Jim Zuckerman's

PHOTO INSIGHTS

November 2026



Photographing Foreign Models
Mirror Mirror
/Blend with AI
Photo Tours
Photography quiz
Ask Jim
Student Showcase
The Story Behind the Picture
Back issues



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On the cover: Komodo dragon on a beach on Komodo Island, taken during Jim's Indonesia Wildlife tour; *On this page:* Wild orangutan, Borneo, also taken during the Indonesia Wildlife tour.



Getty Images, the largest and most prominent stock photo agency in the world, just filed for bankrupcy. This is shocking. At one time, they were so large that they bought Corbis -- another mega agency owned personally by Bill Gates -- and their assests, including photos, illustrations, videos, etc, number almost half a billion. How does such a giant company with such a huge presence in the marketplace fail?

Before I started a photo tour company, most of my income came from stock. This entailed shooting what I wanted, but making educated assumptions about what would sell, and then submitting the images to the agency. The photographers received 50% of the sale and the agency got the same. When I joined the first agency in 1987 (Westlight which was based in Los Angeles), the average price of a stock image, for one time use, was $500. The average price of a stock image now with a volume subscription is between twenty five cents and three dollars. In other words, no one makes any decent money.

In addition, digital cameras are so easy to use now. Back in the day, when we all shot film, you really had to know what you were doing, especially with respect to exposure. A case in point: If you invested in travel and went to Europe to shoot for the agency for a month and came back with over- or underexposed pictures, too bad. All that money and time would be down the drain. With the immediate feedback we have now on the LCD screen to examine exposure, composition, color balance, and contrast, you simply tweak the image, shoot again, and it's perfect.

Plus, the number of people who want to make 'a little extra money' with their camera is huge. In '87 when I was accepted into Westlight, there were 70 professional photographers in the agency. At this time, Getty has 600,000 contributors! That means before a shooter's images compete in the marketplace with other agencies, the competition within the agency itself means the likelyhood of your pictures being seen by clients is small. If you have a great picture of an African lion, for example, how many other great lion shots are in the files of Getty? I just checked the Internet . . . Getty Images has 291,000 pictures of lions!

This is why the stock photo industry has crashed and burned.

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PHOTOGRAPHING FOREIGN MODELS

Travel photography is often frustrating because you can't always be in the right place at the right time with the right light. Photographing people and cultures means you usually breeze in and out of a village or town relying on serendipity to get good shots, and most of the time the results show a low percentage of great pictures. This is not the way to do it.

I learned a long time ago that forethought and planning are required to insure successful pictures of people in other cultures. Sure, serendipity does happen at times when everything comes together. We all know, however, this doesn't happen often. That means you have to take matters into your own hands and make it happen.

Therefore, when I travel to a foreign destination, I make a list of the types of images I want to take. It's my previsualizations based on images I've seen online and artistic ideas I have. For example, my preconceived partial list of ideas when I took a photo tour group to Indonesia looked like this:

-- Balinese dancers posing in front of a temple

-- Kecak fire dance at dusk



-- Javanese bride with full makeup and traditional attire

-- Workers mining sulfur in smoke at Ijen Crater

-- Balinese dancer posing with a barong (photo on previous page)

To get these kinds of shots, I have to wear a director's hat and set them up. I use a local guide, taxi driver, and sometimes the concierge of my hotel to make the arrangements. I choose the time of day when the lighting is best, the location, and I always select the models to make sure they are the kind of people I want to photograph. I never ever trust a local to bring a model to a shoot. I have to see them beforehand. I've had the experience in India, for example, of requesting a young girl in her late teens or early twenties, very pretty and slender, and my female local guide brought her sister who was in her late 30's and overweight. They wanted the money I was paying, of course, but that's when I learned to see and approve the models before the photo shoot.

The fee is negotiated before any photography takes place, of course.

It's really important to choose the location, i.e., the background environment, for the model(s). It could be as simple as an arched doorway, a famous monument, a landscape, a garden, a colorful stucco wall, an alleyway, or anything else you feel compliments the subject and the culture. For the Mongolian eagle hunters, below, I thought a mountain landscape would be perfect. For the model in green and purple in Morocco on the next page, I chose a narrow street in the 'Blue City' so the colors essentially became the picture.





Usually through an interpreter, I direct the action. I place the models where I want them, and I ask for a certain expression, pose, or stance. For the Kecak fire dance in Indonesia where I had about 80 performers, below right, I asked them to go through the entire dance and when I said 'stop', everyone would freeze in place -- no music and no movement. In this way, my photo tour group wouldn't have to worry about using fast shutter speeds in the low light environment. We could get the perfect picture which would be almost impossible during the actual performance, which is usually done at night.

Notice also there are no tourists in the shot. When this particular dance is performed, the audience usually surrounds the dancers. This makes it hopeless in terms of getting the kind of images you want. No serious photographer wants other tourists in their pictures.

