

PETER EASTWAY AND BETTER PHOTOGRAPHY MAGAZINE'S
CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY FOR PHOTO TOURS AND WORKSHOPS

COMPOSITION



Better
Photography

Argentine Islands, Antarctica. What appears balanced and well-composed to one photographer may not to another. So suit yourself!



CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY FOR PHOTO TOURS AND WORKSHOPS

EXCERPT: COMPOSITION

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Monument Valley from Hunts Mesa, late afternoon. A high horizon line puts the compositional emphasis on the foreground.



Composition And How To Use It

Composition is a skill which, once mastered, can transform your images into masterpieces.

The camera manufacturers would have you believe that their fully automatic cameras will make you a great photographer. Perhaps they would be more accurate to say they can make you a great technical photographer – one who gets the focus and exposure correct most of the time.

However, we're yet to see a camera that will tell you where to point the camera, how to frame the subject and when to press the shutter.

So how do you learn to point the camera in the right direction and press the shutter at the right time?

Experience and learning from observation. This is the only way. Some people can be lucky and take one or two excellent photographs, but the best photographers are committed. They have put in the hours to learn their art. They take lots of photos and they look at all their results – critically.

The great artists we revere today all started somewhere. Most of them went to art school where they learnt the basics of

drawing and painting. Many also studied under 'the masters' where they could develop their talent and understand the thought processes behind 'great art'.

So why do photographers think they can just pick up an automatic camera and take great photographs? Automation is one thing, but it doesn't replace the thought processes. It can't give you ideas or experience.

To become a more proficient photographer, you need to expose yourself to a wide variety of ideas and images by other photographers, artists and writers.

However, don't just look at the photos or paintings, study them. Where has the photographer positioned the subject in the frame? What shape is the frame? What is the main light source? How does the light reveal the subject? Is colour an important element? Why? How many colours are used?

Remember, you're not looking at these images to copy them, but to learn about them. Decide what works and what doesn't.

Although there are rules of photography, there's nothing to stop you from breaking

them. What's important is to learn a variety of ways of analysing and photographing a subject, and then to apply it to your own work. Hence the need for practice.

Composition is a broad topic and there are lots of aspects to consider: framing, centres of interest, dividing the image area, colour, lines, shapes, repetition, texture and balance. All these concepts are as fundamental to art and cinematography as they are to photography.

Perhaps the best place to start improving your photographs is with framing. Framing is not just about how close you are to your subject, but what you include and exclude in the photograph.

Before you press the shutter, take a look around the viewfinder. Where is the subject? In the middle? Why? Probably because that's where the autofocus gunsight is! Stop being lazy – anyone can take a photo with the subject in the middle, but how many photographers take a look at what's around the edges?

Some of the most common mistakes

are portraits of a family member with a tree growing out of his head! By simply moving your standpoint, you could move the tree to one side of the head (or perhaps select an aperture to throw the background out of focus). Simple, but fundamental.

A new standpoint might solve the tree, but what else is in the photograph? A brightly coloured chair, someone's shoulder or an unsightly piece of rubbish? By simply reframing the photograph, you may be able to eliminate these. Walk in a bit closer or zoom in...

While you're moving the camera around, see what effect positioning the subject on one side of the frame has. Think back to a lot of the really good portrait photographs you've seen in books and magazines. Where has the subject's face been positioned in the frame? Chances are it's not bang in the middle!

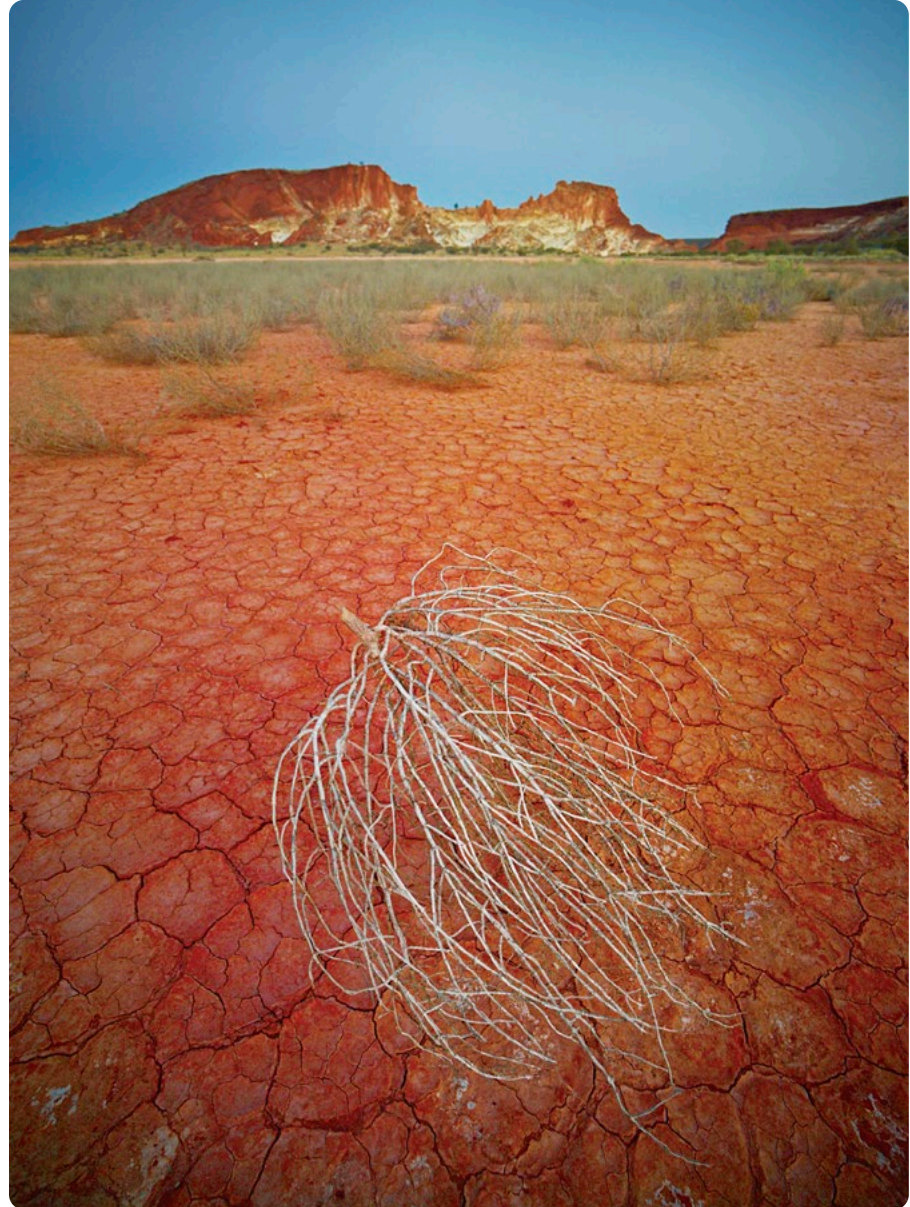
There's lots more to composition, so turn the pages and have a read.

But remember, these are just suggestions to get you thinking!

Telephoto lens. Compresses distance so the background looks closer than it is.



Wide-angle lens. Creates depth, so background appears further away than it is.



Lenses In Composition

Perspective, along with light, can give a photograph its three-dimensional characteristics, even though we all know that a photo is only two-dimensional.

The lens we choose can have an effect on the perspective we see in our photographs.

Wide-angle lenses generally deepen perspective while telephoto lenses compress it.

Wide-Angles

Wide-angle lenses have a focal length wider (smaller number) than 50mm on a full frame DSLR, 35mm on an APS-C size camera, and maybe 25mm on a Four Thirds sensor camera. These are approximate focal lengths, but the point is, when it comes to creating perspectives with incredible depth, the wider the lens the better.

