

# Composition and Shooting Tips



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# Why Composition Matters

- Adds interest for the viewer, thus reinforcing the message of your photo
- Captures the beauty of our world in a creative way
- Adds your unique viewpoint or “signature” to your work



# What is Composition?

- The ability to see beyond the objects to the greater artistic and pleasing whole; the “organization of space” (Michael Minner)
- Emphasis on the subject within the frame
- Arrangement of a subject within (and without) the frame

*Good composition excites the viewer's eye*



# The Power of Observation

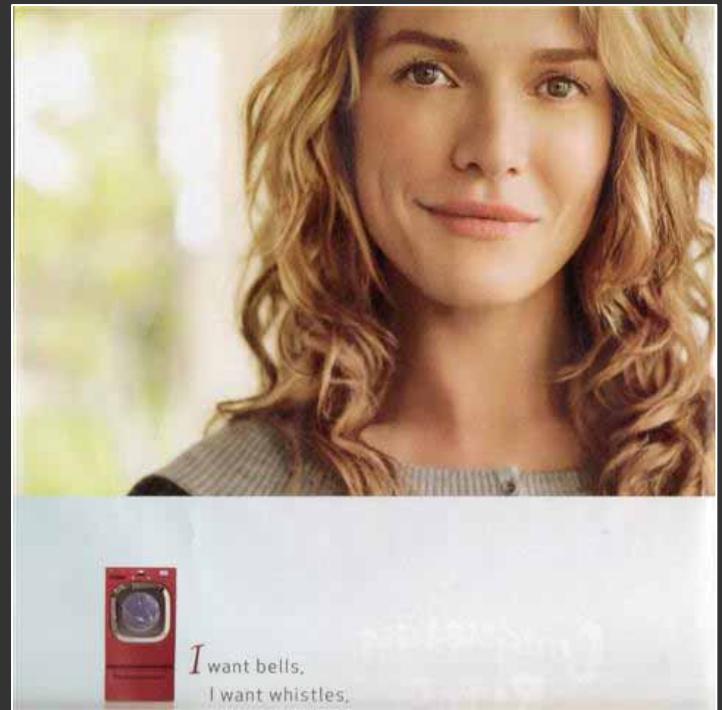
"The only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes."

--Marcel Proust

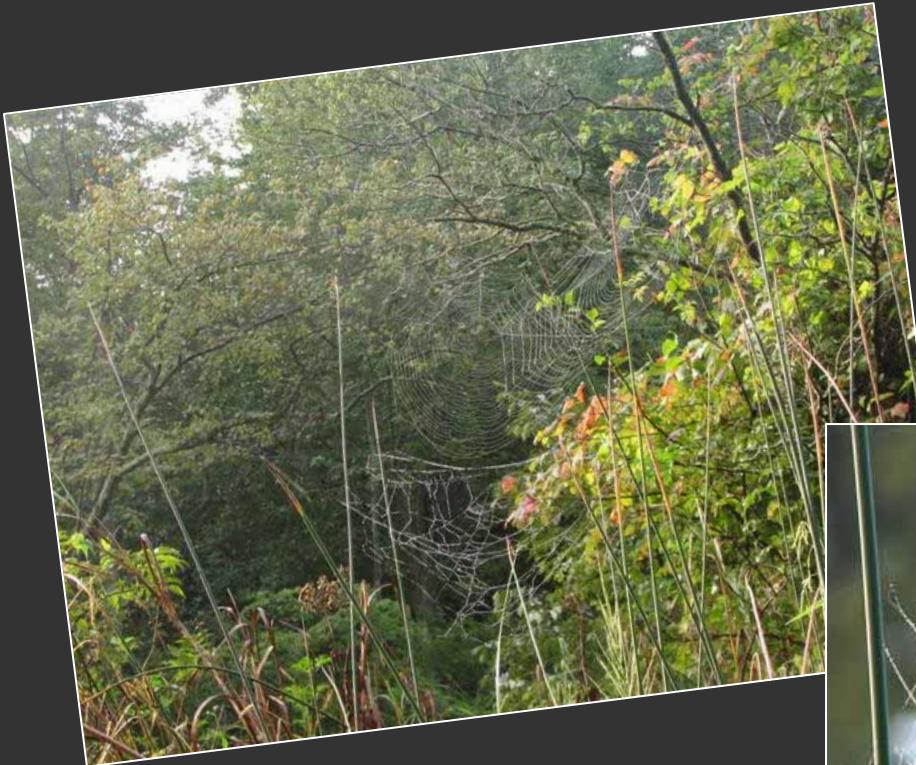


# Increase Your Artistic Sensibility

- Practice *seeing*
- Study others' work on Flickr, ads in magazines, pictures in newspapers
- Make a conscious effort to compose creatively
- Check the background for distractions
- Experiment with everyday objects
- Determine in advance what the photograph will be about and look like



# The Potential for Great Shots is Limitless



Initial shot in series

Keep on shooting when you find something interesting—this became the best of about 2 dozen shots



