

Expressions

Conversations in landscape photography



JOURNAL 2

Expressions

Conversations in landscape photography



This journal is published by **aspect2i.co.uk**

Contact: **journal@aspect2i.co.uk**



© Cover Image: Sunflowers in Winter by Michael Pilkington

No part of this journal may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from aspect2i Ltd.

The copyright to all photographs and text featured in this journal belong solely to the authors of the photographs. For permission to use any of the images included in this journal please pass your request to the publisher, who will then forward the request to the authors.

Copyright © aspect2i Ltd 2023. All rights reserved.

JOURNAL 2

Introduction	4
Feature	5
Looking back to the future <i>by Paul Gallagher</i>	
Portfolio of a place	14
Iceland <i>by Michael Pilkington</i>	
Featured photographer	27
Steve Carroll <i>Interview by Paul Gallagher</i>	
Broadening horizons	38
Harris and Lewis, Scotland <i>by Paul Gallagher</i>	
How I got the shot	50
Recovering the light <i>by Michael Pilkington</i>	
The making of a photograph	57
Field edge <i>By Michael Pilkington</i>	
End note	59

We have to begin with extending a huge thank you for all your kind words of praise and gratitude when we released our first issue of Expressions a few months ago. As with all these journeys, a concept is hatched, and commitment has to be made and followed through. This is always fraught with self-doubt and a little worry as we questioned if what we were creating as content would be of interest to you all. Those initial fears are now alleviated due to your responses and notes of appreciation. Thank you to you all!

In this issue we have decided to take you on a journey to many different places from as far as India to Iceland and share with you the experiences of photographers working and photographing in these environments. The challenge for every photographer, no matter what your chosen subject, is trying to see it differently. All too often we see the same images taken at the same location, but when we are faced with the work of a photographer that has thrown aside the shackles of conformity and allowed themselves to 'see' with a new set of eyes, then the results are often evident in the photographs.

This is by no means an easy process because as we see work that we regard as inspirational, we often wish to recreate it in some way, regardless of the genre. By sharing this issue of the journal, we want to sow seeds of inspiration in your mind, but along with this, hopefully encourage you to think about the way you are approaching your photography when seeing the work of others. As Walker Evans eloquently said, "The eyes traffic in feelings, not thoughts."

Lastly, we do want you to share your thoughts and images with us. As we set out in the first volume of Expressions, we want this to be a two way conversation, so if you have any topic you would like to discuss, debate or images and experiences you wish to share please drop us a line at any time.

The journals are for everyone and please feel free to share with fellow photographers wherever they may be. You can copy and share this link <https://www.aspect2i.co.uk/journal>.



Looking back to the future

by Paul Gallagher

Looking back to the future

by Paul Gallagher

If we consider it, every photograph that we take, metaphorically speaking, is always behind us. The moment has gone in an infinite number of ways. As Michael Kenna once said, “Nothing is ever the same twice, as everything is always gone forever”. The light may change, the winds may pass, or as we walk forward one metre, our surroundings may look altogether different. I think this is a good thing in the pursuance of photographs. If grasped, it means our creative reservoir will never become dry.



© Silver Birch, Hokkaido, Japan by Paul Gallagher

This is making reference to being out with a camera and capturing the environment around us, but it can also be applied in equal measure looking at work we completed in previous years. Images are simply visual records, slivers of time in which we have compartmentalised a distilled version of what we were looking at into a four-axis frame. When looking back over previous work we may gain an understanding of our emotional input, or it may be clear what our influences were at that time. The way in which we interpreted the image is an integral part of who we are as photographers and we see how many of us pass through phases of processing images for different effect. For example, dark for impact and drama, then leaving this behind and arriving at a juncture where our images are soft and gentle.

I encourage you to take the time to do this with your past collections as it is nothing less than an enlightening experience and can prove to be fruitful for the work you are yet to undertake. Why is this? Put simply, as photographers we tend to work in a unidirectional way. We seek out new locations and environments in which to work. We change our equipment which serves as inspiration to get out, not to mention the advancements in processing platforms that have evolved at breakneck speed over the last five years or more which entice us to try a variety of different image editing approaches.

All of these elements combined influence the ingredients, and therefore the final appearance of our images. It is these ingredients that we use temporarily, then tend to put on the shelf where they can be forgotten about, regarded as old hat. A photograph is a powerful means of visual communication, and contained within it are many different ingredients, that, when brought together in synergy, complete the finished piece.



© Ice Pools, Lofoten by Paul Gallagher

As I look back over my decades of making photographs there are certainly candidates that I look at and wince whilst questioning the reason I got the camera out of my bag in the first instance; but there are others that captivate me to this day. I afford myself the time to try to understand why an image I made in film over thirty years ago can still have gravitas. One thing is for sure, my skills were certainly rudimentary compared to now, but something came together in me, the

landscape and the darkroom and it's not always apparent what that particular element was. I have recently delved into my archives and found evidence of a number of directions my photography has taken me. All have been influenced by what I allowed myself to explore over years passed.



© Glencoe, Scotland by Paul Gallagher

At the beginning of my career, as with many young photographers, I was looking for inspiration to act as a springboard and discovered the work of Ansel Adams. I dedicated many years trying to pursue the delicacy of tones I'd see in his work and this led me on a wonderful journey of film, darkroom and large format photography. It is still very important what I learned about photography and about myself during those formative years. It is clear to me that black and white photography will always be a form of visual expression that I still, and always will, relish in. When I look back at the days when I was carrying that huge bag full of dark-slides and large format lenses, I can see little suggestions of Adams in my photographs and recall how much I enjoyed pursuing a singular vision.

With the advent of digital cameras, it took me some time to be convinced that a 'little' camera could possibly out-perform my large format equipment. Part of this stubbornness was perfectly validated as the first digital cameras certainly could not, but I did decide to begin scanning sheet film in order to digitise my negatives and make my first explorations of Photoshop. Once again, the way in which I approached the adjustments in Photoshop were directly passed over from how I would work in a darkroom; in other words, simple. They remain that way to this very day.

It was in 2008 when Nikon released the D700 that things began to change for me. The image file quality could not be ignored, and by this time I had gained a good understanding of Photoshop for image editing. For some time, I worked with both large format and the D700, but as you can imagine, carrying around the two camera bags was nothing less than a ludicrous pursuit so I began 'allowing' myself 'digital-only' days, always fearing that a moment would arise that would only be worthy of large format that I didn't have with me. Looking back, this was a big shift in the way I worked.

