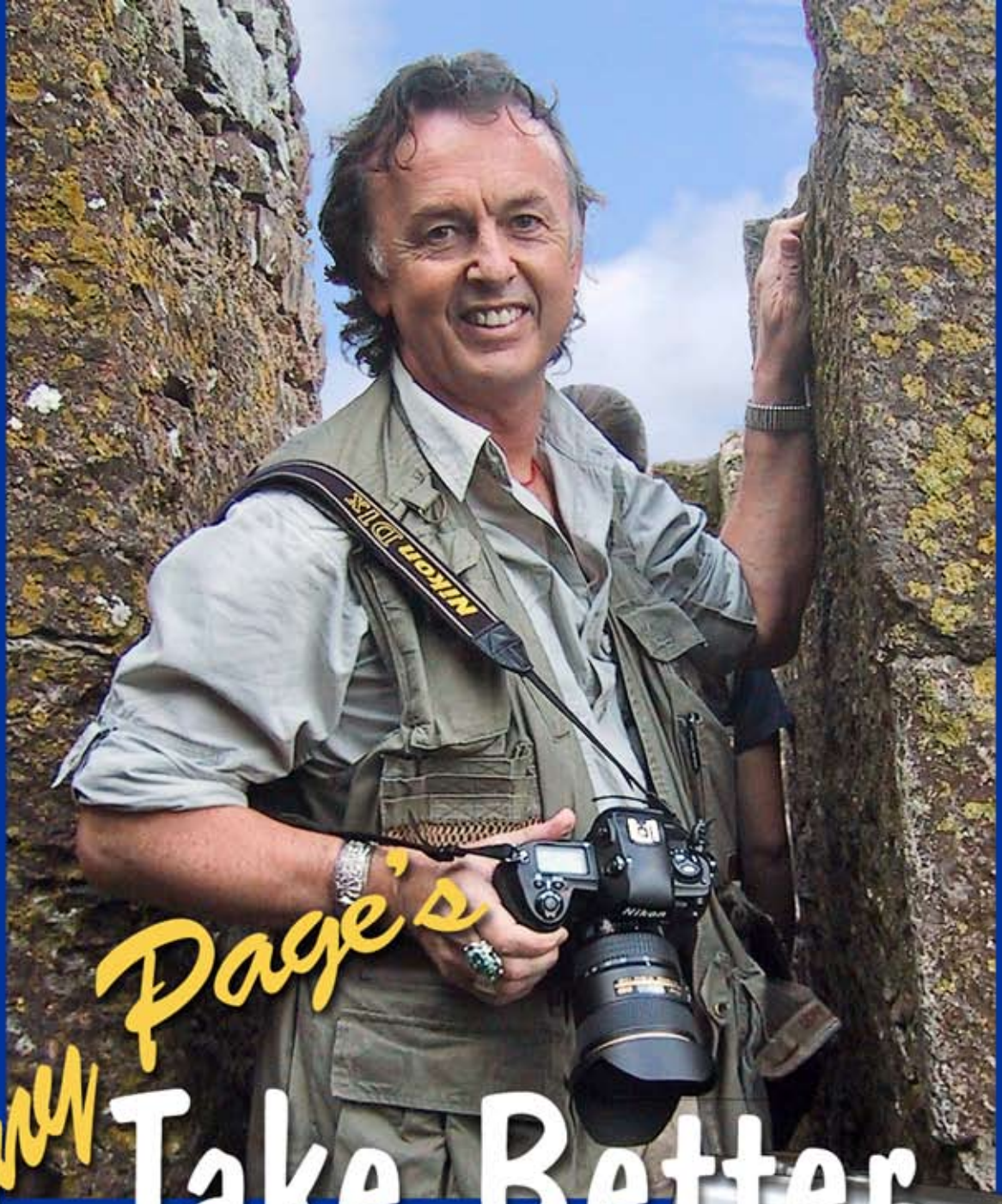

Tony Page's

Take Better DIGITAL Photos

www.travelsignpostsphoto.com

Take Better Digital Photos!

It's not about technology; it's about recognizing what makes your pictures look good.

by Tony Page

Extracts from the full ebook:

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Waterfall, Plitvice National Park, Croatia

Take Better Digital Photos

It's not about technology; it's about recognizing what makes your pictures look good.

Why This Book Was Written

Although I've been a professional photographer for many years, my wife Helen only started taking pictures relatively recently, mainly when we've been travelling round on trip assignments for our website, Travel Signposts. But I noticed she looked at things in a different way to me.

At first, she was really worried about all the technical stuff (at that stage I was using a D1x, and still had a truckload of Hasselblad gear in the equipment cupboard) and kept asking me whether she should do this or alter that. Frankly, I was a bit lazy in answering but after a while realized that most of the time her little point and shoot Canon was turning out perfectly acceptable shots from the technical point of view set on automatic (hey, sometimes they looked better than mine!).