# Be Alert to

- Reflections on water, polished surfaces, glass
- Striking or monochromatic colors
- Rule of Thirds for positioning subjects
- Diagonals
- Foreground or middle ground interest with vistas
- Silhouettes and simplicity
- One feature to highlight
- Massed subjects (flowers, birds, jelly beans, shop displays)
- Mood/atmospherics (lighting/mist/fog/clouds)

# Reflections



Rockland, Maine harbor



Washington Monument in Packard hubcap

Use fast shutter to freeze moving water

# Reflections



Arezzo, Italy town square in an antique store's mirror

This shot combines the sightseeing action with the object itself--the Florence, Italy Duomo



# Reflections



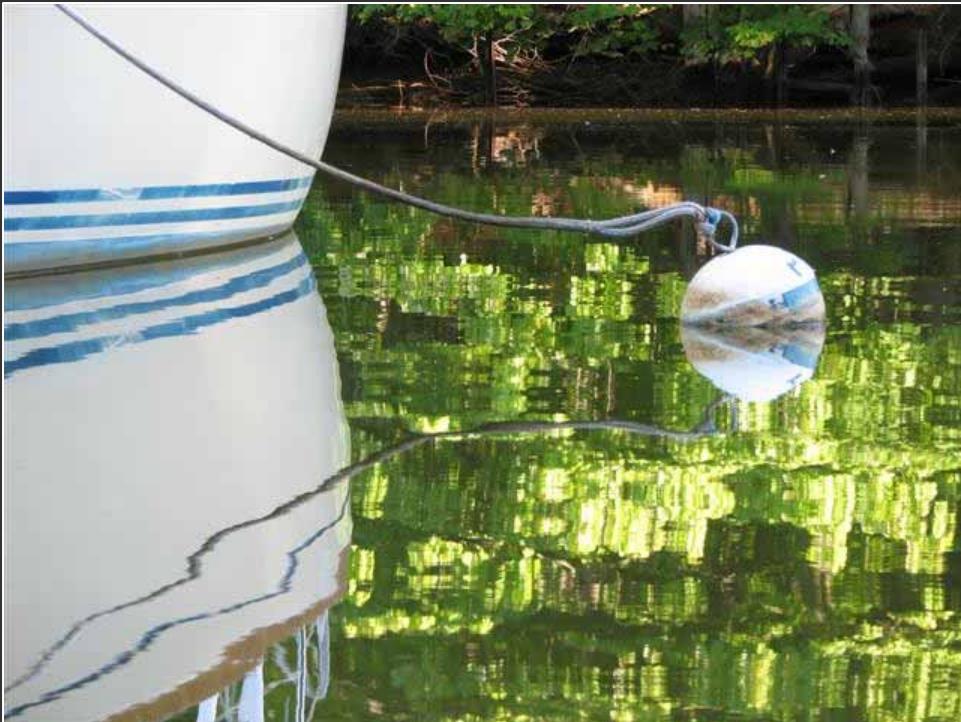
Law office window by the State House



Butchart Gardens, Canada globe

Choose the orientation that best showcases the reflection: portrait or landscape

# Striking or Monochromatic Colors

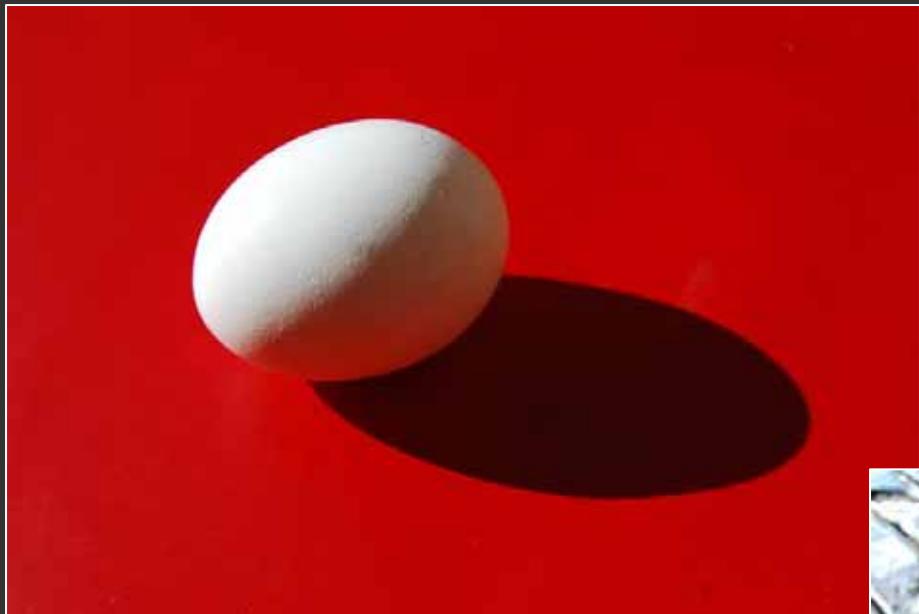


With reflections, move around until you find the best colors surrounding the object and the best framing

