WHAT DO JUDGES LOOK FOR?

BY MARC BRIMBLE

PUNCTUM

IMAGES SHOULD HAVE IMPACT.
A JUDGE ONLY HAS LESS THAN A MINUTE TO LOOK AT AN IMAGE. IF IT DOESN'T MAKE AN IMPACT IN THAT TIME THEN IT IS VERY UNLIKELY TO GET GOOD MARKS

COMPLICATED IMAGES

COMPLICATED IMAGES RARELY DO WELL IN COMPETITIONS. JUDGES JUST DON'T HAVE TIME TO LOOK FOR A STORY. THE STORY HAS TO BE CLEAR AND OBVIOUS.

SIMPLE IMAGES

SIMPLE STRAIGHTFORWARD IMAGES ARE GOOD - LESS IF MORE. BE CAREFUL THOUGH AS AN IMAGE MAY BE TOO SIMPLE AND DOESN'T HOLD THE JUDGE OR VIEWERS ATTENTION FOR LONG ENOUGH.

IN GENERAL IMAGES SHOULD BE SHARP.
UNLESS YOU DELIBERATELY WANT AN ELEMENT OR ELEMENTS WITHIN YOUR IMAGE TO BE SOFT

GOOD COMPOSITION IS ALWAYS A GOOD STARTING POINT

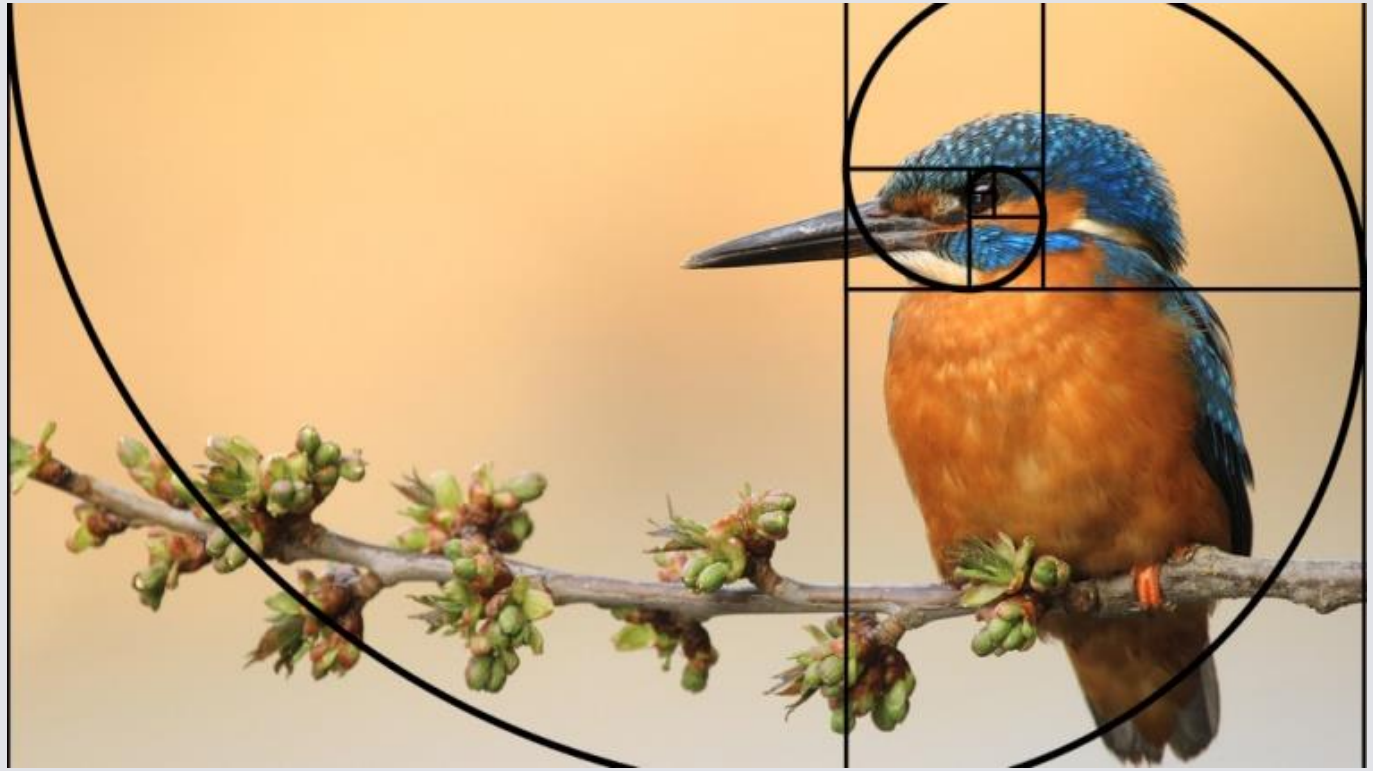
All the usual composition rules apply but remember that a well composed image is only half the story. It doesn't mean that your image is more interesting or impactful

