

Insight + Inspiration Series

On-Location Photography



Photo by featured photographer:
RALPH LEE HOPKINS

VOLUME 9

The Insight + Inspiration Series features varied on-location shoots from around the world. From beautiful nighttime skies to up close and personal style shots, we feature four professional photographers and glimpse behind the scenes to learn about their pre-planning, technique, and outdoor setups. These on-location shots bring to light the never-ending opportunities when shooting in wide, open spaces, evoking the creativity and inspiration behind each elaborate and intended captured image.





Summertime Fun

by Jeff Carpenter

I acquired an old yellow pickup truck from my parents last year and since I've had quite a bit of time to work on it, I decided to put a fresh coat (nine if we're actually counting) of paint on it. Before I even put the first coat on, I knew I wanted to capture some bright sunny portrait shots that worked with the bright yellow that I painted the truck. That was really the initial concept but there was still some work to be done to prep for the shoot.

Since we're still pretty early into springtime, I wanted to capture a shot that really said "Summer is coming." I also wanted to give the shot a vintage feel since the truck is from 1975. My plan going into this shoot was to capture an image that makes the viewer want to be a part of the image. I wanted it to look like my model was having fun with friends while sitting on the truck, possibly tailgating or just picnicking at a park. This part was a bit of a challenge since I was only working with one model.

As I mentioned above, I really wanted this image to capture friendship and summer fun, but how can I do that with just one model? If it were any other time, I would have brought in multiple models to make this easier. Finally, I want to bring up my final challenge for this shoot which was that it was out on location. I am predominantly a studio shooter, so anytime I shoot out on location I'm bound to run into a challenge or two. One major challenge is finding power for my devices, batteries, etc. Luckily, I recently picked up some mobile power solutions that allow me to get power to my devices and shoot literally anywhere without worrying about whether or not I packed enough batteries or if I charged my laptop.



Once I came up with the initial plan for this shoot, I reached out to my good friend Allee-Sutton and let her choose the outfit and style for her portion of the shoot. She then brought a few different options and we chose an outfit and look on location.

Speaking of the location, here is how I went about choosing that. I knew I wanted a location that was easy to access but also seemed secluded so there weren't too many distractions in the background. A few days before the shoot I took the truck to a local park with my grill in tow and had a little cookout. I had shot at that park once before and decided it would be the perfect location for this shoot. There are only a few buildings and a ton of different looks depending on the direction you shoot.

Now that I had the model, the location and Allee was taking care of the wardrobe, all we had to do was show up and shoot.

As I mentioned before I wanted an image that was fun with a summer vibe that was just overall a happy image. Well, of course the day we can all get together to shoot the weather doesn't cooperate. Thankfully the rain held off, but the sky was a bit dark and gray which didn't really give off happy summer vibes.

Although I don't love doing a lot of post processing with my images, I pretty much knew right away that I was going to have to replace the sky to get my image to have the desired outcome.



Jeff Carpenter is a commercial portrait and headshot photographer, educator, and owner of ReadyLight Media, a visual media and marketing agency based outside of Nashville, TN. He started his photography career in 2010, shortly after college where he was required to take a photography class in order to graduate. Being a predominantly self-taught photographer, he developed a passion for educating in a way that was simple and easy to understand. His main goal as an educator is to teach the fundamentals of photography and lighting, allowing photographers to absorb information and apply it to their style of shooting.

www.readylightmedia.com

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After I did my basic retouching, I brought the image into a program called Luminar 4 which has a pretty darn powerful and easy to use sky replacement feature to swap out the sky. After I did that, I brought the image back into Capture One Pro and did some final color adjustments and threw on a bit more grain than usual to really sell the vintage look.

When shooting on location, I try not to overpack my gear, but I did need a camera, flash and my computer. Additionally, I needed to make sure I had power for all those devices since there isn't too many power outlets at city parks. I brought all my location power solutions which put my mind at ease knowing that I could work a bit more methodically and not have to rush the shoot.