Sunrises may be even more interesting with foreground or middleground objects



# Striking or Monochromatic Colors



Egg and shadow on red poster board



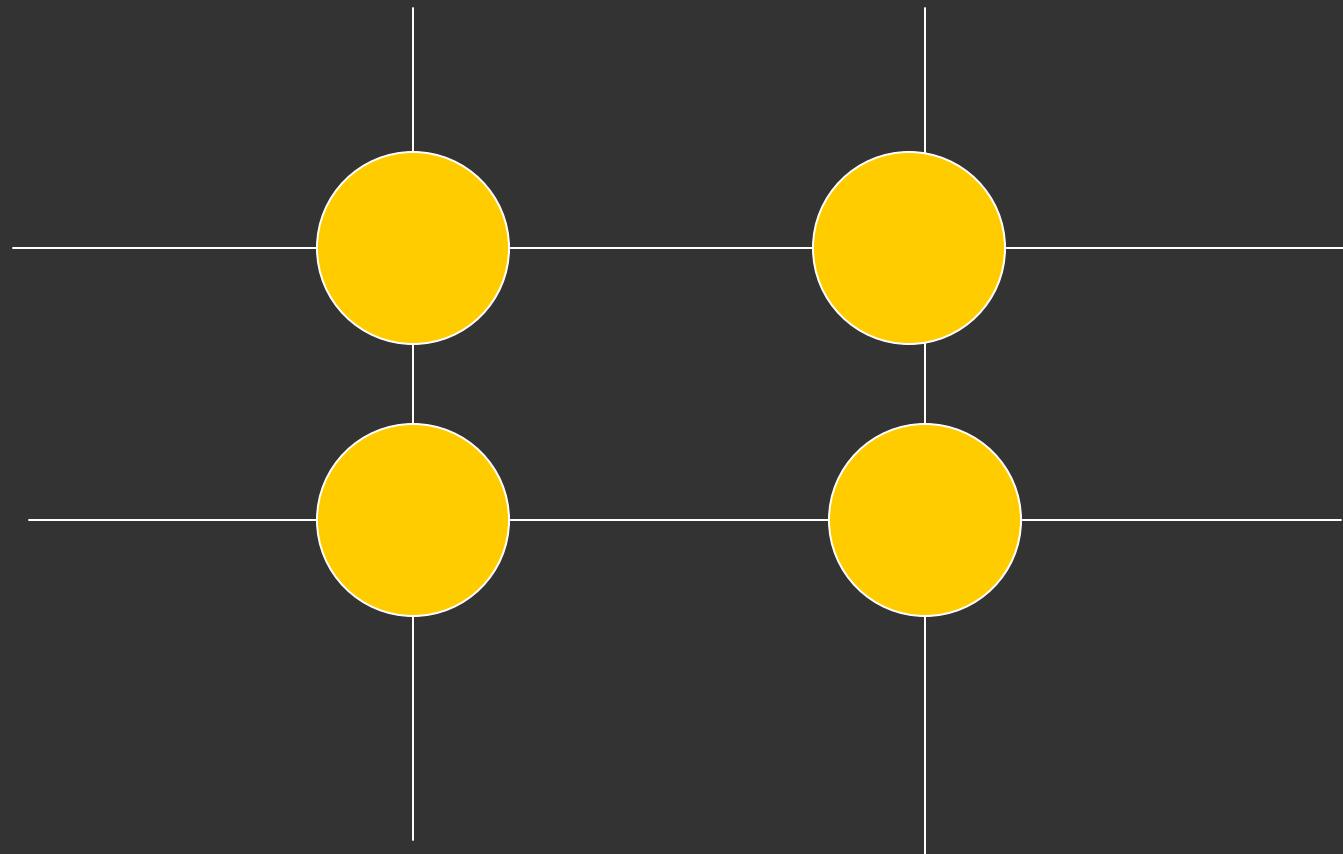
Holiday display at Homestead Gardens

# Striking or Monochromatic Colors



# Rule of Thirds

Place objects of interest where the lines intersect



# Rule of Thirds

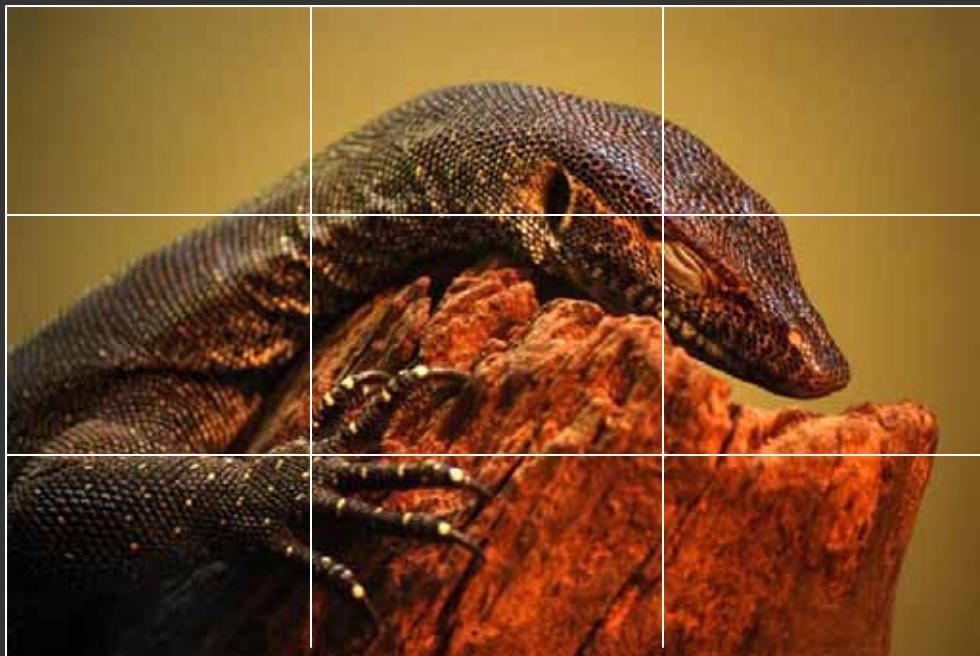


Lizard at National Zoo



Crabbers on the Severn

# Rule of Thirds



This “rule” isn’t hard and fast, but often it works



# Rule of Thirds



Goat at USNA entrance

Sailboat in Saltworks Creek

