Gill Moon Photography
Photo Club

May 2023 Challenge 5
Inspired by the Sea

Hello

and welcome to my monthly photo club challenges.

Each month I will be setting a new challenge for club members to work with. The challenges are not designed to be competitive but they are designed to be fun and inspiring and help you grow as a photographer.

During these challenges we will be looking at the work of different photographers who are 'masters' in their chosen field of photography. We will examine how they make their images and discuss how you can use their techniques in your own work. I hope these will be inspiring sessions.

Every monthly challenge will be followed by a 1.5 hour Zoom session (which is entirely optional) on the last Wednesday of every month where we will discuss some of the submitted images and talk about what worked and what didn't. I hope this feedback will be useful.

Thank you very much for being part of the Photo Club and I hope you will find it a fun and rewarding challenge.

Gill.

Inspired by the Sea

This months challenge is all about coastal photography and taking our inspiration from the sea.

There are numerous ways to photograph the sea. We can capture crashing waves with fast shutter speeds, or slow down our exposures to create a streaky effect in moving water. We can use long exposures to blur the water completely to achieve a milky minimalist effect, or we can photograph on a still day when reflections are at their best.

To compliment our shutter speed we can look for structures such as piers, groynes, wooden posts and rocks to add a focal point to our images. We can also focus on smaller details and look for sand patterns, rock formations or other geological features on the beach.

Choose your location

Select your location with the weather and tides in mind. Some locations will suit rough weather while others will be more suitable to calm conditions. Think about the type of image you would like to make given the weather and tidal conditions and plan your trip accordingly.

Check Tide Tables

Make sure you are aware of what the tides are doing at all times. It is very easy to misjudge situations or get so engrossed in what you are doing that you don't notice the the state of the sea. There are numerous tide table apps available. I use 'My tide times' which is a free app. It gives you the tidal information for your nearest locations along with the sunrise and sunset times, the moon phases and times of the moon rise and set.

Use a Tripod

Invest in a sturdy tripod and make sure to push it well into the sand if you are using it in the sea. Extend the bottom legs first so the first joint of your tripod is clear of the sand. Now you can adjust the height using the top legs only and the bottom narrower legs stay firmly in the sand.

Remember to wash your tripod well in fresh water after a shoot as salt water is very damaging to equipment.

Composition at sea

Shooting out to sea can be challenging from a compositional point of view. You will need to look for elements that guide the viewers eye through the frame. Using man made structures such as piers, groynes and breakwaters add structure to an image.

Southwold Pier - 5 seconds at F16, ISO 100 at a focal length of 24mm

Isolating subjects in part of the frame also works well with seascapes and can be combined with a slow shutter speed to create a minimalist effect. The following image was taken at Bawdsey and uses an exposure time of almost 3 minutes at F11 to create a really minimalist effect with no texture left in the sea. The diffused light helps to create a tranquil feel and the lack of texture in the sea and sky really helps the post to stand out from its background.

The colour image works because of the contrasts between the area of shingle in the shade and the brighter part of the beach in the sun. The shapes are obvious but this image is very much about the early morning light.

For the second image I have converted the same file to black and white so that it is more simplistic in nature. The shapes feel more important and the contrast in the shot is now between the dark shingle and the brighter water and the very bright cottage.

Sometimes the shape of the coastline can be just as compelling as the features within it. Below are two versions of the same image taken at Shingle Street. This shot is all about the shape of the shingle and the light at the time.

Shingle Street - 10 seconds at F16, ISO 31 at a focal length of 24mm

Comparing these two images it is clear that your post processing is just as important as your initial choice of composition and I will talk a little about this later.

Look for different viewpoints

Southwold Pier must be one of the most photographed locations on the Suffolk Coast and images are often captured using the groynes on either side as foreground interest. The image below was taken from a high vantage point and shows the granite groynes amid much swirling water. This image really focuses on the pier and doesn't give much of an impression of what the rocks are like.

