USE LONG EXPOSURES FOR STRIKING MINIMAL CITYSCAPES

USE MOODY SKIES FOR DRAMATIC MONO LANDSCAPES

USE SHAPE & TEXTURE FOR AMAZING ARTISTIC ABSTRACTS

ENHANCE FINE DETAIL FOR GRITTY BLACK & WHITE PORTRAITS

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How to use moody skies for dramatic mono landscapes

- Colour landscape photography tends to work best under clear or partly cloudy skies around sunrise and sunset. For mono, though, the rules are less defined, and you can get great shots at any time of day. Create atmosphere by working in overcast or stormy conditions, and look out for towering white storm clouds (Cumulonimbus), which always look incredible on camera. You can get dramatic results when the sun pokes through dark clouds, lighting a patch of land beneath.
- High contrast landscapes tend to give the most striking mono results, but are also the hardest to expose for. This is because your camera can’t always record extreme highlights and shadows in a single frame. A good way around this is to use an ND grad filter to reduce the light intensity from the sky, which will also help make any storm clouds even more moody and foreboding. If you don’t have a grad, always expose for the highlights, allowing the shadows to go to pure black if necessary.
- It’s best to shoot in RAW for more control at the editing stage. Not only will this allow you to rescue under- or overexposed areas, but you can manually adjust colour channels to change the brightness of specific parts of your scene. Turn on mono picture control to see your image in black & white on the LCD – the file will still be in colour when you get it home.

DRESS FOR THE OCCASION

As black & white landscapes tend to work best under stormy skies, be prepared to get wet. Always take waterproof clothes, a hood or baseball cap are good for keeping spots of rain off the lens.

How to use long exposures for striking minimal cityscapes

- Towns and cities have lots of intersecting shapes, repeating patterns and interesting textures, which are perfect for artistic black & white photography. However, they can be hard to shoot because urban areas have so much clutter that it’s tricky to achieve a clean composition. To get around this, try pointing your camera upwards to eliminate the hustle and bustle at ground level. This works best in cities such as Birmingham and London, where there are lots of tall glass and metal-fronted buildings.
- If you want to shoot a more traditional cityscape with street level in shot, you might try using a 10-stop ND filter to create a very long exposure, ideally of 15 seconds or longer. This will allow any moving objects in the scene – people, cars, clouds, water – to blur across the frame during the exposure, usually almost becoming invisible. This will give you a much cleaner composition, helping your building to stand out.

KNOW THE LAW ON WHERE YOU CAN SHOOT

If you’re standing on public land, there are no UK laws to stop you shooting anything or anyone you like. However, the police can step in if you’re causing an obstruction or photographing sensitive sites like military or government installations.

How to use shape and texture for amazing artistic abstracts

- You can shoot artistic abstracts virtually anywhere – even the most mundane or unlikely subjects can produce incredible results. As you walk around, look out for interesting shapes, patterns and textures, or attractive light and shade. High contrast scenes tend to work best for mono abstracts, so if possible shoot side-lit subjects, creating a sense of depth.
- The principle of abstract photography is to focus in on a small detail because of its visual beauty. For this reason, don’t feel you need to represent your subject in a literal way, or even worry that the viewer might not know exactly what they’re looking at. In order to achieve this tight framing, you’ll ideally need a telephoto lens, such as a 70-200mm or 75-300mm. This is particularly important if you can’t get close to your subject and need to shoot from distance. A macro lens can also be useful for abstracts of very small objects. If you only have a kit lens, shoot wider then crop in later in Photoshop, though this will reduce the resolution of your final image.

TAKE A LESS IS MORE APPROACH

Don’t be afraid to opt for an extremely clean composition – a minimal image often has more impact than a busy one. Even something as simple as shooting a single side-lit sheet of paper can yield very eye-catching results.

How to enhance fine detail for gritty black & white portraits

- Portraits always work well in mono, as without the distraction of colour the contours of the face and texture of the skin are much better defined. In such an emotive genre, the evocative and expressive qualities of black & white help to build a strong connection between the viewer and the subject. Use this unique quality of mono to capture the character and personality of your subject. Find interesting faces that really tell a story, and in particular choose male subjects with lots of creases and wrinkles.
- To give your subject’s face plenty of depth, avoid lighting it directly from the front, which will remove all shadows and give a very flat, low contrast look. Instead, light from above (about 45° is ideal), or from one or both sides. So long as you’re creating shadows somewhere on the face, you’re generally okay. Don’t light from below though – this isn’t flattering. You can use window light or flash heads – both work well. For the latter ensure you use a light modifier to soften shadows.
- Always focus on the eyes as they’re the most communicative and emotive part of the face. Failure to do this will render your shot of little use. It’s particularly important when using a wide aperture, where depth-of-field is so narrow that focusing errors are considerably more obvious.

REVEAL FINE DETAIL WITH THE CLARITY SLIDER

Open your RAW image in Photoshop, and in the initial Camera Raw window locate the Clarity slider in the Basic settings tab. Move this to the right to increase local contrast, giving your image a gritty look with exaggerated fine detail.