

EXPRESSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

By Richard Young and Ken Wright



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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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 - EXPRESSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

You have captured the perfect shot—a shot that tells a story and reflects personal expression. All it needs is a little enhancement in Lightroom or Photoshop, and it will be a finished work of art. This final step may just seem like the icing on the cake, but who eats cake without icing? For a good photographer, making the capture is not the end of the story, nor is it the only critical stage of your work. To end up with a polished product, it's important to approach post-processing with as much informed intent as you extended to the capture itself.

Consider the post-processing strategy you've used for past work. Can you pinpoint what, specifically, you hoped to achieve? Perhaps it was simply to “make images look better”. Indeed, many photographers approach post-processing with this simple goal, not sparing much thought to their process; just working based on a subjective, but general, sense of aesthetics. Unfortunately, this simplistic approach can wreak havoc on an artist's vision and style. With a more mindful approach, post-processing can—and should—help us to achieve the opposite. It gives us an opportunity to continue to refine our message to the viewer—and the personal expression that can be achieved here is as meaningful as that which was started in the field.

This book is designed to teach a process of evaluating an image: deciding what message to enhance, and allowing this to guide our processing. To facilitate this, we will explore how the use of controls such as luminosity, contrast, and colour—along with simple tools like cropping—can change the mood, impact, and flow of the photograph.

Hope you enjoy this creative process.

Richard & Ken



CHAPTER 1

IMAGE ANALYSIS

By Richard Young

EXPRESSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

IMAGE ANALYSIS

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WHAT DO YOU WANT TO EXPRESS?

When a student asks me how to process their image, I always feel a little hesitant in directing them. I can show them what tools to use, where to set each slider, and how to crop the image—there is nothing wrong with imparting such information. But in doing so, I run the risk of imposing my own expression and vision on their work, rather than enabling them to find theirs. It's similar to arranging someone else's shoot in the field: if I set up their camera, show them where to point it, and advise them on what lens and settings to use, the photograph won't express their own style and vision.

The first and most important step of processing is to define your message; processing tools only have purpose if we know what it is we want to express. "Expressive processing" may be a more fitting title than "post-processing", since it's not about learning a straightforward set of skills. There are no definitive "right" or "wrong" settings for your sliders; the trick is in learning how to use the tools to express yourself. What do you want the viewer to notice about the image? About your experience? About you? What do you want them to feel when looking at it? These are the first questions we should ask ourselves when processing an image.



"The question should not be how to process, but why."

A photograph isn't just simply a record of what's in front of us: it's an expression, a piece of artwork, a way of communicating. And as such, Lightroom and Photoshop are not simply tools to process a photograph—they are tools to express ourselves, just as much as the camera is.

Of course, the journey of a photograph starts long before the processing stage—it starts when we choose a subject, compose it in the lens, and capture the image. These steps are vital to the telling of our story. But don't let this be where personal expression stops. Enhancing (or altering) the message captured during the shoot is a powerful step in its own right, if we are processing with intent to express our own personal **Style & Vision**.

This is not to say that you can't seek help during the processing stage; while it's up to you to determine your vision, it may be useful to seek input on how best to convey it in a particular image. Just be careful to avoid defaulting to someone else's Lightroom settings. The processing stage, just like the shoot itself, should not be the product of a set of "rules" you have learned from an outside source. Every time you make a processing choice, ask yourself **why** you made this choice. **What** does it change? **How** will it affect other choices? Remember, your goal is to enhance your vision/message, define your style, and present the subject in the photograph, so begin with these three ideas—**vision, style, and subject**—in mind.

	What will guide my processing?		How can I achieve this?	
Vision / Message	What message do I wish the photograph to convey?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- my vision- a message- a story	How can I enhance this in post-processing?	Use it to guide the mood, impact, and flow in the photograph
Style	What needs to remain consistent with my personal style?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- presentation?- composition?- tonal response?- colour response?	How will my processing maintain stylistic consistency?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- aspect ratio?- crop?- tonal adjustments?- colour adjustments?
Subject	What is the subject of the photograph?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- one main subject- multiple subjects	How can I give a presence to the subject/s?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- localised presence- remove distractions



HOW WILL YOU CONVEY YOUR MESSAGE?

“The question is not, ‘how can I process this image?’ but rather, ‘how can I process this image to express my vision?’”

After determining your message, you can explore the many variables that will help you to express it. The following chapter explores **mood**, **impact** and **flow**: three qualities to guide your processing for powerful expression. These variables cannot be directly adjusted with a slider in Lightroom or Photoshop, of course—but keeping them at the forefront of your mind will influence how you use the sliders and tools that are available to you. Mood, impact, and flow are deeply connected to one another: changing the mood of an image will affect its impact; changing the impact might affect how the eye moves around the image. Therefore, we will approach these three subjects together to balance our choices as we decide how best to convey our message.

For any image, our vision should be the guiding factor as we decide how much processing is necessary and when we are finished. We will explore the possibilities in the following chapters:

- Composition
- Luminosity & Contrast
- Colour & Saturation
- Tonal Relationships
- Local Presence

Some of these elements might have a dedicated slider in Lightroom or a tool in Photoshop. The tools themselves are, of course, straightforward enough to not require explanation, and we will not be discussing their technical use; we will be exploring the creative choices they offer to affect **mood**, **impact** and **flow**. For example, rather than teaching how to change the contrast in an image, we will explore **why** we might wish to do so, and Ken and I have included examples (not to guide, but to illustrate) of our own use of processing elements. Yours, of course, will be led by your own vision.

Before processing a photograph, ask yourself some questions:

- **What** mood do I wish to convey, and **how** can I enhance this mood in the photograph?
- **What** impact do I want the photograph/subject to have, and **how** can cropping affect this impact?
- **What** is the flow pattern in the photograph, and **how** can changing tonal relationships affect/enhance this?

	What will guide my processing?		How can I achieve this?	
Mood	What mood do I wish to invoke in the viewer?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- cheerful- gloomy- tense- calm	How can I enhance this mood in post-processing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- luminosity & contrast- colour & saturation- composition
Impact	What impact do I want the photograph/subject to have?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- bold- subtle- depth- suppression	How can I increase or decrease the impact of the photograph/subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- colour & saturation- tonal relationships- local presence- composition
Flow	What is the current visual flow pattern in the photograph?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- vertical- horizontal- diagonal- between objects	How can I enhance/change this flow?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- tonal relationships- local presence- composition

WHAT DETRACTS FROM THE MESSAGE?

In story-writing, writers have to consider which details add to their story and which are only a distraction. If a writer is not careful, they might leave readers lost searching for a subject. Likewise, a good composition is determined by what we leave out just as much as by what we include. We can change the viewer’s interpretation of a scene by leaving something out—those electric pylons that run to the right of our frame, for example. When we process a photograph, we have the chance to reassess our image and, if needed, make further exclusions through cropping.

Even subtle distractions, while not always immediately obvious to the photographer or viewer, can catch our eye or change the way we read a photograph. For example, a stray blade of grass poking into the bottom of the frame may not demand much attention, but it can still pull attention from the intended subject. Capture defects are another source of distraction.

The goal is to avoid such errors in the first place, but defects are sometimes inevitable due to equipment limitations or shooting conditions, so we must look for these distractions while processing, learning to recognise how they were made and how they can be removed or suppressed. If the colour, luminosity, or detail of an object in the frame stands out, no matter how subtly, it can draw our gaze—so once we've defined our message, it pays to consider what subtracts from it.

Approach your images with this lens from the outset, before you make your capture. Good field craft involves recognising distractions so as to remove them where possible. Processing may allow us to remove or crop out that pesky blade of grass, but in most cases it’s easier—and produces a better result—to adjust our frame, or even just push the grass out of the way before taking the photograph.

	What will guide my processing?		How can I achieve this?	
Distractions	What distractions in the photograph detract from the subject or flow?	- items that pull attention from the message or subject	How can I reduce these distractions?	- cropping - object removal - changing luminosity
Capture Defects	What capture defects are present in the photograph?	- noise - chromatic aberration - dust spots	How can I remove these?	- use of related tools on Lightroom/ Photoshop

THE ART OF VISUALISATION

Ansel Adams was a landscape photography pioneer in the art of visualisation—his creative process was guided by an intentional vision. He did not lose sight of his vision after the capture, but let it continue to guide his work during “post-processing” in the darkroom. Ansel Adams was a master of the darkroom: not only did he understand his tools, but he knew just how to use them to express his vision.

Visualisation is the mental process of transforming a message or vision into a final visual representation. The process starts with the capture, but—as Ansel Adams knew—it doesn’t end there. The work of visualisation isn’t finished until your image is in its final form. In every step of the photography process, we have a new chance to let visualisation impact our image.

Ansel Adams wrote: “Visualisation is a conscious process of projecting the final photographic image in the mind before taking the first steps in actually photographing the subject. Not only do we relate to the subject itself, but we become aware of its potential as an expressive image.”

Our expressive processing should be guided by the same visualisation that led us through the capture—we cannot be expressive if we do not have a clear vision of what we wish to express. Look at one of your favourite photographs and ask yourself why you created it. What were you trying to express? What is your emotional attachment to it? The answers to these questions should be what guides its processing.



“The term visualisation refers to the entire emotional-mental process of creating a photograph, and as such, it is one of the most important concepts in photography.”

— Ansel Adams

IS IT PHOTOSHOPPED?

Photoshopped images have become somewhat of a taboo among the general public. With today's technology, artists can manipulate reality so convincingly that viewers have learned to assess the integrity of an image by asking "Is it Photoshopped?" In post-processing, it's easy to cross the line between just enough and too much, and this is how we lose the feeling of realness in an image. But using Photoshop doesn't automatically mean you've crossed that line. Photoshop serves many purposes; the goal is not always to confuse or deceive. We must also ask ourselves what our intention is. Are we aiming to capture an exact representation of the scene in front of us? Or to create something different? Do we want to be journalists or artists?

The work of Ansel Adams was "Photoshopped", though his adjustments took place in a darkroom rather than with modern photo manipulation software. A comparison of his final prints against the negatives reveals the edits Adams made, resulting in images that were not an exact representation of the landscape he photographed. With the use of heavy dodging and burning, he gave more presence to his subjects and reduced distractions. Despite these liberties, Adams' work still feels "real" and does not face the same stigma that manipulated digital images face today.



*"You don't take a photograph, you make it."
– Ansel Adams*



NO IMAGE OFFERS A TRUE REPRESENTATION OF REALITY

“There is a difference between what feels real and what is real.”

Although viewers tend to mistrust “Photoshopped” images for manipulating reality, it must be acknowledged that no image offers a true window into reality; it can only offer a photographer’s interpretation of reality. As photographers, we can present a photograph as “straight from the camera” or “unprocessed”, but this does not give the image any more value, or make it “real”. All images manipulate reality to some degree, and this is part of the nature of the art. Some might argue that shooting on film creates an accurate representation of what’s real, but this is not the case either, as I know from experience. I used to shoot on film with a Velvia 50, favoured by many landscape photographers for its saturated colours. It had a limited exposure latitude (dynamic range) of only 5 stops, producing rich contrast even when shooting subtly lit scenes. The wide-angle lens on my Mamiya 7 altered reality as well: under certain conditions, light falloff around the edge of the frame created a beautiful soft vignette. Compared to a RAW file from my Nikon D850—with its 14 stops of dynamic range—a film transparency capture on my Mamiya 7 would look far different—it would have much more punch, with deeper contrast and increased saturation.

The digital image would look flat, and it would take a lot of processing to achieve the same “straight from the camera” effect. Additionally, the unprocessed JPEG files on my D850 differ drastically depending on the picture control (shooting profile) and white balance settings I have selected. One can therefore argue that these, too, are forms of editing reality.



TO BE ARTISTS, WE MUST CREATE

“To create something, we must bring it into existence.”

An image is not a true representation of reality, but it doesn't need to be. Being a creative photographer requires creation, which is to bring something new into existence, rather than simply to present what exists already. As discussed, even “un-processed” photographs do not present a scene as is—we control so many factors that make the image what it is. If we leave out an electrical pylon, for example, the viewer will never know it was there. The choices we make in the field—using telephoto lenses to compress distance between objects, using wide-angle lenses to create distortion are acts of artistic deception, just as much as the choices we make in post-processing.

Processing is a valuable tool we can use to challenge the viewer with our art. In my own work, I want to challenge the viewer while maintaining a sense of “realness”, so my processing boundaries are set by the question “does it feel real?”. Not all photographers work this way, however; you may wish to present your own work with highly saturated colours not found in nature, or to highlight detail to an extreme extent using HDR. Choices such as these will not create a feeling of “realness”, but this does not make them wrong. It can take just as much time, technique, and vision to create a surreal aesthetic as a realistic one, and neither style lessens a photograph's artistic value.



HOW FAR IS TOO FAR?

“There is a difference between what looks Photoshopped and what has been Photoshopped.”

Not only do photographers have to consider how real they want their images to feel, they also have to consider how much is too much in terms of directly altering image content. Is it acceptable to remove something from a photograph during post-processing? Is it acceptable to put something in, or to move something around? This is a question only you can answer for yourself. It depends on what you’ve set out to create, and on the end-use of the photograph.

For me personally, if I find a small twig poking into the corner of my frame, I’ll happily edit it out when producing a fine art print. You could even argue this is more acceptable than snapping off the twig to remove it during capture. I have no hesitation removing small distractions, like rocks that account for 1% of the total image area. But I don’t feel comfortable editing out a permanent part of the landscape—something you’d see no matter when you visited. I also don’t feel comfortable replacing the sky in a photograph, although some feel differently in that regard.

Regardless of where you draw the line, there’s a point at which alterations turn a photograph into more of a digital creation, and this is not what I set out to produce in my own work. Heavy alterations are appropriate if your images are presented as digital creations, but if you’re presenting your work as photographic, there is a grey area in terms of how much altering is too much.

A dramatic scene of a ship at sea. In the foreground, a dark-hulled ship with a white superstructure and two masts is visible on the right side. The ship has several orange lifeboats and is illuminated by its own lights. In the background, a massive, dark iceberg looms over the water, with a large plume of white water spraying upwards from its base. The sky is a deep, dark blue, and the water is a dark teal color with small whitecaps. The overall mood is one of awe and danger.

CHAPTER 2

MOOD

By Richard Young

EXPRESSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

MOOD

By Richard Young

One of the best ways to convey feeling and emotion in a photograph is to let your choices in both capture and processing be led by the mood you wish to express, and work specifically towards this goal. Being able to convey emotion visually through stylistic choices is a very important skill, and making a decision about mood before beginning your edits will transform your workflow from perfunctory post-processing to “expressive processing”.

Recall how the landscape made you feel during your shoot. What emotions do you wish to express? Do you want your photograph to convey a feeling of hope? Anger? Do you want it to look romantic and mysterious? Not every viewer will experience the same emotions when looking at your photograph, of course; images express different things to different people. But having an understanding of how people interpret and respond to visual elements can unlock powerful tools of communication and storytelling. If you haven't determined what to express, it's very hard to decide whether an image should, for example, be warmer or cooler—your choice will only be made according to what you think “looks better”. On the other hand, if you plan to express a romantic mood, choosing warmer tones will be a tactical choice. The mood will be influenced by the scene itself, as well as choices made at the time of capture, but one file can be processed in all sorts of ways to transform what the viewer feels.



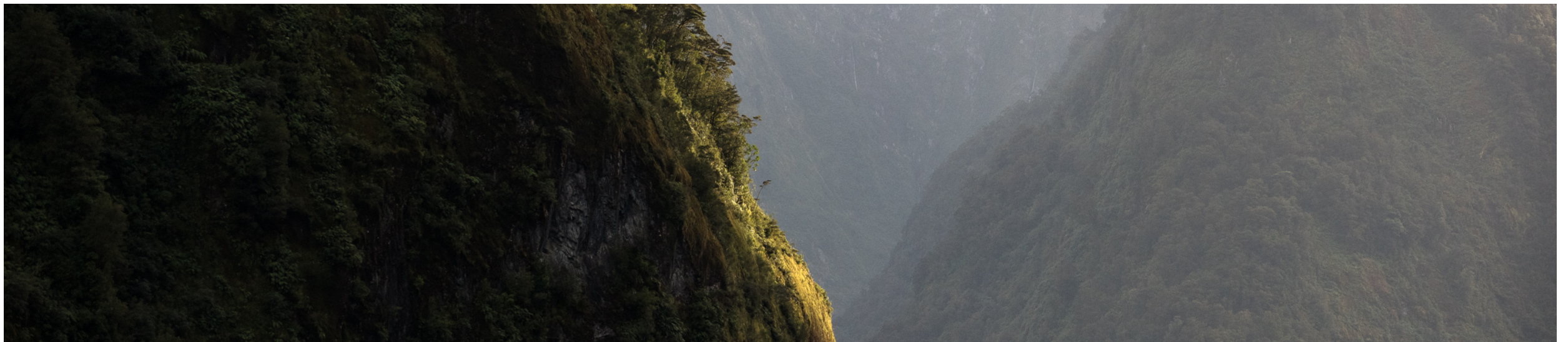
“What emotions do you wish to express?”

When creating work to express your vision, the mood will be determined by vision and how you connect with your subject. You might convey a specific mood consistently, as a defining part of your style—but, as with any stylistic choice, it does not have to be a defining element. When creating work for commercial purposes, mood is still an effective guide, but you might focus on what your viewer wants to feel, rather than using your photograph to highlight your own emotions and connection to the scene. A print that evokes feelings of peace and serenity might be perfect to hang in a living room or bedroom, while a more dynamic scene—evoking tension and excitement—might inspire motivation when displayed in a creative environment.

As we go about our daily lives, our moods are in constant flux, and we (often subconsciously) assign emotions to everything we experience. One of the primary reasons for the existence of art is to engage our emotions, to make us feel. Think of one of your favourite songs: how do you feel when you listen to it? Does it make you happy or sad? Does it relax or energise you? Look at one of your favourite photographs: how does it make you feel?

