

Foreword

By JOE MCNALLY

This book is like a great photograph. It is seamless, intuitive, and filled with minor details blended with larger themes. It has impact—the color play is so strong it’s like a hard and fast punch to the visual gut. Still, there is nuance and subtlety that shimmer like a catchlight.

It is sympathetic, warm-hearted, and decent. But, just like any effective photo, it is unflinching and sparse, and it hones in on the essentials. Interesting and vivid, it pulls the eye, and then, once the eye is intrigued, it directs and shapes where it needs to go and what it is supposed to look at.

It is vibrant and quiet at the same time. It teaches you without dogma or bombast, and it leads you on a journey that you are so engaged to take that you look around at the end of it and can’t really believe how far you’ve come. It looks and feels effortless, which masks the intensity, sweat, dedication, and hard work that went into its creation.

And, just like a great photograph, once you view it and let it filter into your eyes, your head, and your heart, you will never, ever be the same.

It is a book filled with color, light, and learning, which is no surprise, given the author, David duChemin. He is a photographer with a purpose, hence this book. He knows, and states right up front, that the world does not need another pretty picture book, or another set of stylish, attractive, brittle pictures. His counsel to photographers about photographing places—go deep rather than broad—perfectly describes this book.

Both the pictures and the writing on these pages don’t stay on the surface of things. They both go deep, to the heart of the matter, to the core of both the purpose and method of making great photographs. He is a wanderer, to be sure, but it is a sure-footed wander, and he takes you on every step, explaining the principles of good photography, offering practical and surprising advice, and making sure that, as a reader, you stay inside his head and therefore his vision, right from the moment he shoulders the camera bag and heads out the door.

You are right there with him as he articulates the reasons for his choice of lens or f-stop, his compositional approach, his techniques about exposure, and his grasp of light and how to use it. He throws open his camera bag and lets you peer inside to see what he takes and why he takes it, right from essential hardware like the telephoto and the tripod to the pocket fillers like sun block, local currency, and extra eight-gig cards. The book is brimming with real-time, practical advice on how to make storytelling pictures about culture, faith, food, people, and places—in short, the world.

If the book simply stayed right there in the realm of how-to, go-to advice, it would be a wonderful book indeed. But it crosses the line from useful to inspired because David opens up much more than his camera bag. He opens his considerable heart and mind, both of which belong to a masterful storyteller driven by an acute sympathy for the human condition, coupled with an intense curiosity and respect for both the differences and the sameness of the world.

He openly talks of the interior conflict common to all shooters—that of the artist and the geek. As he says, gear is good, vision is better. That discussion, honest and open, separates this book from so many currently on the shelves that are more than happy to tell you the right f-stop.

It is far harder to figure out how to make a good picture. It is far harder to know how to intuitively work a street, and, with respect and care, get inside people's fences and boundaries to create images that matter. It is hard to be in the mix of color and light and people—this noisy, fast-paced world—and be able to distill that cacophony into a simple, powerful photo that makes the reader feel like they were right there in the din, in the market, in the temple, in someone's shop or home.

It is in this realm that David centers so much of the discussion, and a valuable discussion it is. He talks about how vision and technique combine to make art and craft. He shows the artist plenty about the gear, to be sure, and he explains very well the buttons and dials of all the digital machinery. But he also beckons to the geek in all of us, and pulls us beyond shutter speeds and white balances into the heart of the matter—pictures that speak, pictures that tell true stories, pictures that inform the mind and move the heart.

As he mentions on his website, David is an inveterate do-gooder with a camera in his hand. He has traveled the world to all manner of places, distressed and otherwise, working with relief organizations, bringing back pictures that cannot be ignored. He describes his mission:

“Anyone can take a picture of poverty; it’s easy to focus on the dirt and hurt of the poor. It’s much harder—and much more needful—to pry under that dirt and reveal the beauty and dignity of people that, but for their birth into a place and circumstance different from our own, are just like ourselves. I want my images to tell the story of those people and to move us beyond pity to justice and mercy.”

How do you make pictures that move people? How do you work in unfamiliar places, without the convenience of language, and achieve understanding and common ground quickly? How do you come back with images that are real and true, deeply human and connected? How do you photographically explain and interpret the world instead of making a snapshot of it?

Within the Frame is a book that, in plain but eloquent language, grapples with the core issues of how to make great pictures. You go out into the world with a seasoned traveler and a keen observer who understands people and places as well as he understands the camera. He shows you not how to resolve the conflict between artist and geek, between storyteller and technician (that struggle will always be with us) but rather how to embrace it on all levels. He gives you the tools and information that enable you to make the camera—a machine—an extension of the human heart and mind. Then he gives you a road map to his own, and invites you on the journey.

This is a trip well worth taking.