

Mastering Composition

A Landscape Photography
Workbook
By
Gill Moon



Introduction to Composition

A photograph of several purple flowers, likely wallflowers, in a field. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, with some fully open and others as buds. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green and white, suggesting a natural outdoor setting. The lighting is bright and even, highlighting the vibrant purple of the petals and the green of the leaves.

*“A good photograph is
knowing where to
stand”*

Ansel Adams

Composition is one of the most important elements of landscape photography. Without a good composition our images will fail. It is something we need to think about carefully before pressing our shutter button because it cannot be corrected in post processing and has the power to make or break your image.

There are numerous rules that help us focus our attention when we are composing an image. I will cover some of these in the following pages. They are there to help you think about how to construct your images but they should be stored at the back of your mind and used for reference. If you make all your images fit the rules all of the time you will end up with a portfolio of very similar looking images.

For me composition comes as second nature. I don't really think about rules when I am out in the field I just photograph what feels right at the time and I guess this comes with practice. All I am looking for when I set up my image is something that looks balanced and visually appealing.

Later when I get home and analyse my shots I generally find that they conform to some rules of composition. This is probably because the rules were written as a result of deconstructing images and seeing what make an attractive and compelling photograph.

Lets look at the image opposite. This was taken on the saltmarsh between Bawdsey and Shingle Street on the Suffolk Coast. My reason for taking the image was to capture the colours of the saltmarsh plants in the autumn.

My focal point for the image was the martello tower. I chose a viewpoint that allowed me to draw lines pointing to my focal point with the saltmarsh vegetation - these are the white lines on the image. The martello tower and the foreground vegetation mirror each other in shape and provide some visual contrast between a man made element in the background and a natural one in the foreground. (highlighted by the red ovals).

When I set up this image I knew that the martello tower was going to be my focal point. I also knew that I wanted to use the vegetation as my foreground because I wanted my image to be about the colours of the Suffolk coast in the autumn. With those things in mind I searched for a viewpoint and a composition that connected the two together.

Thinking about these elements made this a considered composition. It is a photograph that shows the viewer what I wanted to say.

A good composition shows the world what you see, rather than a snapshot which shows the world what the camera sees.

Know the rules and the reasons that they work and then know that you can break them if the moment feels right.



Composition
The building blocks
of
Photography

In order to “give a meaning” to the world, one has to feel oneself involved in what one frames through the viewfinder.

Henri Cartier Bresson - The Mindful eye - writings on photography and photographers.



Approaching composition?

Landscape photography is all about making a successful image from the scene in front of you. Even if your view is dominated by amazing scenery it doesn't follow that you will produce a stunning image without giving some serious thought to your composition. Similarly mundane scenery doesn't mean you will come away with a dull image. It is all about your interpretation of what is in front of you and how you translate that into an image.

We are going to start with some really basic guidelines and then think about reasons to abandon them. I hate the idea that landscape photography has to follow a prescriptive pattern. In my mind this just stifles creativity. Guidelines are important to understand and should be considered carefully but they are just guides and should not come to define your image making.

When faced with finding a composition it is a good idea to ask yourself some questions. The first one might be

What is my subject?

This can be any feature that catches your eye, for example a building, a geological feature, or a tree, or it can be something more subjective like an area of light or a pattern or a block of colour.

What am I going to use as my foreground?

Your foreground is there to compliment your scene and draw the viewers eye into the image. It is often used to add depth to an image or to anchor the composition in the frame.

Your foreground doesn't need to be a physical structure, it could be areas of pattern or texture or lines created by the movement of water.

What are my supporting elements?

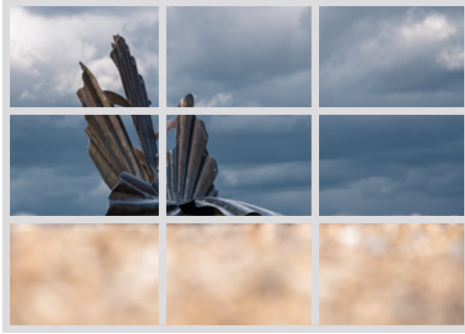
These are elements which support your subject and which can be used within the scene to guide the viewers eye across the entire image.

What am I going to leave out?

The secret of good composition often comes down to what to include within the frame and what to leave out. It is really important to identify unwanted and distracting elements from your composition and to then try to eliminate them from the frame.

The most commonly stated rule of composition is the rule of thirds and I will mention it here as a guide for you to think about.

The rule works by dividing the camera frame into a grid of thirds - two lines horizontally and two lines vertically. This produces a grid as shown on the next page. The rule of thirds works by placing the horizon on one of the horizontal thirds and subject on one of the intersecting points. This should give you the most pleasing arrangement of elements within the frame.



Point of View

Another really important aspect to think about when looking for a composition is your point of view. This will completely change the look and feel of your image and can be illustrated using the following two images.



The image above shows the Scallop Shell on Aldeburgh beach. The shot was taken from half way down the shingle bank lying down with the camera on the beach and the horizon in the bottom third of the frame. The low viewpoint emphasises the texture of the shingle beach and compresses the middle ground. It places the shell above its environment and makes it the prominent and only feature in the shot.



The shot above shows a completely different view of the same subject. It was taken from a much higher point of view than the first image. The horizon is still in the bottom third of the frame but the higher viewpoint emphasises the wider landscape and helps the viewer place the subject within its environment.

