



CHASING THE *Light*

*Improving Your Photography with*  
AVAILABLE LIGHT

IBARIONEX PERELLO

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VOICES THAT MATTER™

**CHASING THE LIGHT:  
IMPROVING YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY WITH AVAILABLE LIGHT**

**IBARIONEX PERELLO**

**NEW RIDERS**

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# *Dedication*

For Cynthia, my biggest cheerleader

and

Mike Cohen, for the gift of learning to see.

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Compiling a list of people to thank for all that they have contributed to the book that you hold in your hands is daunting. So many people have helped to inspire and encourage me that this list seems far too short. Thank you to:

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My family, who has, each in his or her own way, helped inspire the way I see the world.

The thousands of people I've met on my journey who have provided me the opportunity to turn my camera on them and record our momentary encounter during this all-too-brief time on Earth.

And God, for the eyes to see and the talent and the inspiration to make the most of it.

## About the Author

Ibarionex R. Perello is a photographer, writer, and producer with over 25 years of experience in the photographic industry. His photographs and articles have appeared in numerous publications, including *Outdoor Photographer*, *PC Photo*, *Digital Photo Pro*, *Shutterbug*, and *Rangefinder*. He is an instructor of photography at BetterPhoto.com as well as an adjunct professor at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. Ibarionex is the co-founder of Alas Media, a multimedia production company. He is also the host and producer of *The Candid Frame: A Photography Podcast*, which features conversations with the world's best emerging and established photographers.

Ibarionex lives near Los Angeles with his wife and their dogs, Spenser and Tracy.

# Contents

ABOUT THE AUTHOR • iv

FOREWORD • vi

INTRODUCTION • vii

## CHAPTER 1

*Beginning to See* • 2

## CHAPTER 2

*The Elements of Exposure* • 12

## CHAPTER 3

*The Camera, the Exposure,  
and You* • 38

## CHAPTER 4

*The Color of Light:  
White Balance* • 60

## CHAPTER 5

*Building Visually* • 76

## CHAPTER 6

*Light and the Portrait* • 106

## CHAPTER 7

*Light and the Small Details* • 130

## CHAPTER 8

*Light and the  
Natural Landscape* • 150

## CHAPTER 9

*Light and the  
Urban Landscape* • 172

## CHAPTER 10

*Light and Black-and-White* • 198

## CHAPTER 11

*Wrangling the Light* • 222

## CHAPTER 12

*The Transformative  
Power of Light* • 246

RESOURCES • 256

INDEX • 259

# Foreword

When I first started reading this book, I immediately felt engaged with a passionate photographer who really cares about his work, and with someone who really wants to share his long experience with other photographers.

I have known Ibarionex since he worked for Werner Publishing, where, at the time, I was Group Editorial Director of the photo magazines. Ibarionex always had a passion for light, for photographing people, and for photography in general that came across strongly in his work and especially his photography. That shows up again in this book. I love the photos and the stories you can see within them. Ibarionex knows how to get involved with life and capture that with his cameras.

But the book is so much more. Ibarionex has poured himself into the text to bring his perspective to photography to everyone. He shows us his photos and gives some perspective on how they were shot. I love the way he incorporates real stories of how he approached photographing certain subjects. He doesn't just tell you to be careful of photographing white clothing, for example, but tells you of his experience in photographing a young girl in her first-communion dress.

Ibarionex's joy in photography comes through, too, in both the text and the photos. These are positive photos that make you feel good about the world we live in, and they help you get to know the people in the photos as if they were good neighbors. His how-to explanations are the same, a positive, helpful approach that you feel good about reading. And you will definitely learn a few things.

This is a book that can be enjoyed and learned from simply by paging through the photos and reading the captions. Then it can be further savored while you learn about photography as you read the text. You will enjoy reading it the first time, and you'll return to it as a reference again and again.

—**Rob Sheppard**

*Author, Photographer; Editor-at-Large, Outdoor Photographer Magazine*

# *Introduction*

There is no shortage of books dedicated to the topic of photography. Despite photography's relative youth, countless words have been dedicated to this craft, which uses a little magic box to convert the intangible quality of light into something tangible, a photograph.

I've learned from and been inspired by many of these same books, and I have to admit some feelings of intimidation at the thought that I have something to contribute. Yet, despite these feelings, I have every confidence that what I share here will help to contribute to your passion for photography.

It's not because I believe that my way is the better or best way to approach photography. I don't dare make that claim. What I do know, however, is that I've been blessed with the gift of seeing, and that gift has been nurtured by the words I've read, the photographs I've seen, and the photographers I've met. That gift becomes valuable only when I make the choice to share it with others. Sometimes that sharing comes in the form of a photograph, but it also takes shape when I help inspire others to discover their own unique ways of seeing.

If you become a better photographer as a result of the words and images in these pages, that's a wonderful thing. However, the worth of this book becomes much more valuable if you discover a completely new way of seeing with and without a camera. That's my hope for you.

Enjoy the chase.



# 4

## *The Color of Light: White Balance*

A photographer friend once said to me, “Just because you shoot in color doesn’t automatically mean that you’re seeing in color.”

Color is everywhere, and it’s a big part of virtually every photograph that I make. But the presence of color alone doesn’t mean that I’m on my way to making a great color photograph. It’s only the careful evaluation of colors in relation to each other, to the light, and to the various elements in the scene that lead me to make the conscious and creative choices that help make a good image.



## *Feeling Color*

Color was an afterthought in many of my early images. I photographed a woman who just so happened to be wearing a red shirt. I photographed a landscape that by chance had some yellow flowers in the foreground. I was looking at the people and the objects that were within my frame, but I wasn't really seeing what was happening with the light and, consequently, with the colors. Yes, I might have seen it and recognized it later, when I looked at the photographs onscreen or in a print, but I wasn't seeing it when it mattered most: the moment of exposure.

