

Jim Zuckerman's

PHOTO INSIGHTS

October 2026

Adding a Fisheye Effect
AWB, When To Use It
Flash Options
Photo Tours
Photography quiz
Ask Jim
Student Showcase
The Story Behind the Picture
Back issues



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On the cover: Participant in the Jember Fashion Carnaval, Jember, Indonesia; *On this page:* Volcanic crater as seen from a drone, The Highlands, Iceland..



When I think about my love of photography, I wonder what exactly it is I love. Is it working a camera, handling gear, the hunt for appealing compositions, the images themselves, or something else? What made me think about this is the vociferous disdain for AI from many or even most of the photographic community. Don't these people love making images? And if so, what difference does it make if it's with a camera, a computer, or even mental telepathy if it were possible to project our imagination onto a canvas or photographic paper? I wonder if the naysayers love their camera more than the images it takes.

For me, the camera is only a tool by which I make images. I love creating images no matter how I get there. When photography first was invented in 1826, traditional artists who put paint to canvas looked upon this new form of image making with contempt. 'This isn't art' they said. All a photographer does is push a button to get a picture. We have to create the forms, the light, and the subtle colors to make a painting. That's real art.

Now, much of the photographic community believes firmly that photography is art but AI isn't. Maybe in a few years AI will be accepted as art, but some new technology that produces images will be scorned.

All I know is that it's the images I love, not the pathway to create them.

Jim Zuckerman
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ADDING A FISHEYE EFFECT

Years ago, before I had lower back issues, I carried pretty much all of my lenses with me wherever I went 'just in case'. You never know when a particular composition pops into your head. My gear included the 37mm fisheye lens which, for the Mamiya RZ medium format camera system, was quite heavy.

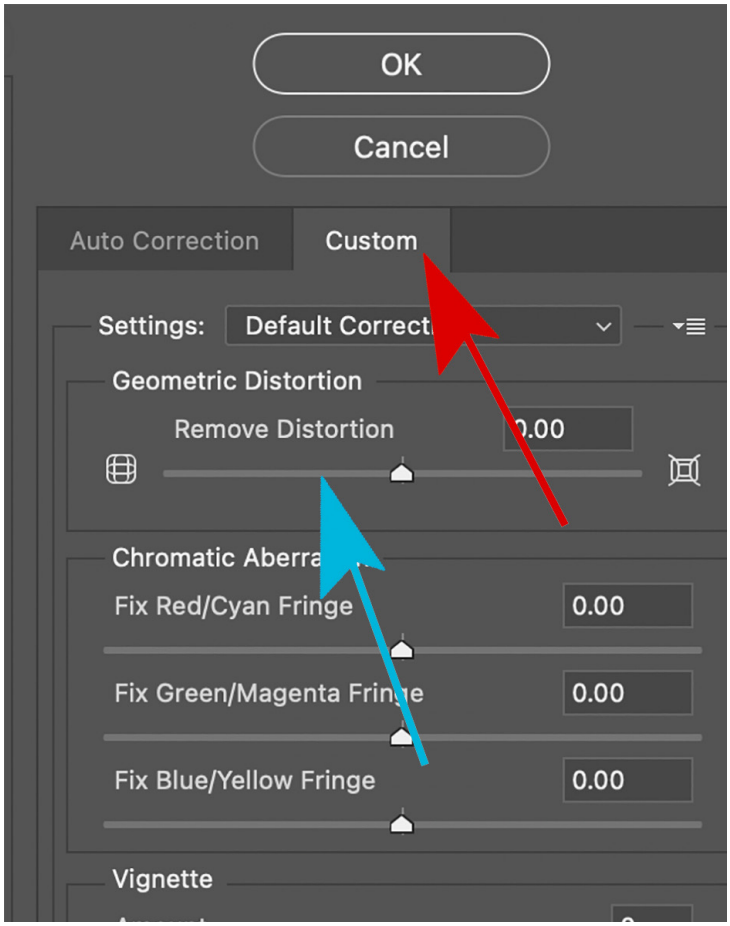
Fortunately, as I've aged, improvements in technology have allowed us to eliminate items from our camera backpack. For example, I haven't carried a fisheye (the Canon 15mm) for a long time. These lenses are virtually unnecessary now because in Photoshop I can reproduce the fisheye look after-the-fact.

I typically don't like curved horizontal and vertical lines, but once in a while I think the effect works. In the drone shot below of a volcanic crater in Iceland, for instance, the curved horizon line looks like the natural curvature of the earth -- even though in the original image the horizon is level.

The procedure is easy to do. In Photoshop, go to **Filter > Lens Correction.** In the dialog box that opens (partially shown on the next page) click on the *Custom* tab (red arrow). This opens a new list of options, and you'll want to use the *Remove Distortion* slider (blue arrow). I know this seems counter intuitive since you'll



be introducing distortion. By moving the slider to the left, horizontal lines curve in a convex fashion as you can see in the picture of the volcanic crater on the previous page.



I did the same thing with another drone image of a braided river in Iceland, below. There has to be enough space in the sky for this technique to work because in the process of applying a curvature, some of the sky in the top middle of the frame is lost. Therefore, if the distance between the land and the top of the frame is narrow, use **Edit> Generative Fill** to add area to the picture. I had to do that in the image below or else the top of the curvature would have expanded past the border of the picture.

This technique doesn't only work with



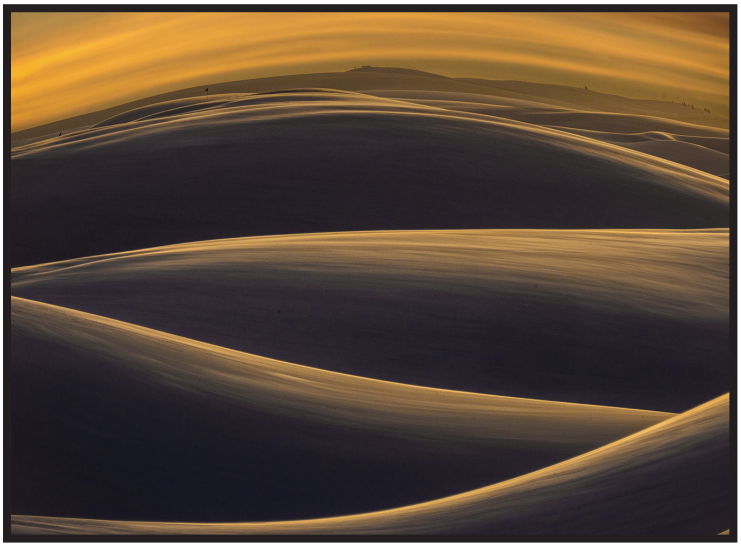


photographs taken from drones. In the photo above, the white dunes of Lencois Maranhenses National Park in Brazil were photographed from the ground with my Canon R5 and a 100-500mm. In post, I applied the same fisheye curvature. The effect has the biggest effect and shows the most curvature at the horizon, although several of the dunes exhibit curvature as well.