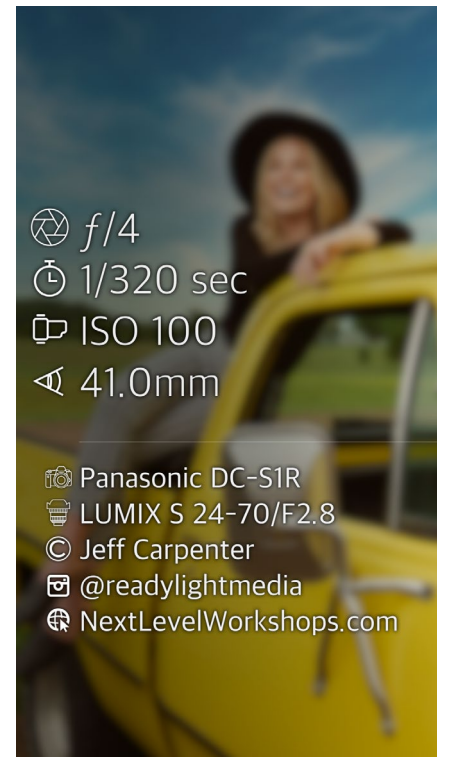
Since the sky was overcast while we were shooting, that provided a nice balanced ambient exposure, but I wanted to have just a bit more fill to allow my subject to pop. I brought just one Paul C. Buff Einstein with a beauty dish which is probably my favorite modifier for location portraits with a single subject. I also made sure to use a sturdy stand and a heavy sandbag so my light didn't get blown over by the occasional wind gust.

As a studio photographer, I tether for every single shoot. I honestly don't know what it would be like to not shoot tethered. One challenge when tethering on location is running out of cable and knocking your laptop to the pavement. That's one major benefit of wireless tethering with the Air Direct.

I was able to move my laptop around to make sure it wasn't in the shot and not have to worry about being tied down with a cable. As for tethering in general, I love that I can see the images right when they come in to check focus and other details on a larger screen. Another thing that a lot of photographers may not think about is allowing your subject to view the images to check for posing, clothing mishap, and also to select their favorite images right there on set.

I tend to run with a skeleton crew when shooting and this was no exception. It was just me, the model and my wife shooting some behind-the-scenes and providing moral support.

When shooting with no crew like this, it does mean that I have to assume the role of DigiTech, assistant, art director and so on, while the model tends to take on the role of makeup and wardrobe.



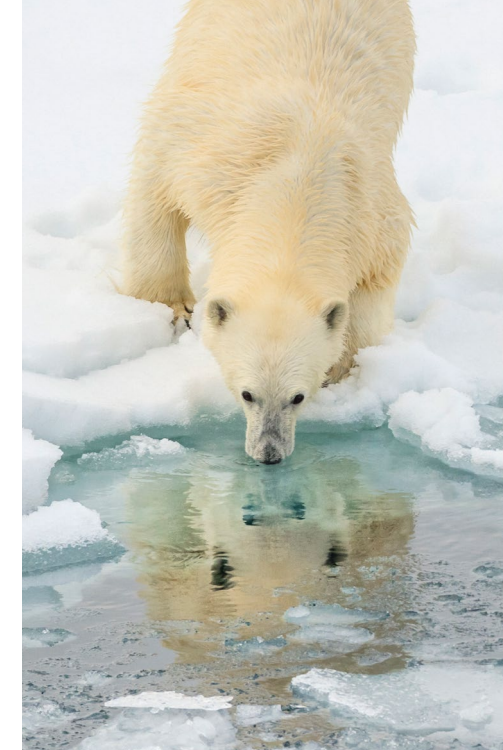
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Polar Fever in the Far North

by Ralph Lee Hopkins

It's true. I'm addicted to ice. I dream of icebergs, glacier-clad mountains, and wildlife adapted to live in the white world at high latitudes. I long to see the King of the Arctic – the Polar or Ice Bear – confidently walking across the pack ice in search of its next meal. Turns out I've got what is called in the business, polar fever.

Thankfully, there's no cure for polar fever. To deal with my condition I head north each summer on expedition ships with Lindblad Expeditions and National Geographic. And without hesitation my favorite place in the far north is Svalbard, an archipelago high above the Arctic Circle that reaches 80 degrees north, only 600 miles from the North Pole.

