



Photography 101

Each issue of PhotographyBB Online Magazine will bring you helpful tips and tutorials on how to get the most of your digital camera and equipment. We'll cover camera techniques, principals of photography, digital photography issues, and how to get the most from the dreaded manual-mode!

THE GREAT OUTDOORS: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO BETTER LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY - By Kenneth Fagan

Landscape Photography is possibly one of the most popular subjects of choice for photographers, from the complete beginner right through to the seasoned professional. In this months issue, I will give you some easy to follow hints, tips, and tricks on how to improve your landscape photography skills.



Many photographers, especially when they are just starting out, reach a stage in their abilities where it seems impossible to improve any further. So if you feel like you are one of these people, you are not alone. Trying to achieve a composition which justifies and accentuates beauty is not something too easily achieved. With a little bit of practice your ability to create aesthetically pleasing landscape images is just a click away.

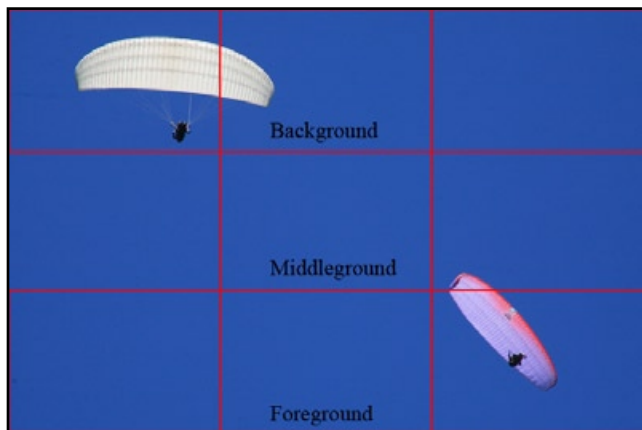
To begin, I suggest that you use a tripod or a monopod for shooting landscapes; the reason being is

that using filters, small apertures and low ISO ratings can slow your shutter speed considerably, leaving your photos vulnerable to camera shake. Otherwise, as long as you stay within your shutter speed comfort zone of around 1/90th or 1/125th sec. handholding will be perfectly fine. You may often find yourself having to compromise apertures and shutter speeds based on the light conditions.

Almost all of the time for landscape photography I use my medium format Pentax 645 with a 75mm lens. A 75mm lens on a 6x4.5 camera is equivalent to

approximately 28mm on a 35mm SLR (full frame DSLR). If I require a different perspective, I use my DSLR with a 24-70mm lens. A cable release is also very useful for those longer exposures when your SLR is mounted on a tripod particularly for when you use the bulb mode.

When shooting landscapes, as with everything else we photograph, it is important to frame the subject in a manner that creates interest and appeal. All too often landscapes shots can appear boring because of some simple composition errors while framing the shot. In saying this there are few hard and fast rules about how you should or should not photograph a landscape. It all depends on your style (of course), but always consider what would look best and create a wider appeal for more than just yourself. There is a simple 'grid' system known as the rule of thirds which works by dividing the frame into nine segments in the foreground, middle ground, and background. The rule of thirds is based around the golden mean proportion, which is said to be the most pleasing ratio to the eye, as it is a known fact that images are more pleasing to look at if the main subject or focal point of the image is off centre.



See the examples of the next two images of the same scene: The first image has the same main subject in the centre and the second image has the main subject off center. Notice how the second image draws



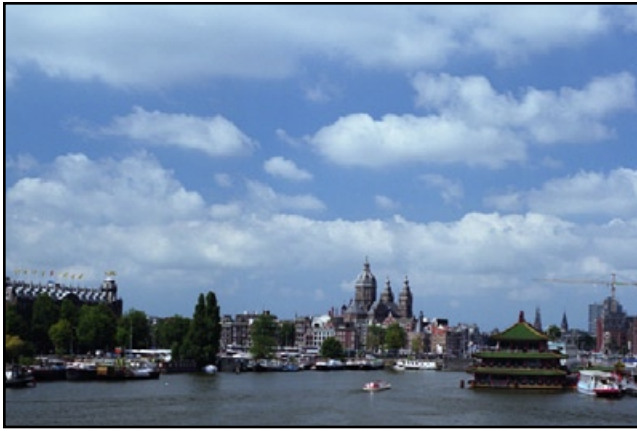
your eye to the whole image and creates more interest, where as with the first (centered) image the appeal is much less and it draws less attention to itself.

