Mastering Composition—Simplicity_transcript

Session Themes

- Simplicity as clarity, not reduction for its own sake.
- Subtraction as a creative act: removing distractions to strengthen intention.
- Negative space and framing as tools to guide emotional response.
- Choosing between literal representation and abstraction in storytelling.

Key Insights from Robert

- *"Simplicity isn't absence — it's focus."*
- Ask: *Does this element contribute to the story? If not, remove it.*
- Mood and atmosphere can be more powerful than technical accuracy.
- Composition works like music — silence (space) is just as important as notes (subject).

Participant Questions

- How do you know when you've simplified enough?
  → When nothing in the frame competes with the subject for attention.
- Isn't leaving things out a problem?
  → Trust that clarity matters more than completeness; the viewer doesn't need everything.

Takeaways

- Simplify by intention, not by default.
- Use negative space to let emotions breathe.
- Subtraction sharpens meaning and strengthens narrative.
- Simplicity = clarity + focus + emotional resonance.

Transcript

here so as I said when I you know when when I ask students what they what they struggle with the most almost always

they say composition but within this broad field of

composition um I would say the biggest thing the biggest growth area that I see

uh is using Simplicity as a compositional strength that's the thing that I notice that uh many students can

benefit from myself included i' argue that Simplicity is a

problem in all of digital photography in general I mean across the board software camera gear Etc but certainly it's

important in um and it's important in every genre photography as well but particularly

important in nature and landscape photography because we are uh faced with

you know lots of chaos and lots of seeming Randomness and being able to

simplify uh the composition being able to capture a simple essence of what it

is that you're you're responding to is really important and I think uh really defines

um the difference between a composition that is kind of mediocre

or um not specific enough and one that really uh is clear to the

viewer um there's this idea of overworking an image as well and this is an idea that I got from uh or something

that I I learned from painting when you overwork a painting it means you add too many layers too many breast Strokes it

it doesn't look simple and fresh and the same thing can happen I think uh not only in composition but also in editing

and in developing images where an image just looks like it's been worked and overworked and that's a thing as well

that I think can benefit from kind of a simpler approach and one of my other webinars I

talked about the five compositional Concepts Concepts that I thought were

most important and you notice at the top of that list I put simp Simplicity that's the first thing that popped into

my head in addition to the other things like capturing light and you know Rhythm and so forth but again this idea of

Simplicity my effort to understand composition and especially to teach

composition uh is what inspired me to come up with the lcu framework that a

lot of you are also familiar with because I've talked about it over and over again right this idea just a simple way of approaching a composition instead

of thinking about all kinds of rules and so forth It's you know lead the viewer make sure you have a way that you're

leading the viewer through through the composition you have some sense of a

center of Interest whether that's an actual object and also that the image feels

harmonious and unified and the simpler an image is the more harmonious it's going to look and feel the less

harmonious it is the harder it is to get that sense of simplicity so I'm going to show you a a

few images and I'll talk specifically about the what I was striving for and

the thing that attracted me to make the composition that I did with this idea of

simplifying now many people think that when you simplify an image that somehow it it's

not as interesting right you're eliminating things and the more things you have perhaps the more interesting they are but the way that you create

Simplicity is uh in in an image that the way you create interest I'm sorry an interesting image when when you have

lots of Simplicity is again something that you've heard me mention a lot contrasts and variation variation and

tonal values meaning the lightness or darkness of something right that's the tonal value uh color variation in color

things like a sky if you've got a simple sky with not many clouds you've noticed in the past that I've talked about

adding a nice gradation to the sky that adds variation and that variation creates a lot of interest in what would

otherwise be a flat and uninteresting sky and the same thing with shapes

particularly with shapes if you have large shapes in your image which in a sense larger shapes mean that your image

is simpler but uh if you don't have any variation in those shapes then they become kind of static and boring so this

idea of variation in the shapes which is where a lot of the dodging and burning comes in again adds interest and so

hopefully I can show you a few examples of that and um you can start to uh

use these ideas first you see them hopefully I can show you show them to you and then you can start to use them in your own work and kind of implement

them so let's jump in here let me turn my camera off okay so I'm going to show you the

original raw file the original capture and then I'll show you the processed or the edited version and I'll show you the

original raw file first because this is what I was more or less looking at through my viewfinder and thinking about

in terms of the composition so you know was in this first picture I believe this is

somewhere in Nova Scotia the broad shapes that I'm trying

to capture in the frame right basically this shape here so I'm looking at I'm

that's one broad shape that I'm seeing there's another one here uh and you can

kind of connect those these two areas here so it kind of makes one shape there's another one

here another one here here here and then the clouds form this

last shape and when you when you when you see me draw these shapes out you can

see that it is a rather simple kind of design because in my mind what I want

is the viewer to kind of move this way this way kind of this way and then

up into the sky and then notice as we go up into the sky the sky gets

simpler so that it creates kind of a rest area and their eye is is is

automatically going to come back down to the areas that have more interest more texture more

variation right so those those are the basic shapes that I'm looking at there now I want to create more interest in

those shapes and I want to simplify the image even further I think I can and when I look at this image you really

notice that it's mostly blue there isn't any direct light this is early in the morning before uh there was any direct

light in the foreground and so as I developed the image I decided to make it into a black

and white image and when uh students ask me when I when is it that I decide to

convert to black and white or look at that interpretation of an image in black and white it typically has to do with

