

Jim Zuckerman's

PHOTO INSIGHTS

January 2018



Photography solutions
Pano-mirrors with a Twist
Star Photography and Noise
The Problem with Cruises
Photo tours
Ask Jim
Student showcase

- 
- A large, snow-covered evergreen tree stands prominently in a winter landscape. The tree is heavily laden with snow, and its branches are dark against the white background. The ground is covered in a layer of snow, and other trees are visible in the distance, also covered in snow. The sky is a pale, overcast white.
- 4. Photography solutions**
 - 9. Pano-mirrors**
 - 14. Star photography and noise**
 - 19. The problem with cruises**
 - 22. What's wrong with this picture?**
 - 24. Short and Sweet**
 - 25. Ask Jim**
 - 26. Photo tours**
 - 28. Student showcase**
 - 34. Back issues**
 - 38. Subject index for Photo Insights**

On the cover: Eyelash viper, Costa Rica. *This page:* Winter landscape, central Oregon.



*H*appy New Year 2018!

Every technology has its own language. Photography certainly does. When people start changing traditional ways of expressing photographic concepts, I get annoyed. For example, instead of referring to the orientation of photographs as vertical and horizontal, many people now say *portrait* and *landscape*, respectively. Why the change? It's ridiculous, actually, since portraits can be taken with a horizontal composition (like the one of my dogs and me above) and landscape images can be taken vertically (like the winterscape on the previous page).

I also get annoyed -- and confused -- when amateur photographers say "I used a higher number" referring to a smaller lens aperture. Yes, a small *f*/stop has a higher numerical value, but the correct terminology is, "I closed down" or "I stopped down". For large lens apertures, instead of "I used a bigger number", it's more correct to say "I shot wide open" or "I opened up to *f*/5.6."

During midday when the sun is out, people often say it's too "bright" for good picture taking. It's not the brightness that makes photos bad at midday, it's the contrast and the direction of light. It's more correct to say the light is *harsh* or *contrasty*. That is more to the point.

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PHOTOGRAPHY SOLUTIONS

saving a bad image

Backgrounds are just as important as subjects in making a picture successful. If the background is distracting in some way, the picture will be a failure even if the subject is great. An example of this is the image below. I shot this during a Christmas parade in Puerto Rico, and it's obvious that the background is terribly busy. The onlookers, the white car, the markings on the street, and the poles and tree trunks all detract from the subject. It's hard to fully appreciate the subject's wild costume because of all the visually annoying shapes and colors in the background. I think of this picture as a mess!

Compare this shot with the one on the next page, and it's immediately obvious that the modified background makes all the difference. Now we can fully appreciate the unique costume and the wild mask.

So many times the character of the background we capture behind a subject is completely out of our control. That's why I feel it's essential to know how to change or replace a background to save an otherwise excellent image. In order to do this, you have to know how to make a perfect selection around the subject. This usually takes



more time than many people are willing to invest in the project, but in the end the effort is worth it. Once the selection is made, the elements behind the subject can be replaced, blurred, darkened, or otherwise modified so the subject stands out. Then there is nothing that takes our attention away from the subject itself.

For the image below, I applied Filter > field blur, and then I added Filter > blur > radial blur (in the dialog box, I hit the zoom button). The result is that the messy and distracting background has been transformed into an abstraction that directs all of our attention exactly where it should be: on the subject.

The power of Photoshop is having the ability to apply an effect to one part of a picture while another part remains unchanged. That's exactly what I did here. The secret is having the

ability to make precise selections.

Because of the multi-colored background, and because of the nature of the mask, the only way to separate, or select, the parade participant from the background was by using the pen tool in Photoshop. At first glance, most photographers, I think, would conclude that this would take forever and they wouldn't want to spend the time. But why not? After spending thousands of dollars on a computer, software, camera equipment, and travel, why not devote the time to make your pictures perfect? Why would you spend so much money and not strive for this goal?

There are three options you have in evaluating your images: (1) Trash shots that aren't perfect, (2) show them to friends and family with excuses, or (3) spend the time to make the photographs as good as they can be.



The pen tool is very simple to use if you apply it as I explain it. Here are the steps:

1. Choose the pen tool in the tools palette. The icon looks like an old-fashioned ink pen nub.
2. Enlarge the photo to 66% or 100% so you can see the edge detail of the subject.
3. Lay down a series of dots, or anchor points, along the edge of the subject. When you need to move the photo to expose more of the edge, hold down the space bar. It automatically turns into the hand tool, and you can move the image. Release the hand tool and then continue laying down the anchor points.
4. If you make a mistake and want to delete anchor points, you can (a) hold down the Command and Option keys on a Mac (or the alt and control keys on a PC) and then press the 'Z' key

as many times as necessary to undo the various anchor points (this is simply the multiple undo method); (b) click and hold the pen tool icon in the tools palette and you'll see several tools hiding beneath. Choose the pen minus tool, click the points you want to eliminate, and then resume with the original pen tool by first clicking the last point you've retained, and then continue laying down anchor points.

5. When the last anchor point touches the first anchor point you laid down, you've completed the circuit around the subject. This gives you a *path*. Now choose the paths palette (if it's not open, go to Window > paths), and in the upper right corner there is a tiny icon. Click that and you'll see a pulldown submenu. Among the choices, choose *Make selection*. In the dialog box that opens, select one pixel and hit OK. The path has now been turned into a selection complete with the 'marching ants.' §



OREGON COAST PHOTO TOUR

August 29 - September 3, 2019

Oceanscapes Stunning waterfalls Star photography Rocky beaches





POST-PROCESSING

online course

by Jim Zuckerman

Learn how to process your images so they have visual impact. Learn Photoshop techniques to go beyond what you see and even beyond what you can imagine. This four-week course is invaluable to making your pictures look as good as the photographs you envy!

