



# STYLE & VISION

By Richard Young and Ken Wright



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*“We are passionate about New Zealand and its stunning landscapes and wildlife. We pride ourselves on our ability to offer unique experiences, to inform and inspire.”*

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



## RICHARD YOUNG

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Both Ken and Richard are professional photographers with years of experience producing fine-art prints. They have both managed art galleries in the past, and both regularly exhibit and sell their photography in galleries. Richard has worked with Lightroom throughout his career, while Ken—as both professional photographer and graphic designer—has 25 years' experience in Photoshop. They have dedicated more than five years each to teaching photography, and this course is the culmination of their years of in-field experience and teaching. Through their expert guidance, this course will help you refine your portfolio down to twelve strong images that best showcase your style.



## INTRODUCTION - STYLE & VISION

This book on Style and Vision will help you on a journey of discovery behind personal and expressive photography.

It will not lead you straight to a defined style or vision; that will take time and inspiration. It will, however, get you thinking about your photography in a way that has meaning to yourself. This is the goal: to begin using your work as a form of personal expression.

We have both provided examples of our work, illustrating how it has been shaped by our personal style and vision. Keep in mind that this is a very subjective realm: there are no right or wrong answers. Above all, we encourage you to create a body of work that is personal to you; don't let the work and views of others—including ours!— influence this process.

Enjoy your journey and have fun!

Richard & Ken

A serene landscape featuring a sunset or sunrise over a calm ocean. The sky transitions from a warm orange at the horizon to a pale yellow at the top. A large, dark, horizontal cloud is positioned in the middle of the sky, with smaller, wispy clouds scattered around it. The ocean is a deep blue, meeting the horizon line.

CHAPTER 1

# DISCOVERING STYLE AND VISION

By Richard Young

# STYLE & VISION

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## DISCOVERING STYLE AND VISION

By Richard Young

Achieving competence in photography is easy enough; with some basic technical understanding, almost anybody can create a good photograph. In the age of digital photography and smartphones, this is truer than ever. However, this ease of accessibility also makes photography one of the most difficult art forms in terms of developing a signature style and clear personal vision.

Style and vision cannot be simply taught by reading a book. They are personal: reflections of our unique expression of the world and how we wish to convey this to the viewer. Copying a favourite photographer's style—using the same locations and the same approach—does not constitute a personal vision. While we can, of course, learn from the way others approach image-making, our style must emerge from our own creativity.

Creating an original body of work—one that is consistent with one's own vision and stands out from that of other photographers—is the most difficult challenge facing any photographer. Style and vision do not develop overnight, and they also may not fully develop during the course of working through this book.



*“How do we find our unique expression of the world, and how can we convey this to the viewer?”*

Great inspiration often follows patience and perseverance in any given practice. With that in mind, the following chapters are designed to give you an understanding of the defining elements of style, along with the tools you'll need to unlock your vision. Through this workflow, we will help you evaluate your work, refine a collection of images, and assess your current approach to photography. This process will—and should!—make you question your art and the expression behind it. It will likely leave you with more questions about your work than answers; if it simply gave you the answers, the style and vision would not be yours!

Both Ken and I are primarily landscape photographers, so we have approached the course from this perspective. However, the tools we offer can be utilised for any genre of photography, and we encourage you to work with the subject you are most passionate

about. Working with a subject you understand—one that excites you—will lead to work that is most true to your view of the world. This is what we call your vision.

To be a great visual storyteller, you must know your subject. You may decide the photography you enjoy most is wildlife, street, or wedding photography. Perhaps you're thinking of a location from your past, a story you have to tell, or a subject you have great knowledge about. Just be careful not to let outside influences guide your journey; be true to yourself and your vision, and let this decide your path. Above all, remember one thing: photography should be fun! Why spend time (and money!) pursuing this passion if you are not enjoying yourself? Our hope is that this book, and the subsequent course modules, will help you experience this joy as you take one step further in your journey as a photographer.



# APPROACH THE INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTS



*“Our vision will determine our style, and we will use style to express our vision.”*

Before we can approach the individual subjects of **style** and **vision**, we must understand what differentiates the two. What is the difference between **style** and **vision**?

- **Vision** refers to how we see the world and the message we wish to express through all our images.
- **Style** emerges from the choices we make or the tools we use to express our vision, giving our work consistency when viewed as a collection.

To further explain style and vision, let's look at two example images: one by Ken and one by myself. The difference between style and vision is highlighted in each image.

I shot the top image in an 8x10 ratio, with a centrally placed subject and horizon as part of my **Style**, to express a **Vision** of a balance within the natural world. Ken shot the lower image with a wide angle lens close to the foreground subject as his shooting **Style**, to offer **Vision** that the viewer should feel like they are walking straight into the scene.



## LEARN FROM THE MASTERS

*“The best way to experience and study the work of a photographer or artist is by viewing them in a book, exhibition, or portfolio of prints.*”

Studying the work of great artists is a brilliant way to understand style and vision. Examining a collection of work from one photographer (or any artist) can shed tremendous insight into how they unite their body of work through simple elements. Studying other artists can also lead to great inspiration; without copying, you can use ideas from various artists as a tool to develop your own style and vision.

The best way to study the work of an artist is by viewing them in a book, exhibition, or portfolio of prints. These collections of work have been carefully selected with the help of editors and curators, and presented in a manner true to the artist's vision.

Today, the internet is often used as a source of inspiration and research. There are many helpful resources online—but in the abundance of content, there are also many poor-quality resources cluttering the search. Be very careful when using the internet to view the work of others. We live in a digital world, and while an ebook (like this one!) might not be the same as a printed copy, it has still gone through an editing process.

I want to [share a link](#) that was recently sent to me: a collection of videos featuring photography masters discussing their work. Listening to a master can provide great inspiration; some of these very photographers, along with many others, have been an inspiration to me personally.



## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

*“Because of social media, some photographers’ portfolios become more of a stamp collection of iconic locations than a body of work with style and vision.”*

Social media has had a large (mainly negative) impact in the individuality of photographers’ work today, especially in landscape photography. For many, it seems the goal is not to create an image with personal meaning, but to create the one that will receive the highest number of “likes” on social media, and this is the measure of its success.

A personal image that expresses our vision might well receive little attention on social media; it may not deliver the instant ‘wow’ factor of the sweeping vista everyone else is posting. Craving that magnificent scene and the recognition that comes with its capture, some photographers allow their portfolios to become little more than a stamp collection of iconic locations rather than a body of work with style and vision. Simply posting images to impress others and get the most ‘likes’ is like trying to make yourself happy by buying material items. For a time, it may feel good, but it will not lead to lasting happiness.

Of course, there are many benefits to social media, and it has certainly helped to raise the popularity of photography as a hobby over recent years—but use it carefully. It is far from the best place to view photographers’ work as a collective body, nor is it the best place to showcase your own style and vision. For this purpose, books, exhibitions, and fine art prints are the better mediums to pursue.



## THE IMPACT OF ICONIC LOCATIONS

*“Simply going somewhere and capturing a technically-perfect image to represent it is not enough.”*

### HOW DO LOCATIONS AFFECT OUR STYLE AND VISION?

When photographers visit well-known locations, their goal is often to capture the perfect shot of an iconic view. They're afraid to return without it. However, a true artist will be more afraid to return without an image expressing their personal vision, and the urge to capture popular scenes can be little more than a distraction. This raises the question: should we be photographing in famous locations if we really wish to develop a unique body of work?

### SHOOTING ICONIC LANDSCAPES

The popularity of landscape photography, as well as the sharing of images on social media, affects both where we shoot and how we capture such images. We may be envisioning the image we want before we even arrive. For a clear example of this, you only have to think about “That Tree” on the shores of Lake Wanaka here in New Zealand.

The widespread nature of such images has opened up a very real challenge for the landscape photographer. If we choose to visit iconic locations, how can we capture photographs that carry our own style or interpretation of these landscapes?

Simply going there and capturing a technically-perfect image to represent it is not enough—and besides, it has already been done by so many before us. When we make a photograph, we want it to be about our experience, not just about the place.

This goal can be tricky in frequently-photographed landscapes; if you're not careful, there will be little in your image to make it stand out from all the others. I don't mean to put you off with this reality, but rather, to ready you for a good challenge.

**“With enough creativity, there will always be an opportunity for your style and vision to shine.”**

With enough creativity, there will always be an opportunity for your style and vision to shine. Where others may end up with the exact same images as each other, strive to tell your own unique story.



# DISCOVERING STYLE AND VISION

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

- 📌 **Create an original body of work**—one that is consistent with your vision and stands out from that of other photographers.
- 📌 **Style and vision are personal**—reflections of our unique expression of the world and how we wish to convey this to the viewer.
- 📌 **Vision is the way we see the world**—the message we wish to express through all our images.
- 📌 **Style emerges from the tactical choices we make**—the decisions and tools we use to express our vision, giving our work consistency when viewed as a collection.
- 📌 **Style and vision do not develop overnight**—they will take time, and may continue to evolve over a lifetime.
- 📌 **Study the work of great artists**—it will help you understand style and vision.
- 📌 **Photography is one of the most difficult art forms**—it poses unique challenges for developing a signature style and clear personal vision.
- 📌 **Be a great visual storyteller**—get to know your subject.
- 📌 **Don't use social media to evaluate your work**—on these platforms, a personal image that expresses vision may not receive the attention it deserves.
- 📌 **Capture iconic locations in fresh ways**—create photographs that carry your own style or interpretation of these landscapes.
- 📌 **Photography should be fun**—as should finding your style and vision.



CHAPTER 2

# STYLE

By Richard Young

# STYLE & VISION

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## STYLE

By Richard Young

Keeping consistency of style throughout all stages of work—capture, selection and processing—will give your photography a signature look. Developing this style is not an easy task for any type of photographer; however, as explained earlier, landscape photography proves particularly challenging in this respect.

A photographer's style should not be static. It should evolve as you grow as a photographer and as a person, your expression informed by new technical expertise and inspiration. While establishing your own style is important, it is equally important to remain open to new ways of expressing yourself. Without experimentation, there can be no growth. There is so much joy to be found in the learning and mastering of new equipment and techniques—and along the way, you may discover a strategy to incorporate into your style, or a new tool to help express your vision.



*“Style is a product of the choices we make or the tools we use to express our vision. It gives our work consistency when viewed together as a collection.”*



## STYLE OR A STYLISTIC LOOK?

Some photographers set out to define their work through the heavy use of a single tactic or element. This is a lazy approach, resulting in a ‘stylistic look’ rather than a polished style. While a stylistic look clearly demonstrates that all images were created by the same hand, it lacks depth and feels more imposed than a carefully-curated style. Style is created through combining a number of elements to achieve consistency within your work. Each element should be part of a unified whole rather than attempting to pass itself off as style on its own. In assessing your own stylistic choices, ask yourself this: if you took away a particular element, would there be anything left to define your style?

**Style** is created through a cohesive and measured manner of creating, doing, or presenting your work.

**A stylistic look** is created through the excessive preoccupation with one choice to produce a particular look: this could be a technique or way of processing your work. For example, shooting only in HDR will give your images a strong stylistic look—but unless you make further stylistic choices to unify them, they will lack any real polished style, and this will be obvious to your viewers.

# WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO STYLE?

There are many elements that make up a photographer's style. Some elements will be consistent across all images, while others may be used selectively; we don't want each image to look exactly the same. Throughout the process of creating a photograph, we must view it through multiple lenses: as an individual piece in its own regard, as a part of its collection, and as an expression of our overall vision. Although the choices we make for an individual photograph may not carry over to the others, we must take care that these choices do not subtract from what we are trying to achieve within the collection or from our overall style.

The list below highlights the most important elements to consider in our stylistic choices. Over the following pages, we'll explore each element and its variables in greater depth; this will enable you to make conscious and informed choices when cultivating your own style.

Under each topic, four variables are detailed. This is not meant as a decisive list, as there are, of course, many variables to each element.

## ELEMENTS OF PHOTOGRAPHIC STYLE

- Equipment
- Technique
- Perspective
- Composition
- Quality of Light
- Colour and Tonality
- Black & White
- Post-Processing
- Final Presentation
- Subject and Location





*“When it comes to style, sometimes less is more: limitations can help define both our approach and our work.”*

## CAMERA EQUIPMENT

Your choice of camera equipment will impact your style. Many photographers carry a choice of cameras and lenses for the sake of versatility, but this increases the number of variables, which can be a distraction and hinder your attempts to create a style. Limiting yourself to one or two single focal-length lenses will force a more deliberate creative approach to the shoot and will establish unity in the resultant images. Narrowing your range of equipment may sound like a disadvantage, but you will find that limiting your options in this way makes it easier to achieve stylistic consistency.

### EQUIPMENT CHOICES THAT AFFECT STYLE

- Limitations in equipment
- Type of camera and aspect ratio of its sensor
- Lens: focal length and effect on perspective
- Use of filters to control and balance out the light



## TECHNIQUES

Modern digital photography has opened up many new techniques and ways to capture photographs. Some of these are solely 'in-camera', and others are part of the post-production process. The measured use of specific techniques can help to create a signature look, whereas the gratuitous use of too many techniques can lead to inconsistency in the aesthetic of our work.

### EXAMPLES OF TECHNIQUES

- Focus Stacking
- Long Exposure Photography
- HDR (High Dynamic Range)
- ICM (Intentional Camera Movement)

*“Techniques like Long Exposure Photography can create a signature look and allow us to capture our subject in an unique way.”*



## PERSPECTIVE

Our approach to capturing a subject and its surroundings is a crucial aspect of our storytelling. What is this photography really about? How much weight or space do we give to our subject? How do we work to include or exclude other elements of the environment? The positioning of our subject matter within the lens can be a powerful way to create consistency of style.

### PERSPECTIVE TO A SUBJECT

- Wide-angle or inner details
- Foreground emphasis
- Background perspective
- Viewpoint or height

*"The perspective with which we approach a landscape will be a core part of our style, guided by our vision."*



## COMPOSITION

Some artists believe the composition of an image should adhere strictly to rules, such as the ubiquitous 'rule of thirds'. Such ideas can be a helpful guide, but don't be afraid to let your compositional choices be led by your vision and the story you wish to tell. Choose what you do and don't want in your image; how you position content within the frame will affect the story that is told. Composition can contribute to our overall style if we make specific and consistent choices. Working to a set aspect ratio is a good start, ensuring uniformity among images displayed as a collection.

### HOW COMPOSITION CAN ADD TO OUR STYLE

- Position of subjects within the frame
- Position of the horizon line
- Use of leading lines
- Working to a set aspect ratio

*“Placement of subject matter within the frame and choice of aspect ratio can create consistency in our work.”*



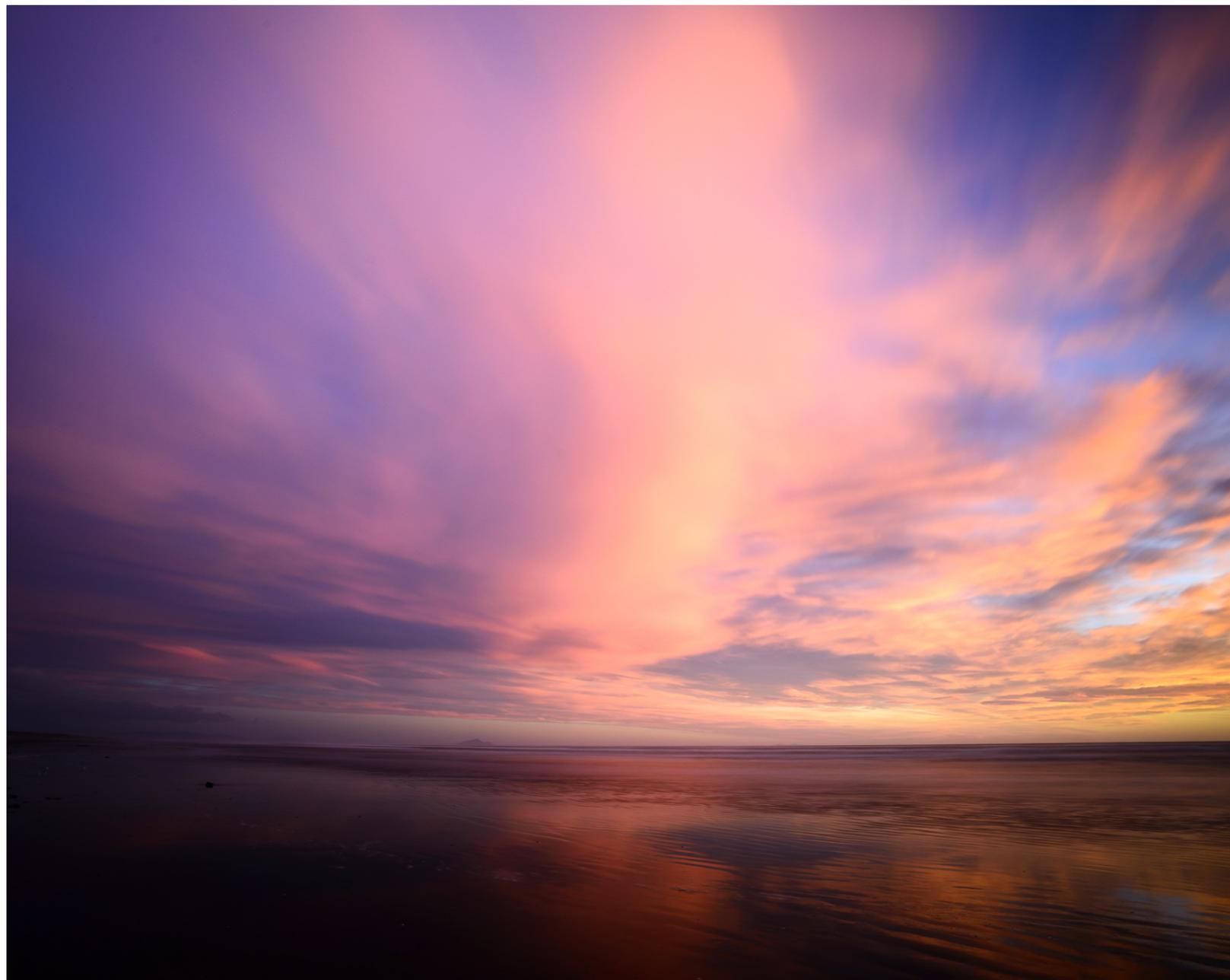
*“Light is a defining element in all photographs; the light we shoot in will, therefore, help define our style.”*

## QUALITY OF LIGHT

The specific quality of light that we prefer shooting in, or that is complementary to our approach to image-making, can create uniformity within our work. Perhaps our images are best suited to being captured under the stark brightness of a midday sun, or maybe the softer light of an overcast day brings out the subtleties we want to showcase. We might choose to highlight landscape shadows that are most dramatic at sunrise/sunset, or we might seek to work with moody lighting like that of an approaching storm to bring energy into our art.

### QUALITY OF LIGHT

- Mood and drama created by lighting
- How lighting affects contrast and tone
- Working at night or in low light
- Colours of sunrise/sunset



## COLOUR OR TONALITY

How do we incorporate colour? Do we seek the eye-catching effect of intense saturation or the subtlety of muted hues? Colour can unite images powerfully when we make consistent choices in regards to hue and level of saturation. Less obvious but equally striking in effect is our use of tonality. Tonal range refers to the range and distribution of values—light and dark—and the transitions between them. Tonal range is an important consideration—like colour, the use of tone in an image can create a mood, whether through striking contrasts or subtle variations.

### USE OF COLOUR OR TONALITY

- Saturation or the subtlety of colour
- Shooting high- or low-key images
- Tonal distribution and balance
- Tonal transitions

*“Our response to colour and tone affects so many other elements, from the way we compose to the light we chase.”*



## BLACK & WHITE

While colour can pack a powerful punch, it can also be an unhelpful distraction from qualities of an image that may be more important, depending on the photographer's vision. One advantage of shooting in B&W is that it encourages the viewer to pay more attention to tonality and texture. Additionally, shooting in B&W can be an effective means of unifying images that don't fit well together in their original colour representations.

### USE OF BLACK & WHITE

- Uniformity of presentation
- Removes distractions of colour
- Offers more focus on tonality
- Gives more attention to texture

*“Working in B&W offers more than just a stylistic look: it will change how you work with tones, the light you look for, and the subjects you shoot.”*



## PROCESSING

*“Post-processing can enhance our response to tone and colour. It offers not just stylistic choices, but the means to refine other elements.”*

As with the other elements of style, our methods of processing have immense impact on the overall look of our work. Consistency in post-processing can contribute to a stylistic look. Inconsistency during this stage will become an issue when the images are brought together as a set; while they may look fantastic individually, they will not appear to belong together. As well offering many ways to create a signature look, post-processing gives photographers some flexibility to edit many of the other style elements we have already covered. In doing so, remember that the more we can get right during the shoot itself, the better our images will turn out. Post-processing is no substitute for quality shooting.

### WAYS WE CAN USE POST-PROCESSING

- Subtle processing to create natural-looking images
- Strong processing to create a stylistic look
- Adjustments to colour, saturation, sharpness, etc.
- Adjustments to image contrast & tonal relationships



## FINAL PRESENTATION

*“The way we plan to present a finished piece of work will affect the choices we make during its creation, and will shape the viewer experience.”*

How will the final product be presented? This is a question that is often, unfortunately, overlooked in the midst of the shooting process. Having a clear vision of the end presentation can guide your approach to other elements of style. Choosing how your work will be displayed also gives you one final means to express yourself. Bear in mind what limitations your work might face in its presentation format. How much impact is required in the display medium? Does this image need to grab someone's attention, as on social media? Or will the audience already be engaged with the work, viewing it in a book or as a print? What size will it be viewed at? Choices such as the type of printing paper will affect the end look and can also add consistency to a portfolio.

### FINAL PRESENTATION AND HOW IT AFFECTS OUR STYLE

- Display medium determines necessary impact and aspect ratio
- Size of final image determines composition and necessary level of detail
- Consider final style choices, for example, paper type and framing
- Consider limitations of the presentation format (e.g., the gamma and contrast of a paper type)

## SUBJECT AND LOCATION

*“A location can be influential in our style: while it should not be the only unifying aspect of your work, it can help to refine other stylistic choices.”*

As discussed above, no single stylistic element, however strong, is enough to define you as a photographer. This includes image content. Although you may be passionate about a particular subject or location, do not mistake your image content for personal shooting style.