When you set up shots like this as a private venue, you have control over everything . . . except the weather. This enables you to return home from your travels with great shots. §



Abandoned in Georgia photo tour

April 12 - 18, 2027





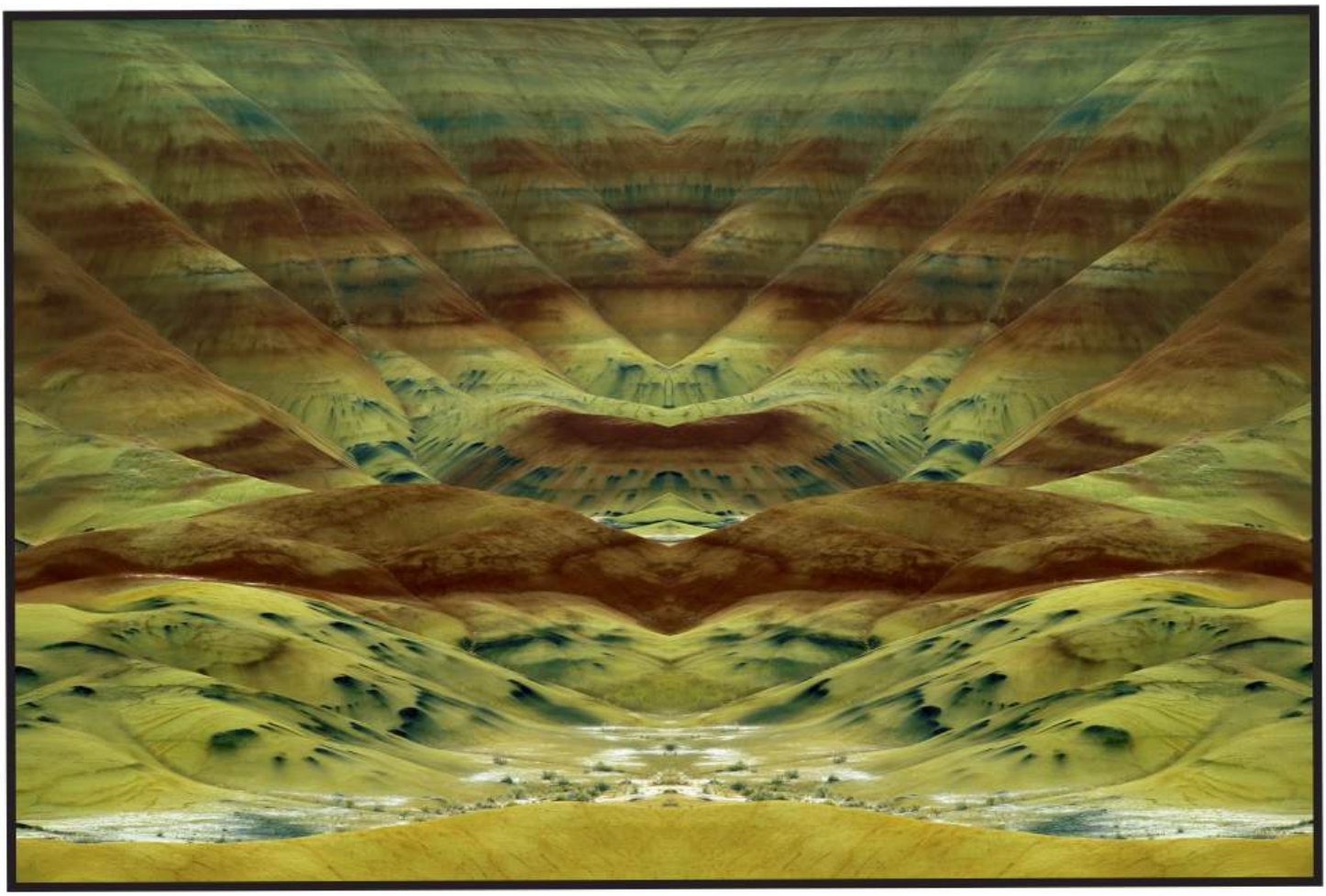
Mirror

Many years before Photoshop entered the scene, I experimented with a technique of making mirrored images with photographic prints. I would print an image with the correct orientation and then flip the slide or negative in the enlarger and print it in reverse. By mounting the prints together, I could create some wonderful images that were very different in character and graphic design from the original shot.

With Photoshop, the process is very easy to do and, unlike before, the seams between the images disappear.

Choosing an image

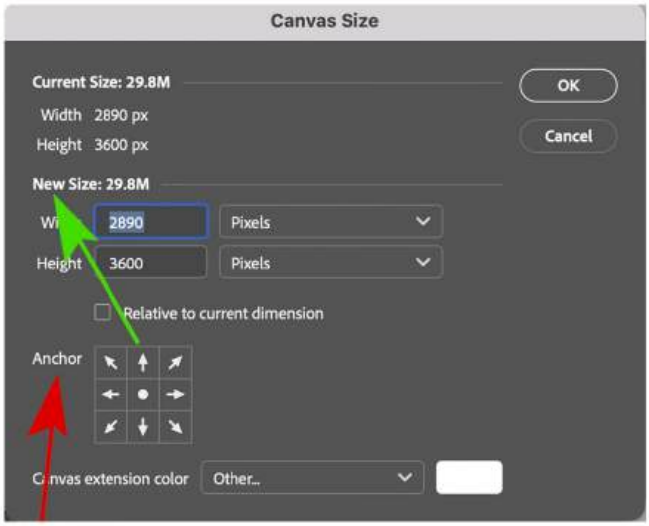
Any photo can be used for this technique, but some work much better than others. For strong graphic designs, chose photos with diagonal components like tree branches or an exaggerated perspective taken with a wide angle lens of a building. C-curves and S-curves work very



well, too. When these elements are mirrored, the graphic design that's created is quite dynamic.