Why does it affect you that way? Does it match what you experienced while capturing it? Would another viewer feel the same? When reviewing our own images, our judgement can be clouded by our emotional connection. The viewer doesn't share this connection, so the mood must be represented clearly for them in the image itself.

Mood can be conveyed through our photographs in many ways, including our use of colour, tone, form, and detail. The impact and flow of our images communicate emotion, and landscapes often evoke a powerful mood in and of themselves. Many people see a sense of dynamic energy in a rough coastal landscape, for example, and feel at peace in a sunny field of wildflowers. This is all felt before a photograph is taken—and a good photograph will be able to harness some of that emotion and highlight it even further.





MOODS

In life, it is useful to be able to name the specific emotion we are feeling. This skill is just as useful in photography—when we know what mood we want to evoke, our choices become clearer.

This list isn't comprehensive by any means, but hopefully it will get the ideas flowing. Below, a few examples illustrate the wide range of feelings a photo can inspire—and for each, I've shared the thought process behind the mood.

- Cheerful
- Relaxed
- Reflective
- Gloomy
- Humorous
- Melancholy
- Idyllic
- Whimsical
- Romantic
- Mysterious
- Ominous
- Calm
- Lighthearted
- Hopeful
- Dramatic
- Angry
- Fearful
- Tense
- Lonely
- Epic
- Pictorialist
- Beautiful
- Sublime
- Surreal



SURREAL

We use the term “surreal” to refer to something that appears to defy reality, often in a “magical”, unexpected, or disorienting way. An image that communicates surrealism is one that takes physical realities and distorts them. The mist in this photograph achieves this, masking the predictable shape of the trees and flattening the image, removing the usual definition between fore/mid/background that we expect to feel. The low light is reflected at different angles by the surface of the flowing water—making it brighter, warmer, almost like silk. The end result is an image that looks more like a field covered in snow than a river.



HOPEFUL

Hope inspires optimism about the future. It is a feeling of light breaking through darkness, of the value of life becoming clearer through struggle. Photos can evoke a sense of hope through contrast: when both light and darkness, or life and struggle, are juxtaposed. This image captures a moment of change, creating a feeling of optimism and progress. It was taken just at the moment when light broke through the dark clouds, bathing an otherwise-forbidding scene in a warm orange glow. The viewer gets a sense that the heavy clouds will pass and a burden will be lifted.



TENSION

Tension is a feeling of strain caused by forces in opposition or in conflict. We can conjure a strong sense of tension through contradiction and imbalance, causing shock with clashing colours and extreme tonal values. Here, the dark tones of the land contrast with the brighter, unnatural colours in the clouds and lightning (notice the purple outline on the lightning and the greenish undertone of the clouds). The lightning itself also provides tension. Not only does it inspire fear and awe, its very existence—as a burst of energy seeking to equalize built-up electric charges—is a result of tension.



LONELINESS

Not always a negative emotion, loneliness is one of the most universally-relatable feelings. From the dreadful sense of being lost to the pleasure of solitude, loneliness is the simple state of being apart from others. This feeling can be conveyed by isolating a subject in time, tone, or space. Here, a wide-angled shot creates space around the subject, and the hills are a long way off in the background. The softness of the water gives the sense that time is passing slowly. A simple hut sits alone, offering a sense of uninterrupted, serene existence. The pastel colours and soft light contribute to a peaceful sense of solitude.



MYSTERY

An image is mysterious when it feels strange or intriguing. Is something hidden or obscured? What lies beyond the mist? What's the story about? Mystery is a powerful feeling we can develop through storytelling—specifically, through what we hint at, without giving away the answer. It makes the viewer question the scene and the meaning behind it. It allows the imagination to fill in the missing gaps to complete the photograph. This mist-shrouded landscape with dramatic layers of dark against light suggests that there is truth to be found, but the mist obscures the detail, offering depth, drawing us into the image.



OMINOUS

An ominous image is threateningly inauspicious, suggesting impending doom. It displays the possibility of a powerful event or subject approaching. Here, the contradiction between the subjects and tone creates drama and depth, drawing us into the photograph and making the image look foreboding. The freezing of motion and time are powerful storytellers that can create feelings of inertia or paralysis. This image places the viewer under a dark, stormy sky with a dynamic foreground, and the movement of a heavy, swelling sea enhances the threatening mood.



EPIC

Epic photographs instill a sense of the heroic through scenes that are grand in scale or character, giving the viewer a rush of adrenaline. To create this mood, try working with dizzying heights, bright/bold colours, and high contrast. In this image, we get the awe-inspiring feeling that we are seeing a place not many other people have visited before, on a mountain above the clouds. The height inspires fear, and the thick layer of cloud makes it seem as if you could walk over and touch the sun.

CALM

An absence of other strong emotions creates a sense of peace, a world without tension at balance with itself. Soft, neutral tones can make us more relaxed, and blue—a soothing colour—can help calm a busy mind. The slow, gentle movement in this image adds to its calming mood. The colours of this photograph are actually the 2016 Pantone colours of the year: as explained by Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute, “Joined together, Rose Quartz and Serenity demonstrate an inherent balance between a warmer embracing rose tone and the cooler tranquil blue, reflecting connection and wellness as a soothing sense of order and peace.”



LATE AUTUMN

A STORY ABOUT EXPRESSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY AND SETTING OUT TO CAPTURE MOOD IN A PHOTOGRAPH.

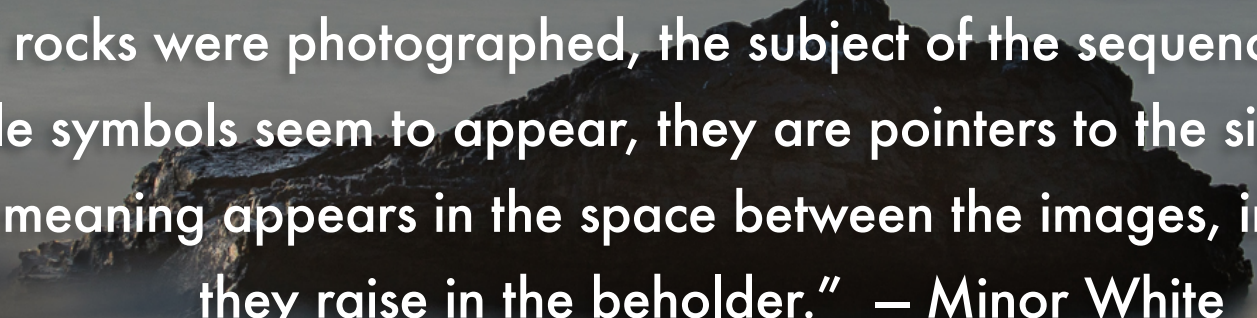
It has been a strange autumn. I have not had as much time on the road lately, and while I have enjoyed a break from traveling, I have also missed the experience of connecting with more wild landscapes. I live right next to the sea—and not sure if I could live too far from it—but this section of coastline has been built upon and some of its wilderness suppressed. Even so, the beautiful thing about any view across the ocean is that it's different every day. Each day the waves carry a different level of energy and the expansive sky a different tone, giving the landscape a different mood. This is what I would miss if I did not live next to the coast. I feel the need for a break, time in a more wild landscape—maybe even some photography—so I pack my VW camper and drive out to one of my favourite sections of coastline for a few nights away.

As I sit here writing this, I am looking out across a rugged coastline on a fine afternoon in late autumn, with the sun low in the sky and warm on my face.

The morning's breeze has dropped and this coast doesn't feel as wild as it normally does—on other days, I've struggled to stand on the beach as mighty southerly waves threatened my existence, but today the swell has calmed to a relaxing ebb and flow.

The warmth of the afternoon sun makes it hard to imagine that winter is on its way. The fur seals that call this landscape home also seem relaxed today—I watched one floating out by the rocks for ages. There are no waves for her to surf, and it looks like she has finished her fishing for the day.

Tonight, I have decided not to head to my favourite sunset spot (an impressive spine of rock that juts out into the wild ocean). It feels too dramatic for such a pleasant day, and it doesn't match the serenity I feel. Instead, I've settled for the unimpressive section of coastline right next to where I will camp in my van. Not traveling for sunset has removed the pressure to create an image, but as the warm sun starts to drop, I decide to head on to the beach anyway. It's been a long time since I have been out shooting, but I am just happy to be here enjoying the moment on such a nice day.



“While rocks were photographed, the subject of the sequence is not rocks; while symbols seem to appear, they are pointers to the significance. The meaning appears in the space between the images, in the mood they raise in the beholder.” — Minor White

If I am going to take a photograph, I want it to be about my experience with the landscape today—that feeling of the late afternoon sun, the relaxing ebb and flow of the waves. I have been here many times, and will return again; why would I need another image that simply represents the subject? I am happy, content, and relaxed. This is the feeling I want to capture and share with the viewer. Maybe this is why I did not feel the need to travel to one of the more “impressive” vistas that are just only a few minutes up the coast. I want to make an image I haven't before, one that expresses my mood today—can I express this in my photograph?

The air is clear of the dust that carries down from the dry hills during summer, clear of the light mist sometimes formed from the spray of breaking waves. The hills across the bay feel a little bit closer. As I wander along the beach, I spot a rock out to sea that looks almost like a hill itself; as I walk closer, it lines up to the hills on the horizon. The rock's shape echoes that of the hills, creating a harmony between the two objects. I reach for the telephoto lens in my bag to refine the composition and suppress any surrounding elements of drama along the coastline. Moving a little higher up the beach allows for some negative space above the rock, setting it in balance against the hills.



The extra height above the water allows the light to reflect off its surface just in front of the rock, offering a little more warmth.

I move about three times—each only a step—and finally, I am completely happy with how the two objects sit together. The ripples on the water's surface, gentle as they are, create tension, so I lengthen my exposure to make the image feel calmer. I take this one photograph, and then—feeling no need to search for further compositions—I walk back along the beach in the fading light.

Nearly 24 hours later, I sit here trying to break down and document the experience of last night's photograph, as I look out at the same rock from my camp—where I have not moved from all day. I did not have to consciously consider every step of the process: my own mood guided that of the photograph. It was an organic process that arose from the simple desire to enjoy a fine late autumn day.

When I woke this morning, the crisp air carried the promise of winter. Although it was another fine day, the weather is now starting to turn. Sunset is approaching, and the day feels softer. High clouds have rolled in across the bay, and the hills look more distant than they did yesterday. A front coming in across the Pacific is threatening rain for tomorrow. Already the sky feels much cooler, and the clouds are hanging much lower in the sky, carrying a cool blue tone. The sea is also colder, lacking the warmth reflected from last night's sky. Perhaps it's not just a weather front but winter itself that is approaching over the horizon. I thought about heading to yesterday's rock—how different would it look in tonight's light? But the rock hadn't been chosen for being a particularly notable subject; it had been chosen organically to express my mood. I decided that photographing it again might dilute last night's experience.



Instead, I start walking in the opposite direction. The landscape has become much more minimalistic as the tones of the sky, hills, and sea begin to blend together as one. After a while, I stop to line up a shot of a round rock. I study it through the viewfinder, but decide not to take a picture. It feels too complex for tonight. The lower contrast inspires me to further simplify the landscape. A little further up the beach, I find an area clear of foreground rocks. The scene suits the mood, and I capture the second photograph of my trip.

Back at my van, I study today's photograph over a glass of red wine. I consider processing it—maybe I should wait until I've had some space from the experience. But the experience was the goal of the image. So I proceed, feeling that if I leave it until I get home, I might forget the mood I was trying to express. Can I approach my processing expressively to help convey my feelings to the viewer?

I wake to the sound of waves. A first look out to sea presents a dark, ominous sky—the landscape holds more tension this morning. The ocean has gained back its normal power, and I can see waves hitting the side rock I shot on the first day. It feels very different from when I arrived two days ago.

I had not planned to shoot anything this morning. I am quite happy laying here watching the waves roll in across the bay while sipping a morning coffee. But then I notice the wildlife has also woken up. It's a gannet—the first one I have seen in three days. I watch him through my binoculars as, dwarfed by the waves, he turns and dives into the sea. He has become part of the landscape, making it even more dramatic. His energetic turns above crashing waves capture the feeling of this morning. Maybe I will take a photograph after all.



Just as I return to the van, I feel a drop of rain land on my cheek. It's hard to imagine it was so warm only two days ago—winter has arrived.



CHAPTER 3

IMPACT

By Richard Young

EXPRESSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

IMPACT

By Richard Young

When creating a photograph, do you ever take a moment to consider its level of impact? Such a concern may not be at the forefront of your mind, but it's crucial to your workflow, both during capture and post-production. Defining your image's intended impact will guide many choices—from composing to knowing when processing is complete. High-impact images can be very powerful: they make a statement; grab our attention; compel the viewer to engage. Low impact images may not inspire the same immediate excitement, but their subtlety can be very beautiful, drawing the viewer in for a closer, longer look. The level of impact you want to build in your work is a personal choice, another means of self-expression.

We can assess and adjust our images both in terms of **global impact** and **local impact** area.

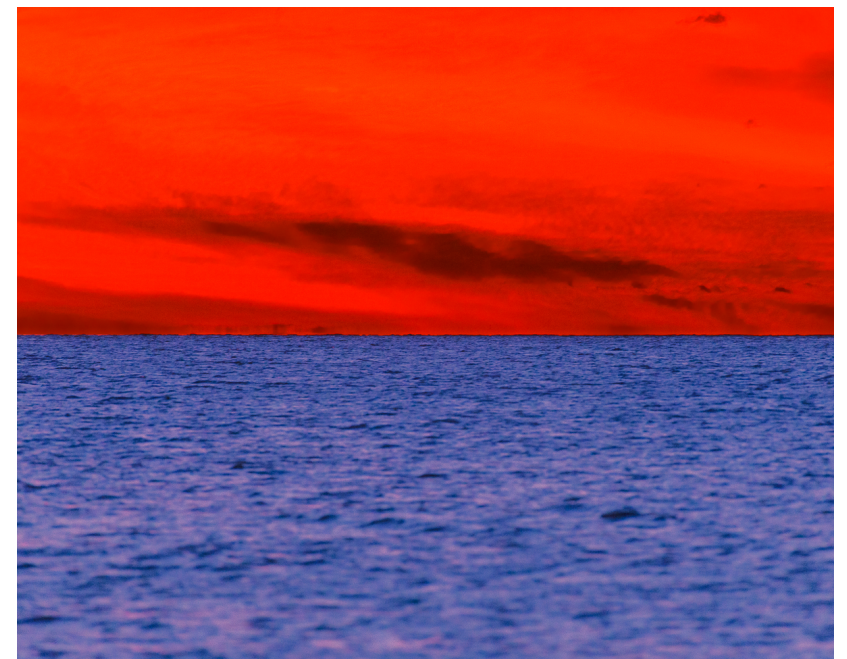
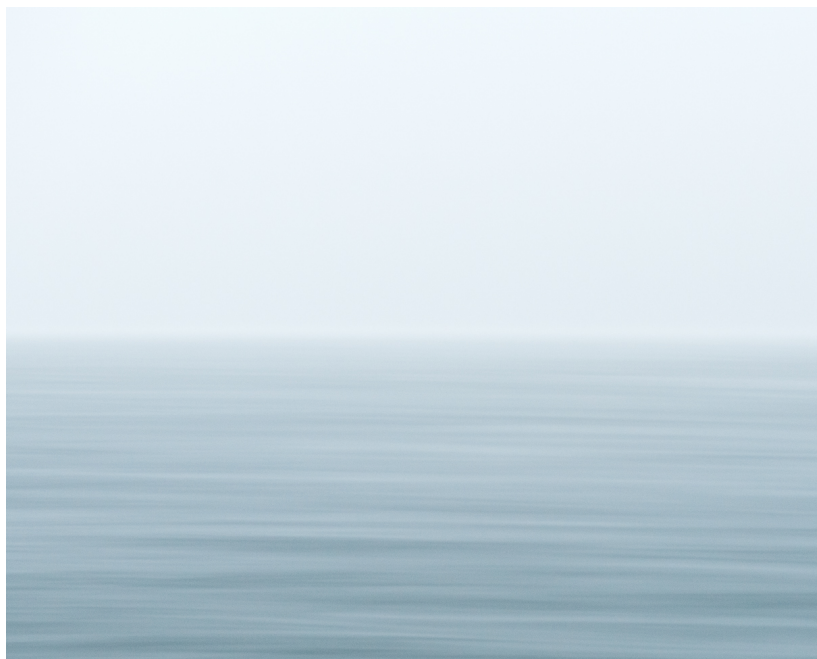


GLOBAL IMPACT

Global impact refers to how strongly the image impacts viewers as a whole—is it bold or subtle? The overall impact affects how we first connect with the photograph. How quickly does it grab us, and how long does it hold our attention? We can heighten our impact through use of bold compositions, vivid colours, deep contrast, and extreme tonal ranges to create images that capture attention from a distance and move viewers in a very powerful way. However, successful photographs do not always need to shout out to the viewer. A subtle, low-impact image might not arrest our gaze, but this can allow a deeper connection to emerge: lower-impact images encourage our eyes to flow more freely within the frame. The lesson here is that impact, like all other photographic choices, needs to be applied both creatively and in moderation. If your high-impact images grab—but fail to hold—the viewer’s attention, they will have little lasting effect.

Increasing global impact can get your work noticed, but be careful not to rely too heavily on that first double-take. Likewise, if an image does not deliver enough impact, it may be perceived as bland and dismissed without any engagement at all.

The level of impact you seek in your images will likely become a cornerstone of your style, guided by the vision you wish to express. Do you want your work to shout or whisper? Does it present like a heavy rock concert or a gentle piano concerto? Like any other element of style, our use of impact can unite our work; a bold image would likely not sit well with 11 very subtle photographs when viewed together as a collection. The level of impact we seek will also influence many other aspects of our work, from the subjects we shoot to the way we process.





