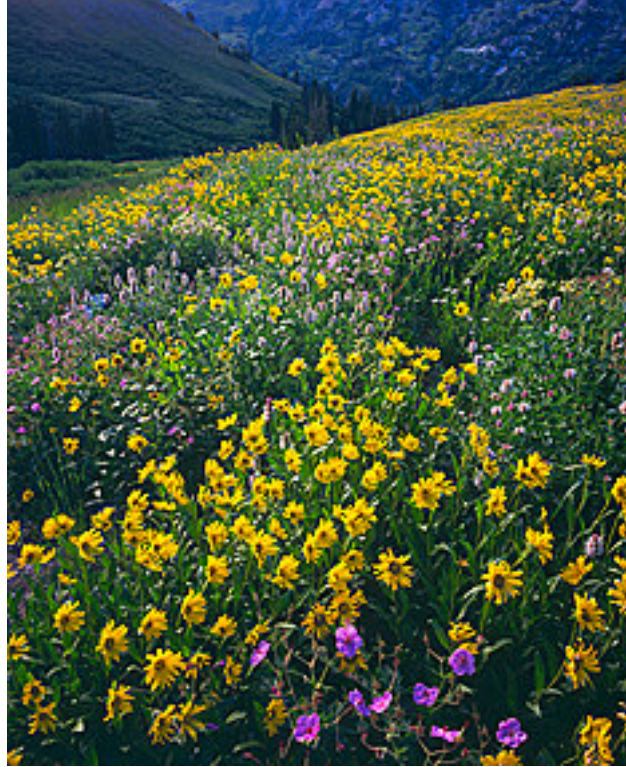


SCENIC WILD PHOTOGRAPHY

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I woke up today and realized that just like that, summer has almost ended. The thunderstorms still bellow over the Wasatch Mountains in the afternoons and the weather still calls for short sleeves, but something inside know the fall season will soon be upon us. Extensive travel these past few weeks left little time or energy for photography so now is a time to rest and plan for the turning of the leaves, and returning to the magical haunts of the canyon country and mountain wilderness.



With the previous newsletter I included an apology for being low on content and somewhat high on marketing. I hope this edition will even things out. Rather than babble about prices and offers and sales, I'll just say it right here – if you appreciate these articles and like our images, please consider showing your support by visiting our web site and purchasing one of our fine prints.

We can be found at: <http://www.scenicwild.com>

Before you proceed, I would like to mention that the article titled "The Big Picture", included below, was rejected from publication in another venue for fear that it might be offensive to some. It is not my intention to offend anyone with this or any other article. If you feel it is inappropriate or if you would like to discuss any of the points made, please contact me directly. I always appreciate a good and honest discussion and I'm not beyond admitting when I'm wrong.

Guy

The Big Picture - A Personal Statement

"Keep me away from the wisdom which does not cry, the philosophy which does not laugh and the greatness which does not bow before children." – Khalil Gibran

There comes a time in everyone's life when we question who we are, why we do what we do, what it is we believe in, where we want to be and what we hope to achieve. Other existential issues aside, I often think of photography and, more importantly, of my role as a photographer and what I hope to convey or accomplish by pursuing the practice.



Perhaps the most important question a nature photographer should be able to answer is how they define the term for themselves. Are you a photographer first or a naturalist first? Is photography for you an extension of your love for nature, or is nature just a collection of raw material to be used in your craft? I suspect many start with the former and, often without explicitly meaning to, end up gravitating towards the latter. How many of us started out in photography because we wanted a way to capture a beautiful natural scene, only to find ourselves obsessed with photographic equipment and technique, or engaged in endless arguments about what constitutes art and what a "good" composition is? Is it perhaps time to return to the basics and realize why we got into it in the first place?

For me it always was about nature and the spirituality of wild places. Every now and then I will get caught up in the same old gear and/or art debates to a point of extreme frustration. When this happens, taking a step back and realizing my love for the subject (rather than the tools of the trade or academic semantics) always helps put things in perspective. I want to capture natural beauty. Everything else is just a means to an end and arguing about it will get me no closer to my goal.



