

A tiger with orange fur and black stripes is standing in shallow water, looking directly at the camera. The tiger's reflection is visible in the water. The background consists of dark, dense foliage and trees.

Jim Zuckerman's

PHOTO INSIGHTS

February 2026

Drone Flying in Winter
Impossible Metering Situations
When Diagonals are Distracting
Photography Quiz
Photo Tours
Ask Jim
Student Showcase
The Story Behind the Picture
Back issues



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On the cover: A Bengal tiger captured in Ranthambore National Park, India. *On this page:* Giant panda sculptures in snow, Harbin Snow and Ice Festival, China.



Often I shake my head in disbelief at the pictures I'm able to take now compared to what we could take in the past. Think about it. Birds in flight? Forget it. The fastest film I used for action photography was 400 ISO, and that was too grainy. 400 film wouldn't provide a fast enough shutter speed to freeze wings, especially with no sun. We'd rationalize this by using the term 'artistic blurs'.

What about the ability to have great skies behind any scene or subject? We can easily do that now. Back in the day, the best we could hope for was a well exposed sky by using those plastic Cokin filters that tinted the sky darker while the bottom portion of the image was unaffected by the clear portion of the filter. How primitive!

And what about contrast? With film, I used to teach that you'd have to expose for the highlights and let the shadows go dark (or black). No one had ever heard of HDR where detail in both bright highlights and deep shadows is never lost. Or how about focus stacking? You can now maintain complete depth of field with any lens at any aperture including super long telephotos.

I know it's hard to believe in 2026, but there was actually a time before Photoshop when our creativity was limited to the push of a shutter button. Tweaking photos regarding saturation, contrast, highlight and shadow detail, etc. wasn't even in our consciousness. Now, the sky is absolutely the limit. We can do anything imaginable to our pictures. What a great time to be a photographer!

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DRONE FLYING IN WINTER

There are special considerations you have to think about when flying a drone in cold weather. These directly affect whether your drone returns safely after a successful flight.

1. Weather conditions: Always check the weather before you fly. For example, if it's snowing or if snow is forecasted, don't fly. The performance of the drone may be negatively impacted. In addition, when snowflakes fall upon the warm motors driving the propellers, they will melt and the resulting moisture can damage the sensitive electronics.

2. The cold: In cold weather, batteries become depleted much faster than when it's warm. This is a serious issue. If the battery manufacturer states the effective flying time is 45 minutes, this could very well mean in cold conditions the actual flying time is only 20 minutes. In extreme cold, the flight time is less.

To extend battery life, the best procedure is to keep the batteries as warm as possible. Place them in pockets inside your parka to take advantage of your body heat. If you carry them in a backpack or drone case, place a



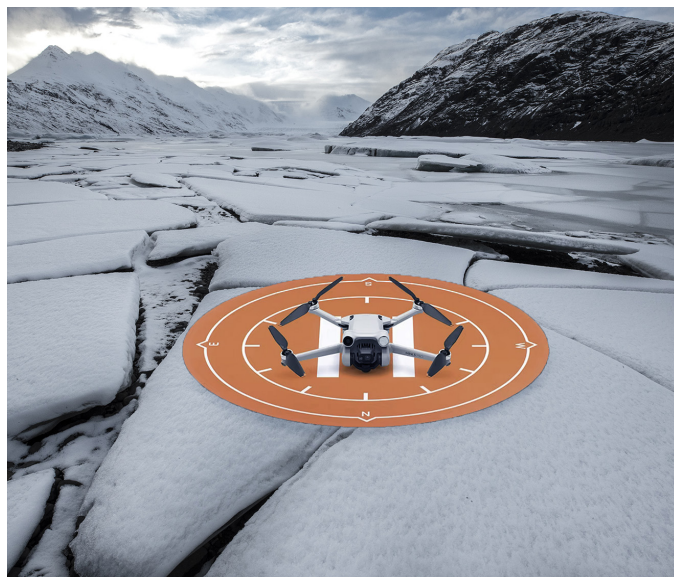
Godafoss waterfall, Iceland

couple of hand warmers against each battery to keep it warm.

It's always important to carry extra batteries, but this is particularly true in winter. They extend the flying time. In addition, never take off with a battery less than 100% charged.

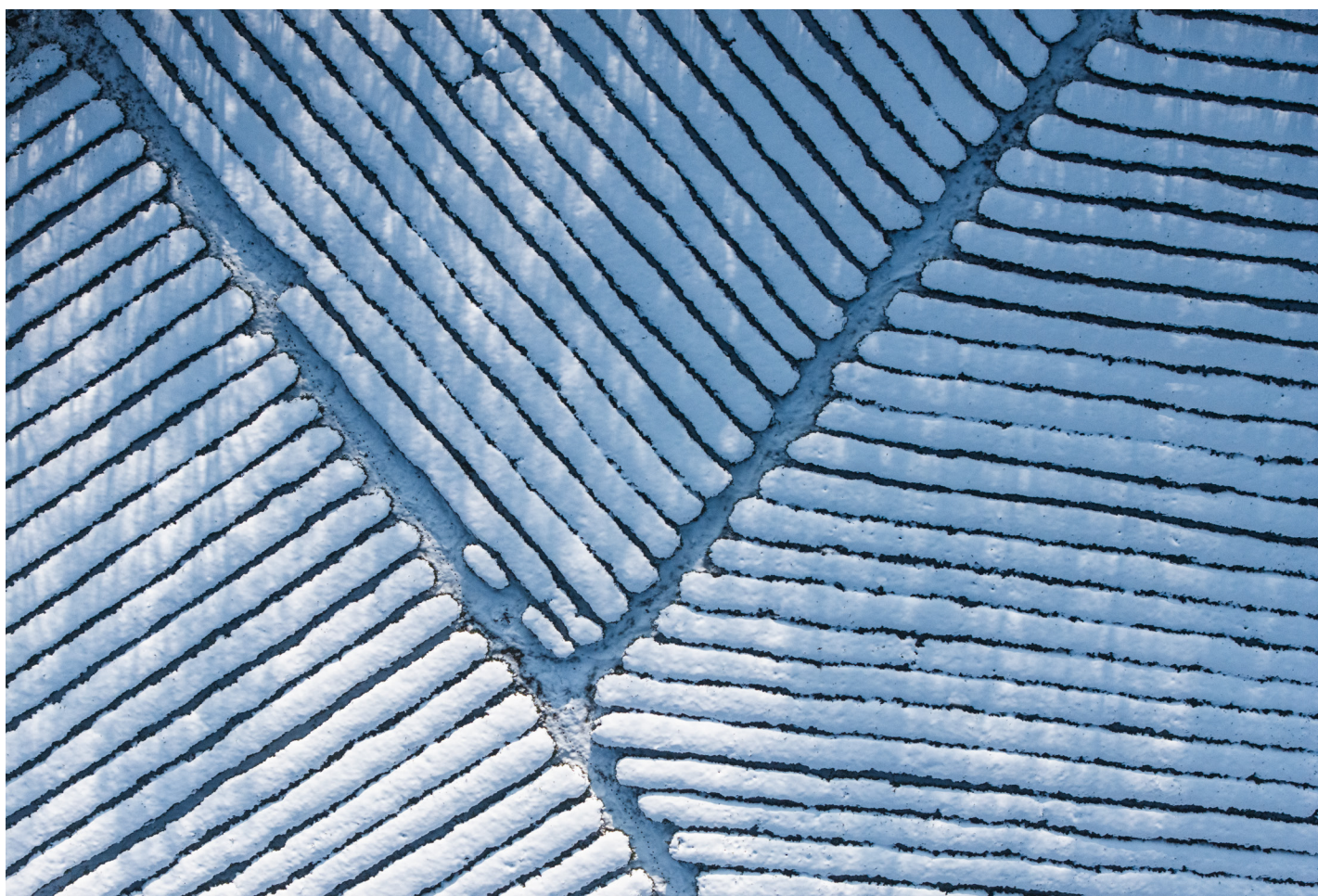
3. Gloves: In cold conditions, it can be painful to fly a drone without gloves. Therefore, invest in a pair of touch-screen compatible gloves that allow you to select camera and drone control icons on your iPhone or controller. Consider this essential equipment.

