

# ALAMANCE PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB

2012-2024

©

## December 2024 Newsletter

[www.alamancephoto.com](http://www.alamancephoto.com)

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Photo by Gene Lentz

## APC BOARD

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Secretary	<i>open</i>	Membership	Ken Sellers
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PhotoShow Chair	David Hall	Editor	Ray Munns

## President's Comments—December 2024

By Keith O'Leary

Hi everyone. First of all thank you for your vote to allow me and John Reich to serve you again in 2025! I hope you enjoyed our "Back to Basics" programming this year and was able to learn a thing or two along the way. Our board and chairs have been busy already and are excited about the activities we are planning for next year.

Ken Sellers will be stepping down as our Membership Chair at the end of the year and I would like to personally thank him for his attentive and diligent service for the last 2 and a half years. Please join me in welcoming Resi Forrest as our new Membership Chair beginning in January.

We saw some great photos taken in our home state of NC in last month's PhotoShow. I would like to share a little more about one of my entries of the Hugh Mangum Museum of Photography at West Point on the Eno in Durham. Hugh Mangum (1877-1922) was an itinerant photographer in the late 1800's, early 1900's, traveling by rail, setting up temporary studios throughout NC, VA and WV. The museum is located in the circa 1880 tobacco pack house which, in addition to housing his 72 sq ft corner dark room from 1893 to 1922, was used to store hay and later as a chicken coop. More than 900 of his **glass plate negatives** were found here in 1968. Mangum defied social norms of the Jim Crow era by photographing white and black customers alike. The museum features rotating exhibits of Mangum's photography plus his cameras and equipment.



*Continued on following page*

**President's Comments . . . Continued**

Unfortunately, it was closed during our visit but the website states it is open from mid-Jan through mid-Dec from 10am to 2pm. Might want to call first though (919-471-1623).

I hope to see you at our Christmas party on Dec 16th as we close out 2024 and I will end with a quote that David Hall likes to use at the bottom of his emails:

**“My favorite photograph is the one I am going to take tomorrow.”**

This quote is attributed to Imogen Cunningham and signifies the constant pursuit of improvement and the excitement of capturing new moments in photography. 😊

Best regards,

Keith O'Leary

**WEBMASTER NOTES**

Visit [www.alamancephoto.com](http://www.alamancephoto.com) to:

Renew your membership for 2025.

Introduce potential members to the club.

Stay up to date on the club events.

**Christie O'Leary—Webmaster**



## Table Talkers

**Will resume in 2025**



**Mio Winkle**

***Here is a preview of the 2025 Alamance Photography Club PhotoShows – David Hall***

For 2025 we will be having six PhotoShows with two of them being judged by an outside judge; two where the club members will be the judges and one month with just the show.

The overall concept behind the 2025 shows is to be more creative in our photography. If we choose, get a bit out of our photographic comfort zone(s). That creativity could be either behind the lens, in the editing/post processing --- OR both. If you prefer, neither --- it is all up to you.

- February
  - Smartphone photos – any subject you choose taken with your Smartphone
  - Member Judging/Voting
- April
  - Color – pick a single color and shoot anything of that color and/or photos of a subject framed by a solid block of that color
- June
  - Any photograph(s), members choice
  - Outside judge
- August
  - Members choice of any subject, but all submissions must be of that same subject
  - Member Judging/Voting
- October
  - Photographs representative of one season [can be any season]
  - Outside judge
- December
  - Christmas Slideshow

**Creativity**

The months when we will have Member Voting might be a good time to try something more creative. With your camera you might try blurring with panning or zooming during the exposure.

To my mind, one can be very creative with post processing. From what I can gather we all use an editing program for at least the basics --- show us your creativity with the use of the other features of the program. Express creativity using textures, replacing backgrounds, using borders, various filters or compositing. Whatever you do .... Enjoy your photography.



**Christmas Party**  
**December 16<sup>th</sup>**  
**7 pm**  
**@ First Baptist Church**

This year:

- **We will only have a Dessert Bar.**
- **A dessert sign-up sheet link will be emailed in early December** so watch your inbox so you can indicate what dessert item(s) you would like to bring. This sign-up sheet will update automatically; hence, let us bring a variety of treats.
- **Paper products and beverages will be provided.**
- **Your spouse or significant other is welcome to accompany you!** On the sign-up sheet you will be asked to list the number attending.
- **A slideshow of submitted photos will be shown.**
- **A Show & Tell, Swap, Sell or Buy equipment table.**

We are excited to see you and your spouse (*significant other*) at our annual Christmas Party!

Merry Christmas,

Christie O'Leary

Christmas Party Coordinator

**Q4 2024 Personal Field Trip:**

**Lakes and Ponds**

Check out the photos from this field trip by following the link you received in an email. Enjoy!

**Happy Holidays!**

Hugh Comfort—Outings/Field Trips Chair

## Alamance Photography Club Shirts!



APC Club shirts are available at our monthly meetings

Polo: \$25    T-Shirt: \$12

## APC Membership Corner

*December 2024*

The holidays are fast approaching. Whether it is to let someone know how thankful you are to have them in your life or you are hoping to get a head start on your Christmas shopping, here is a suggestion to help you. Why not give the gift of a yearly membership? Any new member joining in November and December can also get the remainder of the current year included in their 2025 membership at no additional charge!!

