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THE  
**B&W**  
ISSUE

**JOHN  
SEXTON**  
WRITING  
WITH LIGHT

WHEN TO  
**CHOOSE  
MONOCHROME**

NOVEMBER 2020

+

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A great blue heron is captured in flight against the backdrop of a cliff face. I photographed the soaring bird from the rim of a river canyon, hand-holding the EOS R5 and RF800mm F/11 IS STM combination and staying on focus with the EOS R5's animal and eye detection technology. At f/11, a 1/4000 sec. exposure at ISO 3200 stopped the action.

# F/11 and Be There



**In the field with Canon's new EOS R5 and RF super-telephoto lenses**

By George D. Lepp

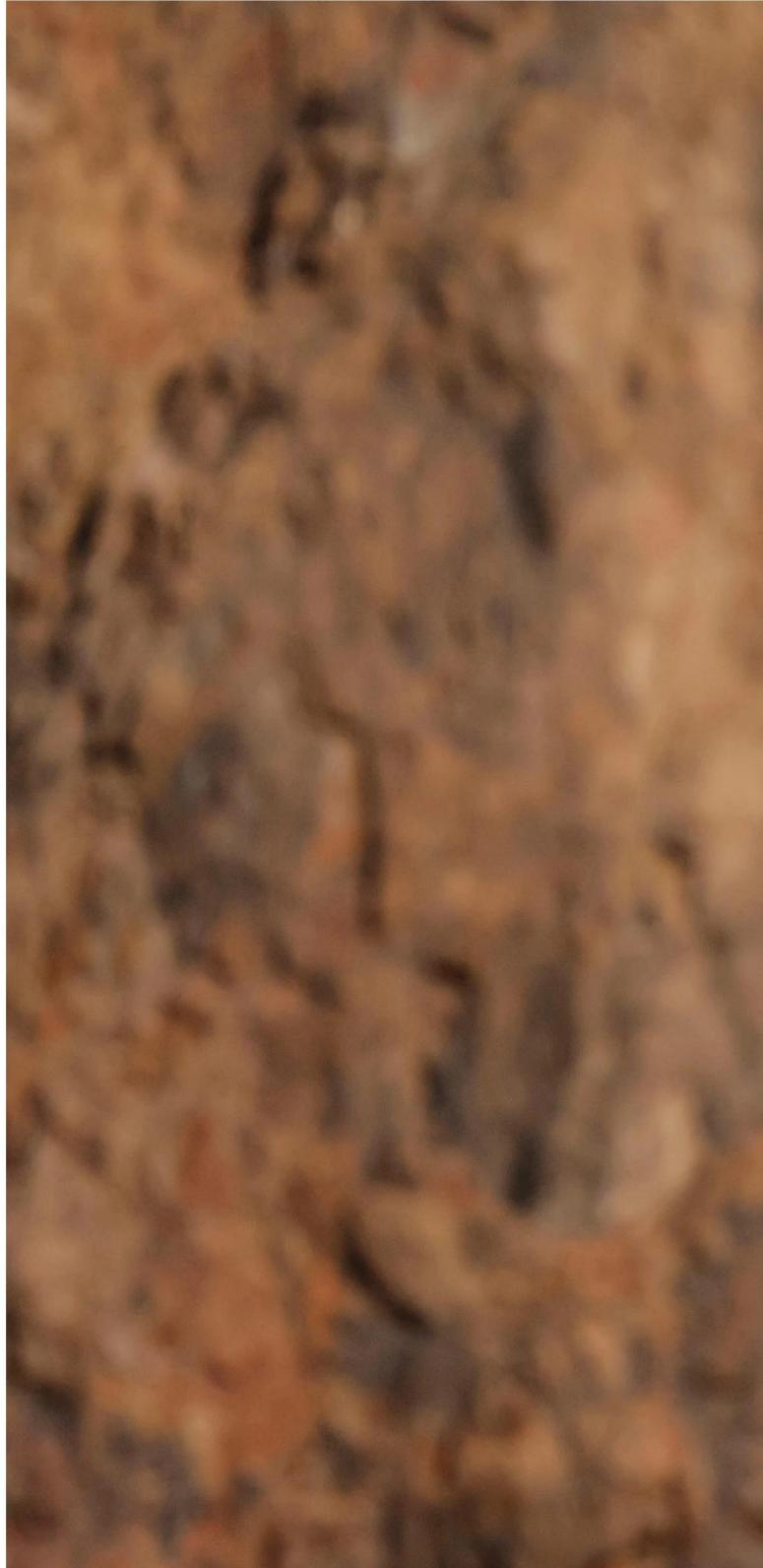
I'm experiencing new freedom in my nature and wildlife photography, a sense of unencumbered lightness and agility made possible by Canon's latest EOS R full-frame mirrorless system and super-telephoto lens combinations: the 45-megapixel EOS R5 and dedicated RF600mm F11 IS STM and RF800mm F11 IS STM lenses. The system offers superb autofocus, resolution and stability—everything I demand for highest-quality images—while its remarkably compact and lightweight design are game-changers for working in the field.

The lenses are simple in design, with a fixed f/11 aperture, and that means they are significantly less expensive than their EF counterparts. The RF600mm F/11 lists at around \$700 and the RF800mm F/11 at about \$900. Paired with the new EOS R5, the 600mm combo weighs less than 4 pounds and the 800mm slightly more. When I first held this gear in my hand, I had to wonder how it would perform in action. My first test images with a hummingbird in my backyard demonstrated its worthiness.

Lens reach is a critical component of wildlife photography; it enables the photographer to maintain a respectful distance from animals and birds without causing them to run, scamper, hop or fly away. With these lightweight lenses, I'm able to trek through the woods with a small backpack and no tripod, always ready to seize any opportunity that arises. How can that be possible? With the EOS R5, image stabilization is up to five stops for the RF 600mm and four stops for the RF 800mm. And the sharpness is excellent, even with the addition of a Canon Extender RF 1.4x, which increases the reach of the RF600mm to 840mm and the RF800mm to 1120mm!

Early one morning, I carried the EOS R5 and the RF800mm lens setup on a hike along the canyon rim of Oregon's Crooked River. I came upon a committee of turkey vultures sunning on a rock outcropping, and I was able to capture full-frame images of individual raptors. The eye detection autofocus feature of the EOS R5 put the sharp focus exactly on the vultures' eyes, and the 800mm reach kept me far enough away so as not to push them into the air. Then I observed three great blue herons circling in flight against the background of the canyon walls. The EOS R5's animal and eye detection features, along with its quick autofocus, gave me numerous sharp photos from the hand-held 800mm lens. On the hike back, I came upon a cottontail rabbit; again, the focal length allowed me to capture many images without disturbing the subject, and the eye detection technology kept the focus in all the right places.

The RF lenses will work with all of Canon's mirrorless bodies—the EOS RP, R, R5 and R6—but the 45-megapixel EOS R5 and 20.1-megapixel EOS



R6 are especially good choices for these lenses and wildlife subjects. The electronic LCD viewfinders are quick and bright. The autofocus is fast and accurate (with 1053 autofocus zones covering nearly the entire sensor), and the animal and eye detection features extract sharp images from seemingly impossible situations. The exceptional sensitivity of the sensor enables quality results at ISO settings far beyond those typically used in the past. That capability, coupled with excellent image stabilization, addresses any limitations that might be anticipated from the fixed f/11 aperture, which is the critical characteristic that enables the light weight and small size of the lens itself. The EOS R5 and R6 offer continuous shooting speeds of 12 frames per second with their mechanical shutters and 20 frames per second in silent electronic shutter mode, which means you don't miss the ac-



tion. And if video is important to you, the EOS R5 will capture 4K at 120 fps and 8K at 30 fps.

I can say unequivocally that the Canon EOS R5 is the best field camera for nature and wildlife photography that I have ever used, and the lightweight and capable RF600mm and RF800mm super-telephoto lenses are giving me a new sense of unfettered adventure in the outdoors.

My new motto? F/11 and get out there!

---

Learn more about Canon's EOS R full-frame mirrorless system at [usa.canon.com](http://usa.canon.com).

Canon EOS R5, RF600mm F11 IS STM and RF800mm F11 IS STM lenses and Canon Extender RF 1.4x. This system provides full-frame, super-telephoto capability in a package that's incredibly compact and lightweight.

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## cover shot



**Photographer:** Aaron Baggenstos

**Location:** Katmai National Park & Preserve, Alaska

**Equipment:** Nikon D5, AF-S NIKKOR 600mm f/4E FL ED VR

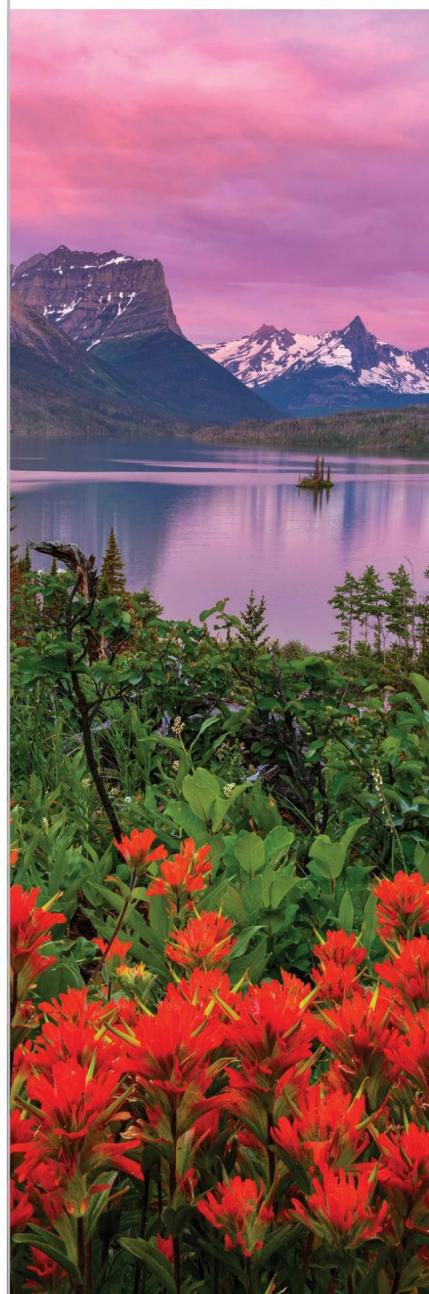
**Situation:** In June 2017, I was leading my Ultimate Alaska photo tour in Katmai National Park & Preserve, a wilderness where about 2,200 brown bears roam in an unaltered, natural habitat. Our skiff picked us up from our floatplane as the heavens drenched us with heavy rain. Despite the downpour, we headed out for an afternoon shoot of about one hour where we sighted only a solitary bear high on a hill...no great photos.

Then I spotted a beautiful brown bear on the beach. I estimated the path of the bear and quickly positioned my group about 75 yards ahead up the shoreline. We laid down in a row on the rocky shore to be below the bear's eye level, trying to achieve a larger-than-life perspective. Clicking rapidly, I suddenly realized the bear was completely filling the horizontal frame of my 600mm lens, so I flipped to portrait mode to make this image just before the bear turned and walked away from us, into the distance.

We were overwhelmed with the opportunity to capture this encounter, despite the severity of the conditions. The lesson is that regardless of weather, there are images to be made—you miss 100 percent of attempts you don't make.

—Aaron Baggenstos

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Image by John Weatherby

# in this issue



Surf and Driftwood, Afternoon, Point Lobos, California, 1978

*Writing with Light*

How my experience with Polaroid films helped me discover the qualities of light and its impact for successful photographs

Text & Photography By John Sexton

I feel privileged to have had photography as my passion, and my profession, for more than 45 years. I have been fortunate to have wonderful teachers, mentors, friends and colleagues along the way from whom I have learned so much about the craft and aesthetics of the medium, and whose images have inspired me during my journey. I love the word "photography"—its literal meaning being "light writing." For me, light is the essential element of this magical medium. The pursuit of this often elusive and variable band of electromagnetic radiation, and how photographic films and papers respond to it, is still a magical part of the process for me.

outdoorphotographer.com November 2020 21

A fortunate turn of events led to our feature article in this issue when I received an email from **John Sexton** asking for help with his *Outdoor Photographer* membership. Of course, I knew the name—Sexton is among the great photographers living today, having worked for Ansel Adams in the late '70s and early '80s and then establishing a reputation as an artist in his own right with a body of work that is widely recognized and has earned numerous awards. Though Sexton's photography has been featured in this magazine before, I had never worked with him personally, so I seized the opportunity to try to persuade him to contribute to *OP* once again.

Over the course of our conversation, we discovered a mutual affection for Polaroid films, and he proposed the story you'll read here, "Writing With Light," which includes several never-before-published images from his collaboration with

Polaroid. Sexton takes us back to a time in the art and science of photography when Polaroid films were primarily used for making instant proofs of an image prior to exposing the final negative. For Sexton, though—and many who worked with Polaroid films—there was something special about the medium beyond the "instant" proofing capabilities. Sexton refers to the "intimate, jewel-like quality of an original Polaroid instant print" and how working with Polaroid helped shape his approach to photography early in his career.

There's a timeless beauty in black-and-white photography that Sexton's Polaroids exemplify. Though the tools have changed, black-and-white interpretations of a scene remove the distraction of color and force us to focus on the more subtle qualities of light, texture and the geometry of composition in a photograph. Choosing between color and monochrome expression for a given

subject is, of course, largely subjective, but **Aaron Baggenstos** proposes several situations in which black and white may be the better option for wildlife photography in his article "When To Choose Black & White." While color is the obvious choice for wildlife images, especially for colorful subjects, monochrome can be a compelling alternative in some situations and may help you overcome technical challenges as well, as Baggenstos explains.

Also in this issue is the final article in our three-part series "The Art of Luminosity" by **Marc Muench**. In the previous articles, Muench covered the fundamentals of digital imaging and how light is captured by our cameras, along with advice for learning to interpret and expose the light in a scene and use it creatively. In part three, Muench introduces us to his approach when processing images in Lightroom. Though he does use some global adjustments, more often Muench makes very selective enhancements to specific parts of an image. "Post-processing isn't just a technical function," Muench observes, "but rather a blend of technical and creative skills required to create the final image. When editing an image, I consider it a performance that combines my pre-visualization, editing skills and passion for my art at that very moment in time." Muench walks us through multiple examples of images and his processing of each. No matter your skill level with Lightroom and post-processing techniques in general, Muench offers insights that will help you fully realize the potential of your best images.

—Wes Pitts, Editor

## contributors



International Photography Hall of Fame inductee **John Sexton** is known for his luminous photographs of nature. He served as

photographic assistant and consultant to Ansel Adams from 1979 to 1984 and still finds magic making silver gelatin prints in his darkroom. See more of his work at [johnsexton.com](http://johnsexton.com).



**Aaron Baggenstos** is an award-winning professional wildlife photographer, videographer and author in nature and

wildlife. In addition to his photography, Baggenstos leads small-group photo tours to some of the premier wildlife destinations on the planet. Learn more at [aaronstours.com](http://aaronstours.com).



**Marc Muench** is a renowned landscape photographer, following in the tradition of his grandfather Josef Muench and father, David Muench, with numerous book titles and publication credits to his name. He also runs photography workshops around the world. See more of his work at [marcmuench.com](http://marcmuench.com).

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## The American Landscape 2020

Congratulations to the winners and finalists of **The American Landscape 2020** photo contest! Featured here are the Grand Prize, Second Prize and Third Prize winners. See all of the finalists at [outdoorphotographer.com/photo-contests/the-american-landscape](http://outdoorphotographer.com/photo-contests/the-american-landscape).

### Grand Prize **Dawn's Early Light** By Gary Grossman

"This photograph was shot at day-break in early February 2020 at Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge in southwest Washington. The refuge is on the Pacific Flyway and is part of a diverse chain of habitats extending from the arctic to the tropics.

"As pink highlights appeared on the clouds, a flock of geese broke from their nightly roost and flew overhead, with many of them reflected in the wetland pond."

► Canon EOS 6D Mark II, Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM at 40mm. Exposure: 1/40 sec., f/11, ISO 1000.



