



**TEN 10 MORE**

Ten More Ways to Improve Your Craft. None of Them Involve Buying Gear

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# Introduction

**Ten More** is a follow up to my first eBook, **Ten**. The goal is simple; to cut through the clutter and give emerging photographers solid steps on which to take their craft and art to the next place, wherever that place is.

The internet is full of so much nonsense, so much noise, and - positively - so many great tips and tricks. But in all that noise it's easy to lose our focus, to begin to wonder which voices to listen to and in which direction to aim your efforts. **Ten More** is a collection of another ten ways in which you can work on your craft. They are steps I think we need to return to once in a while, to return us to the basics, or to re-calibrate ourselves. There's nothing magic here, this second group of ten is pretty much like the first in its goal - to bring us back to the most important stuff, which in turn will free us from the endless tips and tricks and how-to stuff and set us on our own path of artistic discovery.

There are no rules here. In fact, I'm hoping this loosens our dependence on rules and the endless need for articles titled "The 3 Rules of Composition," and so on, and pushes us to a place where the deeper principles give us a solid foundation without the need for gimmicks. I think if we all spent less time reading how-to stuff and more time out shooting and exploring our craft, we'd be miles better at our photographic expression. We need this how-to stuff, I know we do, but there's a danger of addiction and the sooner we are free of the dependence, the more we'll flourish. As such, the following ten are less about the how-to, and more about the why. Here's my 10 more:

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*Make sure you're viewing this in 2-page spreads if you want this to look its best. In Acrobat go to View > Page Display > Two Up. Also checking "Show Cover Page During Two Up" will make sure the pages aren't out of sync.*



*Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2009  
Canon 5D Mk2, 25mm, 1/125 @ f/2.8, iso 100*

*Saffron robes of Buddhist monks hang to dry  
at a monastery outside Chiang Mai.*

# 1. Get Closer

One of the oft-cited tips for new photographers is to get closer. I can only imagine how many photographers end up shooting macro images of butterflies on account of this advice. Getting closer can be done in several ways, and for several reasons, each of which can make your images stronger. Most of them don't include butterflies.

**1. Proximity.** Move your feet. This is the most literal interpretation of the Get Closer maxim. Get your camera closer to your subject matter. Of course, the opposite is true, often we need to back up - especially if you're using the next method to "get closer" but there are times your proximity to the subject can't be replicated with a longer lens - like when you're shooting with a wide angle lens and want to be in tight. Sure, you could use a longer lens but it would change the whole look of the image, and that's the point, isn't it? The look? Still, moving in and being unafraid of being close can dramatically improve images, especially portraiture where proximity implies intimacy and allows you a deeper connection with your subject.

**2. Compression.** Use your lens. A longer focal length will allow you to get closer when you yourself are unable to. It will also allow you to pull that background close to your foreground, and in some cases where this effect is important you'll find yourself needing a longer focal length but having to back up to use it. Getting closer by walking backwards. Weird, but helpful. Too many photographers get stuck in a tripod mentality, planting themselves in one place and using a zoom lens to frame. Sometimes necessary, but often too limiting. Move around. Move forward, move side to side, and when what you really want is the gorgeous compressed look a longer lens will give you, then put it on and back up!

**3. Exclusion.** Sometimes getting closer is merely a matter of reducing the number of elements in the frame and creating a photograph that looks at one thing prominently. Don't hesitate to experiment with sparse compositions, reducing the image to its simplest form. When there are less things to look at the remaining ones pull our eye the strongest.

**4. Research.** The more you know about your subject, the more intimate and revealing your images about that subject will be. This is not physical closeness at all, but a mental, emotional, even a spiritual, proximity to it through familiarity, intimacy, or respect. The more you know a subject the deeper your images are likely to be.



*Shanti Stupa, Leh, Ladakh, India, 2008  
Canon 5D, 17mm, 1/320 @ f/10, iso 100*

*Photographer Matt Brandon shooting out over the valley in Leh. This framing, and the ability to get Matt within the colourful context of the Shanti Stupa, was possible only with a wide angle lens and getting close. Really close.*





Bangkok, Thailand, 2009  
Canon 5D Mk2, 24mm, 1/150 @ f/3.5, iso 100

## A Creative Exercise

*Pick a subject. It could be a park near your home. It could be your wife, your child, your cat.*

*Take a photograph. Now get closer.*

*First get closer physically. Make a photograph. Now get closer by using a longer lens or perhaps a macro lens, depending on your subject.*

*Play with this one. When's the last time you shot a macro photograph of your husband? Why not? Now shoot a closer image using the principle of exclusion. Finally, see if you can get closer by increasing your knowledge or understanding of your subject. How would your image of your cat change if you spent some time visually exploring, as I did with this umbrella in a market in Thailand?*

