



2 From Conventional To Unique

Commonplace Photos and Your Own Point of View

Sometimes you have pictures planned out in your head before you set out on a trip. They may even be the reason for taking the trip in the first place. Who does not recognize the perfect symmetry of the Taj Mahal lit by dawn's gentle colors? Or the most photogenic side of Switzerland's legendary Matterhorn? Who wouldn't love to press the shutter button when

viewing the orange-red Dune 45 in Sossusvlei, Namibia?

Wherever you go, you can be relatively certain that other photographers have already been there. It's always tempting to imitate well-known photos of world-famous sites or limit yourself to the obvious post-card view of your subject. As satisfying as the former and as

convenient as the latter may be, take your own pictures of the world – don't just imitate those of others. This sentiment is legitimate, but don't stop photographing after you have the photo that you wanted on your memory card.

After the obligation comes the choice: Search for additional points of view, surprising perspectives, alternative standpoints, and inconspicuous details that possess their own charms. Look out for your angle, your perspective, your view. Be critical, ironic, reflective, playful, bold, loose; leave the well-trodden paths; and always stay curious.

Think about a photograph not as something that is readily available, but as something that you can shape and design. You are the one to decide how your picture will look. Your photo shouldn't simply reflect what you saw; it should also reflect how you saw it and how you want it to affect your viewer. Ideally, your thoughts and sensations will be embedded in your picture. Achieving this is easier said than done, but it's always worth the effort.

The Treasury is likely to be the most-photographed subject in the ancient Nabataean city of Petra, Jordan. Visitors wander through the

Opposite: An alternative view of the famous Stupa of Boudhanath (Nepal) emphasizes the prayer flags. You might not spot Buddha's eyes at first glance. | Film photograph, exposure details unrecorded

Below: This classic view highlights the Stupa's symmetry, its distinctive coloring, and its accessibility. Film photograph, exposure details unrecorded



canyon as-Siq, with its vertical sandstone walls, towards the rock-hewn monumental structure that remains invisible. Only in the final yards does the view open up, and at this specific spot in the canyon, you'll almost always find a crowd of photographers. This is the place from which to create the classic postcard view of Petra, and for good reason. It is without question a breathtaking view and a fascinating perspective: light and shadow, natural structures and manmade shapes, curved lines and strict geometry, vertical and horizontal lines, color and colorlessness, warm and cool, bright and dark – all in one picture. But aside from this obvious view, there are so many more photo-

graphic opportunities to show the Treasury, to tell stories about it, and to position it within a much broader context.

Some of these are evident and easily accessible while others require walking or climbing. Some can be planned, such as “Petra by night,” when the space in front of the Treasury is illuminated only by candles; others are the product of chance. You'll need curiosity and a bit of time, but what's most important is the photographer's attitude: the will to seek out an individual image and the joy of working creatively.

Photography is a creative means that leads to a very personal result. A photographer



The city of stones – to go: Mini depictions of the most famous facades in Petra (Jordan) wait to be purchased at a souvenir stand. | Nikon D700 • 35 mm • 1/125 s • f/5 • ISO 250



She who rises, sees more: A short hike led me to this viewpoint over the Treasury in Petra, Jordan.
Nikon D700 • 17 mm • 1/320 s • f/9 • ISO 250



Unusual viewpoint: A view from a souvenir stand at the Treasury. The shop with keepsakes, batteries, and disposable cameras belongs to Petra just as much as the famous facade in the background of the picture. Nikon D700 • 17 mm • 1/100 s • f/5 • ISO 200

shows viewers his or her selection of what he or she has discovered from his or her subjective perception. You can think of this subjectivity as a manipulation of reality, but also as a possibility for shaping and designing: a picture – our picture, your picture – is made.


Ansel Adams's observation, "You don't take a picture, you make it," hits the nail on the head. A photographer plays an active role and does more than capture what is readily available for the taking. The process begins with perception and the selection of a subject, and continues through the selection of the actual image, perspective, focal length, aperture, and shutter speed, all the way to image editing.

The creative process – or the manipulation of reality – doesn't start on the computer or in the darkroom, as is often supposed; it's much earlier than that. Every picture illuminates the

subjective view of the person who photographed it, regardless of how much or how little it has been post-processed.

Many times the desire to create a picture arises spontaneously, and in the first moment you may not even realize what it was that triggered the impulse. It's useful to analyze this subconscious drive, however, because the more precisely you understand what image you want to make and why, the better you can concentrate on achieving it.

Photography is about focusing, not only in the technical sense, but also figuratively. It's all about the mental focusing required to distill the essence of an image and delve into the idea. It's about removing what is unessential and emphasizing what matters. It's about refining an image until it shows what you want it to – nothing more, nothing less.



The classic view: The Treasury in Petra on
an early autumn morning. | Nikon D700 •
70 mm • 1/250 s • f/8 • ISO 1600



"Petra by Night" shows the Treasury illuminated
only by candles (and a camera flash here and
there). | Nikon D700 • 17 mm • 10 s • f/8 • ISO 2000

