ISSUE 87 - AUGUST 2026

Mobiography

FOR INSPIRING SMARTPHONE PHOTOGRAPHY

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH THE NEW REEFLEX ULTRA TELEPHOTO LENS

INSIGHTS:
THE QUIET CRAFT OF
INTENTIONAL PORTRAITS

TUTORIAL:
EXPLORING NEW ANGLES
FOR BETTER PHOTOS

FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHERS:
ALI ZOLGHADRI & ALISON DEVINE

PLUS: AI-FREE EDITING APPS TO TRY & PHOTOGRAPHERS TO FOLLOW ON INSTAGRAM

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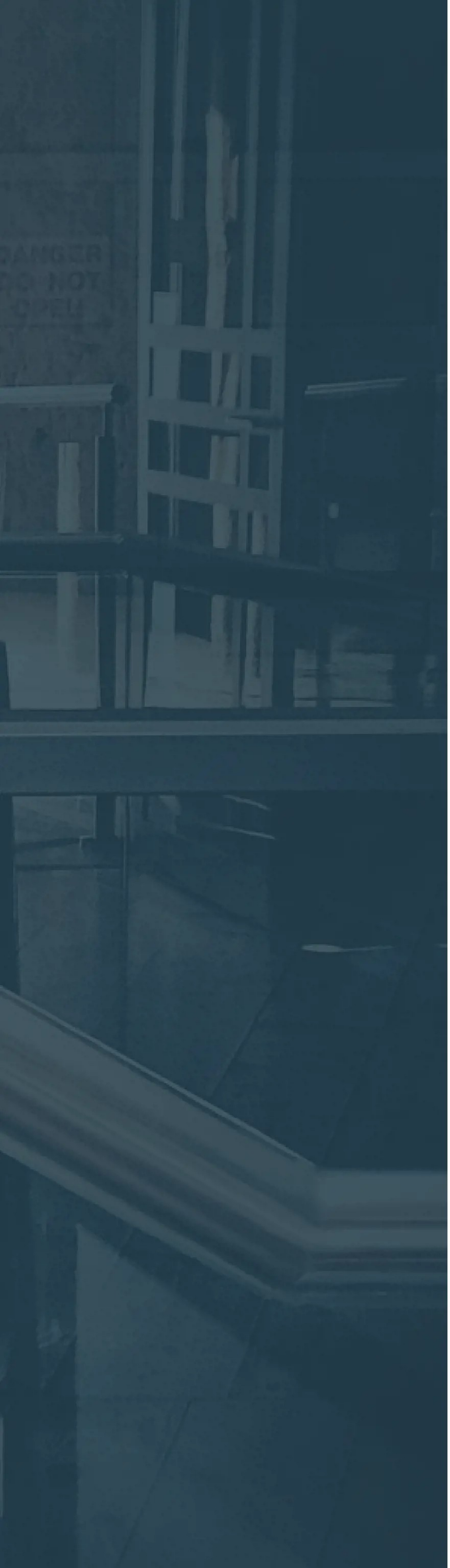
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Mobiography™

Editor

Andy Butler

Contributors

Andy Butler

Jack Hollingsworth

Mark Myerson

Nicki Fitz-Gerald

Cover Photo

‘Flamingoes’ by David Addison

Contact Information

Email: hello@mobiography.net

Website: www.mobiography.net

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Inside This Issue...

Featured Interviews:

Silence and Space: The Minimalist Photography of Ali Zolghadri

Where the Mist Settles: The Nature & Landscape Photography of Alison Devine

Tips, Tutorials & Insights:

- Using the New Reeflex Ultra Telephoto to Shoot Close Up Wildlife Photography
- Intentional Portraits: The Quiet Craft of Portraiture with a Smartphone
- How to Explore New Angles in Your Photography
- 5 AI-Free Editing Apps to Try in 2026
- 5 Inspirational Photographers to Follow on Instagram
- Mobiography Gallery Showcase

From The Editor...



Welcome to another summer issue of Mobiography Magazine with more interviews, tips, and creative ideas that I hope will inspire you to get outside and make the most of the camera in your pocket.

Inside, I talk to two more smartphone photographers: Ali Zolghadri and Alison Devine.

Ali Zolghadri is an Iranian fine art photographer known for his minimalist, conceptual style. He uses negative space, shadow, and solitary figures to go beyond simple composition. His photos express feelings of isolation, fragility, and the tension between his subjects and the quiet world around them. In my chat with Ali, he shared why mindset matters more than the device, how editing is just as important as taking the photo, and how his belief in vision over equipment has grown over time.

Alison Devine, a smartphone photographer from Hamilton, Ontario, captures the quiet corners of nature, from misty forests and calm lakes to flowers in the gentle light of dawn or dusk. Her photos have a peaceful stillness that invites you to pause and look closer. In our conversation, Alison talks about her photographic journey, her creative process, and the stories behind some of her most personal images.

I take a look at the new 300-600mm Ultra Telephoto lens from Reeflex alongside their updated Reeflex Pro Camera app. I head out to see whether this ultra-telephoto lens can open up new opportunities when it comes to photographing wildlife.

Meanwhile, Jack Hollingsworth, an expert in portrait photography, shares his top tips to help you take better portraits, connect with your subjects, and create images with real depth and meaning.

Mark Myerson explores the idea of how changing your viewpoint can improve your photos. He talks to Barbara Januszewska-Piróg about her approach to finding unique angles, framing, and foreground elements before taking a shot.

Finally, Nicki Fitz-Gerald takes a look at five AI-free photo editing apps that she regularly enjoys, as they allow her to make creative decisions herself and stay in control of the creative direction of her work.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Mobiography. Share your photos with the hashtag #mobiography on Instagram, and watch for our weekly challenges.

Happy Shooting,

Andy Butler



‘Untitled’ by @oldhamjaz

MOBIOGRAPHY GALLERY SHOWCASE



‘Blueberries’ by @bulldog.loves.wildflower



‘Reflections’ by @jelena19.966



‘Untitled’ by @kimmy_abbas

‘Sepia self short storytelling’ by @kosmou.self



‘There is a pain I often feel, which you will never know…’ by @luiggi1905bn



‘Nature’ by @soniabridekirk



‘Preparing to leave the capsule’ by @ariscaith

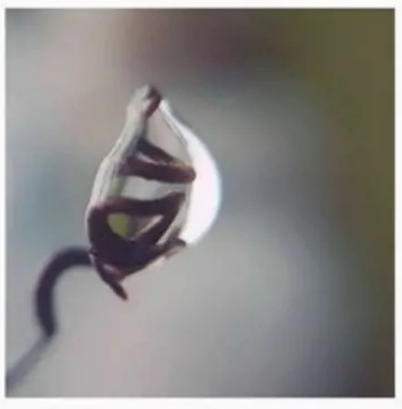


‘In a big month it will be back: farmer worm herb’ by @smartzine.nl

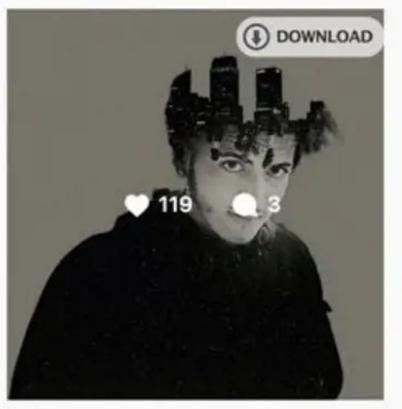
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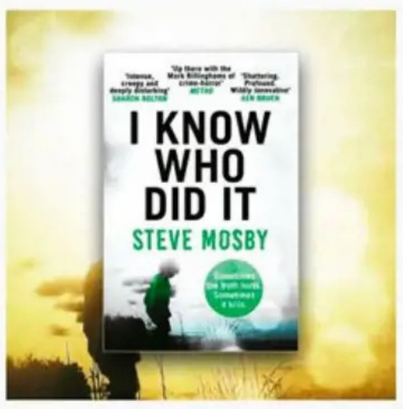




