TIPS & TRICKS

Photography

ISSUE FOUR

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Welcome Back!

Well it's been a while since we put out an issue. I think its likely a combination of the spring weather beginning to show up and just the general hectic schedules that can occur.

The Tips & Tricks Photography Cover Contest

We are starting up a new idea, we want to see to great photographs that our readers take. So we have added a cover page to issue and are inviting entries for making the cover. What we're hoping to achieve eventually is to obtain some sponsors to provide prizes for the person who's picture makes the cover of each issue. So I guess in a sense this is also a call for sponsors, if you would like to support the great photography being done, work for a company that might like to let us know.

tipsandtricksphotography@gmail.com

So start sending in your best shots and see if you can make the cover!

This weeks cover shot is from Ervin Tong (co-creator of this podcast).

We are also showcasing for the first time an article (and hopefully series of articles) by other people. In this issue Andy Wong touches on the basics of composition.

As always we are always looking for other contributors to Tips & Tricks Photography so if you have something to say or a great idea or technique, please send it along to share with the rest.

Enjoy

Zoo Photography

Written by Ervin Tong

Zoo photography is a great way of get pictures of animals that most people really wouldn't see otherwise. A lot of people think that zoo photography is pretty easy, the animals are right there in front of you and they're not going anywhere. Contrary to popular belief, there are quite a few challenges to zoo photography. I think the greatest difficulty is taking a shot that makes the animal look like it is in its natural environment. The enclosures, cages, wires, fences, concrete, shooting through dirty scratched up glass, and people wandering around through your shot are just some of the things to consider.

The best advice I've been given for taking pictures of zoo animals is to shoot tight and wide open. It's simple, straightforward and easy to remember. Shoot tight and wide-open. By framing the shots so that the animal fills the frame, you effectively eliminate all the man-made elements in the backgrounds. A lot of the best shots I've seen are almost "portrait" shots of the animal, where the head fills half to three quarters of the frame. I find tighter shots are more interesting compared to something looser showing the

whole animal and its surroundings, we are there to see the *animals* after all.

There are times, however, that screams for us to shoot a little looser and show a bit more background. When you run into these situations the wide-open part comes in. By opening up the aperture you isolate the animal and blur our most of the distracting elements and take the animal out of its zoo enclosure and put it back into something more natural looking. So how wide open do you need to go? Personally, I like to open up the aperture as far as my lens will let me. Usually, that means I'm shooting at f2.8 or wider. Keep in mind that the closer you are to your subject and the larger your aperture the better your focus needs to be as the depth of field becomes increasingly narrow.

So now we're all shooting tight and wide-open, too bad there's dirty scratched up glass or cage wires in our way. These are hard to deal with and they change from animal to animal, zoo to zoo.

When shooting through glass using a polarizer might help reduce some of the reflection and clear up a few of the scratches. Personally I try to avoid using the polarizer as it just cuts too much light. Instead I get right up to the glass and put the front of my lens against the glass. Try to pick the best area of glass in terms of scratches and dirt to shoot through and get right up against it. Inevitably, there will be some loss in contrast and there may be slight color shifts depending on the glass you're shooting through, but I find most of these problems are easily corrected in Photoshop with some curves and color balance adjustments. When shooting through cage wires, there are a couple of options. If the wires are far enough apart, you might be able to get the lens between them and get an unobstructed view. Be careful if you decide to do this, you don't want a lion having your lens for an appetizer with

your fingers as the main course. Another option is again to get close. Sometimes the wires are fine enough that if you're right up against them they'll just blur away. You might also try to get the fences and cages to work for you and incorporate them into your shot. Unfortunately, some enclosures simply aren't photo friendly and it just won't work.

When going to the zoo, I usually try to go on an overcast day. My flash is good, but it's nothing compared to having a giant softbox in the sky provided by Mother Nature. On overcast days you can get some very even lighting that won't blow your highlights. When thinking about where to shoot form, try to find some unique perspectives. Just because everyone else is crowded around one spot doesn't mean that's where the best photo opportunity will be. Perhaps getting closer to the ground will produce a better shot. Maybe getting a little higher and standing on a bench would work? Move around and keep your eyes open, sometimes, you just need to be patient.