The great thing about online courses is that they can fit into any schedule. Life gets in the way at times, and Jim puts no limit on the time you can submit your work for his critiques. [CLICK THIS PAGE](#) to read more about this course.

PANO-MIRRORS . . . with a TWIST

Many intriguing composites can be created by mirroring an image. You end up with patterns and designs completely unexpected, and if you like creating surrealism, there is no easier pathway than to mirror an image with itself.

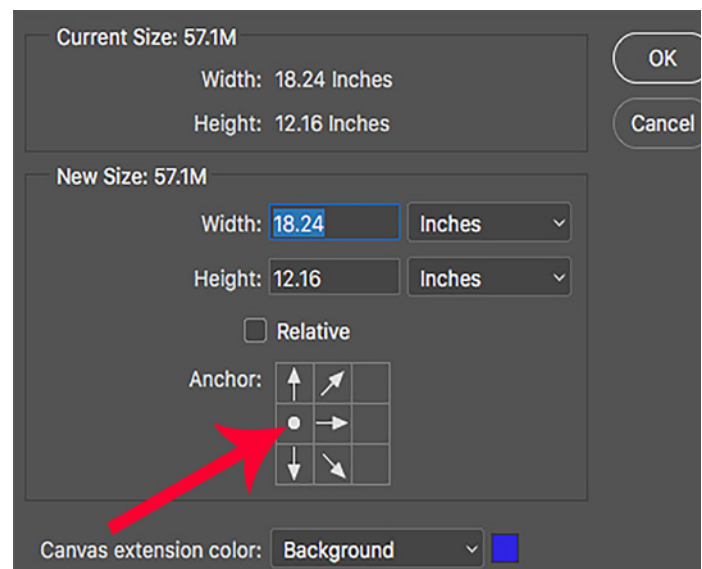
If you mirror a horizontal photograph with itself, the result is akin to a panorama. It is very long in relation to its height. You can also start with a vertical picture, and when it's mirrored with itself you can simply repeat that process three or four times to create a panorama format. You end up with a very unique repeating pattern (see photo on page 12).

Once the panorama mirror is created, you can then add another element such as the frog, below. With a mirrored image, the viewer expects perfect symmetry. When a single element is added, that creates visual tension. At first glance, it doesn't make sense. That's what

is so interesting about this technique.

Here is the step by step procedure for creating pano-mirrors with horizontal pictures:

1. Open a horizontal photo in Photoshop, choose **Select > all** and then **Edit > copy**. Now the photo is in the clipboard.

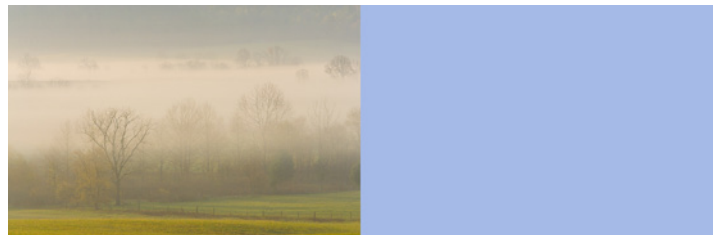




2. Pull down the menu command **Image > canvas size**. In the dialog box on the previous page, note the tic-tac-toe graphic. Use your cursor to click in the center left or center right box (red arrow previous page). The box you choose depends on which side of your photo you want to create the mirror.

Then, in the *width* box, multiply that number by 2 and type in the new width. Click OK. The image doubles in width, and in the blank half the color you get is the same color you'll see in

the background color box at the bottom of the tools palette. The color doesn't matter at all. It will be covered up shortly.



3. Choose Edit > paste. The clipboard shot will be pasted into the center of the panorama. This creates layer 1.



UPCOMING PHOTO WORKSHOPS



Carnival in Venice workshop

Outrageous costumes in a medieval environment! Venice is great to visit and photograph any time, but during carnival it's magical. There is nothing like it anywhere in the world. Exotic masks, stunning colors, classic images.

Feb. 26 - March 4, 2019



Frog & Reptile Workshop

Close-up encounters with poison dart frogs and exotic reptiles such as chameleons, geckos, snakes, and more in St. Louis, Missouri. This is a macro workshop in which everyone consistently gets amazing pictures.

March 24 - 25, 2018



Photoshop workshop

The setting is in my home, and in this two day workshop you'll learn enough to be truly dangerous in Photoshop! How to replace a sky, how to fix all kinds of photographic problems in your pictures, how to handle blown highlights, how to be incredibly creative . . . and more.

June 30 - July 1, 2018



4. Choose Edit > transform > flip horizontal. This command flips only the layer horizontally.

5. Click on the *move tool* and move the layer in the new area you created such that the photograph is now mirrored on itself as you see above. Enlarge the composite to 100% to make sure the two halves are perfectly aligned. If they need nudging, you can use the arrow keys to do that.

6. Finally, flatten the image with **Image > flatten layer**.

To create a repeating pattern

1. Start with a vertical composition. In the example here, you can see that the original shot is simply a backlit tree with hoarfrost. Note how many diagonal lines there are. Diagonals usually end up producing amazing patterns.

2. Make a mirror image as described on pages 9 and 10. You can make the mirror either on the right side or the left side. The two possibilities



ties are shown below. For the pattern, it doesn't make any dif-



ference which one you start with.