Firstly, the relief of not having to carry the weight of the large format kit felt life changing at the time, the other was every image I made began its life as a full colour file. The freedom to embrace colour was at first tainted with an element of guilt that I was abandoning my specialism of black and white photography, along with my tiptoeing into new territory.



© Yellow Mountain, China by Paul Gallagher

Change does not always feel welcome as it can be laced with doubt about one's ability, and bidding farewell to familiarity makes us face some of the unknown. For me, this has always served me well as my gentle migration into working in colour added an extra freedom and dimension of expression that black and white alone could not. Whilst my exploration of digital cameras presented tangible benefits, there was one aspect that quickly became a handicap to my way of working, namely the tilt movements always afforded to me with large format cameras which enables me to achieve an incredible depth of field. This initial limited depth of field problem soon transformed into a direction in my work in which I delighted in for several years to follow. Within a few months of using the D700 I purchased my first 24mm tilt and shift lens. Largely destined for the pursuits of architectural photographers for its in-lens

movements preventing converging verticals, its' tilt functionality offered me exactly what I needed, and infinite depth of field.



© Tjørnuvik, Faroes by Paul Gallagher

This practice is certainly not new in landscape photography, and it leads the viewers eye from the closest foreground detail of the composition, towards to furthest horizon producing incredible clarity. Furthermore, because of the standard 3:2 aspect ratio of most digital cameras, when placed in portrait orientation, the long narrow image frame accentuated the effect. The symbiosis of colour photography and large format camera movements was inspirational for me.

Taking time to reflect on past work and considering how you would approach the same subject in the same light now, bears fruit. I often find myself seeing images within images, and sometimes, the original photograph becomes somewhat of a mosaic of its original form. I have commonly been found taking to the crop tool and removing the superfluous in the image by way of a retrospective refinement. After a number of occasions exploring this rather barbaric treatment of my images, it occurred to me that this practice was beginning to seep into my field craft and my departure from near-far tilt and shift compositions was certainly underway. I was no longer looking at details of the landscape at my feet and seeking parallels in the distant landscape, but was looking out and further away and applying my mosaic visualisation to the environment in which I was stood. Put simply, I was seeing in an entirely different way. I would not be described as a photographer who could be seen using a long lens regularly, but soon I bowed to the needs of my compositional mind and purchased a long lens with which I have had, and still do, many hours of pleasure.



© Woodland Study by Paul Gallagher

It is unusual that a regretful phase in your photographic journey of the past will have you exploring it further, and even more curiously, becoming an integral tool in your current work. For me, infrared did this very thing. As a photography student I consumed every opportunity to experiment as often as opportunities presented themselves. Infrared was one of those opportunities. Back in the day it was infrared film, and as you would expect, the results reliably displayed golf-ball grain and levels of contrast that now make my eyes squint when I look at the results. Being a devotee to the work of Ansel Adams and his nuances of beautiful tonal variation, this shameful phase was soon passed through and I came out quite unscathed and quickly stored the dreadful prints under lock and key. Fast forward thirty or so years, I was asked to test out a newly converted digital infrared camera, which, if I am to be honest having agreed to help, I did not savour. I reluctantly did some test images, and as to be expected, the harsh blacks and whites and being bereft of subtle mid tones found me keenly returning the camera to its bag ready to return to sender. That is until one day something happened that changed my mind about infrared, and a whole new world revealed itself to me.

I had travelled to the highlands of Scotland, and along with many of the other ridiculous mistakes I have made in my photographic career, I had successfully forgotten all of the batteries for my non-infrared camera. Here I was faced with some of the most amazing landscapes in the world, and my only photographic companion was my nemesis. The conditions were certainly not conducive to infrared with heavy cloud and passing storms and not a ray of sunlight to be seen. Borne out of pure frustration, I decided to simply try anything. I explored the coast of the Applecross peninsula and made, what would turn out to be, an image that was to change my perception of infrared for good. The composition was simple. A small group of young pine trees perched on a hillside overlooking The Inner Sound with a storm approaching in the distance from the open seas. That evening in my cottage overlooking the coast, I opened the image file, converted it to black and white, and with a slow and diligent approach, the image blossomed from flat grey to a vast array of tones. I had learned that the approach I had adhered to in the past using bright sunlight had no bearing on how I should work now, and for the rest of my visit to Scotland, my nemesis became a good friend indeed.



© Applecross Peninsula, Scotland Infrared by Paul Gallagher

I have many photography books that contain the work of an array of talented artists which I allow myself to dip in and out of when time allows. Quite recently I found myself devouring books from black and white film photographers, some of them dating back some time. Whilst the subject matter did not always inspire, the essence, character and timeless look of the images was in stark contrast to the pristine digital files I see almost daily. I reflected on how time does not stand still, and along with it, the quality of cameras and lenses. We seem to strive for crisp sharp images that look as realistic as the moment the exposure was made. Looking at photographs made with old cameras from old processes with imperfect lenses, instilled a desire in me to deviate into this ethereal world but create it digitally. I decided to concentrate on images I have made in two woodlands in the Lake District. The images I chose were not ones full of drama and light, but subtle, subdued and rather simple in nature. Whilst I was visiting these woodlands, I allowed myself the privilege of roaming freely and establish a close communion with my

surroundings, my only intention was for the finished work to have a soft, calming appearance as though taken many years before I even knew of the place.



© Woodland Absract by Paul Gallagher

As with all images, the journey began back at home when processing the files. It was sometimes demanding to move toward an image that was never intended to look polished or sharp and engage in very shallow depth of field adding noise, grain and actively blurring proportions of the image. To date I have shared very little of this work, but it is a journey I am enjoying hugely and one which feels like I have gone back to the very beginning of my photography. This experience has cemented in me the need to seek out the ingredients of what I have turned to in the past and understand that they can nourish the work I am engaged in today. I cannot imagine a day where anything I have practised in the past has no right to be integrated into what I do now. The past is what informs the future of photography.



Iceland

by Michael Pilkington

Iceland

by Michael Pilkington

Iceland has become increasingly popular over the past decade that I have been travelling there. Its popularity has been prompted by many television dramas and films that have been shot there, and along with a consistent marketing campaign by the Icelandic authorities and airlines.