Southwold Pier - 6 seconds at F16, ISO 100 at a focal length of 35mm

By changing my viewpoint and setting my tripod up on the rocks I was able to create an image that focused much more on the rocks highlighting their texture. The pier really became the background to this shot.

Experimenting with shutter speed.

Shutter speed can have the biggest impact on how you portray the water in your images. A faster speed will freeze the motion and give you an feeling of drama in rough conditions. A slow shutter speed will blur the motion and simplify your image. And something in between (say 1 - 5 seconds depending upon the speed of movement) will give you a lovely textured feel to the water.

This image taken at Sizewell was shot at sunrise on a rather blustery day. I wanted to create a calm feel to compliment the sunrise but I wanted to retain some texture in the water. The image was shot at 9 seconds at F16 which has given me some lovely foreground colours and texture. To achieve this shot I used a 0.6ND grad and a 6 stop ND filter.

I created another image on the same shoot which was shot at 72 seconds at F16. This was taken before the sun rose above the horizon. The use of a longer shutter speed has created a much more minimal image blurring the sea completely and removing all its texture. For this shot I slightly over exposed the image which has given the shot a very dreamy feel and really emphasises the contrast between the sea and the metal structure.

To achieve this shot I used a 0.6 ND grad and a 10 stop ND filter

motion of the waves around a small bank of shingle off the coast at Shingle Street. This shot is all about the movement of the water and the patterns that it makes.

Using shutter speed to create streaky water

By choosing our shutter speed carefully we can create streaky patterns in our images which become integral parts of our composition. In the shot below the lines created by the receeding waves create a lovely texture in the foreground which becomes a compelling part of the image. This image was taken using a 1 second exposure at F18, ISO 31. I timed the shutter release to coincide with the moment the wave turned and began to retreat down the beach. Timing is critical with these shots so it is best to use a remote shutter release rather than the 2 second timer on your camera.

The final shot in this series was again taken with a 2.5 second exposure, this time at F16 with an ISO of 64. This time I wanted to capture the patterns in the water that formed around the rocks when the waves encircled them.

Similarly in the next shot I used a shutter speed of 2.5 seconds at F11 to capture the

Post Processing your seascapes
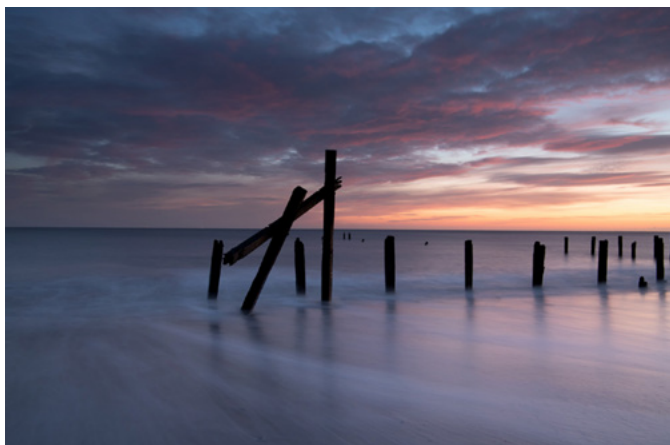
I am going to start this section with an image I took at sunrise on the beach at Happisburgh. The two images above show the RAW file at the top and my processed shot underneath.

You will see that the RAW file is much flatter, a little darker and a different aspect ratio.

The shooting settings for this image were: ISO 400,
F11,
13 second exposure,
a focal length of 32mm using a 24-70mm lens.

I also used a 6 stop filter and a 0.6 reverse grad to try and balance the bright part of the sky with the sea.

The reason I used an ISO of 400 was to achieve the shutter speed I was looking for whilst exposing for the bright parts of the sky.

When I selected this image to work on I decided that the 'out of camera' aspect ratio didn't really work for me so I cropped using a 10 x 8 ratio. Basically I wanted the depth in the image but not the width - especially the left hand side of the shot which has no visual interest.

I also wanted to simplify the scene by removing the clutter on the right hand side. I made a decision to remove the distant posts near the horizon as well. I felt these detracted from the 'simplicity' of the cropped image.