Depth of Field Comparisons

I wanted to pass this website along that I found quite a while back. Tamron has a great website that allows you to get familiar with how Depth of Field Changes when you change the aperture and lenses focal lengths. In general, the bigger the aperture (lower F-stop number) the less DOF. Likewise, the larger the focal length on a lens the less DOF. If your fairly new to ideas about DOF, check it out the website and play around to get a sense of how photographs can change depending on aperture and lens focal length.

http://www.tamroneurope.com/dof.htm

Better yet, grab your camera and a lens or two and try it out for yourself.

The "Rules"

Put Together & Written by Jeff Tindall

This is an article more aimed at the beginner but still very useful as a refresher for more experienced shooters. When I got my first SLR camera I had thoughts about actually being able to take decent pictures. After all, finally I had a camera with a light meter, a broader range of focal lengths and a better ability to control the aperture. All excited I loaded Velvia into the camera and went off for the day taking pictures. When I got the film developed I was quite disappointed in my pictures, I was happy with the broader focal length and the fact I could zoom in as much as possible (as I imagine most newbies to SLR's enjoy zooming their lens in as much as possible), but most of my pictures seemed very static and uneventful. some were badly over exposed, others badly under exposed. I made the critical error of thinking that because I now owned a better camera I now would take better pictures. Well let me say the cost of the camera does not equal the quality of the photographs. Truly great pictures are taken using good technique and attention to details. The questions that most new photographers are faced with after being disappointed with their first photo shoot is: What makes a good photograph? A very difficult question to answer since everyone has different tastes and opinions. To help new photographers out with dealing with this question a lot of "rules" have been suggested to help deal with how a picture is taken and what it should look like. Now I put the word "rules" in quotations because throughout the photography literature they are referred to as that (for example, the rule of thirds). In my opinion this is one of those words that misleads people, because it suggests that if the "rules" aren't followed you won't end up with a good photograph.

A better term to use would be Guidelines. I like the term guidelines because it doesn't indicate a hard boundary on the suggestion made. It allows for a creative latitude on the suggestions made, no longer should you feel compelled to use only one-thirds, you can now use one-sixths or one-ninths. All of which can still produce stellar pictures.

I present here a collection of basic guidelines that have developed since photography began to teach beginners how they can improve there photographs. Remember these are just guidelines and altering them to suit your need is strongly encouraged. After all it's the creative side of photography that makes people look at your photo and say WOW!

The Rule of Thirds

The rule of thirds is a fairly basic compositional rule, it starts by dividing your view through the camera into thirds on both the horizontal and vertical planes. This leaves you with an imaginary tic-tac-toe board. The suggestion for the rule of thirds is to place important elements of your composition where the lines interact. The rule of thirds is designed to produce a nice balanced photograph for the viewer. It does this by eliminating empty space around your subject, which would be the case if you placed your subject directly in the middle of the frame. It also forces the eye to move around the scene and explore other details. Usually the first place the eye looks at when looking at a picture is the center, since you placed your object of interest away from the center the eye has to move around the picture and look for it. In doing so it usually explores the other elements of the scene.

Sunny *f*/16

The sunny *f*/16 is an exposure guideline for those who don't want to use a light meter or don't have one. I states that on a bright sunny day, the correct exposure for and subject at an aperture of f/16 is to use a shutter speed that is the reciprocal of the ISO. For example, on a bight day with the aperture set to f/16 and using ISO 200 the shutter speed for correct exposure would be 1/200s. Keep in mind this doesn't mean that to correctly expose you're stuck shooting at an aperture of f/16 all day. Remember that apertures,

ISO's and shutter speeds work on a 1:2 ratio. Opening the aperture 1 stop (lowering the f-number) allows twice as much light through. So in the above example you could also get correct exposure by using f/8 and doubling the shutter speed to 1/400s or f/22 and 1/100s.