At sunset, the same area looked really dramatic, right. This image shows more of a curvature because I moved the *Remove Distortion* slider more to the left.

If you go too far, the picture becomes totally distorted and it doesn't work at all. Carefully applying the fisheye look until it looks good is what's called for.

This same dialog box also allows you to eliminate chromatic aberration in photos, and you can also apply a vignette. §



Abandoned in Georgia photo tour

April 12 - 18, 2027





AWB

WHEN TO USE IT, WHEN NOT TO USE IT

Most nature and travel photographers I know choose auto white balance, or AWB, for virtually all of their picture taking. They assume this function correctly renders the color balance of virtually all scenes as we see it.

It doesn't.

Here's the problem. Auto white balance is programmed to render color accurately in midday natural light, either direct sunlight or on days with a thin cloud layer. This is considered *white* light.

At sunrise and sunset, color is dramatically different. The natural light outdoors becomes yellow-red, i.e., the golden light photographers love. If you use AWB for this kind of lighting condition, the software is designed to 'correct' the warm light so it looks like white light. Not only is this not what any of us want, it's also an inaccurate rendition of the scene.



Compare the two photographs, below and on the previous page. This is the view from Dead Horse Point State Park in Utah at sunrise. The picture on page 8 shows what I saw. The colors are golden and beautiful. This is why photographers get up early and stay out late. My white balance was set to *daylight,* not AWB.

The picture below, on the other hand, shows the same scene in which the white balance was set to AWB. The yellow - red coloration when the sun had just risen is gone, replaced by the typical colors of midday light.

We all know the colors of sunrise can be brought back in post-procesing. There are problems with doing that, though. First, it takes a lot of time to go through all the pictures from a particular location. And second, when you study the images on the back of the camera, colors appear disappointingly dull and not what you saw at the time.

I recommend for sunrise and sunset situations, always use daylight white balance. This choice will give you the true and correct colors you saw and wanted to capture.

When shooting in the middle of the day, there will be no difference in color balance rendition between AWB and daylight WB. They will look idential. It's only in the early morning or late afternoon that you wiill see a dramatic difference.

There are other situations in which AWB





doesn't produce correct colors. Indoor lighting today has so many funky shades and tones of color that it takes trial and error to capture what looks like accurate results.

For example, the photo above is the famous theater, La Fenice, in Venice, Italy. I bring my groups here during my Carnival in Venice workshop. The light inside the theater is strangely very red. I've tried AWB as well as tungsten (or incandescent) white balance, and the theater still has a strong red cast. Only when I lowered the Kelvin temperature to 2500 K was I able to overcome the reddish lights. This bypassed the presets like AWB, but here it was necessary to do that.

AWB works much of the time, but often it doesn't. You have to be mindful of what it's doing. §



Flash Options

On-camera flash is, in my opinion, ..the least attractive artificial lighting in photography. It's garish, dimensionless, and harsh. It's easy to use, however, and the camera's automation gives you a perfect exposure on the subject pretty much every time.

To improve your flash pictures (or if you've been intimidated by flash and you want to experiment with it), try thinking outside the box and use a more creative approach. The following options will produce images you may like a lot more.

Off-camera flash

Simply by removing the flash from the camera and holding it off to the side (or have a friend hold it for you), everything changes. The picture below is an example. I took this shot during my annual workshop, Carnival in Venice.



I took the flash off the camera, rested it on my camera backpack which was laying on the ground off to the side, and that created attractive light on the model. The fabric in her costume has texture, dimension, and great color. Note also I balanced the light on the model with the sunset sky in the background.

Some cameras will automatically balance the lighting in a flash picture between the foreground and the background. Even so, you may not like the light ratio the camera provides. So, here is the procedure I use to control the amount of light throughout the image:

1. I set the shutter speed at 1/250 or less, depending on the ambient light. This must be done so the camera's shutter syncs with the flash.

2. I take a light reading on the background, using the shutter speed just chosen, and I note the lens aperture and ISO.

3. Set the flash mode to the automatic exposure setting. On a Canon, this is typically ETTL. On Nikon, it's iTTL or TTL. On Sony, it's called Autoflash.

4. Set the camera to the shutter speed, lens aperture, and ISO determined in step 2.

5. Take the picture. If you want to tweak the exposure on the *background,* change the f/stop and/or shutter speed. Adjust the exposure on the *subject* from the flash by adjusting the *flash exposure compensation* feature directly on the flash itself in 1/3 f/stop increments. In this way, both foreground and background can be adjusted independantly of each other.

Backlighting



I lit a baby alligator from the left side. The flash was held off-camera so it just skimmed the gator's reptilian skin to emphasize its texture..

Translucent subjects like leaves, fabric, flower petals, hair, ice, etc. present other types of creative possibilities.

The silhouette of the frog, below, is an example. I took this during my annual Frog and Reptile workshop held in Kansas City every summer. With the frog positioned on the leaf, I took the ring flash off my camera and stretched the connecting cable (between the flash and the power unit) until the leaf blocked the flash from the camera's point of view. I took a test shot, adjusted the *flash exposure compensation* dial accordingly, and then took the photo.



Fabric works with all kinds of subjects in silhouette. As long as the subject has an attractive shape -- an artistic graphic design -- the result will be successful like the model's backlit image above. Here, I had an assistant hold the flash behind the model and two other people stretched the fabric.

