The Art of Landscape Photography.

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As photographers, we are trying to go beyond simply reproducing the three dimensional view in front of us and then converting it to a two dimensional image on a camera or phone screen.

We are capable of so much more, and that is the focus of this evenings talk.

Why, the, ‘Art’, of landscape photography ? I believe that if you approach photographing a landscape, a scene, in a similar way to an artist embarking on a new painting, we discover that the two disciplines have similar rules, techniques and elements. An artist thinks about how to recreate and express a particular scene using, for instance, canvas, oil paint, brushes, a palate of colours, s/he may have a story in mind too, as well as bringing their own style to the work. An artist is likely to have researched the landscape, they may have preliminary sketches, knowledge and a connection with the scene that they hope to convey to an audience.
All of these apply to you, the landscape photographer, but you may not yet have realised it yet.

**How do landscape photographers translate scenes that a viewer may have no connection with, into images that are engaging & interesting?**

In other words, how do you start to move your landscapes from making a viewer, who might feel ambivalent, not particularly interested or lack understanding of the content; to, liking and appreciating your photograph and hopefully wanting to see more! How do you start being able to produce images that capture whatever it is that drew you to a scene in the first place? Without the need to say, ‘you really had to be there to appreciate it’.

I’m going to talk about four habits that I think anyone can adopt straight away to improve their photography. But, all of them require some work!!

1. **Creativity.**
2. **Technical photography skills.**
3. **Patience and concentration.**
4. **Attention to detail.**

If you already have some under your belt, you’re ahead of the game. However, until they are habits, keep working on your skills. If you don’t feel that you are a very creative person, then start with landscapes that you can represent in a more straightforward, representational way. Architectural photography is a good place to start. Practice getting all those horizontal and vertical lines straight, look at shadows, parallels, look at the textures in the building materials.

Next time you are in or near an interesting building, try photographing it. But, before you raise your camera to you eye, what do think will make a good focal points or point? (less is more, remember, you can’t capture everything). Try shooting from a few different angles, look for the **leading lines** and **vanishing points**, where is the eye being led? What are the possible distractions in the scene? Look at what’s happening in the corners of your photograph and start by following the, ‘**rule of thirds**’, until it becomes second nature. Look at the connections between the different architectural features of buildings and within buildings, arches, beams, walls and looks at where the light is coming from.
What effect do the rows of chairs have in this photograph of Lincoln Cathedral?

If you are already a creative person, your focus for improvement might need to be finding that point of interest in the scene, the aspect of an image that will draw in the viewer. Again, look at the scene from different angles. Which might mean getting down on your knees, or even lying down, to get a building reflected in a puddle or getting the froth as a wave comes right in, but you’ve also got the horizon in the shot to, right!

Look for, foreground interest, trees, boats, stones, etc that a viewer sees first before they are drawn to the mountains, horizon etc, give your photograph layers of interest that take a viewer into the image. But keep it uncluttered and strong and start thinking about the story and mood of the image.

**Critique photographs that you like:** Look at the big picture, then look for the details these provide context, without detracting from the focus of the photographs. Try not to get diverted by the detail in your scenes, use the points of interest to enhance what's happening, but, it's the big picture you want. You’re a landscape photographer!

When you think about your photography, ask yourself, 'who cares?' ‘what interest is this to a stranger?’ harsh, but the only way you will draw people to your images, is by making them care, be interesting and create images that speak to your audience, visually, obviously!

**Attention to detail and the big picture will keep your viewers engaged.**
Look for the sailor about to throw the rope in this photograph of the Star Ferry, Hong Kong.

Composition and **light** are everything, you’ll hear this said by photographers the world over!

**Composition**, literally what’s in your photograph, what is it composed of and where are those elements in the frame? Good composition takes practice, it matters, it’s the **shape** of the image.

If I’ve taken several shots of one scene, I look at the shape of the images on the back of the camera and download the one with the most pleasing composition to further edit, checking that its tack sharp first though! Good composition comes from practice and training your observation skills….combined with your artistry. Have a look at professional photographers work to see how good composition can be achieved in a variety of different situations.

**Light**, you’ll have heard of the, ‘**Golden**’ hour, that hour or so around sunrise and sunset, when conditions for photography are about as perfect as they’ll be all day. There’s also
a, 'Blue' hour, the hour after the sun has set and you can get some wonderfully soft tones, particularly good for black and white photographs.

Cloudy weather creates a very different mood in landscape photography. Look at where the train track is positioned in the composition.

In the UK, sunshine can be a rarity, but that mustn’t stop you !! Learn to work with the weather and light. If there is very little sun, look for textures in your surroundings, drama in the clouds, look for the shapes in landscapes. Be brave and try the, M, manual setting on your camera. Set a high ISO, try some long exposures, play around with the light that’s available, think black and white for images taken with poor light.

A little bit of technical information:
What do you need for landscape photography ?
1. A wide angle lens (not always, but 80% of the time they’re used for landscape photography )
2. Set your ISO to 100.
3. Use F16 (so that you can get as much in focus as possible)
4. A tripod if you want to take long exposures of the light in fading.
5. A polarising filter if you’re somewhere with bright sunshine (lucky you !!)
Where is your gaze drawn to in this photograph of the board walk leading to Marsh lock in Henley-on-Thames? Notice that the walkway takes up the whole width of the frame, what effect does this have on the composition?

**Image tweaks that can be done after you have taken your photographs:**

1. Straightening horizons and verticals.
2. Cropping for a better composition.
3. Brightening and or a bit of colour saturation. (careful here though!)
4. Pulling back highlights to reduce glare.
5. Lightning shadows to increase detail in darker parts of the image.

If you try to take good images to start with your editing will be minimal. But usually some editing does help to enhance what you’ve taken and, again, this is about art, about creating an image that a viewer will look twice at, or three times! A well executed and sympathetically crafted image is what we’re moving towards.

**If you need inspiration for your photography,** good places to look are travel books, interior design coffee table books and cookery books, the ones written in a way that
they are travel books too. Photography books can be more weighted toward equipment mastery rather than creativity.

Don’t spend too much time comparing your photographs with the hundreds posted on photography website. These shots are taken in ideal conditions, which could have meant a two week wait for a shot, they are often heavily edited and quite possibly composite images, using a lot of very expensive equipment and at least one flight and a long drive to get to the location. However, the work of professional landscape photographers are good places to go to for ideas and inspiration. Try critiquing one or two images, you’ll find a common formula in many landscape photographs and you can try out the techniques in your own photography.

Think about a small project to set yourself, start a portfolio to collect the images you take for the project. Doesn’t need to be a big trip or anything expensive, find interest in the everyday. Think about what kind of photographer you want to be, work at it, keep practising and you have a hugely rewarding future of photography guaranteed.

*When your creativity, artistry, knowledge of your surroundings and technical photographic skills all come together. That’s when the magic happens.*

*Ruth E Morris*

*If you would like to receive my bimonthly newsletter, send your name and email address to: ruthemorrisphotography@gmail.com*