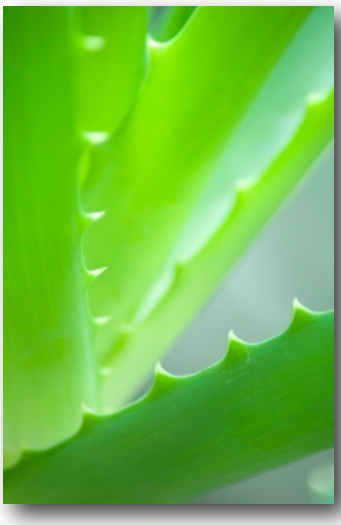
Hand Hold / Tripod Rule

The average photographer can hand hold their camera and avoid noticeable camera shake if your shutter speed is faster then the reciprocal of the focal length of the lens being used. For example, if you're using a 150mm lens the shutter speed of the camera would have to be 1/150s or faster to not see any significant camera shake. Shutter speeds slower then the reciprocal of the focal length, than typically a tripod or other stabilizing device is needed to not see camera shake. If your photographing a moving subject, then it's suggested that you double the speed (150mm lens with a moving subject = 1/300s or faster). If you are moving triple the speed (150mm at 1/600s). If your performing macro work, always use a tripod.

Flash Range Rule

There are two basic flash rules to know if you ever need them. The first is to determine how far your flash will reach. The general rule is that a standard flash will reach double the distance for 4 times the speed of the ISO. This requires that you know how far your flash can originally reach. You can almost certainly find this for ISO 100 either in your camera or flash manual or online. For example, if your flash reaches 15 ft at ISO 100 then your flash will likely be able to reach reach about 30 ft at ISO 400.

Filling the Frame Or Simplifying Your Photo



Filling the frame doesn't necessarily mean you have to get really close to your subject, it's more of a guideline to try and compose a picture that doesn't have a lot of clutter that you don't want. Filling the frame is one way to do this. You can typically do this by getting closer to your sub-

ject or by using zoom and telephoto lenses. Using a shallow depth of field (open aperture) can help eliminate details that are not important, like busy backgrounds.

Frame Your Photos

This guideline is not meant to be for every picture you take, but can add a very nice touch to your photos in certain situations. Framing a photo is using objects to frame your object of interest. For example, using tree limbs, or a archway as a border within your picture. The most difficult part of framing a picture is finding the frame. Take a close look around the area your in to see if there is anything you can use as a frame. Frames can be almost anything, from a constructed building or arch to grass blades or clouds.

Find Different Perspectives

Perspective is what can make or break a shot. Take a look at the majority of shots that you like, I imagine that most of them likely aren't shot from eye level. By exploring a subject from all kinds of angles you can find great and different looks that you typically would never have thought to take. Looking down onto a flower or pet usually won't produce a very interesting shot because most people see them that way all the time. Try getting down low so your at face level (or below) with your pet, or underneath a flower. Try the opposite and get up high or to the side of a subject that has a usual face or plane to it. Some angle with work and some won't, but I assure you the ones that do work will almost always look better then the typical eye level shot.

Be Ready!

The last one of these tips is more like a rule then the rest. Always be ready! Make sure you have charged batteries, memory cards, film and all the necessary equipment for taking photographs. Also carry your camera around, because the best opportunities are when you least expect it.

Putting Together a Workflow

Written by Jeff Tindall

Digital photography has revolutionized the photographic processes. When film was the only way to take a picture many photographers carefully planned their shots. Consider this, on the typical photo shoot, I often take roughly 300 pictures with my digital camera, if that was film my typically photo shoot would cost me about $170 CND. I guess my point is that digital photography has allowed photographers to endlessly take pictures and experiment with different angles and settings until the shooter is happy. However, with the ability to take countless shots also means you will need a good organization system to keep track of all the pictures you take. Now there is no perfect way to organize photos, everyone has different reasons for taking pictures and have different priorities for what is important when organizing, but there are some general guidelines that likely apply no matter how you organize your pictures.