## 2. Embrace the Constraints

Creativity works best under constraints, and while our tendency as photographers is to labour under the delusion that the size of our camera bag or gear closet is directly related to how creative we can be, that doesn't seem to bear itself out in the real world. What it does, in fact, is paralyze us with options and choices. But give a photographer one camera and one lens and watch her explore her options. I'm the first to admit to carrying more gear than I need when I travel on assignment, but most of it stays in the hotel or the Land Cruiser. When I'm out shooting, most of the time, I limit myself to two bodies and two lenses. I leave the gimmicks and the toys at home. And in those times I want to play with the toys, I still embrace the idea of constraints. If I'm playing with my Lensbaby, I go out with my Lensbaby, and I work it. It's then that the ideas come to me, that the unexpected happens, or the muse shows up to inspire me - when I've run up against the wall of the constraints, exhausted the possibilities and have to rely on my creativity to kick in. Want to jump start your creativity as a photographer? Go with less gear, not more. Even beyond creativity, it's good advice. Better to master one lens than be mediocre with 4.

### A Creative Exercise

*The goal here is to hem yourself in, paint yourself into a corner and see what you can do with it. First, get your favourite lens. Got it? Good. That's the one you can't use for this exercise. Put it away and take out the one you use the least. If you only have one zoom lens, then tape the ring down at your least-used focal length. Now pick one of the following and spend a full hour exploring it. Interpret these any way you like but shoot only the theme you've chosen. An hour will give you time to really milk it without going insane. Here they are: Blue. Alphabet. Jump. Hidden. Shadow. Up. Down. Fast. Slow. Six. Face. Anonymous. Red. Rough. Dying. Gone. Bigger. Loud. Obvious. You. Or come up with your own. But pick one, commit to it, milk it.*



### 3. Study The Masters

They say we become who we are in large part due to (a) the people with whom we surround ourselves and (b) the books we read. Photography is a hands-on craft, an art that's improved by getting out there and doing it, frame after frame after frame. But there is a needed place for good old fashioned study. When I was 16 I studied the images and the life of Yousuf Karsh. I poured over his images, took his work out of the library so many times I can't help but wonder why the librarian didn't just let me keep them. I immersed myself, lost for hours in the tones and lines, textures and emotions, of his portraits. Same thing with Steve McCurry, and now in my later years, with others - like Cartier-Bresson, Frank, Arbus - as I study the men and women who brought my craft to where it is today.

Studying the masters is more than paying my respect to their legacy, it's a chance to see how they did it and why, to see how they used the basic tools of light, colour, gesture, to create their images. Their work changes me, challenges my methods. I will never meet them, most of the ones I really love and respect are dead, but I can study under them all the same. This doesn't have to cost a thing, go to the library once a week and take out the work of the masters. Heck, take out the work of the obscure ones you've never heard of and the ones you don't immediately like. There is no one you can't learn something from.

#### A Creative Exercise

*Start easy. Each month pick a new photographer from the list below, and then spend some time online looking at their images, or in a library with their books. Just study the work. Do you like it or not? Why? What appeals to you? What doesn't? Why? What is unique about their work? Is there an evolution apparent as the artist has grown? The more you interact the better. Here's a short, desperately incomplete list you might start with: Henri Cartier-Bresson, Sam Abell, Galen Rowell, Yousef Karsh, Steve McCurry, Diane Arbus, Mary Ellen Mark, Annie Liebovitz, Ansel Adams, Richard Avedon, Robert Frank, Helmut Newton, and Irving Penn. Add others as you discover them.*

▼ Navigator FIT FILL 1:1 3:1 ↕



▼ Presets +

## ▼ Lightroom Presets

- Creative - Aged Photo
- Creative - Antique Grayscale
- Creative - Antique Light
- Creative - B&W High Contrast
- Creative - B&W Low Contrast
- Creative - Cold Tone
- Creative - Cyanotype
- Creative - Direct Positive
- Creative - Selenium Tone
- Creative - Sepia
- General - Auto Tone
- General - Grayscale
- General - Punch
- General - Zeroed
- Sharpen - Landscapes
- Sharpen - Portraits
- Tone Curve - Flat
- Tone Curve - Strong Contrast

## ▶ 300 Folder

## ▶ bw\_raw\_pl Folder

## ▼ User Presets

- 99 Cent Bleach
- BikeThonBlues
- BlackAndWhiteTones
- Blue Gold Split
- Bronze
- BW Direct Positive
- COL Lomo with Velvia
- Color Bleach Greens
- Cool Sepia
- CrossPro1
- Deeper than usual
- Earth
- FAUX HDR
- FAUX HDR B+W
- FAUX HDR2
- Fill +20
- Golden
- Just a Little More
- Lighter Cyanotype
- Matt's Cross Process 1
- Matt's Vintage New York Effe...
- Matt's Vintage New York Effe...
- Matt's Vintage New York Effe...
- Moderately Pleasing
- Modern Antique
- Natural Beauty
- Natural Beauty Light
- New Direct Positive
- Old Timee
- Outstanding
- Silver Sand
- Split Wine
- Split to Blue
- That 70s Photo
- Vignette One
- Yellow/Blue Faux-tone
- YogaSharpen

