

HORIZON NEWS #54

IMAGES, THOUGHTS AND NEWS FROM HORIZON PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS

Chiaroscuro: the use of strong contrasts between light and dark, usually bold contrasts affecting a whole composition.

Wikipedia

Chiaroscuro a la California



Extreme image contrast is a recurring challenge to photographers. Too much differential between light and dark can result in blown-out highlights or pitch-black shadows, both of which are *usually* undesirable. Photographers generally seek to reduce extreme contrast by employing one or more tools: flash, reflector, HDR, image processing (Curves, Levels, Dodging/Burning, etc.).

For some subjects, strong contrast — “chiaroscuro” — hits the bull’s eye. Here are three excellent examples taken during last month’s “Western Adventure” in California. (Next year’s trip >> see page 3.)

Roger Singley turned a simple hat and shirt into a strong interplay of colors and shapes. The extensive black powerfully isolates the key visual elements. **Sherm Levine** caught a pensive Roger looking down toward a low light source. Here, blacks create drama. (Does the highlight on Roger’s head symbolize something going on inside?) **Esther Steffans’** B&W image of a row of abandoned cabins near Roy’s Cafe in Amboy, CA, is a very different, and effective, example of chiaroscuro.

Was there digital enhancement to any of these three images, or was the lighting totally natural? We don’t know. We don’t care. We only care about the look of the final image, which is why we stay alert *not only* for naturally occurring high-contrast situations but for situations that, with digital tweaking, we can produce strong chiaroscuro effects .

If you love chiaroscuro, Italian painter **Caravaggio** is “the man”; he mastered this “look” 400+ years before these photos were taken.



Speaking of digitally-enhanced contrast, here's a very different application — using a shot by **Maggie Smith** of Skull Rock in **Joshua Tree National Park**. [In the park, it's the huge boulders, not the trees, that are the real stars.] The sun was *behind* the rock, so the light was shadowless. Flat light made for weak “skull” features. To bump up the contrast, a combination of Curves, Levels, Burning and Brightness/Contrast was used.

Digitally manipulating Mother Nature is a highly subjective decision. These days, most photographers choose maximizing visual impact over reproducing reality. What this means is that after seeing the manipulated photo, a visitor to Skull Rock might well be disappointed by the real thing.



Our group was walking out of the Visitor Center in Kingman, AZ when I spotted this biblical-looking face in the parking lot. (Photographic treasures can be discovered in the most mundane places.) I had two challenges as group leader. First, engage the stranger in extended and “real” conversation so he would ignore clicking cameras, generate natural expressions and gestures, and allow my students plenty of time to shoot. That was easy — he was talkative and expressive. The second challenge was to get him to turn his face from shadow — which is where I found him — toward sun. That was easy, too — I just inched to my left as we conversed.

Here are three fine shots of a truly memorable face. I'm especially fond of Roger's portrait (below); he caught the precise moment when a gust of wind blew the man's flowing mane across his eyes.

No one used flash fill here. Should they have? Yes, it would reveal more in the eyes. No, it would draw (unwanted) attention to the photographer(s). No one answer here.

— Steve Gottlieb

[Below: Roger Singley; Top Rt: Esther Steffans; Lower Rt: Sherm Levine]



More Great Western Shots



How would you light the inside of a cave? On-camera flash makes the foreground rocks too bright and the background too dark. Some form of “light painting” is needed to distribute light relatively evenly. Here, a reflector was used to catch a narrow band of light coming through a hole in the cave; moving the reflector to and fro illuminated the entire scene evenly. The shutter speed was 10 seconds; each person needed to remain still during the 1.5 seconds that light was reflected onto them.
Photo: **Margaret Verhey**



In Joshua Tree National Park at night there’s no ambient light, except for stray headlights. Total darkness allows the camera shutter to be open for an indefinite time (using the “BULB” setting). After a few test shots to get a fix on the right combination of f.stop and flash power, Steve held the flash away from his face and moved around the rocks, popping the flash six times. Why no motion blur during this very long exposure? Flash freezes the action. (Dots of light in sky are stars.) Photo: **Rhoda Levine**



A high ISO enabled **Maggie Smith** to hand-hold this tasty mix of pattern and motion in the interior of Las Vegas’s Venetian Hotel. ... At a vintage car gathering in Seligman, AZ, **Ray Hull** captured a detail of a weatherbeaten Mercury(?); turning the shot ninety degrees gave the car fin the feel of a rocket ship.



Save the Date >> 2014 Western Adventure

Dates: Sunday, April 27 to Sunday, May 4 (Note: this is one day longer than previous Horizon Western Adventures due to abundance of exceptional destinations).

Location: Death Valley to Eastern Sierras (departing from Las Vegas)

Highlights: Death Valley, Eastern Sierras/Inyo National Forest, Mono Lake, Bodie Ghost Town, Mammoth Lakes, June Lake, Yosemite Park, Las Vegas



Esther Steffans

“Abandoned Factory Photo Contest”

PRIZES

FIRST PRIZE: \$150 + \$150 Horizon Gift Certificate

SECOND PRIZE: \$100 + \$100 Gift Certificate

THIRD PRIZE: \$50 + \$50 Gift Certificate

12 Honorable Mentions: \$50 Gift Certificate

RULES

- Anyone who joins Steve Gottlieb for the NVF abandoned factory visit in Yorklyn, DE, is eligible.*
 - Email up to **THREE** lowres images of the factory to Horizon by Nov. 12.
 - Winners will be notified in late November; they must then provide a 13 x 17 print of their winning image(s).
- We will matte & frame prints for *permanent* exhibit at the factory.**
A “Gallery Party” will be held at the factory in early 2014.

* See dates below...or create a date exclusively for your club/meetup members.

Upcoming Workshops

June 30: Abandoned Factory, Yorklyn, DE (1/2 day)
July 13: The Creative “i”: Shooting with iPhone
July 27: Glamour & Beauty
Aug. 18: Abandoned Factory (1/2 day)
Sept. 14-15: Real People, Real Places
Oct 5 - 6: Flash Magic: Indoors & Outside
Oct. 5: Adobe Lightroom
Oct. 6: Photoshop Elements
Oct. 11: Camera Basics
Oct. 12-13: Creative Vision: 2 Day
Oct. 19-20: Washington DC: Icons w/ a Creative Eye
Oct. 25-27: Chesapeake City thru Nat’l Geo Eyes
Nov. 2: Abandoned Factory (1/2 day)



Photo in Abandoned Factory by Steve Gottlieb

END FRAME

Every spring and fall, Horizon Director **Steve Gottlieb** leads a workshop in D.C. (Next date: Oct. 19-20.) A favorite stop is the tunnel joining the East and West buildings of the National Gallery. Over the years, students have shot an impressive variety of wonderful images, as the tiny lights ebb, flow and undulate and people move in and out. **David Aloisio** was the first student who took full advantage of the periphery of the passageway in his shot. The lights seem to be cradled in a question mark followed by an exclamation point. **BEAUTIFUL, NO?!**