As I continued to shoot, I realized that I was often responding to color. It was the color itself that was making me stop, raise my camera, and make the

---

**Canon 40D | ISO 100 |  
f/10 @ 1/200th**

Making the choice to follow the light provided me the opportunity to discover a photographic subject that I otherwise would've missed completely.



photograph. When I wasn't conscious of my attraction to color, I would make a photograph, but it would include a lot of extraneous elements in the frame, which weakened the image and would make me question why I had made the photograph in the first place.

The problem was that if I didn't understand what I was responding to in the scene, I was just snapping the shutter and hoping the camera would capture *something* for me. And it did capture that something ... along with a lot of other elements, which, more often than not, weren't important to the story or the photograph.

But that changed when the switch in my brain was flipped, and I realized that I was not only seeing color but also feeling color. I was having a visceral reaction to what my eye was seeing. Now what I had to do was find a way to use the camera to capture that physical reaction within the confines of the frame.

On the afternoon that I made this image of the building, I had decided to get out of the house and just allow the light itself to lead me to my subject. I didn't go out with any preconceived notions of things to photograph. Instead, I started with a completely blank slate, looked at where the light was falling, and let that alone dictate who and what I photographed.

So, when I saw this roofline, I first saw the light and then I saw the color, and I experienced that wonderful quickening of the heart. I had the clear blue sky and the bright white wall, but I also had the little bit of red in the shade. The contrast between those three colors and the vibrancy they provided shouted out to me for a photograph. So, I made a series of images, carefully refining my composition for line and shape until I finally felt that I had produced an image I would be satisfied with.

To everyone else walking past, I was just a guy with a camera taking a photograph of the side of a building. But as you can see here, I was doing much more than that. I was seeing the light. I was seeing the color. And because I knew what I wanted to emphasize in this image, I used the added presence of line and shape to build a strong, graphic composition.

Other times, I'm led to a subject not by the light, but by the color itself. Yet, it's my awareness of the quality of light that allows me to make the most of the colors and subjects that I find.



While walking down a street in San Francisco, I spied this young woman wearing a purple jacket and carrying a red purse. The energy of the purple and the red were exciting, and I knew that I had to ask to photograph her. Not only did she say yes, but there was a bright yellow wall right behind us, which served as the perfect background for my portrait.

Because it was a cloudy day, I had already increased the ISO and adjusted the white balance before I discovered her at the corner. She was pretty shy, and I knew I didn't have a lot of time to spend photographing her. So, having most of my camera settings preset allowed me to quickly make a series of images of her. But the image isn't just about a woman standing on a street; it's also about the energy created by the juxtaposition of the red, purple, yellow, and black.

Color is an important element in these and many of my photographs not merely because they're colorful, but because they're allowing me to reveal how I experience the moment. I can and have made images just because they were colorful, but those images quickly become repetitive and lack the impact that I'm hoping for. Color, when used right, becomes as important a tool as light, focal length, and exposure.

---

#### **Olympus E-30 | ISO 800 | f/3.1 @ 1/160th**

With my camera preset, I was able to take time finding the ideal location for this photograph, which not only provided me the perfect background but also allowed me to use the quality of the soft, diffused light.

## *Light's Impact on Color*

One of the more important things I've come to understand is how the quality of the light impacts the rendering of color in a photograph. If you think a red door is always a red door, think again. The color of the door appears to change in appearance relative to the quality of the light that's illuminating it. If you shoot that door under direct sunlight and then later, on a cloudy day, the resulting photographs will be markedly different, as the hue of the red changes and shifts.

Colors under direct sunlight possess more vibrancy and saturation. There is a "pop" to such colors that is a result not only of the harshness of the light, but also of the increased contrast that such illumination produces. Those same colors photographed in the shade or on an overcast day will appear more muted and less intense because of the diffused and softer quality of the light.

The images of these oranges at a fruit stand reveal the amazing differences of color even within a small, confined area. The oranges illuminated by the direct sunlight have a high degree of saturation that's lost as you move down into the shadows, where the colors become duller. By the time you move down to the lower-right corner, where light is being reflected off the street and into the oranges at the bottom of the stand, you see a color that has a saturation and contrast somewhere between what you find in the direct sunlight and shadow.