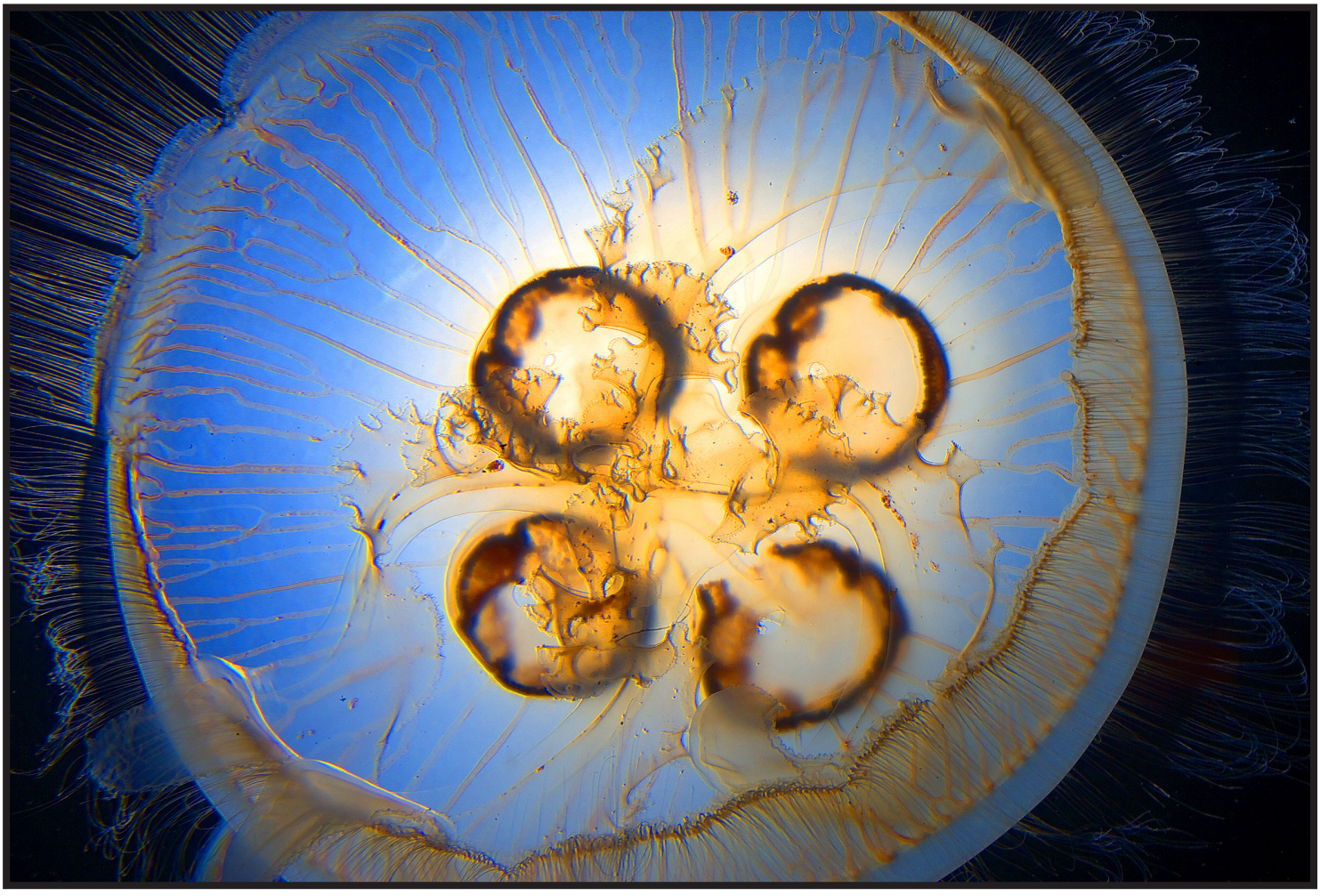


When the flash is pointing toward the camera and illuminating a translucent subject, test shots are almost always needed to determine the correct exposure.

This was the case with the moon jelly, below. I took this picture in the Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga. It was in a cylindrical Plexiglas column about 6 feet in diameter from floor to ceilng. On-camera flash would have been terrible, plus the reflection of the flash in the Plexiglas would ruin the pictures. In this situation, I had my wife walk around to the other side of the water-filled column, holding my flash. As the moon jelly floated up and down in slow motion, I moved my camera to keep the flash -- which I could see through the water -- directly in back of the animal. I didn't have a connecting cable between the camera and the flash or a wireless trigger, so in the dark room I counted to three. My wife triggered the flash on '3' and I opened the shutter on '2'. I used a 1/2 second exposure so my wife could trigger the flash in that short interval.

Wireless triggers

All camera systems have devices that sit in the hotshoe of the camera to trigger the flash. Third party companies also make these devices. Some work on line-of-sight while others are radio, meaning they will fire the flash no matter what might be between the camera and the flash unit.







Flash Blurs

When shooting a moving subject with flash, you can create what in essence is a double exposure. If your shutter speed is slow, such as a half second or more, and the flash fires during that interval, you'll get a sharp image superimposed with a blurred one.

Both of the images above exemplify this. The Chinese dancers I photographed in Beijing on the left were taken with a flash. I underexposed by 2/3 f/stop, and my exposure was 1/4 second. If you look closely, you can see that the sharp rendition from the flash is combined with the blurred version due to the relatively long exposure. The movement of the dancers made this possible.

I photographed the Brazilian dancers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during carnival. It was night so I used flash, but to convey the sense of movement and celebration, I used a one second exposure and zoomed the lens during that interval which accounts for the blur effect typical of a zoom lens. Both of the pictures above were taken while hand holding the camera.

In both cases, the flash was mounted on the camera body. A tripod is not necessary.

As you can see, both of these shots were taken with on-camera flash. I had no choice. These were situations in which it wasn't possible to position the flash off to one side or even behind the subjects. As much as I prefer sidelighting and backlighting, in these two cases I think the on-camera flash look works because of the technique I used. The blurred elements seem to mask the aspects of direct flash I dislike. §