Below are suggestions on the key aspects of a workflow and examples of the workflow I tend to follow. The example workflow I use is an adaptation of the workflow episode on the Radiant Vista Podcast. It is more based towards Photoshop, however even if your not a Photoshop user the ideas behind organizing and the basic editing of photos does apply.

Setting up Your Workflow

I guess the first tip is to sit down and write out a plan of importance with respect to your photos. Ask yourself questions, what do you want to achieve? What are the important points you would like to organize by, date, location, subject type? Usually this would be done in a folder structure, but there are several ways to do it, do you dump all your photos into one giant folder, setup a more in-depth structure based plan, allow software programs

to organize it for you (e.g. iPhoto). What ever folder structure you choose I would stress is however you decide to setup a folder structure, try and keep it consistent.

I'm typically a Photoshop user and soon to be Lightroom user, so I have opted for a workflow from the Radiant Vista that has a main folder with the date and location and then two subfolders called RAW and Prints. The RAW folder as you may have guessed holds my original photos, the Prints folder will end up holding my photographs after they have been processed, edited and ready for printing.

Adding Your Photographs

The first and important steps are adding your photos, although this seems like a simple step of connecting your memory card and dumping the contents into the folders you just created, there are a few easy things to do that will make editing and finding your photos much easier down the road. The first thing I like to do is copyright my photographs which I do using Adobe Bridge (check out Issue 2 for the details on how to setup an easy copyright template). Copyrighting your photos is easy a smart thing to do and take about 10 seconds to do no matter how many photos. The next easiest thing you can is scan through your shots and rotate them to the correct orientation, once again these are simple things to do that don't take much time but will cut down your time when working on photos. So here is where it gets tough, KEYWORD YOUR PHOTOS! This is not really a tough thing to do, but can be a little time consuming with large amounts of photos, however the benefits of taking the time to do this will undoubtedly help your out months or years down the road when your trying to find a particular photo. A couple of short cuts that I use to help make the task a little easier is to batch keyword files. Chances are that a photo shoot will typically have overlap in the subjects of the photographs, for example if you spent the morning shooting birds then batch them with the word 'Birds' or whatever you deem appropriate. The other idea is to use generic keywords like 'Wildlife' or 'Flowers' to group your photos into more easily manageable groups. I use customized preset keywords that fit my organization setup. Also keep in mind that a photo can have more then one keyword and the more you add the easier it will be to narrow down a particular picture your looking for.

I consider the above steps the most crucial in the workflow and should be done shortly after the photo shoot itself when the details of each picture are fresh in your mind. Typically I like to leave my photos for a day or two before editing, partially because I'm either tired from the

photo shoot or just not in a mood to sit in front of a computer for a long time editing photos. By ensuring you take the time to enter the details of your photos and the photo shoot, you can leave your photos for however long you want and still be able to come back and pull up your important details. I also like leaving my photos for a few days to allow the excitement of the photo shoot to wear off. Perhaps it's just me but when taking pictures, I get fairly excited and quite biased as to the quality often over looking flaws with the photo, by leaving my photos for a few days gives me a chance to take a more accurate non-biased examination.

Purging, Minor Edits & Global Corrections

Once I'm ready to sit down go through the photos, I often start with purging, minor edits and global corrections. A lot of photographers advocate never throwing out photos, I am not a fan of it. When I take photos, I often start the day with a few test shots, then take lots and lots of pictures. For a given static subject like a flower or landscape picture I will often take about 20 to 30 pictures, when photographing a moving subject like wildlife I often switch to continuous shooting and average around 60-90 shots for a subject. Needless to say the majority of these shots are garbage or in the case of continuous shooting nearly identical to the previous shot just taken. Im my opinion this is a lot of repetition and useless files just taking up space. So the first thing I do is go through my photos and trash the bad photos and one copy of identical shots (I would suggest taking a close look when eliminating identical shots, sometimes, they will be similar however one has a certain aspect that makes it more attractive.