So I just let her run with it, telling her to simply take snaps. Of course, there were situations where the camera's setup couldn't deal with the light or subject, but in most cases the problems with her images weren't "technical". And that was when I realized this truth:

> ***The fastest, most effective way to help most people take better photos is to teach them to recognize the elements that go into making a photo look good and how to build these basic essentials into their own images.***

Most photo manuals or courses kick off with teaching you about the technicalities: f-stops, ISO, EVs, exposure metering modes, etc., and how a digital camera works. I'm not saying you shouldn't know about all this, but from a practical point of view as far as most people are concerned this is doing things back to front.

The fact is, the technology built into most cameras today means that just left on automatic they will produce pretty acceptable photos from a technical point of view straight out of the box. And another fact is that the vast majority of users operate their cameras in just this way.

What the camera won't do, though, is to tell you what to put in your picture, how to frame it, how it should be lit, or how to arrange the elements in your photo so that it looks good.

Yet these questions are the most important ones to answer if your image is to be a success. When we're disappointed with our photos, 90% of the time it's because we've gone astray in one or more of these areas.

That's why in this book we concentrate right from the start on **how you can improve your creative vision**, the way you look at what you want to photograph. Follow our advice – you can begin putting it into practice right away – and your photos will immediately look better. Of course, I deal with the "technical" stuff later in the book (although you need less than you think), but if you want fast results, doing it in this order is the best way to "get more bangs for your buck".

Helen enjoying the hospitality on an evening river cruise along the Neva at St Petersburg, Russia.

Note: you'll have noticed I say "we"; that's because I've made a point of getting my wife Helen's input into "Take Better Digital Photos".

She has a full-time job so her experiences are probably much like yours, taking photos in your spare time and on holiday. So you get both a professional's knowledge and relative beginner's experiences and comments to help you put these recommendations and tips into practice!

How To Use This Book

Above all, this book is designed to be practical. Think of it as a toolbox. It's easy to get a little airy-fairy and esoteric when you're talking about photographic composition, but I'm assuming that you're more interested in learning how to take better photos than holding a dinner conversation. So the emphasis here is to give you solid information that you can use right away to improve your shots, with a minimum of technical jargon. Where we do get into technical matters, mainly in the last section of the book, we make a point of defining our terms and explaining things simply (and as part of your purchase we are also providing you with a free bonus of a 36 page Photo Glossary, check it out when you have a query).

> ***We're aiming this book at people who have started taking photographs, but haven't got the results they were hoping for.***

If you're an advanced photo enthusiast, you'll probably find some of it a bit basic (although the ideas in the book should be a part of every photographer's vocabulary, and there may be a few hints that you'll find useful…). Don't be deceived, though, what you'll read here is distilled from literally decades of experience, not just my own but also that of other photographers, both professional and amateur, that I've known over the years.

Our number one aim is to help you improve your creative vision, to develop your own unique creative view.

Each section is arranged as follows:

- Brief summary of the section
- Section content
- What have we learnt? A list of the main section headings

We recommend you first read the book straight through, then come back to bits which particularly interest you, or that you're not clear about. There are hints and tips scattered throughout the text, and you can skip instantly to any part of the book from the page links in the Index of Contents at the beginning.

Lily in bloom, Cremorne Point, Sydney, Australia

A Note on the Photographs and Our Equipment

All the photographs in this book were taken by myself, Tony Page, or my wife, Helen, over a number of years. Most of them were taken during our various trips on asssignment for our travel website, **Travel Signposts** (http://www.travelsignposts.com).

I have been very conscious of the fact that the majority of our readers do not have professional cameras or other expensive equipment, and have made a point of selecting many photographs that were actually taken with lower tech cameras than most of you will be using today! This is because quite a few of the shots - all those in Russia, for example - were taken at a time when digital photography was in its infancy, and the digital cameras we were using were by today's standards quite primitive.

The Equipment

I have always used Nikon and Hasselblad film cameras and lenses, and when I started using digital I first got a Kodak 210, then a Nikon 995 (3.34 megapixels) with screw-on telephoto and fisheye accessory lenses. I still have and use this!

My first professional digital was a Nikon D1x, and the main lenses I used (and still use) while travelling were an AFS Nikkor 17-35mm zoom and an AF Nikkor 28-200mm zoom, although my new 18-200 AFS DX VR zoom will probably replace the latter. I now use a D200.

My wife Helen started off with a Canon Digital Ixus (2.1 megapixels) and progressed to a Canon Ixus 400 (4 megapixels). She is going to get a small SLR this year. I also borrow her camera when I don't fancy lugging mine around in the evening...

So as you can see, nothing too fancy!

As far as software is concerned, for processing I use Adobe Photoshop on a Dell workstation, with the following plug-ins:

Bibble Pro for processing RAW files

LightMachine for adjusting highlights, shadows and a lot more

ColorWasher for adjusting colour balance and saturation

NIK Sharpener Pro for sharpening (just paint it where you want it!)

For storing and cataloguing my shots I use Digital Pro 4 - invaluable!

Taking Better Photos

Summary
What **are** better photos?

Three elements: Composition, Content, Technical factors.