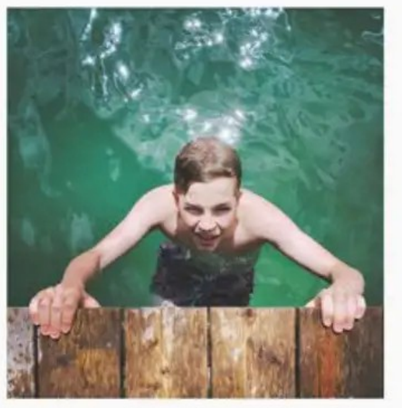






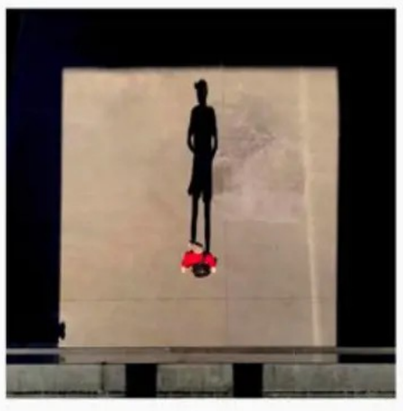










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ALSO LOOK OUT FOR THE WEEKLY CHALLENGES

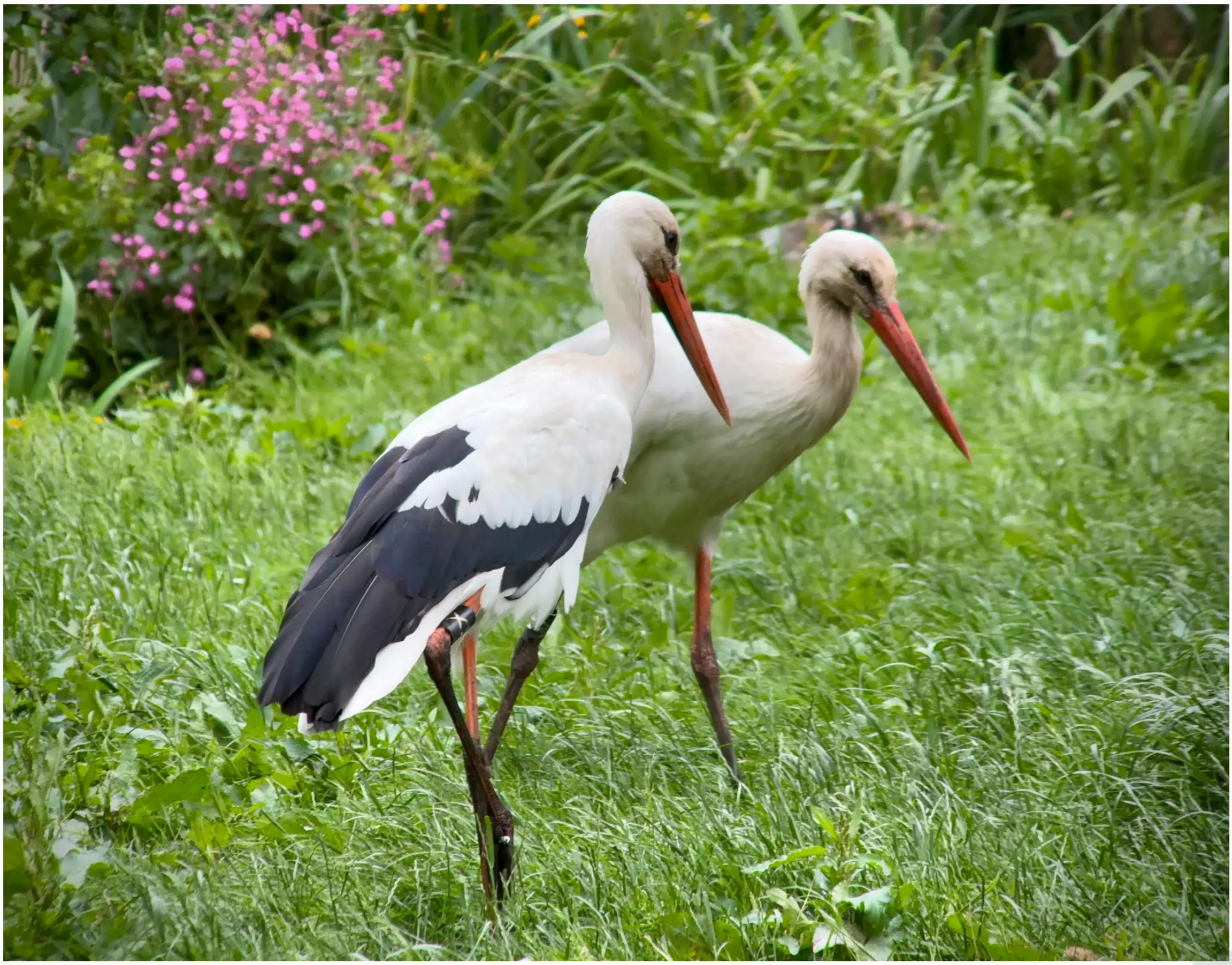
USING THE NEW REEFLEX ULTRA TELEPHOTO TO SHOOT CLOSE UP WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

By Andy Butler

I've always felt at home out in nature, whether I'm shooting landscapes or hunting for macro shots of the small things found at my feet or in the hedgerows of country lanes. Photographing wildlife, though, has always been a different matter. The smartphone offers very limited options for capturing high-quality, close-up photos of birds and animals, and for a long time that gap has been difficult to bridge.

Capturing pets and tame animals is one thing, but most wildlife are wary of humans. So, unless you have a camera with an extremely long focal length, a smartphone simply won't give you the results you're looking for. The subject is either too small in the frame or is gone before you can get close enough to take your shot.

Recently, I've been testing the new 300-600mm Ultra Telephoto lens from Reeflex alongside their updated Reeflex Pro Camera app. I was interested to see whether this ultra-telephoto lens would open up new opportunities when it comes to photographing wildlife.





iPhone x2 Lens



iPhone x5 Lens



iPhone x5 Lens with the
Reeflex 300-600mm Telephoto

GETTING CLOSE WITHOUT GETTING CLOSE

The main challenge of wildlife photography is not disturbing your subject. Most birds and animals have an invisible boundary which, once crossed, they're gone... and so is your shot. With some species, that zone can be wider than you'd expect, and no matter how careful you are, you often can't get close enough to get the shot you'd like.

So, when it comes to wildlife photography, having enough reach isn't just a technical consideration—it's everything. Thankfully, for iPhone and Samsung Galaxy series users, Reeflex is bringing out their new 300-600mm lens, which, when coupled with the iPhone's built-in 5x telephoto zoom, gives you some serious magnification. This allows you to keep a good distance between you and your subject while still getting a more detailed shot.

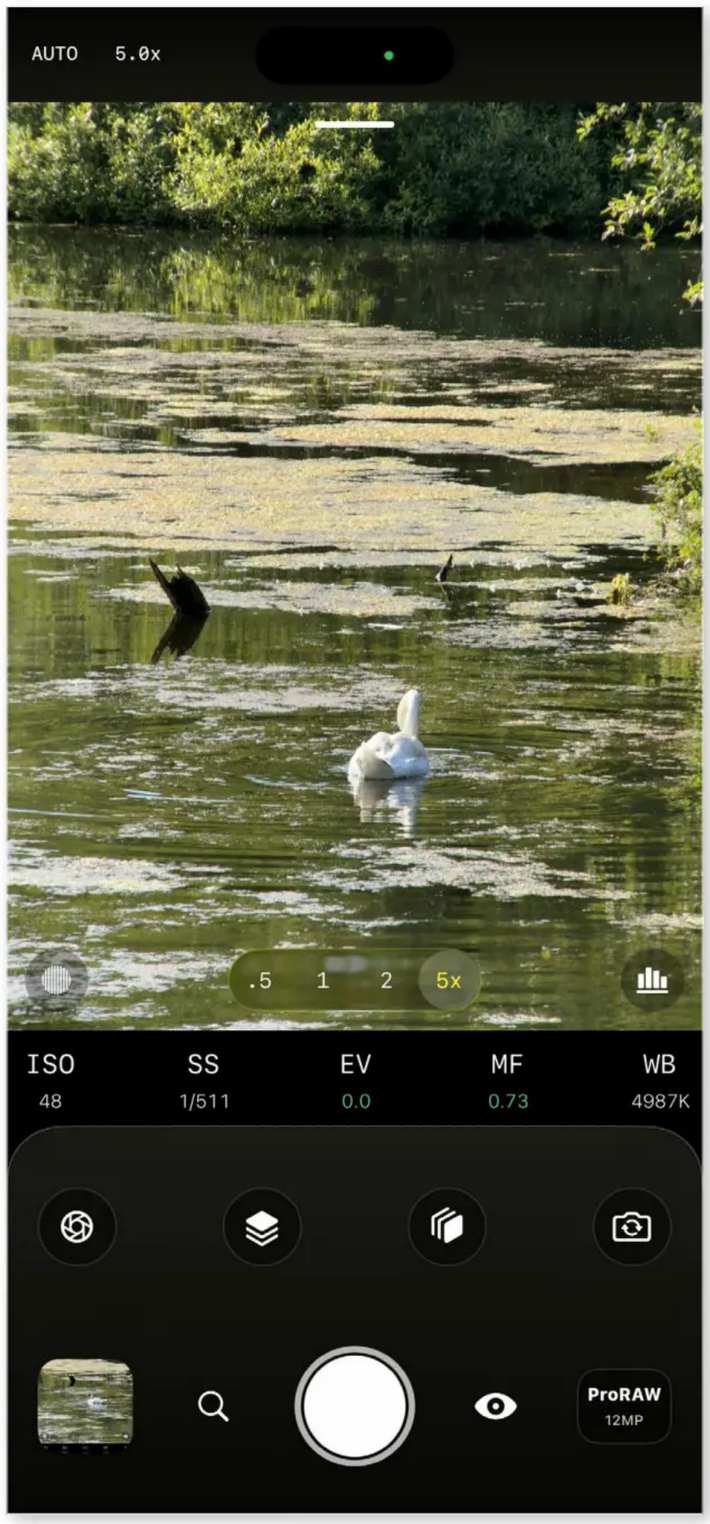
The lens itself is built to the same high standard that you'd expect from Reeflex. It's made with a solid aluminum housing, high-quality glass, and a screw-on fitting that attaches directly to the Reeflex case over the iPhone's 5x telephoto lens.