GLOBAL IMPACT IN THE FIELD

While shooting in the field, we can create impact through the use of bold subject matter and dynamic movement. The light we shoot in—both quality of weather and time of day—plays a part in this: a vivid coastal sunset delivers a vastly different impact than the soft, diffused light of a misty forest. Our composition—placement and balance of elements within the frame—contributes to impact as well. Have we given heavy visual weight to part of the scene, such as a bold foreground subject? Have we composed with dramatic angles or gentle transitions? Our intent should be clear before capturing a photograph. The subject, light, and composition of our images do not have to be the product of chance—we can tailor the location, time of day, and many other factors to our intent.

These two photographs were taken at one of my favourite beaches in Abel Tasman National Park—a place I have visited many times, returning with very different images from each trip. The first was captured in 2018, in a rushed manner while focused on helping a client, who had been drawn to the bold subject. I like the image, but something about it never sat quite right with me. It took me some time to realise it was because of the impact: shooting with an ultra-wide angle lens and working very close to the rock had created a high-impact image that didn't fit my style and vision.

The second image was taken a year later, and it creates a very different feeling—a feeling much more strongly aligned with how I wish to express this landscape. Without the dominant foreground rock, the photograph is not so bold, which frees the eye to move around the image and explore it more deeply. The lighting in the second photograph is also a little more subtle, and the sky does not hold the same drama as the first. My preference for the second image (as an expression of my style and vision) doesn't make it “better” than the first; some may prefer the first photograph, but like any other choice in photography, it is a case of what you wish to express.



GLOBAL IMPACT IN POST-PROCESSING

In post-processing, global adjustment tools like contrast, saturation, and tonal values affect the global impact of a photograph.

Today—because of all the visual stimulus that surrounds us within the modern world—most people tend to process images to increase their impact, making them stand out from the crowd to grab the viewer's attention. Post-production is often approached with the simple goal of creating as much impact as possible—slides like contrast, saturation, and clarity are usually increased, and rarely decreased. While this approach can create some very powerful imagery, we need to know when we have reached our goal or gone too far. Beginning with our intent in mind will allow us to pursue the right level of impact and know when to stop.



IMPACT AREAS

An “impact area” is a localised part of the image that delivers higher impact, making it stand out from the rest of the photograph.

The effect of an impact area is to draw the viewer's attention.

An impact area might be a subject that stands out due to size, placement, or relationship to other elements, or it might be part of the photograph that stands in contrast to the surrounding tonal value due to a change in brightness, colour, or saturation.

Most photographs will have more than one impact area, and the relationship between them creates a flow that guides our eye within the frame.

IMPACT AREAS IN THE FIELD

Impact areas, like global impact, should be considered while composing a photograph in the field. Once we're happy with a composition, it's worth taking an extra second to study it and decide if there are any bold areas that are drawing too much attention from the desired subject. Sometimes a small adjustment will allow us to intentionally include or exclude something from the frame—a bright area of the sky, or a small foreground object, for example. We can't always control impact areas in the field, but being aware of them from the start gives us an advantage when making decisions during post-processing.

IMPACT AREAS IN POST-PROCESSING

In post-production, how we adjust impact areas changes how the viewer will interact with the image. The adjustments we make change the relationship between flow anchors, influencing both the overall flow and the story of the image. Keep in mind that impact areas are not always useful to the story we're trying to tell; if an irrelevant object or area of the image is highlighted, it can distract from the main subject or disrupt the flow pattern.





ANALYSING IMPACT AREAS

Assessing the impact of your image is a bit of a process, but doing so will give you clarity on how to approach post-processing. We already discussed how attention to impact can be useful while in the field, but it is good to let this guide your post-processing strategy as well, so we have outlined a helpful process for analysing impact areas. This analysis will allow you to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in an image while discovering elements that support the story or vision you want to express. If vision wasn't on your mind in the field, this process may allow you to find your direction.

STEP 1

Note the structural areas and objects that draw your eye. At this point, all these areas have the potential to be either subject or distraction, depending on the story you want to tell.

STEP 2

Identify contrasting tonal values within the photograph, including bright and dark, high and low contrast, and high and low saturation. This may reveal a pattern you wouldn't have otherwise seen. It may also highlight a few problem areas that require local adjustments.

STEP 3

From your findings in steps 1 & 2, create a map of impact areas within your image, and pay attention to how the areas of tonal contrast affect the impact. This understanding will inform your post-processing decisions.

STEP 1

STRUCTURAL IMPACT AREAS

The areas and objects that instantly grab your attention have been coloured in red. Without even considering impact, we immediately see a few elements that could become the focus of this image: The vertical line created by the waterfall is repeated in the vertical direction of the trees.

The placement of the three rocks mimics the direction of waterflow. At the edge of the river, there is a contrast between the detailed green top half and the soft blue/grey lower half.



Upon evaluation, perhaps we decide that the most important parts of the image are the waterfall and diagonal set of rocks. That makes the other highlighted areas (the vertical lines of the trees and the rock at the bottom right) distractions to those subjects.



STEP 2

TONAL IMPACT AREAS

Next, we locate the contrasting tonal values. The lightest areas have been coloured in orange, the darkest areas in blue. Looking at the lightest areas of the photograph, we can see some potential issues that were not immediately apparent. The large portion of forest in the upper left corner carries a lot of visual weight because of its bright tonal value. If we want to focus on the three rocks and the waterfall as our subject, this could be a distraction.



We also find that the rock on the far right of the image (the third of our set) is one of the brightest points in the image; it might hold more visual weight than the other two rocks. Among the darker areas, the top right has a high proportion of darker tonal value, making it a little unbalanced against the bright area to the top left.



STEP 3

COMBINED MAP OF IMPACT AREAS

When we overlay the three masks—subject, bright tones, and dark tones—we discover further insights on how the impact areas interact. The waterfall commands attention not only as a strong vertical line, but as an area of high contrast between light and dark tonal values. Seeing the three masks overlaid reinforces that the waterfall and the set of three rocks are the strongest part of this story, and that certain other areas, such as the top left corner, also demand attention.



We can see now that the large area of bright tone sits directly over a large area of dark tone, creating a contrast that carries a lot of visual weight. Our processing choices will be shaped by what we decide to emphasize. For example, we may choose to adjust the tonal value of the forest on the left hand side, as well as that of the rocks.



THUNDER CREEK FALLS - IMPACT AREAS



In this example, the tonal value we are considering is brightness, but you could also analyse tonal values such as colour, saturation, and contrast. Don't feel the need to assess every aspect of every image—let your predetermined vision guide you on what's most important to address. For example, if your **vision** involves conveying a specific mood through colour and saturation, you may want to avoid changing these qualities on a local level to keep the mood of the whole image consistent.



CHAPTER 4

FLOW

By Richard Young

EXPRESSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

FLOW

By Richard Young

In art, flow describes how the eye moves around an image. When used effectively, flow will lead the viewer through a scene, holding their attention. The eye tends to be drawn to a specific point in an image at first glance—an area of local impact that grabs our attention. From there, the eye travels to a nearby point of interest, and it will continue to move on and on as the flow allows.

The flow pattern can make or break an image; if there is no natural next point for the eye to seek out, the viewer will lose engagement. Likewise, if the eye is drawn to an unintended area, the subject or story may not be conveyed effectively. A poorly thought out flow pattern might lead the eye out of the frame altogether—prematurely finishing the reading of an image.





In Western cultures, we read from left to right. We start at the top left-hand corner of a page, and our eye moves horizontally across the page, making its way down line by line until we reach the bottom right-hand corner. By default, we tend to use the same pattern to read images, so it's useful to consider how this will affect flow within an image. The eye's direction of travel influences how we assess and interact with what we see. Sometimes, the flow pattern of a photograph will be clear—defined by strong compositional elements—while other times it will be so subtle as to go unnoticed, even while guiding our journey through the image. Many factors can change the flow of an image, but there are a number of patterns that feel more natural to the eye: defined as **flow lines**, these include both linear and curved patterns. Most photographs are composed of multiple flow lines, which together comprise the **flow pattern**. Not everyone will read an image the same way, however—you might move through an image differently than someone else, just as you both might differ in your overall interpretation of what you see.

Our knowledge of flow patterns can help us compose in the field to powerful effect. Flow lines can serve as compositional devices in our photographs—search for lines and curves within the landscape, changing your angle and height to find their ideal placement within the frame. When we envision the landscape as an abstract collection of shapes and tones, flow lines often become much more apparent.

LINEAR FLOW LINES

We tend to think of linear patterns as being man-made, because shapes in nature tend to be organic rather than straight. But while physical straight lines such as those seen in architecture do create very strong flow, linear flow can also be achieved through a combination of elements working together to guide the eye along a straight path. This can be created through the structure of the subject, or created from the space between subjects—the eye moving from one object to the next, or moving through a line of negative space.

Horizontal flow - In Western culture, we have learned to scan images horizontally, because our eyes have been trained to read left to right. Horizontal flow patterns draw our eye, increasing our natural inclination to read in that direction.

Vertical flow - The eye naturally tends to scan from bottom to top, and a vertical flow pattern will encourage this movement, guiding the eye up and down the image.

Diagonal flow - A diagonal flow pattern creates a sense of movement. Because we naturally scan from left to right and from bottom to top, one of the most powerful diagonal flow patterns connects the bottom left to the top right-hand corner. The flow draws us back into the photograph, prompting us to take another look after we've scanned it—this is why we call it a “leading line”.



CURVED FLOW LINES

Curved flow lines are created in the same way as linear flow lines, but while straight lines can make parts of an image feel separated, curves create more harmonious connections, especially when capturing the natural landscape. A curved flow tends to be more subtle and less defined than its linear counterpart; it can gently lead us on a journey without us being aware that we're being led at all. Once we start to look for curves in nature, we will find them everywhere: from the meander of a river or the arch of the tide line to the shape of a hanging branch. And, like straight lines, curved flow can also be formed by connections between multiple objects in the frame.

Curved flow - The organic shape of curved flow patterns feels natural to our eyes. It adds depth to an image, leading the eye around and back into a photograph.

S-curve flow - The S-curve flow pattern is an extension of the curve—our eye follows it as it winds through an image. Its shape slows our scan, causing us to explore a larger portion of the frame than we might normally. Like the simple curved flow, the S-curve gives a sense of depth, drawing us deeper into the image.

Spiral flow - A set of curved lines can form a spiral pattern, which draws our gaze around and inwards towards the centre of an image.



USING FLOW LINES AS LEADING LINES



The strength of diagonal, curved, and S-curve flow patterns—what sets them apart from horizontal and vertical patterns—is in their capacity to draw the viewer deeper into an image, making them take a second look. Try to avoid leading the viewer right to an edge or corner of the frame; doing this can upset the balance of an image and discourage the eye from returning for a longer look.

TONAL FLOW LINES

Structural flow lines, which are created by physical objects—man-made or organic—are not the only way to create flow. Tonal changes can also create flow within a photograph. Flow lines created by tonal transitions can be harder to pick up on, but our eyes are intuitively tuned to them, and they can be just as powerful as structural lines. Tonal flow lines are created when our eye is drawn from one area of the image to the next due to a change in its luminosity or colour.

Tonal flow: luminosity - This pattern leads our eye across a change in luminosity: from bright to dark or vice versa.

Tonal flow: colour - In this type of flow pattern, our eye follows the direction implied by a change in (or transition between) colours. The pattern can also be created by a subtle flow between warmer and cooler tones.





ANALYSING A FLOW PATTERN

Before starting to process an image, it is important to analyse how the eye naturally moves through its frame. From here, we can decide whether to enhance the current flow pattern or alter it, changing the way the eye flows around the image.

As a photograph is made up of both **structural flow lines** and **tonal flow lines**, the first step is to identify each within the image. The overall **flow pattern** will be a combination of the two. It can be changed by altering the local impact areas, drawing attention towards or away from specific parts of the image. **Impact areas** become **flow anchors**—the relationship between which will determine how the eye moves around the image. What grabs your attention first? Where does it go next? Spend some time examining the photo to get a sense of the patterns you see.

STEP 1

Identify **structural flow lines**. This will be the easiest step.

STEP 2

Identify **tonal flow lines**. Remember, this could be a change in luminosity or a change in colour.

STEP 3

Consider the overall **flow pattern** of the image. Think about the structural and tonal flow lines: what is the main path your eye follows across the image? Being aware of the flow pattern will help inform your post-processing decisions.

STEP 1

IDENTIFYING STRUCTURAL FLOW LINES

This image features **structural flow lines** formed by the horizon line, patterns in the sand, the shape of Kapiti Island, and the clouds. Note how all the arrows go both ways: at this stage, the eye can move freely along the flow lines in either direction.

Note: In these examples, we have used red arrows to highlight structural flow lines.



STEP 2

IDENTIFYING TONAL FLOW LINES

In this image, the gradient from darker (at the edges) to lighter tones comprises the main **tonal flow**. Though the flow can move your eye in or out, your eye will likely favour one direction over the other, depending what it is drawn to first. In this example, we have more motivation to follow the lines inwards, towards the middle of the image, rather than out towards the darker edges of the frame.

Note: In these examples, we have used orange arrows to highlight tonal flow lines.



STEP 3

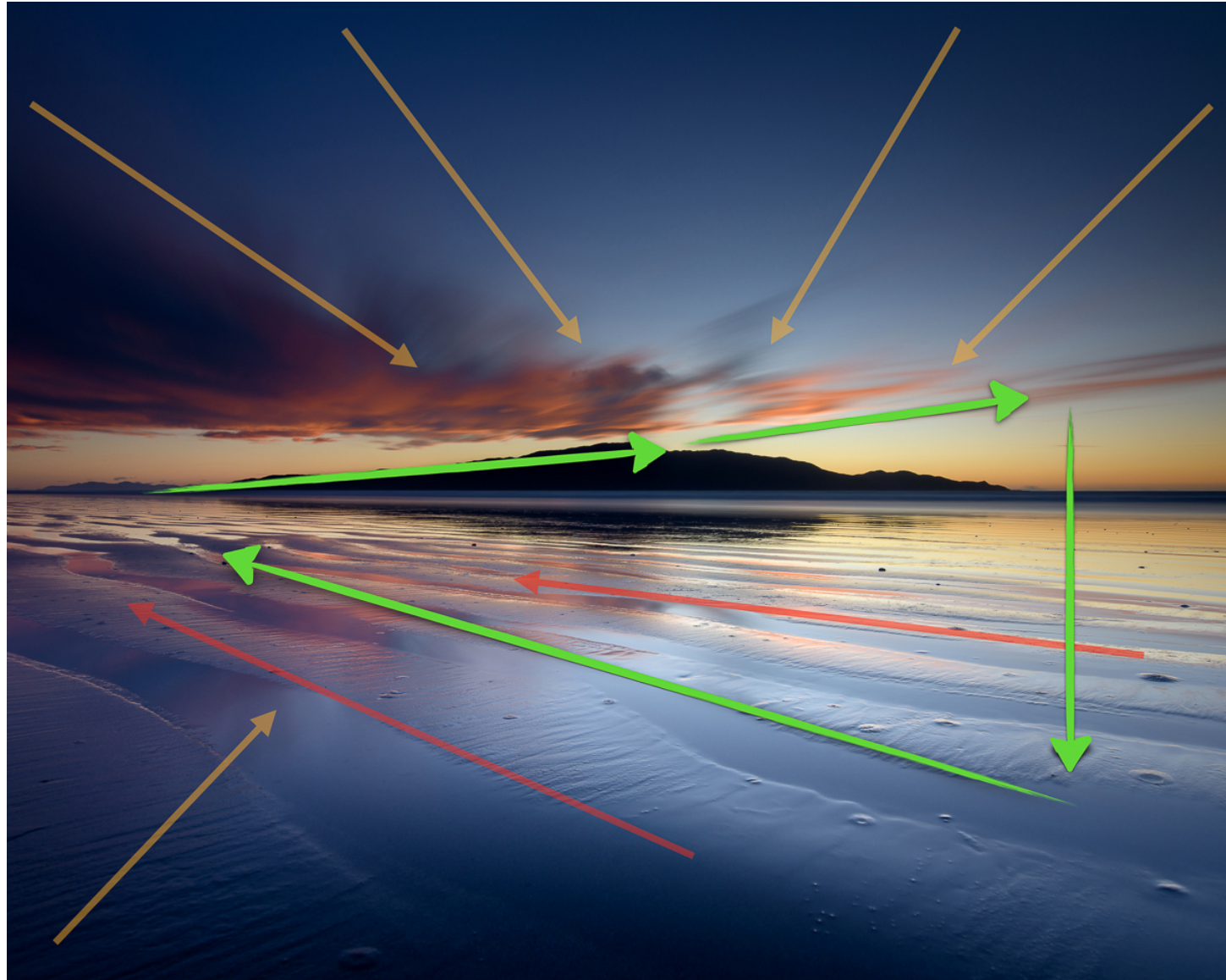
OVERALL FLOW PATTERN

When considering the **flow pattern** of this image, most viewers will likely be drawn first to the brighter yellow tones on the right hand side of the image. From here, the eye sweeps down across the sand to the bottom right-hand corner, where the strong diagonal lines of the sand usher us across to the left-hand side of the photograph. As our eye hits the main subject—Kapiti Island—the clouds direct us back up towards the right side of the image, away from the darker tones in the sky on the left.

Note: In these examples, we have used green arrows to highlight the overall flow pattern.



KAPITI ISLAND - FLOW PATTERN



This image shows the overall **flow pattern** alongside other important **tonal** and **structural flow lines**, which serve as secondary flow patterns within the image. You may find that your eye follows a different set of flow lines or moves in a different direction throughout the photograph; we will all scan the image slightly differently. This photo of Kapiti Island mainly contains linear flow patterns, so our analysis has focused on these rather than curved flow patterns. Be sure to look for both types when analysing your image. Having established the existing flow pattern, we can make decisions to enhance or change this pattern, post-processing with intent.

A wide-angle photograph of a beach at sunset. The sun is a bright orange orb on the horizon, casting a long, shimmering reflection across the water and sand. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, some of which are illuminated from below by the sun, creating a dramatic silhouette effect. The foreground shows a wide expanse of wet sand with intricate, wavy patterns created by the receding tide. A narrow, winding stream of water flows from the ocean towards the viewer, its surface reflecting the colors of the sky and the sun. The overall mood is serene yet powerful, capturing the raw beauty of a coastal landscape at the end of the day.