Basic Rules of Composition:

1. Rule of thirds/Golden ratio
2. Rule of odds
3. Lead in lines
4. Symmetry
5. Rule of space
6. Framing/Sub-framing
7. Repetition
8. Colour theory
9. Diagonals
10. Fill the frame

RULE OF THIRDS

GOLDEN RATIO



RULE OF ODDS

- Odd numbers like 1,3,5,7,9,11 are much more pleasing to the eye than even numbers.
- Believe it or not judges can count and will use the rule as part of their assessment of your image

LEAD IN LINES

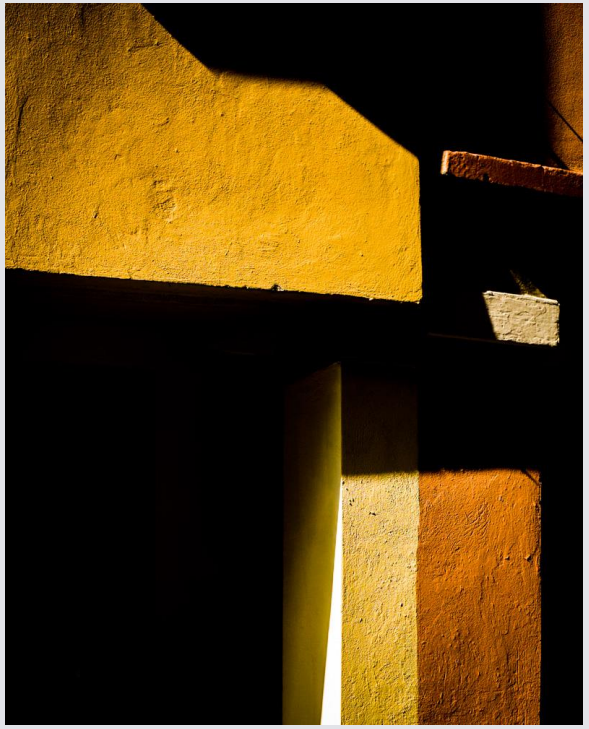
SYMMETRY

RULE OF SPACE

FRAMING AND SUB-FRAMING

REPETITION

COLOUR THEORY



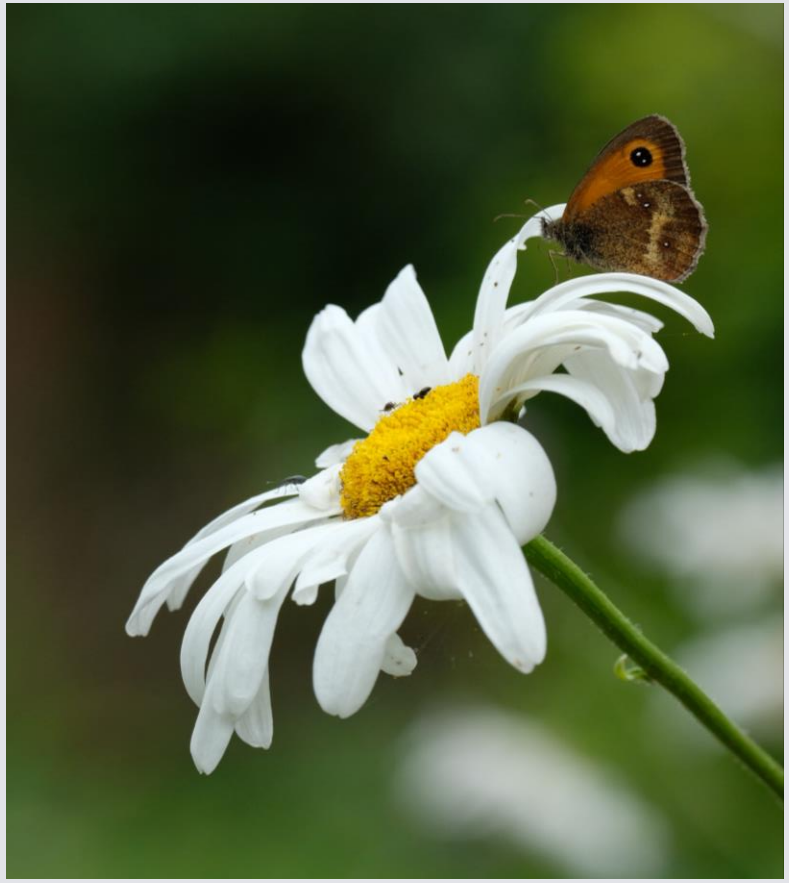
DIAGONALS

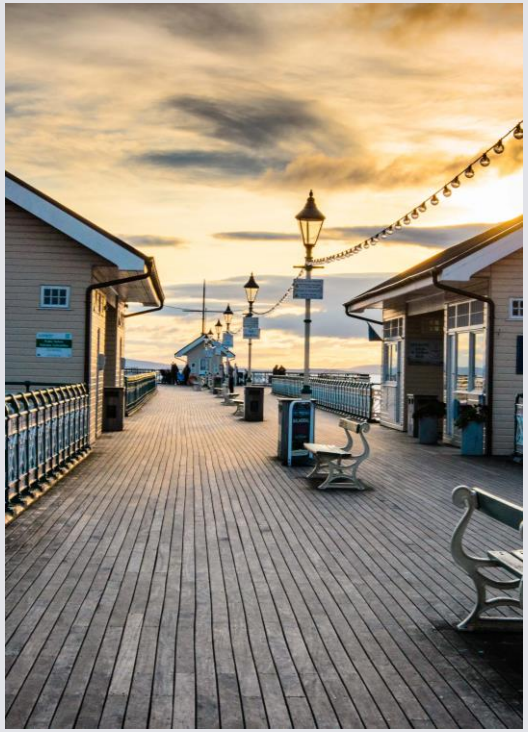
FILL THE FRAME

SPOTS ON YOUR SENSOR

HORIZONS - KEEP THEM STRAIGHT

LIGHT AREAS THAT ARE NOT THE MAIN FOCUS OF YOUR PHOTOGRAPH OR ARE ON THE EDGE OF THE IMAGE.
CONSIDER USING A VIGNETTE



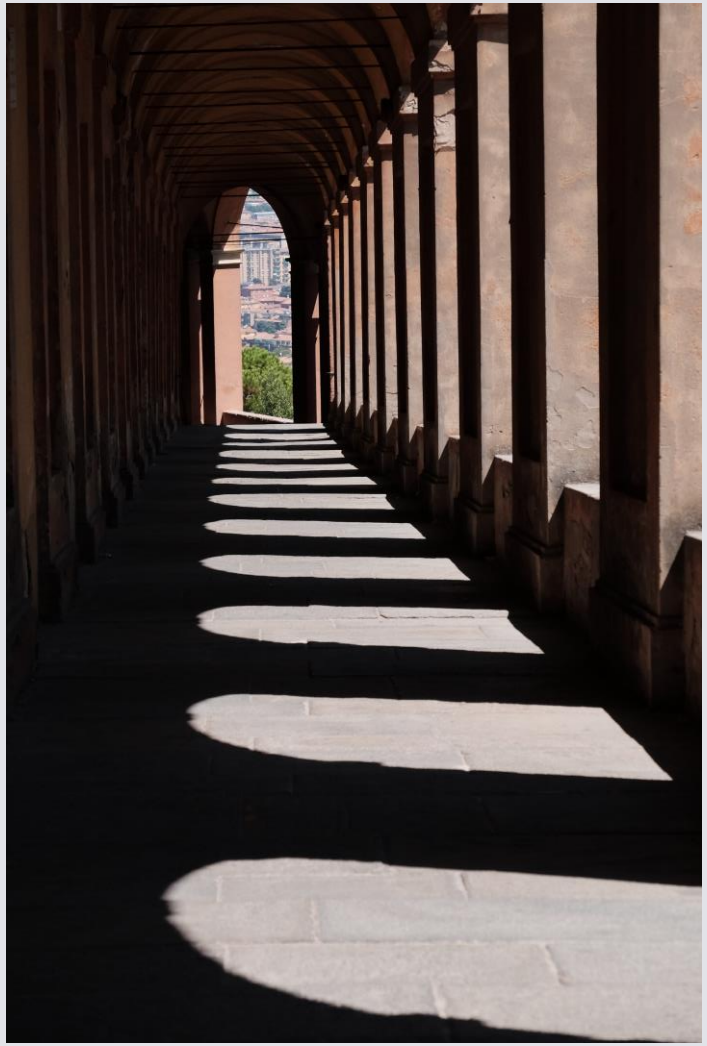


BLOWN OUT HIGHLIGHTS

- It’s very easy to blow out the highlights when taking landscapes or photographs of snow.
- Outdoor shots in winter can also be very contrasty and difficult to control the exposure on your camera
- Check the blinkies on your camera. It’s easier to slightly underexpose your highlights and bring up the shadows in post.

NO DETAIL IN THE SHADOWS

