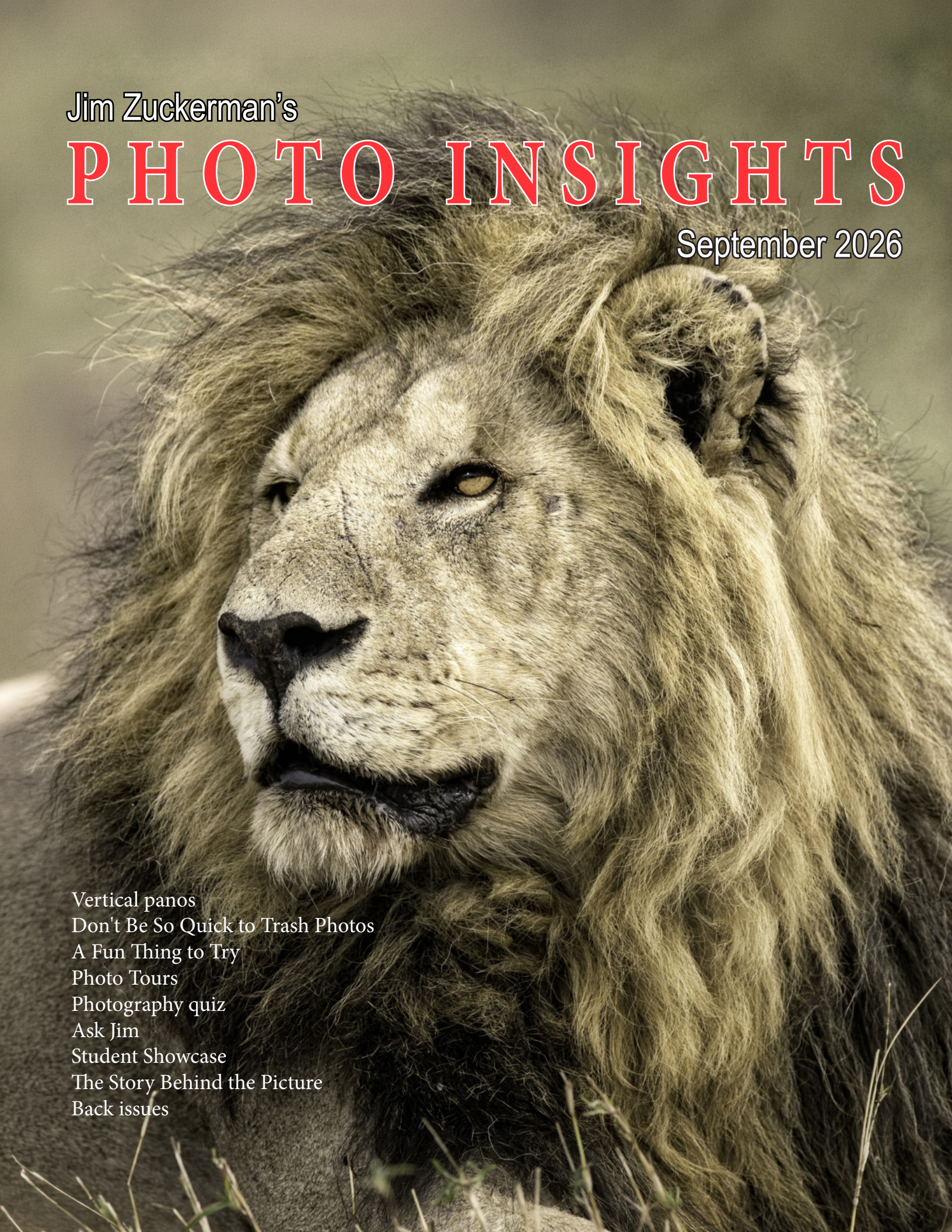




Jim Zuckerman's

PHOTO INSIGHTS

September 2026

Vertical panos
Don't Be So Quick to Trash Photos
A Fun Thing to Try
Photo Tours
Photography quiz
Ask Jim
Student Showcase
The Story Behind the Picture
Back issues



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On the cover: Male lion, Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya; *On this page:* Burgos Cathedral, Burgos, Spain.



Digital technology has made me re-think some photographic parameters I've held for decades. For example, low ISO settings are essential to minimize noise (it was called grain back in the day), and tripods are essential for tack sharp pictures because low ISO settings required slow shutter speeds.

All of us subscribed to this way of photographing from the beginning of our involvement in picture taking.

But what if the noise issue became much less relevant? What if 3200 ISO or even 8000 ISO was like shooting 400 ISO in 1990? Enter Topaz DeNoise. This remarkable software mitigates noise in a way that was unthinkable just a handful of years ago. In last month's issue, in the 'Ask Jim' feature, I showed an image in which I shot with an astounding 40,000 ISO. I applied DeNoise AI twice and Topaz Sharpen AI twice and the image looked like I'd used 200 ISO in the 90's. I admit, this was extreme, but if this software can deal with an ISO setting through the roof, how will it handle ISO settings much less than that? Topaz handles it brilliantly.

This means when I travel now, I rarely bring a tripod. Only if I'm going to be shooting the night sky or doing photography at night in cities will I bring a tripod. If I want more depth of field using small lens apertures for landscapes, for instance, I just raise the ISO and hand hold the camera when using f/16. In post-processing, DeNoise eliminates the noise.

For traveling, this is a big deal. As I've gotten older, lightening the load I carry is very important. It seems like Topaz developed this software just in time!

