

## Towards More Creative Images by Ron Cork

I don't profess to be an original thinker. In fact there are extremely few 'Original Thinkers' in this universe. Like 99.99% of the people on this planet, everything I know is either the result of education or plagiarism, in one form or another.

Knowing stuff as a result of education is reasonably obvious in that what we know has been infused into our brains by seeing things, hearing things, touching things and playing with variations of things that were initiated or developed by others before us who learnt the topic in much the same way we did. When we learn something and then put it to use, particularly without modification, this is a form plagiarism. Whether viewed in terms of common law or common sense, we are benefiting, in material and/or spiritual terms, from the efforts of others.

So this month I bring you some tips that I do not for one moment pretend are original, have been developed by me or even have evolved from experimentation on my part, but have been gleaned, deciphered, maybe even directly pinched, from various sources and then tried or tested, but are nonetheless, still worth consideration.

If you are a little stumped for ideas when looking for a 'new' image, or a 'new way' to interpret a scene, it is helpful to continually update the creative thinking areas of your brain by constantly looking at other images and from many different sources. Don't limit yourself to photographs. Art is everywhere but often we don't see the possibilities of shape or form because of limited experience and exposure. By exposing our brains to the various ways others look at the world, we will see new things. In particular, you should regularly visit art galleries, and not just the major ones or the photography oriented. Every suburb has more than a few galleries, even if most are just on-selling cheap prints and knock-offs. These too can be surprising sources of inspiration and ideas.

When looking at a sculpture or other three-dimensional object, consider the interaction of the light and the various shapes it makes. Isolate details by shielding the rest. How would you interpret these shapes in a photograph? Does the 'new' object seem familiar in some way? Does it give you an idea to maybe root around in the kitchen gadget draw for an artifact that has similar form? Maybe with some fiddling of your light source, you can make it look like the sculpture. It might even look good as a complete photograph, if somewhat abstract.

Try this.... visit a (new) location and shoot 'blind'. That is, don't look through the viewfinder, just point and shoot, even from the hip. You will be amazed at what you discover later and what you might create in your image editor. You may finish up with a totally unexpected masterpiece, or not.

Shoot for yourself, not others. You are the one you have to please first. If you like what you do and see, then (eventually) others will too, sometimes, maybe. If you just shoot for competitions, then you are really doing yourself an injustice. Every image will finish-up looking pretty much the same and while you may have a wall of awards, they will have little real value, aside from the ego/esteem boost. A bigger reward is creating something you would be to see hanging on your wall or even on the walls of others. Of course you must hang them to see them, so don't hide your works in a shoebox or a wardrobe, print, mount/frame and hang them.

Knowing the 'rules' of photography is important, but not essential. BUT one rule you really *shouldn't* break is keeping the horizon level, especially in seascapes. It is a scientific fact that 'water finds its own level'; (the surface of a body of water will always be level, horizontal). After all, if the horizon is not level, the water would run off the edge of the earth, wouldn't it? That is unless you purposely tilt the scene (by an obviously large amount) for dramatic impact, though I have never seen a scene where it works with bodies of natural water.

Once you have 'mastered' such things as the 'golden' compositional Rule of Thirds and the like, push them to the back of your mind and just shoot. Rules have a nasty habit of restraining your creative juices. It is an unfortunate reality that in Australia, whether it be at club or national competition level, judges tend, in the main, to be caught in the constraining wraps of rules and standards. If you get the chance to browse through some European competition catalogues, you will be flabbergasted and amazed at the variety of styles and creations that seemingly ignore rules and are yet heralded as works of outstanding value and rightly so in most cases (an opinion – of course). Even so, having said all this, I must add that the Rule of Thirds is important. It has been known since DaVinci's time that (in the world of art and photography) an image composed with the main subject sitting near or at an intersection of a third is pleasing to the eye. It has a sense of 'balance' that doesn't grate on the senses. This is not to say that other compositions are not pleasing, but it is a rare thing when they are.

When editing and reviewing a complex image, one with many elements and subjects that may confuse the viewer if untreated, a good idea is to work on it, save it, then leave it for a while, a few days or even weeks. When you come back to it, you will probably feel very differently about how you want it to look from when you first stared 'playing' with it, maybe markedly so. You will most likely have new and maybe even better ideas of what the final result should look like. Try them, you work non-destructively, yes? In Photoshop, working non-destructively means using adjustment layers and/or smart objects and saving the file as a PDF, with all the layers intact, not flattened. In fact, this is one of the axioms of image editing that I consider essential.

My set of image-editing axioms is as follows:

- Set your camera to Adobe RGB colour space
- Shoot RAW
- Open your image at 300dpi and into Adobe RGB colour space
- Work in layers
- Use adjustments layers to modify the 'look'
- Learn how to use masks
- Play with blending modes
- Save your un-flattened work as a PSD file to preserve the effort
- Give yourself a break and leave time to revisit the image later
- When finished all work, save the final PSD file, then flatten, convert to sRGB, resize (to suit the output, print, projection or web), sharpen to suit output and save-as (jpeg)

Remember that when saving the image as a jpeg file, the resolution depends on the output. For mini-lab printing its 300dpi, for pro-lab printing it will be between 220-250dpi, for projection or viewing on a web page, it is 72-100dpi.

Finally, something that annoys me is hearing people complain that editing images is changing reality. There are two things to consider.

First: because of the nature of digital image capture, the varying quality of the image capturing devices (camera sensors) and the quality of the firmware built into the camera that processes your capture (even in RAW mode), some level of post-capture processing will be required (essential).

Second: the moment the shutter clicks, reality has gone. The instant in time you captured is no longer reality, it is past.

Film, even transparency film, alters reality the moment it is exposed to the light. The chemical composition of the film enhances or subdues the colours it 'sees'. A digital imaging sensor only generates an electric charge when photons hit the light-sensitive photosites on the sensor plate. This electrical charge is then amplified and filtered by various electronic devices in the camera. The resulting signals are then interpreted as an image by lines of computer code embedded into computer chips in the camera. Even if you do nothing to the capture, it is a new 'reality'. The very physical nature of the media can only create an interpretation of the reality it was exposed to, whether it be by chemical or electrical means. What most of us try to do is recreate a version of the reality we saw at the moment of pressing the shutter button and usually a somewhat 'enhanced' version of that reality. We try to make it into what we thought we saw, or 'better'.

Photography is art, not reality, make it more so.

Ron Cork