For your first exercise on composition visit a favourite area and identify a suitable subject. Take a series of 4 images from the same viewpoint which place your subject in different parts of the frame. Try to be versatile and remember that landscape images do not have to be landscape in orientation - so please experiment with portrait shots too.

Now repeat the same exercise but change your viewpoint, move around your subject, shoot from head height but also try using much lower viewpoints too. Remember we all see the world at head height so choosing a view that differs from this will almost certainly be more eye-catching.

Spend some time analysing your images afterwards and see which ones work best and why that might be. This is discussed further on the next page.

Viewpoint

Choosing a viewpoint to photograph your subject from is one of the most critical choices you can make. As you can see from the four images on the opposite page where you choose to stand, what lens you use and what depth of field you choose has a huge bearing on the type of image you will make.

Foreground

Useful for creating the concept of depth in your image. Foreground, middle, background and sky. You don't need all these elements all of the time in your images but they help to create a natural progression through the frame. In image 2 opposite I used a low viewpoint and a shallow depth of field (F3.5) to create a sense of depth. I focused on the shell so that the shingle appears out of focus creating the depth in the image.

Near / far compositions with a wide angle lens.

Creates a visual connection with the foreground and the background. Using a wide angle lens makes the foreground appear larger than the background. Think about the shapes that the foreground form and how they relate to the background. A wide angle lens will also give you some perspective distortion make lines seem bigger at the front. In image 1 I have used a 24mm lens and chosen a close and low viewpoint. This exaggerates the foreground elements

and makes the background seem further away. In the case of the shell it has distorted the perspective and created a dynamic view of a well photographed subject.

Image 3 opposite begins to put the subject into context and locates it on a beach with the sea in the background. Again a different viewpoint gives a different feel to the image.

Finally image 4 shows a more remote view of the structure. By standing slightly further away and using a 24mm focal length I have placed the shell in its surroundings and have been able to include more of the beach.

All four viewpoints have led to the creation of four very different images. My favourite shot is image 1 because it is a viewpoint you don't see as often as the others. The lines leading from the front of the shot are dynamic and the colours and tones help to emphasise the mood. I feel this shot has a lot of energy about it which helps grab the viewers attention.

My least favourite shot is image 3 because it isn't offering me anything different to the many images I have seen from this location. The image was taken at head height and the texture and light is rather flat. This viewpoint hasn't made the most of the opportunity presented.

These four images were all made within 5 minutes of each other and illustrate how important your viewpoint choice can be.

1



2



3



4



Framed & Framing

Framed

Every image we make has a frame to it which has a certain aspect ratio. All modern full-frame and APS-C DSLR cameras have 3:2 aspect ratio sensors, whereas 4:3 is a popular choice among smartphone, Micro Four Thirds and some medium format camera manufacturers. We need to bear this in mind when thinking about our compositions.

Our aspect ratio will effect where we place our horizon and the principle subjects within our frame. If we are going to crop our image afterwards we need to think about what aspect ratio we might want to crop to.

Many modern DSLR's allow you to compose in different aspect ratios out in the field. There are settings in camera that allow you can crop to different aspect ratios eg. 1:1 or a 16:9. This is really helpful when it comes to thinking about composition. If you don't have the ability to do this in camera it is a good idea to think about how you might crop your image during post processing. Composing with the finished image in mind will ensure that your composition works when you come to crop in post processing.

Picture orientation

The orientation of the frame makes a huge difference to the feel of your image. Composition will always work better in one orientation than another. It is always worth considering a portrait shot. Even when there are no tall elements in the frame portrait shots can definitely work. They allow you to focus on the foreground and can exclude unwanted areas that don't add anything to the composition.

A good example can be see in the images below.



These images were both taken on the River Deben at Ramsholt. The first shot has a slightly higher viewpoint than the second. Coupled with the horizontal orientation this makes the boat feel very isolated in the landscape. The portrait orientation and slightly lower viewpoint in the second image focus the eye towards the foreground and make the boat seem less lost within the scene.

If we then change the aspect ratio from 5:7 to 1:1 or square we can then see how this affects the image.



Our photograph has now gone from a shot that is all about a boat that felt isolated within a large area of mudflats to a much more focused scene that feels more intimate and focuses much more on the foreground.

Visit a location and take a series of images using portrait and landscape orientation. Think about the aspect ratio too. many modern cameras allow you to shoot in different aspect ratios but if your camera doesn't have that option think about the aspect ratio before you

press the shutter button and compose the image with a square crop or a 16 x 9 panorama and make your crop in post production.

Notice how your choice of crop influences the feel of your final image.

Framing

Framing your subject by using other elements within the landscape is a useful compositional tool. It can add depth and context to your image.

Foreground frames are the easiest way of using a frame within your image. Find a part of the landscape that you want to focus on (subject). Then find an object to 'frame' your subject and hold it for the viewer. In the image below I have used the branches of the tree to frame the sun and force the viewers gaze to linger in that part of the image.



In the next image I have used the yellow gorse to frame the cottage on Sizewell beach.

This image uses a technique called shooting through. I have placed the camera very close to my foreground - in this case the gorse - and I have used an aperture of F5.6 focusing on the buildings. This has rendered the gorse out of focus and created some depth in the image.



I have used a similar effect with the flowers opposite and have created a white frame around the bottom of the image using the out of focus blooms to create an abstract wash of colour. This technique works really well for small scenes and macro images.