Brazil Untamed

June 19 - 27, 2027

Drones welcome





Frog and Reptile

Workshop

June 5 - 6, 2027

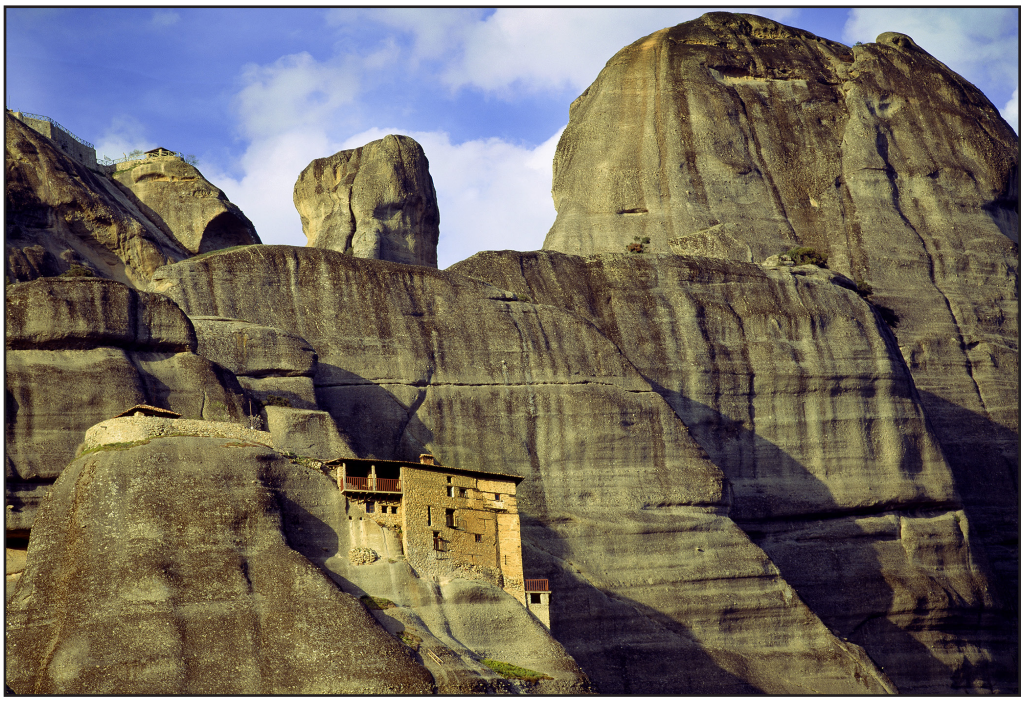




Greece Photo Tour

Feb. 26 - March 5, 2028





The Pantanal, Brazil

Nov. 11 - 19, 2027





Photography Quiz

1. The main purpose of an L-bracket is:
    a. To protect the camera from impact damage
    b. To quickly switch from vertical to horizontal (and vice versa) when on a tripod
    c. To give the camera body more stability when hand holding it
    d. To make the battery compartment more secure

2. The Inverse Square Law has nothing to do with composition.
    a. True
    b. False

3. Autumn colors photograph best when:
    a. The sun is shining at midday
    b. The wind is blowing
    c. The sky is overcast
    d. At twilight

4. In black and white photography, you can darken the sky with which filter?
    a. UV filter
    b. Blue filter
    c. Skylight filter
    d. Yellow filter

5. When using a tripod, you should turn off image stabilization.
    a. True
    b. False

6. The best exposure time for getting a sharp picture of the Milky Way using a tripod is:
    a. 5 seconds
    b. 20 seconds
    c. 1 minute
    d. 5 minutes

7. Depth of field increases as you move further away from the subject.
    a. True
    b. False

8. If you are shooting at f/5.6 and you want to quadruple the amount of light entering the camera, which lens aperture should you use?
    a. F/2.8
    b. F/4
    c. F/8
    d. F/11

9. An 85mm lens is considered better for portraiture than a 24mm lens because:
    a. It lets in more light
    b. It has more depth of field
    c. It makes the nose look smaller
    d. It's more complimentary to skin tones

10. Color temperature and white balance refer to the same thing.
    a. True
    b. False

Answers on page 52

UPCOMING PHOTO WORKSHOPS



WINTER WILDLIFE WORKSHOP

Get up close and personal with North American wildlife -- mountain lion, wolf, foxes, bobcat, lynx, and more. The animals are in their full winter coats and look awesome.

December 16 -20, 2026



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









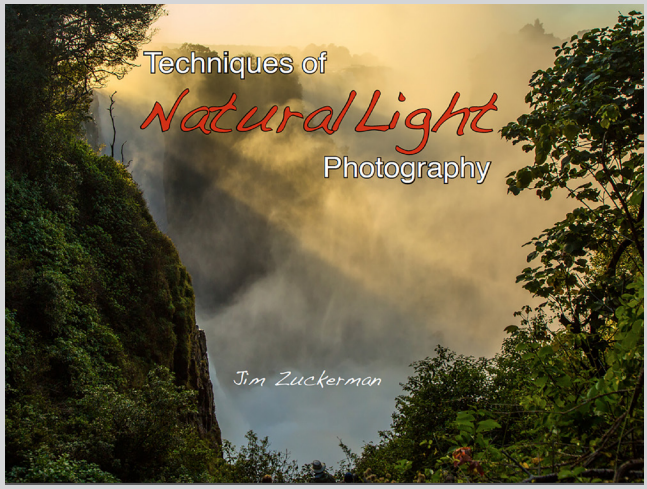




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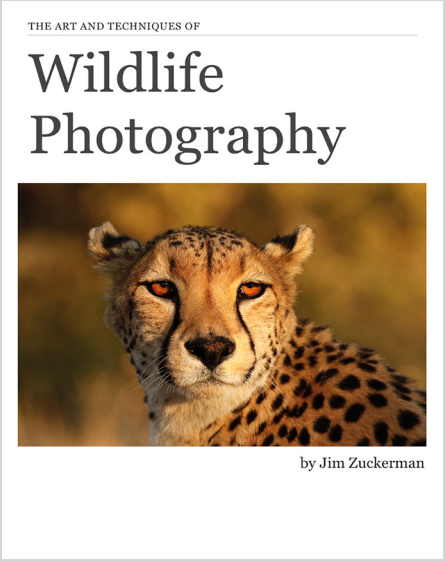
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Carnival in Venice

January 30 - February 5, 2027





What's Wrong with this Picture?



Autumn colors are beautiful to look at in any lighting situation. However, there is a difference between seeing something and appreciating its beauty and photographing it.

The problem with this picture is it was taken with direct sunlight. The lighting is harsh and the contrast is too much. That means the shadows are too dark with a loss of detail. This is why I maintain that autumn colors shouldn't be photographed under these conditions. Looking at the scene on a bright sunny day is beautiful for sure. But photographing it will give you pictures that are less than ideal.



This picture of autumn colors was taken under a cloudy sky. The light is soft and diffused. Most photographically uneducated amateur photographers think a bright sun is best to bring out rich colors in pretty much everything, including the colors of autumn. I know it's counterintuitive, but the opposite is true. The colors of the leaves will appear more saturated when they aren't competing with too much contrast. Bright highlights and dark shadows are elements that will definitely detract from the reds, yellows and oranges that made you want to take the picture in the first place.

If you have the time, and the sky is completely blue with no hope of a cloud cover, then wait until just after sunset to get the kind of light that will make beautiful photographs. §

Indonesia Wildlife

October 29 - November 8, 2027





SHORT AND SWEET

1. When using a long lens for closeups, make sure you use a small lens aperture for depth of field. In this shot of a Eurasian eagle owl, my aperture was f/4.5. As a result, too much detail is soft. I should have used f/11 to render all of the feathers and other details sharp. What's the point of shooting such a great subject that's less than sharp.t



2. When photographing reflective subjects with flash, take the time to clone out distracting and unwanted reflections when appropriate. This Halloween moon crab from Mexico has a shiny carapace that's reflecting my ring flash. I used the clone tool on the legs and the head to eliminate the reflections which were virtually solid white and definitely distracting.