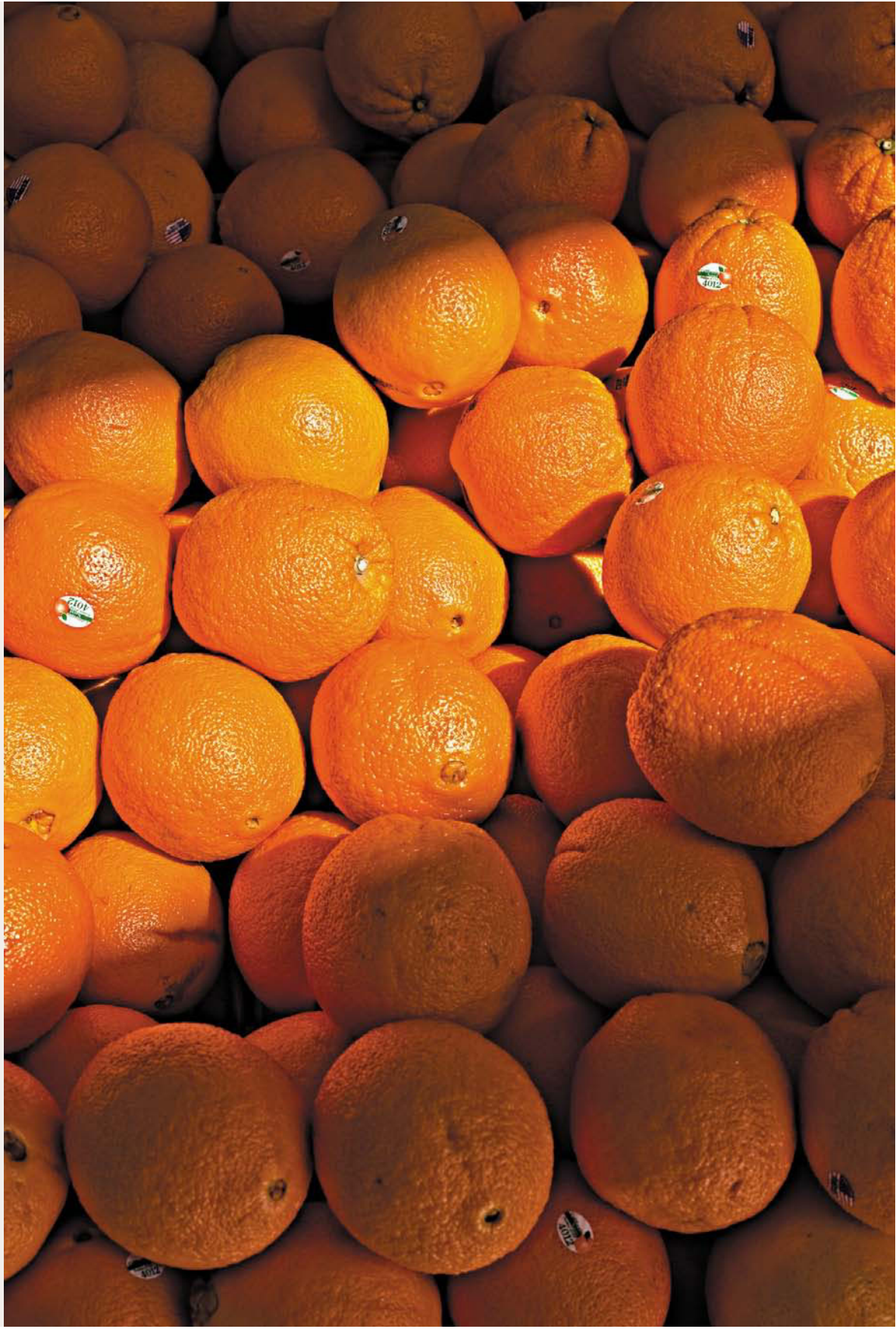
Light and color are intertwined. They aren't independent qualities of a scene or photograph. If I see color, I'm examining the light and what it's illuminating. If I'm following light, I'm examining what's happening to color in the direct sunlight, in the shade, or even beneath a neon sign.

The color of any object will shift in hue as a result of the different qualities of light, but few are more important than the light's color temperature.

---

### **Canon 5D Mark II | ISO 100 | f/9 @ 1/160th**

The difference in the color of the oranges is largely the result of the different color temperatures of the diverse range of light found in this single scene.







# Understanding White Balance

In order to understand light, you need to understand that light consists of color. The light that illuminates our world is made up of three primary colors: red, green, and blue. The combination of these colors impacts how the color in the scene you're photographing is rendered by the camera. The quality of light can range from the cool blue of early morning to the warm, orange glow of sunset.

The color temperature of any light source is based on the experiments of British physicist William Kelvin, who discovered that a piece of carbon produced varying colors at different temperatures. On a scale ranging from 0 to 10,000 Kelvin, light at lower temperatures of 1,850K to 3,380K (candlelight, tungsten) produces a warm, reddish glow; higher temperature ranges, such as 7,000K to 10,000K (overcast, open shade), produce a bluish color cast.

If there is a baseline for color temperature, it's direct sunlight, which has a color temperature of around 5,500K. This is the kind of light you probably find yourself shooting under on most days.

On an overcast day, with clouds that diffuse the rays from the sun, the light is cooler, with a color temperature of around 6,500K. This is a much cooler (or bluer) quality of light, which, if not corrected for, will produce a slight bluish tint in all colors, especially skin tones.

When you shoot under tungsten lights, which have a color temperature of 3,200K, you'll see the warm, orange/yellow glow of a much warmer light source.

You can see the difference in color temperature in this portrait of songwriter and producer Preston Glass. His face was illuminated by the direct sunlight of the late afternoon sun, which has a slight warm glow to it. The yard that was behind him and served as the background was in shade and had a cooler (bluer) color temperature. This produced an image in which the contrast between the warm and cool light added a nice vibrancy to the image, in addition to reinforcing the color contrast between his skin tone and his hat and jacket.

As you travel through the range of light sources, including fluorescent, halogen, and open shade, you'll see not only difference in color temperatures, but also, more important, their impact on the rendering of color in your scene.

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**Olympus E-30 | ISO 160 |  
f/3.7 @ 1/200th**

The contrast between warm and cool is something I was able to use to my advantage because of my awareness of color temperature and knowledge to find the best light possible.

The good news is that you don't have to remember these numbers in order to make a good photograph. They're good to know, but not knowing won't adversely impact your photographs. What's important to know is that whichever light source you're shooting under, if you don't set the white balance correctly on your camera, your colors may not be as accurate as they could or should be.

## *Setting White Balance*

Color accuracy is critical for the work I do. Although I have a lot of flexibility and control in my editing software, it all has to begin with what's happening with the camera. If I nail the color when I make the image, I make considerably less work for myself. Get it wrong, and I have to spend way too much time trying to make it look right. Color accuracy begins with white balance.