## Second Prize

### Mesquite Dunes #2

By Thomas Gibson

"This image was shot at sunrise in Death Valley National Park. My favorite time of day to photograph the sand dunes is at sunrise because it never disappoints and always provides some surprises.

"The light was starting to get specular, so I began my trek back to the car but stopped to take another look at the dunes. What I saw was the different layers of dunes, and I was inspired. It was the last shot I got that morning before the light was completely flat."

► Nikon D810, AF-S NIKKOR 200-500mm f/5.6E ED VR at 240mm. Exposure: 1/125 sec., f/13, ISO 100.



Photographers who reached the top  
of the mountain didn't just fall there...

...they had the right help along the way.



Dwayne's Photo



## Third Prize

### Cypress Cove

By **Don Pelliccia**

"During a late fall photography trip with a couple of friends, we kayaked through what looked like an enchanted forest of amazing cypress trees. At one point, I paddled off to explore an area thick with trees, and I could see that there was an interesting cove a little further ahead of me.

"As I navigated closer, the morning light began to break through the cypress, illuminating their leaves with a bright orange glow. The water at this location was about a foot over my tripod, so I quickly had to shoot this image handheld from the kayak before the amazing colors from the light disappeared."

► Sony a7R III, Sony FE 70-200mm F4 G OSS at 200mm. Exposure: 1/160 sec., f/6.3, ISO 1000.



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\*Based on a survey of 858 US-based full- and part-time photographer respondents, June 2017.

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Wildflower close-up. The Tamron 70-180mm F/2.8 Di III VXD's minimum object distance of 33.5 inches throughout the zoom range and pleasing bokeh effects make this a great lens for capturing nature's details. Exposure: 1/200 sec., f/2.8, ISO 250 at 180mm.

## Di III Duo

Tamron's expanding Di III series lineup for Sony E-mount includes two versatile new zooms

Text & Photography By Dan Havlik

Tamron expanded its lens lineup for Sony's full-frame E-mount mirrorless cameras this year with the 70-180mm F/2.8 Di III VXD (Model A056) and 28-200mm F/2.8-5.6 Di III RXD (Model A071). Both zooms offer appealing features for Sony shooters:

compact weather-sealed lens bodies, versatile zoom ranges and fast maximum apertures. Even better for photographers on a budget, these Tamron E-mount lenses are relatively affordable. The 70-180mm F/2.8 Di III VXD sells for \$1,199, and the 28-200mm F/2.8-5.6 Di III RXD goes for

\$729. Sony's own closest equivalents to these lenses sell for considerably more.

How do they perform? I had a chance to test these lenses this past summer in the Catskills in upstate New York, and they were both excellent telephoto zooms and a good value.

## TAMRON 70-180MM F/2.8 DI III VXD

Tamron calls the 70-180mm F/2.8 Di III VXD the "lightest and most compact" lens in its class, and it isn't joking around. The lens is 5.9 inches long, 3.2 inches in diameter and weighs 28.5 ounces, surprisingly small and light for a 70-180mm lens that can maintain its maximum *f*/2.8 aperture through the entire zoom range. The filter size is 67mm, which is the same on all of Tamron's E-mount lenses, convenient if you want to purchase more than one Di III lens.

During my testing, I paired both the 70-180mm F/2.8 Di III VXD and the 28-200mm F/2.8-5.6 Di III RXD with the Sony a7 III, which is Sony's smallest and most affordable full-frame E-mount camera. It was a great match, and I'm guessing there will be quite a few a7 III owners considering adding these two Tamron tele-zooms to their camera bags.

With roughly the 70-200mm range that's a popular one for nature work, the Tamron 70-180mm F/2.8 Di III VXD was especially useful for capturing close-ups of wildflowers. This is partly because the lens's MOD (Minimum Object Distance) is 33.5 inches throughout



the entire zoom range, which is quite close for a large-aperture telephoto zoom lens at the long end of the range. (At 70mm, it's possible to shoot as close as 10.6 inches manually but with some decrease in image quality in the peripheral areas.) The lens's constant *f*/2.8 aperture also helped me blur out the backgrounds of my close-up flower shots to draw

more attention to the subject.

Like the Tamron 28-200mm F/2.8-5.6 Di III RXD, the 70-180mm F/2.8 Di III VXD doesn't have Tamron's Vibration Compensation (VC) image stabilizer built into the lens. There's a good reason for that. It allows the Tamron zooms to be smaller, lighter and cheaper by making use of Sony's in-body image stabilization in its

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Alder Lake reflection. The Tamron 28-200mm F/2.8-5.6 Di III RXD's versatility lies in its wide-to-tele zoom range and compact size—a perfect hiking companion.  
Exposure: 1/125 sec., f/9, ISO 100 at 28mm.

full-frame mirrorless cameras to keep things stable. I generally find that lenses with built-in stabilization perform better than relying on in-camera stabilization, but the Sony a7 III's system did a fairly decent job of counteracting hand shake with both Tamron lenses, even when they were zoomed to their tele extremes.

The 70-180mm F/2.8 Di III VXD features Tamron's first-ever linear motor AF drive focus mechanism, dubbed VXD for Voice-coil eX-treme-torque Drive. It's the company's fastest AF system yet and accurate down to 0.0002 inches (0.005mm), which is less than one-tenth the width of a human hair. The floating AF system uses twin VXD units designed to produce crisp images across the focal range while reducing the size and weight of the lens. The result in my testing was quick, quiet and accurate AF that makes the lens capable not just for landscape work but for shooting action subjects like wildlife and sports as well.

Optical construction of the lens is

top notch, featuring 19 lens elements in 14 groups, with a total of six XLD (eXtra Low Dispersion) and LD (Low Dispersion) lens elements combined, and three GM (Glass Molded Aspherical) and hybrid aspherical lens elements combined. The lens also has BBAR-G2 (Broad-Band Anti-Reflection Generation 2) coating to reduce ghosting and flare. The result was images with lots of detail and generally good sharpness from edge to edge. Chromatic aberrations were minimal.

Other features that make this a solid outdoor lens option include its moisture-resistant construction to protect against inclement weather and the fluorine coating on the front lens element that repels oily fingerprints and makes it easier to clean. I also liked the zoom lock switch to prevent the barrel from extending while carting it around.

## TAMRON 28-200MM F/2.8-5.6 DI III RXD

While I enjoyed shooting with the 70-180mm F/2.8, I found myself

reaching for the Tamron 28-200mm F/2.8-5.6 Di III RXD much more often during my testing. This lens is just extremely versatile, with a wide focal range that helped me capture everything from lake scenes to zoomed-in shots of wildlife. I could also see the Tamron 28-200mm being a great all-in-one travel lens—you're set for almost any photo op.

In terms of size and weight, the 28-200mm F/2.8-5.6 Di III RXD is extremely portable at 2.9 inches in diameter and 4.6 inches in length and weighing in at just 20.3 ounces. Like the 70-180mm, this lens also paired well with the Sony a7 III, and I felt comfortable shooting this combo all day. While there's a zoom lock switch on the lens, I experienced no zoom creep while holding it by my side during walks through the woods. Also like the 70-180mm, the 28-200mm lens has a 67mm filter diameter, a moisture-resistant build and fluorine coating on the front lens element.

What makes the 28-200mm

F/2.8-5.6 Di III RXD unique as an all-in-one zoom is that fast f/2.8 aperture available at the 28mm end of the zoom range. Yes, the aperture narrows as you zoom (f/3.5 at 50mm, f/4.5 at 100mm and f/5.6 from 150mm through 200mm), but having an f/2.8 option at the wide end for a lens of this size and at this price is special. Like the 70-180mm, this lens was great for close-up photography, with the MOD just 7.5 inches at 28mm for a maximum magnification ratio of 1:3.1. Add in the blurred backgrounds you'll get at f/2.8, and it's another handy tool for capturing beautiful details of nature.

The AF drive in the 28-200mm uses a sensor to detect the position of the lens, while its RXD (Rapid eXtra-silent stepping Drive) motor locks in on the target quietly and quickly. I found the lens's AF to be responsive and nearly silent.

Image quality wasn't quite on the level of the pricier 70-180mm, but it was still quite good. The 28-200mm F/2.8-5.6 Di III RXD is built with 18 lens elements in 14 groups, including an array of special lens elements that includes GM, hybrid aspherical, XLD and LD glass. It also has BBAR coating to reduce ghosting and flare. My photos looked sharp, even in the edges of landscapes captured at



28mm. Though it doesn't have the resolving power of the 70-180mm lens, there was plenty of detail in my 28-200mm shots. In particular, my photos of Alder Lake made gorgeous 13-inch prints when output on an Epson SureColor P700 printer. On the other hand, I did notice instances of purple fringing (chromatic aberrations) in photos with high

contrast areas, such as dark branches against a white sky.

Overall, though, the Tamron 28-200mm F/2.8-5.6 Di III RXD is one of the best all-in-one zoom lenses I've ever tested. Sony mirrorless camera owners should seriously consider adding this multi-functional super-zoomer to their photo bags.

**Contact:** Tamron, tamron-usa.com. **OP**

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# Bear Rocks Preserve

Allegheny Mountains, West Virginia

Text & Photography By Kent Mason

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## Location

The Nature Conservancy's Bear Rocks Preserve is remote, rugged, high-elevation West Virginia mountain land with an often-severe and quick-changing boreal climate. It's atop the Allegheny Front, the predominant ridge of the Appalachians and the "eastern" continental divide. This ridge has a rim of sandstone cliffs and giant rock outcropping with a 2,000- to 3,000-foot drop below to hills and valleys. To the east, there are breathtaking 30-mile views where seven mountain ridges are visible on a clear day. Along the rim are stunted red spruce trees with flag-formed limbs pointing to the east as a result of the almost-constant and often high-velocity winds.

Large, striking and uniquely shaped white sandstone and quartz rocks are found throughout the Bear Rocks Preserve area. These wind- and rain-sculpted boulders rise up out of the heath barrens and tundra-like areas. In addition to the sculpted boulders are "rock streams" that formed during glacial periods and can be hundreds of feet long. Large areas of heath barrens and peat bogs, more typical of Canada, are scattered along the west side of the Allegheny Front.

The preserve is located at the north end of Dolly Sods Wilderness off Forest Road 75, a gravel road with some potholes and rocks that must be avoided. At the north end of Road 75, there's a parking lot for about 30 vehicles; trails into the preserve are north of the parking lot. This area is about 40 minutes south of Davis, West Virginia, which can be accessed best via U.S. Route 48. Excellent overnight accommodations are available at Canaan Valley State Park and Blackwater Falls

State Park, which are also outstanding photo locations.

## Weather

Bear Rock Preserve is known for its frequently severe, ever-changing climate. Strong prevailing winds bring clouds from the west and, while rising to clear the Allegheny Front, are cooled, causing mist and rain totaling over 60 inches a year. Afternoon thunderstorms are frequent. In the warmer months, high winds and temperatures in the high 40s and the low 50s at daybreak on the Allegheny Front can drop the wind chill to near freezing, requiring winter clothing. By the same afternoon, one can adequately dress in a shirt. The first snow typically occurs in late September or October.

## Photo Experience

For over a half mile along the Allegheny Front at Bear Rocks, there are giant rock outcroppings punctuated by flagged red spruce trees, providing the opportunity for hundreds of compelling compositions using these foreground elements. Looking east, the valleys, hills and distant mountain ridges provide interesting middle and background elements. This is one of the best sunrise locations in the east. The high elevation combined with cool morning temperatures often provide fog and cloud formations where the play of light can be dramatic.

Hiking west of the Allegheny Front, there's a vast expanse of heather punctuated with boulders and trails created by blueberry pickers. Beyond that are the headwaters of the red creek, which is a huge peat and cranberry bog with large patches of cotton grass. Then, moving further west is a grassy bald containing



a few red spruce trees and stunted wind-swept easterly leaning deciduous trees. Hiking south into the Dolly Sods Wilderness, one can travel through three climate zones in a day.

This is truly a wilderness presenting a great variety of topography and habitat with very distinctive features waiting to be photographed. For the outdoor photographer, it's an inspirational experience. **OP**

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See more of Kent Mason's photography at [WVphotographs.com](http://WVphotographs.com).



► Canon EOS 5D Mark II, Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM at 24mm, Gitzo tripod, Really Right Stuff ballhead, Lee 3-stop split neutral-density filter. Exposure: 1/5th sec., f/16, ISO 800.



### Best Times

Spring provides many great photo opportunities with large expanses of azaleas in early June and Mount Laurel in late June, followed by rhododendron in early July. In late August, summer wildflowers appear in the wetlands and bogs that are found throughout the area. Fall is the most popular time because of the blueberry plants whose leaves turned deep red in early October, as depicted in the photograph featured here. The road to this area is closed during winter months.

**Contact:** The Nature Conservancy, [nature.org](http://nature.org).



# Always Learning

Study the work of photographers who inspire you to develop your own style and techniques

Text & Photography By William Neill

**B**lack-and-white photographs have inspired me for decades. Edward and Brett Weston. Paul Caponigro. Minor White. Wynn Bullock. Ansel Adams, of course. These photographers were early influences, even for my color work, as I wanted to inscribe the kind magic and mystery I saw in their imagery into my own.

With digital software, converting from color to black and white is as simple as one click, yet to create a vibrant and glowing photograph of the highest level, as seen in the prints of the darkroom master, is never simple. I've slowly built up my black-and-white skills over recent years as software options have evolved.

The Yosemite photograph shown here was especially tricky for me to process as much as it was spectacular to witness. The extreme lighting conditions were changing by the second as the clouds drifted through the scene. Just as I thought the light show was over, more drama would keep me working on capturing it all. I stayed for two hours and made around 400 frames. To give me the best chance of capturing the full range of contrast, especially when the sun would come out from behind the clouds, I bracketed with seven frames per composition with a half-stop exposure change between each. After a couple of decades using a 4x5 camera and missing a few great moments, I relish the opportunity to have the insurance that bracketing offers. Once the bracketing was set, I could think less about "data capture" and concentrate on watching the shifting clouds and light to time for the best compositions.

To process the files for this composition, I used the Merge to 32-bit HDR Plugin for Lightroom by Photomatix. After much trial and error, I ended up using only four out of the seven frames I had created with the bracket, as the fast motion of the clouds made the blending a challenge. Once the HDR file came back to Lightroom, I made local adjustments with the Adjustment Brush. With each new version of Lightroom, there are new ways of making those critical refinements. Still, I usually end up working in Photoshop to take care of the final details. In the case of this image, I took the photo into Photoshop to use Tony Kuyper's luminosity masks on the highlights in the clouds. Finally, I had to apply some noise reduction in some of the shadow areas.

As a photographer, I'm always striving to improve my ability to resolve and refine my vision through better technique. However, I often feel like I'm falling behind on all the rapidly changing digital tools. Maybe it's true what they say about old dogs and new tricks! However, when I find challenging images to process like the example here, I hunt around for new methods of delivering my expressive intent. Fortunately, there are many great resources for staying current, such as YouTube videos, podcasts, blogs, books, webinars and tutorials.

I feel that much of what I've learned about making photographs is from looking at other photographers' works, most often in books. Absorbing the mood and meaning and studying techniques develop over time and often subconsciously. The critical question is: Does that image move



me or doesn't it? Why or why not? Study your favorite photographers in depth.

Speaking of books, I have a new one out, *Light on the Landscape*, which is a curated selection of 60 essays originally published here in *Outdoor Photographer*. Of course, I highly recommend it. One of my goals in writing my "On Landscape" column was to steer away from overly technical discussion and focus on the creative process—the inspiration to make a given image and how I chose to convey the emotions felt at the time of exposure. The essays are illustrated by 128 of my favorite photographs. The publisher, Rocky Nook, offers other books featuring landscape photography. Of particular interest to me



are the books by Guy Tal, Jack Dykinga and Bruce Barnbaum.

We all have different learning needs and styles. You probably have your favorite sources for improving your photography, but here are some photographers who offer book and video tutorials regarding digital black-and-white photography: Guy Tal, Alister Benn, Sarah Marino and Jack Curran. I recommend looking them up online.