when I feel that the black and white version is a simpler version which allows me to elaborate more on the

things that I resonated with and the thing that I really was interested in in this picture was these beautiful rocks

and uh Boulders in the foreground okay and by converting it to

black and white I'm able to make those shapes a lot more graphic I still have

maintained the broad shapes that I showed you before here they are so the

image still has a sense of Simplicity however there's a lot more

interest in each of the individual shapes and the other thing to keep in mind or to notice here is that as you

move up through the image away from the area that first pulls you in and grabs

you and sort of sets the stage from the sense of perspective you notice that as

we move up through the image it gets simpler and simpler so I don't add as much uh I'm not trying trying to uh

specify all the detail that's in here this is almost a silhouette okay this

area over here I'm letting it go darker and simpler but the most amount of Interest the most amount of variation is

in the foreground which means that as you move up through the image eventually you'll come back down to the foreground

and that creates this repetitive pattern that hopefully makes the image uh

maintains a sense of interest in the image and notice that I've darkened the sky on the top again to kind of push the

viewer into the image in all four

corners all right and that's the original and the black and white

version let's go to another one this is uh local just a couple miles from where

I live in the Hudson Valley and from a compositional standpoint and thinking

about Simplicity uh again imagine in your mind there's lots of things going on all

around me different trees shrubs bushes Etc but I keyed in I sort of simplified

my field of view my vision to this one very strong

shape and then there's a sort of repeating shape over here it kind of repeats that motif of that tree they're

similar and the third broad shape is this area

here and I should probably include these bushes there because those little

grasses there because they will become a part of that third shape so even though there's lots going on I'm trying to

position my camera and trying to move the elements in the frame so that

there's this relationship between these three shapes so your eye moves in here

it definitely goes to the silhouette to the strong contrasted area here moves

over to this one and then there's the background which is the light that is coming into the scene to create the

backlight effect and a a strong sense of

U of of light and that is

the the edited version the developed version so as I mentioned before I

definitely wanted to emphasize these grasses here because that's what's catching the

light and these few little Stones here there's some light over here but this whole area here is kind of one area

you're not looking up here and and you know wondering what's up there this is not calling your attention too much it's

just a kind of a a line here that brings you back down to again this this shape and down here I've got some extra light

that comes in but again not nothing that's going to be distracting and then we've got again the central piece here I

would call it the you know the main actor in the scene and then the secondary piece over here which just

adds a bit of context adds a way for your eye to move back and forth so if

you imagine that this tree was not

here I probably wouldn't make this image I probably wouldn't have comp I mean I I

I might have made it I might have you know taken the picture but I don't think that I would have felt that strongly

about the image because that tree here provides a way to move the eye back and

forth it makes the image more Dynamic it keeps you moving around and again

everything else is simplifying the image notice that I didn't add lots of contrast or heavy overworking to the sky

because had I done that that would have taken away from this sense of foreground Middle Ground background and

it's this sense of depth right this

way okay that's really what I'm trying to convey this sense of movement front to back if and so in order to do that I

have to you can use tonality variation and tonality to establish that the

darkest thing the tree is closest to us because it's the thing that's creating the strongest silhouette and as we move

back into the distance then it gets a little softer and uh until we get to

This Light com coming in that for me creates a sense of of depth and it keeps the image simple there's no need to get

bogged down or weighed down with texture and drama in the background with the sky the sky is just there as a way to

support the light that is streaming in at that last moment of

sunset there's a question from Mark the fourth uh uh he Mark is asking if the mountain in

the background is a fourth shape um you could think of it as a as a fourth shape

um but it's it's in the distance and it's not in other words when I talk

about how you're moving through the image this way this way and this way right then whether that shape in the

back whether it's a straight horizon or you know it could have just been water yes there's a shape there and the shape

adds a bit of a bit of context but I didn't think um of it immediately as a

as as a a main shape it's kind of a background shape kind of the same way that this shape over here is a

background shape okay but if you take if in other words if we were to replace uh if we were to eliminate this

foreground by some you know let's say there was nothing here there was no light here let's say was this pretty flat area here um and no light hitting

these grasses here then this this and the shape in the back would not make the composition work for

me because I'm asking a shape that is way in the distance to become part of

the strength of the composition and yet look at where I've divided this image right it's almost in half that I'm

utilizing this foreground which is what creates that sense of depth that's great question

though okay here's another similar image similar location different time of year

um the these are all images that I've made close to home so just as a little side note there just something to keep in mind right I know these locations

intimately I I've visited these locations many many many many times and

because I know them very very well um I become familiar with the way the light

uh interacts with the landscape in summer in Winter and I'm I become more

aware um of how things are going to change over time and that's one of the

Advantage I think to to having a lot of familiarity with a location or with a region is that you really become much

more familiar uh with different conditions and what those conditions are likely to produce versus a place where

you have very little familiarity with you may get lucky I've gotten lucky certainly but I don't I certainly don't

feel a sense of at homeness of familiarity so here once again um if I

were to think about how I was trying to simp simplify this image very chaotic all around me if you if you would have turn left or right or backwards there's

trees there's all kinds of stuff going on this is not a national park right this is just kind of um you know Woods

that have been uh chopped down and and and regrown and and was farmland and all

that so here's one uh sort of big

shape key to this shape is that even though it's one big shape it has lots of interesting variation within it but not

