

PHOTOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUES

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GENERAL

Q.: How can I become a good outdoor photographer?

A.: This is a complex question but let me give you some thoughts which may be helpful:

Exercise regularly and be able to walk long distances with a heavy load. Not very many outstanding pictures are found near a parking lot.

Do not let physical difficulties and an adverse weather discourage you. Most of the unusual images have been made under difficult conditions. Professional or serious amateur photography is hard work.

Always take a camera along when going somewhere and do not forget the polarizer, the graduated neutral-density filter, and the flash.

If you always use the auto focus and auto exposure modes, you are not a serious pictorial photographer.

Lighting is the most important factor determining the quality of the image. The work day of an outdoor photographer begins at sunrise and ends after sunset.

Plan ahead your day of photography but are prepared to react quickly to some unexpected opportunities. Although an outdoor photographer has usually time to compose the picture, some situations require the ability to compose rapidly.

Shoot plenty of film or digital images. It is better to discard ten images than saying that if I only had taken one more shot....

If using a digital camera, do not rely on the LCD screen to determine the quality of the captured image. The color density and depth of field cannot be judged on the screen. Download the images as soon as possible to view them.

Be familiar with the digital editing in the Photoshop.

Q.: What is the first thing you would suggest to a beginner?

A.: Before taking a picture, decide which format would be better, the horizontal or the vertical. This advice seems to be superfluous but observe people taking pictures. The camera is held almost always in the horizontal (landscape) mode, even when photographing portraits.

Q.: Has the digital photography lowered the quality of photography?

A.: Yes, but not for technical reasons. Digital photography has several important advantages over film. The sensitivity (ISO) and the white balance can be changed to fit the lighting conditions, an instant review of the histogram helps to optimize the exposure, and the noise of digital images is much less noticeable than the grain of film. Editing of images is much easier than in the wet darkroom. The resolution of the top digital cameras is comparable to that of film and better than the resolution of scanned transparencies. All these features enable the photographer to make excellent images. Many of the digitally made prints are very good indeed, although the overuse of digital editing has produced a lot of kitsch.

The degradation of quality has occurred in the point-and-shoot area. Years ago the film was expensive and an effort was made to make every photograph worthwhile. The

pictures were stored in the family albums to be viewed even many years later. This has changed. The main purpose of the “consumer” photography is no longer to record the important events and photograph family members for archival storage. Photography has become a telecommunication tool. Most of the images made by digital cameras are never printed. The images are mailed electronically to the friends and relatives and serve a useful but different purpose. The quality of the pictures is no longer as important, the ease of capturing the image is paramount. The cell phone has become a convenient picture making tool. The phone is always available and the picture quality is sufficient to show what Baby Johnny looks like.

TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY

Q.: Is travel photography pictorial photography or photojournalism?

A.: Travel photography can be both, depending on the intended use of the travel pictures. The primary purpose of pictorial photography is to create beautiful images of a country for photographic exhibitions, magazines and books, travel brochures, picture postcards, and calendars. Pictorial pictures show the beautiful side of a country without attempting to balance beauty and realism. Pictorial beauty of a travel photograph is achieved by an artful presentation of a scene or the local people, not by a manipulation in the computer.

National Geographic has been known for its high quality photography but the new editor-in chief of National Geographic, Chris Johns, has changed the magazine and embarked on photojournalism. He prefers pictures to be a little rough, more revealing than a perfect postcard or calendar picture. He believes travel pictures should not look produced but tell a candidly recorded story. Photojournalism has the objective to tell it the way it is, without esthetic preferences.

Photojournalism in extreme is looking for the shock value by recording misery, poverty and human suffering.