Workshop Notes: How to Take Better Pictures

Workshop Date and Location: 5/25/10, Bound Brook Library, Bound Brook NJ

Workshop Statement

The subject, *How To Take Better Pictures*, cannot be answered by formulas, recipes, or strict rules (although these can help in the beginning). It has individual and subjective meaning.

There are two aspects to photography: craft and art/aesthetics. This workshop addresses the former and brushes against the latter. A solid understanding of the craft of photography is needed, otherwise one must wait for the accident to happen that results in a good picture, and then does not know how to reproduce it.

Again, "better" is defined by the individual. The workshop will be more interesting to you if you email me a one or more issues with your photography that want to make better, or an area you would like to learn more about. Please email to victorlglass@gmail.com

Workshop Leader

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Workshop Participants

Somerset County Photography Club

Pre-workshop Questions

Thoughts About Taking Better Pictures

1. Whether an image is good is a personal matter.
2. The most important thing in a photograph is the content, not how technically perfect it is.
3. Shoot what interests you. If you don't know what interests you go shooting with no goal.
4. Take good workshops and only choose top notch instructors.
5. Shoot often. It takes 10,000 hours of practice to become really good at something.
6. Do not get discouraged with your shooting; the majority of your images will be shit.
7. If you find yourself shooting the same things, try something new and different.
8. When in doubt take the shot. Take it again if it doesn't work.
9. Posing a subject leads to boring pictures.
10. Do your best work and be good to people.
11. Each image should have a single focus; Eliminate anything not contributing to it.

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12. Don't just take a picture and leave. Look at the subject from different angles.
13. Do not use the shotgun approach thinking you'll edit and correct later in *Lightroom* or *Photoshop*.
14. Bracket exposure which gives you a fighting chance of getting a good exposure.
15. Become very familiar with the operation of your camera, ready the manual periodically.

Composition

16. Think about why you are taking the photo, otherwise it's hard to compose it.
17. Look for fresh perspectives on well worn topics, subjects.
18. Include a person in the shot in order to add an element of interest.
19. You are responsible for everything in your frame. Look for things you don't want and adjust accordingly.
20. Draw the eye to the central point/theme of the photo. The eye is drawn to contrast, brightness, color, lettering, geometric shapes (especially triangles). If these elements ARE in the photo but you did NOT want them in the photo then read #19 again.
21. Look at the light and shadow before taking the photo. Don't shoot from the first position you take. Walk around the subject to find the best light.
22. Develop an aesthetic sense of the most pleasing/interesting placement of the subject in the frame. If you must, start with the rule of thirds until you develop your own sense of composition.
23. Scale can make a picture more interesting.

Using On Camera Settings To Improve Your Photos

Digital cameras have many controls that can help you take a better photo. Some are global and others are changed more frequently. Periodically re-read your camera manual to remind yourself of what you can do. Listed below are some important ones.

Exposure Modes: P, Tv, Av, M, Bulb

Exposure is determined by the combination of Shutter Speed and F-stop. Both determine how much light is used for a shot. Except for modes M and Bulb the internal light meter makes exposures decisions. The exposure modes are listed below.

- **P – Automatic.** Shutter speed and F-stop are chosen for you based on metering mode.
- **Tv – Shutter Priority.** You set the shutter speed, the camera chooses the F-stop.
- **Av – Aperture Priority.** You set the F-stop, the shutter speed is chosen for you.
- **M – Manual.** You set the F-stop and the Shutter Speed, the internal light meter is not used.
- **Bulb.** The shutter stays open as long as the shutter button is fully depressed.

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Exposure Metering

You can tell the camera how to read the exposure of the scene. How do you know which one to choose? This depends on the tonal range of the scene, and what part of the scene you want exposed correctly. Listed below are types of metering that your camera may have:

- **Evaluative Metering**. evaluates the entire scene and determines the best exposure. I use this when the scene has good, general lighting, that is, no extremes in the highlights or shadows.
- **Partial Metering** is weights at the center of the frame. I use this when I want the subject to have good exposure, for example when there is bright light in the background.
- **Spot Metering** measures only a small area in the center of scene. I use this to check the metering in different parts of the scene; then I use the M mode to set the shutter speed and the F-stop based on what I think is best.
- **White Balance**. Regardless of the type of light (sun, florescent, incandescent, …) our eyes see white as white with no color cast. However the camera does not unless we tell it the type of light it is seeing. This is called adjusting the White Balance. WB can be changed by adding some degree of blue (cold) to yellow (warm). If you tell the camera that there is florescent (cold) light, then it will compensate by adding yellow (warm). With incandescent light the reverse is true. The White Balance of your camera can be set in several ways.

  (1) By type of light source, as symbolized as an icon, for example sun or cloud.
  (2) There is also an Auto White Balance (AWB) setting where the camera tries to determine what WB to use.
  (3) By shooting a white card and instructing the camera to use the resulting WB.
  (4) Degrees Kelvin.

ISO

ISO stands for the International Standards Organization which sets the standards for many things including the sensitivity of the light sensor in your camera. ISO can range from 50 to 100,000+ depending on the camera. So, when should you shoot at what ISO? There are two important factors in choosing an ISO: Noise and Shutter Speed
.
The Bad. The higher the ISO the more Noise in your photo. Higher end cameras (Nikon D3, D3x, D700, Canon 1Ds mark III, 5D Mark II) have little Noise in higher ISOs. Other cameras have too much noise beyond ISO 200.

The Good. A high ISO allows us to shoot at lower shutter speeds and/or wider apertures Why would we want to do this? If you've set ISO to 100 and find that the fastest usable shutter speed is a 10th of a second (will result in camera shake) then increasing the ISO will allow you to shoot at, say, a 30th of a second.

