

Hird About The Place

The Scene by Hird Newsletter.

Edition #11: April 2005

Dear Friends,

Easter has been and gone and it's only April. I hope you had a good break, and at least we can go shopping without seeing those gaudy little chocolate decorations everywhere now. We saw our first ones on the second day of the year! Honestly, anybody would think Easter is nothing more than a celebration of the day your parents lay eggs in the garden. Perhaps I'm too cynical? Well, just a little

Print Raffle for St John

We are raffling a framed Night Stalker lighting shot worth \$470 to help St John Ambulance purchase some much needed training equipment. If you would prefer to have properly trained people trying to save your life, please come into the gallery or call us with your credit card details and purchase a few tickets at \$2 each. And if you would like to sell a few books for us, by all means, come and collect them from us. Every ticket sold helps save a life.

We are drawing the prize at the Scene by Hird Quiz Night, Friday 13th of May. If you have 5 friends who are nearly as smart as you, why not form a team? Tickets are only \$10 per brain and available now from us or the Ambulance depot. St John could really use YOUR help in their support of our community. Funds from the quiz night will help build new the Disaster Management Facility for Kalgoorlie-Boulder. Let's hope we never need it.

Questions and Answers.

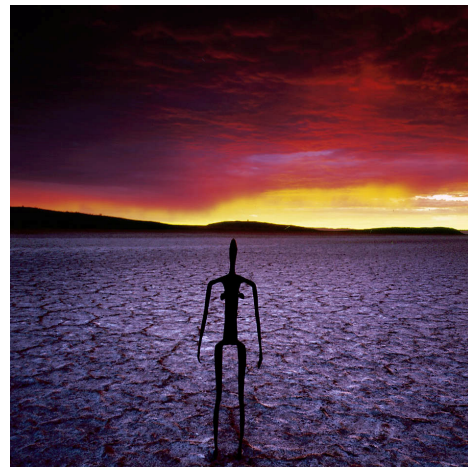
Now it's your turn to ask the questions: I'd like to throw the floor open to you – the faithful reader. What would you like to know? Ask me questions and I'll write articles to answer them. It could be on any topic – how to take better photos, how to hang your Scene by Hird print, how to get a print framed, why birds fall out of the sky when you point – anything! Don't be shy: if you aren't sure

about something, chances are others have the same question too.

Asking me a question lets me know what you are interested in and helps me fill up some space (it's not easy coming up with this stuff, you know!). Honestly though, your questions will help me give you a more interesting newsletter, which is good for all concerned.

Photo Tip: Crop Your Prints.

Cropping is actually trimming a print so the shape of the print enhances the composition. Quite often the subject you've captured does not look at its best when framed in the 2:3 ratio of 35mm film or 3:4 ratio of digital sensors.



"Inside Inside Australia"

Cropping allows you to remove unwanted or boring portions of the scene, enhancing the final product. It's the "Less Is More" theory in action. It is not so much "thinking outside the box" as "changing the shape of the box".

Before taking to your print with a pair of scissors or a trimming knife, make a pair of "cropping aids" to help visualise the preferred crop. Cropping aids are simply two "L" shaped pieces of cardboard with which you can hide parts of your print. Take

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Cassidy St, Kalgoorlie, 6430

Ph: (08) 90 911 611 Fax: (08) 90 911 711 Mobile: 0408 95 11 76

Email: graeme@scenebyhird.com Web: www.scenebyhird.com

note of the best composition, then hack away! It's great fun (but then again, I'm easily amused).

Exposure Meters – Part 2

Last month, in part one of this article, I discussed how the camera should be able to get the exposure perfect every time. By measuring the light reflecting from the scene and comparing with a known standard, the camera suggests the aperture and shutter speed which it thinks will yield perfect photos.

So what happens between the camera's suggested settings and the photo-lab? Why do some shots just look terrible and nothing like you remember? Did the Gods of Mt Fuji intervene because you did not make a worthy offering at the Altar of the Sacred Consumer (AKA maxing out your credit card at the local camera shop)?

Cameras, for all their sexy designs and touted features, are dumb. The sales staff where you bought your film camera probably told you how good the "zoom" the lens is, how fast it can rewind a film, then showed you the dinky "pop-up flash" and how rugged/small/light-weight/pretty/cool your new camera will be.