3. Flatten the image with **Image > flatten image** in the pull down menus.

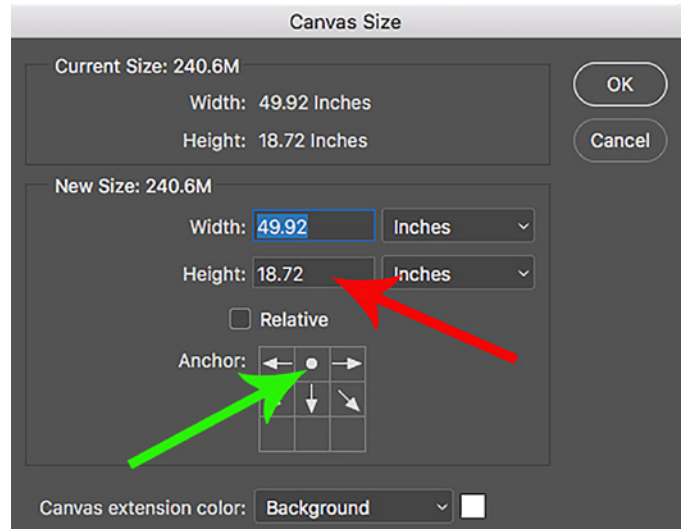
4. Choose **Select > all**, then **Edit > copy**. Now the mirrored image is in the clipboard. Consider this the original photo now, and mirror it again using the same procedure as on page 10. When you are finished, you'll have four reproductions of the first picture and the beginning of the repeating pattern.

5. Click **Layer > flatten image**.

6. Put the entire 4-image pattern into the clipboard with **Select > all** and **Edit > copy**.

7. Now select **Image > canvas size**. This time, however, in the tic-tac-toe graphic you see in the dialog box, choose the *top center* box (green arrow, upper right) and then double the number in the height field (red arrow). Click OK.

8. The expanded 'canvas' is now at the bottom of the image instead of to the right or left. Choose **Edit > paste**. The clipboard image becomes layer 1. Use the move tool to move it into place which then mirrors the top portion of the image.



9. Select **Edit > transform > vertical**. The repeating pattern should now be complete.

10. You can continue this proces to expand the pattern in any direction.

Adding the twist

Adding the additional non-mirrored component introduces an unexpected element since everything else is mirrored. Once the background image is complete, simply select the new subject with one of the selection tools and then use **Edit > paste**. With the move tool, you can move it into place and then further tweak the composite if necessary. For example, you might want to add a drop shadow or reflection. §



STAR PHOTOGRAPHY AND NOISE

Photographing the night sky, specifically the beautiful Milky Way, is a challenge on several levels. One of the most important aspects of sky photography is noise.

Because of the rotation of the Earth, a relatively short shutter speed is required to capture the night sky without star trails. Some photographers love streaks of light in a night sky, but to me this is no different than replacing the stars and the Milky Way with any kind of abstrac-

tion. The mystery, the grandeur, and the sheer beauty of the night sky can only be revealed when everything is sharp.

Getting back to the technical aspects, a short shutter speed means less light enters the camera. To compensate for the reduced light, there are two options: (1) Shoot with the largest aperture possible, and/or (2) Raise the ISO. If the largest aperture is already selected, then -- in order to prevent star trails or even the beginning of the trails (such that the stars look ob-



long), the ISO must increase.

With increased ISO, though, noise increases. This is particularly vexing because the subtleties in color, tone, and detail in a starry sky can only be revealed with minimum noise.

So, what is the solution?

Stacking

The term *Stacking* refers to taking several pictures of the same scene from a tripod and then combining them using a few short steps in Photoshop. The rationale for doing this is that noise is random, and when several images are stacked together the software does two things: First, it aligns the images. If there is movement, particularly uniform movement such as the stars moving across the sky due to the Earth's rotation, all of the stars are aligned. Even though the images were taken over time, the final composite appears as if it is a single photo.