For the photographer, and for me especially, it is a landscape that boasts incredible variety of features from deserts of black sand, to mountain spires and rugged coast lines. Much of the landscape is unspoiled being relatively untouched by human development; indeed, much of it could never be tamed and remains out of reach throughout the harsh winter months. The weather is dynamic with rapidly changing conditions from sunny moments to dramatic clouds and mist, rain and snow, not to mention the powerful winds arriving from the open Atlantic Ocean. This variability can add drama and a dynamic mood to your photographs, making each shot unique. That's the thing; every time you visit Iceland, it is different. Different due to the weather and the way it consistently reveals new perspectives and character. This is further amplified by the light. In the winter, the golden hours, sun rise and sunset, can last for four hours.

From a personal perspective, my preference is winter in Iceland. It does have a lot to offer at other times of the year. The green mosses that seem to grow in the most hostile conditions are a wonderful contrast to the black lava rocks to which they cling. The rainbow of colours that can be found in the rocks of the hills and mountains, particularly in the central highlands, are truly magnificent. For me though, the starkness of the black landscape peaking through the ice and snow is enthralling. Glacial lakes become frozen, trapping icebergs in their midst, which merge into the terminus of the glacier behind them. The light is particularly special with the sun residing consistently low in the sky throughout the day.

I have been to Iceland around 15 times already and it never ceases to fascinate me, and I always come away with images that I regard as inspiring to me. I would say that it is probably the best country for landscape photography that I have visited and will continue to visit for many years to come.



© Jokulsarlon, Iceland by Michael Pilkington



©Vestrahorn, Iceland by Michael Pilkington



© Frozen Lagoon, Jokulsarlon, Iceland by Michael Pilkington



© Black Beaches, Iceland by Michael Pilkington



© Vik Stacks, Iceland I by Michael Pilkington



© Hvalnes, Iceland by Michael Pilkington



© Moss Covered Lava Boulder Fields, Iceland by Michael Pilkington



© Central Highlands, Iceland by Michael Pilkington



© Hvitserkur Stack, Iceland by Michael Pilkington



© Jokulsarlon, Iceland by Michael Pilkington



© Grasses, River Delta, Iceland by Michael Pilkington



Featured Photographer: Steve Carroll

Interview by Paul Gallagher

Steve Carroll

Interview by Paul Gallagher

When we discussed this section of the journal, we naturally had several names that came to mind really rather quickly. Whilst we love landscape photography, this journal is about conversations and sharing experiences, together with knowledge.

There are many photographers I would like to sit down and talk with, but Steve Carroll was one I felt I had to, and Expressions was my excuse to bring this to fruition. I felt like I wanted to hear stories of places I have never been and longed to go, but also about how he thinks and how brilliantly these experiences are portrayed in his work. The questions, answers and accompanying photographs will do the rest.



© Huangshan by Steve Carroll

I know that you once worked in the corporate world and having retired you can now attribute more time to your photography. How did you discover photography and what photographers most inspire you?

It is certainly true that leaving the business world has freed up time for important stuff like photography – and golf. Working for an American multinational may, if you are lucky, make you cash-rich but you will certainly be time-poor. Nevertheless, I photographed all through my corporate life. In fact, I started photography at the age of 8 when I lived in Singapore but on returning to UK a couple of years later my interest waned and I did not resume photography until shortly after finishing university.

I joined a camera club and tried my hand at just about every style and genre of photography but, for a long period, without producing many satisfying images. Gradually I began to concentrate on a smaller range of subjects and it was then that I started to produce results which were more pleasing.

I tried just about every style and format of camera imaginable from 35mm to 10x8 sheet film cameras. I worked in my home darkroom producing mainly monochrome prints – as well as shooting huge numbers of transparencies. I was a late convert to the digital world but now fully appreciate the huge benefits the technology has provided to photographers.

I now shoot almost exclusively landscapes and what has come to be known as Street.



© Standing and Riding by Steve Carroll

Two huge influences for landscape have been Ansel Adams and aspect2i. I guess that Paul and Michael will be pleased that I place them alongside Adams as my influencers but, of course, I never had any personal interaction with Ansel whereas with Paul and Michael I have had plenty and it has really helped.

For street photography the situation is similar. My early influences were Cartier-Bresson, Doisneau, Frank and the like. More recently I have been guided and developed by someone, Mark Seymour, who I first met when I attended a street workshop he was conducting and who has now become a good friend. Mark spent many years as a wedding photographer but his photographic passion has long been documentary and street work – and he is very good at it. I have learned a lot from Mark.



© Red Rebel by Steve Carroll

We should be pleased to learn from others in photography. It is not reasonable to think that all will come from within. Grafting something from within to what we learn from others results in us developing our own style.

It is clear from your work that you have travelled widely in the world and seen many cultures and environments. What country or culture influenced your photography the most?

The part of the world which has played the biggest role in developing my photography is the UK. I could say Scotland but it is probably more accurate to say that my own locality has been most important. Places which I can visit within a day from home. The Kent and Sussex coasts, the north Kent



© Kent landscape in Winter by Steve Carroll

marshes, the streets of London. The less developed, less well off parts of the world can provide great street opportunities but, having said that, I have probably done more street shooting in London than anywhere else. After all – it takes me just one hour to get into central London.

You are right that I do love to travel for both landscape and people photography. India is certainly a wonderful place to photograph in the street and to capture people going about their daily business. There is just so much colour, the people are generally unconcerned about being photographed and the bustle in the thronged cities provides an environment into which a street photographer can readily meld. The Indian countryside and villages are also great for people pictures.

As for landscape locations one of the regular aspect2i tour locations, Hokkaido, is high on my list of favourite places. I am sure it is beautiful at any time of year but in winter the landscapes are truly sublime. I have now been there four times in winter, including four weeks in January and February of this year, and there are not many areas I have not explored. I would like to go again but there is a lot of world to see and I may take a break from Hokkaido for a couple of years.

I like winter landscape locations. Snow simplifies the landscape and it can also simplify the photographic process. It is often necessary to manage the tonal range of sky and ground in a landscape using graduated filters or exposure bracketing. With a snowscape that is rarely necessary. The less need there is to think about technical matters the easier it becomes to concentrate on composition and content.



© Silver Birch in Snow, Senja, Norway by Steve Carroll

You seem to have a rare skill to be able to master more than one genre of photography. Your street/people photography is compositionally superb and yet your landscape photography is equally consummate. How easy is it to switch between the two genres?

Two good sets of influencers, to use that trendy word again, helps!

Adams / Gallagher / Pilkington on the one hand and Cartier-Bresson / Doisneau / Frank / Seymour on the other.

