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COVER SHOT



PHOTOGRAPHER
Nili Gudhka

LOCATION
Kitenden Conservancy in the Amboseli ecosystem, Kenya

EQUIPMENT
Nikon Z8, NIKKOR Z 24-120mm f/4 S, Pholsy wireless shutter release remote

EXPOSURE
1/2000 sec., f/4, ISO 100

SITUATION
This image shows Craig, one of the last remaining super tuskers in the world – and also one of the most famous. On a recent safari in Amboseli National Park, my goal was to find and photograph super tuskers, especially Craig. I received word from his tracker that Craig was outside the park in a conservancy and heading to the community water tank for a drink – an ideal opportunity.

I quickly set up my camera with a remote trigger inside a handmade metal box. Craig was about 500 meters from the tank, following a path elephants often used. I placed the box along the path, then drove a few meters away and waited. Luck was on my side – Craig came straight down the path and walked past the box. The photo was taken around 4 p.m., under a cloudy sky, with light falling just behind him. – *Nili Gudhka*

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IN FOCUS





People sometimes ask me what makes a good photograph, and I usually say the same thing: A great image doesn't have to be technically perfect (though that helps), it doesn't have to be compositionally flawless (though that doesn't hurt either), but it does have to make me feel something. I know it within moments of seeing a photo. A tingle up the spine. A flutter in the heart. Clichés, maybe – but they're real.

And there's something about great black-and-white photography that gives me, as the kids say, "all the feels." Maybe it's because black-and-white offers both clarity and mystery. The phrase "seeing things in black and white" is another cliché, but it also rings true – an attempt to look at things exactly as they are, without preconceptions. At the same time, black-and-white imagery can be like classic film noir, full of shadowy drama and enigmatic allure, suggesting that things are not always what they seem at first glance.

We offer all that and more in this special Black-and-White Issue of *Outdoor Photographer*. Along with showcasing monochrome imagery, our six featured photographers share their own riffs on black-and-white. I call them the six Ps. For Clyde Butcher (page 26), it's Patience. Nili Gudhka (page 38) explores Portraiture. Randy Bott (page 52) discusses his Process, while Richie Johns (page 62) describes his Persistence. Mike Mezeul II (page 76) exemplifies Power, and for Cole Thompson (page 86), it's pure Poetry.

That familiar flutter in my heart is back. I think you'll feel it too.

– Dan Havlik, Editor in Chief

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THE 2025 WILDLIFE PHOTO CONTEST



Wildlife photography is one of the most challenging—and rewarding—subjects to explore with your camera. From intimate interactions to majestic migrations, it inspires us both technically and creatively to capture meaningful images that tell the stories of animal life in wild places.

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ANTHROPICS

Congratulations to the winners of and finalists in our **The American Landscape 2025** photo contest! Featured here are the Grand Prize, Second Prize and Third Prize winners. See all of the finalists at outdoorphotographer.com.



Grand Prize
Alpine Ascent
By Max Foster

"For a brief moment, the clouds parted, revealing the majestic Xanadu, Ariel, and Albatross, all surrounded by drifting low clouds."

Location: Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, AK
Gear: Nikon Z7, NIKKOR Z 14-30mm f/4 S at 14mm
Exposure: 1/2 sec., f/13, ISO 64





Second Prize
Sunrise on Sparks Lake
By George Gill

"Sunrise over Sparks Lake in Oregon, with dramatic lenticular clouds forming above Broken Top."
Location: Central Oregon
Gear: Fuji GFX 50S
Exposure: 1.8 sec., f/16, ISO 100



Third Prize
Twilight Great Sand Dunes National Park
By John Schmidt

"The sun was setting and the air cooled quickly as evening settled in. Soon, a full moon would rise. I had hiked to the top of a ridge when this splendid scene unfolded before me. With tripod in hand, I carefully composed the frame, aligning the dunes in the upper corners so they converged toward the center of the view. Once satisfied with the alignment — click went the shutter."
Location: Great Sand Dunes National Park Mosca, CO
Gear: Canon EOS 5DS R, Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS II USM at 105mm
Exposure: 1/15 sec., f/16, ISO 50





Mastering Focal Lengths for Outdoor Photography

From wide to telephoto, each lens unlocks a different way of seeing

By Erin Babnik

Nature photographs appear across commercial, editorial and fine-art contexts, and no single set of technical or creative goals rules them all. Consequently, the focal lengths that outdoor photographers use are just as diverse as the reasons for choosing them.

Deciding which lens to use is often less about fitting a frame to a view than about choosing one idea over another. From ultra-wide to super telephoto, any lens has potential in the right outdoor environment for the photographer who understands its character. Once you appreciate the visual effects that each focal length can achieve, it becomes second nature to spot compatible scenarios, increasing your chances of seeing something others might miss.

Contrary to many common explanations, focal length choice is not simply a matter of field of view. Framing and composition are obvious concerns, but they serve the deeper interests of emphasis and intrigue that focal lengths can strongly affect. Focal lengths not only circumscribe a view — they influence perspective and proportions that may spark the motivation for an image.

Sometimes the goal is to make a scene maximally legible. More expressive approaches might exaggerate, compress or obscure elements instead — effects that focal lengths achieve differently. You may even benefit from reversing the usual order of things, letting a lens's effects inspire subject choice rather than the other way around. In this way, focal length choice is fundamental to developing photographic style, making it a fruitful realm for experimentation.

Understanding Range Effects

Learning photography often begins with standard focal lengths. These are popular because they roughly correspond to the field of view of the human eye — generally estimated at 35–50mm. Comparable lenses tend to produce images that feel objective and relatable.

But a field of view that approximates static eyesight is not always ideal for outdoor photography. Opportunities abound in nature for lenses that interpret the world differently. Nonstandard focal lengths can also feel relatable by suggesting a more dynamic or selective way of seeing.

In truth, it's problematic to claim that any focal length replicates human vision, since our brains continually synthesize and revise the interplay of eye movement and refocusing. For example, shifting focus from a small flower to a mountain peak unites both into a coherent scene. Likewise, concentrating on a distant tree often filters out other elements in the same view. Focal lengths that mimic these experiences can create photographs that resonate with viewers despite being nonstandard.

To move beyond straightforward ideas of framing and documentation, it helps to think in terms of the following visual effects as alternative motivations.

Immersion: Wide-Angle Focal Lengths

Wide-angle lenses are especially useful for immersive compositions, placing details close to the viewer while also revealing their broader context. Lenses such as the Canon RF 10-20mm f/4L IS STM can "see" up, down, left and right at once, collapsing the view of a roving eye into a single frame.

These effects come with some stretching at the edges, more or less pronounced depending on lens tilt. As shapes stretch into corners, they emphasize diagonals — a dynamic form that heightens depth and reinforces the sensation of plunging into or reaching out of a scene. Done well, wide-angle immersion creates a strong sense of presence.

Continuity: Standard Focal Lengths

Standard lenses in the 35–50mm range can emphasize continuity between distinct zones by preserving spatial relationships across the frame. Outside this range, views may appear elided or segmented, shifting emphasis in ways that aren't always desirable.

For example, a meadow of wildflowers can read as a mere stripe of color through a telephoto lens, while the closest bend of a stream might look like a lake through a very wide focal length. Lenses that cover the standard range, such as the Canon RF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM, help maintain continuity and legibility.

Layering: Telephoto Focal Lengths

Because of the compression they provide, focal lengths longer than 50mm are effective at uniting planes of interest as layers. Layering is often more constructive than thinking of telephotos only in terms of isolation, which on its own can fall flat.

Layering brings together multiple zones, either through repetition of forms or striking juxtapositions. Echoing shapes intrigue through variation, while contrasts or alignments captivate through difference.

Of course, these effects are possible at various focal lengths, but these particular combinations are especially useful in nature. They can guide experimentation with different lenses or the ends of a zoom range. The key is to move beyond simple framing to control proportions, depth and intrigue — opening more opportunities to create memorable photographs.

Mastering focal lengths is ultimately a project of exploration, yielding compelling results with any lens you choose to carry outdoors.

Erin Babnik is a Canon Explorer of Light (EOL). See more of her work at erinbabnik.com.

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5 Favorites for Black-and-White Photography

From film to software, our top picks for crafting a timeless monochrome look

By Henry Anderson

PHOTO BY DAN HAVLIK



Color dominates the digital era, but black-and-white photography remains one of the most powerful ways to tell visual stories. Stripping away hues forces the eye to see differently – through contrast, texture, shadow, and light. Many outdoor photographers turn to monochrome to emphasize form and mood in a way color sometimes obscures.

Whether you're hiking into the mountains at dawn, documenting wildlife in shifting light, or capturing the stark geometry of a landscape, black-and-white photography has its own gear essentials. While there are countless tools and films to explore, these five standouts – three legendary Ilford and Kodak film stocks, a modern emulsion, and two specialized software packages – offer a mix of classic character and modern precision for your black-and-white vision.

ILFORD HP5 PLUS 400



If you could only pack one black-and-white film for outdoor adventures, Ilford HP5 Plus 400 would be hard to beat. Known for its versatility, HP5 handles a wide variety of lighting conditions, making it ideal for unpredictable fieldwork. Rated at ISO 400, it provides enough speed to freeze action yet maintains beautiful midtone separation and rich blacks.

The film's forgiving nature is another reason it has earned a loyal following among photojournalists and documentary photographers. You can underexpose or overexpose by a stop or two and still retrieve usable detail, which is invaluable when you're shooting fast in changing light. Its grain is noticeable but not overpowering, giving images a timeless texture that feels organic and alive. For landscapes, wildlife, or work on the trail, HP5 Plus remains a reliable classic.

KODAK TRI-X 400

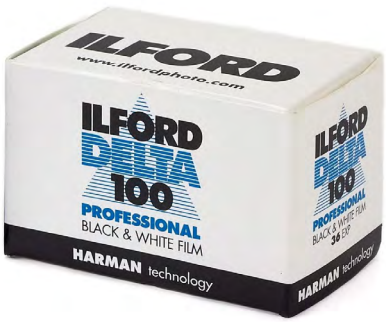


Few films carry the same mythic status as Kodak Tri-X 400. For decades, it was the film of choice for legendary photojournalists covering conflict zones, musicians, and cultural icons. Its reputation comes from a distinctive look: bold contrast, punchy midtones, and a grain structure that feels unmistakably gritty.

For outdoor photographers, Tri-X adds drama to almost any subject. Storm clouds over the plains, a windswept canyon, or a shadowy forest all take on heightened intensity when rendered through Tri-X. It's also highly pushable; many photographers shoot it at ISO 800 or 1600 to accentuate its bold character. The result is images that feel raw, immediate, and full of energy.

If HP5 is your all-around player, Tri-X is more of an expressive wild card – the film to choose when you want your images to shout rather than whisper.

ILFORD DELTA 100 PROFESSIONAL



At the other end of the spectrum, Ilford Delta 100 Professional offers a slower, more refined approach. Rated at ISO 100, it produces exceptionally fine grain and remarkable sharpness, making it a favorite for landscapes, architecture, and other subjects where detail matters.

Delta 100 rewards careful shooting. In bright light with a sturdy tripod, it produces negatives with a stunning tonal range, from delicate highlights to deep blacks with rich texture in between. Many photographers find it ideal for large prints, where its smooth tonal gradations really shine.

In practical terms, Delta 100 is less forgiving than HP5 or Tri-X – you'll need to pay closer attention to exposure – but the payoff is stunning clarity. For outdoor photographers who want to create gallery-quality prints with exquisite tonal subtlety, Delta 100 is hard to beat.

KODAK T-MAX 400



Kodak's T-Max 400 represents a more modern approach to black-and-white emulsions. Built with a T-grain emulsion, it delivers incredibly fine grain for a high-speed film, along with excellent sharpness and tonal smoothness. Compared to Tri-X, it has a cleaner, more polished look — less grit, more precision.

For outdoor photographers, that means you can shoot in low light or fast-moving situations without sacrificing fine detail. Wildlife at dusk, handheld forest scenes, or long hikes where you want one film that covers multiple conditions — T-Max 400 gives you flexibility with fewer compromises.

It also scans beautifully, which appeals to photographers working with both darkroom and digital workflows. If Tri-X is the film of tradition and history, T-Max is the film of modern precision. Having both in your bag lets you decide which voice best suits the scene in front of you.