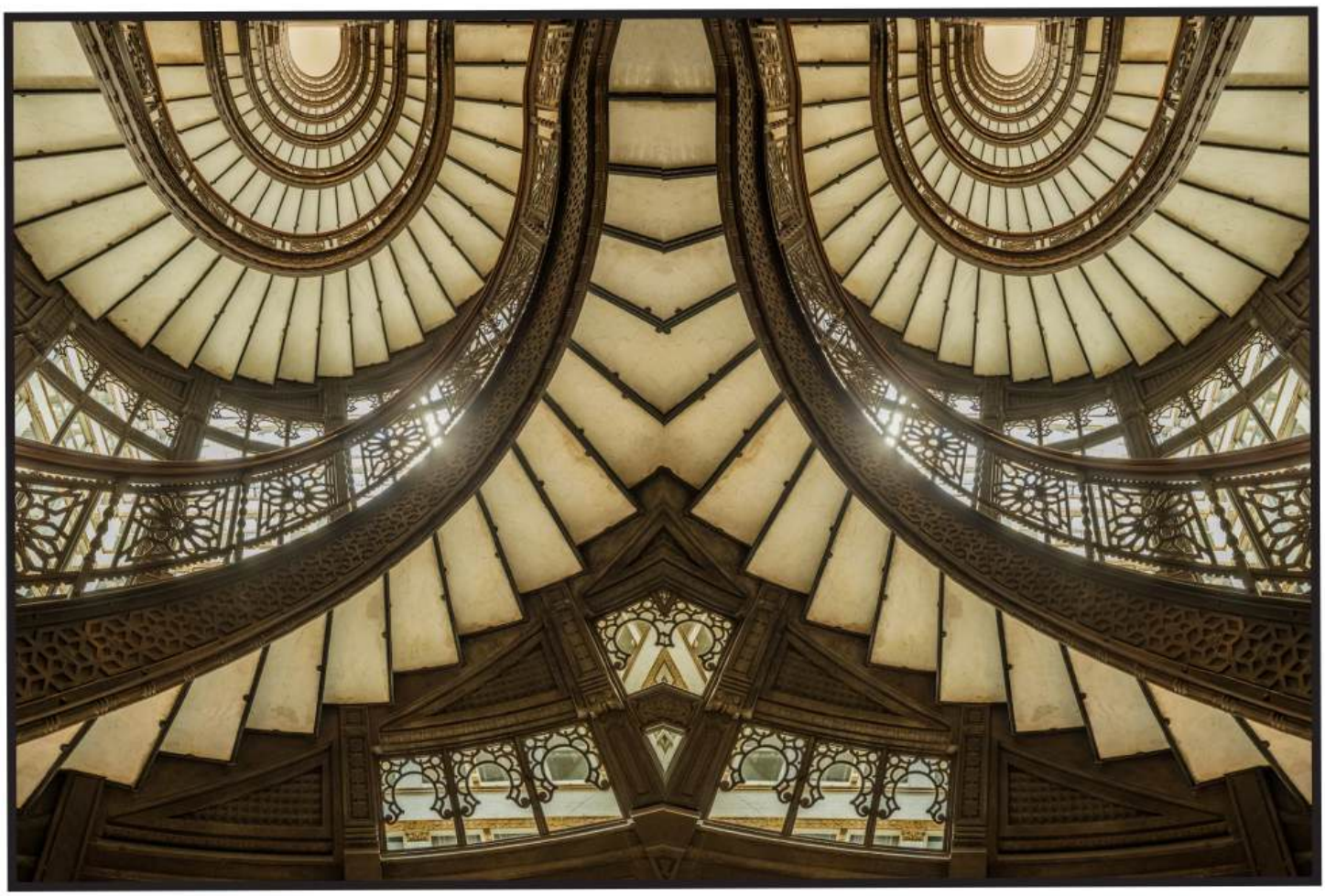
The technique

Open a photo in Photoshop and click **Select > all.** This copies the image into the clipboard. Then choose **Image > canvas size.** In the dialog box that opens (right), chose where you want the new area. Do this by clicking within the Anchor box (red arrow). For example, if you click in the left middle box, the arrows will point to the right, indicating where the new area of the image will be.



The size of the new area is defined in the width and height boxes under New Size (green arrow). If you are expanding the image horizontally, the number to use to create the mirror is twice the width dimension. In this example, that would be 2890 x 2, equaling 5780 pixels. When you click OK, the color that comprises the new area comes from the background color box, but that color doesn't matter at all. It will be covered up.