Visit a location and take a series of images using framing.

Take one shot that focuses on framing in the wider landscape (like the sun shot on the left)

Take one shot that uses shooting through to frame a subject in the distance (like the sizewell shot above)

Take one shot that uses abstract blocks of colour to frame a subject (like the macro shot on the right)



Compositional Elements

The key to a good photograph is composition and the key to good composition is good observation. We have talked a bit about tuning into the landscape and noticing what is around you, now it is time to put all these elements together to create interesting images.

There are a number of compositional elements which we can use to make compelling shots. The ones I am going to discuss in the following sections are: Points, Lines, Shape and Form, Texture,

Colour and Light.

These are the ingredients that make up your image and it is up to you to see how they all fit together. Essentially composition is the art of arranging these elements through framing.

Unlike artists, photographers don't start with a blank canvas. We start with complicated scenes which we have to make sense of by the use of framing. To do this we have to change the position of things but we cannot physically move landscape objects so we have to move ourselves and change our viewpoint - hence changing the relationship between objects within our frame.

The following exercises are all about composition, colour and light and will help you put together compelling images from your observations within the landscape.

*“You don't take a
photograph,
you make it. ”*

Ansel Adams



Points

Points are the most basic element of composition. For an object to be considered a point it must be small in the frame and stand out well from its background. It must catch your eye in an otherwise empty or uniform landscape. In other words it is an obvious focus point.



This shot at East Lane, Bawdsey uses the old pill box as the single point within the image. It focuses the eye and draws the viewer into the scene.

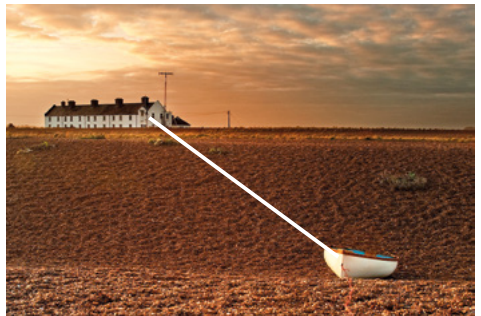
The following image at Butley does the same thing. Their eye is drawn to the tiny hut on the horizon and although it is very small compared to everything else in the image it still has the ability to be the main focal point.

These two images use points which are small in relation to the rest of the frame.



When using single points think very carefully about their position within the image. They are the main focus so need to guide the eye through the shot. Off set points create dynamic images whilst centrally placed points can create static looking images.

You won't always be able to use single points, sometime you will have more than one point in an image. In these cases it is the relationship between the points that make the image work.



This image of Shingle Street uses two points, the dinghy and the coastguard cottages, to draw the eye across the frame. By placing the points as I have done I have created an implied line diagonally across the frame.

Although these objects are bigger elements they work as points because

they sit within a very uniform landscape in terms of terrain and colour.

Often when you have multiple points within the frame you will find that one has more visual weight than the other. This might be because it is bigger, nearer to the front of the frame or has more light shining on it.



In this image above the two cooling towers at Sizewell form the points within the frame. The front tower is the prominent point because it is larger but your eye is still drawn to the far tower on the horizon. The sunrise colours and the long exposure have both helped to isolate the dark towers from the background and make them stand out as points within the image.

By using multiple points within an image you can create more complex relationships between the elements within your frame.

In the following image taken at Bawdsey Quay the boats and the winch act as points in the foreground while the sun acts as a point on the horizon. These multiple points help your eye navigate the image and although the boats are quite prominent in the frame your eye is still drawn to the horizon thanks to the

brightness of the sun.



Visit a location of your choosing and practice making images using points. Take a series of shots which feature a single point. Practice placing this in different areas of the frame and see what works best. You have several options - in the middle, off centre or at the edge.

Now find a composition which features two points. Construct a series of images which uses these two points and implied lines to guide the eye through the frame.

Finally create an image using a series of multiple points. Think about the shapes you are creating with your points and implied lines. Three points and implied triangles work really well.

Pick your favourite shot from each task and think about why they work for you.

Lines

Lines form the edges of shapes, but they also form shapes of their own. Lines can lead the eye in a photograph and serve as a powerful compositional tool.

There are several different types of line that are available for us to use in our compositions. These are:

Horizontal lines - the most obvious one being the horizon but you can also find horizontal lines in shadows, man made objects or a row of objects which run parallel to the camera.

Vertical lines - the sides of buildings, tree trunks, posts and figures are just a few vertical lines you might find in the landscape.

Diagonal lines - these can be found throughout the landscape and their creation will depend upon your viewpoint.

Curved lines - these are often found in naturally occurring elements such as rivers and streams, branches and shadows.

The direction a line travels plays a role in the emotion of the image. Diagonal lines create a feeling of movement within the frame. They lead the eye towards a particular part of the frame. A leading diagonal line that heads into the

distance will give a photograph a sense of depth.

A vertical line builds a feeling of strength or stability, while a horizontal line is more generally associated with a calm or peaceful image. Curved lines will create a sense of motion.

Some examples of lines in the landscape can be seen in the images below.

Horizontal lines - this image below uses the horizon and the shingle spit to create horizontal lines within the frame.



Vertical lines - these are created in the image below by the tree trunks.



As the lines of vertical trunks recede into the distance they create a sense of depth within the image.

