What Judges Look For

Disclaimer:

- I am different to many judges as I started out as an artist and a teacher – photography came later.

- All judges have prejudice. We are all attracted to different types of images more than others. We all have different life experiences that affect the way that we view the world – your images are no exception.

- However, like every good judge, I strive to be fair, honest, consistent, objective and open-minded.

So - what *do* we look for?

- Originality & Creativity
- Technique
- Aesthetics
- Mood
- Story-telling
- Planning
- Relevance

Judges Look for:
Originality & Creativity

- *Excite me!*

- Show me something *new.*

- Don't be afraid to give it a go!

- Take Risks!

- Be *brave* in your choices!

- Push the boundaries.

Cliched Subjects:

- Don't photograph others' artworks
- If you want to copy someone's style/ technique/ idea, etc. – then appropriate, don't plagiarize.

  (Note: see my presentation "Lighting Like an Old Master" for more ideas)

- *"Not another pelican*!"*

  *insert here - sunset, rose, happy snap, train tracks, etc.

- Photograph old subjects from a *new perspective* - this could be in relation to:

1. Technique
2. Purpose/meaning
3. Concept
4. Camera angle/composition

E.g. "Standard" Pelican shots I always see:

✓ Well shot and well exposed
✓ Background blurred and uncluttered (not distracting)
✓ Sharp
✓ Catch lights in eye
X   Boring

Pelican shots I sometimes see:

1. Close up of a face (still containing negative space)

2. Pelican catching fish

Pelican shots I rarely see:

1. Relationship / emotion
2. Symmetry
3. Mood (mist)
4. Shooting through grass – a sense of the voyeur

5. Splashes (sense of frenzy/excitement)
6. Silhouettes/sunsets

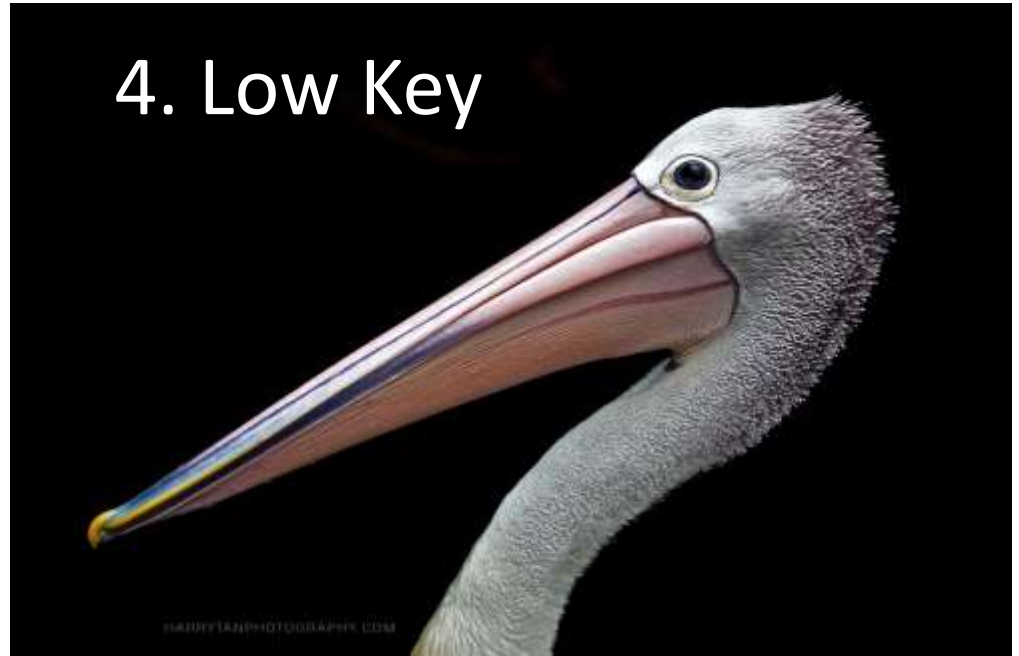# Pelican Shots I Never See:

1. Blurred Movement

© 2012 Tim Boyer

©Greg du Toit

copyright 2014 Charles Glatzer, www.shootthelight.com

2. High key:

3. Monochrome

4. Low Key

5. Up Close/ Abstract / Open Compositions
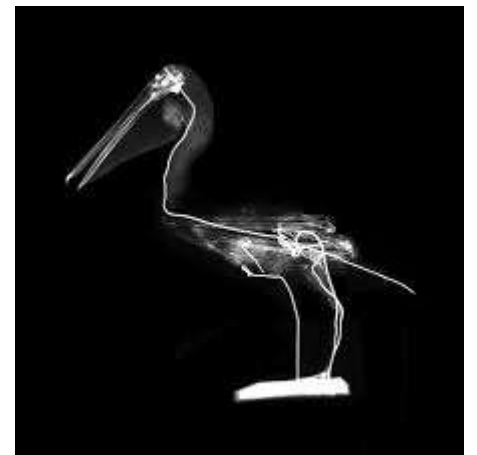
6. Focusing on Pattern / Repetition:

7. Different Perspective

8. Conceptual Pelican Photography:

Feeding a stinky pelican **by John Wilhelm** (500 px)

Pelican by Jasna Matz (500px)

Judges Look for:
Technical excellence

1. Basic Technical skills
2. Technical intelligence
3. Technical creativity
4. Editing Techniques

Basic Technical skills

Ask yourself:

- Is my image sharp *where it needs to be*?

- Have I used the right *shutter speed* to freeze/capture the movement in the image?

- Have I used the right *aperture*? Should every thing be in focus or the *background blurred*?

- Is my image *under or overexposed?*

- Have I used the *correct ISO?* Is my image unnecessarily noisy?

Technical Intelligence

- Knowing when and how to use particular lenses – knowing which lens will best suit your subject and the story you're telling.

- Knowing when and how to use filters.

- Timing & ability to adapt settings quickly.

- Understanding lighting, "seeing" the light and using the light to your advantage.

- Knowing when to use a tripod.

- Knowing where to position yourself for the best shot (camera angle).

Technical Creativity

- Knowing your gear so well that you can be creative with your techniques in order to achieve more dynamic results.

- Using colour temperature to add mood.

- Creative use of light.

- Shooting with different settings to the "norm" – e.g. blurred images.

- Creative editing techniques.

Note: See my presentation on Creative Photography, featured on my BLOG for more ideas.

Editing Techniques

- Always shoot in RAW (mainly to help avoid blown out highlights and burnt out shadows)
- Always edit your images – even if just a little.
- When you learn a new technique – temper yourself – don't use it on EVERY image.
- Be subtle in your editing.
- Can you define your editing style? If not, do some soul searching and googling, because every pro photographer/artist has one.

Cliched Techniques to avoid:

- White vignette or heavy vignetting
- Selective colouring
- Over-blurring of skin
- The 'Dutch Tilt' (diagonal horizon line)
- Naff borders, garish watermarks and text
- Overdone HDR
- Fake looking lens flare

How to fix common technical errors:

Common mistakes	How to fix it in Photoshop
Not sharp	Use selective high pass sharpen
Blotchy Skin	Spot heal + hue mask OR dodge/burn method
Noisy	Depends on the image, but usually I reduce colour noise 100%, and luminosity 10%
Under/over exposure Loss of detail in highlights or shadows	-Levels / Curves (in an adjustment layer) -Paint brush (in extreme cases) -Turn image to mononchrome
Distractions in background	Healing tools &/or paint brush
Emphasize focal point	Selective dodging/burning. Selective blurring/sharpening.
Needs cropping	Learn to crop effectively
Needs more space	Select area > Edit > Fill > "content aware"

Aesthetics

1. Know, understand and utilise the art elements, design principles and concepts*

2. Understand composition

3. Change your perspective

4. Get in close and look for abstract patterns

5. Isolate your focus point

*Note: See my blog post entitled "Aesthetics of Photography" for more info.

Composition:

- Know the compositional rules / guidelines and when to break them

- How can you make your image more dynamic?

- Don't be afraid of negative space or open compositions

- Train your eye to mentally frame images.

- Try a different perspective

How to emphasize the focal point?

- Minimise distractions in the background – do this by changing your perspective or lighting. You can also heal them later).
- Use a shallow depth of field to blur the background
- Get in close
- Use colour and tonal contrasts:
- White/light/bright elements advance in space
- Dull/black/dark elements recede in space

Move around your subject!

Shot from eye level – Boring!

More dynamic perspective and composition is created by stepping in close to the tree and shooting up from underneath.

Judges Look For:
Mood & Emotion

- Judges often tend to overlook mood, but it can dramatically affect images and the way in which viewer's respond to them.