A wide-angle lens reduces subject size in order to encompass more. As a part of this process, there is an exaggeration of size for nearby objects compared to more distant ones.

In addition, there is some image distortion – the objects in the photograph are stretched towards the sides of the frame. The net result is an image which can have an incredible 'depth' to it.

You almost feel like you can walk into a landscape captured with a wide-angle lens.

To enhance this feeling of depth, you can include a foreground object (such as a rock or a tree) so that it is large within the frame. Its relative size is exaggerated when compared with the rest of the landscape behind. The result is very powerful.

A 28mm lens (for a full-frame DSLR) will produce some feeling of depth, but the wider you go, the easier it is to create depth. A 20mm is great, a 17mm better still.

If you go even wider to a fish-eye lens, while you create a great feeling of depth, there are lots of curved lines to deal with which are not always appreciated.

Telephotos

The opposite to depth is compression, where objects that in reality are quite distant from each other appear to be stacked up on top of each other.

Telephoto lenses produce compression and once again, the longer the telephoto the greater the effect. There is a very moderate

Ultra wide-angle lens. The camera is only 15 cm away from the ice in the foreground.



amount of compression with a 100mm, while at 200mm and 300mm the effect is more obvious.

If you can go to a 400mm, 500mm or 600mm, compression is very obvious, especially in distant landscapes.

For compression to be obvious, you need to have two or more areas within the frame. A popular example is a series of mountain ranges, one behind the other. While the ranges may be ten or fifty kilometres apart, in the photograph they look very close together.

Atmospheric haze also enhances the compression effect because, the greater the distance, the more haze you are looking through. Haze has the effect of reducing contrast and often produces a

blue colouration. If you can find a viewpoint where the line of sight is just skimming across a series of mountain ranges, the effect can be magnificent.

Compression doesn't just work with landscapes. Many portrait photographers prefer a slight telephoto because it has a slight flattening (compression) effect on the face, and this flattening is flattering for many subjects.

If you've bought a camera with a standard zoom lens and you're wondering why other photographers are producing more interesting images, in some cases it could be their choice of lens gives them an unfair advantage.

Unfair? It's only unfair if you don't join them!

Viewpoint

Many photographers reach a destination, step out of the car or coach and take the first scene they see. Sometimes the car stops in exactly the right position, but more often than not, you can find a better angle somewhere else.

Or perhaps they are taking a portrait, so they stand up and shoot from a comfortable standing position.

Shooting from these viewpoints are comfortable for us physically and chances are they are also relatively boring. To create stronger compositions, you should consider your camera's viewpoint first. It's better to have an angle that is interesting to compose, than composing a boring angle!

One of the easiest ways to find better viewpoints is to go exploring. When you reach a popular destination or a lookout, by all means take the 'tourist' photo, but then walk around. It's amazing what you will find by simply going to the side, or stepping back, including some trees in the foreground, or shooting between two rocks.

Sometimes getting a better angle will involve a lot of extra effort. If the really good photos were that easy to take, they'd become the normal postcard shot and there'd be an escalator taking you up to the lookout! Some locations are exactly like this and some locals at tourist spots also know that they make a good subject and charge to be photographed. Good luck to them!

There are two other things you can do to create an interesting viewpoint: shoot low

and shoot high. Most humans look at life from one and a half to two metres above the ground.

Most photographs are taken from the same height.

Immediately you change the height of your camera, you also create an image which looks different and potentially has more impact.

Getting down low is easy to do, but it only works if you have a foreground. If you're shooting a landscape from the edge of a cliff, then whether you're standing or crouching doesn't make much of a difference.

However, if you are including the edge of the cliff in your frame, then a low angle will bring the rocks and grass on the cliff into view. They will appear larger in the frame (they are closer to the camera) and, if you're using a wide-angle lens, the foreground can lead the eye into the distance.

There are many situations where getting down low can make quite a difference. If you have trees in the foreground, why not lie down on your back and look up, with the horizon low in the frame. Or place the horizon high in the frame and focus on the ground at your feet – the small pebbles can appear the size of boulders (this technique

works best with a wide-angle lens).

The second option is to gain a higher vantage point.

Some photographers use a very tall tripod and carry a ladder in the back of their car or van. It's amazing how even an extra one or two metres altitude can change the perspective of a landscape.

Another option is to climb a nearby hill or mountain, or jump into an aeroplane, helicopter or balloon and take a true aerial perspective. It can be even simpler than this

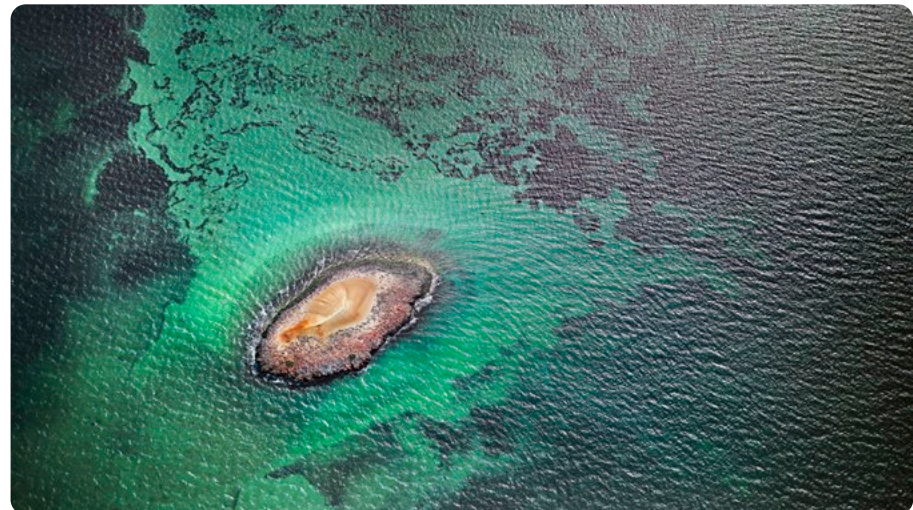
– climb the stairs and look out the window.

If you choose to shoot a photograph with a different viewpoint, do it in such a way that the viewpoint suits the subject.

Try not to use a high or a low viewpoint on a subject just because you read about it here – you will find some subjects work well while others are not so successful.

Choosing a high or low viewpoint doesn't mean you should never shoot from a standing position, rather that you should think about your options.

Aerial Viewpoint. Shooting from the air is very popular, especially with drones.



Looking down. Getting above your subject gives a different viewpoint.



Close up. Little things can have great interest when used in context



Looking up. A low camera angle can make your subject appear more imposing.



