Sandro V Cuccia
sandro@ImageMedic.com
Spring 2009

Key Learnings #7 – Unit 3 – Light

Seeing the Light

In this course we have learned that photography involves a number of choices, such as camera orientation, which elements of design to exploit, whether to use selective focus or not, or whether the subject should appear blurred or frozen in time, among others. *We also need to decide what type of light we want to capture in our image.* We learned how the various ***qualities*** of light, combined with the ***direction*** and ***intensity*** of light can be used to form your images.

- ***The Quality of Light*** - **Hard Light**: Harsh and contrasty; results from a point light source - the sun on a clear day, a bare lightbulb. **Soft Light** is diffused or reflected light or generated from a broad light source - an overcast day. Best for portraits and landscapes. Heavy overcasts provide the softest of lighting.
- ***The Direction of Light*** - **Front Lighting** is very flat, minimizing detail texture. **Top Lighting** ignites surface colors but is flat and may cast unsightly shadows with portraits. **Side Lighting** produces long shadows, emphasizes texture, depth. Shadows become an integral part of the composition. **Back Lighting** often produces silhouettes. Watch out for lens flare!.
- ***Time of Day Affects Light*** **-** Lighting from the sun can yield different effects depending on position of the sun in the sky, your position, and atmospheric conditions. **Dawn & Twilight:** called the "Magic Light" - from about 45 minutes before sun appears at horizon, and up to 60 minutes after sun sets. **Sunrise & Sunset:** called the "Golden Hours" - first hour or two after sunrise, and about the last hour before sunset. Gives a flattering golden glow to subjects. Sure to enhance your photography! **Midday Sun** results in downward shadows; hard and contrasty.
- ***The Intensity of Light*** - **Brightness** of the light in the scene can add or detract from the image. Strive for an image with a **Balanced Ratio** of shadows and highlights, but be aware that the sensor/film has a limited **Exposure Latitude.** Only the eye can see more tonalities from black to white than the sensor. Use your camera's **Histogram** readout to measure the distribution and quality of the pixels that make up your image.
- ***The Color of Light – White Balance***. Camera sensor sees color of light one way only. Cannot continuously adjust like the human eye. With **Auto White Balance** the camera takes an "educated guess." But ultimately you can apply finer control. You can set to *specific light sources*: **Daylight:** generally bluish but correct for clear sunny day. **Shade:** a warmer color balance to counteract the bluish tinge that shade adds. Used frequently to warm up colors for other settings. **Cloudy Day:** Warmer than Shade. Use it to add a late-afternoon look to a picture. **Tungsten:** Regular incandescent light looks very orangey-warm to sensor, so this settings adds blue to counteract. **Electronic Flash:** Similar to Shade. **Fluorescent:** attempts to counteract ugly fluorescent lighting by adding magenta. Use **Custom White Balance** for tricky mixed lighting. Check your manual to implement this!

NOTES

A Great Photograph ...

- *Has a central theme or idea.*
- *Focuses attention to a single point-of-interest*
- *Simplifies*

© Sandro V. Cuccia - www.ImageMedic.com