The first thing you'll notice is the weight of it in your hand, though not unpleasantly so. It feels purposeful and not cumbersome. The lens is 78mm long, so it's possible to use it hand-held. However, I got better results when I rested the lens on something to keep the shot steadier.

Beyond the practical advantage of shooting at a distance with the lens, its focal length does something useful for your image compositionally. At a 300-600mm focal length, the compression effect becomes much more pronounced.

Background elements appear closer to your subject than they actually are, and the scene flattens in a way that isolates the animal against a smooth wash of color and texture rather than a cluttered tangle of foliage. This is a result of shooting with a long focal length, which gives wildlife photographs a quality that simply isn't achievable with a standard smartphone lens, regardless of how good the computational processing behind them is.

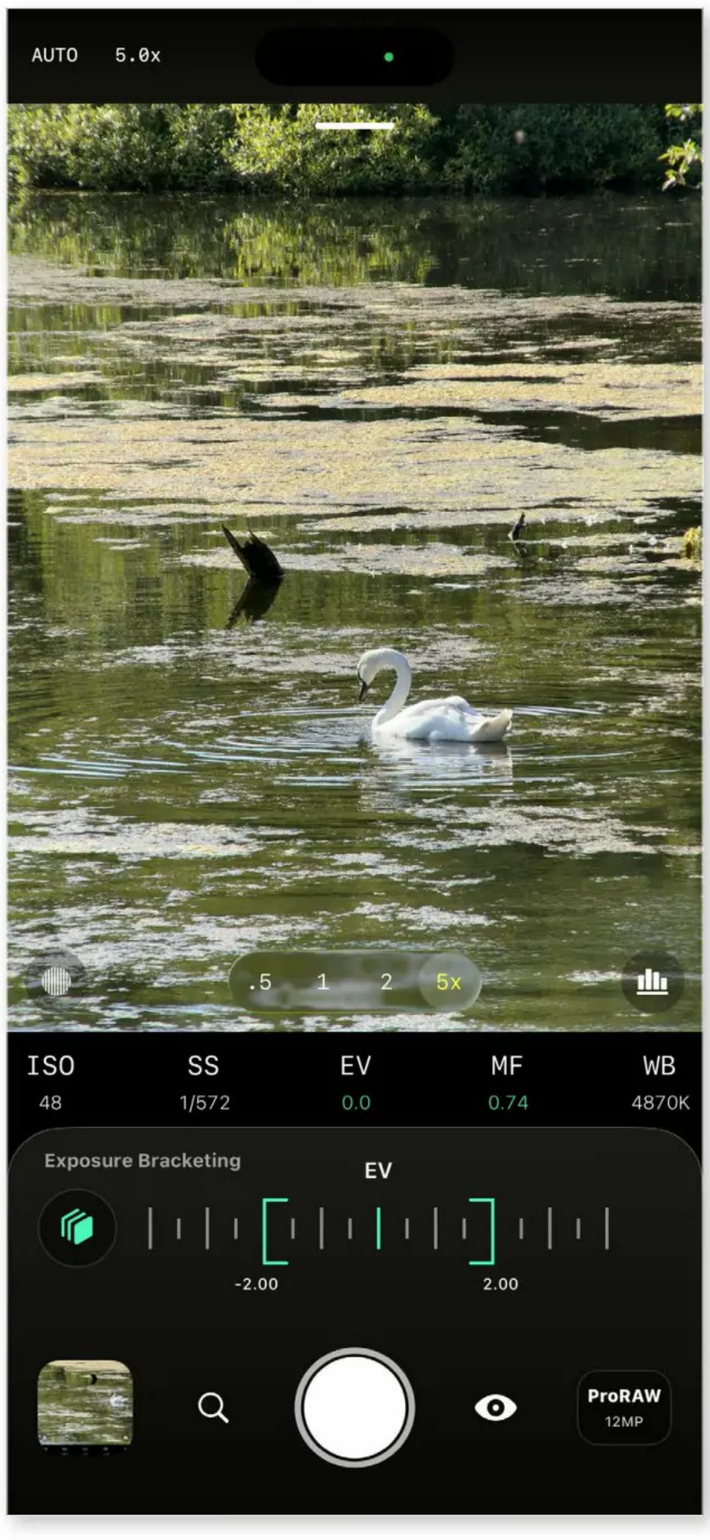
However, there's one thing to keep in mind. To get the best results with this lens, you'll need a third-party camera app. The iPhone's built-in camera doesn't always work well with add-on lenses and can have trouble selecting the right lens. It often randomly switches between the various built-in lenses, which makes taking a photo very frustrating. A much better option is to use the Reeflex Pro Camera app, which, with the latest version, is a serious upgrade for this kind of photography.



MASTERING THE REEFLEX PRO CAMERA APP

Version 3.0 of the Reeflex Pro Camera app is a significant step forward. Those familiar with previous versions will find the interface largely unchanged, but with some new features added making a real difference in the field.

Firstly, burst mode is a much-needed addition and essential for something like wildlife photography. Pressing and holding the shutter button will capture a rapid series of images in quick succession, with a running count displayed in real time over the photo gallery icon. The Burst on Tap feature (enabled in the settings menu) lets you set a sequence of 2 to 20 frames with a single press, which is great for capturing a specific moment without taking up too much storage. The new capture engine also means there's almost no shutter lag, so the app feels very responsive.



Another new feature is exposure bracketing. This helps solve a common problem in wildlife photography: the difference between a bright sky and a darker subject. If an animal is backlit or set against the sky, a single exposure can't capture both well. If you expose for the subject, the sky is too bright; if you expose for the sky, the subject is too dark. Bracketing takes several photos at different exposures, giving you more options to combine later into one more evenly exposed image. The ability to blend the three exposures together in app will allow photographers to create more evenly exposed HDR style images.

Focus stacking is another new addition which works by picking a near and far focus point, choosing how many photos to take, and the app shifts focus between those points as it shoots. This isn't as important in wildlife photography, where you usually want a single sharp focus, but it's great for close-ups of flowers, bark, or insects, and it gives you more creative options. However, the app cleverly blends the photos together to give you a composite image.



COMPOSITION AND PATIENCE

Technical capability is only part of the story. The photos that really catch people's attention usually come from a mix of good field skills and a clear sense of what makes a strong image. In wildlife photography, these two things are even more connected than in most other types of photography.

KNOW YOUR SUBJECT

Before you even start taking any photos, spend a few minutes just watching. Wildlife has routines such as favorite spots, feeding times, and regular paths that they follow. Time spent observing before you start shooting will help you figure out the best place to position yourself, much more than any amount of moving around trying to chase the action. If you're at a nature reserve, check the website or social media to see which animals are around and when or where to find them.