Ken Sellers – Membership Chair  
Alamance Photography Club  
336-252-1113

# November 18<sup>th</sup> PhotoShow - "Photos from North Carolina"



Photo by Gary Gorby



Photo by John Reich



Photo by George Siple



Photo by Karen Cole-Loy

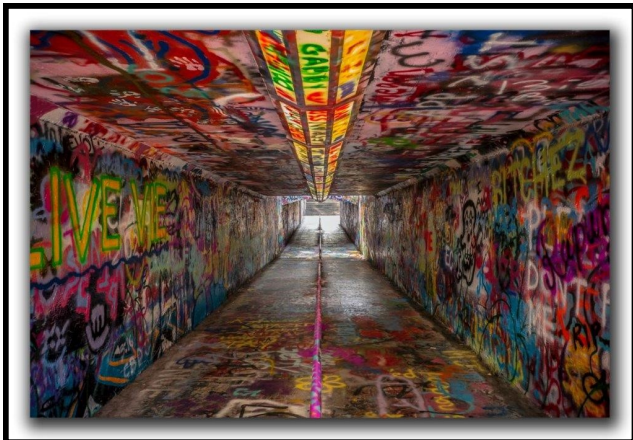


Photo by George Bohannon



Photo by Sam Lynch

Cont. - "Photos from North Carolina"



Photo by David Hall



Photo by Hugh Comfort

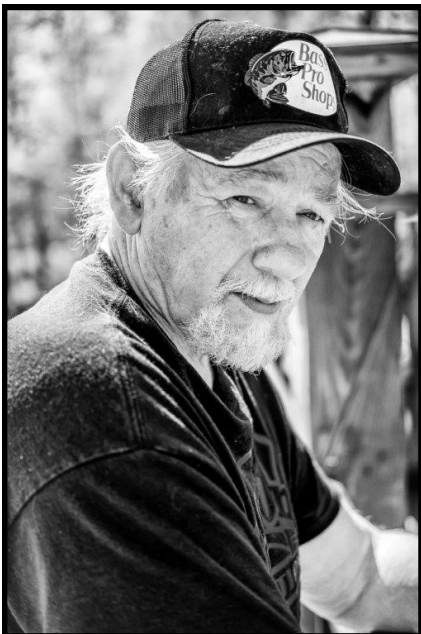


Photo by Dick Schenck



Photo by Keith O'Leary

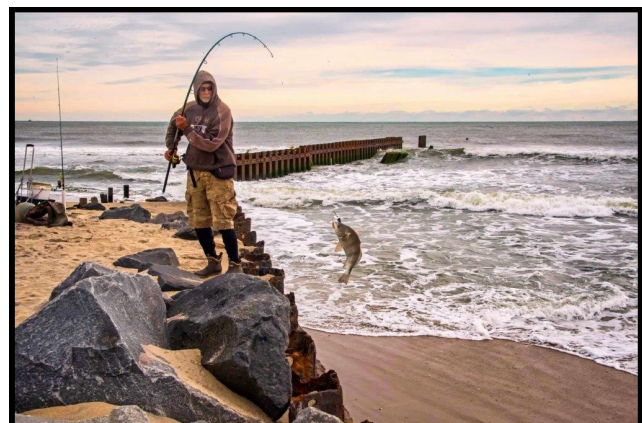


Photo by Ray Munns



# APC Trading Post

Submit brief descriptions of photography items you would like to sell, swap or purchase to Ray Munns ([raymunns@bellsouth.net](mailto:raymunns@bellsouth.net)) no later than the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month. Please include your name, contact info (phone and/or email) and if each item is for sale or something you are looking to purchase. Also notify Ray when items should be removed from the newsletter.

\*\*\*\*\*

**David Hall (dlhallofnc@gmail.com or 919-840-8198)**

## ***Cokin Filters – for “P” System***

ND Grad Kit --- \$26 / OBO

- Filter Holder
- Filters – Graduated Neutral Density
- ND Grad Soft [3 f.stops]
- ND Grad Med [2 f.stops]
- ND Grad Light [1 f.stop]

Adapter Rings with Caps --- \$7.50 each / OBO

- 52mm [extension ring]
- 55mm
- 62mm
- 67mm

## ***Domke Canvas Camera Bag***

This bag can hold two cameras and 6 lenses plus accessories. The four-compartment padded center insert is removable or adjustable. There are six pockets – two on the side and two on the front. The largest pocket runs the length of the bag. With all the pockets and compartments you can carry a lot of equipment and accessories. There is a removable shoulder strap and hand strap. There are O rings on the back for attaching to a backpack. The canvas is thick and rugged offering a good deal of protection.

The bag is in very good condition.

This bag currently sells for \$162.00 (B&H Photo) asking \$75



# How to Photograph Christmas Lights

## 8 Comprehensive Tips

By Dahlia Ambrose

For photographers, the best part about the holiday season is photographing Christmas lights and subjects with Christmas lights as background. It is during this season that you can go for images with beautiful Christmas bokeh and they are really fun to photograph.