## 4. Learn The Digital Darkroom.

If there's one thing I like to convince myself I miss about film it's the darkroom. In truth, I don't miss the mess, the expense, and the fumes. But I miss the tactility of it, the hours that went by like minutes while I was in there creating, fiddling, and - truthfully - cussing about dust in my enlarger and all the other issues as I learned my craft. But what I loved most of all, and what digital gave back to me, was the control over the end product. The ability to finess my work until an image said exactly what I wanted it to. Digital gave me a level of control - without the chemicals and total lack of social interaction - that I never had, even in the darkroom.

If you want to take your skills to the next level, invest some time learning Lightroom, Photoshop, or Aperture. My preference is Lightroom. I can't imagine ever going back to a Photoshop + Bridge solution, and I tried Aperture but it wasn't intuitive to me. A tool's what you make of it so pick the one that works for you and then learn it. Truly learn it. Sure, tinker with it and try a tip here or there, but at some point you'll want to sit down - maybe over a weekend - and dedicate time to learning what each and every slider does and how you might use them.

Why? Because these are your tools of expression and your inspiration will only take you as far as your familiarity with these tools and your mastery of them. The more I work on my craft the more I see the blindspots and the gaps in my expertise. In some cases I'm cool letting them go for now. There's so much to learn, I can't master it all. But I can prioritize. In a couple places now I've posited that there are three images that go into making the final photograph: the one you visualize, the one you capture, and the one you refine in the darkroom. So learning to see, master your camera and lenses, and use the digital darkroom with comfort and expertise, are the biggest blocks I work on myself.

Copy...

Paste



## A Creative Exercise

For the sake of continuity I called this one a creative exercise. It's actually profoundly pragmatic. It'll also need tweaking if you're working outside Lightroom. Take 7 of your favourite images, create Virtual Copies and put those virtual copies into a collection. Now take an hour on each one, one each evening for a week (or whatever timing works best for you) and spend a full hour on each image. Begin by applying each and every Development Preset and seeing what it does. Then go back to the beginning and work your way down the development tools on the right side. Play. What does each slider do, what aesthetic effect does it have on the image? Play with the Tone Curve. Play with Split Tones. Play with the Graduated Filter and the Brush. And as you finish each hour spend the last 15 minutes creating one or two alternate treatments of the image. Something wildly different from the way you normally would. The goal is to get familiar with the tools, as well as becoming a little more relaxed when it comes to playing with variations.

Histogram ▾

R 81.6 G 86.1 B 94.8 %

Tool: Crop & Straighten

Aspect: Original ▾

Angle: 0.00

Reset Close

Basic ▾

Treatment: Color Grayscale

WB: As Shot ▾

Temp: 0  
Tint: 0

Tone Auto

Exposure: 0.00  
Recovery: 0  
Fill Light: 0  
Blacks: 0

Brightness: 0  
Contrast: 0

Presence

Clarity: 0  
Vibrance: 0  
Saturation: 0

Tone Curve ▾

Region

Highlights: 0  
Lights: 0  
Darks: 0  
Shadows: 0

Point Curve: Linear ▾

HSL / Color / Grayscale ▾

	Hue	Saturation	Luminance	All
Hue				
Red	0			0
Orange		0		0
Yellow			0	0
Green				0
Aqua				0
Blue				0
Purple				0
Magenta				0
Saturation				
Red		0		0
Orange			0	0
Yellow				0
Green				0
Aqua				0
Blue				0
Purple				0
Magenta				0
Luminance				

Previous Reset (Adobe)