Diagonal lines - these very much depend upon your viewpoint. In the image below I have used two diagonals to lead the eye to the end of the pier.



This image uses the row of beach huts at Southwold to create a diagonal line but if I had changed my viewpoint I could have shot these huts as a horizontal line which would have resulted in a much less dynamic image.



Curved lines - these are often naturally occurring and are a great way to lead the eye with a dynamic sweep through the frame.

The following image shows the curved shoreline at Shingle Street forming an S shape to lead the eye to the cottage on

the seashore.



The next image uses the curved tree to create a relationship with the tree behind so linking the foreground and background of the image.



Visit a location of your choice and take a series of images which feature the following:

- 1. horizontal lines**
- 2. vertical lines**
- 3. a combination of horizontal and vertical lines**
- 4. diagonal lines**
- 5. curved lines.**

Think about your compositions and where the lines are leading you. They should always lead to something relevant and never straight out of the frame.

Shape and form

Shapes are everywhere in the landscape and the skill is recognising and using them creatively in your images.

Shapes are two dimensional representations of an object, form is three dimensional and gives your object depth.

Shapes can be geometric (usually manmade) or organic which are more random and natural. They can comprise actual objects - positive shapes or they can be composed of space surrounded by objects - negative shapes.

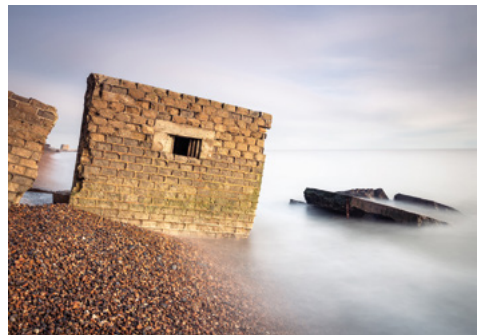
Geometric shapes consist of squares, rectangles, triangles and circles. In general the more regular the shape the greater its impact on the composition. Regular shapes like squares and rectangles convey a sense of order while triangles are slightly more dynamic.

Organic shapes are natural shapes which are more irregular in nature and tend to give a more fluid feeling to an image.

When thinking about your compositions think about the shapes you are using. Too many different shapes will create a confusing and cluttered image, while a collection of similar shapes will be much more pleasing to the eye.



The image above shows a series of round hay bales in a field. The eye is drawn from the front left round to the horizon by following the curve of bales around the field.



This image shows the fallen pill box at East Lane in Bawdsey. This image is composed of a series of squares which has a calming influence enhanced by the long exposure which has softened the movement of the water.

The next image shows the sail from a sailing boat on the River Ore. The triangular shapes are very prominent and are enhanced by the contrast between the white sails and the darker sky.



of the shape in stark contrast to its surroundings. Shadows are another good way of defining shape.

The shot below show a series of rectangles composed of bridge piers. Taken face on they represent flat shapes but because the camera is looking along the row they accentuate the perspective and create a feeling of depth in the image.

The image below is a really simple shot which is all about shapes. It comprised a geometric shape - the post, which is surrounded by more natural shapes which are the stones on the beach and the cloud in the sky.



When photographing shapes think about the lighting. Shape is best defined when the subject is front or backlit creating a high contrast image. If you are shooting silhouettes then sunrise or sunset are perfect times - form and texture tend to vanish leaving only the outlines



Take a series of photographs to illustrate the following shapes:

1. a square or rectangle
2. a triangle
3. a circle
4. an organic shape
5. a silhouette

Now take an image which uses form to create a sense of depth in your image.

Texture

Texture is something that visually describes how an object feels. You will find textures everywhere and they are a great way to add foreground interest to your compositions without using specific objects. For example the image below is really a composition based entirely around textures. The ripples in the sand which come in from the left of the image lead the eye to the mudstone behind while the slow exposure has enhanced the texture in the waves leading to the horizon.



Texture brings images to life and without it a photograph can seem flat and one dimensional.

You will find texture all around you in every aspect of the landscape although most of the time we are oblivious to its presence.

We use texture to describe how things feel - the bark is rough, the stone is

smooth, the rocks are jagged etc. By incorporating these elements into our images will can convey a mood as well as physical depth to our work.

The textures in the image below are amplified by the black and white processing. The clouds give texture to the sky and give the image a feeling of containment as they compress the height of the scene. The grasses and sea purslane provide plenty of foreground interest and help the smooth hull of the boat to stand out from its surroundings.



How well texture stands out in the landscape is dependant upon the lighting. Textures are most prominent with low angled side light when shadows are most prominent emphasising depth and texture.

Harsh midday light is the most difficult to work with as the high angle and intensity of the light mean that shadows are short and textures are flattened.

Rhythm and Pattern

Pattern is a combination of elements that are repeated. Rhythm involves using intervals or spaces between elements to give the user an impression of movement.

Often visually appealing images will contain some form of repetition. This manifests itself in two different ways. Uniform repetition will create a rhythm through an image - this is where your eye moves from one object or shape to another. Rhythm will guide the eye through an image and is an active design element.

In this image taken at Bawdsey your eye moves from one post to the next in a rhythmic journey through the frame. Similarly in the next shot your eye moves through the frame following the perspective along the line of beach huts.



Patterns are more random than rhythm and are usually composed of more elements and shapes.



This image, taken under the Orwell Bridge is made up of rhythm and pattern. The bridge uprights create the rhythm through the image and the concrete blocks at their bases create the patterns.