*Jonathan Borba*

When photographing Christmas lights, it is important to understand the environment. Since the light from the Christmas lights is not as bright as other lights that you would normally use for photography, you will need to use techniques that you would use for low



light photography. You will be dealing with high ISO values, so care needs to be taken so that you choose your aperture and shutter speed wisely in order to get sharp images.

*Michelle Maria*

## *How to Photograph Christmas Lights: 8 Comprehensive Tips . . . Continued*

### **Here are 8 tips for photographing Christmas lights:**

#### **1. Plan Your Shoot**

Depending on what you are looking to shoot, you will need to choose the time of the day. For example, if you are photographing Christmas lights in a fair, you can wait till the sky becomes dark and experiment with long exposure photography. In this case, you will have to use a tripod, so you can shoot at low ISO, to create noise-free images.

Also, if there are movements of light on the scene, you can capture light trails when shooting using a tripod and long exposure techniques.

But, if you are planning on photographing Christmas lights on buildings like churches or



other structures, the best time would be the blue hour as the ambient light that is still available will help you capture good details of the buildings, structures and help you get some colors in the sky as well. Your photographs will have details and textures, rather than being flat and boring.

*Karsten Bergmann*

Either way, it is best to use tripods when shooting under very low light conditions, so you can shoot at lower ISO.

**Note:** *The blue hour lasts for a few minutes, so make sure you are ready in your location all set up, so you can shoot away. Also, this is the time when you get some detailed beautiful shots rather than boring photos that look like just lights on a black background.*

*bluartpapelaria*



## *How to Photograph Christmas Lights: 8 Comprehensive Tips . . . Continued*

### **2. Gear Required To Shoot Christmas Lights**

The gear required to shoot Christmas lights is very minimal and you probably have these at hand already. You do not need a high-end camera or an expensive lens for great results.

1. Camera that can shoot in manual mode
2. A faster lens with wide aperture in the range f/1.2 to f/2.8, most photographers have a 50mm f/1.8 lens which is one of the best for low light photography
3. A tripod for long exposure photographs
4. A cable release to avoid camera shake due to shutter release. If you do not have one, use the timer delay feature in the camera.



*Gábor Bejő*

### **3. Camera Settings for Photographing Christmas Lights**

The cities are so lively at night after darkness falls and the lights go on. So, the best time to photograph Christmas lights as mentioned in the section above is the blue hour or at night. You need to have a good understanding of the exposure triangle to get the exposure right and make sure you keep an eye on your histogram as well, so you do not blow out the highlights or lose details in dark regions of the image.

If you are using a tripod, set your desired aperture and select shutter speed depending on what you want to shoot. For example, for long exposure shots, you may need to have shutter speed from a second to a few seconds. Choose your ISO, depending on aperture values and shutter speed values, so that you get the exposure right.

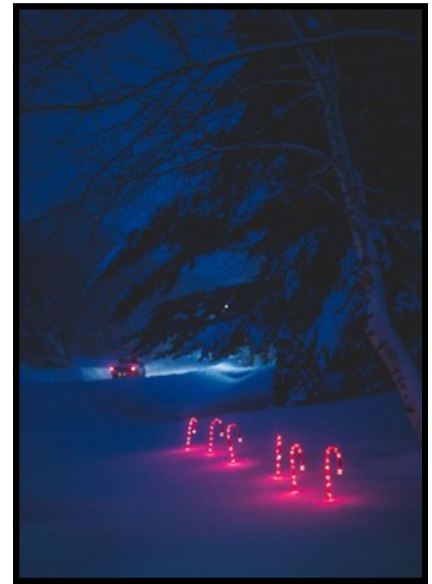
*Martin Lutze*



### *How to Photograph Christmas Lights: 8 Comprehensive Tips . . . Continued*

If you are going to be shooting handheld without a tripod, then you may want to choose the widest aperture possible, shutter speed greater than  $1/(2 \times \text{focal length})$  or  $1/250$  of a second if possible, so you avoid any blur due to hand or camera shake. Depending on the aperture and shutter speed values, you will have to choose ISO values. For handheld shots, aperture values of  $f/1.2$ ,  $f/1.4$ ,  $f/1.8$ ,  $f/2$  or  $f/2.8$  would be the best, so you can shoot at moderate ISO values without having much noise in your images.

If you are going to be shooting portraits with Christmas lights as the background, the best lenses would be the 50mm  $f/1.4$  or  $f/1.8$  lens for an APS-C camera and the 85mm  $f/1.4$  or  $f/1.8$  on a full-frame camera. These lenses are fast in focusing and let in more light, so you do not have to increase your ISO that much to get decent images and they help with amazing bokeh in the background. If you are struggling with focusing in the dark, make use of manual focus.



*Filip Mroz*



For macro images using Christmas lights, like photographing Christmas figurines or other detailed shots of ornaments and others, you can make use of a macro lens. Since most macro lenses come with aperture values  $f/2.8$ , it should let in enough light to shoot using ambient light.

*Gareth Harper*

Do not use flash for photographing Christmas lights as it can make the images look very unnatural and washed out. Make use of the ambient lights available to illuminate your scene and subjects, and that is what shows the real Christmas mood in your images.