A subject is **what** you photograph; a style is **how** you photograph. You can capture many different subjects using a single style, just as you can capture a single subject through many different styles. There's nothing wrong with sticking to the same subject matter time and time again; just take care that content is not the only unifying quality of your work.

This being said, in landscape photography, location is hugely influential in our style, as our shooting location informs many other choices we make along the way. Perhaps you live by the coast, focusing solely on beachside shoots: this will affect your approach to composition, possibly guiding you to use long exposure photography as a technique. Maybe you're drawn to the mountains and get your camera out most often during long hiking trips: this will limit the equipment you carry, and working in high places will be sure to change your approach to perspective. Whatever the case, we can use our photography as a means of capturing the places we visit and telling a story of these landscapes, and telling this story might lead us to refine other style choices within our work.

**Picking a subject does not equate to having a personal shooting style**

**A subject** is what you photograph; a **style** is how you photograph.

**You can capture many different subjects using a single style, just as you can capture a single subject through many different styles.**

# STYLE

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

- **Style is a product of the choices we make and the tools we use**—how we express our vision. It gives our work consistency when viewed together as a collection.
- **Keeping consistency of style throughout all stages of work**—capture, selection and processing—will give your photography a signature look.
- **A photographer's style should not be static**—it should evolve as you grow as a photographer and as a person, your expression informed by new technical expertise.
- **A stylistic look lacks the depth of a carefully-curated style**—it demonstrates that all images were created by the same hand, but it is not the same as a real, polished style, and this will be obvious to your viewers.
- **Picking a subject is not picking style**—a subject is what you photograph; a style is how you photograph. You can capture many different subjects using a single style, just as you can capture a single subject through many different styles.
- **Consistency in post-processing**—this can contribute to a stylistic look, as well as giving photographers the flexibility to edit many of the other style elements.



CHAPTER 3

# VISION

By Richard Young

# STYLE & VISION

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## VISION

By Richard Young

Our artistic vision is the message we strive to express through our photography. Between vision and style, vision is the more difficult concept to grasp, as it can not simply be broken down to a number of elements. Vision is also the more elusive of the two: we could consider it the “holy grail” of photography—a goal we continue to seek throughout our entire journey as a photographer.

Attempting to copy another artist’s vision will lead to weak and ingenuine work; your vision must come from within. Because it is a reflection of how you see the world, your vision will evolve naturally over time, shaped by your own personal growth and experience. This evolution often takes place alongside stylistic evolution, as we learn and adapt our approach to the image-making process to fit our changing vision.

In following your vision, be prepared for the possibility that your work may not always be understood or appreciated by your viewers. Photography that is very personal and full of meaning to the creator might not express that to the viewer, but this in no way equates to failure. It is all part of the artistic experience, as many famous artists throughout history would tell you. Going out of your comfort zone to experiment and express yourself is, in large part, what makes you an artist.



*“Vision is how we see the world and the message we wish to express through all our images.”*

For beginning photographers—those still experimenting with style and working to master the camera—developing an artistic vision can be a particularly daunting task. It's natural to be strongly influenced by the images of others during the early stages of your photography journey, but this makes it difficult to approach the subject with a truly open mind and express a personal vision. If you feel you are at this stage, don't rush yourself; continue to master the basics first. There will be plenty of time to build your vision once your artistic energies are freed up. After all, the process is a marathon, not a sprint.

Ultimately, developing your vision will give purpose to your image-making. It will present a goal you can constantly work towards. It will keep you engaged with your own photography. Your vision will help guide you to create works that are original and meaningful. Once it starts to unfold, your vision will also help you to define your style, as style is the voice through which your vision speaks. If you feel your vision is still a mystery, don't worry: many photographers feel the same, and finding your vision is more of a journey than a destination.





## THE VISION BEHIND THE SHOT

*“The art of storytelling with a single image. What message does it convey, and how does the viewer engage with it as a solo piece of art?”*

Thus far in speaking of vision, we have used the term to refer to an artist’s overall message. As photographers, we strive to remain true to this overarching vision in all our work, but we still want variation across our shoots and between individual images. While all our work should share common themes and fit together as a unified body, we don’t want to simply be repeating ourselves. An artist’s overall vision is like a tree: all inspiration should spring from the same root, but it can branch out on many limbs, and it can stretch as tall or as wide as it wants. In photography, we have the freedom to express a unique angle of our vision with each collection we create. Further, individual images within a collection may carry their own specific visions, while still in line with our overall vision as an artist.

**Our overall vision** is that “holy grail” of what we want to express. Seeking and developing this is an ongoing process in our photographic journey. Every time we think we have it figured out, it evolves, and we double down on the search.

**The vision behind a photograph** is a much simpler concept to address: it is the art of storytelling with one photograph. You can see an example of this on [page 54](#).



## VISION AND VISUALISATION

*“Do you seek to find the work, or does the work seek to find you?”*

I used to be a strong believer in pre-visualisation of images. I would set out with a known intent of what I wished to capture, the story I wanted to tell. I would research a location, work out the best time of day or year, and seek to get there for the optimal light. This approach did lead to many great successes—one of which is detailed on [page 54](#)—and is a method I still use frequently to make the most of available time when guiding groups. However, when it comes to my more personal work, I no longer rely on this type of structured planning. Often I find more joy in shooting with an organic approach; I gear the shoot to what I find when I arrive. And I find myself wondering: was my past work truly driven by vision, or by pre-visualisation of the results I wanted?

As I said, while this ‘pre-visualisation’ process worked well at times, I was not always able to capture what I had visualised—and the result of this was disappointment. Approaching photography in a premeditated manner had made me less adaptable to capturing something else. Letting go of expectations eased the pressure to create a “good image” and enabled me to enjoy the experience of being in the landscape and remain open to what I found. Sometimes during these expeditions, something speaks to me, and I am able to capture a photograph true to my vision. But just as rewarding are the days when I find myself experimenting freely, even knowing I may never use the images I take.



## WRITING ABOUT OUR VISION

*“Can a photograph fully convey our vision without need for an explanation?”*

Most people have no trouble writing a story to explain the vision behind a single image. Most people are also comfortable using such a process—an artist statement—to explain a collection of images. However, writing a statement to define your overall vision can feel like an impossible task. Can we really use words to convey the depth and meaning we’ve captured visually? Do we need to?

Putting words to your vision can help clarify it in your own mind, but words are not always necessary when sharing your work. It should be strong enough to speak for itself. At times, a written interpretation can even distract from or weaken the viewing experience, so use discretion.

### INTERPRETATION OF A TITLE

A title and statement can help define a work and give it a specific meaning that may not otherwise have been accessible to the viewer. However, it can also completely change the viewer’s experience and interpretation of the images, and this is not always desirable. Many artists choose to present their images without a statement or title, allowing viewers to interpret the work themselves.

As an exercise, try viewing an exhibition without reading the artist statement. Come up with your own interpretation of the photographer’s voice and vision. Afterwards, read the photographer’s statement and see how your view of their work changes.

## LEARNING TO SEE

*“Slow down, connect with your subject, and decide what you wish to express before you attempt to try to capture it.”*

Today, life tends to take place in a rushed manner. It's hard to leave this attitude behind, even when we go out to photograph wild places. Our instinct is to turn up, capture the image, and go. For our vision to truly emerge, we must give ourselves time to connect with our landscape or subject, take in its beauty, and decide the story we wish to tell. We must give ourselves time to see.

The skill of learning to see should take precedence even above the search for the “holy grail” of our vision, because without it, there can be no vision.

One thing I really enjoy about working as a photography tutor is the opportunity to travel to amazing locations with people from all around the world. Discovering the individuality and uniqueness of everyone's visions comprises a very important part of the workshop environment. Sure, these photographers have primarily come to learn from their tutor— but in reality, everybody ends up learning from one another. Every time I run a workshop, I learn from the clients I am there to teach. That is one of the amazing things about photography: we never stop learning. And when it comes to learning about our vision, there is no right or wrong answer.

During these trips, there are times when everybody sets up their tripods in a line to capture the same vista. However, these are vastly outnumbered by the times when everyone ends up with their own unique image from the same location. Time and time again, even



when I'm sure I've visited a location far too many times to see a fresh interpretation, someone always finds a way to create something totally new. Maybe they have seen some small detail that others overlook, or maybe they just approach the view in front of them in an unusual way.

I particularly enjoy taking people to lesser-known locations for this reason. Sure, everyone has a hit-list of images they hope to capture on the trip, but sometimes, the most unknown locations are the real gems. Arriving with no preconceptions allows visitors to explore, experiment, and express their own vision. Teachers of photography often focus on technique, but the part I enjoy most is teaching people to see: to break down the scene in front of them, decide the story, determine the key elements of their photograph, and figure out how to express their vision.



## THE CHASM - MILFORD ROAD

While capturing iconic locations in a fresh way can be challenging, it is not impossible. One approach is to present the location in such a way that it is not instantly recognisable.

Sometimes, when given the time to just look and take in a scene, we even surprise ourselves. No matter how many times we've visited an iconic location, there is always something new to see. Finding it might just be a case of not following the herd—capturing something different to “that view”—but more often than not, it comes from just having time to see. I have photographed the chasm on the road to Milford Sound too many times to count: one of the most popular stops on the Milford Road, it is photographed by thousands of tourists each day. I don't enjoy visiting locations like this for photography, as they are so often crowded. With so many people around, it's hard to get into the right mental space to feel “in the zone” and create work that is personal to me. However, locations such as Milford Sound or “That Tree” in Wanaka are often at the top of clients' lists during our photography tours—and while such popular locations present challenges, there are always fresh ways to see them. On the last two trips I guided to the Chasm, I did not intend to capture any images (this is often the case during tours, as my focus is on the client). But on both occasions, I saw something new, and I was pleased with the result.



*Jan 2019 | Rainbow Spray*

## TRIP 1

While helping a client set up for a long exposure, I looked into the canyon to notice a miniature rainbow forming from sunlight caught in the spray. I pointed it out to my client, but he continued to try to capture the larger view. Luckily, I had a camera over my shoulder and managed to snap a quick shot of this beautiful inner-landscape.



*May 2019 | Bonsai Tree*

## TRIP 2

On the next trip, a unique reflection caught my eye as I was (once again) standing with a client to help capture the wider view. In the reflection, this beech tree looked like a bonsai tree, and the scene seemed to belong to a landscape in Japan. Although I was not carrying a camera, the image was so beautiful that I pulled out my phone to record it. I showed the image to a client, and the two of us shared the beauty of this moment. I borrowed a spare camera body, and we both captured our own interpretations of the scene.



# VISION

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

- 📍 **Developing your vision will give purpose to your photography**—it will present a goal you can constantly work towards.
- 📍 **Your vision will help you define your style**—style is the voice through which your vision speaks.
- 📍 **Finding your vision is an ongoing process**—every time you have it figured out, it will evolve again.
- 📍 **Give yourself time to connect with your subject**—take in its beauty, and decide the story you wish to tell.
- 📍 **Let go of expectations**—easing the pressure to create a “good image” enables you to enjoy the experience of being in the landscape and remain open to what you find.
- 📍 **‘Pre-visualisation’ can lead to disappointment**—it can work well at times, but you will not always be able to capture what you had visualised, and the result might be disappointment.
- 📍 **Putting words to your vision can help clarify it in your own mind**—but words are not always necessary when sharing your work. It should be strong enough to speak for itself.
- 📍 **A title and statement can help define a work**—these additions give it a specific meaning that may not otherwise have been accessible to the viewer



CHAPTER 4

# RICHARD'S STYLE AND VISION

By Richard Young

# STYLE & VISION

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## RICHARD'S STYLE AND VISION

By Richard Young

It has taken time for my style and vision to develop; many aspects of my current style and vision can be related back to different parts of my journey. This journey is broken down into four stages to illustrate that style and vision can take a long time to discover and are constantly evolving. I have focused my style and vision on my approach to landscape photography, but I have also included an example of wildlife photography to show how the process can look with an alternative subject.

Over the last couple of years, my objective for producing photographs has changed. For a number of years I had my own gallery, which led me to create work that would be popular to others—even if not personal to me. This felt a little like trying to gain popularity by posting to social media or getting noticed in photography competitions. Today, the gallery is not as important to my business, and I have largely stopped posting to social media and entering competitions. This has allowed me to return to creating images driven by personal expression—my style and vision have found greater freedom. When I head out to shoot, I don't feel the need to come away with “the shot” or chase pre-visualised scenes. I have become more connected with the landscape—producing photographs to express my experience with it.



*“My style and vision have developed over time— I did not discover them overnight.”*

## PART 1 - DEVELOPMENT OF STYLE & VISION



### 2004 - 2007 | WORKING IN B&W

I first started shooting seriously in 2004, working with black and white film and developing my own prints in the darkroom. I shot a range of subjects—whatever interested me. There was certainly no style or vision guiding my work at this stage, and this did not change for quite some years. I think this is where most photographers start out, and this experimental process is an important part of any photographer's development. While I did not have a style or vision guiding my work during this period, working in black and white gave me a brilliant understanding of contrast and tonal relationships. In fact, many skills I use as part of my current digital process were originally honed while working in the darkroom.



### 2008 - 2010 | WILDERNESS LANDSCAPES

As I spent a lot of time hiking in wild places, these slowly became a focus in my image-making—I wished to showcase the wilderness landscapes I visited. Along with this new subject-oriented focus, I developed techniques to match. I moved to shoot on colour slide film along with digital work, but I still had a strong love for black and white. During this time, light and the way it interacted with the landscape became an important focus in my work. In 2010, I had my first solo exhibition in New Zealand. It was called "Alpine Light", and it explored the effect of light in mountain landscapes. For me, this was the first series of images that had some real vision behind its creation.



## 2011 - 2013 | SHOOTING MEDIUM FORMAT

I spent all of 2011 and 2012 away from New Zealand, during which I worked on a number of exhibition projects (the following pages include a couple of examples). Before this, I shot mainly on 35mm film, with some digital photography on the side—but in 2011, rather than fully embrace digital, I decided to start capturing my landscape photography solely on medium format film. I worked with a Mamiya 7; the 6x7 format and slower, more methodical approach required helped shape my current style of shooting. Certain elements in my current style emerged from working with this format and its limitations; the whole experience helped develop my way of seeing.

The time I spent shooting different locations and subjects reshaped my art. When I returned to New Zealand, my approach to landscape photography was very much changed from what it had been when I left.



## 2014 - 2020 | CAPTURING NEW ZEALAND LANDSCAPES

During the year of 2014, I greatly shaped the style and vision of my current work. A move from medium format film to a fully digital workflow changed my image-making process, allowing for more flexibility in my approach to the landscape. The ability to experiment more also led to plenty of work that did not fit my style and vision—but that being said, a number of images from that year still sit in my current portfolio, and my style has demonstrated (evolving) consistency since then. However, it was not until 2019 that I started to feel connected to the vision represented in these images. The vision had been there, but not fully understood. I had been quite distanced from my own work, having no real clarity about its future direction—even though I had been shooting with a consistent style for the last five years.



2011 | *South Downs*



2014 | *Misty Forest*

## PART 2 - EXHIBITIONS

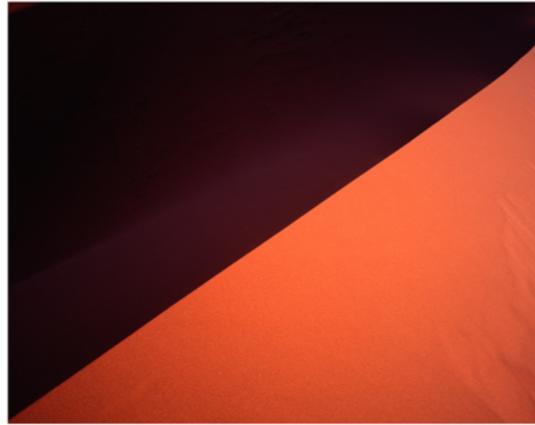
Creating a body of work to exhibit forces you to focus on style and vision. The exhibition needs to sit together as a collection (style) and have a focus or story (vision). Below are two of my past exhibition examples from 2012/2013.

### 2012 | SHIFTING SANDS

These photographs present a very abstract view of sand dunes in Namibia: due to the absence of a horizon, their scale is unclear. These images are an exploration of form, light, and tone. I shot them on medium format film: a Mamiya 7, with Velvia 50 film and two fixed focal length lenses. This information is relevant, as working within the limitations of the medium affected my approach to the landscape and contributed to the look (style) of the final photographs. I would not have come back with the same work if I'd approached it digitally.



2012 | *Shifting Sands*



## 2013 | IMPRESSION OF AFRICA

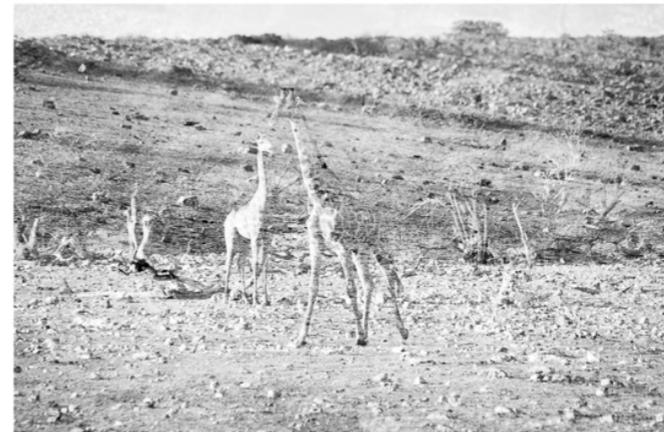
Before I went to Africa, I knew I wanted to shoot a wildlife series to exhibit on my return—a series that could be classed as fine art photography. Stylistically, I decided to work in black and white and to capture a more abstract view of wildlife. Both the message (vision) and the final approach (style) to the exhibition were developed during the process of being there, as I formed a connection with the subject and a story to tell.

Africa boasts a rich diversity of wildlife, but humans continue to put pressure on these animals, bringing some to near extinction. Poachers are responsible for thousands of animal deaths each year. Growth and changing lifestyles of the rural human population is also damaging, as humans increasingly come into conflict with animals.

This exhibition offers an alternative view of African wildlife. These photographs were created using in-camera effects (rather than by digital post-production), including long, multiple, and zoomed exposures. They reflect on the uncertain future of these wild animals, sometimes rendering them as ghost-like images in the landscape. Sadly, more wildlife is becoming just that: ghosts.

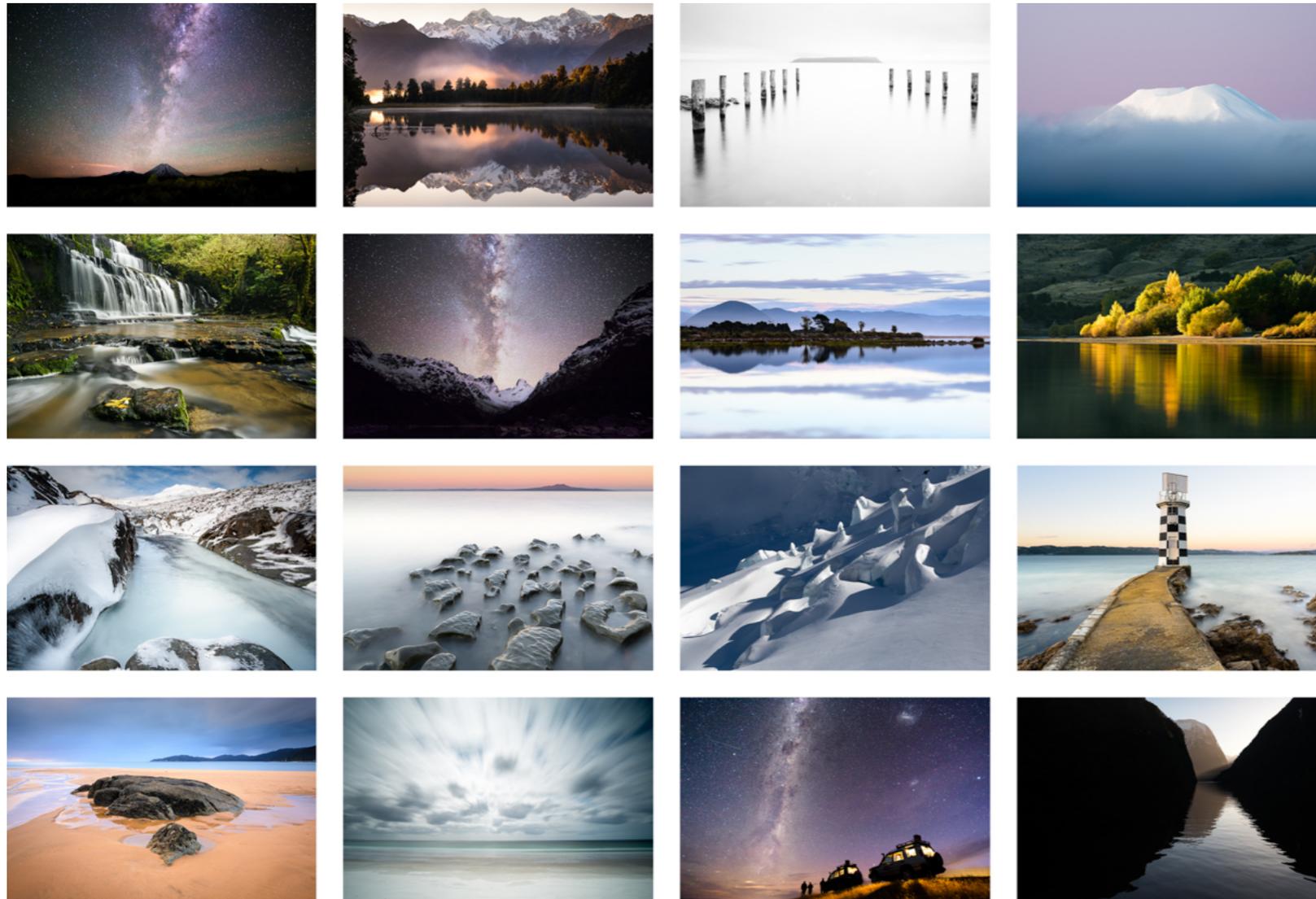


2013 | *Impression of Africa*



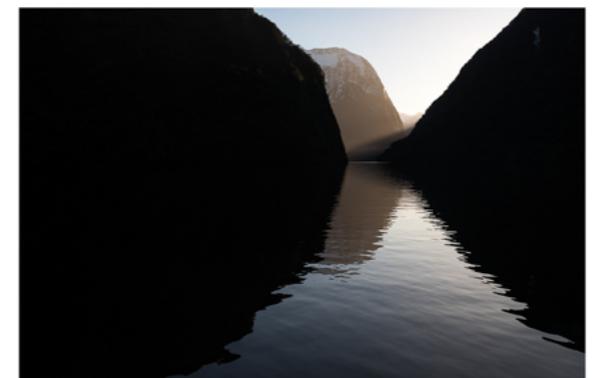
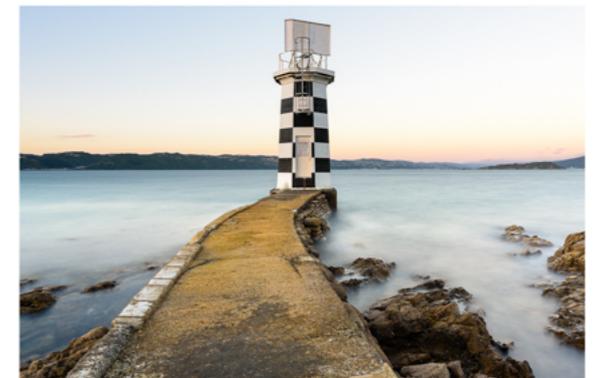
## PART 3 - NEW ZEALAND LANDSCAPES

Before I share the collections that represent my current style and vision, I would like to show you a few images of the opposite. I like all of these photographs; they were a response to how the landscape made me feel (vision), and they demonstrate a level of technical consistency (style). In the past, I even included some of these photographs in my portfolio collections.