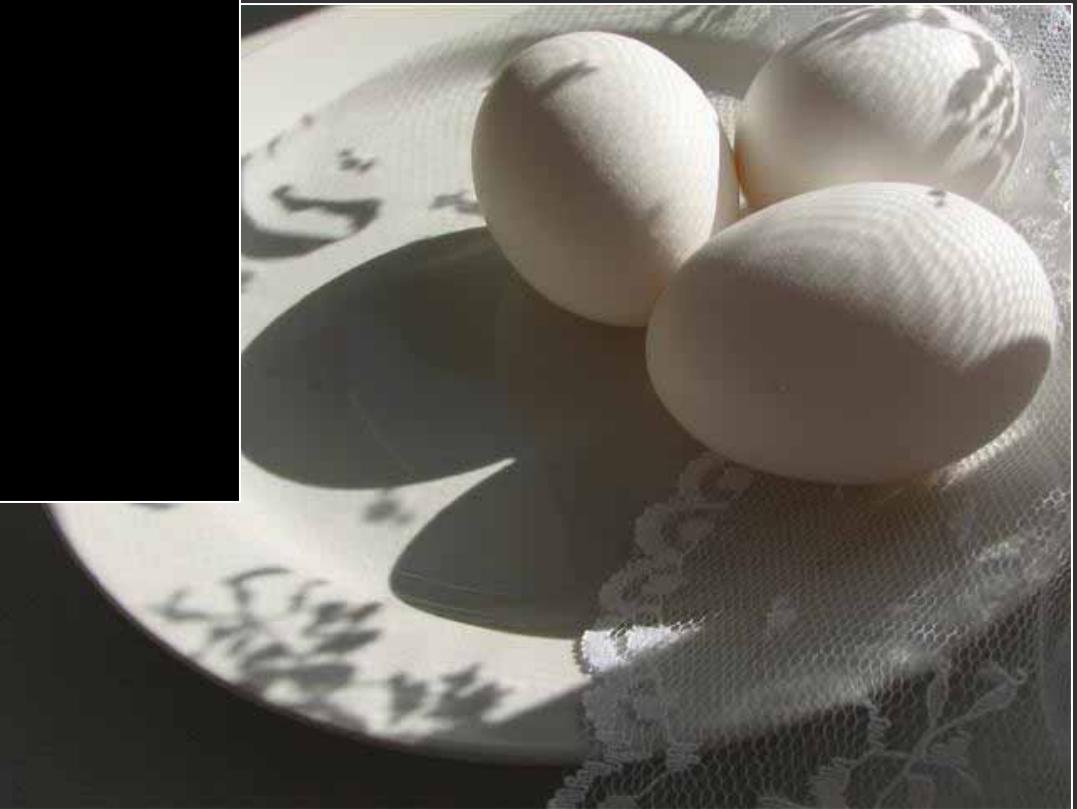


# Subjects Often Best Off-Center



Subject generally should face or be moving toward the center

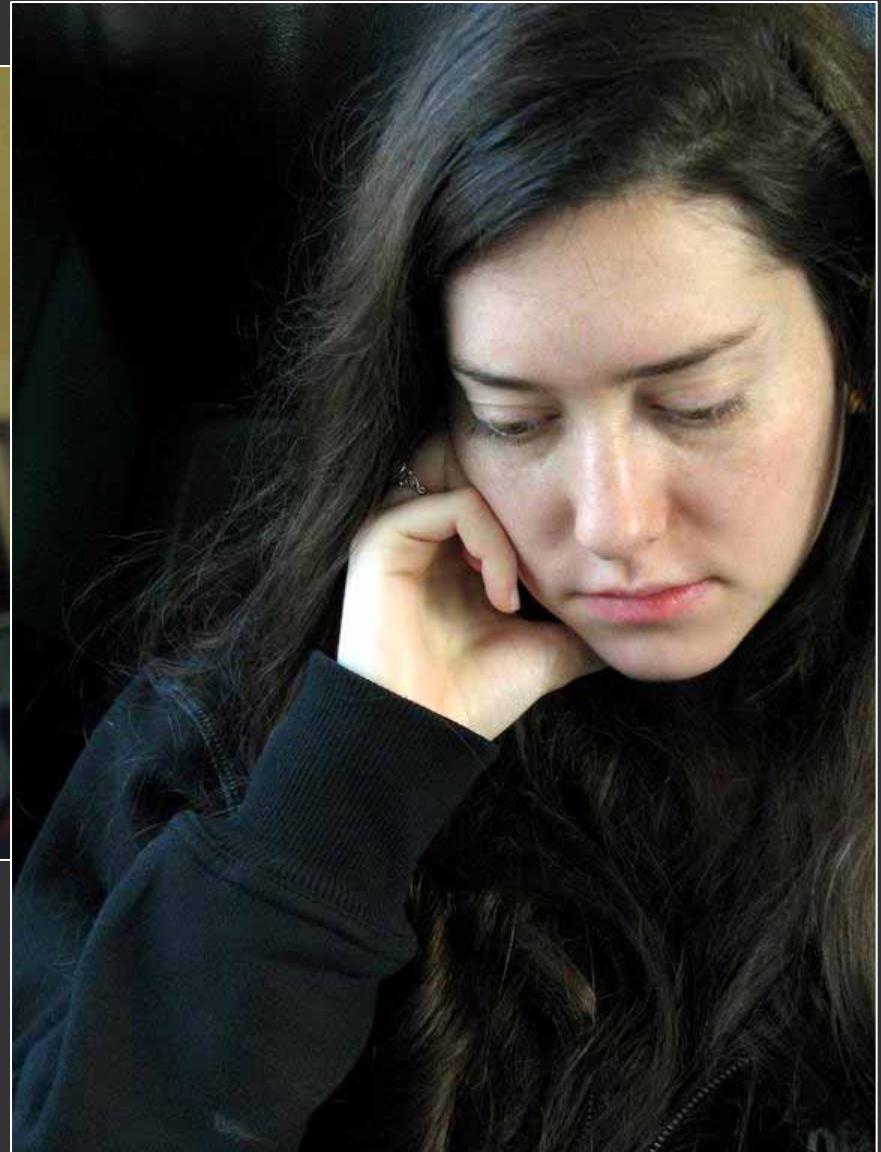
Antique doll lit by flashlight



# Subjects Often Best Off-Center



Pro shooter Scott Kelby suggests zooming in so that either the top of the head or the ears extend outside the frame



# Diagonals



You can increase/create the diagonal through post-processing cropping, depending on the space surrounding your subject

Green herons will let you get closer than most other birds will

Great blue heron feather in water on a cloudy day in Saltworks Creek



# Diagonals



Commedia dell'arte masks in Arezzo,  
Italy school

Arezzo windows

These pictures would not have the same impact if they were shot straight on



# Diagonals

Pure luck that the baby created a diagonal on her own!



Route 50 bridge shot from a kayak  
in early morning last summer

# Add Foreground Interest



Contributes to the depth and interest of the shot



# Add Foreground Interest



Arezzo, Italy vineyard and church

Rule of Thirds also at play in this shot

Take out the objects in the foreground/middleground and the shots become much more mundane