For this exercise take the following images:

- 1. Five different images which each incorporate a different texture. Look for hard surfaces like rocks, shingle, tree bark or softer surfaces like plant foliage or motion in water.**
- 2. An image which shows rhythm through the frame.**
- 3. An image which is all about pattern.**

Colour

Colour is an important aspect of landscape photography and our choices of colour combinations can make a huge difference to the feel and mood of an image.

I will begin with a little bit of colour theory.

We have three primary colours:

Red

Yellow

Blue

These combine to make secondary colours: Red and Yellow make Orange
Yellow and Blue make Green
Blue and Red make Purple

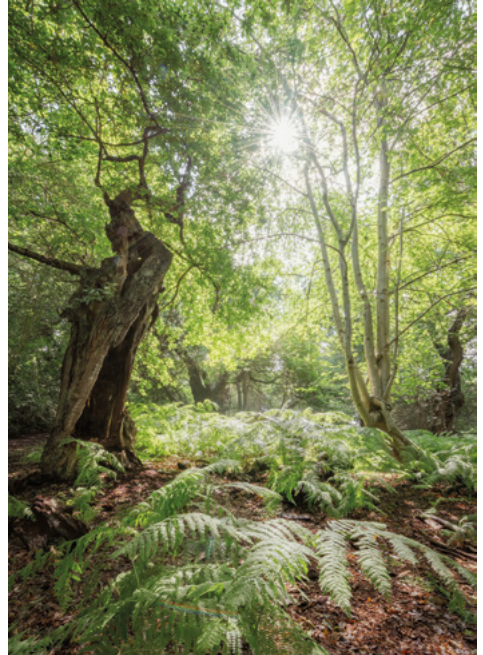


So how does this affect our photography?

Colour combinations and mood

The variety of colours and where they sit within the colour wheel affects the mood and feel of an image.

Take this image taken at Staverton Thicks.



It is made up of a range of similar tones from dark green to brown. These colours all sit side by side on the colour wheel and are known as **analogous or harmonious colours**. They create an image which is pleasing to the eye and is calming and restful.

In contrast the following image taken at Saxtead Mill has two principle colours, blue and yellow/ orange. These colours sit opposite each other on the colour wheel and are known as **complimentary colours**. These can be used to create dynamic, visually striking images with

plenty of contrast.



Monochromatic images such as this shot of the River Deben use variations in lightness and saturation of a single colour.



The very restricted colour pallet in this image allows the shapes of the boat, the vegetation on the bank and its reflections to dominate the image. Any additional bright or bold colours would have distracted from the visual prominence of the shapes.

A monochromatic image is another example of colour harmony, where colour is present but doesn't dominate the composition. These images work

well for conveying shape and form.

How colours behave

Colour in photography is often described in terms of temperatures. Reds, yellows and oranges are warm colours and greens, blues, and mauves are cool colours.

Warm colours will advance in the frame and cool colours will recede. Red is the colour that advances the most and blue recedes the most. This means that if you were photographing two objects at the same distance, one blue and one red the red object would appear closer and more prominent in the frame.

In the image below the red poppies are very dominant in the frame. This is down to their position and the narrow depth of field but also to their colour which advances much more than the green of the background.



Where to look for colour

Colour is everywhere in the landscape it is just a case of looking for it. If you want to shoot an image which is all about colour start with a telephoto lens and look for blocks of colour and colour relationships. Focus in close and work with smaller areas of the landscape and

simplify your compositions as much as possible.

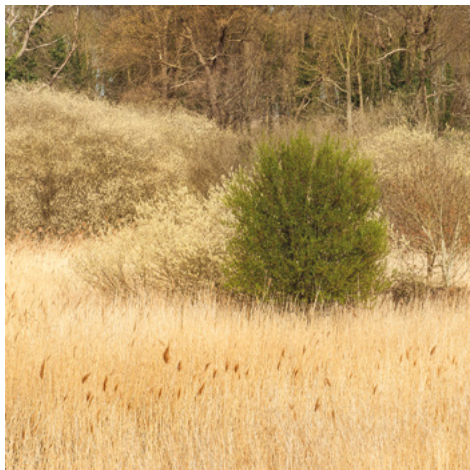
Use a colourful foreground

Another way to add colour to your image is to seek out a colourful foreground. The image below shows a moody shot at Bawdsey Quay. The tones in this image range from neutral through to darker browns and red. These colours all compliment each other and sit together very harmoniously creating a pleasing image. The dark red of the foreground lifts the darker mood of the image and creates a compelling focal point.



Create a focal point with colour

Sometimes it is possible to construct the entire composition around an area of colour. The following image was taken on the banks of the River Deben at Ramsholt and is composed entirely around the bright green tree sitting in a sea of neutral tones. The green tree becomes the focal point of the image purely because of its colour.



Working at sunrise and sunset

The golden hours at either end of the day will often give the best opportunities for colourful landscape shots.

Light has a slightly different temperature in the morning to the evening - sunrise tends to be cooler and sunset a bit warmer. If you are shooting with a DSLR shoot in RAW as this will allow you to capture the most information in your digital file and will give you the greatest freedom when it comes to post processing. Set your white balance to automatic. If shooting in JPEG you may want to choose a cloudy white balance to warm your image a little.