To create the mirror, select the new area



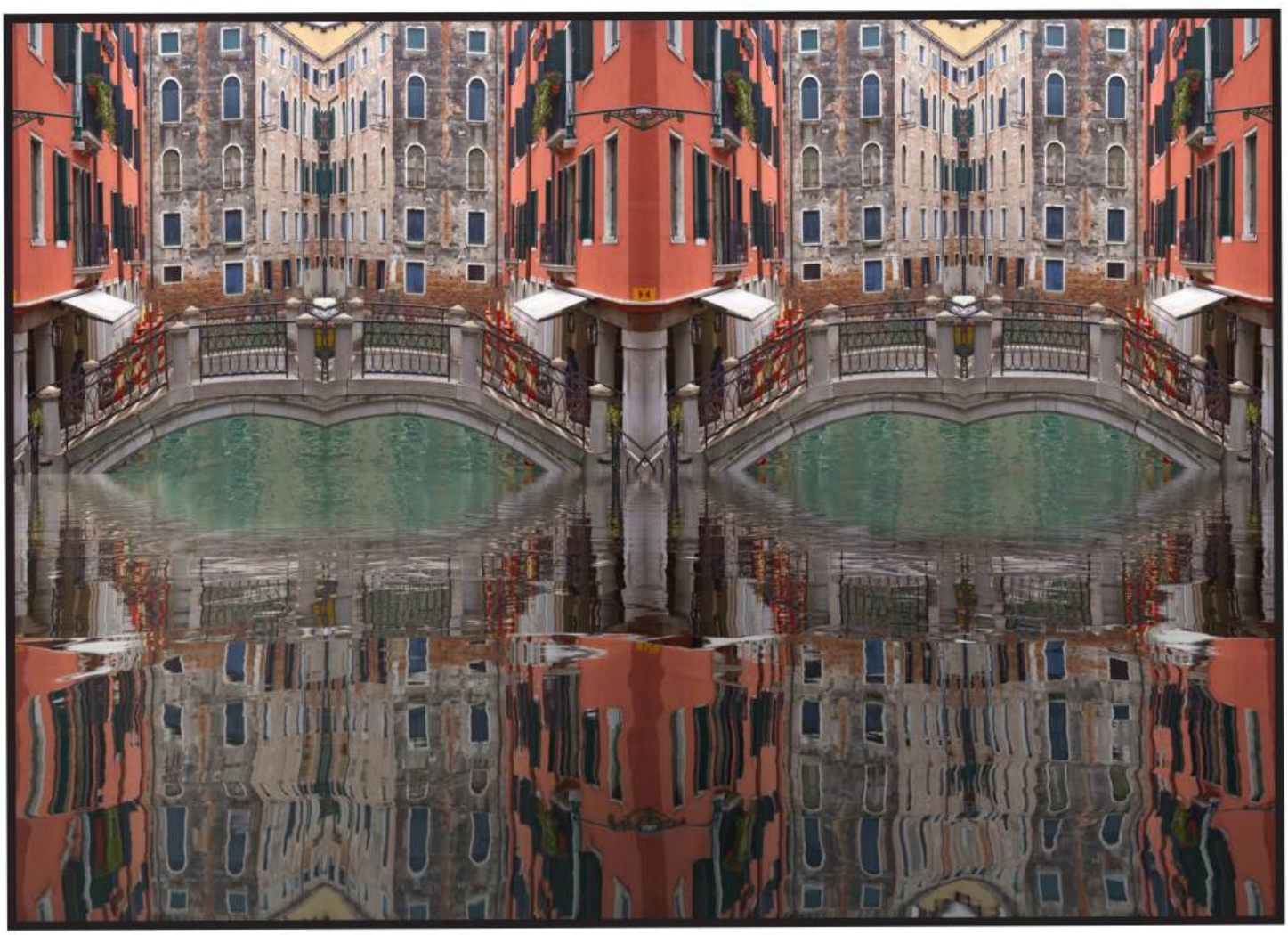
with the magic wand tool. Now choose **Select > modify > expand.** In the dialog box that opens, select one or two pixels. What this does is expand the selection ever so slightly so when the new image is pasted in, any telltale line that comes from the temporary color is eliminated, thus the juncture between the two pictures will be seamless.

At this point, choose **Edit > paste into > paste special.** The clipboard image will be placed into the selection you made with the magic wand tool, but it needs to be flipped. Finally, click **Edit > transform > flip horizontal.** The mirror is now complete.

There are many variations to this technique. For example, in the picture below of architecture in Venice, Italy, I first created a mirror image, then I used that composite as my original and mirrored it again. Finally, I added a watery reflection using the Photoshop plugin, Flood.

Another approach is to add a single, non-mirrored element to a mirrored background as I did in the picture on the next page. This shows a lone tree captured during winter in Michigan. I first created a mirrored image, and then I added a shot of a wolf, also taken in winter. This gives people pause because they're not really sure what to make of it.

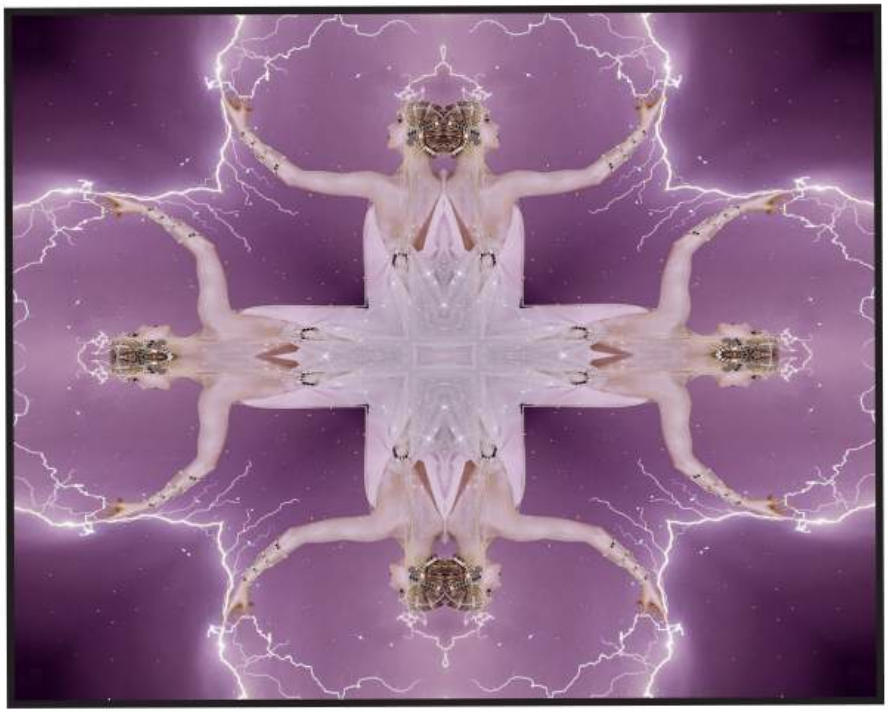
With people, wild and crazy images can happen. Look at the mirrored images on page 12. This is just the tip of the iceberg. §





Mirrored images







/Blend with AI

Getting the most out of AI in which your photographs are imported into the software can produce amazing results. My favorite approach is working with the 'blend' function. Using the online software, Midjourney (considered by most to be the best AI software for image making), word prompts are entered following the prefix **/imagine.**



Rather than simply typing words that describe the image you want, it's possible to blend between 2 and 5 of your own images together. This opens up enormous possibilities. In the apporpriate field, type **/blend.** That opens the door to this technique.