From those images you will see by simply moving the point of focus in the image to the left or right of the frame can greatly improve the aesthetic nature of the final product.

Horizon lines can also make or break a photograph. Where the horizon appears in an image, is the splitting point between the land/sea and sky. It seems to be a habit for some photographers to position the horizon line right across the centre of an image. When you split an image right across the centre you lose the benefits of the rule of thirds. This is not to say that you must stick rigidly to the rule of thirds, but it does help. Whenever I see a horizon line across the centre, it always reminds me of a sheet of paper with a fold line, fold the page over and you lose half the image. The same goes in most cases for landscape photography, place the horizon across the centre you lose most of the aesthetics that the scene has to offer. This is just my opinion; If you like your images with a centre line go right ahead and shoot them that way but do experiment on raising or lowering your horizon lines and see which one you prefer. Remember that it is not necessarily what you like but what your audience likes.



Horizon Centered.



Horizon Off-Centered.

Once you have composed the shot in your SLR the next thing you have to work out is the exposure. Using a handheld light meter would be quite beneficial for correct exposure, but if you do not have one to avail of, you can use the in-camera meter as normal. On overcast days you do not have to worry about shadows, as the clouds act like one giant soft box, which diffuses the light, where as on sunny days you have to deal with other issues such as shadows and highlighted areas. I recommend for landscape photography that you use a circular polarizer or a neutral density filter, or in some cases you may need to use both together. Polarizer's reduce glare and unsightly highlights, but they can greatly reduce the shutter speed and aperture on average by two stops. You can use polarizer's or ND filters on overcast days as well as sunny days. A sky covered in a thick blanket of cloud can appear flat and over exposed, but with the use of a filter as described, more shadows and texture can be brought into the image.

The smaller the aperture you use, the more likely you are to get a nice blue sky and fluffy textured clouds. With smaller apertures you really need to consider the shutter speed. If you are using a hand held light meter you will need to compensate the shutter speed for the filters. If you are metering through your SLR the light will be measured according to the filter on the lens whereas if using a handheld meter you will have to increase the shutter speed shown on the meter by one or two stops. Remember to bracket one or two stops under and over the given correct exposure. For best results if possible try to shoot the scene at an angle where the sun is not catching the lens (causing often unsightly images). Shooting with the sun behind you will light up the main subject without causing shadows (which end up under exposed) making sure that your own shadow does not end up in the same image. If the sun is in front of you when shooting, the main subject will more than likely be shadowed, and exposing for the shadows may cause the rest of the image to be over exposed. By exposing for the shadows (light metering



Lens flare shown here, from sunlight catching the lens.

off the shadowed areas of an image) you will have more detail in the final image. I tend to expose for the shadows using a smaller aperture such as f22 or f32, which greatly reduces the chances of overexposing the brighter areas of a scene such as the sky. In the image of the oil jack, the sun was behind me so there were no shadows on the subject. Using an aperture of f22 at 1/8th and a circular polarizer, the sky and clouds kept their natural tones nicely, and the oil jack and the ground remained correctly exposed.

