

THE IMAGE

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Shooting Great Landscapes. Part 1.

This two-part editorial will help you make the most of your landscape opportunities...

The Right Location.

It stands to reason that location is important. This is without doubt the reason we raise our camera. We look at a scene and say, "this is great. I have to photograph this". However, no matter how beautiful or captivating a scene may be, it is not the entire secret to a great landscape photograph. Often, even the most everyday scenery can be transformed into a stunning landscape – and vice versa. The photographer needs to understand that the camera doesn't remember the context of this scene or the reasons for your being there. It has a limited frame and field of view and yields a silent two-dimensional image that must stand alone. Therefore, working with the location to create visual dynamics is the key. While in reality the

scene may be appealing in itself, its appearance on film may be another thing altogether. The challenge for the photographer is to evoke atmosphere within the image itself. It should also be a dynamic and captivating composition that does not necessarily rely solely upon the beauty or dynamics of the location. Anyone can take a snapshot of a scene in front of them. An artist interprets it.

A successful landscape photograph requires a point of interest. Sweeping general scenes are not eye-catching. They are more like snapshots than works of art. The focal point might be a lone tree in a barren and rugged terrain, an outcrop of rocks, a manmade structure or any aspect of the scene that can be placed within the image to form an interesting composition and perhaps become the reason for the photograph. Once this is chosen, correct placement within the image is imperative for the picture to work. A common and successful formula is the rule of thirds – a rule that despite its everyday use rarely fails to create a pleasing picture.

Perspective is also important. Elevating or lowering your perspective adds another dimension to your picture that creates interest. This is because most people usually view a scene from a standard standing position, rarely changing their viewpoint and thus not seeing the scene from any other aspect. Your doing so immediately makes the image come alive.



Working with the location means more than turning up. It involves all the processes we have discussed

The Right Light

The successful landscape photographer understands the importance of light. This is because the right light is just as much the key to great landscape photography as is perhaps the location itself. Maybe more.

Light adds shape and texture to an otherwise two dimensional image and it can dramatically alter the entire appearance and mood of a landscape. Early morning and late afternoon are without doubt the best times of day to photograph landscapes on cloudless days. When the sun is muted by clouds there is little variation during the day as shadows and colour temperature often vary little throughout the day. However, the early morning and late afternoon sun bathe the landscape in warm soft light that reveals texture and dimension, while simultaneously warming up the scene to invite the viewer.

Midday sun is without doubt the worst time of day for landscapes. It is harsh and produces flat, lifeless images. For the landscape photographer, midday is the best time to catch up on the sleep lost chasing the morning sun. That is about it.

Muted light can also be used very effectively, provided the right approach is taken the right location. Often, the most dramatic landscapes are taken in overcast or even downright inclement weather conditions. The photographer needs to be in touch with the feelings this kind of light conveys and use it accordingly. Light evokes emotions as well as reveals textures and this can be used effectively. Not every landscape photograph needs to pay homage to the rising sun. Colours blend beautifully in muted light and the subtlety of the landscape is revealed. However, these kinds of landscape photographs usually rely more heavily upon composition, as they do not have the benefits of dramatic lighting to enhance the image.

The Right Aperture

In most landscape photography, foreground and background are essential aspects of the image, none being of greater importance than the other. Sharpness throughout the entire image is therefore necessary as an instruction for the viewer to accept all parts of this image as either an indispensable context or of equal value. Where this is not the case, selective focusing and a wide aperture will be your guide to instructing the eye as to the elements of greater importance in the composition.

Even with a small aperture, you may be wasting depth of field beyond the infinity focus point where it does you no good whatsoever. Some lenses have markings that will let you bring that wasted depth of field forward and thus bring your

foreground more into focus. These marks are sometimes found between the aperture settings and the focus markings on a lens. Simply close your lens to the smallest aperture possible or practical and reset the focus so that the infinity marking agrees with your aperture setting on these markings as seen in these photos. By bringing your depth of field forward, you are focusing on a point known as the 'hyperfocal distance', which uses depth of field to cover the rest and make everything sharp. For those with lenses that do not have hyperfocal settings, there is another answer. A less accurate but easier method of employing hyperfocal distance is to close your aperture to the smallest setting and focus about one third into the picture. Almost invariably this will cover you if you are using a wide angle lens and f22 or smaller

Landscape photography can be very rewarding – and also very disappointing. The key to making it successful is in recognising that you are the artist and that whatever has been created prior to your arrival has little to do with your photograph. You must make the image your own - and not just a copy of the scene as you happened upon it.



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