

Ideas & Inspiration



Ideas to kick start your photography

Hello

Welcome to 'ideas and Inspiration' a new blog feature to help inspire your photography. It is easy to get stuck in a rut sometimes especially with the arrival of summer and blue sky days (which photographers seem to avoid like the plague) and it is easy to lose enthusiasm.

This little publication is designed to give you some ideas, it is easily downloadable so that you can keep it and refer back to it when you are in need of some inspiration. There is no theme, the ideas are fairly random based on what has appealed to me at the time but I hope you will find it interesting.

As always there are workshops and mentoring session which are related to the topics discussed so if you would like to come along and practice your skills then please get in touch.

As American photographer Alfred Stieglitz is credited for saying '*Wherever there is light, one can photograph*'.

Inspiration really is everywhere if you choose to look.

Gill

Companion shooting



Images that combine well together based on their colours, tones and subject matter. This combination was taken at Wells-next-the-Sea and shows the beach after a rain storm and a shell that I found in one of the shallow pools.

I am a landscape photographer with a passion for the natural world. I am drawn to capture the wilder side of the environments that I work in and tend to shy away from the more iconic views which draw many photographers to an area. I am inspired by the work of photographers like Joe Cornish, Lizzie Shepherd, Simon Baxter and Sandra Bartocha for their sublime use of light and colour but also for the subjects they photograph. Their images are photographs of place but the places are generally unrecognisable. The story is about the environment and not the specific location.

I have been thinking about this a lot recently and it has inspired an idea for a new project that I have started shooting in my local landscape of Suffolk. I have been shooting here for over 15 years and whilst I love the landscapes the familiarity can sometimes make the photography seem less interesting. So now when I go out locally I try to capture some companion images to go with my

landscape shots. Shots that when displayed together together say a little bit more about the landscape I am working in.

I tend to look for small details from the natural world that I generally don't photograph on their own but which could form a really nice intimate image to compliment my landscape shots. These shots are intended to be displayed side by side so they need to sit in harmony with each other. So I am looking for both shots to contain similar colours and tones and to come from the same environment and have a story to tell.

Gestalt theory is the principle that "the whole of anything is greater than the sum of its parts" and that is what I am aiming for with my images. They tell you more about a landscape than just one shot but they look visually appealing when combined and displayed together.

Combining images based on their colour

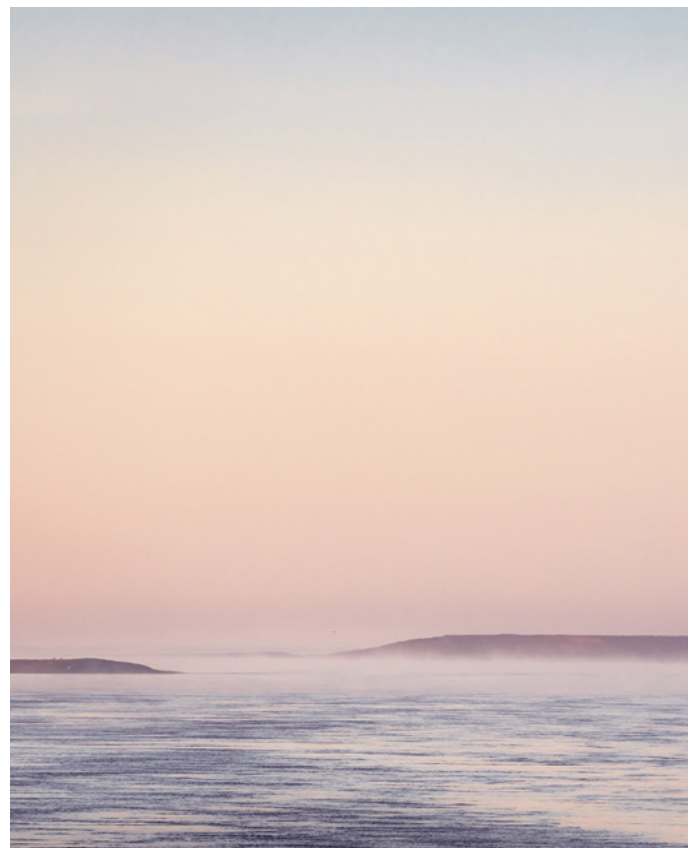
combinations is an idea that I was inspired to try after looking at a copy of a photography book about the Outer Hebrides and its connection to Harris Tweed. The book by photographer Ian Lawson is called 'From the land comes the cloth' and it features images of wonderfully coloured woollen yarns and woven Harris Tweed sitting side by side with images of the landscapes that had inspired them.