**Note:** *If you are using a DSLR on a tripod for longer exposures, make sure you use the mirror lock-up feature to avoid the slightest of camera shake that can cause blur in photographs.*

## How to Photograph Christmas Lights: 8 Comprehensive Tips . . . Continued

### 4. White Balance

The best white balance preset to use would be tungsten or incandescent. Since Christmas lights are of various colors and the ambient light can vary quite quickly as well, it is best to choose Auto White Balance while shooting and make sure that you shoot raw. This way, if you find any variation in color temperature in your photographs, you can adjust it while post-processing.



*Dar1930*

### 5. Experiment with Starbursts

If you are a fan of starbursts, you can narrow down the aperture to around f/16, set up your camera on a tripod and do a long exposure photograph to get the right exposure. This



way, depending on the build of the lens, you will get different types of starbursts. If you do not want to use narrow apertures, you can make use of a star filter for your lens. That will help you get the star effects from Christmas lights.

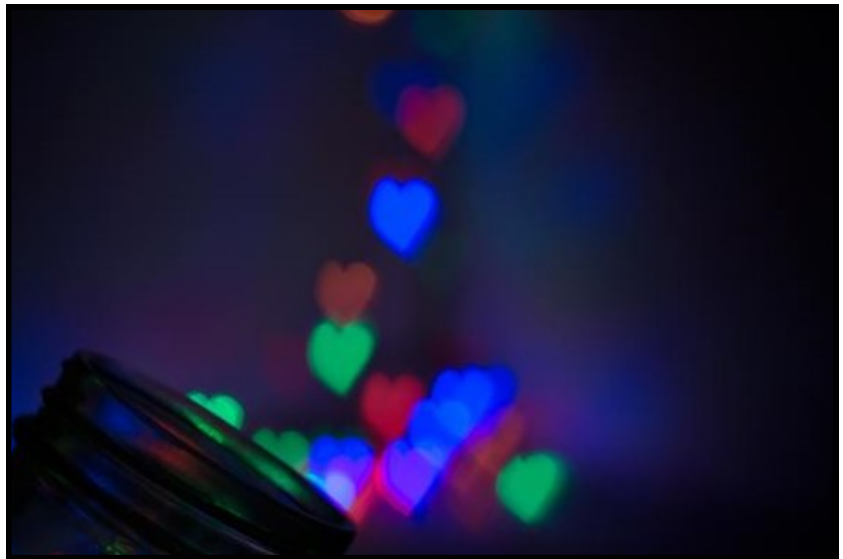
*Paul Kells*

## *How to Photograph Christmas Lights: 8 Comprehensive Tips . . . Continued*

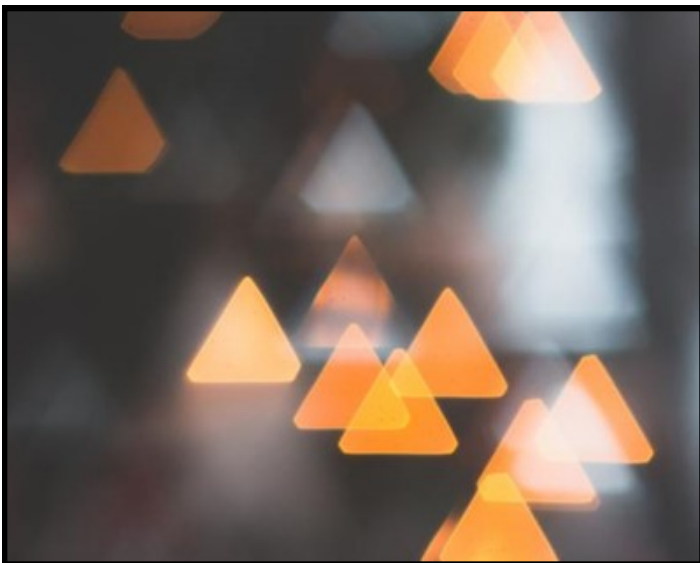
### **6. Experiment with Creative Bokeh**

Christmas time is the best time to try creative bokeh images. Apart from the normal bokeh you get out of your lens, you can use a bokeh kit to create different shaped bokeh like heart, tree, star, snowflakes, etc. If you do not want to invest in a kit, just make one yourself.

*Joshua Anderson Slate*



**Note:** *This is what I usually do – take a thick piece of paper and draw an outline of the lens I will be using. I cut out this circle, fold it into half and cut out the shape I need. This way I know that the shape is symmetrical on both sides and this helps with cutting out the shape easily as well.*



*I then use blue-tack around the rim of the cut out circular paper and stick it to the front of the lens. I have tried this on my 50mm f/1.8G lens and it has given great results.*