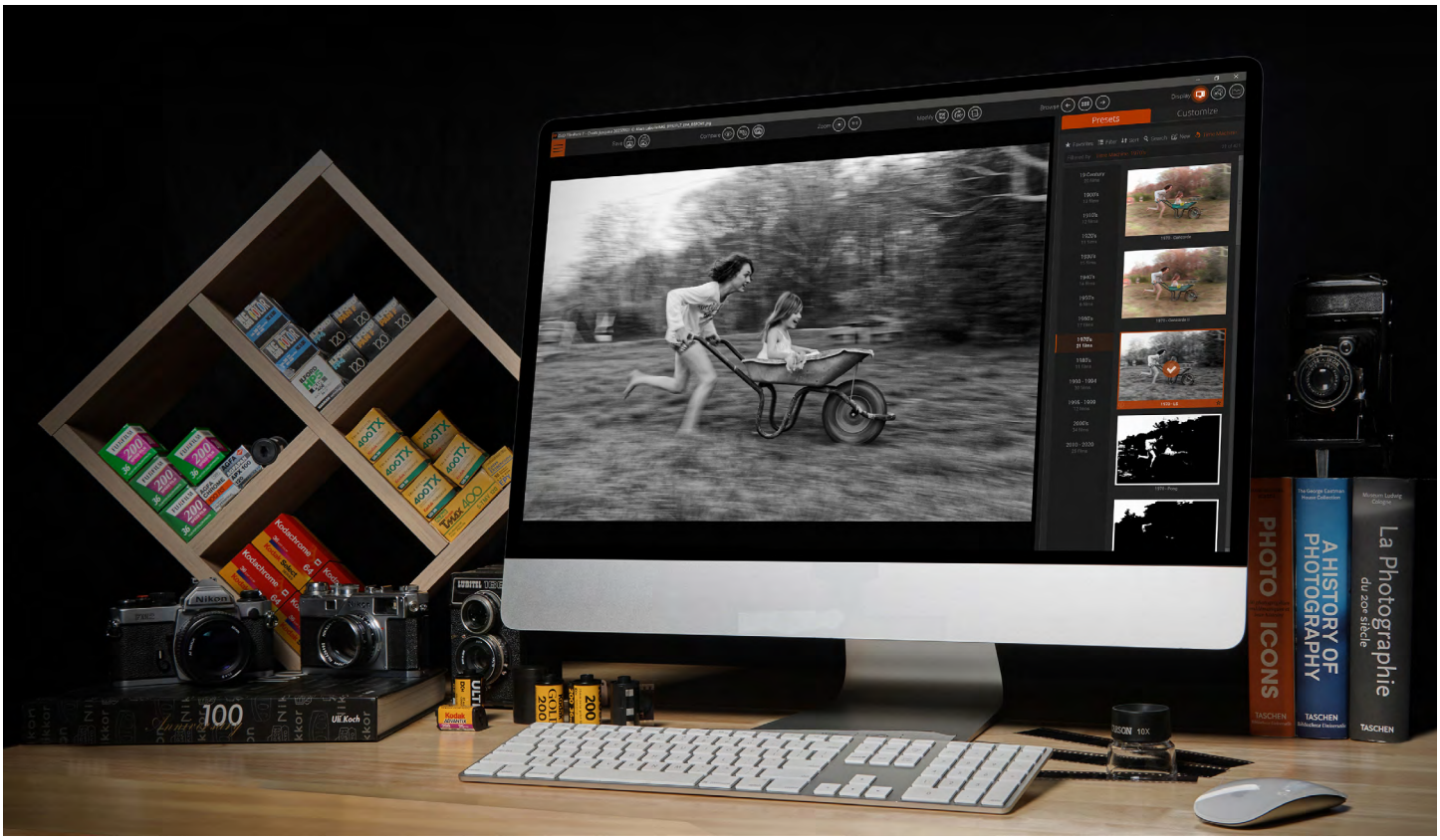
DXO FILMPACK & NIK SILVER EFEX

Film has its charms, but many outdoor photographers today work digitally or use a hybrid approach. That's where specialized editing software comes in. Two of the best tools for digital black-and-white are DxO FilmPack and Nik Silver Efex. (Both products are owned by DxO Labs.)

DxO FilmPack excels at emulating the look of classic films, including many of the stocks mentioned above. It offers customizable grain, contrast, and tonality, letting you create digital images that mimic the feel of analog negatives. For those who miss the tactile quality of film but prefer the convenience of digital, FilmPack provides a compelling bridge.

Nik Silver Efex, long considered the gold standard for digital monochrome conversion, goes even further. With intuitive controls for contrast, brightness, and local adjustments, it gives you the power to sculpt your tones precisely. Its film emulations are excellent, but the real magic lies in its creative control. Want to deepen a sky while holding detail in the highlights? Or emphasize texture in tree bark without over-sharpening? Silver Efex gives you that level of finesse.

For outdoor photographers who want to refine their monochrome vision, these tools are as essential as a tripod or a favorite lens. **OP**



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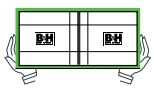

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Learning from the Landscape

How photography deepens our understanding of the world

Text & Photography by Pete McBride



On a clear February morning, I open the window of the Cessna 182 and a blast of thick ocean air hits my face. I turn in the cramped cockpit and tell my friend and pilot, Will, to bank right. At 85 mph, the wind buffets my lens, and I clutch the camera tighter. As we start to bank, I feel weightless for a split second, suspended by just a waist belt, 1,000 feet above the earth.

Below me, tendril-like fingers braid across a bluish-white expanse that looks like tree roots merging with the arteries of a forgotten river. Leaning out the window, bracing against the airspeed, I click the shutter three or four times, capturing the Colorado River's delta in Mexico stretching below us.

I'm struck by the abstract beauty – the mosaic of nature's patterns woven together just north of the turquoise waters of the Gulf of California. But one thing is missing from the frame: fresh water.

A River Run Dry

At the end of the 1,450-mile Colorado River – the same river that carved the Grand Canyon, supplies drinking water to 40 million people across seven states, and grows much of America's produce – there is nothing left. It is a river run dry.

A high tide flows up from the south as if searching for its old friend, the Rio Colorado, partially filling the feather-like waterways that historically provided brackish habitat for countless species.

It's not my first time here. Fifteen years ago, I hiked 100 miles across this dusty section. I was so alarmed by what I saw it changed the course of my photography and storytelling. Since then, I've spent much of my career using my lens to bring awareness to this river and other threatened landscapes.

Early on, I was lured by adventure – dangling from ropes, hanging inside glaciers on Himalayan peaks, or diving under icebergs in search of my next "eye-burner" image. My camera was a passport that opened doors. I threaded assignment to assignment for magazines like *National Geographic*, *Smithsonian* and *Outside*, in the era of big readerships and even bigger budgets.

Breaking the Ice

During those exciting assignment days, my cameras became more than a passport; they became teachers. In 25 years as a photographer and filmmaker, my cameras have repeatedly taught me lessons – not just about photography, but about life.

When documenting people, whether locally or in remote corners, I not only made better images but also had richer experiences when I approached as a human first and a photographer second. Once, while working on a story about wildlife conservation in northern Kenya, I handed a camera to a group of Samburu women who were wary of me. In broken Swahili, I suggested they make their own images.

Within minutes, the ice broke and laughter engulfed us as the women photographed themselves – and me. In that moment, I captured an image that opened the story. One of their portraits ran as my headshot (with credit, of course).

When photographing landscapes or wildlife, my lenses taught me that listening was as important as, or more important than, chasing action and light. Many times, I heard the hit of hooves or pounce of paws before I saw the action. In Botswana, I thought a lion was on my right when, in fact, it had backtracked and leapt into a river at full run on my left, just yards away. Thankfully, I heard the splash in time.

Returning to places years later, I've often struggled to repeat images because the landscapes had changed – sometimes dramatically. Documenting that change – glacier to no glacier, river to sand, meadow to parking lot – creates powerful "then and now" portraits of impact that a single image cannot.

Images with Impact

In today's image-saturated world, where everyone has the tools to make extraordinary photos, my lenses have taught me one of the greatest lessons: striking images are important, but well-documented stories endure.

Without story, even beautiful photos can fade into the mix. But images that both capture attention and tell a story of change – good or bad – connect us with greater impact.

One story I've focused on for decades is water in the American West: its importance and scarcity. That pursuit is what led me to the seat of that Cessna 182, torso hanging out the window over the dying Colorado River delta. The river continues to struggle with drought, climate change,



Aerial patterns of the Colorado River's dry delta, Baja Mexico. Sony A1, Sony FE 24-105mm f/4 G OSS. Exposure: 1/400 sec., f/20, ISO 25.

over-allocation and too many demands. And, like many issues of our time, it also battles apathy.

My hope is that telling the river's story – from boat-flipping rapids and alpine trickles to goliath dams, mines, power plants, sprawling cities and, finally, its vanishing delta – will remind us of water's true value.

Through it all, I try to find "the pretty amidst the gritty," because there is art in everything, if you look. There are times when I want to move on to lighter subjects, but I keep digging. Stories require time and dedication. Sometimes, those with long and painful histories are even more vital in today's world of short attention spans.

"When the well is dry, we know the worth of water," Benjamin Franklin once said.

As we bank the plane again, circling the parched delta, I capture more frames, reflecting on the value of this lifeline running dry. Hopefully, this ongoing body of work around one iconic river – and the freshwater it carries far and wide – will remind us, and decision-makers, of a lesson we cannot forget: Water is life. Not just for us, but for the river itself and the wild ecosystems it sustains. **OP**

Pete McBride is the author of *The Colorada River: Chasing Water*. He is a Sony Artisan of Imagery. See more of his work at petemcbride.com.

Get Wild

To make wildlife photos that truly come alive, you need to think — and feel — like an animal

Text & Photography by Brooke Bartleson

For me, wildlife photography has always been about more than just capturing images of animals. The magic lives in feeling like an animal myself. To chase the untamed frame, you need to step outside the comfort of the ordered world and into something older, wilder, deeper and more chaotic.

Feel the north wind blow as you follow a bear down the Alaskan coast. Hear the gravel crunching beneath your boots as you trace her tracks along the edge of a salmon stream. Taste the crisp air as you wait beneath unnamed mountain peaks. See the way the bear watches you back, unblinking, as though you are no different from any other wild thing that stirs in the thick brush.

My favorite wildlife photos aren't necessarily the ones that are technically perfect – they're the ones that breathe, bite and show the pulse of the subject at hand.

Finding Yourself in the Wild

One reason I'm so drawn to wildlife photography is because I often see so much of myself in my wild subjects. My interest in bears reveals a lot about me. Bears inspire me to own my solitary nature, embrace my independence and expand my resilience. I encourage aspiring wildlife photographers to identify the traits that your wild subject might inspire you to embody.

When you're crouched low in the mud photographing a bear, don't just focus on your shutter speed – think about how you can capture the moment in a way that reflects what inspires you most about the bear. See her powerful steps, watch how she lifts her head to sniff the breeze and capture the shot that does not simply show a bear, but also feels like a bear.

Embrace the Beautiful Chaos

Minimalism certainly has its place in fine art photography, but it can often rob a wildlife photo of its wildness.

During the summer months, I work as a bear-viewing guide. I take clients into the wilderness with me to photograph bears in the Alaskan bush. One of the most common mistakes I see photographers make is trying to tame the wild. They wait for the perfect light, the unobstructed composition and the precise pose. They forget that nature owes them nothing, and sometimes the best wildlife photos are made from moments of chaos.

The true perfection is in the details you can't control – the blur of flapping wings, the texture in wet fur and the shadows intensifying uncontrollable light. Invite the unpredictability in. Shoot through the tangled branches, frame the bear half lost in shadow, let the rain obscure the background. Never forget that imperfections are part of the story.

Enjoy the Wait

Wildlife photography requires the same type of patience that enables bears to catch fish, mountain lions to ambush deer and owls to dive for rodents tunneled deep beneath the snow. In a world of instant gratification, patience can be considered a lost art. I've learned to consider the long stretches of stillness and nothingness between photo opportunities as something to be appreciated – something that can be hard to find in the bustle of everyday life.

It's rare that you'll get the wildlife photo of your dreams without putting in hours, even days, of pursuit, waiting and trying without success. You become part of the landscape after a while, and every failed attempt is practice that will eventually help you be ready for the moment you've been waiting for.

Be Wild

To shoot the untamed frame, you have to let yourself be untamed too. It can be easy to get caught up in the technicalities of photography. You can spend endless time researching and speculating on which bodies and lenses are best for the subject and circumstances you have in mind, but in the end, what matters more than the gear itself is your presence in the moment.

When you allow yourself the time to set aside thoughts of perfection, you also allow yourself the time to breathe in the scene unfolding before you. Your presence in the moment enables you to see the split second that marks the difference between a good shot and a great shot. Let yourself be just as wild as the animal you are photographing.



A juvenile bobcat springs through the snow in Yellowstone National Park. OM System OM-1, OM SYSTEM M. Zuiko 150-400mm f/4.5 TC 1.25 IS PRO at 150mm. Exposure: 1/1000 sec., f/5.6, ISO 200.

When the Wild Gives You the Shot

The untamed frame is never a finished product. It's an ever-evolving story that will change and improve as you learn more about your subject and yourself.

My photo style changes with every season I spend among the bears, learning more every day and finding different behaviors that excite and impress me. Embrace the untamed frame. Wake up early, before the light. Wade through the swampy marsh, let your gear get muddy as you go. Miss the shot and then miss it again.

When the moment comes together and you click the shutter in time, remember that you didn't simply take the photo – the wild gave it to you. You earned it. **OP**

Brooke Bartleson is an OM System Ambassador. See more of her work at littlebearwildlife.com.

Mara Triangle

Maasai Mara, Kenya

Text & Photography by Susan Portnoy



Location



I could give you the precise location where I photographed the Cape buffalo and oxpecker (image at right) within the Mara Triangle, but it wouldn't help. The horned giants are perpetual grazers, always on the move.

What I can tell you is that this region is a haven for wildlife, including Africa's Big Five – Cape buffalo, elephant, lion, leopard and rhino – as well as cheetah and nearly 500 bird species.