- *Composition* is the way you put your pictures together
- *Content* involves both subject matter and treatment
- *Technical factors* are your equipment and your expertise in using it.

You want photos that look good. I'm generalising, but most of us take this to mean well-exposed (neither too light nor too dark), reasonably sharp on the most important parts of the photo, with good colour and, most important of all, *interesting*.

The **technical factors** are reasonably straightforward; *"Interesting"* is the killer quality. What we really mean by this is a satisfying blend of your **content**, i.e. subject matter, and the arrangement of the elements making up your photo in the image frame; the pleasing selection and arrangement of subjects within the picture area. We call this arrangement of elements making up your photo **"composition"**.

Let's look briefly at these three factors before going into more detail:

Composition
Composition is the way you put your picture together. Improving this skill is the fastest, most effective way to take better photos and give your images the "Wow!" factor. And it's what we're teaching you in this book.

In practical photographic terms, composition involves

- Where you are in relation to your subject
- What lens you are using to capture your subject
- What light is falling on your subject
- The way you frame your subject

Content

This comprises not only the subject matter of what you're shooting, but also the way you treat that subject. Sometimes the actual treatment itself forms the most important part of the content.

Subject matter:

Your choice! Landscape, cityscape, people, wild life, nature, sport, interiors, still life – the options are, of course, endless. People photography can further be divided into portraits, which can be formal or informal, and activities, which can cover a wide range of situations.

Treatment:

This consists of both the techniques and style of photography you use. Obviously most of your photos will be taken in daylight conditions with a straightforward treatment, but you may also find yourself shooting in other styles, e.g. night, macro, underwater, aerial, action, infra-red, high key, low key, romantic, documentary, candid etc.

Technical factors

This is all the stuff most photo courses zero in on, but although it's got its place, in my view we often put too much emphasis on it given current camera advances, especially for those just starting out. Elements of influence here are:

Equipment:

Camera, lens, flash, filters, tripod, etc.

Nowadays the new cameras, especially at the consumer level, are packed with features, not all of which are particularly useful. In the *"Technical Stuff"* part of the book I give you a pretty extensive, easy-to-follow run-down on the various features you might find in your digital camera, what they do and how (and if) to use them. I also throw in some advice on camera care, batteries, filters, tripods, printing and other topics for good measure.

Your technical skill in operating your equipment:

Self-evident. It's just practice, and not having fat fingers if you've bought a mini-camera (some controls on those tiny models are too fiddly for me!).

In this book, I'm going to emphasize photographic **SITUATIONS**, as well as giving you the technical info and tips and hints as to how to get the photos you want.

Composition: how to design your photos to "look good"

Summary
Getting your photos to "look good" is just a matter of training your eye to recognize when the elements making up your image "look right".

These are the creative tools and techniques you are going to use when deciding how to take your photo:

- **Design Elements:** the basic building blocks of design
- **Design Concepts:** ideas that provide a framework on which to build your composition
- **Design Techniques:** methods or tools which you can use to fuel your creativity

OK, let's talk about composition. There's no great mystery about this. Getting your photos to "look good" is just a matter of training your eye to recognize when the elements making up your image "look right". Photographic composition is an expression of your natural sense of design. Don't look doubtful, we all have it to some degree or another!

It's true that forests have been sacrificed to produce the multitude of books, articles and learned treatises on composition that have been created over the centuries, but the basic ideas are really quite simple to grasp, and you'll find many of the same phrases turning up in any discussion. The great thing to remember is that all these so-called rules and principles have just one purpose: to help you produce something that "looks right" and is pleasing to the eye.

> ***Warning: watch out for the "It looked OK at the time" trap:***
> ***Sometimes when you look at your photos a while after taking them, you see problems you didn't notice at the time you were pressing the shutter, such as too much sky, subject too small, person making a face in the background, etc.***
> ***It's easy to concentrate so much on your main subject you miss the big picture; take a mental step back and look around to make sure everything "looks right" before making your exposure.***

Now down to the practical stuff:

The Creative Tools

These are the creative tools and techniques you are going to use when deciding how to take your photo. They will help you get an image that is interesting and "looks right", and after a while you'll find you are using them automatically. They'll help you sharpen your natural sense of composition, develop your creative vision and take better pictures.

Don't think of them as rules never to be broken, they're just guides to give you a helping hand. You'll rarely use just one of these tools and techniques in isolation; ***in any one of your images, you'll normally employ several in combination***, just as you'd use more than one brush or technique in painting a picture.

In the end, if you genuinely think your image looks good, that is all that matters. Van Gogh wasn't appreciated in his day, and look at his reputation now!

I've split this discussion into three main sections:

- **Design Elements:** the basic ***building blocks*** of design
- **Design Concepts:** ideas that provide a ***framework*** on which to build your composition
- **Design Techniques:** methods or ***tools*** which you can use to fuel your creativity

This may all sound theoretical, but I've adopted a strictly practical approach with examples of situations that you can adapt for your own use. Far from being just theory, these ideas and techniques are **highly practical tools** you can use *right now*. Trust me, you'll see an immediate improvement in your photos if you start building these elements into your own shots.