I chose nature photography as a way of capturing and sharing the beauty, power, and fragility of wild places and the life that inhabits them, so that those who have become mired in the man-made chaos may open their eyes to the real world. No, I do not seek to spread peace and love; my motives are far more selfish – I want these places preserved so that I and those I care about can go to them and be inspired and find peace. I want to make up for the devastating wrong-doings of my species. I want to show those who believe in a savior who died for their sins that many places and lives and even entire species continue to die for our sins every single day. I want to show those who put their faith in science and

technology what all science is based upon and that technology sometimes comes at a cost, at the expense of wildness and spirit. I want to show those who have evolved for millions of years to live in balanced harmony with the natural world and lost their way, where their roots are, and to help those who ventured too far and have become lost in a world of scripted and manufactured reality to see a path back; back to a life that has a deeper meaning than the brand of vehicle they drive, the blathering of a sitcom character, or the latest diet craze.

Whether my photography is lumped into any "school" of "genre" or whether I attempt to endow it with ulterior, obscure, or abstract personal meaning will not help my message and may only distort it. The raw power of a natural scene, large or small, grand or intimate, packs more power to move souls than any pompous review by a self-proclaimed art critic ever could.

Have we reached such a degree of arrogance and obtuseness that we can dismiss a magnificent creation, four billion years in the making, as cliché? Is not the tired, overused, nauseatingly repetitive banter about "classical" or "postmodern" principles the very essence of cliché? Do we keep debating these lofty artificial concepts in the context of a single image, while ignoring the very reason the image was made and the timeless miracle it portrays? Is there not more complexity, sophistication, mystery, and beauty in a single leaf or petal than all human art and science combined can reproduce?

I am a naturalist first and foremost. Photography, and indeed art, is to me but a means of expressing and communicating my love and concern for the natural beauty of this world, and even greater concern for those who choose to shun, tame, contain, or even destroy it. Rather than attempt to assert my own limited intellect (by mere fact that I am little more than a living being, doomed to spend but a fleeting instant in this world with no hope of truly understanding all that it is), I prefer to see the simple beauty and power around me with a naked eye, a child's heart, and an open mind. Anything man-made is just that – a feeble attempt that may be impressive in the confines of the little bubble we live in, but paling in comparison with even the minutest element of creation.

My photography is not about the equipment I use, or my skill at visual composition, or any aspiration of being considered an artist in anyone's eye. It is not even about the images. It is about the natural world and the way it moves me, its beauty and its pain, its hard substance and unknown mystery. Those are the things I seek to capture. That is my Big Picture.

"Belief? What do I believe in? I believe in sun. In rock. In the dogma of the sun and the doctrine of the rock. I believe in blood, fire, woman, rivers, eagles, storm, drums, flutes, banjos, and broom-tailed horses." – Edward Abbey

Quick Photoshop Tip – How to Avoid Sharpening Halos

A lot has been written about sharpening techniques and anyone willing to spend the cash will find an abundance of advanced tools. Still, the most common way of sharpening digital images is Unsharp Masking (having little to do with a similarly named darkroom technique).

You will find detailed explanations about Unsharp Mask (USM) settings in most digital photography books. One thing not often mentioned is halos - a common sharpening artifact forming around lines in areas of high contrast. Figure 1 below shows an unsharpened image, while Figure 2 shows the sharpened version – note the halo along the crest of the mountain.



Figure 1



Figure 2

A simple solution is to mask off edges of high contrast before applying the USM filter. In Photoshop this can be achieved quite simply using Quick Mask mode (keyboard shortcut "Q" toggles between normal and Quick Mask modes).

Once in Quick Mask mode, select the brush tool, select a brush size that will allow you to comfortably paint over the edge, and set the opacity to 75%. This will ensure that the masked area is not completely blocked. Now select black as the foreground color (keyboard shortcut "D"), and paint over the problem edge(s). You will notice the brush paints in a faint red color. Everything being painted will be masked. Figure 3 shows the unsharpened image with the mask painted over the ridgeline.