I love flicking through the pages of this book. It is a weighty volume, almost too heavy to comfortably sit with, but I find the use of colour combinations between the images so inspiring.

The idea is one that has also worked really well in Colin Prior's book 'Fragile' which compares images of birds eggs with the landscapes that they are found in. Again the use of colour is well thought out and beautifully executed.

The beauty is not
in the colours,
but in their
harmony.”

Marcel Proust



These two images were taken at Hollesley marshes just along the coast from Shingle Street. They were taken at sunrise on a winters morning and show the view along the coast combined with a shell that I found on the saltmarsh.

How to take companion shots

Work in the same landscape

When thinking about images that fit naturally with each other I feel it is important to capture them in the same environment and usually at the same time when the lighting conditions will be similar. This will help you match your tones across both images.

Be observant

Look for the smaller details that can become the focus of your intimate image. This will also help you with compositions for your landscape images. Using the tiny details like flowers, rocks, seashells or interesting geology can really have an impact on your landscape scenes particularly if you shoot in portrait orientation with a wide angle lens.

Use the light.

I love shooting at sunrise, the light is soft, there is often dew on the ground and the light gives the colours a subtle pastel feel which I love. I also find that intimate landscapes are much easier to capture at this time of day. If I am shooting a landscape at sunrise I will often shoot into the rising sun, but not always. Sometimes the colour is just as good (or better) in the opposite direction. It all depend on the look and feel that I want in my image.

If I am shooting an intimate landscape, particularly flowers I will shoot into the light. This will give me some interesting effects with light and shadow but it will also allow me to play with the bokeh - the out of focus highlights in my image.



These two images were taken at East Lane, Bawdsey and show the view across the ponds on a misty morning combined with some Cuckoo Flowers that I found growing next to the water.

Post Processing

When post processing your colour images think about the quote from Marcel Proust -

'The beauty is not in the colours, but in their harmony.'

For these diptychs to work they need to look like they belong together. This is where your post processing skills will come in useful. It doesn't matter if your two images were taken at the same time in the same location the camera may not render the colour temperature and tones of both images exactly the same. So you may need to change specific things to get the images to harmonise.

I will use the image below as an example. This is a screen shot from Lightroom showing the before and after of an image I took at dawn of the sea pinks on the saltmarsh. The image on the left is the RAW file straight out of camera and the one on the right is the processed, colour graded image.

For me the image on the left didn't match my memory of the morning when I took the shot - the colour temperature is too cold, the mauve colour of the flowers is too blue and the highlights are not warm enough. So in this instance I have applied a fairly dramatic colour grading effect to cool down

the shadows and significantly warm up the mid tones and highlights. You can see the amount of adjustment I have applied in the screen shot below. This has given me a much closer emotional feel to the dreamy effect I am looking for. This effect can also be achieved by using the selective colour tool in Photoshop.