CHAPTER 5

UNDERSTANDING COMPOSITION

By Ken Wright

EXPRESSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

UNDERSTANDING COMPOSITION

By Ken Wright

Composition is a simple concept referring to the arrangement of content in a piece of art. Nonetheless, it is one of the most difficult aspects of photography to teach. Many photographers who are advanced enough to have mastered technical skill still find themselves at a loss when it comes to achieving aesthetic balance. Composing a scene in the field can be daunting, and it's tempting to rely on the "nip and tuck" post-processing approach to balance an image after a shoot. But trust me: the more you get right in the field, the better your image will be. We could fill a whole book discussing composition (and many have)—but for now, here's an overview with some simple guides to help you get started.

Good composition comes easy to some and harder to others. It can be as complex or as simple as you like, and your images will reflect this in your style. The key to composing a quality image is to create balance and flow throughout. Your story needs a beginning and an end: where do you want your viewer to start, and where are you leading them? Does the eye stop and fixate on one spot in the photo, or is it invited to continue exploring?



"An aesthetically pleasing image is one which has "Balance" regardless of the rules."



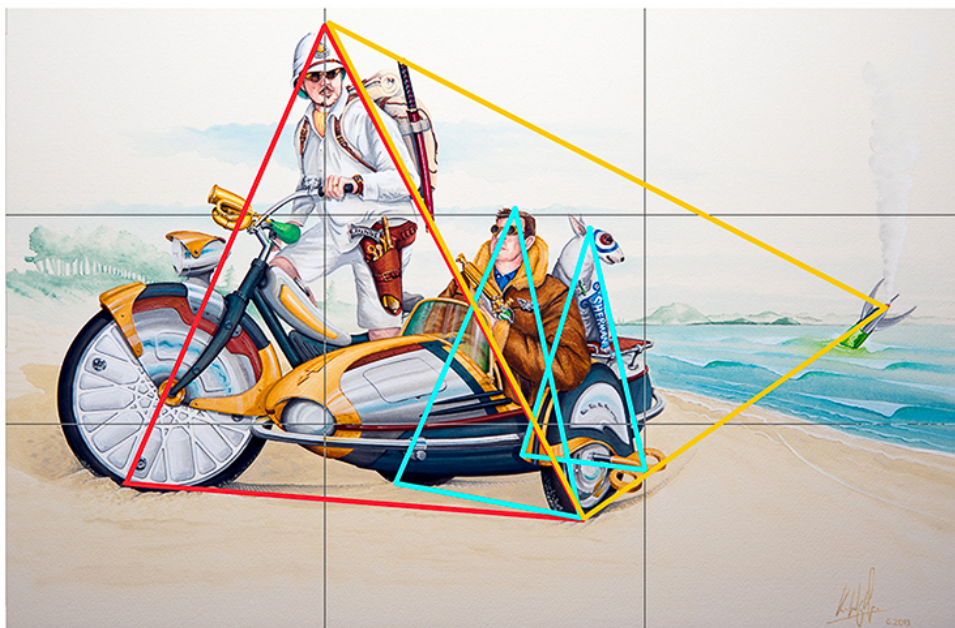
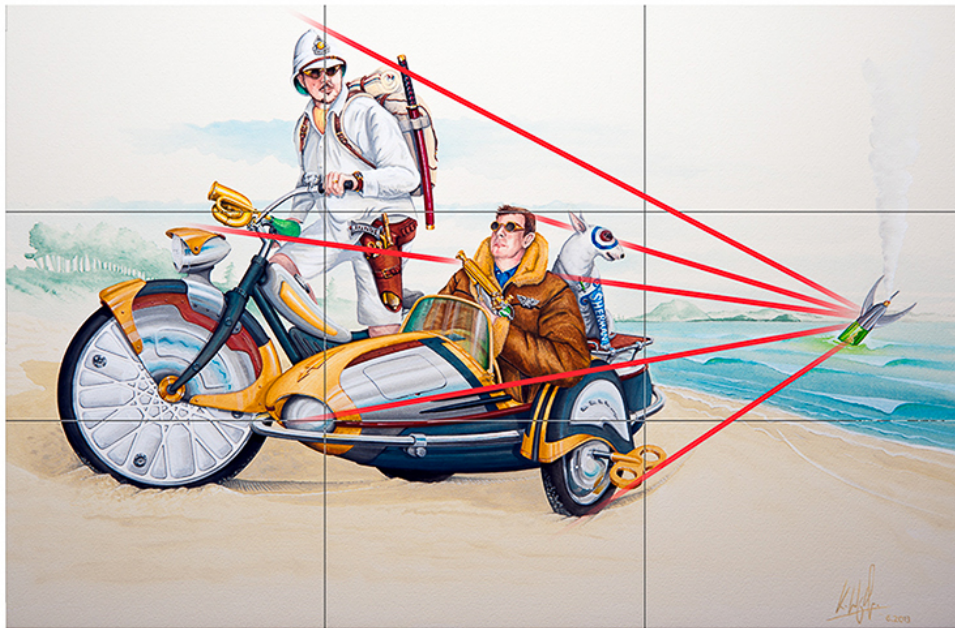
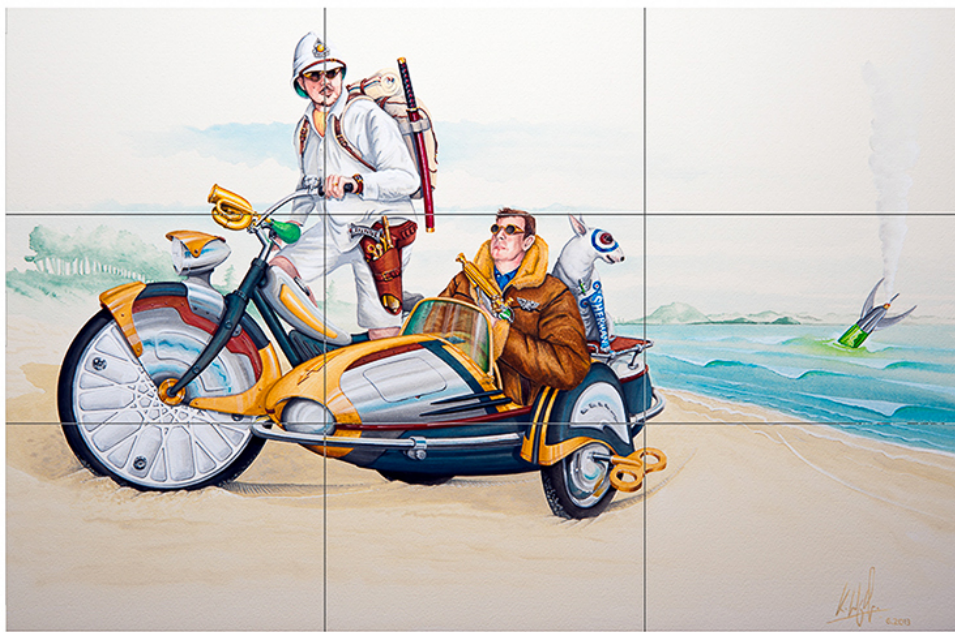
If composition is a new concept to you, or one you are struggling to grasp, it is worth looking at some of the old master paintings. Many examples available online have been deconstructed to show the artist's compositional lines, so you can get an idea of how they work. You might be surprised at some of the patterns you find—for example, how often triangles are used to create hierarchical balance within a scene.

TYPES OF COMPOSITION

For this workshop, we will look at three types of composition:

- Artist Composition
- Photography Composition (in the field)
- Post-Production Cropping

You may be wondering why we've separated a seemingly straightforward concept into three distinct types. Although the end goal is the same for all three, composition must be approached differently according to the unique needs of each situation.



ARTISTIC COMPOSITION

"An artist starts with a blank canvas."

When admiring a masterpiece painting, it's hard not to marvel at how every element has been perfectly placed. Unlike photographers, the artist starts with a blank canvas, commanding complete control over their composition—they have the freedom to lay out the shapes in their image to achieve perfect balance, regardless of whether any such scene actually exists. They can construct their image with a perfect "rule of thirds", absolute symmetry, balanced asymmetry, or any other arrangement they choose. Of course, constructing a scene from scratch comes with its own considerable challenges, but in terms of flexibility, artists have a distinct advantage on photographers, who must find more creative ways to achieve the desired composition.

EXAMPLE 1- 'WIND IT UP WRIGHTY'

Here is a painting of mine from 2013. Deconstructing its composition, we find the dominant character occupying the first vertical third. Because we read from left to right, our eyes are trained to move in that direction, and this painting presents a contradiction in this regard. What makes it work is the rocket acting as a counterbalance. In this case, I deliberately put the perspective vanishing point behind the rocket. Note the strong presence of triangular connections in the main group, and the low horizon, which exaggerates the perspective to add more drama to the scene.



EXAMPLE 2 - 'SUMMER CRUISING'

"An artist can make a scene fit perfectly because the canvas was blank to start with."

I built this piece using both artistic composition and photography/Photoshop composite skills. The car was shot during an American car day at a race course, and the background is a 13-image panorama of Mount Maunganui. To achieve this composition, it was crucial to match the perspective of the car with the perspective of the background. If it didn't fit, it would have looked as though it had been stuck on. The car was also placed so that the angles on the windscreen matched the angles on the Mount.



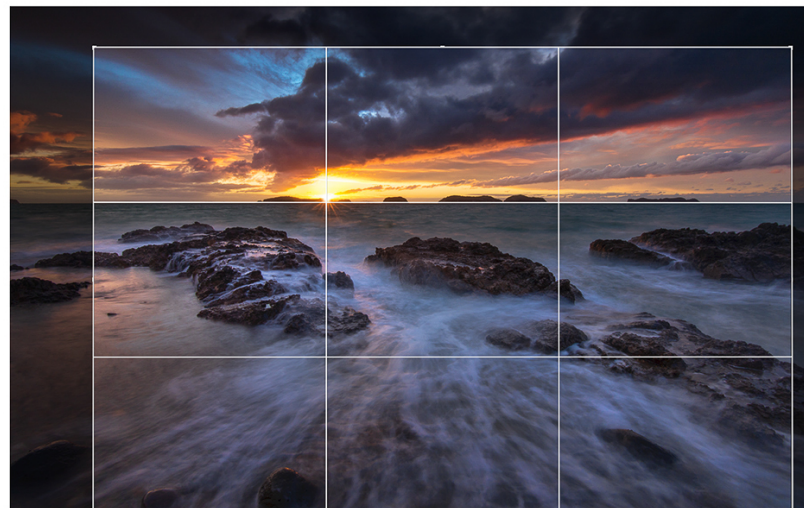
PHOTOGRAPHY COMPOSITION

It's crucial to know how to compose your image "in real time" to create quality photography. This doesn't mean you have to follow a rigid set of rules; in fact, it's the opposite—it means you need to be flexible and creative, because you can't manipulate the scene or the conditions, which are ever-changing. No one told nature that it had to conform to a "rule of thirds", and the sun won't stand still while you arrange the perfect composition. A photographer's canvas comes pre-painted, but it also comes with shifting variables (sea, clouds, sun, people, etc), and you may have to work quickly to capture a time-sensitive photo. Practicing enough to be able to envision composition overlays on your scene is a great advantage, as is the ability to think outside the box. While you can't change the landscape, you can take advantage of the best width, depth, and angle of a view to arrange the scene.

In this shot, I had all the variables working against me: I was in the middle of a storm with a 25-knot headwind, my tripod perched on a narrow ledge on the edge of the sea, working with multiple time-sensitive elements.

I could barely see through the sea spray on my glasses, and I had to keep wiping the camera lens as it fogged up. Composition was the last thing on my mind—but after years of practice, it was automatic.

Compositional guidelines should be there in the back of your mind whenever you're out in the field, but you won't always be able to achieve balance through repeating a single arrangement or keeping to a set of rules. Having a grid of thirds on the back of your camera can be as much a hindrance as a guide; if you force a scene to fit a convention, you may end up with a contrived image. The scene and the story you are telling will guide you to the best way to create balance, and breaking the rules will sometimes be advisable. Pay attention to perspective, object counter-balance, and what you include or exclude from the frame. Does the image lead in or flow out through the corners? Are there any natural leading lines in the scene? Make sure your composition is intentional rather than haphazard.



LEARNING TO SEE

Your ability to compose in real time will be strengthened by learning to see a scene the way your lens sees it. This will teach you how close you should be to your subject, and how much will fit in your frame. A “standard” lens of 50mm, for example, captures an angle of view comparable to that of our eyes, while a 24 or 16mm wide-angle (my preferred lens) captures an angle wider than your normal field of view.

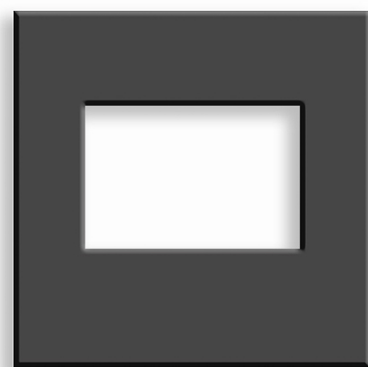
To help you see how your lens sees, set your camera on a tripod and look at the scene through the lens. Observe the right and left-hand edges of the frame, then look at the scene in front of you and hold your arms out in front of you with your hands framing what fits in the lens. The angle of your arms demonstrates the angle of the lens; memorising this angle will make the shoot much smoother.

Soon enough, you’ll be arranging your composition before your camera’s even out of its bag. When you arrive at a new location, you’ll be able to analyse possible compositions based on how your lens will capture the view. What’s in or out of the frame?

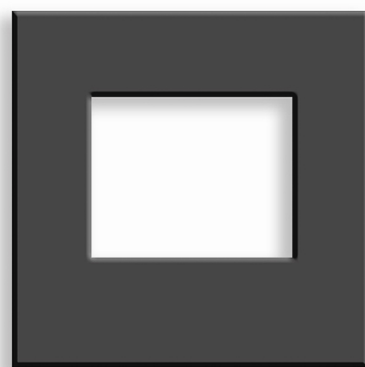
How much foreground interest is there? How much will you need to tilt the camera? Where should you stand? Using your hands to assess the angle and create a physical window may feel silly, but it really helps to eliminate the distractions outside the frame.

A visual aid in the form of a card may also help you learn to see like your lens. On your next shoot, try using an A5 piece of card with a hole cut into it—ratio 2x3, 8x10 or 1x2—as a viewfinder (alternatively, use two L-shaped cards and adjust the ratio as needed). Holding the card close to your face shows a wide-angle view, and holding it further out shows a zoomed-in scene.

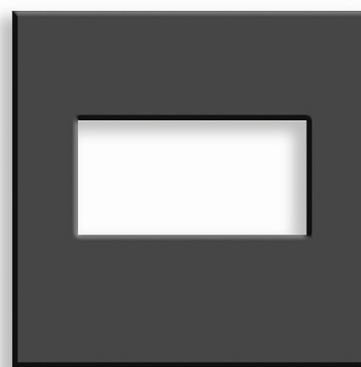
You may wonder why I don’t advise you to simply peer through your lens to practice, but the goal is to learn to compose before setting up and fiddling with your camera equipment. If you don’t train yourself to think like your lens, your composition can easily become an afterthought. You want your composition to lead you to your position, rather than your position dictating your composition.