*Thijs van der Weide*

## *How to Photograph Christmas Lights: 8 Comprehensive Tips . . . Continued*

### **7. Try Using Lights in the Foreground**



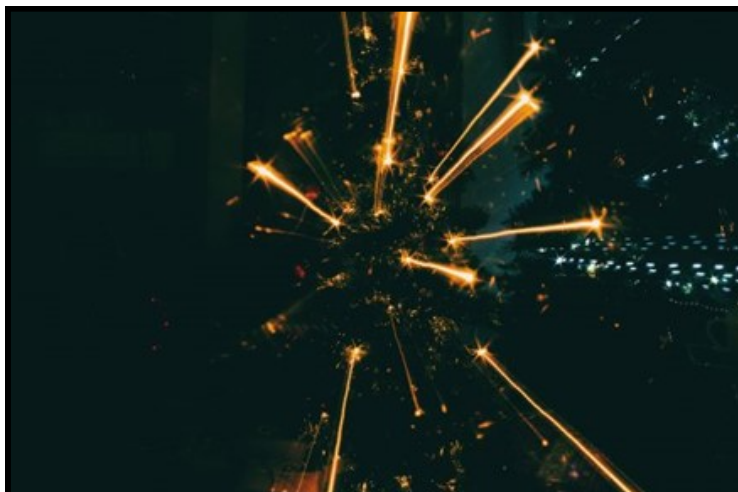
When shooting portraits, you can also include some lights in the foreground to get some interesting foreground bokeh and it also will help illuminate your subject's face. This technique can also be applied when photographing Christmas toys and figurines.

*Ryan Graybill*



*Caleb Woods*

### **8. Try Zoom Burst Effect**



For zoom burst effect, you will need to have your camera on a tripod for best results and you will need to use a zoom lens. This is also a long exposure technique where you put the camera in manual mode, compose the image and you rotate the zoom ring while the shutter is pressed.

*Caleb Martin*



## *How to Photograph Christmas Lights: 8 Comprehensive Tips . . . Continued*

### **Some Things to Keep in Mind for Christmas Lights Photography**

1. Use the widest aperture possible for amazing bokeh and to shoot at low ISO
2. Use narrow apertures for starbursts
3. Use a tripod for long exposure shots so you can shoot at low ISO
4. Make use of mirror lock-up feature if using a DSLR on a tripod
5. Use a cable release to avoid camera shake during shutter release for long exposure images
6. Always shoot RAW
7. Try incandescent or tungsten white balance preset, if not, set the white balance to auto and change white balance if required, while post-processing
8. Experiment with creative bokeh, starburst or zoom burst effect



*Ylanite Koppens*

*We hope you enjoy photographing Christmas lights during this holiday season and that these tips really help you out.*



**Light Stalking**

# 6 Tips for Breathtaking Church and Cathedral Photography

By Christina N Dickson

Looking to capture gorgeous photos of churches and cathedrals? You've come to the right place.

Last winter, I traveled across Europe so I could visit and photograph the old cathedrals and churches, and I had an amazing time. I also learned plenty about the art of church photography – and in this article, I share my top six tips.

Now, photographing churches and cathedrals is a uniquely challenging endeavor; you're often working in near darkness, surrounded by other folks who can easily become unwanted distractions, all while you attempt to create beautiful, well-exposed compositions. Fortunately, there are lots of easy tricks and techniques you can use to handle such scenarios, starting with:

## 1. Carefully choose the best church photography settings

Most old churches are incredibly dark, and it's tough to capture sharp shots that are also well-exposed. So what do you do?

First, make sure that you get your camera off its Auto mode. Set it to Aperture Priority mode (which lets you choose the aperture and the ISO while your camera selects the shutter speed) or Manual mode (which lets you choose the aperture, shutter speed, and ISO independently).

Remember: To counteract low light, you can make three adjustments:

1. You can widen the aperture.
2. You can lower the shutter speed.
3. You can increase the ISO.



## **6 Tips for Breathtaking Church and Cathedral Photography . . . Continued**

When you're working in churches, you'll often want to keep a relatively narrow aperture; otherwise, you won't have enough depth of field and the scene won't be in focus throughout.

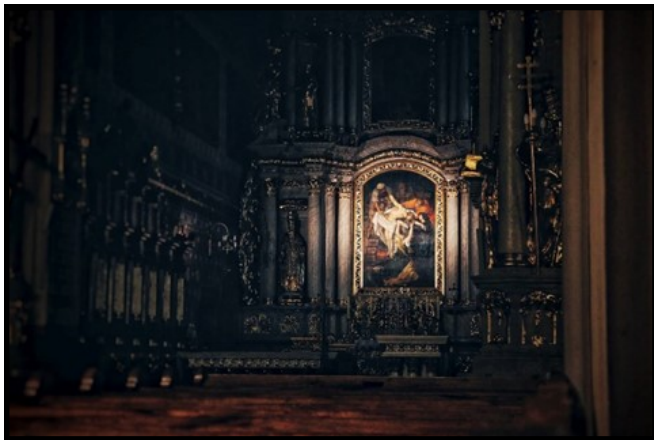
And unless you're using a tripod (which often isn't allowed), you'll want to keep the shutter speed fast enough to capture sharp handheld shots. (Around 1/80s is a rough cut-off point, but it really depends on your handholding technique, camera, and lens.)

So the biggest adjustment you can make when photographing churches and cathedrals in low light? Boost that ISO. Unfortunately, a high ISO does produce noise, but most modern cameras can go up to ISO 800 and beyond without issue. And if your images do end up a little too noisy, you can successfully correct a lot of the problem areas in post-processing.

But don't only rely on a high ISO. Widen your aperture as far as it can go while still capturing the depth of field you want, and lower your shutter speed as far as it can go while keeping the scene sharp. You can also stabilize your body by leaning against a wall, or you can keep your camera completely still by setting it on the floor or a bench.