The image below is an example. I blended a shot of a Japanese crane in flight with an abstract of paint mixed in a Tupperware container. The result is like a painting. §



Brazil Untamed

June 19 - 27, 2027

Drones welcome





Frog and Reptile
Workshop

June 5 - 6, 2027





Greece Photo Tour

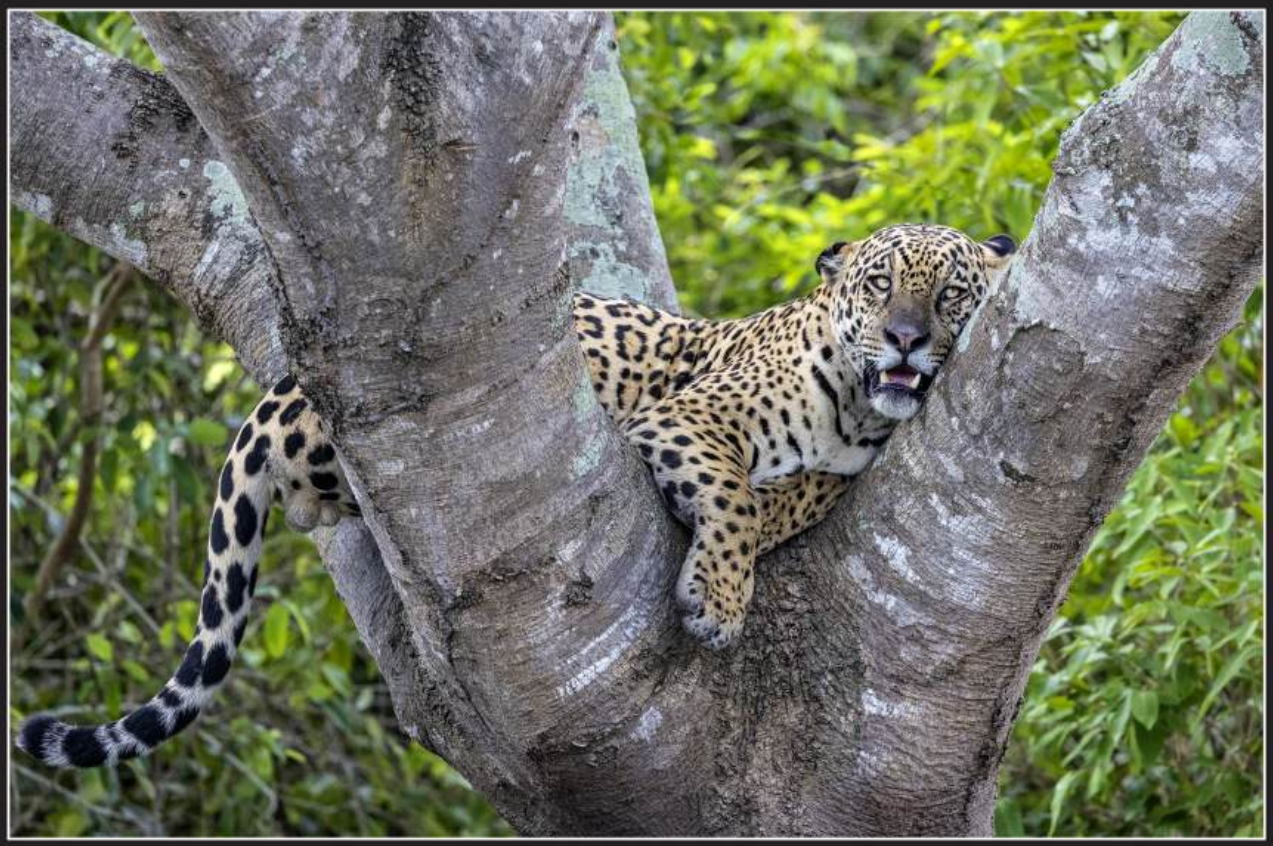
Feb. 26 - March 5, 2028





The Pantanal, Brazil

Nov. 11 - 19, 2027





Photography Quiz

1. The light that creates the most texture is:
    a. Front light
    b. Side light
    c. Back light
    d. Transillumination

2. 'Blowing the highlights' means a bright area of an image is so overexposed it has become solid white with no texture or detail.
    a. True
    b. False

3. Which teleconverter would you expect to see more of a loss in resolution?
    a. 1.4 x
    b. 2x
    c. Neither

4. In underwater photography, red and yellow wavelengths are absorbed by the water and pictures look blue. The lost colors can be recovered in post-processing if you shoot in RAW mode.
    a. True
    b. False

5. Which produces a sharper picture, focus stacking at f/8 or a normal photo taken at f/22?
    a. f/8
    b. f/22

6. Why can an image be properly exposed but still lose highlight detail?
    a. There is too much contrast in the scene
    b. You have included the sun in the composition
    c. The highlights include reflections of the sun, such as in a chrome bumper
    d. All of the above
    e. None of the above

7. Chromatic aberration can be rectified and thus eliminated in Photoshop.
    a. True
    b. False

8. If you are shooting at f/8 and want to decrease the amount of light entering the camera by 8 times, which lens aperture should you use?
    a. f/14
    b. f/16
    c. f/18
    d. f/22

9. The most important aspect of compositing images to make them look real is to:
    a. Make sure the elements were taken with the same lens
    b. Make sure the elements were taken with the same lens aperture
    c. Make sure the white balance of the elements is the same
    d. Make sure the lighting matches

10. Drones are capable of doing 5-frame HDR images while in flight.
    a. True
    b. False

Answers on page 42

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 -16, 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