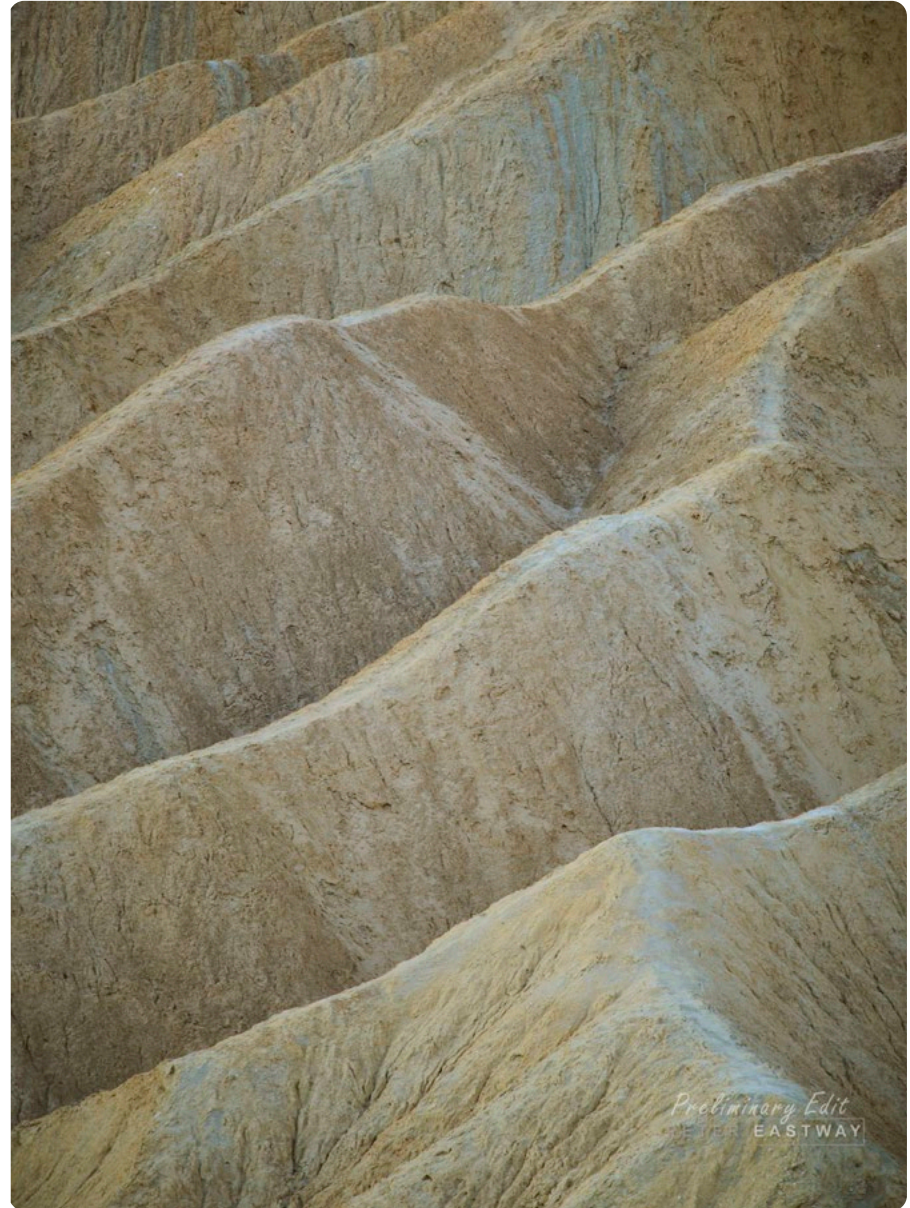
The Wide View. Establishes the location - it fits it all in!



Choosing what to include/exclude. Does this work better with the sand flats above?



The Detail View. Eliminates the surroundings so the viewer can concentrate.



Framing

Framing determines what you include in your photograph and, equally importantly, what you exclude.

It sounds simple enough, but it's amazing how easy it is to get the framing messed up in the heat of the moment. When all the action is happening in front of the camera, whether it's the fleeting smile on a subject's face or a burst of sunlight onto a spectacular landscape, we tend to forget about the camera and just look at the scene.

Click.

The problems are only revealed when we see our photographs afterwards – the horizon isn't straight, there's a rubbish bin in the corner, and the subject that seemed so close to us looks like it's a million kilometres away in the photograph.

Thank heavens for digital cameras because we can view our framing on the LCD monitor immediately afterwards. While this isn't always a good technique, it is certainly very useful when you're learning how to frame your subject and practising.

The size of your subject within the frame is important. If it is too small, there will be too many other elements in the frame which are distracting. If the subject is too large within the frame, you mightn't get a sense of place or location.

With a portrait, you need to decide how

big the person's head should be in the frame, or whether to shoot a full-length portrait?

In landscape photography, there are often lots of different points of interest that make up a great scene, so it can be tempting to simply put on a wide-angle lens in order to fit it all in. But will this framing make an interesting composition?

Sometimes a wide-angle lens is the right decision, but don't be scared to shoot landscapes with a telephoto where you pick out a single element of interest and make that your subject.

When you come across a subject with lots of potential, shoot lots of different images – some with your wide-angle and others with your telephoto. By experimenting, you'll soon discover what you like – and you'll probably be surprised from time to time what works the best. This is all a part of the learning process.

Zoom lenses are certainly helpful for framing, but don't just set the zoom at its minimum or maximum focal length, use the mid-range settings to correctly frame your subject.

And if you don't have a zoom lens, use your legs!

(Top) Tight framing excludes unwanted surroundings, concentrating our attention on the subject. (Bottom) Expansive framing with a wider angle includes the subject's surroundings, showing us where the subject is. The framing you choose depends on the purpose of the photograph.

As a suggestion, follow this process (when you have the time) to carefully compose your image.

1. What is the purpose of taking the photo? What is it designed to show?
2. What is surrounding the subject? Does it help the story or hinder it? Does including the surroundings make the story too complicated, or would excluding the surroundings mean your subject was out of context?
3. If your subject will work best with a minimum of surroundings, use a telephoto lens or move in close with a wide-angle lens so the subject fills the frame.
4. If your subject needs to be seen within its surroundings, how much do you need? Use a wider lens or step back to include the surroundings.
5. Now, look around the edges of the viewfinder frame. Is your subject contained within the frame, or if it is cropped off, is it done in a pleasing way?
6. When you look at the subject's surroundings, are there bright distracting areas or intrusive objects that could be cropped out, or perhaps hidden by moving the camera position?



Cropping Options. This single image has been cropped many ways. Which do you like?



A N I N T R O D U C T I O N T O C O M P O S I T I O N

Cropping

We are not restricted by the shape of the rectangle used by our camera to record the image.

Most cameras record a 3:2 ratio rectangle – the long side is 3 units to the short side's 2 units. However, there are lots of other cameras with a 4:3 ratio, a 16:9 ratio and even 1:1 (square).

The point to notice is that choosing the shape or ratio of your picture frame is up to you, and if you don't want to use the one that comes with your camera, you can

use Photoshop or Lightroom etc. to create a different frame, simply by cropping the image afterwards. Be brave and try it!

You can also choose whether the image is to be vertical or horizontal. This is usually decided at the time of capture, but there's nothing stopping you from turning a horizontal photo into a vertical, assuming you have enough pixels to play with (most



modern cameras do).

The act of cropping an image means you're removing some of the image area. Where you crop is important. Just as you needed to make decisions when framing your subject in camera, so you should make decisions when cropping your subject.

For instance, in the photo above (this page), the farmer is positioned centrally in

the frame. Would the photo look better if the farmer were positioned to one side (previous page)? For some people, having the subject off-centre creates a more interesting composition.

It's easy enough to turn this photograph into a vertical, and when we do, we can choose where to place the farmer within the frame. Does it work better with the farmer

on the left or on the right?

Because the farmer is turned to camera left, more space on the left of the frame (top right) seems to work better (is better balanced), than when the farmer is positioned on the left and the space is behind him. In comparison, the farmer sits quite nicely in the middle of a square, but what do you think?



Centre of interest. This is a relatively obvious centre of interest – the ship in the harbour.



Centre of Interest

Most photographs have a centre of interest. A centre of interest is just that, a part of the photograph that is of particular interest.

Sometimes it is our subject and the reason we are taking the photo, but it could also just be a small part of a larger scene.

Compositionally, the centre of interest should be the most important element within the frame. For instance, it could be a single tree in a forest of trees, a person running along a beach, or a ship in a harbour.