GET DOWN TO EYE LEVEL

One of the best ways to improve your wildlife photos is to get lower. Taking pictures at your subject's eye level will make your shots feel more personal and intimate, rather than shooting down from your normal standing height. This usually means crouching, kneeling, or even lying down.

With a smartphone and a handheld lens, it's easier than you might think because you don't have to deal with heavy, cumbersome gear. I was able to shoot handheld all morning when out at a local nature reserve. This allowed me to move around and get down close to ground level when needed. Using a monopod or tripod can make your shots much steadier with a longer lens like the Reeflex 300-600mm telephoto, but you lose flexibility and maneuverability.

In practice, I found the Reeflex lens easy to handle when I could brace my stance against a solid object or when tucking my elbows in against my body.



USE THE RULE OF THIRDS

Placing your subject dead center will almost always produce a static, lifeless image. Using the rule of thirds and placing your subject near one of the four points where the grid lines cross will instantly make a photo more visually appealing. Most camera apps, including Reeflex, let you display a grid on your screen, making it easy to frame your photo.

GIVE YOUR SUBJECT ROOM TO MOVE

When composing your photo, always give your subject room to look into. If your subject is facing left, leave space to its left. If the animal is on the move, put more space in front of it rather than behind. The viewer's eye will naturally follow the subject's line of sight or direction of travel, and a composition that works with that creates a sense of movement and intention. Fast-moving or airborne subjects generally need more leading space than stationary ones, so it's better to give them extra room.



MAKE USE OF DEPTH OF FIELD

The long focal length of the Reeflex lens is helping your composition, even if you aren't aware of it. The compression effect of a long focal length makes backgrounds look flatter and softer. This helps to create clean, uncluttered photos. You can push this further by shooting at the widest virtual aperture available in the Reeflex app, which gives you a much shallower depth of field and makes your subject stand out even more from its surroundings.

It's also worth paying attention to the foreground. It's easy to see things like grass, branches, or reeds between you and your subject as obstacles, but in wildlife photography, a slightly blurry foreground object can add depth and make the animal feel like it's really in its environment. Try lowering your camera so that a stem or patch of grass is softly out of focus in the foreground. This gives your photo a layered, three-dimensional look that draws people in. What seems like an obstacle at first can often become the thing that makes the shot so special.

WAIT FOR THE DECISIVE MOMENT

The best action shots like a bird taking off, landing, or feeding, come from watching and waiting, not chasing. Spend time observing before you start taking photos. Wildlife has routines, and the more you watch, the better you'll know what's coming. Using burst mode, start shooting slightly before the moment you want to capture to avoid missing that decisive moment. For this technique, burst mode is essential as it captures a series of shots around the moment you're aiming for.



FINAL THOUGHTS

By using a combination of a telephoto add-on lens like the Reeflex 300-600mm lens, along with a third-party camera app, and paying close attention to composition and framing, you'll see your wildlife photography greatly improve. Animals that used to require you to get too close, and still didn't fill the frame, are now much easier to photograph. The distance that was once a problem now works in your favor.

The Reeflex lens is solidly built and gives sharp photos within its optimal working range. The compression effect you get adds a look you can't get computationally or with digital zoom. With burst mode, focus peaking, and exposure bracketing now in the Pro Camera app, the software has finally caught up with the hardware.

There are a few limitations to mention. At 300-600mm, you need steady hands or something to rest the lens on, and a monopod is a good idea for longer shoots. Anything closer than a distance of six meters will throw your image out of focus.

But these issues don't change the fact that if you've ever been frustrated by how close you have to get to a distant subject when trying to take good wildlife photos with your smartphone, this setup could quite possibly be a game-changer for you.

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SMARTPHONE WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY JUST GOT REAL (REEFLEX 300-600MM)

Video Placeholder

Internet Connection Required

In this video, Bobby Tonelli takes a hands-on look at the massive new Reeflex 300-600mm ultra-telephoto lens for the iPhone and Samsung Galaxy series. Whether you are shooting wildlife at the zoo, pushing for extreme reach during live events, or just want optical compression that phones normally can't achieve, this piece of glass completely shifts what is possible. Bobby breaks down everything you need to know, such as how to balance it, the optimal shutter speed settings, and the difference between the 300mm and 600mm crops.

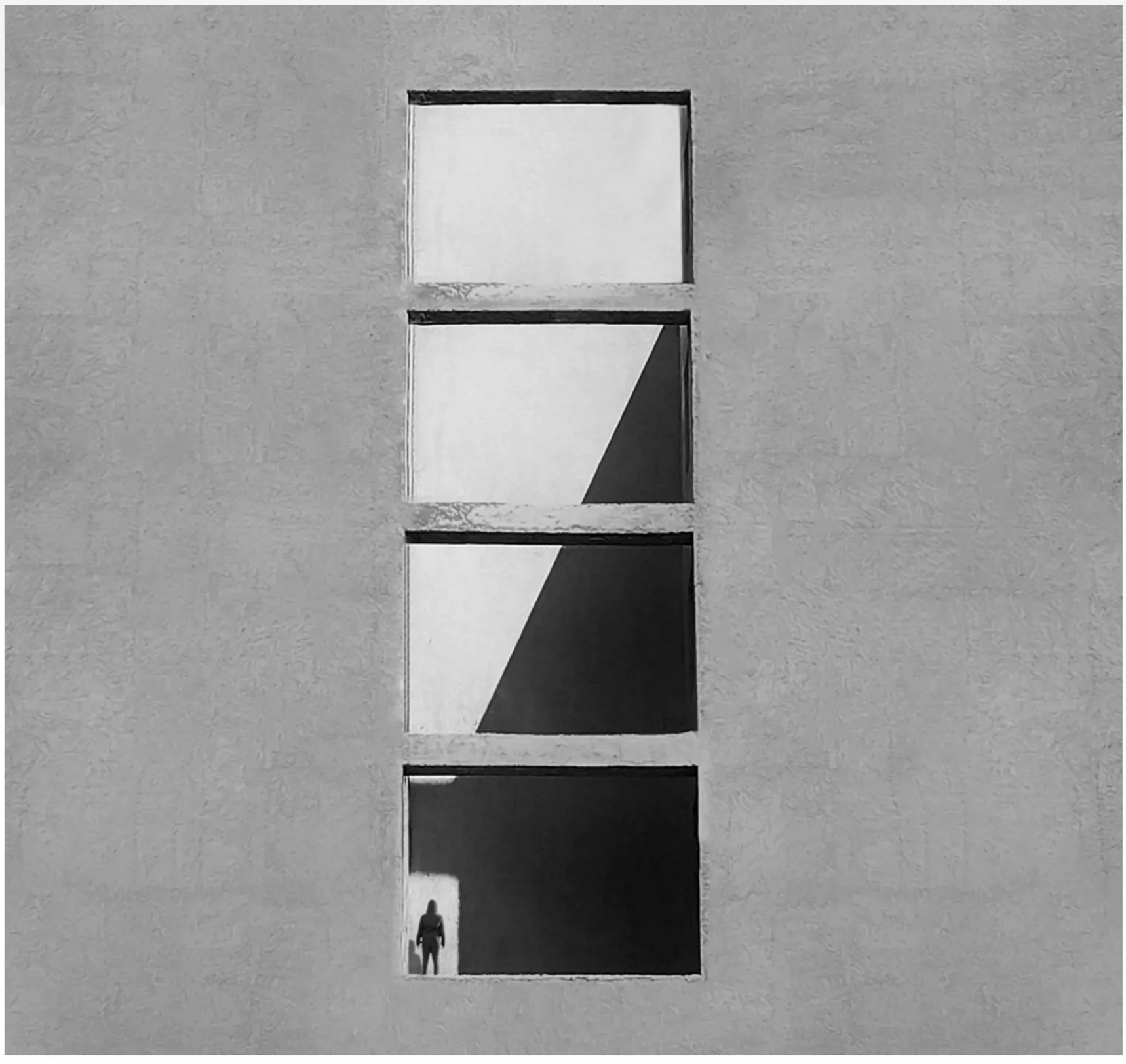
SILENCE AND SPACE: THE MINIMALIST PHOTOGRAPHY OF ALI ZOLGHADRI

By Andy Butler

Ali Zolghadri is an Iranian fine art photographer known for his minimalist, conceptual style. He uses negative space, shadow, and solitary figures to explore more than just composition. His photos convey a feeling of isolation, fragility, and tension between the solitary figures in his images and the quietness of the world around them. In his work, architecture and open landscapes are not just backgrounds—they become metaphors.