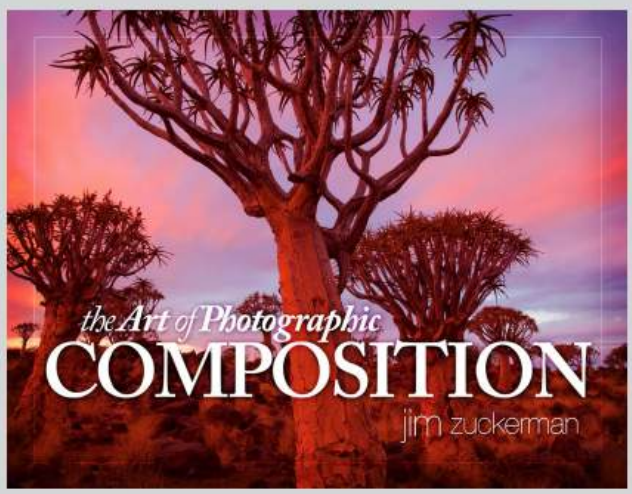
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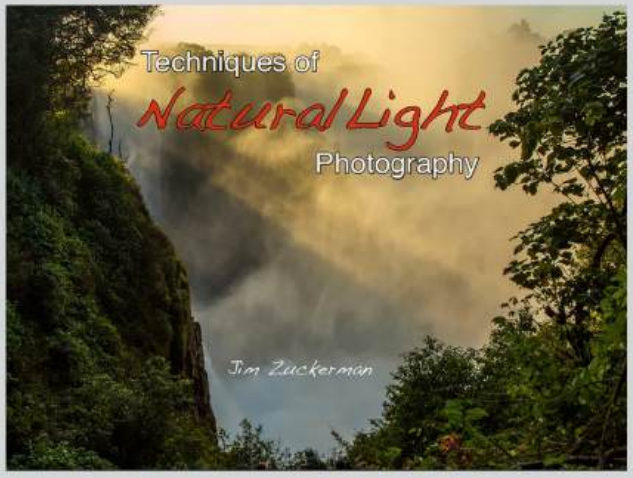




eBooks continued

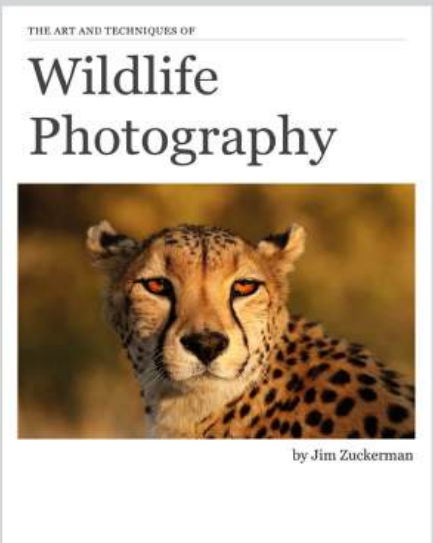
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Carnival in Venice

January 30 - February 5, 2027





What's Wrong with this Picture?



There is really nothing wrong with this picture. It has simplicity, a nice little s-curve in the center foreground, and the soft light in the late afternoon is attractive. The reason I wouldn't hang this on my wall, though, is because for my taste, this picture doesn't have enough going on. There is a lot to say for simplicity of design, but what makes dunes images work are beautiful, artistic, and often bold graphic lines. This shot lacks that kind of punch.

The shot on the next page was taken in the same dunes but from a different direction the next morning at sunrse. The lighting is certainly more dramatic, but it's the graphic



design that I think is a lot more engaging and compelling. I took this shot with a 500mm focal length which is why the dune crests appear to be more compressed. It's that compression in addition to all the nice shapes and lines that make this picture more dynamic than its comparison on the previous page.

Graphic design is all about lines. This underscores virtually all compositions involving all subjects. Some pictures have visual impact due to emotion for sure. Strictly from an artistic perspective, though, when I'm photographing nature, architecture, people, macro, wildlife and more, I'm always looking for strong lines. The more dynamic the lines are, the more successful will be the image. §

Indonesia Wildlife

October 29 - November 8, 2027





SHORT AND SWEET

1. When photographing significant contrast, in this case a giant river otter on snow, it's a good idea to underexposure the pictures by at last 1/3 f/stop, but I often use 2/3 f/stops. This protects the highlights -- the snow -- from blowing out. Once you lose detail in the snow, it's gone for good. You can then adjust the exposure in post-processing.



2. When photographing butterflies, make the back of the camera as parallel as possible to the wings. This will insure complete depth of field so the insect is sharp from wingtip to wingtip. Often, butterflies hold their wings in a V-formation, and it's very hard to maintain complete DOF. Be patient and wait for them to flatten their wings.



3. Just after sunset is a great time to shoot because the colors are beautiful in diffused light. In addition, all the tourists waiting for the sunset in famous places like Santorini, Greece, are gone. Once the sunset occurs, for them the show is over. But for a serious photographer, it's just begun -- dusk and twilight.



4. Photographing streaks of traffic lights at night is much more effective when capturing tail lights of cars instead of headlights. The red/orange color is more dynamic than brilliant, washed out headlights. Therefore, position yourself to shoot the cars as they go away from you. This is Charleston, South Carolina. §



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 . . What do you think of long lenses with maximum lens apertures much smaller than the traditional f/4 super telephotos? They are a lot less expensive and much lighter, but can I take good pictures with them? Scott Harrison, Boise, Idaho

A: Because we can now raise the ISO so high without paying a terrible price in noise, these lenses are fine. They are sharp, easy to carry and to use, and yes, the pictures you take will be good. In the past, my go-to ISO for wildlife was 100 (Fujichrome Provia 100). By today's standards, that's ridiculous. An f/4 lens aperture was essential to allow a fast shutter speed for sharp pictures in low light situations. Now, we can shoot at 3200 ISO and more, so maximum apertures like f/6.3, f/7.1, etc., are fine. §



Partial List of Photography Tours 2027 - 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.

