



Designing Your Photographs

. . . using the building blocks of visual design ©

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By reaching into yourself and reaching out to others through photography, you will ultimately make discoveries both about yourself and about the world around you.

~ Freeman Patterson

A PHOTOGRAPH is writing/recording with light.

COMPOSING OR DESIGNING YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS: involves arranging the elements in the picture space by a plan (design).

***MAKE rather than TAKE photographs!!

YOU MUST HAVE GOOD DESIGN to create an image that:

- evokes feelings,
- expresses ideas clearly, or
- records scenes, objects or events effectively!!

BUILDING BLOCKS OF TWO DIMENSIONAL VISUAL DESIGN:

Light, Line, Shape, Texture, & Perspective

• LIGHT (raw material)

Characteristics: Contrast, Direction, Quality

- Contrast -- color (hues) & tonal (brightness/darkness)

Distinguish between color & tone to see how they become the raw materials for images.

- Direction -- front, side, rear

- Quality -- diffused/harsh, warm/cool

• LINE

- most prevalent design element
- seen because of tonal & color contrast
- define shapes & clarify spaces between areas
- can visually leads us places

Straight lines

- have a sense of purpose
- define shapes
- can take us to & from areas in a scene

Curving lines

- may create a more relaxed trip through a photograph
- may be sensual or tranquil

Considerations

- carry visual weight - thin less impact than thick
- straight ones may convey rigidity & structure
- horizontal may impart calm or stable feeling
- vertical may convey stiffness & formality, strength, or growth
- oblique may convey a sense of motion

• SHAPE

- is a subject's 2-dimensional outline.
- is visible by tonal &/or color contrast.
- to see shapes better, go beyond their labels, e.g., flower, as a circle; trees, as rectangles and/or triangles; sky and foreground, as rectangles, etc.

Keep in mind that:

- Shapes possess strong symbolism, so that dominant shapes will determine an image's feelings.

• TEXTURE

- is an object's tactile surface quality...memories of what things feel like...baby's skin or fuzzy hat, leaves, rough boards, strawberries, etc.
- texture is often poorly photographed, e.g. ripples, grooves, dew on blossom, etc., even if it's what caught the eye

- possibly missed because particular light is critical to visualize texture in image
- if texture is your subject...remove distracting material...move in closer...fill the frame with the texture
- How do you create images which accentuate texture?
- tonal (light & shadow) contrast needed to record texture
- sidelighting is most effective to show bumps, hairs, ridges, etc.
- diffused light often works better for softer textures.
- PERSPECTIVE
 - represents depth or distance on a 2-dimensional surface
 - quickest and easiest way to create or enhance perspective - distort or deform space, e.g. enlarge an object in relation to another
 - creates, increases, decreases or eliminates an impression of 3rd-dimension with arrangement of shapes, lines and/or textures in picture space

Some variables that influence the creation &/or control of perspective:

- sharpness -- sharper appears closer
- size -- larger appears closer
- subject placement or location - - lower half often tends to command more attention & seem closer

PUTTING THE BUILDING BLOCKS TOGETHER

- arrange blocks (line, shape, texture, & perspective) to produce clear visual documents, arouse emotions or convey ideas
- no rules, just principles & guidelines for good composition
- Dynamic vs. Static (descriptive terms for images)
 - * Dynamic (Gr. power/strength) energetic, vigorous, forceful, in motion compared to static
 - * Static (Gr. causing to stand) at rest or equilibrium, inactive, not moving

LESS IS MORE

Generally, the simpler & more orderly a composition...the more quickly and effectively ⁴ it delivers your message.

FOUR PRINCIPLES OF PICTURE ORGANIZATION

Dominance, Balance, Proportion & Pattern (Rhythm)

- **DOMINANCE**

- influences entire composition more strongly, often called Center of Interest
- dominant by - - size, color, location and/or symbolic value
- every image does not need a C of I
- reason dominance important - - brain focuses on it and subconsciously disregards the rest

Ways to Make a Subject Dominant

- move closer, e.g. with telephoto or macro
- isolate by camera position
- selective focus (depth of field)
- interesting element in foreground
- elements draw attention to main subject

- **BALANCE** (harmony or sense of equilibrium)

- create a balanced image...keeping in mind that every object/element has visual weight by its size, shape, location in frame.
- balancing on a teeter-totter is a useful analogy.
- check visual weight and balance
- examples dealing with balance

Imbalance

- may create a tension to convey excitement of moment

- **PROPORTION**

- about relative **Size** of objects in picture space

- sense of scale
- different proportions may create different feelings
- proportions may change symbolism
- decide what you want to express...create a proportional relationship of elements to express it.
- PATTERN (Rhythm)
 - when the elements (lines, shapes, tones or color) are repeated within a scene

Make the best composition you can...if you get frustrated, go back later and try again...hindsight leads to foresight...your awareness will improve over time.

