



COMPOSITION

PHOTO WORKSHOP

Develop your talent



BLUE FIER



COMPOSITION PHOTO WORKSHOP

Blue Fier



Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Composition Photo Workshop

Published by
Wiley Publishing, Inc.
111 River Street
Hoboken, N.J. 07030
www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2007 by Blue Fier

All photographs © Blue Fier 2007

Published simultaneously in Canada

ISBN: 978-0-470-11436-0

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 750-4744. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Legal Department, Wiley Publishing, Inc., 10475 Crosspoint Blvd., Indianapolis, IN 46256, (317) 572-3447, fax (317) 572-4355, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY: THE PUBLISHER AND THE AUTHOR MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS WORK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ALL WARRANTIES, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION WARRANTIES OF FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES OR PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR EVERY SITUATION. THIS WORK IS SOLD WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PUBLISHER IS NOT ENGAGED IN RENDERING LEGAL, ACCOUNTING, OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. IF PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE IS REQUIRED, THE SERVICES OF A COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL PERSON SHOULD BE SOUGHT. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR THE AUTHOR SHALL BE LIABLE FOR DAMAGES ARISING HEREFROM. THE FACT THAT AN ORGANIZATION OR WEB SITE IS REFERRED TO IN THIS WORK AS A CITATION AND/OR A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF FURTHER INFORMATION DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE AUTHOR OR THE PUBLISHER ENDORSES THE INFORMATION THE ORGANIZATION OR WEB SITE MAY PROVIDE OR RECOMMENDATIONS IT MAY MAKE. FURTHER, READERS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT INTERNET WEB SITES LISTED IN THIS WORK MAY HAVE CHANGED OR DISAPPEARED BETWEEN WHEN THIS WORK WAS WRITTEN AND WHEN IT IS READ.

For general information on our other products and services or to obtain technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at (800) 762-2974, outside the U.S. at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2007925983

Trademarks: Wiley and the Wiley Publishing logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley and Sons, Inc. and/or its affiliates. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Wiley Publishing, Inc. is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

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.



© Photo by David Paul Bayles, 2007

Credits

Acquisitions Editor

Kim Spilker

Senior Project Editor

Cricket Krengel

Project Editor

Kelly Maish

Development Editor

Kelly Dobbs Henthorne

Technical Editor

Larry D. Sweazy

Editorial Manager

Robyn Siesky

Vice President & Group Executive Publisher

Richard Swadley

Vice President & Publisher

Barry Pruett

Business Manager

Amy Knies

Book Designers

LeAndra Hosier

Tina Hovanessian

Project Coordinator

Adrienne Martinez

Graphics and Production Specialists

Joni Burns

Brooke Graczyk

Jennifer Mayberry

Barbara Moore

Shelley Norris

Amanda Spagnuolo

Quality Control Technician

Todd Lothery

Cover Design

Larry Vigon

Daniela Richardson

Proofreading and Indexing

Broccoli Information Management

Sossity R. Smith

Wiley Bicentennial Logo

Richard J. Pacifico

Acknowledgments

Many extremely talented people collaborated on this book. My utmost gratitude and appreciation goes to Kate Shoup Welsh, my personal editor, who clarified my thoughts, organized my ideas, and researched topics above and beyond my expectations. I'd also like to acknowledge all the editors and staff at Wiley for allowing me the opportunity to work with them. Next up, thanks to the many students I have taught at Santa Monica College, who have been the testing ground and inspiration for my ideas; also, thanks to my clients, who have trusted me to bring back images of beauty out of seeming chaos. My wife, Kim, and sons, Zack and Easton, have enthusiastically supported me in undertaking this lengthy project in lieu of other events. I am grateful for the ideas and suggestions offered by my close friend, David Paul Bayles, in addition to his excellent portrait of me. Special thanks go to Robert Farber for suggesting I get involved in this series. I would like to thank Christian Erhardt of Leica USA for loaning me the latest Leica digital cameras and the Lifepixel Company for converting my Canon digital camera to an infrared one. In creating this book, it helped immeasurably to be a part of Ian Summers' Heartstorming group, which encouraged me to pursue my vision.

