

Hird About The Place

The Scene by Hird Newsletter.

Edition #10: March 2005

Dear Friends,

February was *supposed* to be a nice quiet month, where not much was going to happen and we could just cruise on into March. I don't know who was writing the script, but they got it all wrong. Busy? Just the other day we heard a pair of blue-arsed flies complaining that they were "busier than a Hird in February"!

But then again, I couldn't imagine life any other way

The sound of a trumpet blowing ...

I'm not normally one for boasting about my successes, but this particular feat has me bursting with pride and I've got to let you all know about it (hey, just humour me for a couple of paragraphs, okay? I'll be referring back to this later in the photo tips section ...)

One of the best resources for learning about photography is a web site called photo.net. I learnt most of what I know by reading the pages and forums found on it, and I still read it every day (did I mention I'm obsessed with photography?)

The site has a critique forum which gets about 10,000 images loaded to it each week, and there are over 700,000 photos already on the site. Each week, the people running the site select one photo from those 700,000 to feature as "Photo of the Week", and on Valentines Day, they chose one of mine!

The photo they chose was the original (B&W) version of "Thunderstruck", one of my favourite lightning photos. During the week when it was featured, over 200,000 people looked at it and around 2,000 then visited my web site. I received congratulations from all over the world and many emails asking for advice about lightning photography.

To be featured in this way is a real honour for me. I don't enter many competitions because art is such a subjective realm and my vision rarely matches that of art competition judges. However, to be selected from over 700,000 images as being worthy of note is a huge boost to my ego (it doesn't show, does it?). And what really stirs my pride is that this is the second of my photos they've chosen as Photo of the Week



Thunderstruck (B&W)

Because I'm feeling in a good mood now, I'm going to offer this print for sale only to the subscribers who receive this newsletter in the mail. It's not normally available in the gallery, but if it takes your fancy after seeing it here or on the photo.net site, you can purchase the 30x12" print from us for a special price of \$190 plus the cost of a frame (about \$140) for this month only. But keep it quiet, okay? It is a special offer only for you (this paragraph will be deleted for the online version of the newsletter).

ND Grads.

Actually, I'm not referring to people from New Delhi with uni degrees the term "ND Grad" is short for neutral density graduated filters.

One of my friends (Robert Lawrence) is a highly awarded pro photographer in Wales. He has been instrumental in the way we run our gallery and his advice to me has rarely been far from the mark. He has been niggling at me for around three years, telling me I'm mad for not owning a set of these

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filters. I've always suspected he was right (about being mad, anyway ...) but I had found ways to work around not owning these filters.

The filters are designed to help the photographer control the amount of light reaching portions of the film in a similar way that a photographer can control the way the paper is exposed in the darkroom. The filter blocks some of the light from part of the film, much like the left thumb of some would-be photographers I know. Think of them as sunglasses for the film. They are grey for half the filter and clear for the other half, with a graduated transition between halves.

I've been avoiding the purchase of the filters because they are quite expensive, and to make up for not using the filters, I've been doing some advanced printing techniques to bring back what was lost. Those techniques are perfect in some instances, but it is usually better to get the process right in the camera, if possible. Expose the film correctly, and the work required later is less onerous and time consuming.

Just before Christmas, I bit the bullet and bought a set of the filters. If you hear my kids lamenting how bad they must have been last year because they received so few presents from Santa, don't be too harsh on them, okay? They *were* indeed good all year, but I was better in a relative sort of way.

I used the filters on the trip to Victoria on many of the shots I made, and I'm pleased to say that they really did significantly improve the ratio of "keepers" I ended up with. (This month's Photo of the Month is one example.) I've also used them on a few shots I made late in February, one of which is shown below.



"Hannans North"

When I feel more confident about using these filters, I intend to place an article on my web site about how to use them. I'll let you know when it's on the site. In the meantime, I'm keen to get out and make more shots with my new toys

On Inspiration And Creativity. (An Unusual Photo Tip)

It's amazing how much confidence can encourage enthusiasm in any creative endeavour. Following the good news about my award from photo.net, I found myself reinvigorated and bursting to get out around Kalgoorlie and capture more images.

In the week that followed, I was out four times and made 15 images, at least two of which will make it into the gallery before long.

So that got me wondering why I felt this sudden urge to create more images. Was it the great light during the week? Was it due to confidence? Was it my new filter set calling me out to play? Was it the stress of being back in the day job?

I decided the huge boost to my ego from the award had the most influence, because all the other factors had been there the week before. It must be true that success breeds success.

If that was the case, I asked myself "Were there other times in my past when I could pinpoint creative bursts and attribute them to a boost in my confidence from some external source?" Had I previously been inspired by high praise or success?

I looked back at the times when I had been at my most expressive and productive, and was surprised to find that I had indeed been offered strong encouragement in some form shortly before each of them. Most notable among them was when Ken Duncan [after seeing my work] told me to "give up [my] day job and make a career of [my] photography". The following twelve months were when most of the prints in the gallery were captured!

I've decided that when I'm facing a "creative block" in photography I will attempt to overcome it by systematically listing my proudest moments and reliving them.

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Thus, my photo tip for this month is to seek inspiration in your past successes when you're striving for a new creativity burst.

Testimonials (Please!)

We are seeking testimonials from our customers to help us become known as Western Australia's best photographic gallery.

