

# HORIZON NEWS #64

IMAGES, THOUGHTS AND NEWS FROM HORIZON PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS

***Magic Hour: a period shortly after sunrise and before sunset during which daylight is redder and softer compared to when the Sun is higher in the sky.***

Wikipedia

## The “Magic Hour” BEFORE and AFTER the “Magic Hour”

Steve Gottlieb

Every photographer agrees: on sunny days, light can be especially delicious during the “magic hour,” those minutes after sunrise and before sunset. It’s no surprise that photographers are especially anxious to be out shooting during those times. But the time *before* sunrise and *after* sunset can possess its own magic...yet that’s when many shooters tuck their cameras in their cases, kick up their heels and relax their eyes. They shouldn’t. If you want your images to have distinctive atmospherics, opportunities abound at those times, all the more if you’ve mastered your flash. Here are some post-sunset shots I took at last month’s Ireland workshop.

Ireland is known for its hyper-green grass, one of the few benefits that come to mind from the country’s year ‘round rain and relatively cool temperatures. The town of Doolin, on Ireland’s western coast, has a golf course exhibiting that hyper-green color. About 30 minutes after sunset, the sky took on a rich blue cast that contrasted beautifully with the grass. No saturation was added here; the only significant processing was brightening up the grass about one stop. With a shutter speed of 1/10 sec., a tripod was essential.



About 400 yards away from the golf course lies the Atlantic ocean. At low tide, rock formations appear that are absolutely fantastical, unlike anything I’ve seen elsewhere. The reflective blue/white surf was much brighter than the dark brown, non-reflective rocks, so flash was needed to brighten the rocks and reduce the overall contrast. Keeping the flash in its normal position, i.e., pointed down at the rocks, made the closest part of the rock formation much lighter than the area further away. Simple solution: point the flash up about 15 degrees, which “feathers” its light, thereby balancing near and far areas. (There is no flash head “click” at that



angle so I just held the head in place by hand.) Moving the flash *off-camera* would undoubtedly have improved this shot. That would have given the undulation in the rocks greater definition by creating more distinct highlights and shadows. (Direct, on-camera flash reduces or eliminates shadows.) My Panasonic Lumix GH3 has remote capability. Why didn't I use it? Laziness, pure and simple. I had just finished a very long workshop day and was about out of gas, so I chose not to take the extra minute or two to do it right. Now, of course, I wish I had.



Just up the road from the golf course were pastures with grazing cows—friendlier (or perhaps more curious) than their American cousins that I've known. To maintain the moody dark hues of the environment, I set my manual exposure two stops under "normal." Then, using a 10mm lens (20mm on full frame SLRs), I used the zoom feature on my flash and set it at 70mm. That focused the flash on the head of the cow in the foreground. It took a few shots (and a couple of minutes) to determine the precise flash and ambient exposure mix I wanted; the cows were patient and, like most animals I've photographed, weren't disturbed by flash.



The next two shots were taken on Inisheer island, an hour ferry ride from Doolin. Inisheer is a haunting step back in time; its most distinctive feature is a maze of centuries-old rock walls, which are so prevalent and well-constructed that it's hard to imagine that early inhabitants had time to do anything but build them. The top image, taken shortly after sunset from atop the island's largest hill, captures the walls' arrangement; an added touch was the cows grazing in one of the miniscule grassy areas enclosed by the walls. To maintain the richness of the grass and deep grey of the stone, I shot this one stop below "normal."



The second shot, of students Sarah and Helen, was taken a few minutes later. Manual exposure was set 1 1/3 stops under to subdue the background; then I popped my TTL flash directly on them; the differential between the normal exposure on the people from the flash and the slightly darker background, subtly causes them to pop out of the background. ##



## CELEBRATING SARAH

Several days before our Ireland workshop began, Sarah broke a bone in her foot. Undaunted, she came on the trip anyway. With an assist from her boot—and her husband, Mel—she kept pace with the group...and took many wonderful shots (see, e.g., left). Bravo Sarah! Here's my shot of her taken in a plaza in the vibrant city of Galway. SG



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