

HORIZON NEWS #68

IMAGES, THOUGHTS AND NEWS FROM HORIZON PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS

“Everything was an adventure at night, when you were where you shouldn’t be, even if it was somewhere you could go perfectly well in daylight, and it was then only ordinary.”

Robin McKinley, Pegasus

Rock + Moon + Flash(light) = Photographer’s Heaven

Steve Gottlieb

Over the years, I’ve photographed some amazing rock formations in the Grand Canyon, Bryce, Zion, Yosemite, Joshua Tree, Monument Valley, Antelope Canyon (see last Horizonews), the Burren in Ireland. If you asked me to recommend just one rock formation for you to photograph, it wouldn’t be any of those places. It would be Devil’s Garden...especially at night. Never heard of it? Few have—including, until recently, yours truly. It’s southeast of the quaint, no stoplight town of Escalante, Utah. Devil’s Garden gets scant attention in travel guides, I assume because it’s not large and it’s a 20 mile drive off the highway, mostly on rough dirt road. It would never have hit my radar screen but for Tracy Hassett, a local photographer who was supremely generous with his time and insider information. When I asked him to suggest a place to take my workshop group for night photography, he said Devil’s Garden couldn’t be topped; his fine photos of the place underscored the point.

Our group arrived before sunset to get our bearings, take some daylight pictures and select good spots to shoot once it got dark. It was obvious from the moment we arrived that this was a magical place. Large, sculpted rocks with dramatic, cavernous spaces between them, with an occasional tree punctuating the rocky landscape. The Garden was spread over about four acres, so it didn’t overwhelm. Being this remote guarantees there’ll be no ambient light from towns, houses or cars. In fact, when night fell, we were the only humans in the place, which creates the lovely illusion of being trailbreaking explorers, discovering a place for the very first time. >>>



Before sunset, **Rhoda Levine** grabbed this shot of a pair of monoliths. At the tip of the front rock’s “nose” is the moon; that’s how small it appears with a wide angle lens. **Yair Egozy’s** shot of this stone arch beautifully captures the feel of Devil’s Garden. [I see animals in both pictures...do you?]



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This night was moonlit, which is good for two reasons. First, once the eyes adjust, you can see quite well, which makes it easier to compose your picture and safer to climb around. Second, the moon can serve as a light source. Moonlight is not bright, which means a long exposure is required, but that's good—it gives you time to paint with your artificial source—flash or flashlight.

How do you determine the right exposure? There are **six variables**. 1. ISO. 2. F.stop. 3. Shutter speed. 4. Moon brightness, which depends on its position in the sky (low on the horizon = less bright) and the lunar phase (that night, the moon was “gibbous” (about $\frac{3}{4}$ full). 5. The intensity of your artificial light source (its power, distance from the subject, and how directly you're pointing at the subject) and, for flashlights, the duration the light is on the subject. 6. Ambient light, which exists long after sunset, though it may only be visible in long exposures.

That's a lot of variables, indeed, and it's easy to feel intimidated. But it's less complicated than you might think. Just experiment with some test shots, mixing the moonlight and ambient light (if any) with your artificial light and see what happens. Then tweak as needed.

You might start at ISO 400, f.8 and 30 seconds; then play around with the power on your flash or time with your flashlight. Keep in mind that you can make either the moon or your artificial light the main light or the fill (secondary) light. (If the moon is your *only* light, remember that it's a “point source”—light emanating from a small spot—and therefore it will produce black shadows.) Once you have the right exposure, if you find you don't have enough time to artistically “paint” with your artificial light, you can always add shutter time without the picture getting brighter simply by reducing the ISO and/or using a smaller f.stop.



Ronda Doty took this semi-silhouette just as the sun was setting, using a small aperture to produce a strong starburst. In this section of the Garden, some rocks were naturally lined up, Stonehenge style. Beautiful sky added to the day's perfect atmospheric. Just after sunset, we all sat down for a picnic dinner and awaited the darkness. All tripods were splayed in preparation for the evening's work. **Sherm Levine** used a low perspective to dramatically transform this otherwise innocuous subject into something like a poster photo for a sci-fi/horror movie. [“The Tripods Are Coming to Get Us?”] LCDs that tilt enables you to take shots like this without lying on the ground. Wonderful!



Equipment for basic nighttime work is simple: tripod, remote trigger (so your finger doesn't touch, and therefore shake, the camera), and a flash or strong flashlight, with some gels if you want to add some color. A black card may be helpful to cover the lens to shut out ambient light during extended exposures (see caption below). [Want to learn more about night photography? Attend **Chris Georgia's** class on night photography at the Horizon Summit.]

Some students worked alone in the Garden, others in teams of two or three. People work in teams all too rarely. Collaborating on a creative endeavor can be tremendously satisfying. Furthermore, in light painting situations, where there are generally many variables, two (or three) heads are usually better than one...and having one person operate the camera while one or two others work the light(s) expands your possibilities.

Everyone staked out their spot, daylight faded, and it was off to the races. Here are two, among many, results.

Daytime vs. Nighttime = Vive la Difference.
Compare this shot by **Rhoda Levine** (**Sherm Levine**/lighting assistant) with her page 1 picture from the same perspective. Some colored gels jazzed up this one. Note the touch of ambient light; the sky is a royal blue—dark enough for the stars to be clearly visible. The tiny streaking of stars is the result of an extended exposure (earth rotates> stars move). If streaking bothers you (I like it here), you can raise your ISO and/or use a larger aperture, which will enable you to use a faster shutter speed...just be sure the exposure is long enough for you to do your light painting. Notice something unusual about the shadows? The light is coming from below, a situation you never find in nature.



Bill Daniel, Jill Youse and Ginny Lockman teamed up to create this unusual, dramatic and technically demanding shot. I wasn't present when they shot this specific picture, but the team apparently combined moonlight with multiple flash pops (flash power must be dialed way down when close to the rocks). A shot like this requires moving the flash (or flashlight) around the scene for proper painting effect. (On-camera flash produces objectionably uniform flat light with very bright foregrounds.) For lengthy exposures like this (more than 30 seconds), use the "B" [Bulb] shutter setting and fire the flash when the shutter is open. What if you need a longer time exposure to give yourself more time to work the flash, but then the moonlight becomes too bright? Have the camera "operator" block the lens with a black card while the lighting person changes position (moonlight won't hit the sensor during those times); then, retract the card right before the flash is fired.





Bahl



Brack



Cox



Georgia



Gottlieb



Lubow



Madden



Meredith



Ransome



Russo



Sweet



Walkotten

The Summit Is Coming! The Summit Is Coming!

The annual Horizon Photography Summit, the premier photo event in the region, comes to Wilmington on March 5 & 6. An inspiring, illuminating weekend of photo experts (above) speaking about landscapes; night photography, portraits; underwater photography; studio lighting; photojournalism; B&W processing; creativity; using social media, travel and exploration, and more. Plus portfolio reviews, personal coaching and a fabulous keynote speaker. Register by January 20th and the whole weekend is just \$179 (5% added discount for camera club and meet-up group members). There's an intensive **"Creative Day"** on March 4 in nearby Chesapeake City featuring **Tony Sweet** and **Gail Meredith**. Information and registration: www.horizonworkshops.com/summit.



To the breathtaking **Olympic Peninsula** in Washington. Before this spring trip was even formally announced, Western Adventure alumni filled up the class. If you'd like to get on the wait list—or discuss scheduling a second trip in the fall—call me at 603 305-8282. See: <http://www.horizonworkshops.com/workshops.html?cr=222>. [Photo above: Zion Park tunnel, taken during this past spring's workshop, by **Roger Singley**.]