Photography is all about choices: what to look at, when to push the button, where to stand, and, ultimately, who to photograph. The decisions all influence each other, and you as well, because the ultimate decision you are making is who you want to be and what you want your work to stand for. The work you create will be a direct reflection of who you are. We are forged by our experiences; the people and things we photograph fundamentally change us—and that’s the exciting part.

In this chapter, we’ll break down some of the most basic choices we have to make.
**Objective >>**
- To learn some helpful compositional guidelines, but not be afraid to break the rules.

**Exercise:**
**Composition Analysis**
Look through your favorite photographs (either your own or those of other photographers) and see how many of them employ the classic compositional devices featured here.

**Dominant Aspects**
When we apply the rule of thirds to portraiture, we find that many strong portraits place the dominant eye of the subject at one of the intersections. This photo by Samantha Adler places both the dominant eye and the subject’s hand at diagonally opposed locations within the “rule of thirds” grid to create dynamic tension.

Most art, painting and drawing in particular, uses the frame as a staging area; graphic elements (line, shape, color) are brought onto the stage by the artist. Paintings are built from the “inside out” within the frame. The scale of the frame (the canvas) is determined by the artist before the work is created, in anticipation of the elements it will be required to contain.

In photography theory, the area that the camera’s field of view sees is sometimes referred to as the “limit frame” in order to distinguish it from the frame as an object. Photography uses the limit frame as an editing tool. The photographer uses the camera to select and edit elements from the larger scene, or as a “lasso” (my term) to encircle disparate elements, creating emphases or connections that wouldn’t have been apparent without the photographer’s choices. Of course, photographers might also decide to bring objects into the frame as well (as in studio tableaux photography), but this is still consistent with the concept of selection and editing.

Scale is also unique in photography; the scale of photographs is increasingly becoming a “virtual scale” because the same photograph may be seen in so many different variants—exhibition prints, web-based screen presentation, portfolio prints, and so on. In fact, it’s a fair bet that probably none of the photographs in this book were created to be viewed in the sizes that they have been reproduced here. Scale sometimes seems irrelevant to photography until you see an epic Andreas Gursky or Richard Misrach print in a gallery setting.

Art in general, and photography in particular, uses a number of compositional devices to create visual interest within the frame. It is useful to be aware of these devices, but we should always remember that while good photographs are often well composed, this is a bit like saying that good writing is usually well punctuated and spelled correctly. Good composition alone can’t elevate a photograph that is trite or meaningless. Conversely, some of the most powerful images in the history of the medium don’t follow any of the classic rules of composition. Composition is simply a tool at our disposal, not an achievement.

**The rule of thirds**
The rule of thirds is so important and pervasive in Western culture that it can sometimes be difficult to find a work of art that doesn’t incorporate it in some way. If you review the photos you have seen in this book so far, you’ll see that over half of them use some variant of the rule of thirds.

The rule of thirds states that if we take a golden rectangle and divide it into thirds we find: voilà! Nine more golden rectangles! If we place our main subject at one of the intersections, the result will dynamically draw the viewer to the subject.

The rule of thirds is especially important to photographers because so many cameras (35mm, digital SLRs) use the 2:3 “golden rectangle” aspect ratio (although the exact proportions of the classic golden rectangle are actually slightly different: 1:1.6, to be precise). The golden rule was also championed by the first master of 35mm photography, Henri Cartier-Bresson, giving it a highly respected stamp of authority for generations of photographers who followed in his wake.

**The frame within a frame**
This compositional device uses an object—such as a doorway, a window, or even another person—within the photograph to frame the main subject. Frames can also
GETTING IT RIGHT
This portrait by Michelle Peralta is a textbook example of the rule of thirds. The frame is broken into thirds horizontally by the sidewalk and the stripes on the wall. The subject’s head is exactly at the intersection of the upper right rectangle.

THE GOLDEN RECTANGLE AND THE RULE OF THIRDS
When the golden rectangle is divided into thirds, nine more golden rectangles are created. Placing the primary and secondary subjects at the intersections creates a balanced, yet dynamic, composition.
FRAMED WITH OBJECTS
This studio photo by Rachel Cerreto uses objects to reframe the main subject. Rachel used a 16 x 20 view camera (with the back removed), which was large enough for the model to actually crawl into and peer back at the photographer through the opening in the lens board.

FOUND FRAME
This photograph by Seth Mroczka frames the subject in a found frame that provides both narrative context and geographic location.