3. When shooting street parades like carnival in Sao Paulo, Brazil, you have to shoot fast because there is very little time to compose pictures. Everything is changing constantly. Take a lot of pictures, don't worry about backgrounds, etc., and then do the Photoshop later to fine tune the best images.



4. When photography birds, you can never go wrong with diffused light from a cloudy sky and a dark background. Even though we never see out of focus, black backgrounds behind subjects, from an artistic viewpoint, works. I took this shot of a red-headed woodpecker in my backyard in middle Tennessee. §



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 . . I'm going to East Africa next year and I wanted your opinion about a long lens. Do you think 400mm will suffice?
Amanda Silverman, Toronto, Ontario

A: I would also bring a 1.4x and/or a 2x teleconverter. 400mm isn't quite long enough for an African safari unless you don't mind cropping your images a lot. For birds, it's definitely not long enough. For mammals, too, there are too many situations when the animals are far enough away to require a longer focal length. Even for closeups when an animal is close, a long lens is useful. The black faced vervet monkey, below, was only about 12 feet away but I used a 500mm lens to make a tight portrait of the primate. §



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



For a complete list of all the photo tours/workshops Jim conducts, go to his website: www.jimzuckerman.com.

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.

Gary Lipsitz, La Jolla, California. Morocco photo tour, The Balkans photo tour





© Gary Lipsitz

Student Showcase, continued





© Gary Lipsitz

Student Showcase, continued





© Gary Lipsitz





© Gary Lipsitz

The Story Behi



nd the Picture



I took this shot in the late -80's or early 90's at the Orange County Internatiomal Raceway in Southern California. The funny cars had long metal rods they dragged behind them to create sparks.

It was dark, and given the fact I was sitting at the top of the bleachers, the distance to the cars was too great for my flash to be effective. There were 3 or 4 photographers who had obtained press passes to be down on the track close to the cars. So, I thought maybe I could use the light from their flashes for my picture.

I estimated the guide number of these flashes to be 120 at 100 ISO -- a typical number for the time. I also guessed that the photographers were about 15 feet from the cars. The formula for determining the lens aperture is:

GN = f/stop x flash-subject distance.

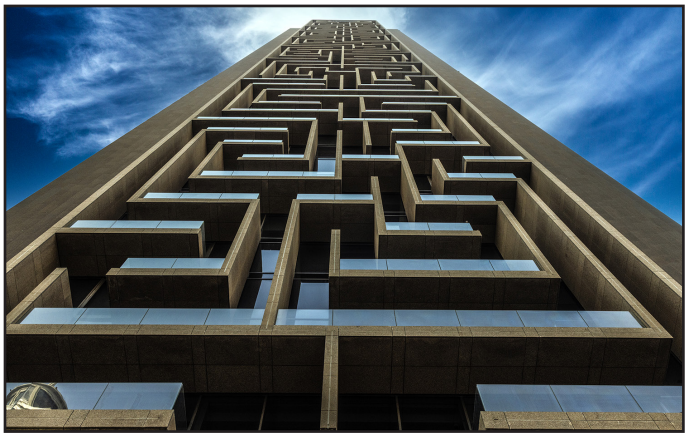
Plugging in the numbers: 120 = f/stop x 15, and doing the math the aperture turns out to be f/8.

From a tripod, I set the shutter to one full second to allow enough time for the various flashes to be fired. This also created some blur. The shutter speed had no bearing on the exposure. I was shooting Fujichrome Provia 100, and I had no idea what I'd captured until the film was developed the next day. §

DUBAI & ABU DHABI TOUR

Nov. 27 - Dec. 5, 2027







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PHOTO INSIGHTS

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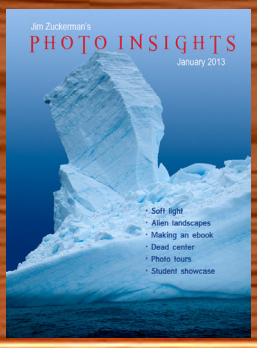
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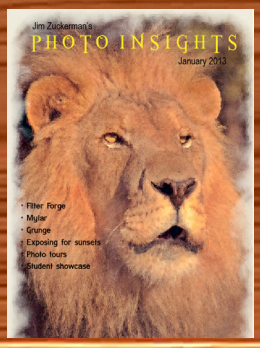
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Feb. ‘13



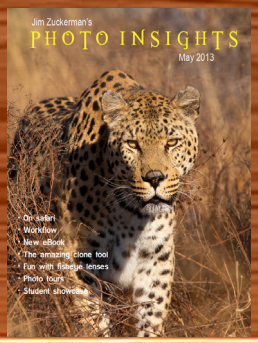
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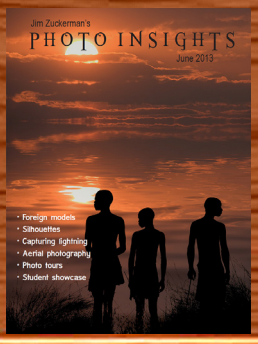
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Jun. ‘13



Jul. 13



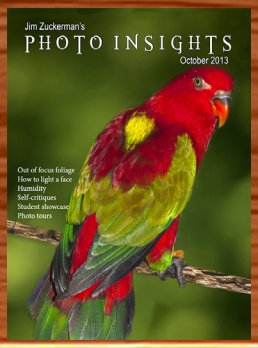
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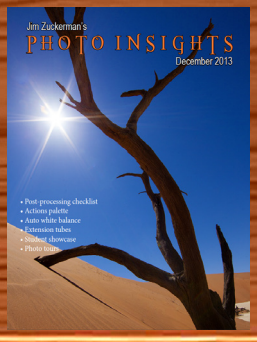
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Dec. ‘13



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Feb. ‘14



Mar. ‘14



Apr. ‘14



May ‘14



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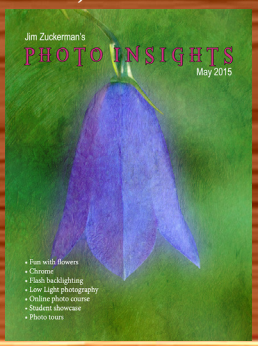