# Silhouettes and Simplicity



Great blue herons at sunset

Shoot into the sun and  
boost contrast  
afterwards, if necessary

Dogwood blossoms



# Silhouettes and Simplicity

Sometimes less */S* more



I moved around to create the diagonal gap between the planks



City Dock lantern and  
lights shot at daybreak

# Silhouettes and Simplicity



Florence, Italy street in late afternoon

**Silhouettes often convert well  
into black and white**



Mistletoe on old door in Italy

# Highlight a Feature



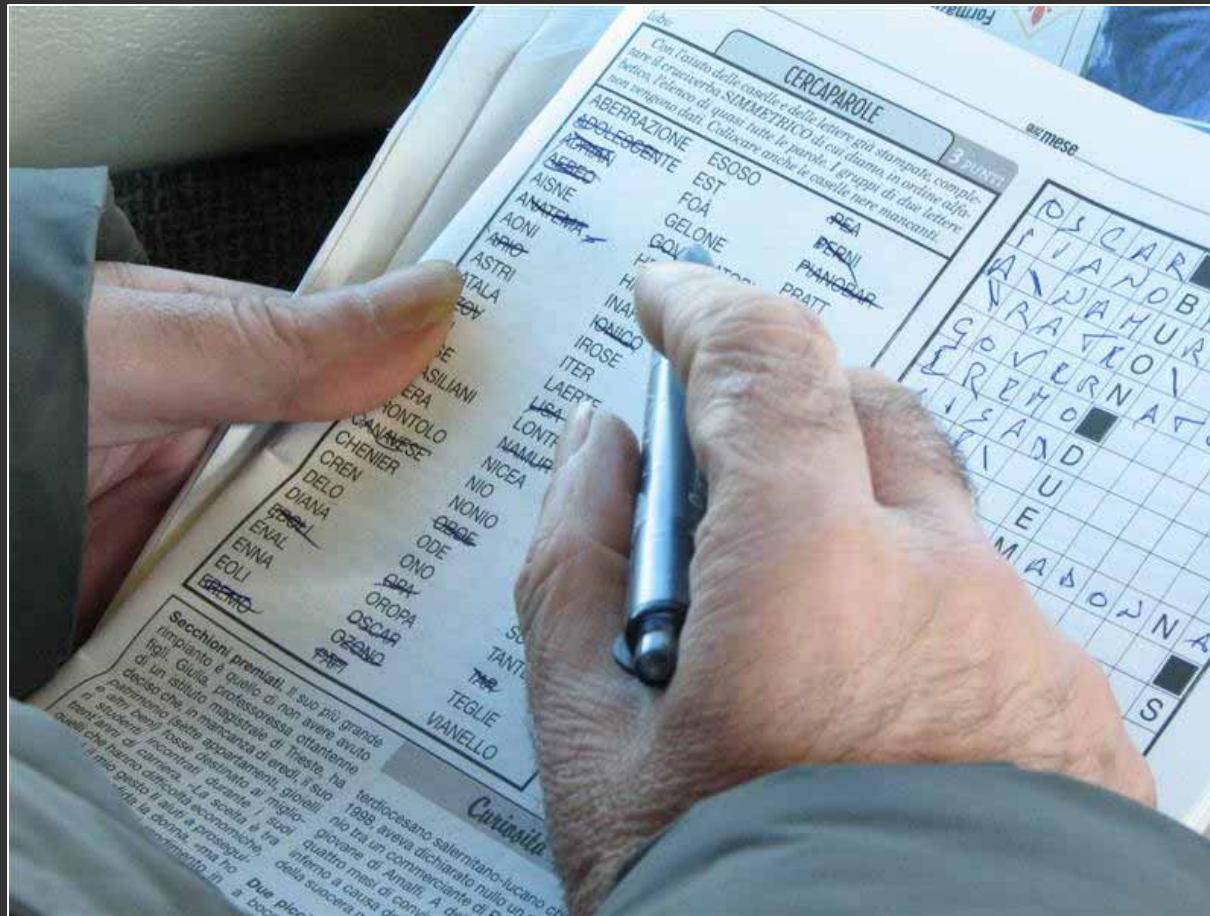
Flamingo feet at the National Zoo  
with boosted contrast

Crab trap



Helps the viewer see  
familiar objects in a new  
way

# Highlight a Feature



"Stealth shot" of an old man on a train in Italy

# Highlight a Feature



# Massed Subjects



White roses at the Philadelphia Flower Show

Move in close enough to lose the background/setting



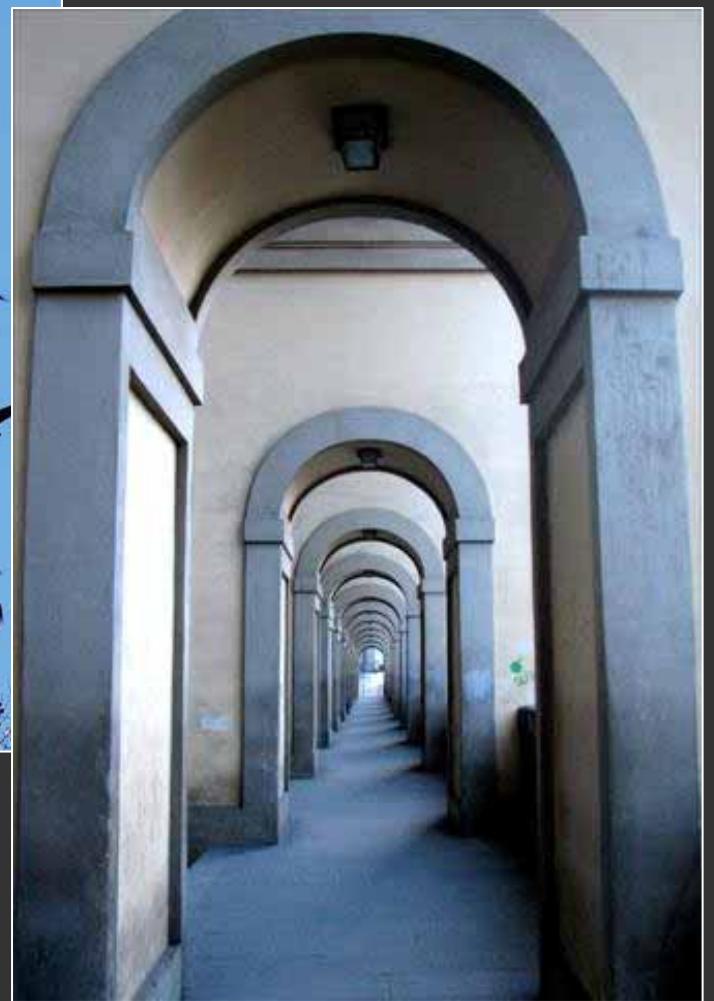
Florence stationery shop window

# Massed Subjects



Watch for intriguing textures,  
colors, or graphic shapes

Archways near Ponte Vecchio, Florence



# Massed Subjects



Arezzo, Italy lanterns

Fancy store windows offer great potential



Florence jewelry shop

# Atmospherics

Mist, fog, shadows, sun shafts add an “otherworldly” feel



Note position of water line—it's not centered

# Atmospherics



Boy in mist at National Zoo

# Shooting Tips

- Shoot at animal's or children's eye level
- Catch subject doing something interesting (know your subject's behavior patterns)
- Move in close
- Use simple backgrounds
- Experiment with ordinary objects – take plenty of shots and change your camera settings



# Get at Eye Level for Animals



Green heron



Macro setting plus a cooperative dragonfly

# Catch the Animal in Action



Sometimes serendipity is part of the equation!