If you're like me and make both color and black-and-white landscape photographs, it will be helpful to think carefully about why you're doing one versus another. There are strengths for both and as many theories as photographers for when to use which. Try saving separate

collections and see what trends develop for each. For example, I tend to select more graphic images for black and white, especially nature details. Or, as in the case of my photograph here of Yosemite Valley and dramatic clouds, the color was already muted and dull, and so a black-and-white interpretation brought the scene to life. Trust your instincts for what directions are working. Follow your favorite black-and-white photographers and research their techniques and philosophies. At least for me, the learning never stops. **OP**

To sign up for newsletter updates and to see more of William Neill's work, visit [WilliamNeill.com](http://WilliamNeill.com).

Morning mist, Yosemite Valley, Yosemite National Park, California, 2013.



## Grounded

Finding beauty and connection at home

Text & Photography By Amy Gulick

**B**ad weather can ground airplanes. Parents ground children for bad behavior. And a microscopic virus has ground life as we knew it to a halt. What's a nature photographer to do?

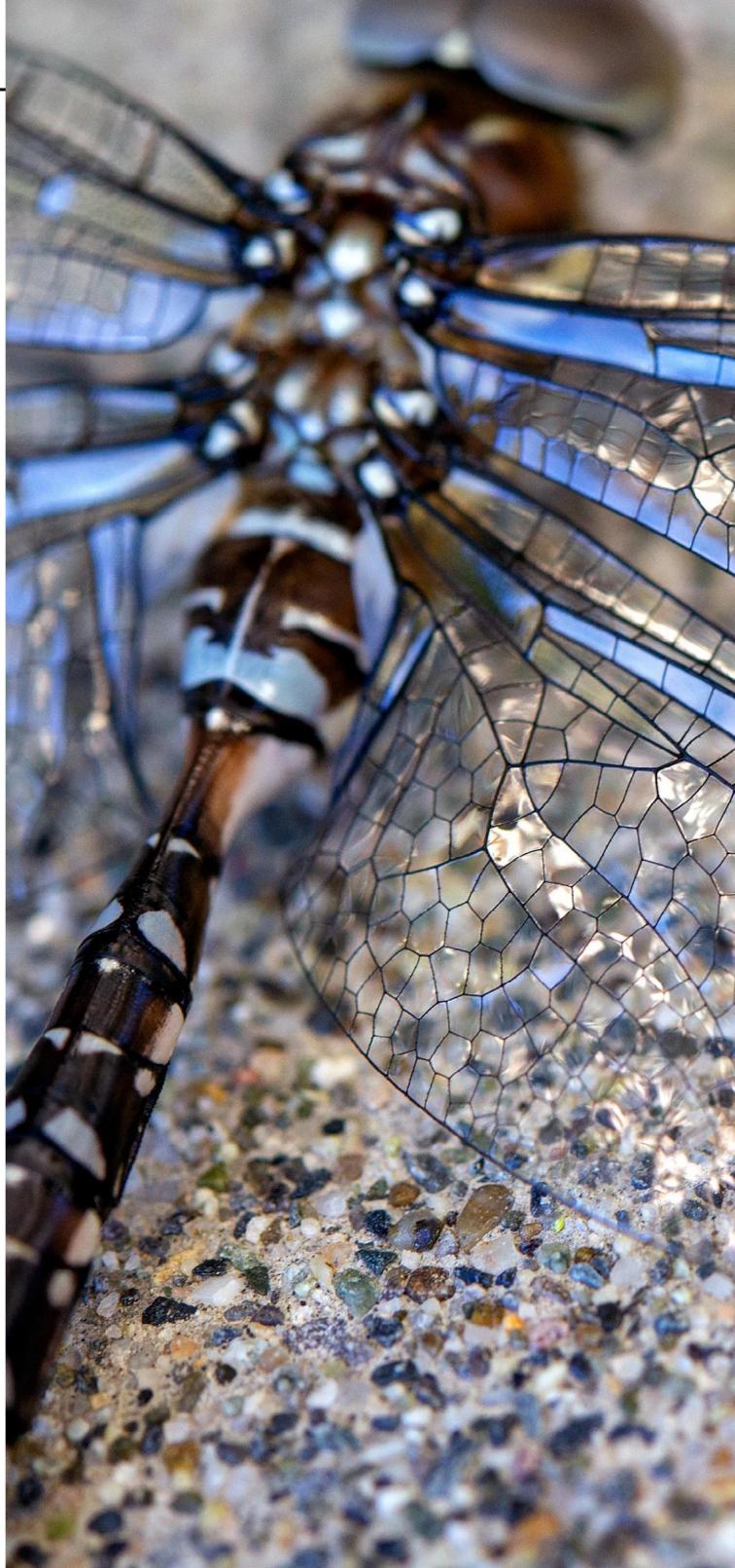
Aldo Leopold said, "There are some who can live without wild things and some who cannot." I'm definitely of the "cannot" camp. The camera is my tool for exploring wild things and increasing my understanding of the world and my place in it. Getting splashed by thousands of spawning salmon pulsing up an Alaska stream, sitting near a Patagonia puma and her three cubs feeding on a guanaco or looking into the eyes of a mother mountain gorilla in Rwanda as she nurses her infant—in moments like these, I'm bursting with joy and grateful to be alive. But why? I used to think it was because I was seeing something new. Whenever we see something for the first time, it's easy to be filled with wonder. And yet for me, the novelty of wild things has never worn off, no matter how many times I return to a place or see familiar wildlife. Instead, I feel a deep sense of connection to the earth and all of its inhabitants. I feel—grounded.

To experience the best of wild things, I have ventured to places where the natural processes of life are still functioning as they always have. Where the circle of life is whole. But ecologically intact ecosystems are increasingly difficult to find in a world where we've converted wildlands to farms, factories and toxic waste dumps. And so I've long believed that travel, sometimes to faraway places, is the only way to experience a connection to the wild and the feeling it evokes in me. Or is it?

In the early days of the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, I felt like a punished child grounded to the confines of my living space. The days melded into one long continuous stream of hours. Lots of repetition. Lots of bouncing off the walls in my house and in my mind. But a photographer has to shoot, and an explorer has to explore. So, I dusted off my camera and set out on a grand adventure—to my backyard.

While I'm always appreciative of the nature I see on a regular basis at home, I don't often photograph it. Not because it doesn't inspire me, but because I'm usually too distracted doing other daily chores. The beauty of travel is that I walk out my door and leave the distractions behind. I'm free to focus and be physically and mentally present. Could I do this in my own backyard? More important, could I feel that deep sense of connection to nature in a not-so-wild place?

I photographed the usual suspects:



black-tailed deer, Douglas squirrels, coyotes, goldfinches and other animals. I photographed Douglas fir trees, plump salmonberries and maidenhair ferns. I shot cloud patterns and stayed up way past my bedtime to capture Comet NEOWISE streaking across the night sky. The more I photographed at home, the more I realized that physical confinement doesn't have to mean mental confinement. Beauty is everywhere, in every moment. We just have to choose



to see it. The fine hairs on a squirrel's bushy tail backlit in the afternoon sun, the emergence of billions of stars at dusk or the flick of an alligator lizard's tongue—good grief! It's all so incredible.

One cool summer morning, a dragonfly brought me to my knees. Grounded on a concrete slab, the insect remained motionless. Was it even alive? I carefully crawled toward it. The powder-blue markings on its body, the delicate legs, and the wings—oh, the wings. Viewed

through a macro lens, the wings looked like miniature panels of stained glass. The tiny “panes”—some clear, some blue—formed an intricate mosaic. Viewed at certain angles, the iridescence of the panes bounced unfathomable beauty back to my eye. My entire being buzzed. And the wings before me began to buzz, vibrating and blurring as nature's flying machine warmed its engine in the dawn sun. At liftoff, the dragonfly hovered in front of my face and then took flight,

leaving me grounded to the earth in a heap of gratitude. OP

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Amy Gulick is a founding fellow of the International League of Conservation Photographers. Her new book, *The Salmon Way: An Alaska State of Mind*, is the winner of both a Nautilus and Independent Publisher Book Award and has been named a Best Indie Book by Kirkus Reviews. See more of her work at amygulick.com.



Surf and Driftwood, Afternoon, Point Lobos, California, 1978

# *Writing with Light*

How my experience with Polaroid films helped me discover the qualities of light and its impact for successful photographs

Text & Photography By John Sexton

*I feel privileged* to have had photography as my passion, and my profession, for more than 45 years. I have been fortunate to have wonderful teachers, mentors, friends and colleagues along the way from whom I have learned so much about the craft and aesthetics of the medium, and whose images have inspired me during my journey. I love the word “photography”—its literal meaning being “light writing.” For me, light is the essential element of this magical medium. The pursuit of this often elusive and variable band of electromagnetic radiation, and how photographic films and papers respond to it, is still a magical part of the process for me.

I was recently interviewed by Jennifer Quick, curator of the Polaroid Consultant Photographers collections at the Baker Library, Harvard Business School, regarding my time as a photographic consultant to Polaroid. In preparation for our virtual video interview, I was inspired to gather numerous portfolio boxes of original 4x5 Polaroid Land instant prints that I have made over the years. We have a few of these images framed in our home and studio, but I had not looked at many of the prints for a number of years. As my wife, Anne Larsen, and I went through the boxes print-by-print, fond memories of making these photographs came back to me. We agreed that the intimate, jewel-like quality of an original Polaroid instant print was uniquely beautiful. I was very pleased when *Outdoor Photographer* editor Wes Pitts expressed a keen interest in sharing some of my Polaroid images here and decided the best way to reproduce them was to show them in virtually the same size as the original print. The unique palette of a black-and-white Polaroid instant print—which is due to the diffusion transfer process from the negative—is most challenging to reproduce. The “creaminess” of the highlights is difficult to convey in a reproduction. I hope that the reproductions included in this selection will retain some of the beauty contained in my original prints.

My initial experience with 4x5 Polaroid Land instant photography was as a photography major at Cypress College in the early 1970s. The photography program there was excellent, and I was fortunate to have truly gifted and caring instructors, along with classmates fully dedicated to photography, many of whom remain my friends today. If you were photography major, you began using a 4x5 view camera (whether you liked it or not) during your second semester of studies. This introduction to large-format photography was primarily focused on photographing in the studio. My instructor for that class, Marshall LaCour, required that each

time before we made an exposure on 4x5 Kodak Tri-X Professional film, our setup had to be checked by showing him a 4x5 Polaroid print, which he would approve and initial. We were to consider him as our “art director.” As some readers may recall, the exposure tolerance of Polaroid instant film was extremely narrow. If you were off by a half-stop, you were definitely off in terms of the resulting Polaroid print. My experience working with studio lighting and using a handheld light meter was limited, so it meant I used a lot of Polaroid film in pursuit of getting exposures and images that were acceptable to Mr. LaCour.

In 1973, along with my fellow

photography major John Charles Woods, I applied to attend Ansel Adams' annual two-week workshop held in Yosemite Valley. We were both elated when we received our acceptance letters. Yosemite was already a very special place for me. According to my father, we first went on a family vacation there when I was 2 years old, and that continued on an annual basis until I was well into high school. Those two weeks of camping and hiking each June were the highlight of my year. Now, I was going to have the opportunity to study photography with Ansel Adams, and the staff he had gathered together, in one of my very favorite places.

Included in the list of materials to

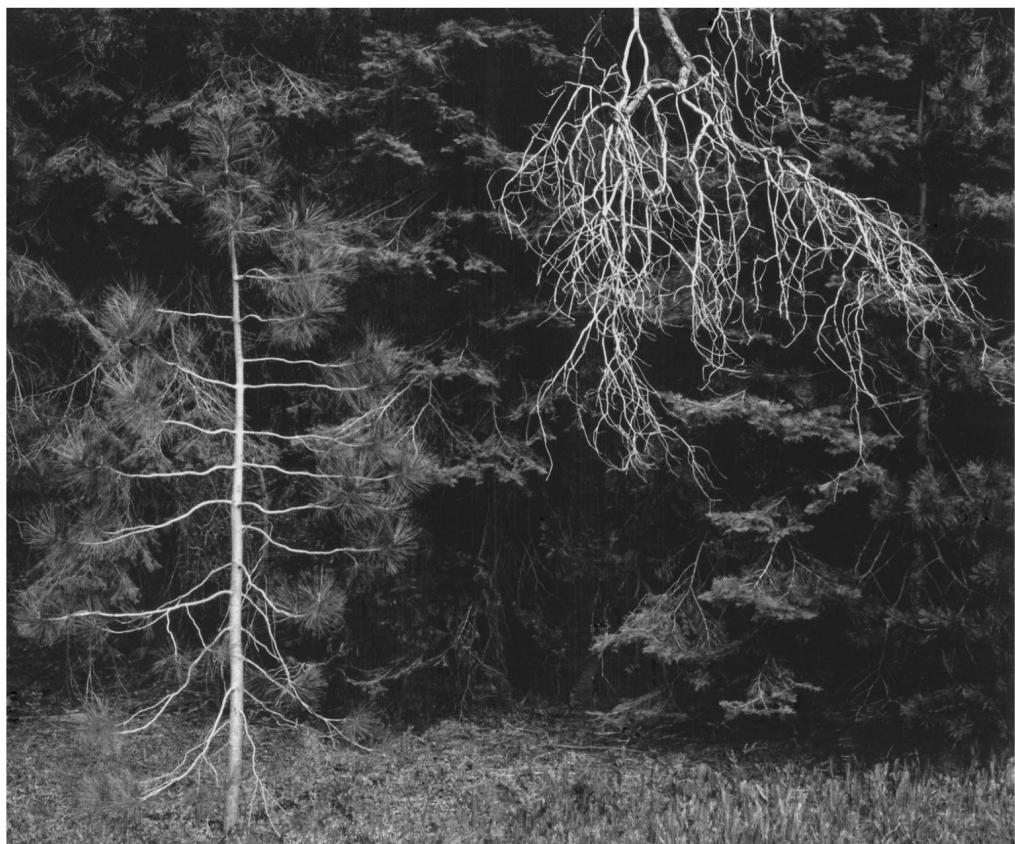


Sycamore Trees, Dusk, Big Sur, California, 1981



Trees in Fog, Santa Cruz, California, 1977

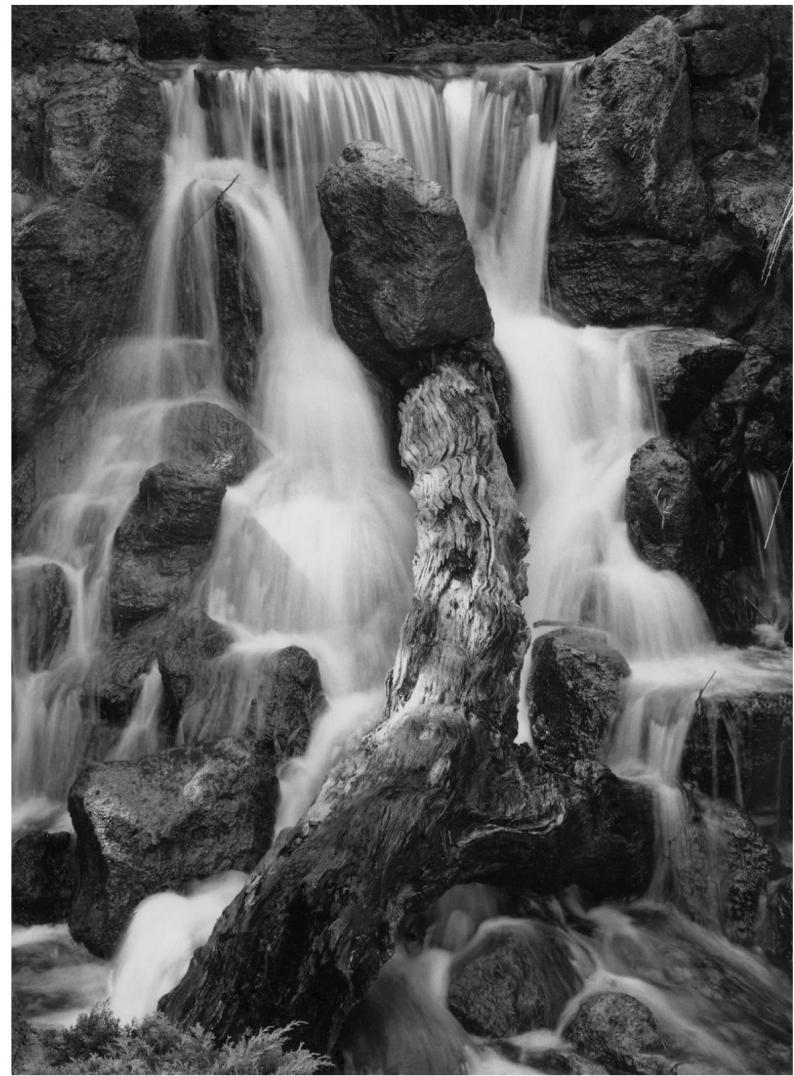
Pine Forest Detail, Yosemite National Park, California, 1980



bring to the workshop was a 4x5 Polaroid back if we had one available. I borrowed one from the college photography department, along with a 4x5 Calumet view camera, complete with Schneider 210mm and 90mm lenses. At school, we used an incident light meter, but for the workshop, we were encouraged to bring a reflected light meter. I brought my only light meter, which was my 35mm Minolta SRT-101 camera with its built-in reflected light meter.