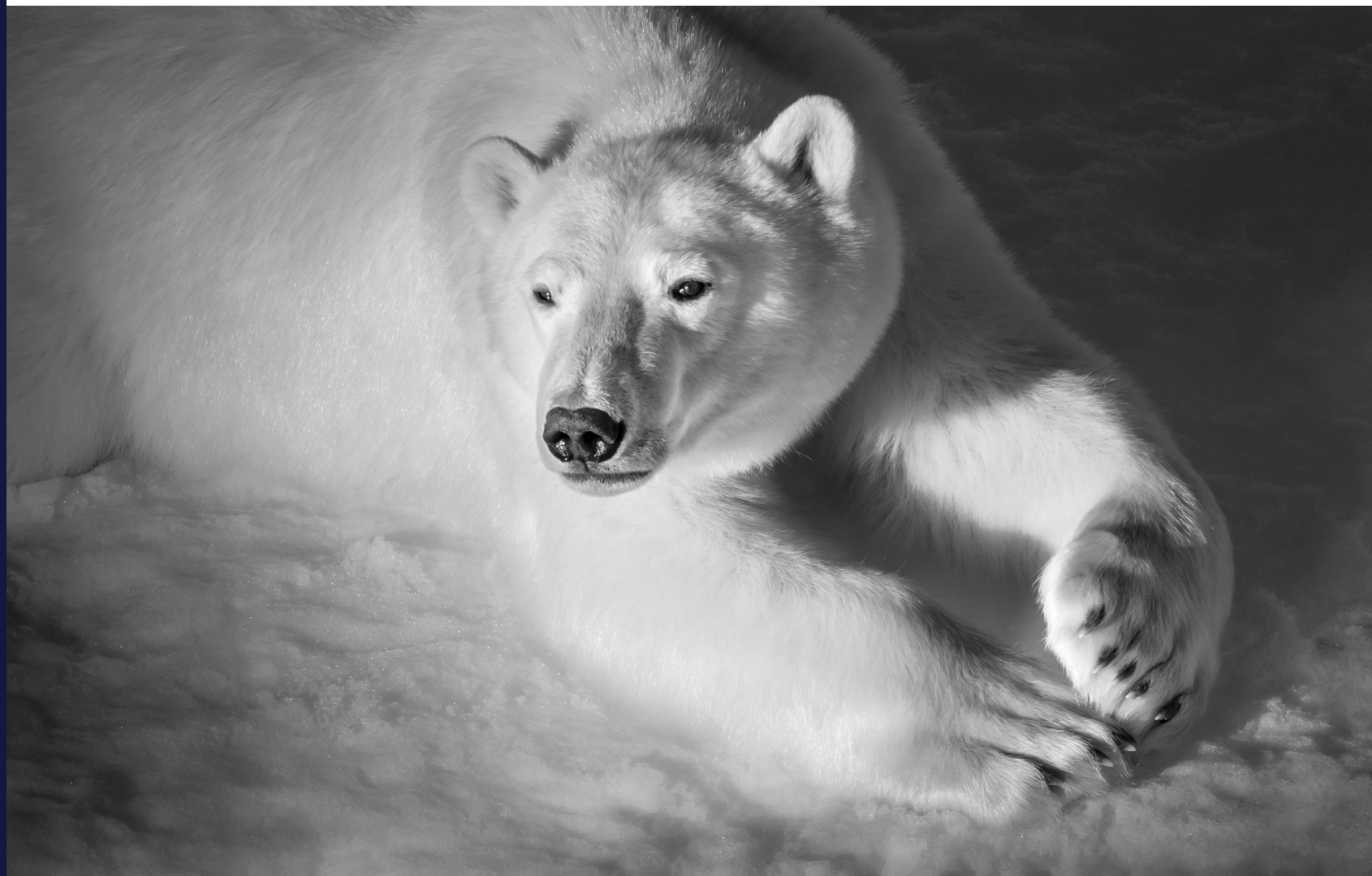


There are many challenges photographing in the extreme environments of the far north. Some of these challenges involve the blinding white scenes in ice and snow and the extremes of contrast it creates. In the white world of the Arctic you must understand how your camera sees light, using exposure compensation to purposely over-expose keeping highlights bright.