Also, I have worked hard to develop both my landscape and street competencies. I think that narrowing down the genres which you work in can help you progress. There was a time when I would be shooting still life one week, sport the next, then portraits, butterflies, close-ups, etc, etc. I enjoyed all that stuff when I was doing it but am pleased that my interests are now narrower and my efforts more concentrated.

I do have just a little trouble switching from landscape to street and vice versa. If I have just spent a fortnight shooting street somewhere and on coming home I head out for a landscape session the first potential issue is kit. My street kit consists of a camera body with a 35mm lens on the front – plus a few memory cards and a spare battery. No other lenses, usually. No filters, no tripod, no remote release.

There is also a different mindset required. In the landscape, although it is good to be able to respond quickly to a fleeting change of light, it is really all about slowing down and absorbing the location. I often put my camera bag down and walk around at a new landscape location for some time before starting to shoot. It is a little different with street.



© Kids by Steve Carroll

Street/people photography is often regarded as seeing and capturing fleeting moments of time. When looking at a lot of your street photography you seem to be adept at getting in quite close to people as opposed to standing back. What is your general approach when working with people?

If you are scared to get in close – and scared to shoot people from the front – then you are going to struggle with street photography. Robert Capa of Magnum famously said, “if your pictures are not good enough, you are not close enough”. I have to admit that sometimes I struggle to be comfortable with getting in close. It varies from day to day. I can be affected by the atmosphere of a place but I think it is more to do with how I am feeling on that particular day. The best way to get over that is simply to make yourself do it. Once you have a few shots in the bag you will feel more relaxed.

Getting in close is not the only way that rewarding street images can be captured. The juxtaposition of compositional elements, positioning important elements (usually people) in their “own space”, appropriate use of background, adding depth by layering and of course catching the moment can all help you to construct a fine street shot without having been right in the face of your main subject. However, if you never get in close you will probably not succeed.

One thing that tends to prevent you from getting in close is using a long lens or a zoom lens. With a long lens you will be shooting from the other side of the street and with a zoom lens, when you have the choice to either zoom or walk in closer when you are framing you will zoom – it is very difficult not to. Do not give yourself the option – use a wide angle prime.

If you fill the frame with a long lens the viewer will subconsciously and immediately know that you were on the other side of the street and will feel like a detached spectator. If you fill the frame with a wide lens the viewer will feel like she was there, in the scene, when the shot was captured.

You mentioned catching the moment and that is, indeed, critical. The key to capturing the moment is anticipation. If you can see in advance that various picture elements are coming together and that the moment is about to happen you will have a good chance of catching the moment. Mark is particularly



© Ciggy Man by Steve Carroll

good at that. If you do not see the moment developing and only see it when it happens you have probably missed it.

For the images included in this article, some close and some not-so-close compositions in the images here. They were all shot on full frame cameras, without any interaction with the subjects, and the longest lens used was 35mm. The shortest lens was a 12mm for the man with the ciggy – so I was almost on top of him.

I have always been envious of one your photographic pursuits, storm chasing in America! I believe it is one of the most powerful and raw displays of nature's energy. What is it like to be close to such a phenomenon and photograph it? Have you ever had any close shaves?

The supercell storms, which sometimes spawn tornadoes, are absolutely spectacular even if no tornadoes drop. The sheer stage presence that a supercell has cannot fail to impress – however many you have seen. The clouds can be 10 miles thick and day can turn to night in a matter of minutes. The beast seems to be alive.

I always go with the same guide and would never attempt to chase without an expert. Firstly, I would likely not be in the right place at the right time to see the action and secondly if I did find a storm I would not be confident I could keep myself safe. The storms move across the land as well as spinning and you need to stay out of the path. Winds, lightning and huge hail are all potentially dangerous.

Our guide, and his team have always kept me and the other guests safe. The most dangerous part is the driving. Sometimes on dirt roads and, when a storm is in progress, often at ludicrous speed. The locals can also be an issue and on my trip this year a red-neck farmer tried to run one of our vehicles into a ditch.



© Supercell by Steve Carroll

The image with the mammatus cloud was at Gillette, Wyoming in June this year. Within an hour of taking this pic a coal mine at nearby Rochelle was hit by a powerful tornado. Trains were derailed and vehicles and equipment destroyed. Eight people were hospitalised but fortunately there were no fatalities. Most businesses in Gillette closed and sent staff home and we had trouble finding a place to eat but eventually found a restaurant.



© Supercell by Steve Carroll

All the cars in the car park had been wrecked by hail. There were cricket ball sized holes in the windscreens. No glass was intact. A woman sheltering under the canopy of an adjacent garage forecourt was being taken away by ambulance after being hit by hail which had punched through the roof but our guide had kept us safe.



© Supercell, South Dakota by Steve Carroll

Later that evening our guide took a call in which he was told that a storm chasing friend of his had been killed while on a storm. If you go chasing – go with an expert.



© Farm in the firing line, South Dakota by Steve Carroll

Given all the places you have travelled to, experiences you have had and landscapes you have seen, what do you have on your photography bucket list?

Location 1 on the bucket list is Svalbard which is an island lying between 78 and 80 degrees north which makes Lofoten seem almost tropical. The plan is to go at the end of winter / start of spring so that the winter conditions will remain but there will be light, because the sun is down for four months in winter proper. For five years I have been trying to get a trip there organised. The pandemic scuppered the original plan and I am now trying to reorganise it. There are some photo tours to Svalbard but they are all ship based – with day trips ashore. I have a contact who lives on the island and the plan is for a two week snowmobile-based trip deep into the interior. The photo opportunities are stunning.



The Isles of Harris and Lewis, Scotland

by Paul Gallagher

The Isles of Harris and Lewis, Scotland

by Paul Gallagher

Scotland has always been a mainstay for my photography, and by the time I was in my early twenties, I had visited many islands and travelled through the majority of mainland Scotland. There was however, one archipelago that had been out of reach, and when I gazed at the Ordnance Survey maps of the coastlines of the Hebrides, it was only a matter of time before their gravitational pull would overcome me.

Two things became quite apparent to me on my maiden voyage to the islands. Firstly, it felt like you were a long way from the mainland as the journey time in those days from Ullapool to Stornoway took over four hours. Secondly, the islands looked and felt very different to the Scotland I loved and was familiar with.

