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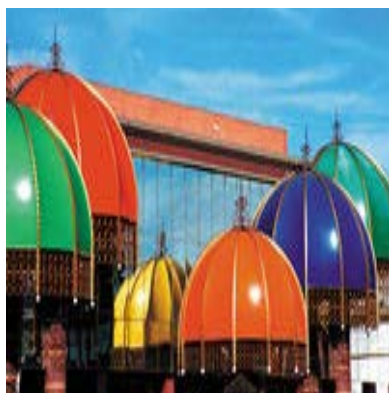
From the Archives

Film Tips: Color & Design

Text and Photos by Jack and Sue Drafafl, July, 2000



Focus in on color, and you'll catch the viewer's eye. You can go for multiple colors, emphasize a single color, or isolate colors against a dark background to really make them stand out. But color is just part of the equation: Good composition counts, too. Use the elements of the scene to keep the viewer's eye flowing in the picture, not out of it.



Whenever we perform film testing, we try to photograph subjects that maximize the film's capabilities. It seems that no matter what subjects we choose, we always end up including some color and design images. You know the ones...the photos that go one step beyond just documenting the scene. Those photos are the opportunities that allow us photographers to add our creative touch through the manipulation of color and design.

The key to creative photography is obtaining images that go beyond what most people see when they view a particular scene. View the world as a canvas, and like a painter, add different shapes and splashes of color. Don't be afraid to try things that feel right, but just don't seem to conform to all the rules. That is what will make your pictures striking and cause people to take that second glance.

When you start analyzing what makes pictures striking, you may often find that subjects become the center of attention and backgrounds generally don't. Many times a dominant color can be the entire subject or just a tool to lead your eye into the photo. Sometimes even the lack of color is what makes the photo work.

Eye flow is the path that your eye follows as it is drawn into a photo. There are different reasons that your eye flows through a photo or remains to linger inside a picture. The key to a good photo is making the viewer remain as long as possible looking at the photo. Therefore, you don't just want them to flow straight through in a quick in-and-out path, but rather to move in quickly and meander slowly

Digital Camera HQ: See prices and reviews of digital cameras.





before having a direct line of exit. This eye flow is a powerful creative tool, and if used properly can help you create some outstanding photos.

Throughout most photos there seems to be a compositional thread that ties it all together. This compositional line may not always be out front and obvious, but it is almost always there. You may find it in the vertical lines of a building or the winding curves of a river. Objects that form a line as they recede into the distance may draw your eye through the picture and out of the scene. Carefully look at some photos you like to see just what type of compositional line you find most attractive.



The yellow wheel's circular rim keeps the eye in the photo, while the spokes keep it moving throughout the image.

Just seeing a compositional line in an image is often not enough. You must learn to make it work for you. Doors and windows are great subjects for creating abstract color and design. Look around and you'll be surprised what colors people paint them. Both offer vertical and horizontal lines, it's just a matter of how you crop the scene. If you move in tight, so that you have only part of the window or door, then the color becomes the dominant design. Back off, and the lines themselves become the center of interest.



One of the most effective color and design combinations is when you can include diagonal lines and a single small subject in a scene. The lines lead you into the picture, and you stop and reflect when you see the single object. It becomes even more effective when the single object is of a contrasting color.



Perspective lines are created by a row of similar objects gradually fading off into the distance. Your eye will follow the line of objects and fade right off the edge of your photo. It is often very effective to have a contrasting subject at the end of the row which causes your eye flow to stop and linger within the photo. This row of items can consist of as few as two objects if they are similar in shape but different sizes due to distortion caused by the



Whether bright or subtle, colors are great design elements. How you choose to use them can mean the difference between a viewer loving a photo or ignoring it. You can use color as the main theme of the photo, or as a compositional element (or both). Contrasting or complementary colors can be striking, but so can bright or subtle colors against neutral areas. Keep your eyes open for color!



distance from the camera.

Rivers and streams make great subjects with their wandering curved lines. They gently lead you into a photo, and you slowly amble and enjoy various subjects along the way. Roads, paths, and sidewalks are another interesting way of leading a person's eye flow. Having a covered bridge, building, tree, house, or other colorful object at the end of the line makes you stop and remain longer within the photo. The line can even be more exaggerated by getting down closer to the line, or using a wider-angle lens.

Often a photo can include just a single subject. You would naturally think that having a subject so simple would cause the viewer to race quickly in and out of the photo and move on, but generally that is not the case. A solitary subject usually evokes a feeling or emotion that causes the viewer to remain within the photo to reflect.

Scenes with two contrasting objects, either in color or shape, cause the eye to move back and forth from one object to the other and back again. If the two objects are side by side, the conflict to monopolize the center of interest is overwhelming. If one object is closer to the front of the picture, or larger in size, it usually claims the viewer's admiration.

Patterns fit into a category all by themselves. If the pattern is continuous with no changes, it becomes the center of interest itself. The pattern becomes stronger when you can include a small pattern change or an object positioned in the scene. The eye scans the pattern, but eventually locks in on that contrasting subject.

Circular designs are great because once the eye moves in to view the photo, it gets locked into the circular motion and goes around and around several times before it gets dizzy and exits. Remember that your main goal is to keep them looking at your photo the longest possible time. Who cares if they get a little dizzy along the way!

Nature photography is a great place to find color and design and experiment with your favorite film. Flowers have a

natural radial symmetry, causing the eye to flow from the outside edges to the center. If a colorful insect is at rest in the middle of the flower, the eye flow is even stronger. Trees have both vertical and horizontal lines that can reflect strength. You can emphasize the vertical lines with extreme perspective, while the branching horizontal lines reflect peacefulness.

One of the best ways to see how color and design work is to study all types of photographs. Carefully critique and analyze them to determine why you like or dislike a photo. Usually the reason for your decision is the eye flow through the photo, or the lack of it. Your mind craves direction and if the compositional artistry is properly achieved, then your brain signals its approval



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