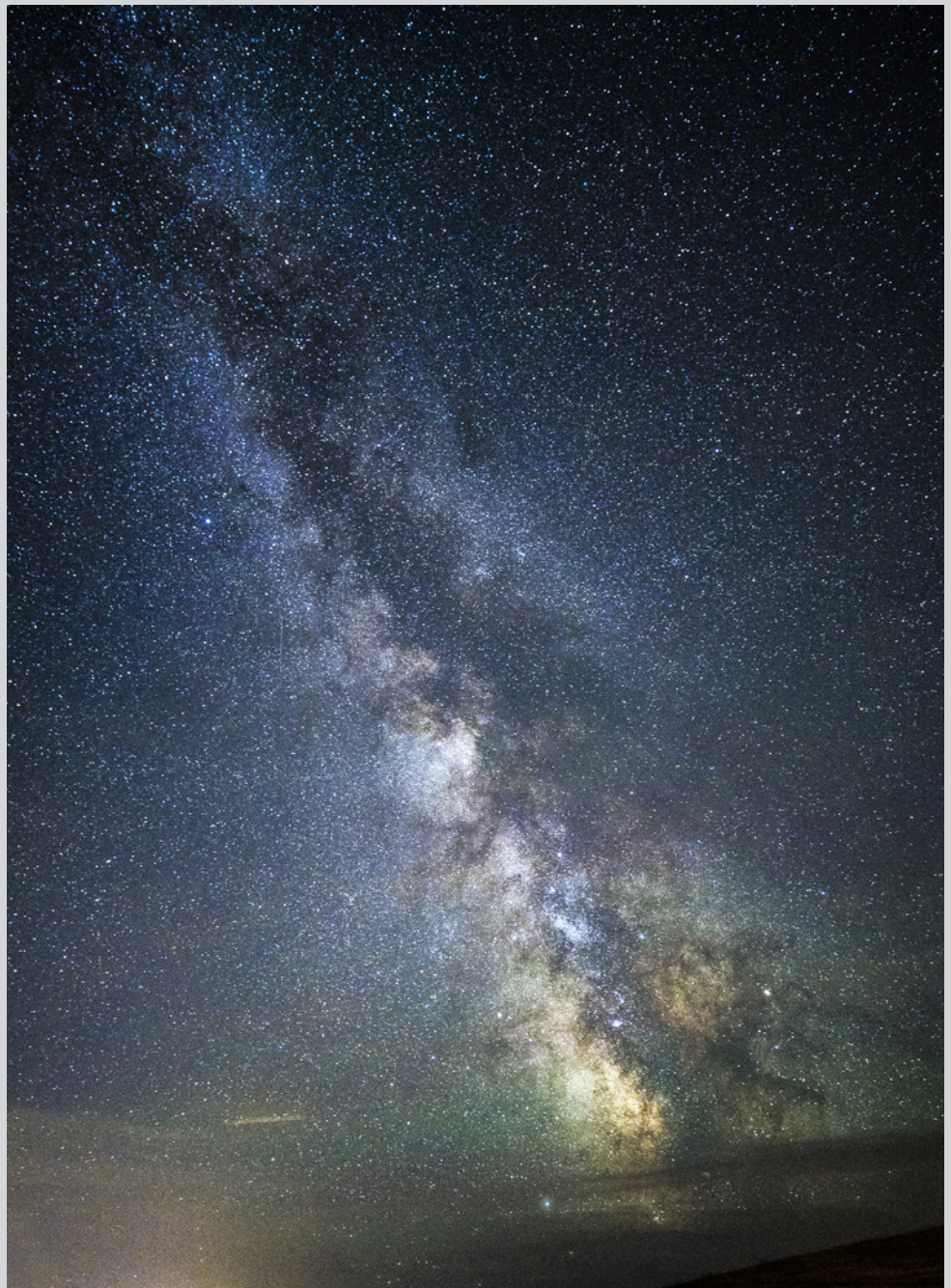
Second, the noise, which is laid down in a random pattern, disappears. Each image in the composite has its own pattern of noise, and it is this randomness that makes it possible for the noise to disappear.

Even if you shoot as high as

6400 ISO, the unwanted noise will be obliterated with stacking.

Here is the procedure in Photoshop to stack a series of shots.

1. Take a series of 8 to 10 shots of the sky from a tripod in RAW mode. I suggest using no more than 20 seconds for the exposure, and less time is better to prevent oblong-shaped stars. I prefer tungsten white balance because that makes the sky look bluish instead of brownish, which



is what you get when using daylight white balance.

2. In Bridge or Lightroom, highlight all the frames you wish to stack. You do this by holding down the shift key and clicking on the first sky shot and then the last sky image in the sequence.

3. Use the pull down menu command in Bridge: **Tools > Photoshop > Load Files into Photoshop Layers.**

In Lightroom, use the pulldown menu command: **Photo > Edit in > Open as Layers in Photoshop.**

4. Photoshop is now active and you can see the layers you just created in the layers palette. Select all of the layers by holding down the shift key and clicking each layer. At this point,



choose **Edit > auto-align layers.** In the dialog box that opens, make sure the 'auto' button is checked. Click OK.

You may need to crop the image slightly because when Photoshop aligns the images, the edges of the frames may not line up.

5. Now select the pulldown menu command: **Layer > Smart Objects > Convert to Smart Object.**

6. Finally, choose: **Layer > Smart Objects > Stack mode > median (or mean).**

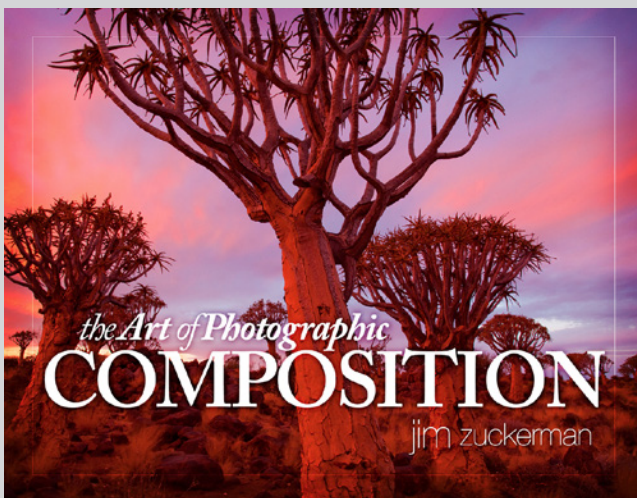
Temperature

Another way to keep noise to a minimum is with temperature. The colder the digital sensor is, the less noise you'll have. If you photograph the night sky in winter, for example, with sub-freezing temperatures, the images will have less noise.

The Milky Way is not visible from November through mid-February. It reappears in late February and March just before sunrise. For many months during the winter, then, you can photograph the night sky with its billions of stars, but the Milky Way will be hidden beneath the horizon. When it finally shows itself starting with a couple of hours in April (from 4am to sunrise), it may not be that cold in your area. If you live near mountains, drive to the highest point accessible by road. The temperature should drop approximately 5.4 degrees Fahrenheit per thousand feet of elevation gain (6.5 degrees Celsius per 1 kilometer). Another advantage of shooting the stars from the mountains is there shouldn't be any light pollution from nearby cities. You should also choose a night of a new moon so the sky is totally dark except for the stars. §