enough for it to be a distraction there's a nice kind of uh continuity in

that shape and that's one of the things that you should notice as well even when you have lots of things happening within

a shape you need to have a certain amount of continuity otherwise it looks disjointed so that's one big shape

another one here another one kind of

here right there's kind of another one over here and then there's one in the sky

and once again I'm trying to create this movement

that way and then back down so you notice in

the uh edited version oops go back

one this is obviously where your eye is going to go first first and then your eye goes over

here cuz that's where the light is and then the

clouds create another

area so it's just simple movement but if you look at all of the

colors and the textures in the image uh they they all kind of fit in all right

there isn't anything that is uh standing out or it doesn't doesn't look like it's

it fits in it doesn't look like it's there's nothing that looks like it's added in or or or unharmonious about the

image and that's not to say that there aren't other images that I've made before or after that were not harmonious

but this one in particular just kind of worked out is the softness of the light in the foreground this area here which

is quite chaotic and busy um the the moment or the time that

I captured it the light is kind of skimming over this and hitting the far side of the river

hitting over here but there's no light in here because there's no light in here that makes this area just kind of blend

in and become a larger shape with not a huge amount of variation and that means

that it doesn't distract or attract the eye there's just enough variation to

show you that there's trees here it's a you know forested area but you're going to move to other areas that are more

interesting warm beautiful light and even within this shape here you notice that there there are variations in this

shape when we get over here then it becomes very sort of diffuse and simple

again the same Principle as before as we move into the distance I think that it helps to think

about how you're simplifying the image so that the background supports the foreground and isn't calling attention

to itself even the sky of course I could have done way more to the sky that the

wasn't necessarily going to make it more realistic because the sky was more or less the way you see it there but I

needed the sky to support the foreground not get in the way and I didn't want the

sky to look overworked it's just this soft streaming Sky coming into the picture the light is very soft the whole

Ambiance of the of the images is is preserved I think that

way okay I've here's another image oops went

too far here we've got uh one big

shape and I think it a shape like this so it basically is the edge of the

frame because if you notice I am taking the tree off the edge everywhere except

on this side and the reason why I've done that on purpose is because if I isolate this tree inside the frame

meaning if I don't clip any of the edges so that it doesn't extend off the frame this way then the tree becomes too

solitary for me it's it wasn't about just that tree by itself it was a connection between that tree and

everything El that everything else that was going on in the image uh in this image I also have

another shape that's here which must be developed it must be opened up in the

processing uh actually that's the original I'm very sorry that's the original okay so here's my original raw file there's the

shape I got another shape here and then a third shape and here the

mountain in the back is important because it has lots of interesting variation within it but it's soft and

diffuse which again creates a contrast with what's going on in the foreground which is very uh defined and uh and hard

so to speak and so you notice now in the finished version oops sorry too

far in the finished version I have opened up the foreground to make that

shape more interesting and added or not added but emphasized the variation that was there

by um sort of dodging and burning this area

here to get some nice sh Shadow light and Shadow repetition areas so this is

dark light dark it moves you into the frame and then this area here kind of

shows you it kind of is a it's a it's a repetition sort of of what's going on in

the foreground which is there's this one tree but then there's lots more of these trees in the background and I'm just kind of uh allowing this tree to to

stand in front of the others as a way of connecting the two It's Kind it's somewhat isolated but not completely

isolated I needed to maintain that connection between the front and the back and the other thing I really like

is that the um the blue of the sky and the sky in

general is also very simple and that's what I really like about the Simplicity of the imagees the sky is simple it

really allows the beautiful branches uh to stand out that's what I love the most about it it was just the way that the

tree grows organically and just has this wonderful rhythmic feel to it okay

uh Jim asked about uh there isn't strong colors I'm not sure if you're referring

to this image uh Jim but this image has fairly strong colors particularly when you see that it there's blues uh in the

sky which are cool colors and then warm colors in the middle here and then cool colors again in the foreground

definitely wanted to keep the colors there particularly the sky which um really emphasizes the fact that the warm

light is streaming in in the morning in this in this

Valley okay so here's another uh image where I am attempting to

simplify the scene as much as possible okay not only simplify though but create

a a pattern of sort of a visual pattern where your eye can move through the

image in a way that keeps it interesting and keeps it Dynamic so of course I'm

sure all of you can see now here's your main shape okay there's another one over

here another one over here which I would say are more of just a little accent but for me your eye immediately moves to

this bigger Boulder and you can go through here and then you move move to the

Horizon and because I'm trying to create this dynamic between this rock here and

basically these lines here which kind of have a repetitive pattern to them I need

to keep my sky uh as minimal as possible in other

words I really want to push the sky the horizon line as far up as I can but still leave

a little room here right this this room of the the sky which is something that uh is

always a question about um how much Sky do I leave how much Sky don't I leave

it's it's a question of proportions and it's something that um

you I guess you kind of Intuit it over time but it's it's really about

proportionality um notice here The Space Between The

Rock and the frame at the edge of the frame I'm leaving kind of enough space here to

uh let these shapes kind of feel

uh uh what's the word I'm looking for I guess the the giving enough room around

the shape so that they don't feel crowded they don't feel tense this is not an image that I want to create