The rich interior of the Monreale Cathedral in Palermo, Sicily is made more dramatic by shooting at a low, angled viewpoint.

Design Elements

Summary

The design elements I'll deal with here are:

- **Lines**
- **Shapes**
- **Texture**
- **Perspective (Size)**
- **Light**

Lines

I'm not just talking about obvious lines here, like the horizon or the edge of a building. Lines in your images can be vertical, horizontal or diagonal, curved or straight, visible or implied. ***The important thing to remember is that our eyes tend to follow lines.*** A line is defined as a path between two points, and our eyes find it easier to run down them rather than stray off into the undergrowth on either side.

Strong lines abound in the interior of the new Reichstag building in Berlin.

This attraction of lines can be a good thing, leading your viewer deeper into your picture so that they get more involved, but get it wrong and lines can distract from your main subject, confusing the viewer so he is unsure of where he's supposed to be looking, where the focal point of your picture really is. And people who get lost get bored, and look for something more interesting elsewhere.

Look out for physical features, like these rows of vines on the Côte d'Or, France, to help you add depth and interest to your image.

Always look for the unseen lines

Don't forget, lines can be imaginary and still be influential. This is because our brain is always trying to create a coherent picture out of the impressions sent to it by our eyes. So we "see" a relationship between two objects as an imaginary line if they're placed in particular positions relative to each other. Try moving your camera around or altering your own position and notice how these unseen lines change.

An unseen line links the parents and child in this beach scene at Santa Cruz, California

Use lines to lead your viewer into your picture

Where you have a river or a road in your photo, make sure it leads your viewer **into** your image to a point of interest rather than out of the side or away from your focal point. A fence line, someone pointing or the edge of a table in a still life shot are other examples.

Anneçy in France is often called "Little Venice", and here the lines of the Thiou canal lead the eye into the picture ; note the starting points in the corners.

Converging lines always convey a feeling of depth, and can be especially striking when arranged on a diagonal.

Curving lines are softer and more sensuous in appeal. And don't forget that a line can be a spiral, too.

By tilting the camera upwards you can capture the beauty of the ceiling of the main vestibule of the Palais Garnier in Paris while emphasizing its length with the converging lines of the ceiling mouldings and the rows of chandeliers.

Above: Looking upwards into a spiral staircase in Melk Monastery, Austria, creates a stunning optical effect.

Right: The converging lines of this jetty in Samoa lead us up to the boat's yellow sail which creates a "spot" by breaking the line of the horizon.

Use horizontal lines to imply calmness and tranquillity

Horizontal lines **can** be used effectively to give a feeling of rest and peacefulness, but they carry with them a real risk of a boring, static composition. An obviously suitable horizontal composition would be the classic beach idyll with golden sands, blue sea and horizon.

The promenade at Zadar in Croatia is a favourite spot to wait for the sunset; the horizontal composition here lends a peaceful air to the scene, although actually there were many people just out of shot.

Use vertical lines to convey strength

Vertical lines can imply strength and solidity, but they also carry with them a lack of movement. If they converge upwards, as when you tilt your camera to get in the top of a building, they can give a soaring feeling, but this is nearly always improved by slanting the camera slightly to build in a diagonal.

Below: The massiveness of the columns suporting the dome of the Aya Sofia Mosque in Istanbul is dramatised by the slight slant of the camera angle

Above: Huge pillars soar upwards at the Temple of Horus in Egypt, their tremendous size and strength given scale by the tiny human figure.

Use diagonal lines to increase interest

Whereas horizontal and vertical lines tend to give a stable, static feel, diagonal lines are more dynamic, implying action and movement.

Don't forget, you don't have to have an actual line between two points; it can be imaginary, created by the positioning of e.g. two people. If you find yourself with horizontal or vertical lines you don't want, change your camera angle to place them on a slant.

Neither the gondola in Venice nor the Ferrari in Rome are moving, but the use of diagonal lines gives a more dynamic feel to both images.

Use lines into corners

If your lines are going to break the frame or come to an end, try to make it happen in a corner. Of course, that's not usually going to occur with the horizon, but a road will probably look better coming out of, say, the bottom left corner of your shot and moving into and across the image than starting in the middle and exiting halfway up the right side.

Check out the use of lines into the corners in these shots of a church interior in Rocamadour, France, and the crowded road traffic outside the Kremlin in Moscow.

Don't cut your lines short

When you have a line that implies motion in your photo, don't cut it short. This really means you should watch out for the edges of your photo frame and give any moving object space to move. Seeing a runner or a speeding car about to hit the vertical edge of your photo is uncomfortable.

Anything that moves needs a space in front of it to move into, to continue its action, so don't cut your imaginary line too short. The same goes for people or animals, don't have them looking straight into the brick wall of the side of your frame, give them some open space to continue their line of sight so things don't feel so cramped.