4. Launch pad: It's a good idea to use a launch pad at the beginning of the flight. This small, inexpensive and foldable platform prevents the propellers from striking snow and ice when taking off and landing. It also elimi-



nates the problem of the snow being sucked up into the motors by the turbulence of the props.

5. First, hover: When launching your drone, it's a very good idea to hover at a low altitude



Snow covered tea plantation, China

-- like 20 feet or so -- to warm up the motors and other components gradually. This insures good performance of the drone.

6. Flight distance: Because of the decreased flight time in cold weather, don't fly your drone great distances. Don't push it beyond its limits. You may never be able to retrieve it. I recommend returning to home when the battery level reaches 50%. This is a conservative approach, but it will guarantee you don't lose the drone. If there is wind, the drone has to expend more energy to come back to you. This further depletes the life of the battery. Monitor the battery charge throughout the flight to ensure you have enough power to bring it back.

7. Minimum temperature: Drone manufacturers publish in their user manual and their

official specifications the minimum temperature recommended for flying. Each drone is different. For example, the specs for my DJI Air 3S state it's not recommended to fly below minus 10 degrees Celsius or plus 14 degrees Fahrenheit. Can you fudge on these numbers? Yes, you can, but do so intelligently. I wouldn't fly my drone if the temperature was minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit, for example. The consequences of extreme cold are sudden potential power failure, increased motor strain, rapid battery drain, and brittle propellers. Cold air can also cause icing on props and sensor failure due to condensation.

Flying a drone in winter can produce outstanding images. Take these extra precautions to ensure safe and rewarding flights. §



IMPOSSIBLE METERING SITUATIONS

Exposure in photography used to be a real challenge, especially when dealing with pictures that had extreme contrast, intense backlighting, and fragile highlights. The photo below is an example of an exposure situation making most photographers insecure. When faced with this kind of lighting, we used to bracket all over the place because camera meters couldn't be trusted when shooting into the sun with backlit ice and a blue sky. Given the meter's inaccuracy, photographers usually exposed one and two f/stops over the reading and one or two stops under the reading. This pretty much

guanteed that one of the frames would be correct.

The ice storm that hit much of the country last month covered every tree on my property with glistening ice. When the sun came out, it made each twig look like it was coated in diamonds. Including the sun in the composition compounded the difficulty of a meter reading.

I said earlier '*used to be a real challenge*' because today, the moment we take a picture, we see the exact exposure on the LCD screen in real time. And it's a simple matter to adjust -- lighter or darker -- until the image is perfect.





Another impossible metering situation is the ice sculpture of a horse I photographed in Harbin, China, above. It was night and everything was dark except for the colored light illuminating the contours of the ice. No meter in the world could be relied upon to produce an accurate reading of this subject. A meter might or might not get it right. So much depends on the exact composition with respect to how much of the illuminated horse is included in the frame, how close that illumination is to the center of the viewfinder (where the meter takes most of its information) and how bright the blue reflections off the ice are.

Two modern aspects of photographic technology make this exposure a slam dunk. First, I could see the exposure immediately on the LCD screen. This allowed me to tweak my

camera settings so the next time (sometimes making three adjustments) the exposure looks perfect.

The second technological breakthrough we use all the time is post-processing. In Lightroom and Adobe Camera Raw, we can tweak exposure, contrast, highlights, shadows, and so much more. In large measure, this enables every photographer to deal with exposure after-the-fact. Before digital technology, this was never possible.

A common question I am asked on my winter tours is how to expose for snow. Camera meters are designed to correctly read a subject or scene by analyzing the middle tones (referred to as '*middle gray*'). But what happens if the subject is completely white? The huge (about



20 feet tall) snow sculpture of a cat, above, offers no middle gray at all. There are some shadows in the snow, but these aren't large enough for a typical digital camera to read. So, how do you expose for this type of situation?

What the meter is going to do is assume the cat is middle gray, and it will give you a reading that is underexposed -- which makes the white snow gray. The conventional wisdom from the film days is to overexpose the scene by 1-1/3 or 1-2/3 f/stops. That works, although exactly how much the picture needs to be overexposed is educated guesswork.

There are two ways to handle this kind of exposure situation. First, because mirrorless cameras show the exposure in the viewfinder, it is a simple matter to adjust either the shutter

speed, the lens aperture, or the ISO to lighten the image. You can see the change in real time in the viewfinder.