Harris and Lewis boast similar features to that of mainland Scotland with deep lochs, handsome mountain ranges, waterfalls and glens, but for me, it was the coast I needed to experience. I have listened to photographers trying to describe the beaches of the Hebrides and grapple with words that seem to fall short of describing the beauty they have actually witnessed. Unbelievable, staggering, captivating have all been adjectives used. I have done the same and understand that sometimes it has to be seen to be believed. There was once a poll offering people the opportunity to vote for their favourite beach in the world. It came as no revelation to me that Luskentyre, on the Isle of Harris, stood proudly at number eight of the best beaches in the world.

Many landscape photographers love working at the coast and for very good reason. The essence of openness and freedom instil an excitement in you that seems innate and is evident each time you are there. I've forgotten the number of times I have seen children, parents and the family dog running at full pace through the dunes and onto the sands, just because of the way the place makes them feel.

I could sit here and strive to describe places like Uig Bay with its vast swath of white sands, Mangurstadh Bay and the sea stacks that suffer the full force of Atlantic waves every day. I could recount the staggering beauty of the smooth sea-polished granite wave platforms looking out towards the Isle of Taransay, and chronicle the time I stood on Reef Bay on Lewis witnessing the darkest storm clouds I have ever seen, but that would feel rather futile. The one thing I will say that I cannot assert for other places I have been, much of what you see on Harris and Lewis, you will never forget the moment you saw it for the first time. You simply have to be there.



© Luskentyre, Hebrides , Scotland by Paul Gallagher



© Horgabost, Hebrides , Scotland by Paul Gallagher



© Seilebost, Hebrides , Scotland by Paul Gallagher



© Seilebost, Hebrides , Scotland by Paul Gallagher



© Luskentyre, Hebrides, Scotland by Paul Gallagher



© Wave Study I, Hebrides, Scotland by Paul Gallagher



© Seilebost, Hebrides, Scotland by Paul Gallagher



© Wave Study II, Hebrides, Scotland by Paul Gallagher



© Mangeurstadh Bay, Hebrides, Scotland by Paul Gallagher



© Seilebost, Hebrides, Scotland by Paul Gallagher

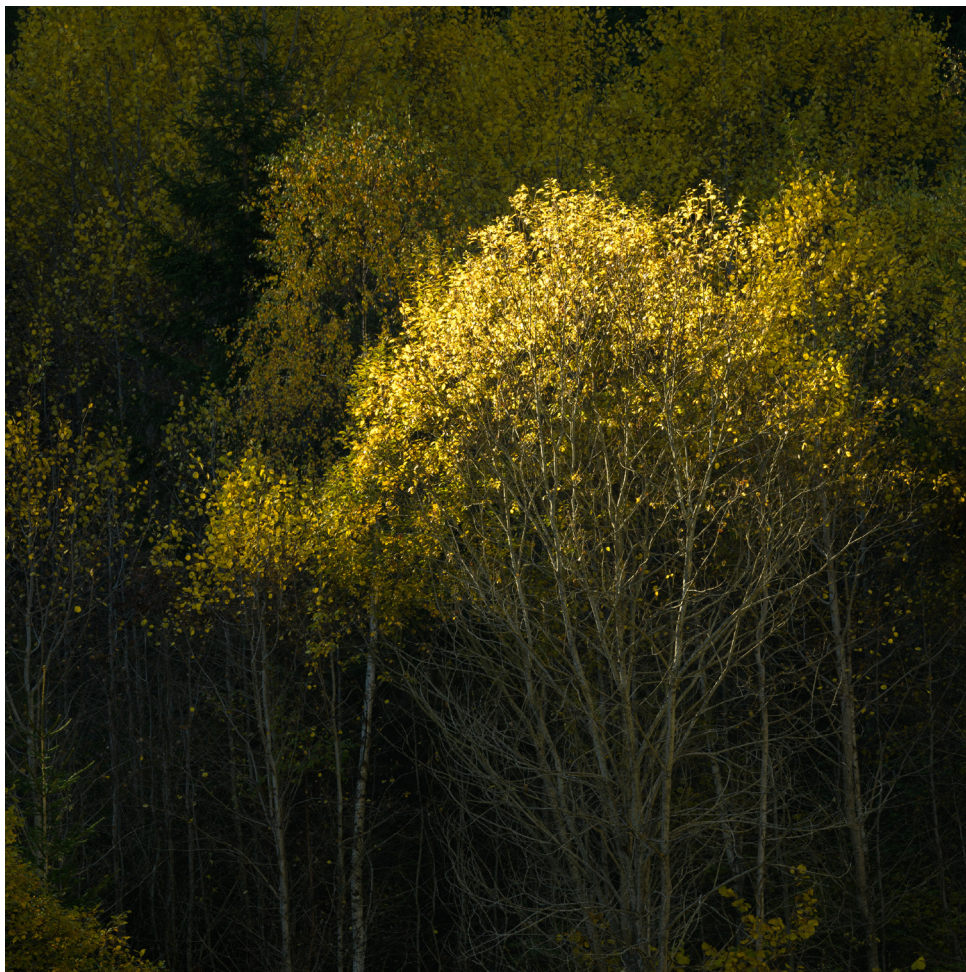
How I got the shot: Bringing light into an image

by Michael Pilkington

How I got the shot: Recovering the light

by Michael Pilkington

One of the main goals in post-processing is recovering the light. What we must consider is that when we capture an image, the exposure can be a compromise. What I mean by that is that you have chosen an exposure that has to ensure that all levels of brightness in the scene are captured. This entails ensuring that both the whites and the blacks are not clipped. It is also necessary that we expose as far to the right in the histogram as possible without clipping the whites, as the more data we have in this area will minimise noise, inherent in digital sensors, which may reveal itself in the blacks and shadows when post-processing later.