I assumed we would be using Polaroids for test exposures, as we were doing in my photography classes, and was surprised to learn on my first field session with Ansel that he was not only using the Polaroid instant print to show us what was in front of the camera, but he was also revealing the subtle qualities of light and discussing the aesthetics of the image. He was very effective in making Polaroid prints that were much more beautiful than any I had previously seen. I recall Ansel sharing a quotation from his dear friend and inventor of Polaroid instant photography, Edwin H. Land: "Photography is the intersection of art and science." Ansel's goal was not merely to use the Polaroid print as a proof; he approached it with the same degree of care, concern and integrity to make it as successful a final image as possible. He then would make an exposure on conventional film.

At the workshop, there was an ample supply of Polaroid film available for all of the staff and participants. In addition, there were skilled and generous Polaroid employees to help us all get the best results from the Polaroid Land instant materials. They helped us with technical as well as aesthetic challenges and welcomed different ideas on how to use the film—deviating from the "official" instruction sheet suggestions. We learned how to increase the contrast of Type 52 Polaroid prints by processing them for longer than the suggested time and also how to reduce the contrast slightly by under-developing them. We were taught how to use pre-exposure



Cascade, Los Angeles County Arboretum, Arcadia, California, 1978

on Polaroid materials to better handle high-contrast situations, which were not easy to deal with. What began to excite me was to discover the quality of light and the impact it had on the success of the final photograph, whether using Polaroid or conventional film. There were a variety of Polaroid products available for our use, and my favorite was the black-and-white 4x5 Polaroid Polapan Type 52 Land film. All of the images reproduced here were made on that film.

I had the good fortune to return to a number of Ansel's workshops over the years, serving as an assistant, Ansel's personal assistant, an instructor and, eventually, director of Ansel's

workshops for the final two years they were offered in Yosemite. Every one of those workshops had Polaroid products and staff on hand, and over time, I learned to use the materials more and more successfully.

In 1977, at the age of 24, I was invited to become a participating photographer in the Polaroid Collection. It was a tremendous honor to be part of a group that included some of the best-known photographers working at the time. My participation in the Collection required me to focus my attention on Polaroid materials. The opportunity to work with these instant films transformed the way I made photographs. As I concentrated



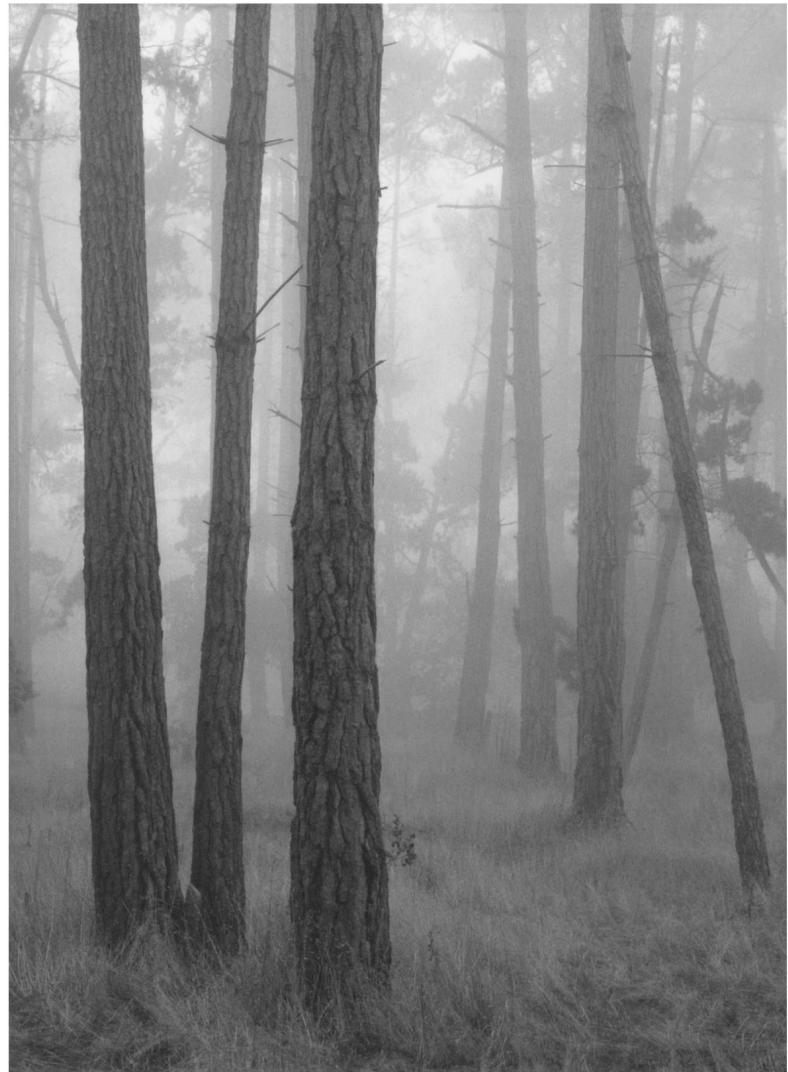
Corn Lilies, Yosemite National Park, California, 1977

Pampas Grass, Carmel, California, 1979



on trying to make the best-possible Polaroid instant prints, I also focused on the quality of light and how that was an integral part of a successful image for me. I began to cultivate a greater appreciation of how essential light is to making a photographic image. I would work very carefully in the making of the original Polaroid print, even using pieces of black cardboard in front of the camera lens to “burn and dodge” (darken and lighten) areas of the Polaroid print, just as I would use similar tools under the enlarger lens when printing in the darkroom. Once I got the Polaroid print precisely the way I wanted it, I would then make the negative as a “backup” to the Polaroid. If I had used burning and dodging techniques, I then applied them in the same proportions for the negative, which hopefully would make that negative easier to print.

Four of the 12 photographs included in this small selection of my Polaroid prints are images that I later successfully printed from the 4x5 negative and became popular over the years. One of my best-known images is “Aspens, Dusk, Conway Summit.” The Polaroid I made in 1978 was an important part of the experience of making this photograph well after the sun had set in the Eastern Sierra Nevada. As the light became less intense, it seemed, to my eyes, that the aspen trunks became more luminous and began to glow. I made the Polaroid print you see here and was very excited by the result. I then made a 2-minute exposure at f/22 on Kodak Tri-X film as the light level continued to drop. It was when I first printed that negative in my darkroom a few weeks later that I made a conscious decision to continue exploring photographic possibilities until there simply was not any light left. This, of course, has changed with digital technology today and increasingly high ISOs. I rated Tri-X Professional film in those days at an exposure index of ISO 200 when developing normally. My typical ISO for Polaroid Type 52 film was most



Monterey Pines in Fog, Monterey, California, 1979

often 640—nearly two stops faster than Tri-X. I included “Aspens, Dusk,” in my first monograph, *Quiet Light: Fifteen Years of Photographs*, which was published in 1989. There are three other images reproduced here that are included in the same book. Those images are “Corn Lilies,” “Pine Forest Detail,” and “Surf and Driftwood.”

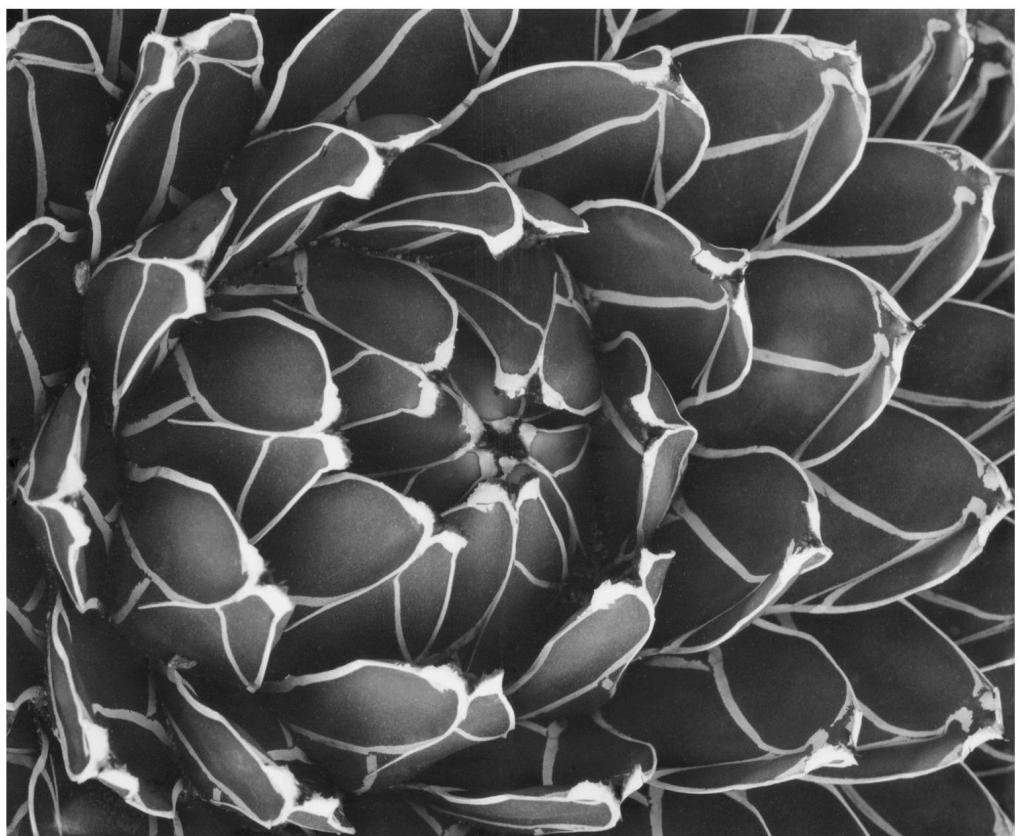
Because of the more limited contrast range of the Polaroid Type 52 film I found myself often attracted to soft-light subjects. This type of lighting was something that appealed to me soon after I became serious about photography. The Polaroid process brought this to an even keener focus and an even more intense interest.

During the years that I was involved with the Polaroid Collection, I was fortunate enough to have 44 original Polaroid prints added to their massive photographic collection. Forty-two of those images were 4x5 original Polaroid Land instant prints, and two were 8x10 Polaroid Land instant prints. As many readers may know, Polaroid Corporation went bankrupt in 2001, and in 2010, much of the Polaroid Collection was sold off at auction. A portion of the collection went to the WestLicht Museum of Photography in Vienna, and my Polaroid prints from the collection reside there. Some of them have been included in two books about the Polaroid Collection, and most



Aspens, Dusk, Conway Summit, California, 1978

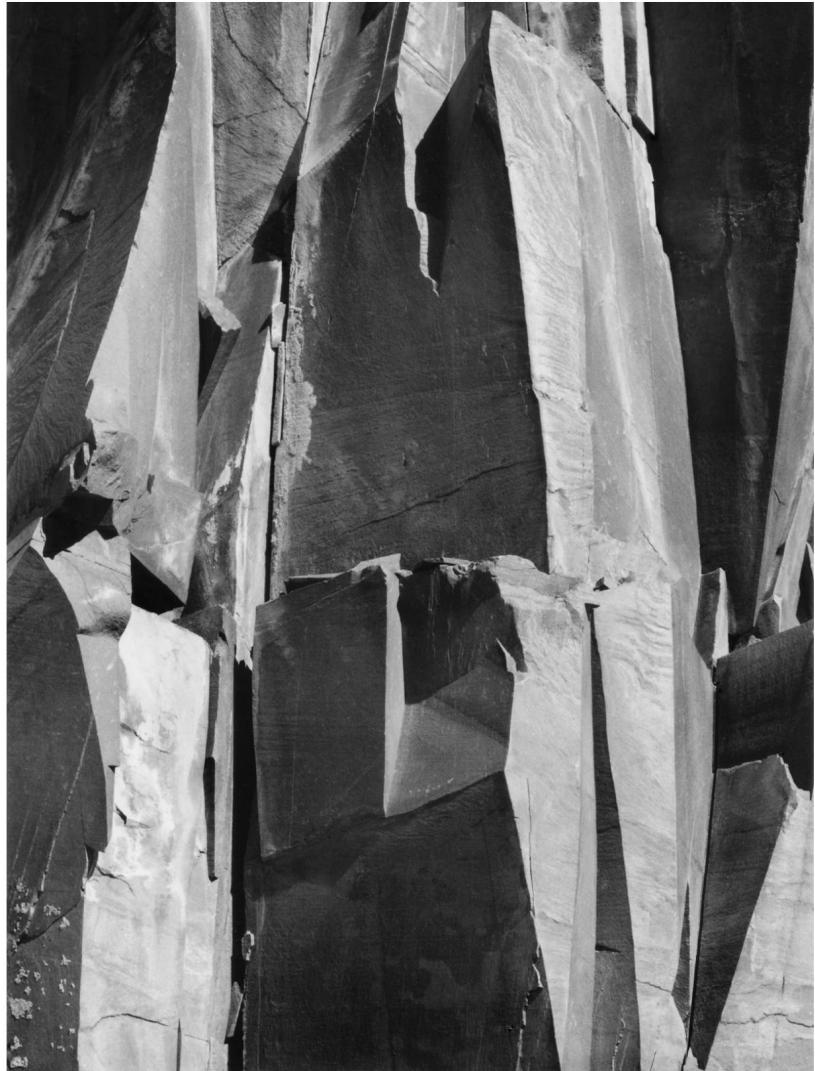
Agave, Huntington Library, San Marino, California, 1978



recently, I was pleased to have an image included in the international traveling exhibition “The Polaroid Project: At the Intersection of Art and Technology.”

In 1979, I went to work as Ansel’s technical and photographic assistant and helped him in all aspects of his photography. We made use of many Polaroid materials, primarily 4x5, some 8x10, and Ansel absolutely loved the Polaroid SX-70, as did I. During my tenure with Ansel, I had close communication with the folks at Polaroid. Ansel had been a consultant for Polaroid Corporation since 1949. If Ansel was working on a project involving Polaroid materials, I was there working with him side by side. When I left my full-time position with Ansel (he retained me as his technical consultant until his death in April 1984), he wrote wonderful letters to both Eastman Kodak Company and Polaroid Corporation, encouraging them to use me as a photographic consultant. I was pleased to be a consultant for both companies for a number of years.