Second, you can simply take the picture, allowing it to be somewhat underexposed, and then in post-processing the exposure can be corrected by using the *exposure* slider in Lightroom or ACR. A one f/stop correction is not enough to affect noise. That is how I derived a perfect exposure on the cat sculpture. Besides adjusting the light, the only other thing I did was eliminate the unwanted blue tone from the high Kelvin temperature associated with deep shade. I did this by desaturating the blue here: **Image > adjustments > hue/saturation.**

You can see that no matter how challenging an exposure seems to be, it's not a problem now. §

When Diagonals are Distracting

Diagonal lines are often dynamic elements of compositional design. A perfect example is the image below of a Nubian village in Egypt. The bold diagonal line of the staircase defines the picture and makes it visually compelling.

In nature, diagonal lines are everywhere. One such example is the picture of the slot canyon at the top of the next page. Once again, the

prominent diagonal lines give the image an artistic flare and a strong sense of design.

Not all diagonal lines look good, however. Sometimes they can actually be distracting. The rule I go by is this: *Diagonal lines behind a subject that are not part of the subject are almost always distracting.*

Study the picture of the snub-nosed monkey on page 11. The diagonal line of the eyes actu-



ally works well, but there are two diagonal lines that are distracting. They are very subtle, but once you notice them they divert attention away from the subject. Indicated by two red arrows, these two lines could be easily overlooked. But for sake of photographic perfection, they should be eliminated.

At the bottom of page 13, I used the clone tool in Photoshop on a lesser opacity to eliminate the noticeable diagonal lines in the background. This improved the image. As I said, these flaws were subtle, but an experienced eye would notice them.

The photo on the top right of page 13



is a composite of a veiled chameleon and a tropical landscape from Brazil. Based on what I've been saying, I'm sure you can spot the error with respect to my choice of background. The defined tree with diagonal and very noticeable branches is distracting. It needs to be cloned out or eliminated with generative fill, or I should choose a different background.



Iceland Drone Tour

August 24 - September 2, 2026



The essence of what makes art photographs successful is beautiful graphic design, and what makes designs look good are artistic lines. Strong, bold, and appealing lines make or break works of art as well as photographs. S-curves, C-curves, diagonals, repeating patterns, leading lines -- all of these types of attractive lines contribute to the success of an image. The only exception is when these lines occur in the background and not part of the subject. They draw the eye away from the subject like the tree behind the chameleon diverts our attention from the reptile.

There are so many things to think about when taking a picture. Besides exposure, composition is the most important. And what makes up composition? The answer is *lines*. Lines can be both artistic and distracting. It's the number one thing I focus



on when taking pictures. It doesn't matter the subject -- people, landscapes, wildlife, architecture, macro, cityscapes -- it all comes down to lines. Many times and in many instances it's frustrating because there aren't any easily recognizable lines that make a strong composition. That's when you have to change lenses or change the shooting position or, possibly, choose a different subject until you find artistic lines. §



Frog and Reptile Workshop

June 13 - 14, 2026



Exotic Birds of Colombia

Sept. 23 to Oct. 3, 2026



The Pantanal, Brazil

Nov. 23 - Dec. 2, 2026



Photography Quiz

1. An f/stop is calculated by dividing the focal length of the lens by:
 - a. The diameter of the lens aperture
 - b. The square of the diameter of the lens aperture
 - c. Half the diameter of the lens aperture
 - d. The inverse of the diameter of the lens aperture
2. Compositionally, you should never put a subject in the middle of the frame.
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. In black and white photography, a red filter placed over the lens lightens all elements in the picture that are:
 - a. Yellow
 - b. Blue
 - c. Red
 - d. Green
4. Using a 1.4x teleconverter causes a reduction in how many f/stops of light?
 - a. 1 f/stop
 - b. 1.4 f/stops
 - c. 2 f/stops
 - d. 2.4 f/stops
5. The complementary color of orange is:
 - a. Blue
 - b. Cyan
 - c. Halfway between blue and cyan
 - d. None of the above
6. When evaluating camera format ratios, a 4:3 ratio and a 3:2 ratio are the same.
 - a. True
 - b. False
7. Is 1/125th of a second a 'magic shutter speed' with respect to producing sharp pictures with any lens?
 - a. True
 - b. False
8. The sharpest aperture of a lens with a maximum aperture of f/2.8 is:
 - a. f/2.8
 - b. f/4
 - c. f/11
 - d. f/22
9. The articulating LCD screen is a big help with macro photography because it allows us to shoot from a low angle without twisting our neck. When this technique is used, there is a light loss of 1/3 f/stop.
 - a. True
 - b. False
10. Photographers in the late 1800's were often seriously injured because they used highly explosive flash powder for their flash.
 - a. True
 - b. False

Answers on page 49

UPCOMING PHOTO WORKSHOPS



FROG & REPTILE WORKSHOP in Kansas City

This is an exciting macro workshop in which you will be able to photograph about 40 species of colorful dart frogs and exotic reptiles. Held in a hotel conference room, Jim sets up natural backgrounds for outstanding photos. The photo at left shows a Jackson chameleon with the background replaced in Photoshop.

June 13 - 14, 2026



GREAT GRAY OWLS, CANADA

Get up close and personal with these spectacular birds flying with their magnificent wing spans. The slow flying owls are easy to photograph, even for beginners, and you will absolutely love your pictures!

February 13 - 18, 2027



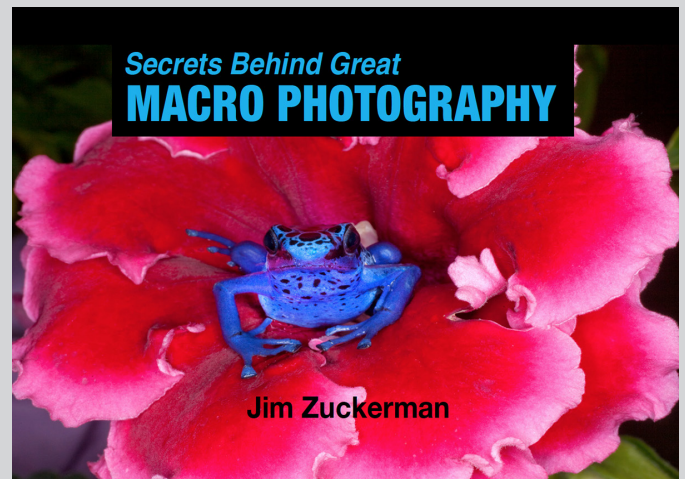
TEXAS BIRDS

Get up close and personal to many species of exotic and colorful birds. We shoot from a blind and get frame-filling shots of cardinals, green jays, crested caracaras, painted buntings, and more. Based in McAllen, Texas.