Look out for S-curves

Straight lines are all very well, but the alternating sweeps of S-curves seem to be more attractive to the human eye. The variation in line is more interesting – think of a straight road compared to a winding one or the arabesques of dancers as they move. Look out for S-curves and try to build one into your shot; sometimes this single line can form the main interest in your image.

This shot of Helen walking down a spiral staircase in the Louvre in Paris has very complicated lines, but although I have cropped off part of the S-curve of the staircase it still dominates the image, nicely contrasting with the arrow-like line of the balcony leading you into the picture.

Shapes

The altar and dome of St Peters in Rome provide graphic contrasting shapes

Shapes can be closed lines like circles, squares, rectangles, triangles, stars etc. or defined by areas of shade or colour (this is more often the case in photography). They can form patterns, like a row of street lamps or a tiled floor, or the pieces on a chessboard. Or they can simply be striking in themselves, like the abstract curves of a Henry Moore sculpture or a jagged cliff outline.

Look for shapes

Shapes and patterns help our brain process the visual information it receives, and therefore are attractive to us. If some shape or pattern strikes us as interesting or noteworthy, the odds are that it will make a good photograph, no matter what the actual subject matter is.

Don't have too many shapes

You can have too much of a good thing. If you cram your frame with too many shapes, your composition will be confused, especially if the shapes are dissimilar. Try to have a balance between shapes and areas that are undefined in your photo. Often concentrating on a single particularly striking shape or pattern is the way to go.

This Lamborghini has such a stunning design you don't need anything else in the shot.

Similar shapes form patterns

Although in some circumstances it is possible for dissimilar shapes to form patterns, e.g. where an underlying frame is strong, as in the case of the chessboard mentioned earlier, it's generally where you have similar shapes that patterns are created. Don't just go for objects in a row, like a line of trees or houses, also look out for more complicated patterns, like a flock of birds wheeling in the sky.

The gondolas on the London Eye provide many opportunities for using patterns.

Break a pattern to create a point of interest

Think of a queue of people waiting for a bus. You shoot along the line towards the bus-stop; it's an interesting perspective, the people form a repeating pattern, but a little boring. Now a small child leans out of the queue and looks at you. The pattern is broken, and immediately your eye is drawn to him. Artists call this "creating a spot", or a point of interest. You can use the same technique. It's especially useful when your composition is nearly there but lacking "something"; add in a single contrasting element to break it up a bit – don't forget, perfection is boring!

This giant chess board in Hobart, Tasmania, is a great attraction for kids and a fine photo opportunity.

This richly carved wooden ceiling in the Mariott Hotel in Cairo, Egypt, simply begs to be included in a photo!

Plants are a wonderful source of repeating shapes; these leaves are in the Plitvice National Park in Croatia.

Texture

A photographic image is two dimensional, printed on a flat piece of paper or shown on a (usually) flat screen. You can't run your fingers across it and feel texture, like you can with a piece of wood or a cat's fur. We have an essentially emotional response to texture, and that makes it a powerful element we can use in composing our image. Add texture and you add depth to your photography.

Emphasize texture by lighting

We'll deal with this in more detail later, but by lighting a surface from a shallow angle, especially with hard light, we can highlight its texture (essentially its unevenness) by producing more pronounced shadows. The opposite also applies: soft, frontal lighting smooths out a surface by removing shadows.

This is particularly useful when you want to emphasize the smoothness of a model's skin.

Emphasize texture by contrast

By placing objects with contrasting textures next to one another or in opposition in our image, their individual qualities are magnified. Think of a jagged rock protruding from water, or beach sand on skin.

Use digital noise to produce texture

Digital noise can be used in the same way as film grain to give a "gritty", documentary-style effect, or just to add emotion and atmosphere. It's especially useful at night, when you can make a virtue out of necessity if it's so gloomy you have to use a high ISO setting to get anything at all!

Midnight in Moscow! This shot in Red Square was very underexposed, but when brightened in Photoshop gained an atmospheric grainy quality.

Perspective (Size)

In an image, size is relative and depends upon your viewpoint in relation to your subject. It also depends on your having a point of reference in your photograph, something to establish relative sizes of the various objects shown, and the focal length of your lens.

Have a Point of Reference

The impressive *Temple of Karnak* in Egypt needs a tiny human figure in the picture to show how gigantic it is, and the small size of a premature baby might be dramatized by the presence of an adult human hand. If you don't have a point of reference, the impact of some of your shots could be drastically reduced.

This is a big bell (it weighs 200 tons)! Unfortunately it never pealed, as it cracked while still in its casting pit during the 1737 fire, but Czar Peter III kept it and it remains in the Kremlin in Moscow.

The huge scale of this scupture in the Vatican courtyard can only be seen in comparison to the smallness of my wife Helen as she walks by it.

Wide angle smaller, telephoto bigger

In photography, size and perspective also depend on the focal length of the lens you are using. A wide angle lens makes objects in the background recede and look smaller; a telephoto lens will compress perspective and make things in the background look closer and therefore larger.

