PHOTOGRAPHY MASTERCLASS MAGAZINE | ISSUE 167

PHOTOGRAPHY MASTERCLASS

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SIGMA 85MM F1/2 DG ART LENS

INSPIRATION

PHOTOGRAPHING THE RARE TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE



EXPERT GUIDE

COLOUR VS BLACK AND WHITE STREET PHOTOGRAPHY: WHICH SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

featured

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NOCTURNAL MINIMALISM

EDITING

THE EDITING SKILL MOST PHOTOGRAPHERS NEVER LEARN

MASTERCLASS

WHITE BACKGROUND STUDIO PORTRAITS IN YOUR LIVING ROOM

PHOTOGRAPHY MASTERCLASS MAGAZINE







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EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to this edition of Photography Masterclass Magazine

No studio? No problem. Discover how to create bright, white-background portraits in your own living room with a simple backdrop and just two or three flashes. From balancing your lights to preserving fine hair detail, our masterclass in this issue shows you how to get a professional finish in a surprisingly small space.

In our interview in this issue, we sit down with Lincoln, Nebraska-based photographer Ron Quick. Specializing in "nocturnal minimalism," Ron relentlessly pursues urban landscapes that feature strong architectural elements shrouded in the darkness of night. With award-winning work published in Focus on Nebraska and recognized by the International Photography Awards and Monochrome Awards, Ron shares the adventure, anticipation, and creative process behind his captivating black-and-white night photography.

We got loads more articles, videos and incredible pictures in this issue so we hope you enjoy it. If you try out any of the techniques mentioned, we'd love you to see your results, so please do share them with us in our readers' Facebook Group,

Happy Shooting!

Gill



MESSAGE FROM GILL ROBERTS
THE EDITOR

EDITOR'S CHOICE

A Hand-Picked Selection of our Favorite Photos

By: Julia Taubitz
Shot Details: Nikon Z6 III, at 24mm, f/4, 1/125 sec, ISO 3200
Instagram

EDITORS CHOICE



By: Jayson Hinrichsen
Instagram



By: Giulia Squillace
Shot Details: Sony a7C, at 28mm, f/6.3, 1/60 sec, ISO 4000
Instagram

EDITORS CHOICE



By: Kristina Shvedenko
Instagram



By: Spacex Photography
Shot Details: Nikon D4, at 70mm, f/11, 1/1000 sec, ISO 320
Instagram



By: Nick Martin
Shot Details: Sony a7R II, at 75mm, f/2.8, 1/200 sec, ISO 200
Instagram

EDITORS CHOICE



By: Getty Images
Website

EDITORS CHOICE



By: Getty Images
Website



By: Ohlamour Studio
Shot Details: Canon EOS 5D Mark III, at 84mm, f/5.6, 1/250 sec, ISO 250
Instagram



By: Zoltan Tasi
Shot Details: Fujifilm X-T1, at 12mm, f/2, 30 sec, ISO 800
Instagram

THE IMAGE THAT TOOK TWO YEARS TO CAPTURE

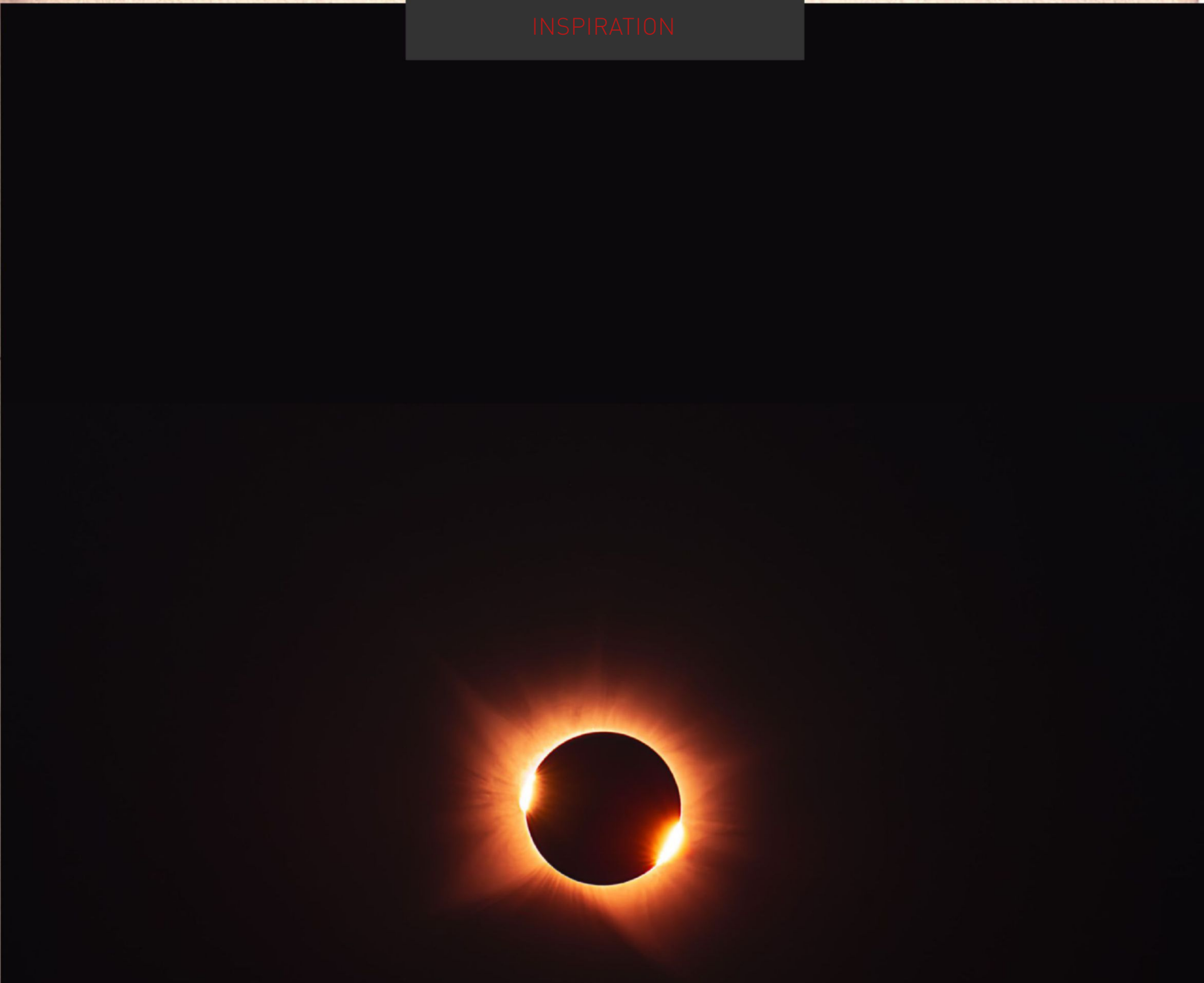
INSIDE THE RACE TO PHOTOGRAPH THE RARE TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE



Following the spectacular total solar eclipse across Europe on 12th August, we were lucky enough to have exclusive access to Nikon photographer and astrophotographer Angel Fux.

Angel captured one of the event's most striking images after spending more than two years preparing for just 103 seconds of totality.

After selecting her location years in advance, Angel travelled to Spain where she carefully prepared her equipment, rehearsed the shoot and waited for the right conditions. When totality finally arrived, she had just 103 seconds to capture the eclipse before daylight returned.



The final image (which you can see on this page) combines technical precision with Angel's signature artistic style, documenting one of Europe's rarest astronomical events.



Alongside the first official release of her eclipse photograph, Angel has shared what it really takes to photograph one of the world's rarest natural phenomena – from months of location scouting and practising with specialist equipment to making split-second decisions when the Moon finally passed in front of the Sun.

To capture the project, Angel used two Nikon Z8 cameras with the NIKKOR Z 400mm f/4.5 VR S and NIKKOR Z 14-24mm f/2.8 S lenses.



Angel's work has previously been featured in NASA's Astronomy Picture of the Day, BBC Science Focus, The Guardian and Astronomy Magazine. The image showcases both the technical precision and creative vision required to photograph a total solar eclipse.



INSPIRATION



Angel also documented the entire project as part of a short documentary film, following the months of preparation, travel and anticipation leading up to the eclipse. Rather than focusing solely on the 103 seconds of totality, the film captures the human story behind the image, revealing the planning, uncertainty and emotion involved in photographing one of nature's rarest spectacles.

You can watch her short film on the next page.

VIDEO:
THE SHADOW BETWEEN - CHASING TOTALITY

by ANGEL FLUX & PRINCE BERKOH



Professional astrophotographer and artist Angel Fux sets out to experience and photograph her first total solar eclipse, following over a year of planning and months of technical preparation. Created together with filmmaker Prince Berkoh, this short film follows the anticipation, uncertainty and pursuit surrounding the eclipse — from the mountains of Switzerland to the path of totality in Spain.

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER:
You can follow more of Angel Fux's work on her website

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COLOUR VS BLACK AND WHITE STREET PHOTOGRAPHY: WHICH SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?



Photo by: Kin Li

by School of Photography

Colour or black and white? It's one of those decisions every street photographer has to make.

Sometimes the answer is obvious. Beautiful colours, warm sunlight or bold contrasts might make colour the natural choice. At other times, strong shapes, shadows, textures and interesting light seem made for black and white.

But what happens if you **don't get to choose?**

I recently headed into the City of London with professional photographer and YouTuber Jimmy Cheng for a street photography challenge. One of us would photograph entirely in colour and the other entirely in black and white — and a coin toss would decide who got what.

Jimmy ended up shooting black and white. I got colour.

More importantly, once we had made that decision, we had to stick with it.

It turned into a really interesting exercise in how limiting your choices can actually make you a better photographer.

COLOUR VS BLACK AND WHITE: THE STREET PHOTOGRAPHY CHALLENGE

We started around Liverpool Street before making our way towards Bank and eventually the Lloyd's of London building.

The rules were simple.

Jimmy would shoot exclusively in black and white while I would shoot exclusively in colour. Rather than taking RAW files and deciding on the look afterwards, we also wanted to use our cameras' colour profiles to get as close as possible to the finished photographs in-camera.

That meant we had to start **thinking in colour or black and white before pressing the shutter.**

And that changes the way you see a scene.



© Jimmy Cheng. The London street scene photographed in colour, where the vivid orange workwear and urban details become important elements of the composition.



© Jimmy Cheng. The same London street photography scene captured in black and white, using contrast, light and everyday activity to create a strong urban composition.

SEEING THE STREET IN BLACK AND WHITE

Jimmy was shooting with an OM System camera and a 25mm f/1.8 lens, giving him roughly the equivalent of a 50mm focal length on a full-frame camera.

He also deliberately restricted himself to that single prime lens for the day.

For his black-and-white photographs, he used a customised high-contrast monochrome profile.

Without colour to rely on, elements such as **light, shadow, shape, line and contrast** become incredibly important.

When we had strong sunlight in the City, this worked brilliantly.

The architecture around Bank produces strong lines and shapes, and when sunlight cuts between the buildings you can get small areas of bright light surrounded by deep shadow.

Put the right person into that light and suddenly you have the ingredients for a fantastic black-and-white street photograph.

But there was another lesson waiting for us - The sun disappeared.



© Jimmy Cheng | Harsh light and deep shadows create bold contrast and strong geometric lines in this black and white London street photograph, drawing the eye towards the pedestrian and dog moving through the scene.



© Jimmy Cheng | Harsh light creates bold shadows, strong lines and striking contrast in this black and white London street photograph, turning an everyday moment into a graphic urban composition.

STREET PHOTOGRAPHY IS ABOUT ADAPTING

One minute we had strong sunshine and hard shadows. The next it was overcast.