May 12 -15, 2027

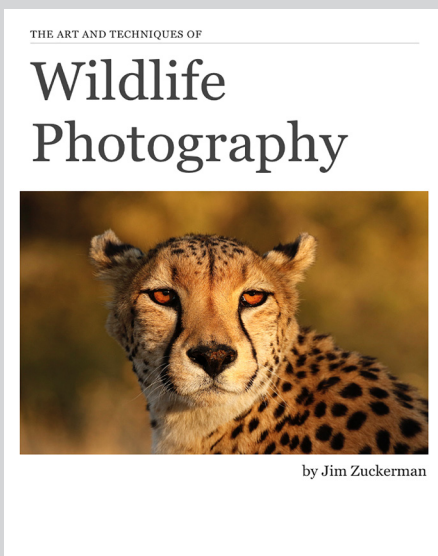
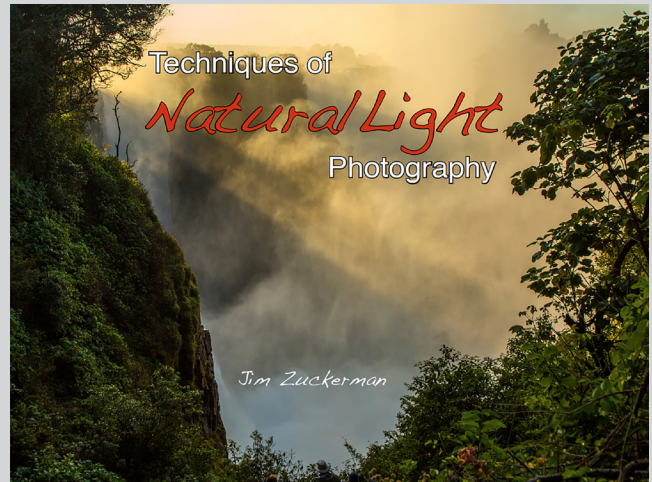
Expand your photographic artistry with *eBooks*

Click on any ebook to see inside



eBooks continued

Click on any ebook to see inside



India Tiger Safari

May 20 - June 1, 2026



What's Wrong with this Picture?



This very impressive bonsai arrangement was on display in a park in China. I had never seen one so large and artfully done, but of course the problem with this shot is the white sky. I can understand how some people would like the clean, graphic, and very stark image with the white background, but I don't. I feel that appropriate and subtle detail in the sky would complete this picture and add important detail behind the trees.

I have a collection of hundreds of sky images that I use all the time. Some of the skies are dramatic -- colorful sunsets and storm clouds -- while others are much more subtle. You never know when a particular sky will be needed to complete an image. I've loaded many of these sky images into the *Sky Replacement* command in Photoshop to make them immediately accessible.



To add the new sky, I used the **Edit > Sky Replacement** pulldown command. I'd deleted all of the Adobe Stock skies that came with the program and replaced them with my own skies.

What is particularly noteworthy with this image is the retention of detail in the plants and grasses as that image merges with the new background. The software is amazing in this regard, but to guarantee that the smallest details in the bonzai were still visible in the composite, I moved the sky around using the move tool. This meant the lightest parts of the clouds meshed with the top edges of the plants. If you look closely, every detail seen in the original image has been retained. §

Indonesia Wildlife

October 12 - 23, 2027



SHORT AND SWEET

1. Photographing in deep shade produces bluish images like with this pine martin. This can be corrected in-camera by switching the white balance to 'cloudy'. But if it's too late and you've already taken the shots, use the 'color temperature' slider in Lightroom or ACR to make the correction.



2. To ensure as much depth of field as possible when doing macro work, make the back of the camera (i.e., the plane of the digital sensor) as parallel as possible with the plane of the subject. Of course, also use small lens apertures. This is an ice-covered plant taken during the recent ice storm in Tennessee.



3. City skylines are their most beautiful when photographed at twilight. For maximum visual impact, make sure the sky is cobalt blue as opposed to black. This is one of the impressive skylines in Dubai. Enhancing the colors in a skyline with Photoshop always makes the architecture look especially dramatic.



4. I photographed this cape buffalo from a blind in South Africa. Notice how impactful the low angle is. When photographing many subjects -- wildlife, models, even architecture -- a low angle is extremely impressive and gives the subjects greater stature. This is true for any focal length lens, but especially wide angles. §



Ethiopia photo tour

Go back in time 20,000 years

January 5 - 18, 2027



ASK JIM

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

Q: Jim . . . What is the best telephoto range for wildlife photography? Not all camera manufacturers offer the same focal lengths, but I wanted your opinion on this.

Larry Eaton, Long Island, New York.

A: I think the 200-600mm and the 200-800mm are the ideal telephoto ranges. Fixed focal lengths like the 500mm or 600mm don't have the all important zoom range for maximum compositional flexibility. Plus the 200-600mm and the 200-800mm lenses are hand-holdable. The maximum aperture isn't super large, but with the ability to raise ISO settings now without paying a huge price in increased noise makes these lenses even more attractive.



