How to become a Great Photographer

by Clem Wehner

How do you learn to take great photographs, not just snapshots?

First- you must learn what makes a photograph great. There are twelve elements, listed below, that are generally recognized as characteristic of great images. Study them until you commit them to memory.

Second- when you go out to shoot, but before you press the shutter, look through the viewfinder and ask if what you see has the elements of greatness. Don't think in general terms, think specifically. Does the image you see have 1. Impact, 2. Creativity, 3. Good composition, and so on for each of the elements. If the image in the viewfinder is weak on any element, maybe there is something you can do to correct it. For example, if the shot is not well composed, you may be able to move around, zoom in, tilt the camera, etc. When you are satisfied that the image will be the best it can be, then press the shutter. This is a deliberate process and is not a fast one. But, the more you evaluate before you shoot, the faster it gets until it becomes second nature.

Third- critique your images after you get home. Look at each picture and ask yourself if it meets each of the 12 elements. For example. The first of the 12 elements is IMPACT, meaning does the image make you say WOW!, Does it captivate you? Is it hard to take your eyes off of it? That's impact. So look at your image and ask yourself "Does it have impact?" If yes, then ask, "How much impact does it have?" Give yourself a score from 1 to 10. Once you evaluate your photo for impact, do the same evaluation with each of the remaining elements.

When you are done, you'll have a clear and realistic evaluation of your photographs. Most importantly, you will know what to improve next time you shoot something similar. If this were a late-night TV infomercial, it

would be titled, "The Secret That Great Photographers Don't Want You To Know"!

It's all too easy to fall in love with your own pictures and convince yourself that they are the greatest ever taken. But, until you realistically critique them against criteria like the 12 elements of great photography, you will never really know. This process not only teaches you to critically evaluate your own work, but it instills in you a powerful and consistent thought process you can apply to all your photography.

That's how you become a great photographer!

PHOTO SCORING SHEET

1. IMPACT: Does it make you say "WOW!"

(Score) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. CREATIVITY – Is the subject and layout imaginative?

(Score) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. COMPOSITION- Are the elements of the photo arranged well?

(Score) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. CENTER OF INTEREST- Is the subject apparent? Viewer knows where to look?

(Score) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. SUBJECT MATTER- Is the subject interesting to the viewer?

(Score) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. STORYTELLING- Does the image tell a story?

(Score) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. COLOR HARMONY- Are the colors harmonious?

(Score) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. LIGHTING- Direction of light and exposure right for the subject?

(Score) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE- Focus, exposure, and color what was intended?

(Score) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. IMAGE PRESENTATION- Is it cropped well?

(Score) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

TOTAL SCORE _____

_____Additional elements to consider_____

11. STYLE – Image representative of your personal photographic style?

(Score) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

12. PRINT QUALITY- (If printed) Exposure and color of the print correct?

(Score) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10