tension I want to create a sense of Serenity of calm and the more you bring

shapes to the edge the more tension you add now this shape here doesn't count really because you know the light is

really striking here and so everything is relative right you take this rock away and then yes I would say probably

that uh this is maybe that edge is a little bit too strong although Too Close although I have other rocks that are leading you in so it's about how things

work together but this is the main uh shape there and then same thing

up here if I leave a certain amount of space here so that I create a sense of

of calmness for the shapes that are inside the composition then I also want

to do the same here you know just to leave some space there to provide a sense of relief but

not too much because if I add too much space then I have to or not have to but

then it um it then means that in order to keep the sky from becoming uninteresting I

have to create some variation there okay and if you have clouds you can make some

variation but uh if you have lots and lots of clouds sometimes they can get kind of boring depending on what's

happening in those clouds so this is the edited

version okay and you see here now that I've actually opted to create a

little bit of tension and the way I did that was by kind of emphasizing this Shadow here okay I really liked that

shadow because it made the rock feel like it was really like sitting in the water and I I really I think that it's

always important to make to add dimensionality to your image but it's a very simple kind of shape here there's

nothing here that is complicated or anything like that just dodging there same thing with this Shadow here it kind

of adds weight to the water to the rocket makes it feel like it's in the water and then by adding some dehaze in

the sky because it was kind of a hazy morning in terms of the sky I was able to add some variation to the sky there

without the sky becoming uh overworked or becoming calling more

attention to itself obviously the texture and the detail and the uh sort of the the tactile nature of the image

is found in the rocks that I put in the foreground which is what I that for me that's what calls my attention Okay

that's the thing that I responded to it wasn't a oh here's this nice scene for me it's always almost always uh wow I

just you know this is the thing that I love because they they make me feel a sense of of groundedness of permanence

these rocks that are there they've probably been there you know they move and things like that depending on the weather but they're they're you know

they had a sense of uh they they they give a nice Foundation to the image both

physically but also symbolically for me that's probably the thing that I'm that I'm responding to the most uh Mark ask how important is it to include the full reflection of the front

Rock So if you're talking about this rock here Mark I would say that it's not

that important to include the full reflection because your eye doesn't

spend a lot of time here okay your eye quickly moves to the Rock and so it's

not like you're going to go here and then back down again uh I can't crop the image

here in in the app that I'm using to show these images but I would say it's not that critical the spacing again here

is not so much for the shadow it's to create kind of a uh a unified space

around this rock as I mentioned before and then

uh Jim who asked about the strong colors in the image was talking about the previous image so I imagine I think

you're talking about this one here um

oops and no I I I you know the the warm colors for me there are really important

uh the warm colors add the sense of Morning Light to the picture you take

that that glow off the rocks and the same glow that you see in the sky and the clouds and also some of the yellow

light that's coming from the side for me that loses at least what I was emotionally responding to I hiked up

this mountain in pitch black darkness I got to the top everything was really pretty you know bluish and then all of a

sudden the Light added this wonderful glow um

which regardless of what the intensity was it was enough for me to appreciate it and for me that that was the most

important thing it doesn't have to be you know 100% like you would find in uh the Southwest just enough for me to feel

like that's the thing I want to take a picture of and kind of share so a lot of it has to do with your own response

right it should always be your own response it should be always about what you are responding to what attracts you

what you have an opinion about if there's indifference uh those are the images

that I usually don't bother to make a picture of okay let's look at the next one

here so here's another one oops let's go back again

simplifying uh uh simplifying the scene as much as I can

and here's an example where by putting the camera down close to the ground or

close to the edge of the river here I'm actually able to uh use these shapes in other words

standing up at you know at standing height I really didn't notice these shapes it's only when I got down on my

knees that I could notice these little snow hills and and by positioning my

camera in a particular way with a fairly wide angle lens maybe I don't know 22 20

20 to 22 mm you're able to make these shapes much larger right remember

wideangle lenses emphasize the foreground they diminish the background and so this is the thing that I was most

interested in this shape here and then there's some repetition here okay and

then it kind of smoothes out gets simple and then kind of repeat that same

uh pattern and that's an extremely simple

image notice that I'm starting I'm trying to utilize the corners so this

edge here important to bring the eye in and I'm

using thirds okay and same as the last image

where I am weighing proportionally the

spacing of the sky here and I've pushed the Horizon pretty far up I don't need more sky than that that's all I need and

you'll you know you can tell from this image there were no clouds the majority of the interest in the sky is happening

where there's some warm light in the Horizon here and then it slowly gets Bluer and Bluer and that's all I

need and that's the the the edited version where I've where I've emphasized

the the shapes that I showed in the foreground um and brought out the the

you know the the the dimensionality of the shapes and the texture of the snow which was um which is critical me that

was the most important thing I was right in front of the snow it was on me it was cold and that's the thing that I wanted to uh to really

emphasize and then the mountains in the background are kind of repetitive you

know repeating elements of what's happening in the foreground and you can see the sky is fairly simple so that's

why I chose to really just show just a little sliver of it enough to give a sense of some relief from all the

texture that's in the

foreground um Gerald is asking snow should be white why is it why is it blue

well snow isn't white actually snow is only white at noon um with direct

sunlight on it but snow is a reflective element just like uh just like um water

is and so early in Twilight uh you will have a blue snow

because the blue the snow is reflecting the color of the sky again there's no direct light in the foreground here the