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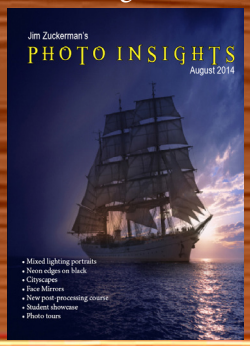
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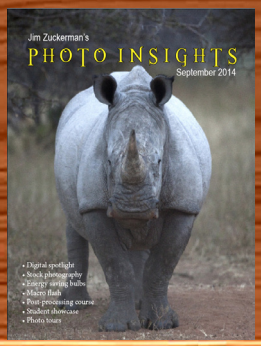
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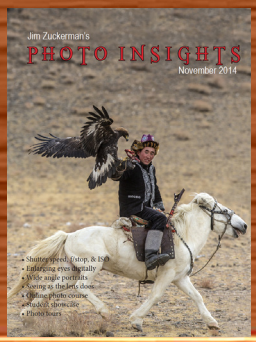
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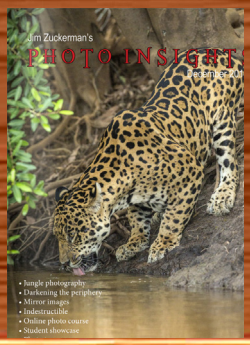
Oct. ‘14



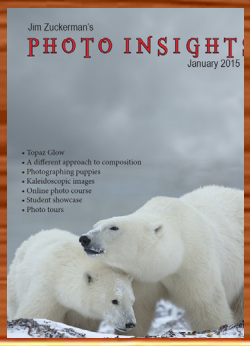
Nov. ‘14



Dec. ‘14



Jan. ‘15



Feb. ‘15



Mar. ‘15



Apr. ‘15



May ‘15



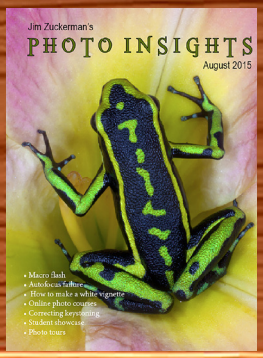
Jun ‘15



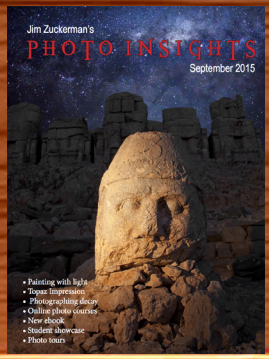
Jul.‘15



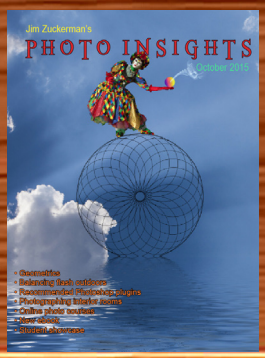
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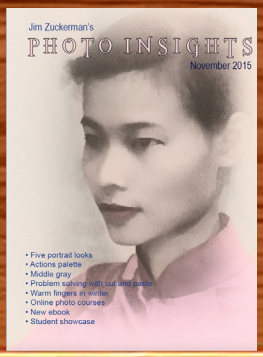
Sept.‘15



Oct.‘15



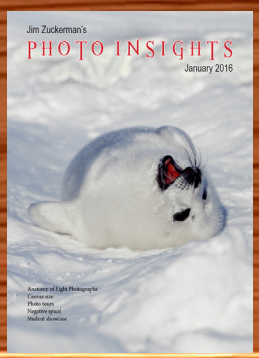
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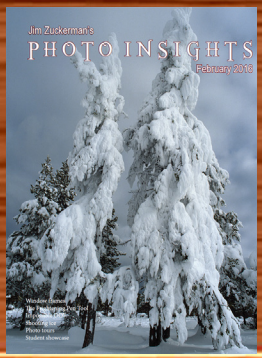
Dec. ‘15



Jan. ‘16



Feb. ‘16



Click on the past issues of

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you would like to read.

Mar. ‘16



Apr. ‘16



May ‘16



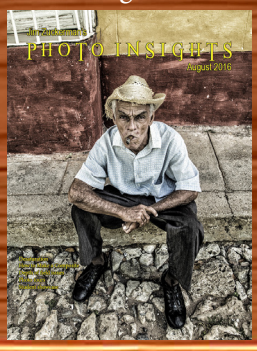
Jun ‘16



Jul. ‘16



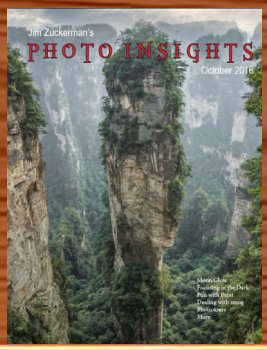
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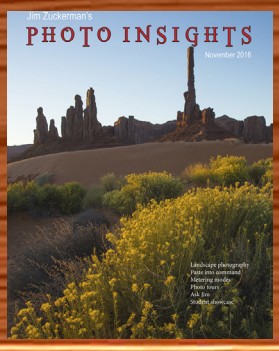
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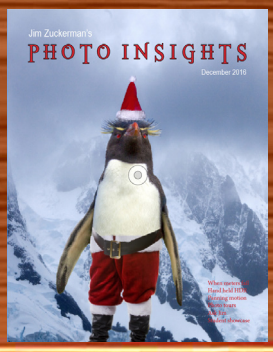
Oct. ‘16



Nov. ‘16



Dec. ‘16



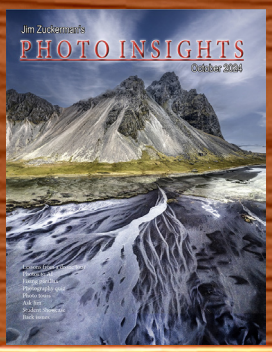
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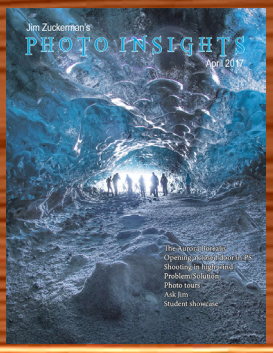
Feb. ‘17



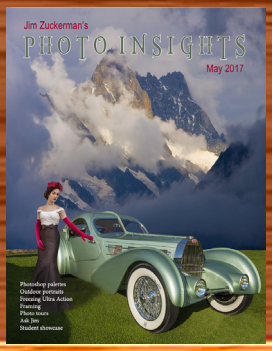
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Apr. ‘17



May ‘17



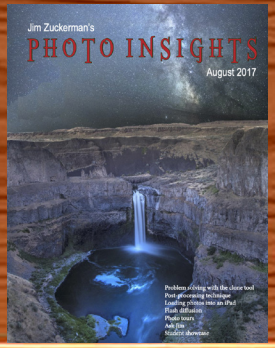
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Jul. ‘17