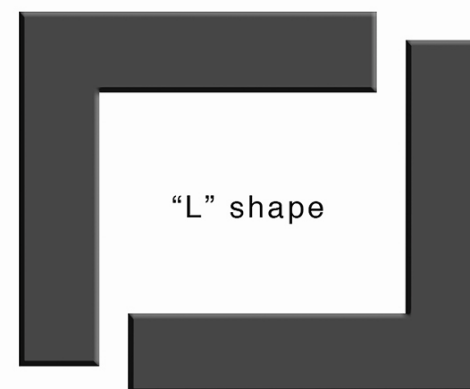
3x2 - 6x4



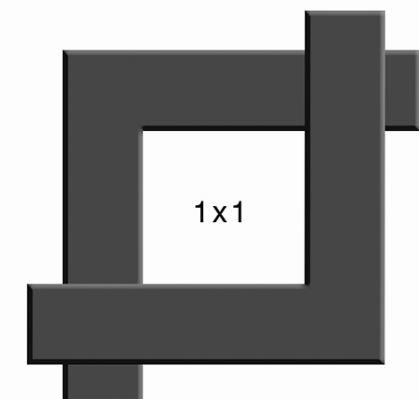
10x8



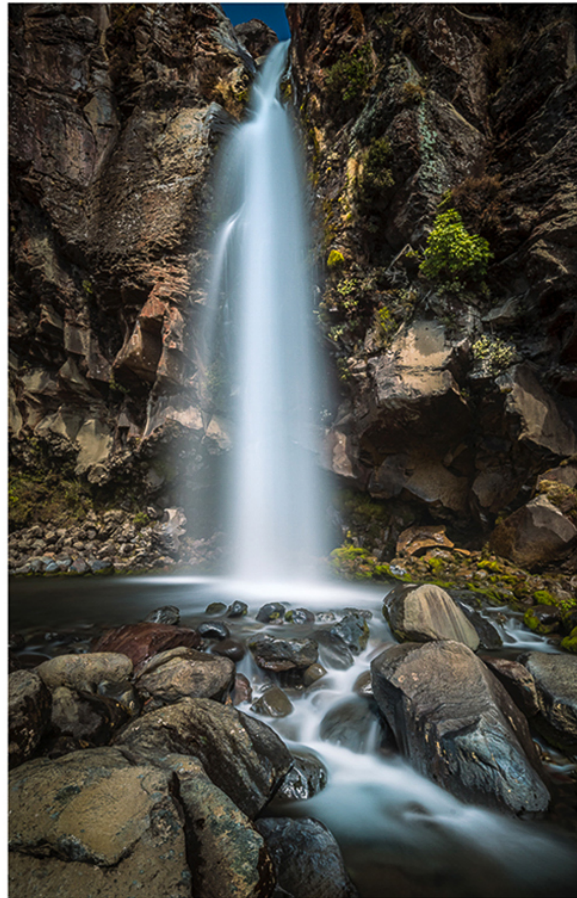
2x1



“L” shape



1x1

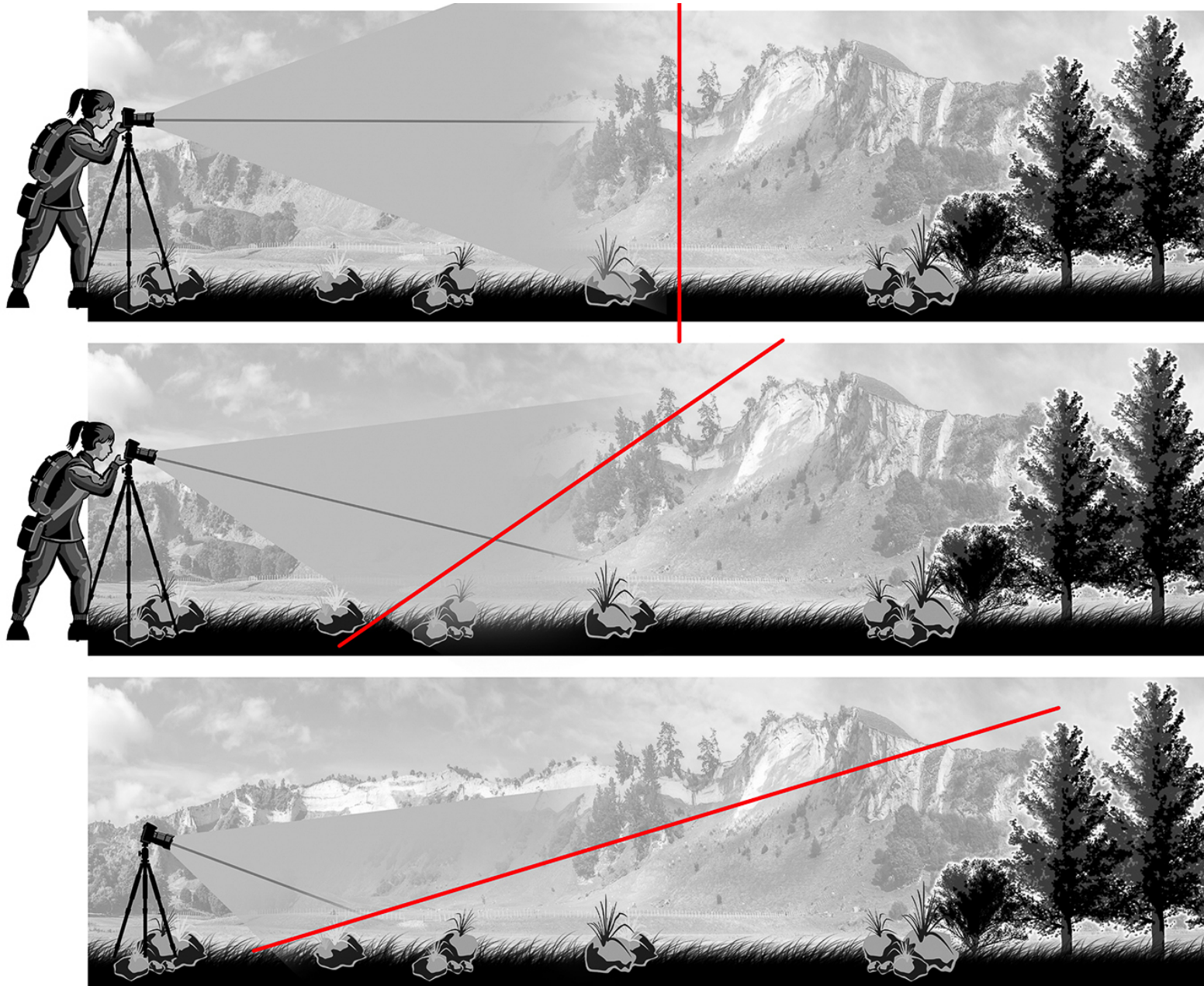


LANDSCAPE OR PORTRAIT?

Will your scene work best in landscape orientation or portrait? This is a fundamental decision that must be made before capturing the image. Changing your mind during post-processing will produce sub-par results: cropping landscape images into verticals eliminates half of your pixels, and, because a true vertical presents a different dynamic, the cropped version will not seem quite right.

Luckily, the elements of a scene usually guide you to the best orientation. For example, single fall waterfalls look very strong as verticals, but you can change the balance by having a strong foreground emphasis, as shown in these three different takes on Taranaki Falls. The 2x3 landscape, with its strong foreground emphasis, works well, but I found the image to be stronger in vertical, with all the emphasis placed on the single fall.

While they can be very effective, vertical images tend to be harder to compose than landscapes, at least in terms of landscape photography. It can be difficult to create flow between the foreground, midground, and background, and images can easily end up looking like three disconnected stripes. An 8x10 vertical is generally easier to compose than the narrower 2x3, but no matter the aspect ratio, take great care that your composition allows your viewer's eye to travel smoothly through it.



HEIGHT & LENS TILT

The height of your tripod will significantly impact the emphasis of your image. Do you want to draw attention to the foreground, midground, or background? Lowering the camera height will reduce the blank space in the midground, while a low angle with the camera tilted downwards will increase foreground interest.

For seascapes, it's often useful to get lower down to minimise the distance between the foreground and the horizon. Both landscape and portrait can be tricky in this regard. With seascapes in particular, you're at a risk of ending up with plain stripes of sand, sea and sky: to avoid this, look for locations that have good foreground detail to lead you into a scene.

ASPECT RATIOS

Aspect ratio is another consideration best determined in the field. Although images can be cropped in post-processing, bear in mind that the aspect ratio will have a significant impact on how the viewer interacts with the scene. It pays to have an idea what aspect ratio you might crop to, so you can make sure your subject placement will lend itself well to the intended crop.

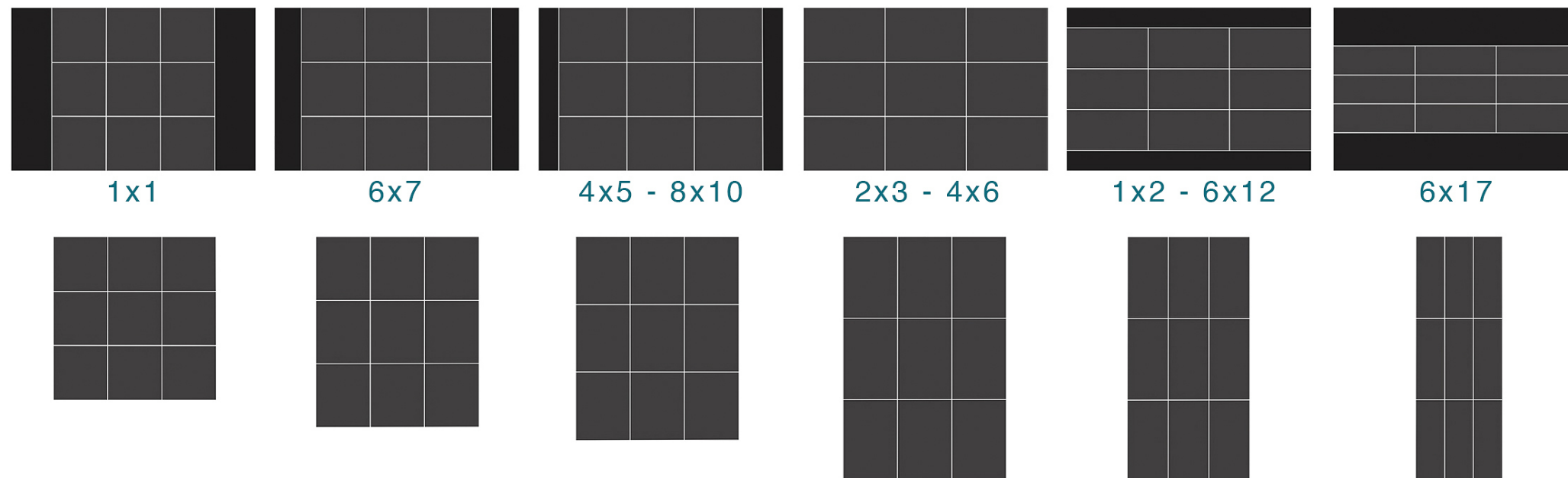
Many photographers strongly advocate for a ratio of 8x10, but my personal preference is for 2x3 (35mm format). I started in a darkroom at art college with 5x4 studio cameras and 8x10 or 16x20 photographic paper, but, having spent most of my career as a designer, I tend to see everything as either an A4 vertical or an A3 double page spread.

Eventually, with the arrival of digital and desktop printers, the photographic industry also moved to “A” sized printers.

For this ebook we will look at all aspect ratios, but bear in mind that some ratios work better for landscapes and panoramas than for vertical images.

ORIGIN OF ASPECT RATIOS

- 1x1 = 6x6 Medium format - (Rollei/Hasselblad cameras)
- 6x7 = 6x7 Medium format - (Mamiya/Pentax cameras)
- 4x5 = 8x10 Large format - (Studio plate cameras)
- 2x3 = 4x6 35mm format - (SLR cameras)
- 1x2 = 6x12 Medium format - (Horseman cameras)
- 6x17 = 6x17 Medium format - (Linhof/Fuji cameras)





2x3 = 4x6
Landscape and Portrait



4x5 = 8x10
Landscape and Portrait



1x1 = 6x6
Square



6x7 = 6x7
Landscape and Portrait



1x2 = 6x12
Panorama

6x17 = 6x17
Panorama



POST-PRODUCTION CROPPING

Most of the time, you'll be shooting in a 2x3 aspect ratio, and changing the aspect ratio in post production will have a significant impact on the visual story that you are trying to convey to the viewer. Here is a 3x2 portrait view of Cape Palliser Lighthouse: this image clearly demonstrates the difficulty in retaining interest through foreground to background with a 2x3 portrait.

Which one of these aspect ratios works best for conveying the story? Which elements should be left in, and which should be excluded from the scene?

This was an interesting process for me to explore. I have lived with the Cape Palliser image for about nine years, and it's one of my favourite images. However, revisiting the aspect ratio for this exercise brought me to favour the 8x10 as the ideal crop. Working down from the top, I decided the space above the dominant cloud added nothing to the visual story.

That became the top of the crop, and the dominant anchor rock at the bottom needed space below without cutting through the two smaller rocks at the bottom. With the aspect ratio change, the foreground feels more strongly connected to the background.





SAIL ROCK, CATHEDRAL COVE

This 2006 image of Sail Rock, Cathedral Cove, was shot as a 2x3 landscape. I share the date to illustrate that “you never stop learning” when it comes to capturing and processing. I first cropped this image to the 1x2 aspect ratio, placing the horizon on the bottom third; but looking back on it now, I realise I had compromised one of my classic “Style and Vision” traits: the foreground emphasis. I rarely concern myself with the “thirds” rule when shooting in the field, so when I deconstructed my past edits, I was surprised at myself.

My conclusion here was to revert to the original 2x3 aspect ratio, with just a fractional crop. This image now exemplifies my typical style. It includes plenty of foreground interest—white water and a rock that exits precisely at the bottom-left corner of the frame, mimicking the top angle of Sail Rock. The dynamic of the image is a strong diagonal leading in from the bottom left.





LIGHTROOM COMPOSITIONAL GUIDELINES

If you struggle with composition, the crop tool in Lightroom is a great learning aid. Try also exploring the compositional grid overlays on your past work to see if any common traits emerge; perhaps you've been subconsciously composing in a pattern all along. Learning grids can help you visualize a composition when you are in the field, even if you're not consciously aware of their influence.

I turned these grids on the other day with the intent to create illustrations of compositional types. The patterns I found in my own work highlighted the strong influence my art and design background has exerted on my compositional choices—predominantly through perspective vanishing lines, strong diagonals, and triangles.

It was somewhat gratifying to see that my images, shot in “real time”, conformed to compositional rules. Although I was not consciously aware of it, my compositional overlays had clicked into place to help me create aesthetic balance.

This being said, a well-balanced image is still a well-balanced image regardless of the rules, so there is no need to force your images to conform to a grid. The guides do not appear on the back of your camera, but in Lightroom, they can be used to help you crop an image for better compositional balance and flow. By default, the grid of thirds should come up when you select the crop tool; Press the “O” key to cycle through a set of composition overlays.

Options:

- Thirds
- Diagonals
- Golden Triangles (Shift Key + “O” key will flip left to right)
- Golden Ratio
- Golden Spiral (Shift Key + “O” key will keep rotating the spiral 90 and flip left to right)
- Aspect Ratios
- Simple Grid

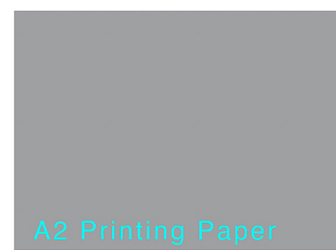
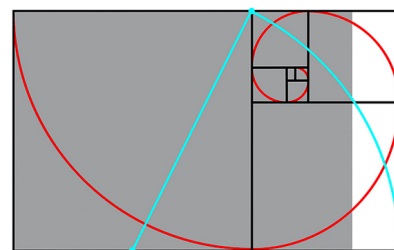
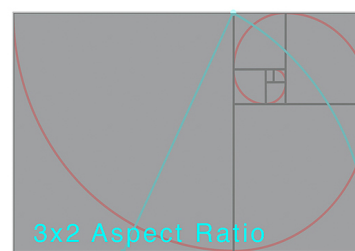
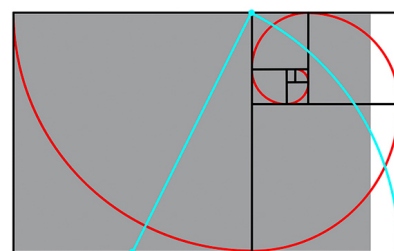
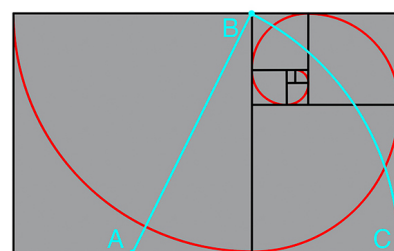




CROPPING CAUTION—GOLDEN SPIRAL

The spiral tool helps you see connections between points—the sweeping curve leads your eye through the image in a fluid manner to find the story’s ending. To try it, hold down the shift key and press “o” to rotate the spiral by 90° (note that on certain rotations, the spiral gets squashed out of its “golden” balance).

The top image shows the curve passing through Mount Cook, leading your eye around the icebergs to the conclusion. In the middle image, the spiral sweeps down through the driftwood and curves round to connect with the second sea stack. The bottom image illustrates the ineffectiveness of the spiral tool for some aspect ratios: in this example, it's not a true “golden” spiral. The top diagram represents the “true” logarithmic golden spiral as found in nature (the nautilus shell), which is calculated from a golden



rectangle. Although not a perfect fit for the true spiral, the 2x3 aspect ratio works fairly well with this tool. A2 falls somewhat short, however—and if you apply the spiral to a 8x10, 1x2, or 1x1 image, it’s no longer a golden spiral at all: it’s just a swirl, as seen in the photo of the cloud over Mt Ngauruhoe. Used in this way, the tool is completely pointless, as the spiral becomes squashed and stretched.



HORIZON PLACEMENT

“A scene should always dictate the position of the horizon.”

Landscape photographers must decide where to place the horizon before capturing an image, as it is difficult to alter this through cropping in post-production. In placing the horizon in your image, consider these three options:

- Horizon near the top third
- Horizon near the bottom third
- Horizon through the centre

While making this decision, do not get hung up on “the rule of thirds”; images should be shot according to what the scene calls for, with consideration to the amount of visual weight you wish to give to the sky or the foreground.



This image of Otarawairere Bay, for example, was shot on a day with little to no water movement. My first composition attempted to capture as much foreground as possible, but the sea wasn’t cooperating; it lacked the drama I sought. I changed tack and tilted my camera upwards, lowering the horizon line to make the shot all about the sky instead.





HORIZON NEAR THE TOP THIRD

Place the horizon near the top third of your image to emphasise the foreground. This will enhance the drama of the shot and lead your viewer more smoothly into the scene. In this type of shot, the foreground should offer a lot of interest to effectively lead the viewer in.



