

Wells Shooting Exercise

(an exercise to promote technically and artistically better photographic images)

by Ron Matson

Developed from the basic workflow practiced in a David Wells' workshop.

Note that the following are guidelines rather than hard and fast rules.

Shooting

Plan a shooting expedition to last two+ hours during "good light" times -- extending from either:

1) early in the day, before sunrise to perhaps when the sun approaches 45 degrees,

or

2) late in the day from falling sun position of about 45 degrees to dusk. The area selected should be one with some anticipated photographic potential.

During this outing, select a small number (three to five) of subjects to photograph. Each should have some degree of "interestingness", have good light, be reasonably "photographable" (in that the item can be reasonably isolated, free of unwanted clutter/distractions, etc.).

For each subject, take a number of images (10 to 25, or even more), shooting it to near exhaustion. In shooting, start with an overall image, then work in and refine. Variables can be: camera to subject distance, depth of field, focus point, viewpoint, zoom amount, relationship to the sun, vertical aspect angle (low/high), lens choice, shutter speed, light modeling considerations, cropping choices, and any other variable that might be reasonably possible. In this shooting, a sense of "experimentation" should be on one's mind. In total, at least 60 images should be shot of the selected subjects during the outing.

Editing and Evaluation

Do a quick, rough edit and reduce the total number of images by about 50%. For each rejected image, briefly think about what the factors were that caused it to be rejected, using perhaps considerations discussed in the following paragraphs.

Then, evaluate each of the remaining images in some detail as follows:

- **Technical:** Does histogram crowd the right side? Does the histogram show clipping? Is it in focus? Any camera movement? Review the camera parameters in metadata. Etc.
- **Compositional:** Is it tightly cropped? Is it aligned horizontally/vertically? Is it free of objectionable distractions? Background busyness? Is there unwanted dead space? Are there any objectionable tangents? Rule of thirds. Leading lines. Visual flow. Balance. Does orientation work (horizontal/vertical)? Etc. Identify and mentally note favorable and unfavorable aspects. Keep in mind that one of the primary goals of this exercise is to program one to compose, frame, and crop in the camera as opposed to in post-processing. Ideally, the image should be "print ready" out of the camera.
- **Artistic:** Does the image have artistic merit? Does it tell a story? What is good about it? What is not good? What could be better?
- **Comparative:** Compare the images in each subject group. Evaluate what factors differentiates the various images. What are the factors of variation that worked to the benefit of the image and which did not work? Pick out best image. If one had an opportunity to shot it again, what could be done differently to make the final result even better?

Review and evaluate what was learned in this exercise. What problems were encountered that should be avoided? What was learned that will be of benefit in the future?