Jim Zuckerman
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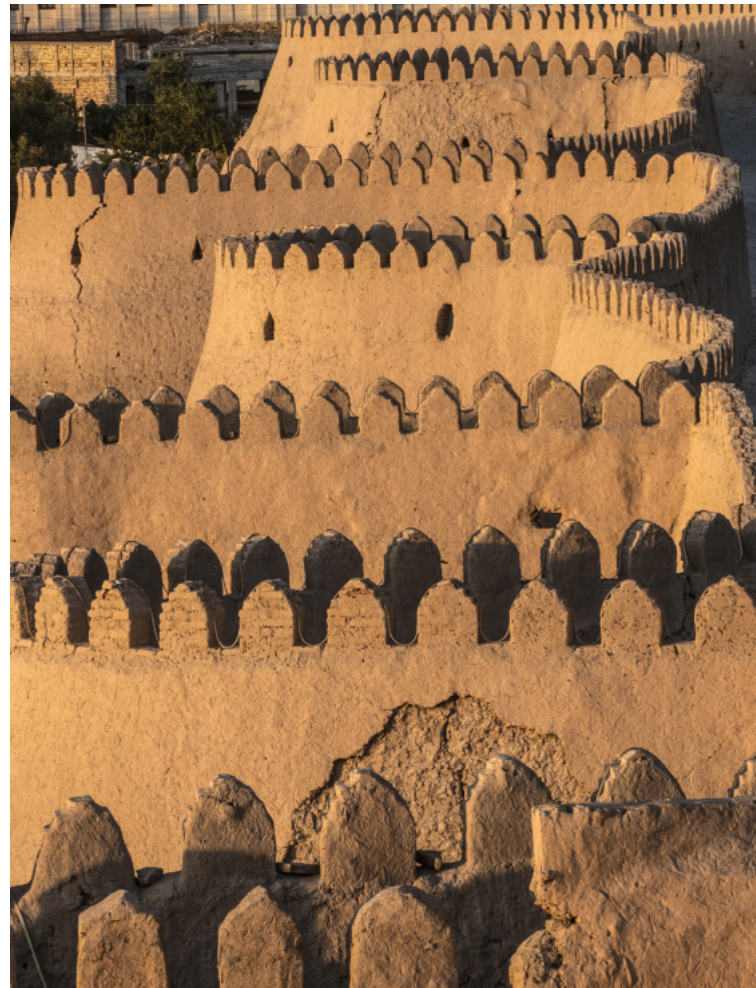
VERTICAL PANOS

One of the most compelling ways to photograph architecture, particularly interiors, is to create a vertical panorama, i.e., a vertorama. Yes, there is distortion, but we as photographers are used to distortion in our pictures. For example, the picture below left was taken in Iceland with a 14mm wide angle lens. The frost on the black sand is significantly distorted; it didn't look that large when I was photographing it. It was the close proximity of the lens to the foreground that caused the distortion. We not only accept this

kind of exaggerated perspective, but we use it to our artistic advantage.

The photo below right shows the wall of a fortress in Uzbekistan. Here, I used a 300mm focal length, and the various planes of the long wall look compressed. This is typical of telephoto lenses and, again, we not only accept this kind of distortion, but we often use long lenses specifically to capture this kind of look.

A horizontal panorama landscape or cityscape





attempts to address the issue of 'peripheral vision.' Compared to our eyes, if you include what we see peripherally, camera lenses have narrow angles of view, even wide angles. Notwithstanding ultra wide fisheye lenses, of course. The horizontal pano on the top of the next page shows this.

Vertical panos, on the other hand, include not only elements in a scene that are in front of us, but they also include the elements that are above as well as behind us. We never had the ability to do this until the digital age. As I mentioned, there is going to be distortion and the subject will look little like it really does in reality. But, it's a fascinating interpretation.

The practice preview

If I think a particular subject will look good as a vertical pano, I first take a test shot with my iPhone. Smart phones are fast, easy, and you can assess the image before committing to taking several frames with a mirrorless or dSLR camera.

The technique is simple. Switch from *photo* to *pano*

mode, hold the camera horizontally (not vertically, even though the result will be a vertical image), and scan the scene, keeping the directional arrow in the center of the composition as much as possible.

To capture a room from floor to floor, as I've done below in the vertical pano of the Episcopal Palace in Astorga, Spain, you



either have to be young and flexible so you can bend backwards to capture the part of the scene behind you, or you have to angle the smart phone above your head to pan all the way down to the floor.



You can move the camera phone fairly fast as you take the pano. Don't go too slowly.

Or, you can do a partial pan and not continue panning down to the floor behind you.

Once I like the image produced by the smart phone, I take the same thing using my Canon mirrorless camera.

The Technique

For a large, cavernous room typical of cathedrals like St. Gilles in Edinburgh, right, it usually requires 7 or 8 frames to encompass the entire room from, say, the alter to the entrance doors.

Similar to taking a pano with a smart phone, you have to hold your Canon, Nikon, Sony, or Fuji horizontally. The choice of lens determines how much of the interior will be included in the frame, and it also governs how much dis-



tortion there will be in the final stitched composite. The wider the angle of the lens, the more distortion there will be. Both pictures on pages 6 and 7 were taken with a 16mm focal length.

The first shot determines the amount of foreground included. From there, raise the camera for the next image overlapping the first one by approximately 50%. About the fourth frame, you'll be shooting straight up at the ceiling (or in the case of the Modern Art Building in Leon, Spain, right, the sky). Take the shot, and then turn 180 degrees to face the opposite direction. Continue shooting until you reach the end of the sequence.

Even though you turned around at midpoint during the process of photographing the interior, the software is intelligent enough to stitch the 7 or 8 images correctly.