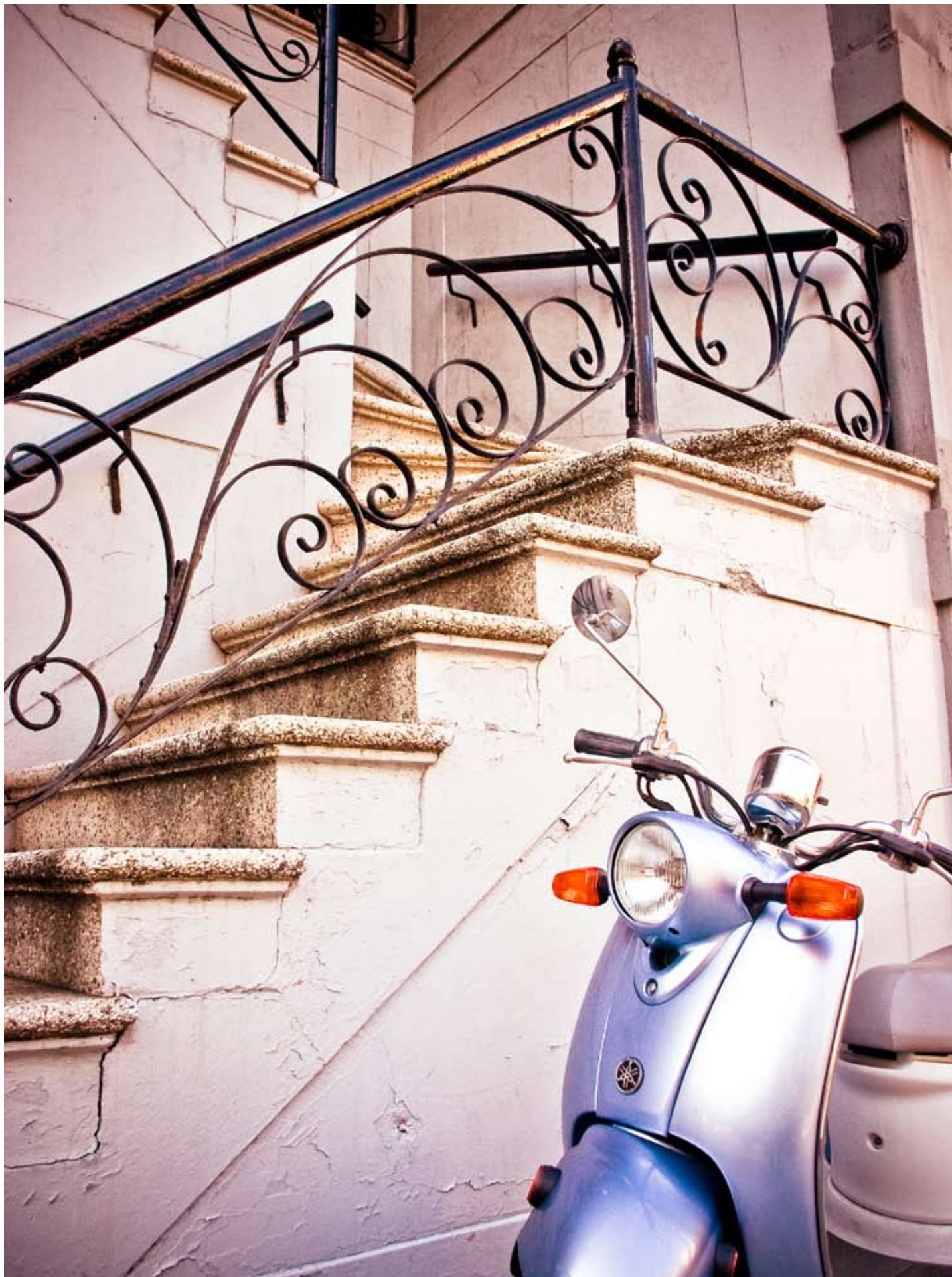
## 5. Play. Risk. Fail.

For something that most of us take up for fun, we sure know how to take it way too seriously at times. Occasionally I wonder if the Canon vs Nikon wars that rage in forums across the internet will end in casualties. Other times I realize they already have. The more seriously we take the wrong issues, the less time we give to making photographs. If the participants in those forums put that much passion into their art as they did into their arguments, there'd be a photographic renaissance. I'm all for taking this craft seriously, but not at the risk of losing our sense of play and our willingness to experiment, fail, and learn from the failures.

Learning to chill is important. When we take this too seriously we begin to censor our efforts and silence the playful voice that used to say "Hey, what if?" or "I wonder what it looks like when I do this...?" when we go out to create. If you're like me you do your best work when it comes from a place of playfulness, curiosity, or willingness to try something just to see what happens. Art carries with it - must carry with it - an element of risk. In fact, it's that risk, even in matters as simple as risking few bad frames, that separates the good from the mediocre. It's the ones who colour outside the lines that go on to become Picasso and the ones that colour within the lines that go on to become, well, I don't know, accountants or lawyers maybe.

Artists must have something of an anarchist within them, a spirit that bucks at the rules and wants to follow the "what if...?" But grown-ups have usually lost that innocent anarchist, it's discouraged in schools - even, God forbid, in art classes. My wife Sharon coloured a turtle blue when she was in Grade 2. She was told to colour the turtle, had never seen a turtle, so coloured it a beautiful blue. The teacher rebuked her, told her "turtles aren't blue!" and made her re-colour her turtle. What a shameful way to beat the creative spirit out of a child. Pursue the "what if?", colour your turtle blue - or purple for that matter! Whatever you do, don't ever fear failure. Play. Risk. Fall on your face and see what happens. To do otherwise is to stagnate.