Next I felt that I wanted to bring out the light and texture in the wooden posts, highlight the white streaks in the water and make sure the reflections and colours showed up in the sand. I wanted my sky to be a little lighter than shot and not quite as warm.

My workflow in Lightroom was to:

Check the profile corrections and chromatic aberration. Crop the image. Check the white balance, exposure, shadows and highlights across the whole shot.

Work on individual areas of the scene using linear gradients, radial gradients and brushes.

The screen shot on the next page shows the position of the masks I used and the separate areas I worked on to achieve the finished result.

Everyone will have different ideas when it comes to post processing and how you want your finished image to look. The important thing is to have a firm idea and work on the parts of the image that will help you achieve the results you are looking for.

When I composed this shot in the field I was looking for the waves to draw some streaky lines into the image towards the posts. So when it came to processing it was these lines that I wanted to highlight.
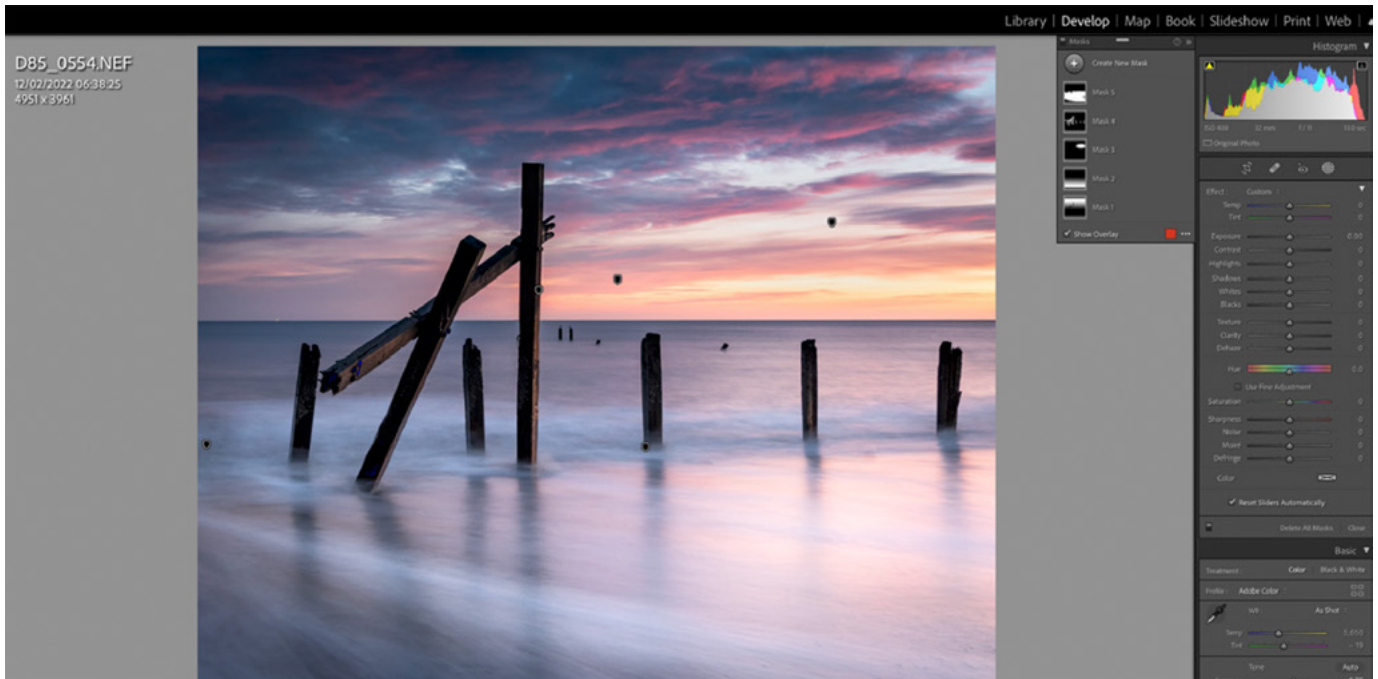
Focus on the Beach