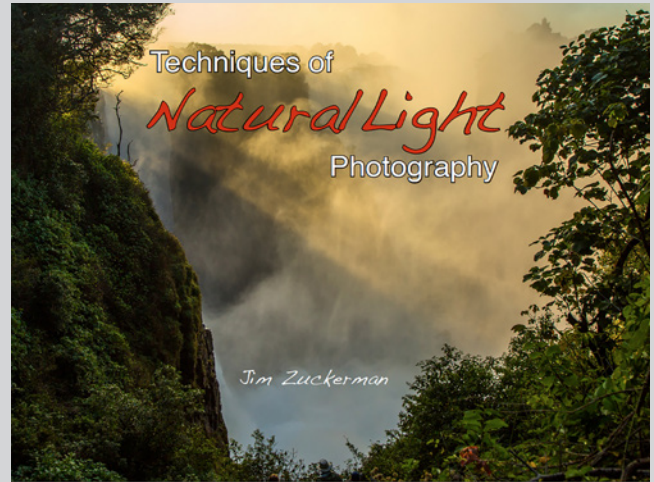
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eBooks continued

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Fantasy Nudes is in production and is coming soon

The Problem with Cruises

If your passion is photography and picture taking is your primary focus when you travel, then don't go on a cruise. I've only been on one cruise to the Caribbean at the insistence of my wife. It was enjoyable, relaxing, sort of fun, and definitely decadent. Sitting in a jacuzzi on the top deck watching a movie on a monster screen was a very cool experience. Nevertheless, I was frustrated every day because the picture taking opportunities were very limited. Even though I expected this, it was still frustrating.

Virtually without exception, you go ashore between 8 and 10am. You have to return by 4 or 5pm, and this means you miss both sun-

rise and sunset lighting. You are always fighting harsh sunlight and too much contrast. When it comes to shooting at twilight -- forget it. That's not going to happen because you must be back on the ship which will then cruise to the next port destination. When the lights of the city come on and when the sky is cobalt blue, you won't be there to photograph it.

If the ship interior is architecturally dramatic, you can use it as a background for doing portraits of your family or friends, as I did with my wife on the next page. There's not much to shoot besides that. Go on a cruise to relax, get away from the office, and eat. Don't go thinking you'll come home with exciting photos. \$





CHINA

Dec. 29, 2018 - Jan. 8, 2019

The incredible Harbin Ice Festival Siberian tigers in snow Blue-faced monkeys



Siberian tigers in sub-zero cold, China.

What's wrong with this picture?



I took this picture during the remarkable Jember Fashion Carnaval in Indonesia. To direct the attention to the costumed participant, I used the burn tool to darken the pavement as well as the area of the onlookers. One could argue that all the people in the background are distracting, and in terms of a clean, artistic picture, I would agree. But this is a parade down a street with thousands of spectators, so in that sense the crowd not only works but is appropriate.

The problem I see in this shot is the newspaper lying in the street at the middle left. It is white and very graphic in its shape, and both of those factors make it distracting. As you look at this picture, notice that your eyes automatically re-focus from the subject to the newspaper. That's not how a successful picture is supposed to



work. Our attention should primarily stay focused on the subject.

There is one more thing that bothers me as well. In the upper left corner, the white fabric behind the spectators is distracting. The crowd as a dark backdrop is ok, but those graphic shapes of the silhouetted people draw the eye away from the young woman.

In the version above, I used a combination of the content aware feature (Edit > fill; and then in the dialog that opens use the submenu to select 'content aware') and the clone tool in Photoshop to eliminate the newspaper lying on the ground as well as the paper adjacent to it. In addition, I used the clone tool to eliminate the shapes of the people in the upper left corner. Now the presence of the crowd shows the parade as I saw it, but without the elements that diverted the attention from the costumed participants. §

SHORT AND SWEET

1. Puppies can be manipulated into various positions when they are very tired. They seem almost 'punch drunk'. To take this image, these Cavalier King Charles spaniels were almost sleeping. I placed the head of one on top of the other since they were completely out of it.



2. Don't hesitate to compose pictures where the subject is dead-center. The Rule of Thirds works in many, or even most, types of shots, but a central placement also works in many situations. Sometimes, both types of compositions look good.



3. Great moments with wildlife are very fleeting. You have to watch animal behavior through the viewfinder of your camera to catch it. If you observe animals with only your eyes and, when seeing something photogenic you raise the camera to your eyes, it will probably be too late.



4. This is what happens when you take a camera from a warm room in your home or a hotel outdoors in the cold. Moisture condenses on all the glass elements of the lens, the viewfinder, and the mirror. Plan ahead. Acclimate your equipment to the cold for at least 20 minutes before shooting. \$



ASK JIM

Every month Jim will answer a question from his online students, from people who participate in his tours and workshops, or from subscribers to this magazine. If you have a question you'd like Jim to answer, please drop him a note at photos@jimzuckerman.com.

Q: Jim . . I took this shot of a moon jelly in the Atlanta aquarium, and when I enlarge this to 100% on my computer, it doesn't seem as sharp as I'd like. What do you think the problem might be?
Lynne Atkinson, Marietta, Georgia.

A: When photographing in an aquarium, sharpness is a function of two things: (1) The optical quality of the glass or Lucite, which you can't control, and (2) the angle between the lens axis and the front surface of the aquarium. You can control the latter. Maximum sharpness is achieved when the lens axis is perpendicular, i.e. 90 degrees, to the front of the aquarium. If you angle the camera such that the lens axis is oblique to the glass or Lucite, the image degrades quickly. Of course, your shutter speed has to be fast enough to give you a sharp picture as well. I would use a shutter speed at least 1/125, although 1/200 is better. The subject is usually moving plus you are hand holding the camera, so the fast shutter is necessary. §



(c) Lynne Atkinson

Photography Tours

2017 - 2019

SOUTH AFRICA & NAMIBIA
Apr. 2018



TUSCANY
Jun. 2018



INDONESIA WILDLIFE
Aug. 2018



NORWAY & DENMARK
Sep. 2018



THE PANTANAL, BRAZIL
Nov. 2018



CHINA
Dec. 2018 - 2019



ETHIOPIA
Jan. 2019



SNOWY OWLS
Jan. 2019



ICELAND
Mar. 2019



SCOTLAND
May 2019



OREGON COAST
Aug. 2019



UZBEKISTAN & KYRGYZSTAN
Sept. 2019



For a complete list of all the photo tours/workshops Jim conducts, go to his website: www.jimzuckerman.com.