DIRTY FRAME
These photos were made as part of a class assignment that required a team of students (David Macedo, Janice Gilman, Cesar Vega, and Lupe Salinas) to work together in creating a complete photographic story. The cinematic treatment and repeated use of the dirty frame throughout was a perfect solution.
The frame in this photo by Michelle Watt is bisected twice on the diagonal, forming an X—first by the line of the subject’s arms, and again by the S-curve of his body. Note that his face is placed exactly at the imaginary upper-left intersection according to the rule of thirds. Cropping tightly emphasizes the power of his physique, making him seem as though he is ready to burst from the frame.

Layering and reflection
Layering (shooting through glass or other surfaces) and reflections can be used simply to create visual interest or to bring greater context to the subject by incorporating elements that otherwise would not be included in the frame. Layering can be a very effective tool for establishing or explaining complex relationships in space, time, or geography. Examples might be a son’s reflection in a framed portrait of his mother, or shooting through the window of a diner to reflect the desert sunset that wouldn’t otherwise be visible.

Symmetry and dynamic symmetry
In many ways, symmetrical compositions are the most subtle of all photographic devices. Photographs that employ either symmetry or dynamic symmetry (symmetry that is off by a subtle amount) seem to convince the viewer that the photograph is simply a recording of “what was there.” Many of the world’s greatest photographers—Walker Evans, Richard Avedon, and Thomas Ruff, to name but a few—have employed very simple compositions in order to focus the viewer’s attention on the emotional or intellectual content of the photograph.
PERSPECTIVE
This photo by Michelle Peralta uses the receding lines of the railing to bring your eye to the blue arrows, which in turn point to the main subject.

LAYERING TO SUPPLY CONTEXT
This photograph uses layers to supply context (the driver’s name and profession) as well as creating visual depth.
This photograph uses the dirty frame (out-of-focus foreground), diagonals, the rule of thirds (placement of the subject’s head), and a “dutch angle” (a cinematic term for moving the camera slightly off the level in order to create dynamism).
When Maki Hirose was a student, he seemed to understand instinctively the importance of styling. He was artistically ambitious, worked hard, and thought carefully about the pre-production of his shoots; he built his own sets, pulled the wardrobe himself, and watched his shoots carefully for flaws in the lighting, styling, or the pose of the models. Even though he was “just” shooting his classmates, he had high standards and understood that his portraits of women would only be as good as the effort he put into them (see this page).

After school Maki went on to assist many top professionals as a digital technician, and refined his skills in lighting, styling, and post-production digital retouching. Now, as a post-graduate professional, it’s easy to see how his work ethic and attention to detail have helped him in his career (see right-hand page).

**SHARP STUDENT STYLING**

1. It’s difficult for students to spend money on styling shoots but Maki was always clever about finding ways to make his early test shoots look as professional as possible by pulling clothes from the model’s wardrobes.

2. Maki was clever about finding inexpensive ways to create backgrounds that were simple but more interesting than plain background paper.

3. Here the background was a piece of inexpensive vinyl from a discount plastics store. The white reflection is from the soft box that was used to light the main subject.
Here Maki creates an illusion of weightlessness through the high camera angle, distorted perspective, and the pose of the model.

This is a great example of simple lighting done well. One light was bounced into a silver reflector. However, much of the reflector was covered with cinefoil (a matte black aluminum foil) in order to shape the reflection to highlight the model's eyes.
While it is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words, most of those words are nouns and adjectives; stories need verbs and adverbs.

**O B J E C T I V E >>**
- To explore how props and objects can provide insight into the subject.

**e x e r c i s e:**
**CREATE A PORTRAIT WITHOUT PHOTOGRAPHING THE PERSON**

Go into a friend’s home and select ten objects that you believe will provide insight into the person.

Before you photograph them, write down the reasons you have selected them. Are they old, new, personal, iconic, universal? What do you think they mean and why did they interest you? Use these notes to decide how to describe them photographically. Will you light them? If so, how? Will you shoot them so close that you can only see the details that interest you—or will you take a more objective/emotionally distanced approach?

Photograph them, and ask a disinterested third person to describe the person who owns the objects and what they imagine they mean to the owner.

This statement, paraphrased from the great critic and curator John Szarkowski, might be the single most important thing anyone has ever taught me about photography.