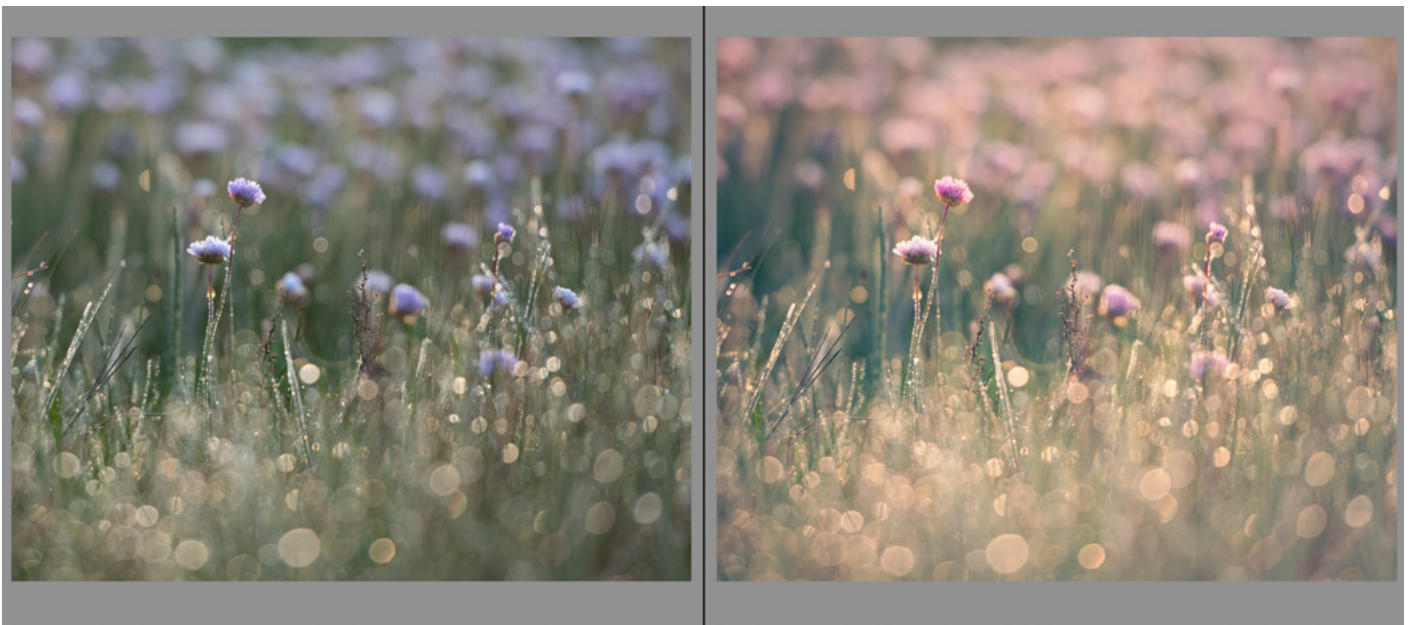
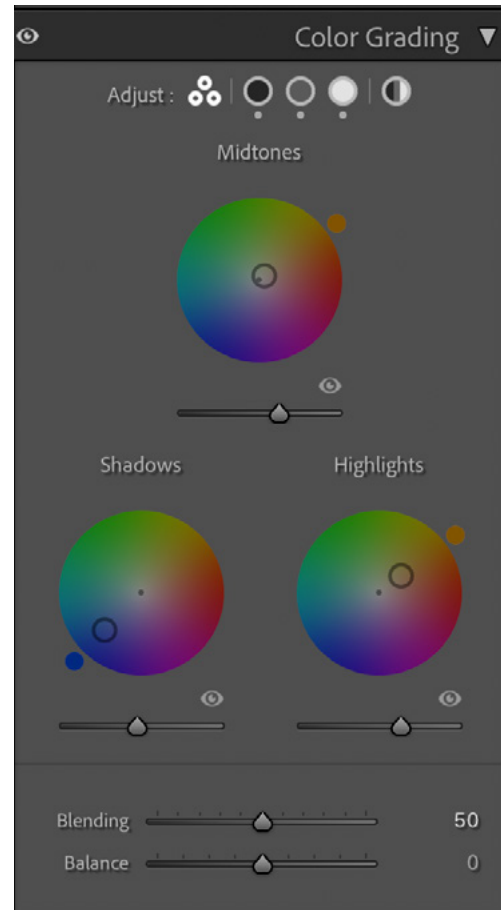




Image edited in Lightroom, ready to be finished in Photoshop

This is what my image looked like once I had finished processing it in Lightroom. I then opened it in Photoshop to finish my edit and create the dreamy effect I was looking for. You can see that the two images are slightly different. The left hand shot still has some elements I consider distracting and the background at the top is not blurred enough for my liking.