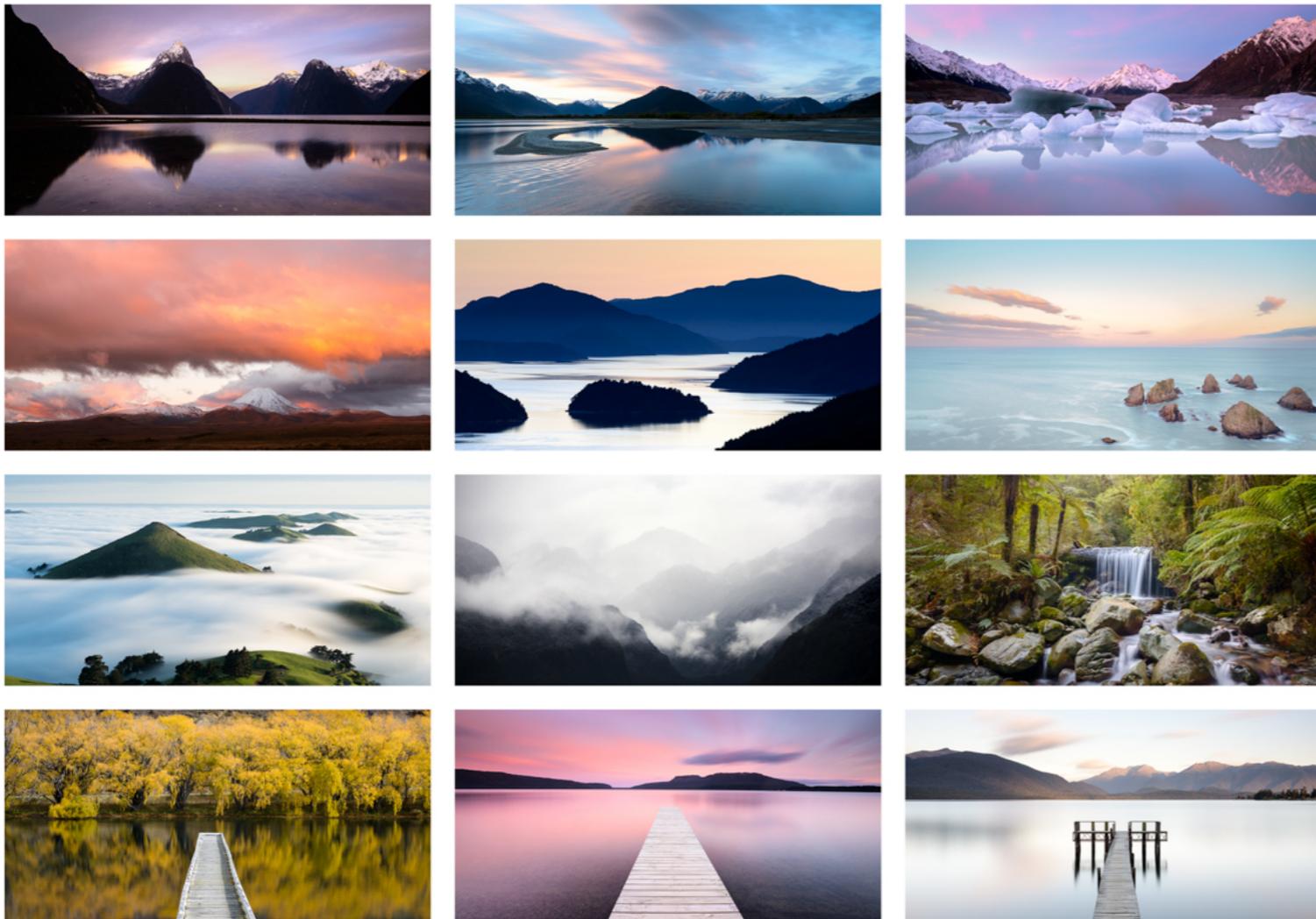
Several have sold very well as prints, and a couple are still hanging on the wall in my gallery (until I sell them!). Each one represents a past achievement: a unique moment, the mastery of a new technique, a fresh approach to the landscape. But despite all this, the images do not align with each other in a uniform way, nor do they align with my shooting style—and therefore, they do not belong in my current portfolio.

Images should not be chosen for your portfolio just because they are good, connected to a great moment, or appreciated by others. Choosing to exclude an image you like is not easy, but your portfolio will benefit from excluding any image that is not as strong as the others or that doesn't fit your style and vision. A portfolio is only as strong as the weakest image, so refine your work: look for the weak links, for the ones that do not fit in. This being said, if your objective is simply to showcase a collection of your best work, a portfolio like the one above would be perfectly appropriate.



## NEW ZEALAND LANDSCAPES COLLECTION

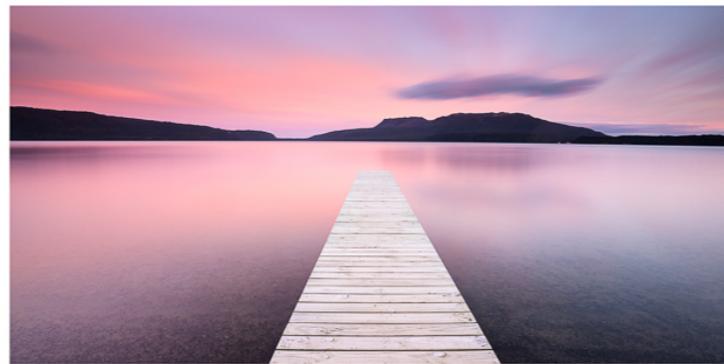
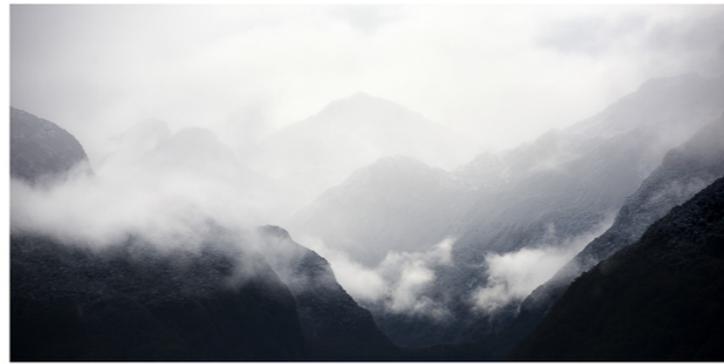
I find all the photographs in this collection enjoyable to view both individually and as a set. With an underpinning style, they sit together well. To me, they represent the achievement of capturing iconic New Zealand vistas, showcasing my technical ability as a landscape photographer. However, they fail to express my overall vision. They may demonstrate my expression of the landscapes portrayed, but they are not allied with my personal vision.



Most of these images were made with the viewer in mind, rather than myself. They were made to be sold as fine art prints from my gallery. And some of them are best-selling prints, so they have succeeded in their purpose. Is there anything wrong with creating a collection like this, or in using sales as a drive to create? Of course not. Photography has many uses beyond personal expression. However, it is important to distinguish work that demonstrates your vision from work that does not—and for me, this collection of “beautiful photographs” simply does not convey my vision.

## VISION OR VISUALISATION

While I love each of the shots in the above collection, I do not connect with them in the same way I do with my more personal work, as they are not true to my vision as an artist. Out of the twelve images, only two show my vision—or maybe it is just that these two have a visualisation behind their creation.

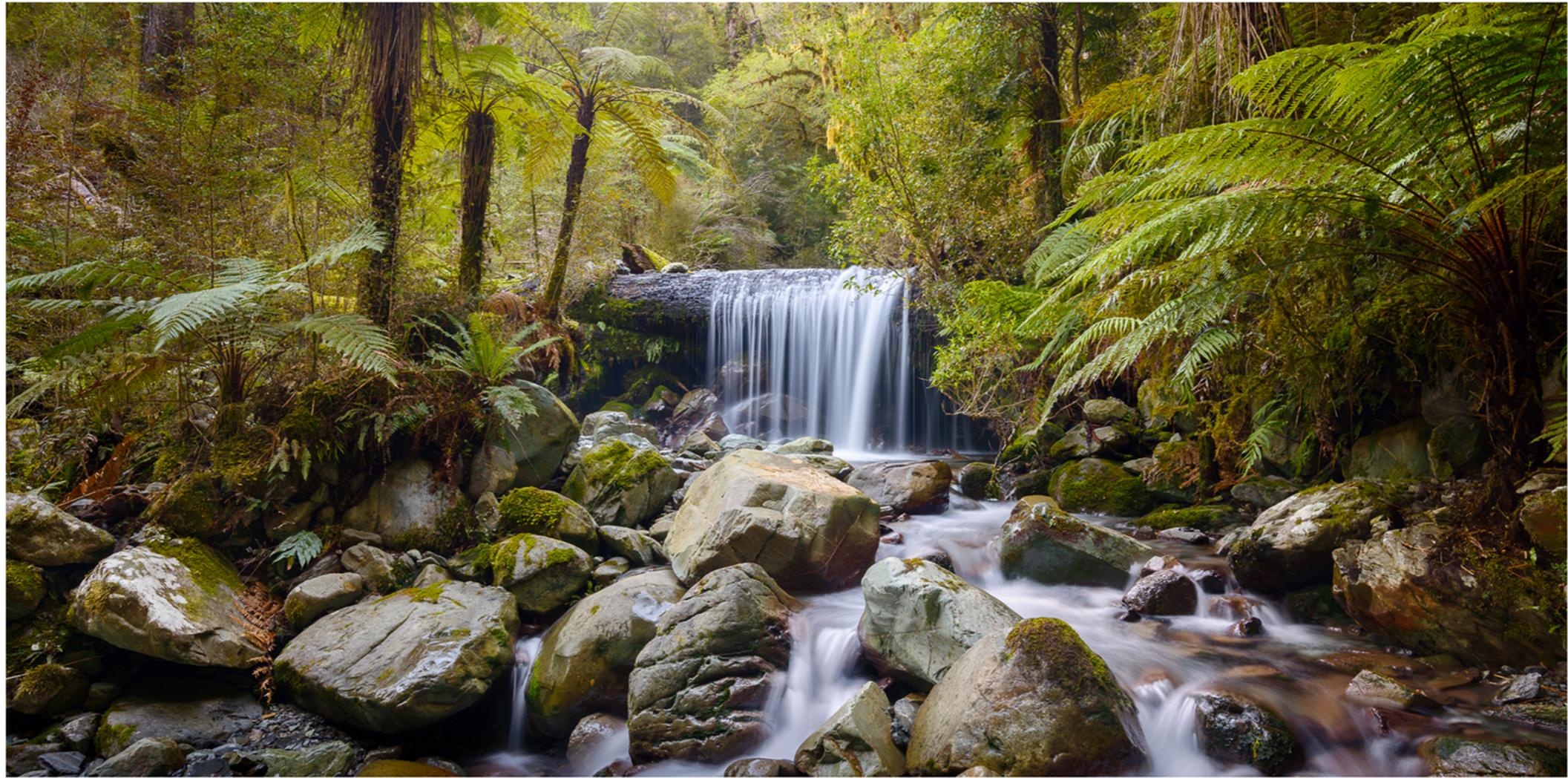




2014 | *Hollyford Valley*

## 2014 | HOLLYFORD VALLEY

I captured this image with a vision (though not one that aligns entirely with my current vision). Because it was a planned shot, I would class it as pre-visualised. The shot was captured in 2014, in a remote part of the Hollyford Valley. I was with my good friend and fellow photographer Spencer Clubb on a two-week photography excursion through Fiordland. We entered the valley with the vision of capturing a perfect forest stream shot to represent both Fiordland and New Zealand's clean green, untouched landscape. While exploring off-track, up a small side stream, we discovered this small waterfall created by a fallen log. The lighting and conditions were not right for shooting at the time, so we got up at 5 a.m. the following day and made the three hour trek back into the forest to arrive before the sun penetrated the forest. My fond memories of this occasion translate to a strong personal connection to the photograph, of which I own a very large framed print. The print has hung in my home, office, and gallery, and I have not tired from it, so you could say it has also stood the test of time.



2014 | *Hollyford Valley*

## 2017 | LAKE MANAPOURI

I captured this photograph while crossing Lake Manapouri on the way to Doubtful Sound in 2017. I was lucky enough to be making this journey for the third time in a year, and I felt like I was really starting to connect with the landscape. The conditions were perfect, and I wanted to make an image to convey the way I visualised Fiordland's wild and untouched landscape: its mood; its weather; its scale; its drama. Although the photograph looks almost monochrome, it is in fact in colour. Fiordland, for me, has become an inspirational landscape for my work—one I never tire of returning to and finding new ways to capture.



*2017 | Lake Manapouri*



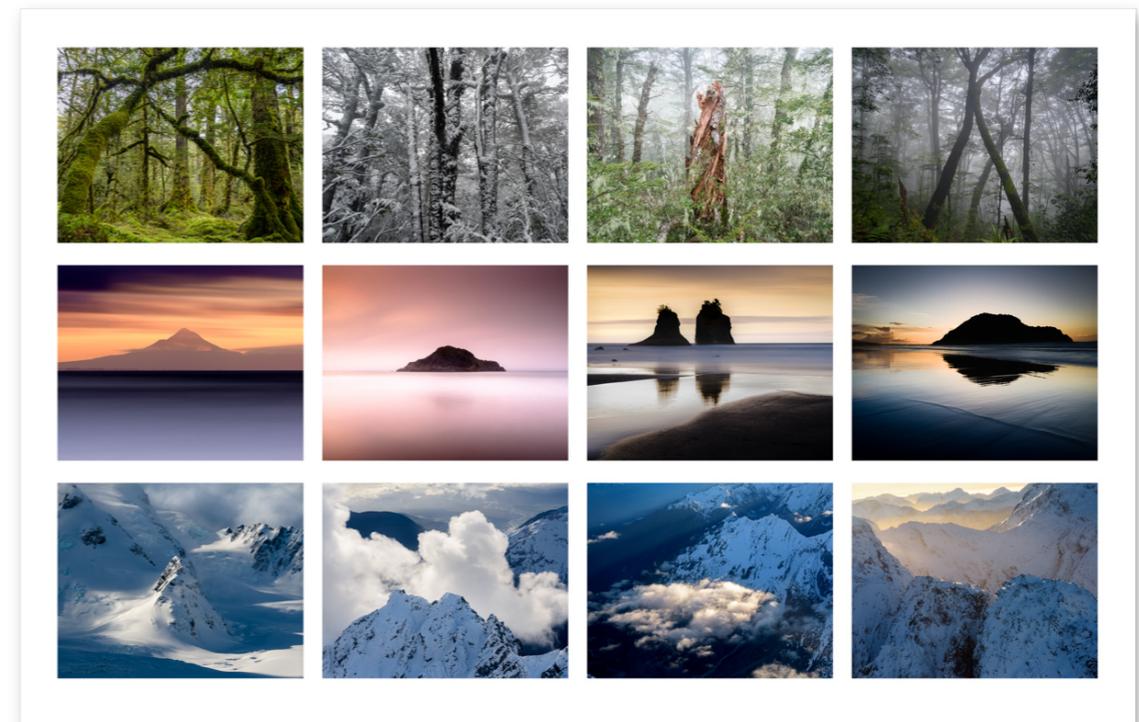
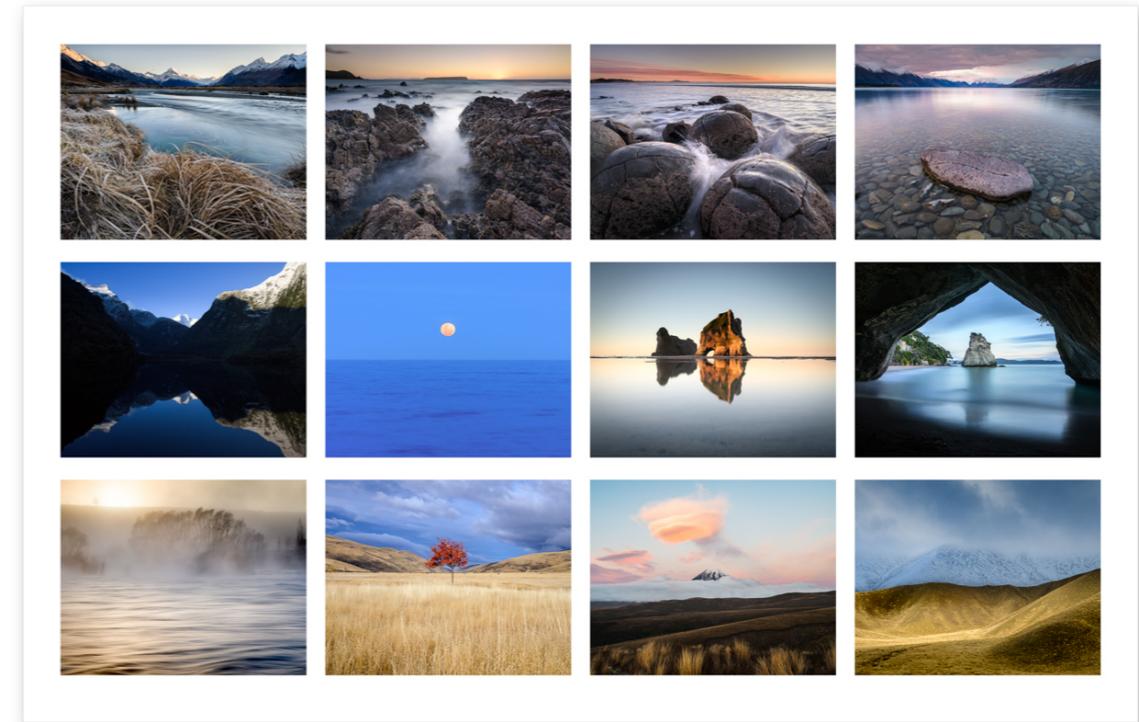
2017 | *Lake Manapouri*

## PART 4 - MY STYLE AND VISION

These two collections were not refined from a larger set, but rather, were built up over a number of years. A few of these photographs were captured in ‘iconic’ locations, while others are unknown. They are not meant to tell the story of their specific locations—instead, they represent my response to the New Zealand landscape as a whole. With this in mind, I did not limit the collections to a single type of landscape or location.

The evolving nature of vision is demonstrated in these collections: nearly half of the images were captured in the last year, whereas others are now six years old. I chose to constrain the collections to 12 images each—and although I add images each year, for each added photograph, another is removed. In this way, the collection grows stronger each time and stays in tune with my vision. Visions #2 was only added last year, as my evolution had led to a somewhat disjointed effect in the original presentation, and a collection of work must offer harmony and balance.

The body of work pictured here is true to my style and vision. What is this style and vision, you might ask? I am not sure I can distil it into a simple statement; perhaps I am too close to my own work to do so. I named the collections simply ‘Visions #1’ and ‘Visions #2’ to avoid influencing viewer interpretation, as a more descriptive title or statement would have been likely to do so. If I had to define my style and vision in these images, it would be “my response to the subject”, expressed through my approach of “composing the landscape” and “working the light”.





## MY RESPONSE TO THE SUBJECT

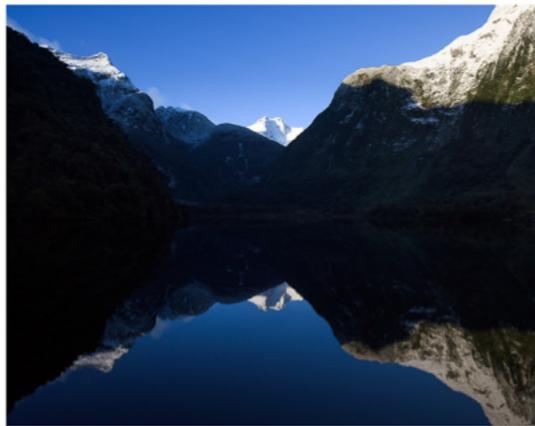
I do not let my work be defined by subject or location. Instead, it is defined by my physical response to a place. I try to capture the feeling of a wider landscape through a more intimate view, rather than documenting a grand vista. I look to find balance within my work, and I seek out subjects and landscapes that can offer this, but I also love to record details. I feel most at home on the coast, as this environment allows me to work with a smaller number of elements. But I think the forest represents the perfect challenge of creating simplicity and balance from such a complex environment.

## COMPOSING THE LANDSCAPE

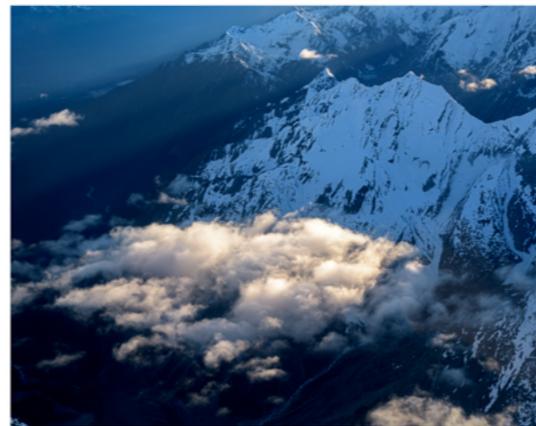
I do not think about the position of the subject or horizon line when shooting, nor do I work to any set compositional rules. If anything, my horizon line is more likely to fall dead centre or right at the top of a frame than conforming to the 'rule of thirds', but this is not a planned decision; it is simply a response to the subject. I seek to create harmony and balance within the frame, illustrating an imperfect symmetry when the subject allows. To achieve this, I tend to place the subject centrally in the frame or find a way to balance one element against another. If I cannot achieve a sense of balance in my composition, I am likely to walk away from the scene.