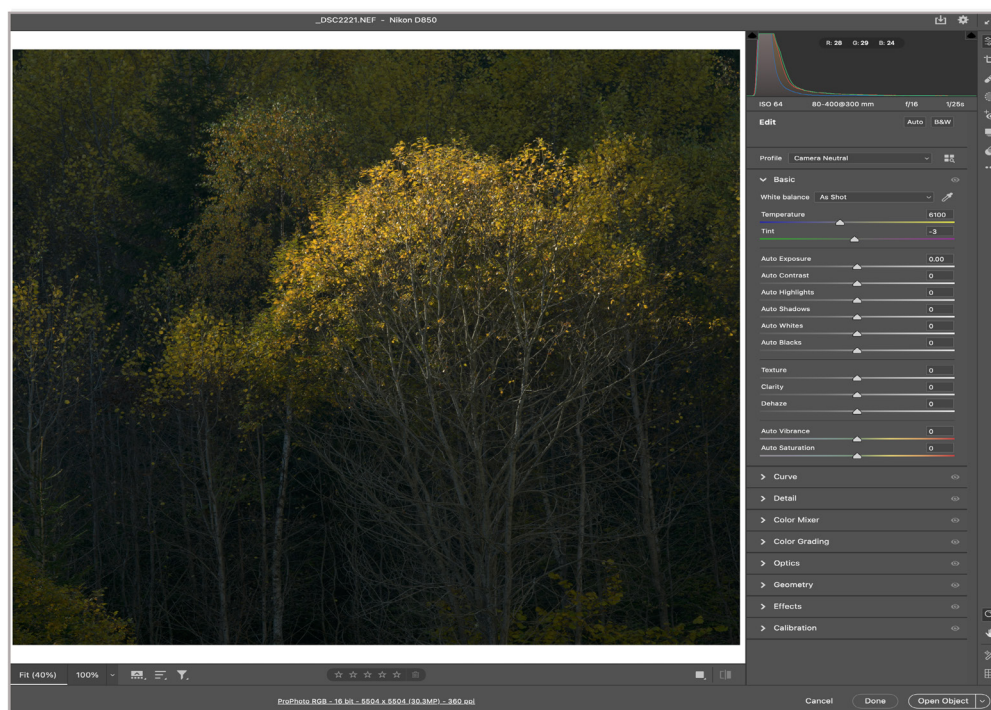


© Sunlit Silver Birch, Dolomites by Michael Pilkington

In recovering the light, we are introducing light into areas that have been essentially underexposed and re-establishing shadows in areas that are too bright. In this article we are going to explore some techniques for reintroducing light into an image.

This image was taken in The Dolomites in Italy in 2018 when we were researching this location for our subsequent aspect2i tours. A research trip involves traveling practically every single road in a region to discover the best photography locations. Towards the end of day, as we were winding down a steep-sided mountain pass into one of the ubiquitous mountain villages below, we saw the setting sun catch the very tops of some Silver Birch trees, starkly illuminating them against the background which was already in shadow. In these circumstances you must work quickly as the light is changing minute by minute as the sun dips in the sky and any delay would result in the main subject being cast into shadow, merging it indiscriminately into the background. We stopped the car abruptly, grabbed our kit and ran back up the hill to find our best vantage point and secured the shot.

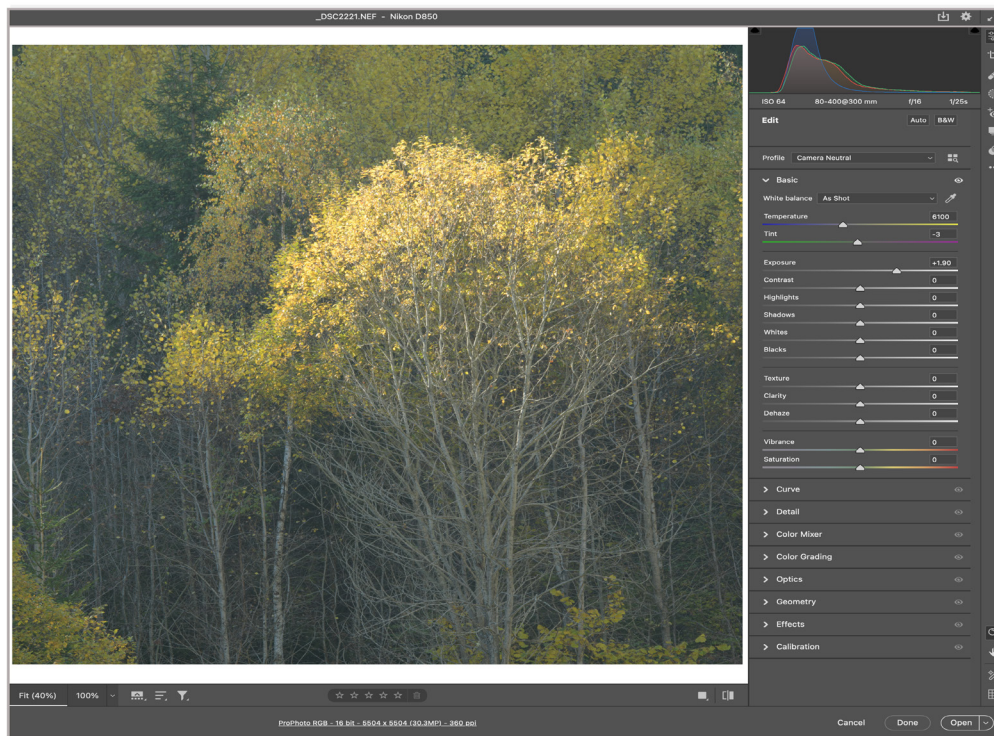
The dynamic range in the scene was considerable as the sunlit autumnal leaves were very bright and in order not to clip the highlights, which formed the main subject, I was obligated to shoot placing my histogram as far as possible to the left, being ever mindful not to clip the blacks in the process. You can see from the histogram that it is very much biased to the left. The blacks and whites are still safely within limits though. It might take a few attempts to get this right, however, you need to keep in mind that the light is changing rapidly, so you need work quickly constantly checking your histogram.



Original raw file without any changes

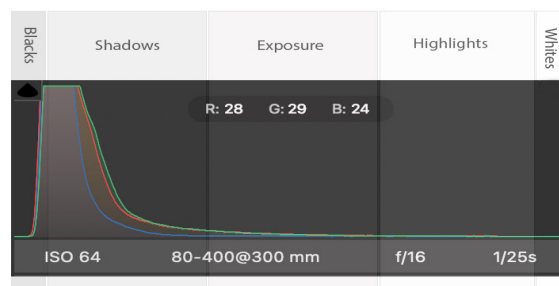
Once captured it was now a matter of processing this image to recreate what I had seen, in essence recovering the light. The raw file is dark and the highlit tree, the key element in the composition, is subdued.

In order to bring the light back into the image whilst considering the histogram it is easy to conclude that the image is under exposed. A usual reaction to this would be to move the exposure slider to the right. What this does though is to create a washed out look.