Ali has more than 150 international awards to his name. He's seen his work exhibited in Dubai, Paris, New York, Budapest, and Siena, earning him the UAE Golden Visa for Exceptional Talent. Many of his most acclaimed photos were taken with a smartphone, not as a compromise but by choice. For Ali, the device is never the focus.

I was intrigued by Ali's unique style and approach, and was eager to learn more about his work. In our chat, Ali talks about how it's not about the device you use to capture an image, but your mindset. He discusses how minimalism found him rather than the other way around, why editing is as central to his creative process as the moment of capture, and why his belief in vision over equipment has only deepened with time.



COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY AND HOW YOU FIRST DISCOVERED SMARTPHONE PHOTOGRAPHY?

My love for photography began as a child. I started as an amateur with a compact camera, exploring different styles without a clear direction. Over time, I realized I had a particular affinity for minimalist and conceptual photography, and saw the world differently through that lens; it felt natural to me.

What's interesting about my process is that I almost never plan a shoot in advance. Even during work or daily life, my mind is constantly thinking about photography. I'm always looking for light, geometry, silence, a moment that could become an image. Because of this, many of my most meaningful photographs have happened by accident, not by design.

That's where the smartphone became an essential part of my routine. It's always with me. There's no need for much preparation, or a bag, or decisions to be made. It's simply there when the moment comes. For exactly that reason, most of my spontaneous and unplanned images have been captured with my phone.

The turning point came when one of my most awarded photographs, an image that went on to win at a major international competition, was taken using a smartphone. That moment changed something for me. It confirmed what I already felt: the tool you use is not the point. The vision is. The smartphone doesn't limit my work. In many ways, it has freed it.

YOUR WORK IS VERY MINIMAL AND HAS A CALMING FEEL TO IT. WHAT FIRST DREW YOU TOWARDS THIS STYLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND VISUAL STORYTELLING?

Interestingly, I didn't discover minimalism. Minimalism discovered me.

In the early days of my photographic journey, I knew nothing about this style. I was simply shooting everything and experimenting as an amateur without any real direction. But amongst a large collection of ordinary images, there was one photograph that stood out from the rest. Although I didn't know it at the time, it had an unintentional minimalist quality.

A more experienced photographer saw that image and said something that changed everything for me: "I think your eye is more mature and refined in minimalism." I didn't fully understand what he meant, so I went home and searched for minimalist photography. I looked at image after image, and something happened. I felt it immediately. My eyes were drawn to these photographs in a way that was different from anything else. There was a calm, precision, kind of silence in them that deeply resonated with me.

I think that feeling and the quiet recognition are what pulled me toward minimalism. It wasn't a conscious decision. It was more like finding a language I had already been speaking without knowing its name.

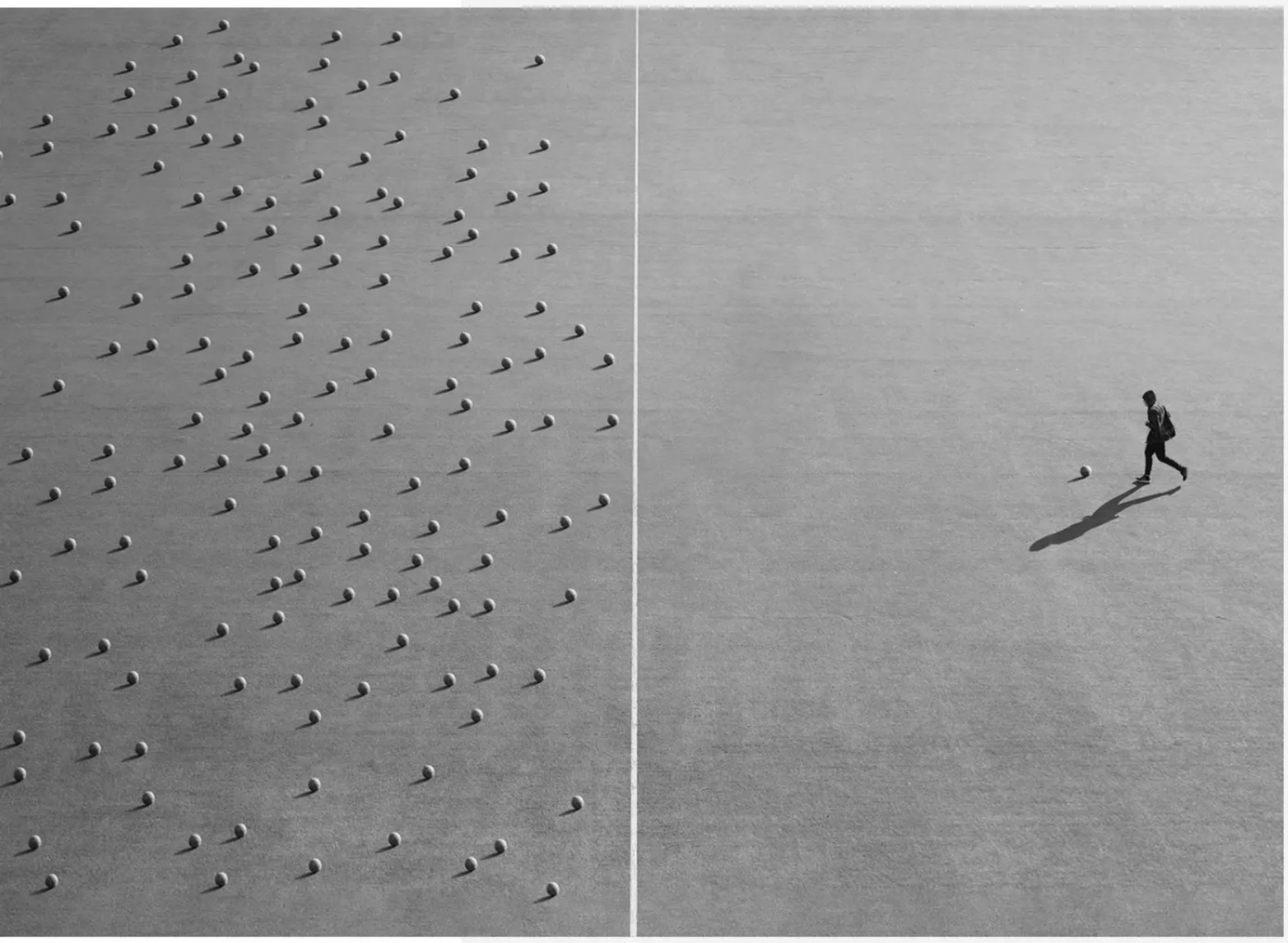
Since then, minimalism has become not just a style for me, but a way of seeing. I don't add. I subtract. I don't fill the frame. I listen to what needs to be left empty.



MANY OF YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS HAVE A SURREAL OR DREAMLIKE QUALITY. WHEN YOU BEGIN CREATING AN IMAGE, DO YOU USUALLY START WITH A CLEAR CONCEPT IN MIND, OR DOES THE IDEA DEVELOP NATURALLY AS YOU SHOOT?

My creative process doesn't follow a single path, and I think that's what keeps my work alive.