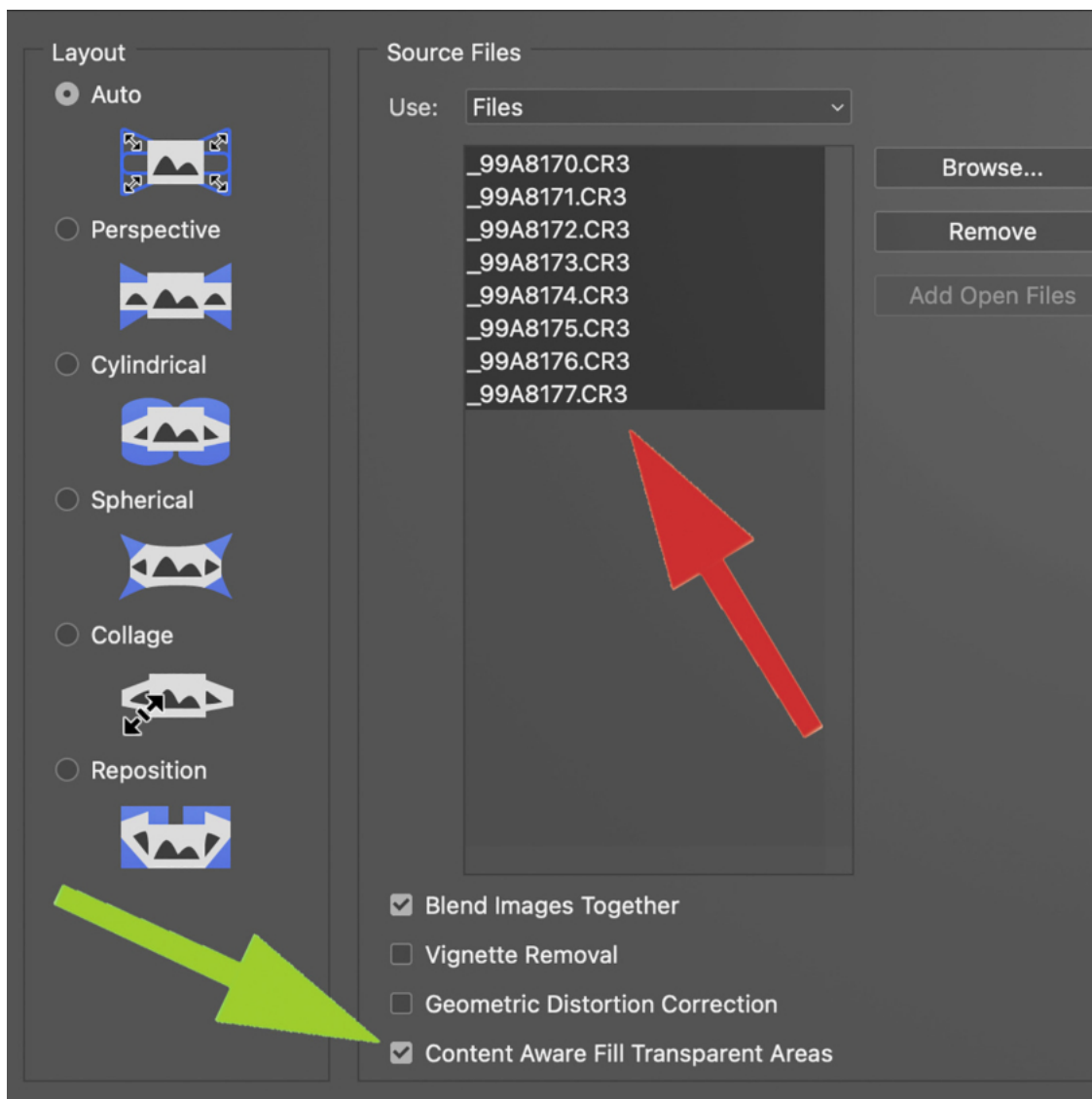
Post-processing

To stitch the images together into one photograph, use the following procedure.

In Bridge: Highlight the various images to be combined by holding the Shift key down.

Then choose **Tools > Photoshop > Photo Merge**. In the dialog box that opens, shown on the next page, highlight all the images (red arrow) and then check the box that says, *Content Aware Fill Transparent Areas* (green arrow). By checking this box, Photoshop fills in areas between and around the images that make up the composite. Due to lens angles, color shading, distortion caused by some lenses, and the types of subjects that





make up the pano, the pictures wouldn't meld together correctly if this box were not checked.

I don't use Lightroom, but for those of you who do, I got this from the Internet:

Go to the Library module and click all the images you want to combine for the pano. Open photo merge and go to the top menu and select **Photo > Photo Merge**. Then, to merge the final file, click the **Merge** button.

Experimentation

The look of a vertical pano depends a lot on

where you position yourself when shooting. For example, if you stand in the middle of a cathedral, you'll get a very different pano than if you were shooting from one end or the other. And the closer the camera is to any foreground element, the more distortion there will be.

Experiment by standing in different places in the room or near the facade of an interesting building. Just a few feet closer to an interesting or prominent architectural detail produces a very different photograph. §

DON'T BE SO QUICK TO TRASH PHOTOS IF THEY ARE NOT GOOD

I was disappointed when I arrived at this small waterfall in Iceland. The direct sunlight that makes the color of the glacial runoff so beautiful was also responsible for casting an unwanted shadow on the water. It really ruined the shot. The shadow came from a pedestrian bridge that spanned the river.

I've written a number of articles on Generative fill, demonstrating the remarkable things it can do. So, I thought I'd give it another test to see if this powerful AI software could eliminate the shadow. I really didn't think it could go that far, but we live in amazing times when it comes to photography and AI.

When I use **Edit > Generative Fill**, I rarely describe what I want with words in





the dialog box. To remove a person or object from a photograph, it's a simple matter to make a rough selection around said object with the lasso tool and click *generate*. The Adobe software always knows what to do.

However, if I want something specific -- like removing a shadow -- then I type my request in the dialog box. For this particular scene, I wrote: *remove shadow on water and rocks in the bottom portion of the image*.

Generative fill provides three variations of what it thinks the photographer wants. The first three images gave me variations that included a shadow, albeit a smaller shadow. I clicked *generate* again to ask for three more, and this time all three variants of the original were good. The shadow was completely

gone, and in its place was water and rocks that 'apparently' were illuminated by direct sunlight just like the rest of the falls. See the image on the previous page. Pretty amazing.

Using Generative fill is a reason to revisit photographs that you thought had seemingly impossible-to-solve problems. But now that you know so many issues can be rectified, don't be so quick to discard images. Significant improvements might be just a simple request away. It doesn't always work out -- after all, the software is guessing what you want. On many occasions, my hoped-for results weren't realized.

