

# The Art of Photography Richard White

PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKSHOPS ON LINE GALLERY PHOTOGRAPHY ARTICLES HIGH COUNTRY CALENDAR

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Chestnuts & Snow, Mansfield

In the last issue of this newsletter I was making comments about some of the differences between the current capture mediums. Given some of the comments and questions that resulted from the newsletter, I thought it may be worth expanding a little more on some of the areas.

For a short recap, my main concern comes from photographs that are supposed to be a representation of our times. This can cover a wide range of topics or subject matter but, because my main interest is either a landscape photograph or a portrait, I will concentrate on these, or at least the treatment of these.

I think what landscape photographers offer to the world of photography is the ability to see past the normal and isolate the incredible. If we are out roaming the countryside and we come across something that, to us, is quite extraordinary and we happen to make a photograph of this then there is a sense of accomplishment that we have captured something quite unique.

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Nature creates and amazes everyday, sometimes bland and sometimes fantastic. If, as photographers, we are lucky enough to be there to make an image, how fortunate is that? The resulting photograph is seen and viewed with awe. How fantastic is nature to deliver to us such a scene that has the potential to move us, excite us and humble us in the same breath?

For me, the reward for effort is a fabulous image that I happened to see and record. I get immense satisfaction knowing that it was, and it is. It is at this point that I part company with concocted landscapes. Scenes that never existed. Scenes that were created by the aid of PHOTOSHOP. And I am not referring to enhancements of the image. I am referring to additions and subtractions. Skies added, boats put into lakes, birds flying across the sunset sky, houses and cars removed, and on it goes.

When ever I mention this, the name Frank Hurley is usually thrown back at me for it was he who, in the early 20th century, "added" things to his black and white landscapes. So did many other photographers of that time and later, but why should that make it right? The one point overlooked in that argument is that there were many photographers who didn't and wouldn't and wouldn't even conceive of it. For me it is quite unnecessary, for Nature has its own Photoshop.

The same can also be said of people. Capturing people as they are, not as those silly magazines present people to be with everything retouched to the max. The "look who's turned 50" headline shows us a person without one blemish or line or eye wrinkle. I am not sure who they are kidding, but it just isn't like that, as most of us know!

There are also some in our midst who liken dodging and burning in a traditional darkroom to "photoshopping" an image on the computer. If one understood the inadequacies of photographic paper then one would know what is required to eke out all the information from a negative. Most images that are captured digitally, either Raw or in Jpeg format usually require some treatment when downloaded to the computer.

Then of course there is that other "got you" point. "If you photograph a landscape or a person in Black and White then right from the outset you are changing reality". In some ways that is true but, as I stated in the last newsletter, the direct lineage to the original scene can easily be traced back. Different colour films will display some colours differently. Is there a difference here when comparing to B & W? Maybe it is time to repeat Uncle Ansel's well phrased line, "The negative is the score. The print is the performance," and explore this a little.

If we take an average scene of some rocks in the foreground, dark trees in the middle ground and a blue sky with a few fluffy white clouds above, all lit from side lighting, how do you think this would represent in an image of either colour or black and white? You might need to use your imagination here a little. If we take the black & white print first my guess would be that the sky would be overexposed by comparison to the rest

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of the image assuming that the rest of the image has good detail and tonal separation. Let's say that the trees are too dark, the rocks are okay and the sky is washed out somewhat. If we raise the exposure on the trees and do nothing else then the rocks become too light and the sky becomes even lighter. If we correct exposure for the sky then the trees become a nonexistent black mass and the rocks appear very dark. It is obvious that the image or, more correctly, the paper needs help.

The same problem can apply to colour as well, whether captured with film or by digital means. At the time of capture the extreme in contrast will be recorded onto film with no problem, or recorded on the sensor, but not with quite the same latitude. Over exposure is the main problem with digital. It is best treated like transparency film and err on the side of under exposure. No amount of work will bring detail into a highly over exposed area. It just isn't there.

The work that goes into a print once the image has been captured though is often down to the printer and their ability to eek out as much information from the negative/pixels that they can. When the scene gets interpreted the printer is working from the information that is on the negative. (Treat "negative" as meaning at time of capture, whether film or digital). They don't add things because they feel it is lacking something. They work from the information available to them. We lighten the trees, darken the rocks and the sky or lighten the rocks etc. The truth of the capture is still intact. It was all there to begin with and just becomes an interpretation of that scene by way of contrast enhancement, darkening hot spots, lightening shadow areas and so on.