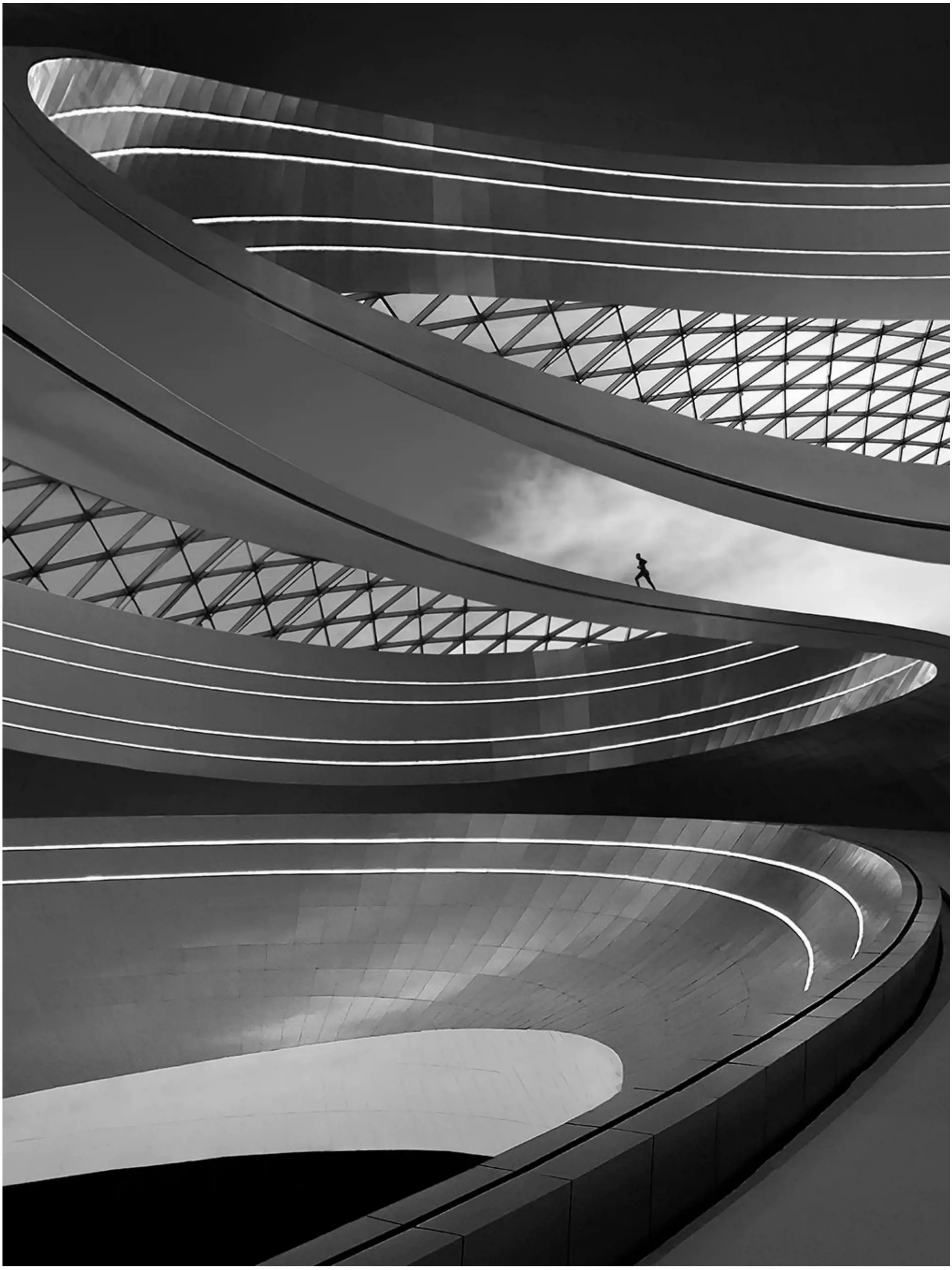
Some images start with a concept. I have a feeling, an internal tension I want to express, and I work backward from that. I find a location, a subject, a light that can carry the idea. But many of my most celebrated works arrived in a completely different way.



My image "Confrontation"—one of my most awarded photographs—is a perfect example. I'd taken a family member to a location to photograph them running in a clean, open space for a minimalist conceptual piece. But in that same moment, I noticed a football on the other side of the field. Something told me these two elements belonged together. So, I photographed both the figure and the ball, without yet knowing why.

The concept only revealed itself during editing. Through photomontage, I brought the two elements together, and the final image emerged. A lone figure confronting something larger than themselves, with all the tension, silence, and psychological weight that I wanted.

So when people ask me whether I plan my images, the honest answer is, sometimes yes, sometimes no. What remains constant is the moment of recognition. Whether it happens in the field or in post-production, there's always a moment when something clicks, when I feel the image becoming what it needs to be. I trust that feeling more than any plan.



YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY MAKES STRONG USE OF NEGATIVE SPACE AND SIMPLICITY. WHAT ATTRACTS YOU TO MINIMALISM? AND HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHAT TO LEAVE OUT OF A FRAME AS MUCH AS WHAT TO INCLUDE?

Negative space is one of the central pillars of my work, but not in the way it's typically discussed.

Most photographers use negative space as a compositional tool, a way to balance the frame. I use it for that, but also for something deeper: to construct meaning. In my images, the empty space is not the background; it's part of the statement. It carries weight. It creates tension. It tells the viewer where to feel, not just where to look.

But here's what I think separates my approach from a purely technical one. I have no rules.

I don't follow a formula for how much space is too much or too little. I don't stop at the "correct" compositional balance. If the concept demands that I push the emptiness to an extreme — that the figure becomes almost nothing against a vast, silent void, then I go there without hesitation. The rules of composition are a starting point, not a destination.



What guides me is always the final feeling and the final concept. I ask myself, does this image make you stop? Does it make you feel something before you understand it? If the answer is yes, then the space is right, regardless of whether it follows any conventional principle.

For me, knowing what to leave out is not a decision. It's an instinct. And that instinct has been shaped by years of trusting the image over the theory.

COMPOSITION FORMS SUCH A STRONG ELEMENT IN YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY. WHAT'S YOUR APPROACH TO COMPOSING AN IMAGE?

After 13 years, composition is no longer something I think about. It's something I feel.



My work is known for certain recurring elements such as strong lines, shadows, and solitary subjects placed within clean, open environments. These are not techniques I consciously apply to each image. They've become part of how I see. My eye moves naturally toward geometry, toward the relationship between light and shadow, toward the single figure standing against a vast and quiet space. I don't search for these things. I simply notice them before anything else.

But I want to be clear about something, I don't photograph only with my eyes. I photograph with my instinct and my soul.

What I mean is that, for me, composition is not just a visual exercise. It's an emotional one. Before I press the shutter, I feel whether the frame is right. There's a kind of internal resonance, a quiet confirmation, that tells me the elements are aligned not just geometrically, but conceptually. The lines, the shadows, the emptiness. They all need to carry meaning, not just balance.

Almost every image I make carries a high conceptual weight within a simple, minimal space. That combination of complexity of meaning, inside simplicity of form, is what I'm always reaching for. And after all these years, my eye and my instinct have learned to find it together, almost simultaneously.

BLACK-AND-WHITE PLAY A HUGE ROLE IN YOUR WORK. WHAT DOES BLACK-AND-WHITE ALLOW YOU TO EXPRESS THAT COLOR PERHAPS CANNOT?

I worked in color for many years before moving to black-and-white. And that journey was important. I explored many different styles and genres, all in color. I understood what color could do, how it could move people, how it could add warmth or drama or life to an image.

But when I discovered minimalism and conceptual photography, something shifted. I realized that for the kind of work I wanted to make, color was doing too much—or rather, it was doing the wrong things. It was drawing attention to itself when I needed the viewer's attention to go elsewhere, to the composition, the space, the silence, or the idea.