Often, though, the application of Generative fill is way beyond expectations. What I've learned about using this new technology is this: If it seems impossible, try it anyway. You might just be pleasantly surprised . . . or blown away!

Tunisia Photo Tour

April 25 – May 3, 2028



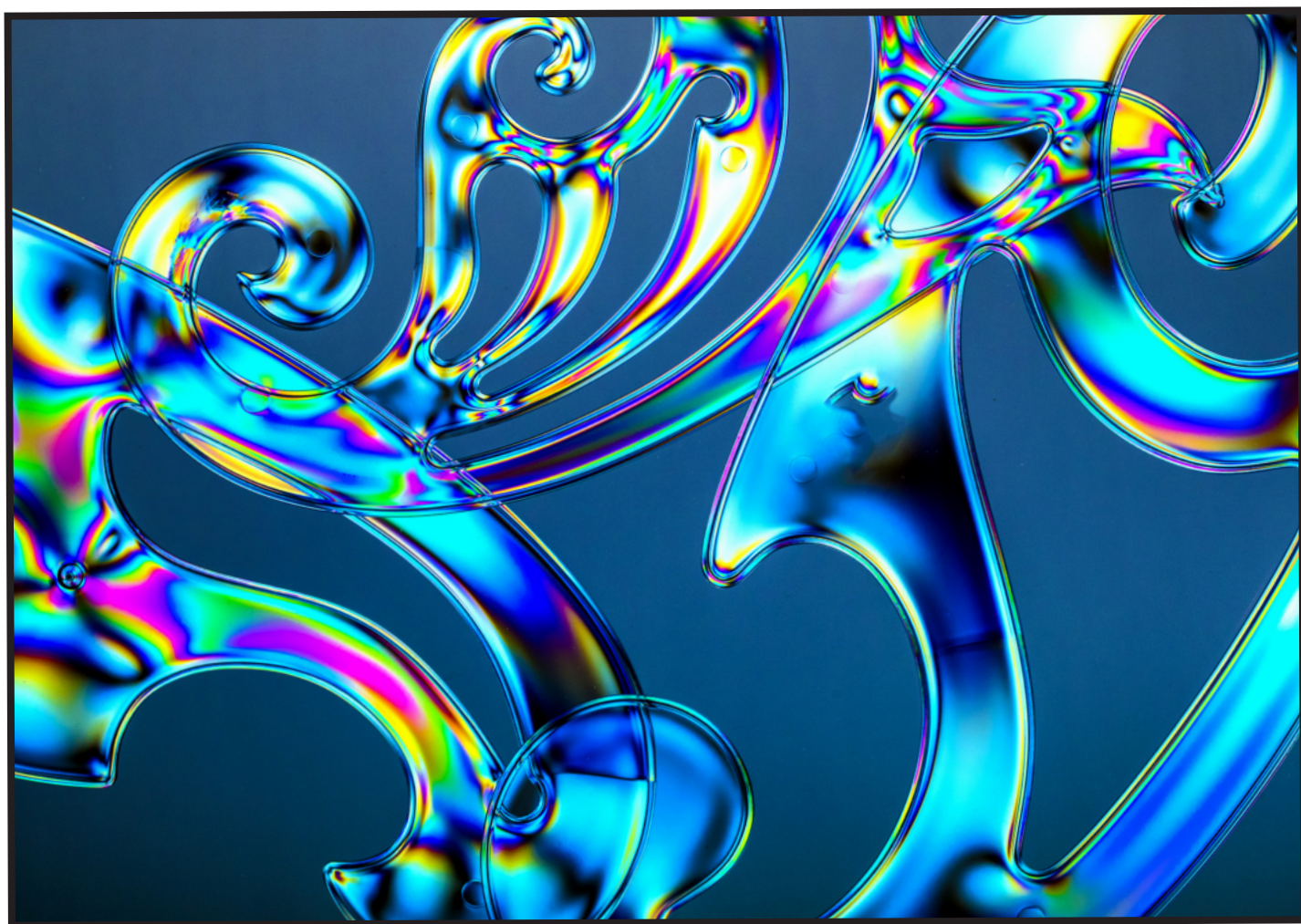
Something Fun to Try

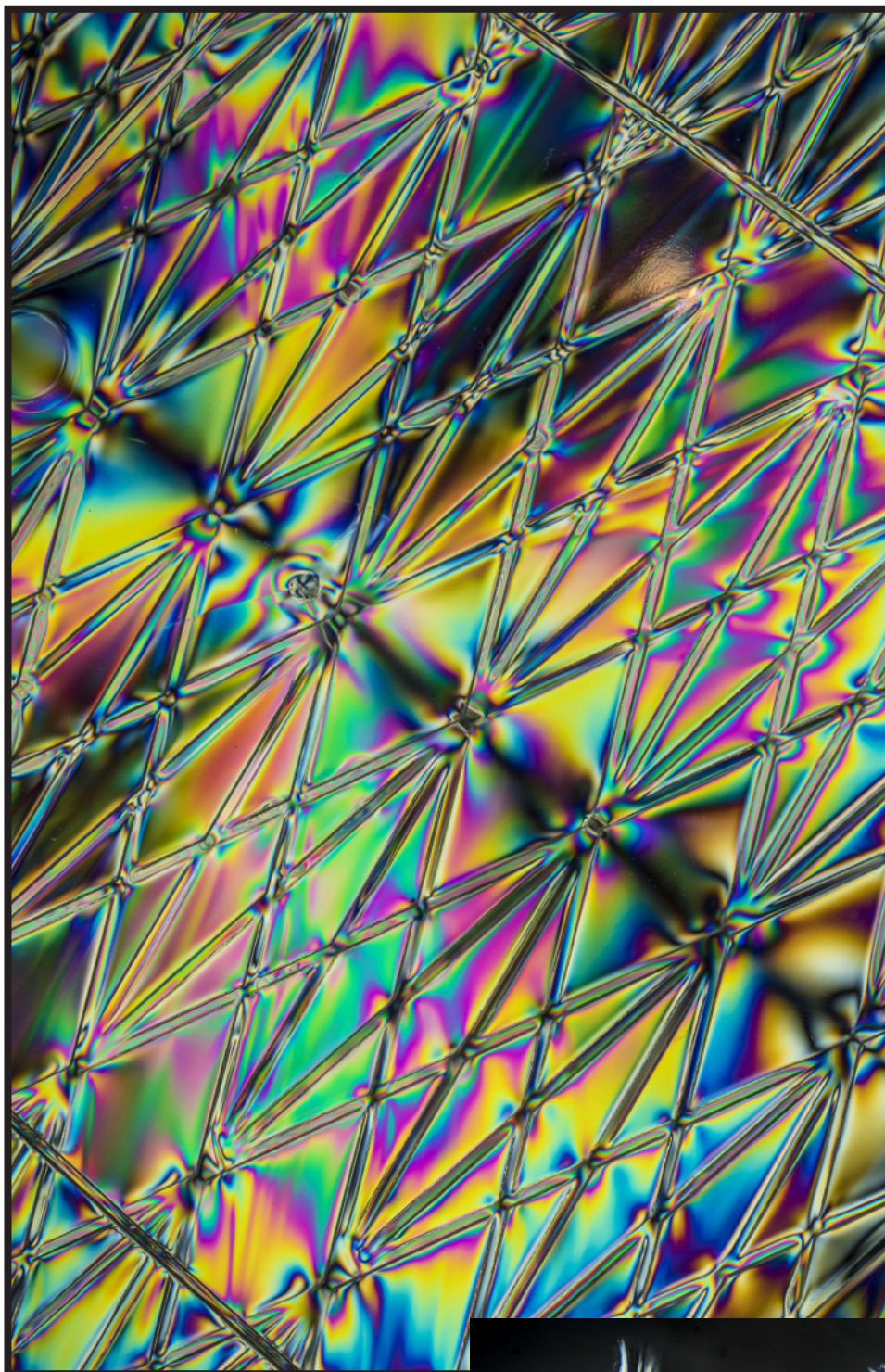
Birefringence, in simple terms, can be thought of as 'double refraction.' What this means in physics isn't important to a photographer. In terms of taking unique images, certain materials, when viewed through two polarizing materials (a filter placed in front of the camera lens and a larger piece of polarizing film positioned behind the translucent subject), produces rainbow colors and remarkable tonalities.

Among the subjects that work great with this technique are plastics. The image below

shows three plastic French curves, the types used in drafting. I've also used plastic cutlery, plastic packing material, and even a plastic serving tray such as the one shown on the next page.

The subjects need to be backlit, so I use a small lightbox I still have from the days when I'd examine 35mm and 6x7cm slides. It's about 16 x 20 inches. For the polarizing sheet film, I purchased an 8 x 12 inch piece online, placed it down on the light box, and then the plastic objects were laid on that. With a polarizing filter on my camera, the colors in the plastic suddenly come to life. What looks like ordinary clear plastic to the



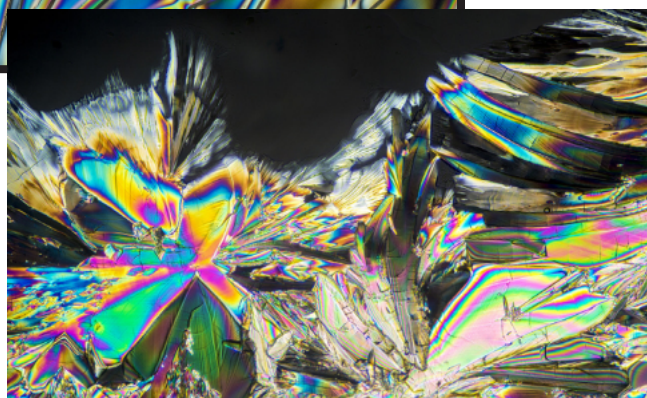


naked eye becomes something quite different under polarized light.

You can vary the colors and patterns in the plastic by simply rotating either of the two polarizers. It's easier and more convenient to rotate the filter on the lens. The background behind the plastic, even though the lightbox is illuminated, becomes black or very dark blue.

If you don't have a lightbox, you can use a piece of white Plexiglas or even a piece of waxed paper laying on a small sheet of glass. All you need is evenly distributed diffused light.