## WORKING THE LIGHT

I do not aim for my images to shout loudly; I prefer to use soft pastel tones rather than strong vivid colours, subtlety as opposed to saturation. I utilise tonal transitions and contrast as a way to express my response to a subject. I process my work to enhance this response rather than to create a stylistic look.



*Visions #1*



*Visions #2*



*“While I currently feel I have clarity in my image-making process, I have also felt that way in the past, when my process was much different. I know that this is not the final destination for my style and vision. Each stage is just another step in my journey: a journey in which I look not to the end, but always to the next part of a continuing adventure.”*



CHAPTER 5

# KEN'S STYLE & VISION

By Ken Wright

# STYLE & VISION

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## KEN'S STYLE & VISION

By Ken Wright

With 30 years of art directing and working with professional photographers, I had lots of influences swirling around in my head. My past as a graphic designer and illustrator has greatly influenced my work, and I often say that “I don’t set out to take a photograph, but to create a painting from captured light”. I was heavily influenced by The Old Masters as a child, and many of their works are permanently etched on my brain—for example, Rembrandt's “The Night Watch”: such depth of colour, low light, and mood. Or Turner’s epic skies: the golden glow of the last light of the day; dramatic seascapes with thunderous skies.

Growing up, we always had cameras in the house, but nothing serious—just happy snappy things. Art college (Lincolnshire College of Art, 1976-80) was my first real introduction to photography. My experience there had a huge influence on my B&W photography, and it also taught me discipline: 24 or 36 frames to a roll, and you had to get it right. Even more so with a 5x4 studio camera—these were great, allowing you to look at a big screen just like we do now with digital cameras. Studying at art college also gave me a good understanding of light and shade, and how the drama of B&W can influence mood. Scenes that look like nothing in colour can take on an emotion all their own.



*“Style is something that develops without you realising. I don’t think that I set out with the intent to develop a style—it just happened over a period of time.”*



*“I have had the luxury of spending hours in remote places, creating images for my own pleasure. If I didn’t get a shot in the bag, it didn’t matter. The luxury of time allowed me to continue to visit a location until I captured a hero shot.”*

As landscape photographers, we tend to gravitate toward the ‘golden hour’, with its deep shadows and warm horizontal light. In my work, I tend to lean towards those deep colours and rich tones—qualities generally associated with painting rather than photography. I have had customers standing in my gallery arguing whether a piece is a photo or a painting; in moments like these, I feel like I have achieved what I set out to do with the effect of light and my depth of processing. I have a particular processing technique that I use to make parts of the image feel three-dimensional—I want the image to look like you could reach into it and pick up a branch or move a stone.

Using a particular focal length can shape a photographer’s style more than you might think. I shoot most of my work around 16mm, and this single factor automatically gives a look to a scene. You learn to see the scene the way your lens sees, which helps you compose a scene quickly. Seeing the width and depth of a scene—deciding what’s in and what’s out—helps your vision emerge. Most of my earlier work featured different types of seascapes: exploding waves, waves receding, long exposure.... Because of the nature of the lens, I was close to the action, forced to make decisions quickly.

My style evolved over a short period of time, as I was constantly seeking out scenes with similar features. A deep foreground was of paramount importance, and the exaggerated perspective from shooting with an ultra wide-angle lens fulfilled my vision, giving the viewer the feeling of walking right into the scene. My tendency to use deep colours leading to a bright spot also helped the viewer travel into the image.



This image of Amodeo Bay offers the depth and tonality that the old masters achieved in their paintings. Just as Rembrandt's use of sunlight and shade in "The Night Watch" leads you past the two officers in the foreground to the sunlit character at center left, the leading lines of the underlit cloud and the passage of water in the photograph lead your eye to the setting sun. It was taken during a gale with a 25 knot headwind. Because I had to clean the filters after every shot, it was a challenge to capture, but the result ticks all the boxes for me.

A specialty area for me is shooting straight into the sun: I enjoy the extra dynamic of having a sunburst in the shot, whether it's just clipping the horizon at dawn or the last dying light of day. Most photographers will avoid this shot, because it requires two exposures to pull off well. If you want to capture that fleeting moment when the rays are just right, you only have enough time for a couple of takes.



*“If you were any closer, you’re going to get wet.”*

## MY VISION

I think “vision” is always present in your subconscious, but it shows itself slowly, over a period of time; you don’t notice it until you start pulling images together in collections. Once you see them all side by side, you’ll notice the patterns and themes that emerge.

Out in the field, we create images for their own merit individually—but without realising it, our “subconscious overlay” is at work: we tend to repeat the same choices, angles, composition, etc. It took me some time to realise there are angles I shoot from repeatedly, and that a deep foreground emphasis from shooting ultra wide-angle creates a strong consistency in my work. I used the below quotes to describe the work of my first exhibition; I had forgotten writing these, but in studying the collections now, I realise there has always been an underlying vision.

This image of Otarawairere Bay explains it all: you can walk right into this scene. I did, in fact, get wet taking the shot, and the result is up close and in your face.



*Otarawairere Splash*

# THE JOURNEY TO MY VISION

*“I want my viewer to feel like they can walk straight into the scene.”*

## PART 1 - THIS “VISION”

This “vision” or underlying quality in the way I shoot emerged from one particular shot. I was using a loaned lens on my new camera body (Nikon D700), as the lens I’d ordered had not yet arrived, and I couldn’t leave the shop with just a body. So I walked out with a second-hand Tamron 17-35.

That weekend, I ventured out to Wainuiomata, a real wild stretch of coastline. It was a fine day—the sky was boring, and it was incredibly windy. I was so disappointed with this lens. There wasn’t anything wrong with it, but it made everything look so far away! I was ready to give up. Then, to add insult to my frustration, a big wave rushed up to my knees, nearly sweeping me off the rock I was standing on. For fear of losing my new camera (on day one!), I pinned the tripod down with my body weight. As the wave broke behind me and started drawing back, I realised I still had the cable release in my hand, so I took the shot.

What appeared on the camera screen blew me away. It was not what I expected; the ultra wide-angle lens had exaggerated the perspective of the scene, creating instant drama. The now-distant rocks were complemented by massive foreground impact from the receding wave. And two weeks later, I was the proud owner of a Nikkor 17-35mm lens.

When this image was displayed at my first exhibition, one lady commented that it scared her. It made her feel like she was going to get sucked into the image. And that’s exactly the reaction I aim for: I want you to feel that close.

Without my realising, this image set the tone for most of the work that followed, as I continued to emphasize foregrounds leading into a distant scene. In my opinion, this is the only way to work with ultra wide-angle lenses. The downside of shooting with an ultra wide-angle is, of course, that it makes everything look further away. It’s easy to end up with a scene that feels “distant” or, as I call it, “over there”. In using the lens to achieve width, it’s all too easy to sacrifice depth, disconnecting viewers from the scene. But by consciously seeking out depth with a wide-angle lens, I allow the viewer to be drawn right into the scene.





*Wainuiomata - Sands of Time*



## PART 2 - VERTICAL SEASCAPE

Eventually, as I started seeking even larger foregrounds, my vision expanded. What followed was the journey of “The Vertical Seascape”.

The scenes pictured in all these images begin roughly 500mm in front of the camera: take one more step, and you’ll be in the scene. For most of these images, the tripod was set up near waist height, with the camera angled forward to exaggerate the foreground





*Vertical Seascapes*



## PART 3 - THE LAST 12 YRS

Over the last 12 years, my work has continued to evolve. We moved to the Bay of Plenty to be near the beach and, initially, my work consisted entirely of seascapes. However, not long after this move, the Rena disaster unfolded: a container ship ran aground on Astrolabe Reef and shed its load of oil into the sea. This was a tragedy for NZ, resulting in damage to our normally pristine coastline. The area was deemed unsafe to visit; an unfortunate reality that led me to consider other photographic subjects. With a chance visit to Kaiate Falls on ANZAC Day, 2012, everything changed. The images I shot here resulted in the first exhibition in my new gallery: “Beyond the Ledge ~ Hidden Waterfalls of the Bay of Plenty”. For a period after this, I found myself focusing entirely on waterfalls, rivers, streams, and forest. It was very different to my experience working with the ocean.

The ocean has a set of dynamics that you have to get used to reading. Waves move through a cycle of seven: waves 1,2, and 3 tend to be lame; 4,5 and 6 are where the action is; wave 7 will give you a bath.

### *Beyond the Ledge*

This image of Whataroa #2 or “Beyond the Ledge” is one of those hidden waterfalls; I had gone to photograph Whataroa Falls (#1), but as I waded through the water and peered over the ledge, this enchanted scene was revealed. To get close for this shot, I wore fishing waders and stood waist deep in the pool.

Never turn your back on the sea—power builds up through the wave cycle, and that's how we catch rogue waves. Capturing seascapes with dynamic, explosive waves is always a matter of split seconds. A quarter of a second is the magic number, while receding waves require longer—one to two seconds— depending how far the water has to run. Determining 'how long is long enough' when it comes to the rhythms of water is a specialty of mine.

In my art, understanding and capturing water in motion, from the dynamic explosive wave actions of the sea to the linear movement of a waterfall, is key. Waterfalls are very different from seascapes. They are linear, like a running tap. The white water is continuously 'overwriting' itself—so if you overdo the exposure length, you will lose secondary detail in the water. Your exposure length should be geared to the speed and volume of falling water.



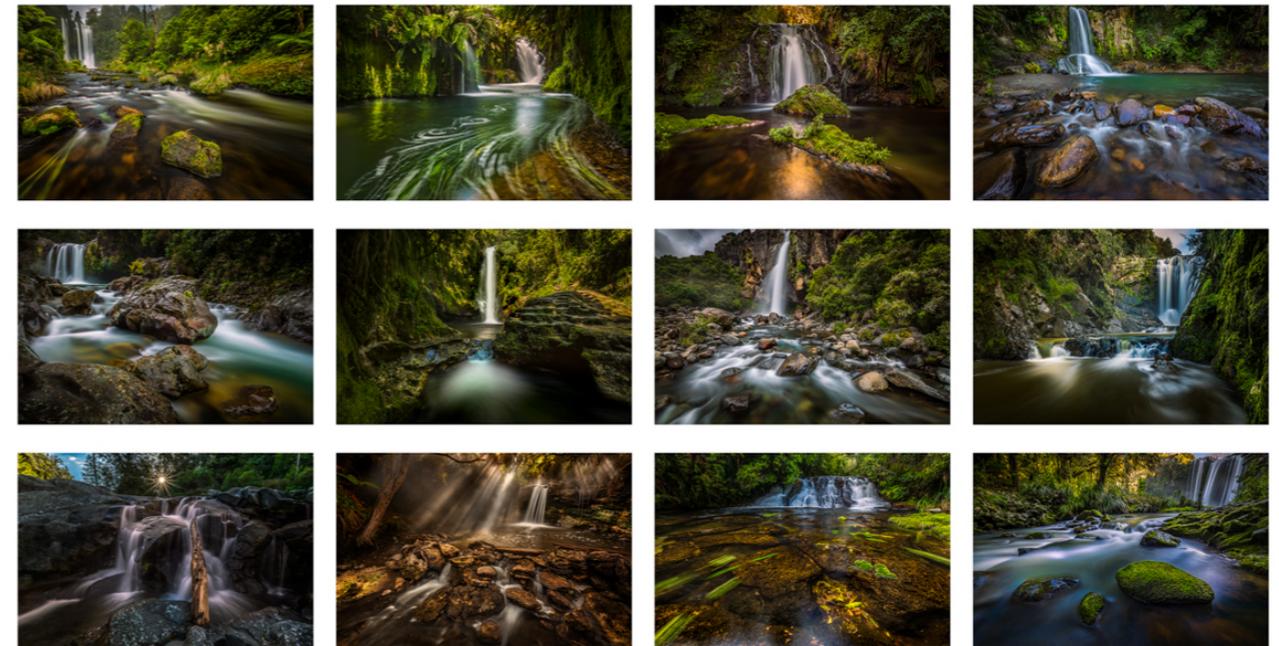
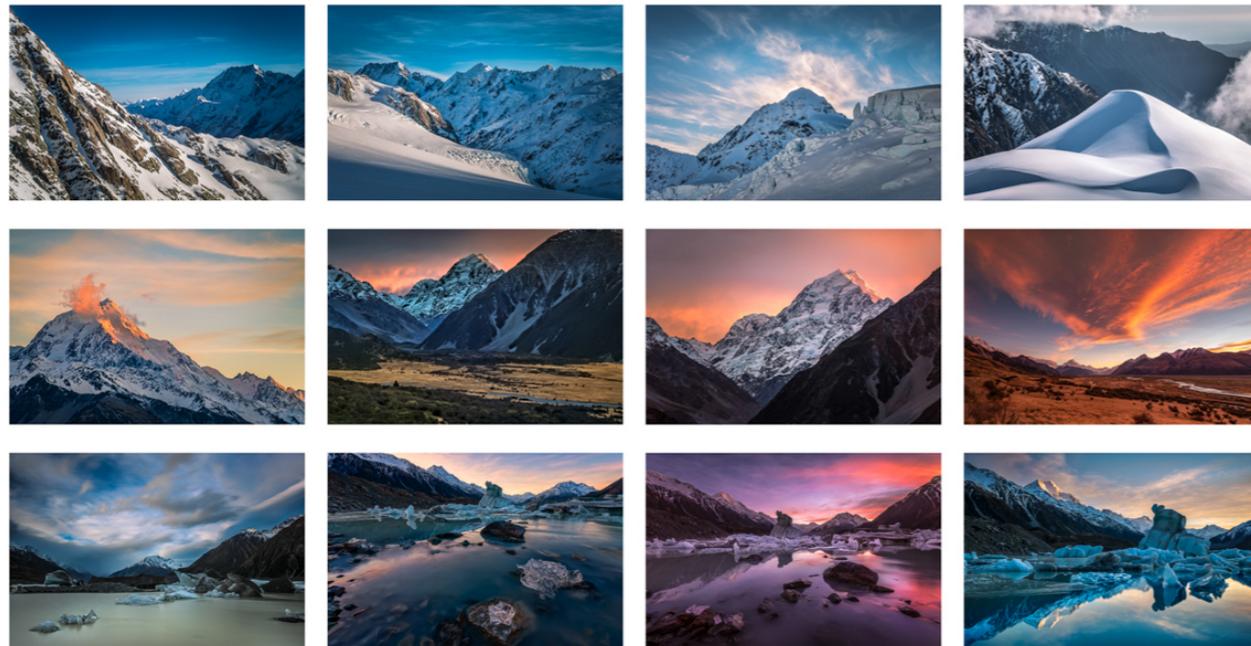


After joining Richard Young at New Zealand Photography Workshops, my subject matter expanded even more. These days, I photograph wilderness, mountains, snow and ice, the wild south, the vast expanse of Aoraki/Mt Cook, and the volcanic landscapes of New Zealand's North Island.

This image of Tasman Glacier Lake, with its deep foreground leading to a distant scene, demonstrates the continuity of my style and vision. The path of light along the water leads the viewer to the dominant iceberg, and the foreground bears my signature wide-angle perspective. The rocks lead into the scene like stepping stones. Fortunately for me, the sky here was very dark, adding to the mood of the scene. A bright sky would have resulted in a totally different dynamic.

# COLLECTIONS

Here are some of the sets I compiled before refining my work down to a single portfolio. You'll notice the Scenic Views collection does not fit with the others—the images lack my signature deep foreground. Four are panoramas, and the others are various focal lengths.





*Scenic Views*



*Jetties*



*Old ~ Somewhere along the way*



*To Milford and Back*



*Dramatic Black & White*



CHAPTER 6

# ORGANISE YOUR WORK

By Ken Wright

# STYLE & VISION

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## ORGANISE YOUR WORK

By Ken Wright

### ORGANISE YOUR WORK IN COLLECTIONS

Sorting through and organising your own work may seem like a daunting task; it was for me. My Lightroom folders contained years of work, and I didn't know where to start. To save you the frustrations I faced, this chapter aims to teach you a solid process of refining and sorting your best images with Lightroom Collections. Organising your work in these collections will enable you to view it in relevant sets, without becoming overwhelmed at the sheer volume of images. This process will also prepare you for the task of refining a finished portfolio set in the next chapter.

The following process explains how to sort your work according to three measures of content as well as by shooting style. The goal is to end up with many organised collections—from broad to very specific—to suit any purpose. As each collection will showcase the best of your work in a specific subject, location, story, and/or style, individual images may end up in multiple collections.

**NOTE:** Please refer to our book [Lightroom - Catalogue Management](#) for information on working with Lightroom Collections.



*“This chapter aims to teach you a solid process of refining and sorting your best images with Lightroom Collections.”*

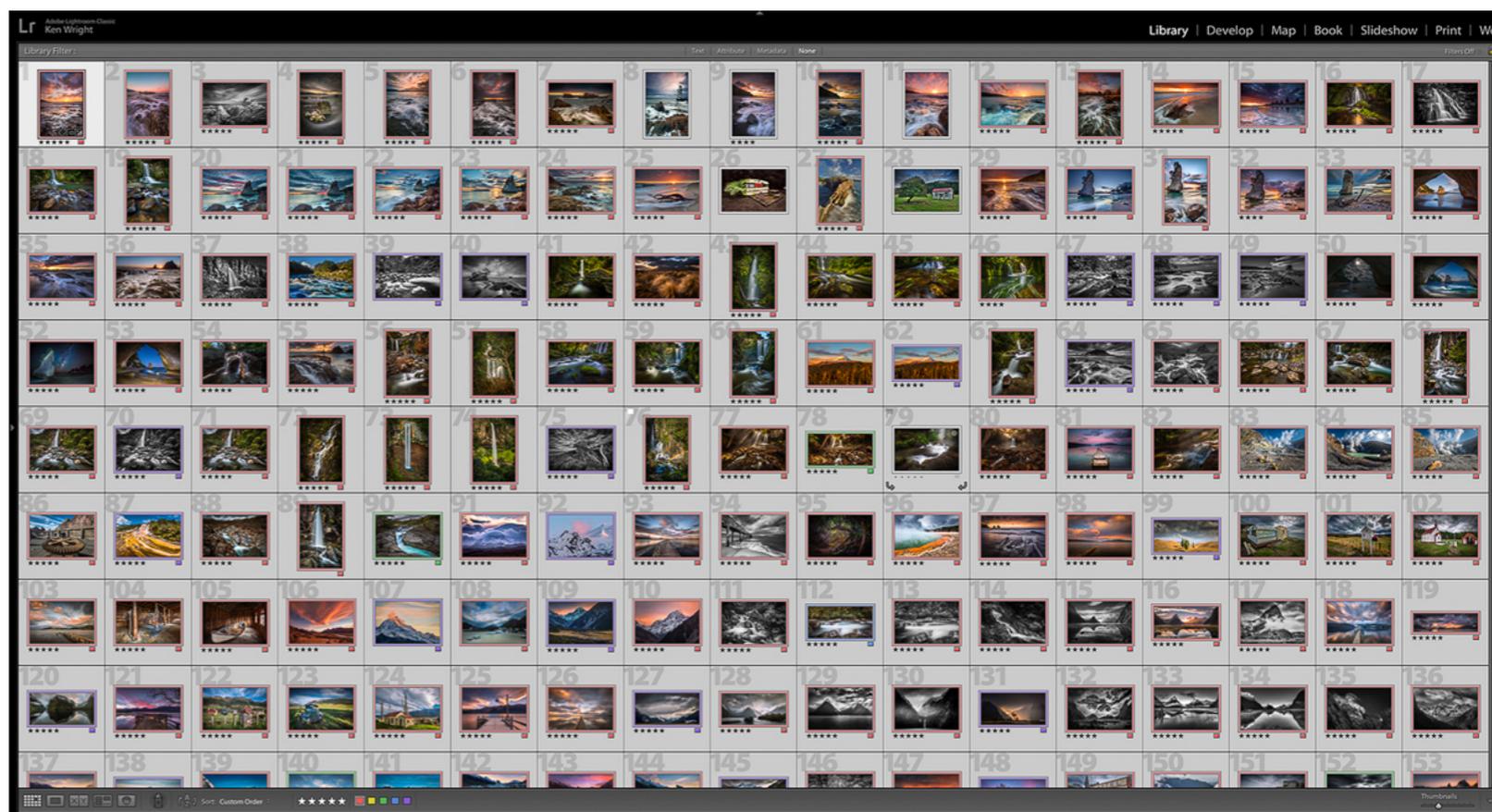
## STEP 1

### START A MASTER COLLECTION

*“If you’ve spent years shooting, you may be facing a nightmare list of folders representing individual imports, such as ‘2019-05-11 Glenorchy.’”*

The first step in the sorting process is to identify your best images, regardless of category. This will be a subjective process, of course, but the goal is to isolate the images that have the most potential for future use.

The method I would suggest is to start a Lightroom collection called “Best Collection”. Working through your existing Lightroom collections and folders, select only your best images and drag them into this new master collection. If you already have your images marked with a star rating system or colour coding, you can use the filter bar to isolate all your highest-rated photos,



which will greatly expedite the process. In this case, using a Lightroom “Smart Collection” rather than a standard collection will be particularly useful—if you set it to automatically add any photos marked with five stars, for example, it will stay up-to-date as more work is added to your Lightroom library.

Identifying your best images and populating this master collection is only the first step in sorting your work. It shows you the big picture—all your best work in one place.