YOU CAN USUALLY RECOVER MOST SHADOW DETAIL IN POST.



SUBJECT TOO CLOSE TO THE EDGE OF THE FRAME OR EVEN MISSING. IF YOU'RE GOING TO DO THIS MAKE IT CLEAR, OBVIOUS AND DELIBERATE

Mistake

Deliberate

MAKE SURE YOUR WHITE BALANCE IS CORRECT

- White balance can be adjusted before shooting or after, in post.
- Indoor lighting is the most difficult to control especially if you have a mix of natural and fluorescence/incandescent.
- Skin tones are the most difficult to get right

PROCESSING AND OVERPROCESSING

- Overprocessing often doesn’t go down well with judges. Process your image as much as you think necessary and then ease back on your sliders. Otherwise it can often lead to:
  - Halos on over-sharpened edges
  - Oversaturation
  - Plastic looking skin tones/artefacts
  - Loss of detail

  - Don’t forget to remove any chromatic aberrations

HALOS AND ARTEFACTS

CHROMATIC ABERRATIONS (PURPLE FRINGING)

EDITING OUT ELEMENTS IN YOUR IMAGE

- If you are going to delete elements within your image, then make sure you do it properly. If you are struggling to do so, then leave the element in the photo.

STORYTELLING

- Story telling can be a strong element to your image. Some images have done well in competitions simply because of the strong storytelling element within the image.
- If this is what you are going for make sure that the story is clear and obvious to the judge.
- Street photography and Social documentary often do poorly in competitions simply because the story telling element is weak or non existent.

TITLES

- A good title can make or break an image.
- A title should marry well with the subject.
- Don’t try and get too clever with your titles. Judges may not like it! or they may simply not understand your meaning.

PRINTING

- Choose the right type of paper for the photo. A fine art paper for a fine art print. Otherwise go for a pearl/semi-gloss/lustre type.
- Make sure your image is printed and mounted well.
- PDIs should have a key line around the edge of the image.

GET TO KNOW SOME OF THE JUDGES

- No two judges are the same. Some are harsher than others and some have particular preferences. We have some old school judges and some more modern open minded creative judges. Try to get to know which ones will look upon your images positively. I will often try to push the boundaries of photography especially if the judge is likely to be more open minded. It's interesting to see what sort of response you get. Don't be afraid to experiment! Just don't expect to get high marks in all competitions.