

Passenger Seat

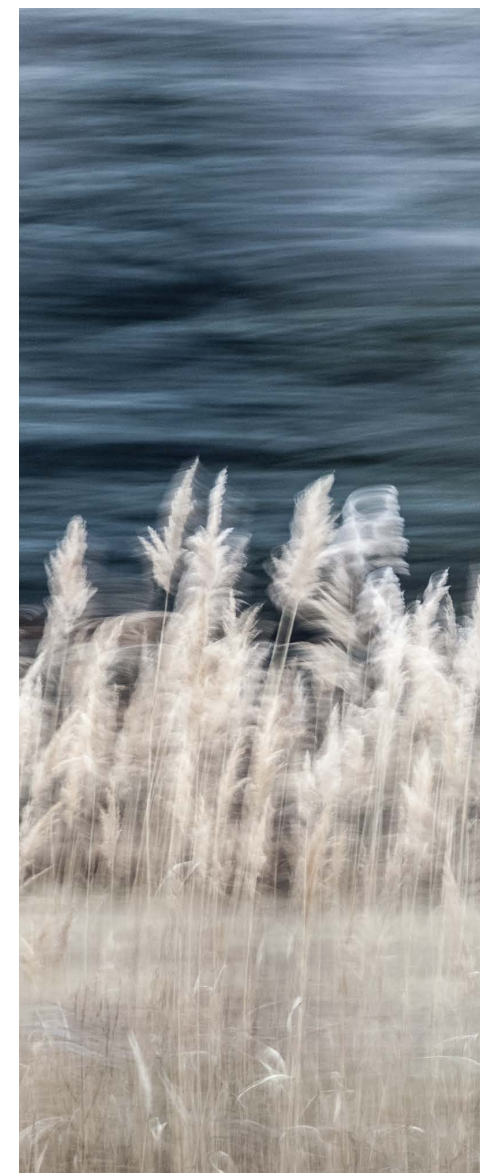
Creating a photographic project from conception
through execution in Adobe Photoshop Lightroom

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Sample Pages

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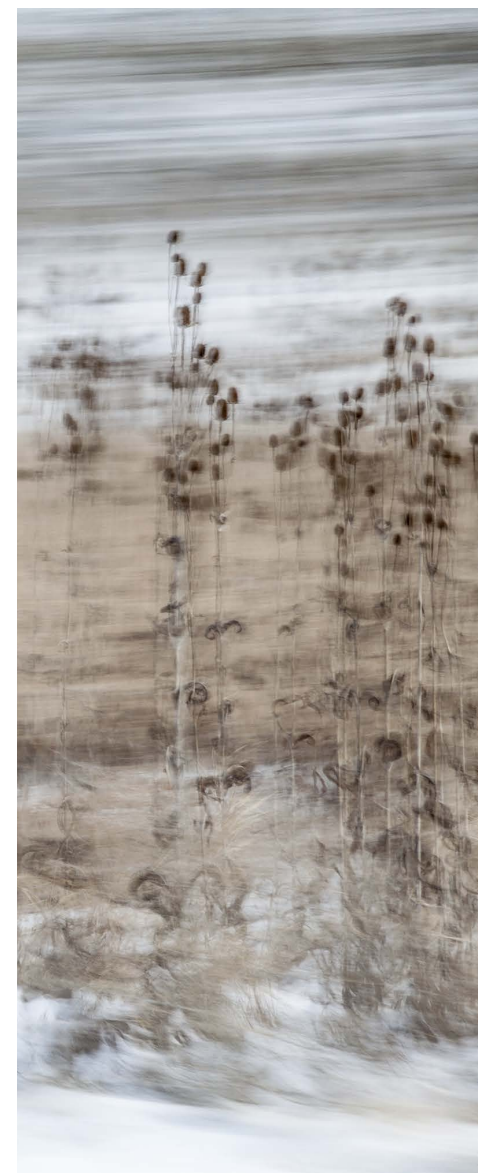
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CHAPTER 4 Finding Inspiration

If you can dream
it, you can do it.

—WALT DISNEY

I am a firm believer that inspiration can be found almost anywhere if you are open to new ideas. Because of this, I try to expose myself to as many different experiences as I can. And anything that I see that catches my attention, sparks my imagination, or triggers a visceral emotive experience, I record in an idea bank for later reference.