# Catch the Person in Action



Flash used to freeze the jumper  
in mid-air

# Move in Close



The traditional tourist shot emphasizes the site over the people...fine if you were the architect!

Close-ups create a better record of "being there"



# Use Simple Backgrounds



Use fill-in flash with bright backgrounds. Many cameras will let you adjust the flash intensity.

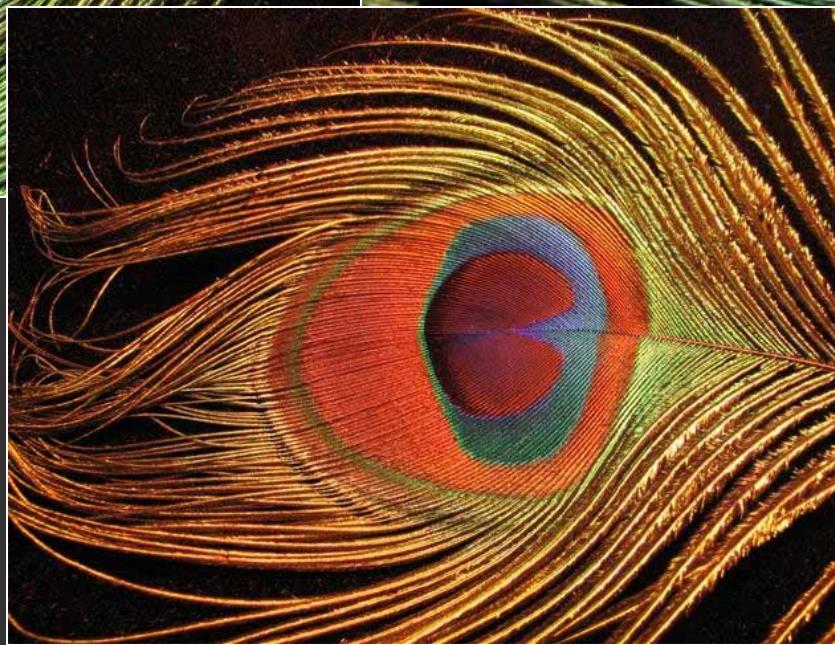
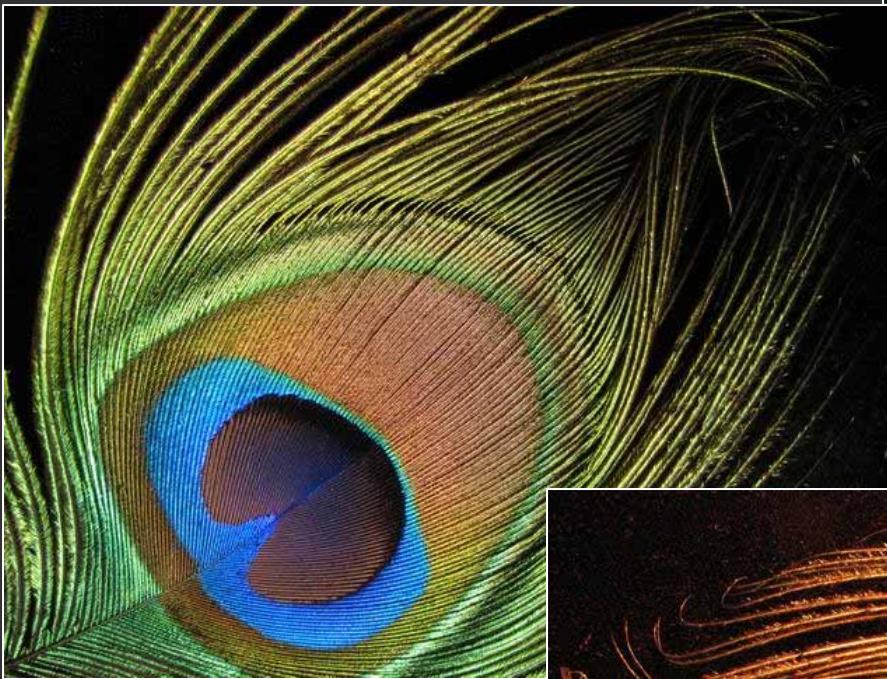


# Darken Distracting Backgrounds



Clone stamp used  
in post-processing  
to make the  
background more  
consistent

# Take Plenty of Shots



Peacock feathers  
shot with various  
white balance  
settings

# Enhance Through Post-Processing

- Straighten
- Crop to showcase your subject
- Use levels to brighten/darken
- Boost contrast, if necessary
- Sharpen/blur as needed
- Convert to black and white (can sometimes save a boring shot)