### The Auto WB myth

Auto White Balance (WB) is the default setting for all digital cameras. And though the word *auto* holds a lot of promise, the camera's Auto WB isn't the universal balm people would like to think it is. Though Auto WB does occasionally produce decent results, it isn't the best if you want the highest color accuracy.

Why? Because Auto WB can be fooled. It works by evaluating the colors in a scene and tries to recognize what the light source is. If you're shooting people wearing a variety of colors on a sunny day, it'll likely produce an accurate white balance. But if the scene includes subjects or objects that have a strong blue or red color to them, this may lead the camera to believe that the light source is something other than what it is. It may not completely veer to a fluorescent or tungsten, but it may attempt to achieve some sort of "compromise" of color. Often, the result isn't the best color that your camera could produce.

Though under direct sunlight the Auto WB may offer good general results, in the shade or on cloudy days, I often see images with a slight bluish tint. This tint becomes glaringly obvious when you shoot comparison shots of the scene using the Auto WB and the appropriate preset. Though you may be able to correct the white balance later in Photoshop, it takes only seconds

to get it right in camera. How long does it take you to restore accurate color on your computer?

Auto WB isn't all bad, of course. It may be beneficial when you're shooting under mixed lighting (for example, tungsten and fluorescent). Instead of switching back and forth between settings, you may want to just hedge your bets with Auto WB and correct for the slight variations later. This doesn't happen often, but it's something to be prepared for.

## Preset white balance

Often, the best choice is a preset white balance, which is set for a specific color temperature. Each preset on your camera is represented on your camera's LCD with a symbol. These symbols vary from one camera manufacturer to the next, but they're commonly a sun (direct sunlight), a cloud (cloudy), a house (shade), a tube (fluorescent), and a bulb (tungsten). With a fixed Kelvin value, the camera can't be fooled by the different colors that may appear in the scene.

So, if you're shooting scenes at the beach on a bright sunny day, you'll choose the direct sunlight WB setting. If you move into the shade of a building to take a portrait, you set your camera to the shade WB setting to avoid the bluish color cast produced by that kind of light.

White balance presets are the best starting point for accurate color. You have to be aware of the lighting before you begin shooting, but you'll easily and quickly develop this skill. Not only will it help you to get the most accurate color from your images, but it will provide you the knowledge you'll need when you *want* to introduce those color casts to your images for creative effect.

I photograph people so often for my work that I've become very sensitive to how skin tones are rendered in my photographs, whether in the studio or on the street. The care with which I determine the type of light I'm shooting under with my white balance setting allows me to have a reasonable expectation that the colors I produce in the camera are as accurate a representation of what I experienced as possible. I don't want to spend unnecessary time trying to fix bad color in software. It's never as accurate or as good as when I get it right in camera.

## Custom white balance

Sometimes you may want to create a custom white balance. For example, if you're shooting a line of clothing or a new breed of roses for which precise color is important, a custom white balance setting will provide the best results.

You can achieve a custom white balance by taking a photograph of a white or gray surface within the lighting conditions under which you'll be shooting. The camera then uses this file to establish a precise white balance setting, which you can use for the entirety of the shoot (assuming that the lighting doesn't change). You may be able to save this setting as a permanent setting in your camera. This option is especially useful for studio photographers whose lighting remains constant.

When measuring a custom white balance off a white or gray card, place your camera in manual focus mode—it won't be able to focus because of the lack of contrast and detail. Also, fill the frame with the card or surface to ensure that you get accurate results.

**TIP:** Several manufacturers sell white balance cards to aid you in setting a custom white balance. These cards can save you the time of trying to find a neutral surface. Alternatively, you can use an ExpoDisc, which is a filter that you temporarily place in front of the lens for determining white balance. For color-critical work, these tools can be convenient and effective.

Custom white balance is the best option when you're photographing in a room with energy-efficient bulbs. There are currently no existing WB presets for these newer light sources. Auto WB may provide you a good overall result for snapshots, but if color is critical and you don't have the ability to control the lighting otherwise, a custom WB is the best alternative.



---

**Canon 20D | ISO 1600 | f/3.5 @ 1/90th**

Lighting at a performance is both challenging and unpredictable. Auto WB would result in images shifting in color in every way. Locking my white balance to a pre-set provided more consistency and a common point for refining color later.

## White Balance and Raw

Most of today's DSLRs provide you the ability to record raw files, as well as JPEGs. Raw files are the raw data produced on the sensor with few to no enhancements for color, sharpness, and contrast.

JPEG files have a variety of enhancements, which adjust sharpness, contrast, and saturation based on what the camera has been designed to believe is a good image. The degree of adjustments vary, but the differences can be seen especially when you're using scene modes, which are geared for specific types of photography (such as portraiture, landscape, or close-up). With scene modes, the camera applies enhancements that hopefully deliver an image straight out of the camera that you can happily print or display.

Raw leaves such adjustments for you to control with the software you received with your camera or with Photoshop, Aperture, Lightroom, or another image-editing application. Many photographers favor raw because it provides them with the greatest degree of control and promises the ability to produce the best image possible, even if some work is required on the photographer's part.

One of the advantages of shooting raw is that it allows you to adjust white balance well after you've taken the image. So, if you've accidentally set the white balance incorrectly, you can set it for the correct value in your image-editing software, without any loss of quality. Correcting color in a JPEG is notoriously difficult and never delivers an ideal result. It can be done, but it's no fun. Raw is the better alternative.

**REMEMBER:** Don't make the mistake of thinking that you don't have to worry about white balance. Leaving white balance to be addressed later in Photoshop or in a raw converter just means an additional step, which becomes particularly problematic if a shoot includes a variety of different lighting conditions and light sources. Though raw can help you out when you make mistakes, you still want to pay attention to the light and get white balance right from the very beginning.