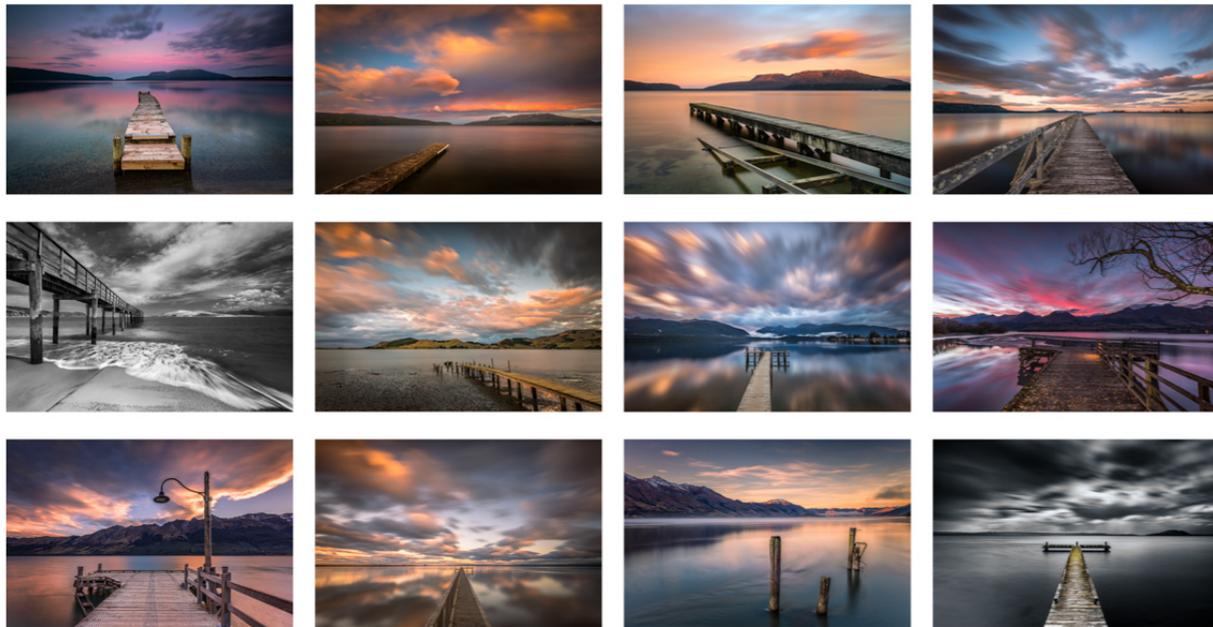
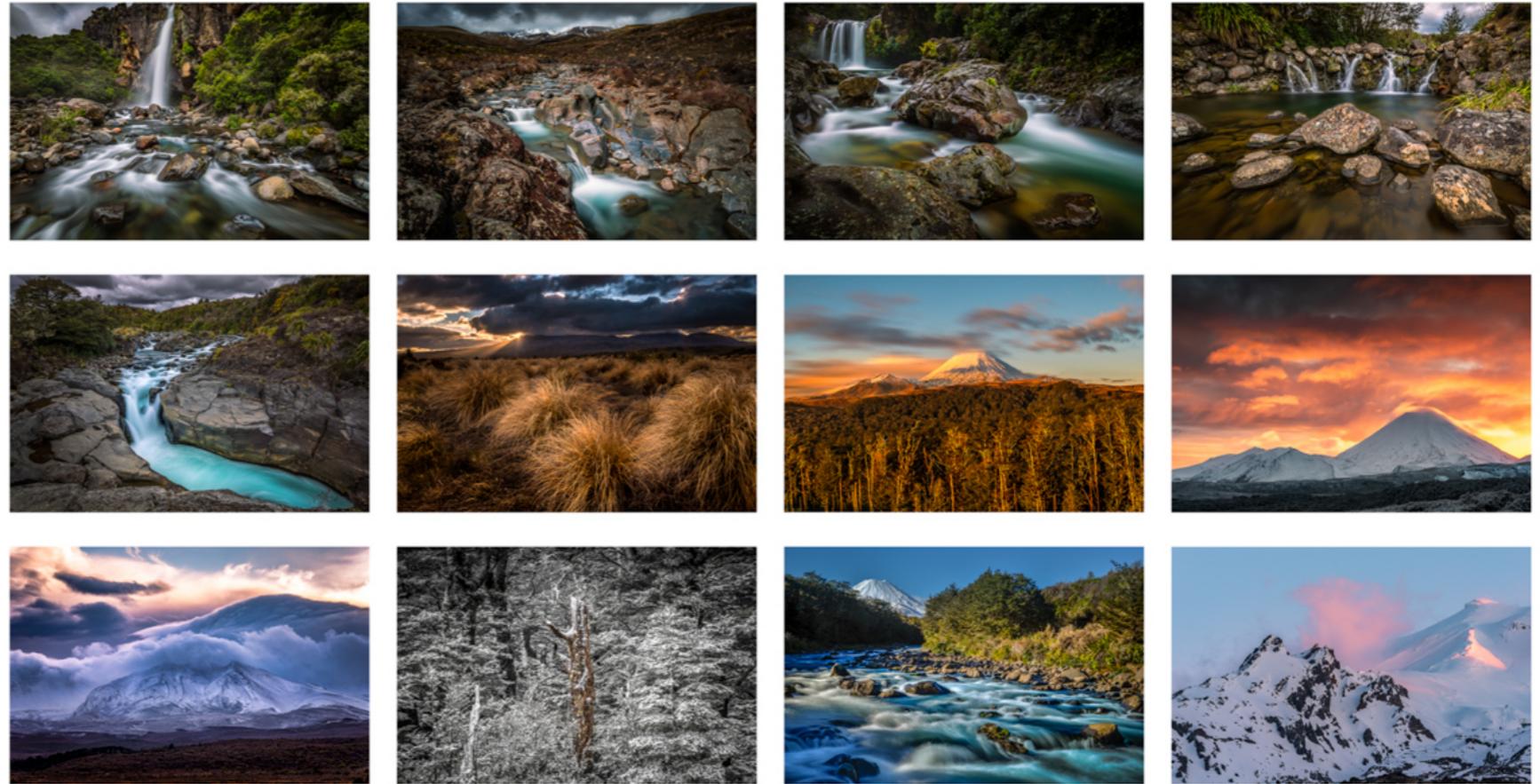
However, this collection is likely to be rather bulky and contain many different types of work (in my case, I hadn’t even worked through a third of my work before my “Best Collection” had surpassed one hundred images).

To highlight areas of portfolio potential, the “Best Collection” requires further organisation.

## STEP 2

# ORGANISING BY CONTENT

All of your images will fall into at least one of three categories: subject, location, and/or story. Your own creative freedom will come into play when deciding what collections to create and how many collections each image belongs to.



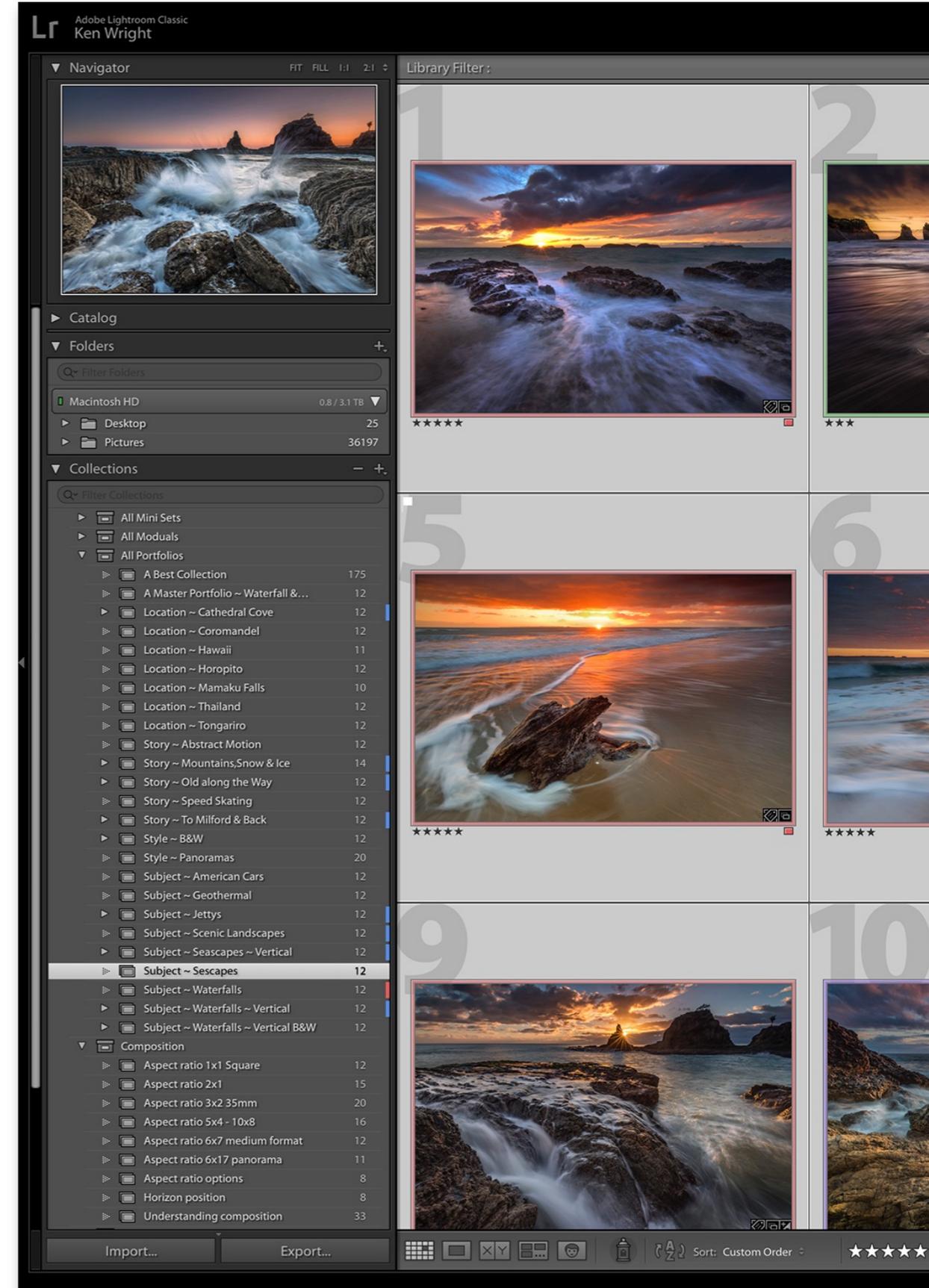
# COLLECTION TYPES

Below are the collection types we will use to help make decisions in the sorting process.

- *Subject Collections*
- *Location Collections*
- *Story Collections*
- *Style Collections*

Whether you specialise in wildlife, portraiture, astrophotography, or exotic locations, this process works for it all. It is easy to get lost in a sea of images, so the goal is to break it down into manageable groups.

Your sets will be different to ours; for example, my work consists predominantly of landscapes, while Richard's features both landscape and wildlife. The organisation process is an exercise in defining your style and vision while building a portfolio based on the things that you shoot. Before you are ready to categorise all your best work, however, you will need to identify and group together all the images you consider to be "best".



# ORGANISING BY SUBJECT

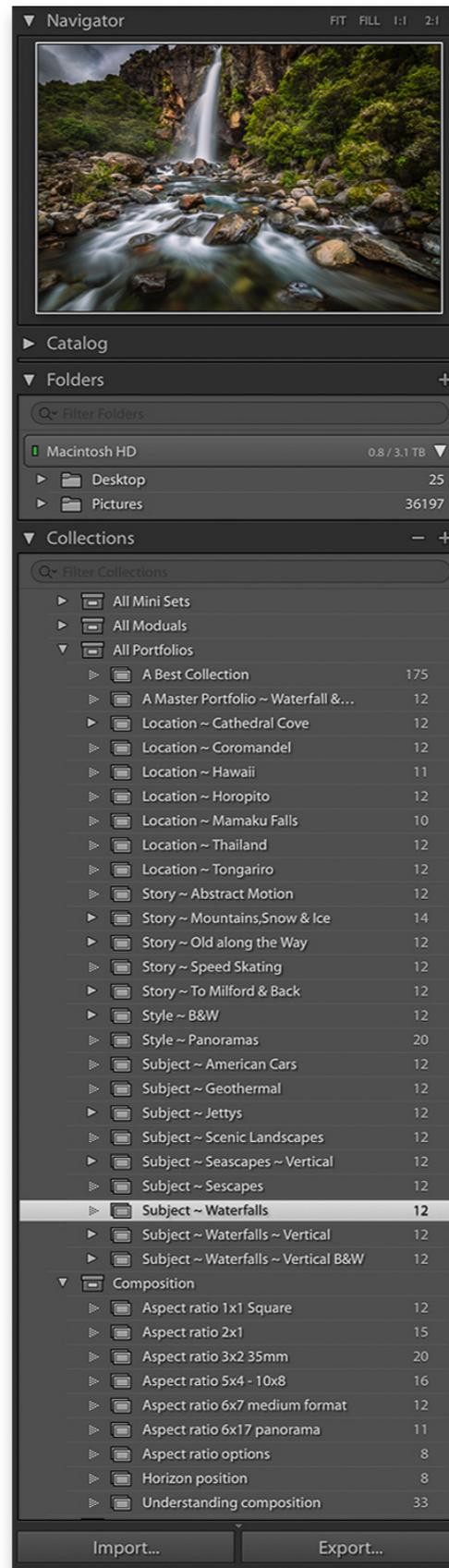
It's easiest to sort by broad attributes first and work down to specifics, and with that in mind, we recommend organising your "Best Collection" by subject first: create as many collections as needed to cover the subjects you shoot the most.

As a landscape photographer, I shoot certain subjects more frequently than others: my master collection features an abundance of waterfalls, seascapes, mountains, scenic vistas, etc. Therefore, I broke my work down to these collections:

- *Seascapes*
- *Waterfalls*
- *Jetties*

Your collections will be specific to you: for example, you may end up with collections titled:

- *"American Cars"*
- *"Portraits"*
- *"Birds of Prey"*





When you view your work in the subject collections you've created, you'll still notice a number of inconsistencies in how they fit together as a set. In my case, the "Waterfalls" collection consisted of a total mish-mash of aspect ratio, vertical vs. landscape, B&W vs. colour, etc.

We'll remedy this in the next step as we organise collections by shooting style.

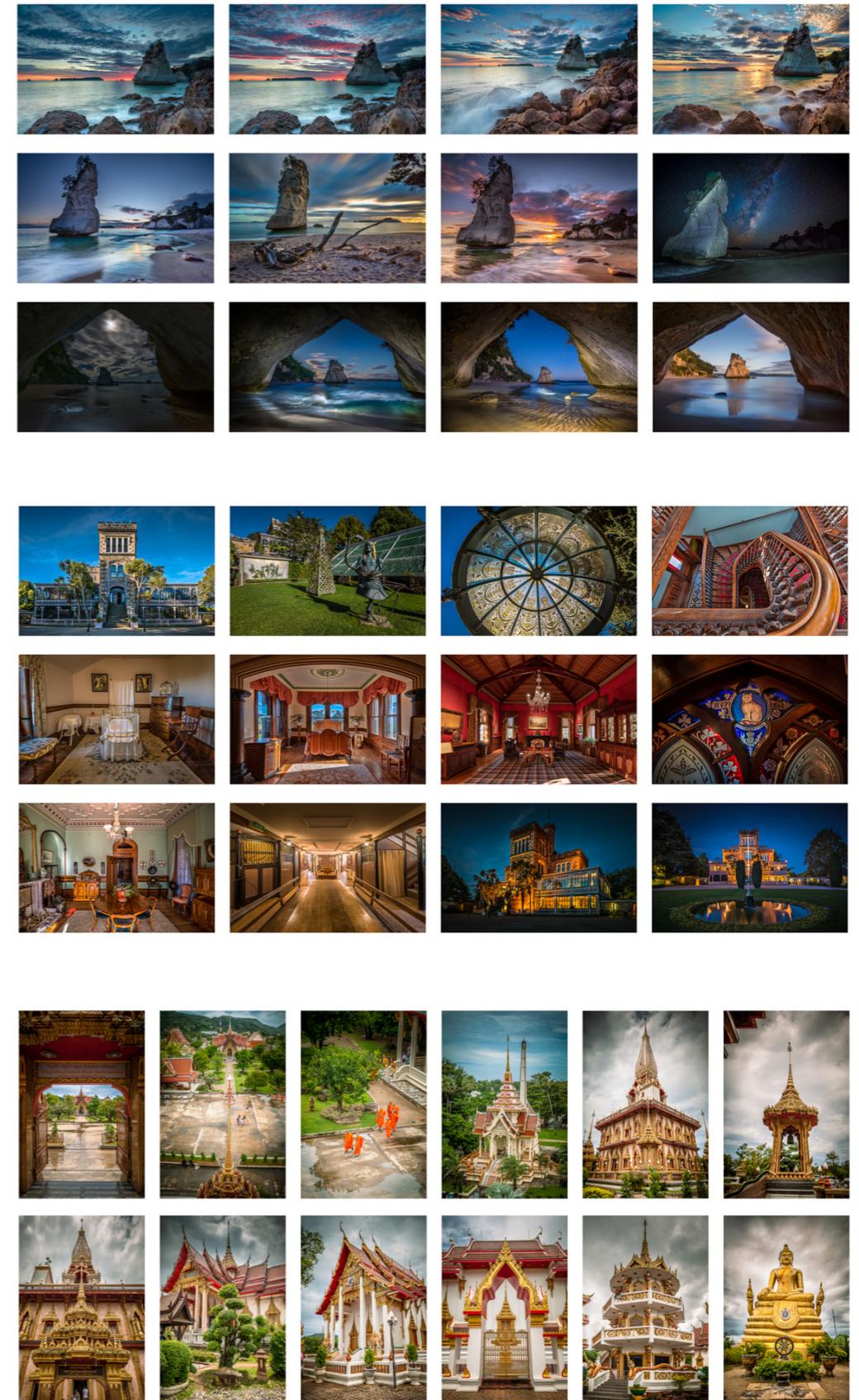
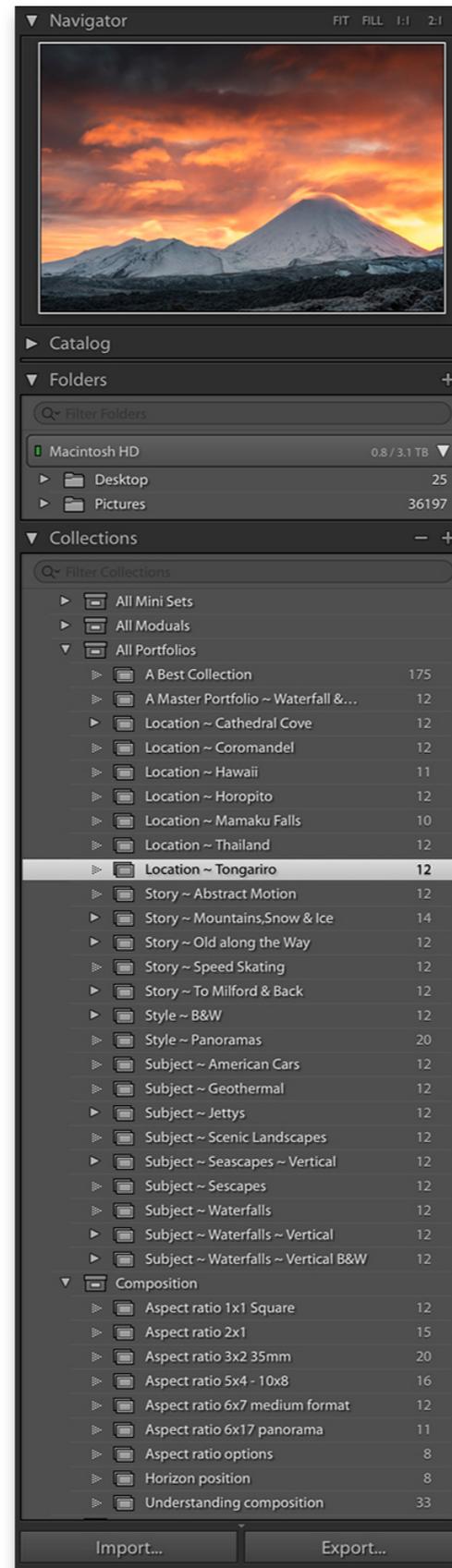
# ORGANISING BY LOCATION

Creating collections of this type will be fairly straightforward. How broad or specific your collections are will depend on where you shoot. For example, if you shoot exclusively in one region, your titles will be more specific than those of someone whose work features only a few images from each country of travel. I gave my location collections titles such as:

- *Tongariro*
- *Coromandel*
- *Mamaku Falls*

Your locations may be exotic: Thailand (pictured), Iceland, Myanmar—or they may be local. Just make sure, when creating these collections, to bear in mind the concept of unity: in NZ, for example, the landscape changes dramatically across various regions, and it may be more effective to create multiple location collections rather than grouping South Island scenes together with less-dramatic North Island scenes. Examples of Location collections:

- *“Thailand”*
- *“Wild South Island”*
- *“The Volcanic North Island”*



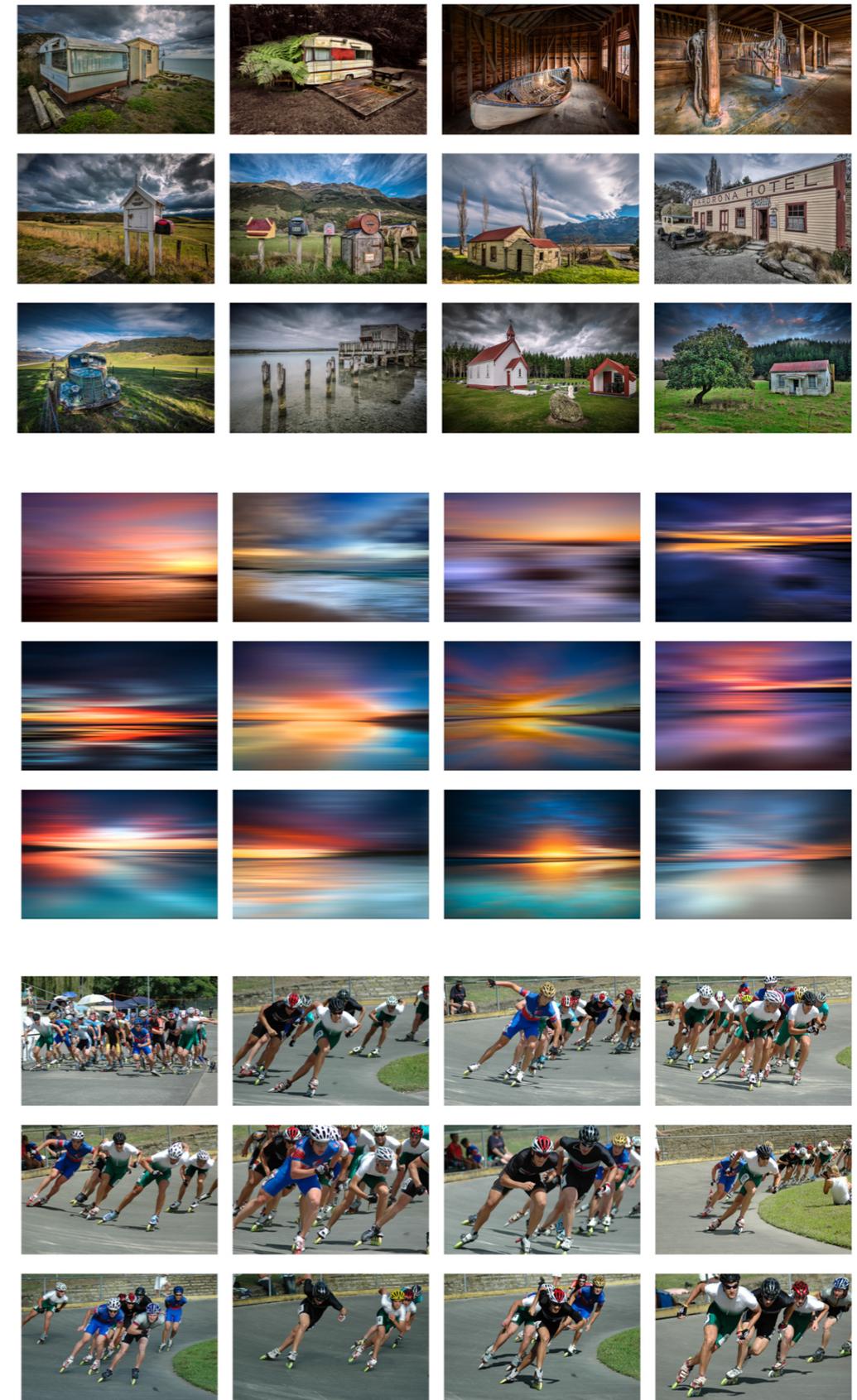
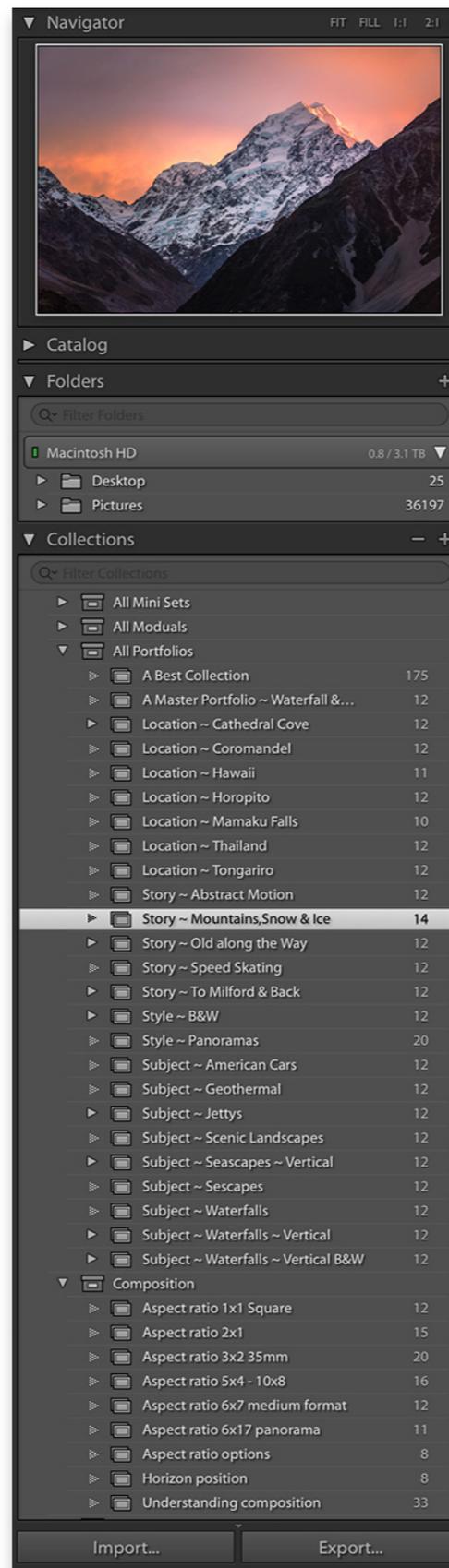
# ORGANISING BY STORY

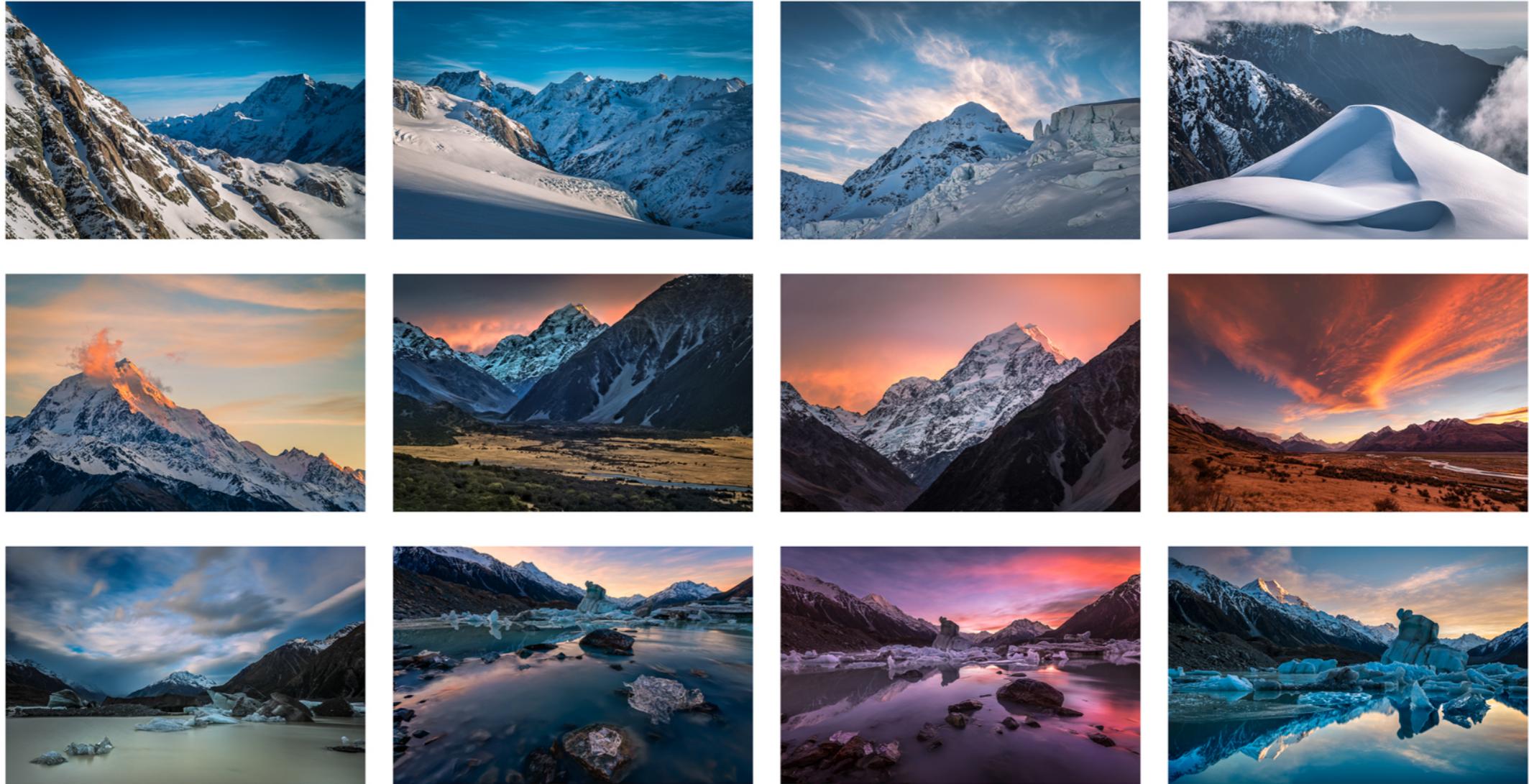
You may find that a set of images is better represented as an event or by the cohesive “story” it tells as a whole rather than by its location or specific subject matter. Here are some of the story collections I created:

- *Mountains, Snow & Ice*
- *Old - Somewhere along the way*
- *Milford and Back*

If you have images from an overseas journey, your collection might be titled “A Travel Story”. If you documented an event, your collection might be “The Road to Worlds”—2007 Inline Speed Skating (pictured). This collection tells the story of the Senior Men’s 10k elimination race, which plays a part in the overall selection process for the New Zealand World's Team. Below are some other examples.

- *“The Road to Worlds”*
- *“Walking the Routeburn Track”*
- *“A Week on Stewart Island”*
- *“A Visit to Hobbiton”*





## STORY COLLECTION - MOUNTAINS, SNOW & ICE

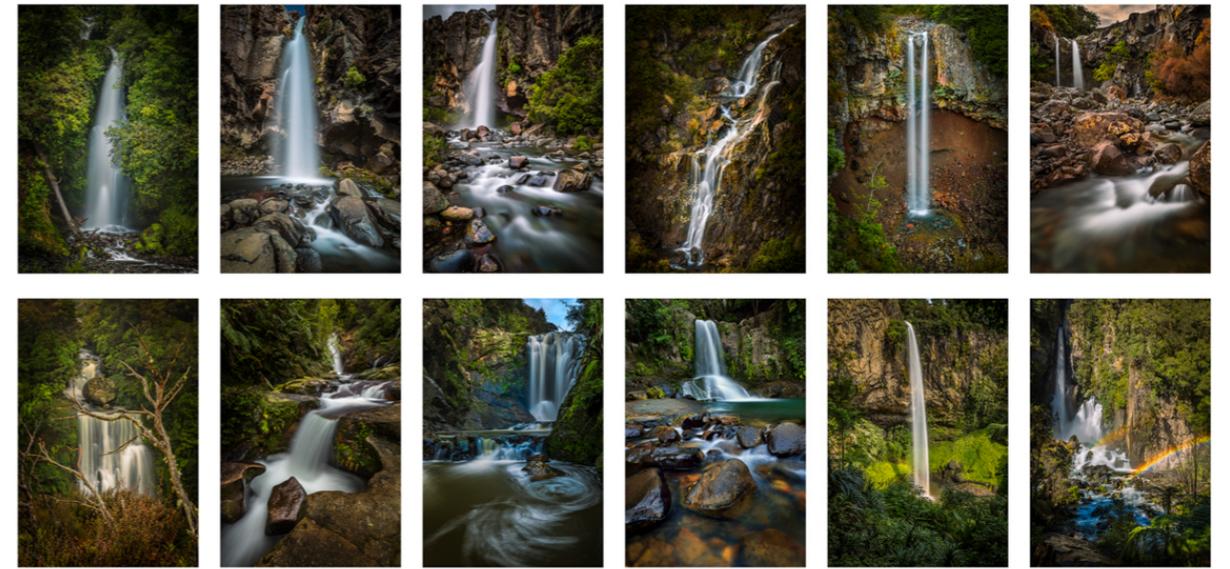
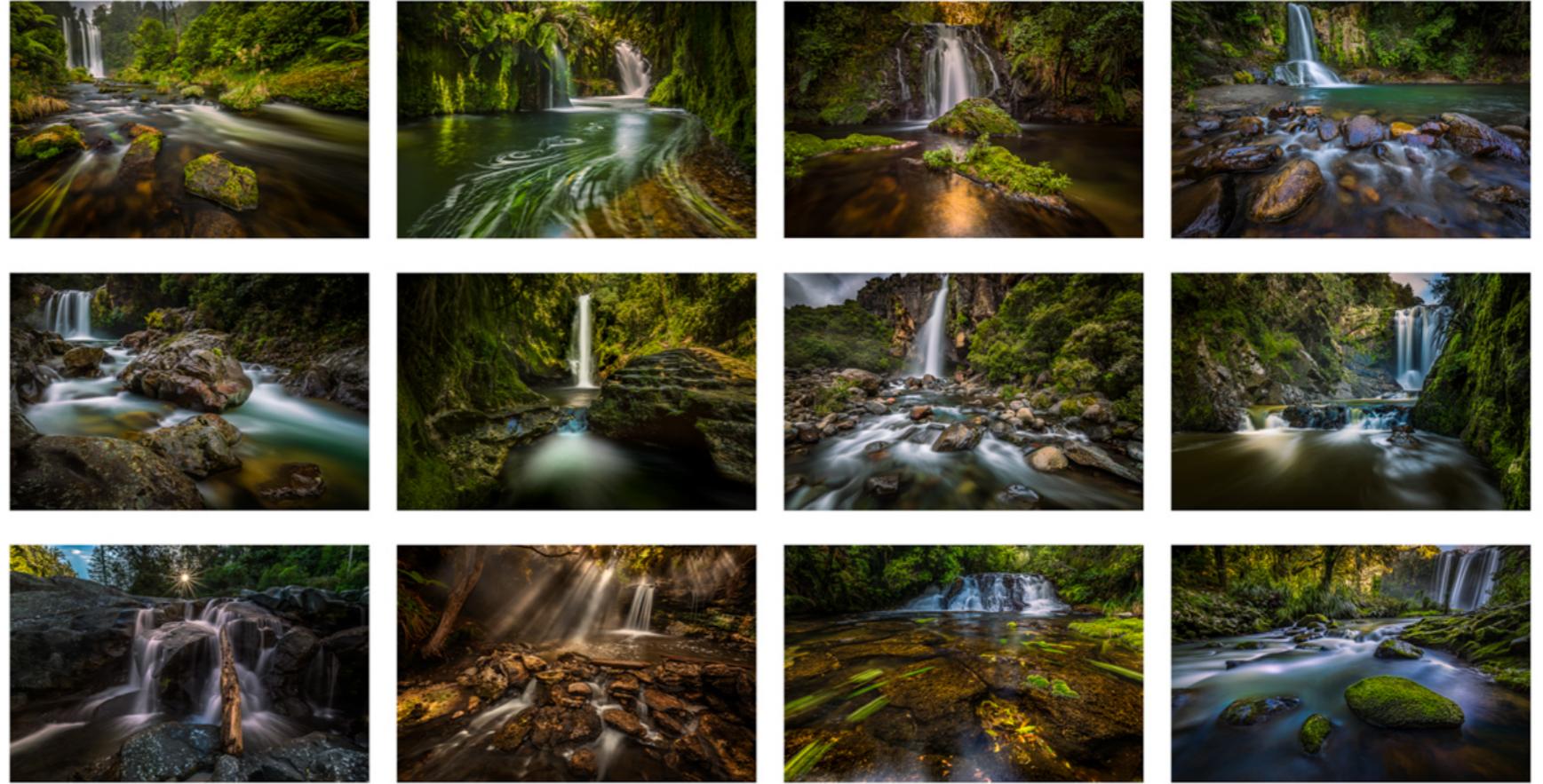
**What brings these images together as a story collection?**

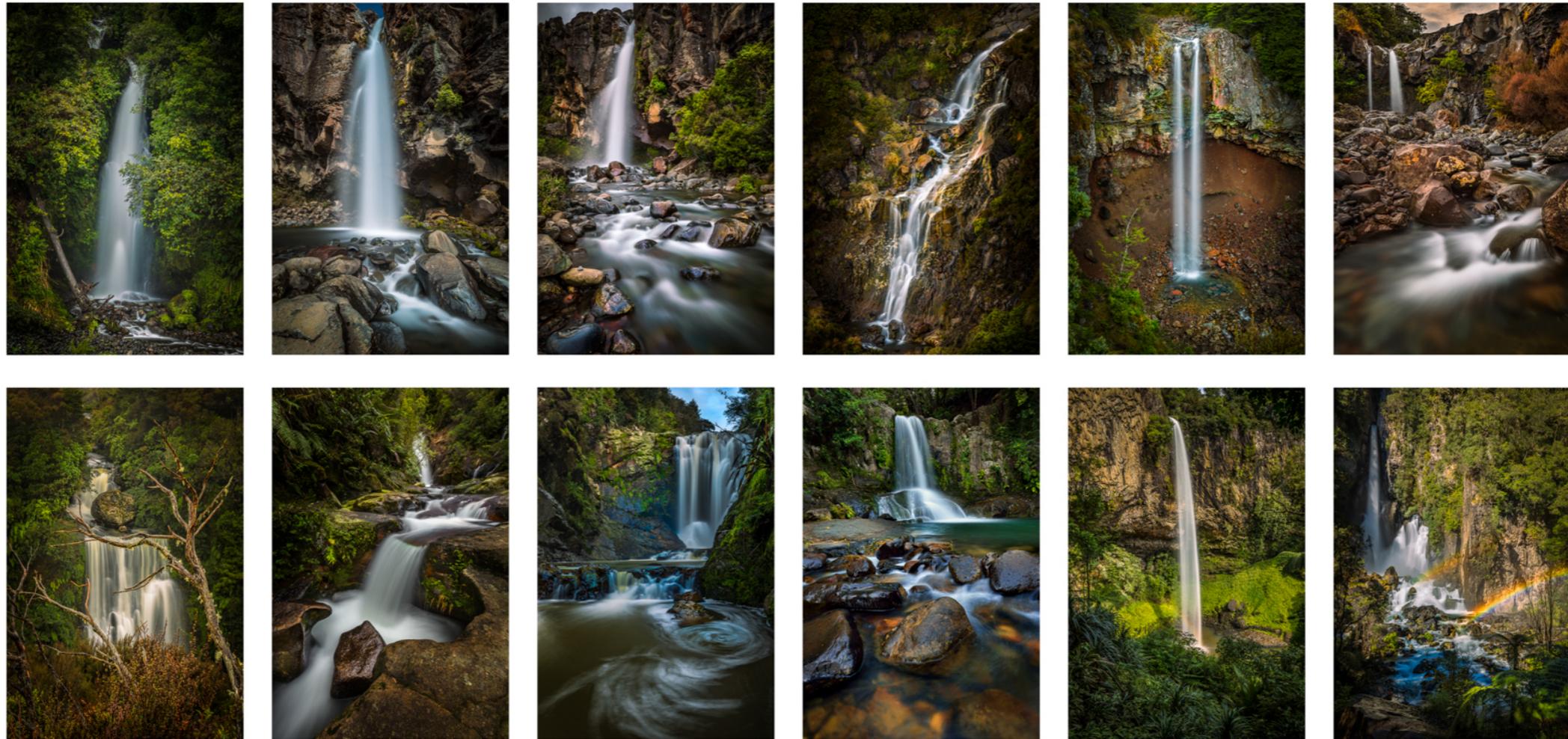
This is my refined set of 12 images from Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park. The top row features elevated views from Tasman and Fox Glacier; the middle row shows Aoraki/Mount Cook at sunrise, leading through to Tasman Flats; the bottom row focuses on Tasman Glacier Lake. The collection takes the viewer on a journey from the top of the glaciers to the bottom of the Tasman Valley.

# STEP 3

## ORGANISING BY SHOOTING STYLE

Despite having sorted your entire “Best Collection” according to subject, location, and/or story, your collections probably include a range of aspect ratio, orientation, colour vs. black and white, etc. To create artistic harmony in your image sets, you will need to organise them further by shooting style: create a collection for each defined style you use.





For me, this meant identifying several differing patterns in my “Waterfalls” collection, resulting in collections titled “Waterfalls B&W” and “Waterfalls Vertical”. This step of the process will leave you, at last, with unified sets of images.

## STYLE COLLECTION - VERTICAL WATERFALLS

### What brings these images together as a style collection?

Firstly, they are all vertical, which gives them a completely different look than my horizontal waterfalls. Additionally, they share similar colours and tonal relationships, and they were all shot at 16mm. It is conceivable that your whole collection could be vertical, square, 10x8, or 16x9, in which case your style collections will be based not on orientation or aspect ratio, but on other factors that set them apart. As with every other step, the specifics will be unique to you and your body of work.



CHAPTER 7

# REFINING A PORTFOLIO COLLECTION

By Ken Wright

# STYLE & VISION

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## REFINING A PORTFOLIO COLLECTION

By Ken Wright

The aim of this chapter is to help you narrow down your work until you've created a single "Master Portfolio" consisting of twelve images.

In the last chapter, you created collections dividing your best images into specific subjects, locations, or stories; in this chapter, you will be evaluating your collections in terms of consistency, style, aspect ratio, processing, and other considerations. The process outlined below is intended as a guide only, and if you find that a different approach works best for you, by all means follow your own process. In either case, your goal is to curate a small collection of images with a shared vision and story.

Regardless of how many collections you filled in the previous stage, this step involves refining each down to twelve images, adding the best four from each to a Master Portfolio, and then whittling that down to a final portfolio of twelve. The process is as follows:

Reduce Collections: 12 images each

Create Master Portfolio: 4 images from each collection

Reduce Master Portfolio: 12 images



**Why twelve?** For this course, we are refining our collections down to twelve images each, with the end goal being a portfolio of twelve prints. Settling on a specific number helps keep our portfolios strong—and also teaches us to be selective. For more general purposes, however, a portfolio does not need to be constrained to twelve images.

## STEP 1

### REFINING YOUR COLLECTIONS

First, consider your collections. One by one, work through them, eliminating the weakest images until you're left with twelve photos in each collection. Which images best fit your own personal style? Take into account composition, colour, and tonal value. This may mean excluding some of your strongest individual photos.

#### **Letting go of an image**

It is hard to be objective when certain images mean so much to you, but, as Richard says, “A portfolio is only as strong as its weakest image”. When I came to this step, I had to eliminate older images demonstrating atypical processing styles. Each of the three images below are significant to me, and I really wanted them to fit into my final “portfolio collection”.

However, while the images themselves are far from “weak”, they do not fit as representations of my overall style and vision, and therefore they do not belong in my master portfolio collection.

Inconsistent style will jump out at you, while images with an inconsistent vision are harder to identify. For example, although my Sail Rock image meets my criteria for style, it lacks a deep foreground that draws viewers in—and this is a key aspect of my vision. The image, despite being a favourite, had to be eliminated.