*San Francisco, USA, 2005  
Canon 400D, 18mm, 1/250 @ f/5.0, iso 200*





## A Creative Exercise

*The next time you go out to photograph, start listening for the voices - the grown-up voices in your head that tell you, "Don't do it that way, it'll look stupid," or "Don't bother clicking the shutter on that one, it probably won't work anyways." Now stop listening to them. Take the shot. Do it the wrong way intentionally. In "Ten" I told you to Get Pickier, this is the opposite of that, but it's just a creative exercise. You can be as picky as you want in the edit. When you shoot, err on the side of doing stupid things "just to see what it looks like." If you shoot straight horizons, stop for a while and play with wild angles. If you shoot clean compositions, mess them up for a while. It'll do you good to have a break from the voices. Colour your turtle blue and colour outside the lines for a while.*



*Varanasi, India, 2007  
Canon 5D, 135mm, 5 seconds @ f/20, iso 200*

*I dragged my tripod a long way to get this shot. It was one of the few that I used it for, and of all the frames I shot that evening, it was the ones where I was "just trying something" that best captured what I wanted of this scene. Of course, more often than not my experiments yield nothing but lessons in "what not to do", but those are just as valuable, if I learn from them.*

## 6. See With The Eyes, Shoot With The Heart

If there's one sermon I am at risk of preaching so much I get run out of town it's this one. And I'm totally unrepentant about that. This is one ship I'm prepared to go down on. There are billions of photographs out there. The world in no way needs more mediocre photographs. What the world does need is more passionate photographs, images that begin life perceived by the eyes but expressed, through the camera, with the heart. If you're going to create better photographs, begin with things about which you care deeply. If that's the natural world and issues of conservation, show me. If it's your children, then show me them. Photographing those things about which you are passionate does a couple of things. It shows me more of you. It shows me more of that thing you love. And it makes better photographs. You might make a nice image of something about which you're apathetic, but when you turn your lens on the things you love - it comes through in your work.

I know, this one seems lame to you left-brainers out there. You want the straight goods and the tips to help you improve your craft and I give you this artsty-fartsy Hallmark Cards stuff. Sorry. But you have to ask yourself why the great art in history resonates the way it does with the world, why the great images are considered great. It's not technical prowess. It's not Photoshop filters. It's not even sharp focus. Sure, craft matters. But passion matters more. I'm giving you a bonus #11 in this eBook to compensate the outraged geeks who don't consider this a real tip. But the more you resist this one, the more you fear it, deny it, or try to ignore it, the more you need to embrace this one.

Mother Theresa said that we can do no great thing, only small things with great love, and I take her meaning to apply to all of life. Don't strive to create a world-changing image with every shutter activation (the pressure alone would kill me!) Strive to create images with great love, and see what happens.

*Vancouver, Canada 2008  
Canon 5D Mk2, Lensbaby @ 1/640, iso 100*

*I don't photograph Vancouver very often. I love it deeply, I just don't get out to shoot. But when I do it's towards the ocean and mountains that my lens tends to turn.*





## A Creative Exercise

*Make a list of the things you love most in this world, the things you are passionate about, most interested in. In my case, Vancouver is one of those places I most love, but I never photograph it. So now go further - what is it that you love about those things. For me it is the ocean that I most love, that catches my breath about the city I live in. Now create a series of images that allow you to express that passion. For me it involves a series on sea planes, kayaks, and other water activities that go on around my home. I can't wait to get started on it, and not being faced with the daunting task of "photographing Vancouver" gives me baby-steps to start with. My excitement, curiosity, and passion will make this project easier to do and the results more personal and gratifying.*



*Vancouver, Canada 2008  
Canon 5D Mk2, Lensbaby @ 1/8000, iso 400*

*I know, I should have shot this at iso 100 and dropped my shutter speed, but honestly I just get pretty distracted sometimes.*

## 7. Shoot On Manual

If you want to use your camera to express yourself, you need to master it. Every setting you choose to use has an aesthetic effect on the photograph, so the more comfortable you are with the camera the more able you will be to use it to express your vision. I'm not old enough to keep playing the "when I was young" card without feeling self-conscious but, when I was starting the first thing we had to learn was how to expose our film and we did it manually with classic bodies like the Canon AE-1 or the Pentax Spotmatic. We learned the give and take of shutter and aperture and became proficient with them to the point that they were second nature and got out of the way, allowing us to focus on other things - like composition. Don't get me wrong, the technology that drives current camera technology is a gift, but I think there's a time and place for putting that gift aside for a time in favour of something even better - a keen familiarity with your settings.

Abandoning Program, AV, or TV mode for a while and working only in Manual will scare the heck out of some, but it's time that has a guaranteed return on investment. It will make you more keenly aware of the interaction between shutter and aperture and force you to be more intentional about these choices. When you return later to shooting in AV or TV mode there's a better chance you'll consider these choices and not blindly allow the camera to make these choices for you. Better control and better images.