Perhaps most challenging are the extremes of weather. In the high Arctic, even in summer, conditions change from moment to moment. Photographing in bad weather can set your images apart, but you must be prepared to deal with conditions below freezing often with blowing snow. Protecting yourself from the elements involves base layers, a waterproof outer shell, and good gloves. Protecting your equipment involves a good backpack and weather-sealed cameras like the Olympus OM-D system.


What is often left unsaid is how to deal with keeping batteries charged and ready to go at all times. And that's where my Tether Tools battery pack comes into play. For long days of shooting in the field my USB-C battery pack is essential equipment, topping off my iPhone when shooting story-telling videos and also for charging spent Olympus batteries. It's no secret that mirrorless cameras drain batteries quickly with their electronic view finders. Having the luxury to charge on the spot allows me to keep shooting even in the harshest conditions.

It's often said that luck favors the prepared. Although even when prepared, luck favors those who understand their equipment and can stay in moment, always ready for what happens next. The magic of photography is when it's no longer about the camera, but simply being there.



Photographer Ralph Lee Hopkins travels to the world's wild places with Lindblad Expeditions and National Geographic. He is founder and director of the Expedition Photography program for the Lindblad Expeditions-National Geographic alliance, and for more than 25 years has photographed expeditions from the Arctic to the Antarctic and points in between.

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Street Fashion Shoot

by Rich Myers

Nomad Supply Co. is a local skate and surf shop owned by a friend of mine, Chris Blackway, who was in need of updating his newly launched website with some of the new brands and clothing options he's offering. After a few weeks of photographing everything as an overhead shot of just clothing lying flat, he received some feedback asking to see how the stuff actually fits and lives in a real-life situation. That's when Chris reached out to me.

After a few conversations, we finally decided to go ahead and shoot some on body stuff with his collection. Now that we had our location, we talked mood for the look and how we can keep it consistent and be able to do pickups whenever, whether it be me or someone else, we've created a recipe for his online shop and started the library. In order to stick to the recipe, we opted to shoot available light. That way we can shoot year-round and incorporate the mood of the season and let the images maintain a simple look without getting into too much modeling to the light. In the future we may need to add a fill light or emulate the available light with supplementing artificial lighting into the scenario, but only at a worst-case scenario. This method also kept it organic, and allowed us to move around the location without any thought, keep gear to a minimum and allowed us to shoot and work quickly. Without having strobes or LED's, we didn't have to worry about power, moving lights, bringing sandbags or modifiers, just the subject in the outfit and the photographer and his camera.

Since this is very dependent on client approval, we chose to shoot tethered. This allowed us to shoot a look and review on location and make sure we were sticking to the layout and getting images that work for the brand. I chose to work with the Air Direct for this project. I'm a huge fan of tethering, and make my living off of it, so anytime I shoot, the first thing I think of is how can I tether safely and efficiently enough to add value to the job but also convenience and something reliable that won't take away from the task with troubleshooting and gear issues.

The Air Direct was the perfect tool for this job. We wanted to tether and be able to move about without any restrictions or safety issues. Now that we were on location and we had picked out the marks for our crops and locations, we start shooting. I brought along a 15" MacBook Pro running Capture One Pro 12 and Tether Tools ADC for image review. In order to make the review process even easier, I mounted the laptop on the Tether Table Aero. The Tether Table Aero was great for location due to its size, as it gave me a large surface to work with and storage options below with the XDC attachments. In order to maintain a cordless set, we opted to run the laptop station on the Tether Tools ONSite Power System. Using a D-Tap battery and an ONSite Versa V-Mount to hold the AC adapter, my laptop was able to maintain a 100% charge and run at full capability and we didn't have stingers running across the back lot.



Richie Myers is a Digital Tech from Philadelphia, PA. Always on the look out for his next project, his computers have taken him all over the world to capture just about anything imaginable. From iconic key art in the desert to winter athletes in the back country. He has a deep understanding of technology, meticulous attention to detail, fascination with innovation and a love for creating images. Rich's art is taking all of the pain points out of a production and allowing his Photographers and DP's to have complete creative freedom with knowing that he has their image pipeline dialed in.

🏠 thedigirichie.darkroom.tech

📷 instagram.com/digirichie

Being completely wireless means, no one has to touch anything, it means I can place my kit wherever it needs to be and not worry about anything other than shooting and keeps everyone safer.