Other subjects to experiment with are various types of crystals like quartz, Vitamin C, and moth balls which is the image below. §.



Brazil Untamed

June 19 - 27, 2027

Drones welcome



Frog and Reptile Workshop

June 5 - 6, 2027



Greece Photo Tour

Feb. 26 - March 5, 2028



The Pantanal, Brazil

Nov. 11 - 19, 2027



Photography Quiz

1. Polarizing filters are used in photography primarily for two purposes. They are:
 - a. To eliminate reflections on water and saturate color
 - b. To increase shadow detail and minimize contrast
 - c. To protect the lens from scratches and reduce depth of field
 - d. As a neutral density filter and to facilitate infra-red photography
2. Which camera settings below produce the same exposure as 2 seconds at f/7.1?
 - a. 10 seconds and f/5.0
 - b. 8 seconds and f/14
 - c. 6 seconds and f/10
 - d. 5 seconds and f/14
3. If possible, it's a good idea to avoid raising the center column of a tripod.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. When three photos are framed together, this is called a:
 - a. A triad
 - b. A panorama
 - c. A triptych
 - d. A series
5. What is the complementary color of violet?
 - a. Cyan
 - b. Red
 - c. Chartreuse green
 - d. Yellow
6. Which flash-subject distance creates the harsher light?
 - a. 5 feet
 - b. 10 feet
7. Laying a translucent object on photographic paper and exposing them with light in a darkroom is called a *photogram*.
 - a. True
 - b. False
8. UV filters do not cause a loss of light.
 - a. True
 - b. False
9. Fisheye lenses cause a curvature in horizontal and vertical lines. What kind of distortion do they cause when photographing round domes in ceilings when shooting from directly beneath them?
 - a. The dome becomes oblong
 - b. The dome's roundness is unaffected
 - c. The dome appears more flat than normal
10. If you cut off the rear of an animal when shooting with a long lens, Generative fill can be used to rebuild that part of the animal.
 - a. True
 - b. False