### A Creative Exercise

*Put on your favourite black turtle-neck and beret. Grab your favourite older Leica M-series. Stick your cigar in your mouth and affect the most artsy look you can. Now go shooting.*

*Unless you don't have a beret or an older manual camera. In which case I'm going to make this simple. Put your camera on M and go shooting. Don't put it back on AV or TV or whatever mode you usually work in for a month. Just shoot manually. I know, this is painful, but if you want to be on more intimate terms with your camera you need to spend some quality time with it.*

**Bonus points** if you turn off your autofocus, you hard-core shooter, you.



*Lalibela, Ethiopia, 2005*  
*Canon 400D, 140mm, 1/3200 @ f/4.0. iso 200*





## 8. Simplify

Without a camera we live in a three dimensional world with pretty great peripheral vision. Then we raise the box to our face and are immediately confronted with the limitations of the medium. Three dimensions are flattened into two, and our field of view is dramatically reduced. That's the nature of photography and the sooner we, as photographers, get used to the nature and limits of our medium, the sooner we'll embrace the medium for what it is and not what it should be. Part of that is the need to simplify. A photograph isn't reality, it's a flattened, very limited perspective on a fraction of a second of reality, and as such it can only say so much. So work with the medium. Don't ask the photograph to say more than it can. Simplify.

When you walk into a street scene in Mexico, and are filled with emotion and all the smells, sights, and sounds, and raise your camera to your eye, it's no wonder the resulting photograph disappoints. How could it possibly capture so much. Instead slow down, create a dozen images - all of them simplified, reduced to one message, feeling, thought. The more you try to cram into the frame, the less each element is allowed to speak, and its impact is reduced. But simplify, push in closer, make use of blurs and shallow focus, and allow each image to speak its piece with the greatest impact or subtlety.

*Paris, France, 2005  
Canon 400D, 77mm, 1/400 @ f/11, iso 200*

*A chair in Le Jardins des Tulleries. Toned blue in post-production because it was a really, really cold day. The blue just seemed right.*



## A Creative Exercise

*Take your camera for a walk, or do this in your living room. Wherever you choose to do this it is an exercise in reduction. Take a photograph of the park or the living room, the street corner, whatever. Now break that scene into as many smaller scenes as possible. Try 20 to start with. You've shot the living room, now shoot the coffee table, then the vase on the mantle, then the spot where the maple floors, white baseboards, and blue wall meet. Reduce until you can't reduce any further. Now ask yourself how the collection of the individual images communicates the essence of that space better than the one single frame you made at the beginning. Now try this in other work. It doesn't preclude the need for wider shots but will train your eye to see scenes within scenes and make simplification second-nature to you.*

*Kathmandu, Nepal, 2009  
Canon 5D, 70mm, 1/100 @ f/5.6, iso 200*

*I shot this in Pashupatinath in Kathmandu. It was the solitary hand poking out of a sea of same-coloured saris that drew my eye. Allowing anything else in the frame except the saris and the hand would change this image. Simplifying made it more powerful.*





## 9. Honour The Frame

The frame of an image is part of the photograph. It's not merely the container in which the photograph sits but is part of that photograph. A photograph is seen in context of the lines that define it. The frame's orientation - horizontal or vertical; its aspect ratio - a 1:1 square, 2:3 rectangle, 16:9 panorama; and the way in which the lines of the frame interact and intersect with the other elements, is as much a part of the image as the elements within that frame. Honouring the frame means paying attention to it, and considering its role in how the final photograph will be read, and experienced.

Practically speaking, what does it mean to "honour the frame"? It means you give intentional thought to how you frame, beginning with whether your vision is best expressed horizontally, or vertically. It means you consider how lines within the image will look when they interact with the frame - for example, will that diagonal line at the top form a triangle with the edges of the frame and trap the eye of my viewer there? Another example; will the perfectly perpendicular line of the frame make the leaning line of a building, or a less than straight horizon, more obvious? Whatever your answer, knowing that the image and the frame interact and are inseparable one from the other means more intentional images.

Another implication of all this, perhaps the most basic, is that we begin to more intentionally look at the frame while we shoot. So often we look through the frame, so familiar with it that we forget it, take it for granted. In so-doing we often end up with unseen distractions, surprises we wished we'd noticed. Why hadn't we noticed? We were looking through the frame and not at it.