HORIZON NEAR THE BOTTOM THIRD

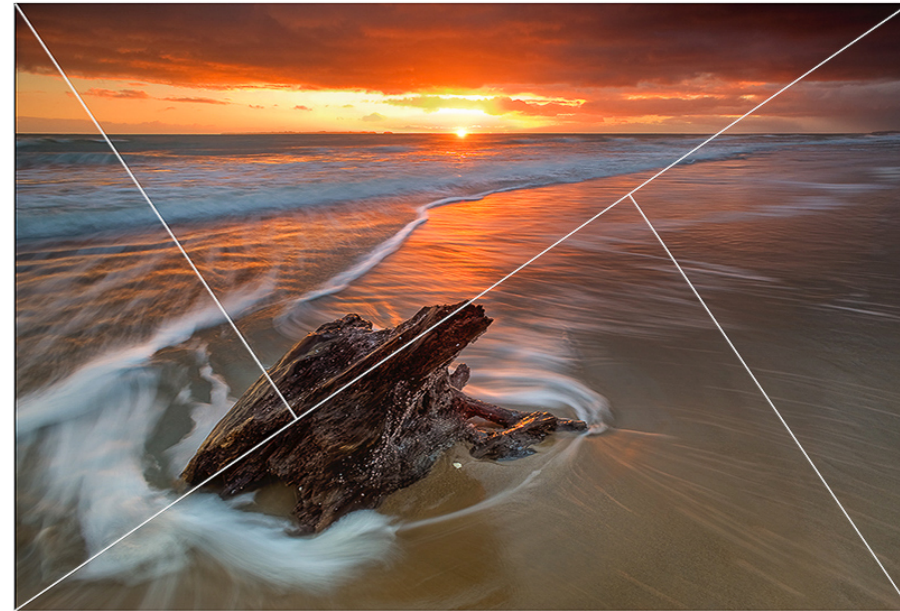
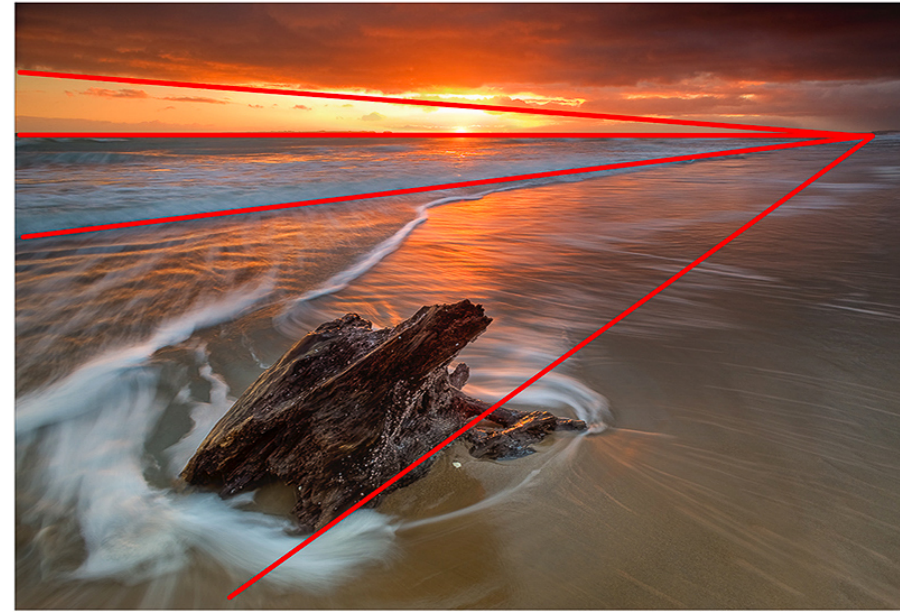
Place the horizon low in the frame—in the bottom third of the image—to emphasise the sky. This approach is great for capturing dramatic skies, and it can be useful when your location offers little or no foreground interest. You can also lend a greater sense of presence to a subject by shooting up at it from a low angle.



HORIZON THROUGH THE CENTRE

Placing the horizon near the centre of your shot will help you achieve symmetrical balance. This is a very useful approach for simplistic, minimalist compositions as well as for reflection shots: shooting from a low angle with a central horizon line will result in a perfectly balanced reflection. Draw attention to objects standing proudly above the horizon through use of a central horizon line, which will allow them to dominate the scene. To create a connection between both halves of the image, include content that breaks the horizon line. The central horizon line works particularly well for panoramas, resulting in the least distortion when stitching—regardless of focal length.

SUBJECT PLACEMENT



This set of images show my thought process in the field (in red) alongside Lightroom compositional overlays. This image is full frame 3x2 aspect ratio, and you'll note that it's not split into perfect thirds: it has its own dynamic built upon the natural leading lines in the sea.



CHAPTER 6

LUMINOSITY

By Ken Wright

EXPRESSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

LUMINOSITY

By Ken Wright

In photography, the word luminosity is used to refer to perceived brightness. It is distinguishable both from true brightness—light reflected off an object—and from lightness, which is a measure of how light or dark the subject itself is. When we take a photograph, we can change the overall luminosity by increasing or decreasing the exposure, making our photograph appear lighter or darker. There is not necessarily a “correct” exposure, because exposure adjustments are creative tools. The mood of a scene changes depending on whether it appears brighter or darker in a photograph, and we can make these adjustments with tools like the exposure slider and the tone curve, which give us control over the feeling of the final product.



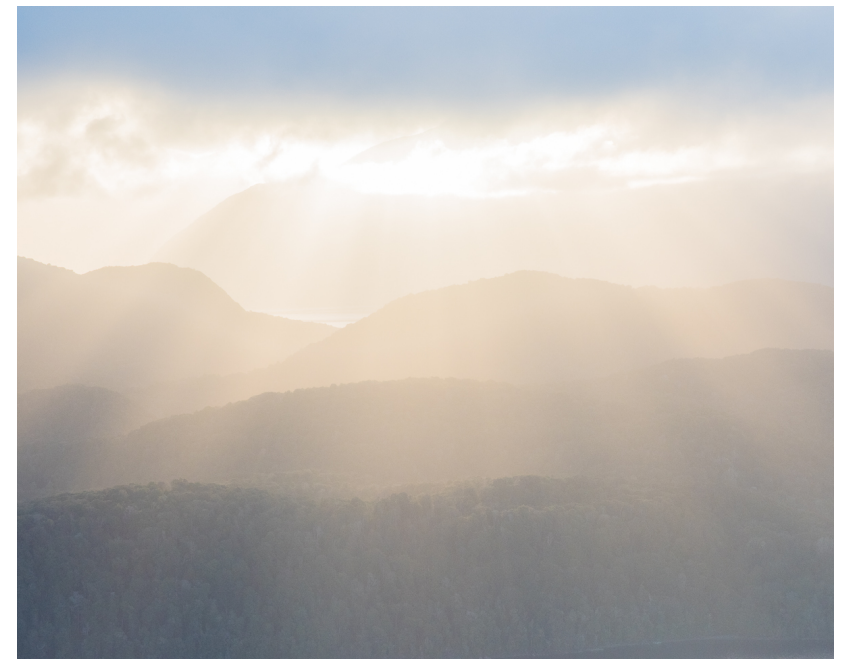
HOW LUMINOSITY AFFECTS MOOD

You may not realise it, but luminosity (perceived brightness) plays a significant role in our moods. It's natural to feel more optimistic and energetic waking up to a bright sunny day, when "luminosity" is high. By contrast, a "low luminosity" day (dull, cloudy, raining) might make you feel subdued and reluctant to get out of bed. Our visual perception of the weather can affect our mood—and as photographers, we can harness this reality to influence how an image is perceived. By manipulating the global luminosity of a scene, we can elicit a range of emotions from our viewers. Light, bright, and airy scenes tend to make the viewer happy and joyful, offering a sense of enlightenment or yearning for adventure. If we reduce the luminosity, on the other hand, the scene feels cold and dangerous, and makes us wary. Including areas of both high and low luminosity within a single image can lead viewers on a visual journey from dark to light.

LUMINOSITY - CHANGING THE BALANCE

Isn't it interesting that we tend to enjoy the sensational colours of sunrise and sunset without giving a second thought to why the clouds are there? Is a storm gathering? Is it clearing? Either way, the clouds are what make the sky look so dynamic, adding depth of colour and light.

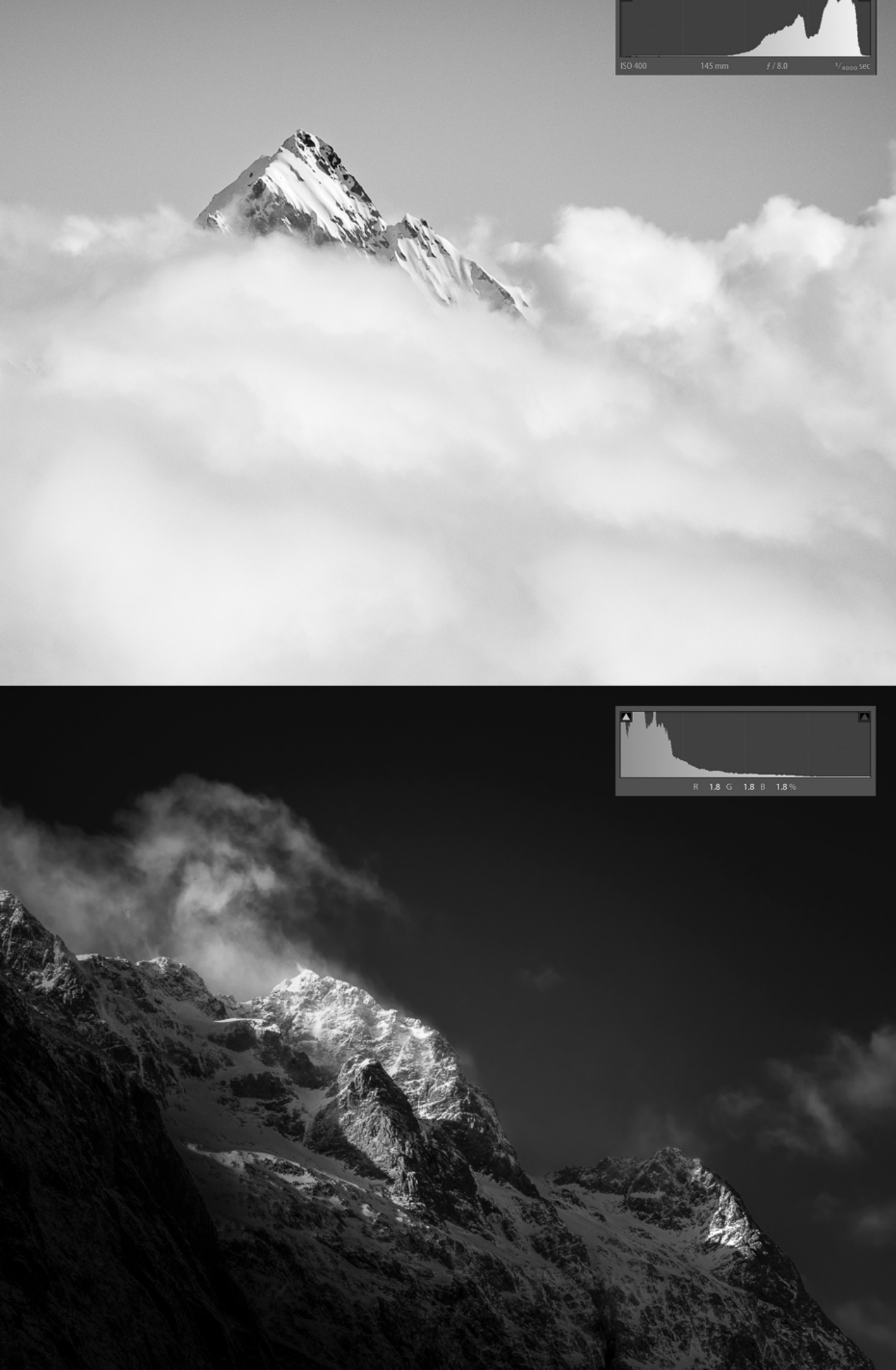
In this scene, changing the luminosity changes the mood of the image. The version in the centre shows a more accurate representation of the last light of day bursting through a clearing storm. The reduced luminosity in the left-hand image changes viewer interpretation—it looks as though a storm is gathering and that rain is imminent. In contrast, the increased luminosity shown in the far-right image creates an air of optimism with subtle rays of light, evoking an almost euphoric mood.



POINT HALSWELL - ADJUSTING LUMINOSITY

I always feel that a lighthouse should be shot on a stormy day: after all, its purpose is to be a guiding light in a storm. However, this shot of Point Halswell Light was shot on a very dull, monochromatic day, with very little contrast. The scene did not convey the dark, foreboding mood I wanted my viewer to feel—but by changing the global luminosity, I was able to add drama to the scene. My adjustments changed the mood of the image from “it may rain” to “there’s a storm coming”.





HIGH AND LOW KEY

HIGH KEY

High Key images are bright in appearance (high luminosity); the histogram will sit far to the right without clipping the highlights. Such scenes tend to be subtle and more minimalistic—ideal subjects include snow, white sands, hills receding in mist, etc. A high key style is often used for abstract landscapes, such as those lacking a horizon line or featuring rock and sand striations. The image doesn't need to be shot in black and white to be high key; serene pastel scenes can be high key too.

LOW KEY

Low Key images are dark in appearance (low luminosity); the histogram will sit far to the left and intentionally clip the blacks to create more depth and drama. A low key technique can create drama and gloom in a stormy scene, making clouds more dramatic and seas more intense. As with high key images, this technique is effective for shooting minimalist textures: dark rocks such as granite, for example.

FIORDLAND PEAKS - HIGH AND LOW KEY

A horizonless sand dune shot in bright light will likely create a high key image, while the same scene, shot at last light, will create a low key image that is markedly different in luminosity. In this example, the low key image on the left is dark and gloomy, hinting at fading daylight or an impending storm. The one on the right shows bright light streaming through the mist between hills—this is a high key image with an air of optimism, leading the viewer into the light.





CHAPTER 7

COLOUR & SATURATION

By Ken Wright

EXPRESSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

COLOUR & SATURATION

By Ken Wright

UNDERSTANDING COLOUR

A basic grasp of colour theory will go a long way to understanding how to control the **mood** and **impact** of your images. This guide will help get you started in exploring colour themes in your work.

The first attempts to figure out the science of colour date back to the early 1600s with Finnish astronomer Aron Syfid Forsius. Later that century, Sir Issac Newton's discovery that the prism separates white light into individual colours led to the realisation that white light is what we see when all colours are present. Building on this, further contributions to colour theory led to what we now know as "the colour wheel", which is made up of primary, secondary, and tertiary colours.



"We are drawn to warm colours. Even though we know the mountain is cold, the image has an air of optimism from the warm sunlight."

ARTISTIC COLOUR THEORY

PRIMARY COLOURS

In artistic colour theory, **blue**, **red**, and **yellow** form the foundation of all other colours. As primary colours, they cannot be made by mixing any other pigment/paint/ink together: they are pure colours. We can mix these three colours to create all the other colours in the spectrum.

SECONDARY COLOURS

These colours are created by mixing equal parts of one primary colour and its neighbour on the colour wheel.

- Mix 50% red + 50% blue = **violet**
- Mix 50% red + 50% yellow = **orange**
- Mix 50% blue + 50% yellow = **green**

TERTIARY COLOURS

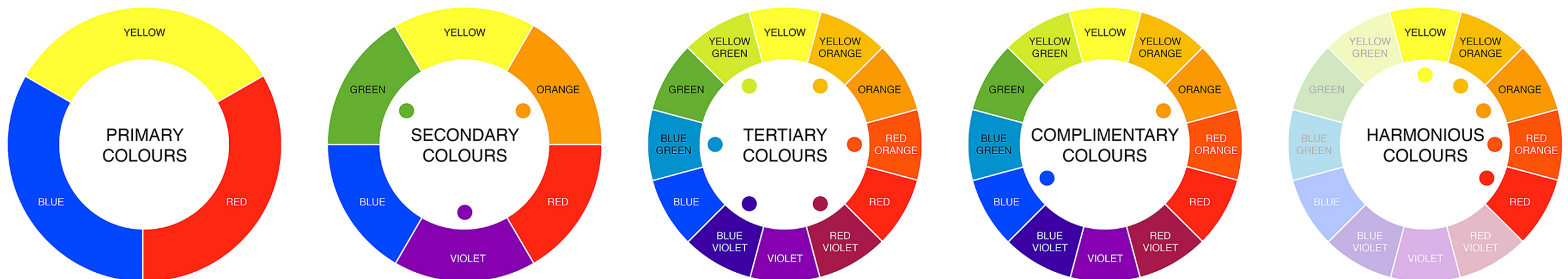
By taking the above process one step further to blend secondary colours with their neighbour, we create the tertiary colours. For example, 50% yellow + 50% orange = yellow/orange.

The tertiary colours are:

- yellow/orange
- red/orange
- red/violet
- blue/violet
- blue/green
- yellow/green

Together, primary, secondary, and tertiary colours make up the full spectrum of white light as seen in a rainbow. Tertiary colours are like a transition between secondary colours.

Note: black and white are not considered colours. Black is an absence of light and white is pure light.