Partial List of Photography Tours 2026 - 2027

INDIA TIGER SAFARI
May/June 2026



ICELAND DRONE TOUR
Aug/Sept 2026



ASIA for BEGINNERS
Oct 2026



EXOTIC COLOMBIA BIRDS
Sept/Oct 2026



DUBAI & ABU DHABI
Nov 2026



THE PANTANAL, BRAZIL
Nov/Dec 2026



WINTER WILDLIFE WORKSHOP
Dec 2026



ETHIOPIA
Jan 2027



GREAT GRAY OWLS
Feb 2027



TEXAS BIRDS WORKSHOP
May 2027



VIETNAM
Oct 2027



INDONESIA WILDLIFE
Oct 2027



WINTER WILDLIFE WORKSHOP

December 16 - 20, 2026



Mountain lion



Red fox

STUDENT SHOWCASE

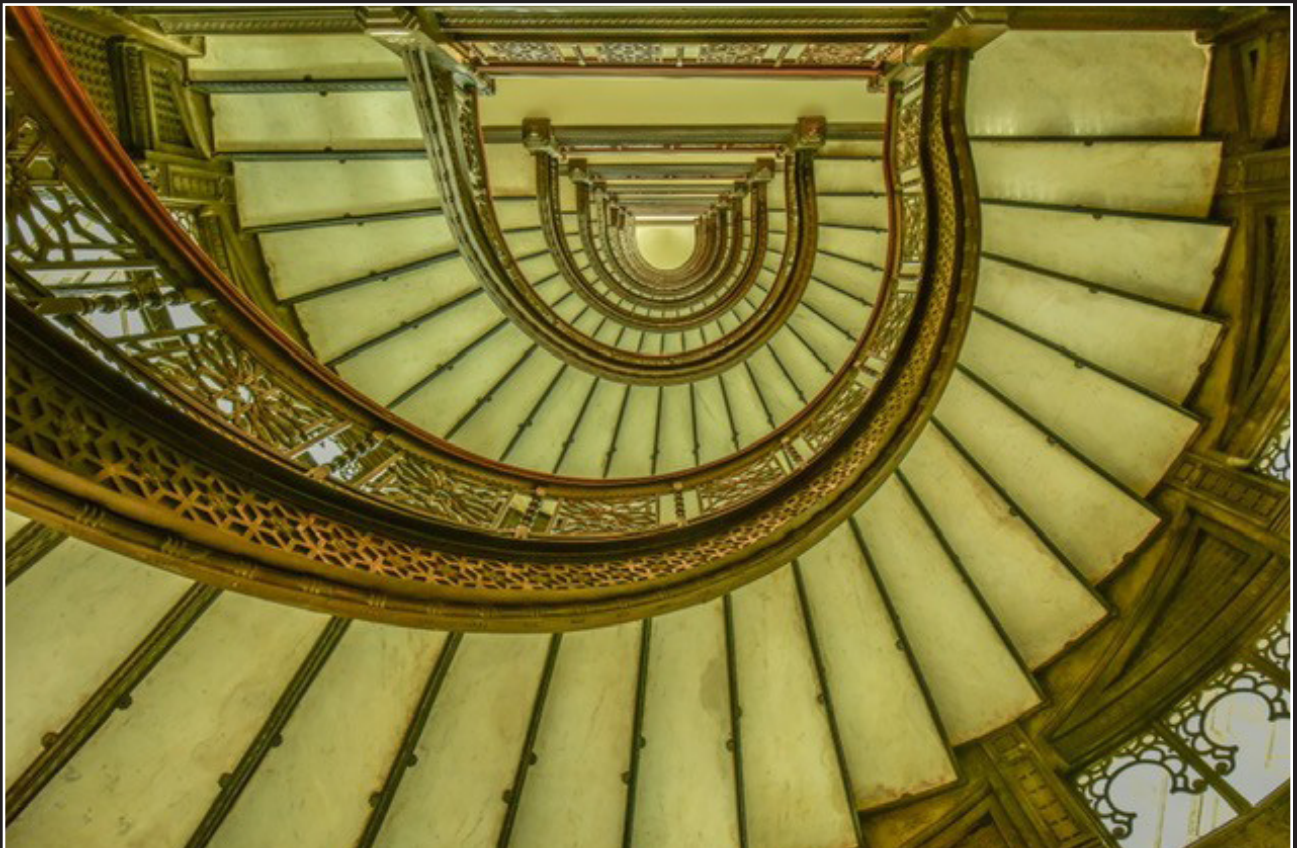
Each month, Jim features one student who took beautiful and inspiring images on one or more of his photography tours or workshops. It's really fascinating how photographers see and compose such different images even though we may go to the same places. Everyone takes great photographs on Jim's trips.

Joy McKay, Quincy, Illinois. [Pantanal photo tour](#), [Winter Wildlife Workshop](#), [White horses of the Camargue workshop](#), [Chicago By Night tour](#), [Ethiopia photo tour](#), [Tuscany photo tour](#)..



© Joy McKay

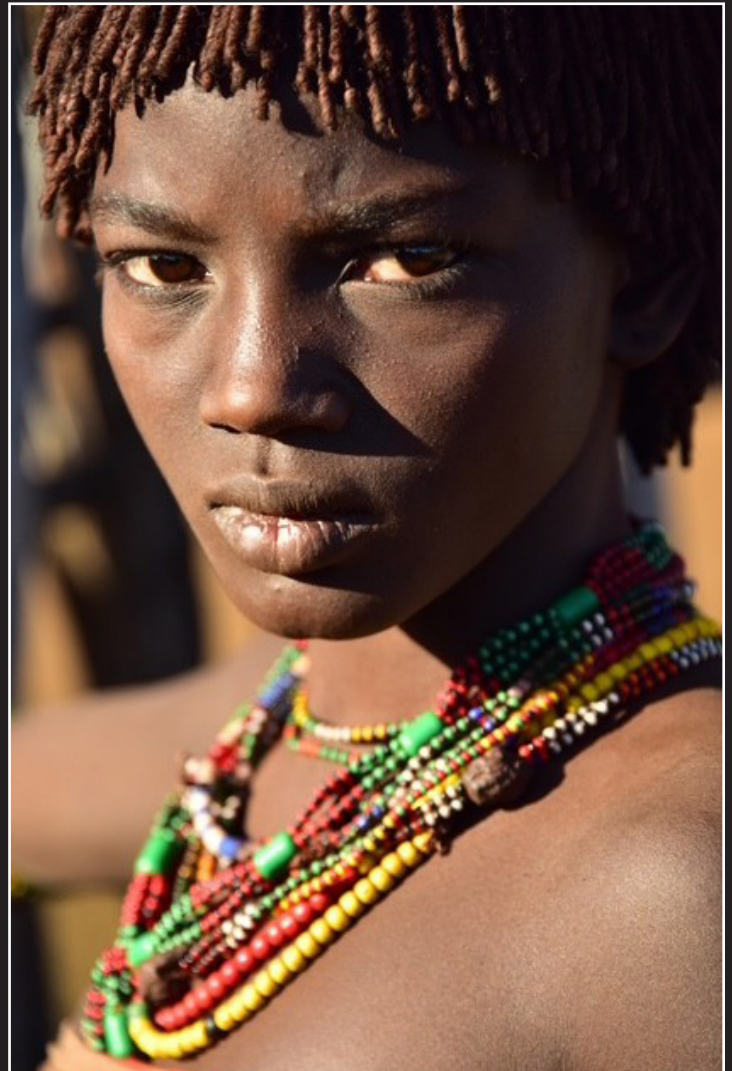
Student Showcase, continued



Student Showcase, continued



© Joy McKay





© Joy McKay

DUBAI & ABU DHABI TOUR

November 14 - 22, 2026



Great Gray Owls workshop

February 13 - 18, 2027

spectacular action shots



The Story Behi



nd the Picture



This is the famous Jacobite steam train in Scotland traversing the Glenfinnan Viaduct, an historic structure built between 1897 and 1901 without any steel reinforcement.