- The most memorable photos are those that evoke a mood or feeling.

- Not just about the mood you were in when you took the image, but about the mood you want your viewer's to feel (not see, *feel*!)

- Mood can be the difference between a good photo and a great photo.

- Remember WHY you are shooting – what concept are you going with? What mood are you hoping to convey?

Common moods

- Nostalgic
- Serene / calm / relaxed
- Quirky
- Romantic / intimate
- bright / happy / fun
- Pensive / thoughtful / dark
- Lonliness / solitude
- Saddness
- Voyeurism

How do you create mood?

- First define the mood you want to create/capture
- Note the similar features and techniques used to create this mood – e.g. monochrome treatment, lens flare, texture, slow shutter speed, etc.
- Choose the weather and location to suit your mood.
- Communicate openly with your team (HMUA, model, client, assistants, etc.)
- Pay attention to the light (even plan for it!)
- Try editing techniques such as – monochrome, haze, split tone, X-pro, adding textures.

Moody Subjects:

- WEATHER
    - Fog/mist/haze/dust
    - Storm Clouds
- LIGHTING:
    - Shooting into the light
    - Light leaks + lens flare
- PORTRAITS:
    - Person/animal experiencing an emotion
    - Focus on eyes, expression or pose, depending on the context

Mood and Perspective:

- **Camera Angle (in relation to subject):**
  - high angle: implies vulnerability
  - low angle: implies dominance
  - eye level: implies strength and equality
- **Framing & distance between camera and subject:**
  - small subject in frame: isolated / lonely
  - large subject in frame: intimacy/trust
  - shooting through something: voyeur/ intimacy

Judges Look for: Story-telling

- Tell me a story

- Be *emotive* (and moody!)

- *Consistency and coherence* is key

- Make your photographs *mean something*

- Shoot a series

- Create a triptych / diptych

Some stand alone images that tell a story:
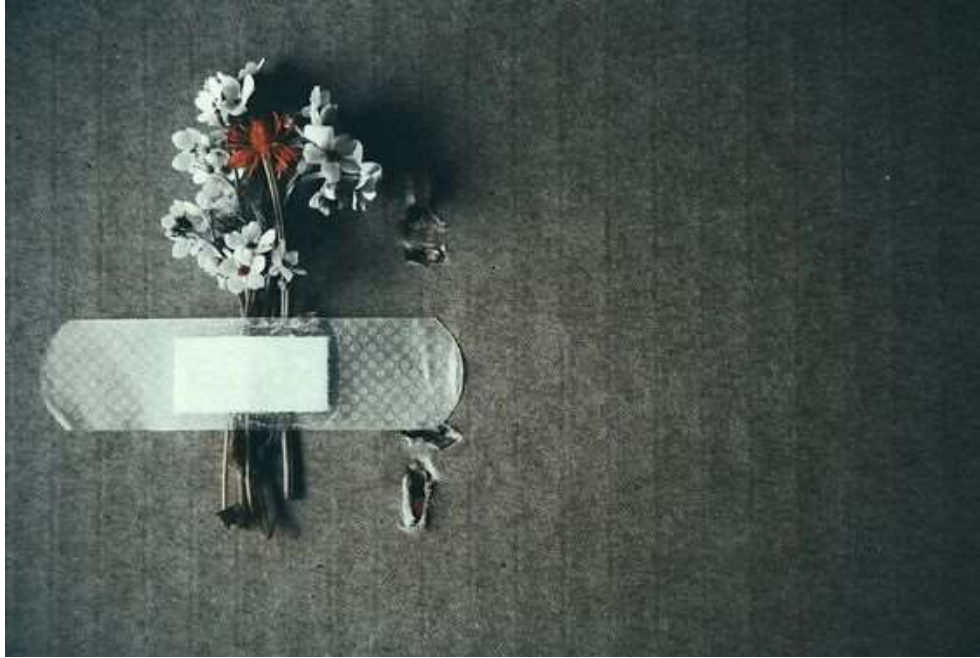
Diptych & Triptych

A Series by Aliza Razell:

Judges Look for:
Planning

- This could just be the teacher in me, but if I can see you have tried something new, set up your shot or attempted to plan it in *any* way, you instantly get more credit.