If we look at the epic F.S.A. photographs by Walker Evans or Dorothea Lange, what we really see are simply people, places, and things; nouns (and adjectives). The “story” is usually something we apply to the photograph using our personal knowledge. We might look at this Walker Evans portrait of Allie Mae Burroughs and think, “What a portrait of despair and desperation”—but that statement is not really supported by the information in the photograph. We know (from other sources or captions) that she is a sharecropper, and that the photograph was made to document the Depression, and we apply that knowledge to the photograph.

What we really see in the photograph is a woman, mid-thirties or so, weathered face, (but quite attractive actually), in front of a wooden structure. The clothes also give us some cues as to the era and her expression does hint at the fact that at that particular moment she might be concerned about something, but she also looks quite confident. For all we know, her car has a flat tire and she is stuck on the road next to an old barn.

The power of the photograph comes from the specificity of its description. It’s not any woman, but a particular woman who really lived. On a particular day, she wore a particular dress and looked a particular way while a photographer took her picture. These are the only indisputable facts; everything else is conjecture and speculation.

Part of our job as photographers is to critically evaluate the people, places, and things that the camera describes and presents in the finished image so that the viewer has enough information to understand what we want them to understand. If we give them too much information and aren’t selective enough, it becomes ambiguous. When we use props and objects to describe a person’s profession or inner life, it is the specifics of the object that provide the viewer with the necessary details. A man in camouflage standing in the woods with an M16 might be a soldier; if he is holding a double-barreled shotgun he might be a hunter.
WHAT CAN A PHOTOGRAPH REALLY TELL US?

If we remove this single photograph from its historical context and the rest of Walker Evans’ work, it becomes apparent that the photograph doesn’t tell us very much. Of course the photograph is a masterpiece, but only because the body of the work creates the context for each of the individual photographs.

GUESS WHO

All of these photographs depict men and motorcycles. Which one....

- Is of a wealthy banker who keeps his prized motorcycle in his boardroom?
- Is of a family who builds custom choppers?
- Is of the legendary racer Giacomo Agostini, who has won more Grand Prix races than any other rider in history?
- Is of a collector who prizes the historical accuracy of his collection?

PORTRAIT AS FICTION OR ALLEGORY

Props and locations don’t have to be real. For her senior thesis, Morgan Levy created these inventive portraits depicting children exploring new worlds. They are all shot in a studio using photographic backdrops that the artist created; all of the props and wardrobe are also two-dimensional paper prints that were cut out, to be worn or held by the models. There is no digital compositing other than what was used to create the paper props, costumes, and backgrounds.
Anybody who has gone to a nightclub in search of romance, or dressed for a job interview, has had the experience of looking in the mirror and trying to analyze what message their wardrobe might convey about them. What the subject wears in a portrait is vitally important.

Wardrobe says a lot about a subject. It can also present formidable technical problems for photographers. One simple example is the classic problem of a bride wearing a white dress while the groom wears a black tuxedo. Colored clothes may also clash with the chosen location or background. It helps if you have options.

**Be a pro**
Shoots with professional models and celebrities are often easier than those with private clients or business professionals because there is inevitably a fashion stylist, as well as a makeup or grooming professional. Shoots with ordinary people can be far more difficult. Their taste in fashion might be atrocious, and quite often they simply don’t understand or fail to consider how their personal appearance will reflect on their personality or professionalism (or lack thereof) in a photograph. There may be lots of doctors who work in a t-shirt and jeans, but that doesn’t mean that they should wear them for a portrait that will appear on their website or in a professional journal.

This is when you have to step in as the professional and help them understand the importance of the photo session and what they should expect. Often, simply asking them to follow a few of the simple guidelines opposite will help them to think about the fact that the photograph you are going to make requires a commitment on their part as well.

**OBJECTIVE >>**
- To appreciate the importance of clothing and styling in conveying a message.

**exercise:**
**TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF**
Create a self-portrait that uses props or wardrobe to tell the viewer about your own passions, hobbies, and interests.

**CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN**
When I arrived to photograph the priest for a *Time* magazine article on faith, he was wearing “civilian” street clothes. I was lucky he was so amenable to changing into his vestments.
GUIDELINES