We often hear that you love receiving the newsletters and Photos of the Month, and (apparently) you like our photographs in the gallery. Michelle and I never want that praise to stop, however, we'd really appreciate receiving those sentiments in writing, with permission to publish your words.

I know it's a strange request, and actively seeking praise is something you won't hear from many Aussies, but your recommendations to others really makes our job of letting people know about the quality of our work so much easier.

So, if you love our work, please, please, please - let us know about it! A few short sentences that we may quote will make a huge difference to us. A quick note explaining why one of our prints hangs on your wall, or why you bought one of our prints for a friend, or why you love to get the Photo each month, or how good the newsletter is anything at all!

You can put your thoughts in an email (graeme@scenebyhird.com) or fax through a hand-written letter to 08 90 911 711. Or even better, come in and deliver it in person!

And just to encourage you to send us something, we'll give **15% off** the price of your next purchase if we quote your sentiments. That is **not** a bribe - honest! I simply want to encourage you to act on your overwhelming desire to heap truthful praise on our work. Let's just call it "an expression of appreciation for the effort required to send us your thoughts" - no questions asked, no brown paper wrapping, the tax man need never know

In all sincerity, Michelle and I would love to read what you have to say about our work, and it would

mean a great deal to us if we could quote you. Please write, and soon.

Photoshop Course

While we weren't exactly bowled over with requests to run the Photoshop course, we did get enough responses to prompt us to conduct the first one. I'll be contacting those who indicated they'd like participate shortly. There are still places available for the course, so let me know soon if you'd like to attend the course.



"The Metropole"

Free Shipping from Scene by Hird

Have you considered getting another picture from us but were put off by the cost of shipping the picture? Are you one of our customers who have left Kalgoorlie for greener pastures? (And let's face it, *everywhere* is greener than Kal).

We figured there must be a lot of you out there: most of you buy your first picture from us when you are on your way out of town for very the last time. And you never write or call sometimes we think you don't care about us anymore

Anyway, the good news is that it won't cost you extra to buy our prints from now on. We are now paying the shipping to send our prints anywhere in Australia (framed or unframed) for people who do not live in Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

So now there's no excuse - call us today for that print you've always had your eye on. We'll package it safely and send it off before you know it. Oh, and call your mother: she misses you too.

The Camera's Exposure Meter

In the previous two newsletters, I've discussed the methods your camera uses to control the amount of light reaching your film or sensor. The shutter

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does so by restricting the time the film sees the light for, and the aperture determines the size of the window through which the light is transmitted.

But how does your camera know the correct combination of aperture and shutter? The really short answer is "It just does, okay?" The slightly longer (and more informative) answer is that it works out how much light is falling on the scene by measuring the light bouncing from it and it sets the exposure based on a known "average reflectance" for most scenes. The really long and tedious answer involves photo-resistive circuits, complex database analyses, multi-site sensors and something scary called an "algorithm": all very distasteful and not for family reading.

Simply, if it's really bright (say, the middle of the day), your camera may calculate an EV* of 15 (for instance) and suggest a small aperture and a fast shutter speed. You can tell it to use a slower shutter speed and an even smaller aperture, or a faster shutter speed and a bigger aperture, but the total light entering will be the same.

When there is less light, your camera may indicate the EV is now 12 and suggest the aperture should now be opened 3 stops ($15-12 = 3$), or that the shutter speed should now be 3 stops slower (assuming that one of the controls remains constant).

When it's nearly dark, your camera may see an EV of 5 and suggest both a slower shutter speed and a bigger aperture, because it now finds 10 stops less light than in broad daylight ($EV\ 15 - EV\ 5 = 10$ stops).

It sounds simple enough, right? (Cue the ominous music, maestro.) You point your camera at the scene, it works out the perfect exposure and you push the button. Hey presto – perfect pictures every time, right? (Build the crescendo, maestro.) You drop your film into the lab. With great expectations of *High Art*[†] being delivered into your hands, you return within the hour. (Maestro! Did I *ask* for maniacal laughter? Desist immediately –

* EV = exposure value: it's a simple way of representing the amount of light falling on a scene reduced to a single number.

† (and a second set of prints for only \$3.99)

this is serious!) You open your little yellow envelope, and with an onset of despair which grows with each glossy 6x4 indictment, you realise it has all gone horribly wrong again.

Why does this always happen? Why have the Gods of Mt Fuji once again forsaken your prints? Well, don't ask me - all mine seem to come out just fine!

Only joking! I do indeed know the answer to the most common problems that occur and I'll explain why the camera doesn't always get it right in Part II of this article in April.

That's the end of the March newsletter. It snuck up on you, didn't it? Sorry about that, but I needed to stop writing somewhere, and just above that grey line seemed to be a good place. It would have been confusing if I'd gone past it.

In the newsletter next month, I'm going to make up some stuff and waffle on for several pages. Hidden, like gems amongst the text, you'll find a few tips, some information about what we've been up to and what we are planning in the coming months. I'll tell you about some more give-aways Michelle and I have planned and I'll complete the story about camera meters.

There are bound to be one or two answers for the Scene by Hird "St John Ambulance quiz night" (May 13) contained in the April newsletter, so you won't want to miss it.

Cheers, and I'll write in April.

Graeme Hird

PS – Hey Maestro! You can stop the weird music and the hysterical laughter now. That joke is well and truly over, Elvis has left the building and you're starting to freak me out

(11 gone, 14 to go

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