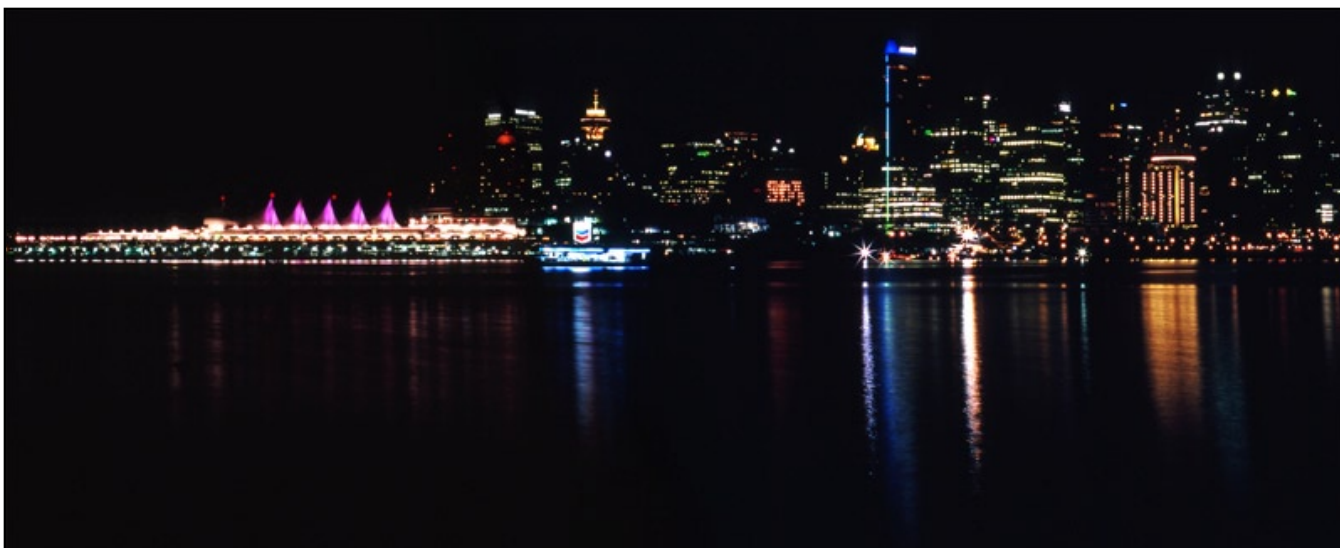




Another aspect of landscape photography to consider is the time of day. Some subjects look better at night than during the day. A mountain scene quite often looks more appealing at sunrise or sunset. If possible, on the day you are going out on a shoot, be selective on what you photograph at certain times. Of course this may not always be possible but a midday sun high in the sky can cause hard shadows. When the sun is lower, it reduces strength and the light becomes softer with beautiful orange and magenta tones.

Sometimes a great time to shoot is after a rain shower. It clears the air of dust and gives the scene a fresher, cleaner appearance. So don't be put off by the rain too much, sometimes you can come up with some interesting shots in the rain.

Cityscapes are landscapes of the night. When all the lights are lit up, a downtown skyline can be beautiful. Have a look at the two cityscapes shown here. The first one is a panorama (three frames) of downtown Vancouver. Shooting panoramas by day is quite possible handheld (such as the snowy mountain sunset), but by night a tripod and a cable release are the essential tools for a successful panorama. This downtown panorama is made up of three