- Planning involves a *design process:*
  1. Idea / Inspiration
  2. Design (try actually drawing it!)
  3. Preparation & Experimentation
  4. Shoot
  5. Be critical (re-shoot if necessary)
  6. Edit

Preparation Involves appropriate:

- Models
- Costumes
- Props
- Backgrounds/Locations
- Lighting
- Camera Techniques
- Composition
- Camera Angle
- Editing techniques

Greg Desiatov Photography

Judges Look for: Relevance

- Consider your audience
- Consider your purpose
- Read the set definition carefully and ensure your images suit – if not sure, save it for an open comp OR a more specific comp.
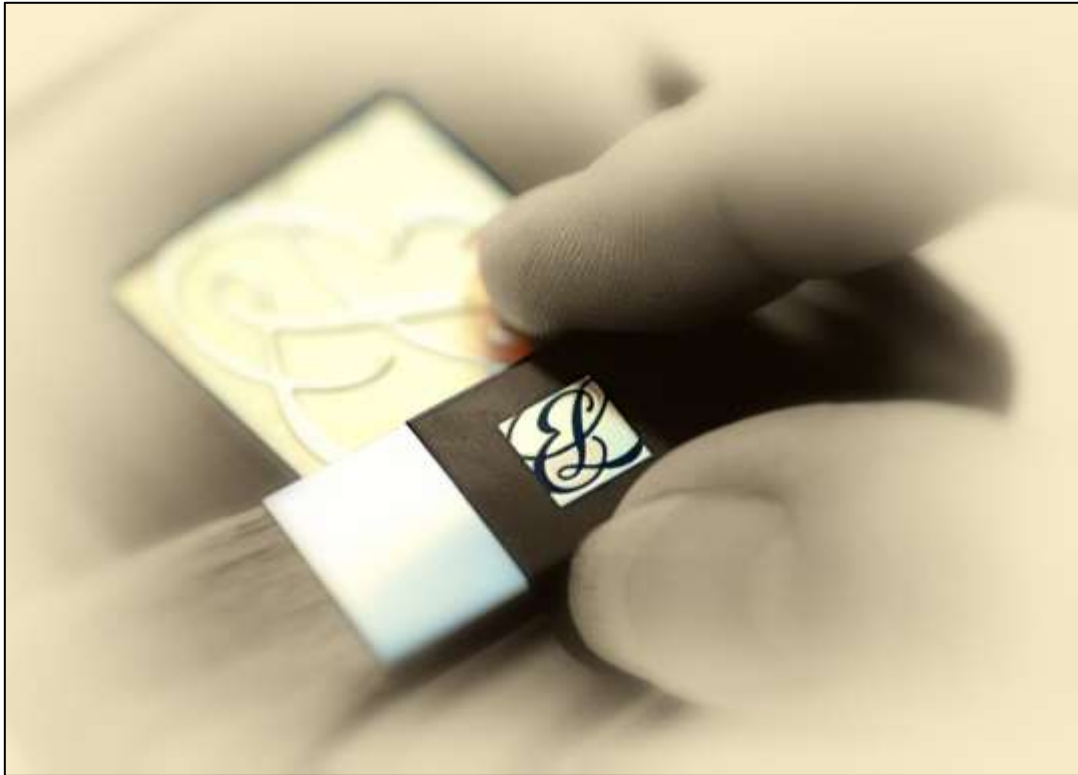
Set Topics

The set topic can dramatically affect the way we view and score your images

This image was entered into to an open comp.
Q. Who is the audience?
Q. What is the purpose?
Q. Would it be more appropriate in a different comp?

A. *I feel the purpose of this image is to promote a product – perhaps on someone's website.*

If I was given this image in a set subject on "product photography" it may have received a better result. It is not a bad shot, but in an open comp, it got lost, as other images stood out more and grabbed my attention.

Difficult Set Topics

Photojournalism:

- Your images must tell me a story and be "newsworthy".

- Pretend you are an editor at a newspaper. You've been given 5 shots on the same topic and you have to choose the one that connects with the viewers most powerfully and which tells the story *instantly*.

- Titles should be like the news headline that accompanies the image.

- There is a big difference between happy snaps which record an event/place/time and photojournalistic images which not only record but tell a story and connect with viewers.

Nature:

- No/limited editing

- No evidence of the hand of man

- No cultivated plants or caged animals.

Creative:

- Find inspiration
- Plan your image/story/mood
- Get in close – think abstract
- Try appropriation
- You Tube techniques and editing processes you intend to use – see how the pros do it.

