

HORIZON NEWS #9

NEWS, THOUGHTS AND IMAGES FROM HORIZON PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS

The human face is the universal language. The same expressions are readable, understandable, all over the world. The key to understanding this language is to have an educated heart.

Dorothea Lange

STUDENT PHOTOS: CLOSE-UP



Photos: Wendy King



What's the difference between a snapshot and a portrait? Is it the amount of time spent taking the photo? The attention to lighting? Deliberateness of the posing? Emotional content of the picture? Defining a line between the two can make for a long-winded, and not terribly productive, debate. We at Horizon have nothing against snapshots – we take them ourselves and, yup, put 'em in our photo albums, but we want our students to go beyond that, beyond: “Look at the camera and say cheese.” We have observed that most amateur photographers are satisfied by shooting until their subject(s) are looking at the camera and grinning. This records a somewhat artificial moment which looks like millions of other such shots. There is nothing creative or revealing or interesting. If you want better, you need to push harder.

Check the two related shots at left. The first is a well executed snapshot. Both subjects look good and the background adds color without being too distracting. Fortunately, Wendy took more shots and got a more spontaneous expression, with a little wind-in-the-hair look that adds a naturalness to the shot. And she got in tighter., putting far more emphasis on the faces. Call this a “snapshot plus.” Which shot do you think the couple will like better? Which one makes you want to know these two people more?

To give you snapshots more snap, here are some suggestions: 1. Shoot plenty to get the best expression. 2. While most of us want to project an “I'm a happy person” image, pictures are more honest and interesting without a “cheese face.” 3. Move in close: more face, less feet. 4. Place the subject far away from the background if you want the background out of focus (hence more attention to the face); shoot at f. 5.6 or wider to minimize depth of field...and make sure to focus carefully on the eyes. 5. Talk to the subjects while you're shooting to elicit different reactions and expressions. 6. Take some shots with your subject looking away from the camera. 7. If the hands are in the picture, have them doing something natural. 8. Find a background that provides contrast with the subject. 8. Especially on a sunny day, be aware of the contrast level on the face and the direction of light...more on this subject in another newsletter. Follow these ideas, or follow your own, and turn your snapshots into portraits.

HORIZON PHOTOGRAPHY SUMMIT

Don't forget Horizon's Annual Photography Summit, our weekend celebration of photography on May 5, 6, 7. Most Horizon instructors will be there, offering “mini-versions” of their weekend workshops, and some other wonderful instructors will be joining us, too. There will be portfolio reviews (only a few openings are left), time to shoot...and to shoot the breeze with fellow shutterbugs. On Sunday afternoon instructors will guide you on field trips in Chesapeake City, Horizon's historic, waterfront home. Take a break from the ordinary. See www.horizonworkshops.com for details.

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QUICK TIPS: PLAYING IN YOUR STUDIO

Photo by Michael Hitaffer



It's raining and it's cold. A perfect day to stay inside and leave your camera in its case. (You might be giving up some atmospheric shots, but we won't badger you.) Why not try working in your "studio." Any table top will do, and you've got backgrounds galore (sheets, blankets, rugs, etc.) What you'll learn will apply to your other photography, such as:

1. How to control depth of field, and the visual impact of selective focus.
2. How to juxtapose elements into a pleasing composition.

3. How to arrange colors that enhances each one.
4. How to separate different objects from each other and from the background.
5. How to control the relationship between subject, camera and light source.
6. How to observe with intensity how light falls on a subject. (It can be tough to do that when you're taking a portrait.) For example, look at the edge lighting on the objects in the student photo above taken during Rich Russo's Studio Workshop—getting comfortable creating edges that will help you create such lighting with portraits...or flowers.
6. The effect of different lenses on size relationships of your subjects, and how wide a background area is visible behind your subjects.
7. You have time to review your camera's controls...and maybe learn some things you didn't know. Keep your camera manual handy.
8. You may find—and this wouldn't surprise us—that you so enjoy the studio work that you'll be doing it on sunny and warm days, too.

THE DEFINITION OF **SUCCESS**

Success. As with such concepts as Love....Happiness...Beauty...Art... every person's definition is different. We've given particular thought these days to people's different definitions of success, because this comes up regularly in two workshops: Marketing Images and Publish Your Photo Book. Sure, everyone wants to have their photos published and make lots of money. And many of us would love to have a book published. The question we must all ask ourselves is: "How do we define, in realistic terms, personal success?" Our courses offer a reality check, but the information we provide has limited significance if you don't know what you want to get from your photography. Speaking of which, Steve Gottlieb shares with his students how much money he made (or didn't make) from each of his books and whether and why he considers them to have been successful. He will give you his definition of success. Yours will undoubtedly be different.

END FRAME



Photo: Tuan Pham

Horizon's Nature Workshop instructor Tony Sweet is a multiple exposure master. Several techniques are available—some in camera, some in Photoshop. The techniques are described in Tony's Nature Photography books and, of course, in his workshops. Tony's students play around with this, and with good effect. Here's a shot of some daffodils that we like. We'd also like to see this subject shot with, say, half the number of exposures. Just another example of creatively playing, of experimenting, with the camera. Give it a try, see what happens.