This corner of the wilderness is part of the Maasai Mara National Reserve, which covers nearly 200 square miles of rolling plains speckled with lone acacia trees, pockets of dense riverine forest and skies as vast as the American West. The Mara River's tawny waters and the 1,300-foot Oloololo Escarpment form natural borders on the east and west, with Tanzania's Serengeti defining the southern edge – a setting immortalized in the iconic picnic scene in *Out of Africa*.

Weather

Mornings and evenings are chilly year-round thanks to an elevation of just over 6,000 feet above sea level – so layers matter. June through September marks the dry season, and by midday you'll peel down to a T-shirt. From mid-October through February, daytime highs can climb into the 80s and 90s, and in November, short, late-afternoon showers roll through. March through May brings heavy rains, with April the wettest stretch.

Keep in mind that the Mara sun is fierce. Pack a wide-brimmed hat, sunscreen and polarized sunglasses – they're essential.

Photo Experience

This photo was shot in early September, when my guide, Sammy Ngotho from Wild Eye Photographic Safaris, and I were on a game drive. We came across a large herd of buffalo, mostly cows with their calves, lounging close to the road. Stopping for about 45 minutes to photograph, the herd gradually formed a loose semicircle around our Land Cruiser, giving me ample time to work the scene.

Where there are buffalo, you'll find oxpeckers. The bovines are bug magnets, and the birds feed on them. The curious cow in the image facing me remained relatively still, chewing her cud. The oxpecker was less accommodating, darting around the buffalo's head in search of a meal. I waited, shutter finger poised, until the moment she paused – and she posed as if on cue.

I recommend bringing the longest lens you can handhold, in case your vehicle doesn't have support, along with a wide lens for environmental shots. (I use a Canon 200-400mm f/4 1.4x extender, and a 24-70mm f/2.8.) Be aware that the bush planes flying to the Mara enforce weight restrictions: a maximum of 33 pounds for your luggage and camera kit.

Best Times

When to visit the Mara Triangle depends on the images you wish to capture.

June – September: The dry season heralds the wildebeest migration, which begins sometime in July, give or take a couple of weeks. Predator activity peaks, and photo-bombing foliage is at a minimum. The landscape is a monochromatic mix of browns, with green patches near water sources. Though it's high season, there are fewer visitors here because the escarpment and river limit access points.

October – December: Green begins to return to the Mara after brief afternoon rains in November. Camps have fewer guests, and it's less expensive than during the dry season.

January – February: Vegetation is in full bloom, creating a stunning backdrop for more vibrant imagery. Although it's sometimes harder to see animals among the flora, it's not a dealbreaker.

Photo Safaris

For first-timers, I suggest joining a photographic safari since the guides



understand a photographer's needs and how to position a vehicle for the best angles. Equally important, they recognize animal behavior and can help you anticipate image-worthy moments before they occur. You'll also be with like-minded people who know that patience is crucial in capturing a good image.

On a classic safari, guides rarely understand photography beyond the skills of an average shutterbug, and sharing a jeep with guests who want to move on after five minutes can be frustrating. **OP**

See more of Susan Portnoy's work at susanportnoyphotography.com.

Contact:
Mara Triangle, Maasai Mara, Kenya
www.maratriangle.org/what-we-do

>>> *Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF 200-400mm f/4L IS USM Extender 1.4x, lens stabilized with a sandbag. Exposure: 1/200 sec., f/9, ISO 320.*





Chasing the Last Ice Bears

Peter Mather's years-long quest to capture a vanishing northern phenomenon

Photography by Peter Mather
Interview by Bill Sawalich

Every autumn in Northern Canada, a small number of grizzly bears delay hibernation, lingering along icy rivers to gorge on the last of the salmon before finally bedding down. Frost and snow cling to their coats, forming crystalline icicles that transform them into something extraordinary: ice bears.

But salmon runs have dwindled in recent years, and with them, the ice bears have become ever more elusive. Yukon photographer Peter Mather set out on the daunting mission to track down and capture images of what some fear could be the last of these hauntingly rare creatures.

OUTDOOR PHOTOGRAPHER: It seems like such a challenging project. How long did you work on it?

PETER MATHER: I'm always trying to photograph things that other people haven't photographed before – stories that haven't been told. I did research for five or six years. My dad and I would go around and find these salmon spots, look for really late salmon runs and then look for bears in those places. Eventually, I found a couple of spots and spent about three years working two to three months every fall photographing these bears to try to tell the story.

In all that time, I think I saw only one bear covered in icicles. The camera trap captured just four or five images of icicle-covered bears. It was a tough project – years of effort for just a few photos – because it rarely happens anymore. It's just too warm, and there aren't enough salmon.

OP: Is it known why the salmon numbers are down?

PM: It's really hard to tell the fundamental cause of why salmon aren't coming anymore because salmon spend most of their lives in the ocean and we don't know what's going on there. The ocean fishery is probably the biggest culprit. There have been years where more salmon were caught as trawling bycatch – and thrown back into the ocean as garbage – than made it up to their spawning grounds. The second biggest issue would be climate change.

OP: Working with camera traps in the snow seems incredibly difficult.

PM: I've got 14 different camera traps. Some are Panasonic, some Sony, some Nikon. My main cameras nowadays are

A grizzly bear catches a salmon in the Klukshu River under the northern lights. In the top right corner is the Big Dipper, part of the constellation Ursa Major, or "the great bear." Sony A7S III with Sony Vario-Tessar T* FE 16-35mm f/4 ZA OSS at 16mm. Exposure: 3.2 sec., f/4.5, ISO 6400.



the Sony A7S and A1. I'll set them up and then I'm just constantly maintaining them. I probably had 10 going at any time.

There are all these different camera trap systems you can use: Camtraptions, Cognisys, TRLcam. I've put these together over 15 years, so it's a real mix, and it is a technological nightmare.

It's a full-time job just managing all these systems. You're always fixing things, changing batteries, changing flash batteries. You get so used to not having success. You're always going out to check your cameras, and there are no photos. So it's always a surprise when you do have a good photo on it.

OP: Why doesn't the flash scare the bears away?

PM: It's really tricky to flash bears, and I wouldn't normally do it. But where I'm doing this work, there's a fishing village called Klukshu. The bears roam through that village all the time because at this time of year it's abandoned. All the houses in Klukshu have motion-activated lights, which are very similar to the camera traps. The bears walk by these houses and the lights go off, so it has kind of acclimatized them to my flashes.

That's why this project was possible — because I could photograph them at night. The bears mostly fish after dark, when they have better success. Salmon are smart and hard to catch during the day because they can see the bears coming. But at night, the fish are more dormant, and the grizzlies can pinpoint them by smell, giving the bears the advantage.

OP: Is it the same bears who stay out late every year?

PM: It's a bit of a mix. These bears tend to postpone their hibernation by about a

Opposite: In the Yukon, some bears delay hibernation into winter to feed on late salmon runs. This image was captured with a remote, motion-activated camera trap. Panasonic Lumix GH4 with Lumix G Vario 7-14mm f/4 ASPH at 8mm (16mm equivalent). Exposure: 1/160 sec., f/8, ISO 2000.

Right: An ice bear uses a fallen tree to cross the Klukshu River in Yukon Territory. Captured with a remote, motion-activated camera trap. Panasonic Lumix GH4 with Lumix G Vario 7-14mm f/4 ASPH at 8mm (16mm equivalent). Exposure: 1/60 sec., f/7.1, ISO 2000.

Right bottom: A sow grizzly bear uses its powerful sense of smell — more than 2,000 times stronger than a human's — to locate a dead chum salmon caught on a branch. Captured with an underwater housing and radio-controlled remote. Nikon D700 with AF-S Zoom-NIKKOR 17-35mm f/2.8D IF-ED at 17mm. Exposure: 1/100 sec., f/14, ISO 800.





month. There's a weekend – like the third weekend in October – when all of a sudden you'll see bear tracks on the highways for a whole weekend because the bears are going to their dens, and the fastest way there is along the road.

So at night they jump on the highway, cover 20 or 30 kilometers, then climb up into the mountains and den. But some bears will just stay out long enough to catch these salmon. It changes, although there are two or three bears that do it every year. There's one grizzly the locals call "the mayor" because he controlled the best fishing spot in the village for so long.

And then you have other bears that maybe stumbled across it, or didn't get enough food, or just feel like staying up late. They're kind of like people, bears. They're all individuals, so it's hard to tell their reasons. **OP**

See more of Peter Mather's work at petermather.com.



Photo by Woody Walters

The Waiting Game

Clyde Butcher and the art of slowing down

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CLYDE BUTCHER, EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

TEXT BY GRAEME GREEN

On New Year's Day in 2000, deep in the swampy wilderness of Florida's Big Cypress National Preserve, Clyde Butcher stumbled upon a secluded pond that struck him as the makings of a great photograph. He began sketching out a composition in his mind – but it would take nearly a decade before everything aligned.

"I needed to be there at the right time," he recalls. "I went back and forth for nine years before I got it. Every trip meant an hour-and-a-half slog through the swamp. It's a jungle. We have something here called Resurrection Fern – you need rain to 'resurrect' it. If it's dry for just two or three days, it disappears. So I had to be there at exactly the right moment. To get a good image, you have to have all the elements right."

The photograph, Cigar Orchid Pond, demanded nine separate visits – one each summer. Every trip meant wading through knee- to waist-deep water to reach the secluded pond, framed by towering ferns, pond apple trees, and rare orchids. The treks were grueling. Butcher and Niki, his wife of over 60 years, lugged heavy large-format cameras and backpacks stuffed with film through the swamp. Still, he persisted, waiting for the elusive combination of soft light and perfectly still air that would allow for a three- to four-minute exposure.

"Unfortunately, it had to be in July or August, when it was really hot, but the water was deep," he explains. Visiting in the dry season would mean shallower water, so the scene would lack the all-important "atmosphere."

"August is pretty warm, so I'd walk for three quarters of an hour through the swamp, then lay down in the water to cool down for a half hour. There's no trail. I'm walking through water. It's a real challenge."

Persistence, Butcher says, is what drives him to make repeats visits to the same location, rather than giving up or settling for whatever he shot on his first attempt. But behind that persistence is a conviction that good things come to those who wait.

"I don't take a lot of pictures," he says. "I wait a lot. You have to know the moment."



Trout Creek. Babcock Ranch, FL (1991). Thunderstorms are a vital part of Florida summers. I love how clouds roll in and build into a powerful, awe-inspiring spectacle of light and sound. But photographing them is risky. During this storm, lightning struck all around me. After one close strike, I covered my camera and hurried back to my truck to wait it out.









Opposite top: **Dunes.** Cape San Blas, FL (1983). After hearing about the dunes in Florida's Panhandle, I was eager to photograph them. In Port St. Joe, the weather stayed overcast. For a week, I returned daily, set up my camera and waited, but the light never came. On my final day, just before leaving, the sun broke through briefly, letting me capture two frames of film.

Opposite bottom: **Little Shark River Tunnel.** Everglades National Park, FL (2005). Visiting the Shark River by boat is always rewarding, surrounded by the beauty and sounds of nature. Niki and I spent a week there on our catamaran, anchoring in a small alcove. With mosquitoes strangely absent, we explored by dinghy and discovered this repeating pattern of mangrove roots, a cadence that begged to be photographed.

Above: **Loxahatchee River.** Jonathan Dixon State Park, FL (1991). The Loxahatchee River is one of only two federally designated wild and scenic rivers in Florida. When the South Florida Water Management District asked me to photograph it for the 10th anniversary of the Save Our Rivers program, I was eager. After three years of work, I finally felt I had captured the river's essence.

Get It Right

Butcher, 83, is speaking from his home in Venice, Florida, close to his studio and gallery. He has a long gray beard and is wearing a shirt with a colorful leafy pattern and a white wide-brimmed fedora. On the wall behind him a sign reads: "Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep."

"Yep," he grins when I ask if this is a philosophy he lives by. For Butcher though, it could be summed up as: "Art is knowing which ones to take." His approach is deliberate – he makes fewer photographs, favoring quality over quantity, and only presses the shutter when he's confident he's captured something special. It's a mindset that stands in stark contrast to the frantic pace of the digital age.

"It doesn't matter if it's film or digital, you have to have the right light, the right shadows. It's got to be right."





Butcher has been photographing Florida and, in particular, the Everglades for nearly half a century, earning him the nickname the "the Ansel Adams of the swamp." Born in 1942 in Kansas City, Missouri, he started out as an architect but developed an interest in black-and-white photography after seeing an Ansel Adams Photography exhibition at Yosemite National Park. Later, he set up the profitable Eye Encounter, Inc. business, selling his and other photographer's mainly color work as wall decorations to department stores, including Sears and J.C. Penny's.

In 1979, Butcher and his family move to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, then Fort Myers. In the early-to-mid 1980s, he was still working mainly in color. But his first swamp walks in the Everglades drove him back to black and white. "When I came to Florida and started shooting color, there was so much green I almost threw up," he groans.

Seeing in Black and White

Black and white might seem a jarring choice for capturing the Sunshine States' vibrant colors and the deep greens of the swamp.

"If you've got all that color, you can't see a place," argues Butcher. "I don't care whether you're in the Everglades or England, you have all these competing colors. Nature is one. Is the water more important? The sky? The trees? All of them are important. Black and white creates a oneness with nature."