Generally centres of interest are only a small part of the frame and are used to balance the surrounding area.

And there can be more than one centre of interest in a photograph.

So why are centres of interest important?

Compositionally, this is where our viewers' eyes go. They look around a photograph and generally settle on a centre of interest. As photographers, it's our job to ensure our viewers look at what we consider is the centre of interest.

For instance, there might be an interesting tree in a landscape. One way to ensure the viewers only look at this tree is to eliminate everything else from the

photograph. This is where framing and viewpoint are so important because they can help you isolate your subject and create a centre of interest.

Unfortunately, this isn't always possible. For instance, because of the tree's location or possibly our viewpoint, we could be forced to include other 'compositional elements' such as more trees, shrubs or rocks. These other elements can fight for attention with the tree, so if we can't eliminate them from the scene (or we don't want to), we might have to use other techniques such as lighting, focus or post-production processing.

We can also use the position of our subject within the frame.

Composition revolves around the centre of interest and where we place it within the frame can influence what our viewers think about it.

When our subject is positioned in the centre of the frame, it is considered to be very strong, but also static and a little boring.

Make the centre obvious. Here post-production has highlighted the headland, making sure everyone knows it is the centre of interest.



If you position the centre of interest to the side, it is more dynamic and can suggest movement.

Think about where you usually place your centre of interest. Most photographers place it in the middle and this is quite logical because generally we also focus on the centre of interest.

Since autofocus cameras generally have the focusing points in the middle of the viewfinder, guess where most photographers leave their centre of interest after focusing?

Sometimes, the middle of the frame is exactly the right position, but not always.

If you're putting your subject in the middle of the frame simply because it's easy to do so, you're putting it there for the wrong reason.

Another position might make a much stronger, more interesting photograph.

Eyes. In a portrait, eyes are often the centre of interest.



Rule of Thirds

Once you've determined your centre of interest, exactly where should you place it in the frame?

The centre of the photograph, as discussed already, is not usually the best position for your subject; somewhere off to the side is generally better, but not too close to the edge of the frame.

Many photographers use the Rule of Thirds to help with composition and as long as you remember that rules are meant to be broken, it's not a bad starting point.

The Rule of Thirds is loosely related to the Golden Mean, a classical ratio used by the Ancient Greeks and also found occurring in nature.

However, the Rule of Thirds is a little simpler to calculate and suggests you divide the frame into three sections, first horizontally and again vertically. You position your centre of interest roughly where the lines intersect, so this gives you four options.

Some cameras even overlay a grid in the viewfinder to help you compose better photographs, but don't be too precise in your positioning. Your centre of interest needn't be exactly on the intersecting lines – near

enough is often good enough.

You also don't want to position your subject on this grid if it means adversely changing your framing.

There's no point including a rubbish bin in the side of your image, just to get your centre of interest in the right place. Better to first omit the rubbish bin, then get the best compromise possible for your centre of interest.

There are a lot of photographs where the Rule of Thirds simply won't work, because of the size or shape of your main subject. However, there are other compositional devices, such as lines and shapes, which can be directed along the Rule of Thirds to strengthen composition.

For most people, working out how to use composition requires experience. With experience, you look at lots of different photographs and paintings, and you assess them. Eventually you have a feeling for what works, and what doesn't.

Some researchers have delved into

Central & Offset. The background is centred, but the subject is not, creating interest.



the mathematics and geometry behind composition and although helpful, for every image that proves the rule, there seems to be at least another that breaks the same rule.

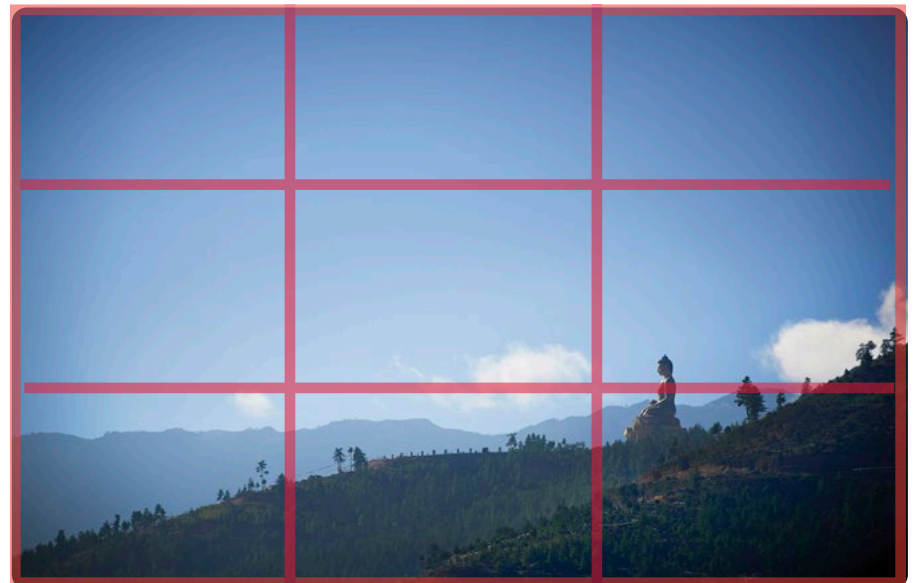
Composition is a difficult thing to teach because it depends in part on aesthetics, on culture and even fashion.

For instance, in a country where the script reads from right to left, composition is

often considered stronger when it's opposite to what we in Australia would consider best, because we read from left to right! So, what works in one culture might be less effective in another.

Nevertheless, although composition can be difficult to pin down, there's no doubt an understanding and appreciation of the issues involved makes a big difference!

Rule of Thirds. Always remember that this is just an approximate rule. Your subject doesn't have to be right on the intersection – nearby is often more than close enough.



Horizon Placement

Most of us tend to think of the horizon as a line evenly positioned between the sky and the land.

However, when you look at a photo with the horizon bang smack in the middle, it can be a little boring. In fact, when you're starting out, it's a good idea to make sure your horizon is not in the middle. (Just don't forget that you're expected to break all these rules from time to time!)

Often it's far better to place the horizon either towards the top of the frame or down the bottom, positioning it so there's no doubt your placement was intentional. (In other words, don't move the horizon line just a fraction off the centre because it will still look like you've put it in the middle, but couldn't get it quite right!)

There's no need to look for a dictionary definition of 'horizon', because no matter what or where it is, the horizon is really just a compositional 'line'. Compositional lines can be real or implied. For instance, a river snaking through a valley creates a curved compositional line. The sides of a building are vertical lines, while the roof might have a number of diagonal lines. The horizon is typically a horizontal line, but in the case of a mountain vista, it might be a jagged, irregular line consisting of a number of peaks and troughs.

If the horizon is the main compositional

line in an image, its placement sets the scene because it determines which part of the image is more important.

For instance, if the horizon is placed in the lower half of the image, there will be more sky than land and so the sky is said to be dominant. You would use this horizon position if the main subject were a brilliant sky or some thunderous clouds.

If the horizon is in the upper part of the image, then the landscape below is the dominant area. This horizon placement concentrates the viewer's attention accordingly.

Were the horizon in the middle of the image, neither landscape nor sky are dominant and the message sent could be that the photographer doesn't know what's more important. In fact, the photographer could appear relatively disinterested.

Of course, there are times when the horizon can happily sit in the middle of the image. You might have a reflection, for instance, and want to create a symmetrical image.

More likely, however, your subject is dominant in the frame and the horizon becomes a secondary element, possibly out of focus. Again, an issue to be aware of.

High or low? A high horizon emphasises the foreground, a low horizon the sky.