Pick a good composition. Colour will often draw the eye and make an image appear really striking but on its own its not a good substitute for poor composition. A vibrant sunset and stunning sky still needs a foreground to anchor the composition and to give the image some context.



The image above was taken at sunrise on Westleton Heath. It has a cool and tranquil feel to it enhanced by the cool colour pallet and the mist in the valley.

When I took the shot I built the composition around the blocks of colour in the foreground. The neutral colours of the grasses form a lovely diagonal line between the mauve blocks of heather leading in from the bottom right of the frame. There is no real foreground object to this image just the blocks of colour.

This next image was also taken at Westleton Heath but this time it was shot at sunset.

This shot has a much warmer feel to it. The colours in the sky were enhanced by the setting sun and a passing thunder storm which adds to the drama of the image. The land has also absorbed some of the warmer light giving it a range of warmer tones.



Take a photograph for each of the following colour combinations:

- 1. An image that uses harmonious colours**
- 2. An image that uses complimentary colours**
- 3. A monochromatic image**
- 4. An image that uses colour as a focal point.**

Light

The word photography is derived from the Greek photos (“light”) and graphe (“drawing”). It literally means drawing with light.

The two most important elements to creating a successful image are composition and lighting. As landscape photographers our choice of composition is entirely within our control but we cannot control the light as we might if we were working in a studio. We have no control over the sun, the amount of cloud in the sky or the quality of the light at any given time. As a result we have to learn to work with the conditions we are presented with when we are out in the landscape.

To do this we can plan our shoots to make the most of the golden light at either end of the day, we can consider our orientation in relation to the sun and we can plan for the variety of weather conditions that nature can throw at us. But however hard we plan we won't always be able to predict the light at any given time so we need to be aware of how light affects our images and how to work with it to achieve the best results.

The key questions to ask yourself when thinking about the lighting are:

Where is the light coming from?

With landscape photography our light source is the sun so we need to think the orientation of the sun in relation to our scene.

What is the angle of the light?

Is the sun high in the sky or low down? Low angled light will exaggerate textures and shadows and will have a softer quality to it.

What time of day are you shooting?

The colour of the light will be affected by the time of day that you are shooting in - ie. midday, at sunrise, sunset, twilight or after dark.

When thinking about your composition and the overall mood of your image ask yourself whether there is a better time of day to take the shot. The mood of an image will depend so much on the quality of the light.

Orientation to the sun

This is one of the most important factors when considering the light and it will make a massive difference to your image. Changing your position in relation to the sun will allow you to shoot using side lighting, front light, or back light. All three will give a different look and feel to your image as they all have a particular effect on the landscape.

Side light

Side lighting is great for emphasising texture, shadows, shape and form in the landscape. It is one of my favourite uses of light.

Side lighting gives a soft feel to an image and works particularly well just after sunrise when the sun is low in the

sky. The following two images show how important the light is in landscape photography - it just makes the image come alive. If the light is not good it will have a dramatic effect on the success of your image.



These two images were taken 5 minutes apart and show the light before and after sunrise. The effect is dramatic and shows how important the right light is.

Back light

Using back light involves shooting into the sun. This method of using the light results in dramatic images full of contrast, an element which can be difficult to manage. The most common time to use back lighting is at sunrise and sunset. Here ND graduated filters can be used to help manage the contrast between the bright sunlight and the darker foreground.

If you spend time shooting at sunrise or sunset you will notice that the colour of the light changes as the sun rises or sets. The golden hour which refers to the period of time when the sun is low in the sky can reveal some of the best light of the day. But it is also worth shooting in the blue hour which refers to the period of time directly before sunrise or after sunset.

When the sun reaches six degrees below the horizon, it is no longer directly illuminating the ground, but it is illuminating the upper atmosphere. During this time red light which has a longer wavelength than blue light passes through the atmosphere into space whilst the blue light is diffused and scattered. This will give your image a cold blue feel which can be quite beautiful. In the morning, blue hour starts about 30 mins before the sun rises and in the evening about 15 minutes after the sun has set.



Using backlight for smaller scenes

One of the most successful ways to use back lighting is in smaller scenes particularly when working with trees, leaves and plants.

The image below was taken in Rendlesham Forest. It was the light catching the leaves of the silver birch that initially caught my eye and the contrast between the yellows and golds and the dark background generated by the pine trees.

When thinking about how to take this image I decide that the shot was all about the light as opposed to the actual subject matter. So to accentuate this I decided to slightly underexpose the image rendering most of the background dark and focusing all the viewers attention onto the light in the silver birch tree and the ferns below it.



Using backlight to create Bokeh in an image

The word Bokeh comes from the Japanese work Boke meaning blur. Essentially it is the term used to describe out of focus highlights in an image.

To achieve good bokeh you will need a fast lens of at least F2.8 - prime lenses are really good for achieving this effect. You will need to shoot with the lens wide open and create a good distance between your subject and its background.

Arrange your composition so that you are shooting into the light. Select the widest aperture possible and a long focal length you should should achieve some good results.

The image below uses the light bouncing off the dew on the grass to create the out of focus highlights.



Front light

Pointing the camera directly away from the sun is described as using front lighting. This can give your landscapes a very flat look because the direction of light will mean the shadows are always hidden resulting in a lack of texture and shape. Front lighting does however emphasise the colours in an image. The image below is a good example of a front lit image. It was taken at Pin Mill about 10am. The shadows in the image are very short and there is not a huge amount of contrast within the image. The colours are bright but the shot lacks the depth that you would get from side lighting. Without the prominent foreground this image probably wouldn't have worked at all.