Just as critical is his slow, steady approach and being prepared to wait, something even he sometimes needs to be reminded of.

"The second ever shot I took in Florida was on the Panhandle sand dunes," he

Cigar Orchard Pond. Big Cypress National Preserve, FL (2009). After hiking deep into the swamp for an hour, I discovered this beautiful, intricate scene — but without my camera. For nine years, I returned, only to find the area changed, sometimes unrecognizable. Then, after rain revived the resurrection ferns and covered the ground plants, I found it again. This time, the light was perfect to capture the moment. Deardorff 5x7 camera, Schneider 72mm f/5.6 Super-Angulon XL, Kodak T-Max 100. Exposure: 2 minutes at f/45.



recalls. "I was there from sunrise to sunset for five days, waiting for the sun to break through clouds and create shadows on the sand. All the elements had to align: sun, sand, wind, shadows. By 4 p.m. one day, I gave up, but Niki said, 'What's another few hours?' Fifteen minutes later, it happened. I was packing up when the sun came out. Boom – I had time for one shot. That was it."

Developing an intimate knowledge of locations, especially in the Everglades, has been a key to Butcher's success. "When you work in the same place for many years, you know what time of day the light is right, and what is happening outside," he explains.

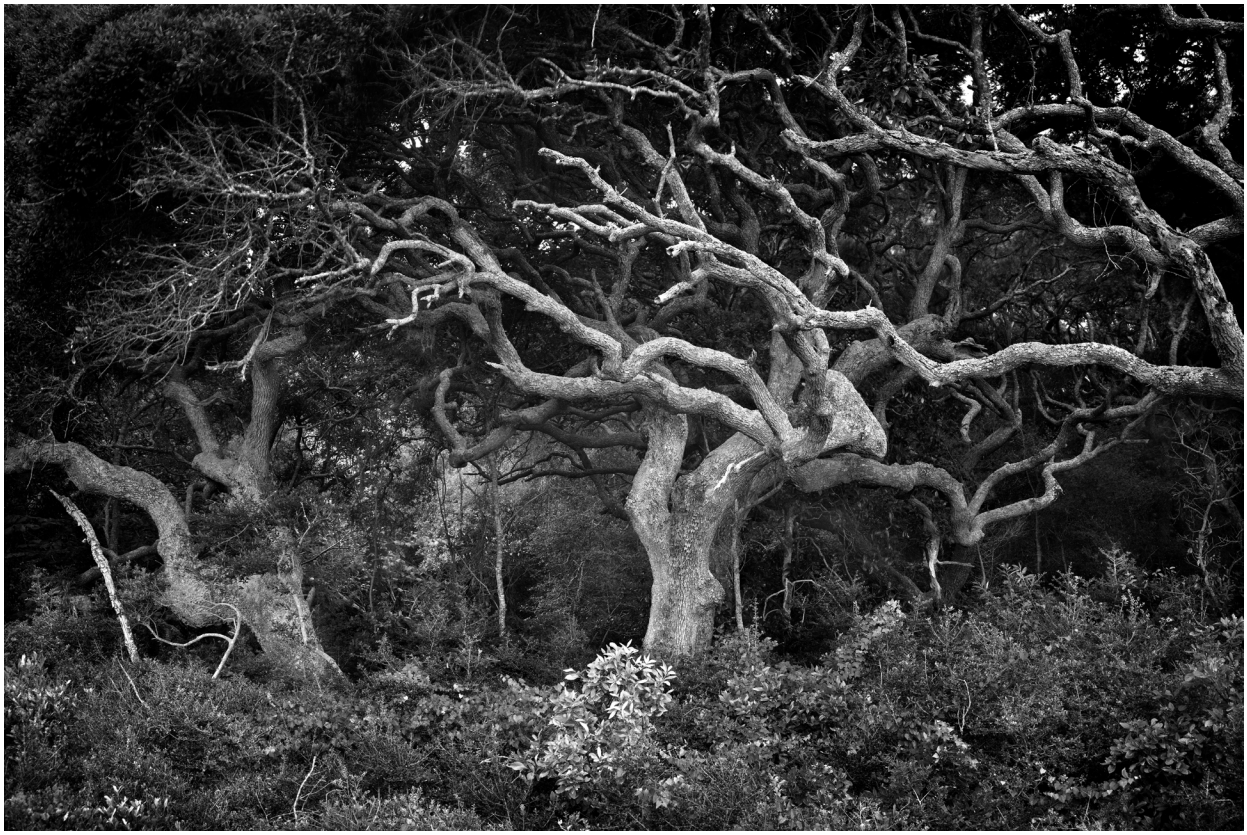
Immersing Yourself

Butcher also likes to immerse himself in the environment, often wading into deep water. "My work is about a feeling. That's what photographers should strive for – an emotional connection in their images. With

Above: **Gaskin Bay.** Everglades National Park, FL (1989). I had seen this old mangrove — a survivor of Hurricane Donna in the 1960s — many times while photographing the Ten Thousand Islands. Its sculptural beauty conveyed the lonely, primal feeling I love in the wilderness, but the light was never right. One summer morning, everything aligned. Sadly, Hurricane Andrew destroyed the mangrove in 1992. Deardorff 5x7 camera, Nikkor 75mm SW with orange filter, Kodak T-Max 100. Exposure: 1 second at f/45.

Opposite top: **Amelia Island.** Fernandina Beach, FL (1989). The captivating shapes of these wind-blown trees demanded to be photographed. Their form and texture contrasted beautifully with the dark background, evoking memories of cypress trees along the Pacific coast and stirring a longing for the California shore.

Opposite bottom: **Keeywadin Island.** Barrier Island, Naples, FL (1996). While strolling the beach, I came across this solitary log, washed ashore like a lonely animal. To emphasize the mood, I used a long exposure, blurring waves and clouds against the log's sharp contours. When I printed the image, the contrast of soft and hard elements drew me in, and I was grateful to have found the scene.







a wide-angle lens, you get close; you can't stand back 100 feet and still get a feeling. A photograph is all about light and mood."

The lack of trails in the Everglades means Butcher often works in places where there are no tourists or other photographers, something he enjoys. There's another big reason why people might not be out in the swamp, too.

"I've only really had two encounters with alligators," Butcher chuckles. "They have trails that they go in, and I happened to be in the guys' way. I was in the water one time, and the alligator was within arm's length. Their nose is a sensitive spot, so I took a paddle from my canoe and jammed it into his nose. He threw up a wall of water up about 10 feet high and took off."

An Unhurried Approach

Beyond the U.S., whether he's in Spain, Cuba, or the Czech Republic, Butcher takes his time, returning to locations until he gets what he's after.

"I did a project in Spain, photographing where Salvador Dalí lived and worked. In nine days, I focused on three spots I shot every day, knowing each had a right moment. One was a boat pulled ashore as the sun broke through clouds. Another was a courtyard, completed by a man walking out of a door. The last was a nighttime downtown scene with boats on the beach and the town in the background — I had to get the light just right."

Such an unhurried approach will appeal

5 LANDSCAPE TIPS FROM CLYDE BUTCHER

1

Figure Out the Light

Every place needs its own light. Forests can be too spotty unless it's overcast. Prairies need sun for drama. Black and white isn't the same as color — you've got to know what works.

2

Keep Going Back

If a spot speaks to you, don't quit after one try. Go back until you get the picture that shows it best.

3

Don't Compose with the Camera

I never walk around looking through the viewfinder. I see the picture with my eyes first. If I feel it, I set up the tripod — that's it.

4

Take Fewer Shots

If you get one good photo in a day, you're doing well. How many photos per day do you think Ansel Adams took a day? Sometimes, he took none.

5

Be Patient

Don't waste your time shooting a thousand frames and scrolling through them. Slow down, wait, and let the picture come to you.



to many people who find modern life too rushed, stressful and time-pressured, or who dislike the transient nature of digital. Just as there's been a resurgence of interest, including among younger generations, in vinyl records, CDs, cassettes, video tapes and DVDs, many people are discovering the pleasures of film cameras, from taking pictures to developing images in the dark room.

"Film is an organic piece of material," Butcher says. "You don't have the depth with digital that you have in a silver or platinum print. That's what people are missing, especially in color. You can do all kinds of things with film you can't do with digital."

For most of his career, Butcher worked with large-format (4x5, 5x7, 8x10, 11x14, 12x20) film cameras, including Deardorff models. After a stroke in 2017, he switched to lighter digital cameras. But his outlook remained the same. "If I took three pictures a day, it was a lot."

Even though he now uses a cane to get around, Butcher recently decided to return to large format film photography. "With my handicap, I needed a certain kind of camera, and I just got the best 4x5 camera that's ever been made." The Alvandi camera, made in Iran, is able to take sheet film or rolls, and has a tilt-shift lens, but it's lighter than most mechanical cameras and is able to zone-focus.

"Last summer, I had a lot of hospital problems," he says, explaining his decision to return to analog photography. "I was in hospital for about three months. I was laying there, and I said to myself, "I want to start shooting again – film."

Then, he laughs: "I'm going to go down shooting." **OP**

See more of Clyde Butcher's work at clydebutcher.com

Opposite: **Beach View from Port Lligat House Patio.** Cadaqués, Spain (2017). While walking around the patio, I noticed a window framing the bay of Port Lligat. Seeing the boats lined up, the view revealed the importance of Salvador Dalí's relationship with the environment just outside his window.

Above: **Conservation.** Everglades National Park, FL (2004). I traveled with South Florida Water Management District staff by airboat deep into Conservation Area 5, land set aside to help clean water before it flows into Everglades National Park. After nearly an hour weaving through thick cattails, the vegetation opened to reveal this beautiful stretch of the Everglades. Deardorff 8x10 camera, Schneider 90mm f/5.6 Super-Angulon XL with orange filter, Kodak T-Max 100. Exposure: 1 second at f/45.

IN Light AND Shadow

Nili Gudhka's black-and-white wildlife images reveal nature's beauty in stark relief

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NILI GUDHKA
INTERVIEW BY BILL SAWALICH

When Nili Ghudhka returned to her native Kenya a little more than a decade ago, she owned a camera but didn't yet consider herself a photographer. Weekends were spent escaping the corporate office to wander Nairobi National Park, where a lifelong love of nature pulled her back into the wild.

That passion quickly grew into something more. Ghudhka soon left her desk job to launch a photo safari company, trading spreadsheets for open savannas and the chance to follow Africa's remarkable wildlife with her lens. Over time, she developed a signature style – capturing animals in black and white, stripping away color to reveal their essence in pure light and shadow.

In this conversation, Ghudhka shares her journey, her approach to photographing wildlife, and why she believes the absence of color can often speak louder than its presence.

OUTDOOR PHOTOGRAPHER: Planning safaris seems like a great gig for a wildlife photographer.

NILI GUDHKA: In photographic safaris, I lead individuals and groups of photographers who want to explore the wild with me. I teach photography techniques and post-processing, as well as a lot about animal behavior. I also lead guided safaris for people who are not photographers. I go along with a safari guide to make their trip more enjoyable and personal.

I also curate regular safaris for people who just want to experience it with my amazingly talented safari guides. I do photography on these trips, but my main focus is the guests. Once they are comfortable at a sighting and I've given them the information they need, that's when I pick up my camera. Sometimes I do personal safaris by myself or with fellow photographers, focusing purely on my own photography.

OP: This issue's theme is black-and-white, and many of your images of wildlife are in monochrome. What determines whether you choose it or color?

NG: Good light is very important in wildlife photography, and there's only a tiny window to shoot in it. But when you are out in the wild, a lot happens before or after the golden hour, and as a photographer it's always hard to let go of that opportunity.

Many of these shots are taken in harsh light, which makes them perfect for black-and-white. It's not always planned if the image is going to be monochrome; it usually happens when curating images. For me, black-and-white has always meant more drama. It can be the pattern on the animal, dramatic skies or contrast against a clean background.

OP: Do you have special black-and-white processing techniques?





NG: I know many photographers who shoot in black-and-white directly in their cameras, but I don't do that. I shoot in color and then convert to black-and-white during post-processing. I use Adobe Lightroom Classic to edit all my images.

When processing an image in monochrome, I first change it to black-and-white in Lightroom and then work with the white balance, tones, texture and color. I edit every single image differently. It just depends on the result I want.

OP: What kind of equipment do you use?

NG: I've used Nikon cameras since day one. My current gear includes a Nikon Z9 and Nikon Z8 with the NIKKOR Z 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 VR S, AF-S NIKKOR 70-200mm f/2.8E FL ED VR and AF-S NIKKOR 24-120mm f/4G ED VR.

I pick up different lenses for different situations. For example, in Amboseli with Mount Kilimanjaro and elephants, I mostly prefer the 70-200mm. For portraits of Craig [the elephant featured on the cover of this issue], I used the 24-120mm. And for places like Maasai Mara, where you mostly need a good zoom range, I use the 100-400mm.

For India, I rent the NIKKOR Z 600mm f/4 TC VR S. Sightings there are usually far, so the longer the better. I prefer doing safaris in India during winter, but that comes with the disadvantage of poor light, so a lens with a low f-stop is always better. I mostly go to parks in Central India for tigers. My favorite is Kanha Tiger Reserve.