## *The Role of Color*

When I'm at my best, I'm seeing color as a fine ingredient in a recipe. In and of itself, it may have its interesting qualities, but it's only when color is mixed in with everything else (light, shape, line contrast, focus, and exposure) that the beauty of the color can reveal itself.

If people look at my photographs and the only thing they say is, "Nice color," I don't think I've succeeded. I'm striving for that experience that I have when I look at the images made by my photographic heroes, filled with a sense of wonder at how uniquely they see the world.

I don't achieve that every time I pick up a camera, of course. Most times, I fail. But as I continue shooting, I have those moments when I release the shutter with the thrill that I've not only seen something wonderful, but managed to capture it in a fraction of a second. It's as close as I'll ever get to trapping a genie in a bottle.

I want to encourage you to not merely think of white balance as some mechanical setting on a camera, but think of it as one of the more important tools in your camera bag—a tool that will allow you to express how you see and photograph the world.

---

### **ONE COLOR AT A TIME**

One of the best ways I developed my eye for color and light was to give myself assignments in which I would photograph only things of a single color—for example, only reds, only yellows, only greens, only blues, and so on. I encourage you to do the same. Not only will you discover new subject matter that you never would've considered before, but you'll be amazed by your discovery of the many different hues of reds, yellows, greens, and blues that exist in the world and how they're each informed and transformed by the quality of light.

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# Index

## A

abstract photographs, 186  
accordion-player photograph, 78–81  
action photographs, 214–215  
Adobe  
    Lightroom, 22, 74, 219, 220  
    Photoshop (See Photoshop)  
AF sensors, 50  
Allard, William Albert, 13  
alley-and-hydrant photograph, 192–193  
ambient light, 128, 241  
amusement-park-ride photograph, 17, 186–187  
aperture, 19–21  
aperture priority mode, 27, 58  
Apple Aperture, 22, 74, 219  
architecture photographs, 182–185, 186. *See also* urban landscapes  
Arena, Syl, 244  
arrow-signage photograph, 182–183  
artificial light sources, 194, 241. *See also* flash  
author portraits, 111–113, 120–121, 124–125, 235–237, 238–239  
auto bracketing feature, 196. *See also* bracketing  
autofocus, 49, 55  
auto ISO, 23, 58  
automatic exposure, 14, 27, 35, 58  
Auto WB, 70–71, 72, 73, 159  
available-light photographs, 113, 194. *See also* ambient light  
Avedon, Richard, 36

## B

backlighting, 140, 144  
bandleader photograph, 82, 83  
bar-scene photograph, 37  
beach-at-sunrise photograph, 156–157  
beachgoer photograph, 140–141  
bearded-man photographs, 202–203, 216–217  
bias, exposure, 47  
black-and-white conversion, 198, 202, 204, 205, 216–217, 219–221  
black-and-white photographs, 198–221

    beauty of gradation in, 211–219  
    choice of emphasis in, 205–209  
    converting color photos into (See black-and-white conversion)  
    distractions in, 206, 208  
    personal reality through, 200–204  
    power of, 200, 213  
    visual draws in, 200, 215  
blurred images, 19, 94, 188, 215  
bonfire photograph, 82, 83  
boy-getting-haircut photograph, 198–199  
boy-playing-pool photograph, 200–201  
boy-running photograph, 188–189  
bracketing, 164, 196  
brick-wall photograph, 90–91  
bride photographs, 102–103, 241  
brightness, 79–81, 99, 200  
building photographs, 184–185, 196–197, 211–213. *See also* urban landscapes  
burning, dodging and, 204, 219–221

## C

caballero photograph, 116–117  
cactus photographs, 28, 90–91, 162–163  
camera  
    automatic exposure feature, 14, 35, 58  
    automatic ISO feature, 23  
    carrying too much equipment with, 224  
    controlling exposure with, 16–23  
    creating starting point for, 44–46  
    exposure compensation feature, 35  
    exposure modes, 27  
    expressing yourself as artist with, 40  
    as extension of photographer's eyes, 40  
    flash compensation control, 241  
    histograms, 32–35  
    limitations of, 39  
    mastering, 36, 252–253

- metering modes, 29–30, 33
- meters, 23–30
- panning technique, 215
- presetting, 44, 49–50
- shutter speed, 16–19
- camera shake, 50, 53, 147, 196
- camera-stabilization features, 55
- candlelight, 7
- Canon cameras, 29
- car-detail photograph, 82, 83
- carnival-ride photograph, 17, 186–187
- center-weighted metering, 29, 33, 35, 47, 156
- chain-link-fence photograph, 92–93
- chain photograph, 146–147
- children-bathing photograph, 118–119
- city-life photographs, 186–193. *See also* urban landscapes
- Clapton, Eric, 36
- close-up filters, 147
- close-up photography, 113, 131, 140, 146–147
- clouds-and-stairwell photograph, 178–179
- clouds-and-trees photograph, 151
- clouds-and-vineyard photograph, 164–165
- color accuracy, 40, 70, 115, 119
- color casts, 69, 71
- color photographs, 198, 202, 205, 217, 219
- color(s), 60–75
  - contrast between, 84
  - correcting, 74, 242
  - developing eye for, 75
  - evaluating, 60
  - feeling, 62–65
  - importance of, 65
  - light's impact on, 66
  - in open shade, 113, 119
  - repeating, 97
  - role of, 75
  - using flash to bring out, 128–129
  - and white balance, 70–72
- color saturation, 86–91
- color temperature, 66, 69
- combating literalness, 174–176
- communion-dress photograph, 25
- comparison, curse of, 249–250, 252
- continuous drive mode, 50, 215
- contrast
  - in black-and-white photographs, 200
  - controlling, 111–113, 123, 126–127, 241
  - handling extreme, 164
  - in landscapes, 164
  - as visual draw, 82–84
  - working with high, 108–110 (*See also* high-contrast scenes)