Exposure Compensation

If I find that my shots are coming out too dark or light even when I'm metering "correctly", I use EC to

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help the situation. EC allows you to increase and decrease exposure by a certain amount, specified in stops (F-Stop).

Exposure Bracketing

Exposure Bracketing allows a scene to be shot multiple times, each with a different exposure: normal (what the meter is reading), an amount less, and an amount more. The amount more/less must be the same and is in stops. A note: when using bracketing you must also set drive mode from single shot to continuous. Then when you depress the shutter bottom three shots will automatically be shot, each having a different exposure.

Other Parameters

You can make global changes to your camera to improve your (jpg) images. In doing this you may be able to use images straight from the camera without the need for adjustments in LR or PS.

- *White Balance*. In processing images I consistently had to reduce the amount of blue (what should have been pure white had a blue cast). So, I compensated for this IN CAMERA and I no longer have to do so while post-processing images on the computer. Some cameras have the ability to change the WB and the Tint. With WB you control the amount of blue and yellow. With Tint you control the amount of green and magenta.
- *Sharpness.* First be aware that digital images usually require some sharpening due to the nature of digital capture. Sharpness can be increased in-camera and/or during post-processing. Experiment with in-camera sharpening to see if it helps.
- *Noise Reduction.* Noise is an electrical phenomenon that occurs in digital camera sensors. Some cameras have more noise, particularly at higher ISOs, than others. Noise can be reduced in-camera or during post-processing.
- *Contrast.* Contrast increases the "pop" of an image. It can be changed in-camera or during post-processing.
- *Saturation.* Saturation is the "strength" of a color. It can be changed in-camera or during post-processing.

Answers To Pre-workshop Questions (from a previous workshop)

- *Taking better close-ups.* Use a lens designed for close-ups, a macro lens. I don't have one and plan to buy one when I have the money.
- *Talking to people I'd like to photograph.* This was well addressed during the workshop. Suggestions: (1) don't sneak or hide; (2) use good judgment – don't put yourself in danger; (3) you can ask permission or just shoot ; (4) if the person objects don't just walk away, be friendly, wave to them, talk to them, explain why you are taking the picture, etc. (use your judgment); (5) practice.
- *Light. I seem to take some pictures that lose color and look pale*. ON WHICH DISPLAY device do they lose color or look pale? On the camera's LCD? On your computer monitor? In a print? The point I'm trying to make is that there are lot of reason why this can happen. What you can do IN-CAMERA is play around with these controls: exposure, saturation, contrast. Also what

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you see on the camera's LCD will NOT necessarily be a good representation of your picture - it is only a thumbnail. Also each computer monitor has its own color idiosyncrasies. Monitors need to color calibrated to honestly represent the colors of an image. So, when you adjust these problems during post-processing note if they occur consistently try to make in-camera adjustment to compensate.

- *Night shots*. Explanation of lens that can be used at night w/out flash. I get some good effects but weird. By the way, weird results can be very good. To shoot at night without a tripod you need a fast lens, a lens with a wide maximum aperture, like at least 2.8. Image Stabilization (IS) in the lens or camera helps. If you are not using a tripod brace yourself using a wall, column, horizontal surface. Hold the camera with your elbows close together. If you are able to use a tripod use one.

- *Flash photography.* Oh my gosh, this deserves a separate workshop.

- *I would like to take better travel pictures*. Don't shoot scenes that are commonly found on postcards. Shoot anything that interests you, even if it seems weird – I like to shoot my meals. If you see something you want to shoot but the lighting is wrong, come back when the lighting is right. Shoot early in the morning and/or late in the after noon – this can be in conflict with what your traveling partner wants to do.

- *Understand how to override the automatic settings*. We covered this, but not as much as deserved due to time constraints.

- *How to compose more interesting pictures.* We covered this, but to really deal with it you should take a workshop where you shoot and then review. Shot what interests you. Make it your own by adding something to it that is unique.

- *How to shoot a scene where natural light from the background doesn't interfere with the subject in the foreground*. Use fill flash. If no flash then change the metering mode to either center weighted or spot and meter the person and not the bright background.

Photography Workshops

You can get a lot out of good photography workshops. But like any other education thing, the teacher makes or breaks the course. Below is a list of people that give good workshops – I've either taken these workshops, met and talked to the person, or heard from good sources that the workshop is worth it.

- *Jay Maisel.* http://www.jaymaisel.com Any workshop with Jay is worth it. He runs an intensive week-long workshop several times a year in NYC. He also does workshops at the Maine Media Workshops http://www.mainemedia.edu

- *Greg Heisler.* http://www.gregoryheisler.com Inspiring, plain talking, entertaining, and expert. Gives workshops at the Maine Media Workshops (http://www.mainemedia.edu/).

- *David Turnley.* http://www.davidturnerphotography.com Pulitzer winning photographer leads workshops in NYC. There's lots of one-on-one. http://www.davidturnerphotography.com/

- *Ken Shung.* http://www.kenshung.com Ken Shung's workshop at the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in NYC is quite good http://www.schoolofvisualarts.edu/ceCourseFinder/app?sDay=0&sTime=0&sLoc=&sDept=&sCourse=&sInstructor=shung&sKeyword=

- *Seth Resnick.* http://www.sethresnick.com/ THE workshop to take on the digital workflow.

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- *Victor Glass*. http://www.pbase.com/vglass/workshops Vic has designed two new workshops: *Mastering The Digital Workflow* and *Fine Art Printing*. Contact him if you have would like to take one at victorlglass@gmail.com