OP: How do you get such amazing wildlife close-ups?

NG: For low-angle close-ups I use a

Previous: A male lion showing of his sharp canines and a thick mane, Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya. Nikon D750, Sigma 150-600mm f/5.6-6.3 DG DN OS. Exposure: 1/500 sec., f/5.6, ISO 280.

Above: The walk of life: A herd of elephants rushes across the dry lakebed to the swamp. Nikon D850, AF-S NIKKOR 70-200mm f/2.8E FL ED VR. Exposure: 1/1000 at f10, ISO 800.

Opposite: A mother giraffe and her calf standing alert while a storm was brewing. Mara Triangle Conservancy, Kenya. Exposure: 1/640 sec., f/5.6, ISO 125.









remote trigger. The camera and lens are placed in a self-designed, strong metal box. You must strategically place the box in the path of the animal and hope they pass by. The image of Craig was taken like this. It took about five tries before I got that shot.

There are many ready-made boxes available, but I haven't found one strong enough to survive an elephant's kick. With the help of a photographer friend and our safari guide, we designed a box and had it made at a local workshop. For the remote trigger to work, I have to be within 65 yards of the receiver. I leave the camera on a high shutter speed.

It's always a game of luck. Because the animals are unpredictable, they all react differently to these boxes. The box didn't bother Craig; he always just walked past without stopping. I've used the box with other animals, and they are very curious. They come close, stop and sniff it.

Sometimes I use monopods as well. I attach my camera, drop it out of the car and then use the remote trigger on the SnapBridge app to shoot. This is mainly for big cats walking toward the car. For close-ups, we must let the animal approach. And, of course, telephoto lenses also help.

In Kenya, I use specially built cars that are good for low-angle photography, and I work with a team of talented guides who know how to position the car and anticipate animal behavior.

OP: You speak about Craig as if you know him well. When you photograph an animal repeatedly, do you get a sense of their tendencies?

NG: Yes, not only Craig but also some cats in the Mara. After spending so much time with them you can predict what they'll do next – like which tree they'll climb, the path they'll walk or even their preferred prey.

Above: Two of Africa's icons: Mount Kilimanjaro, the continent's tallest peak, and Craig, one of its largest super tuskers. Nikon Z9, NIKKOR Z 24-120mm f/4 S. Exposure: 1/2500 sec., f/5.6 ISO 1600.

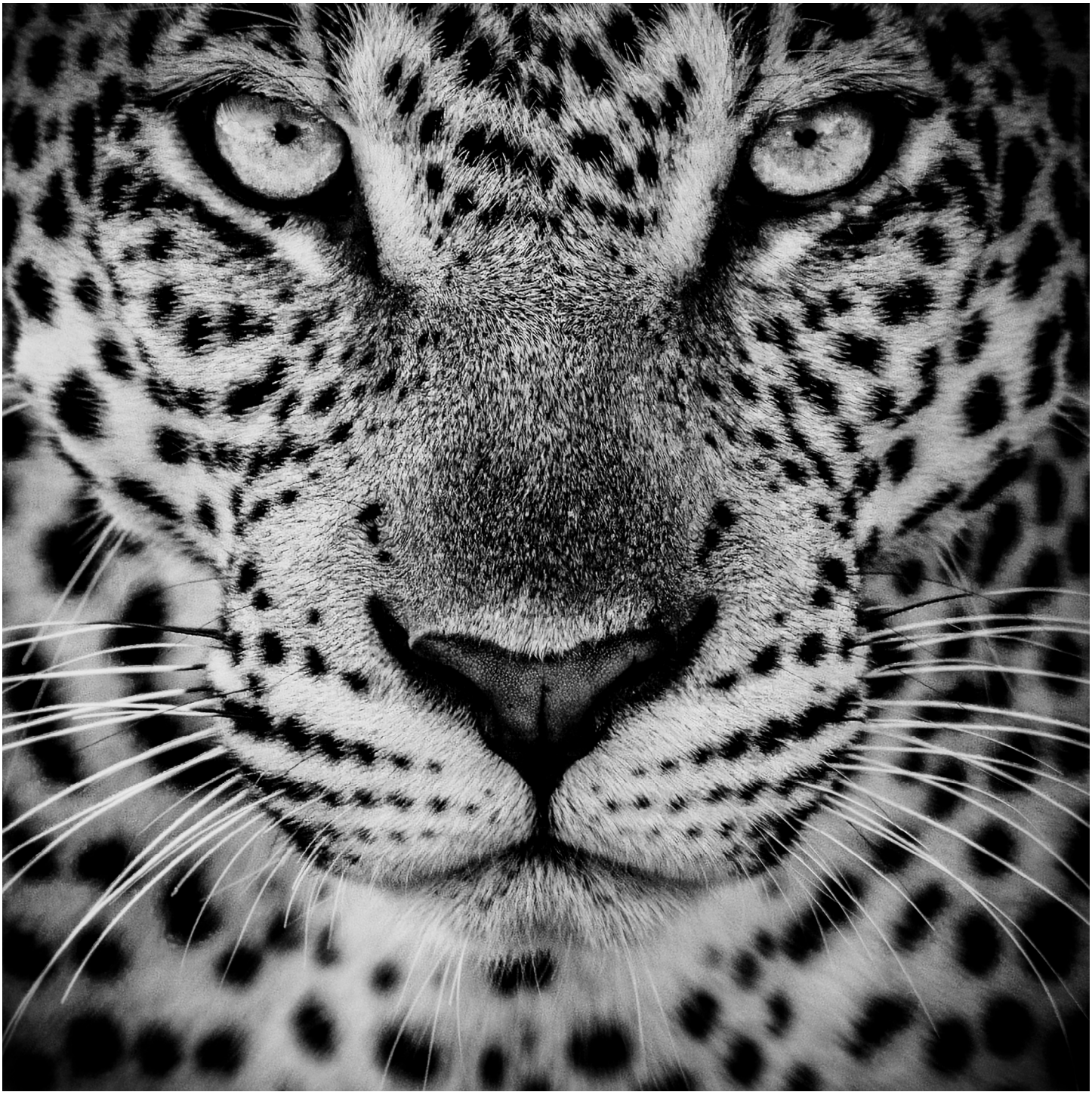
Opposite top: A family of rhinos quenching their thirst on a hot day in Solio Ranch Conservancy. Nikon Z9, NIKKOR Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S. Exposure: 1/500 sec., f/5.6, ISO 64.

Opposite bottom: Two zebra stallions having a moment between themselves. Amboseli National Park, Kenya. Nikon D750, Sigma 150-600mm f/5.6-6.3 DG DN OS. Exposure: 1/640 sec., f/6.3, ISO 200.

Next page: Giza, a melanistic leopard from Ol Donyo Lomboro Conservancy in northern Kenya. Nikon Z9, NIKKOR Z 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 VR S. Exposure: 1/800 sec., f/5.6. ISO 2000.







Previous page: A cheetah mother and her two cubs all cozied up on a cold morning in Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya. Nikon D750, Sigma 150-600mm f/5.6-6.3 DG DN OS. Exposure: 1/160 sec., f/6.3, ISO 5000.

Above: A young male leopard looking right into the camera. Samburu National Reserve, Kenya. Nikon D750, Sigma 150-600mm f/5.6-6.3 DG DN OS. Exposure: 1/500 sec., f/6.3, ISO 1250.

Opposite: A herd of elephants walking in a straight line across the dry lakebed to the swampy part of the park for water and food. Amboseli National Park, Kenya. Nikon Z6, AF-S NIKKOR 200-500mm f/5.6E ED VR. Exposure: 1/1250 sec., f/10, ISO 800.



Every animal, just like humans, has different characteristics and personalities. I've spent so much time with Craig that I know his behavior and even his moods. It's amazing to see how comfortable he is around humans.

The cover photo is one of my favorite images of Craig. It's a very recent picture, taken in June 2025. I used a remote trigger with the camera and lens in a metal box. The safari guide and I heard Craig was outside the main park, near the community water tank. We knew what that meant: either he was heading to the tank for a drink or he'd finished drinking and was heading back to the bushes. Luckily, we found him walking toward the tank. It was about 500 meters away, and Craig seemed to have a set path.

I placed the box on that path and waited at a distance. As he got closer, I started clicking the shutter — at one point I thought I'd break the remote — and whoop! He walked right toward the box, giving me that once-in-a-lifetime shot.

OP: I know you've published a book of your work. Do you make prints, too?

NG: Yes. It initially started as making prints for my own house. Four years ago, if someone told me my images were print-worthy, I would have laughed. But then I moved into a new apartment and wanted to fill the walls. I printed a few images and hung them up and was in shock. It made me realize how amazing these images look on a wall. Plus, seeing them every day is encouraging and motivating.

I have thousands of images on social media and more saved on my computer, but those aren't things I look at daily. Prints make me fall in love with photography every day.

I do sell prints, though it's not my core business. (My main business is photo safaris.) I make the prints in a lab through a professional printer and use different formats depending on the client's needs and budget. For example, canvas prints are more sustainable and easier to manage, while fine art paper is more expensive and harder to maintain, but often better in many ways.

I'm a big fan of German paper brand Hahnemühle. Their Photo Rag and German Etching lines are top quality, especially for black-and-white images.

OP: Do you have favorite animals to photograph, or some you're hoping to someday?



NG: Oh yes! The list of animals I still haven't seen is very long. Top on my list are jaguars in South America. I also want to see the last few remaining Asian super tuskers in the wild. My favorite animal to photograph is the elephant – mainly super tuskers like Craig. He is one of the last 24 super tuskers remaining in the world.

I find photographing small cats such as caracals and servals the most difficult. They are nocturnal, mostly active in early mornings or late evenings when the light is very low. They are also very skittish, so it's hard to capture them with my camera. I've been lucky a few times to manage it. I count my blessings for that.

OP: Where are your favorite places to photograph wildlife?

NG: My favorite place for photography is Amboseli National Park in Kenya. I keep telling my guests that Amboseli is one of the most scenic national parks to exist. It's amazing for huge herds of elephants and super tuskers, but also for its landscapes. You have Mount Kilimanjaro in the background, swamps filled with life and a dry lakebed where there's barely any living thing, all in one place. It's surreal.

Many of my photos are taken in Amboseli. Not only do I love the park because of elephants, but also the rare things I've seen there. Amboseli is known for rare small cats. It's where I saw my first-ever caracal and, on the same day, a melanistic serval. In fact, I was one of the first people to photograph it in Amboseli. The park also had one of the oldest living male lions. It was always amazing to bump into him.

Another reason I love this park is because of the lakes and swamps at sunrise, when the sun is just about to come up. The entire place turns orange, and when you're lucky, Mount Kilimanjaro's reflection shines in the water while flamingos are waking up. It's pure magic. **OP**

See more of Nili Gudhka's work on Instagram at instagram.com/thejunglechic.

Above: A small tower of giraffes stand alert and watching over the savannah grassland, Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya. Nikon D750, Sigma 150-600mm f/5.6-6.3 DG DN OS. Exposure: 1/500 sec., f/5.6, ISO 220.

Opposite: One of the most photographed and famous leopards in Kenya's Maasai Mara scanning the plains before climbing higher into the tree where she had stacked a kill. Nikon D850, AF-S Nikkor 200-500mm f/5.6E ED VR. Exposure: 1/1600 sec., f/5.6 ISO 200.







B&W Made Better

7 Processing Tips that Work

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY RANDY BOTT

"What's the ratio?"

Someone asked me that recently, and I knew exactly what he meant: How much time do I spend in the field making pictures, compared to how much time I spend at the computer making them exactly what I want them to be? I answered, "One-third on location, 16-thirds in post-production." Yes, I know the math doesn't work, but you get the idea.

I'm telling you about the ratio so you know up front that my images aren't the result of an incomprehensible run of good luck or the product of pull-down menus and click-on commands in Photoshop. They are the result of vision, judgment, technology and work. Hours of work. Satisfying, creative, worthwhile, but still work.

Those images are my job. I create and sell fine-art photographs – limited edition, large format prints, signed and numbered, in color, black and white and infrared, reproduced on a variety of surfaces. They have to be perfect in my judgment of perfect. They have to sell – online and at art shows – and to do that they have to make a personal, meaningful connection with potential buyers.

Light is the prime element in my pictures



Previous page: **Wenatchee River.** I went to Tumwater Canyon in eastern Washington to shoot fall color. Sometimes the scene — and in this case the bright spot of light in right third of the photo —tells you what you should be doing, and here it was to make a conversion to black and white. Sony A7R II, Sony FE 16-35mm f/2.8 GM. Exposure: 4 sec., f/16, ISO 50.The cathedral of trees in the Great Smoky Mountains. Nikon Z8, NIKKOR Z 14-24mm f/2.8 S. Exposure: 1/4 sec., f/11, ISO 200.

The Three Wisemen. These aspens are right next to an avalanche chute in the San Juan Mountains in Colorado, so my guess is that while they were growing an avalanche came down and bent them over; then they started to naturally straighten up. Sony A7R II, Sigma 24-70mm f/2.8 DG DN. Exposure: 1/50 second, f/11, ISO 320.





Above: **Monument Valley Storm.** The wind kicked up, the clouds moved in and I knew I was going have all the elements of what I wanted for a dramatic black-and-white image. Sony A7R II, Sony FE 16-35mm f/2.8 GM. Exposure: 264 sec., f/11, ISO 100.