*“A portfolio is only as strong as its weakest image.”*

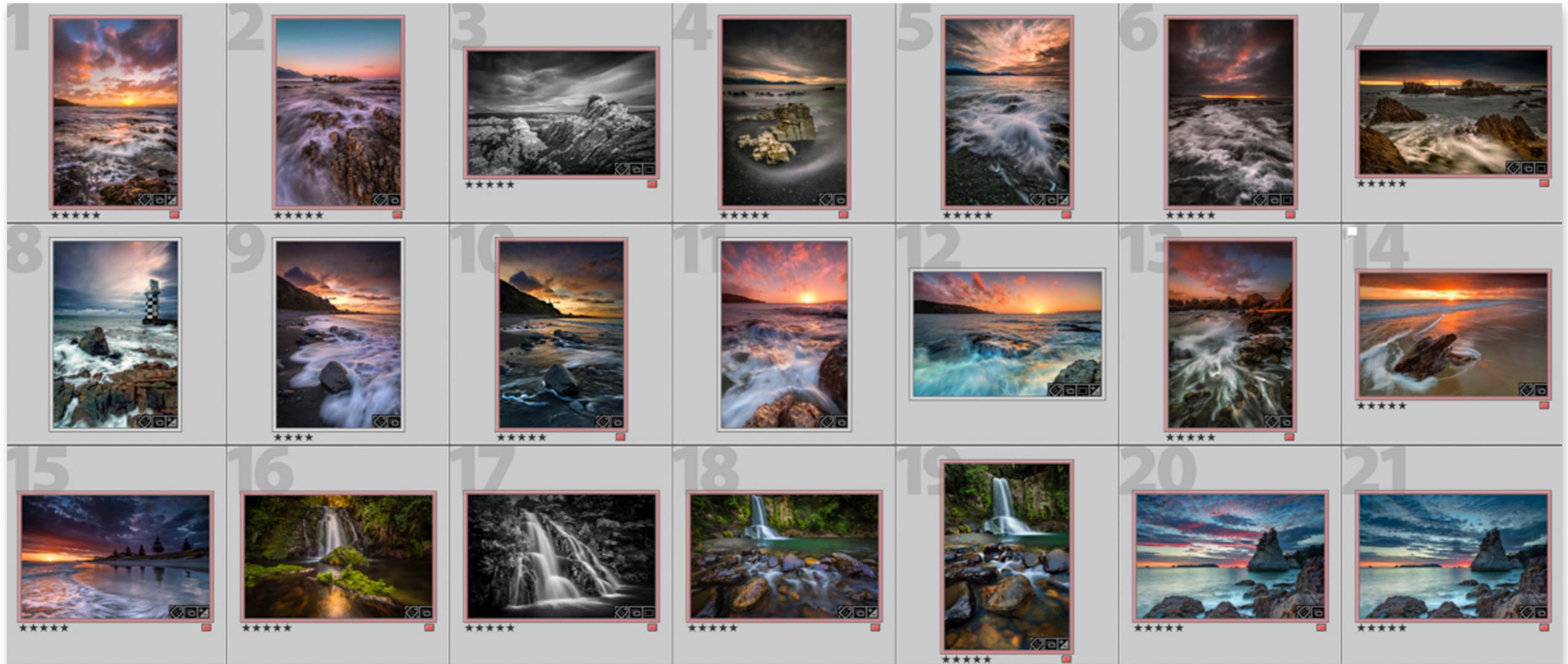


## STEP 2

### BUILDING A MASTER PORTFOLIO

Once all collections have been refined, select the four best images from each. These should be images that are not only excellent individually, but that best represent their collection. Add your selections to a new collection called “Master Portfolio”.

*Once you’ve completed this step, your “Master Portfolio” should be filled with all your best images—this could be anywhere from 20 to 70 images or more.*



## STEP 3

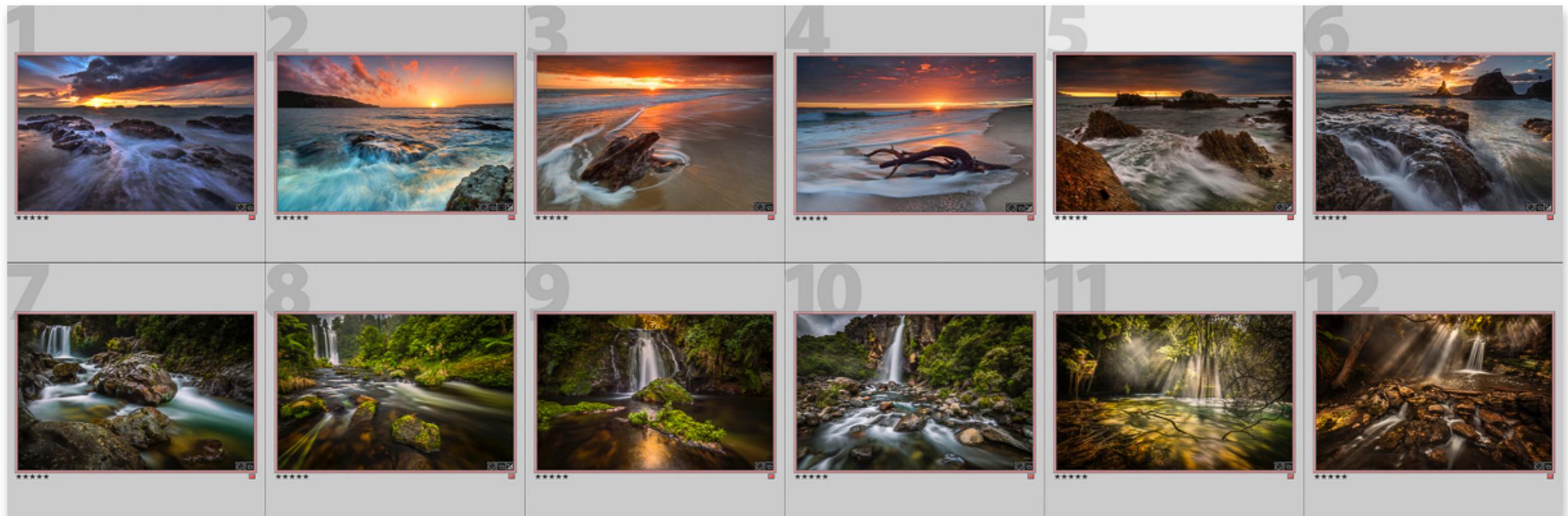
### REFINING YOUR MASTER PORTFOLIO

As you examine this Master Portfolio, you should start to see some consistency. This will make it easier to identify which images don't fit with the rest. You may have to sweep back and forth several times (it took me five iterations). After I eliminated images that did not fit, I ran through the collection again doing just the opposite—picking out images that were too similar. Because I've visited some locations so many times, my Master Portfolio contained multiple shots from the same location. Wanting each image to be a unique representation of my style and vision, I had to select the best from each location and eliminate the extras. Consider seeking an outside opinion: do your images all bear the same handprint? What do they convey in terms of style and vision?

#### Take a break

You're almost there, but this is the most difficult stage of the process. Not only is it emotionally challenging to cull images you treasure, it's also easy to become visually swamped and lose the ability to be objective. Allow yourself to take a break so you can come back with a fresh set of eyes. Do not rush this stage.

Eventually, you will be left with a collection of twelve of your strongest images, each showcasing your style and vision to consistent effect. This is your "Master Portfolio". Keep in mind that this will be an ongoing process as you continue to produce new work and grow as a photographer. Your portfolio is an evolving thing.



# MY COLLECTION-REFINING PROCESS

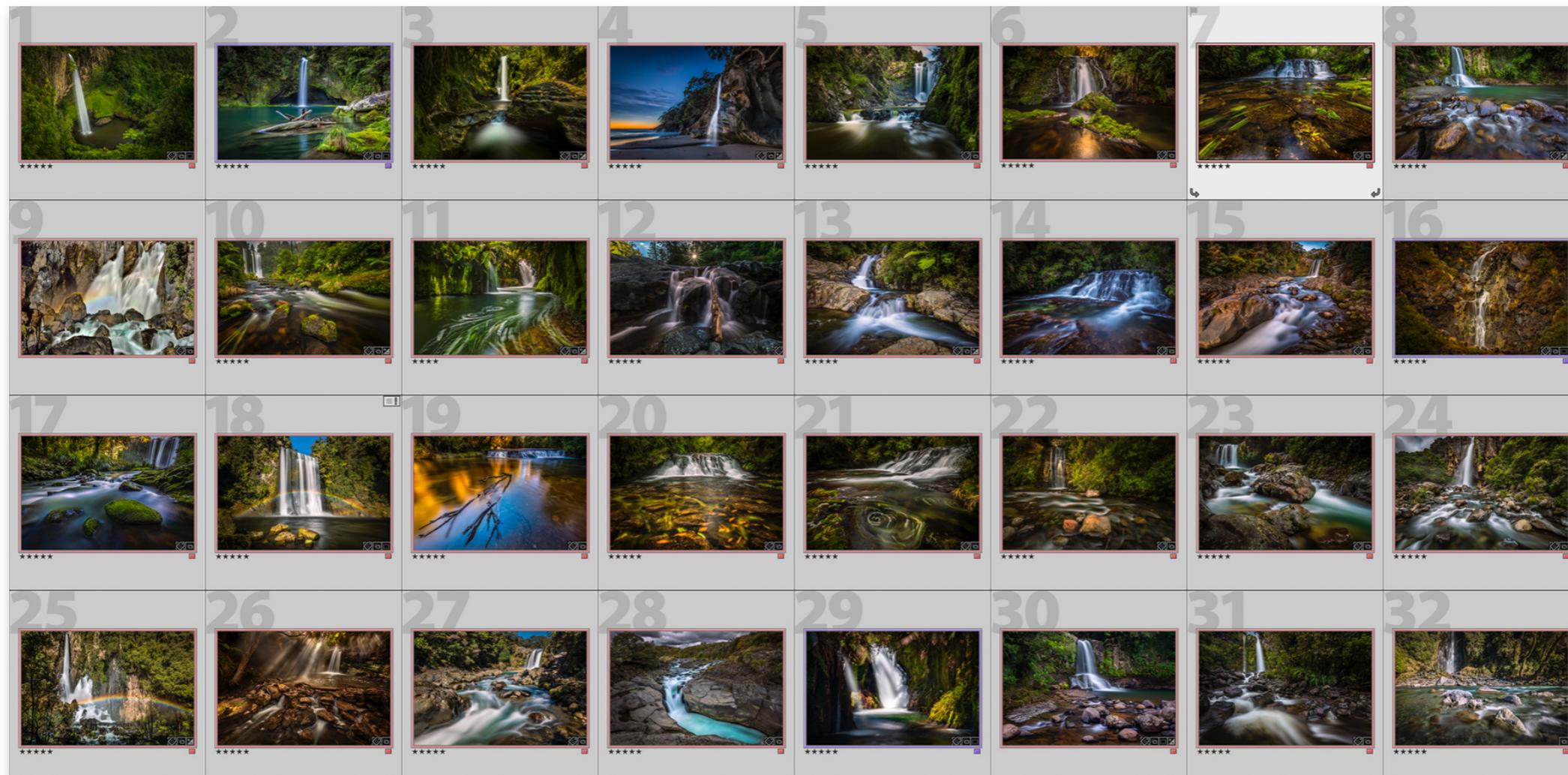
To further illustrate the process and help you refine your collection, let me take you through the steps I took when curating my own portfolio.

## A process of elimination: Waterfalls

After moving the vertical, vertical B&W, and B&W images into their own collections, my “Waterfalls” collection contained 32 images. Through of my decision-making process I determined which waterfalls to keep and which to eliminate.

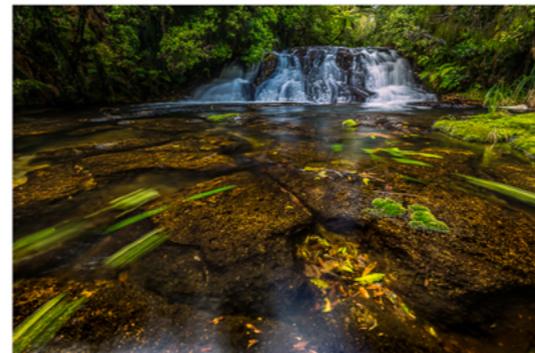
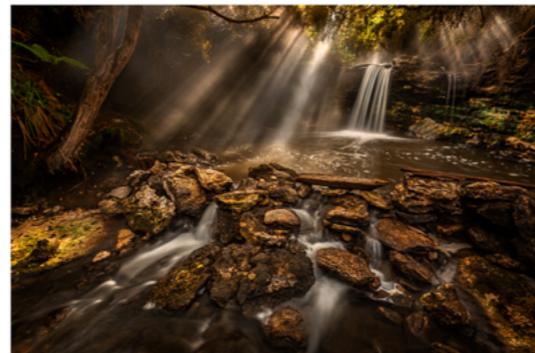
What I found during this process surprised me. While all were nice images in their own right, I had to keep asking myself, “Do they fit with the rest?” You may not agree with my selection; it is a personal process, after all. If Richard had been the one to sort through this collection, I doubt we would have ended up with the same twelve selections.

Most importantly, I wanted to end up with a consistent “look and feel”, a “handwriting” that says these are Ken Wright images.





**View the additional PDF** to see my selection process



*My Final Waterfall Collection*

# MY MASTER PORTFOLIO

## A PROCESS OF ELIMINATION

My work includes a vast range of subjects: seascapes, waterfalls, mountains, and geothermal landscapes. As detailed in the last chapter, I organised images by subject, location, and theme—refining each collection to 32 initially, and then down to twelve.

The process was more involved for locations I've visited numerous times, such as Otarawairere Bay; that collection started out with 82 images. I broke that down into this Mini Set, from which a single image made the final cut for my portfolio.



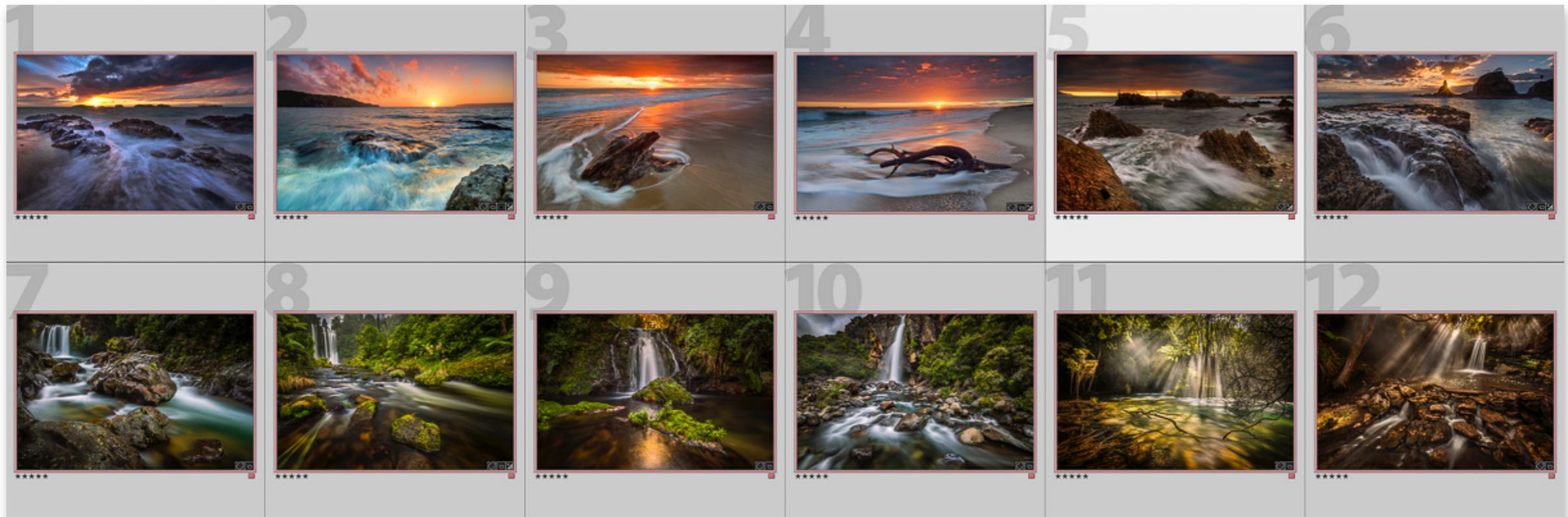
# MY MASTER PORTFOLIO

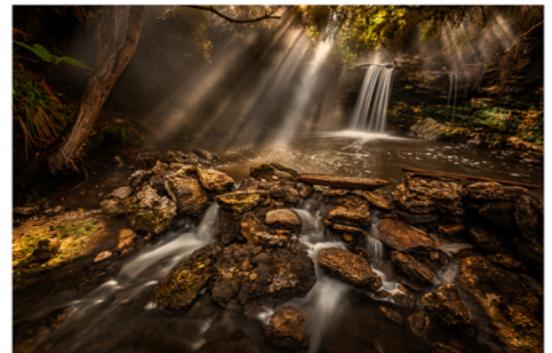
I had decided that my portfolio would consist of photos from two collections that represent me: Waterfalls and Seascapes. My goal was to select six of each for my final portfolio. My final set took days to refine; during that time, I revisited it four times to refine it further. The portfolio represents my two main areas of activity: Seascapes and Waterfalls. Together, these form the story “Water in Motion”.

Water in Motion plays a significant part in my work, as I’ve studied it in the field for 13 years. You may know all the photographic formulas in the world, but on the day of a shoot, nature will dictate how you capture the scene. My seascapes represent the three main aspects of water movement that I work with: water surging forward, water retracting, and water running. They include sunset and sunrise, all

shot straight into the light. Seascape 6 features a waterfall over rocks; this image serves as a transitional device, leading the viewer into the first waterfall image.

The first four waterfalls are shot from unique angles: either from in the water itself or at the side opposite from where people normally shoot. The last two show unique moments in time that were unplanned—I was just lucky to be there when the sun shone through the mist (the last shot is actually steam from a hidden “hot water” waterfall). All shots in the portfolio demonstrate consistency of focal length, style, vision, colour, and processing, featuring dynamic wide angles and deep foregrounds.



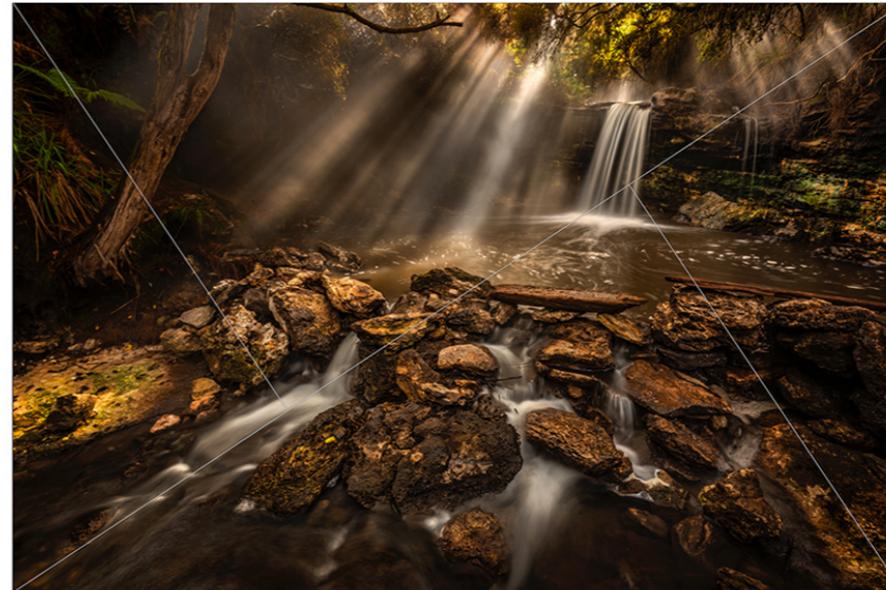


*My Master Portfolio - Seascapes & Waterfalls*

This was a journey of discovery for me, as it will be for you. Overall, what jumped out to me is that I am a “repeat offender” of certain angles, certain compositions, aspect ratios, etc. As I worked through my collections, four waterfalls (pictured below) leapt out at me: different locations, different times of day, yet all balanced with a deep foreground to lead the viewer to the waterfall. Subconsciously, I had repeated this compositional “balance”, not realising it until I saw the images together in a collection.

As mentioned before, “letting go” of an image is hard, and Whangarei Falls (bottom right) did not make the final cut.

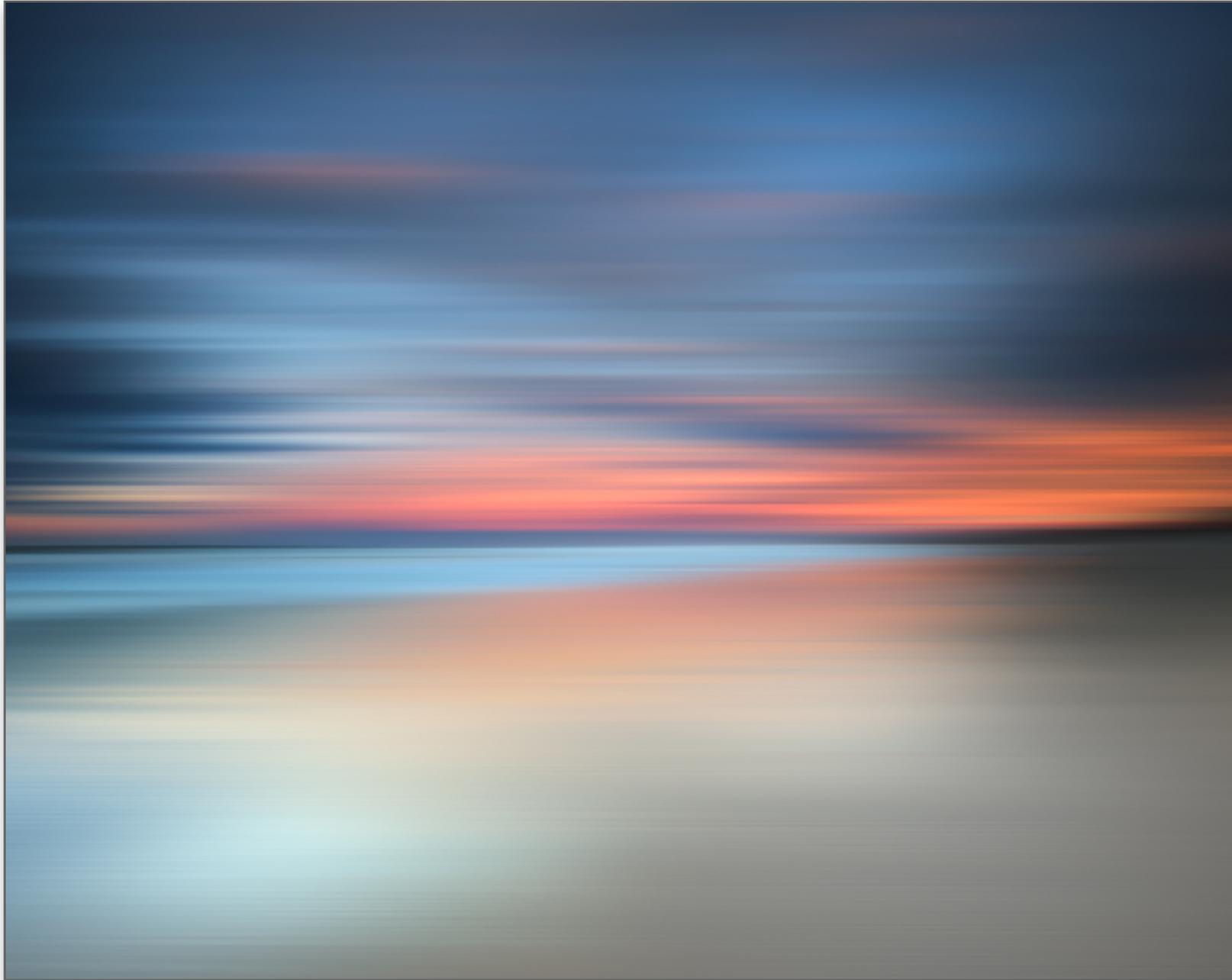
What I am hoping is that this process helps you start to notice your own habits. Regardless of what you shoot, you should notice commonalities emerge in the subjects, composition, and processing you choose, revealing your style. You may find that you had a vision all along—and this process will help you find it.