Notes on time of day

Shooting at the beginning and end of the day during the golden hours will give warm images full of atmosphere. Shooting in the midday sun has a tendency to give high contrast and stark shadows and a much harsher feel to your images.

Diffused light

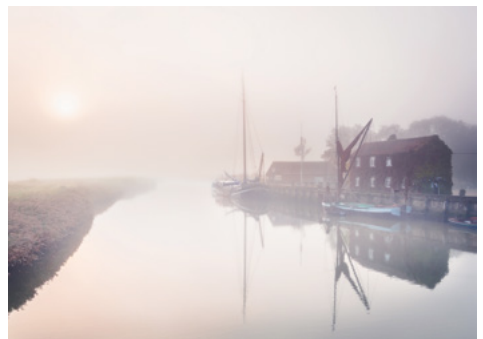
I love working with diffused light. It is generated on dull overcast days, when the weather is foggy or drizzly. It is not the

usual weather that would inspire landscape photography but it is great for woodland work and for creating atmospheric moody images.

These conditions can be a challenge to shoot in as there is not much contrast and you have to be aware of how your camera sensor records the world to get the best results.

Your camera sees the world in shades of grey. As there is not much contrast available in misty conditions the camera tends to underexpose. To ensure that you don't end up with a murky looking image try to add in some positive exposure compensation. Use the histogram and expose to the right as far as you can without blowing any of the highlights. When you come to post process misty images you may find that they work really well in black and white as high key landscapes.

In the image of Snape Maltings below I wanted to keep the colour in the shot as the sun was just adding enough warmth to the scene to make it interesting.



Moonlight

Moonlight can provide some very interesting photo opportunities but it can be quite tricky to get good shots. If you are going out in the dark doing some planning before your shoot will increase your chances of getting a good shot. Visit your chosen location in the day light and work out your composition. Use an app like Photo Pills or the Photographers Ephemeris to work out what time the moon will rise and where it will appear in the sky.

When it comes to choosing your camera settings you will need to use a higher ISO than you would usually use for landscape photography. You will need to balance this with your aperture settings - I would work between F5.6 and F11 and try and keep your ISO as low as you can without having really lengthy exposure times. If the moon is visible in your shot you need to be aware that a long exposure time will show the movement of the moon through the sky and will change its shape from a perfect sphere.



This shot was taken at Sizewell and shows a super moon just edging out from behind the clouds. It was taken in November about 5pm so there was still a fair amount of blue light in the

atmosphere. Because it wasn't properly dark it was relatively easy to balance the exposure to make sure that I retained some detail in the moon as well as on the platform in the sea.

The following shot was taken much later in the evening at about 11pm. Fortunately the moon was blanketed by some thin cloud which really helped the exposure and ensure that the moon didn't get too burnt out. To help balance the shot I used a 0.9ND graduated filter.



The trick with moonlight photography is to get the best balance between the brightness of the moon and the darkness of the landscape. In the field it is best to expose to the left a little to retain some of the secrecy of night time but to make sure that your subject is lit just enough that it captures the viewers attention. When processing this image I made sure that there was some detail visible in the sky but I kept the background deliberately dark. I adjusted the shadows in the wreck only and brought out some of the highlights and colour detail in the wood and on the surface of the water. Shooting with the moon behind you will give you enough light to illuminate the

landscape but it should also allow you to shoot the stars without the brightness of the moon in your image.

When shooting stars you will need to be aware that if your exposure time is too long then you will start to get star trails in your image where the movement of the earth becomes apparent and the stars start to streak. To overcome this you can use the 500 rule which provides a guide for the maximum exposure time for the focal length of your lens. Basically the rule says that:
Shutter speed = Focal length x crop factor. Where a full frame has a crop factor of 1 Canon and Nikon APS sensors have a crop factor of 1.6 Canon and 1.5 Nikon Micro four thirds have a crop factor of 2. So if you are using a 24mm focal length on a full frame camera the maximum shutter speed before star trails will begin to show is $500 / (24 \times 1) = 20$ seconds.

The following shot was taken at East Lane, Bawdsey. It was principally a shot of the house on the edge of the cliff under a starry sky. There was enough light from the moon to illuminate the house and the land around it. The colours in the distance are generated from the light pollution from the port of Felixstowe.

This shot was taken at an ISO of 6400 with the aperture wide open at 2.8. This gave me a shutter speed of 1.2 seconds but the image was rather grainy. It would have been much better to have decreased the ISO and increased the shutter speed a little. This would have given me a better quality image in terms of noise.



Take the following series of images which all explore a different way of using light.:

- 1. An image that uses side lighting**
- 2. A landscape scene using back light - try sunrise or sunset or both.**
- 3. A detailed scene using back light**
- 4. A scene that uses diffused light - shoot on a cloudy day or in the fog or mist. You are looking for a day with no harsh shadows.**
- 5. A landscape scene that is illuminated by moonlight.**

Beyond the Classic View

The term intimate landscape was first coined by photographer Eliot Porter in 1979 who used it as a title for an exhibition he held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The images that he selected for his exhibition can be seen on this website and give you an idea what he meant by the term intimate landscape. www.afterimagegallery.com/porterintimatelandscapes.htm

Today intimate landscapes are a popular part of landscape photography - the term describes a small scene which has been extracted from a wider landscape view and put into a frame of its own.