Below: **Howling Dog.** I knew I wanted a very basic, simple photo, and I knew where to place the light to emphasize my dramatic subject. Sony A7R V, Sony FE 16-35mm f/2.8 GM. Exposure: 146 sec., f/11, ISO 100.





Above: **Mount Moran Panorama.** The mountain is the star of the image, but if the sky isn't lit up behind it, it's just a gray mountain with a gray sky filled with gray clouds. Sony A7R V, Sigma 24-70mm f/2.8 DG DN. Exposure: 10 sec., f/16, ISO 400.



aside from the subjects, and it's critical for me to control how it interacts, or doesn't, with those subjects. I've learned to use Photoshop for post-production editing to enhance and even create light when and where I need it.

Editing often affects what I'm thinking about at a location. Editing also means taking a color picture that isn't working for me and turning it into a black and white that's a whole lot more than just acceptable. When it comes to sales, editing makes winners.

Here are the basics of the seven tips promised in the title – the processes, procedures and considerations that work best for me. Each one figures into the look of my work. We'll get to their details further on.

- No matter what your purpose – décor, sale, gift – you can't print everything. Be an objective editor of your own work.
- If you're using a mouse or trackball, get rid of it and get a pen tablet.
- When you edit, make sure the subject of your photo gets the emphasis. Everything else complements and supports that subject.
- Don't hesitate to create light where you need it.
- Create a hard mask for everything you want to individually edit.
- Create a luminosity mask when it's needed.
- Don't edit an image globally until all sections are edited individually.

1. First, Edit Yourself

Make sure there's a spark between you and an image. "Oh, this is a good exposure" is not a reason to print. What's the attraction? The magic? Do you come back to it, again and again?

However you measure success, it will

ultimately come from your judgment if it's going to come at all. If you're starting out selling fine art, I'd say print what you like and see how it goes.

If you're selling, the popularity of a photograph comes with a caution.

My image of Mt. Rainier is very popular, but I know that's because I'm in the Pacific Northwest, and people from this area really like it. But it won't sell in Southern California.

2. Easier Does It

A big change for me, and a big benefit, was getting rid of the mouse in favor of a Wacom pen tablet. It's easier to use and it's more precise than a mouse. It's pressure sensitive; a mouse is a click, a pen tablet is me, and the harder I press, the harder the effect. And it's tactile – it's a drawing instrument, I'm holding a pen, and that's a lot more natural.

3. Full Focus

The first thing I do when I sit down to edit is remind myself that everything I do in the edit has to be in service to the subject. I think, here is my subject, everything else is the ground; water, trees, rocks, the sky – it's all secondary. Everything I do here, in the edit, has to make the subject obvious, dramatic and powerful. So make sure it's always your focus and it gets what it needs to carry the image.

4. Light on the Subject

If it isn't where I want it, or need it, I'll create it in the edit.

My image, *Howling Dog*, is an example. When I got to Bandon Beach, Oregon, the sky was on fire with sunrise light – red, orange, pink on the clouds and reflecting in the water, but by the time I'd set up, with the sun behind me, all that brilliant light was gone. I knew what I'd do in the edit: I'd create sunlight, in Photoshop, behind the *Howling Dog* sea stack, just as it would look when the sun set at that time of year.

Howling Dog is an indication of the control editing provides. It's also an image that was, like all my photographs, shot in color, and like many of them, intended to be black and white from the start.



5. Behind the Masks

Hard masks and luminosity masks are almost always absolutely essential for my edits. Simply, they assure that the subjects of my photographs get the emphasis they need, and that all else gets the supporting roles in the pictures.

A hard mask is an outline I make with the pen tablet of an area I want to work on. I trace out the image's subject, or any other item or section I want to modify, isolating it so nothing else will be affected.

A luminosity mask gives me a reading of the luminosity values in the entire image, not individual sections. It creates shades of white, gray and black, providing me with a guide to the amount of editing I want or need to get the image to my liking.



There are times that masks are used sparingly, or not at all. For *The Three Wisemen* I knew before I took the picture exactly what I wanted to do. Most photos you see of the bent trees are in color because they're taken during fall-color season, and while the bent trees do stand out from the background, you still see a bunch of white aspens all over the place.

I wanted the bent trees to be the subject, and I knew the picture would be black and white. In the edit I pretty much darkened everything in the background so there was no doubt about the subject. This was a photo dependent on what I left out. It was fairly easily to process – I didn't need to make many hard masks, mostly just a luminosity mask on the entire image.

Ominous. A typical Oregon coast sunrise — gray, cloudy, no color — and that all worked to my advantage, as I was down there to shoot black and white. I created the light behind the island; it's just about where the rising sun would be. Sony A7R II, Sony FE 16-35mm f/2.8 GM. Exposure: 0.8 sec., f/10, ISO 320.



Above: **Mesquite Ripples.** In the edit of the color image, I couldn't get the shadows to stand out in my photo of Mesquite Dunes in Death Valley. I consider this picture my "this can work" tfirst nudge in the direction of black and white. Sony A7R II, Sony FE 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 GM. Exposure: 1/500 sec., f/11, ISO 320.

Below: **Menacing Falls.** This is Lower Lewis Falls, on the south side of Mount St. Helens in southern Washington. If you expect to see an H.R. Giger creation suddenly burst through the falls, you're not alone. Sony A7R II, Sony FE 16-35mm f/2.8 GM. Exposure: 0.4 sec., f/16, ISO 50.





Twin Sisters Mountain. An infrared image taken in the Cascade Range. The sensor's blocking filters were removed, so the camera is dedicated to IR photography. For this shot I used an 830nm filter on the lens to get the super-dark effect. Sony A7R Full Spectrum IR, Sony FE 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 GM. Exposure: 1/500 second, f/5, ISO 400.

For *Wenatchee River* I used only a luminosity mask. I'd gone there to shoot fall color, and the light was coming through to the side of the mountain and I got a really gorgeous color image. Then I started thinking of some black-and-white images I'd seen of the area, and they were all shades of gray, and I wondered what I could do with this scene.

In the edit, I gave it my signature look by accentuating the light on the water and the trees. I didn't have to do much with that inverted V of light at two o'clock; that light got me out of my car and down there to take the picture in the first place. It was gone in three minutes, but that was enough time.

If you're familiar with Photoshop, you probably already know about hard masks and luminosity masks. If you're not already using them and you want to learn how, there are a number of ways. I learned from downloaded tutorials while on a container ship traveling to New Zealand. I bought the tutorials, downloaded them and with a lot of trial and error, learned to create the images I wanted.

6. The Global Edit

Global editing is editing the entire image at one time, after the mask treatments. Often, I'm done with every individual part, and then I realize the whole image is a little too dark, so I'll just increase the exposure overall.

My edited images are usually on the dark side because I'm on a backlit monitor and everything on that screen looks brighter than it really is. I know from experience that the image will appear darker in a print if I don't make an adjustment. So remember to edit globally if for no reason other than your backlit monitor.

7. Scene Dependent

Sometimes I specifically go out to shoot black and white; other times I previsualize that black and white will best suit the scene or the light – or I can make it suit them. *Howling Dog* was that way. I knew exactly how it was going to look in black and white.

Sometimes the intent is color, but as I'm editing, I realize the image just doesn't work for me. I'll try a conversion, and often that's when an image starts coming together.

Mount Moran Panorama was a bit different. Someone who saw it recently said, "That's magnificent." A compliment like that deserved the whole story. I said, "If I haven't shot anything for a while, I randomly go through old files, looking for the I-forgot-about-it image. That was Mount Moran as I looked through some Grand Teton images." When I was then asked how many hours it took to do the conversion, I said, "25 to thirty." I didn't add, "Magnificent isn't easy." **OP**

See more of Randy Bott's work at randybottphotography.com.



The Edited Landscape

Minimalism in monochrome with Richie Johns

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHIE JOHNS
TEXT BY BARRY TANENBAUM







"With me, it's all about simplicity," Richie Johns says of his photography. His subjects might be "a little tree, or a barn on its own — something very simple, something easy on the eye." He believes simplicity draws viewers in, encouraging them to focus on the lines, shapes, and textures in his images. It's an invitation to linger and discover the mood of the photograph, which is exactly what he hopes they'll find.

With Johns, simplicity is never complicated. Every photograph is shaped by deliberate intent, and his methods often reveal themselves in concise phrases that capture their essence.

"I always imagine the finished image without any distractions," he explains. "I look at a scene and think first about the composition: Where should I place the main element, and the camera? What's the best angle to get the most out of the subject? What's also important is what I can take out of the composition to create a greater impact."

Essentially, Johns's photography is all about thinking. His *before, during* and *after* of image capture is based on pragmatic decisions and practices that achieve results that please him.

Johns started off doing "the big landscapes" and gradually evolved into his style of minimalism.

"I find minimalism calming," he says, "and it's a lot easier to do than the big landscapes." Subject selection and rendition are innate choices. He seems to know instinctively what will make an ideal subject, how to recognize its possibilities, explore it and present it. "I've always had the knack for composition," he adds. "It comes quite easily."

He also knows the difference between looking and seeing, and between *seeing* and *seeing with purpose*. Knowing those differences literally comes with the territory.

"I'm self-taught, and I've been around nature all my life," he says. "As a kid I loved being out in the woods, and I knew my area really well, even before I started photographing it."

So, we'll start with what he knew best: the territory.

Knowns and Unknowns

What tipped us off to Johns's approach were the notes he posted alongside his online images. A nearby national park came up a few times, along with brief, matter-of-fact phrases about other places — lines like "I came across this," "I saw this tree just down the road," and "We couldn't resist stopping."

Johns often visits favored places when the conditions are right for his photography, and then there are the places happened upon, or briefly noticed, or recommended by those who know his preferences and style and act somewhat like location scouts.

"There are times when I've been driving along a road, seen a picture, turned around and gone back," he says. "In the early days, with my wife driving, in an area not familiar to us, I'd be looking out the window, and every time I thought, Oh, that'll make a good picture, I'd make notes so I could come back."

Johns lives in Plymouth, England. "When I'm home, I'm very lucky. I live 20 minutes from Dartmoor National Park. I have a photo buddy, and anytime there's mist in the air, we're on the phone to each other. 'Are we going?' 'Yeah, we are,' and we can spend hours up there. I'm also 15 minutes from the coast, so popping down is also easy."

The photo titled *Borderline*, taken near the border of England and Scotland, is one of his "on the way to somewhere else" images.

Previous: **Treeline.** A hand-held shot, taken near Therfield Heath, North Hertfordshire, England. "I turned the color shot into black and white because of the way the light was coming up to silhouette the trees." Nikon Z7, NIKKOR Z 24-70mm f/4 S. Exposure: 1/50 sec., f/8, ISO 64.

Opposite: **Borderline.** On a visit to a friend in Stichill, Scotland, Johns noticed the tree. It was the nest that prompted him to hang around. Nikon D800, AF-S NIKKOR 70-200mm f/4G ED VR. Exposure: 1/80 sec., f/8, ISO 100.



Downpour. An incoming storm on the plains, Indian Arrow, Montana. "I'd gone storm chasing – and when the dark and the light sort of met at the tree, I couldn't believe the luck." Nikon D800, AF-S NIKKOR 70-200mm f/4G ED VR. Exposure: 1/1000 sec., f/4, ISO 400.



Windswept. Near Beachy Head, East Sussex, England. "This little tree sits on a cliff top. About 30 meters on, there's the drop-off. It's well- photographed." Nikon D800, AF-S NIKKOR 16-35mm f/4G ED VR. Exposure: 1/40 sec., f/8, ISO 100.



"I just happened to notice the tree," Johns notes. Well, not only the tree, but also the texture of the plowed field, the unmistakably photogenic Mohawk-haircut foliage, the nicely-painted sky and, most significantly, the bird's nest. "I thought, I'll just hang around for a while," he says, "and when the bird showed up, everything worked perfectly."

Buachaille Etive Beag, titled for the Scottish Highlands mountain it portrays, was a case of "We had to stop on our way to the airport." Stopping, though, was just the start. He also walked 20 minutes into the landscape with camera bag and tripod until he came upon the S-bend.

Natural Selection

Recognizing a scene's potential isn't a problem – the subject, the light, the weather, shape, pattern and contrast all come into play – but deciding what to leave out also plays a part. With *Buachaille Etive Beag*, for example, Johns eliminated another mountain by choosing a square-format composition.

Twister needed a different solution. "The location is a reservoir in Cornwall, and in the summer the water levels drop and expose trees and shrubs. From the water's edge I was able to clean things up by taking away lots of little bits of debris and shrubs."

Branching Out, one of Johns's favorite images, was taken on a murky, drizzling day when no one goes out except photographers looking for exactly those conditions. "When I turn up to a scene, I try to visualize what the end result is going to be, and then I move the camera so that I have to take the least amount of stuff away. In this case, there were some branches on the left."

Often a scene is clean and clear, but the time isn't right for what Johns specifically

Above: **Branching Out.** A re-edit version to isolate a single branch overhanging the waters of Wast Water Lake in Lake District National Park, England. Nikon Z7, NIKKOR Z 14-30mm f/4 S. Exposure: 30 sec., f/8, ISO 60.