To blur the background of an image in Photoshop:

Open your image in Photoshop.

Click Cmd J or Control J to create a duplicate layer. On the duplicate layer go to Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur - select anything from about 30 - 50%

You will now have a blurred layer over your original image.

Now whilst still on the blurred layer go to Layer > Layer Mask > Hide all. This will put a black mask over the top of your blurred layer and will hide it so you can't see it anymore.

Now select your brush tool from the left hand tool bar. Make sure that the two boxes at the bottom of the tool bar (one black and one white) is set to white and now paint over your image where you want the blurring to be present.

When you have finished you can flatten the layers by going to Layer > Flatten image and this will give you a flat image back.

I have applied this process to slightly blur the background pinks and some of the darker area in the mid ground.



Finished image after being edited in Photoshop.

The key to post processing is to know exactly what you want to achieve in your image. I wanted to create a shot that showed the sparkly magic of the morning. I wanted to emphasise the dew on the grasses which I have done by using a telephoto lens at 195mm and a really wide aperture of F3.2. This has given me a wonderful bokeh effect with the out of focus highlights.

I colour graded the image in Lightroom as already discussed and then opened it in Photoshop. I blurred some areas of the background and mid ground then I applied some dodging and burning to the image. I also desaturated the mid ground greens and darkened the highlights in the background, whilst lightening the highlights slightly in the foreground.

I then removed some of the highlights that I considered to be distracting - one half

yellow circle on the left of the image and one bright circle in the centre. Some elements in the centre of the image which I also found distracting reduced in visual weight when I blurred the image.

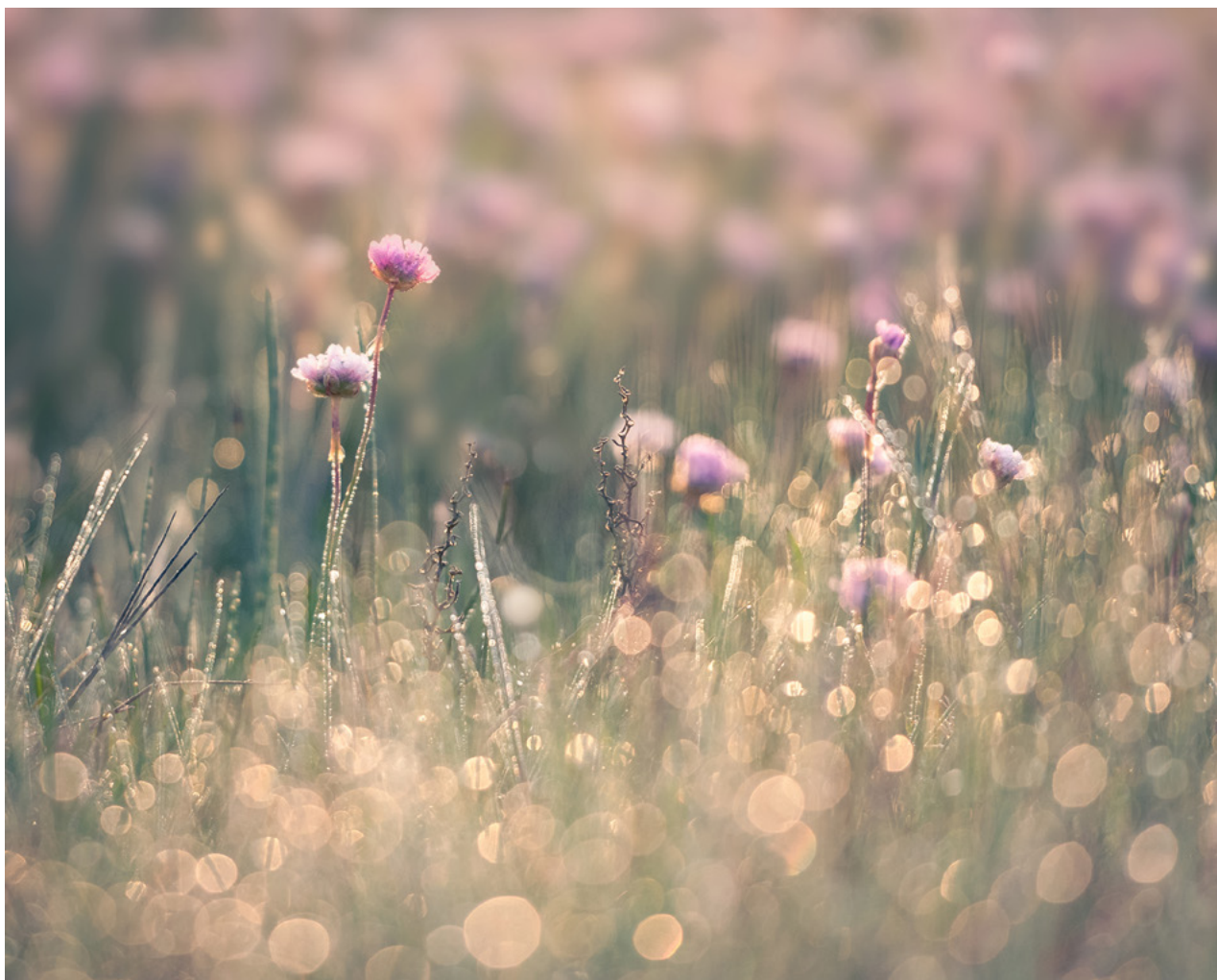
I now have a dreamy shot which I feels evokes the mood of a summer's morning and which now combines well with the landscape shot that I took at the time.