I remember my first trip to visit Polaroid in Cambridge, Massachusetts. My consulting contacts were in the research and development area on Osborn Street. It was a somewhat dilapidated-looking old industrial brick building with the words “Kaplan Furniture Co.” painted on the brick wall. I was taken to a small security entrance that was labeled “Polaroid Corporation.” This is where Dr. Land, as Edwin Land was often called, kept his laboratory and personal office. It was an interesting historical building. Land had chosen it because of its heritage. Alexander Graham Bell’s first long-distance telephone call from Boston to Cambridge had been received in the very same building. Land’s laboratory was located where Bell had done his work. It was in that historic building that I consulted on a variety of technologies that actually became products, including black-and-white “coaterless” films, refining of the 8x10 Polaroid Instant black-and-white film and processor for field use, and many



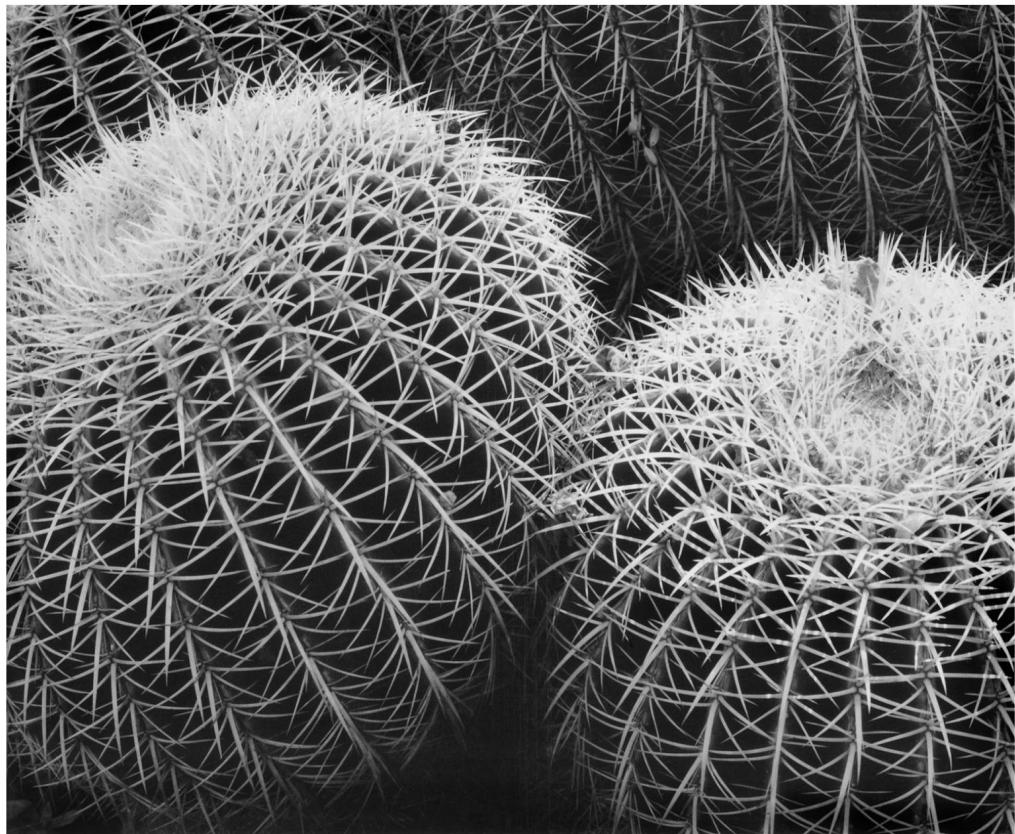
Rock Detail, Westgard Pass, California, 1977

other refinements and explorations.

One of the highlights of my consulting was the opportunity to make the very first black-and-white 20x24 Polaroid prints outside of the research laboratory and to become the first non-Polaroid employee to be trained on the operation and maintenance of the gigantic Polaroid 20x24 camera. The first black-and-white Polaroids were of architectural interiors at the John F. Kennedy Library on Boston Harbor. The huge 20x24 film was the same as the 4x5 Type 52, which required the same type of coating of the print to protect and preserve the photographic image. It took about a dozen print coaters to coat a single print. A few days later, I made

20x24 photographs of the pipe organ inside Memorial Church at Harvard Yard. The dim interior illumination required a 16-minute exposure. Some of the lights near the pipe organ were burned out, which caused an imbalance, so I used the same black cardboard burning and dodging techniques in front of the camera lens during the 16-minute exposure. A print of that image hangs in my wife’s office today and still looks as good as when it was made in 1984.

I suspect that readers who only have experience with digital photography would think that seeing an image immediately after exposure on a LCD screen would be very similar to viewing a Polaroid print following



Barrel Cactus, Huntington Library, San Marino, California, 1978

a brief processing time. I have done both, and I find them to be distinctly different experiences. In my own photography and in my teaching at workshops over the years, I have found that the tactile and emotional sensations of holding and viewing a print are completely different than viewing an image on a device. Maybe I am just old (and old-fashioned), but I think there is something amazing about seeing a print up close, whether that is a Polaroid print, a conventional photographic print made in a darkroom or a carefully executed digital print.

I encourage all photographers to print their work. Printing your digital images will produce a physical and

tactile object that can be studied, refined and enjoyed over time. I also believe printing your images will help you grow as a photographer. Even though you might have all of the color calibration tools to profile your monitor properly, I still encourage you to make your first print early in the process—before you begin the significant interpretive manipulations available in Lightroom, Photoshop or other image-editing software. Print often and look at those prints side by side, touch them and feel the tactile qualities of different papers.

I will never forget the first exhibition of photographs that I saw. It was a Cypress College class

field trip with my great instructor David Drake. That exhibition, which featured the works of Ansel Adams, Wynn Bullock and Edward Weston, changed my photography and my life. I had never before seen such stunning photographic prints. It was viewing those original prints that truly inspired me—where I literally gasped for breath at the sheer beauty of the prints and also had tears well up in my eyes. That was the start of my passion, and my privilege, to pursue light and express myself through photography.

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See more of John Sexton's work at [johnsexton.com](http://johnsexton.com).

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WHEN TO CHOOSE

# Black & White

Monochrome may be a better choice than color for some images.  
These insights will help you decide.

Text & Photography By Aaron Baggenstos







**B**lack and white is a powerful tool for nature and wildlife photography. It magnifies focus on the subject by eliminating the distractions of color and excels in those instances where the subject lacks color naturally, creating interest through shades of gray.

The human eye can distinguish more than 500 shades of gray. As for the digital image, it's limited to 256 different shades of gray, including pure white and pure black. By way of comparison, the human eye can perceive and distinguish around a million colors—considerably more than 256 shades of gray.

I feel that the best way to understand how to compose black-and-white

images successfully is to actually look at captures where it works best and consider the reasons why.

### See The World Differently

Black and white is a different way of seeing the world. It's a purer and cleaner interpretation, a world view without the distractions and complexity of competing colors. Often favored by journalists and artists, black and white embraces an aesthetic that emphasizes line, shape, tonal value, motion, dynamic perspectives and texture.

In wildlife photography, I've found seven scenarios where black and white can result in a better image. To help illustrate the merits, I chose seven

different photos of mine that I converted from color and explained the reasons I consider them superior to original full-color spectrum captures.

### 1. For a classical or historical look.

There's a great demand for classical images, and black-and-white photography conveys a timeless quality, a perspective that's relevant in any era. In essence, black and white imparts an "evergreen" quality to the image that prevents it from becoming dated. It also gives a historic look and feel to places and monuments that reflect a storied past.

Black-and-white photography is a wonderful medium for creating fine art in both interpretation and display, in large part because the elucidation of detail is so much more explicit with definitional shades of gray. My image of the herd of elephants against a dramatic sky becomes a powerful environmental statement when converted to black and white. Dramatic skies can often be blown out because of the extreme range of tonality from brightness to darkness. Black and white provides emphasis where it should be, on the drama and moodiness of the brooding sky. It also accentuates the powerfulness and majesty of the elephant group.

### 2. For portraits with expression—especially where tonal range can define the subtleties.

This image of a mountain gorilla against a dark background presents many challenges in providing definition and differentiation. It's essentially a black-on-black capture. What makes this portrait compelling is the facial expression of the gorilla and the positioning of the hand on the side of the head. It renders a concept of contemplation.

Black and white helps define subtleties in the fur while drawing attention to and emphasizing the catchlights in the eyes. It's the combination of the eyes, the downturned mouth and the hand gesture that creates an expressive portrait revealing the character of the mountain gorilla.

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### 3. To focus on composition.

For compositions that require emphasis on subject matter and involve iconic animals that aren't colorful, black and white can help the image by bringing focus to those details, accentuated by shades of gray providing definition and detail to textures like the dry, mud-caked skin of these rhinos. The background is dark, and in combination

with a slight vignette, further concentrates attention, drawing the eye to the brighter area of the canvas, the mother rhino and her baby.

### 4. When backgrounds are bright or light.

This includes those times when backgrounds may pop with color and be distracting, and when you want to extend

shooting time in the field. Black and white can be an effective remedy for those middle-of-the-day images when the light isn't ideal or the skies are overcast.

My image of the reclusive caracal was overpowered by color, as both the foreground and background were distracting. The light was harsh. By converting to black and white, I effectively draw focus on the subject matter.

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#### **5. For high-key effect.**

By purposefully blowing out your background to pure white, you create an artistic canvas on which to place your subject. The stark contrast of a black wolf allows the eye to focus on the subject matter immediately. The negative white space is important in this image as it helps to isolate the subject.

#### **6. When textural definition and perspective enhance the image.**

Texture can be challenging to capture, especially when it may be the fur of a brown bear or the wrinkled skin of an elephant or rhinoceros. This can be tricky; the best practice is to be aware of how you position the angle of light for the look you want. Side lighting best enhances texture.

My image of a grizzly bear with matted, water-soaked fur works extremely well in black-and-white conversion, giving it an artistic feel while magnifying the predatory presence of this iconic creature. The concept of predator and prey is enhanced by shooting from below eye level, giving the bear a bigger-than-life presence.



## 7. To bring laser-like focus to the subject.

Portraits work extremely well if there is something that defines them, such as light and shadows, perspective, emotion, mood and drama. My portrait of a baby baboon draws in the viewer with curiosity, as the shadowed black-and-white treatment accentuates the face, ear and eye. The moodiness and mystery of the scene cause the viewer to focus on the baboon's face by concealing other details.

## Use Monochrome To Evaluate Color Images

Black-and-white conversion can also be used as a tool to evaluate color images. If you want to know if your subject matter and composition are compelling, convert to black and white (either through the menu of your camera or in post-processing) and view whether your desired elements prevail.

## Black & White As Creative Alternative

Black and white can be used as a tool to change the way we look at and capture the world. It can tap into creativity by forcing us as photographers to see a scene differently. It works best when we have a good understanding of composition and luminosity.

One merit of black-and-white photography is that it forces the viewer to see the foundational aspects of the image. Since there are no distractions of color, the eyes and brain focus on the basic composition and characteristics of light instead. Black and white reduces a photo to the yin and yang, resulting in powerful images that are evocative and enduring.

It's important to remember that black-and-white images intersect the genres of both fine art and classical photography. These are images that are valued as both artistic and

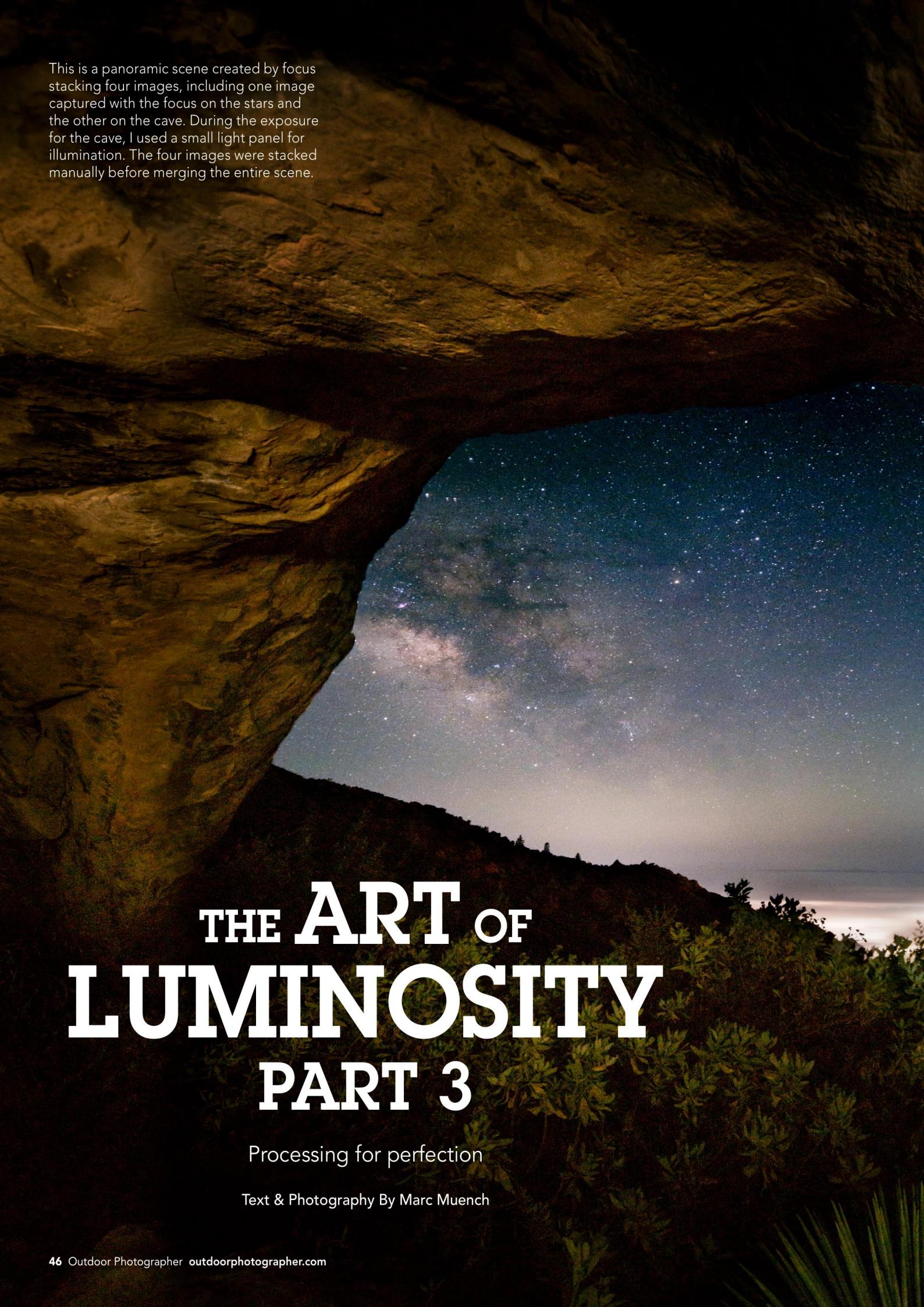
timeless. They endure and maintain their appeal through generations and changing times, despite competition from newer technology refinements. After all, photography started out by giving the world only black-and-white images.

There's a time and place for black-and-white photography. It works when there's contrast between light and shadow and when backgrounds and colors distract from the subject matter. Train your eye to look for contrast and to see shadows, patterns, textures and leading lines. Realize that there are times when color creates an unnecessary complexity in a scene, and use black and white to simplify the image, controlling chaos and minimizing distraction by effectively using 256 shades of gray.

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See more of Aaron Baggenstos' work at [aaronstours.com](http://aaronstours.com).

A panoramic night photograph showing a massive, layered rock formation on the left, illuminated from within by a small light panel. The right side of the image shows a dark, star-filled sky with the Milky Way visible. The bottom right corner features some green foliage.

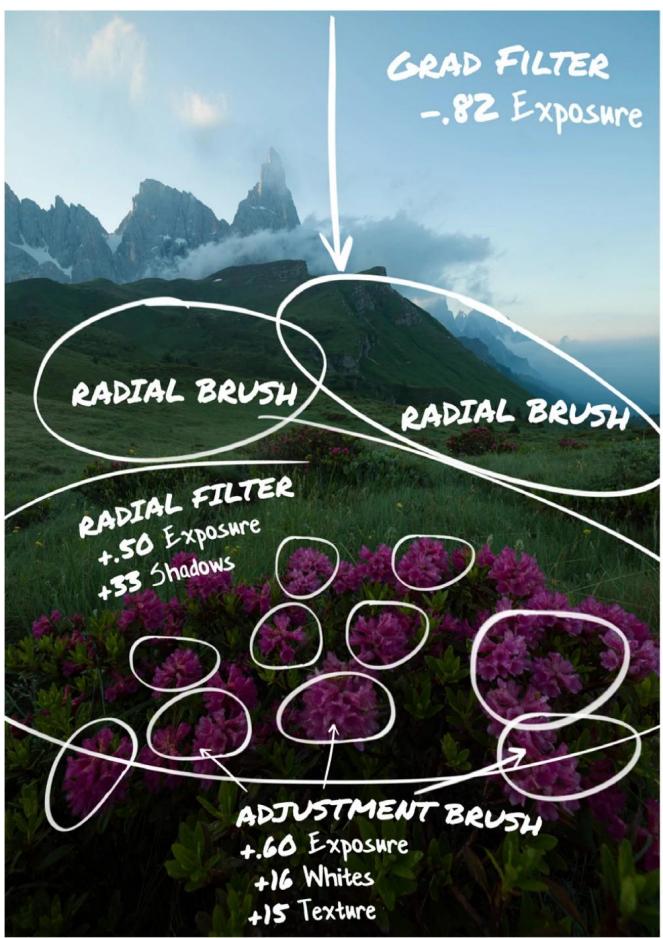
This is a panoramic scene created by focus stacking four images, including one image captured with the focus on the stars and the other on the cave. During the exposure for the cave, I used a small light panel for illumination. The four images were stacked manually before merging the entire scene.