Not every job is the same, not every production has the same expectations. Being a swiss army knife doesn't mean you can't be good at multiple things; it means you don't want to be mediocre at anything and always prepared. Have multiple options, be prepared and push the envelope.

Technology is never going to stop expanding and changing. The best thing we can do is to adopt it and work together to improve it and enhance it to the way we want it to perform. If something doesn't meet your expectations, sometimes you need to reanalyze what you want out of it and find a work around. I've found some really rad things by accident and have expanded the capabilities of things based upon experimenting and looking for solutions to make things work for me.



Joshua Tree

Sometimes it's a piece of gear that helps fuel the imagination. On a recent trip to Joshua Tree, a friend brought his Pixelstick, and we each took turns picking a pattern and painting the light. This was my "interpretation" of the scene. I'm excited to continue to use a Pixelstick in my night work. The options are endless with what you can construct with this tool. But with many options comes the challenge to continue to forge something that shakes you out of your comfort zone.



Capture or Create

How Are You Approaching Your Photography?

by Gabriel Biderman

To capture or create, that is the question.

We live in a world where every moment is precious and must be constantly captured. Some of us need to document to remember. These reasons are important and should not be overlooked. Silly selfies, family photos and pictures of our loved ones unify us. Look at your Facebook page. What are the most liked pictures? Are they your best shots or are they sentimental moments of good times?

Now let's flip the coin. If you consider yourself a photographer, then you need to have a photographic vision. You can experiment and try different styles, but once you truly sync your eye to your camera, a whole new creative world is open to you.

I consider myself an artist and an educator, so I'm always pushing to look beyond the beauty of what is in front of us. I don't want the same picture of the same place. I want to create something new, something that has my personal stamp.

This can be a difficult yet rewarding exercise. And when you are in the awe of an amazing location, such as Yosemite National Park, you are going to photograph El Capitan. But are you going to capture or create?

I advise to live in the awe of the moment and definitely capture a few of those staple shots. But keep looking, keep pressing on and see if you can create something special. Look for unique opportunities when the color, light or a new angle will yield inspiration.

That's one of the main reasons I have chosen night photography as an artistic outlet. Typically, my images are not something that you can see in-person with the naked eye. When we play with time and extend our exposures past a fraction of a second, we are opening a whole new door of possibilities. In my most successful shots, your eyes should wander with a sense of wonderment.

So let's take a look at three shots where I pushed past the norm and explored more.