Scotland Photo Tour

May 17 - May 27, 2019

awesome landscapes ancient ruins remarkable castles



The Old Man of Storr, Isle of Skye, Scotland

Student Showcase

Each month, Jim features one student who took beautiful and inspiring images on one or more of his photography tours or workshops. It's really fascinating how photographers see and compose such different images even though we may go to the same places. Everyone gets great photographs on Jim's trips.

Carl Schneider, Hammond, Louisiana *Photo tours to: Turkey, Kenya, Costa Rica, Namibia, Botswana, India, Tuscany/Cinque Terre, Japan, China, The Pantanal, Holland/Belgium, Burma, and more.*



Student Showcase, continued



© 2018 Carl Schneider

Student Showcase, continued



© 2018 Carl Schneider

Student Showcase, continued



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WILD INDONESIA PHOTO TOUR

August 27 - 31, 2018



PHOTOSHOP WORKSHOP

IN MY HOME

Sat. & Sun., June 30 - July 1, 2018



Photoshop is a photographer's best friend, and the creative possibilities are absolutely endless. In a personal and 'homey' environment (I have a very cool classroom setup in my home), I start at the beginning -- assuming you know nothing -- but I quickly get into layers, cutting and pasting, plug-ins, using 'grunge' textures, replacing backgrounds, using layer masks, blend modes, adding a moon, and a lot more. I promise to fill your head with so many great techniques that you won't believe what you'll be able to do. I go over each technique several times to make sure you understand it and can remember it.

Photoshop instructors approach teaching this program from different points of view. My approach is to be as expansive in my thinking as possible in creating unique, artistic, and compelling images. In addition to showing you how to use the various tools, pulldown menus, layers, and so on, I spend a lot of time giving you

creative ideas that will inspire you to produce amazing images with the pictures you've already taken.

I live in the Nashville, Tennessee area, and if you fly into the airport (BNA) I will pick you up. If you drive, I'll give you my address and you can find my home on Mapquest or with a GPS. For the \$450 fee, I include one dinner in my home (prepared by my wife who is an amazing cook and hostess) and two lunches, plus shuttling you back and forth from my home to your nearby hotel.

[Contact me](mailto:photos@jimzuckerman.com) if you would like to participate in the workshop and I will tell you how to sign up (photos@jimzuckerman.com). All you need is a laptop and a lot of your pictures. If you don't have a laptop, I have two Mac Book Pro laptops I can loan out for the duration of the workshop. \$

Click on the past issues of PHOTO INSIGHTS you would like to read.

Nov. '12



Dec. '12



Jan. '13



Feb. '13



Mar. '13



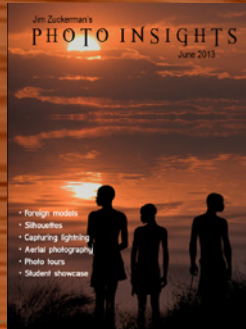
Apr. '13



May '13



Jun. '13



Jul. '13



Aug. '13



Sept. '13



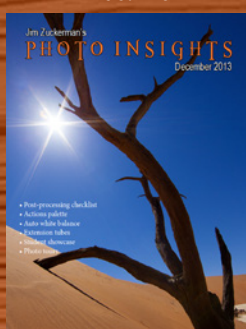
Oct. '13



Nov. '13



Dec. '13



Jan. '14



Feb. '14



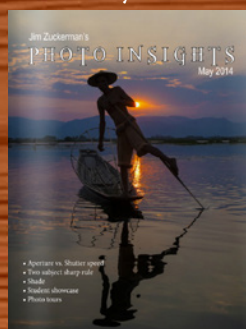
Mar. '14



Apr. '14



May '14

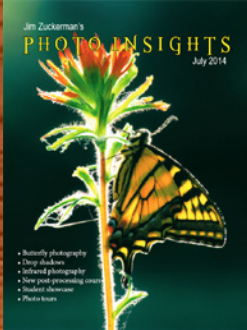


Jun. '14



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Jul. '14



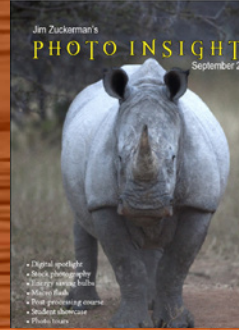
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Sept. '14



Oct. '14



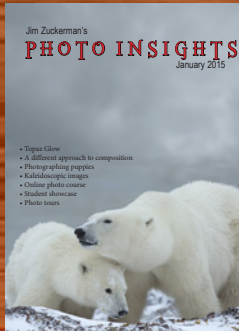
Nov. '14



Dec. '14



Jan. '15



Feb. '15



Mar. '15



Apr. '15



May '15



Jun '15



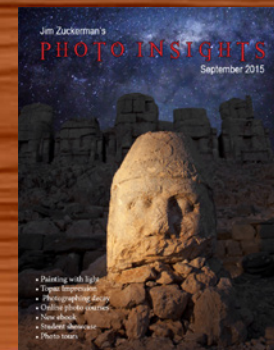
Jul. '15



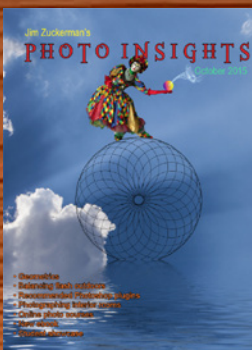
Aug. '15



Sept. '15



Oct. '15



Nov. '15



Dec. '15



Jan. '16



Feb. '16



Click on the past issues of
PHOTO INSIGHTS
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Mar. '16