Opposite top: **Sunlight.** Johns's decision to face the sun rather than shoot with it behind him resulted in a much more dramatic image, taken in mid-Devon County, England. Nikon D800, AF-S NIKKOR 16-35mm f/4G ED VR. Exposure: 1/30 sec., f/20, ISO 100.

Opposite bottom: **Deadwood.** Johns had to wait until dark for the image he wanted of an old tree he came across between Camber Sands and Dungeness, England. Nikon D800, AF-S NIKKOR 16-35mm f/4G ED VR. Exposure: 1/160 sec., f/11, ISO 200.







The Other Side. The waterfalls at Kirkjufellsfoss, in West Iceland, attract a lot of tourists with cameras. Johns photographed from the side less visited. Nikon D800, AF-S NIKKOR 16-35mm f/4G ED VR. Exposure: 30 sec., f/8, ISO 100.



Twister. The exposure caught shadow ripples at the base of the branches in the Colliford Reservoir in Cornwall, England. Nikon D800, Sigma 105mm f/2.8 EX DG OS HSM Macro. Exposure: 1/125 sec., f/8, ISO 100.

Next page: **Old Posts.** The remains of a jetty after years of hurricanes and storms, Magnolia Beach, Fairhope, Alabama. "Shooting in the mist takes the background away. I want the viewer's eye to go to the particular structure or subject." Nikon Z7, NIKKOR Z 24-200mm f/4-6.3 VR. Exposure: 5 sec., f/10, ISO 64.









wants to see. *Deadwood* was one of those. "I'd passed by earlier in the day and liked the scene, but it was too bright. I wanted backlight to emphasize the shape of the tree, and dark skies to set the mood, so I came back in the evening. There were showers in the area, but I waited to get just the right amount of light."

Sunlight is an example of how taking a little walk can make all the difference in a photograph. Johns made the photo early on a frosty day as the sun was coming up. At first, he was on the other side of the trees, the sun at his back. But rather than shoot from there, with the shadows moving away from him, he walked around to face the sun and waited until it was halfway up the trees. The picture he made from that vantage point made the shadows — and their gesture of reaching toward him — the subject of the image.

The Other Side is similar, but there the idea was simply to find a different viewpoint. "Most people who photograph the waterfalls at Kirkjufellsfoss do it from one [particular, favored] side," Johns says. "I went around to the other side, where the tourists don't go, and got in close to emphasize the five little waterfalls in a long-exposure photo."

Screen Time

Simplicity applies to Johns's editing as well. He's self-taught in Photoshop as well as photography; he mainly used magazines and YouTube tutorials to learn to edit. "I think anyone with an elementary knowledge of Photoshop can do what I do," he says.

He uses Adobe Camera Raw for his adjustments, along with a feature that simplifies everything. "It's an option in Camera Raw called Landscapes, and it works automatically using AI. I put a picture up on the screen in Camera Raw and go up to the mask icon in the toolbar and select Landscape. Photoshop automatically selects parts of the image — like the sky, water, mountains, vegetation, trees, even buildings. I then select which ones I want to edit and click Create. Photoshop then builds an individual mask for each one I've selected. I can edit each mask individually using all the normal Photoshop sliders. Once I'm happy with the edits, I move the image from Camera Raw into Photoshop for a bit of fine-tuning."

Better Than Postcards

Johns got started in photography when a trip to the Caribbean prompted him to get a camera so he could show people what he was seeing. "It was more personalized than the postcards I was choosing," he says. Soon "This is what I want you to see" came to include nature subjects.

He began with muted color. "I was inspired by Rohan Reilly and Trevor Cotton, photographers who liked muted color and long exposures. I got off the big landscapes and started doing muted-color minimals."

Simplicity was there from the start; the idea was always to direct the viewer's eye to a single subject. "Gradually I found my own little niche," Johns says, "and I knew I'd found it when I thought, I really enjoy doing this."

Choosing to shoot black and white was equally an aesthetic decision — "Michael Kenna was my inspiration for that" — and a practical one. Bright, sunny days, with their harsh light and high contrast, were not ideal for color photography.

"Summertime is definitely a good time for black and white, although I'll still convert images at other times of the year if I think they'd benefit. In spring, autumn, and winter, I usually shoot color minimals. It gives me the best of both worlds — minimal color images and, when the weather dictates, black-and-white minimals. On a hot summer's day, with the sun shining, I might even photograph a few colorful butterflies.

"I don't want to lose touch with the camera." **OP**

See more of Richie John's work on Instagram at instagram.com/richiej1_john.

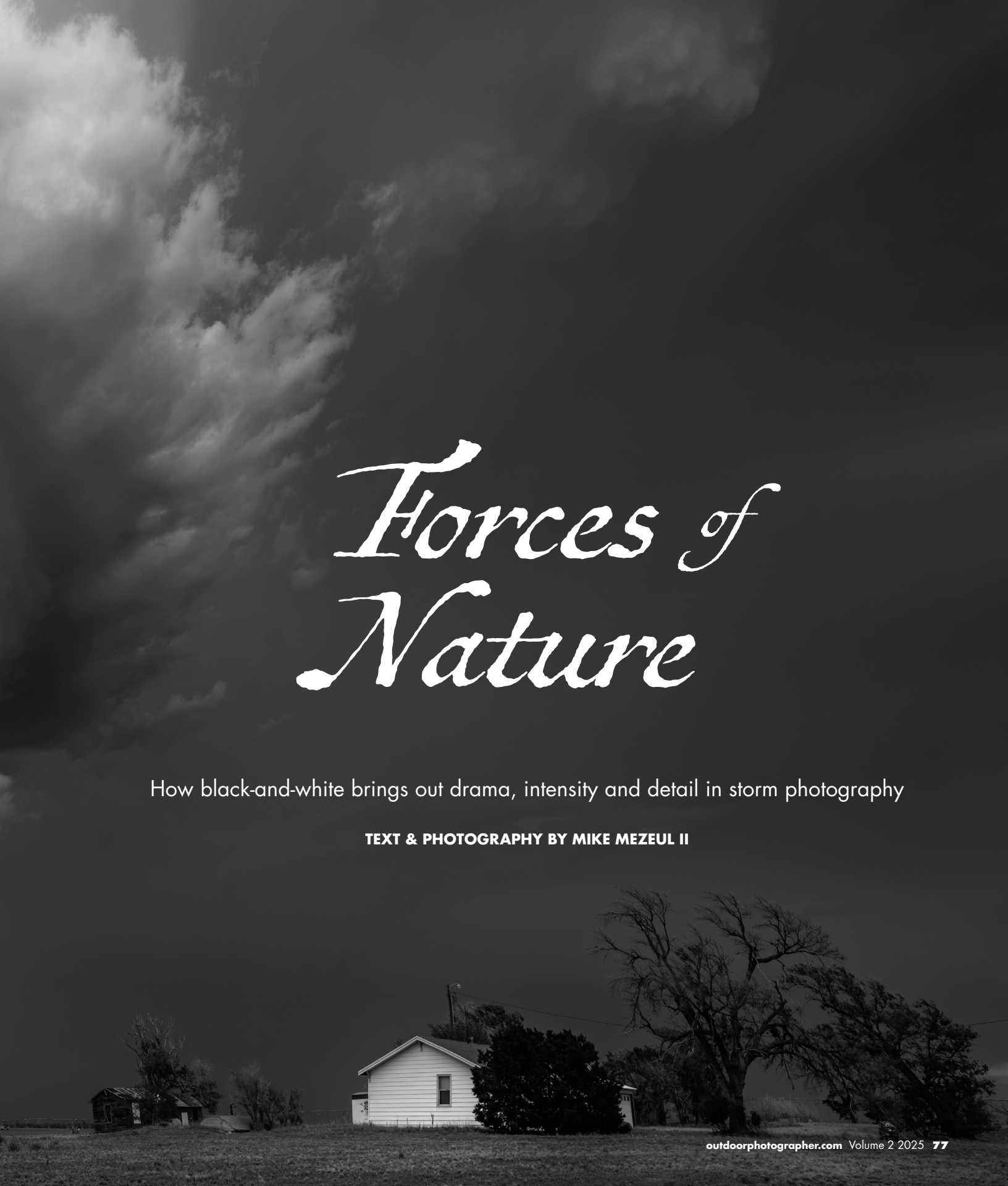
Buachaille Etive Beag. The mountain, in the Scottish Highlands, was the main attraction, but it took a 20-minute hike for Johns to find his choice of vantage point. Nikon Z7, NIKKOR Z 14-30mm f/4 S. Exposure: 1/20 sec., f/11, ISO 100.



Forces of Nature

How black-and-white brings out drama, intensity and detail in storm photography

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE MEZEUL II





Our sky can contain some of the most incredibly beautiful displays of nature. From billowing cumulonimbus clouds towering nearly 70,000 feet to vibrant double rainbows, pastel sunsets and texture-filled storm clouds – by simply looking up, our jaws can hit the floor. It's one of the most magnificent shows in the world, and the best part? It's free.

For the past 25 years, I've spent countless hours chasing and photographing the sky all over the world. From sunrises to sunsets to dazzling astronomical displays, I've found myself absolutely fascinated by what nature can do. Although the sky is stunning every second of every day, I can say without a doubt that I am addicted to photographing the power and beauty of storms.

Storms can bring fear, awe and beauty to the viewer's eyes, and the colors within them can be spectacular. But there is a power and a mystical presence, let's call it, in photographing storms in black and white. In this article, I'll share why I feel a monochromatic approach to photographing some of the most powerful forces in the world can be rewarding, and the steps I take to do so.

The Power of Black and White

Since the days of Ansel Adams, black-and-white imagery has evoked an emotional intensity in viewers – some emotions describable, some indescribable. Black and white brings a sense of timelessness, a focus on light and shadow, and a richer feel for texture and detail. Contours, shapes and lines all emerge more strongly when freed from color.

If you've ever found yourself gazing at a thunderstorm, you may have noticed that the details of the clouds are more distinct and intricate compared to other formations. Don't

Previous page: A tornadic supercell thunderstorm approaches an abandoned homestead near Sudan, Texas, moments after producing a tornado. Nikon Z7 II, NIKKOR Z 14-24mm f/2.8 S. Exposure: 1/160 sec., f/10, ISO 200.

Above: Simultaneous cloud-to-ground lightning bolts strike the mountains east of the Willcox Playa in Arizona during a monsoon thunderstorm. Nikon Z7 II, NIKKOR Z 24-70mm f/4 S. Exposure: 10 sec., f/8, ISO 31.

Opposite: An abandoned truck sits in the middle of a desolate field in the Texas Panhandle as a severe storm moves into the distance, leaving a dramatic display of mammatus clouds above. Nikon D850, AF-S NIKKOR 14-24mm f/2.8G ED. Exposure: 5 sec., f/22, ISO 31.



get me wrong – some of my favorite storm images are in color. But there truly is a place for monochrome when shooting storms.

Pre-Visualization and Storytelling

For many of my projects, I storyboard, pre-visualize and even sketch (more like doodle, actually) anticipated scenes I hope to capture. With storms, all of that goes out the window. Nature is completely in control of every second, minute and hour while documenting storms.

With every passing moment, the scene changes – from the way the light works its way through the clouds to the textures, shapes and movements within the frame. Thunderstorms are meteorological events, but the moment the shutter clicks, they become emotional landscapes.

Chasing storms to photograph may sound easy. It only requires patience, perseverance and the passion to drive thousands of miles in a season chasing water vapor in hopes that it develops into something photogenic. Once a storm does, you must properly position yourself with the light, the road network and escape routes in mind.

Oh, and you have to do all of this while staying safe from tornadoes, softball-sized hail, hurricane-force winds, deadly lightning and flash flooding. Okay – maybe "easy" wasn't the right word. No matter how challenging it can be to capture one image of a storm, I return to Tornado Alley each year with excitement and curiosity about what show nature will put on.

I go out with my gear having no expectations – expectations usually lead to disappointment. Instead, I go out with an open mindset that allows me to connect with the story in front of me.

Storms have personalities. Some look like monstrous aerial beasts chiseled out of stone. They appear apocalyptic and remind you how insignificant you are compared to the powers of this planet.



A powerful EF3 tornado dances across the Kansas prairies just south of Dodge City. Nikon D810, AF-S NIKKOR 70-200mm f/2.8E FL ED VR. Exposure: 1/320 sec., f/5, ISO 200.





Others feel like a Bob Ross painting. Feathered clouds, soft textures and dancing curtains of rain bring peace and ease. Whatever the sky presents, I step back, connect, analyze the scene and decide what story my frame may tell.

It's hard to describe the feeling that compels me to photograph a storm in black and white, but key deciding factors are the emotions invoked, incredible texture, unique shapes and designs, and higher contrast.

Gear and Settings

Photographing storms in black and white requires a slightly different approach. I usually don't worry about picture controls since I shoot in Raw and convert in post. But if I know my scene is monochromatic, I switch to a monochrome picture control. Although the Raw file is still in color, this preview shows me how the image will look in black and white.

I believe most good color scenes don't make great black-and-white images, and vice versa. Having a visual preview on the LCD allows me to refine and get as close to perfect as possible in the field. I'm not a fan of the "fix it in post" mentality.