There is a parking lot near the viaduct, and from here it's a fairly short walk (about a half mile) to this viewpoint. The higher you walk along the trail, the more elevated the view will be. In the summer, many people visit this spot so it's best to arrive early to get a parking spot.

The train engineer knows everyone wants to see the steam, so just as he enters the viaduct, he'll stop the train, turn the steam on, and then proceed slowly making it easy for everyone to get a great picture.

For this shot, I used a 24-105mm lens set to 47mm, and the settings were 1/1600, f/5.0, and 640 ISO.

Please note: If it's been particularly dry in this part of Scotland, the steam train won't run. Instead, they will use a diesel engine for fear sparks could possibly ignite a fire. \$

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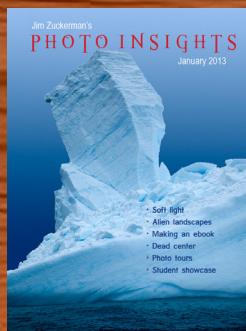
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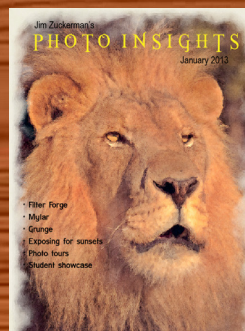
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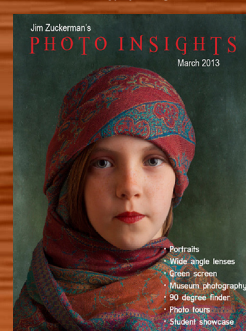
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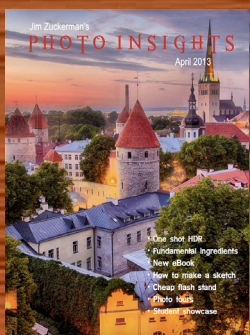
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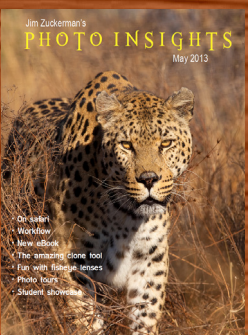
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May '13



Jun. '13



Jul. '13



Aug. '13



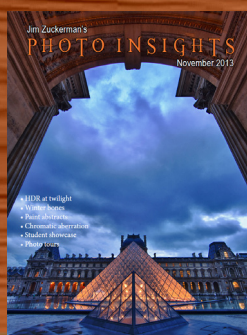
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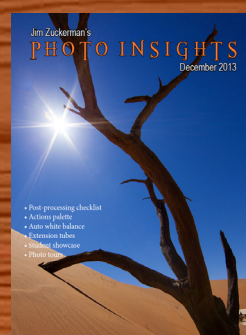
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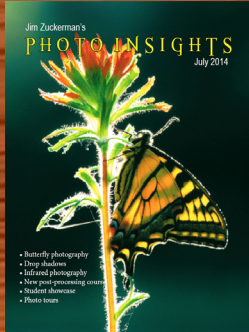


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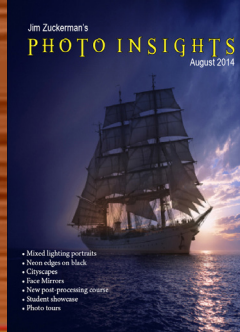


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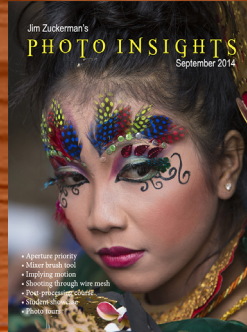
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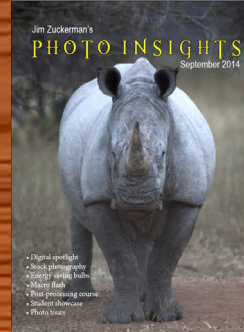
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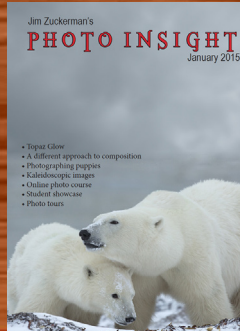
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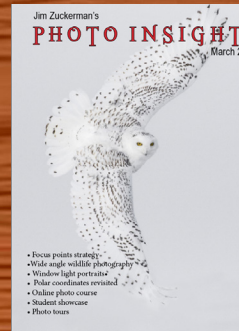
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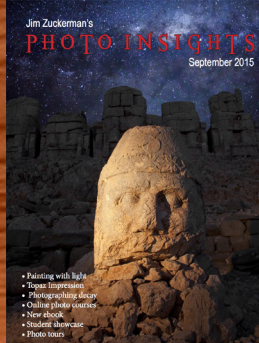
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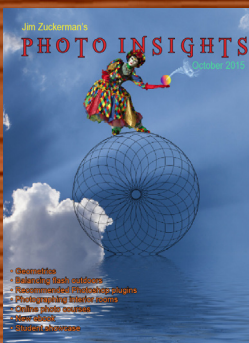
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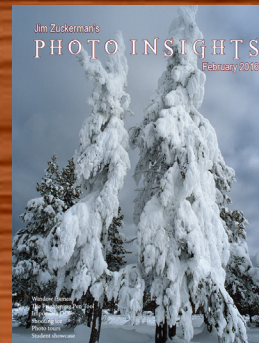
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Feb. '16



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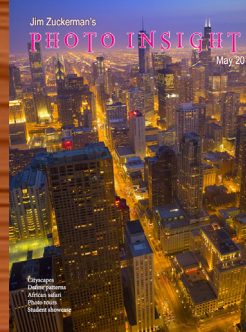
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May '16