- Ask the subject what they were planning to wear.
- When photographing private subjects and there is no stylist, always ask them to bring, or have available, three changes of clothes. This is especially important with female professionals. Women tend to use a larger range of colors in their wardrobe.
- A simple and inexpensive hair and makeup option for female professionals is to suggest that they go to a salon to have their hair blow-dried the day of the shoot. The added benefit is that the stylist might suggest that someone at the salon do their makeup professionally.
- When photographing businessmen, always ask that they bring two or three additional shirts and ties with different color combinations.
- Businessmen often like to be photographed in shirtsleeves because it is less formal, but if they have been wearing a jacket all day the shirt they have been wearing will be a wrinkled mess. Having a fresh shirt to change into is important.
- Look out for wardrobe malfunctions, such as errant ties that poke out from underneath jackets or an unsightly bulge in the back of a jacket when the subject is seated (have them sit on the tail of the jacket). These simple problems can take hours to correct in Photoshop but are easy to fix on set.
- A few clamps or “bulldog” clips can do wonders for an article of clothing that might not be perfectly tailored.
- A steamer or travel iron takes up little room in your lighting kit and can save hours in post-production.
- Always carry a makeup brush and a small selection of powders for a range of complexions. These aren’t a substitute for a makeup stylist but they can be used to knock shine off your subject’s forehead or nose.
- Male subjects can be touchy about using makeup. Oil-absorbent pads (available at drugstores) do a great job of reducing shine. Alternatively, simply having them wipe their face with a paper towel can simplify lighting and post-production.

HAIR AND MAKEUP

Fashion photographers often insist on using their own stylists. Stylists can have a good understanding of the way particular photographers use light and they will tailor their work to the photographer’s vision. However, portrait photographers will often have a hair and makeup artist assigned to them by the magazine, or the subject may insist on using someone they know.

The photographer and the makeup artist should always look at each other’s work beforehand and have a discussion prior to the day of the shoot. Makeup can take hours; if the makeup artist does something awful or inappropriate (it does happen), it can set the schedule back and create tension on set as you send the subject and stylist back to do it over. Remember that you bear the ultimate responsibility for everything in the final photograph, including terrible makeup.

WARDROBE

Upon arriving for a meeting at the *Vanity Fair* offices in New York, I noticed that the reception area and hallways were jammed with racks of clothes that had been pulled by stylists for an Annie Leibovitz cover shoot featuring the actor Daniel Day-Lewis. The clothes were all variants of the same thing: black jackets and dress pants, white shirts, and black shoes. It seemed as though there were hundreds of each item from a myriad of famous designers.

When the cover hit the newsstands, it pictured Daniel Day-Lewis bare-chested, taking off a white shirt that was flowing in the wind. Some might think the stylists had gone overboard by pulling so many clothes for such a small result in the end product; but it was exactly the right shirt that caught the wind perfectly.

DETAILS TELL THE STORY

This car mechanic wears his professional grime as a badge of honor. I was intrigued but intimidated by him. I circled for a few minutes and then said, “You are obviously the hardest-working man here, you gotta let me take your photo.”

PROVIDING CHOICES

These photos were shot for a private client: a doctor who also holds over 20 patents for medical apparatuses he has invented. The client uses the photographs for a variety of purposes—websites, press releases, and to accompany articles in journals—so he needs different photos for different uses. The added advantage of shooting a variety of poses and locations for the photographer is that the subject becomes increasingly comfortable with each photograph.
Tutorial 25

POSEING AND PSYCHOLOGY

There are many books that will tell you to pose a person with a certain type of face or body type in a particular way. They are probably useful in terms of simply flattering the subject, but to view posing as purely cosmetic is an oversimplification of the complex interpersonal dynamics that take place during a photo shoot. Posing and psychology are really two edges of the same sword.

Objective >>

- To understand a little psychology to help you get your subjects to look their best or reveal their inner life.

Exercise: Self-Study

Before you read any further, look at yourself in a full-length mirror for a few minutes. Watch how you look at yourself.

When we look at ourselves in a mirror, we tend to adopt a stance that helps us look our best. Few people stand square to the mirror and look straight at it; most will cock a hip, or stand with one foot slightly in front. We’ll turn one shoulder forward and look at ourselves over that shoulder. Women will often “bevel” (see right). We never know what to do with our hands so we fold them, put them in our pockets, or cross our arms. Notice what your body language reveals about your personality.

The “Bevel”

The “bevel,” as shown in this photograph by Rachel Cerreto, is often an instinctive pose for women. It was first popularized during the ’20s, when a very narrow-hipped, boyish body type was in vogue. Turning the toe and knee and hips inward slims the body visually. Young women unconsciously learn to bevel by imitating fashion models as they grow up.

Every time the camera clicks and the strobes pop, the subject has been sent a clear signal that the photographer has made a judgment about them. They need reassurance that the judgment was a positive one. “Wow, that was great!” might be an inane comment, but it works. All of us, even supermodels and celebrities, have insecurities, and this is why fashion photographers chatter incessantly during shoots: we are reinforcing the subject’s self-image and behavior. Unless you need the subject to feel awkward for editorial/narrative reasons, it is just common courtesy to give them useful feedback as you are shooting.