Digital:

- Resolution matters – get it right (judges often want to zoom in and if it's too low res we can't tell if an image is sharp or not).
- Images that need to be heavily cropped make good candidates for DPI, as they will be too pixilated to print.
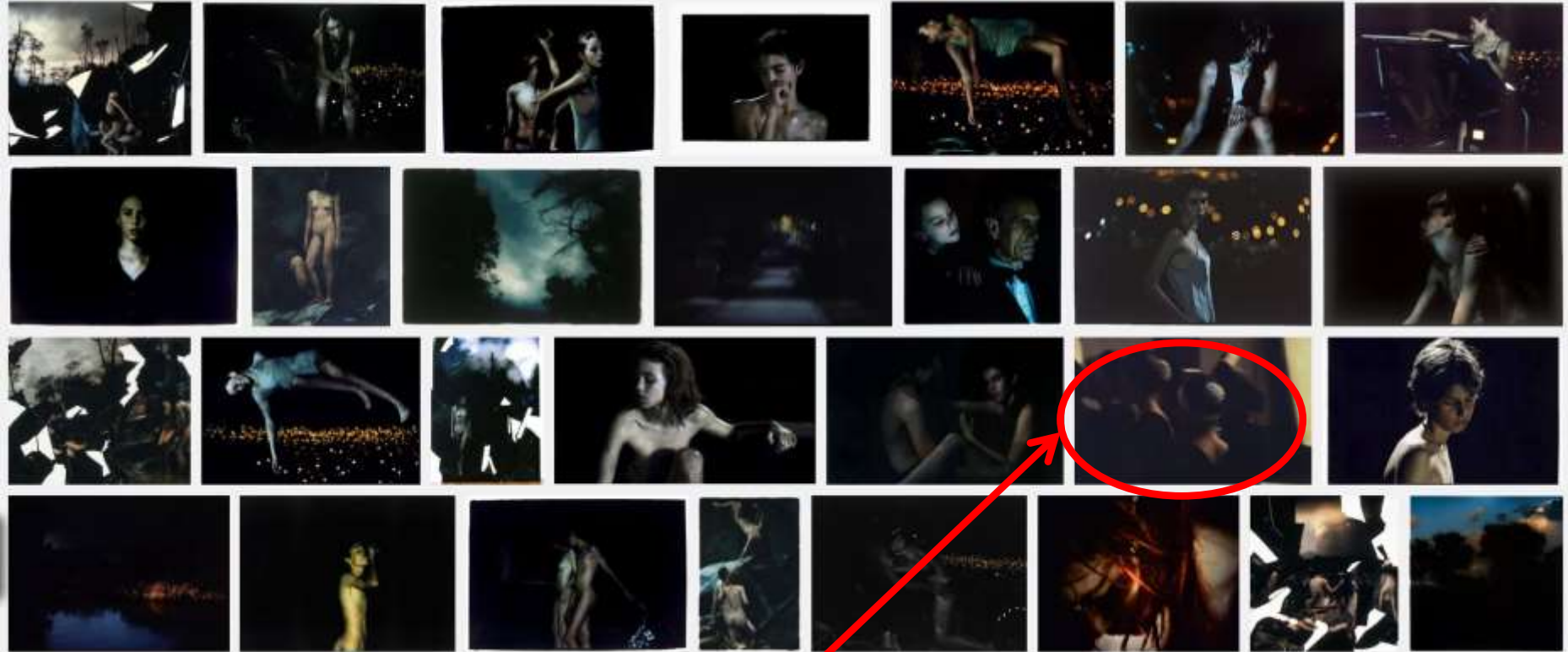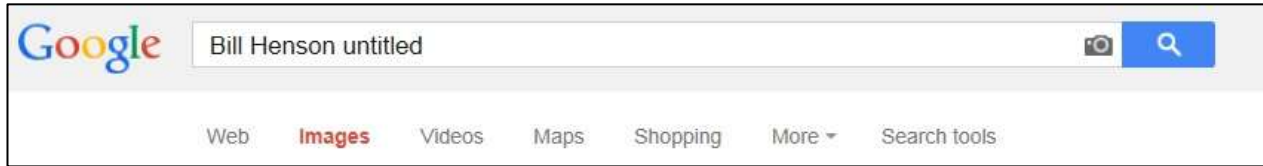
How would you "judge" this image?