That way, you'll get a photo that's sharp and well-exposed, even in the darkest conditions.

### **2. Be quiet and respectful**



No matter where you go to photograph, this is probably the absolute most important guideline I can offer:

Have an attitude of quiet respect.

If you're capturing a famous church or cathedral, people have likely come from all over the world to get a glimpse of the building, and for many, these visits are part of personal

journeys of deep meaning. So do whatever is necessary to remain respectful.

First, make sure you're always aware of your surroundings. If you're adjusting your angle in order to find a composition, keep an eye out for other visitors because it's easy to accidentally bump into passersby when you're staring through a camera viewfinder.

### **6 Tips for Breathtaking Church and Cathedral Photography . . . Continued**

In a similar vein, take steps to avoid disturbing or distracting other viewers. If someone is praying and you wish to take a photo of a nearby window, I'd really encourage you to stay back, shoot from a distance, and plan on cropping if you want to highlight specific details. (A longer lens can be helpful in these scenarios!)

Finally, set your camera to its quietest mode. Some cameras offer a "Silent" or "Quiet" mode, so before heading out to the church, check your camera's menu (or the manual) so you can figure out how to activate it. If you're using a mirrorless camera, you may have access to an electronic shutter; if so, then make sure it's active. (Often, mirrorless electronic shutters are totally silent, which is perfect!)

### **3. Work quickly and efficiently**

Churches have curators and security guards. And unless you contact the church in advance and gain special clearance, there is little chance the church staff will appreciate you taking several minutes to compose a shot. Remember, you don't want to be a distraction!

So instead of walking around with a camera to your eye, keep your camera around your neck or in your bag. Think about the shots you want. Ask yourself:

- How do I want to compose this image?
- What settings should I choose?
- How can I achieve this image in as little time as possible?



Once you've planned out a specific image, *then* grab your camera. Feel free to make adjustments to the composition and settings as you take your shot, but work as efficiently as you can, and if you run into a major issue (such as a person walking into the scene) consider putting your camera away until you've solved the problem.

I wouldn't encourage you to rush each photo – it's important that you treat each shot with care – but you shouldn't work slowly, either. Work as fast as you can while still giving yourself the time you need for a great result. Make sense?

## **6 Tips for Breathtaking Church and Cathedral Photography . . . Continued**

### **4. Use the window light**



As I emphasized above, the lighting in churches and cathedrals is often very limited, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist! Instead, you'll often encounter a few large, open windows, and these can make for amazing photos – if you know how to use them.

For instance, you can create beautiful images of subjects just inside the windows (such as pews or other architecture). Seek out subjects that are bathed in a stream of light; here, sidelight – where the light comes in at a 90-degree angle from your lens – often looks great and will add a strong sense of three-dimensionality.

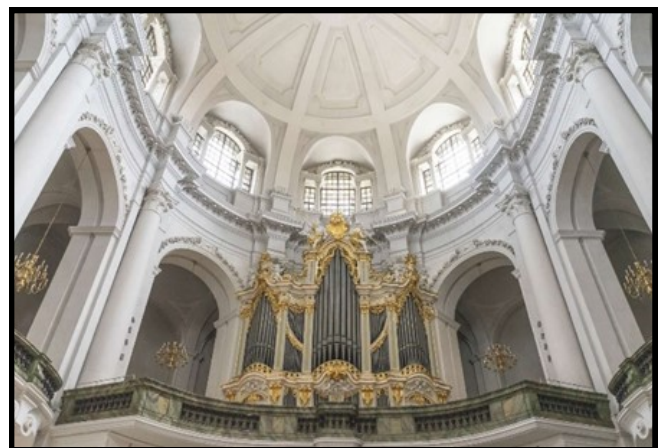
You can also capture stunning silhouette photos. Find a large window and adjust your camera settings until the interior of the church is nearly – but not completely! – dark. Then, when a person walks by, press the shutter button. You'll end up with a beautiful silhouette that helps communicate the grandness of the church interior.

Note: If you're looking to use window light in your church and cathedral photography, I encourage you to research the position of the sun in advance and time your visit accordingly. When the sun is positioned just right, it'll blaze through the windows and produce a gorgeous high-contrast effect (though you can also create great shots when the sky is overcast or the sun shines more indirectly; it all depends on the look you're trying to capture!).

### **5. Work from different angles**

The best church photos tend to communicate a sense of awe, and they also tend to show the space from a completely new perspective.

That's why I encourage you to shoot from all sorts of different angles. Different angles will give the viewer a new way of looking at the church (plus, interesting angles look, well, *interesting*).



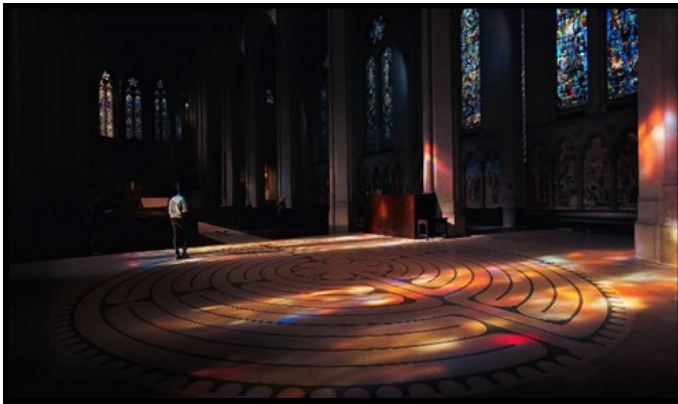
For instance, crouch low to communicate the size and scale of the church. (Of course, in the interest of remaining respectful, don't spend too much time crouched down.)

