



The Art of Creative Photography

BY LARRY LINDAHL

Landscape photographers love the Magic Hour—the hour leading up to sunset, or the hour just after sunrise. The light is sensual. It makes everything come alive with visible warmth. Textures and forms are accentuated by the low angle of the sun. Shadows often reveal hints of blue or violet, colors introduced from the sky above.

Light is one of the most important keys in making better photographs. We won't master the subject in a weekend workshop, or even with a college art degree. Just like learning guitar or gourmet cooking, we learn the nuances over time.

When we take a photograph we engage with what fascinates us about the world. We choose what to focus upon. An important part of making better photographs is shooting those subjects that intrigue you the most, and then taking time to practice.

Photography celebrates our relationship with life. We explore creativity in how we play with ideas. For many, photography is simply a way to appreciate life more thor-

oughly. Our photos can be exacting in detail, just for fun, or an expressive art form. For some, photography becomes a meditative practice that borders on the spiritual.

As travelers, making new photos accentuates the depth of our experience. Our senses are more awake. We often take our most creative photos while exploring new places. As we improve our visual awareness, we are rewarded. Our compositions grow stronger and our images are more engaging. Whether you're chronicling the family vacation or advancing as a nature photographer, most of us know we need tips, reminders, inspiration, and new techniques for taking better photos.

Here are seven simple and encouraging ways to improve your photography.

LIGHT. Pay attention to the time of day. If you want sensational photos get up early or stay until sunset. Plan ahead to be somewhere interesting. The sensual hues of amber, pink, and orange

will glow across the landscape. The Magic Hour makes any subject sing. Your smart phone will usually display sunrise/sunset times.

COMPOSITION. Simplify, simplify. Fewer elements make each element more important. Don't try to capture the entire Grand Canyon in one photo. Capture a section of the scene, the essence of your personal experience. Juxtapose opposites for contrast. Large and small. Bright and dull. Rough and smooth. Shifting clouds and stoic, ancient cliffs.

DEPTH. Add clues of dimension. The 3-D world is being transformed into a flat photo. We need the contrast of near and far. After you choose sandstone formation like Cathedral Rock, find a foreground element only a few feet away. Objects get smaller as they get father away. The size contrast of a nearby and distant element gives a photo depth. Foreground is vital.

FOCUS. Control your depth-of-field using the Aperture setting. A large f-stop number (*f*22) gives you a deep range of focus, ideal for grand landscapes. A small f-stop number (*f*3.5) gives you a shallow range of focus, good for portraits or wildflowers. Contrast a sharply focused subject with a soft-focus background.



VISION. Look into the future. Ask yourself, What could you do to make this photo better? Maybe use a vertical framing if the subject is mostly vertical. Maybe move your feet and change your viewpoint. Try an angle higher or lower than normal eye-level perspective. Change your White Balance setting. Try the Cloud or Shade settings to add warmth to a scene.

INTIMACY. Get closer and get to know your subject better. Spend more time with your subject whether it's a person or a place in nature. Take time to notice the details and find unique characteristics. Revisit a scene in different seasons and at different times of day.

PASSION. In a culture that often doesn't empower creative individuality, the desire for personal expression grows stronger and stronger. Make photos of clouds or rusty cars, flowers or colorful doors, whatever you like. Don't shy away from your own unique interests. Your enthusiasm will give you the energy to take more chances and make more photos. Follow your curiosity!



Professional travel and nature photographer Larry Lindahl is the award-winning author of *Secret Sedona: Sacred Moments in the Landscape* (Arizona Highways Books). See more of his work and sign up for his workshops at LarryLindahl.com.

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