# THE ART OF LUMINOSITY PART 3

Processing for perfection

Text & Photography By Marc Muench





In the previous articles in this series, we've discussed the ways to recognize great light and the best camera techniques to capture it. Now it's time for the last step, understanding when and how an image needs to be post-processed.

Over the years, I've developed a method for producing images that have the correct contrast ratio for printing or publishing to the web while also incorporating my own style. This mostly subjective part of producing your personal work links with your pre-visualization and camera technique. Think of this method as adding furniture to your home to make it yours.

Post-processing isn't just a technical function but rather a blend of technical and creative skills required to create the final image. When editing an image, I consider it a performance that combines my pre-visualization, editing skills and passion for my art at that very moment in time. Future edits of the same file might vary, not just because of my improving skills but also due to changes in my focus and emotions.

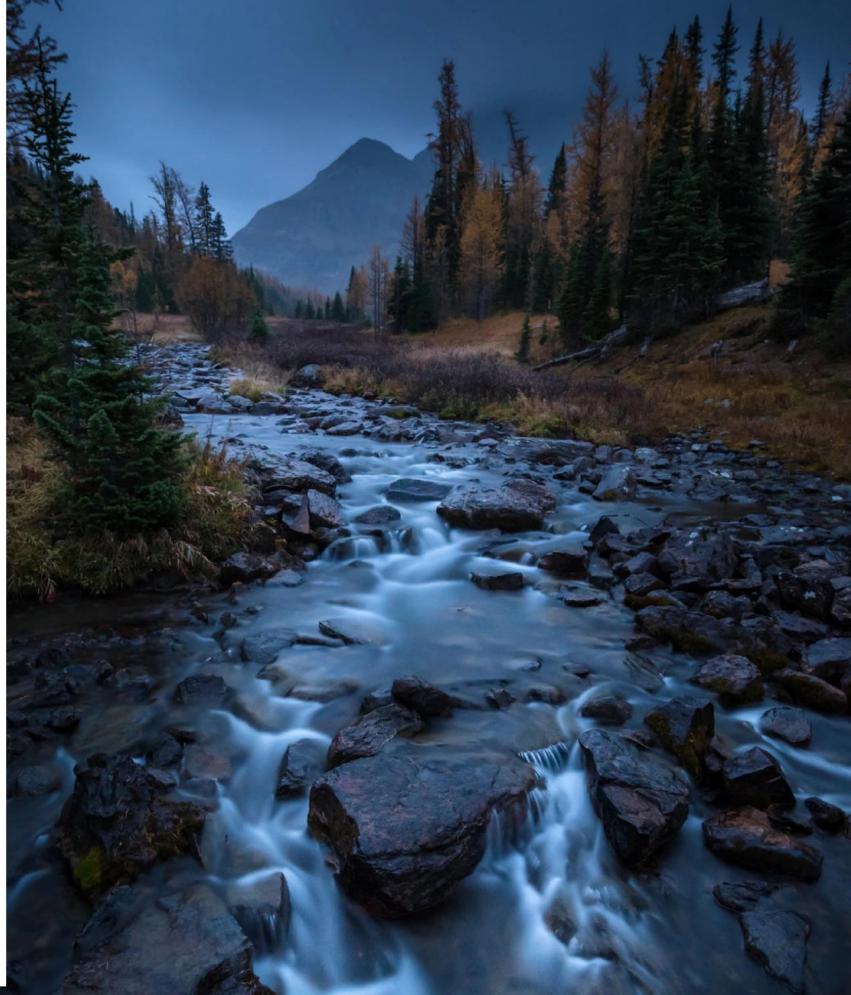
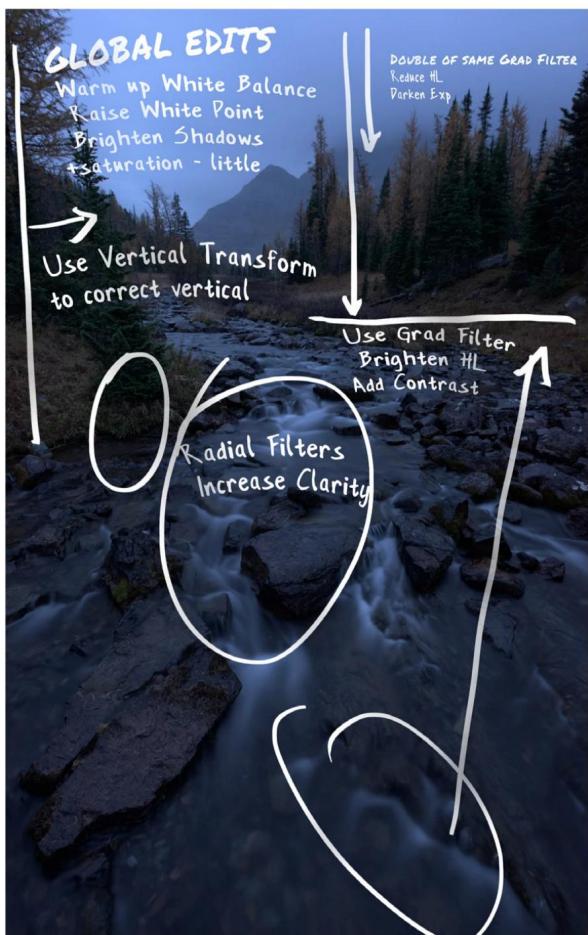
Each scene is different and affects the



This scene of Cimon della Pala in the Dolomites reveals how imperfect light can be handled with the aid of post-processing. The soft shade of the morning and the atmospheric haze were important aspects of the light in this scene that inspired me to create a final image. I used two techniques in camera to accomplish what I had in mind: focus stacking and ETTR. If I did it just right, I could then complete the process in post-production by increasing the brightness of the flowers in the foreground from a shadow to a midtone.

Notice the flowers are in shadow. Notice the sky is a highlight. Notice the soft, low contrast light on the meadows in the middle. These are all aspects of the time of day and position from which the image was taken. The light in the sky is a highlight, and the foreground is in shadow. Because the light was not optimal, I was inspired by my understanding, or pre-visualization, of what this scene would become. I used ETTR for the exposure, giving me the most shadow information possible for the post-production work ahead.

The exposure used for these four focus-stacked files had to be very accurate, placing the very right edge of the data at the very right of the histogram. This allowed for maximum brightness in the foreground shadows while not clipping the highlights. I used masks to bring up the shadows in the foreground to midtone values.



**Dark & Moody.** This image was taken before sunrise under a thick layer of clouds. I employed this dark light to create a mood and a long exposure to soften the water and clouds. I used masks to lighten up the darker midtone regions in and around the brighter water, as well as to lighten the forests on both sides of the stream.



way I feel. I consider this, plus the technical aspects of the process when editing, before making any actual edits. I make some edits globally and leave others for a masked region where I can control the color and density to help lead the viewer's eyes through the scene.

Adobe Lightroom Classic is the tool I use most often and is the focus of what I want to show you. While I still use Photoshop and have invested 10,000 hours in it over the last 20 years, I'm quite pleased with the improvements in Lightroom and find that I can complete most of my editing without Photoshop. Masking is the

main reason I focused on Photoshop for so many years as it allows me to create more intricate masks and gives me the opportunity to combine multiple images together manually, something Lightroom is incapable of doing without the aid of automatic HDR or Merging. Yet Lightroom tools have progressed significantly, allowing me to feel confident in showing you all that can be done with them.

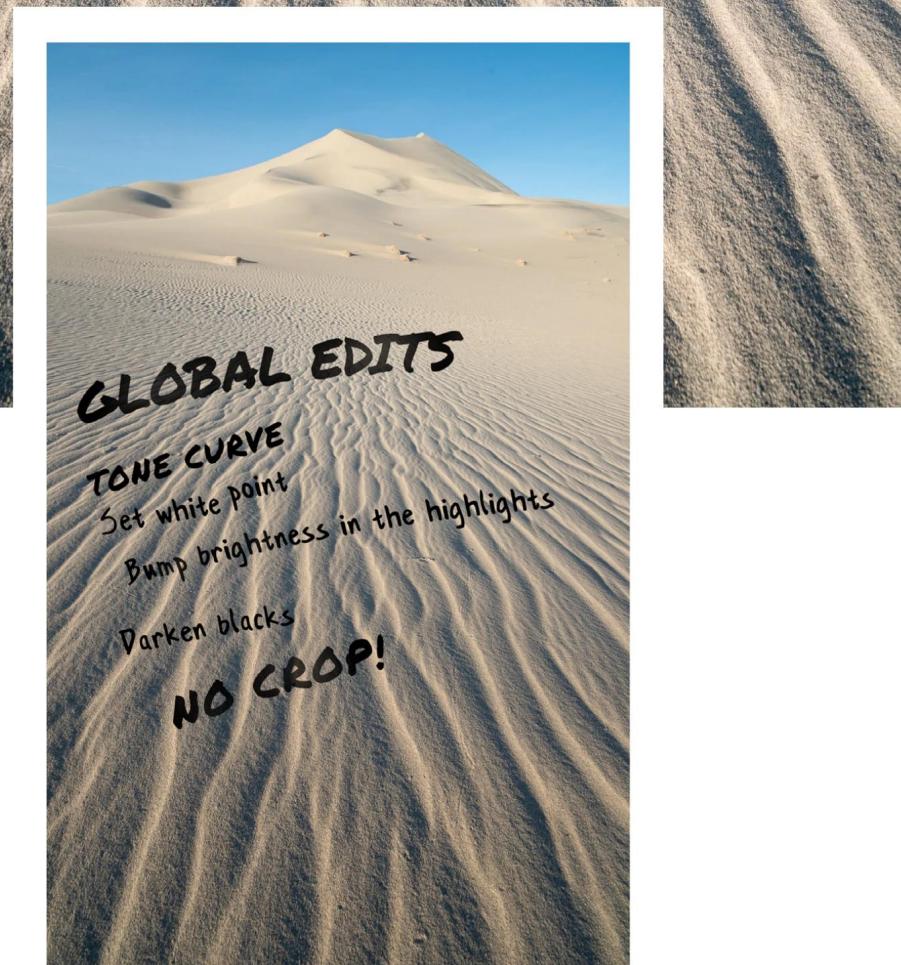
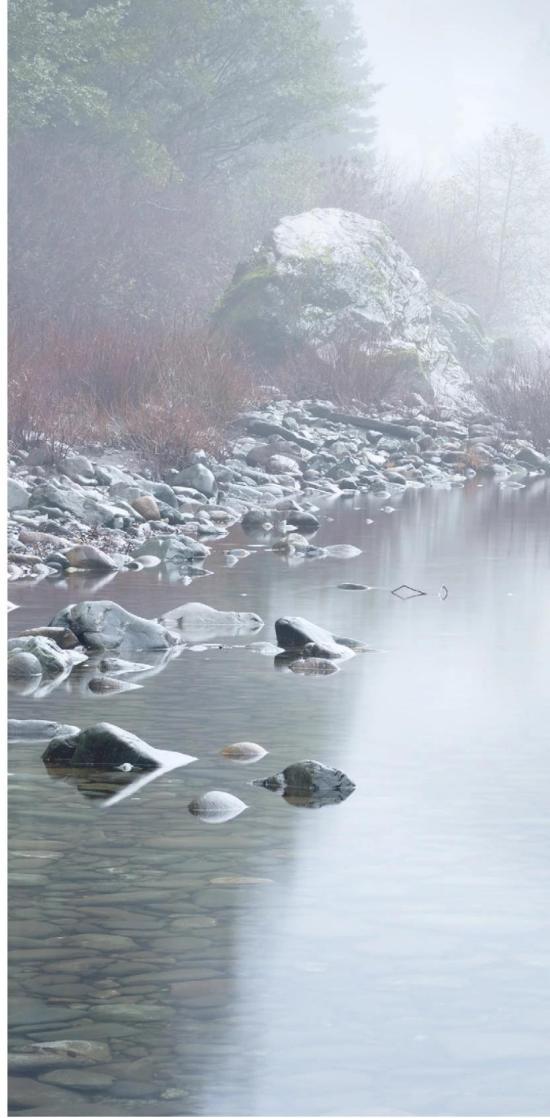
### Lightroom Tools For Adjusting Contrast

Before we get into my processing method, we need to discuss contrast. Lightroom

offers several tools to change the contrast of an image, each producing dramatically different results. You may use some of them already without realizing you're adjusting contrast.

When you change the contrast of an image, you alter the luminance of all affected pixels. Any tool used to increase or decrease the density of a pixel changes the contrast. Some tools apply contrast globally, while others use masks to affect only a specific region.

The effect of adjusting the contrast of an image is essential when working with RAW image files. RAW image data is



**Left: Light & Bright.** In an effort to reveal the softness of windswept dunes and lose any bold colors, the Tone Curve was the perfect choice for making these edits. By removing contrast and color saturation from this scene, this image reminds me of the location. It is unusual for me to remove contrast and color in any scene, but this image became more welcoming when the pastel colors were revealed.

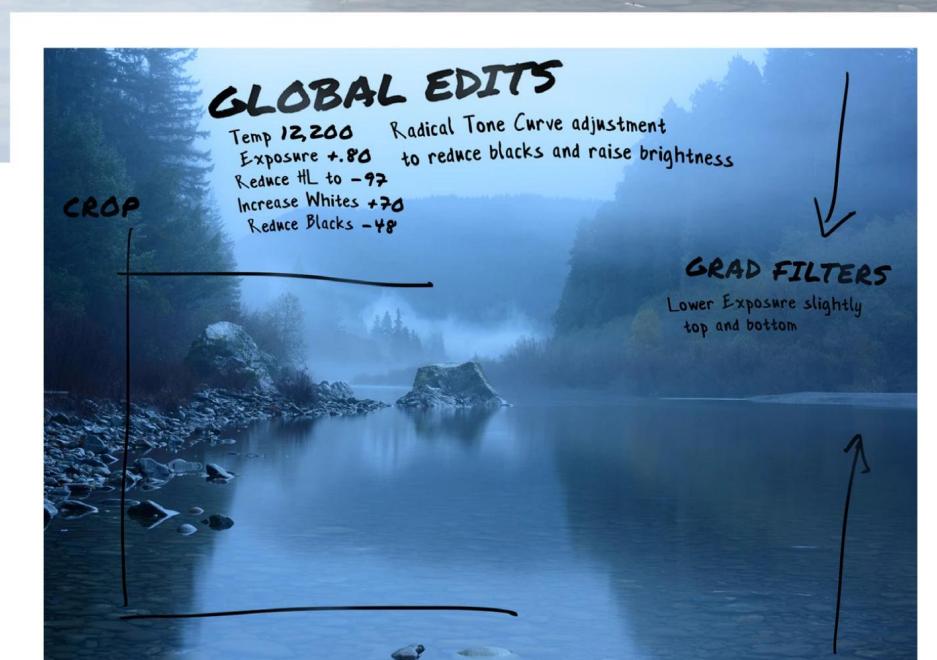
**Above: Light & Bright.** In this scene, morning mist inspired me to lighten up the mood. It was a dark, rainy morning, everything was dripping wet, and the rocks were slippery. The color cast was blue because the sun had barely risen. The mist made this scene easy to transition into bright as I was able to color balance on the mist to eliminate the blue cast that was adding to the gloomy mood.



designed to look flat and lacks contrast. This gives you, the photographer, the opportunity to apply the contrast to your preference rather than the camera doing it for you. Editing in Lightroom uses an RGB color space that allows the editor to manipulate contrast and color simultaneously. This means that when you change the luminosity of pixels, you also change the color. After making dramatic contrast changes, you'll notice changes in the saturation. Typically, as you add contrast, you also increase saturation. Each tool we're going to discuss has a unique way of adjusting contrast, with some having a greater impact on color than others. The trick to applying contrast adjustments is to apply them region by region; don't apply them globally. If you sharpen your file in Lightroom, use the Masking slider within the Details Panel, as I'll explain.