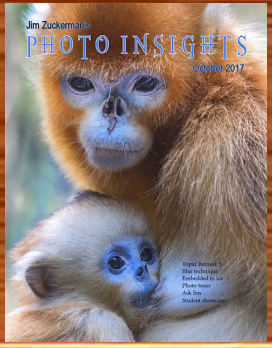
Aug. ‘17



Sept. ‘17



Oct. ‘17



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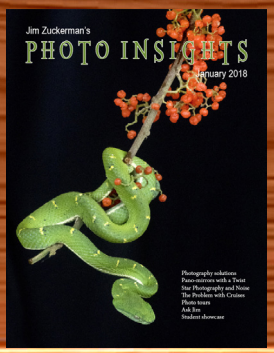
Nov. ‘17



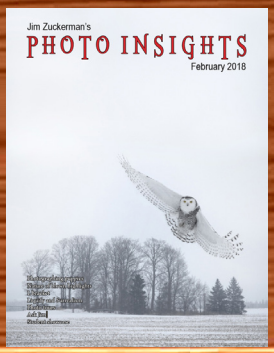
Dec. ‘17



Jan. ‘18



Feb. ‘18



Mar. ‘18



Apr. ‘18



May ‘18



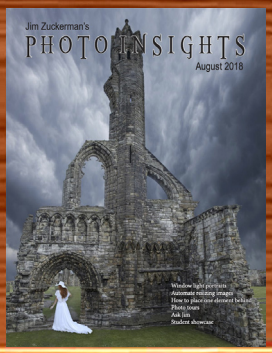
Jun ‘18



Jul ‘18



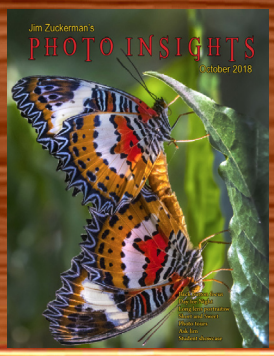
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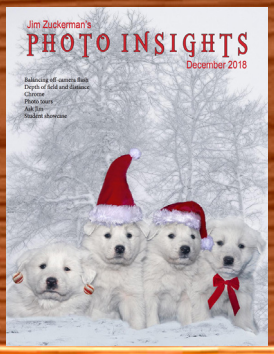
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Nov. ‘18



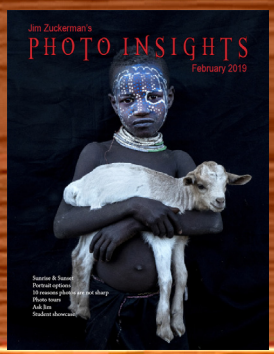
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Mar. ‘19



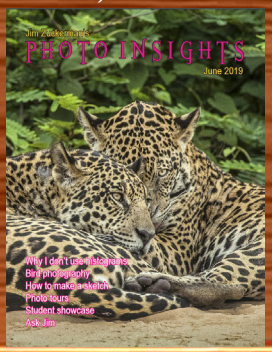
Apr. ‘19



May ‘19



Jun ‘19



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Jul. ‘19



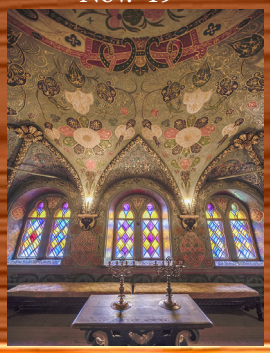
Aug. ‘19



Sept/Oct. ‘19



Nov. ‘19



Dec. ‘19



Jan. ‘20



Feb. ‘20



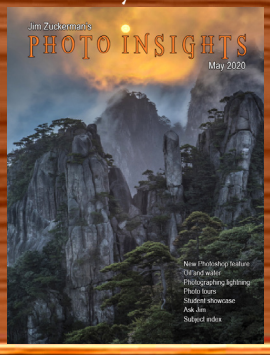
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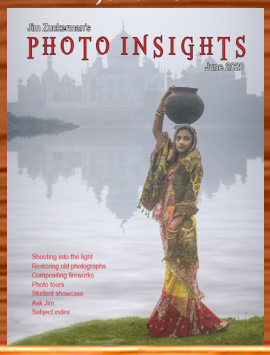
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May ‘20



Jun. ‘20



July ‘20



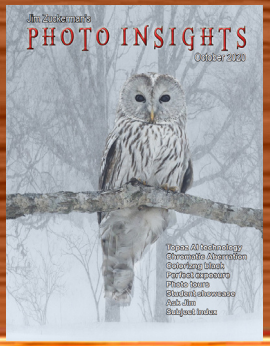
Aug. ‘20



Sept. ‘20



Oct. ‘20



Nov. ‘20



Dec. ‘20



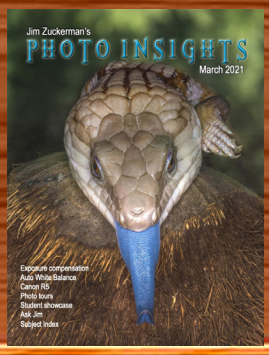
Jan.. ‘21



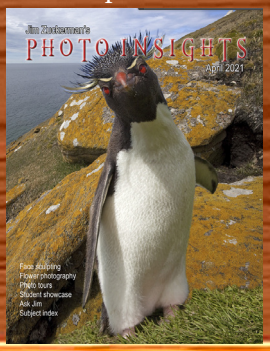
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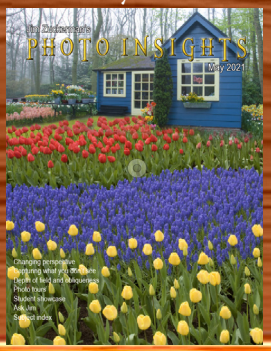
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Apr.. ‘21



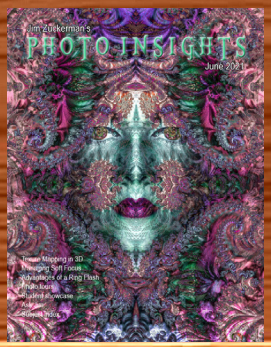
May ‘21



Jun.‘21



Jul.‘21



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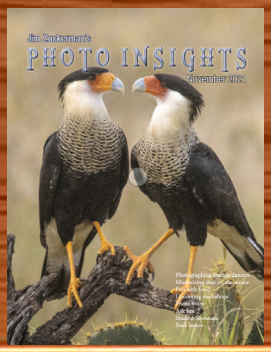
Sept. ‘21