Seascape images are not all about moving water. The geology, the surrounding beach and the patterns that you can find in the smaller more intimate scenes are just as important.
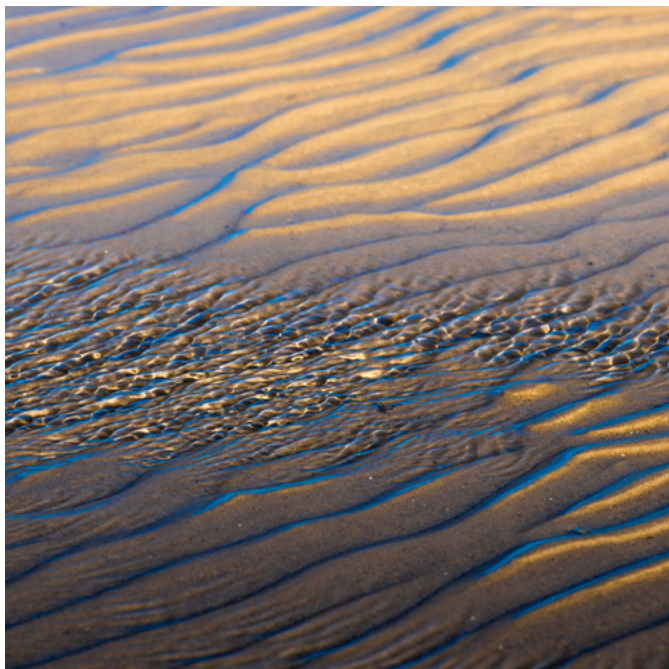
Sand patterns - 1/320 second at F8, ISO 200, handheld.

This image shows sand patterns and the water trapped between them on a blue sky day. The image works due to the contrast between the cool blue of the reflected sky in the water and the warmer colour of the sunlight on the sand. The texture in the centre of the image is the sunlight bouncing off the moving water.

This next image shows a shell underneath a pool of water. The patterns are created by the light bouncing off the moving water.

Reflected Light - 1/640 second at F5.6, ISO 200, handheld.

The next image focuses on the patterns found in a rock formation on Hunstanton Beach. This was a single image taken at 0.5 seconds at F16, with a 24 - 70mm lens at 70mm with a polariser to cut down some of the glare from the surface of the rock.

The next image shows a collection of coloured rocks separated with shingle.

This shot was taken with a 105mm macro but due to the shallow depth of field I found I had to focus stack the image to achieve sharpness across the whole image. This shot was actually a 13 shot focus stack, at 1/10 second at F16, ISO100.

Focus stacking
The image above shows the rough location of my focus points for my 13 shot focus blend. When taking the images I tried to make sure I covered all the high and low points in the shot - as I was shooting with a macro lens the depth of field is very shallow even at F16.

This is my method for processing focus stacked images.

Set up a tripod and take a series of images with different focal points that will ensure sharpness across the whole frame.

Download the images into Lightroom and process one quickly to get the exposure and light correct across the frame - don't crop yet.

Now select all the other images and 'sync' to apply all the processing corrections to all the images.

Open all the images as layers in Photoshop.

Select all the layers and go to Edit -> Auto Align Layers

Next go to Edit -> Auto Blend Layers. Select Stacking Images and check the box for Seamless Tones and Colours.

Photoshop analyses each individual pixel and selects only the sharpest ones from each image by revealing or concealing through Layer Masks which will show up next to each layer.
When the masks are created, zoom in on the image to see if every area is sharp. Photoshop usually does a pretty good job but sometimes it is not perfect so please check really carefully and you may need to mask by hand for some images.