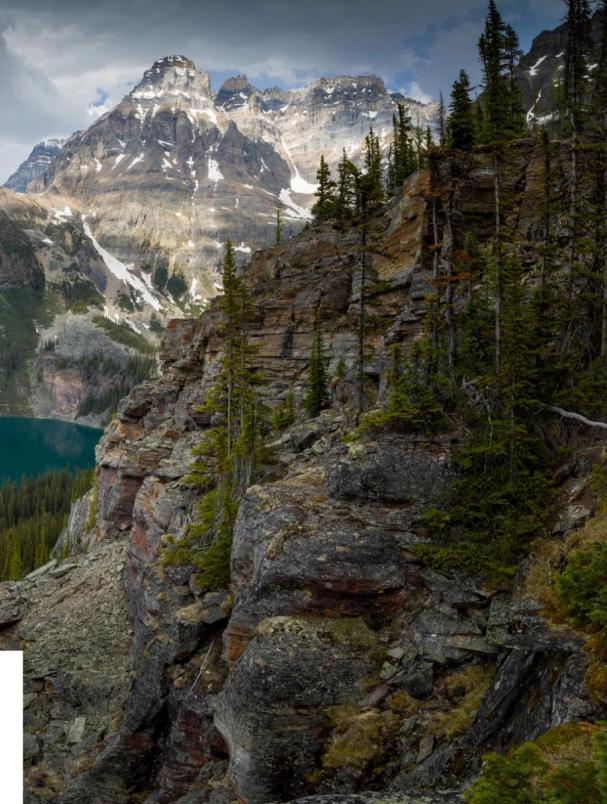
### Sharpening

It's important to understand that sharpening tools adjust contrast to change the



apparent sharpness of an image, even though it's not normally considered to be a contrast tool. The top two sliders in the Detail Panel under Sharpening are Amount and Radius—these sliders are by far the most critical. The Amount slider allows you to increase or decrease the contrast ratio along the edges of all detail. The Radius slider allows you to increase or decrease the number of pixels

affected by the Amount slider—when you increase Radius, the area affected is larger. If you increase the radius too much and the viewing distance to your final image is too close, a halo becomes visible. If viewed from a greater distance, the halo appears as a sharper edge. These sliders work on what's called a "kernel," which is a special type of mask that determines what's an edge (and therefore



**Left: Painterly.** The scattered clouds created some dappled light that cast shadows on Lake O'Hara below. These light and dark areas inspired me to attempt a painterly approach. I knew I would need to brighten the shadows from my first exposure, and my camera's large sensor captured the dynamic range needed to brighten the shadows to a midtone.

**Right: Painterly.** The setting sun was sandwiched between clouds on the horizon, creating natural dappled light that was warm in color. Other clouds in the sky bounced additional light into the foreground, giving more detail to the shadows. Because I was pointing the camera into the sun, I had to shoot a seven-image HDR bracket to capture enough good shadow detail in the foreground rocks.

should be sharpened) within the image.

Because sharpening tools shouldn't be applied globally, Lightroom offers a slider within the Detail Module called Masking, which alleviates potential problems caused by global sharpening. This slider creates a mask of all the regions within your image that hold very little detail and are outside of the kernel. When you increase the value of this slider, more and more of the image is masked away, allowing only specific regions, or what's within the actual kernel of data around all the edges of your image, to be affected by your sharpening settings. If you hold the Option key (Mac) or Alt key (Windows) while dragging this slider to the right, Lightroom reveals the masked areas in black, leaving the region in white that will be sharpened. Slide this right until

the regions like a sky go black. I rarely go past 50, as this will create a visible edge to the mask or kernel.

### Texture

This tool is used to adjust the amount of contrast in detail similar to edges but larger in size. A sharpening kernel of data might hold edges with 1 to 5 pixels. Texture affects edges that are even larger, such as all the limbs of a tree. This tool can also reveal halos when overused.

### Clarity

This is used to adjust the amount of contrast in subjects closer to midtones. It's often used to add more contrast to cloudy skies. This tool rarely creates halos, but if it's used to extremes, it does reveal digital noise.

### Contrast

The Contrast slider affects large regions and is typically used when making global adjustments. This tool controls much larger regions of darks and lights, making everything brighter than a midtone even brighter and everything darker than a midtone darker. There are several other ways to adjust and refine contrast in an entire image, including the Tone Curve, Highlight, Shadow, Blacks and Whites

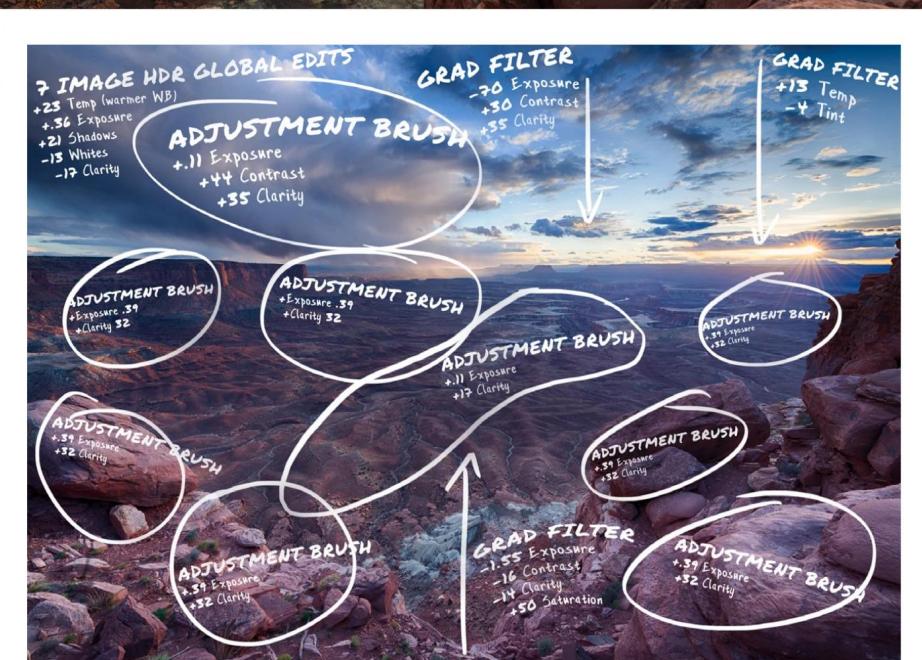


sliders. The Contrast slider is a basic tool that I rarely use because it doesn't offer the control I prefer.

One other tool, Dehaze, affects contrast but is so different from the other tools that I left it out of our discussion on contrast. Dehaze is a combination of contrast and color saturation. Yes, it's true that when you increase contrast, color becomes more saturated, but Dehaze also increases the density of the color as well as the saturation. Increasing Dehaze adds contrast and darkens colors, like using a polarizing filter on your lens.

### The Infamous Tone Curve

Using the Tone Curve takes practice and is less intuitive than a simple slider, so many new users avoid it. I learned how to adjust contrast with a tone curve and still believe it's a very powerful tool. The Tone Curve is a global editing tool and can be compared to the Basic Panel luminosity sliders. There are a few differences between the Tone Curve in Lightroom and Photoshop, but the basic function is the same. It gives you complete freedom



to adjust all the contrast in any image.

You can add points to the curve at any given density between black and white, then adjust that point by dragging it up to make it brighter or down to make it darker. This is all done on the RAW data on a linear scale. The Targeted Adjustment Tool (TAT) can be used to reveal where the density in your image is on the Tone Curve and then edited accordingly. In the upper left corner of the Tone Curve module, look for the small circle and click it once to activate it. Now scroll over your image, and you'll notice the appropriately linked dot appearing on

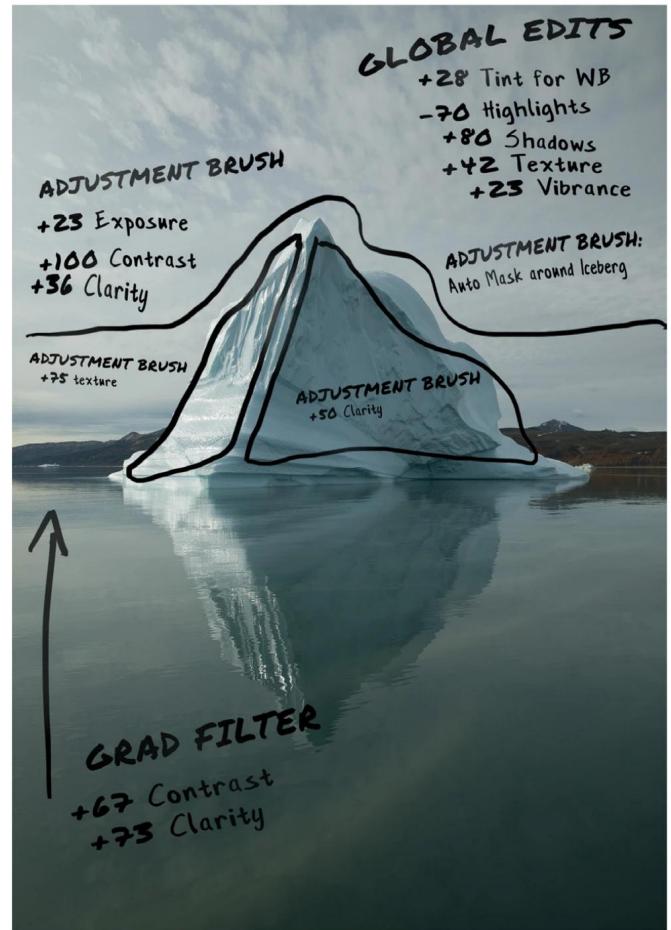
the Tone Curve in the exact location of the density that density is linked to in your tool.

One of the reasons I prefer to use the Tone Curve for larger, more invasive edits is that the tool isn't adaptive based on your image data but rather independent and capable of moving the data the same on any image file. When you use the sliders in the Basic Panel, such as Shadows, Highlights, Blacks, and Whites, it's possible to adjust them too far and create halos between areas of greater contrast. While you can adjust the Tone Curve too far, it doesn't create



**Left: Textured.** Icebergs are a good example of a multi-surfaced subject that requires different tools for different sides. The sky behind the ice needs contrast, requiring a mask. The sunny side of the iceberg requires Texture, and the shaded side requires Clarity. I preferred Clarity on the shaded side because of the lack of fine detail and smooth surfaces. I made a separate mask for the sky and used Contrast and a bit of Clarity.

**Right: Radical.** I made this image with a single file and multiple masks in Lightroom. At this time, masking in Lightroom was new, and I was testing its capabilities. I exposed this scene for the highlights so I would have enough detail in the cloudless sky to capture the morning colors. The shadows were less important for the success of the image because they would become a silhouette.



those same halos because it doesn't use masks when applying the adjustment to the image. The Basic Panel sliders are adaptive to your RAW image data and vary based on those values. Using the Basic Panel sliders may look better on certain images, but there are plenty of times when it's not the superior method to set the contrast range, adjust the mid-tones or add contrast. Without the masking effects, the Tone Curve offers a very powerful editing solution.

### Dark & Moody

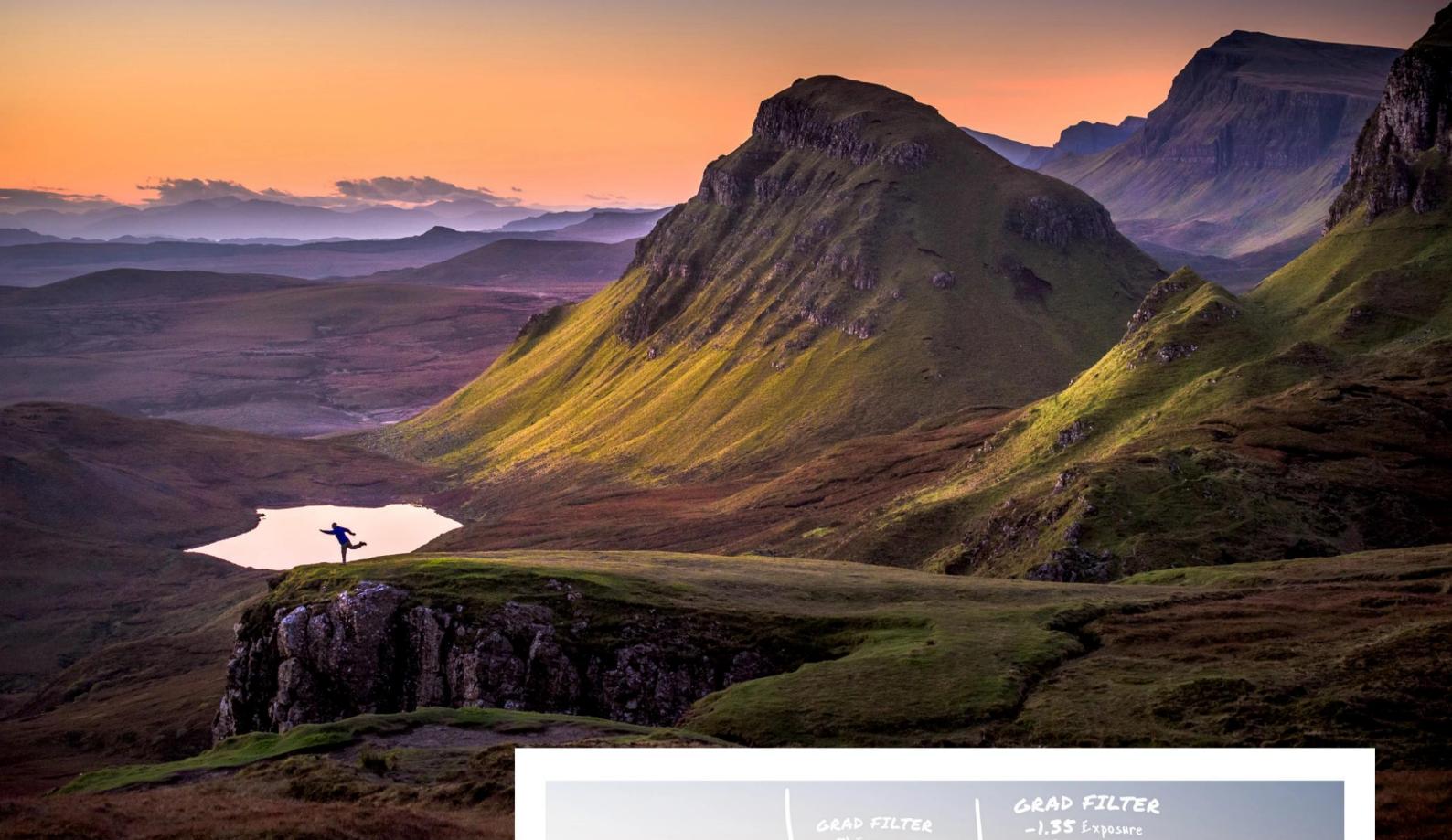
Editing images can be just as exciting as photographing them. Wild weather in remote locations and memories of favorite cinematic Hollywood features have influenced the way I portray my landscape images. The lighting created for

movies like "Lord of the Rings" reminds me of times I've spent in the wilderness. Hollywood is full of examples of movies that portray dark and moody scenes that can influence us in various ways.

A big part of what we remember about times in our lives is the mood. Moods are created by influences we might not understand but direct us in the portrayal of the stories we tell. In the dark of a storm that lasted for days, I remember feeling comforted not by the fury of the weather but by the subtle nuances of what was left to observe, the little things and the stillness. Places where the quiet is loud and reveals an almost motionless and sublime world. I started looking for scenes where darkness comforted me, rather than making me nervous, and settled in over me like a warm blanket.