Central horizon lines can be okay! Compositional rules are made to be broken and sometimes a central horizon is exactly what is required.



Classic landscape composition. When you find a great landscape, walk around until you find an interesting foreground. The sky or horizon becomes the third element.



Fore, Middle, Background

Although not exactly a compositional rule, there's one trick that many professionals use to compose a good image.

And while you don't have to use it all the time, if you're struggling to find the perfect angle, it might help.

The trick is to include a foreground, a middleground and a background.

This might sound pretty obvious because surely every photograph has a foreground, middleground and background?

Not so. Imagine you're on the edge of a cliff photographing a mountain range on the other side. There is no middle-ground between you and your subject, and unless you point your camera downwards with a wide-angle lens, there won't be any foreground either.

In this situation, one solution would be to step back from the edge of the cliff to include some foreground – you might be able to frame the landscape with the branches of a nearby tree or shoot across the top of some long grass. Admittedly you still don't have a middleground, but you have created a sense of depth in your image.

Or perhaps you could move a long distance back from the edge of the cliff so the trees along the cliff edge become your middleground?

The theory behind the foreground,

middleground, background technique is to create a sense of depth (three dimensions) and to give the viewer an entrance to your photograph.

Their eyes can begin in the foreground, move to the middleground (which could be your main subject or centre of interest) and then into the background (which could also be the highlight of the composition).

In terms of portraiture, you may leave the foreground and background out of focus, while keeping just the middleground (with your subject) in sharp focus. The result also produces an interesting image, with different levels of depth to work with.

When travelling and visiting landmarks that have been photographed millions of times before, using the foreground, middle-ground, background approach from a different viewpoint can create a new twist on a popular subject.

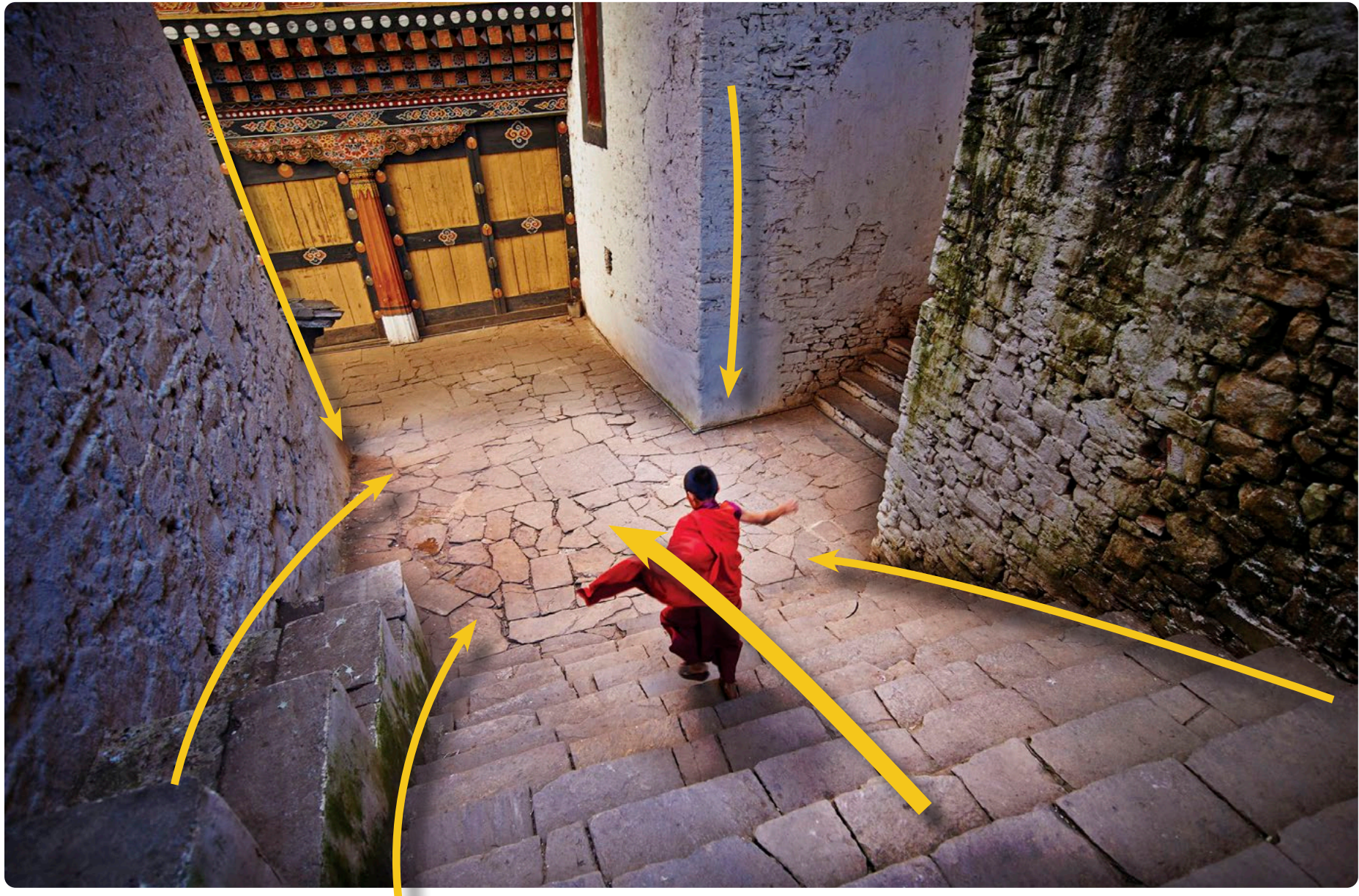
And that's what good composition is all about – creating a twist that makes the image even more interesting than it is.

Notice that selective focus on your subject with foreground and background out of focus is another version of this technique – see photo on the bottom right.

For both landscape and portraiture. Three areas of importance to lead the eye.



Real and implied lines. The lines of the building walls are all leading to the centre of the image – and meeting the ‘implied’ line created by the direction of the running monk.



Lines and Leading Lines

All photographs are made up of lines and shapes – the trick is to use them as compositional assistants.

Lines can be real, like a horizon, or imaginary, such as an implied line between two subjects or objects in a composition.

A line may be simply the edge of a shape, the border between two areas, or a real line like a telegraph wire.

Leading lines are lines that lead the eye around the photograph. So, a good example of a leading line is the languid curve of a river snaking its way through a landscape. We start at, say, the bottom of the image and our eyes trace the river through the image to the top. The line is 'leading' our eyes.

When putting the camera's viewfinder to our eye, it can take a little practice to notice exactly where the lines in a photograph are. When we look through the viewfinder, we see the subject as it is, rather than a series of lines and shapes. However, pressing the shutter and then reviewing the image on the camera's LCD screen can be a great way to better analyse your composition. Because the LCD shows a two dimensional image, our minds can more easily see the lines and how

they link our centres of interest together in the composition.

Lines don't have to be physically evident in the photograph. Lines can be implied between two or more points of interest, so if there are two people standing in a courtyard, then there is an implied line between them.

Nor do lines have to point directly at your subject or centres of interest. They merely have to support a direction or an action. For instance, a car on a road, travelling from left to right, is supported by the line of the road itself, but it can also be supported by a line of trees running in the same direction.

It can be difficult to isolate single compositional rules within a photograph and many of the photos in these articles could be used as examples for several compositional tools.

Everything links in with everything else and a successful photograph may use several compositional devices, each supporting the other and building towards a more successful image.

Leading Lines. Rivers, streams and paths can be used as leading lines in your images.



Patterns & Repetition

Repetition as a compositional tool seems to work for most viewers, probably because people like to see lucky coincidences.