Apr. '16



May '16



Jun '16



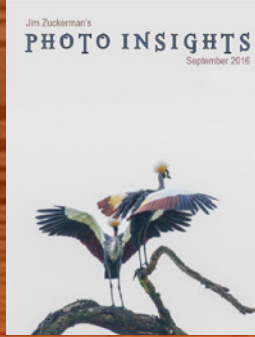
Jul. '16



Aug. '16



Sept. '16



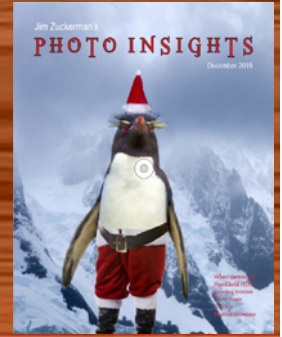
Oct. '16



Nov. '16



Dec. '16



Jan. '17



Feb. '17



Mar. '17



Apr. '17



May '17



Jun '17



Jul. '17



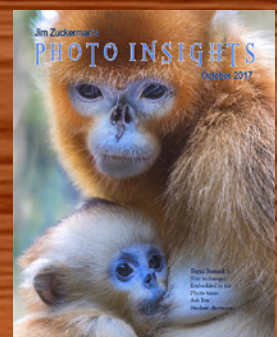
Aug. '17



Sept. '17

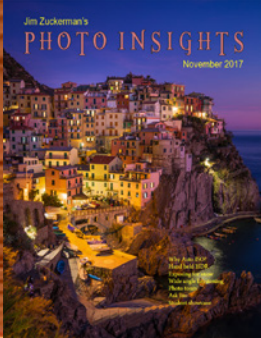


Oct. '17



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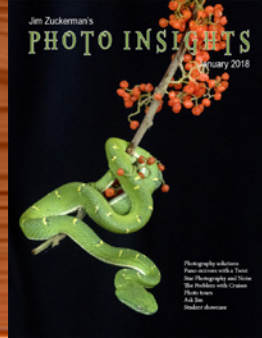
Nov. '17



Dec. '17



Jan. '18



Subject index for past Photo Insight issues

1/3 focus law	Jul. '15
3D sphere	Mar. '16
90 degree finder	Mar. '13
Abstracts in soap	Feb. '15
Aerial photography	Jun. '13
African safari	May '16
Airplane windows	Mar. '16
Alien landscapes	Jan. '13
Anatomy of 8 photographs	Jan. '16
Aperture vs. shutter speed	May '14
Aperture priority	Sept. '14
Aurora Borealis	Apr. '17
Auto white balance	Dec. '13
Autofocus, when it fails	Apr. '15
Autofocus failure	Aug. '15
Autofocus failure	Jan. '17
Auto ISO	Nov '17
Backgrounds, wild	Nov. '12
Backgrounds, busy	Apr. '13
Backlighting	Apr. '16
Birds in flight	Aug. '13
Birds in flight	Jan. '14
Birds in flight	Mar. '16
Black velvet	Mar. '14
Black and white conversions	Mar. '17
Black and white solarization	Sep. '17
Blur technique	Oct. '17
Bokeh	Jun. '15
Butterfly photography	Jul. '14
Camera setting priorities	Jun. '17
Capturing lightning	Jun. '13
Catchlights	Jul. '16
Cheap flash stand	Apr. '13
Children photography	Jun. '14
Chromatic aberration	May '13
Cityscapes	Aug. '14
Cityscapes	May '16
Clone tool, fixing an issue	Sep. '17
Composites and Light	Dec. '17
Composition, different approach	Jan. '15
Contrast vs. exposure	Jul. '15
Creating a star field	Jan. '14
Creating a Sketch	Dec. '17
Creative blurs	Jan. '14
Dawn photography	Jan. '17
Dawn photography	Feb. '17
Dead center	Jan. '13
Dealing with smog	Oct. '16
Decay photography	Sep. '15
Depth of field	Aug. '16
eBook, how to make	Jan. '13
Embedded in Ice	Oct. 17
Energy saving bulbs	Sep. '14
Exposing for the sun	Sep. '16
Exposure, the sun	Jul. '13
Exposure technique	Sep. '13
Exposure, snow	Jan. '14
Exposure triangle	Nov. '14
Exposure, to the right	Apr. '15