Daniel Wright, Phoenix, Arizona. Pantanal photo tour, Yellowstone in Winter photo tour, Kenya photo tour





© Daniel Wright

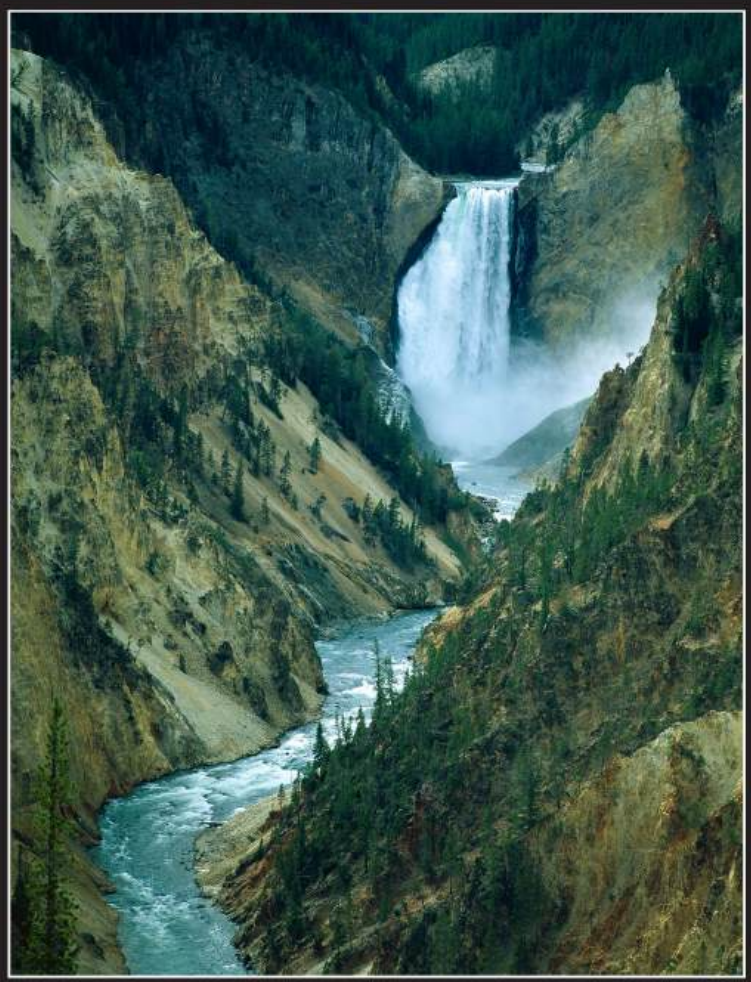
Student Showcase, continued





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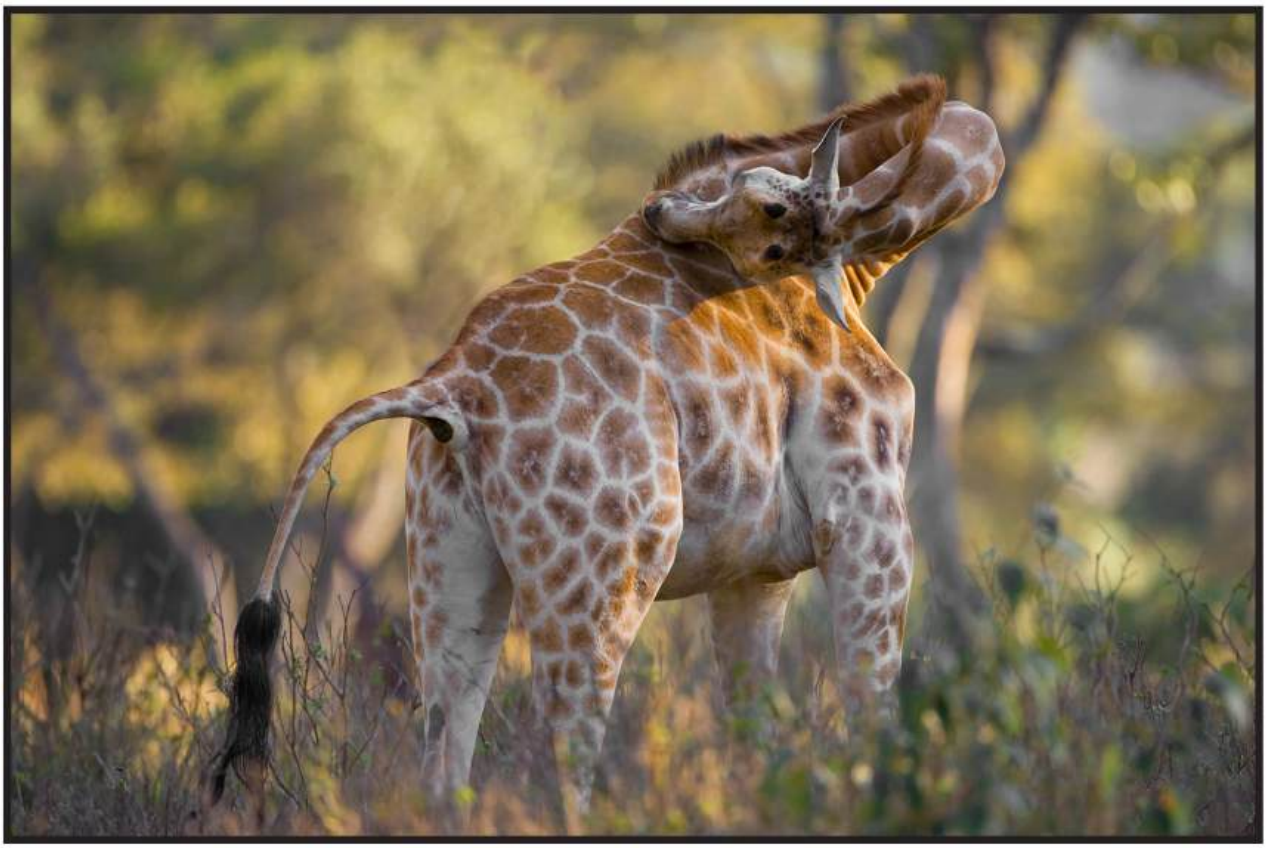
Student Showcase, continued





