What matters is that something happens quickly and you are inside it. That is what photography is: experiencing life as it appears and disappears. Because photography is always about a disappearing moment.

"You respond in a second – an impulse, a reflex. That gasp of recognition is instinct before thought. If you make that picture, it

belongs to you alone. It will never be anyone else's. It is not imitation – it is a direct experience. An emotional response to something in the world. You are living inside the moment you are photographing.

"Often these pictures are accidents – things that happen in the flow of the street. Sometimes I try to include everything around the moment, shifting slightly so the surrounding life becomes part of the frame.

"It is about relationships between things. I moved from being a centred photographer to someone interested in disconnected relationships on the street – fragments that only make sense together in the frame.

"That is different from the 'decisive moment' idea [associated with the Magnum Photos co-founder Henri Cartier-Bresson] – a more formal European approach. The street in New York doesn't work like that. In my 20s, I was working as an art director, designing a booklet that featured photographs by Robert Frank [the Swiss-American photographer and documentary filmmaker]. Seeing his work changed something in me. It was about action, intuition, and the act of making itself. When I left that environment and stepped into the street, it felt like being reborn. Everything suddenly had meaning – gestures, movement, everyday life.

"Instead of going straight back to the office, I walked around for many blocks just to stay in that state of seeing. By the time I returned to the office, I knew I had to leave my job.

"From then on, I carried a camera everywhere. I was learning exposure from a simple instruction sheet – if the sun is behind the subject, reduce exposure by two stops.

"I still have some of those early prints in my first books. The key idea is that resistance often leads you away from what you are meant to do. You leave your house, you make a choice – left or right – and that choice changes everything. In that sense, photography is about being open to what is given to you.

"I carried a 35mm camera everywhere. One of the skills was learning to be invisible in a crowd. That intimacy with speed is what makes photography exciting – you are moving through the world and responding at the same time. It creates a kind of dual identity between an observer and a participant.

"I began to see photography less as isolated moments and more as relationships between things – gestures, people, movement – all coexisting. And that is really what I continue to explore: photography as lived experience, not as isolated image-making." ●

www.joelmeyerowitz.com

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What the f-stop?

How much do you really know about photography? Test yourself to the max every issue with our tricky trivia quiz!

1 Which of these is not a factor when calculating depth of field?

- A Aperture
- B Effective focal length
- C Focused distance
- D Focal length



Alamy

2 Who is the famous photojournalist portrayed in the movie *Minamata*?

- A Robert Capa
- B Henri Cartier Bresson
- C W. Eugene Smith
- D Margaret Bourke-White

3 Which camera feature allows you to record video using all the sensor's pixels?

- A Long GOP
- B Open Gate
- C Full HDMI
- D Intra Frame



iStockphoto

4 What is the best shutter speed to use for photographing lightning strikes?

- A 1/8000sec
- B 1/1000sec
- C 1/60sec
- D 10 seconds

5 Which branch of law covers copyright?

- A Tort
- B Contract law
- C Intellectual property
- D Conveyancing

6 Which of these is not part of the exposure triangle?

- A Shutter speed
- B Focal length
- C Aperture
- D ISO

7 Which of these is the typical focal length for a fisheye lens?

- A 6mm
- B 9mm
- C 12mm
- D Impossible to say



8 Out of the 23 Pulitzer Prizes awarded every year, how many are for photography?

- A One
- B Two
- C Three
- D Four

9 How many megapixels does the Sony A7R VI use?

- A 61
- B 67
- C 72
- D 80

10 How many DSLRs were manufactured in 2025?

- A 186,000
- B 386,000
- C 686,000
- D 986,000

How did you do?

10 points You're a photo mastermind!
8-9 points Fantastic, you're a brainiac
6-7 points Really good score
4-5 points Respectable, but no cigar
2-3 points We'll keep your score secret
0-1 points Epic fail

ANSWERS 1B,2C,3B,4D,5C,6B,7D,8B,9B,10C

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