Jun '16



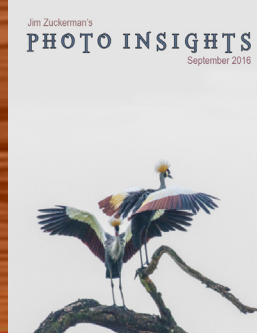
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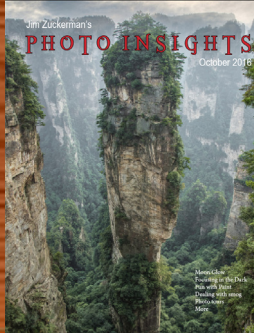
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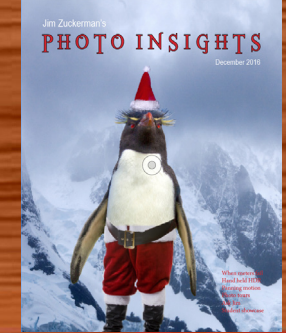
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Nov. '16



Dec. '16



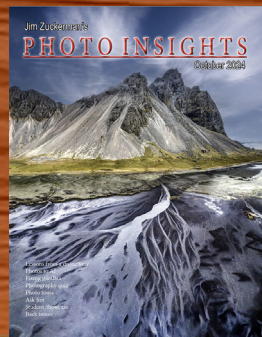
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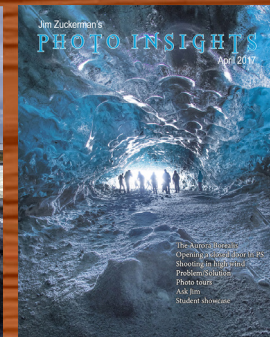
Feb. '17



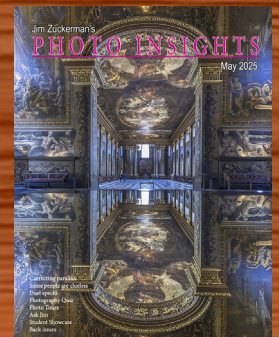
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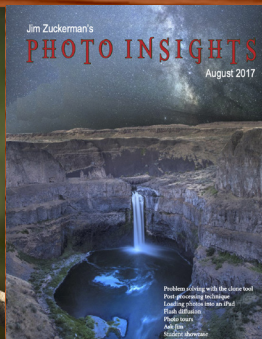
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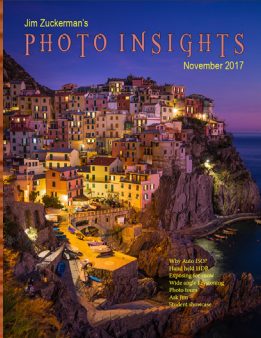


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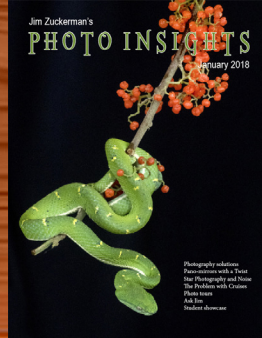
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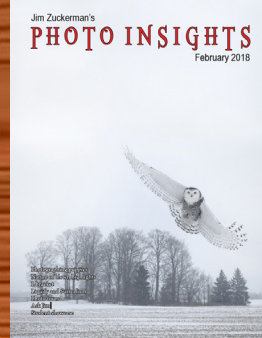
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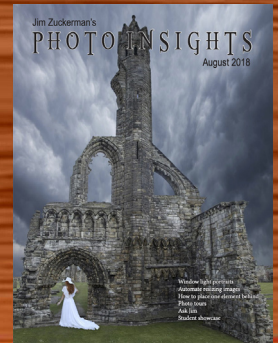
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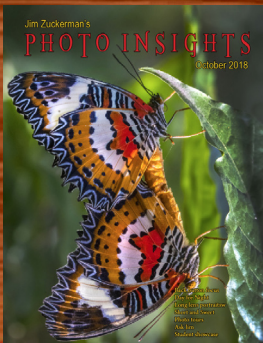
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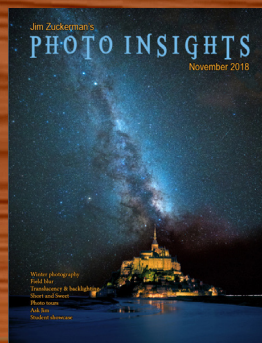
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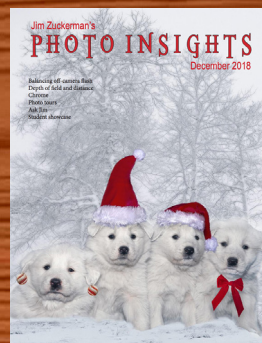
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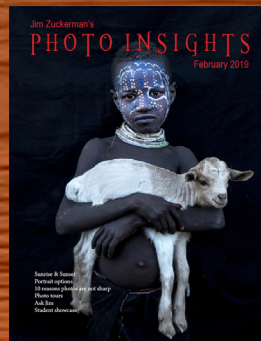
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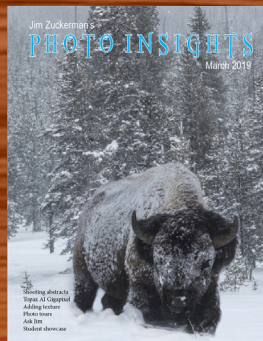
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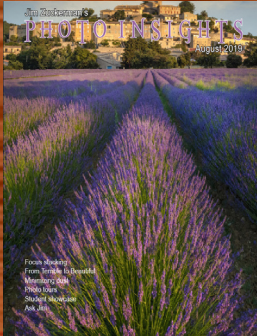