You can see both images on the following pages.

If you would like to try your hand using these techniques then please sign up to my monthly photo challenge which is all about Companion Shooting.

www.landscapephotographytuition.co.uk/product/photography-club-june-photo-challenge





Photographing Summer Flowers

I love a bit of flower photography and its great at the moment because the countryside is looking so stunning. There seem to be flowers everywhere. They also make great subjects when the conditions are not ideal for traditional landscapes.

Here are a few quick tips on photographing wild flowers.

1. Make them part of your landscape compositions. This shot at Shingle Street uses the flowers as a visual line which leads the eye towards the bungalow at the top of the image.



2. Work with the light to create interesting bokeh as in the image I discussed earlier. The wider the aperture the softer the bokeh effect. A macro lens will emphasise this even more.

3. Use light and shadow to add interest to your image. The following image was taken at dawn when the sun was very low in the sky. The white campion flowers were growing on a mound, half in shadow and half in the sunlight. I used this contrast between the cool shadows

and warm highlights to add interest to my background.



4. Make use of dew or raindrops after a show to give your image some added atmosphere. The flowers in the following image are covered in dew and it makes them sparkle and stand out a bit better from their background.



5. Shoot abstracts with a macro lens. Using a macro lens will give you a much shallower plane of focus which lends itself really well to abstract images. The following shot is a section of back lit sea kale. The sun shining through the new leaves has given them the really red colours and the mauve is the natural colour of