direct there is no direct light the D the only direct light actually is in these uh hitting the sides of these

mountains here and so by um emphasizing a little bit of

that blue tonality uh it for me emphasizes the coldness of the scene in the foreground

versus the Warmness of the scene in the background um and it adds uh a little

more um I would say interest okay but um if you've ever gone out early in the

morning before sunrise and there's uh um the sky is blue in other words there's

light in the sky but there's no direct light water just like snow will um will

look blue

okay few more images um so here is one from Death Valley

and here I'm going for uh a variety of shapes and

textures okay so there's kind of a simple shape here then there's another

one here another one here and

then there and there okay and this repeats or kind of is uh reflected in

the sky so these clouds for me give me a sense of repetition with those peaks in

the back and what I what interested me about this image was that the the tones in the

image were varied throughout in other words there were a lot of different tonalities even though the color was all the same pretty boring in terms of the

color or maybe not boring but uninteresting all the color is the same but a lot of different

tonalities uh which is the uh the thing that I thought might work as a uh black

and white image and so if I go

to my edited version all right that's the black and white

color a black black and white image I'm sorry and so now what I'm doing is I'm

trying to use the the not the color in the image but the tones all right

because I found that the tonality was much more interesting to me and so now you can see those shapes that I outlined

before are much more apparent they're much more uh easy to see

and I kind of want the viewer to sort of move from this dark area to this

mid-gray area to this light area then repeating these shapes and then again in

the sky and hopefully that creates a sense of Rhythm right there's a repeating rhythm going

on throughout the image and so that's the idea going from

the original color version on the left to the black and white version on the

right um some of you are asking questions in

the just the chat area so I didn't see that right away

um so in the last uh so Doug is asking in the lake shot the camera or your eye

did not see that Sky when I make that kind of adjustment I feel like I'm trying to make something out of a capture that was not there I just made a

better not sure I understand um what your asking Doug

but if you're saying so if Doug is asking that in this image

here

uh if you're saying in this image here that my the camera uh in other words the

sky that you see in the finished version you don't see that sky in the capture

well I definitely sore that sky with my eyes and also because I'm exposing to

the right most of the time meaning that I am trying to bias the capture of the

camera towards the highlights so that I can get the most amount of information in the highlights lots of times the raw

file just won't give me the separation in the sky that I need or that not that I need but that anyone would would want

and that's the reason why we uh you know that's the reason why you have to develop your images in a raw editor

because the raw file doesn't capture everything with the same contrast the same sort of uh separation that our eyes

do in fact had I made this image with with you know with a my iPhone like as a

JPEG and I may may may have um you would see the sky in the JPEG but the raw file

uh is a linear image um that captures everything evenly in terms of the tones

and in fact when I looked at the the raw file I said whoa what happened to the sky like the sky is not there at least

in the initial capture I had to uh low the exposure in the sky a bit and add a

little bit of dehaze to actually see the clouds that are there but those clouds are there it wasn't like I added them artificially or something like that so

hopefully that that answers um answers a little bit of your question there okay

and then one last

image here again trying to uh attempting to

simplify the image so once again I have this rock in the

foreground something like that with its shadow here and then a few more rocks a few more Boulders moving off this way

then strong shape here one really big shape in the

clouds and then there's a few other shapes that I was painting paying attention to uh which is the edge of the

river here and my

foreground and if you notice that that I've highlighted them now that you see the red lines I've drawn around them

again always almost subconsciously thinking about thirds thirds this way and thirds that

way even within the shapes El and the the edge of the

river here uh I could have raised that or lowered that depending on how high or lower I put my camera um it just so

happened that it was in the right place you know the tide was in the right place where I was able to get it kind of where

I wanted it had it been lower tide the water would have been further out I wouldn't have been able to do that but

you can only work with what you find right what what's there and and uh

whatever nature gives you whatever Environ enironment situation you come across that's what uh you work with and

then you see if you can make it work based on you know your your your best intuitions about how things are going to

work compositionally and for me the movement here is pretty simple just want the

viewer to kind of move this way and the clouds for me speak for themselves don't

need to do a whole lot to the clouds don't really need to make them stronger uh then they

they really are um so the one big change that I made here was that I made this a

black and white image and the reason for that was I thought that the black and white image

simplified the uh the mood of the image it made it

simpler it really brought out what I felt about the image which was just a kind of a stark stormy gray day on the

Hudson with some light streaking in through the

background and some light also kind of creating some little specular highlights

on the water little bit of a reflection there um notice that I darkened the

added enough of to the sky to give it a sense of depth right I really wanted to

make the image kind of Moody but not overpowering I didn't want it to overpowering what's in the foreground so

again if you look at this hierarchy right there's no question that this is

the darkest thing in the image this is equally dark but a quarter

of the size and these other these rocks here are also fairly dark but they're not as

big and they're behind the main uh the main shape here so there's a question of

hierarchy in terms of the size of things how they relate to each other uh and

where they're where they're placed and and so yes I want your eye to move through these rocks but uh you're not

going to at least I don't think you're going to start here and then come back

here particularly with this foreground rock where uh I was careful with some

dodging and burning to you know add a little bit of some highlights here uh

emphasizing kind of some of the light that was wrapping around the rock which was there uh and if you look at the original image