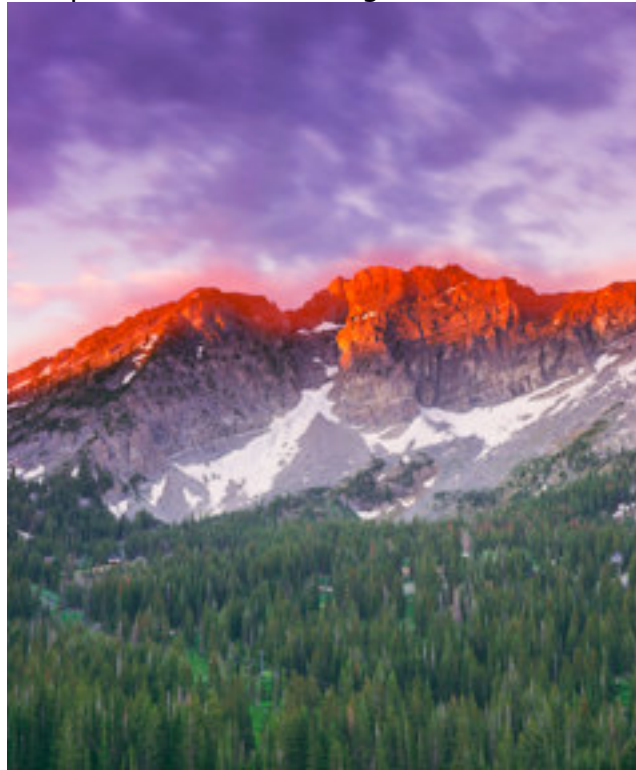


Figure 3

Next, toggle back to normal mode (keyboard shortcut "Q"). You will notice a selection was created, excluding the masked area. If you wish, you can hide the selection outline by using Ctrl-H.

Now when you apply USM, only the selected area will be sharpened at the setting shown. The masked area will only be sharpened with 25% the intensity (remember we set the opacity to 75% when painting on the mask). Figure 4 shows the masked image sharpened with the exact same settings as Figure 2. Note the absence of a halo in this version.



Figure 4

The Canon Digital Rebel – a Digital SLR for the Rest of Us?

I'm sure many of you are now going "huh?". Well, bear with me...

As a landscape photographer I am not too concerned with frame rate, and years of experience have made me pretty confident with exposure no matter how many modes or zones or patterns are built into the camera's computer. I value a camera as a tool and seek the tools that make me the most productive. My workflow is slow and methodical, and automated features only get in the way of the control I need. I also favor image quality over most any other camera feature. Why then, you ask, am I telling you about a consumer digital camera?

For the most part I stayed away from digital cameras for anything other than casual family and travel photography. I have however been intrigued by reports from a number of photographers whose work I respect who began experimenting with some of the less-expensive models and posted favorable reviews (e.g. Alain Briot's experience with the Digital Rebel really ignited my curiosity).

While camera manufacturers will have you believe that "professionals" buy their top-of-the-line models, most professionals I know consider it quite insane to spend \$8,000 on a camera that will not significantly improve their earnings compared to far less expensive film or digital options. Much as I would love to own one, I certainly can't justify paying for those high-end marvels of technology. The Digital Rebel, however, changed the story. Canon reduced the feature set (basically eliminating most things I wouldn't use anyway) but kept the high quality imaging chip used in their mid-range models, and priced the whole package to sell. This was too interesting to pass up.

Well, I have owned this fun little camera for a couple of weeks now and I am quite taken with it. It is much more solid than the plastic construction would have you believe, and its ergonomics fit well in my hands. It is simple to operate and produces impressive images that print well up to about 11x14.

I am still very much in the experimental phase, but so far my impression is very favorable. This might be the lightweight companion many of us have yearned for, for times when lugging the big camera is impractical or when light is quickly changing.

Watch this space for more...

Web Update

If you have not been to our web site lately you will find it had undergone a minor (though a bit labor intensive) face lift. You can now look up images by category, or use a powerful keyword search engine to sift through more than 200 images currently online.

All previous editions of the newsletter are now grouped under the *Articles* section, and new descriptions were added to many of the images (particularly all images in the "Artist's Favorite Work" gallery).

There is also a new Featured Presentation titled "**Seasons in the Wasatch Mountains**", accessible from the home page, and for those with an interest in the technical aspects of photography, I now include more specifics of cameras and lenses used with each image.

And that's it for now! Feedback is always welcome and appreciated.