Answers on page 52

UPCOMING PHOTO WORKSHOPS



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



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 5 - 6, 2027

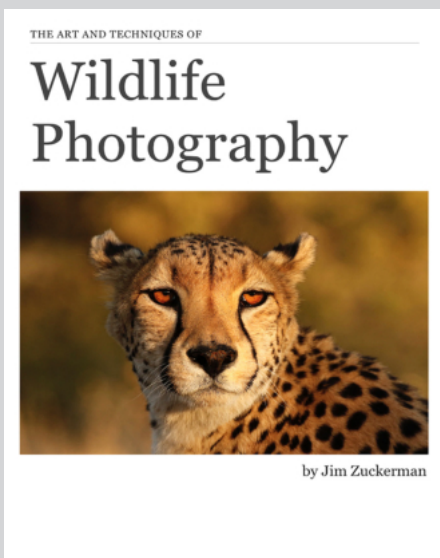
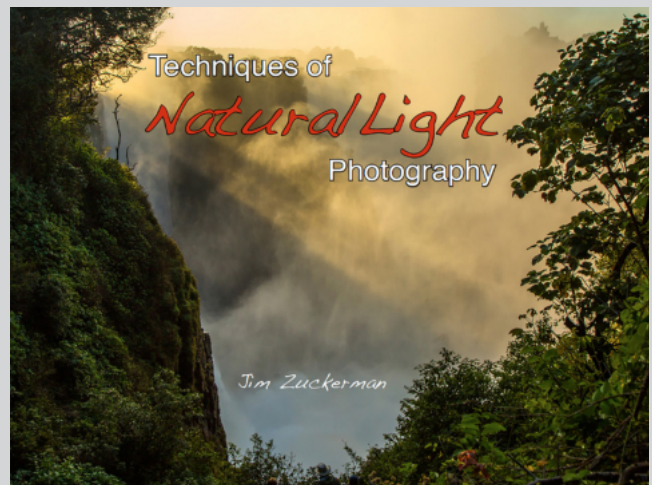
Expand your photographic artistry with *eBooks*

Click on any ebook to see inside



eBooks continued

Click on any ebook to see inside



Carnival in Venice

January 30 - February 5, 2027



What's Wrong with this Picture?



This 1930's church is a well-known icon in the town of Vik, Iceland. It's built on a hill, and from the street below it presents a striking image. Recently I shot this from a drone for the first time, and what I didn't expect was the prominence of the asphalt that essentially surrounds the church.

There are four things that should never be prominent in photographs: dirt, gravel, cement, and asphalt. These are not attractive elements. In this aerial shot, all that asphalt ruins the picture, at least for me. The people and the cars are obviously elements that need to be removed, but it's the parking lot that's the problem.

Studying my controller as I was looking for aerial compositions, I realized this was an issue. So, I photographed vegetation on the hillside surrounding the church to use as a replacement for the asphalt.



In Photoshop, you can clone from one photo to another if both of them are open on the desktop at the same time. The clone tool works normally -- all you have to do is click in one picture from where the cloned elements will be taken, and then activate the second image and you just start cloning. The two photos should be approximately the same size and definitely the same resolution. For example, 300 dpi.

In this case, I cloned the vegetation from one picture to another to cover the parking lot, the people, and the cars. I know this changes the scene, and people who have been here would notice. But so what? Sometimes I take pictures to capture what I see, and sometimes I take pictures as a starting point for a more artistic approach with little bearing on reality. §

Indonesia Wildlife

October 29 - November 8, 2027



SHORT AND SWEET

1. We all know that midday lighting isn't ideal for landscapes. If you have no choice, the best case scenario is for the landscape to be lit from the front. I captured this waterfall in Iceland with the sun at my back. Even though there are dark shadows due to the contrast issue, most of the scene has decent lighting.



2. Photograph a subject against the sun to create a dynamic silhouette. The success of the image depends entirely on the graphic design of the subject. The exposure has to be correct, of course, but the artistic shape of the subject defines the artistry of the shot. This illustrates that graphic design underscores virtually all excellent images.



3. Never underestimate the effectiveness of a dynamic sky to take a picture from mundane to powerful. This is Belchite Ruins in Spain; the original sky was white. The addition of the clouds made all the difference. You should have a folder with scores of sky pictures for situations just like this one.



4. If you don't already use it, Topaz DeNoise AI is a game changer. It's ability to mitigate noise means we can use high ISO settings when necessary -- to use fast shutter speeds, for example -- to freeze the movements of birds in low light environments. This orange-backed troupial from Brazil was captured at 8000 ISO. §



Ethiopia photo tour

Go back in time 20,000 years

January 5 - 18, 2027



Surma tribe



Dallol Depression

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 . . How do you do HDR with moving water, such as a waterfall? Multiple frames of the water super-imposed over each other will create a blurred mess in the water.
Julie Davis, Fort Collins, Colorado

A: You use HDR normally. Let's say it's a 5-frame HDR -- you would then take one of the images with a good exposure on the water, make a rough selection with the lasso tool, and paste that over the water in the HDR composite. Use the clone tool to make the edges of the new layer blend with the background. That solves the problem.



Partial List of Photography Tours 2026 - 2028

WINTER WILDLIFE WORKSHOP
Dec 2026



ETHIOPIA
Jan 2027



CARNIVAL in VENICE
Jan/Feb 2027



TEXAS BIRDS WORKSHOP
May 2027



NEWFOUNDLAND
July 2027



MOROCCO: SOLAR ECLIPSE
Aug 2027



CHILE: THE DESERT to the SEA
Sep 2027



POLAR BEARS
Oct 2027



INDONESIA WILDLIFE
Oct/Nov 2027



THE PANTANAL, BRAZIL
Nov 2027



JAPAN in BLOOM
Mar/April 2028



TUNISIA
April/May 2028



WINTER WILDLIFE WORKSHOP

December 16 - 20, 2026



Mountain lion



Arctic 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.