- control arm, reflector, 237
- control points, 219–220
- conversion, color to black-and-white, 198, 202, 204, 205, 216–217, 219–221
- Courvoisier, Jerry, 220
- creativity, 2, 249, 250

## D

- darkroom techniques, 219
- dark tones, 27, 30
- Death Valley photographs, 94, 96, 152–153
- depth of field, 19, 50, 93–94
- details, 131–149
  - backlighting, 140, 144
  - in direct/diffused sunlight, 136–139
  - and direction of light, 140–144
  - filling frame with, 132
  - interaction of light with, 131, 135
  - tools for capturing, 147
  - using macro lens to capture, 132
- diamond-shapes photograph, 142, 143
- diffused sunlight, 136–139, 171, 238
- Digital Photography Book, The*, 126
- directional light, 120, 125, 219, 231
- direct sunlight, 108–113, 136–139, 238. *See also* sunlight
- distracting elements, 101–105
- dodging and burning, 204, 219–221
- dog photographs, 31, 206–207, 243
- door photographs, 142, 143, 176–179
- drive mode, 50
- dry-leaf photograph, 92–93

## E

- Eggleston, William, 13
- electronic flash, 126. *See also* flash
- emphasis, choice of, 202, 205–209
- evaluative metering, 29
- EXIF data, 53
- ExpoDisc, 72
- exposure
  - bias, 47
  - challenge of, 14–16
  - determining accuracy of, 32
  - fundamentals of, 16–23
  - modes, 27, 58–59
  - refining, 35
- exposure compensation, 35, 43, 58
- extension tubes, 147
- external flash, 164. *See also* flash

## F

fast-ride photograph, 17, 186–187  
feathering, 123, 233  
fence photograph, 47–49  
ferns photograph, 169  
fill flash, 126–127  
fill light, 126, 231, 233, 235, 241  
film ratings, 20  
filters  
    close-up, 147  
    FLD, 242  
    graduated neutral-density, 164  
first-communion photograph, 25  
flash, 241–244  
    bringing out color with, 128–129  
    controlling contrast with, 126–127, 241  
    as creative tool, 244  
    external, 164  
    as fill vs. primary light source, 241  
    high-speed sync feature, 244, 245  
    and ISO setting, 23  
    for portraits, 126–129  
    recommended books on, 126, 244  
    and shutter speed, 126, 241  
    using light modifier with, 241  
flash compensation control, 241  
flash sync speed, 126, 241, 244, 245  
FLD filter, 242  
flower photographs, 8–11, 86–89, 91, 132–133, 144, 255  
fluorescent lights, 69, 71, 194, 242  
focal length, 53–55, 191  
focus, drawing viewer's attention with, 93  
focus setting, 49–50  
foreground elements, 161–166  
found light, 223. *See also* ambient light  
f-stop, 19–21  
full-body photographs, 238

## G

Gary Fong LightSphere, 241  
gas-station photograph, 188–189  
girl-in-blue photograph, 95  
girl-outside-church photograph, 41  
girl-sipping-soda photograph, 222–223  
girl-with-mask photograph, 18  
Glass, Preston, 69  
graduation, beauty of, 211–219  
graduated neutral-density filters, 164

Grande, Reyna, 235–237  
graphic elements, 181–185  
ground-at-your-feet photographs, 166–168  
group photographs, 238

## H

halogen lights, 69, 194  
handheld meters, 23  
hand-on-keyboard photograph, 78  
hard light, 238  
hat photograph, 42  
Haywood, Gar Anthony, 111–113  
HDR Efex Pro, 164  
HDR photography, 164  
HDRsoft Photomatix, 164  
high-contrast scenes, 33, 47, 49, 108–110, 125, 193  
high-speed sync feature, 244, 245  
histograms, 31–35  
Hobby, David, 244  
horse photographs, 12, 214–215  
*Hot Shoe Diaries, The*, 244  
hydrant-and-alley photograph, 192–193

## I

ice-cream-truck photograph, 44–46  
image-editing applications, 74, 89. *See also* Photoshop  
image stabilization, 55  
incident meters, 23  
inspiration, 2, 13  
ISO

    automatic, 23  
    and camera shake, 53  
    compensating for shade with, 117  
    and digital photography, 22  
    and film photography, 20  
    and focal length, 53–55  
    and light quality, 56–58  
    and night photography, 196  
    and noise, 22–23  
    presetting, 44  
    and quantity of light, 53  
    and shutter speed, 53–55, 196

## J

jockey-and-racehorse photograph, 214–215  
jockey-in-stable photograph, 228–229  
JPEG files, 74

## K

Kamm, Zeke, 126  
Kelby, Scott, 126  
Kelvin, William, 69  
Kemper, Ben, 110  
keyboard photograph, 78  
Kodachrome, 33