Adjusting the exposure slider only

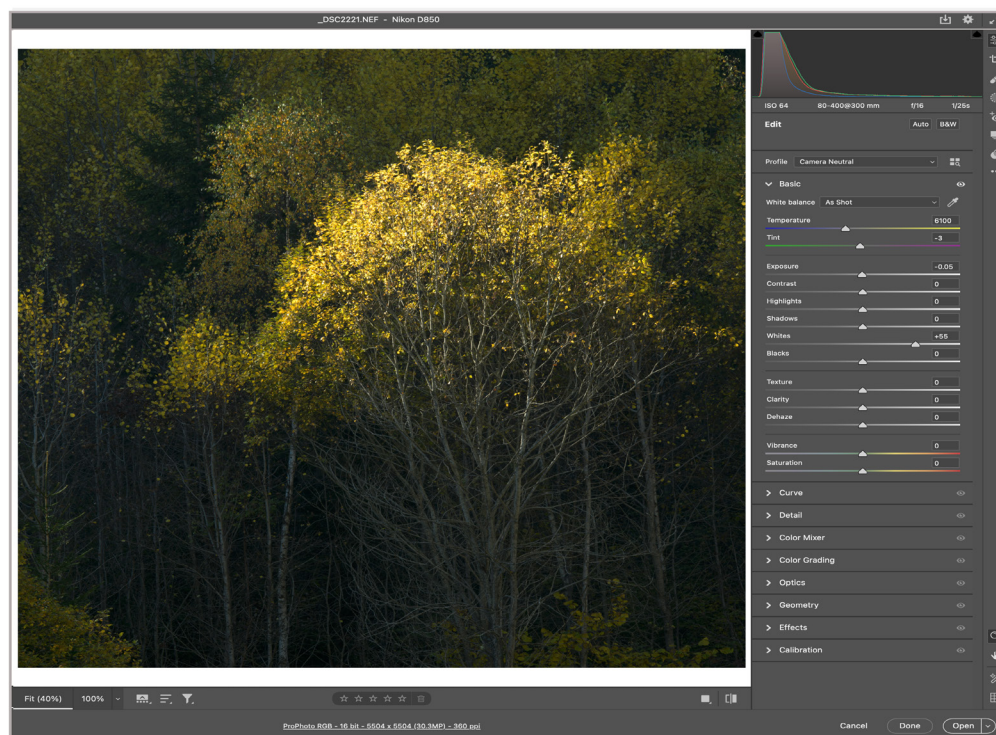
The shadows become paler as does the main tree which is illuminated by the sun. The two elements I wanted to retain in the image were the dark shadows in the background so that they would contrast with the brightly lit tree and make it stand out and to keep the beautiful saturated autumnal colours of the main tree. Another approach is needed. Before considering that, we need to appreciate how moving the different sliders in Lightroom or Adobe Camera Raw affects the histogram.



If we place our cursor over different parts of the histogram, it will show you what segments of the histogram would be adjusted with the relevant slider. So, if we place the cursor over to the far left of the histogram, a grey band appears with the word 'Blacks' showing the black slider will affect this part of the histogram. Similarly, if we place the cursor near to the right-hand side of the histogram, a grey band appears with the word 'Whites' that correlates to the white slider. This illustration shows you which sliders affect which parts of the histogram. Whenever a slider is moved then that is the tonal or brightness range that will be most affected. The adjacent bands will also be affected but to a much lesser effect.

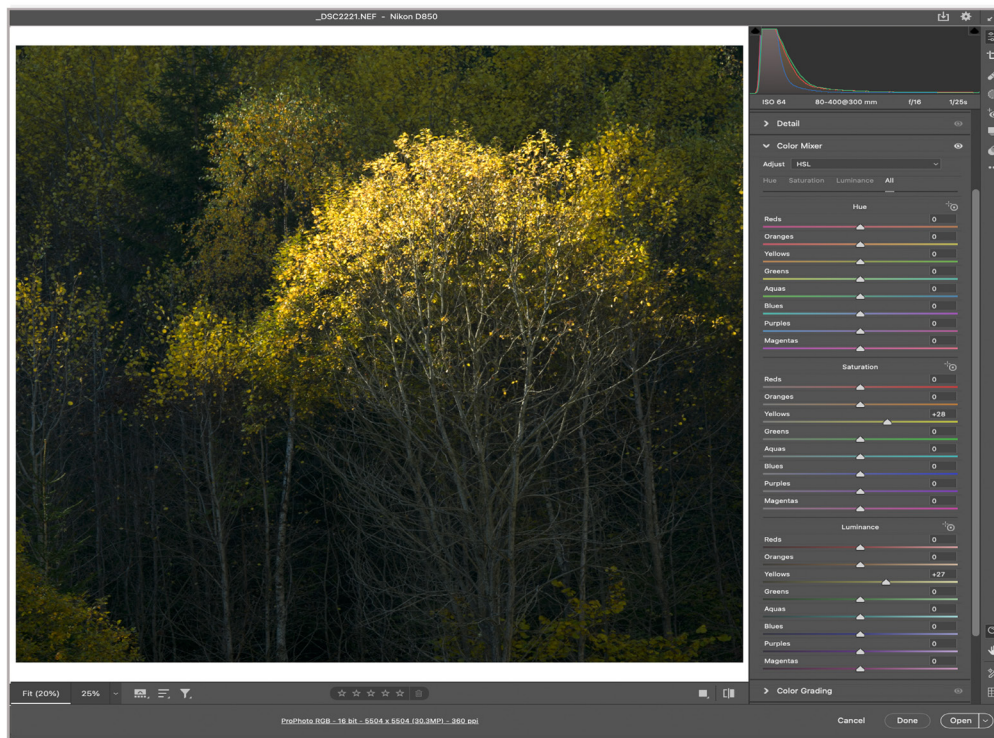
If we consider this image, we want to keep the shadows pretty much where they are and bring out the brightness of the tree. With this in mind we can select the appropriate sliders to make the adjustments we want.

I often refer to the 'White Slider' as the 'Light Slider'. Moving the white slider to the right is increasing the luminosity of those parts of the image that are in the 'white band' of the histogram. As previously mentioned, some of the highlights tones to the left of the whites will also be dragged to the right as well. Importantly, the blacks or shadows will not be affected, leaving the dark areas as they were, which is exactly what I wanted.