Exposure compensation	Sep. '16
Extension tubes	Dec. '13
Fill flash	Sep. '13
Filter forge	Feb. '13
Fireworks	Jul. '13
Fisheye lenses	May '13
Fisheye lenses	Feb. '15
Flash backlighting	May '15
Flash, balancing exposure	Oct. '15
Flat art	Sep. '16
Flowers	May '15
Flowers in harsh light	Jul. '16
Focus points	Mar. '15
Focus stacking	Mar. '17
Focusing in the dark	Oct. '16
Foreign models	Jun. '13
Fractals, generating	Sep. '13
Framing	May '17
Freezing ultra action	May '17
Fun with paint	Oct. '16
Fundamental ingredients	Apr. '13
Garish imagery	Dec. '15
Great subjects	Apr. '15
Green screen	Mar. '13
Grunge technique	Feb. '13
HDR, one photo	Apr. '13
HDR at twilight	May '13
HDR, realistic	Jun. '15
HDR, hand held	Dec. '16
HDR, hand held	Nov '17
HDR panoramas	Jun. '16
High wind	Apr. '17
Highlights	Apr. '14
Highlights, overexposed	Feb. '15
Humidity	Oct. '13
Hummingbird photography	Apr. '13
Hyperfocal distance	Jul. '13
Implying motion	Sept. '14
Impossible DOF	Feb. '16
Impossible DOF	Jan. '17
Indestructible camera bag	Dec. '14
Infrared photography	Jul. '14
Interiors	Oct. '15
iPad: Loading photos	Aug. '17
Jungle photography	Dec. '14
Kaleidoscopic images	Jan. '15
Keystoning, correcting	Aug. '15
Landscape photography	Dec. '12
Landscape photography	Apr. '14
Landscape photography	Nov. '16
Light fall-off	Feb. '14
Lighting a face	Oct. '13
Low light photography	May '15

Subject index for past Photo Insight issues

continued

Macro flash	Nov. '12
Macro flash	Sep. '14
Macro flash	Aug. '15
Mannequin heads	Apr. '16
Metering modes	Nov. '16
Meters, when they fail	Dec. '16
Middle gray	Nov. '15
Model shoot	Jan. '17
Moon glow	Oct. '16
Mosaics	Jun. '17
Museum photography	Mar. '13
Negative space	Jan. '16
Neon edges on black	Aug. '14
Night photography	Feb. '14
Night to Twilight	Dec. '17
Noise reduction	Feb. '17
Optical infinity	Jun. '16
Paint abstracts	May '13
Painting with light	Sep. '15
Panning motion	Dec. '16
Pano-Mirrors with a twist	Jan. '18
Parades	Sep. '13
Photography to Art	Dec. '17
Photography solutions	Jan. '18
Photoshop, content Aware	Nov. '12
Photoshop, sketch technique	Apr. '13
Photoshop, replace background	Apr. '13
Photoshop, actions palette	Dec. '13
Photoshop, layer masks	Feb. '13
Photoshop, the clone tool	May '13
Photoshop, soft foliage	Oct. '13
Photoshop, mixer brush tool	Sept. '14
Photoshop, b & w with color	Jun. '14
Photoshop, drop shadows	Jul. '14
Photoshop, creating texture	Feb. '14
Photoshop, face mirrors	Feb. '14
Photoshop, liquify	Mar. '14
Photoshop, face mirrors	Aug. '14
Photoshop, digital spotlight	Sep. '14
Photoshop, enlarge eyes	Nov. '14
Photoshop, darken the periphery	Dec. '14
Photoshop, mirror images	Dec. '14
Photoshop, beam of light	Apr. '15
Photoshop, polar coordinates	Mar. '15
Photoshop, chrome	May '15
Photoshop, actions palette	Nov. '15
Photoshop, cut and paste	Nov. '15
Photoshop, geometrics	Oct. '15
Photoshop, plugins	Oct. '15
Photoshop, multiple selections	Apr. '16
Photoshop, sharpening	Apr. '16
Photoshop, Flood plugin	Apr. '16
Photoshop, Desaturation	Aug. '16
Photoshop, making a composite	Aug. '16
Photoshop, the pen tool	Feb. '16
Photoshop, canvas size	Jan. '16
Photoshop, using the earth	Jun. '16
Photoshop, define patterns	May '16
Photoshop, paste into	Nov. '16
Photoshop, b & w with color	Feb. '17

Photoshop, open a closed door	Apr. '17
Photoshop, palettes	May '17
Portrait techniques	Nov. '15
Portraits	Mar. '13
Portraits, mixed lighting	Aug. '14
Portraits, side lighting	Sep. '17
Portraits, window light	Mar. '15
Portraits, outdoors	May '17
Post-processing checklist	Dec. '13
Post-processing: Contrast	Aug. '17
Problem/solution	Apr. '17
Problem with cruises	Jan. '18
Protecting highlights	Dec. '12
Puppies	Jan. '15
Reflections	Feb. '13
Safari	May '13
Safari strategies	Jul. '15
Seeing as the lens does	Nov. '14
Selective focus	Jun. '15
Self-critiques	Jul. '13
Self-critiques	Oct. '13
Sepia and dark contrast	Jun. '15
Shade	May '14
Sharpness problems	Mar. '14
Shooting through wire mesh	Sept. '14
Silhouettes	Jun. '13
Snow exposure	Nov. '17
Soft light	Jan. '13
Stained glass	Mar. '17
Star photography	Jul. '16
Star photography and noise	Jan. '18
Stock photography	Sep. '14
Tamron 150-600mm	Apr. '14
Topaz Simplify 4	Dec. '12
Topaz simplify 4	Jun. '14
Topaz glow	Jan. '15
Topaz glow	Sep. '17
Topaz Impression	Sep. '15
Topaz Remask 5	Oct. '17
Travel photography	Feb. '13
Travel portraits	Mar. '14
Travel tips	Apr. '14
Travel photographer's guide	Jun. '17
Two subject sharp rule	May '14
Warm fingers in winter	Nov. '15
White vignette	Aug. '15
White balance	Feb. '15
White balance, custom	Mar. '16
Wide angle lenses	Mar. '13
Wide angle portraits	Nov. '14
Wide angle lenses	Jun. '17
Wide angle keystoneing	Nov. '17
Wildlife photos with wide angles	Mar. '15
Window light	Dec. '15
Window frames	Feb. '16
Winter photography	Dec. '12
Winter bones	May '13
Winter photography	Dec. '15
Workflow	May '13



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