Oct. ‘21



Nov. ‘21



Dec. ‘21



Jan. ‘22



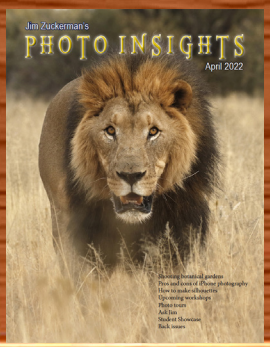
Feb. ‘22



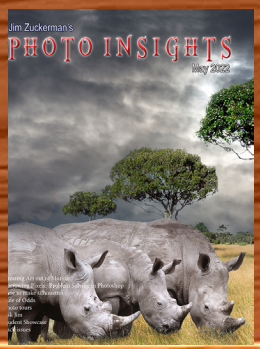
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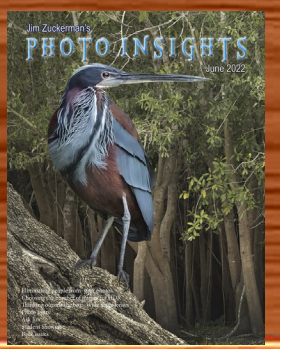
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May ‘22



Jun. ‘22



Jul. ‘22



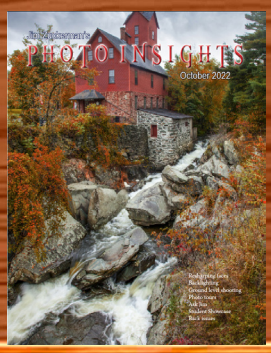
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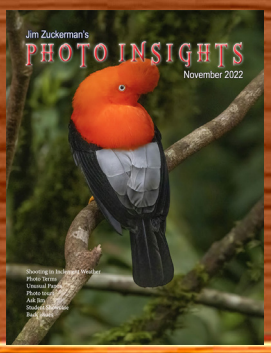
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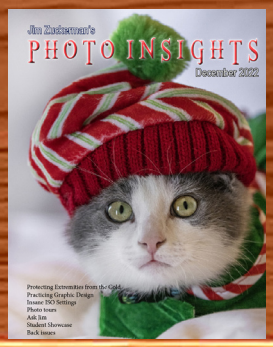
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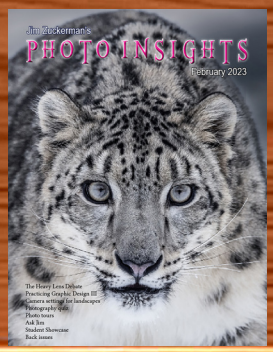
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Jan. ‘23



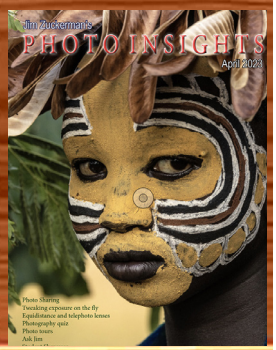
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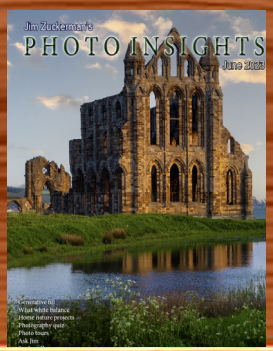
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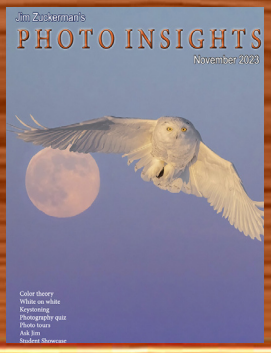
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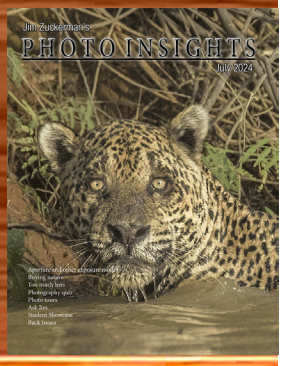
May ‘24



Jun ‘24



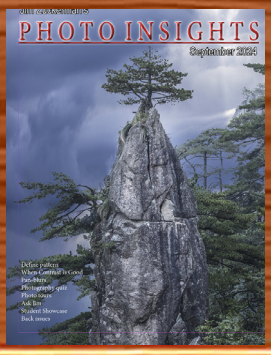
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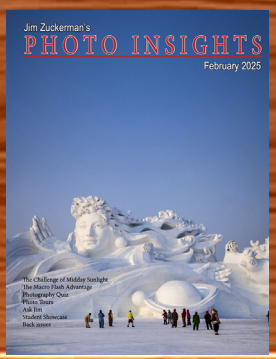
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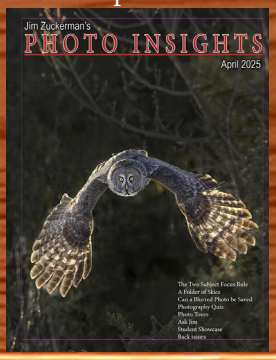
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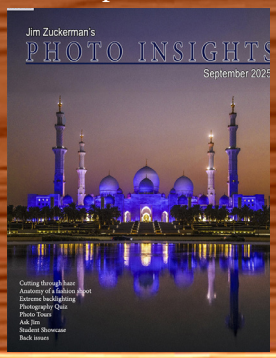
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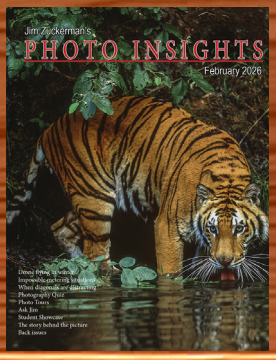
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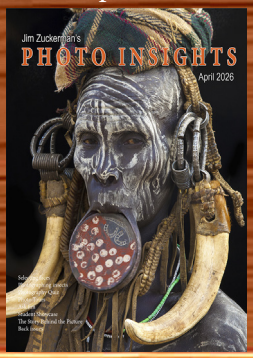
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June '26



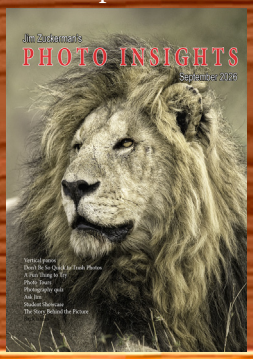
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Quiz answers

1. b
2. a
3. c
4. d
5. a
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



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Edited by Donald Moore

An old car in Old Car City photographed from a drone, taken on the Abandoned in Georgia photo tour.