Other examples of intimate beach shots
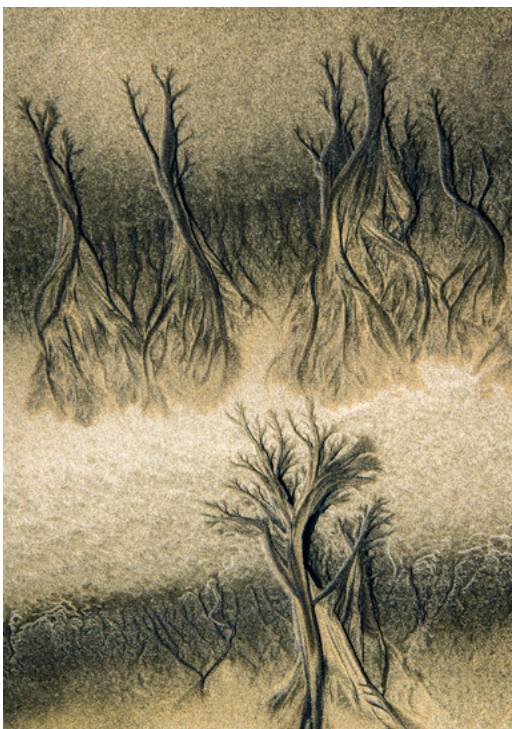
This shot shows some sand patterns on a beach in Ardnamurchan. You can get sand

patterns on the east coast but they are not usually as pronounced due to the geology. The sand patterns work in Ardnamurchan due to the contrast between white sand and black volcanic sand. This was taken with a 24-70mm lens at 55mm, with a shutter speed of 1/250 second at F13, ISO 320

My final shot was taken with a low viewpoint looking along the beach instead of looking straight down onto the subject. By lying down on the sand and focusing on the shell I have blurred out the foreground and background sand ridges. My low viewpoint has allowed the shell to rise above the surface of the sand and I have accentuated this by shooting into the light so that the shell has some sun glow coming from the back.

This image was taken with a 70-200mm lens at 200mm with an aperture of F5.6 at 1/640 second, ISO 200.

Inspiration.

Rachel Talibart
Rachel is a professional photographer with a particular interest in the sea and the coast it carves. She is probably best known for her Sirens series of images but she also has some new work titled 'Ghost in the shell' which is worth looking at for some inspiration.
rachaeltalibart.com

Margaret Soraya
Margaret is a Scottish landscape photographer who has been visiting the Scottish Hebrides for over ten years in search of solitude, a positive state of aloneness which allows her the creative space to capture the untouched beauty of the islands' rugged coastline and endless white sandy beaches.
Her work is very wave focused and is worth looking at for her use of shutter speed and composition.
boshamgallery.com/artists/61-margaret-soraya/works

Zoltan Bekefy
Zoltan is a photographer from Czechoslovakia. His work is black and white and quite minimalist in nature.
zoltanbekefy.com/lex

David Southern
David is a Northumbrian photographer who specialises in intimate coastal scenes, looking at the ground beneath our feet.
In particular please look at the rocks, pebbles and sand gallery on Davids website.
southernphotography.co.uk

May's Photo Challenge

This months photo challenge is to produce two photos.

The **first image** can be either:

A long exposure of more than 30 seconds that removes the texture from the water.

Or

A shorter exposure that shows the texture of water - this can be swirls, streaks, patterns around objects or just the texture of waves.

For both these shots you can incoporate man made features or natural elements. The key is to decide what shutter speed works with your chosen location, composition and conditions.

For your **second image** I want you to focus on the ground beneath your feet and capture an intimate view from the beach. This can be sand patterns, rock formations, shells, the light on water or anything in the style shown in the notes.

Your second image can be taken in one shot or focus stacked.

You can enter a maximum of **two** images for conversation in the Zoom session.

The Zoom session for this challenge will take place on Wednesday 31st May at 7pm

Top image - Bawdsey Beach, Tranquil morning - 46 seconds at F10, ISO 200. This is an example of a minimalist style long exposure of more than 30 seconds where the texture has been removed.

Bottom image - Ardnamurchan Lighthouse - 1 second at F16, ISO 64. This is an example of a shorter exposure image showing the texture of water.