### Light & Bright

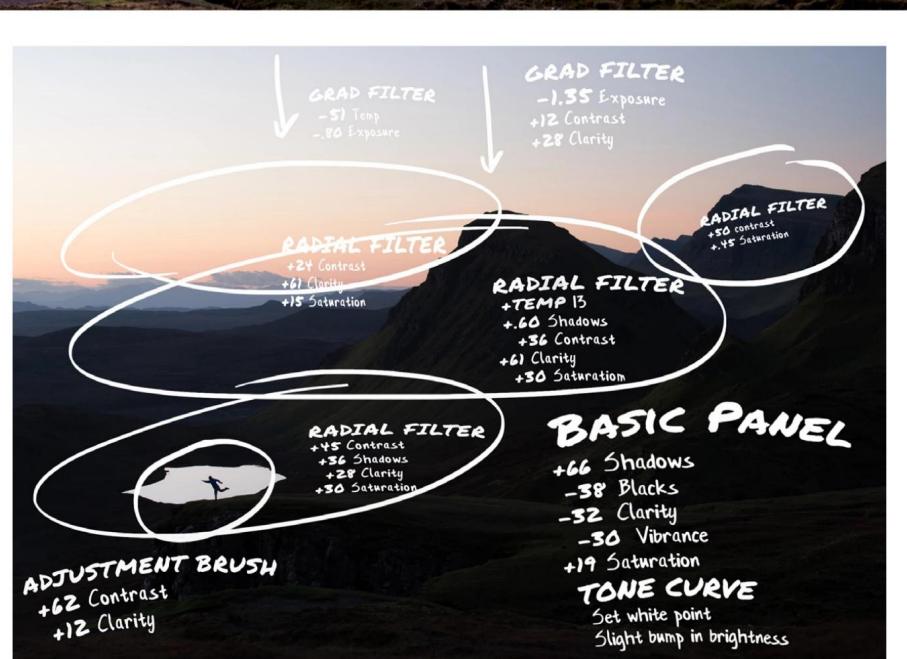
Bright images convey happiness and warmth and can bring back positive memories. Sitcoms in television use high key lighting in most productions to convey the very same upbeat mood. It was originally used back in the film days



to control contrast by simply limiting shadows to fit onto the limited dynamic range of the film. I suppose the technical requirement to lower the contrast ratio determined the light, bright look. This very same method can be used in landscape photography as a powerful tool to create the mood of a scene.

This technique works well in nature if you focus on compositions with structure. Good examples of structure include a dead tree skeleton against a bright sky, patterns of rounded boulders separated by dark shadows and layers of ridges wandering off to the horizon. Each example is a graphic composition with bold lines. I use ETTR (Expose To The Right, discussed in part one of this article series) on many subjects during the middle of the day to accomplish this look.

Brightening an image begins with understanding what you're doing. Many of the shadows become midtones, and most of the midtones become highlights. The highlights might even get blown out or clipped. You create this look when you



brighten all your luminance values by about 25 percent.

### **Painterly**

I'm influenced by the romantic painters of the American West, such as Albert Bierstadt and Charlie Russell. Both of these painters created drama with spectacular light to embellish the scale of the immense grandeur of the West. The scenes included

many vibrantly colored clouds, and some paintings used atmospheric haze to create depth and add scale.

What made these paintings compelling was the dappled light. Often the subject would be highlighted by a shaft of light, resulting in a luminescence that was enhanced by the surrounding shadows. This luminescence is very difficult to achieve when photographing a grand

**Radical.** While I love working in monochrome, I believe that color is more challenging when working on luminosity. When you no longer need to consider color during post-processing, it's a simpler process because color limits each edit by adding the issue of color bit depth.

Once you understand how to process color images, the transition to editing black and white is more straightforward. I was confident that I would convert this image to black and white when I captured it. Why? Because Japanese block carvings inspired me. When you study these works of art, you notice strong shapes created by unusual subject forms. The outlines become the compelling subject, which is exactly what these crazy splashing waves created. I chose to convert this to black and white to focus the viewer's eye on the graphic shapes of the water and sun. The bright sky behind the waves helped delineate the wave profiles to create the necessary contrast. Because it was sunset and the sun was on a hazy horizon, there was much less contrast than during the brighter times of the day. There was very little detail in the shadows, but as you can see here, I used many masks to reveal enough detail to give the water texture.

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scene. Being in the right location to view such magnificent landscapes with a similar light as the paintings became intriguing. I've included two examples here of the very deliberate way I process with this painterly style in mind.

### Textured

I've always been inspired by the amount of detail in nature. The shapes of geologic rocks, ancient icebergs and 3,000-year-old trees all have so much to study. Much of this small detail forces me to capture it with as much resolution as possible. Over the years, I've used many different types of cameras to capture high-resolution images. I've stitched multiple files from full-frame sensors, as well as from high-resolution medium-format sensors. Capturing this much detail is fun to look at and post-process, but it's not the only way to highlight and display nature's details.



### Radical Edits

Out of the shadows! The light that's hidden in the shadows can be amazing. Our eyes don't see everything, and if we don't squint or specifically look at the light in the dark areas of a scene, we might miss it. Light changes quickly, subjects can be moving and sometimes you only have a split second to capture an image. The two examples I've included here are just that—quickly captured scenes with

no time for fancy camera techniques. I used ETTR and hoped that I had enough information in the shadows to allow me to edit to my heart's content.

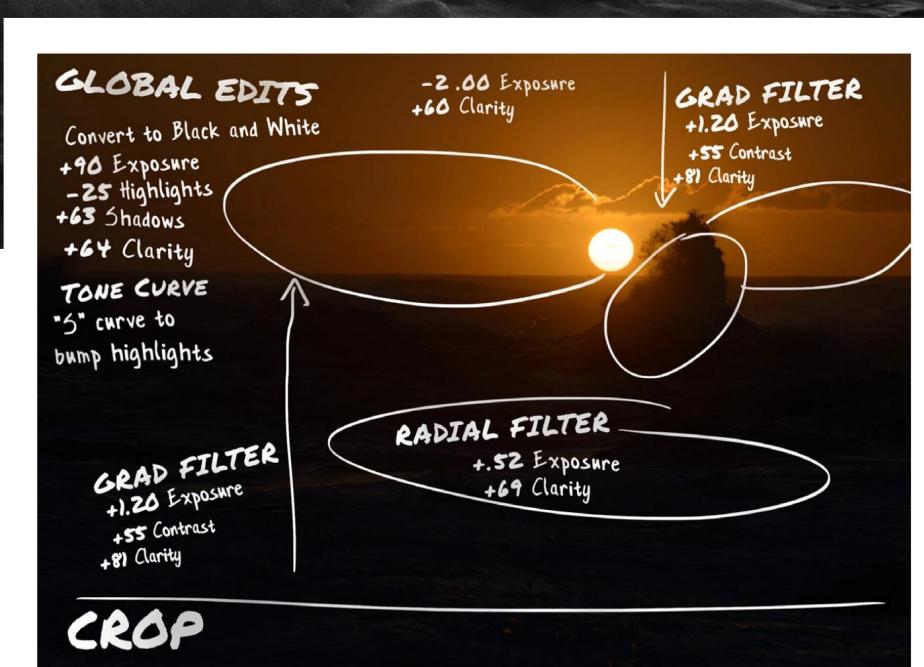
### Mastering The Art Of Luminosity

Understanding light and the impact it has on an image significantly improves the quality of your photography. By observing the characteristics of light, you become experienced in deciding how to visualize



light and how it contributes to your art. When you create an image in this light that you've pre-visualized, it becomes unforgettable. As you put this information into practice, I hope you feel more prepared to capture those fleeting moments. **OP**

This three-part article series is excerpted from *The Art of Luminosity* by Marc Muench, available as a free download at [muenchworkshops.com/ebook](http://muenchworkshops.com/ebook).



## Fairy Dancers

Lake Jesup, Seminole County, Florida

Text & Photography By Linn Smith

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**L**ake Jesup is located in central Florida and is one of the area's largest lakes as well as home to a wide variety of wildlife. Living in close proximity to this area affords me many opportunities for observing and photographing wildlife. To better understand their many complexities and behaviors, I've spent countless hours watching the wildlife perform different activities and capturing these various endeavors with my camera.

When photographing wildlife mannerisms, it's especially rewarding to watch the interaction between members of the same species. On this particular day, after two hours of photographing other birds, I spotted these two great egrets engaged together in movement across the water. They appeared intent to find an appropriate landing spot to begin their search for food. Luckily, I spotted them due to their large size and could check my settings for capturing their landing.

Watching their interaction as they descended to the shoreline and coming very close to where I was positioned reminded me of a dance movement, as if they were performing around a score. Their graceful timing was perfectly in sync with one another and balletic in a smooth, precise touchdown. The rhythmic steps of their descent were fluid in beauty and perfection.

When I returned home and viewed my multiple captures of their flight and landing, I chose this particular image as it seemed to remind me of fairy dancers in a soft mist as they flowed across the water and approached landing with delicate grace. On further reflection and in studying my composition of these two great egrets, I decided to convert the image to black and white in order to emphasize their dreamlike landing. I hope I accomplished this effect.

OP

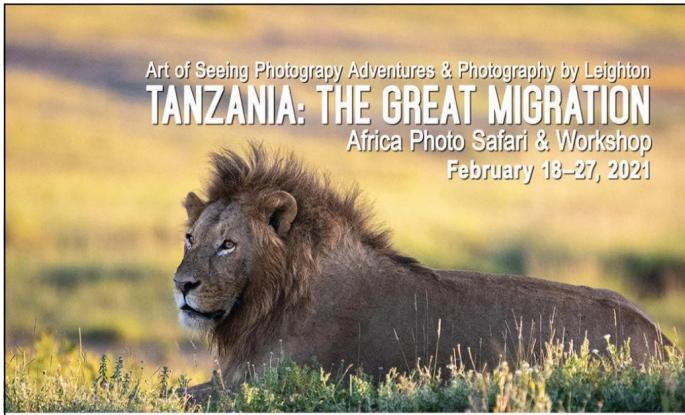
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See more of Linn Smith's work at [500px.com/linnsmith](http://500px.com/linnsmith).

► Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM. Exposure: 1/2000 sec., f/13, ISO 400.







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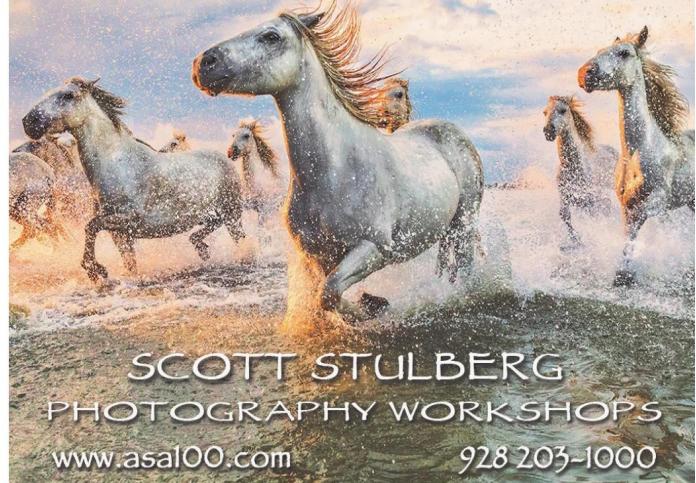
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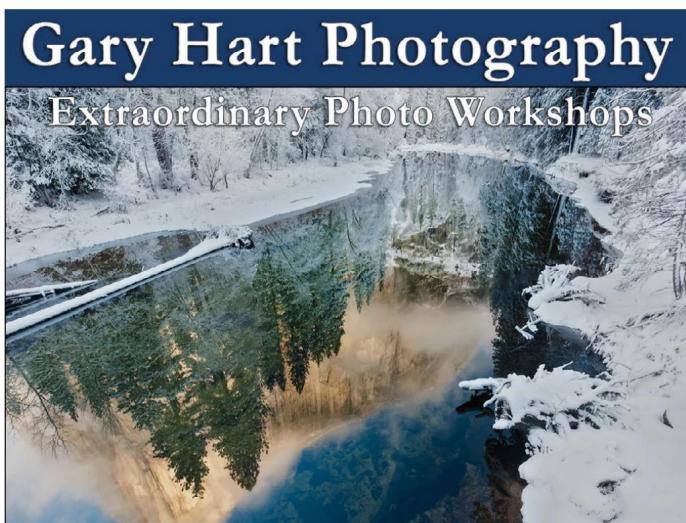
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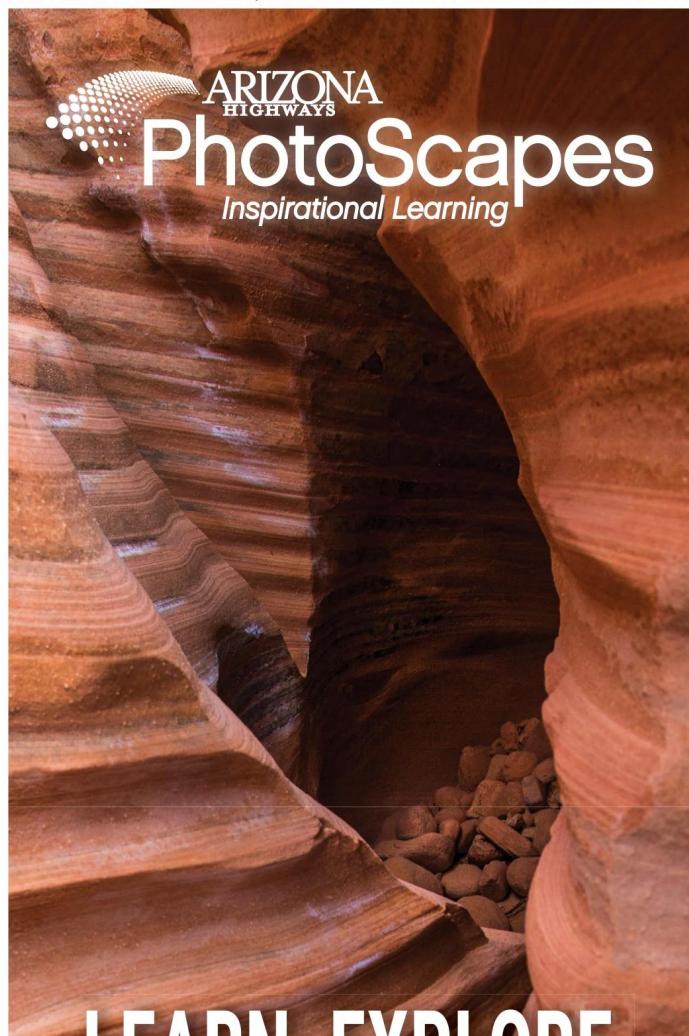
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## Giraffe-itude

"The cold morning air in Bojanala can make you hunt those warm rays of South African sunshine just to break the chill," explains Dutch Dyer. "Several hours into a guided photo safari in the Pilanesberg Game Reserve, we had been on the hunt for some of that sunshine along with what locals call the 'Big 5'—buffalo, elephant, leopard, lion and rhino. My ear-to-ear smile was some indication of how the day was

going. I had also captured shots of hyenas, wild dogs and hippos, but I had yet to add a giraffe to that list.

"We stopped for lunch close to a water source. In the arid African grassland, water is the universal lure, and I didn't have to wait long. I could see two giraffes approaching in the distance, and I moved into position. The young giraffe in this shot drank its fill while the other one kept watch for predators.

Raising its head, the giraffe looked my way and used its long tongue to catch the last drops of water. I laughed out loud."

► Canon EOS 7D Mark II, Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS II USM at 400mm. Exposure: 1/125 sec., f/5.6, ISO 100.

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See more of Dutch Dyer's work at [facebook.com/DutchDyerPhotography](http://facebook.com/DutchDyerPhotography).



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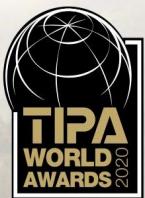
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