Introducing light using the white slider

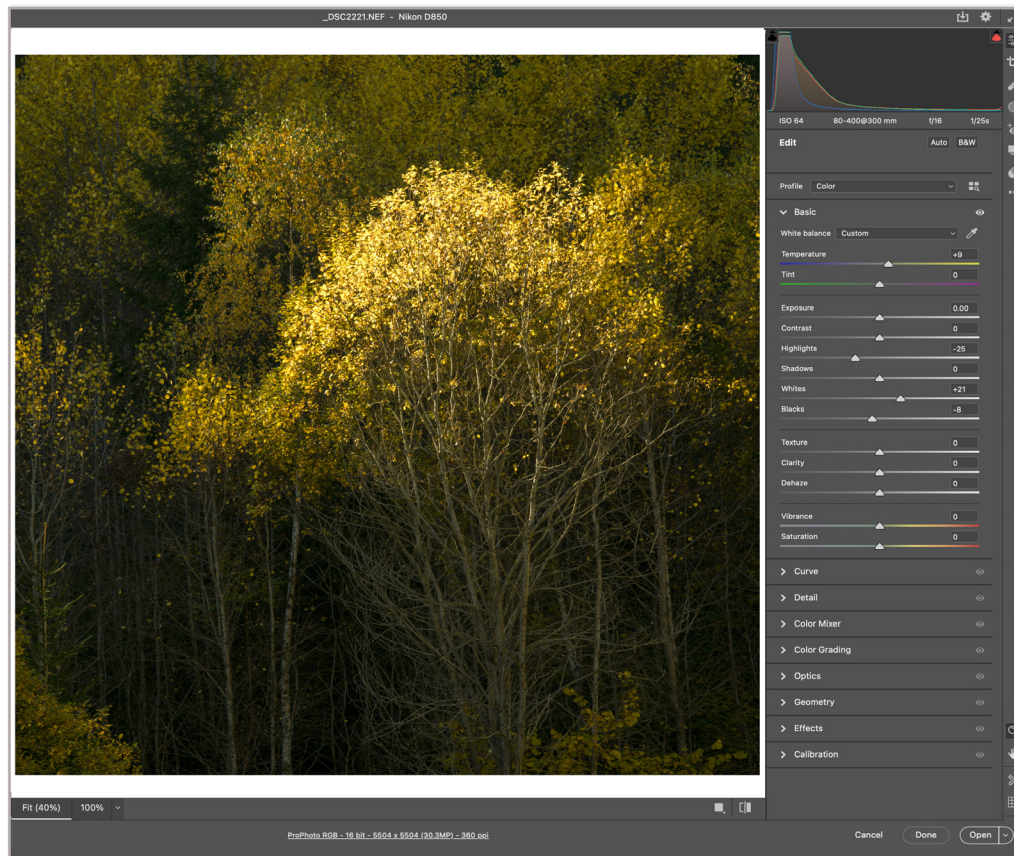
In the previous step I had pushed the white slider as far as I could without clipping the whites. I wanted to further increase the luminosity of the leaves in the image, again without affecting the shadow areas. In order to do this, I moved to the Hue/Saturation/Luminosity controls which are in the Colour Mixer section of the adjustments panel. I selected yellow as my target colour and increased luminosity until it seemed bright enough. Increasing luminosity of any colour will result in that colour becoming progressively desaturated when more luminosity is added. Conversely, reducing luminosity will saturate the chosen colour. To compensate for this, I increased saturation of the yellows using the corresponding saturation slider.



Using the HSL sliders to introduce further light into the image

The image is almost finished now. The major shifts in luminosity have been achieved and now it was time to make some final adjustments.

I have reduced the highlights and then increased the whites. This creates some separation between the two and gives the impression of more detail in the sunlit leaves of the main tree. I then reduced the blacks and shadows to further accentuate the presence of the tree against its darker background.



Final adjustments

It takes a lot longer to write or even read this than to do this in practice. It is a matter of some relatively simple steps being undertaken and this takes just a few minutes. What is key is understanding that firstly that there is light to be recovered, that the original raw file can be a poor representation of how the light appeared in the scene being photographed, and lastly what tools can you use to accomplish this. Image processing can be straight forward and uncomplicated if you want it to be.



Field Edge

by Michael Pilkington

Field Edge

by Michael Pilkington

Infrared can offer you a different perspective on the world around you. However, the effects it produces can be garish exaggerating the highlights in the scene, but there are times when this can be used to good effect. One such occasion is in low light situations.



© Field Edge by Michael Pilkington

Having a dog obligates you to walk every day. It is enjoyable for the most part and gives you time to reflect on and observe the local countryside. Living where I do, I can enjoy woodlands and farmland. I do like to visualise potential images as I walk and often nothing comes of these musings. This particular location had often caught my eye. I must have walked past this cluster of Hawthorn trees and grasses hundreds of times over the past few years. It is adjacent to a small farm access road, shaded by arching trees overhead. The road is made of stone that is light in colour that reflects a beautiful soft light onto the trees and foliage to its side. It is this combination and quality of this light that had always caught my attention.

I finally decided that I could no longer pass it by. The next sunny day, late in the morning, I decided to take advantage of the direction of the sun, I took myself and my dog to the spot. For me, it was always going to be an infrared shot. The relatively low light and dark shadows would make for a lovely contrast to the whites that would be produced by the infrared light reflecting off the leaves and foliage. Also, this being quite a complex scene, I had always thought it would be better rendered in black and white which would help to emphasise the textures and form in the scene.

This image, for me, optimizes the subtlety of what infrared photography can be. It does not have to be loud and brash screaming out at you.

End note

"The great geniuses are those who have kept their childlike spirit and have added to it breadth of vision and experience."

Alfred Stieglitz

Steiglitz was a great thinker and a great photographer, often considered to be the pioneer of modern photography. Sometimes quotes can deliver a poignant message in few words, having read once, you think about many times. We have often heard photographers say that they wish they had a fresh pair of eyes. In essence, this is what Steiglitz is saying here. Wouldn't it be wonderful, if only for a moment, we could see through our eyes as new photographers, and along with that, feel the excitement and freedom. Further still, at that moment having the privilege of drawing on years of experience. The results would be fascinating for sure.

If you feel inclined to comment on what you have read or you have something to add, then we invite you to get in touch. You may have had an experience you would like to share that you know others would be fascinated to hear, or you may want to contribute as a featured photographer or submit an article. Just follow the email link below and feel free to drop us a line with your thoughts or equally leave a comment on our [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) pages.

Lastly, if you have any photography friends who you think would like to read Expressions, please tell them to head to our Aspect2i website where they can download their own copy entirely free via aspect2i.co.uk/journal.

We hope to hear from you soon and what you have to say!

E-mail: journal@aspect2i.co.uk



www.aspect2ico.uk