Then it started raining.

It would be easy to look at that as the end of the photography session, particularly when you've chosen a high-contrast black-and-white style that works beautifully with strong sunlight.

Instead, Jimmy adapted.

After the rain, the wet pavement outside the Bank of England started producing reflections. There was only a small window of opportunity before the ground dried, but it resulted in what could have been one of his best photographs of the day.

That's an important lesson for any street photographer: **work with what you've got.**

You can't control the weather. You can't control the people walking through your composition. You can't control exactly when the sun will appear.

What you can control is how you react to it.

Rain, reflections, mist, strong sunshine and flat overcast conditions all create different photographic opportunities.

Don't wait for perfect conditions. Learn to recognise what the conditions you've been given can offer you.



© Jimmy Cheng | Strong architectural lines and a near-perfect reflection create symmetry and depth in this black and white London street photograph, with the lone pedestrian providing a clear focal point within the geometric composition.



© Jimmy Cheng | Black and white London street photography showing a woman walking beside classical columns, with her reflection mirrored in the wet pavement after rain.

SHOOTING STREET PHOTOGRAPHY IN COLOUR

While Jimmy was concentrating on black and white, I had the opposite challenge.

I was shooting with my Fujifilm X-T5 and 18-55mm lens, using a Kodachrome-inspired film recipe.

The idea was to create a warm, saturated and slightly old-fashioned film look straight out of the camera.

When the sunlight appeared, I absolutely loved it.

Warm light combined with the colours of the city produced a completely different feeling to Jimmy's high-contrast monochrome photographs.

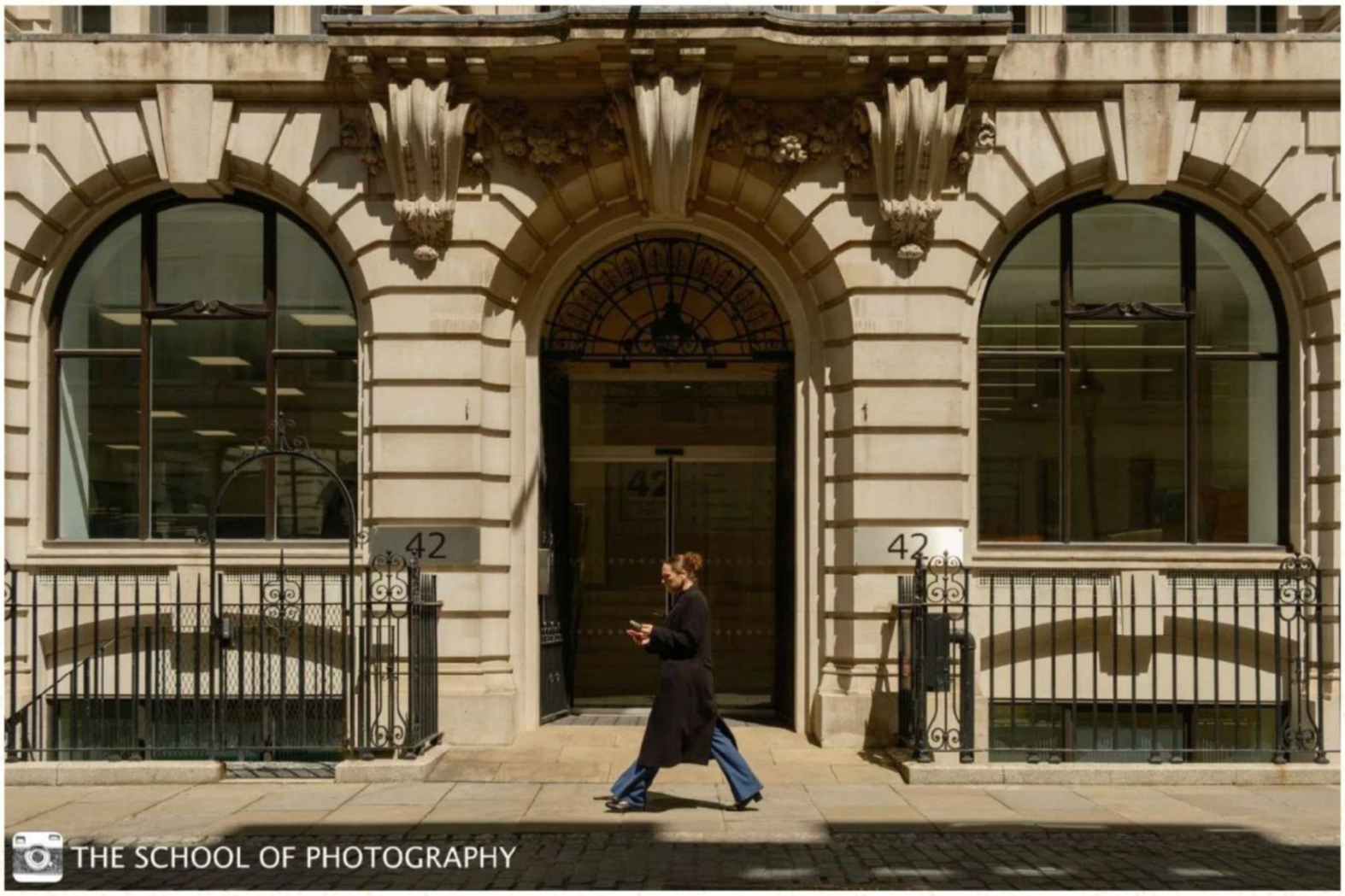
And this is where the colour-versus-black-and-white question becomes interesting.

Neither is necessarily better.

They simply make you look for different things.

With black and white, you might find yourself concentrating on contrast, geometry, texture, highlights and shadows.

With colour, the colour itself can become part of the composition. A brightly coloured coat, warm sunlight hitting a building or contrasting colours within a scene can become the reason you take the photograph.



© Jimmy Cheng | Black and white London street photography showing a woman walking beside classical columns, with her reflection mirrored in the wet pavement after rain.



Kodachrome 64, one of photography's most iconic colour films, renowned for its rich colours, strong contrast and distinctive look that continues to inspire photographers and modern film simulations.

FIND THE LIGHT AND WAIT

One of my favourite photographs from the shoot came from doing almost nothing.

I found an area where a small section of light was cutting through the scene and waited.

And waited.

What I needed wasn't simply a person to walk through the frame. I wanted the right person in exactly the right position.
Eventually, a smartly dressed woman walked through and the light briefly caught her face.

That was the photograph.

Later I found another narrow shard of light down an alleyway. Again, rather than moving on, I waited.

Eventually a man came out of one of the offices and stood directly in that patch of light to smoke a cigarette.

Click.
This is something we've spoken about before with street photography: some of the photographs that appear completely spontaneous actually involve a great deal of patience.

Instead of constantly chasing interesting people, try reversing the process.

Find the composition first.

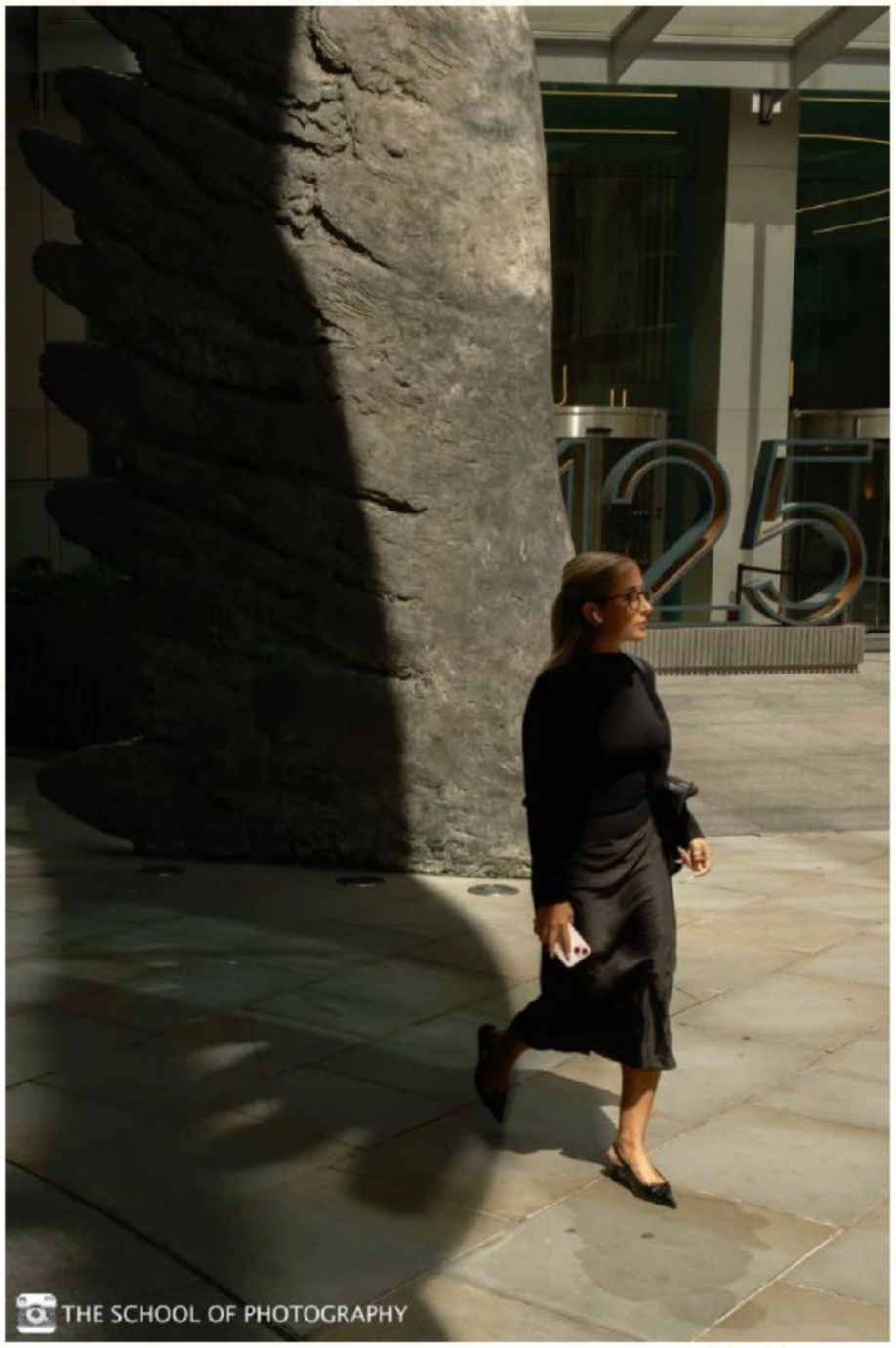
Look for an interesting background, good light, strong shadows or a shape that gives you a composition.

Then wait for your subject.