### A Creative Exercise

*Honouring the frame begins with seeing it, being conscious of it. If you have an old slide frame - the white cardboard frames from the good old days of film - they make great pocket-sized tools for frame-awareness. Carry it around, look through it at scenes, and intentionally take note of the affect of the frame on the scene. What does it exclude and by so-doing what does it draw attention to? How do the vertical and horizontal lines of the frame interact with the lines within the composition. Alternately, you can skip the slide frame entirely and get straight to the point of this - paying attention to the frame as you look through the viewfinder. Before you shoot, count to three and as you do allow your eye to roam the frame. This is nothing more than an exercise in slowing down, and forcing yourself to be more aware of the frame itself. Take a breath, count to three, explore the frame. Then shoot.*



*Thiksey Monastery, Ladakh, India, 2008  
Canon 5D, 32mm, 1/1000 @ f/4.0, iso 100*

*I waited a long time to get the series of shot from which I pulled this frame. I first saw the long shadows and played with the framing, assuming a monk would come by eventually. It began with the frame and the way it interacted with the other elements. The monk was just wishful thinking that paid off.*

## 10. Shoot Monochrome.

I think the reason black and white photographs are often deemed more powerful, more gritty, is because their absence of colour forces us to look at other things instead. Colour, as evidenced by colour psychology, is a powerful thing to us. Our eye is drawn to colour very quickly, and colours have powerful associations for us, evoking emotions and mood simply by looking at them. It's no wonder then that in a colour image the other elements, like tone, line, gesture, take a back seat. But remove that colour and those elements, and others - like contrast and texture - leap out and are given the chance to tell the story. Colour is the good-looking, Oscar-winning, star of photography - he might look great and sell box-office tickets but he's not always the best storyteller. A great-looking star can carry an otherwise crappy movie, but pull Johnny Depp and Keira Knightley from *Pirates of the Caribbean* and you've really just got a mediocre pirate flick.

Shooting images in monochrome is the equivalent of pulling a great actor from a movie and seeing if the story stands on its own. That's not to say a great photograph can't be one that makes brilliant use of colour. Of course it can. But as part of our creative process, rendering our work in black and white is an extremely valuable exercise. It shows you more clearly the weaknesses of your image and gives you ways to improve. And the absence of colour just as capably shows us where an image shines. In fact, when colour doesn't contribute to an image at all, like any other extraneous element, taking it out makes the remaining elements stronger.

If I were teaching an introductory course to photography in my imaginary perfect world, I'd have students shooting black and white film on manual cameras. It sounds cruel, I know, but kick the crutches out from under us and you'll see pretty quick which legs are strong enough to walk on. Colour and the infinite possibilities of the digital darkroom can be crutches on which we lean to carry our images. Want to know how strong your photographic legs are? Kick out the crutches.



*Leh Palace, Ladakh, India, 2008  
Canon 5D, 70mm, 1/250 @ f/2.8, iso 100*

*We hired these dancers to act as models for our Lumen Dei tour in September 2008. Their traditional clothes were very colourful, deep crimsons and turquoises, but the monochrome treatment allows the image to focus on the details and interaction rather than competing with the colours.*

## A Creative Exercise

*This one's obvious. Shoot for a day, a week, a month, in black and white. If your camera allows it you can set the preview to show you only a black and white image. That's a start. But it's cheating if you go home and look at them in colour. When you import them turn them into black and white images immediately. In Adobe Lightroom you can apply a development preset to your image as part of the import process. Find a preset you like for general use, then apply it. The point is not to get into a discussion about greyscale conversions or best practices for monochrome images, it's to get you looking at your work in terms of lines and tones, contrasts, gestures - and to give colour a needed break. Don't just look at the images, ask yourself where the strengths are, where the weaknesses. Shooting to express with tones and gestures is different than shooting to express in colour, so find the differences.*

*Now go do it all again but this time shoot for black and white. Ignore colour entirely. Learn to see in black and white and I promise it will improve your perception of scenes and the overall impact of your colour photography if and when you return to it.*

*For bonus points, put a roll of Tri-X into your old AE-1 or Nikon F3 and go make some photographs the old-school way.*





*Lamayuru, Ladakh, India, 2008  
Canon 5D, 17mm, 1/60 @ f/18, iso 200*

## Bonus #11 Memorize Your Camera.

You should know, by memory where every important setting and function button on your camera is located. You should be able to find it by touch without giving it much thought. I don't mean every custom setting deep in the menus, but could you find and change your ISO without taking your eye from the scene? How about the focus points, the metering mode, or the motordrive/continuous settings? Seriously. Not only should we know how to use every button on there, we should be able to find them intuitively in the blink of an eye.

Know what the camera can do. Inspiration only goes so far as our craft can take it. The better you know what your camera is capable of, the more your inspiration can make use of that. If you don't know what in the world the camera can do then your inspiration has nothing to go on. I know this is dry as toast, but take an hour, meditate if you have to, and read your manual.

Know how to access those tools. The more comfortable you are with your tool the more easily the tool can get out of the way and allow inspiration and your own particular creative process to process unhindered. Photography so often depends on capturing that particular moment, don't miss it because you were trying to find your ISO or change your aperture. No, using Program mode isn't the solution. Well, it might be, but it won't help us get better at our craft, it'll just give us more lame reason to remain complacent. Memorize your tool.