Central Park

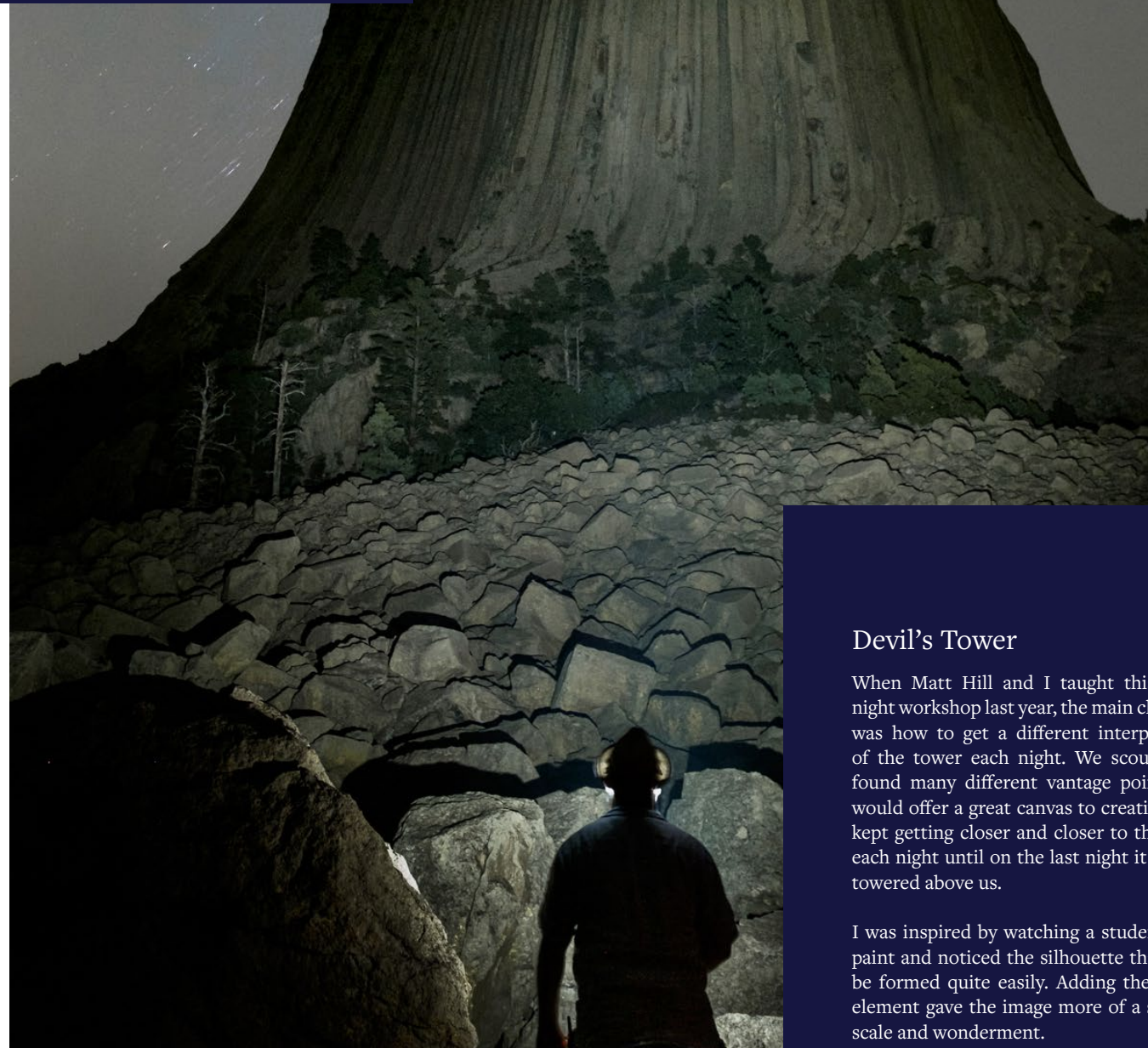
Finding the right time. This was shot with fellow NPAN teacher Chris Nicholson right after our 2016 NYC blizzard. The San Remo is an oft-photographed scene and the winter scenario definitely makes it a little more special. But what really makes you go "wow" on this image is the picture-perfect movement of the clouds. This was a two-minute exposure and the clouds were moving pretty quickly. If my exposure was 4 to 6 minutes, it would have smeared the whole sky. It is those breaks in the clouds that make the shot. I waited to pull the trigger until they cleared the tower lights. We get to play with time a lot at night. Learn to react quickly to the many movements and your night visions will flourish!

So I invite you to challenge yourself next time you are out shooting. Capture the moment but try to produce something special. It won't always work, but at least you'll be flexing those creative muscles and it will better prepare you for the next time.



Gabriel Biderman is a Brooklyn-based fine art and travel photographer, and author of *Night Photography: From Snapshots to Great Shots*. During the daytime hours, you'll often find Gabe at one of many photo events around the world working for B&H Photos road marketing team. See his portfolio and workshop lineup at www.ruinism.com.

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Devil's Tower

When Matt Hill and I taught this three-night workshop last year, the main challenge was how to get a different interpretation of the tower each night. We scouted and found many different vantage points that would offer a great canvas to creativity. We kept getting closer and closer to the tower each night until on the last night it literally towered above us.

I was inspired by watching a student light-paint and noticed the silhouette that could be formed quite easily. Adding the human element gave the image more of a sense of scale and wonderment.

Photo by BRANDON SULLIVAN



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Air Direct Wireless Tethering System brings you a tethered workflow shooting experience that frees you to be mobile as you shoot. Air Direct's utility software makes a virtual PTP connection so you can wirelessly control your camera and transfer files to your software. Air Direct utilizes its own power source and will not drain the camera's battery. For longer shoots, use large external USB batteries or AC wall power via the supplied DC cable. Air Direct offers the flexibility to swap power sources without ever shutting down, so you can power and shoot simultaneously.