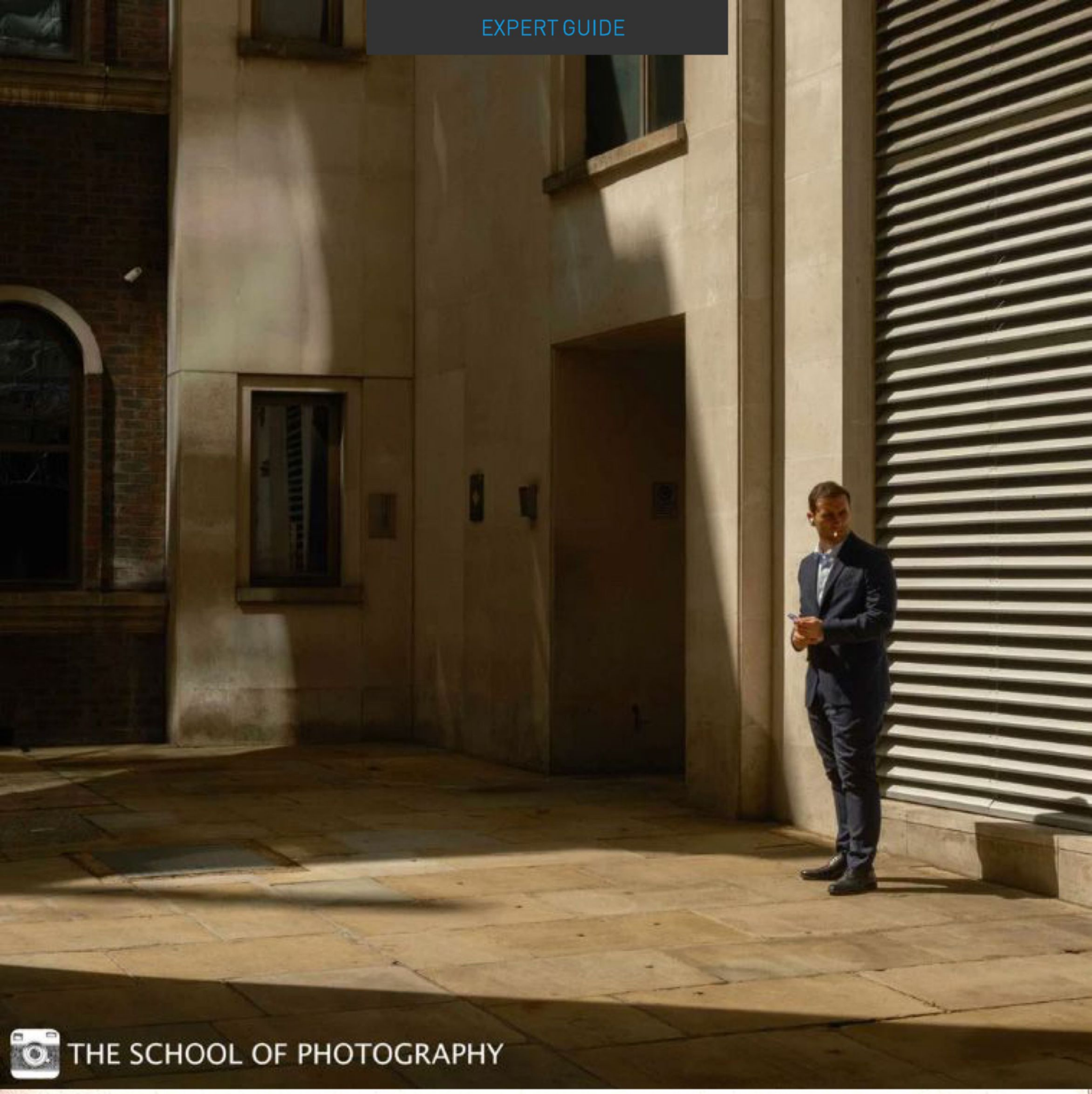
Sometimes you'll wait five minutes. Sometimes considerably longer.

And sometimes nobody comes at all.

That's street photography.



A perfectly timed street photography moment where the subject moves from deep shadow into harsh sunlight, creating strong contrast, texture and shape within the composition.



Harsh light and deep shadows create a dramatic street photography composition, with the solitary figure positioned against strong architectural lines and contrasting shapes.

WHY RESTRICTIONS CAN IMPROVE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY

One of the biggest lessons from this challenge had surprisingly little to do with colour.

It was about **restriction**.

Jimmy had restricted himself to black and white and a single 50mm-equivalent focal length.

I had to shoot colour using the same Kodachrome-style look throughout the session.

Neither of us could simply switch styles every time we saw a photograph that might look better another way.

And that's a very useful exercise.

Modern cameras give us an enormous number of options. Different lenses, autofocus modes, exposure modes, colour profiles, film simulations and countless other settings are available at the touch of a button.

Having all those choices isn't always helpful.

If you're constantly wondering which lens, setting or look you should use, the photograph can disappear while you're still making your decision.

Restrict yourself and something interesting starts to happen.

After shooting with one focal length for a while, you begin to instinctively understand what will fit inside the frame before you even lift the camera to your eye.

Stick with black and white and you begin looking for scenes that work in monochrome.

Commit to colour and you start noticing colour relationships that you might otherwise have ignored.

Limitations force you to look harder.

And that can make you a better photographer.



Strong vertical lines, negative space and contrasting light and shadow frame the subject in this minimalist street photography composition.



© Jimmy Cheng | A low viewpoint transforms an everyday street scene, using leading lines, bold contrast and harsh light to draw the eye through the black and white composition.

3 STREET PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS FROM JIMMY CHENG

At the end of our shoot, I asked Jimmy for his three top tips for street photographers.

1. BE BRAVE

Street photography often requires you to push yourself a little.

That doesn't only mean having the confidence to photograph around strangers. It also means being prepared to go out when conditions aren't perfect.

Some of Jimmy's best photographs have been taken in the rain.

Provided your equipment is suitable for the conditions, don't automatically put the camera away when the weather changes.

Rain can give you reflections, umbrellas, different light and an atmosphere you simply won't get on a clear day.

2. BE PATIENT

Great street photographs don't always happen instantly.

Choose your location. Look at the light. Think about your composition.

Then wait.

If you've found a great background with beautiful light but the photograph isn't quite there yet, the missing ingredient might simply be the right person entering the frame.

Patience can be far more effective than walking around endlessly hoping that a great photograph suddenly appears in front of you.

3. DON'T ALWAYS SHOOT WIDE OPEN

There's a strong trend towards photographing with very wide apertures and using shallow depth of field to separate a subject from the background.

Jimmy often takes a different approach.

He likes to use smaller apertures to create greater depth of field, allowing the foreground, subject and background to work together.

Rather than separating the subject using blur, think about using **light**, **shadow**, **patterns and contrast** instead.

It's a very different way of approaching street photography and one that's well worth trying.



© Jimmy Cheng | A busy London street scene captured in black and white, where crowds, architectural lines and strong contrast combine to create a sense of movement and everyday city life.

SO, IS COLOUR OR BLACK AND WHITE BETTER FOR STREET PHOTOGRAPHY?

After spending the day shooting both, the answer is probably not the one you were hoping for.

Neither.

There were photographs Jimmy took that made me wish I'd been shooting black and white.

And there were colour photographs that made Jimmy wish he'd had the Kodachrome look.

The important thing isn't deciding that one is better than the other.

It's learning to recognise **why a particular scene works in colour or black and white.**

If colour is adding something important to the photograph, use it.

If colour is becoming a distraction and the photograph is really about shape, expression, texture, light or contrast, try black and white.

Better still, give yourself the same challenge we did.

Go out for a couple of hours and decide beforehand that you're only going to photograph in black and white.

Then do another session entirely in colour.

Don't keep switching between the two.

By removing that choice, you might be surprised by how differently you start seeing the world around you.



© Jimmy Cheng | Reflections add layers and visual complexity to this black and white street photograph, combining a passing pedestrian with the surrounding architecture, light and shadows.



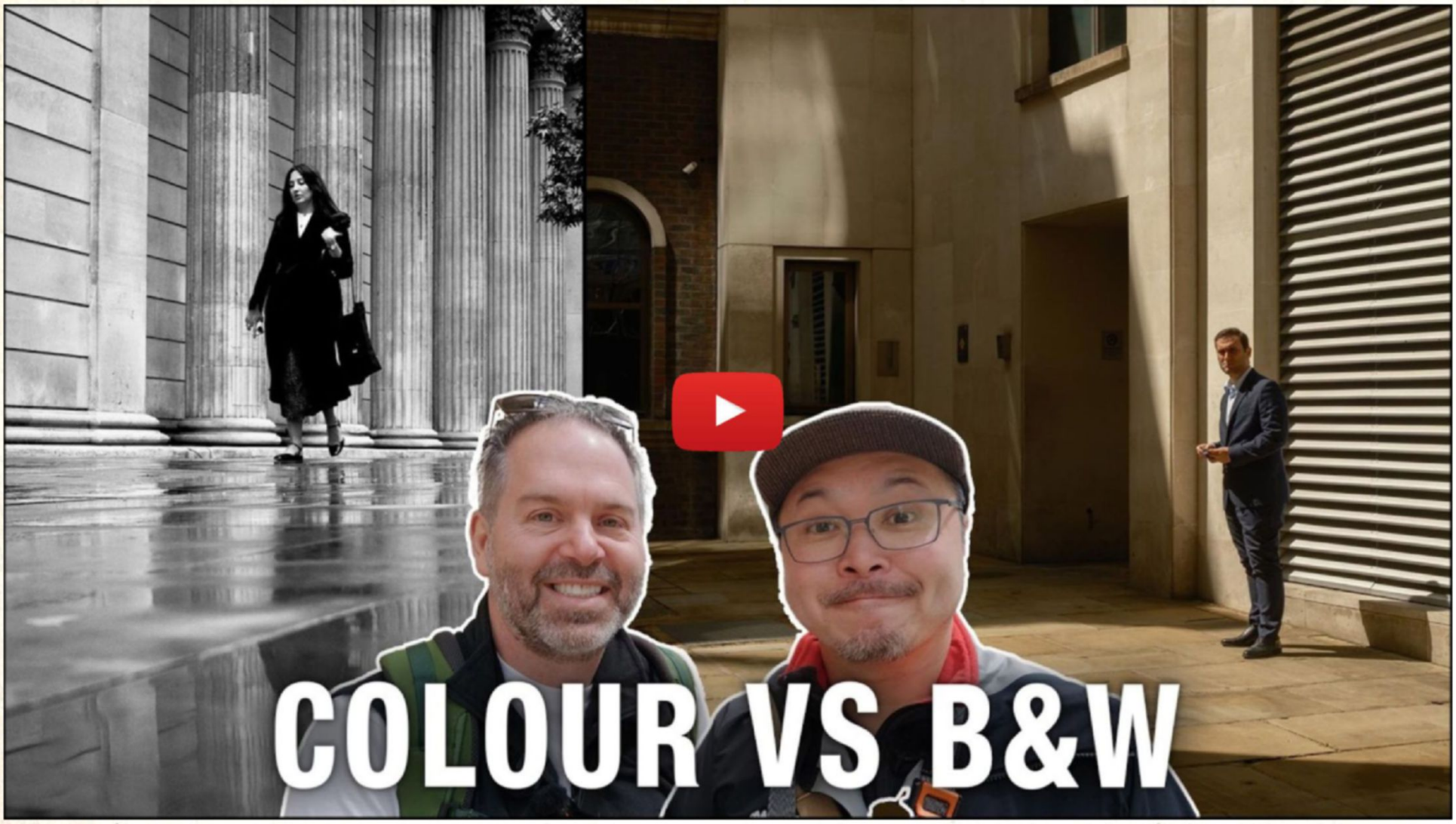
A fleeting London street photography moment at Bank Station, using strong sunlight, colour and the surrounding architecture to frame the subject as he emerges from the Underground.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

The School of Photography deliver high-quality photography courses online, in person and in books, and are a leading provider of photography education to schools and colleges in the UK. You can follow more from The School of Photography on their website, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