© Daniel Wright





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The Story Behi



nd the Picture



I've been leading photo tours to Venice, Italy, to photograph Carnivale since 2006, and from 2008 I've stayed in the same hotel. The reason I like this hotel so much, besides the location and the great staff, is because of this room. The traditional Venetian decor with the fabric-covered walls, the matching bedspread, and the Murano glass sconces create a perfect environment for a photo shoot of costumed models.

Every year I bring one or two models to the hotel and my group photographs them in various positions. They'll pose in front of the window, by the mirror, with the sconces for moody backlighting, and at the edge of the bed.

In this shot, I stood on a chair to get an elevated vantage point with a 14mm wide angle lens. The settings were 1/60, f/5.6, and 1250 ISO.

When using wide lenses, it's so easy to skew horizontal and vertical elements, so I'm very careful to orient the lens correctly. Notice, for example, how the pattern of the red fabric at the top of the picturet is perfectly aligned with the upper edge of the frame. I learned a long time ago before I snap a picture to quickly move my eyes around the image in the viewfinder to notice things like that. §

DUBAI & ABU DHABI TOUR

Nov. 27 - Dec. 5, 2027

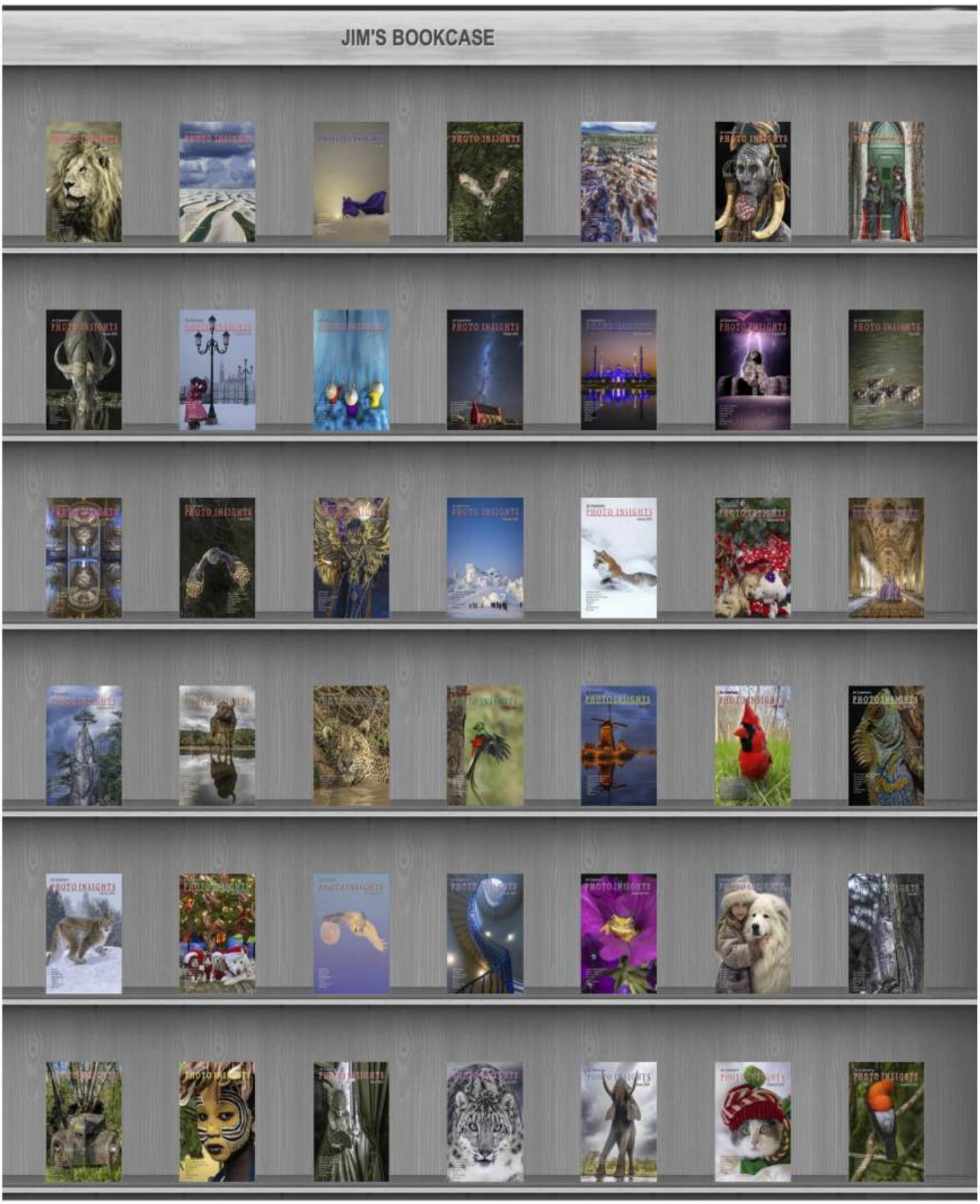






PHOTO INSIGHTS

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Quiz answers

1. b
2. a
3. b
4. b
5. a
6. d
7. a
8. d
9. d
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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Lencois Maranhensis National Park at sunrise from a drone, Brazil