U there was a little bit of light on the back of it and so I wanted to really bring that

out and uh yes Rick is asking uh

or commenting about images that work better in black and white I selected more black and white images than I

normally would in in this uh for this uh for these examples because they

do show how you know you can keep simplifying and keep simplifying and uh

taking the color away many times makes for a stronger simpler composition but

certainly not one that is absent of Interest or is lacking in depth okay and

for me that's the the main sort of impetus that I the criteria that I use

when I am converting to black and white is I have an image that's in color

and I am noticing that it's not really speaking to me or giving me a sense of

the vision that I had when I made the image and if I want something a little more graphic in nature uh simpler uh

maybe less literal a little more symbolic than black and white is something I will try and I'll see okay

let's see what happens if I convert to black and white and and many other times I don't even consider black and white

because the color was one of the main main factors in making the image it's one of the things that I was drawn to

when I made the image and so I feel like hey that's that's part of what makes the image I don't know that I would want to

take that away but sometimes you don't know and so it's okay to uh you know to

try um an experiment so I want to uh take a slight

little detour I'm going to show you one more image but a little detour here which is to talk about um using

smartphones uh and the reason why I'm bringing this up is because I and I want

to share how I use my my smartphone I you know again I I I'm right now I'm using an

iPhone uh 15 Pro but this is not uh you know an

end endorsing iPhones or anything like that any any modern smartphone that's been produced in the last year or two or

three is going to be equally good as just the phone that I choose to use but I've been using smartphones more and

more and more as a learning tool and I have noticed uh this sense uh this kind of

underlying theme in a lot of photographers that they think of a smartphone as a competitor to their main

DSLR or as a threat or anything like that and I I don't think there's any reason to think of like that at all in

fact I think I think of it as a cousin to you know to my cameras right that um

I use them all for Creative exploration it's kind of like you know I enjoy drawing and I've been painting for a

while and when I want to make a nice drawing I look for my fountain pen and that's the the tool that I feel most com

most comfortable with um making my my drawing but if I only

have my pencil or I want to do a quick sketch um I have no nothing against my

using a pencil it's not like the pencil is somehow threatening my fountain pen whatever tool happens to be there

particularly if uh I want to make a quick sketch you know uh it's perfectly

fine so I don't think any there there's any reason to create kind of a false

kind of dichotomy between your phone and your camera so I just wanted to a lot of you probably know this already but I

just wanted to uh reiterate this again right for me the the the smartphone is

portable and discreet I can use it and place it that I wouldn't want to pull up my DSLR um it I definitely experiment

with my iPhone probably more than with my DSLR just because I have it more often on me um and I also puts me in a

more relaxed mindset I don't have to feel any pressure about uh an image that I make on my iPhone being you know a

successful image or keep or anything like that I can you know it's just a way to try different things the main thing

for me though is that it provides um creative constraints which means that because I'm

limited in in the sense that I'm not changing lenses and I'm not playing with all kinds of things it's just a little

bit you know more pure in terms of hey um I see something interesting let me

see what I can capture with the phone as a way to create kind of a sketch a way to exper with an idea with light with

shadow um it's just a way to keep the creative juices flowing to keep

practicing composition much more often than if I only did it when I went out

for my serious photography okay um and it helps me to focus on

simplifying the composition because I don't really have anything else I can do with it right I

don't can't change lenses things like that the reason why I bring this up particularly is because the next image

that I'm going to show you and the last two images that I showed you were made I

used my iPhone to make those images uh and I probably wouldn't have made those images with my iPhone uh I probably

wouldn't have made those images had I not had my iPhone with me because in all of these circumstances I wasn't out to do photography I was running out to door

with my dog uh and I just happen to find come across a scene and I was able to

continue to practice my eye and there's no question about the fact that you will only get better

at intuiting composition at getting it to become second nature the more you

practice the more you make it something that you naturally see shapes prop

portions light and Shadow uh Simplicity that you know the only way to get there

is practicing and uh uh pushing yourself

creatively so I think that an iPhone an Android whatever is a great way to do that and there's nothing about it that

has to feel like it's you know somehow threatening uh you use the tool that

most suits the need that you you know that you're the goal that you're trying to achieve so let me look jump into my

to Lightroom here and I'll show you one more image tonight uh this

is again same you can notice that it's the same river with the same mountains

totally different time of of day season what have you and this is one of those image where images where uh I wasn't

really expecting anything wasn't really thinking about uh taking pictures seriously but the conditions were just

perfect the Stillness in the air the water was calm uh there was this

beautiful kind of haze in the distance and this warm light coming over the uh

mountain now I'm not going to get into my uh I'm not going to get into too much of the technical aspects of the like the

the workflow that I use it is fairly simple but I do have a work uh you know

you can if I'm if I want to make an image that I want to be able to work on afterwards with my phone I will use the

Lightroom app because that would allow me to capture it as a raw file automatically so I open up the Lightroom

app the camera app you know the it goes into camera mode and it's ready to capture as a raw file and this gives me

a little more leeway gives me a little more flexibility in editing the image and sometimes I'll start making jpegs

just with the basic camera app whatever camera app your phone has but if I say hey this is really nice let me switch

over to Lightroom and make uh capture some better quality images and that's exactly what I did here I probably made

two or three with the regular camera app and then I switched to Lightroom once I had a better sense of or not really a

better sense I just switched to Lightroom when I realized hey this is quite nice let me um capture something a

bit better again this is with the iPhone 15 which is the latest version one of the things that's interesting is the amount of detail that I'm capturing with

the phone which um again this is not a competition with my regular DSLR just

noticing that uh the the the the the depth of the of the information is

better so what I'm looking at here is what I liked about this image is just this sense of foreground middleground

background with a a very strong shape in the foreground uh with some nice repetitive

elements here this these little branches here then this is bigger branch and then there's the bigger tree then you've got

this middle shape which is kind of the this little Peninsula that sticks out into the water and then the distant