If it is a digital compact camera, the talk would have been about how many megapixels the sensor has, how it docks with the printer, how much optical zoom it has, then showed you the dinky pop-up flash and how rugged/small/light-weight/pretty/cool your new camera will be.

Generally, compact cameras have the least intelligent metering systems because they are the cheapest. Some of the higher quality SLR and dSLR cameras are more selective with their metering systems and provide better predictions about correct exposure. However, very few get it right every time.

The reason, not surprisingly, is the fact that no two scenes are exactly the same. Cameras are designed to give the ideal exposure (or something close to it) for an "average scene".

Meters are calibrated to give the film the required amount of light averaged over the whole frame. In doing this, parts of the film must receive more

light and other parts receive less light than the average (otherwise you wouldn't see any details).

The white flowers in a scene reflect more light than the grassy tones, which in turn reflect more light than the burnt logs. The camera sees the scene and tries to reproduce the grassy tone exactly, and by doing so ensures white flowers will be white and the logs will be black. That's an average scene, as far as the camera is concerned.

With such a scene your camera has no problems making a good exposure. Scenes which don't deviate too much from that grassy tone throughout the scene look fine in print or on the screen – everything fits within the film's or sensor's ability to reproduce tones.

The problems begin when the scene is **predominantly** very dark or very light in tone, much darker or lighter than grass. Examples might be photos of snow covered trees or burnt logs in a coal mine.

The camera doesn't know what you are trying to photograph (white snow or dark logs) and suggests an exposure which would turn your snow or your log into the tone of grass (i.e. middle grey). As I said earlier, cameras are dumb! In situations like these, your meter will be fooled and you will need to over-ride the automatic exposure of your camera.

That's done with the exposure compensation control: dial in +1 or +2 if the scene is predominantly light tones (and the opposite if it is predominantly dark tones). The lighter the tone, the higher the number, and the darker the tone, the lower the number.

These rules apply in all light conditions – sun, shade, night, flash. It's the tone of the scene I'm referring to, not how dim or bright it's getting outside (your camera will allow for that factor quite well.)

Share The Love!

Why not let your friends have a good chuckle at my expense? How about sharing this newsletter by passing it to workmates and friends to read during their lunch break. Leave it lying on the lunch

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Email: graeme@scenebyhird.com Web: www.scenebyhird.com

room table or pin it to the notice board. Don't just throw it in your bin at home when you're finished reading it – please take it to work and place it in the paper recycling bin after sharing it around.

Watch your Inbox

I'm about to send out a special offer via the email for a picture which will not be available through the gallery. It's a surrealistic rendition of a part of mining history from Laverton, guaranteed to make people scratch their heads whenever they see the print on your wall. Keep an eye on your inbox!

So Near And Yet So Far: Cue

During the recent Easter break I drove to Cue to make some images of the tiny town and its surrounding areas. It's 750km by road from Kalgoorlie, making the place not only a small Cue, but a far Cue too!

After our disastrous journey from Menzies to Sandstone via the "back road" last Easter, I opted for the much longer sealed road to Sandstone via Leinster. Driving by myself on this trip, I considered the peace of mind (read "boredom") more important than the excitement of loose, sharp, "tyre eating" gravel and a shorter trip.

I arrived safe and bored in Cue about an hour before "sunset". Have you ever felt cheated by the elements? I drove for 8 hours to find a cloud covered western horizon and dull light. Oh well.

Determined to make the most of it (and to prove I had been there) I made a shot of the grand old government buildings, after which I moved down to the old Bank of New South Wales building. I'm fairly used to being approached by strangers when I'm using my camera – it *does* look quite unusual. Questions like "Is that a Hasselblad?" or "Can you still buy film for that thing?" are the norm. However, I was floored when the guy approaching me with his partner in tow asked "Are you Graeme?"

Stunned, I halted my routine: who would have thought I'm world famous in Cue? Where were the rest of the welcoming committee? I didn't see

* To which the correct answer is "No, I only bring it out to start conversations with strangers"

any red carpet and the ticker tape was very thin on the ground. Where was my welcoming lei? Was I on Candid Camera or was I in The Twilight Zone?