VIDEO TUTORIAL: COLOUR VS BLACK AND WHITE STREET PHOTOGRAPHY: WHICH SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

by THE SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY



Colour or black and white? We took on a London street photography challenge where a coin toss decided our shooting style. Jimmy Cheng got black and white, I got colour — and we had to stick with it. See how limiting your choices can actually make you a better street photographer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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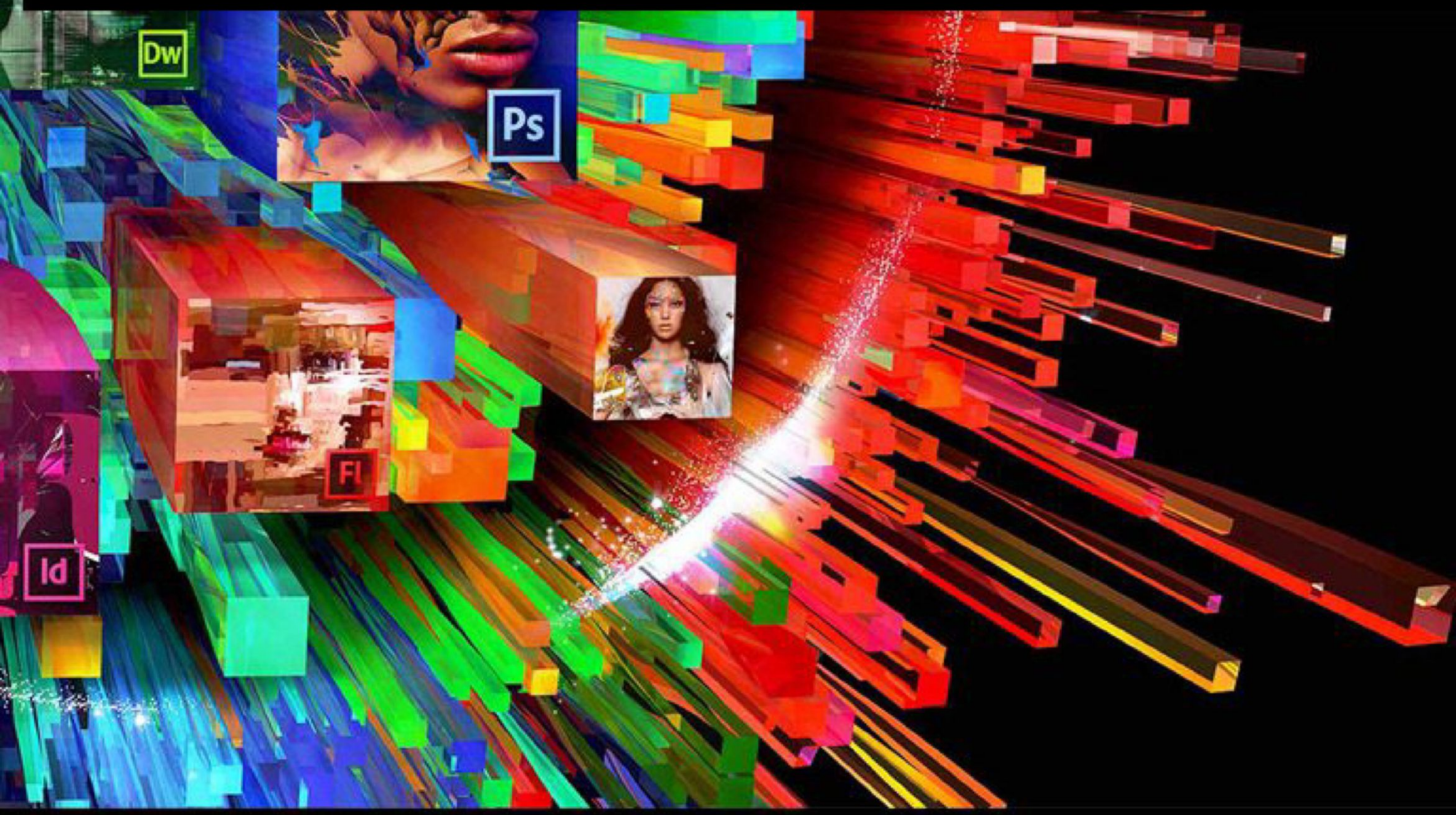
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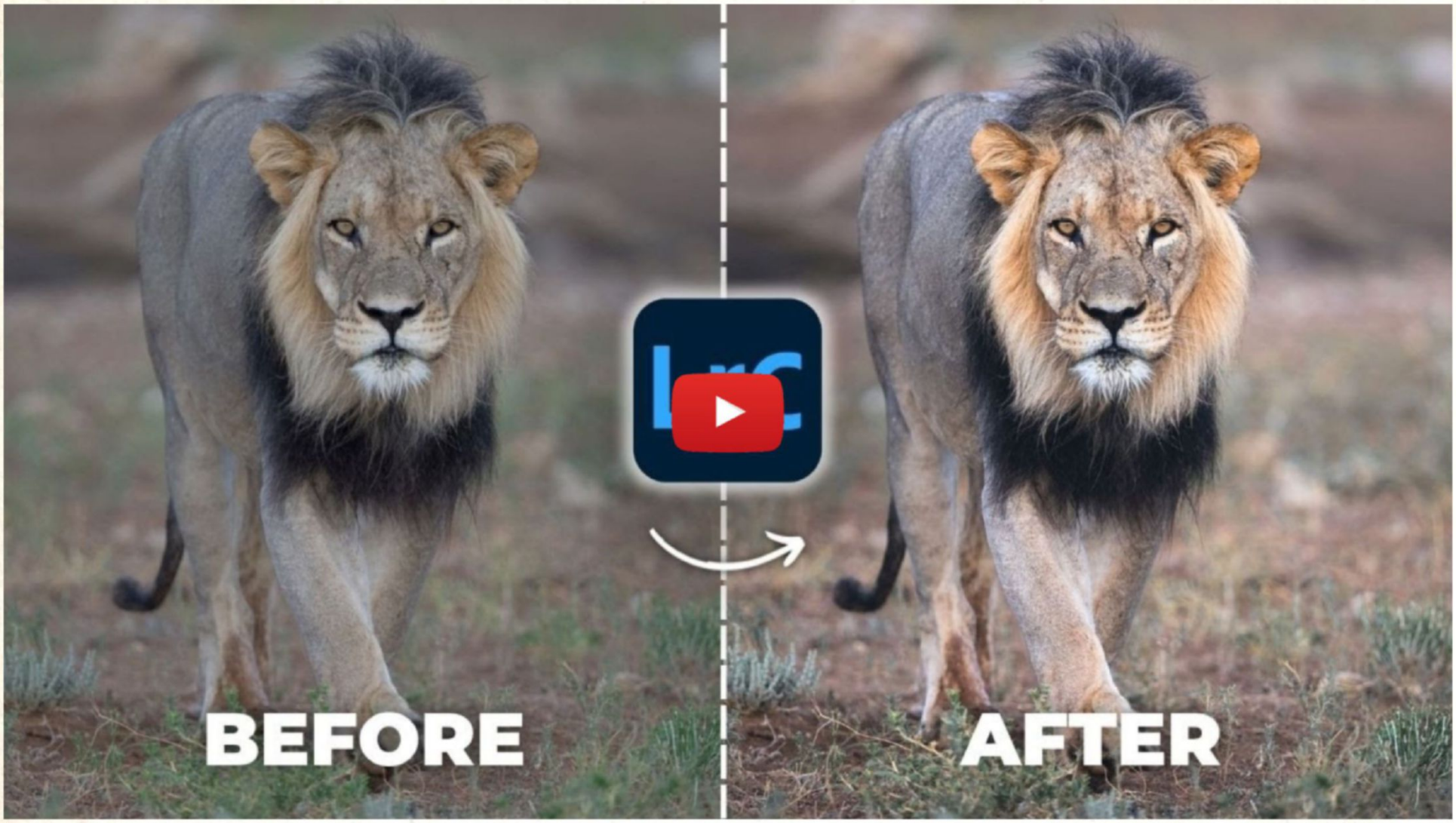
PHOTO EDITING:

The Editing Skill Most Photographers Never Learn



VIDEO TUTORIAL: THE EDITING SKILL MOST PHOTOGRAPHERS NEVER LEARN

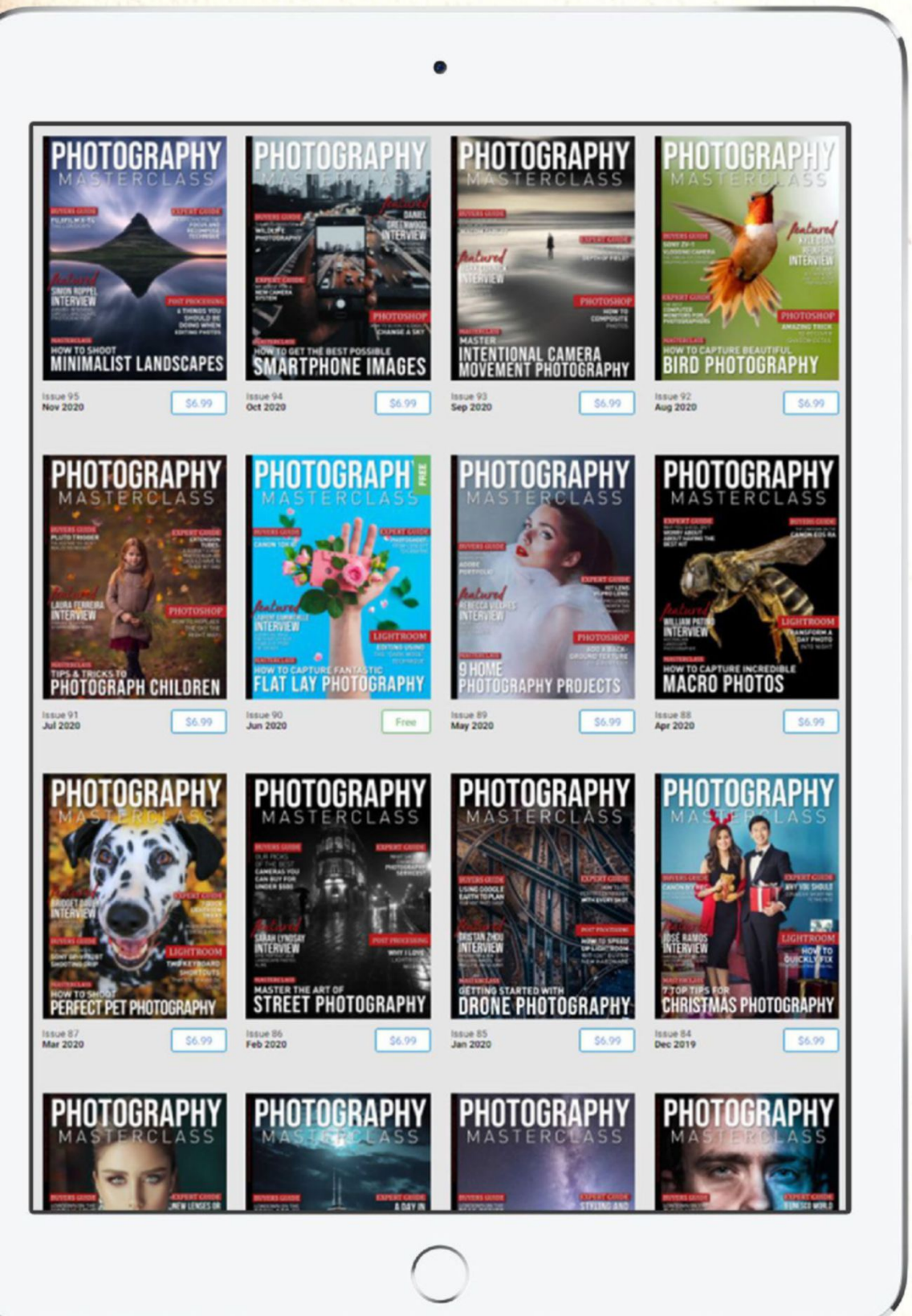
by MARK DUMBLETON



In this video, I'll take you through the full edit of this wildlife photograph and reveal an essential editing skill that most photographers never learn, one that completely changes how you approach editing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Mark Dumbleton is an award-winning and internationally published landscape & wildlife photographer from Johannesburg in South Africa. You can view more of his work on his website, YouTube, Instagram and Facebook

WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO PHOTOGRAPHY MASTERCLASS?