## **6 Tips for Breathtaking Church and Cathedral Photography . . . Continued**

If the church includes a balcony, you can try shooting from high up. Even if there are lots of visitors, a high-angle shot can really encapsulate the mood and feel of the area.

And no matter what angles you use, make sure to keep your compositions simple and compelling. Exclude distractions, consider adding foreground subjects to give the scene a sense of depth, try to include a clear main subject, and follow the basic composition guidelines (such as the rule of thirds, the rule of odds, and the rule of space).

### **6. Go when the crowds are gone**



If you're photographing lesser-known churches, this won't be a huge issue – but if you plan to capture some of the most famous buildings on the planet, you risk scheduling your photoshoot on a crowded date and time.

Now, including people in your church photos isn't necessarily a bad thing. In fact, adding people to your architectural photography can be a good idea; they'll add context and can act as key compositional elements. But too many people are (photographically) distracting, and you'll be forced to abandon certain compositions simply because the scenes are full of people.

I encourage you to research each church in advance. Determine when they're quietest, and plan to head over during those times. In general, you should avoid school vacation periods, weekends, and mid-morning and mid-afternoon time slots. Instead, go early or late on weekdays, and try to schedule your trip dates when travelers aren't trotting the globe (e.g., in the winter).

That way, you can capture all the images you've envisioned, and you can avoid plenty of frustration, too!

### **Church and cathedral photography: final words**

Now that you've finished this article, you're ready to head out with your camera and capture the beauty of churches and cathedrals.

Just remember to stay respectful, use the light, adjust your settings, and plan your trip carefully. That way, you can create consistently amazing photos!



**Digital  
Photography  
School**

## Back Button Focus

# What Is It and Why Should You Try It?

By Simon Ringsmuth

What camera operation could be more simple than pressing the shutter button to trigger the focusing mechanism, and then taking a picture? There's not much to it, really: you look through the viewfinder (or at the LCD screen on the back of the camera), press a button with your index finger, wait for the camera to focus, and voilà! You've got a photo.

Of course, consistently nailing the focus – so that your photos turn out sharp, especially when dealing with a variety of subjects – can be a challenge. You have to choose the right focusing mode for the job, and when conditions change, you have to change the focusing mode to suit. In other words, it can be frustrating (even for the most seasoned photographers!).

But...what if I told you there was a better way? Hidden deep within the settings of most cameras is a feature called back button focusing, and it has the capacity to transform your approach to photography. In this article, I explain the ins and outs of the back button focusing method: what it is, how it works, and why it's so important!

What is back button focus?

If your camera has an AF-ON button, you can use it to focus instead of the shutter button. If your camera does not have this button, you can usually adjust the camera's settings to make another button such as AE-L/AF-L perform this function.

Back button focus requires your thumb to press a button on the back of your camera (hence the name) and your index finger to press the shutter. In other words, you use the button on the back of your camera to focus, then press the shutter button to take a photo once focus has been locked.

This takes a few days to get used to, but it soon becomes second nature. All this begs the question – why should you re-learn how to do something as basic as focusing your camera when the shutter half-press works perfectly fine? The answer lies in the overall concept of giving more control back to you, the photographer.

## **Back Button Focus: What Is It and Why Should You Try It? . . . Continued**

### **Why is back button focus so effective?**

Cameras today have a dizzying array of autofocus points – those little dots or squares that light up in the viewfinder when you press the shutter button down halfway. You also have a ton of options in how you use these points. You can select an individual point, you can have the camera select what it thinks is the best one, you can tell your camera to use some of them in conjunction with one another, and many cameras have modes such as automatic face and eye detection as well.

To be honest, all these options work well. But by decoupling the act of focusing from the shutter button, and moving it to a separate button, you will be able to do a lot more with your photography than you may realize.

By using a button on the back to focus, you will no longer have to hunt around for the specific autofocus point you want to use or wait for the camera to focus on what it thinks you want to before allowing you to take a picture. Trying to keep a moving subject in focus while deftly holding the shutter down halfway is a feat of dexterity that would keep Legolas himself at bay. This is easily remedied by using back button focus. With this method, you can hold the back button down as long as you want, which keeps your camera continually focusing on your subject until you are good and ready to snap a photo. This is incredibly useful when your subject is in motion, whether you're photographing people, animals, mechanical objects, or simply a flower petal meandering across a meadow.

One of my favorite cameras is the Nikon D7100, which has 51 autofocus points that cover almost the entire frame. For a long time, I used all of them, and I'd frantically shift from one to the next as I adjusted the focus for each shot or tried to track a moving subject. It worked fairly well, especially in conjunction with Nikon's 3D subject-tracking algorithm (variants of that can be found in most cameras today), which did a good job of keeping my subject in focus whether it moved or I adjusted my perspective.