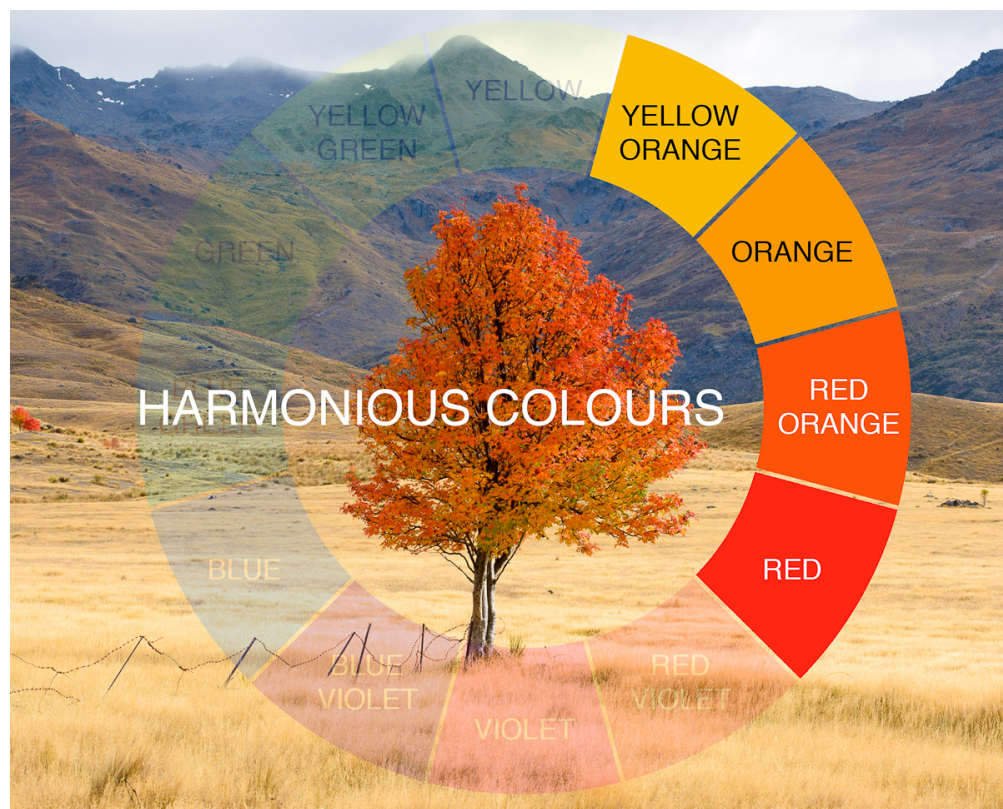
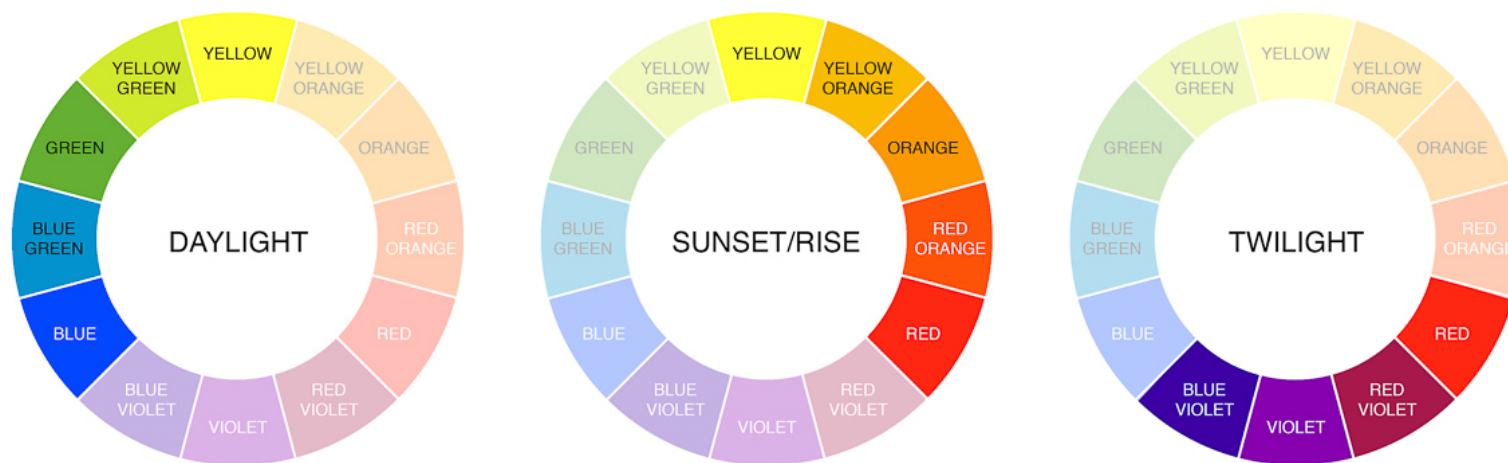


COMPLEMENTARY COLOURS

Complementary colours are those that sit directly opposite each other on the colour wheel. When two complementary colours are juxtaposed, the lighter colour appears more vibrant. This effect creates the strongest contrast for both colours. Because of this, it's no wonder red berries look so stunning against green foliage, and that yellow/orange sunflowers stand out dramatically against a vivid blue sky. The colours are natural complements.

This image of sunrise at Kaikoura demonstrates a natural harmonious balance between the slate blue sky on the left and the reflective orange on the clouds to the right. These colours are complementary—the colour wheel shows a near opposite placement of blue and orange. Knowing the complements of colours can be advantageous in photography—we will explore this later.





HARMONIOUS COLOURS

Harmonious colours are those that sit next to each other in the colour wheel, appearing to blend. One example is yellow - yellow/orange - orange - red/orange - red: a combination that reminds me of autumn. Indeed, harmonious combinations such as this are abundant in the colours of nature. As a landscape photographer, I even see harmony in the colours of different times of day. As shown in the graphic, daylight, sunset/rise, and twilight can be represented by different harmonious blends of the colour wheel.

Most of the details of artistic colour theory and the colour wheel are geared towards paint mixing, but the knowledge is useful when we want to enhance the harmony or contrast of colours in our image to create the perfect balance.



COLOUR PERCEPTION

Our perception of colours is subjective. We don't all see colours with the same intensity; it's like being in a TV store where the image on all the screens looks a bit different. We all experience vision with slight variation. If I say a colour is red, you may disagree, claiming it is clearly orange. If you have ever been in a paint shop with your partner, you'll know what I mean. The specific colour each of you sees is not the same. Ask someone which panel on this scale is orange, and you may start a fierce debate between the two in the middle. If all four—from yellow/orange to red—were merged into a smooth transition, as in the lower image, which point would you call orange?

Even though I know where orange is, I tend to perceive the centre point as more orange. This discussion is based on 40 years in the design industry dealing with clients' perceptions of colour.

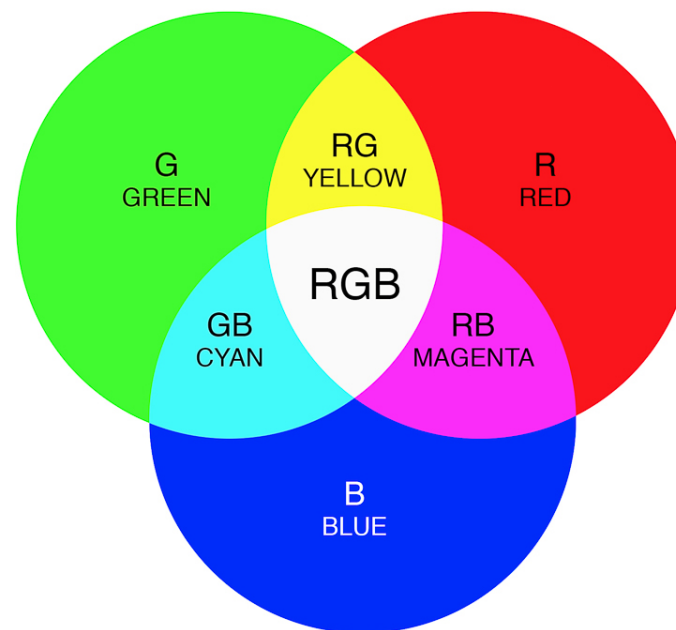
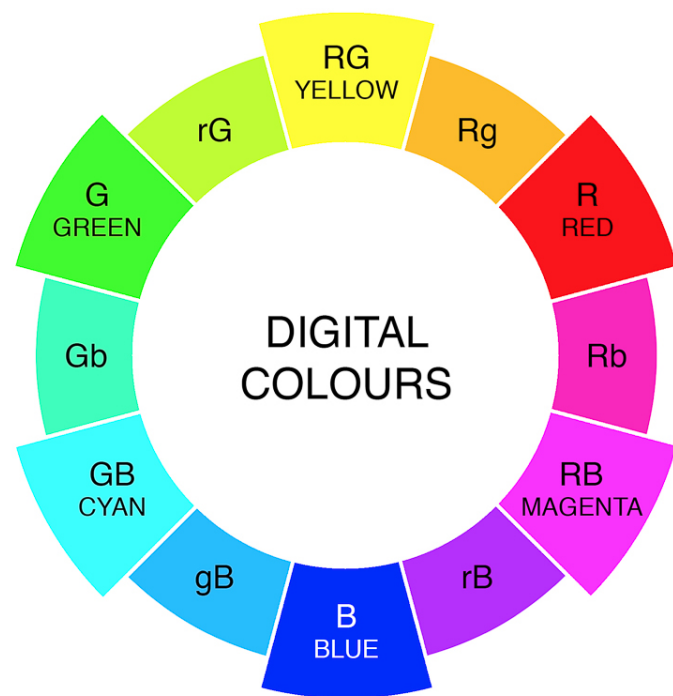
To complicate issues for photographers, our work must be processed on a monitor, so we have to make sure our monitor is properly calibrated. Am I seeing the same colour/tonal range on my monitor as you see on yours? All screens project colour differently unless they are calibrated.



ADDITIVE & SUBTRACTIVE COLOUR MIXING

All the discussion so far has been based on what's known as "subtractive" colour mixing, i.e. mixing paint and inks. We call it "subtractive" because a mix of all pure colours produces black. This is the more intuitive colour theory, and it's most relevant to everyday life. However, in digital photography we work with "additive" mixing. We call it "additive" because in the digital colour wheel, a mix of all the primary colours produces white. These colours are in light, rather than pigment form, and interestingly enough, the primary colours are different than in subtractive mixing.

The primary colours of the digital colour wheel are red, green, and blue, which together comprise the RGB colour model. Your camera's histogram breaks down into these colours, and all computer monitors work according to the same model. Because it's based on how light interacts, the additive model is very different than how we normally think about colour.





HOW COLOURS AFFECT MOOD

The ability of colour to elicit a specific response—to create or impact mood—has been written about at length. Every colour produces a different mood, and often our individual reactions to a colour are so widely shared that colours take on cultural significance. In most countries, purple is considered regal and is associated with wealth. It's a colour not often found in nature, although exotic plants and birds spring to mind. In the Western world, we typically associate white with purity, which is why brides wear white. Conversely, in some Asian countries, white is seen as a symbol of death and mourning. Some Eastern countries use black to symbolise health, prosperity, and stability, whereas in the West it often represents evil, death, and mourning.

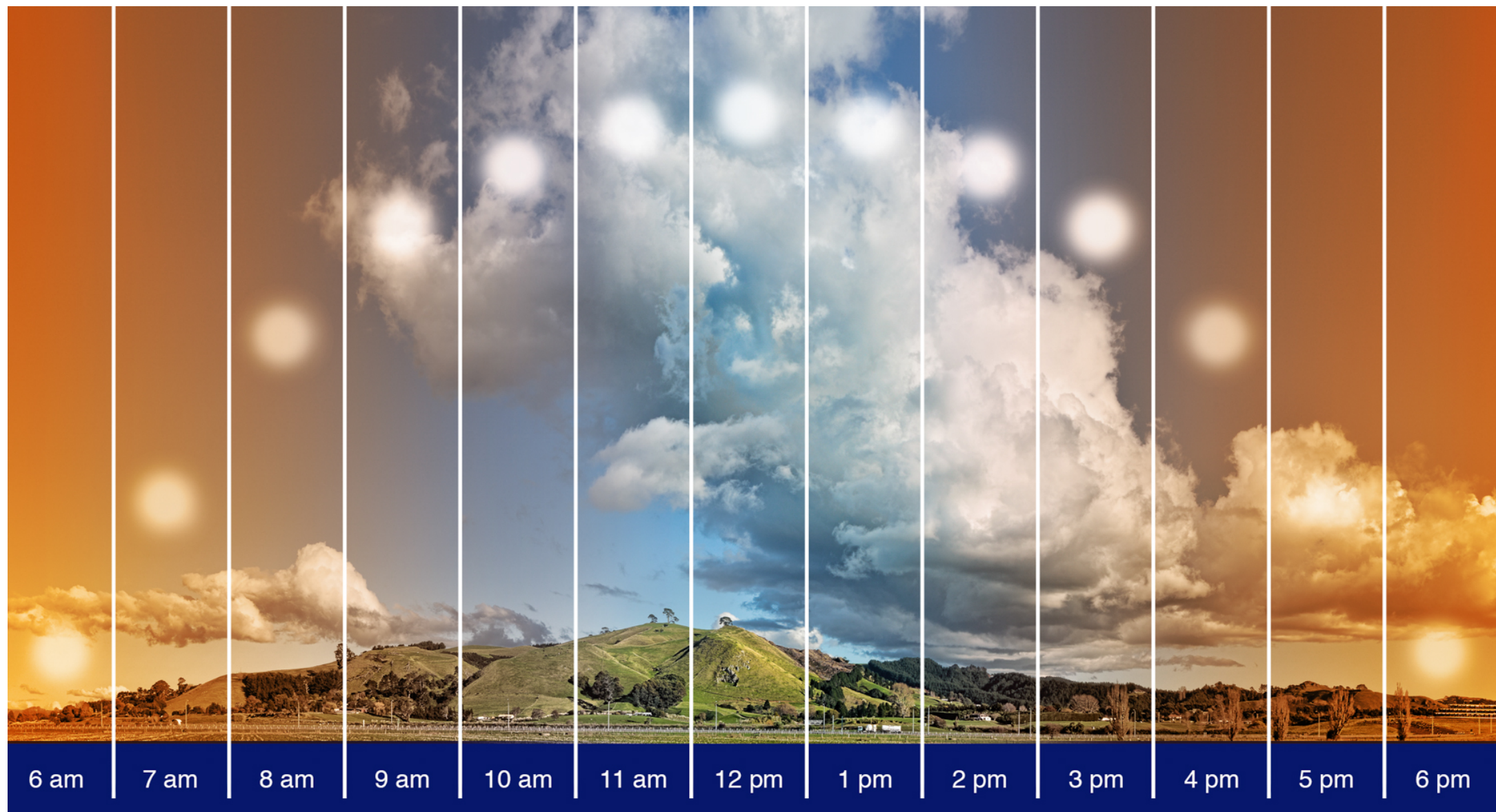
COLOURS AND MOOD ASSOCIATION:

- **Red:** romance, passion, violence, anger, speed, power, fun
- **Orange:** warmth, excitement, enthusiasm, confidence, autumn, fire, spiritual, meditation
- **Yellow:** joy, optimism, energy, excitement, cheer
- **Green:** calm, growth, rebirth, spring, nature, compassion, fresh, restful
- **Blue:** cool, cold, calm, sad, serenity, productive, balanced
- **Purple:** religion, regal, wealth, mystery, imagination, exotic, sensual, soothing

SEASONAL COLOUR MOODS

As a landscape photographer, I have become attuned to the effects of light and colour that shape the mood of each season. Cultures that lived off the land in times past were even more attuned to seasonal changes: new growth in the landscape, abundance of food, weather variations, and animal migration all played a part in mood. These cultures had a visual guide to the landscape, which reflected a different part of the colour spectrum according to the angle of the sun, both through the day and through the seasons. In summer months, the angle is higher; in winter and autumn, it is lower.

Autumn owes its warm tones partly to this lower angle—and we as landscape photographers search out this same quality of light during “the golden hour” of sunrise and sunset. This is when the light passes through the red, orange, and yellow part of the spectrum, whereas the sun’s angle at midday produces white light that brightens greens and blues.



For this exercise, I calculated the angle of light on my local beach (in New Zealand) throughout the seasons.

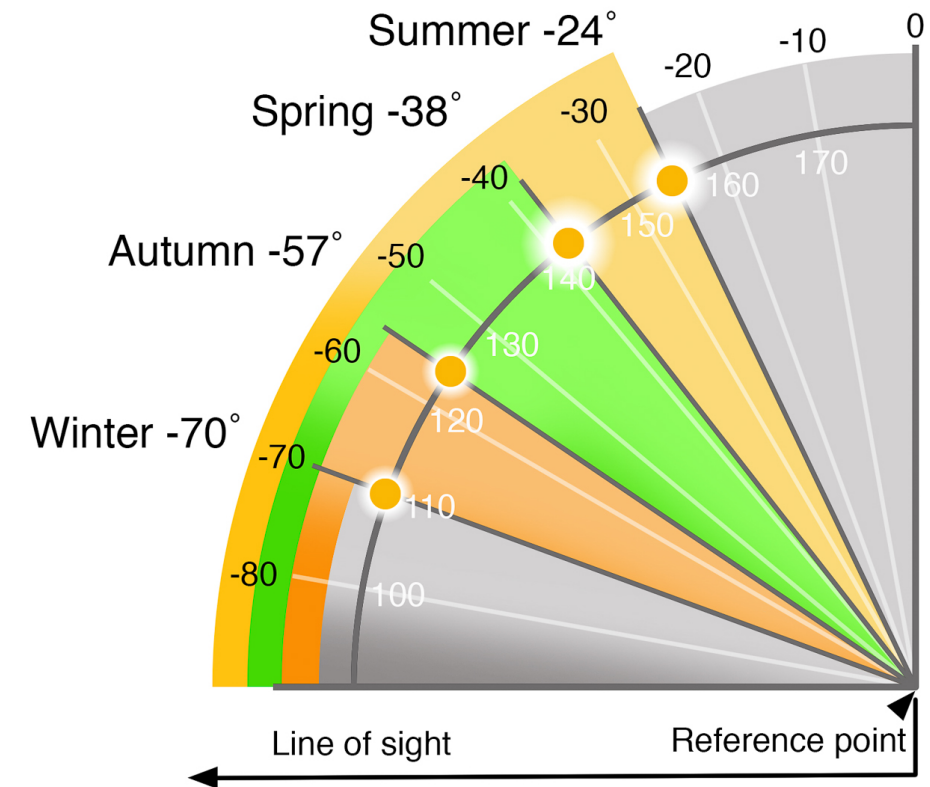
The measurements were taken at noon on the 15th of the middle month of each season.

Spring	Sept- Oct -Nov	-38° Vivid
Summer	Dec- Jan -Feb	-24° Bright
Autumn	Mar- Apr -May	-57° Warm
Winter	Jun- Jul -Aug	-70° Cold

These measurements show the highest point of the sun during the middle of each season. The higher the angle, the brighter the seasonal colours; the lower the angle, the colder the light. Even the colours of sunrise and sunset change throughout the year; I have noticed that the colours of a winter sunset feel cold and crisp, whereas those of a summer sunset feel warm and soft. In pre-dawn and twilight—"the blue hour", as we call it—the angle of light is so low that the blue, purple, and indigo part of the spectrum is strongest.

The four images shown represent the colour moods of the seasons (in New Zealand). As the viewer, you will have a natural response to the colours in these scenes—some of the descriptors below may come to mind.

Summer	bright—blooming—sunny
Spring	fresh—lush—growth—crisp
Autumn	golden—vivid—warm—rich
Winter	cold—moody—stormy—damp





A VISUAL STIMULUS

Knowing how our viewers respond to colour can be advantageous when attempting to elicit a particular mood. Cool and warm tones, for example, create very different moods. If you are in a cold room and you light a log fire, the room will take a while to heat up, but you will feel warmer immediately, bathed in the glow of yellow/orange flames—a purely visual stimulus. Similarly, we can enhance yellow/orange in a sunset shot to automatically warm the scene.