Four Tips for Every Macro Shot (SLBE)

- Subject
 - Light
 - Backgrounds
 - Edges
- (from *Tips for Improving Your Photography*)

The Subject - *What is your subject and where do you place it in the picture space?*

- squinting helps feel for proper subject placement. Try it & compare
- squint & compare
- avoid crowding near edges
- move into the frame
- give breathing room
- aiming into the frame
- try off center
- radial subjects lend themselves to being centered
- tell a story

Working the Light - *What will enhance your subject the best?*

- direct light: often harsh & fattens subject
- side light: shows more texture

- rear light: illuminates subject when it passes through
- rear light: illuminates subject's rim
- Diffused light comes: on cloudy days, thru diffuser, indirect light, large light source
- Diffused light produces: softer light, more saturated colors, less apparent texture, minimal shading/contrast
- Artificial Light - Reflector: Illuminates subject as seen; consider feathering [with, without]
- Artificial Light - Flashlight: illuminate shaded areas [with, without]
- Artificial Light - Fill Flash: covers universally, not selectively; can bounce off reflector; can shine through diffuser

Check Your Background - *Does it add to or take away from your subject?*

- Background competes with subject
- Background adds to subject
- CONTRAST is key. Notice the difference...
- Notice contrast using blurred background (bokeh)
- Notice color contrast and how simple the background is

Run the Edges - *Is anything too close to the edge or just cutoff?*

- run your eye around the edges & through out image for distractions

REVIEW - Four Tips to Use with Every Shot

1) TIP: _____

Q:

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2) TIP: _____

Q:

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3) TIP: _____

Q:

4) TIP: _____

Q:

Answers

Subject - What is your subject and where do you place it in the picture space?

Light - What will enhance your subject the best?

Background - Does it add to or take away from your subject?

Edges - Is anything too close to the edge or just cutoff?

WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY

- look at good photography
- practice (use a tripod!!)
- classes/workshops
- practice, practice, practice
- get feedback from pro photographers
- more practice

REFERENCE: *Photographing the World around You: A Visual Design Workshop*, by Freeman Patterson; see Amazon.com. (Freeman gave me permission to use any of his visual design concepts.)

INFORMATION: about Lou & Todd Nettelhorst's workshops, outings, lessons and presentations, visit NettelhorstImages.com and send an email to Info@NettelhorstImages.com requesting addition to their distribution list.

ENJOY PHOTOGRAPHING...GOOD LUCK!!



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Dewitt Jones' Checklist

(adapted from Brenda Tharp's *CREATIVE NATURE & OUTDOOR PHOTOGRAPHY*, p. 14)

Create a vision of the image you want. What are you trying to convey? Then use this checklist for each photograph you make. You may decide to change the list to better suit your needs. It will become intuitive after using it for a while. Regardless, be aware of what you are trying to make. **There are multiple right answers!!**

- Is light appropriate for the subject (direction, quality)?
- Light range in the field of view (contrast)?
- What subject do I want to dominate?
- What's in the frame (Building Blocks: line, shape, texture; Putting It Together: dominance, balance, proportion, pattern; check background & edges)?
- Angle of view to create or remove a sense of distance (perspective)?
- Depth of field desired (focus)?
- Shutter speed, fast/slow (stop-action/blur)?
- Tripod (camera shake, micro-composing)?
- Filter?
- Creative technique to better express my vision?

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Celebrate What's Right with the World, by Dewitt Jones (Extraordinary Speaker)

<http://trainingabc.com/xcart/product.php?productid=16229&cat=0&page=> [To view full length video clip, you must register at no charge.]

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Cut and laminate to carry in your camera bag.



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