

# PHOTOGRAPHING PEOPLE, PLACES AND THINGS

HOW CONFERENCE 2011, CHICAGO • JIM KRAUSE

Learn to recognize, capture and create the kinds of photo opportunities that result in beautifully composed images with great content.

## Section 1: Visual Texture and Abstraction

*Visual Texture = A visually active image with no clear center of interest.*

### ASSIGNMENT 1 OF 3: Capturing Visual Texture.

- ▷ Consider taking pictures of clothing, carpet, skin, hair, water, ice, coffee, the walls, the lights, a detail from your chair—or absolutely anything else you can find in this room.
- ▷ Feel free to use the beads and mini-umbrellas.
- ▷ Try using your camera's close-up mode.
- ▷ How about intentionally blurring your photos?
- ▷ What about images that are very dark, or very light?
- ▷ What about an extreme minimalist shot?
- ▷ Or a shot that is very busy and colorful?

### Tips for taking pictures in low light:

- Steady the camera using the edge of a notebook, your chair, or by setting your elbow(s) against a solid surface.
- Consider raising your camera's ISO setting to a high number (this will result in grainy images, but at least they might be in focus)
- In this workshop, use your flash, if needed, but only as a last resort.

## Section 2: Making the Scene

**Backdrop:** Even a dull looking person or thing can look great in front of an interesting backdrop. A poor backdrop, however, can distract from, compete against, hide or generally suck the life out of even the most interesting person or thing.

**Framing:** Look for ways to compositionally frame your subject using background and foreground elements.

**Points of View:** Explore points of view: Upward, downward, from ground level, from overhead, from eye level, tilted or level.

**Depth:** How about incorporating suggestions of depth in your scene through elements that are both near to, and far from, the lens?

**Order/Chaos:** Either is good when it supports a desired look or theme.

**Symmetry/Asymmetry:** Aim for one or the other when composing a scene. Be decisive.

**Minimalism:** What about composing your scene so that your subject barely enters the frame, or is virtually the only thing “on stage?”

**Highlighting Color, Contrast or Lines and Curves:** As designers, we should recognize the photo potential of scenes that are big on any of these qualities.

### ASSIGNMENT 2 OF 3: Making the Scene.

- ▷ Keep a *constant* eye on your scene's backdrop as you photograph your lizard. Take several shots where the backdrop elements, both near and far, frame the lizard. Be especially creative in this regard.
- ▷ Use the beads and mini-umbrellas as props and as scene-dressing.
- ▷ Vary your points of view (see the P.O.V. notes, above).
- ▷ How about placing the lizard *very* near the lens and composing an interesting shot of whatever's beyond?
- ▷ Aim for shots that are either orderly or chaotic; symmetrical or asymmetrical.
- ▷ What about an abstract image using the lizard?
- ▷ Take portraits of the lizard within both semi-plausible, and completely implausible settings.
- ▷ Photograph the lizard through something semi-transparent. Some fabric or sunglass' lenses?
- ▷ Use the notes at the top of this column for more ideas.

### Section 3: Approaches to Photography

**See the Extraordinary in the Ordinary:** It's all about how you capture it with the camera.

**Juxtapose:** Keep your eyes open for photo opportunities that involve things and occurrences that aren't normally seen together.

**Visit Places Off Hours and Out of Season:** It's a sure way to take photos that won't look like most other people's photos.

**Embrace Flaws:** Often, "flawed" images are more communicative and interesting than technically perfect photos.

**Look for Details:** Always and everywhere—consider photographing the tiny things.

**Seek Signage:** Signs as focal points, signs as theme setters, signs as... signs.

**Alter Reality:** Use digital effects, alternative lenses and non-traditional shooting techniques to capture non-ordinary views of the world.

**Take Advantage of Opportunity:** Keep your radar tuned for unusual events and spontaneous occurrences. Photograph them.

**Appreciate Metaphor and Symbolism:** Photos rich in metaphor or symbolism intrigue viewers and have excellent commercial and fine-art potential.

**Collect:** Come up with a theme and fill it with photos. Collections can provide you with great material for gallery shows and web sites.

#### **ASSIGNMENT 3 OF 3: Approaches**

- ▷ Feel free to use your lizard as a prop in these photos of places. Or not—it's up to you.
- ▷ Take at least a half-dozen visual texture or abstraction photos while out and about.
- ▷ Keep your eyes open for interesting juxtapositions.
- ▷ Photograph some ugly things in beautiful ways.
- ▷ Keep a sharp eye out for this place's tiny details!
- ▷ Try this: put your camera in close-up mode and focus on something very close. Then, before snapping the photo, aim at a large, distant view. Embrace blur!
- ▷ Begin collecting images of a something in particular, and then keep collecting all conference long.
- ▷ Aim for photos that appeal strongly to YOUR visual preferences.
- ▷ Use the notes at the top of this column for more ideas.

### Section 4: Lights, Camera, Interaction

When it comes to photographing people, it is important to understand the technical aspects of photography, but nothing is as important as paying attention to how your subject is interacting with you, the camera, their environment, clothing, props, and other people within the scene.

Interactions also occur between inanimate objects, such as your subject's attire and their surroundings

Try to capture shots that are either purely natural, or purely posed. Avoid the middle ground.

How about providing your subject with a silly or serious prop? A prop can be anything from a Porsche to a Popsicle.

Make your subjects comfortable by engaging in conversation with them before—and during—the photoshoot. Work at a measured pace. If the model sees that you're nervous or in a hurry, they'll feel pressured as well.

Offer your subject ideas about where to look and what to do, but avoid making them pose in artificial ways. Unless you're working with a professional model, it's not up to the subject to provide you with fantastic poses: It's up to you to notice and record your subject's most photogenic moments—whenever and however they occur.

Let your subject know you're shooting digital and that you have a very large-capacity memory card (in other words, let them know that they can relax because you can afford to take LOTS of pictures, and only a few need to turn out).

Choose backdrops and environs that either complement, or contrast with, the look and actions of your subject.

How about mixing things up? A well dressed subject against a weathered backdrop, for instance. Or, vice versa. The possibilities are endless.

Ever consider buying an underwater case for your pocket digital camera? They can be used underwater, while washing the car, during water-balloon fights, in the shower, on the slip-and-slide and during rainstorms.

Consider playing dress up with your subject. Costumes can be made, bought or improvised. Same goes for masks.