It’s also about you

You can learn a lot by photographing your friends and classmates, but in the real world you will need to be able to quickly establish rapport with someone you have just met. Our careers depend on our ability to emotionally connect with complete strangers.
THE HOPEFULS

The "deadpan" pose is in danger of becoming a cliché in fine-art photography, but there are many times when it is completely appropriate, as in this series entitled “The Hopefuls” by Lexi Lambros on the graduating class of 2008 (young adults entering the worst job market since 1930).

PROFESSIONAL MODELS

When working with professional models or entertainers, it is usually best to respect their expertise and professionalism. Let them adopt a pose that they come up with, then offer collaborative suggestions as the shoot progresses. The best models are smart, work hard, and are worth every penny they make. Pros often have great ideas that can inspire you to be a better photographer. Ordinary people and business professionals will need more guidance from you.

LIGHTING

In editorial/magazine photography the pose is often guided by the story: Is the subject a rising comedian (as in the photograph by Adriel Reboh) or a sultry cabaret chanteuse (as in the photograph by Michelle Watt)?

Lighting is also an important issue in posing. In the photographs of the comedian, the lighting setup is simple enough to allow the subject to express himself by playing on the large “stage” created by the photographer. The lighting of the singer is more evocative and cosmetically flattering, but it is also so specific to the pose that it “locks” the subject into position. If she raises her head the light will need to be reset, breaking the flow of the shoot. Having an assistant ready to follow her moves with the light would help.
exercise:
TURN THE CAMERA AROUND

Have a classmate or friend shoot your portrait. Give this exercise some real importance by promising yourself that, whatever the outcome, you will use the photograph on your website or Facebook page for three months. Think about what you will tell the world about yourself through body language. Note how helpful (or not) the photographer is in guiding you.

Don’t cheat by doing a self-portrait; the psychology isn’t the same if no one else is present.

TRICKS TO GETTING PEOPLE TO FEEL COMFORTABLE

Ask the subjects to check their grooming and wardrobe in a mirror. Watch carefully as they do this, as it will give you insight into the poses that make them feel comfortable and that they feel make them look their best.

Guide the subject by showing them a pose you might have in mind or that seems appropriate to the narrative content of the photo. If it seems forced or uncomfortable when they try it, it is usually because they have taken the suggestion too literally. Have them get up, walk around, then try it again using their own body language.

Ask the subjects directly what they dislike in other photographs they have had taken. This accomplishes two things: It tells the subject that you are on their side and want them to look their best. It also alerts you to possible problems you might not have noticed or didn’t consider a problem.

Simple posing techniques can help with common cosmetic issues:

- **To alleviate a weak chin** Have them turn to the camera rather than standing square. It strengthens the jaw line.
- **Deep-set eyes** Raise the camera slightly; this forces them to look up (it also helps with middle-age jowls).
- **Balding or receding hairline** Lower the camera slightly, have the subject turn into the photo, and avoid the use of a hair light.
- **Ground the subject** Very few people are comfortable standing in an ocean of white seamless background paper. Having a stool to sit on, or the edge of a table to rest a hand, helps the subject find their place. This will also help the photographer to set lights because it limits the amount the subject can move on the set.
- **If the subject is seated, be very careful to make certain that they don’t slouch** Even heads of state will slouch if you allow them to. A stool is a better platform if one’s available.
- **If the subject is seated in an upholstered armchair, try putting another cushion or pillow under the chair’s normal cushion** This will often force the subject into better posture.
- **Give the subject something to do** It can be something as simple as holding a pencil in a certain way. The more you can take the subject’s mind off their appearance, the more natural their body language will become.
- **Give the subject a break** Most people will start to glaze over after 10–30 exposures. Being the subject of a portrait is actually a hypnotic experience. When you see their smile become a frozen grin, it’s time to let them walk around or jump up and down a few times.
- **Never use the subject to set your initial lighting** Most people have limited patience and you don’t want to exhaust it on preliminary tests. Get the lighting as close as possible before the subject arrives, then “tweak” it for their specific facial structure or wardrobe.
- **Don’t let the subject “chimp by looking at the back of the camera** It breaks the flow of the shoot and only serves to feed their insecurities as they scrutinize their perceived flaws. If the subject is also the client, you can review the shoot when you are confident you have something they’ll like. However, on editorial shoots this is the equivalent of letting the subject read the article before it is published—poor journalistic practice.