Deliberate distortion

This can be very effective in adding impact to your pictures. The distortion of perspective produced by a wide-angle lens is particularly useful here (as is its greater depth of field), but by getting close to your subject even a normal lens can produce dramatic effects. Smaller objects in the foreground can seem gigantic, especially when your shooting position is on the same level or lower than your subject.

This glass of wine is the same size as my head in the photo thanks to its closeness to the camera lens!

Light

Light is the single most important element in photography and photographic composition. A subject of no intrinsic interest can be transformed into a fascinating image by the magic of creative lighting, by man or nature.

When you photograph something, you are actually capturing the light reflected from or radiated by whatever is in front of you. This is really important to understand, because unlike your brain, the camera cannot interpret what it sees, or make allowances for colour distortion, it just records the light that it receives.

The setting sun breaks through low clouds over the sea off Samoa as a ferry makes its way home. Keep an eye out for interesting light effects towards sunset, clouds often produce photogenic rays as they filter the sun.

So the *quantity, quality* and *colour* of the light are all important.

- The **quantity** of the light affects whether an article is underexposed, i.e. receives too little light and is recorded as being too dark, or overexposed, too much light, too light.
- The **quality** of light affects the degrees of contrast in your image, the depth of the shadows and brightness of the highlights, and the harshness or softness of the outlines.
- The **colour** of the light affects the look of the image, but more importantly influences the "feel" of the photo; for example, we associate a blue cast with a cool feel, a red tone with a warm one.

Light Quantity

No matter how strong the light is, you can *always* expose to show detail in one part of the image, e.g. the highlights, but then you may well lose detail in another part of your photo, because your camera has not got a wide enough **dynamic range** to capture everything.

The dynamic range is the range of brightness levels in a recorded scene from the darkest shadows to the brightest highlights.

The important thing is to have light where you **need** it; unimportant areas are often best left in the shade or the opposite, "burnt out".

You've got to watch out for patches of white or light areas in your images. A viewer's eye will always go to the brightest part of a scene, so make sure you cut out any bright spots that will drag attention away from your main subject. Of course, where the whole background is light, as with snow, a contrasting dark object will attract attention first.

Tiny though they are, these mountaineers on the skyline above Chamonix in France immediately catch your eye.

Light Quality

The quality of light is usually described as being either **hard** or **soft**. "Hard" light casts deep shadows with distinct outlines, while "Soft" light, if it casts shadows at all, makes them with soft, fuzzy outlines.

An example of hard light would be the sun overhead at noon in a clear sky or direct flash, while an example of soft or "filtered" light would be the illumination cast by the sun shining through clouds later in the day, or a flash with a "softbox" or diffusing filter over it.

Although hard light can give you problems with harsh contrast, it usually gives better texture to your subject, except when it is flat on, i.e. behind you shining directly over your shoulder. On the other hand, a very even, shadowless light can make for

Soft filtered light in the late afternoon at the Isola Madre on Lake Maggiore in the Italian Alps.

a rather flat, boring image, although if bright can produce very true colours (if dull though, a cloudy day can be very blue).

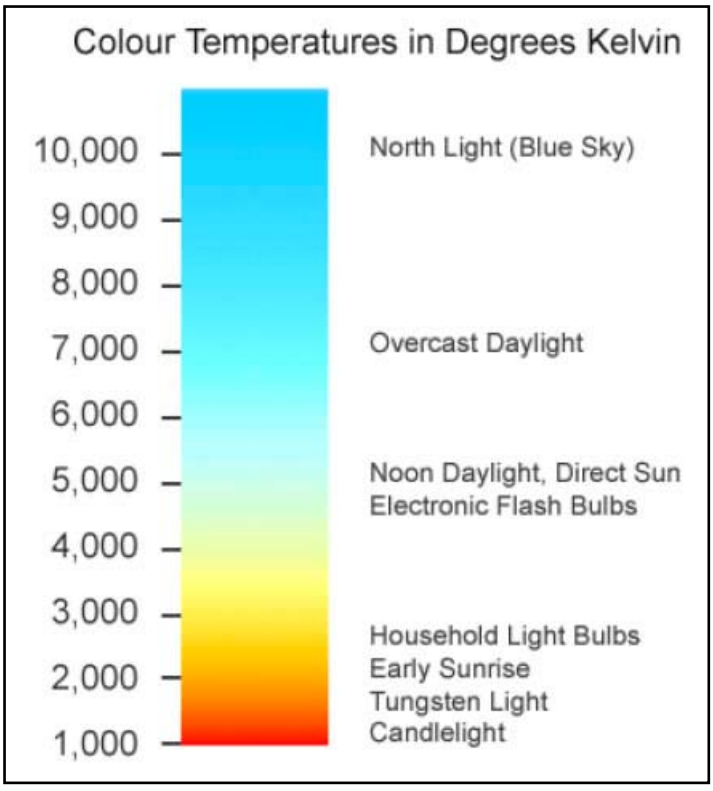
Light Colour

Natural light varies according to the time of day, weather, and time of year. And also what altitude you are shooting at (high altitudes have bluer light as the UV content is greater).

The frost on the trees and the steely light give an unmistakeably wintry feel to this French landscape near Dijon.