Leigh and Francine then introduced themselves to me. They had been receiving the newsletter since they left Kalgoorlie for Port Hedland, and recognised me from both the gallery and the Burt St markets. Like me, they were passing through Cue. Thus, my brush with fame in Cue was fleeting and tenuous at best. Not another soul in the town knew or even cared who I was: I was back on familiar ground.

I finished making my shot (it was yet another to justify my lack of notoriety in Cue) and drove to my intended camp site for the night. The old hospital is now a ruin on the edge of town; more like a war zone than a place of healing. I used the rising full moon to act as my light source for a photo which I hoped would show the desolation and bleakness of the scene.

At 5.00am next morning, I awoke - the old Freemason's building was calling me. This building could well have been the inspiration for the Addams Family architect! A classic example of "Victorian Gothic with a corrugated finish, distinctly 'Goldfields' in character". I would love to have taken a peek inside, but Lurch was not answering (must have been told to keep the riff-raff out).

After making my shot, I took a quick drive to a mesa near the town and made a landscape shot, before heading out to Afghan Rock. Apparently, the place was named after a Muslim Afghan was killed for ritually washing his feet in the natural waterhole – it turns out people object strenuously to the taste of Afghan sandals in their drinking water. Who would have thought?

I spent the rest of the day scouting for photogenic scenes and a place to stay that evening. Near the abandoned townsite of Austin, I found an old stone hut made from BIF (the geos out there will know what I mean, but suffice to say it's a dark red rock). Here was the shot to make the whole trip worthwhile! I marked the spot in the memory of my GPS and sought a place to shoot next morning.

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A mesa near Cue, WA.

I returned to “my” hut an hour before sunset, giving myself plenty of time to set up for that perfect shot as the westering sun approached the horizon. It’s a good thing I was there so early – The ubiquitous clouds severely curtailed my window of opportunity, allowing me only 20 minutes of direct sunlight before returning the world to drab grey. I managed to make three exposures before mediocre light prevailed.

I packed up when I realised my preferred light would not eventuate and headed towards Mt Magnet for my camp site. I chose an area close to some breakaway country called “The Granites”, which I thought would come alive by the light of a sunrise: I was not let down the next morning.

With glowing clouds behind me providing a light source, I aimed my camera to the west. My goal was to capture the scene lit by high, red clouds and I fired off half a dozen shots from a series of locations within a few metres and minutes of each other. I love that time of the day: What were you doing at 6.00am on Easter Monday? I hope you weren’t sleeping in

Although a long drive back to Kalgoorlie awaited me, I was looking forward to seeing this part of the state at a more leisurely pace than my trip towards Cue allowed for. After a bite to eat and a poor man’s (mis)guided tour of Mt Magnet, I set off towards Sandstone, stopping at various places as I found interesting rock formations. (It’s something

only a geologist who is travelling alone would attempt).

When I diverted to some breakaway country between Leinster and Leonora, I stood in awe of the scene before me. I will write more of the location later in the year, since I intend to return there in June to make what I believe will be one of my best photographs from the Goldfields. I can hardly wait, but the light won’t be perfect until the middle of winter. (I must be mad – a 660km round trip, planned three months in advance, to make a picture of some old weathered rock. Ah, but just wait until you see what I bring back!).

Three hours later I arrived home to an empty house and fridge full of chocolate. It would have been so easy – like stealing chockies from a kid! But I was strong – I resisted this time. 15kg down and only 10 to go, and I wasn’t about to weaken for the sake of a piece of sweet, cold and oh-so-inviting Easter egg chocolate. My family are so cruel to me ...

A Testimonial!

Rob and Karen were kind enough to send us a testimonial and will be coming in soon to take advantage of the 15% discount I offered last month. Here’s what they wrote:

*Dear Graeme,
We've just purchased one of your pictures 'Red Sky At Night' and I just wanted to let you know that we absolutely love it. This picture captures why we love Kalgoorlie with its beautiful sunsets and scenery. Thank you for sharing your magical visions.
Kind regards,
Rob and Karen Leonforte*

Thankyou very much Rob and Karen – I appreciate your effort very, very much!

Ta da - done! One April newsletter in the can! I didn’t think I had enough to fill four pages when I started out, but the cutting room floor is littered with discarded ideas and thoughts.

I hope you enjoyed it, and I’ll write again in May.

Graeme Hird

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