There is no secret formula: Be attentive to your subject and alive to what you see in the camera.

In many respects, posing and the psychological dynamics of a session are really a reflection of the photographer’s personality. Some photographers can never put people at ease, yet there are plenty of successful photographers with modest technical skills, but amazing rapport with their subjects. Photographers with this unique psychological skill can build a career solely on their ability to get subjects to open up.

But not every great portrait photographer is a social butterfly; one very famous portrait photographer (who shoots 20–30 magazine covers a year) is so shy that he can barely say hello to the subject or look a person in the eye—yet this emotional insecurity actually seems to encourage his subjects to open up in front of his camera. It’s a mystery, but he makes it work—and his photographs owe much of their special power to his acute social anxiety.

The lesson is that, as a portrait photographer, your personality is your most powerful and idiosyncratic tool. You don’t need—or want—to be like anybody else. You need to learn how to use your personality effectively.
USE A STAND-IN

These photos were tests for the portrait of a Fortune 500 CEO that would appear in an official shareholders' report. Using the art director, an assistant, or even yourself as a stand-in enables you to experiment with poses without wasting the subjects' time or trying their patience. By shooting tests digitally you can show the subjects some alternatives when they arrive on set. This allows them to comment on the suggested pose in the abstract without bringing the specifics of their personal appearance into the equation.

Although the poses above all seem fairly similar and they are all flattering, there are some that seem more confident, some that seem a bit too smug, some that are too affected or guarded. Only one hits just the right note of optimism, confidence, and humility.
Student Michael George created an ambitious challenge for himself by setting up a free portrait studio on a busy New York City sidewalk. He photographed everyone and anyone who walked by and wanted to have a photograph taken, delivering the finished photos by email. Two of the results are shown above.
CONFIDENT AND OPEN
The pose in this portrait communicates the friendly, quiet confidence of three-time NHRA motorcycle drag-racing champion Angelle Sampey, a beautiful woman who competes—and wins—in a man's world at 200 mph (320kph).

HEADSHOTS FOR HAITI
“Headshots for Haiti” was a one-day charity event at NYU. Photo students were organized into rotating crews of photographers, assistants, and digital technicians. The students created three separate portrait studios in a large space and shot professional headshots at an affordable rate for anyone who showed up. At times there were 10–20 people impatiently waiting. The experience gave the students invaluable training, as they felt the pressure of having to quickly deal with a wide variety of technical problems, personalities, and cosmetic issues while still enjoying the safety net of having instructors and technical staff nearby in case things really went wrong. The students shot about 50–60 subjects over the course of the day and raised almost $4,000 for Haitian relief efforts.
These photographs of surviving World War II heroes by Konstantin Suslov are masterfully crafted testaments to their subjects. Uniforms supply the historical context, while the surrounding environment of their humble apartments tells us of their lives in the present. The low camera position and stoic poses reveal both the photographer’s respect for his subjects and their pride in service. The color palette and classic lighting are just enough to suggest nostalgia without falling into the trap of cliché.

An elderly man stuffed into the uniform he wore as a young recruit is often a comic foil in films; Suslov’s subjects have a dignity that reminds us that the bloody rubble of Stalingrad and the sands of El Alamein were won by a generation that is passing into dust daily to quietly join their friends and comrades.

**AVAILABLE LIGHT**

1 One of the most interesting technical aspects of Suslov’s portraits is that while they are all shot using only available light (he used reflectors and translucent disks to modify existing window light), the portraits are remarkably consistent in their use of light.

**PORTRAYING THE HEROS**

2 Although Suslov portrays all of his subjects as strong and heroic, he often found the project emotionally overwhelming: “It’s not easy to sit opposite a 90-year-old man who bursts into tears while telling you of his childhood friend being ripped apart.”

3 Suslov concentrated initially on Russian veterans because of his Russian descent—his grandfather was a veteran of the Great Patriotic War.

4 The project was shot with a digital camera and one lens—a 24-70 zoom, the perfect choice for Moscow’s small apartments. By including his subjects’ surroundings, Suslov conveys a lot about their present circumstances.

5 Because he shot everything with available light in Moscow, in the winter, sittings had to be planned and timed carefully. By 4 PM it was often too dark to shoot.

6 Wardrobe was one of the biggest obstacles. Suslov had to research and contact more veterans than he could shoot, because so few of them still had their uniforms.