"Cold" light has a blue tinge; "warm" light has a red tinge. Dawn light tends to be cooler than sunset, for example, but both are warm when compared to midday sunlight.

"Colour temperature" is the standard method of describing colours scientifically. Colour temperatures are normally expressed in ° kelvin (K). You may have seen references to this in your camera manual. The relevant temperatures for photographic purposes range from around 2,000K to 8,000K, the most common lighting conditions.



This diagram shows some examples of different light sources and their colour temperatures.

Your brain compensates to some degree for these different lights, so that a white handkerchief

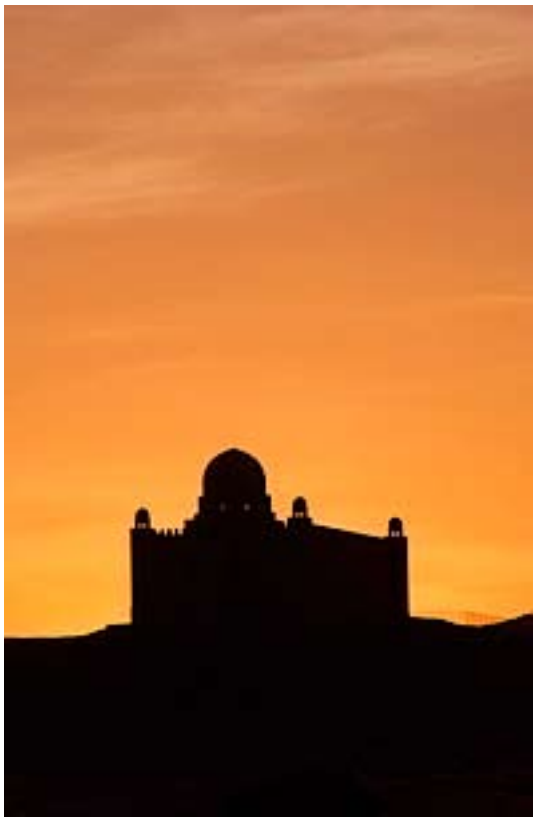
roughly looks white and a yellow banana looks yellow no matter whether you see them in sunlight or under fluorescent tubes.

But a camera cannot do this and will simply capture the light reflected off your subject. As the light from these two sources is quite different (most fluorescent light is in fact greenish), the colours will look "wrong" unless you make an adjustment to take the colour of the light into account.

On the other hand, it is possible to use the "white balance" adjustment on your camera not only to "correct" colour casts but also to produce them for creative purposes, e.g. to "warm up" a cold overcast day.

Here are a few examples of different types of light:

'Magic Hour' is the hour just before sunset and after dawn when the light has a superb luminous quality, as in this shot of a bird in a flame tree at Perth, Western Australia.



Right: The silhouetted Aga Khan Mausoleum overlooking Aswan, Egypt.

Below: Misty coolness on this winter ascent of Mount Pilatus above Innsbrück, Austria.

Twilight tends to drain the colour from objects, often silhouetting them as in the case of this islet off Raratonga. Note the fishermen paddling their canoe home and the silvery quality of the water as it reflects the sky: the colour palette is small and harmonious, adding to the peaceful feeling.

A low sun is particularly useful in creating backlighting, as in this study of grass fronds outside Toledo in Spain. Look out for these opportunities early or late in the day.

Shooting at night can be tricky with a compact camera, you have to be careful not to under expose as your camera's meter can be deceived by the bright electric lights. Fortunately you can often fix things later as I did with this scene from the Heidelberg Weihnachtsmarkt in Germany.

What have we learnt? Design Elements

Here's an outline of the main topics covered in this last section.

Swayambhunath Temple, Kathmandu, Nepal

Format card

Although you can delete images on your memory card in the camera, only do this when you have run out of space. After you've downloaded your photos onto your computer or other storage, FORMAT the card in the camera in which you are going to use it to delete all the images and empty the card. DON'T use the "Delete all" feature on the camera. By using the "Format" option, you completely wipe out everything on the card and get a "clean slate". Professionals do this religiously, because it avoids card "freezes" and greatly extends its useful life.

Note: the format option is all or nothing, you can't only delete some images.

Basic Settings

Resolution (size)

All digital cameras can take photos in different resolutions (sizes). Descriptions can vary, and are sometimes combined with the file compression setting (quality) in simpler cameras. The resolution is measured in pixels, like the size of your computer monitor. My Nikon D200, for example, offers these sizes:

Image size	Size (pixels)	Approximate size when printed at 200 dpi
Large (10MB)	3872 x 2592	49.2 x 32.9 cm (19.36 x 12.96 in.)
Medium (5.6MB)	2896 x 1944	36.8 x 24.7 cm (14.48 x 9.72 in.)
Small (2.5MB)	1936 x 1296	24.6 x 16.5 cm (9.68 x 6.48 in.)

You can change these settings in your shooting menu or often by using a button on the back of the camera. The larger the image, the larger the size at which it can be printed without getting "grainy"; there's an indication of typical print sizes in the table.