# Post-Processing Magic

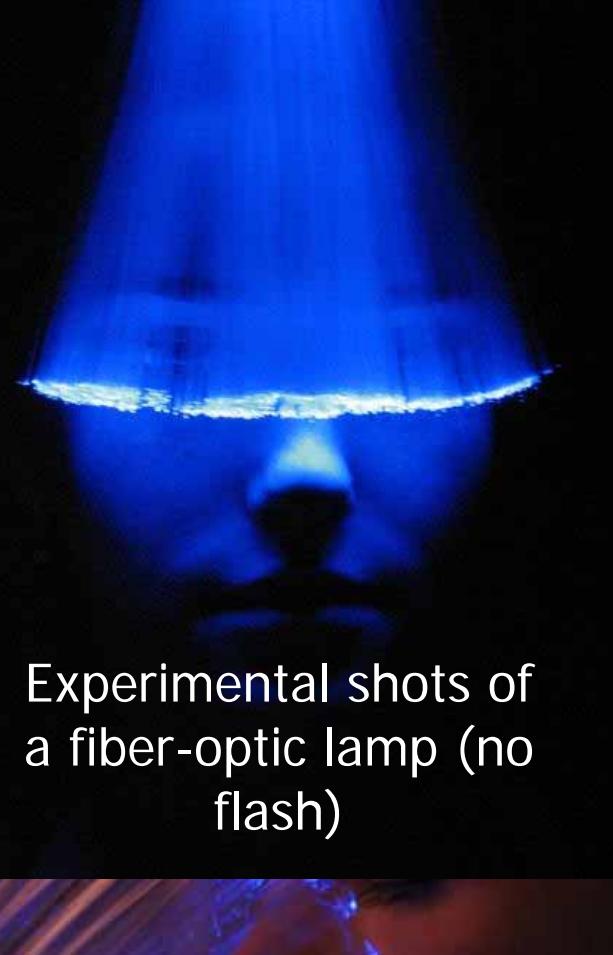
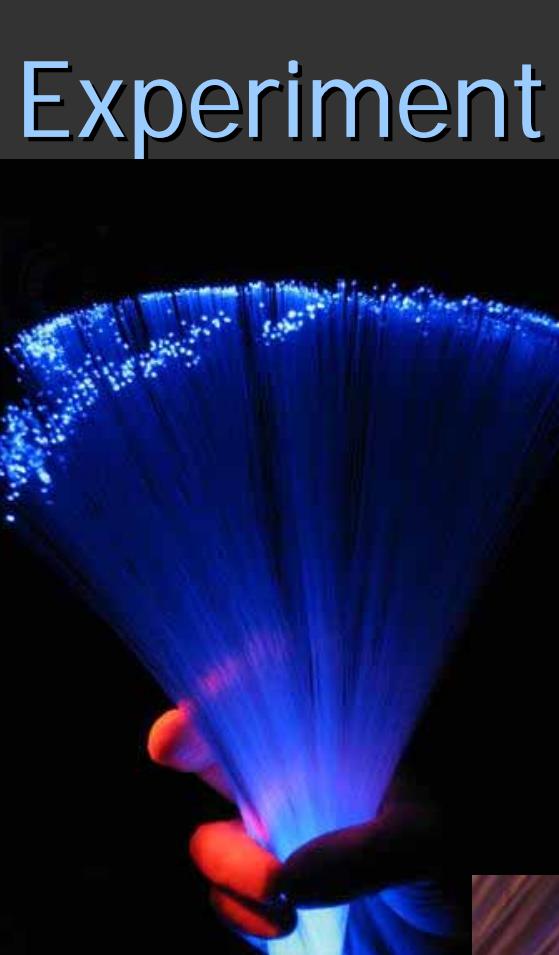


As shot from a kayak

After straightening,  
lightening, and cropping

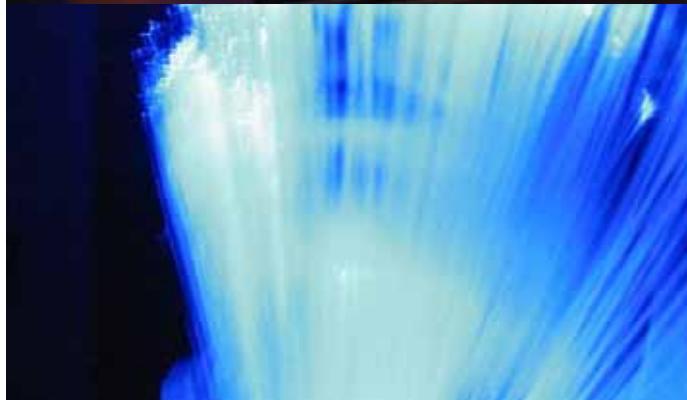


# Experiment



Experimental shots of  
a fiber-optic lamp (no  
flash)

# Experiment



# Some Resources

## ■ Podcasts at 7 Photography Questions

“Learning to See Creatively” interviews with Bryan Peterson

Part 1: <http://www.7photographyquestions.com/2008/10/podcast-20-learning-to-see-creatively-an-interview-with-brya.html#more>

Part 2: <http://www.7photographyquestions.com/2008/10/podcast-21-learning-to-see-creatively-an-interview-with-brya.html>

Articles about composition and graphic design at BetterPhoto.com

<http://www.betterphoto.com/photography-articles/Photographic-Composition/>

Articles about composition at Photoinf.com

# Have Fun!