But I found that I often messed up some critical shots because I was either too busy changing the autofocus point or letting my camera decide what it thought should be in focus. Switching to back button focus remedied all of this and helped me get shots that would have been much more difficult otherwise.



### **Back Button Focus: What Is It and Why Should You Try It? . . . Continued**

To get this shot, I used the back button to focus on a different passerby and then waited for others to come down the sidewalk. Once I took my thumb off the focus button in the back, I was free to snap photos no matter where people were in the frame because the shutter button was not constantly refocusing the picture when pressed.



By using the back button to focus, I will often just utilize the center focus point to get my subject in focus, and then release my thumb from the button while recomposing to frame the subject. It's much faster than hunting for a specific autofocus point, and it allows me to take the photo at the exact instant I want – not when the camera thinks the subject is in focus.

This focus-and-recompose technique works great for a variety of situations, but there are certainly times when I like to utilize one of the built-in AF points. When that happens, I just go through the motion of selecting one and then taking a picture like normal while using the back button to focus.

In essence, using the back button to focus simply gives me more options when taking a photo, which allows me to think more about the pictures I'm taking instead of fiddling with the camera.

I was able to snap a few photos of this husky by holding my thumb down on the back button to continually adjust the focus and pressing the shutter to snap photos whenever I wanted.



## *Back Button Focus: What Is It and Why Should You Try It? . . . Continued*

### **The power of back button focus**

Most cameras have a few common focusing modes: Single, Continuous, and Manual.

In Single mode, the camera focuses once and won't refocus again until after you take a picture. This is how many photographers can use the focus-and-recompose method without switching to back button focus, and it works fine in a variety of situations.

The Continuous method forces your camera to constantly adjust focus while your finger is held down on the shutter button and doesn't stop until you snap a photo.

Manual, as its name implies, leaves all the focusing duties to the photographer, who must adjust a ring on the lens to nail the focus without any assistance from the camera.

All three of these methods have their uses, but you will often encounter situations where you need to switch from one to the other (for example, if you're photographing a stationary subject, then the subject begins to move, you may want to go from Single to Continuous). Doing this requires digging through menus or flipping a dial on your camera, and it can be a bit of a pain.

Using the back button combines all three focusing modes, giving an incredible amount of power and control to the photographer. Here's how you can replicate all three of these focusing modes thanks to back button focus:

**Manual:** Take your thumb off the back button and focus by rotating your lens barrel. (Note: Do not do this if your lens doesn't have a "M/A" focus setting. If it is fully autofocus, you will be forcing the gears.)

**Single:** Press your thumb on the back button until your camera is in focus, and then lift your thumb off the back button to keep the focus locked until you press the button again.

**Continuous:** Hold your thumb on the back button as long as you want, forcing your camera to continually adjust the focus until you take a picture. (Note: You must be using Continuous focus mode for this to work.)

### **Back Button Focus: What Is It and Why Should You Try It? . . . Continued**

Nailing this shot of falling water drops required a lot of switching between automatic and manual focus and would have been virtually impossible if the shutter button had been used for focusing instead of the back button.

You can effortlessly switch between all three methods without doing anything at all except moving your thumb away from the back button, which means you can spend far more of your effort on things like composition and framing instead of digging through menus on your camera.

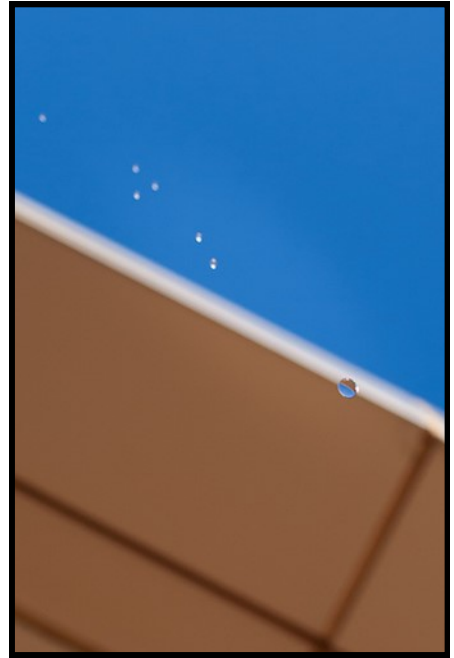
Finally, one of the most overlooked benefits of using the back button to focus is that it frees up your shutter half-press to do other functions (such as locking the exposure).

You will have to enable this option using your camera's settings menu, and you might not use it on every shot, but it's yet another tool in your photographic arsenal that can help you get better photos.

Basically, when your subject is in danger of being over or underexposed, you can quickly point your camera at something else to get a better exposure, press the shutter button down halfway to lock the shutter/aperture/ISO values, and then recompose to get the image you want. This trick, combined with back button focusing, has saved my proverbial bacon more times than I can count. Normally this exposure-locking function is handled by its own dedicated button, but I have found it to be far more useful to use the exposure-lock button for locking focus and the shutter for locking exposure – effectively reversing the default behaviors of both buttons, but making your camera much more versatile in the process.

#### **Try out back button focusing!**

All this talk of button-switching and extra finger-pressing might seem inordinately confusing, but it's much easier than it sounds. Though it might seem counterintuitive at first, the more you use the back button to focus, the more it will make sense and help you unlock new creative possibilities with your camera.



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