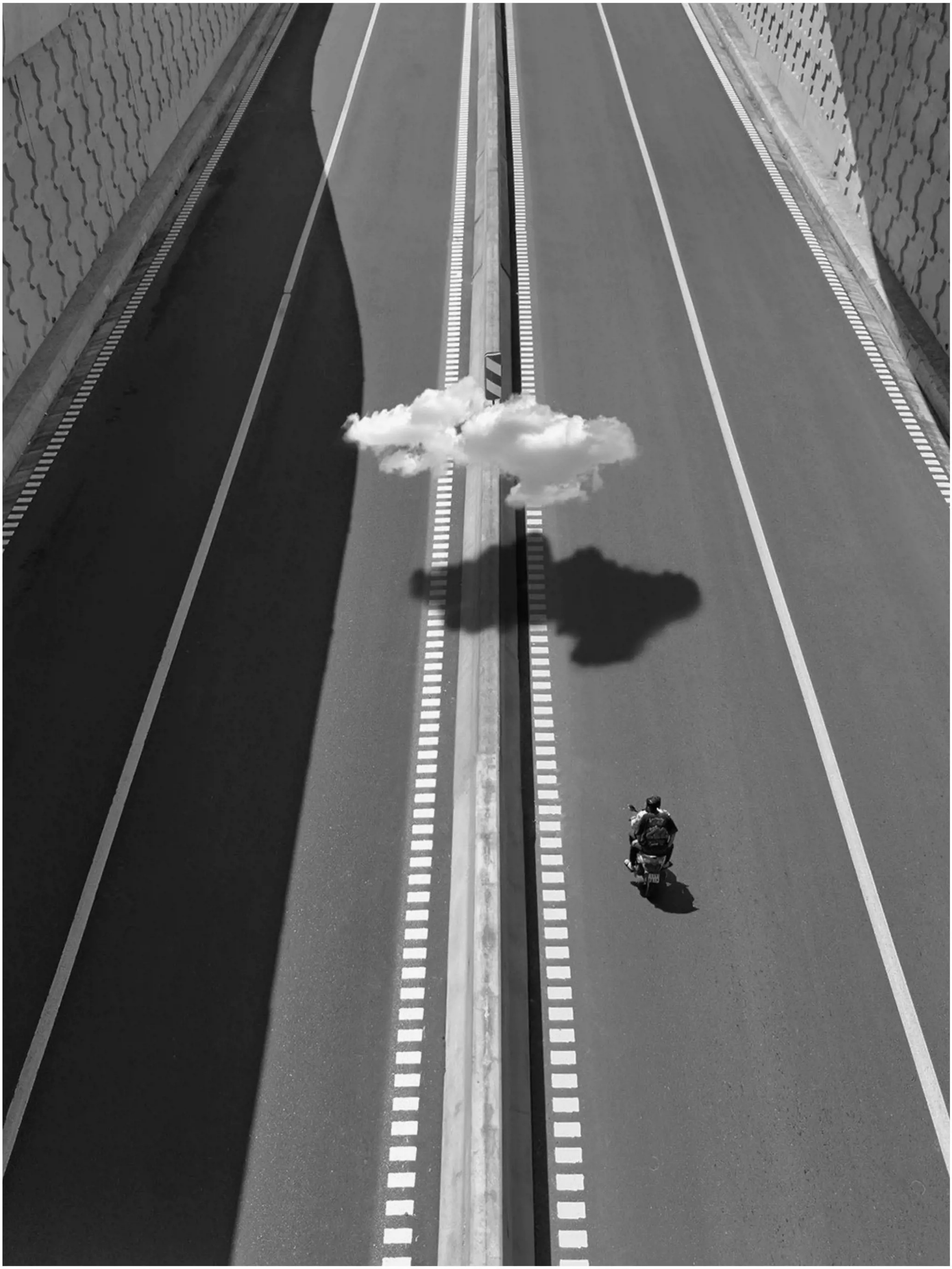
Color is beautiful. I genuinely love it. But in my vision, minimalism and concept don't need it. When color is present, the viewer's eye is inevitably drawn to it, and they begin to feel the warmth of a tone, the contrast of a hue. And in that moment, the simplicity I'm working so hard to create becomes slightly more complicated.



Black-and-white, on the other hand, returns everything to its purest form. What remains is geometry, light, shadow, and meaning. Nothing competes. Nothing distracts. The composition alone must carry the viewer, and for me, that's exactly the challenge I want.

Black-and-white isn't a stylistic choice for me. It's a conceptual necessity. It's how silence looks.





MANY PHOTOGRAPHERS FOCUS HEAVILY ON GEAR, YET YOU'VE SAID THE CAMERA ITSELF IS NOT THE POINT. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO FEEL LIMITED BY THE EQUIPMENT THEY HAVE?

I believe that the more time an artist spends in their craft, the more clearly they arrive at one conclusion: it's vision and artistic sensibility that make an artist, not equipment.



I've lived this truth personally. For years, I worked with budget cameras. Many of my most recognized images were captured on a non-flagship smartphone. And yet those images have won awards in major international competitions, been exhibited across multiple countries, and moved people in ways I never anticipated.

The moment that confirmed everything for me was when one of my most awarded photographs—one that went on to receive significant international recognition—was taken on a smartphone. Not because I planned it that way, but because the moment arrived and my phone was there. The vision was there. That was enough.

My belief is simple. Tools don't create. Tools work for me. It is we, the artists, who create.

I hear from many emerging photographers who ask me about gear, about which camera will improve their work. My answer is always the same: stop thinking about the tool and start developing your eye. Study light. Study space. Study what moves you and why. A more expensive camera will not give you a more meaningful vision—but years of honest, curious observation will.

The camera is an instrument. The artist is the instrument that matters.

COULD YOU TALK US THROUGH YOUR EDITING PROCESS? HOW MUCH OF THE FINAL IMAGE IS SHAPED DURING POST-PRODUCTION?

In fine art and conceptual minimalism, editing isn't a finishing step. It's a fundamental part of the creative process. For me, post-production is where many of my images truly come to life.

Many of my works are composites—combinations of multiple photographs layered together in Photoshop to create the final image. "Confrontation" is one example. The figure and the football were photographed separately and brought together during editing, where the concept finally revealed itself. However, there's one principle I hold without compromise: every element in my images is photographed by me. Nothing is sourced externally. Every shadow, every figure, every piece of sky—it's all my own work. The composite technique is a tool for construction, not a shortcut.



I also have many single-shot images, captured on both a smartphone and a camera, where the editing is more restrained—adjusting tone, contrast, and the depth of blacks-and-whites to achieve the emotional atmosphere I'm looking for.

But across all my work, editing serves the same purpose. To arrive at the clearest, most precise expression of the concept. In conceptual minimalism, technical skill in post-production is essential. The final image must feel inevitable, as though it could not exist in any other form.

My broader belief is this. Modern art exists to push beyond boundaries. The frame, the shutter, the single moment, these are starting points, not limitations. Editing allows me to take an image into infinity—to build a world that feeling demanded but reality alone could not provide.

YOUR IMAGES OFTEN COMMUNICATE THEMES LIKE ISOLATION, SILENCE, BALANCE, AND TENSION. WHAT DO YOU HOPE VIEWERS FEEL OR TAKE AWAY EMOTIONALLY FROM YOUR WORK?

My images operate on two levels simultaneously, and this is something I think about deeply.

The first level is a clear, accessible concept. When someone looks at my work, they should feel something immediately—a sense of solitude, tension, silence, or scale. This layer is open to everyone, regardless of their background or experience with art. You don't need to understand fine art photography to feel the weight of a single figure standing alone against an infinite space.

But beneath that, there's a second level—one that's deliberately open. A complexity that doesn't resolve itself into a single meaning. And this is where I believe the real power of an image lives.

I want each viewer to bring themselves to the work. Their own experiences, their own fears, their own quiet moments. These become part of what the image means. Someone who's felt isolated will see isolation. Someone who's stood at a crossroads in life will see a decision. Someone who's felt small against the world will see exactly that. The image remains the same. The meaning shifts with the person standing in front of it.