Margaret Brown, Troy, Michigan. [Yellowstone in Winter photo tour](#), [American Southwest photo tour](#), [Louisiana Swamps photo tour](#)



© Margaret Brown

Student Showcase, continued



© Margaret Brown

Student Showcase, continued



© Margaret Brown



© Margaret Brown

The Story Behi



nd the Picture



I took this unique image recently on my Iceland Drone Tour. It is the dendritic meanderings of a river as seen from 400 feet. I used the equivalent of a 70mm medium telephoto lens on my DJI Air 3S drone, and the settings were 1/1250, f/2.8, and 340 ISO.

The interesting color and the sheen on the water comes from the lighting. The sun was fairly low in the sky, so I turned the drone toward the sun and then angled the camera downward. The reflection was intense, and when the autoexposure function adjusted to the bright light, the copper and blue tones in the river became pronounced.

What is remarkable is that standing on the ground, this incredible abstraction in nature is completely invisible. You would never know this beautiful design was essentially right next to you. Only when the drone climbs to 50 or 100 feet is this beauty revealed. §

DUBAI & ABU DHABI TOUR

Nov. 27 - Dec. 5, 2027



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Nov. '12



Dec. '12



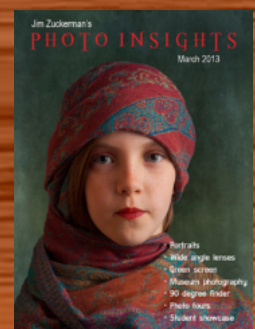
Jan. '13



Feb. '13



Mar. '13



Apr. '13



May '13



Jun. '13



Jul. '13



Aug. '13



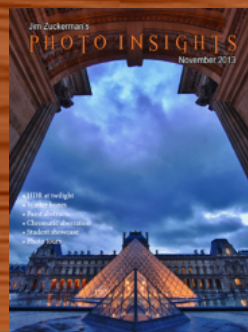
Sept. '13



Oct. '13



Nov. '13



Dec. '13



Jan. '14



Feb. '14



Mar. '14



Apr. '14



May '14



Jun. '14



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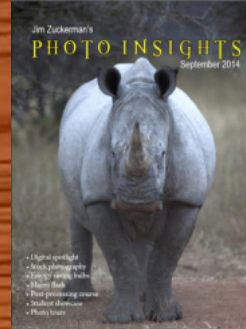
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Oct. '14



Nov. '14



Dec. '14



Jan. '15



Feb. '15



Mar. '15



Apr. '15



May '15



Jun '15



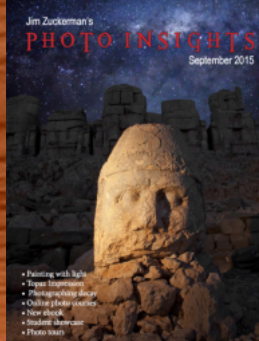
Jul. '15



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Sept. '15



Oct. '15



Nov. '15



Dec. '15



Jan. '16



Feb. '16



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Mar. '16



Apr. '16



May '16



Jun '16



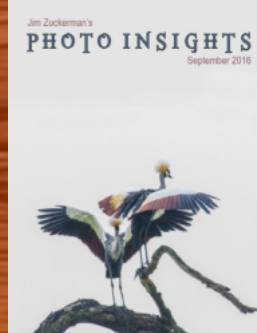
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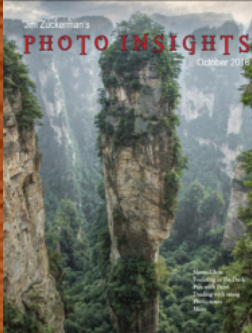
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Sept. '16



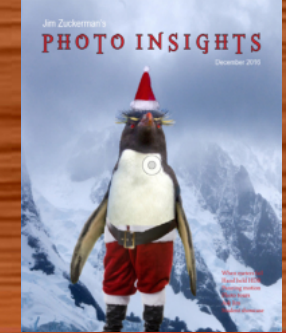
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Nov. '16



Dec. '16



Jan. '17



Feb. '17



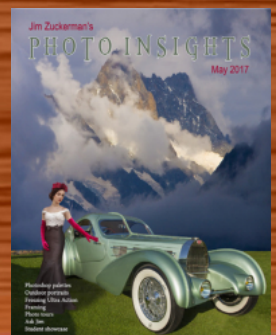
Mar. '17



Apr. '17



May '17



Jun '17



Jul. '17



Aug. '17



Sept. '17

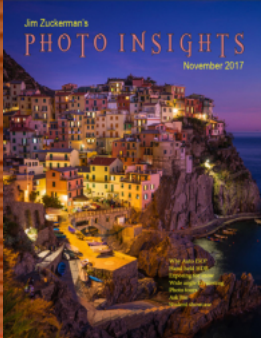


Oct. '17



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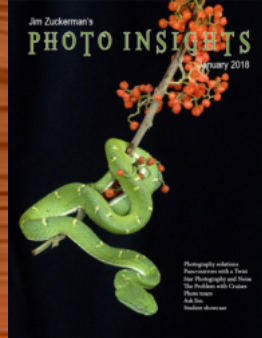
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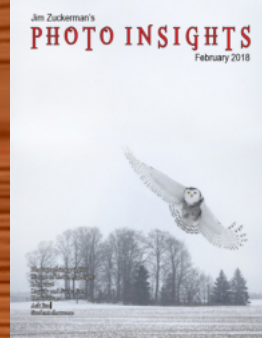
Dec. '17



Jan. '18



Feb. '18



Mar. '18



Apr. '18



May '18



Jun '18



Jul '18



Aug '18



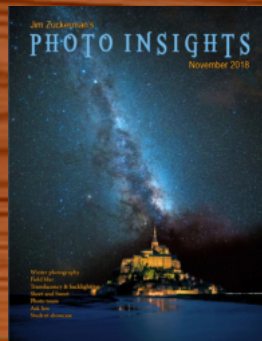
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Oct. '18



