

Some thoughts on landscape and pictorial composition

As a photograph or digital image is a 2- dimensional object, it is the skill of the photographer that can create an impression of 3 dimensions or depth and interest within an image.

Here are some basic compositional rules which are not hard and fast but give you guidance to understand better composition.

1 Rule of the thirds

If the composition can be considered being split into 3 horizontal sections, which are the foreground, middle distance and distance this will give the appearance of depth in the image.

2 Intersection of the thirds

If the image is split into thirds both horizontally and vertically, like a nought and crosses format, where the horizontal and vertical line intersect are very good positions to place your points of interest. Placing your main subject directly in the centre of your frame is not as interesting as placing your main subject at one of the four intersecting points. This is very similar to the “Golden Mean” positions.

3 Rule of the odds

Odd numbers in an image work better than even numbers of objects. Even numbers appear to jar in a composition.

4 Lead-in lines

Any object which leads your eye into the picture is thought of as a good compositional aid. This could be a footpath, stream or road which takes your eye onto the main subject.

5 Moving from the left to the right

Any object which is thought to be moving, i.e. a car or bicycle, should, to the westerner’s eye, appear to move from the left to the right and also into the composition not out of it.

6 Contrast where needed

A good composition should where necessary contain a pure white and a pure black point, this is called a good dynamic range. Obviously, an exception to this is a misty scene.

7 Diagonals, horizontals and verticals

An image containing a diagonal gives the impression of dynamic movement, whereas a horizontal composition one of stability, and a vertical subject appear unstable.

8 Texture and Colour Contrast

An image can work by work by using a texture and /or colour contrast.

9 Direction/ quality of the light

The direction of light and its quality can have a massive impact on you image.

Other considerations

Consider the depth of field as this can make the difference between a good image and a great one. Ask yourself, should I have a narrow depth of field to emphasize a particular object, or should I have the widest possible depth of field to give the impression of great distance? This is a choice which is controlled by your aperture setting and point of focusing.

What lens should I use to optimise the quality of this image; wide lens for landscape or a longer lens to emphasise and isolate a subject in a pictorial image?

Should movement in the image be frozen or emphasized by using the appropriate shutter speed?

Is there sufficient light of the required quality and if not, how to overcome the problem?
In landscape photography is it the right time of day and the correct direction of light to create, enhance and produce the image you are aiming for?

Should I use a tripod to achieve the correct setting in relation to conditions to obtain the image I am aiming to produce?

Does trying a different angle or height of the camera improve the composition?

All of these are suggestions to make you think about what you are doing to achieve the image you envisaged, and to have a considered approach to your photography.