If you are a photographer with tips to share and are interested in helping others improve their photography, then we'd love to feature your content in Photography Masterclass Magazine.

Your submission can be based on any topic relating to digital photography, including post production. We also accept reviews of cameras, lenses and equipment.

Submit your articles or videos at Photographymc.com and your content could appear in an upcoming issue!

FIND OUT MORE

WHITE BACKGROUND STUDIO PORTRAITS IN YOUR LIVING ROOM



By: Anastasiia Nelen
Instagram



By: Curated Lifestyle
Shot Details: Nikon D810, at 58mm, f/4.5, 1/200 sec, ISO 200
Portfolio



By: Curated Lifestyle
Shot Details: Nikon D810, at 58mm, f /4, 1/320 sec, ISO 160
Portfolio

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By: Curated Lifestyle
Portfolio



By: David Banjo
Shot Details: Sony a7 IV, at 24mm, f/6.3, 1/320 sec, ISO 1250
Instagram

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By: Getty Images
Website

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By: Getty Images
Website



By: Marc Yusufu
Shot Details: Canon EOS 200D, at 50mm, f/1.8, 1/4 sec, ISO 400
Instagram



By: Miguel Bandeira
Instagram



By: Ohlamour Studio
Shot Details: Phase One IQ3 50MP, at 80mm, f/5.6, 1/500 sec, ISO 200
Instagram

WHITE BACKGROUND STUDIO PORTRAITS IN YOUR LIVING ROOM



Photo by: Getty Images

There's something about a clean white or light background that makes a portrait look professional straight away. It's simple and timeless, and there's nothing to distract from the face. It's also a look most of us link to big studios, with sweeping cyclorama walls and a rack of lights. The good news is that you don't need any of that. With a pop-up backdrop, a few small flashes and a little patience, you can get a beautiful result in an ordinary living room.

The trick is to change the order you work in. Most of us light the subject first and worry about the background later. For white-background work, flip it round: get the background right first, then light your model.

START WITH A BLANK CANVAS

Living rooms are full of curtains, pictures, bookshelves and odd colours, and none of them belong in a clean studio shot. So, the first job is to cover them up. A pop-up reversible backdrop is ideal for this. It folds down to almost nothing, opens in seconds and usually has a plain side and a textured side.

Don't worry if the plain side isn't pure white. Out of the box it will probably look off-white or light grey. That's fine, because lighting is what will make it whiter.

UNDERSTANDING WHITE

This is the idea the whole technique rests on: white isn't really a colour you photograph, it's a colour you create. Overexpose almost any light surface enough and it records as pure white. So, the more light you put on your backdrop, the whiter it gets.

Your first instinct might be to put a flash behind your model, aim it at the backdrop and turn it up to full power. Try it once and you'll see why that's a mistake. In a small room, all that light hits the backdrop, bounces off the walls and ceiling and comes back towards your subject from the front. The background goes white, but so does everything else. Fine hair detail around the edges of the head disappears, contrast drops and the whole picture looks washed out and hazy.

FINDING THE SWEET SPOT

The answer is to hold back. First, a word on where the background flash goes. It sits behind your model, between them and the backdrop, facing away from the camera and pointing straight at the backdrop. Place it directly behind the model so their head and body hide it from the lens. A small light stand set roughly at shoulder or head height works well, or a floor stand if your model is seated low. Keep it a few feet from the backdrop so the light has room to spread instead of making a tight hotspot.

Then set the flash somewhere in the middle of its power range. Around 1/8 power is a good starting point for a small speedlight-style flash. Take a test shot, then check it with your camera's highlight warning.

If you haven't used the highlight warning before, it's one of the most useful tools on your camera, and photographers often call it the "blinkies". When it's switched on, any part of the image that is so bright it has gone pure white, with no detail left at all, flashes on and off (usually in black or red) when you play the picture back. In technical terms, those areas are "clipped": the camera has recorded them at maximum brightness. You'll usually find the option in the playback or display menu, often called Highlight Alert, Highlight Warning or Overexposure Warning. On some cameras you need to press the Info or Display button during playback until a view with the blinkies appears. Check your manual if you can't find it.

For most photography, blinkies are a warning sign. Here, they're exactly what we want, because they show which parts of the backdrop have turned truly white.
What you're looking for might surprise you. You don't need the whole background to blink. You only need the area directly around your model's head to clip to pure white. The corners and edges can stay slightly grey, because they're quick to fix later. What you can't fix later is hair detail that has already been blown away. So, keep the clean white close to the subject and protect the edges of the head.

SPREAD THE LIGHT

Most small flashes have a zoom setting that controls how wide the beam is. Zoomed in, the light is concentrated, so you get a bright hotspot in the middle of the backdrop and dark vignetting around it. Zoom the flash out to its widest setting so the light spreads across as much of the backdrop as possible.

You'll still get some fall-off at the edges in a small space, but it will be softer. If you're shooting head-and-shoulders rather than full length, a slightly tighter crop will hide most of what's left.

WORK WITH YOUR SPACE, NOT AGAINST IT

In a home setup, the room is always the limit. Low ceilings and short distances affect everything. If you don't have much height, seat your model rather than having them stand. And put as much distance between your subject and the backdrop as the room allows. Every extra foot cuts down the light spilling back onto your model and makes your job easier.

Photo by: Curated Lifestyle



Photo by: Getty Images



Remember the golden rule of home studios too: if it's not in the frame, it doesn't matter. Cables, boxes, stacks of books holding up props, the cat wandering past, none of it counts if the camera can't see it.

A QUICK WIN: THE PROFILE SILHOUETTE

So far, the only light on your model is whatever is bouncing back off the backdrop. Soon you'll add a key light, the main light that illuminates your subject's face. Before that, try a simple creative shot. Put a second flash to the side of your model and slightly behind them, then ask them to turn their face towards it. With the bright background behind them and a rim of light on their features, you get a striking profile portrait that's close to a silhouette. Because the face is side-on, the result looks deliberate rather than underlit.

ADD A WHITE FOREGROUND

To make the picture feel like a proper studio set, give your model a white surface to lean on. This becomes the foreground and joins the background into one clean white space. A sheet of white acrylic propped on a storage box works well. White foam board or a large white floor tile is even better, because both are rigid and won't flex when your model leans on them.

SETTING THE KEY LIGHT

Now it's time to add that key light. Before you start, set your camera to manual mode. Pick an aperture, for example f/5.6, keep ISO low (100 to 200), and set a shutter speed at or below your camera's flash sync speed (usually around 1/160 to 1/200 sec). After that, the only thing you change is the flash power.

Next, you need to meter the light. That just means measuring how much light is falling on your model, so you know whether the face will come out too dark, too bright or just right. There are two ways to do it.

With a flash meter. This is a small handheld device that measures flash. Hold it just under your model's chin with the white dome pointing towards the camera, then fire the flash. The meter tells you which aperture that light needs. If it reads f/8, turn the flash down. If it reads f/4, turn it up. Keep going until it reads f/5.6, the same as your camera.

With test shots. No meter? Take a photo, look at the face on the camera's screen and check the histogram. If the skin looks dark, increase the flash power. If it looks bright or the blinkies show on the face, reduce it. It takes a few more frames, but you get the same result.

Photo by: Getty Images



The following two habits will save you a lot of trouble.

First, pose before you meter. If your model is going to lean forward on the tabletop, get them into that position before you measure. Even a small change in distance to the light changes the reading. Second, work with one light at a time. Switch the background flash off while you set the key light, so you're only measuring the light on the face.

With only the key light firing, the background will look grey. That's expected. Turn the background flash back on at its earlier setting and the white comes back.

FIXING GREY EDGES

Look closely and you may see grey creeping back in where the foreground meets the background, especially at the edges. The cause is the inverse square law. Light gets dimmer quickly as distance increases, and the edges of your backdrop are further from the flash than the centre is.

There are two fixes. Moving the background flash further from the backdrop makes the light more even, because the difference in distance between centre and edges matters less. If one side is still grey, add a second background flash so you have one on each side.

Be careful where you put it. A background light set too far forward will catch the side of your model's face and leave an odd highlight on the cheek. Keep both background lights behind your model, one on each side, angled in towards the backdrop, so they light only the backdrop.

FINISHING IN POST PRODUCTION

The aim is to do as much as possible in camera, but a little editing finishes the job.

Open the RAW file in Lightroom or Adobe Camera Raw and turn on the clipping warning. Don't be surprised if it doesn't match what you saw on the camera's screen. The camera preview is a JPEG, and the RAW file holds more highlight information. Slowly raise the Whites slider until the clipping just covers the area around the top of the head, keeping that fine hair detail.

Next, use a masking brush with a moderate boost to the whites to paint over the nearly-white patches. For the corners, far from your model, use a much stronger brush: push exposure up by around three stops and lift shadows and blacks. Because these areas are nowhere near the hair, you can be heavy-handed.
To finish, take the image into Photoshop. Set your background colour to white, choose the Crop tool with the fill set to background colour, and drag the canvas out. Because everything around your model is already pure white, the new area blends in without a seam. The result is a wide, airy studio frame that was really shot in a living room.

THE TAKEAWAY

Studio results at home come from keeping your ambitions the right size. Don't try to build a huge set. Keep it compact, light the background first, protect the edges of the head, and accept that a few minutes of cleanup is part of the process. Get those right and nobody will guess your "studio" was the front room.

LIVING ROOM WHITE BACKGROUND PORATRAITS CHECKLIST

Follow these directions to get the perfect shot

- Cover the room with a pop-up backdrop
- Background flash at widest zoom, around 1/8 power
- Check that the blinkies show pure white around the head only. Blinking hair? Lower the power.
- Seat your model and maximise distance from the backdrop
- Pose first, then meter the key light
- One light at a time
- Key Light - Manual: f/5.6, ISO 100–200, sync speed. Meter at the chin to f/5.6, or use test shots
- A second background light, kept behind the model, for even coverage
- Grey edges? Move background flash further back; Add a second one, each side; Keep both behind the model, angled in

ADJUSTMENTS:

- Raise Whites until it clears the hair
- Brush near-white patches
- Brush corners hard (+3 exposure)
- Extend canvas with white in Lightroom/Photoshop

VIDEO TUTORIAL:
STUDIO QUALITY WHITE BACKGROUND PORTRAITS (NO STUDIO REQUIRED!)

by Adorama



Creating a clean, pure white background might look simple, but achieving it in camera takes careful planning, especially when working in a real living space. In this video, photographer and educator Gavin Hoey shows how to create studio quality white background portraits using limited space and minimal gear.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Shop Adorama for a powerhouse lineup of cameras, lenses, cinematography gear, studio lighting, tripods, pro audio, computers, printers, and every cutting-edge accessory you need to manifest your creative vision.

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FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER: RON QUICK



In this interview, we sit down with Lincoln, Nebraska-based photographer Ron Quick. Specializing in "nocturnal minimalism," Ron relentlessly pursues urban landscapes that feature strong architectural elements shrouded in the darkness of night. With award-winning work published in Focus on Nebraska and recognized by the International Photography Awards and Monochrome Awards, Ron shares the adventure, anticipation, and creative process behind his captivating black-and-white night photography.

FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER





Photographic Speciality/Style:

My preferred style of photography is what I like to call nocturnal minimalism. Specifically, dark urban images with a strong focal point of light shrouded in darkness.

Short Bio:

Living and working in Lincoln, Nebraska in the medical imaging field. Married almost 30 years to my wife Melissa we have a daughter Finnley and two Weimaraner dogs Hazel & Winnie. I have a Bachelors degree in Human Relations and a Masters degree in Management.

How did your love of photography begin, and what first drew you toward photographing urban scenes and architecture?

Photography comes from my mom Mary who was the family shutterbug growing up taking family photos. Followed in her footsteps with having a camera at a young age especially on scouting trips and vacations. At this point my photography was solely just for documenting memories. During my undergraduate degree I enrolled in a 9 week introductory course into digital photography just for extra credits. By the third week I knew I had found my artistic outlet.

Every day for over a year I did nothing after work but walked the sidestreets of downtown Lincoln exploring most of its parking garages and alleys capturing everything that looked remotely interesting. I migrated instantly to architectural patterns, textures, shapes, and colors. Shooting on average 200 to 300 images a day with a Canon 50D/18-200 lens kit and several worn out memory cards.

Urban scenes and architecture were an easy choice because I had to drive through downtown Lincoln and the University of Nebraska campus during my daily commute home. It gave me an endless canvas of challenges to photograph without leaving town. I also believe it was critical in developing an eye for seeing things that most people just don't notice. Specifically, photographing the same alley, building, or parking garage over and over forced me to work harder in extracting something new from the same scenes.



FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER





Your work has a very distinctive black-and-white, night-time feel. What is it about monochrome and shooting after dark that you enjoy?

Many things go into my love of night photography. The adventure and adrenalin of the hunt when I leave the comfort of home to travel into some strange dark scene. The payoff is the adrenalin and euphoria when finding an ideal object or scene. Night photography is a very tranquil time that recharges me artistically. Most nights I'm shooting in monochrome about 95% of the time. If an object or scene with vibrant colors presents itself I will certainly switch over and capture in color.

For me color can distract from an object or a scene's details by overshadowing the dark vibe of the composition. I immensely enjoy creating an image in b/w that conveys something from deep space or perhaps a deserted road by allowing the viewer to hear the silence of isolation. By doing so, I'm wanting my images to have a sense of unease that monochrome does so well like an old black and white horror movie. Unfortunately, for color it contradicts that feeling by giving warmth and reassurance.

Much of your photography is rooted in Nebraska city life. Where does your inspiration come from when revisiting urban spaces that may feel familiar to you?

Many of my images are inspired from simply noticing an interesting building or structure during the day. I'll then use Google Earth to scout the scene in satellite/street view in order to determine if there is proper illumination of the scene such as a nearby street light. During these night excursions I'll try and have three or so targets in mind. Generally, another scene will present itself by chance as a drive down an unfamiliar road, town, or through industrial park. My photographic inspiration comes from the duality of having two Nebraska city lives. One that I work and live in by day the other that presents itself during the night into a vaguely familiar alternate universe of possibilities.


PANAMA-HUTO
Firestone
TIRES

When you arrive at a location, what are the main things you look for before making an image — light, lines, atmosphere, symmetry, or something else?

At night my first step is being aware of my surroundings for safety as well as a last minute gear and camera check. Approaching the scene I will go for the shot I think will make the biggest impact. After that I generally work my way out and then back in while bracketing the entire time. In addition, depending on the scene I will adjust up or down on the tripod for a high or low angle. Ultimately, when I leave the scene I have captured all angles, perspectives, and exposures needed. Simply put, the more you do on the front end, the less that's required on the back end during editing.







You've said photography gives you the adventure of shooting, the anticipation of editing, and the reaction of viewers. Can you describe your typical creative process from exploration to finished image?

Adventure is always associated with my images in various forms. Sometimes adventure masquerades as an internal challenge in forcing myself to leave a perfectly comfortable home. To travel alone in the middle of the night down a lonely two lane highway heading to nowhere is a hybrid of anxiety induced fear, adrenalin, and self doubt. During the drive self doubt dissipates and a calm takes over as my internal check lists on what's needed to capture tonight's scene. As the subject of my shoot presents itself the experience, muscle memory, and camera knowledge become involuntary and I become hyper focused on getting the needed shots.

Editing is an adventure of anticipation. Regardless of the time upon returning I almost always edit my images the same night or early morning. Being impatient is mostly to blame for the need to edit quickly and for selfish reasons to relive the experience once more. Upon opening LightRoom I start to carefully choose one or two images that will have the most impact with the least editing required. During this process I never add but only remove unwanted elements. Such as hot pixels, peripheral items that distract from the main focal point, framing, and adjustment of darks and lights.. This editing process is very impactful because anticipation of the image's potential becomes a reality as it morphs through the stages of the editing into what I had envisioned.

Reaction of viewers via social media and photography sites such as 500px is at times rewarding. The validation from fellow photographers or viewers from around the world is at times humbling. Especially, when an image does well or is featured in one of 500px category sections as the top image. It shows there is appreciation for a cold, dark, minimalistic image from a remote, unforgotten part of Nebraska. These reactions show that you don't need the traditional subjects to create memorable art like colorful sunset's, mountainous landscapes, old barns, windmills, skyscrapers, or animals on safari. Creating photographic art can come from the most obscure places if you know where to look.





You've received recognition from several major competitions and have exhibited your work in a range of venues. What do you consider to be your greatest photographic achievement so far, and why?

Honestly, the biggest achievement I guess would be placing first place (amateur/architecture) category in the 12th annual Black & White Spider Awards back in 2017. It was the moment I realized that my photographic style was being noticed and appreciated. It's an image entitled "cape cod" and was captured almost by accident. The scene is a commercial structure with dormers reminiscent of a traditional cape cod house. I travelled an hour from home to capture a few rural scenes and a highly illuminated gas station in the middle of nowhere. After finishing the shoot I was walking back to my car. I just happened to look across the street at the last minute through some trees and immediately recognized the potential of the structure. The image represents "I've made it" and it shows that when you least expect it an image or opportunity will present itself.


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What's your favorite photograph that you've ever taken, and what makes that image especially meaningful to you?

An image entitled "canopy of light" on my profile site at 500px . Captured back in 2018 that shows a long covered walkway leading into a building from an open parking lot. It has long tubular light strands running the length of the canopy illuminating the darkness and ends at the double doors of the building. I've always been enamoured by this scene immensely as a beacon of long horizontal illumination. The image is a favorite for more than its aesthetics. Personally, it's metaphorical in many ways representing tenacity, failure, humility, and ultimately loss.

The tenacity part of the image is that I've captured it multiple times over the years trying to perfect it but ultimately never feeling satisfied with the results. The failure to capture it correctly to my own liking is a humbling aspect that I rarely encounter with my photography. Humility is not all scenes are going to work out and that possibly my skills do have limitations. The loss is that the canopy no longer exists and the opportunity to perfect the scene is lost forever. Overall, I enjoy this image because it's taught me to stay humble, always improve, some images will never work, and most importantly keep moving forward to the next image.

What long-term ambitions do you still have for your photography, either creatively, professionally, or personally?

I would like to expand geographically outside of southeast Nebraska more frequently. There are and always will be photographic opportunities here day or night. However, incorporating more photography road trip destinations urban or rural is a personal must do. Specifically, in regards to my photography I briefly enjoyed long exposures during the day using neutral density filters. Capturing motion blur with stationary objects in the frame has always been artistically engaging. In addition, expanding my current style of dark minimalist images could be achieved by stacking neutral density filters turning day into night.







What's inside your current kit bag, and what's the one piece of equipment you couldn't do without?

I pack light and shoot with a Canon 70D or 80D accompanied with a Tamron 10-24 wide angle lens mounted on a Manfrotto tripod. Essentials are microcloth, extra battery, and a bulb syringe for dust. Having multiple lenses to choose from I always migrate to the "old reliable" Tamron 10-24 lens that I trust the most. It comes down to reliability and it has proven itself many times to become the one lens that most of my night images are captured on.

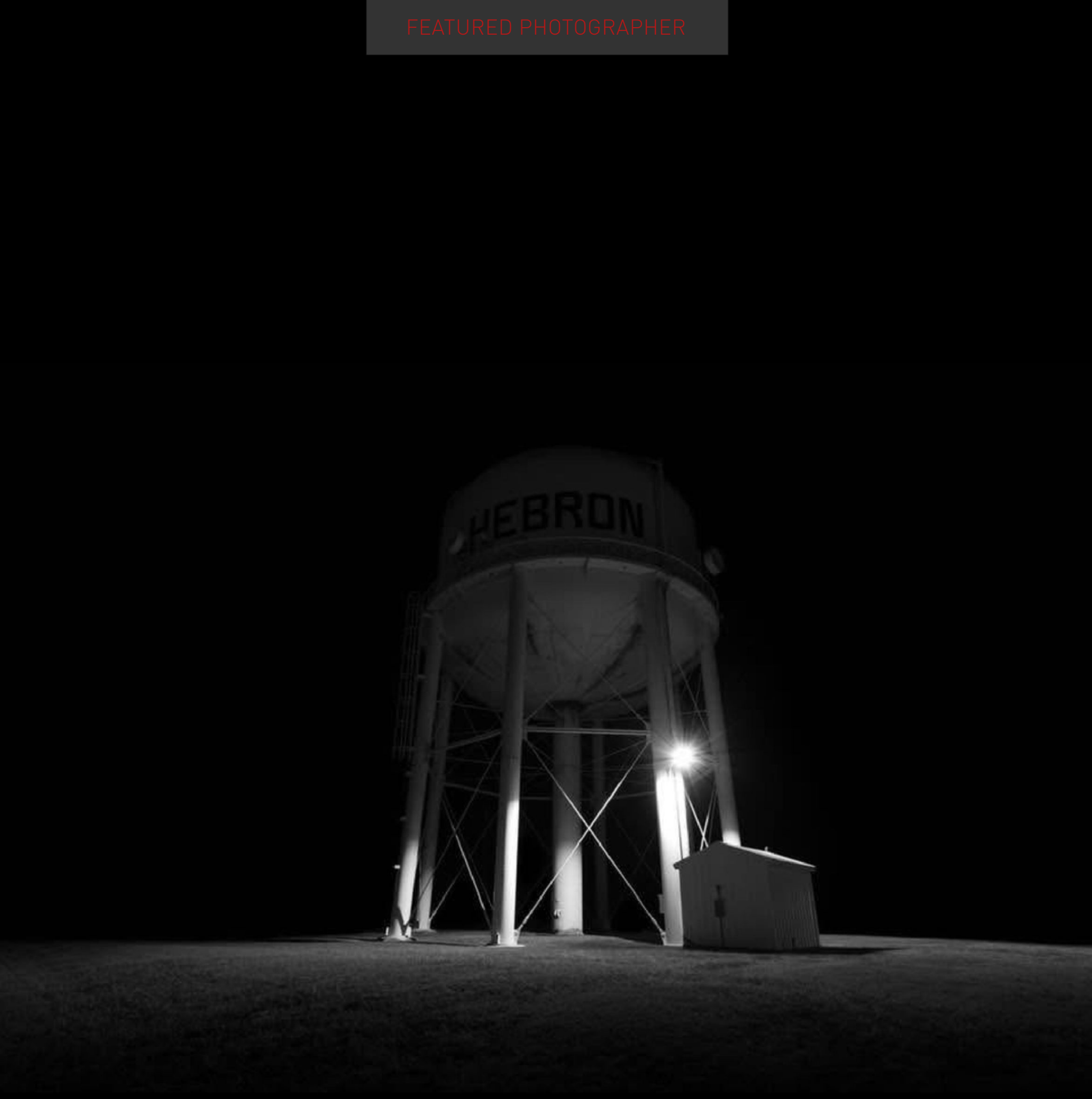
If you could build your dream kit bag with no limitations, what would it include?