Ever since I can remember, I have kept a journal (in fact, several at one time) to collect and store ideas. I'm an avid reader and books are one of my favorite sources of inspiration. I jot down words that I don't know and look up their definitions, and I keep track of quotes, notes, descriptions of places and people, lyrics, anything that triggers a visual that I feel is worth remembering. I don't know when I might use it, but I don't want to lose it. I keep a pencil and paper next to the bed at night so that when I have that artistic insight I can write it down so that I will remember it in the morning. I relish knowing that I have diaries of inspiring references that I can return to at any time.

Don't Get Too Comfortable

To make work that tells a compelling story, we need to look closely at the things that

surround us, which can be very difficult to do when we're merely going through the motions of our lives. Habits in and of themselves are not bad, but we need to avoid the mind-numbing routines that form when we set our lives on auto-pilot. I try to constantly push myself to break out of the comfortable cocoon that I find I am predisposed to spin around myself. If I'm not paying attention, I will drive to work by the same roads, eat the same foods, and solve problems in the same way, time after time. Instead, open yourself to new experiences—explore a new neighborhood, try a new food, play a new sport. Try to do something new every day. Challenge yourself to constantly evolve.

Learn how to do something unique every year. Be a beginner and ask questions. Flip on your "learning switch" to expand your mind in new directions. Keep your brain exercised. Take an active part in the world. Be a creator as often as possible; don't be satisfied with merely being a bystander. Do interesting things, and chances are you will become a more interesting person. It's far more gratifying to generate your own content and tell your own stories than it is to simply watch and consume other people's take on life.



Visit other places; seek out other cultures. Traveling is one of the easiest ways to alter your consciousness. Changing your environment can instantly expose you to different customs, divergent architecture, distinctive fashion, and diverse behaviors. As Arthur Schopenhauer said, “Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world.” These predetermined views prevent us from exploring things. Trying to understand other people’s point of view and seeing the world through their eyes can help us overcome some of our own fears. Don’t fight it. Open yourself up to others’ ideas and ways of life. Don’t judge; just be a part of it. Be in the moment and experience the situation, and see where it takes you.

Look, Then Look Deeper

Of course, we don’t have to travel to change perspective. The key is to make sure that you continuously view the world around you with fresh eyes. Try looking from a different point of view. Get down low or climb up high. Get close to a subject, then back away. Look at the quality and quantity of light and study the shadows. Look for reflections; notice where lights converge and subjects overlap. Pay attention to negative and positive space. Scrutinize your surroundings and take note of the details. The more “present” you are, the more you will see.

Try staying at one location for one hour and make ten photographs of different things. Then make ten different photographs of the same thing. Forcing ourselves to slow down and analyze the world around us provides new insights and opens new doors.

I have a habit of walking around my neighborhood in the morning. I collect things that I see on my journey—interesting twigs, seedpods, even metal coat hangers (I’m astonished at how many of the twisted hanger tops I have found over the years). I don’t typically know exactly how I will use them when I find them, but over the years I’ve photographed many of the objects, incorporated others in my encaustic paintings, and even decorated the planting beds in my gardens with them.

Sometimes I give myself assignments for the morning walk. I’ll look in my journal for ideas, and then try to find examples of those concepts when I walk. I might choose a word, like “resilient,” and then try to find examples of how resilient nature can be and photograph them—weeds growing up through the sidewalks, trees overtaking a side-yard, and insects building their homes within an abandoned structure. When I encourage myself to look at things more closely as I walk by an empty lot, I find myself wondering what world is contained in that space that I walk by every day and don’t even notice. If I really look, how much life would I find in a



The more one looks, the more one sees. And the more one sees, the better one knows where to look.

—TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

shovelful of earth or the branch of a tree? Nature is a source of infinite variation and inspiration. Make the time to study and take in its beauty.

I constantly observe the way other people capture the world around them, as well. I look at photographs anywhere I can—in books, online, in museums and galleries. By studying other photographers' work, I have learned a great deal about what I feel makes a successful image, from content to composition to lighting. I look at other sources of imaging, such as alternative light sources (infra-red and ultraviolet), chemical-based

processes, scanning microscopy, and molecular science. They all have the potential to influence my photography and generate new ideas.

I try to stay well rounded by looking at other mediums of art—sculpture, painting, fiber, installation—from different cultures around the world, today and throughout history. Inspiration can come from anything—a piece of music that kindles the imagination, the beauty of a well-built piece of furniture that brings us joy, or a simple, thoughtfully prepared home-cooked meal that comforts our soul.

Sample pages