Intimate landscapes are really worth exploring because they are a way of creating an image that is unique to you. It is very unlikely that anyone else will see the same elements or composition as you even if they visited the same location. Intimate landscapes are personal to you, they are your take on the world and are more emotive than the classic view that many photographers jostle to take.

How to find an intimate landscape

It is easy to spot a classic view and the elements that make up the most obvious compositions are easily identifiable. It is less easy to spot an intimate landscape. It all comes down to observation and a particular way of seeing the landscape

around you. Intimate landscapes don't need dramatic light and very often dull or shady conditions work really well.

Try to distill the scene into its component parts and think about the landscape in terms of shapes and tones. Give yourself time to notice what is going on around you and take in all the various elements. Consider textures, patterns, colours, shapes and tones.

Intimate landscapes are best shot with a telephoto lens which will allow you to focus in on smaller areas of the scene.

The following two pictures were taken at Ramsholt on the River Deben.



This pond with its reeds and dead trees had always caught my eye but I wasn't sure how best to capture it. The image above is a shot encompassing the wider view. It's a nice scene but for me it lacks

impact probably because there is not an obvious focal point. The colours are nice and there is lots to look at but this is not enough to create a really impactful image.

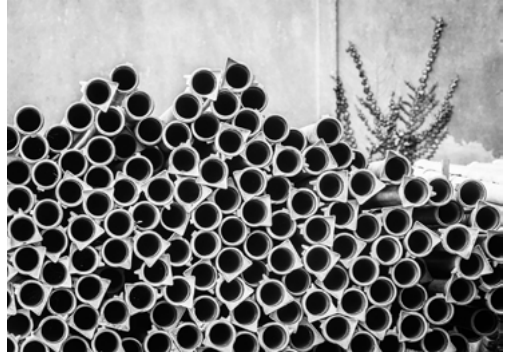


The second image (above) was made by zooming in on a couple of the elements within the scene. These were the ones that had initially caught my eye - the dead tree trunks in the middle of the water with the reeds as a backdrop.

By using a longer focal length and picking out areas of texture and colour and thinking about these as graphical elements I was able to make an image that I felt was more impactful.

What makes a good intimate landscape?

Intimate landscapes are images that make the viewer think. They force us to use our imagination and capture our attention for longer. They often work best when the sky is excluded from the frame. The key to intimate landscapes is observation, reacting to light, texture and the colour and learning how to build an image around these components instead of looking for obvious subjects in the landscape.



Tips for good intimate landscapes

Start wide and refine your image by focusing in on a specific area.

Use a telephoto lens.

Eliminate the sky.

Look for graphical elements within your landscape and use these to guide your composition.

Visit a location and take a series of images that are all intimate landscapes.

Post Processing

Post processing is the phrase that we use to cover everything that is done to the photograph after it has been taken. The process has always been an important part of photography even in the days of film. Photographers would employ techniques such as dodging (lightening) and burning (darkening) to make their images more impactful and to guide the viewers eye through the frame.

Today the darkroom is our computer screen and although the process is very different the fundamentals are the same - we process our images to make them complete. Post processing is an integral part of the art of photography and in my opinion is something that you should practice and perfect if you want to make eye catching and impactful photographs.

If used correctly post processing can be an important compositional tool. Using processes like dodging and burning or selective highlighting we can control the visual weight in an image and make the composition appear stronger.

Even though I consider post processing to be an essential part of image making it will never turn a bad photo into a good one. If the composition or light is not right in the original file no amount of post processing is going to rescue the image.

So what do I mean by adding visual

weight to a composition?

Basically I am talking about emphasising parts of the image where I want the viewer to look.

Your eye will always travel to the lightest part of a scene. By using a process of dodging and burning we can emphasise the lights and darks in our image and guide the way viewers look at our images.

Take the two images on the right. The top file is the RAW file straight out of the camera and the bottom image is the processed file. This image is all about the connection between two dead trees - one seems to be reaching out to the other. Because this is the story that I had chosen with my composition it is also the theme I have tried to accentuate with my post processing.

I have tried to lighten and warm the sky a little and then I have set about emphasising the layers within the image to increase that feeling of depth. To do this I have increased the luminance on areas of the reedbed including the tan coloured reeds behind the trees. I have brought out some of the highlights on the foreground leaves and have then darkened the shadows in the hollow that connects the two trees. The processed image now has more depth and life than the original RAW file. The information was all there, I haven't added anything, I have just emphasised the areas I wanted to draw attention to.

Spend some time going through your RAW files and see how your compositions might be enhanced by selectively editing certain areas.



A little about Gill

Gill is a professional photographer based on the Suffolk Coast. She specialises in landscapes, waterscapes, and marine photography and is passionate about promoting a connection with the environment through her work.

Gill's images have been published widely in many photography, countryside and sailing magazines. She holds regular exhibitions of her work and produces a range of cards and calendars featuring her Suffolk images.

Gill has spent the last 15 years photographing the Suffolk landscape and is keen to share her knowledge of this unique and beautiful area.

For more information on Gill's photography and her workshops on the Suffolk Coast visit

www.gillmoon.com



**Save 10% off any workshop
with the voucher code
Comp10**

GILLMOON
PHOTOGRAPHY