I think as photographers we owe it to ourselves to be truthful to what we capture when we are showing images that represent the natural world - true to its content, but open to interpretation of the content. I have no problem with increasing contrast, highlighting or darkening aspects of the image, but all within the negative's boundaries. Some may call this double standards, but I go back to Uncle Ansel's words, "The negative is the score, the print is the performance". Each of us would bring slight or major variations to a negative just like we would to a piece of music. What we are doing is creating an atmosphere within the print, we are not creating a landscape!

Within photographic circles there is always talk about raising the bar to lift the standards of photography. Computerized imagery seems to be a trendy thing at present. The fabrication of photographs is setting standards and precedents that will likely become the norm of tomorrow and by allowing this to persist no photograph will have any validity at all in the future. How unfortunate for such a wonderful medium that is all about discovery and the ability to see far more than most could ever hope to.

And one final point on the matter. My feeling is that if one chooses to add or subtract and totally change an image, then state that and don't delude the viewer into thinking otherwise. As people who represent a photographic body, albeit amateur or professional, we owe it to ourselves to set standards that maintain the integrity of photographic images.

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## **Hypo or Fixer.**

I thought this might be of interest to those of you who are still making prints in a darkroom. Recently I was given a 4 litre bottle of Ilford fixer. Those who know me or have done a printing workshop with me, would know that I have been using Kodak fixer for more years now than I care to remember. It has never been an issue and with me always thought that one brand was similar to the other. Well the day I started using the Ilford fixer I noticed a distinctive odour coming from the tray. I recalled another friend telling me years ago that the only thing that they didn't like about the darkroom was the smell of the fixer. I always thought that they must have had a very acute sense of smell. So all along it was the brand. Kodak doesn't seem to smell to the same degree.

As we all know, fixer is reusable. Good for a certain number of prints per litre. Well the other thing I have noticed is that from mixing up a fresh batch on Friday, using it, and then using it again on Tuesday, it had discoloured quite a bit. For me this is not normal, and my experience with any photographic chemical is that if it changes colour it must be oxidizing and losing its potency. No doubt there will be a chemist out there who will set me straight. It was purely an observation that was hard to ignore.

## **Banana Photography**

Due to the fact that petrol costs are so high and interesting scenes have been in short supply this year the price of all landscape photographs will increase by up to 100%. We (Landscape Photographers of the World "LPW" or is it Photographers of Landscapes "PoL") regret this decision, but when more scenes are made readily available and the cost of fuel comes down, things will come back to normal.

## **Black & White High Country Calendar 2007** (not affected by the above)

As in past years I have produced the High Country Calendar for 2007. I have been able to keep the price the same as for the past 3 years which is \$29.50. From the end of September, the calendar can be found at most good book stores, ABC shops and some newsagents. If you would like a copy sent directly from me, send a cheque or postal order along with your name and address to P.O. Box 425 Mansfield Vic 3722 and I will post a copy back to you. If you would like it personalized just ask. Overseas orders add \$10 for NZ and \$20 for the rest of the world.

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## **NEWSLETTER PRINT OFFER for issue #17      100% guaranteed**

The print offering for this issue is again the photograph I have presented at the head of this newsletter:  
**Chestnuts & Snow, Mansfield, Victoria.**

These photographs are designed to give you the opportunity to purchase one of my photographs at a reduced rate. This will apply **only** to receivers of this electronic mail.

**This offer lasts till September 17, 2006.**

Photographs are usually offered in the image size of 11 x 14" (27 x 35 cm) approximately. The size may vary slightly depending on cropping of a particular image.

### **About the image**

The image was made in 2000 on TRI-X 4 x 5" film with a Linhof Technika.

Given that we have had such a lousy snow season I am hoping that this might cheer up the skiers amongst you. This particular was made after a rather strong snow storm the night before. I awoke this particular Sunday morning, saw the snow all over the ground and grabbed my camera and went for a look see. I remembered these trees up the road from my place so headed in that direction for a look. Now, 2006, one of them has gone. The progress of man has taken it's toll.

The print will be over matted to an overall size of 407 mm x 508 mm (16 x 20").

The image will be printed on my dwindling stocks of Kodak Polymax Fibre base paper mounted to rag museum board and over matted ready for framing. As always only the finest materials are used in the production of the image.

Details relating to the image and print number will appear on the back of the photograph.

Well that's it for this time. How ever you do it I hope you keep making images and enjoy the process.

Till next time.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke underneath.