Mount distant Mountains in the background and what the raw file doesn't really show you or

capture is the color and the mood that was in the scene now this is uh the

white balance is set to as shot so I'm just going to go through some quick adjustments here in Lightroom to show

you what I came up with in terms of the final edit and what was truer to my

response to the image not only what I saw but the kind of the what I felt and

I will say something now and that is that what I felt is often not exactly

what I saw uh and there there's a whole psychological reason for that that you know has to do with the way our brains

work but I know that I saw this juxtaposition between the soft blue kind

of fog in the distance and again the warm light in the foreground which is

what created uh that night int that nice intensity and the contrast between the

colors so let me show you what I what I'm going to do here so I'm going to

probably change the profile to landscape uh and that brings out the

colors a little bit more and I'm going to cool off the white

balance so I'm going to adjust the temperature so that I get more of that

coolness in the distance that I was talking about

before I'll raise the exposure a

bit pull down a little bit on Highlights uh let's see we'll adjust

whites here so whites I'll stop there we got some little specular highlights up here

but I'm going to use um a separate local adjustment to uh bring the exposure down in the sky a

little bit to give me more depth and Detail in the sky as I sort it because

there's clouds there right now it's kind of blown out I'll adjust my

blacks okay something around there so again there there's the before and there's the after that's looking much

closer to what I uh envisioned before and

after I'll add some more clarity uh I'll add quite a bit of

texture and the reason I'm adding aot a lot of texture is because the texture control in the texture adjustment in

Lightroom allows you to bring out the texture of all this stuff in the foreground here without it adding uh

brightness to it which is what Clarity does so Clarity tends to brighten things up a bit and make them look a little grungy so to speak I just want a lot of

Textra I want those branches and all this kind of Shrubbery here to have a little more contrast a little more

detail to it but the light here is fairly even and so because the light is even it doesn't uh make it I think

distracting just enough to give it a sense of texture which also I think creates a nice balance between

what's happening here and then the softness that you see in the background in this particularly in the in the fog

in the distance okay so I'm going to stop with

the basics there I'm going to go to my local adjustments and I'm I'm going to

select uh I'm going to make a new mask mask for the

sky and it creates a decent mask not great because it kind of left out uh a

lot of the stuff here around the branches however I'm going to be lowering primarily the highlights for

the sky and a little bit of exposure which means that I don't really have to worry too much about these branches if I

uh um close up this mask so what I mean by that is I'm just going to click on

ADD and I'll use a brush

to uh finish up what it should have done I

just don't want to go over the main branches of the tree maybe in

here maybe in here doesn't have to be too specific or too detailed because I'm

not going to apply a drastic adjustment here it's just enough to give me a little more detail

in the sky okay something like that and then I'm going to come over to um exposure

I'll try highlights first

exposure and maybe a tiny tiny bit of

dhaz and a little bit of Cl clity okay and that for me that is more or less

what I'm looking for in the sky just a sense of this kind of fleeting clouds

high up in the atmosphere uh which helps to continue this sense of the fog and

the uh the the Mist in the distance so there's

before and there's after I also want to emphasize or

highlight the a little bit of the warmth that's in the foreground now if I do that

by changing the overall temperature then I'm going to warm up my sky which I

don't want to do so I can do that a little bit but remember I wanted to I want to try to keep the

background uh cooler than uh you know

cool right so how do I make the foreground a little bit warmer the simplest way that I can see doing that

is by using a adjustment mask and I use a

brush and just going to select very broadly here particularly here where the

light is that's very important there uh here in fact I'm going to do one

thing here which is I'm going to erase uh a lot of

this because I only these Shadows don't need to be warm so it's only really

where there's some light there okay something like that and

then in here and then I'll maybe come down this

tree here and I'm adjusting the size of the

brush with the left and right bracket Keys something like that and if I

spilled over a little bit here here I'm holding down the optional Alt key to turn the brush into an erase

brush and I'll just clean up a little bit of this here no big

deal okay and maybe I'll add in here as well like

that and now what I'm going to do here is I'm going to go to the temperature adjustment

and uh adjust this more towards a positive number which makes it

warmer okay and that for me uh again creates and gives me this the feel that

I uh felt when I was there and I want to convey in the image which is this just

the position between the coolness and the warm in the foreground so there's the

before and there's the after and then I will add some the last thing that it needs to

simplify the image and not only to simplify but to add uh some depth and

again I'm just giving you some very broad uh ideas here if I was editing

this to make a final print I might spend a little more time with you know little details and whatnot but the overall feel

of the image wouldn't change right the overall feel of the image is something that you should be able to achieve fairly quickly with with broad

suggestions in terms of what you're looking for so I want I think that what

I would like is at the beginning when I started talking about this image I talked about

foreground Middle Ground background so I want to emphasize that sense of depth so