## L

landscapes, 150–197  
  capturing unexpected moments in, 188  
  and color saturation, 87, 91  
  combating literalness in, 174–176  
  contrasts between light and dark in, 53  
  and depth of field, 94  
  foreground element in, 161–166  
  graphic elements in, 176–185  
  ground as subject for, 166–168, 171  
  handling extreme contrast in, 164  
  importance of light in, 153  
  light and shadow in, 176–179  
  and magic hour, 154–161  
  and metering modes, 30  
  natural, 150–171  
  and point of focus, 50  
  urban, 172–197  
leaf photographs, 144, 145, 169  
lemons photograph, 138–139  
lensless tubes, 147  
*Lessons in DSLR Workflow with Lightroom and Photoshop*, 220  
Levels adjustment, Photoshop, 33  
light  
  and black-and-white photos, 198–221  
  and color temperature, 66, 69  
  controlling with reflectors, 230–238 (*See also* reflectors)  
  direction of, 140–144  
  evaluating/interpreting, 31–36, 77, 108  
  feathering, 123  
  importance of, 4, 11, 250–252  
  and ISO setting, 56–58  
  magic hour, 154–161  
  moving subject into better, 227  
  and natural landscape, 150–171  
  physical qualities of, 7  
  and portraits, 107–129  
  questions to ask about, 6–8  
  reflecting, 123–125 (*See also* reflectors)  
  and small details, 131–149  
  softening, 111, 123

  transformative power of, 247–254  
  and urban landscape, 172–197  
  using *vs.* seeing, 16, 247, 253–254  
  working with found, 223  
light modifiers, 120, 230, 238, 241. *See also* reflectors  
Lightroom, 22, 74, 219, 220  
LightSphere, Gary Fong, 241  
light stands, 237  
liquor-store photograph, 194–195  
LiteDiscs, 238  
literalness, combating, 174–176  
lock-on-door photograph, 176–179  
Los Angeles photograph, 196–197  
low-light photography, 7, 20, 22, 56

## M

macro images, 131. *See also* close-up photography  
macro lenses, 132, 147  
magic hour, 154–161  
magician photograph, 109, 110  
mailboxes photograph, 205  
Maisel, Jay, 13  
man-against-security-door photograph, 97, 98, 99  
man-in-barn photograph, 20  
man-in-black-hat photograph, 26, 204  
man-in-blue-hat photograph, 68  
man-in-crowd photograph, 190–191  
man-leaving-subway photograph, 57  
mannequin photograph, 4–6  
manual mode, 27, 58–59  
man-washing-horse photograph, 126–127  
man-with-beard photographs, 202–203, 216–217  
man-with-bible photograph, 15  
man-with-dog photograph, 243  
Mark, Mary Ellen, 13  
mask photograph, 18  
matrix metering, 29  
McNally, Joe, 244  
metering  
  and auto exposure, 27  
  center-weighted, 29, 33, 35, 47, 156  
  evaluative, 29  
  matrix, 29  
  mechanics of, 23–30  
  modes, 29–30, 33 (*See also* specific modes)  
  multi-pattern, 29, 30, 35, 47  
  partial, 29  
  spot, 29, 33, 35  
  TTL, 127, 241, 242

Mexican-dancer photograph, 128–129  
monk-with-laptop photograph, 54  
monochrome photographs, 200. *See also* black-and-white photographs  
morning light, 5, 29  
motion effect, 17, 19, 196  
motorcyclist photograph, 244, 245  
mountain photograph, 162–163  
Mt. Whitney photograph, 162–163  
MultiDisc 5n1 reflector, 111, 230, 231  
multi-pattern metering, 29, 30, 35, 47

## N

Nakamoto, Colleen, 231–233  
natural landscapes, 150–171  
    foreground element in, 161–166  
    ground as subject for, 166–168, 171  
    handling extreme contrast in, 164  
    importance of light in, 153  
    and magic hour, 154–161  
nature photographs, 168–171, 176. *See also* natural landscapes  
negative space, 135  
neutral-density filters, 164  
New York photographs, 185  
night photography, 194–197  
Nik  
    HDR Efex Pro, 164  
    Silver Efex Pro, 219–220  
noise, 22–23

## O

open shade, 113–119, 224, 233, 235  
optical sharpness, 93  
optical stabilization, 55  
oranges photograph, 66–67  
Orr, Molly, 122, 123  
oversaturated images, 89

## P

palm-frond photograph, 96, 97  
panning, 215  
Parks, Gordon, 13  
partial metering, 29  
patterns, 47, 97, 99, 144  
phone-lines photograph, 174–176  
photo-editing applications, 74, 89. *See also* Photoshop

Photoflex  
    light stand, 237  
    LiteDiscs, 238  
    MultiDisc 5n1 reflector, 111, 230, 231  
photographers, 13, 36, 249  
photographs  
    analyzing, 105  
    capturing feelings with, 252  
    color, 60 (*See also* color)  
    consistently making “great,” 4, 14  
    controlling how viewers experience, 79  
    curse of comparison, 249–250  
    developing ability to see, 196, 253–254  
    distracting elements in, 101–105  
    inspiration for, 2, 13  
    of landscapes (*See* landscapes)  
    as means of communication, 79  
    of people, 107–108 (*See also* portraits)  
    point-and-shoot, 39  
    taking risks with, 249–250  
    visual draws in, 79–97  
photography  
    close-up, 113, 131, 140, 146–147  
    flash (*See* flash)  
    HDR, 164  
    low-light, 7, 20, 22, 56  
    night, 194–197  
    true value of, 254  
photo reflectors, 230. *See also* reflectors  
Photoshop  
    black-and-white conversion plug-in, 219–220  
    and bracketing, 164  
    color correction in, 242  
    creating masks/selections in, 220  
    enhancing shadows in, 33  
    handling noise reduction in, 22  
    and HDR photography, 164  
    Levels adjustment, 33  
    and raw files, 74  
pier photograph, 156–157  
plant photographs, 160–161, 168, 169  
point-and-shoot photographs, 39  
ponytail photograph, 148–149  
pool-player photographs, 84–85, 200–201  
portraits, 107–129  
    from behind subject, 148–149  
    black-and-white, 199, 203, 204, 216, 218–219, 221  
    blurred background for, 94  
    and color temperature, 69  
    controlling contrast in, 111–113, 123, 126–127, 219