Competition Judge says:

- Shutter speed too slow – camera shake?
- nothing in focus - blurry
- No centre of interest
- Under-exposed
- Subject not facing camera
- Bright spots at edges of image
- Needs cropping
- Grainy

Bill Henson is a Famous Australian Artist

- Henson's artwork must be viewed in the context of his entire portfolio
- **Common features of his style:** Chiaroscuro, underexposure, bokeh, diptychs/tripychs, flattened perspective (using telephoto lenses), moody, dark, depressing.
- **Common features of his subjects:** shadowed or blurred, facing away, adolescents, sexualised, expressing duality.

Know your Audience & Purpose

Image Style	Example / Technique	Purpose =	Audience	Club comp?
Holiday Shots or Happy snaps	Food, Friends, Accommodation, Buildings, events	Memories Pique interest Tourism / Post Cards	Yourself Friends and Family Social Media Tourists (e.g. postcards)	No
Holiday Shots	Landscapes Wildlife Photojournalism	Show beauty Capture essence Expose / tell story	Competitions Galleries Your friends and family	Yes, but choose only your best
Artsy	Series Unusual technique	Express emotion Tell a story Viewer think critically	Galleries / Exhibits Photo sharing sites Competitions	Yes, but don't be afraid of critique
Fine Art	Stand alone pieces Perfect lighting and execution	Aesthetically pleasing Express emotion Tell a story	Galleries / Exhibits Photo sharing sites Competitions	Yes
Conceptual	Planning + editing	Express emotion Tell a story Viewer think critically	Galleries / Exhibits Photo sharing sites Competitions	Yes

Judges Look for:
Appropriate Titles

- Think at length about your title – it does make a difference!

- We only have 2 things to look at – the image and the title

- The title should indicate the focal point/purpose of the image

- Titles make us react to the image in a particular way (e.g. humour, reverence)

- Titles help the judge to understand your intent

Some Final Hints

- Don't be afraid or offended by criticism – it's how you learn and grow. BUT learn what to take home and what to leave behind.
- Ask the right questions from judges/guest speakers *(please don't ask me what f***ing camera I use!)*
- All judges (whether consciously or unconsciously) will try to create a bell curve with their results.
- The first thing I do when judging is break images into 3 sections: high, medium and low. To get into the "high" section, your image must have:
  - ➢ **Immediate Impact** (sound technique and aesthetics)
  - ➢ **Be coherent** (all elements match and suit)
  - ➢ **Speak to the viewer** (either through mood, emotion, story or intent)

Before & After:
Editing Matters

- Editing make a big difference and shows that you take pride in your work.
- Ansel Adams did considerable "editing" in the darkroom – dodging and burning, etc.
- Even if all you do is a curves adjustment, you will be improving your image and getting it closer to what it looked like when you took it, as our eyes record 25 times more information than the camera can.
- Many people dismiss editing and make excuses for why they don't want to do it.
- If you're in a competition – remember you are competing against many others who are editing their pics in order to achieve the maximum impact – yours will be duller by comparison without this crucial last step.

Basic Editing Demo

SOOC (Jpeg)

Crop out distractions

Spot heal distractions

Selective curves

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OCTOBER 28, 2015

Newborn Photography Tips

Are you interested in becoming a newborn photographer and don't know where to start? Are you expecting a baby or grandchild and want some tips for how to photograph them at home? Here is a general overview of my newborn photography and some of the need to know basics about posing, composing, lighting and soothing newborns.

Read more

SEPTEMBER 22, 2015

Creative Photography Ideas

Do you need some inspiration? Been wanting to try out some new techniques to spice up your photography? Are you completely daft when it comes to being "creative"?
This presentation is packed full of hundreds of different technical and aesthetic ideas that will no doubt give you the inspiration you are looking for, including some simple DIY project ideas at the end.

Read more

AUGUST 29, 2015

"Lighting Like an Old Master"

This presentation covers a (very brief) history of Art, from the Renaissance to Pop Art, focusing on Art Movements, Artists and Artworks that are easily recognisable and therefore easy to appropriate.

Read more

SEPTEMBER 4, 2014

The Aesthetics of Photography

I was so pleased to be invited to Southern Suburbs Photographic Society (SSPS) last night to give my presentation on the Aesthetics of Photography. Thank you all so much for your warm welcome and positive feedback...

Read more