A sunset over a body of water. The sky transitions from a deep purple at the top to a bright orange near the horizon. The sun is a glowing yellow orb on the right side of the horizon, with its light reflecting on the water below. The overall mood is serene and peaceful.

CHAPTER 8

# EXERCISES



*Notes: Copy this text into a Word document and write out your answers. Refer to [Chapter 2](#) for more information on style elements.*

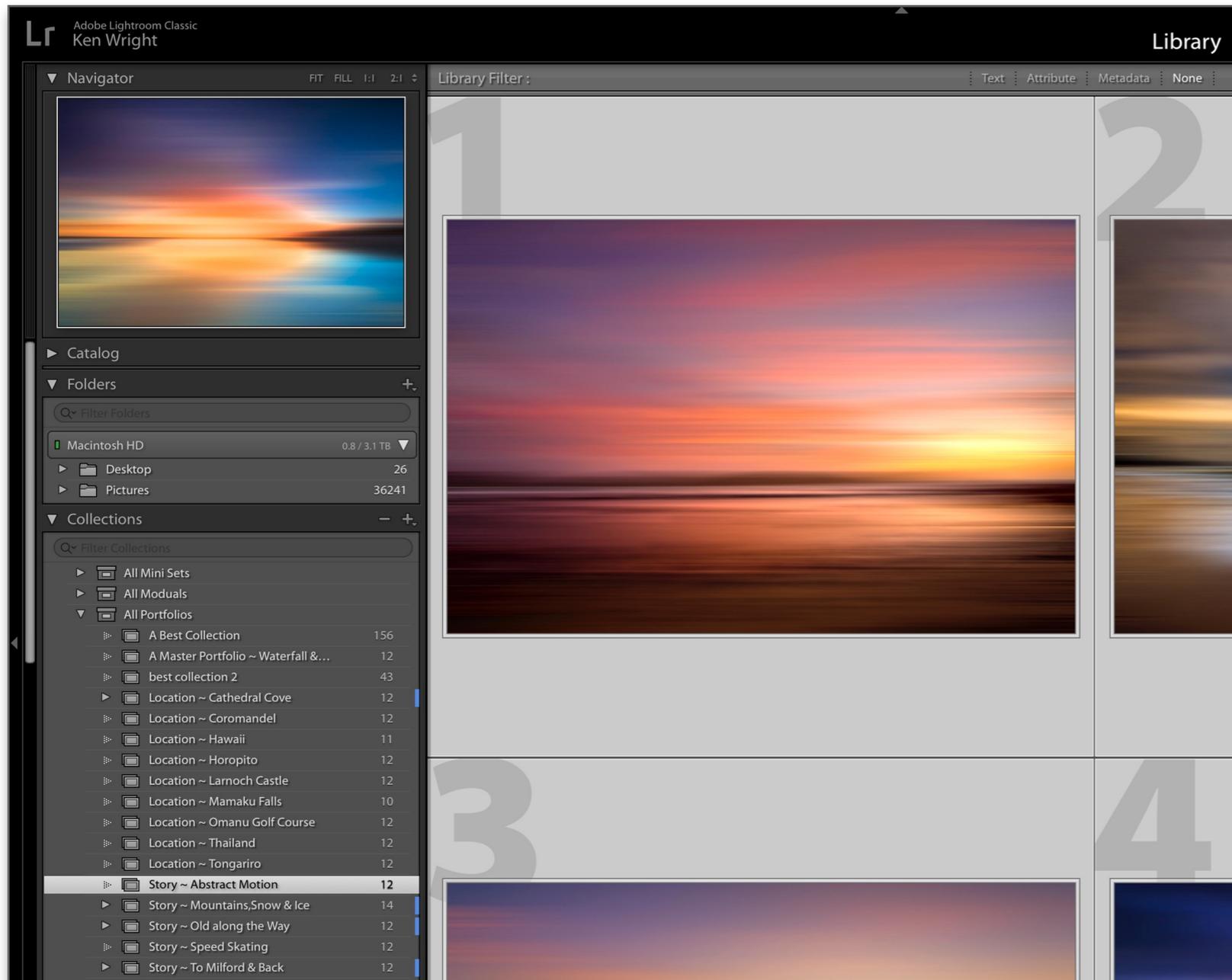
## EXERCISE 1

### EXPLORE STYLE COMMONALITIES

Without looking over your photographs, work over the following questions to help define your approach (style) to capturing your subject.

#### **Questions:**

- What is your favourite lens, and why?
- Do you own a lens that you rarely use, and why?
- Do you prefer wide, sweeping views or close-ups of details?
- Do you normally shoot in landscape or portrait orientation, and why?
- What aspect ratio do you normally work/crop to, and why?
- What time of day do you do most of your photography?
- What is your favourite type of light/weather for photography?
- Do you prefer colour or black & white photographs, and why?
- What is your personal favourite subject matter to photograph?
- Do you prefer to photograph new or familiar environments?



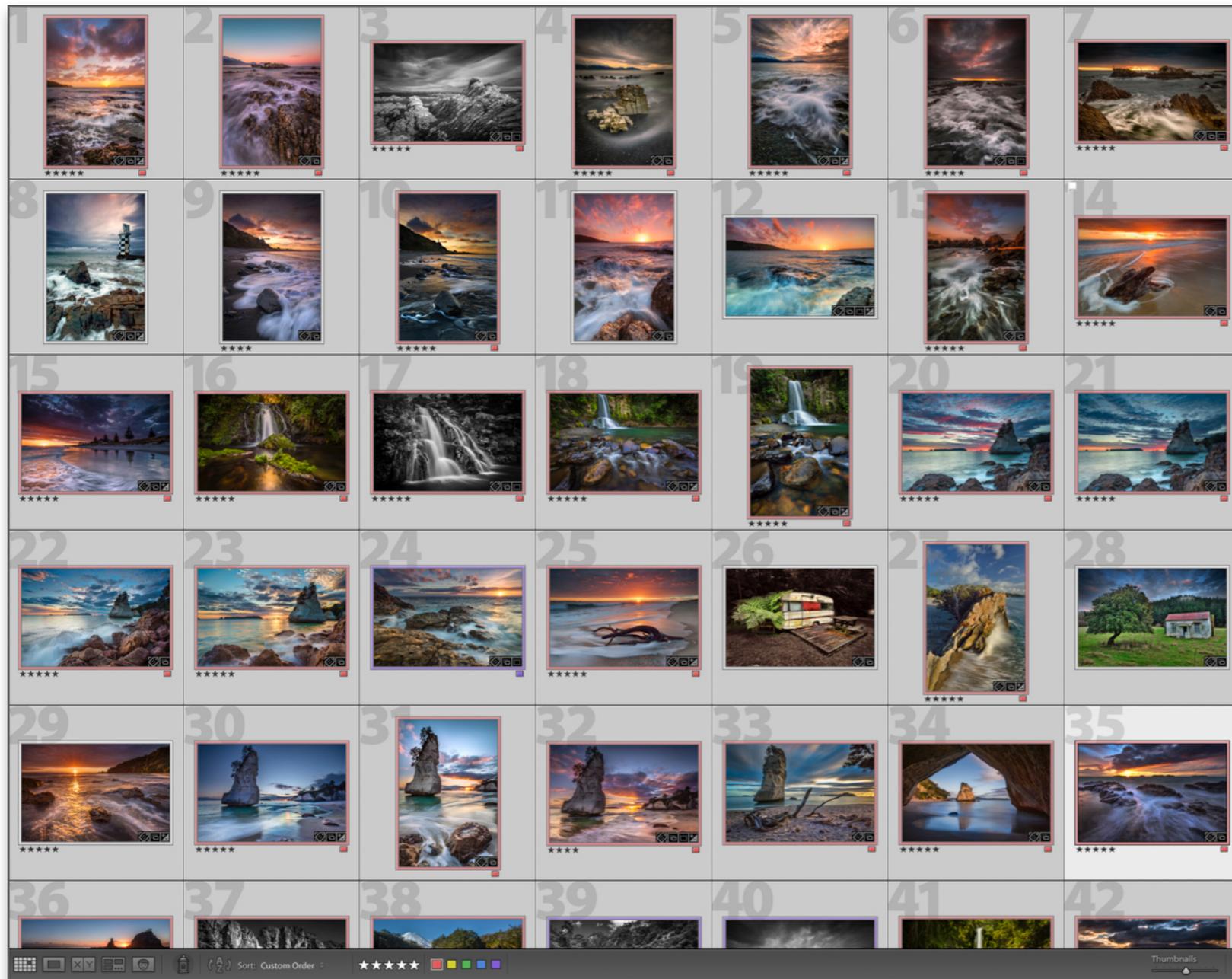
## EXERCISE 2

### MAKE A SET OF PORTFOLIO COLLECTIONS

As detailed in **Chapter 6**, create a number of Lightroom collections based around the genres/subjects/locations you shoot.

Make a “Collection Set” in Lightroom and call it “All Portfolios”. Create “collections” within this set for different portfolio types, i.e. “Portfolio - Seascapes”

***NOTES:** Refer to our book Lightroom - Catalogue Management for information on working with collections and collection sets. Refer to Chapter 6 for ideas on topics and subjects for your collections.*



*Notes: We have referred to this final set of images as your “Master Portfolio” collection for the purpose of this book. You can call your final collection anything you wish; give it a name that means something to you.*

## EXERCISE 3

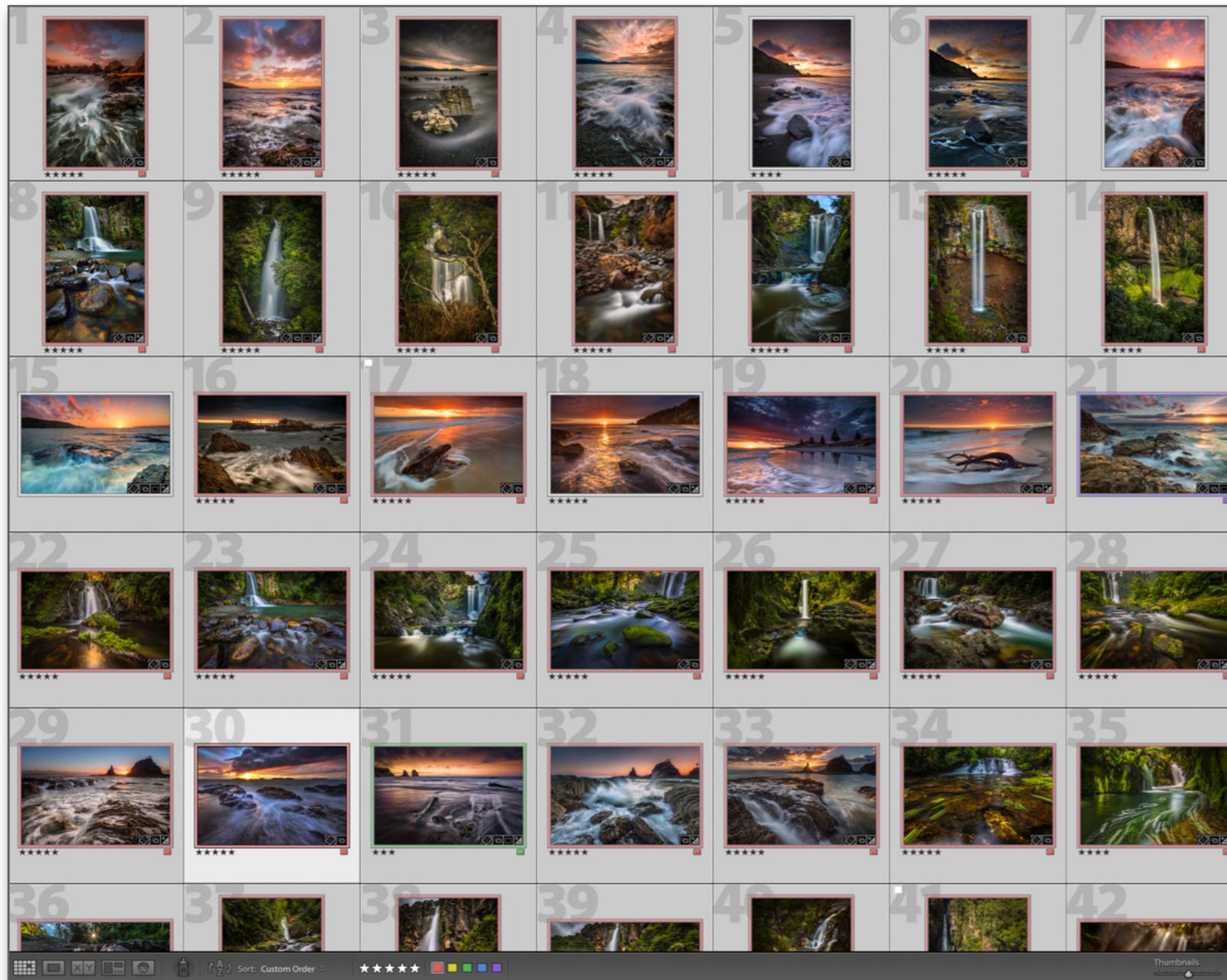
### PICK YOUR TOP 30

Work through all your sets of Lightroom collections and pick your top 30 photographs to build your “Master Portfolio” collection. We suggest picking one of the following topics to build a master portfolio collection.

**Best Collection** - Pick your favourite photographs to represent yourself as a photographer—for consistency, it works best to select a specific genre. If you shoot a mix of genres and want your Best Collection to represent this, pick three genres and use ten photographs of each.

**Style and Vision Collection** - If you’ve just learned about the subject, it will be a difficult task to make a collection focused on your style and vision. As we discussed, this is a process that can take years to discover! If you do feel you have some clarity on your style and vision, you could base your portfolio collection around this.

**Subject Collection** - Is there a particular subject you shoot most? A story you want to tell? A project you have been working on? The topic is your choice! Try to select images with some consistency in shooting style.



***Notes:** Screenshot the collection at its different stages to show the work sorted in different orders. In the next stage of your selection process, review the screenshots, looking at how the images sit together in different ways. Refer to [Chapter 2](#) for more information on style elements .*

## EXERCISE 4

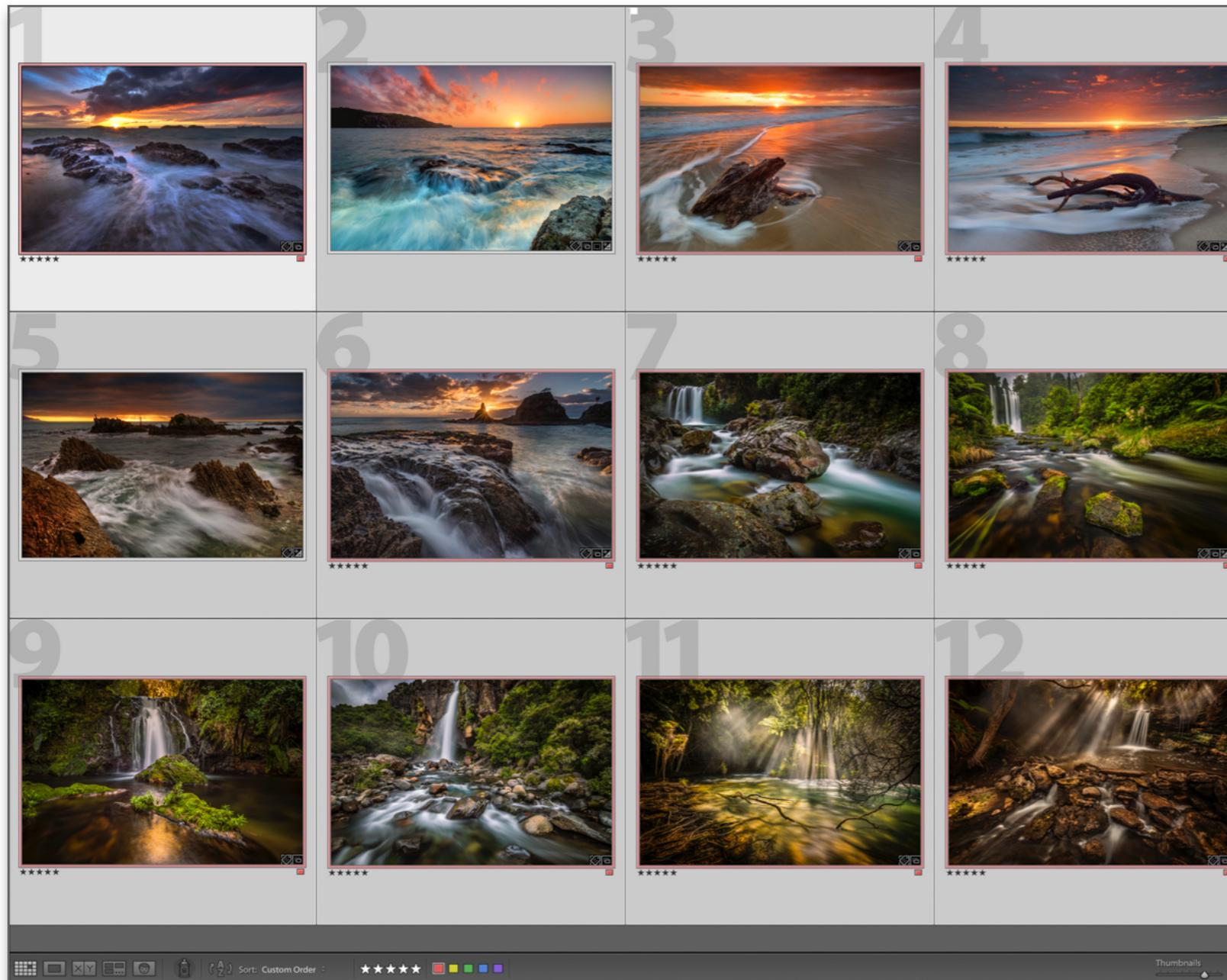
### DISCOVER STYLE COMMONALITIES

Among your top 30 images in your “Master Portfolio” collection, there will be a number of commonalities showcasing individual style elements in your work. Try reordering the images by the following topics to discover commonalities.

- Subject or location
- Lens focal length used
- Perspective or composition
- Quality of light or time of the day
- Colour or tonality

#### **For example:**

- Sort the images in an ascending order by focal length lens used to capture them — 18mm, 24mm, 35mm, 50mm, 70mm, etc.
- Sort by similar perspectives: wide-angle or inner details, foreground emphasis or background perspective, viewpoint or height, etc.
- Sort by the time of day they reflect: sunrise/sunset, golden hour, middle of the day, nighttime, etc.



## EXERCISE 5

### REFINE TO A COLLECTION OF 12

With the help of your style sets, refine your 30 images to a collection of 12 that will make up your final portfolio.

For this course, we are refining our collections down to twelve images each, with the end goal being a portfolio of twelve prints. Settling on a specific number helps keep our portfolios strong—and also teaches us to be selective. For more general purposes, however, a portfolio does not need to be constrained to twelve images.

*Notes: Refer to [Chapter 7](#) for a process to refine your collections.*

*The portfolio represents my two main areas of activity: Seascapes and Waterfalls. Together, these form the story “Water in Motion”.*

*Water in Motion plays a significant part in my work, as I’ve studied it in the field for 13 years. You may know all the photographic formulas in the world, but on the day of a shoot, nature will dictate how you capture the scene. My seascapes represent the three main aspects of water movement that I work with: water surging forward, water retracting, and water running. They include sunset and sunrise, all shot straight into the light. Seascape 6 features a waterfall over rocks; this image serves as a transitional device, leading the viewer into the first waterfall image.*

*The first four waterfalls are shot from unique angles: either from in the water itself or at the side opposite from where people normally shoot. The last two show unique moments in time that were unplanned—I was just lucky to be there when the sun shone through the mist (the last shot is actually steam from a hidden “hot a” waterfall). All shots in the portfolio demonstrate consistency of focal length, style, vision, colour, and processing, featuring dynamic wide angles and deep foregrounds.*

## EXERCISE 6

### WRITE AN ARTIST STATEMENT

Write a 200+ word statement about this collection, what it represents to you, and what you wish to communicate to the viewer.

#### **Consider:**

- What the images represent
- Why you have created them
- Sources and inspiration for your images
- How they fit into a series or longer body of work
- If they reflect your style and vision, explain how



## EXERCISE 7

### SHARE YOUR COLLECTION!

There is little point in keeping your images locked away, so share them with others. Before you share them with the masses, find a couple people that you know well (whose views you respect) and ask for feedback. Take any negative feedback as constructive criticism, but keep in mind that your work may not please everyone, and not everyone will see what it expresses.



## EXERCISE 8

### SHOOT SOME NEW WORK

Capturing new photographs is what we all enjoy the most! Do you feel like you have some gaps in your collections? An image that still does not quite fit in? Then set yourself a goal to create more images for this collection. Once you have a reason to capture new work, you'll find a refreshed appetite for your passion. While developing your collections, remember to have fun and experiment with new approaches.



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