Next, I use highlight-weighted metering on my Nikon Z8 to ensure I expose for the highlights. Overexposed highlights are hard to recover and can become distracting. I'll also use filters to create a more contrasted, dramatic sky that pulls out texture and shapes. These are usually a circular polarizer or a red filter. Both are useful for separating tones in black and white.

Regardless of color or monochrome, I bring a variety of lenses – from the NIKKOR Z 14-24mm to the NIKKOR Z 24-120mm and even the NIKKOR Z 100-400mm. Storms are massive and can present storytelling opportunities at all focal lengths.

Composition in Monochrome

Finding compositions in Tornado Alley can be challenging. If you've ever driven through the prairies of Oklahoma, Kansas or Nebraska, you get the idea. The foreground is limited. Roads, cornfields, cattle

Above: A detailed look at the condensation funnel of a tornado in the "roping-out" phase. Nikon Z7 II, NIKKOR Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S. Exposure: 1/400 sec., f/5.6, ISO 200..

Opposite top: A shelf cloud passes overhead in Kansas, revealing a scene known as "the whale's mouth," as a cloud-to-ground lightning bolt strikes before the rain arrives. Nikon Z9, NIKKOR Z 14-24mm f/2.8 S. Exposure: 1 sec., f/11, ISO 40.

Opposite bottom: A six-image panoramic of a striated supercell thunderstorm in West Texas. Nikon Z8, NIKKOR Z 24-120mm f/4 S. Exposure: 1/160 sec., f/6.3, ISO 800.





and, if you're lucky, abandoned farmsteads are my usual options.

Out in the field, I look less for traditional leading lines and more for light-to-dark transitions that guide the eye. This might be highlights reflecting off steel railroad tracks or the contrast between a bright home and a dark sky. Again, shooting in monochrome picture control helps me see this flow in real time.

I try to keep brighter tones away from the edges of the frame, where they can distract from the main subject. I also use negative space at times to convey scale against the vast sky.

Post-Processing

When it's time to download files and get to work in the digital darkroom, I keep a few key considerations in mind. Post-processing is necessary, but it's easy to create an image that isn't true to the moment. Storms are fascinating enough; I want my edits to represent nature as it was.

I do about 70 percent of my workflow in Lightroom Classic. I increase contrast via the shadows, blacks, whites and highlight sliders. Then I'll increase midtone contrast with clarity and dehaze, but only in small amounts to avoid haloing.

For black-and-white images, remember to convert from color to monochrome in post and use the B&W Mixer to separate tonal values. Also check your black and white points – your image should look like true black and white, not muddy gray tones.

In Photoshop, the most powerful technique for black-and-white imagery is dodging and burning. I often dodge subtle highlights in rain curtains and burn the storm base to emphasize depth. In my opinion, this technique can make or break an image.

Final Thoughts

Storms should be respected, appreciated and approached cautiously. But when done safely, there's nothing more rewarding than capturing an image of a subject that literally vanishes into thin air. Whether in color or black and white, the drama of a storm-filled sky always has a story to tell. **OP**

See more of Mike Mezeul II's work at mikemezphotography.com.



Above: A "negatively charged" cloud-to-ground lightning bolt and its branches turn night into day along the U.S.-Mexico border. Nikon Z9, NIKKOR Z 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 VR S. Exposure: 13 sec., f/9, ISO 320.

Opposite top: Stars shine brightly above an incredible low-precipitation supercell illuminated by lightning strikes. Nikon D850, AF-S NIKKOR 24-70mm f/2.8E ED VR. Exposure: 30 sec., f/5, ISO 400.

Opposite bottom: An explosive updraft on the backside of a tornadic supercell towers nearly 60,000 feet into the air near Earth, Texas. Nikon Z7 II, NIKKOR Z 14-24mm f/2.8 S. Exposure: 0.8 sec., f/13, ISO 100.







MELTING GIANTS

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLE THOMPSON



Upon birth, they immediately begin to die, wandering the oceans in search of their final resting place.

A few years ago, I overheard two men talking about the icebergs that drift along the coast of Newfoundland. That piqued my interest, and off I went on a one-month, 9,000-mile journey.

I never prepare when I travel to a new location — no studying maps, guidebooks or the work of other photographers. I try to arrive with no preconceived ideas, trusting (and hoping) that I will see something that inspires me.

When I arrived and saw my first icebergs, I was saddened. These gentle giants live short lives. Calved from glaciers, they spend 9 to 12 months wandering the ocean until they reach the coast of Newfoundland, where they run aground and break apart in the surf — ending their brief existence.

I didn't envision these icebergs in the beautiful deep blues they're so often depicted in, but instead in stark, contrasty black and white. That was my vision of what I saw and how I felt.

Note on Captions

When *Outdoor Photographer* asked me to include captions for each of the photos in this series, including the camera gear and settings I used, I declined — but I agreed to explain why. I don't want to promote the idea that a great image comes from cameras, settings or processing "secrets." For me, a great image comes from the idea or vision, with equipment and processing as the tools to express it. Vision is the most important tool in my toolbox. **OP**

See more of Cole Thompson work at colethompsonphotography.com.



























When a Bear Photobombs the Perfect Sunrise

Lake Clark National Park & Preserve, Alaska

Text & Photography by Molly McCormick



The Scene

I woke up around 5 a.m., poked my head out of the cabin and quickly gathered my gear. A beautiful sunrise was unfolding over the Crescent River in Lake Clark National Park & Preserve in Alaska. Morning fog mixed with the stillness of the water to create a mystical atmosphere – I felt like I was on another planet.

September is a great time to visit Lake Clark, as the bears are especially active during the salmon run. After a quick cup of coffee, we headed out onto the lake in a flat-bottom boat to see what Mother Nature had in store.

The Gear

I used my Nikon D810 with an AF-S NIKKOR 24-70mm f/2.8G ED, one of the lenses I reach for most often. It's a favorite of mine for landscapes. I had a long lens with me as well, but I wanted to capture the entire scene, which is why I chose the 24-70mm.

Since I was shooting from a boat and the water was calm and glassy, I took the shot without a tripod or monopod. I bumped my ISO to 640 to pull as much detail as possible from the scene, which was full of subtle color variations. My settings were 44mm, 1/250 sec. at f/5.

The Approach

My planned approach to this shot was simple: capture the epic sunrise. The reflection of the mountains and clouds on the water was breathtaking. Combined with the soft colors, it looked like a painting, and I was stoked to be immersed in such a beautiful place.

As I was shooting, my eyes drifted left and caught movement on the bank. A big coastal brown bear had wandered into the scene. At first it was heading the opposite direction, but when it reared up on its hind legs, it noticed a sow and two cubs approaching. That caused it to change course.

This is where I always remind myself: patience pays off. We waited to see if the bear would continue along the bank, and it did just that. My jaw practically hit the bottom of the boat – I couldn't have asked for a better photobomb.

The biggest challenge was making sure I nailed the exposure with so many elements at play. I didn't want to blow out the sky, but I also wanted to preserve the soft reflections of the water and trees. Since the bear was a surprise addition, I decided to keep it as a near-silhouette against the colors and fog, which made for a striking contrast.

The Final Image

After capturing this scene, I reflected on what it means to be a wildlife photographer. I consider this my most successful photo because it encapsulates the wildness of Alaska. One of my goals with photography is to show species in their natural environment. I believe it's crucial to share what these places look like – and why they need to be protected and honored. We must be a voice for our wild places.

Patience and having zero expectations play a key role in capturing moments like this. I never head out assuming I'll come back with an epic shot. I leave it up to Mother Nature, and that's when the real magic happens.

My advice for anyone lucky enough to photograph in Alaska is to be patient and don't rush. Set your alarm early and savor those morning hours when the light is perfect and wildlife is active. It's also smart to carry two camera bodies with different lenses. I had a long lens on my Nikon D850 but kept the 24-70mm lens ready to go on my D810 in case moments like this popped up. The last thing you want is to be fumbling with a lens change, especially on the water.

Lastly – and probably the most important advice I can offer – have fun and love what you do. I don't believe in a "perfect" shot. It's all relative to what inspires you to pick up a camera and head out into the field. We're incredibly fortunate to experience places like this. Don't get so focused on getting "the shot" that you miss the beauty around you. Enjoy the moment and let go of the pressure – everything else will fall into place. **OP**

See more of Molly McCormick's work at mollymccormickphoto.com.

>>> *Nikon D810, AF-S NIKKOR 24-70mm f/2.8G ED at 44mm. Exposure: 1/250 sec., f/5, ISO 640.*



GANG OF FOUR

When Ralph Robinson spotted this gritty group of rockhopper penguins on Pebble Island in the Falklands, he could think of only one thing: They looked like they were up to no good. The penguins' synchronized strut and expressive body language inspired the photo's tongue-in-cheek title, *Gang of Four*.

Robinson says careful planning helped him pick the right spot to capture this moment of magic.

"I noticed a well-worn path running from the colony at the top of the cliff down to the ocean," Robinson recalls.

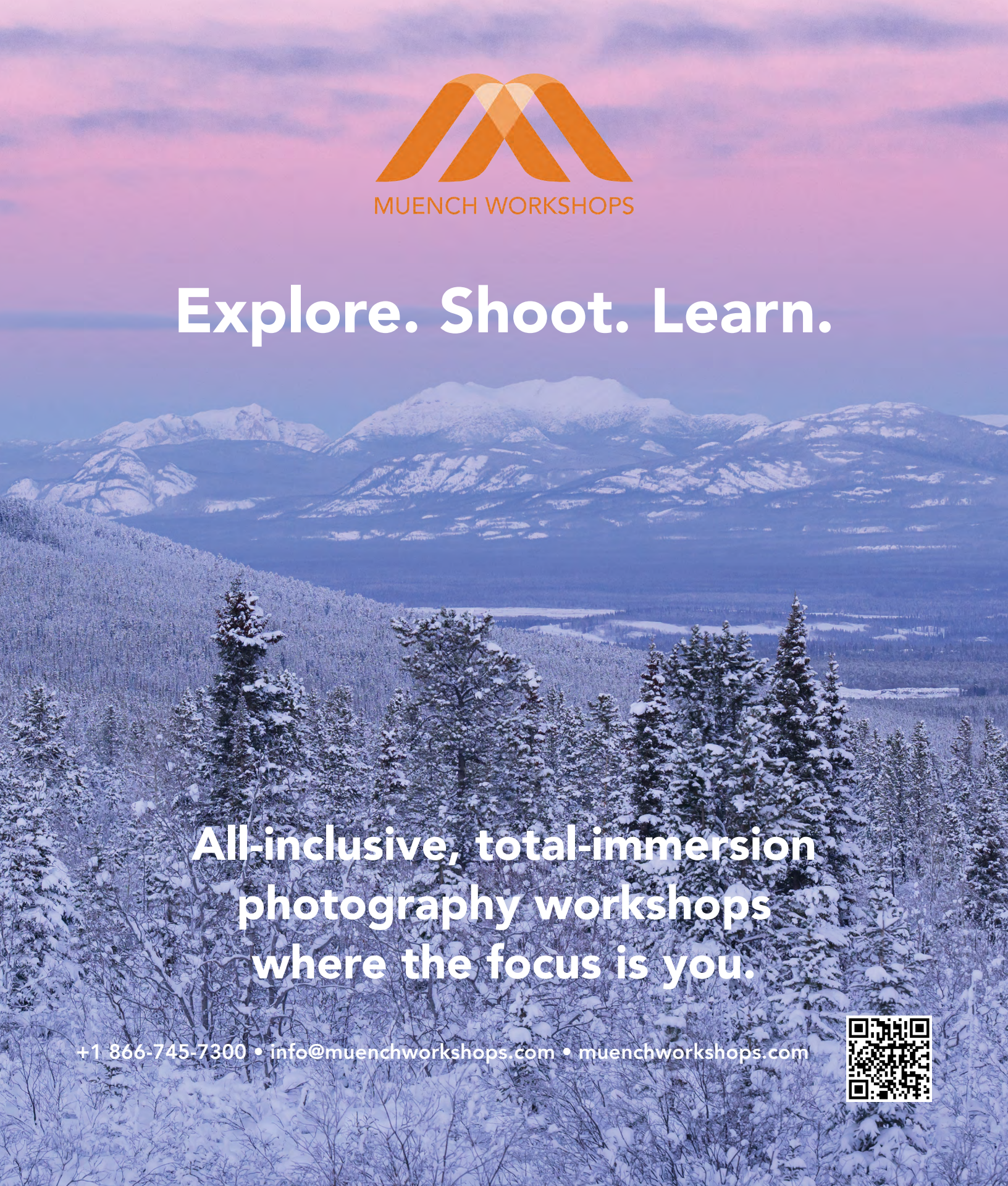
"Penguins were coming and going in small groups, and it looked like I could position myself just off the trail — close enough for a good angle, but not so close that I'd interfere with their feeding behavior. I waited, and this group crested the ridge right on cue."

He adds, "Anticipating behavior is an important part of wildlife photography. Sometimes, the best thing you can do is find the right spot, wait patiently and let the animals write the story." **OP**

See more of Ralph Robinson's work at ralphrobinsonimagery.com.

>>> *Sony A1, Sony FE 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G OSS at 559mm, handheld. Exposure: 1/800 sec., f/6.3, ISO 200.*

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