Sometimes several centres of interest can produce an interesting image and if the centres of interest are all the same or similar, so much the better.

To see one object in a field can be great, to see two, three or four in a row, all exactly the same is a bonus.

Exactly why people like seeing multiples is something the psychologists can debate; but for photographers, repetition certainly works.

Some of the best repetitions are created when your framing is tight, meaning the objects being repeated are quite large within the frame. If the repeating objects are too small within the frame, there often isn't sufficient impact or importance. A telephoto lens is often the best choice so you can 'get in close' and concentrate on the repetition, excluding competing elements within the scene.

Pattern is similar to repetition, but on a

larger scale. Patterns can be found in fields in a landscape, tree trunks in a forest, or ripples on water. Some patterns can be found in textures, such as bark on a tree or sand on a beach.

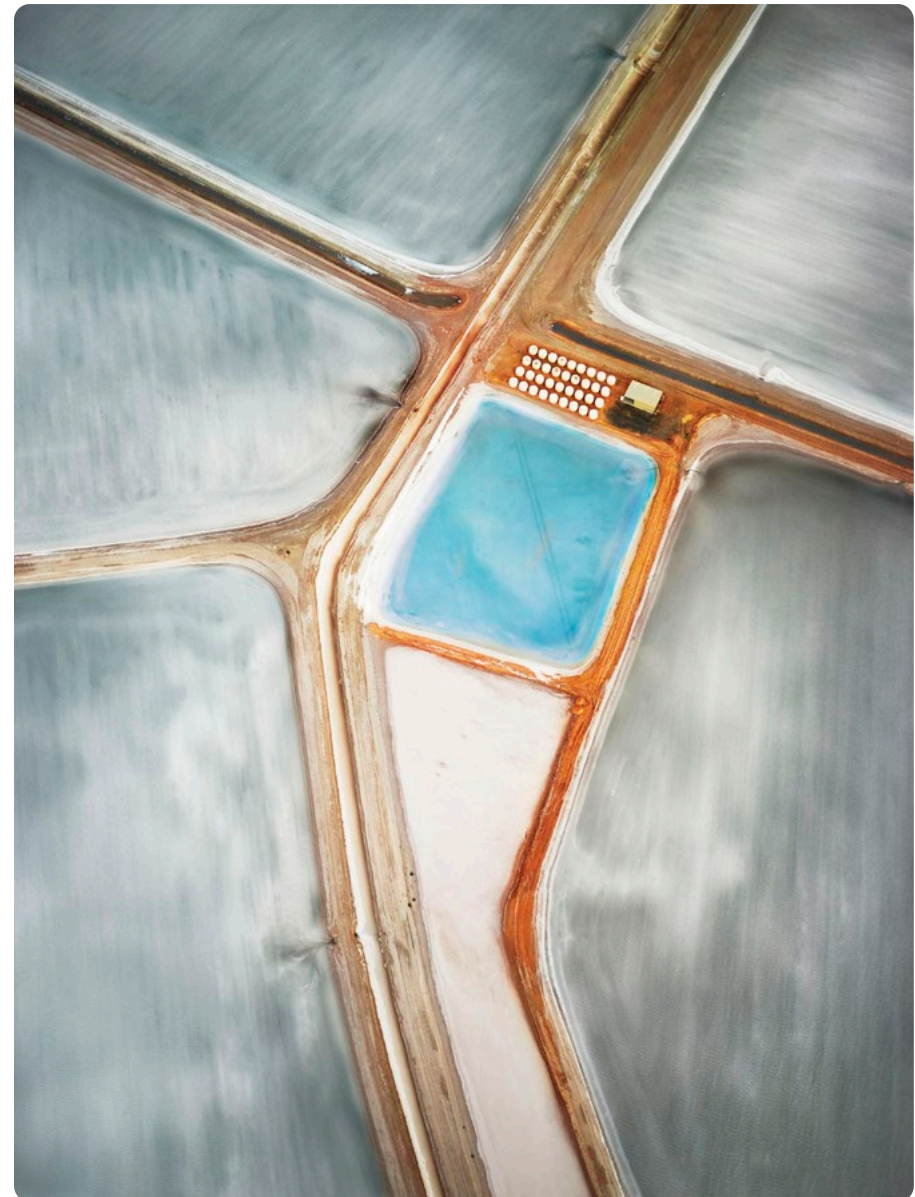
Sometimes patterns work without a centre of interest, as long as the pattern extends from one edge of the frame to the other.

Patterns lose their impact if there are other compositional elements intruding into the frame. However, pattern photos are usually best presented with other images taken of the same location to give them some meaning or context.

Both patterns and repetition can work really well if there are some noticeable differences in one or more of the subjects.

A row of people can look great, but if the second one from the end is wearing different clothes or has a hat on, it creates more interest.

Repetition of shapes. Even if the shapes are exactly the same, it can work.



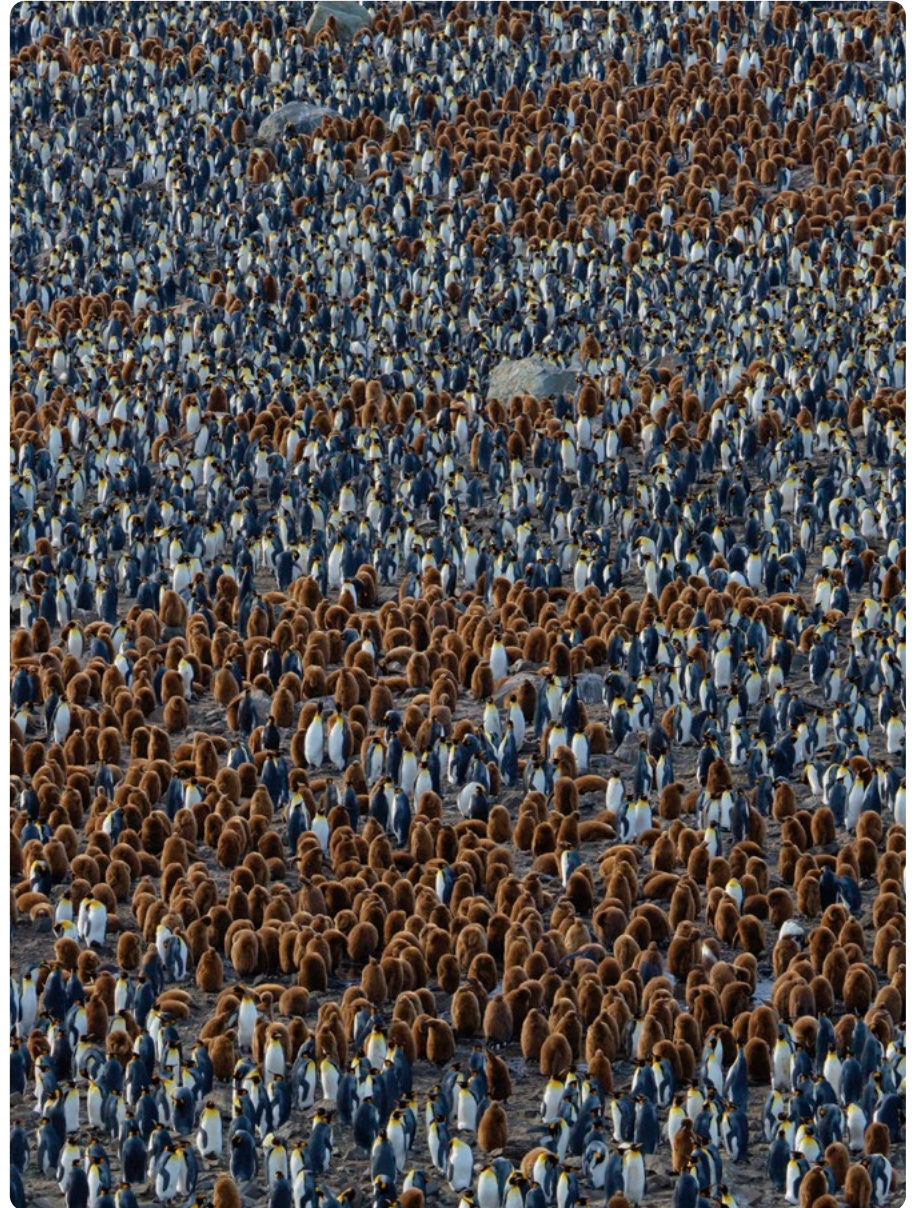
Stupas in Bhutan. One is interesting, a dozen even more so.