A photograph of golden (yellow/orange) sunflowers against a vivid blue sky carries a sense of joy and instantly makes you think of summer. The colours sit opposite on the colour wheel, perfectly complementing each other. The use of red in your scene creates an instant wow factor, especially when offset by its complementary colour, green. Red demands attention, so a red element in your photograph will likely become the focal point of the image. Because of this, it's not unusual to see images that have been deliberately desaturated or made black and white to allow a single red feature to stand out.

As photographers, we are also drawn to different countries and cultures that use colour in different ways: who doesn't want to go to Cuba and shoot multi-coloured streetscapes with classic cars, or to visit India and Middle Eastern cultures rich in bright colours? Especially when offset against different angles of light, colour can be a powerful tool to create mood and impact.

THE COLOUR OF WHITE

In photography, it's always good to maintain some tonal value in our whites, even in the lightest areas. This gives depth and ensures we preserve the integrity of details in the image. When our highlights are pure white, we call this burnout or clipping, and it's something we should always look to avoid when exposing our shot.

There are, however, times when a shot might necessitate an area turning out pure white, such as when dealing with snow or white water. Snow is very reflective, and it can actually take on many shades and colours depending on the angle of light and the time of day.



WHITE BALANCE

White balance refers to the underlying colour temperature of an image: in a correctly balanced image, the whites should appear neither warm nor cool. The colour temperature of daylight changes throughout the day—warm at sunrise, cooler as the sun gets higher in the sky, then warming again as it descends at sunset. When we shoot with auto white balance, the camera automatically adjusts the temperature (white balance) to produce natural-looking colours.

Most of the time, auto white balance will do a good job—but there are times when it doesn't compensate correctly, leaving your image with a colour cast. The camera finds the average across the whole scene, so a strong or dominant colour can fool it into selecting the wrong white balance for the time of the day, resulting in unnatural colours. This often happens when shooting in environments with cool colours—like sea or snow. The auto white balance assumes the prevalence of blue indicates an unnatural cast, so it compensates by warming it up, even though the scene is meant to be blue. Likewise, when shooting sunset—where there is a lot of red in the sky—the camera adjusts to cool down the image, resulting in the loss of the gorgeous warm tones of the sinking sun.

Shooting RAW files allows us to control the white balance of a scene during the processing stage—but we can use it for more than just correcting colour casts. We can greatly influence the mood of a scene by changing its temperature: for example, you may want to cool an image down to create a cold, austere atmosphere. The colour of the light sends a signal to your viewer about the ambiance; cold light leans to blue and warm light leans to yellow.

Personally, I tend to intensify the yellow to red spectrum when shooting at sunrise to add warmth to the scene, but in doing so, it's important not to sacrifice the integrity of the scene. When you increase the warmth of the image as a whole, sometimes parts of it—like the sea that should be cool—become too warm. I deal with these kinds of situations by making localised selections, enabling me to adjust the white balance differently across the scene.





KAIKOURA SUNRISE - WHITE BALANCE

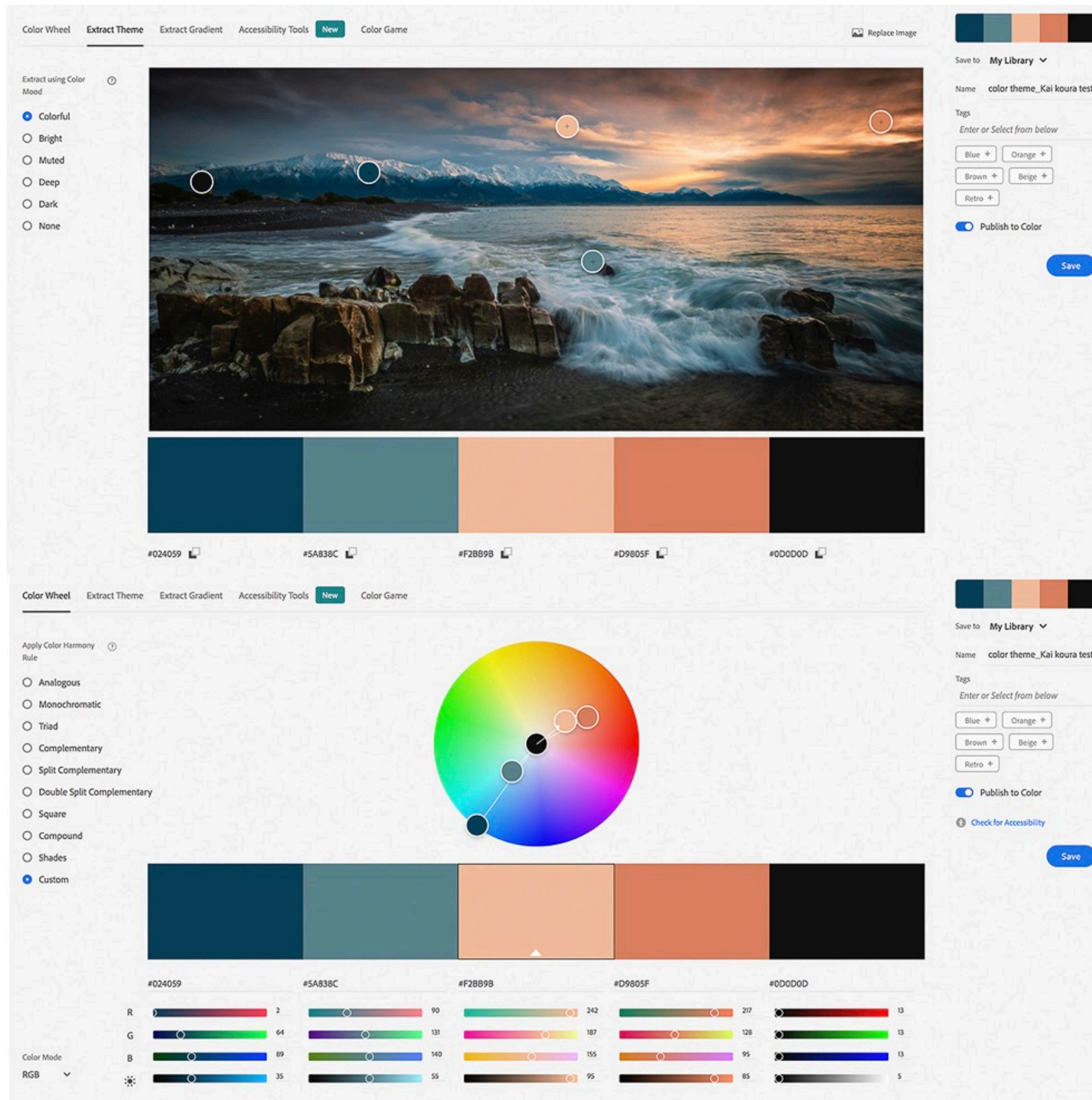
This scene from Kaikoura was shot on a freezing cold morning, and the camera has done a good job balancing the overall temperature. The original RAW was shot for the highlights without a graduated filter.

The first image has had global Lightroom adjustments applied. The second image is the same Lightroom file, but with the white balance made warmer. I found that the first image lacked the warmth that came through at sunrise, but increasing the global temperature warmed the water—which should still be cold. The third image shows the results of localised white balance adjustments. The orange in the sky has been warmed, as have the limestone rocks in the bottom left, to counterbalance the sky on the top right. The sea has been kept at the temperature levels of the second image. The result is an image that no longer suggests the cold, dull morning of the original RAW file, but rather, a crisp morning with the warmth of a new day dawning.



SATURATION

Our use of saturation has a powerful effect on the mood and impact of our images. The level of saturation we use is very much a matter of personal preference; I personally prefer stronger tones and more vivid colours in my work. The image of the Champagne Pool at Wai-O-tapu was shot on a rainy day, and the steam from the thermal pool blended into the storm clouds. Overall, the image was flat—not representative of the stormy mood I wanted the viewer to feel. So I increased the saturation in most of the image, sparing the light areas in the sky and the steam. As you can see, this has significantly affected the mood of the shot and created more impact.



COLOUR RELATIONSHIP TOOLS

Understanding the colour balance of our images will allow us to make a value judgement on strengthening or subduing a colour.

ADOBE COLOUR

A great way to explore the colour relationships in your images is to use Adobe Colour (<https://color.adobe.com/create/image>), which allows you to upload an image and see its dominant colours. From there, you can explore colour sets that complement the dominant colours, and if you are logged in to Adobe CC, it will save your colour palettes in swatches within Photoshop. This is a useful tool for those looking to apply a more artistic effect to their images.



PHOTOSHOP

Photoshop also offers a way of viewing colours on the colour wheel. You choose this by selecting “Color” (American spelling) under “Window” in the top file menu, which brings up your toolbar. It works exactly the same way as the standard “Colour Picker” tool, but the difficulty with the colour picker is that the rainbow strip is actually the colour wheel taken out of its loop form. The red at the top connects to the red at the bottom.

Using the “Color” dialog box, you can select the eyedropper tool and click on an area in the picture to view that colour on the wheel. In this image, this feature has allowed me to make a value judgement on the “complementary” balance of orange and blue. You can find “swatches” in the same dialog box, and you can save colours into your swatch library should you wish to.



CHAPTER 8

LOCAL PRESENCE

By Ken Wright

EXPRESSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

LOCAL PRESENCE

By Ken Wright

Shooting in RAW allows us to capture the most possible information in our photographs, allowing us to change what we communicate based on how the image is processed. Attending to specific areas gives us additional control over the final look of an image.

It's typical to start with global adjustments, setting the mood and impact of the image as a whole to powerful effect. Global adjustments do limit the control we have over individual elements within the photograph, however—which is why it is equally important to implement local adjustments, changing specific parts of the photograph. When processing with intent, we can choose to emphasise or de-emphasise elements in our image, thereby enhancing or reducing an impact area. Using local adjustment tools—such as brushes and masks—we can change the luminosity, contrast, saturation, clarity, and sharpness of a selected area. Having the flexibility to address specific parts of our photographs gives us almost unlimited creative control.



LUMINOSITY

Because the eye tends to be drawn to the brightest area in a photograph, increasing our subject's luminosity will help it stand out against the surrounding landscape. We can increase the luminosity of a localised selection by bringing up tonal values with tools such as the exposure and white point sliders. Increasing luminosity locally is a creative way to produce local impact, giving presence and depth to your photograph.

EXAMPLE: MOSS-LADEN ROCK, MILFORD SOUND

This image of Milford Sound was shot in very poor lighting, just before a downpour. It gives an accurate impression of the cold, damp, isolated landscape, which sees over 7m of rain a year. Unfortunately, due to the low light, the rock doesn't stand out as a clear focal point. To draw attention to it, I've selected the rock with a local adjustment brush, using the exposure slider to increase luminosity.



CONTRAST, SHARPNESS, AND CLARITY

Increasing the contrast, sharpness, and clarity of a localised area creates impact: similar to the effect of a shallow depth-of-field, sharpness will make a subject stand out against a soft background, giving the area a greater three-dimensional presence. Contrast and clarity (mid-tone contrast), when applied to only one part of the image, work in a similar way—a single area of high contrast will stand out against an otherwise low-contrast photograph.

EXAMPLE: PUNGA FALLS, KAIMAI MAMAKU FOREST

In this image of a moss-laden branch, clarity and contrast were increased locally to add definition, brightening and bringing the branch forward from the background. The adjustments lead to a greater local impact, making the photograph feel more three-dimensional.



COLOUR AND SATURATION

Another tool we can use to increase local impact is saturation. When looking at a photograph, our eye is first drawn to highly saturated or uniquely-coloured objects. We can use this to our advantage by increasing the saturation or changing the colour of an object we want to make stand out. Increasing the colour contrast in an image will create separation and definition: if an image has a cool, muted global colour palette, a bold, red object will immediately catch our attention.

EXAMPLE: TAUPO TREE AUTUMN

When I arrived at this scene, the light was very bright, showing off the glowing autumnal willow branches. In exposing the image to make sure I didn't clip the highlights, some of the orange colour was lost—but I was able to intensify it by creating a mask in Photoshop.



USING THESE TOOLS IN REVERSE

So far, we have discussed how to increase local impact by increasing the luminosity, contrast, sharpness, clarity, colour, and saturation of a particular subject or area. But we can also increase local impact by subduing the impact of the surrounding area.

To do this, make a local area selection on anything other than your subject, and apply negative rather than positive adjustments to this area—for example, decrease the luminosity and sharpness. This will comparatively strengthen the local impact of your subject.



If the subject already has quite a high impact, but your image contains other high impact distractions, this can be a useful approach; it draws attention to your subject without increasing the impact of the image overall.

EXAMPLE: LAVA FLOW FALLS

In this photo, a delicate balance is required: if I brighten the rocks any further, they will look out of place. So instead, to give them an increased presence, I have increased the saturation and darkened the colour in the water.





CHAPTER 9

EXERCISES



EXERCISE 1

IMAGE ANALYSIS

Select four photographs you wish to process, and use the Image Analysis workflow on page 7 to fill in this table. Think about what you want to express in each photograph, and let this guide you. Although you may be able to fill each box with an extensive list, just give one example for each.

	What will guide my processing?	How can I achieve this?
Vision		
Style		
Subject		



***Note:** If you are using mood as an element of your style, a collection of work might share a single mood, or you might include several complementary moods that are balanced or contrasted through the variety of images.*

EXERCISE 2

MOOD

Look at your collection of work. Using what you have learnt in Chapter 2, isolate the mood and figure out which elements are contributing to it. You can work with these elements to enhance the mood or even change it. Use the mood to guide your post-processing with intent.

	What will guide my processing?	How can I achieve this?
Mood		

- Pick a collection of your work and try to define a mood for each photograph in the collection—aim for a 1-3 word description.
- Is there any commonality of moods within this collection? Do you use mood as an expression tool as part of your style?
- Pick a single image and fill out the below table; define the mood you wish to express, then write down how you can process your image to enhance this mood.



EXERCISE 3

IMPACT

Look at your collection of work. Using what you have learnt in Chapter 3, explore how much global impact you wish your work to have, and isolate the impact areas within a single image. Then use impact—both global and local—to guide your post-processing with intent.

	What will guide my processing?	How can I achieve this?
Impact		

- How much global impact do you wish your work (or collection) to have as whole—do you wish it to be bold or subtle?
- Choose one of your photos—if you have an image you feel is not quite right but don't know why, choose that image, as this process might illuminate the reason why.
- Follow the steps laid out in chapter 3 on how to analyse an impact map of a photograph (pgs 34-38).

Explore how you can process an image to change local impact areas.

Note: *This version was done digitally, although you can print your image and draw on the highlighted sections by hand if this is easier.*



Explore how you can process an image to change its flow pattern.

Note: *This version was done digitally, although you can print your image and draw on the flow patterns by hand if this is easier.*

EXERCISE 4

FLOW

Look at your collection of work. Using what you have learnt in Chapter 4, explore flow patterns within your images. Then use flow to guide your post-processing with intent.

	What will guide my processing?	How can I achieve this?
Flow		

- Look at a collection of your work. Are there any strong flow patterns that are common in your work? Are there any images that have a unique flow pattern?
- Choose one of your photos—if you have an image you feel is not quite right but don't know why, choose that image, as this process might illuminate the reason why.
- Follow the steps laid out in chapter 4 on how to analyze the flow pattern of an image (pgs 46-50). This version was done digitally, although you can print your image and draw on the highlighted sections by hand if this is easier.



Notes: To do this, you might wish to create virtual copies in Lightroom, so as not to affect the master photos. In Lightroom, if you have the aspect ratio of one image right, you can then select all the others you wish to make the same and use the “sync settings” option—selecting only the crop ratio—to make them all the same.

EXERCISE 5

COMPOSITION

Look at your collection of work. Using what you have learnt in Chapter 5, explore composition similarities with your work.

- Look at a collection of your work. Are there any compositional similarities within your work?
- If so, is there anything you can learn from this that might impact the way you compose your work when out shooting in the future?
- Select all the images within your collection. Try cropping them all to a number of different aspect ratios (e.g. 6x6, 6x4, 8x10, 1x2) and see how they all look.
- Pick four photographs that are very compositionally different. Open them in Lightroom and explore how they work with “compositional patterns” by cycling through the different overlay options with the crop tool (See pg67 for a reference).



EXERCISE 6

LUMINOSITY

Using what you have learnt in Chapter 5, explore luminosity values and the use of high/low key images in your work.

- Search through your Lightroom catalogue and make a collection of high key images.
- Search through your Lightroom catalogue and make a collection of low key images.
- Go out and try to capture a set of both high key and low key photographs.
- Pick four photographs. Try to reprocess them as high/low key images using exposure adjustment tools in Lightroom.



EXERCISE 7

COLOUR & SATURATION

Using what you have learnt in Chapter 6, explore your use of colour & saturation within your work. Look at how you can use colour and saturation as a tool to unite a collection of work.

Look at a collection of your work

Look at a collection of your work and order the images according to three different categories:

- Similar colours
- How saturated they are
- How cool/warm the white balance is

Are there any similarities or images that sit out very differently? If so:

- Is there a way you can process these images to make them sit better as a collection?
- Is there anything you can learn from that might impact the way you work with colour when out shooting in the future?



Adobe colour picker

<https://color.adobe.com/create/image>

EXERCISE 8

COLOUR & SATURATION

Choose four images

Choose four images that encompass the largest range of colours. For each image, use Adobe colour picker to get a map of the colours within the photo.

Ask these questions:

- How are the colours related to each other *within* each image? Are they predominantly primary/secondary/tertiary colours? Predominantly harmonious or complementary colours? Predominantly dark tones or light tones?
- Are there any common patterns showing in your images? Do you use colour as a way to unite images together, or to distinguish differences between them?
- How might you use colour in this collection you are building? Remember that while you are free to use colour in many different ways, when it comes to a collection, having a strategy for colour use will make your collection stronger.



EXERCISE 9

LOCAL PRESENCE

Research an image from a photographer you admire. Find an example of an image that has a good local presence. Identify what it is about the image that gives good local presence to the subject. This could be any combination of luminosity, composition, colour, saturation, contrast, clarity, sharpness, etc.