- and depth of field, 50, 94
- in direct sunlight, 108–113, 224
- distracting elements in, 105
- dog, 206–207
- focus setting for, 49–50
- high contrast in, 108–110
- lens considerations, 120
- in open shade, 113–119, 224, 235
- softening shadows in, 123
- using flash for, 126–129
- using reflectors for, 123–125
  - and white balance, 69
  - in window light, 119–121
- preset white balance, 44, 71
- primary colors, 69, 84
- professional photographers, 13, 36, 249
- program mode, 27

## R

- racehorse-and-jockey photograph, 214–215
- raw files, 33, 44, 74
- red-wall photograph, 87–88
- reflectance, 23–25
- reflections, 7
- reflectors, 123–125
  - components of, 230
  - and feathering, 123, 233
  - naturally occurring, 224–228
  - positioning, 233, 235, 237
  - purpose of, 123, 231, 237
  - and scrims, 111, 230, 238
  - and shadows, 230–237
    - using with window light, 125
- remote shutter release, 196
- repeating patterns, 96, 97
- resolution, 93
- rings photograph, 80
- Roberge, Robert, 238–239
- Rolls-Royce-detail photograph, 82, 83
- roofline photographs, 26, 62
- running-boy photograph, 188–189

## S

- salt-flats photograph, 166–167
- sandals photograph, 130
- sandbags, 237
- sand-dunes photographs, 94, 96, 152–155
- saturation, 86–91

- naturally getting, 91
- overdoing, 89–91
  - as visual draw, 86–89
- scrims, 111, 113, 230, 238
- sculpture photograph, 136–137
- security-guard photograph, 220–221
- shade, 113–119
- shadows
  - in direct-sunlight portraits, 108–109, 235
  - and metering modes, 29, 33
  - in open-shade portraits, 113–115
  - in photographing of details, 136–139
  - and reflectors, 230–237
  - in urban landscapes, 176–179
- shake, camera, 50, 53, 147, 196
- sharpness, 93–95
- shoe-shine photograph, 76–77
- shutter priority mode, 27
- shutter release, remote, 196
- shutter speed
  - adjusting, 17–19
  - and aperture, 17, 21
  - creating blur effect with, 19
  - determining minimum, 53
  - and flash photography, 126
  - and focal length, 53–55
  - freezing action with, 19
  - and ISO setting, 53–55
  - measurement of, 16
  - and night photography, 194, 196
  - and panning technique, 215
- signage photographs, 182–183
- Silver Efex Pro, 219–220
- singer photographs, 51, 73
- single-servo mode, 49
- single-shot mode, 50
- skin tones, 71, 238
- sky photographs, 158–159, 164–165, 178–179
- slide film, 33
- soft photographs, 53
- speeding-vehicles photograph, 196–197
- Speedlites Handbook*, 244
- spot metering, 29, 33, 35
- Stahl, Jerry, 124–125
- stops, 17, 19
- storefront photograph, 208–209
- street-corner-evangelist photograph, 114–115
- street-scene photographs, 34, 194, 227. *See also* urban landscapes
- street-singer photograph, 51
- strobes, 23, 120

*Strobist Photo Trade Secrets*, 126  
stucco-walls photograph, 178–179  
Stulberg, Scott, 196  
sunlight  
    assessing quality of, 7, 108  
    and color temperature, 66, 69  
    how color is affected by, 66, 91  
    and ISO setting, 20  
    and photographing of details, 136–139  
    and portraits, 108–113  
    softening, 111, 238  
    and white balance setting, 71  
Sunny WB preset, 159, 194  
sunrise photograph, 156–157  
sunset photographs, 161  
swimmer photograph, 52

## T

Teasley, Lisa, 120–121  
technology *vs.* technique, 55  
telephone-pole photograph, 174–176  
textures, 97, 132  
through-the-lens metering, 127, 241, 242  
tires photograph, 134–135  
train-window photograph, 173  
travel photographs, 186  
tree-and-sky photograph, 158–159  
trees-and-clouds photograph, 151  
trees-and-wall photograph, 180–181  
tripods, 21, 23, 147, 194, 196  
TTL flash, 244  
TTL metering, 127, 241, 242  
tungsten lights, 69, 71, 194  
twilight photograph, 196–197

## U

underexposure, 25, 35, 55  
urban landscapes, 172–197  
    capturing unexpected moments in, 188  
    city life as subject for, 186–193  
    combating literalness in, 174–176  
    graphic elements in, 181–185  
    light and shadow in, 176–179  
    magic of night in, 194–197  
    using wide-angle lens for, 191

## V

vibration, camera, 50, 53, 55  
vineyard photograph, 164–165  
visual anchors, 78, 79  
visual draws, 77–105  
    in black-and-white photographs, 200, 215  
    combining, 99–101  
    in portraits, 237  
    unwanted distracting elements as, 101–105  
    using specific, 79–97

## W

waitress photograph, 100, 101  
wall-and-trees photograph, 180–181  
wedding-bands photograph, 80, 81  
wedding photograph, 240, 241  
white balance, 69–74  
    cards, 72  
    and color temperature, 69–70  
    custom, 72  
    importance of, 74, 75  
    and magic hour, 159  
    and night photography, 194  
    presets, 44, 71  
    and raw files, 74  
    setting, 44, 69–73  
    for shade, 115  
white-wall photograph, 26  
wide-angle lenses, 94, 163, 191  
window light, 119–121, 125, 231  
woman-buying-ice-cream photograph, 44–46  
woman-in-black-vest photograph, 100, 101  
woman-in-orange-T-shirt photograph, 227  
woman-in-purple-jacket photograph, 64  
woman-with-glasses photograph, 251  
Wu, Jennifer, 235  
[www.thestrobist.com](http://www.thestrobist.com), 244

## Z

zoom lenses, 147