Repetition as Pattern. Repeating the shapes creates an irregular pattern.



Patterns in nature. Adult and adolescent King Penguins make a remarkable pattern.



Balance

Balance is a compositional tool which often works in tandem with the centre of interest.

When we talk about balance, we often think of two objects the same size. For instance, two people the same size and shape, sitting on either side of the frame, would be considered balanced. Balanced and probably a bit boring!

However, while a ton of metal will balance a ton of feathers, in terms of size and area, the ton of feathers will be much larger.

In the same way, a small compositional element within a frame can balance a much larger element elsewhere. A small wave can balance a large wave, a single red leaf in a tree can balance one hundred surrounding green leaves.

Compositional balance can also be implied. A lone building in a large open expanse or perhaps on a hill covered with trees, can appear balanced – the small structure balances the huge space surrounding it. It is considered balanced because the importance of the building is so much greater than the empty space or the surrounding forest.

The next question is not so easy to answer: how much space or how much bigger can one compositional element be than another and still end up with a balanced composition?

There are no hard and fast rules and it

depends on the subject matter, lighting and a host of other issues.

To achieve balance may require you to crop your image, to change the amount of space or the position of elements within the frame.

When shooting with your camera, consider taking some wider views of your subject which will allow you to crop them later on. Most cameras have sufficient pixels to allow you to crop and still produce a high quality image.

Balance is a tricky concept to explain, but with a basic understanding, you can start to look at photographs in a new light.

One of the main reasons particular photos work so well is that they are compositionally balanced.

(Top) Although the two waves are of different sizes, the smaller wave in the background 'balances' the larger wave in the foreground. Balance doesn't mean equal size, but position in the frame is important. (Bottom) The small chapel in a forest of trees is considered to be balanced because the compositional 'strength' of the little building is so much greater than all the surrounding trees.



Light Is Stronger Than Dark! Small areas of bright light can easily 'balance' large areas of shadow.



Tonal contrast. The light on the side of the face and the book use tonal contrast.



Colour contrast. The bright blues of the girls' attire provides colour contrast.



Colour & Tonal Contrast

Using colour and tonal contrast might seem obvious compositional tools because these attributes allow photography to depict in two dimensions what we see in three dimensions.

And good colour and tonal contrast is often determined by the quality of light we use as it is light that creates the colour and tonality in our images.

So, can we control colour and tonality? Obviously we don't always have full control, but we can choose the time of day or the location where we take our photographs to create a particular type of tonality or colour.

For instance, shooting a landscape late in the day often provides long shadows which give shape to a landscape, and the colour of the light is warmer and sometimes more appealing.

In terms of portraiture, we can choose to shoot in bright, midday sunshine for a harsh rendition of our subject, or move into a shadowed area and control the way the light falls on the face.

These decisions that we make all affect the colour and tonality of our photographs and have a big impact on the resulting composition.

However, we have even more control than this. Our choice of camera angle and

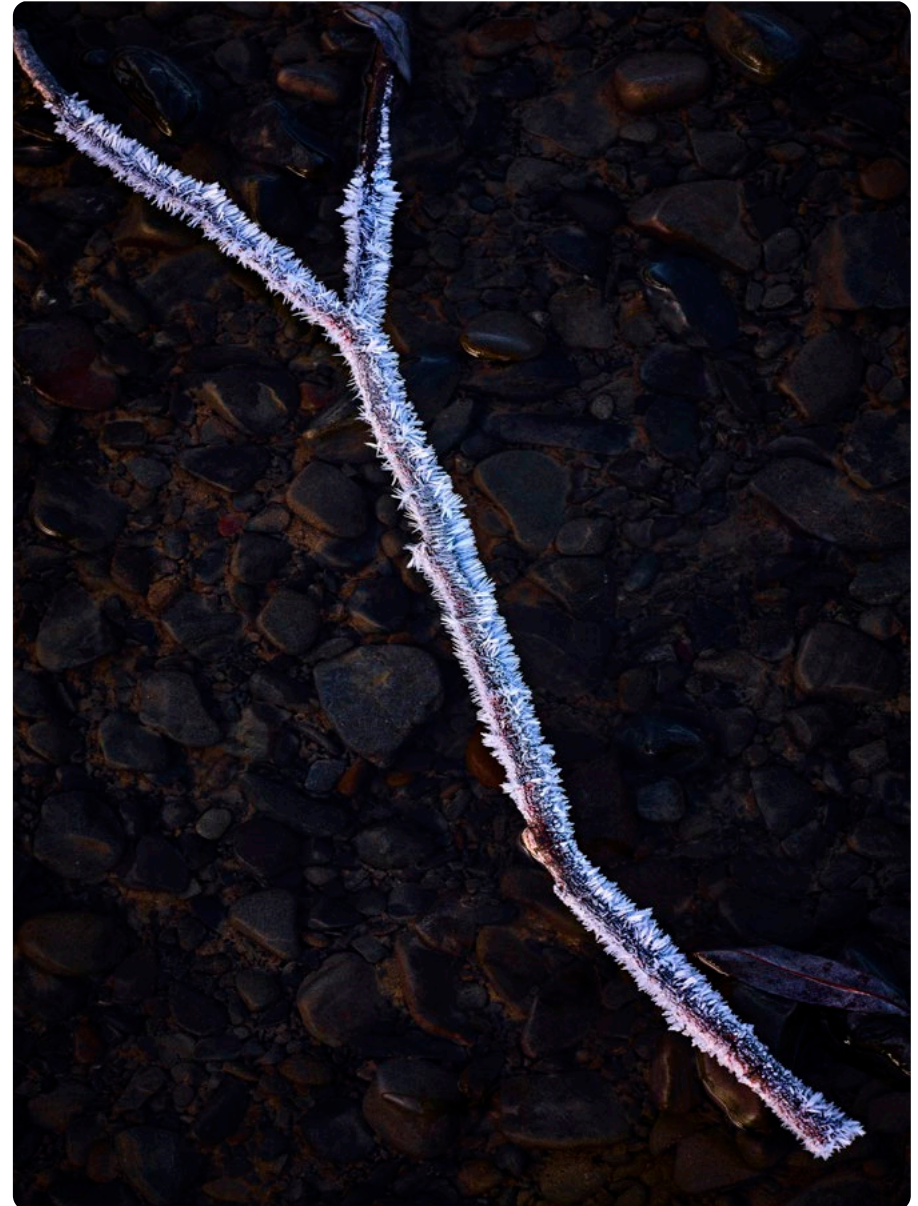
subject can allow us to control to some extent how much colour there is in a photograph. We are used to seeing lots of colour everywhere, so one way to strengthen a composition is to concentrate on just a small number of colours. This can also be achieved in post-production, by changing colours that don't fit in.