After I have gone through my photos and purged the next thing I do is minor edits, since these are more destructive edits I convert the RAW files into either a PSD (Photoshop), TIFF or JPG allowing me the option of going back to the original if needed. Minor edits are things like straightening horizons, cropping the photo and removing dust or other abnormalities that might have occurred. Global edits are next, these are adjustments that apply to the whole photo, such as adjusting shadows and highlights, exposure, contrasts, levels, saturation etc...

Spot Edits

The next thing is to go into more detail where necessary for edits to a photograph that don't globally apply. The usual alterations often include things like saturating the sky, but not the foreground, lightening certain shadows, adding in other photos or major cloning.

Finishing Edits

The finishing edits are sharpening the photo, any additional cropping and removing existing layers that may have accumulated during the edits (in Photoshop terminally: flattening the image). Save this file to the Prints folder. I suggest not resizing your picture from the original attributes. When it comes time to print, then resize print and don't save. Why don't save? Well in my experience, I often save the photo as a 4x6 or some other small size, ad later when I want to print a larger version I encounter pixilation. Remember you can always go from big to small, but not always the reverse.

The Basics of Image Composition

Written by Andy Wong

Very often people taking up photography for the first time often wonder "what makes a good picture?". To address a component of this, I would like to bring to you a series of illustrated articles to explore the concepts of image composition.

I'm a beginner/intermediate photographer. I was interested in photography from a purely recreational standpoint - Simply put, I like taking pictures. I however was interested in techniques to make my photography more dynamic and interesting, so I've read from a variety of sources about this subject. This series of articles will go from the very basic ideas of image composition and continue into more advanced concepts. Disclaimer: these articles are here to serve as a guide, not rules of thumb. So it's to show you what can be done, not necessarily what should be done when taking pictures. Ultimately you want pictures that both you and the other viewers enjoy.

For this first installment, I will illustrate the very common advice for begin-

ner photographers - Fill the frame (aka. keep it simple).

I was visiting the Van Dusen Botanical Garden in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada and saw a Ginkgo tree (native to China) that interested me.

When I first saw this tree, I decided that it was going to be my subject and I wanted to show the uniqueness of this species. I took the first picture of the leaves, hoping to use the sunlight behind the subject to emphasize the veins in the uniquely shaped leaves. Upon the first glance, this picture simply did not do its subject any justice. The

picture is very complicated with branches everywhere and leaves shading each other, so the subject doesn't stand out very much. Also the background can be a tad distracting at both the top and bottom of the frame.

Here I will then try to fix the problem by zooming in (so here's where a zoom lens can be useful, because I couldn't grow taller to get closer to the leaves), and taking a picture of the Ginkgo leaves.

There are four bits of improvement in this picture over the previous one:

1) Here the Ginkgo leaves have stronger sunlight behind them (less shading by other leaves), thus the veins of the leaves stand out more.

2) With a less complicated picture, the Ginkgo leaves are more able to grab the attention of the viewer

3) There's a hint of line in the way the Ginkgo branch is composed from bottom right hand corner to the top left corner. We will get into this composition concept in a later edition.

4) The background is a bit less cluttered, thus the Ginkgo leaves are in great contrast with the background blue sky.

Of course one can zoom in really close and try to do a semi-macro shot of a single Ginkgo leaf. That'd take away much of the distraction and keep the shot really simple. However, I wanted to show that this is part of a bigger plant, so I still included branches, and also a hint of some more leaves in the background (right edge of the frame).

Here's another set of shots on another plant utilizing the same concepts (without back lighting this time). Notice how simple it is to zoom in onto the subject, filling the frame with the subject to lessen distracting elements and backgrounds.

So go out there, take some shots, and try to zoom in (or get closer) and see if you can fill the frame. Happy shooting!