Warning: be careful about changing this setting, as when you look through your viewfinder or on the LCD you won't notice any difference between the smallest and the largest setting; this will only become obvious when you print the images later!

Tony's advice: Always shoot at the largest size available on your camera. You never know what you're going to need your photo for, and this will give you more freedom to crop your image whatever way you want later. Memory cards are cheaper now, so it's false economy to compromise on your photo quality for the sake of smaller files.

File compression (quality)

When your camera saves a digital photo to the memory card it compresses it to save space. Usually it will use a file format called JPEG ('jay-peg') and you can choose what level of compression is used. Most cameras offer three levels, e.g. basic (most compression), normal and fine (least compression). The problem is, the more compression you use the poorer the quality of the image when it is decompressed for you to view or print it. What's worse, you won't notice any difference between the settings when you look at your image on the LCD.

Tony's advice: Always use the best quality setting, for the same reason as I advise you above to shoot the largest size you can: you want to get the best quality images from your camera, especially if you've spent a lot of money to buy it. You get fewer images on your card, but unlike film, cards can be used over and over again, so buy good-sized cards (2GB are fine) and go for quality.

RAW format

Most cameras process the image before saving it, applying white balance, sharpening etc. If your camera can use RAW format, this means it can save **all** the data produced by the camera's sensor directly to the memory card, without doing anything to it at all. This has various advantages and can give you a better end result than using JPEGs, but the files are bigger and have to be processed later on a computer using conversion software matched to your camera.

Professionals virtually always use RAW but in most cases it's overkill for the rest of us. My camera shoots RAW and JPEG Fine at the same time and in the

majority of cases the JPEG is perfectly good enough for most purposes.

Sound volume

I used to love the sound of my motor drive Nikon F3, sort of like the way motorbike fiends rave over the exhaust note of a Harley Davidson, but I have to admit that in some situations (a quiet church!) the noise was an attention-drawing pain…

All digitals can take photographs completely silently if you want, but I like to have some sound set to let me know it's worked. There is often an amazing choice of sounds available (chirping bird, anyone - who thinks of this stuff?) not just for taking the photo but for other operations as well.

HDTV mode

This is a relatively recent development and only a few cameras have it. Most cameras record the image in a 4:3 or 3:2 ratio, but in this mode the camera records in 16:9 which matches the proportions of the new HDTV format. If you want to shoot just for your TV, fine but otherwise this seems largely a waste of time as it is usually done by cropping the larger size.

World Clock

Under no circumstances should you be trashing your photos with a date/time stamp on the image area, but setting the time is important because it is recorded in the metadata of your photos when they're saved to your card. I find this really useful in sorting out my images later, but remember to change the setting as you switch between time zones (most cameras use cities as references, so it's quite easy).

Power saving

The thing that uses most battery power is the LCD display, so make sure it's set to switch off when not in use. The flash also takes a lot of power, so don't use it when it's not necessary. However, these days battery life has greatly improved over even three years ago, and this is not the problem it once was.

> ***Tony's advice: ALWAYS carry a spare fully-charged battery and recharge both batteries every night when on a trip.***

LCD brightness

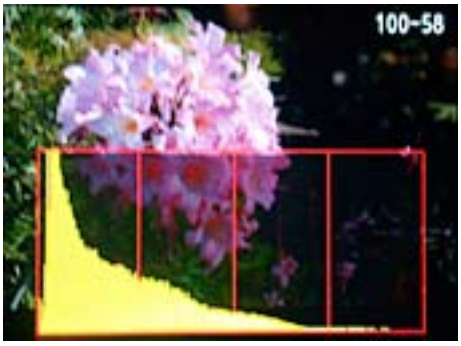
Don't have this too bright for a couple of reasons: the brighter it is the

more battery power it takes, and more importantly, it can give you a false impression of what you're actually shooting. I much prefer a viewfinder because the LCD can be difficult to see in bright light unless you turn it up.

What I do is to try and match the LCD to the image I see through the viewfinder, and then check the LCD against the same photo on my calibrated computer screen. Once you've done this a couple of times, you get some idea of what the normal setting should be. Then if you have to turn the LCD setting up for a while, you can easily return it to "normal" brightness afterwards.

Display options

Many cameras can now display a range of options on their LCD screens as well as the image. Histograms, a "Rule of Thirds" grid, overexposed highlight warnings and detailed exposure information are just a few available. Some cameras allow you to have several running at the same time.



My D200 offers two choices of histogram, the regular single one on the left, and another option that adds histograms of the three colours, RGB, to give you a complete picture.

I don't like a cluttered LCD so usually just have the overexposed highlight warning switched on, but I always check out the histogram to see what's actually being recorded on the card. **The important thing:** don't blow out your highlights; make sure the histogram reaches but DOES NOT RUN OFF the right hand side.

Tony's tip: if you can't see the image on your LCD in sunlight or because it's too dim, switch on the histogram; it will be easier to see and will tell you whether you're getting a useable exposure.

Happy Shooting!

Tony Page

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