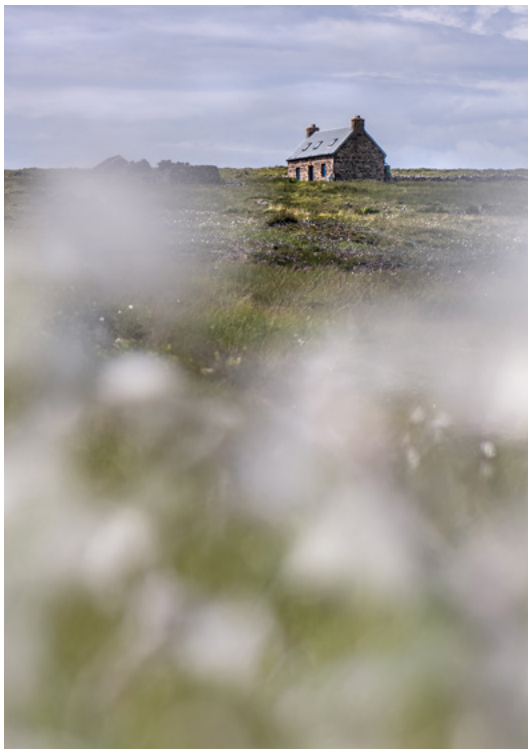
the emerging new growth. Believe it or not I haven't saturated or changed the colours in this shot at all, it was all achieved using the natural light from the sun.



7. Experiment with the technique of shooting through which will add some out of focus texture to your flower portraits. This sea holly head was shot through some of marram grass which has given a soft effect to the bottom leaves.



6. Use selective focus and a shallow depth of field to create interesting landscape images. This shot was taken with a macro lens looking through a field of cotton grass and focusing on the cottage in the distance.



8. Be selective with your processing. For many of my shots I tend to desaturate some colours - particularly greens and yellows. I also use the technique already discussed in Photoshop to help blur my backgrounds.



Random Inspiration

If you want some more wild flower inspiration then have a look at Jo Stephen's website - her images are beautiful and dreamy.

jostephen.photography

She also has a book out at the moment titled 'Wild' and published by Kozu Books

www.kozubooks.com/books-new/wild-by-jo-stephen

Podcasts to fire your imagination

My personal favourites are:

Matt Payne - F Stop Collaborate and Listen

www.mattpaynephotography.com/page/f-stop-collaborate-and-listen

Quiet Landscapes with Margaret Soyrara

which is available on Apple Podcasts or the Podcast App <https://podcast.app/quiet-landscapes-with-margaret-soraya-p1862990>

Biblioscapes with Euan Ross which features the digital library of Euan's personal collection of photobooks and features photographers from around the world, covers a variety of subject matters, themes and styles and includes self-published and handmade books. In the Podcast Euan chats to some of the authors.

<https://biblioscapes.com>

There is a lot about AI in the news recently and what ever you think about it, it has generated some interesting artwork. The most recent to hit my inbox is an online body of work made for the WWF in which the history of art imagines the future of our country. I found it powerful and thought provoking and I think it is worth a look. <https://futureofnature.uk>

Staying on the subject of our planet and landscapes I still have a few copies of my Planet Suffolk book which contains 36 personal stories from around Suffolk. The contributors have done an amazing job and the stories are emotive and powerful.

<https://gillmoon.com/projects/planet-suffolk>

Get out and About - Up and coming photo walks.

Friday Photo Walk - Exploring Contrasts

This photo walk is all about exploring contrasts in our photography. I will be challenging you to take images which explore a variety of contrasts which will include some of the following: Light and shadow, texture and softness, colours, natural and man made, industrial and wild, sea and land.

www.landscapephotographytuition.co.uk/product/friday-photo-walk-exploring-contrasts

Composition Photo Walk - Harwich

The session takes the form of a photo walk around the maritime resort of Harwich where you will be given 10 compositional rules to apply to your images. Each rule will cover a useful way of constructing a photograph and will help you think in much greater detail about how to approach your photography.

www.landscapephotographytuition.co.uk/product/harwich-photo-walkmastering-composition

Friday Photo Walk - Vertical Landscapes

Landscape photography often inspires landscape orientation images but if you choose to go vertical these compositions can give you really dynamic and interesting images. Composition is key and learning to find interesting foregrounds is part of the challenge. I spend more time these days shooting vertical orientated images as I often find them more interesting. If you would like to know more visit www.landscapephotographytuition.co.uk/product/friday-photo-walkvertical-landscapes

June Photo Challenge

If you would like to take part and have a go at Companion Shooting and creating a Diptych then please book here.

www.landscapephotographytuition.co.uk/product/photography-club-june-photo-challenge