Nov. '18



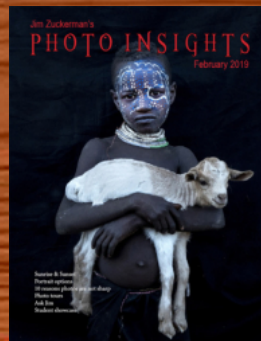
Dec. '18



Jan. '19



Feb. '19



Mar. '19



Apr. '19



May '19



Jun '19



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Jul. '19



Aug. '19



Sept/Oct. '19



Nov. '19



Dec. '19



Jan. '20



Feb. '20



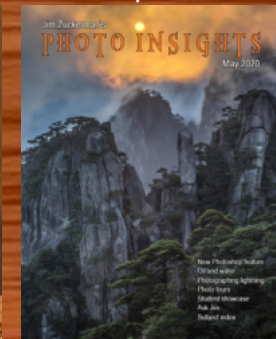
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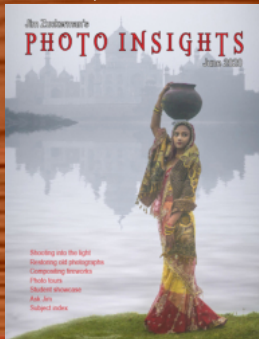
Apr. '20



May '20



Jun. '20



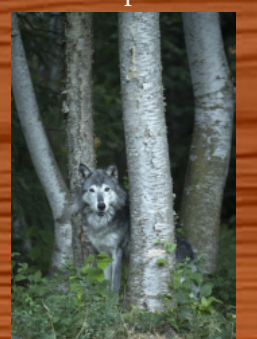
July '20



Aug. '20



Sept. '20



Oct. '20



Nov. '20



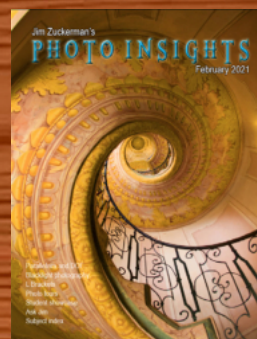
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Jan., '21



Feb. '21



Mar. '21



Apr. '21



May '21



Jun. '21



Jul. '21



Aug. '21



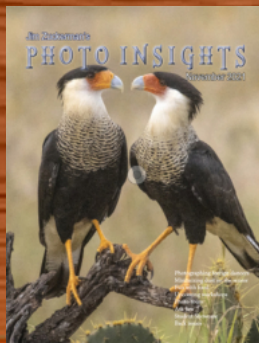
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Oct. '21



Nov. '21



Dec. '21



Jan. '22



Feb. '22



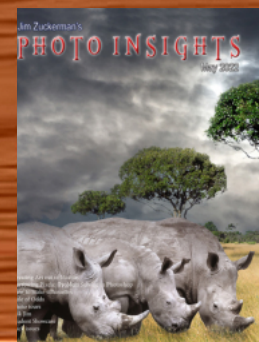
Mar. '22



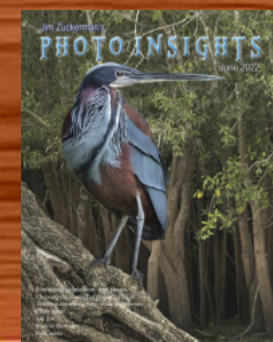
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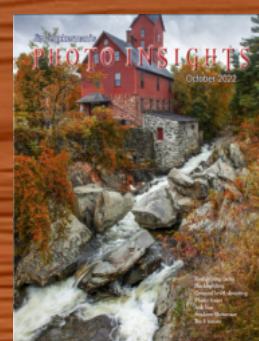
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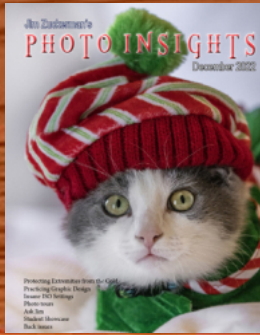
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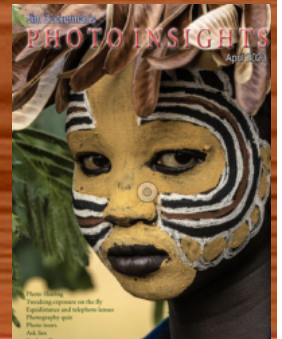
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Mar. '23



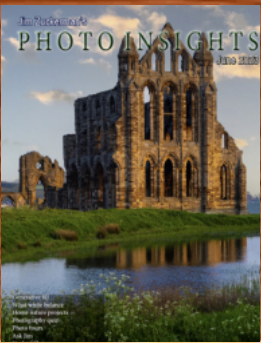
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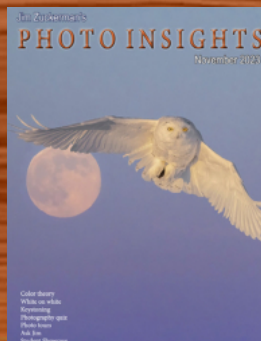
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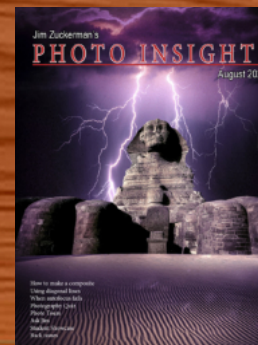
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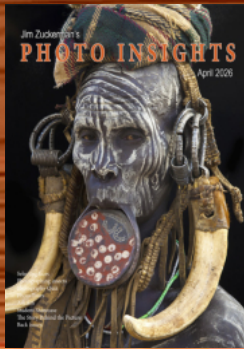
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Quiz answers

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

CHILE: THE DESERT to the SEA

The Atacama and Beyond

SEPTEMBER 14 -24, 2027



Atacama Desert



Marble Caves

PHOTO INSIGHTS

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The black river and white dunes photographed from a drone, Lencois Maranhenses National Park, Brazil.