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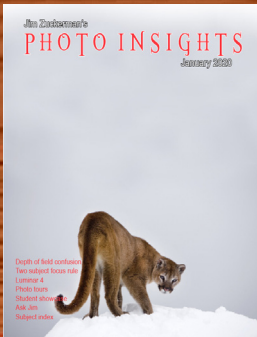
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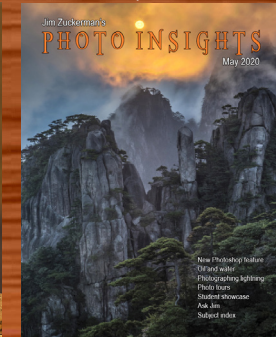
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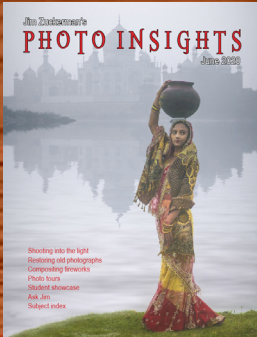
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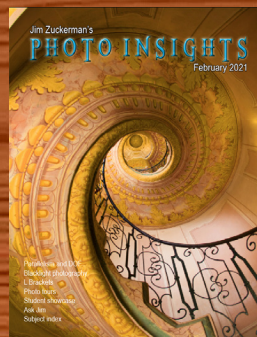
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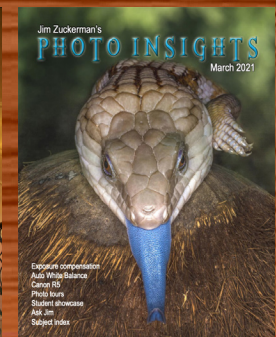
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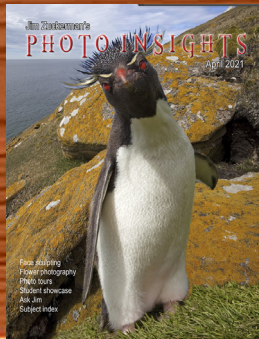
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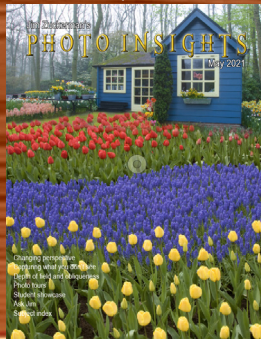
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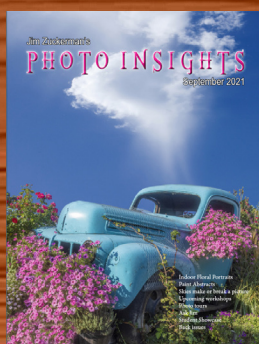
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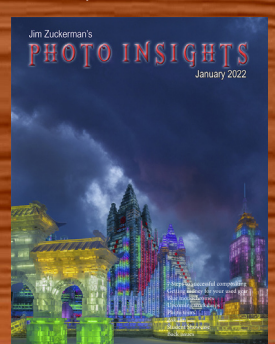
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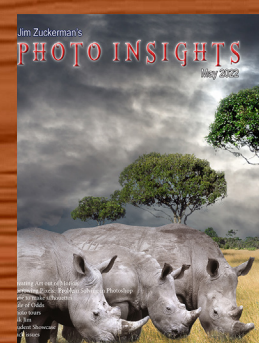
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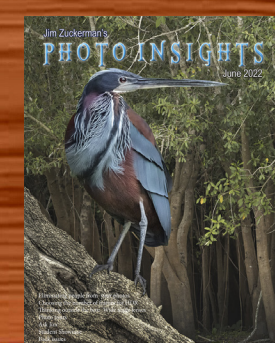
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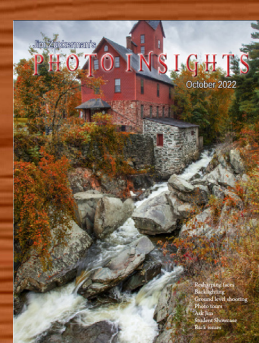
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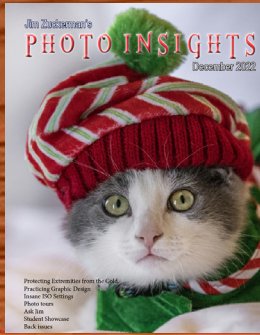
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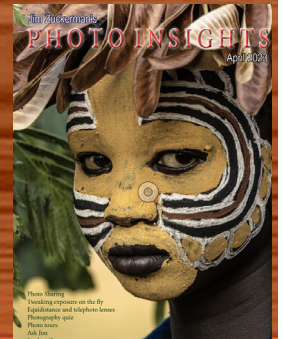
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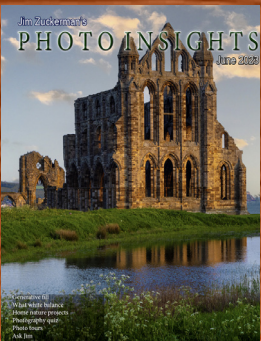
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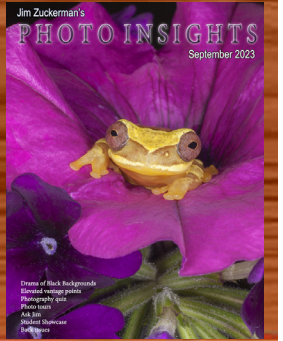
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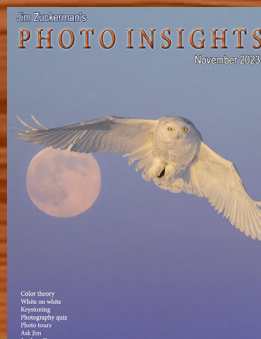
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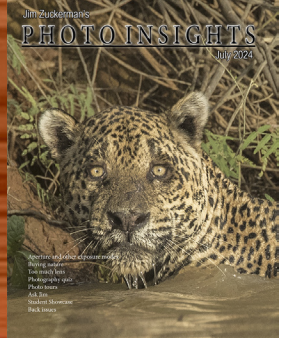
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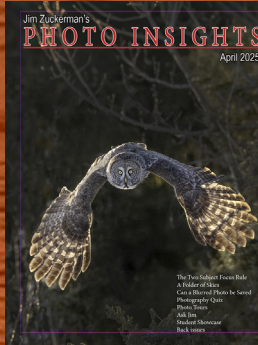
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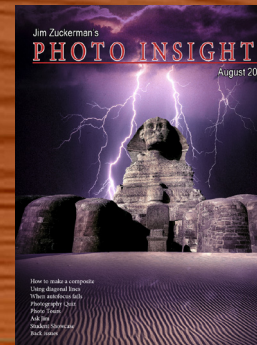
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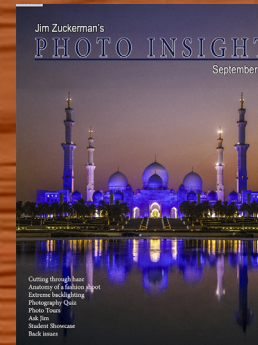
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Total solar eclipse, How to shoot	Mar. '24
Translucency & backlighting	Nov. '18

Quiz answers

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

Your score

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

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

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

< 70%: You should really be using an iPhone

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PHOTO INSIGHTS

published monthly by Jim Zuckerman

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Girls of the Mursi tribe, Ethiopia