### A Creative Exercise

*Step One. Pour yourself a glass of wine, you're going to need it. Now sit down with your camera manual. Read it. If you understood it, move on to step two.*

*Step Two. Pick up your camera. Close your eyes. Run your hands along every surface. When you come to a button, switch, or lever, identify it. Can't do it, just move on to the next one, but make a note and when you open your eyes again see which buttons were foreign to you. Figure out what they do, remember where they are. Got it? Good. Now do the same with your camera to your eye.*





*Kathmandu, Nepal, 2008  
Canon 5D, 200mm, 1/125 @ f/2.8, iso 100*

# Conclusion

Photography is not merely a technical pursuit mastered with an understanding of technology. It's a heady mix of technology, art, and expression. It's got a wildly steep learning curve and that is either a joy or a frustration to some. And to some it's both a joy, for the challenge, and a frustration, for the fact that our vision always outpaces our ability to express it through these tools. In light of that, I want to leave you with an article originally published on my blog on September 02, 2009.

As I dig deeper into this craft a couple things happen.

The first is that I love it more and more, increasingly believing in it as a means of expression and art.

The second is that I'm pushed to look back towards the so-called masters (I'd call them masters, they'd probably reject the term outright) and to study their work, how and why they created what they did, hence the book.

The third is a growing, increasingly stubborn rejection of the notion of shortcuts. In fact, I find myself thinking about a line from the movie Himalaya when the brother, a monk, says he was taught that when two paths diverged in front of him he should take the harder of the two. Robert Frost would say the one less travelled. I suspect it's less traveled because we're all looking for shortcuts and forsaking the harder path. But here's the thing, the shortcuts won't get us there. And the harder path is what makes us better artists.

Shortcuts in art lead to cliché and propaganda. They lead to artists more concerned about the product than the expression, and they lead to art that denies a basic truth about humanity, and that is: there are no shortcuts. No shortcuts in love, in health, in spirituality, or even the wildly pragmatic world of business. Sometimes there are shortcuts to the local Starbucks, but that's about it. A pursuit of shortcuts creates shallow art, if it's art at all.

A pursuit of shortcuts does something else. It deeply discourages the growing artist who tries them, and finds them leading nowhere. The shortcut drops the earnest artist in the middle of nowhere, with no map or water, then vanishes. It leaves us with a sense of "now what?" and in the end we're forced to walk back to where we started and make up for lost time on the path we ought to have trod from the beginning.

Art is pretty hard to define, but I don't think you can separate the product (the end) from the process (the means). So what am I saying? Well, on the one hand I'm back to reminding you

– and myself – that it’s just plain hard. It is. There’s no secret to success or photographic virtuosity, and if there is one it’s this: it’s a long, hard, but glorious road with no shortcuts. On the other hand I’m trying to encourage you – if you’re feeling frustrated about your craft because it’s taking a while, and it’s proving to be harder than the camera makers and the Shoot-Like-A-Pro websites told you it would be, that’s good. It means you’re in the same boat as all of us. The difficulty and challenge of the craft, the way it stretches you and demands more of you than you expected, is not an obstacle to getting where you want to be, it’s the path to getting there. What’s in the way is the way, to quote Lao Tse.

Don’t give up. Keep at it. Take baby steps if need-be. But keep taking them. Daily. And in time those steps get a little more sure, a little wider and faster. Trip, fall, get back up. And in the mean time, find a way to get out of yourself, out of your niche, and look at other photographers for a while. See how people like Cartier-Bresson, Karsh, Avedon, Arbus, or Frank – to name a very few – or contemporaries like McNally, McCurry, or Leibovitz, for example – pursue their craft. Look forward by looking back, or through the eyes of others. Just lay off the shortcuts, because they’re only sabotaging your journey.

These ten steps, twenty if you count the ten from the first book and twenty-one if you count the bonus, aren’t shortcuts. Nor are they tips or tricks. And they certainly aren’t definitive. They’re foundations of the craft that will be helpful to some, and not so helpful to others, but they are steps I go back to time and time again to recalibrate or refresh, to bring me back to centre as I continue my own photographic journey.

If you found this helpful and are not already familiar with my first book, *Within The Frame, The Journey of Photographic Vision*, you can find it on Amazon.com. My first eBook, *Ten*, to which this is a follow-up, can be found at [LuLu.com/PixelatedImage](http://LuLu.com/PixelatedImage). I can be found online at [PixelatedImage.com](http://PixelatedImage.com) and blogging most weekdays at [PixelatedImage.com/blog](http://PixelatedImage.com/blog) - please feel free to become part of the growing community of great photographers and wonderful people there.

Peace.



David duChemin  
Vancouver, 2009