I want to add some deeper shadows in the foreground that'll also highlight some

of the light here that's just starting to you know uh hit the tops of these little grasses

here and I want to add some shadow here because adding some Shadows here

and also back here will separate these layers right now these layers all feel kind of squashed they all feel flat on

top of one another and I want to create a sense of layering the image from front to back the way it is in real life the

way we add um the way we perceive kind of depth and I like to add that

perception of depth to an image because it just creates um uh a more interesting

inviting picture and it gives you a sense of perspective so the way I'll do that is I will create another mask this

will be a brush and I will set this to uh minus I

don't know let's try minus 40 and I'm going to start in

here okay and then I talked about this here so here we've got some nice more

depth now going to add to the Shadows that I see already

the areas that are getting less light and also back here so above this

bush here uh there's a a a a a secondary

layer and so by kind of darkening this area here

I can kind of separate those layers a bit more the way they appear to us when we're using you know in nature using our

eyes okay and I will also maybe add a little bit back

here like so and down here so that is

my that is my uh mask for uh darkening or burning and I'll

probably add a little more in here

okay then I'm going to add another mask another uh adjustment mask using a brush

once again and this will be my dodging so I'll set this

to35 typically my experience usually the burning

is sometimes more than the dodging not always but generally speaking that tends

to be kind of a a a pattern that I notice the highlights stand out more we notice

highlights more and so the highlights have to be much more subtle I would say Shadows you can be a little more

aggressive because they tend to move the eye towards the highlights which is why the Shadows are so uh critical and so

important so I will add a little bit here there um a little bit in

these just a little bit there to bring to to uh pull that forward I hope you

can see that this now definitely looks like it's in front of what's happening in behind it I'm pulling it Forward by

brightening up a little bit together with the Shadows that I added it down here and that adds creates a layering

effect and then I'm going to maybe add some little highlights in the

tree here where the sunlight is just creating some little uh High highlights

there very important here to notice from a compositional standpoint that if this

tree had a full-on direct light meaning that if the whole tree was more or less

bright without these Shadows um it it it wouldn't have had

the uh well it wouldn't have had the same effect that it has the way it is now it's the it's the highlights on the

shadow on the tree that create the interest that create uh for me the

variation if it's all lit up with light then it would blend in too much to this whole right side here and I you know

that would have been like many many other times that I've come to this location and not made a picture okay

because um it just didn't look uh like anything particularly special or it just didn't really call my

attention all right so all right so that's or

before and that's her after and then I will probably go back to

the we'll go back to the basic adjustments again and check my

blacks that's fine whites are

okay um and maybe add a tiny bit of contrast now just for a final adjustment

and for me that you know that's uh that's I'm happy with that for now uh

contingent upon how I feel about it in a couple of weeks which is another little point that I want to mention um anything

that everything that I do I always come back to it in the future uh after it's

rested in my mind for a while I can come back and have slightly fresher eyes and look at it again and then I notice

either things that I can improve or things that I don't like or I have a a slightly different view of it or um

maybe I feel the same way I did about it before and my feelings about it are confirmed and um and I feel as though

I've had that time to gauge uh my judgment uh initially but I try not to

be and I'll leave you with this last um with this last uh thought for tonight I

try not to be too this is really important I try not to be too judgmental too

to uh not try not to put too much pressure on myself in the initial

editing stage you know when I'm looking at an image after I you know a day or two after I've made it because I know

that I will may see things differently in the future and so for me it's just a an exercise it's a process it's a it's

the activity of making an image and adjusting it editing it um

verifying that my feelings about the image are in fact um accurate that whole

process for me is how you learn and that's how you gain confidence so that when you do look at it a month later you

you feel much better about your decision and um if someone else suggests

something about the picture that you don't agree with you perhaps feel a little more confident about saying well

I actually I prefer this version because after all it's your image and so I don't

want uh I would I I would suggest you make images that are true to your vision

that Vision takes time to develop but it has to be true to your vision

otherwise um I'm not really seeing what you're seeing and that's really what we all want to see we want to see the

pictures that you are seeing and feeling uh and responding

to all right guys so um if there aren't any more uh questions a question

about uh the recording uh yes for whoever is here for the first time uh I record all the webinars and I

make them available uh to everyone to uh as a replay so you can watch this um um

as as often as you like there will be you'll probably get an email in the morning tomorrow morning uh letting you

know where the replay is and then in the newsletter I put a link to the webinar archive which has all the

videos uh of for all the webinars that we've done

okay so I hope that um hope that uh you guys that was uh

helpful and uh there's one little question I believe from Hubert does not

more shapes in the image make it more complex um again it's not a question of

how many shapes you have it's not a qu it's a question of how those shapes interact together

how they are placed hierarch in hierarchically in the image uh whether

they're whether they work together whether they have variation in them so again Simplicity is not a number thing

it's not a quantity um it's uh creating

a sense of Harmony in the picture and that's how you achieve simplicity so you

know this this the last picture that I showed here uh there's while there are

some very broad shapes there are lots and lots of little things like you've got these broad shapes here but there are lots of little things going on uh

that is simplified by unifying the color

by uh not having anything that doesn't have um that does doesn't feel like it

it it you know it belongs that not have anything that's distracting

so all right everyone I hope that was helpful and um I will see you guys next

time have a great holiday Merry Christmas and uh Take Care thank

you