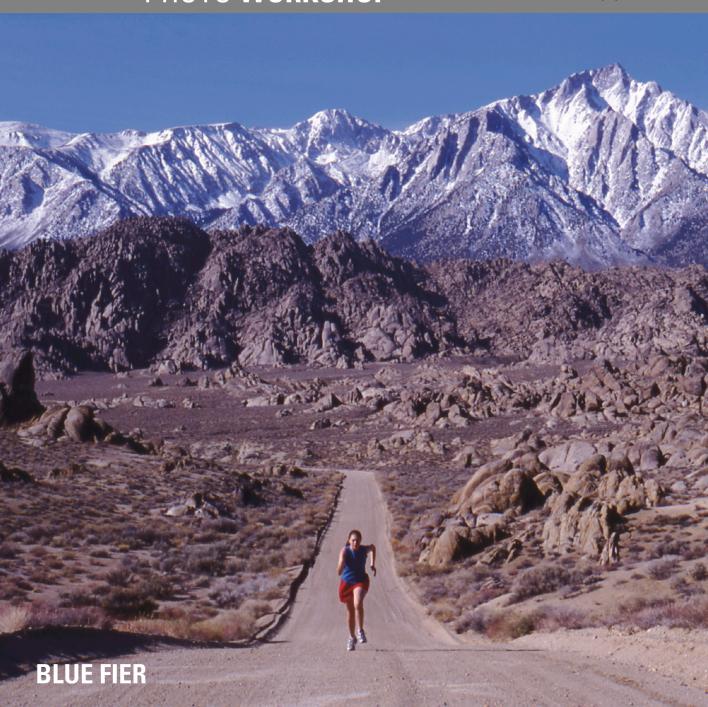


COMPOSITION

PHOTO WORKSHOP

Develop your talent





COMPOSITIONPHOTO WORKSHOP

Blue Fier



Composition Photo Workshop

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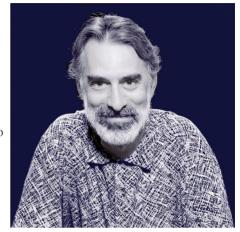
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About the Author

Blue Fier studied art extensively while in college, receiving a Bachelors of Arts degree in Art from Occidental College; a Masters of Art degree in Art from California State University, Northridge; and a Masters of Fine Art degree in Art from the University of California, Los Angeles. Before committing himself to photography on a full-time basis more than 20 years ago, working with clients in the travel, real-estate, sports, and environmental industries, Fier was an exhibiting artist for nearly two decades. In addition to working as a professional photographer, Fier has taught photography for 15 years.



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Foreword

After 10 years of helping photographers hone their skills on photoworkshop.com, I'm thrilled to present this new line of books in partnership with Wiley Publishing.

I believe that photography is for everyone, and books are a new extension of the site's commitment to providing an education in photography, where the quest for knowledge is fueled by inspiration. To take great images is a matter of learning some basic techniques and "finding your eye." I hope this book teaches you the basic skills you need to explore the kind of photography that excites you.

You may notice another unique approach we've taken with the Photo Workshop series: The learning experience does not stop with the books. I hope you complete the assignments at the end of each chapter and upload your best photos to pwsbooks.com to share with others and receive feedback. By participating, you can help build a new community of beginning photographers who inspire each other, share techniques, and foster innovation and creativity.



© Photo by Jay Maisel

Robert Farber

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Introduction

Every waking moment of every single day, you face choices. Toast or bagel? Decaf or regular? Paper or plastic? The list is endless. Some of these choices, like those listed here, are of little importance. That is, choosing one or another option might improve your day, but probably won't change your life. Other choices, however, can have a tremendous impact: where to live, whom (if anyone) to live with, and what type of work to do.

Like life, photography — indeed, any art form — is about choices. What type of camera should you use? Should you orient the image vertically or horizontally? Should the image be in color or in black and white? What settings — ISO, aperture, and shutter speed — would work best? How should your subject be arranged? How should the scene be lit? Should you use a tripod, filters, or special lenses? Where should you position yourself relative to your subject when clicking the shutter button?

Each of these choices factors into your photograph's *composition* — that is, how your picture looks or, more precisely, the information or idea that your photograph conveys. A well-composed picture communicates its message clearly and effectively, inviting the viewer both to further examine the work and to appreciate it.