Wow, the dream kit I guess would be a Leica M11 Monochrom Rangefinder camera with a Voigtlander Super Wide-Heliar 15mm lens.

What advice would you give to photographers who want to develop a distinctive personal style, especially in architecture or black-and-white photography?

Follow multiple international photographers with a wide range of styles. Constantly, browse photography sites looking at various categories. I think this opens up photographers to what's possible. Sometimes, we don't know what we don't know. Creating a style or an identifiable look is usually a hybrid of other genres with your own twist. Once you are onto a look and you firmly believe and most importantly enjoy doing, be prepared for a lonely path. Doing something that's perceived as avant-garde is a test of faith in yourself and your abilities as a photographer. Stay the course and keep refining your imagery. Finally, I'm a firm believer that one's success as a photographer is directly linked to how many times you have used the shutter button. Shoot now, shoot often, and keep shooting!




HEBRON

Follow more of Ron Quick's work on his website and 500px

MILKY WAY TIME-LAPSE

IN 4K | SILENT UNIVERSE

by JUAN CARLOS CORTINA



Experience the breathtaking beauty of Spain's night skies in "Silent Universe", a stunning 4K Milky Way time-lapse revealing hidden cosmic colors and the awe-inspiring silence of the universe.

BEHIND THE SCENES: JUAN CARLOS CORTINA'S "MILKY WAY TIME-LAPSE IN 4K | SILENT UNIVERSE"

Juan gives us a behind the scenes look on how he put it all together



A journey beneath some of the darkest skies in Spain.

Silent Universe is a cinematic Milky Way time-lapse created from hundreds of long-exposure photographs captured over several years in some of Spain's most spectacular landscapes.

Most of the sequences were captured with an astro-modified camera, revealing the rich hydrogen-alpha emission nebulae and subtle colours of the night sky that remain invisible to the naked eye.

TIMELAPSE



In several scenes, you may also notice a soft green glow across the sky. This is known as airglow—a natural atmospheric phenomenon continuously produced high above the Earth. Although usually invisible to our eyes, it becomes much more apparent in long-exposure images captured with highly sensitive cameras.

This film is not only about astrophotography.

It is about silence.

About time.

About the smallness of humanity beneath an infinite universe.

Every sequence was photographed and processed individually with the aim of preserving the natural beauty of the night while revealing the hidden colours and structures of the Milky Way.

I hope you enjoy the journey.

LOCATIONS

- Canary Islands
- Mainland Spain

CAMERA

Nikon D750 (primarily astro-modified)

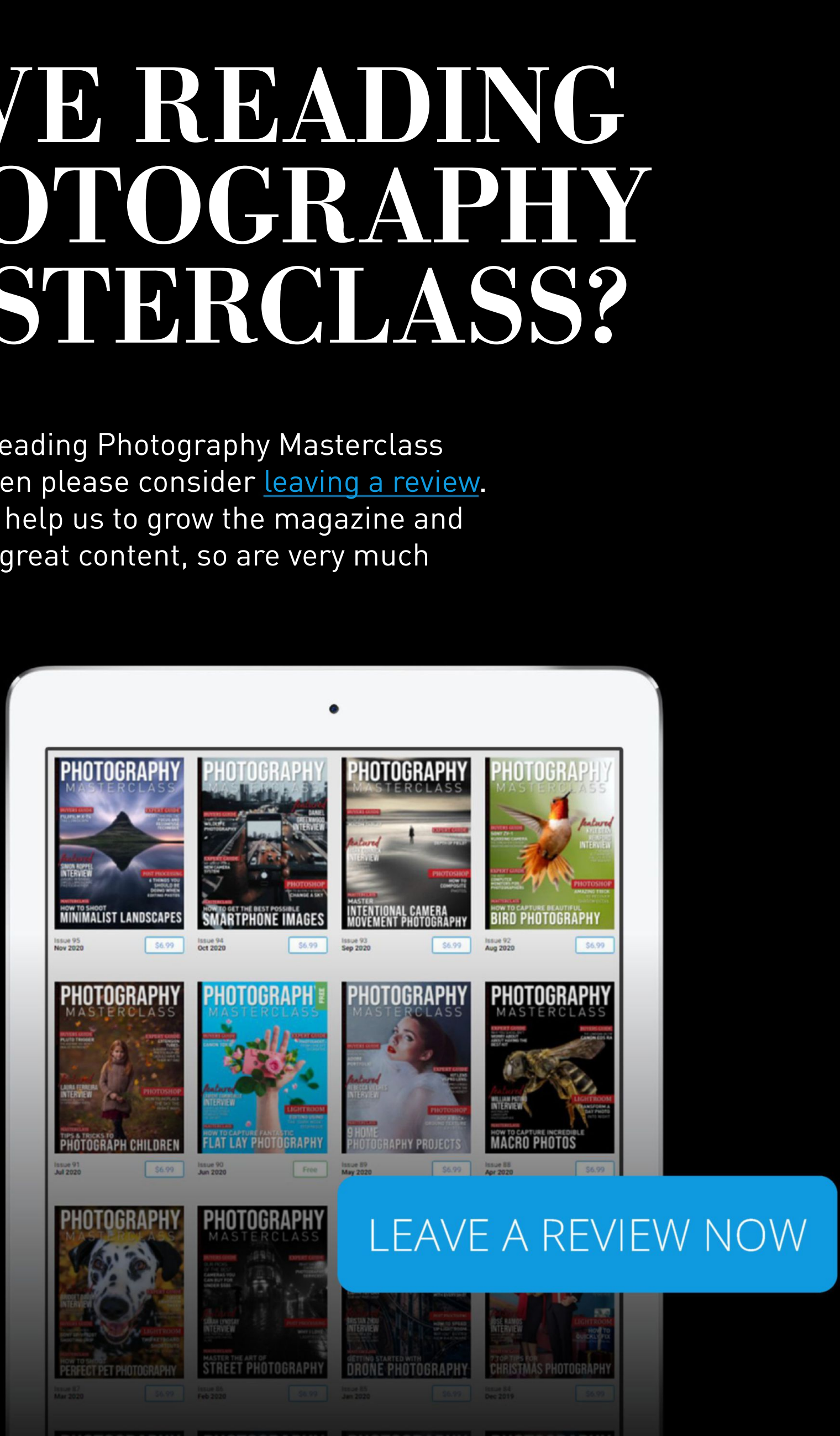
RESOLUTION

4K Ultra HD

Follow more from Juan Carlos Cortina's work on his website, Facebook and Instagram

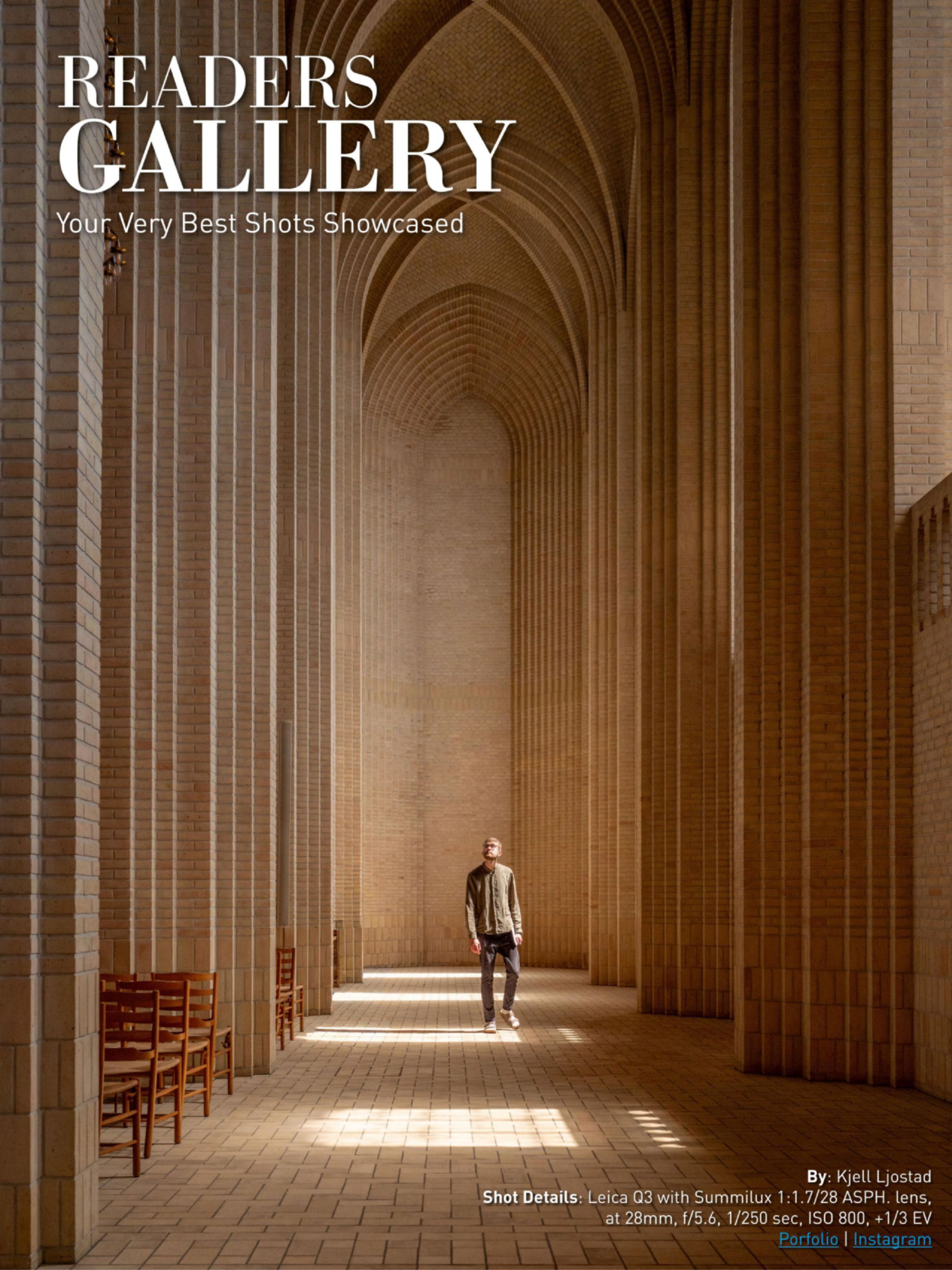
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READERS GALLERY

Your Very Best Shots Showcased



By: Kjell Ljostad
Shot Details: Leica Q3 with Summilux 1:1.7/28 ASPH. lens, at 28mm, f/5.6, 1/250 sec, ISO 800, +1/3 EV
Porfolio | Instagram



By: Alan Mason
Shot Details: Nikon D5600, at 600mm, f/16, 1.3 sec, ISO 6400, +2.3 EV
Facebook | Portfolio



By: Kjell Ljostad
Shot Details: Leica Q3 with Summilux 1:1.7/28 ASPH. lens, at 28mm, f/8, 1/1000 sec, ISO 100, +1/3 EV
Porfolio | Instagram



By: Erich Wurgler
Shot Details: Sony RX 100 III with 24-70mm F1.8-2.8 lens, at 20.25mm, f/2.8, 1/60 sec, ISO 500
Portfolio | Instagram



By: Kjell Ljostad
Shot Details: Sony aR IV with E 28-200mm F2.8-5.6 A071 lens, at 28mm, f/8, 1/1000 sec, ISO 100
Porfolio | Instagram



By: Kjell Ljostad
Shot Details: Leica Q3 with Summilux 1:1.7/28 ASPH. lens, at 28mm, f/8, 1/500 sec, ISO 100, +1/3 EV
Porfolio | Instagram



By: Tom Arnhold
Shot Details: No EXIF
Instagram | Website



By: Piotr Jeczen
Shot Details: Canon EOS 5D Mark II at 35mm, f/5.6, 1/250 sec, ISO 100, 0 EV
Instagram | Portfolio

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FIND OUT MORE

THE LOWDOWN ON SIGMA 85MM F/1.2 DG ART LENS

By Ryan Sitzman



Discover whether the Sigma 85mm f/1.2 DG Art Lens with its dreamy background blur, sharp results and surprisingly compact build, deserves a place in your camera bag

If you're like me, then you've long been on the lookout for a camera lens that can do it all. I want a well-built camera lens that focuses quickly and provides tack-sharp images, and it's got to be ultra-light and compact so that I can fit it into my pocket. It also needs to be an ultra-wide-angle prime lens that somehow contradictorily also zooms out to 500mm.



It should work as a Bluetooth-enabled hotspot so it can send me reminders when friends and family members have birthdays, and it needs to slice and dice veggies, while also making julienne fries. And really, is it too much to ask for it to be self-cleaning too? Finally—and here's the most important part—it needs to be dirt cheap

As you can probably imagine, my search for this imaginary Do-It-All Dream Lens has come up short so far, and I have yet to find any lens that can even help with the most rudimentary vegetable prep work. Alas, my search shall go on, but in the meantime, I suppose we can take some comfort in the fact that camera manufacturers continue to release loads of new lenses that are impressive in different ways.

Occasionally, a new lens will come on the market that actually does attempt to be a jack of all trades, but more frequently, we see lenses that are for ultra-specific uses, and which excel in one main area. The new Sigma 85mm f/1.2 lens is one of those specialist lenses.

The Sigma 85mm lens joins two f/1.2 lenses that Sigma has already released, the 35mm and the 50mm. If you're keeping score at home, you may have noticed that Sigma now makes two more f/1.2 lenses than Sony itself, which has only released a 50mm f/1.2 lens.

The Sony lens is fantastic and widely beloved, but it's also around $1,000 more than the Sigma 50mm counterpart.

That's not to say that one is better than the other, but I do find it interesting to see how assertively Sigma seems to be getting in on Sony's action. And when it comes to 85mm f/1.2 lenses for Sony's full-frame E-mount cameras, unless you're willing to roll the dice with a cheaper lens from a relatively unknown brand, then Sigma is the only option for you anyway.

With that context in mind, it might initially sound less impressive when I say that this Sigma lens is the smallest, lightest 85mm f/1.2 lens on the market. However, that stat also includes lenses for Canon and Nikon.

It's worth noting here that in addition to the version that is compatible with Sony E-mount cameras, Sigma also makes a version of this 85mm f/1.2 lens that is compatible with the L-mount used by Panasonic and Lumix.

There are likely many more Sony bodies on the market than there are Panasonic ones, but it's good that there's another option for those who want it. Regardless of the version, the Sigma 85mm weighs around 2 pounds (905 grams), around a half-pound lighter than the Canon and Nikon equivalents, and it's also significantly shorter than those competitors. That might not sound like a big deal, but when you have to schlepp around a gear bag all day, then every inch and ounce can make a noticeable difference over time, especially when you use multiple lenses.





Photo by: Doan Quang

Although the Sigma comes in a more compact package, it's still built robustly, and its high-quality materials give it enough heft and gravitas so that you won't think you're monkeying around with a plastic lens. Sigma states that the lens is resistant to dust and splashes, but as usual in cases like this, it's probably best not to intentionally spill a beer on it or drop it in the sand just to test the manufacturer's claims.

Because this is "just" a lens, there aren't too many other notable features on the inside or the outside. As can be expected, it has a switch that toggles between manual focus and autofocus, a second switch that provides the option to lock the aperture ring in place, and another switch that allows users select if they want the aperture ring to make a "click" or not.

One notable switch and feature that's missing from the Sigma 85mm is optical stabilization. Presumably Sigma left that out to keep down the cost, weight, and dimensions of the lens. It may not be a major issue if you plan on using the lens with a camera body that has in-body image stabilization, or if you're using it for work that inherently doesn't involve moving or jostling the camera as much, but it's something to be aware of.

In terms of performance, the Sigma's quick and precise autofocusing motor catches most shots in clear focus, even when subjects are moving, and it also excels with video shoots.

It has a "floating focus" system that uses linear actuators, which are two things that I'm man enough to admit that I don't really understand. But I do understand that their purpose is to ensure smooth autofocus, and to minimize focus "breathing," which is the effect of slight movements when focus points shift between different distances in the frame. Sounds good to me!

Who is this Sigma lens for? The fixed focal length of 85mm obviously limits the lens in some ways. It's not very suitable for macro photography, for example, and it won't be too helpful if you need to zoom in on subjects that are very far away.

If you're looking for an extremely shallow depth of field, though, then the f/1.2 aperture could open up some cool possibilities. Using this maximum aperture will almost always blur the background to the extreme. That may be a pleasing effect, but it could also remove subtle context. If you shoot the lens at a less extreme aperture, then it becomes more useful for sports photography and low-light photography, and it can help you make portraits with a unique look.

Even if your photography doesn't fit into those niches, you could still find compelling reasons to pick up the Sigma 85mm f/1.2. If you're choosing between this lens for a Sony camera, or a similar 85mm f/1.2 equivalent for a Canon or Nikon body, then getting the Sigma lens is a no-brainer. At just under $1,600, the Sigma is around half the cost of the Canon and Nikon lenses.



However, I also recognize that most people, even professional photographers, don't bounce between camera brands every day. If you have a camera that's compatible with this Sigma lens, then it's certainly worth considering. If you already have a good zoom lens and a workhorse 50mm or 35mm prime lens, then this 85mm f/1.2 lens could be a great addition to your gear bag as a second or third lens. It's a powerful, high-quality tool that can help you make excellent pictures, especially if you're planning on using it with a wide-open aperture. It's not necessarily the most well-rounded lens out there, but what it does do, it does quite well.

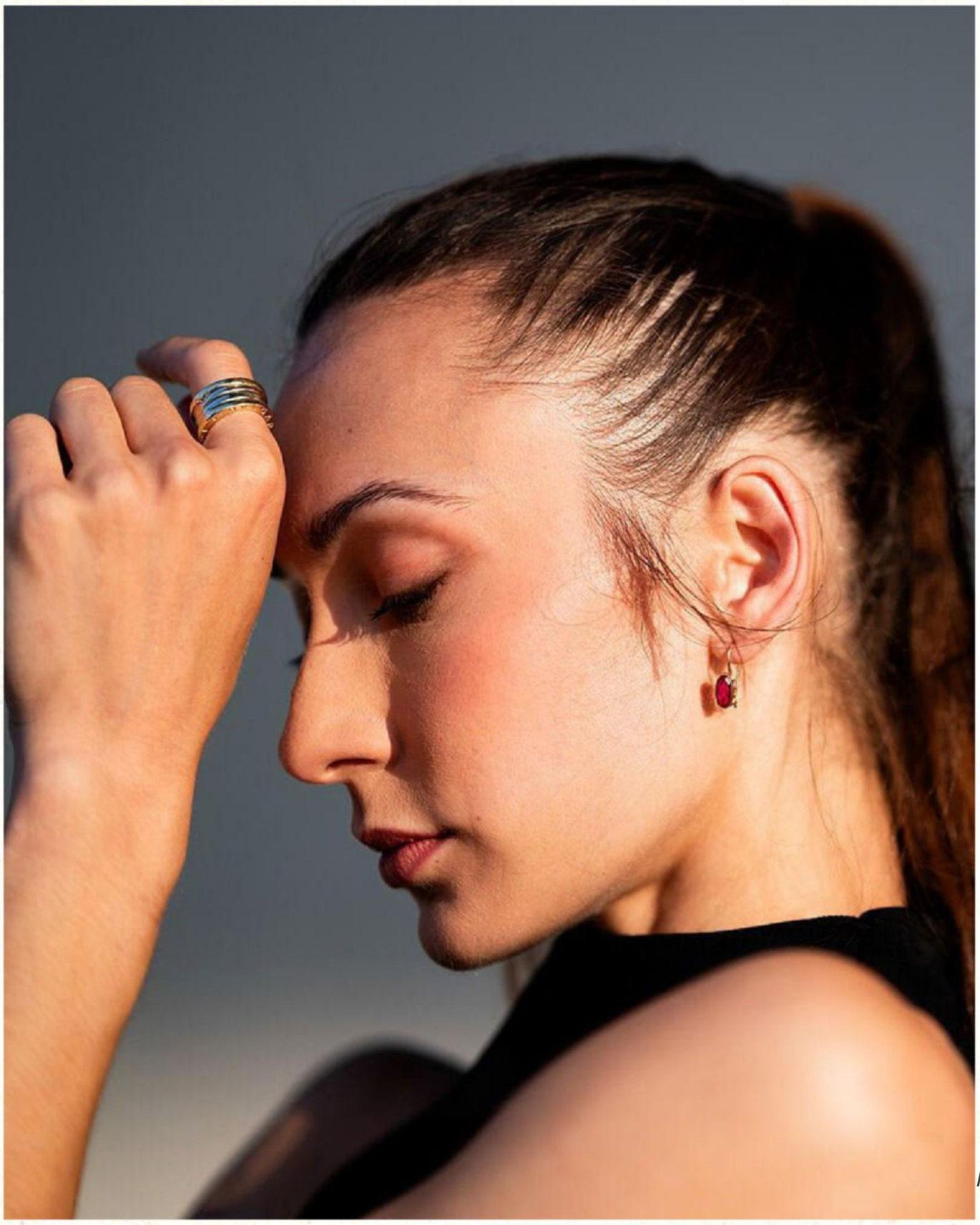


Photo by: Tony Noel

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Ryan Sitzman splits his time between the coffee fields of Costa Rica and the mountains of Colorado. You can find him on one of his several websites.

VIDEO

TOO MUCH BOKEH?
THIS 85MM F/1.2 IS INSANE

by CHELSEA MERCADO



Sigma just released the new 85mm f/1.2 and it's the smallest 85mm f/1.2 on the market! Chelsea Mercado tests the lens for sharpness, speed, usability, and bokeh-ness. See real world tests, test charts, a walking auto-focus test, and more.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Chelsea and Tony Northrup are photographers based in Connecticut. They are the creators of the top-rated photography book, "Tony Northrup's DSLR Book: How to Create Stunning Digital Photography" which features over nine hours of video training and free lifetime updates. To see more of their tutorials and photos you can follow them on Facebook and YouTube

VIDEO:
SIGMA 85MM F1.2 DG ART:
SIGMA'S BRIGHTEST LENS JUST GOT PORTABLE

by ADORAMA



Sigma just dropped the 85mm F1.2 DG Art, and it's doing something you don't usually see at this aperture: staying compact and lightweight without cutting corners on rendering power. We put it in the hands of Samuel Bouret to see how it performs with fashion portraits and video, though it's just as suited for high-end wedding work, headshots, and commercial photography.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Shop Adorama for a powerhouse lineup of cameras, lenses, cinematography gear, studio lighting, tripods, pro audio, computers, printers, and every cutting-edge accessory you need to manifest your creative vision.

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