Some strong compositions are created by having an image with predominantly a single colour, but a small section creates a compositional contrast with a different colour.

Tonality can be used in a similar way. You can use tonality to darkend down most of the image, and just lighten up the subject. Similarly, you can soften the contrast of most of the image, but give the subject extra contrast.

When looking at the image in terms of colour and tone, associating your subject with a colour or tonal difference attracts your viewer's attention. Emphasising your subject this way is what subtle compositional control is all about.

Colour and tonal contrast. Light blues contrast against dark browns.





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Why I love magazines...

by Peter Eastway

When you get into photography, everyone says you need a good camera. And a good lens, a good monitor and good software. But how many people suggest that what you really need are good ideas?

Don't get me wrong! I love buying new equipment - it's part of the thrill of photography. However, I've never taken a great photograph without first having a great idea. It's ideas and inspiration that will set our photography apart, not equipment which everyone else can buy too!

My ideas have come from reading and writing articles. Sometimes I'm reading someone else's ideas, sometimes I'm writing down the ideas of an amazing photographer I interviewed. And these ideas are ones I would never have thought about on my own. I'd never type these ideas into Google because they're simply not on my radar - and that for me is the brilliance of magazines. It only takes one idea or one image on one page to give you a great idea - a new direction, a special technique, a different concept.

Years ago I wrote a book review on Creative Elements: Landscape Photography written by Eddie Ephraums. This book was

written very much like a magazine, showing Eddie's remarkable photography in a way I hadn't seen before. On the first page of each chapter, he showed the original photo and then opposite was his final interpretation. The differences were magical, inspirational - and achievable. On the following pages, he explained how he captured the photos and the steps he took in the darkroom to create the final result.

Yes, in the darkroom! I said this was quite a few years ago!

Around 12 months after reading Eddie's book, I was standing on a stage receiving the 1995 AIPP Australian Professional Landscape Photographer of the Year Award. I'd submitted four prints that were heavily inspired by Eddie's approach.

Interestingly, Tim Griffith who had won the overall 1995 AIPP Australian Professional Photographer of the Year had also read Eddie's book. It was just one idea that took us to places we'd never been before. And Tim had read about Eddie's book in a magazine as well.

I won the AIPP Professional Photographer of the Year another 12 months later and again in 1998, but I was feeling stuck. I felt I

had taken Eddie's initial inspiration as far as I could and I was looking for something new.

Around this time, I interviewed legendary advertising photographer Nadav Kander and afterwards we had an informal chat over a drink. I explained the creative block I was experiencing and asked him if he had any advice. He asked me how I had got to where I was. It was an interesting question and I answered that I was just living my life, but always on the look out for new ideas and opportunities. He replied, "So relax, sit back and wait for the next opportunity. It will arrive."

And so it did. A year or so later, I moved more seriously into digital (I think I bought a 3-megapixel DSLR from Canon) and suddenly the world of photography opened up yet again. I could now take Eddie's original inspiration in directions I'd never previously thought of.

As my photography developed, I found myself working with leading camera and software manufacturers from around the world - Canon, Adobe, Phase One, Capture One. They found the way I and a handful of other leading photographers approached our work new and inspiring.

And I put all this down to my involvement with magazines, not because I was writing them, but because of the ideas and inspiration I was exposed to. The same ideas and inspiration that every subscriber got to read as well.

And that's why I'm passionate about photography magazines. They are written by professional and enthusiast photographers who are willing to share their ideas and inspiration which in turn provide the catalyst for readers to transform their own photography.

Most of us love the idea of buying a new camera, but once purchased, what are we going to photograph with it? How are we going to use it? And how will it help us make better photographs without better ideas?

This is the concept behind every issue of Better Photography magazine. We've never had an equipment focus, rather we follow a strategy about sharing ideas and techniques.

What ideas and technique could you learn? Subscribe now and find out!



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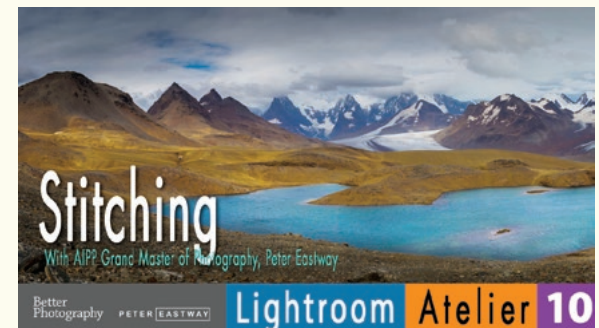
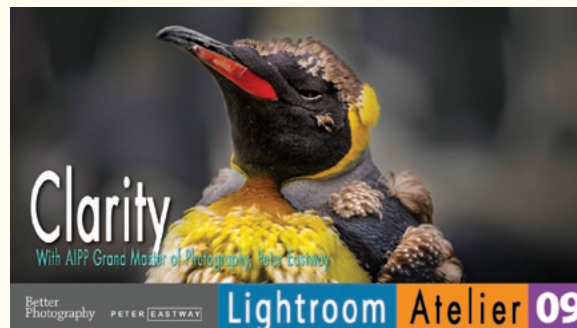
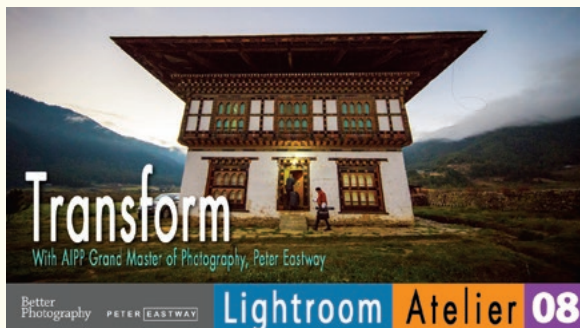
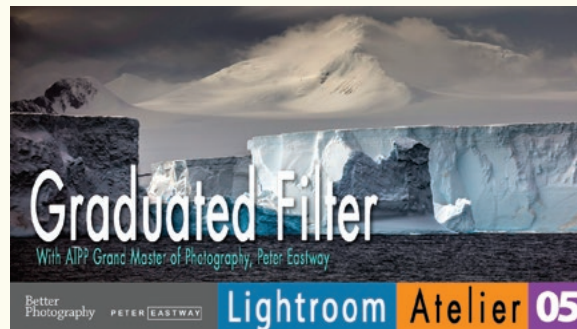
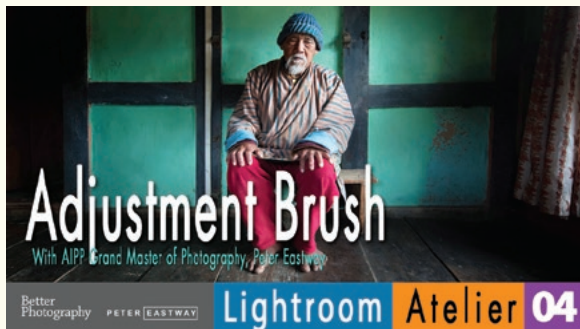
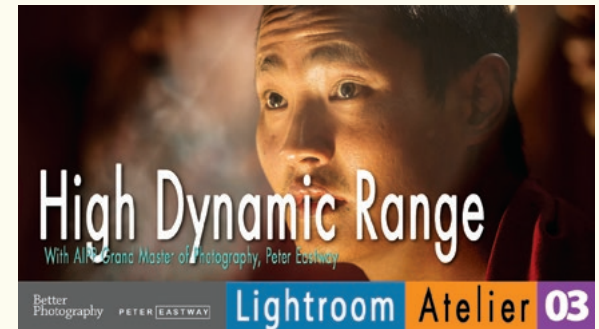
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