Just how do you create a well-composed picture? That's where this book comes in. In its pages, you can discover the tools necessary to compose photographs that urge the viewer to look more closely. Specifically, you explore the following:

- The elements of design that represent the building blocks of any photograph
- How depth of field can factor into your composition
- The compositional effects of using different shutter speeds
- The various ways you can use light in your images
- How shooting in color versus black and white (or vice versa) can articulate your photograph's message

Armed with this information, you then investigate how best to compose images of various kinds, including portraits, landscapes, and other scenic shots, still-life pictures, and macro photographs. You then survey how to use image-editing software to enhance your photograph's composition. Along the way, you complete assignments designed to illustrate the principles of composition explored in each chapter and apply what you've learned.

However, this book is intended to do more than teach you a bunch of compositional rules. Its true goal is to help you develop your own unique compositional style. Using what you learn in this book, you can discover the ways in which to make your photographs, well, yours. If you're ready to change the way you take pictures, to choose between creating images that viewers pass by with barely a glance to ones that stop them in their tracks, then read on.

For comments and up-to-date information regarding this book, as well as future workshops, podcasts, or to purchase prints by Blue Fier, please visit composition photoworkshop.com and bluefier.com, or e-mail me at blue@bluefier.com. Many images in this book are available through www.gettyimages.com or www.panoramicimages.com.

May good light follow you wherever you go.

~Blue Fier





Approaches to Composition
How You See
The Origins of Composition
Understanding Linear Perspective
Composition and Photography

Have you ever studied a snapshot and wondered why it looked amateurish compared to a photograph taken by a more experienced photographer? Even when the subject matter is the same — say, for example, that both photographs depict a shoreline — the difference between them is clear. The master's image is more captivating, more vital, more powerful than the snapshot. But why? What is it about the more skilled photographer's image that makes it so compelling? What is it about the skilled photographer's photograph that promotes it from a snapshot to a work of art?

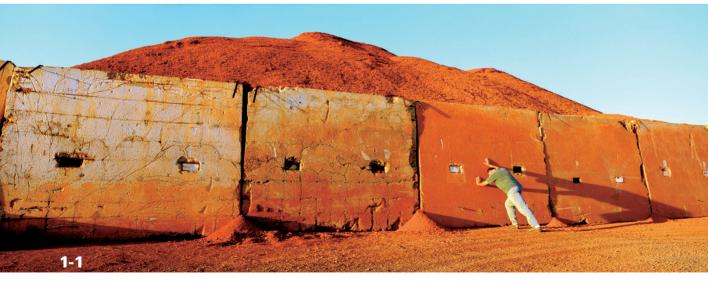
Many factors can affect a photographic image. Lighting, for one, can greatly influence the outcome of a photographic shoot. So, too, can the camera's settings — the f-stop, shutter speed, and ISO. The quality of the camera's lenses can be a factor, as can the use of additional equipment such as a tripod and filters. But more than these is the photo's *composition*, that is, the arrangement of the elements within the image. Indeed, composition is the unifying

element behind all visual art, from painting to photography and beyond.

Taking a snapshot is a simple matter of picking up a camera and photographing whatever is in front of you. Little, if any, thought process is involved. In contrast, when you compose a photograph, you consciously choose what visual elements to leave in and what to omit from your photos (see 1-1). When a picture is well-composed, the message the image is meant to convey is clearly and effectively communicated, inviting the viewer to appreciate and examine the work.

APPROACHES TO COMPOSITION

Although it's true that composition is about choosing which elements your photograph contains, that's not to say that everyone makes those choices in the same way. Some people carefully position themselves for just the right shot;



ABOUT THIS PHOTO Notice how the person leaning against the wall adds scale to the image (105mm, 100 ISO, center-weighted neutral-density filter, f/32.5 at 1/4 second).

CHARTER

others painstakingly arrange their subjects, creating their compositions just so. Still others wing it — waiting for the elements of a photograph to naturally coalesce. For example, nineteenth-century photographer Carleton Watkins, famous for his photographs of the American West (particularly Yosemite), didn't bother setting up his camera until after he had walked around a site, waiting for all the elements in the scene to align in a way that pleased him (see 1-2). Watkins understood how a slight shift in position could change how the components in an image came together, yielding what he called "the best view."

Similarly, Edward Weston, known for his beautiful close-up images of fruits, vegetables, and nudes, carefully arranged his subjects before photographing them, whether they were in the studio or outdoors (see 1-3). In contrast, Henri Cartier-Bresson, renowned for his superb images of people and places (see 1-4), relied more on intuition than planning. He developed a knack for recognizing in a split second, even as the world swirled around him, when a photograph was perfectly composed — what he called "the decisive moment."

ABOUT THIS PHOTO Best General View, Mariposa Trail, ca. 1860's. Photograph by Carleton Watkins. Courtesy Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona