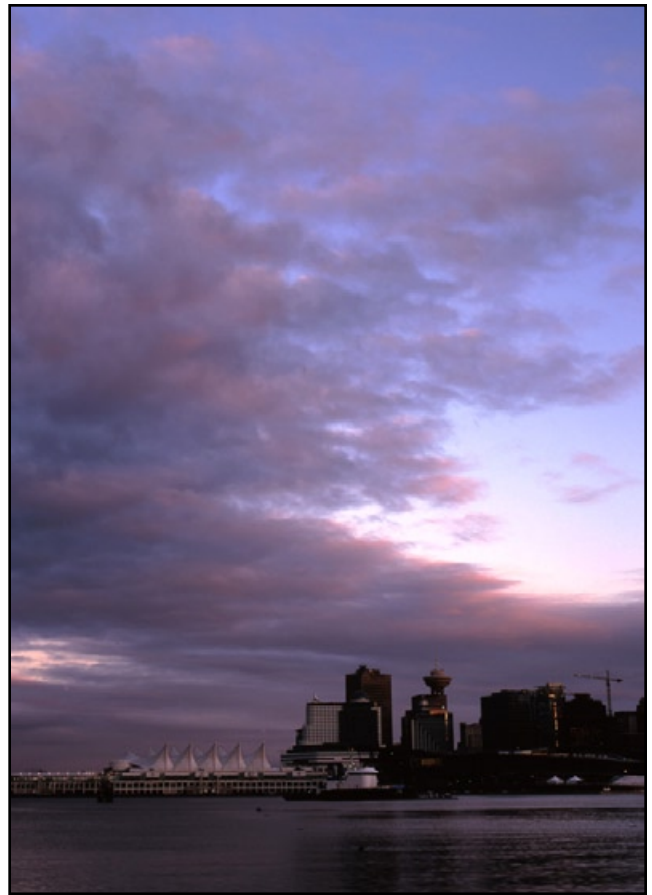
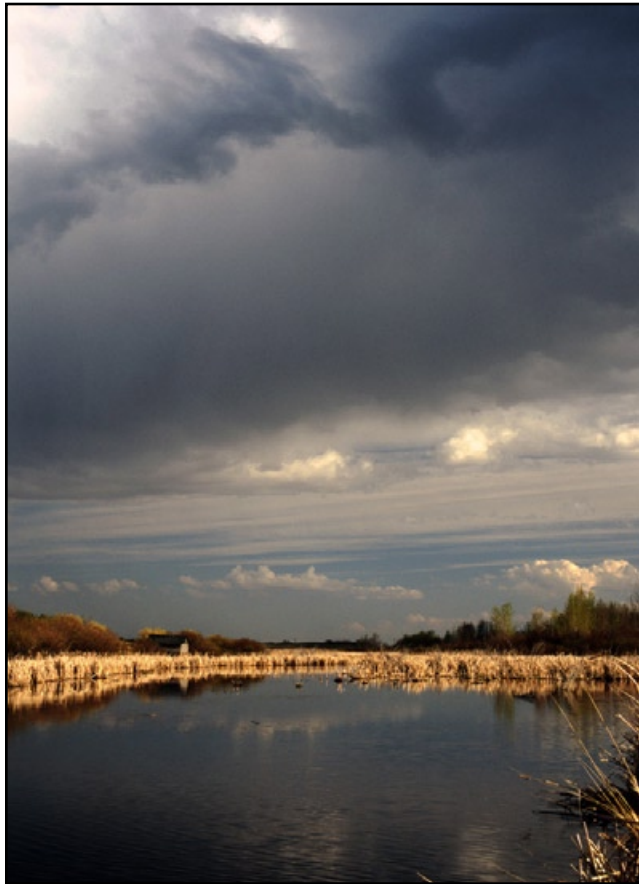
frames at an exposure of 20 seconds each (each frame must have the same exposure time and aperture). In the second night scene (shown on the following page), the SLR was not mounted on a tripod. I simply rested it on the sidewall of a bridge for 16 seconds at f11.

When shooting night cityscapes, the smaller the aperture the greater the starburst effects you will have. The starburst effect is caused by the light moving through the diaphragm of the lens (which controls the apertures).



The longer the exposure, the more the starburst effect will also increase. As can be seen in comparing the two cityscapes, the panorama has a greater starburst effect because of the smaller aperture and the longer exposure.

When shooting landscapes, there are a few formats in which you can shoot: Landscape which is the standard orientation for landscape photography, and portrait which is holding the SLR in a vertical orientation to create higher landscape images while compromising the amount of a scene you can fit in a frame. This can be quite useful for panorama work or if you want a 'Big Sky' effect.



An alternative and less commonly used method (instead of the landscape or portrait format) is the Dutch angle. The Dutch angle is simple tilting the SLR to one side to change the perspective of the composition. It only works in certain instances and if done correctly it can look fantastic, but if it is used in the wrong scene it can just look like a big mistake, where the camera was held at a bad angle.



It is important not to rush landscape photography; like any other photographic discipline it takes time to get 'that shot'. Take your time and work on a few different scenes instead of rushing around and trying to get as much in as you can without any thought. When you do not stop to think about what you would like to get out of an image, you will only end up with nothing! You should spend more time composing and shooting the scene, rather than "fixing" your images in Photoshop. It wastes a lot of time and slows the whole process completely. Becoming reliant on Photoshop to fix your mistakes is time consuming. Striving to become a better photographer means that you must learn to discipline yourself with time and effort when you are actually using your camera. If you want to keep your image natural, ninety percent of your work will have to be in camera, with only a few normal tweaks such as colour correcting in curves, sharpening, and possibly cropping. Having to do too much post processing can destroy an image beyond use with loss of detail and

pixilation; not good if you have a client waiting for the final piece.

Remember that the most important aspect of landscape photography is the appeal that the photo you created has with the people viewing it. Follow the simple steps and you will be well on the road to better landscape photography. Take your time, be patient, and think before you shoot. Have a look through the images below to inspire some ideas about getting a nicely composed and appealing image.