To all those who follow their hearts.

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

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'R' followed by a long horizontal line.

Robert Farber

Contents

CHAPTER 1	Understanding Composition	3
	Approaches to Composition	4
	How You See	6
	The physiology of the eye	6
	Selective vision	8
	The Origins of Composition	10
	Understanding Linear Perspective	11
	Composition and Photography	13



CHAPTER 2	The Elements of Design	19
	Understanding the Elements of Design	20
	Points	20
	Lines	21
	Planes	25
	Solids	25
	Arranging Design Elements in the Frame	27
	Frame shapes	28
	Orientation	30
	Focal point	32
	Symmetrical versus asymmetrical	34
	Harmony versus disharmony	35
	The Rule of Thirds	37
	The Golden Rectangle	40



CHAPTER 3	Depth of Field Decisions	43
The Plane of Critical Focus		44
Understanding Aperture		44
F-stops		46
Circles of confusion		47
Selecting Lenses		47
Focal length		48
Angle of view		52
Which lens do I need?		52
Previewing and Predicting Depth of Field		53
Using the Hyperfocal Distance to Deepen Depth of Field		54



CHAPTER 4	Slicing Time: Designing with Shutter Speeds	59
Shutter Speed and Depth of Field: A Delicate Balance		62
Equivalent exposure		63
Gauging the available light		64
Freeze or Blur: How Shutter Speed Affects a Shot		64
ISO		66
Freeze frame		66

Slowing things down	68
Extended time exposures	69
Multiple exposures	70
Using a Motor Drive	70
Panning	73



CHAPTER 5	Capturing Light	79
The Quality of Light		80
The Direction of Light		82
The Intensity of Light		87
Harnessing Sunlight		88
Dawn and dusk lighting		88
Sunrise and sunset		90
Midday sun		90
Overcast lighting		92



CHAPTER 6	Working with Color	95
Color Theory		96
The science of color		98
Color symbolism		101
Color Temperature		107
The Color of Sunlight		109
Controlling Colors by Using Filters		112
Wratten numbers		112
Color-compensating filters		114
Polarizing filters		115
Neutral-density filters		117



CHAPTER 7	Thinking in Black and White	121
The Zone System		123
Metering and Exposing for Black and White		124
Compensating for the light meter's reading		125
Spot metering		127
Working with Contrast Filters		129



CHAPTER 8	Arranging Appealing Portraits	139
A Little History		140
Framing Your Photo		142
Head shot		142
Upper body shot/midrange portrait		144
Environmental portraits		145
Lighting the Scene		147
Key light sources		148
Fill light sources		149
Color versus Black and White		149
Metering the Scene		150
Posing		151
Posing singles		151
Posing pairs		153
Posing groups		156
Photographing Kids		159



CHAPTER 9	Travel and Scenic Photography	163
Packing Your Camera Bag		165
Scoping Out Your Location		166
Establishing shots		166
Medium views		170
Close-ups		172
Other considerations		174
Photographing People on Location		176



CHAPTER 10	Still-Life and Close-Up Photography	181
	Photographing Still-Life Images	184
	Assembling the set	184
	Lighting the scene	189
	Photographing the scene	190
	Still-life scenario A	191
	Still-life scenario B	192
	Macro and Close-Up Photography	193
	Choosing a backdrop	193
	Lighting the subject	194
	Photographing the subject	195
	A close-up scenario	198



CHAPTER 11	Improving Your Images	203
	Understanding File Formats	205
	Cropping or Resizing an Image	207
	Adjusting an Image's Contrast and Color	208

Correcting Imperfections	214
Eliminating red eye	214
Obscuring flaws	214
Reducing noise	215
Sharpening an image	217
Fixing the Lighting	218
Applying Special Effects	220
Using filters	220
Creating composite images	222
Backing Up and Archiving Your Image Files	224
Taking the Next Step	224



Glossary	229
Index	237

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.

INTRODUCTION

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 compositionphotoworkshop.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



UNDERSTANDING COMPOSITION

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).

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.”

ABOUT THIS PHOTO

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

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.”



1-2