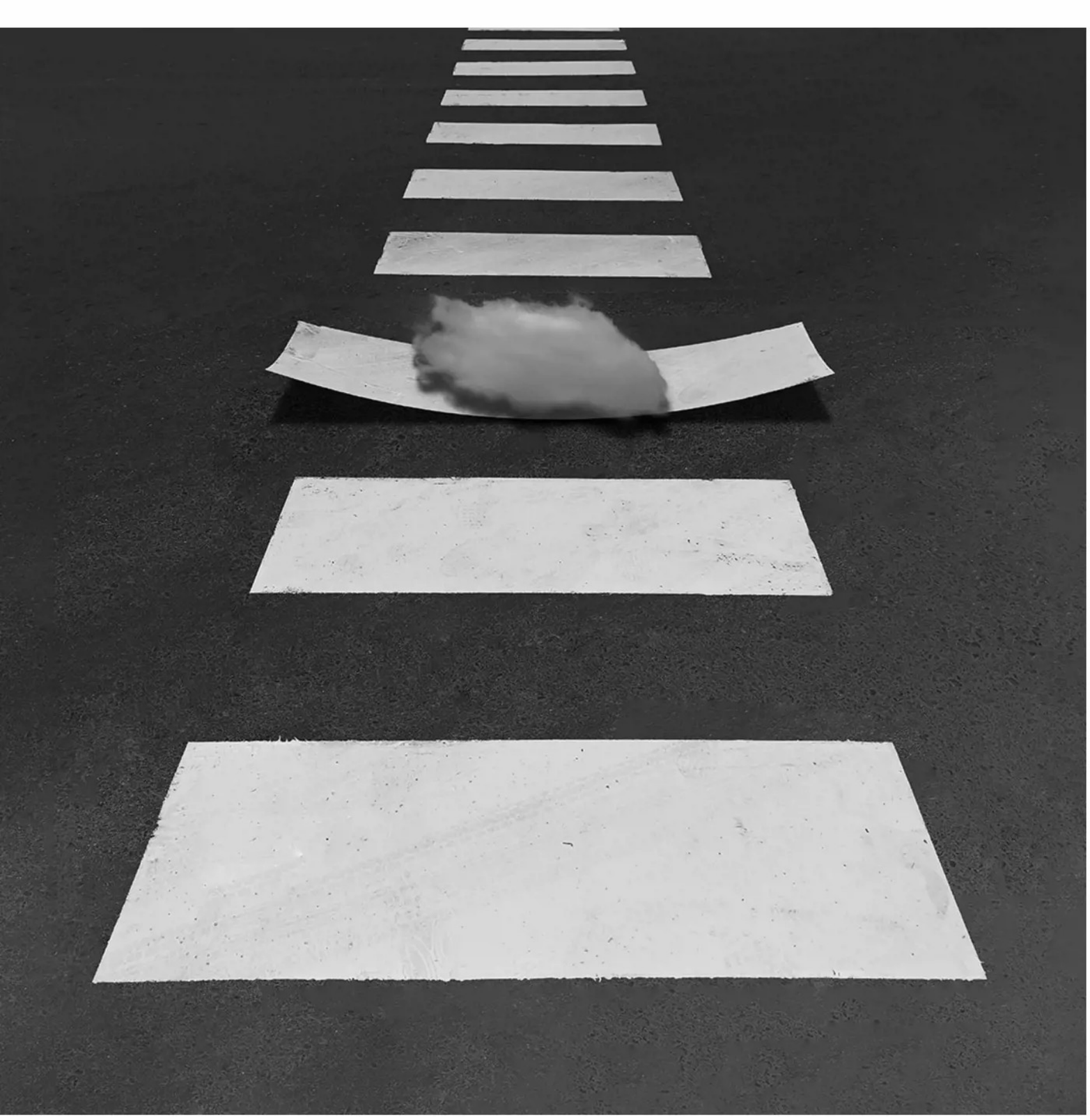


When someone tells me that one of my photographs moved them, or that it captured something they had felt but never been able to express—that's the greatest thing an image can do. Not to tell the viewer what to feel, but to give them a space where their own feelings finally have a form.

That, for me, is what conceptual art is for.

OVER THE YEARS, YOU'VE RECEIVED NUMEROUS INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITIONS AND AWARDS. WHAT HAS THIS SUCCESS MEANT TO YOU?

Every award I've received has meant something to me. Each one is a moment I genuinely cherish. But what I celebrate is never just the recognition itself. When one of my images wins, it's not only the photograph that wins. It's my vision, my instinct, my soul—because every image I make comes from something deep and personal within me. To have that recognized by judges across more than 25 countries is a profound and humbling feeling.



If I'm honest, I can't single out one award above all others. The list is long, and each carries its own meaning. But I will say this: the awards that have brought me the most personal satisfaction are the ones I won with images captured on a smartphone.

There's something deeply rewarding about taking a photograph on a device that fits in your pocket, with minimal equipment, in an unplanned moment, and having it compete with and surpass images made with professional cameras worth many times more. It confirms everything I believe about photography. It proves that vision can't be bought. It proves that the eye, the instinct, and the feeling behind the image will always matter more than the tool used to capture it.

Those wins, in particular, feel like a statement. Not just about my work, but about what photography can be when you stop waiting for the right equipment and start trusting the right instinct.

CONNECT WITH ALI ZOLGHADRI

Instagram: @alizolghadrii

THE STORY BEHIND MY FAVORITE PHOTOS...



THE SPACE IN BETWEEN

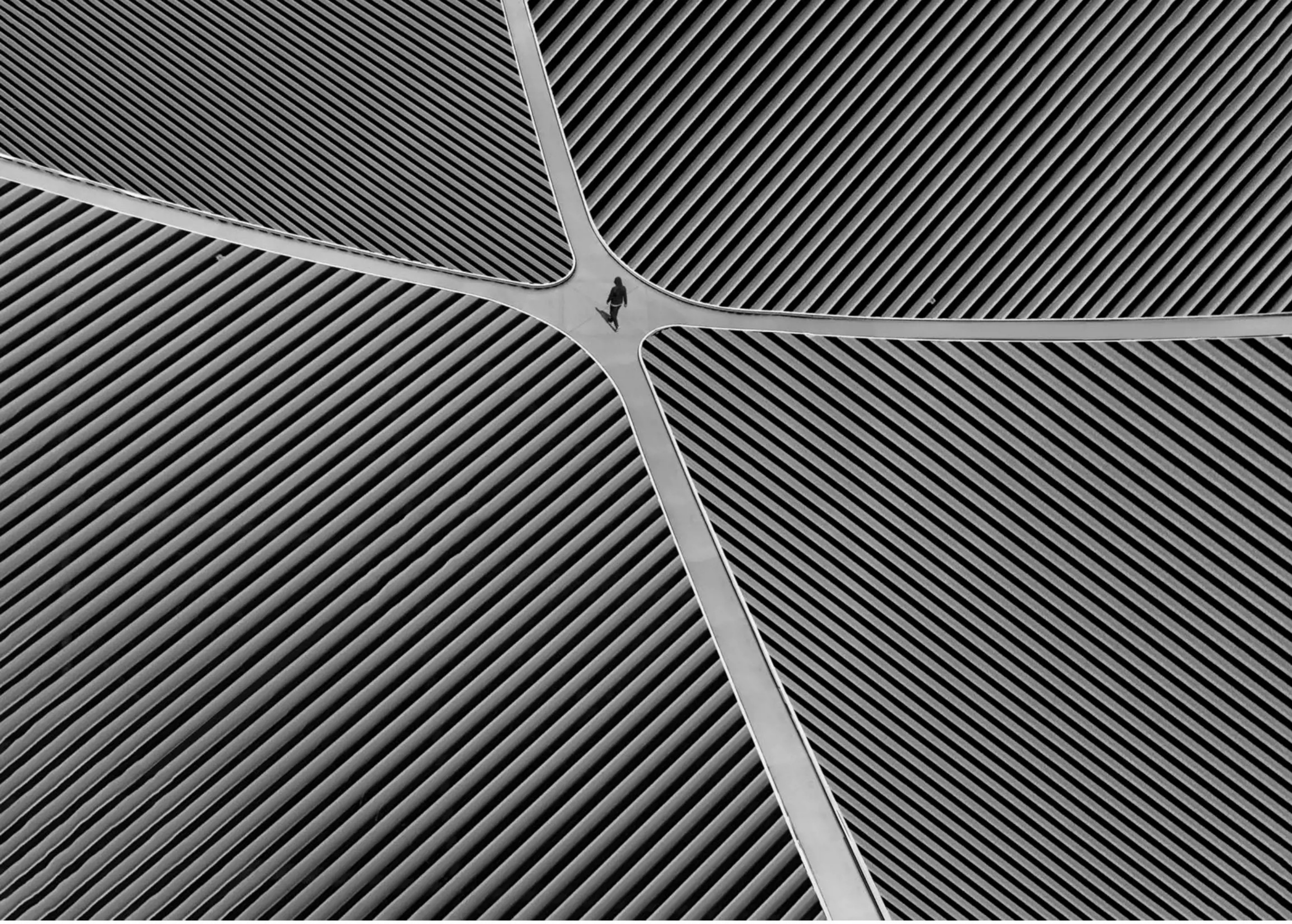
My first image is one of the most personally significant works that I've created—and one of my most recognized. "The Space In Between" was captured entirely on my smartphone and is a composite of three separate photographs, all taken at IranMall in Tehran—one of the largest shopping malls in the world, and home to some of the most striking contemporary architecture I've ever encountered.

What drew me to this space was not its scale, but its geometry. The sweeping curves, the concentric lines, the circular opening above—everything was in conversation with itself. I photographed the upper section separately from the lower and brought them together in post-production to create a world that felt both real and impossible.

At the center of this vast architectural universe stands a single human figure, almost invisible, almost nothing. And yet present.

The concept that emerged is one I find endlessly compelling: the human being suspended between two infinities. Above, an open sky—boundless, unknowable. Below, a dark void pulling inward—equally infinite, equally mysterious. And between them, a person. Small. Fragile. And still standing.

This image went on to become a finalist at the Sony Photography Competition. And it was featured in an interview with The Guardian—one of the proudest moments of my career. But what moves me most is simpler than any award. It was made with a phone, inside a mall, from three separate frames—and it asks one of the oldest questions there is: where do we stand in a universe this vast? And how do we find the courage to remain?



ASTRAY

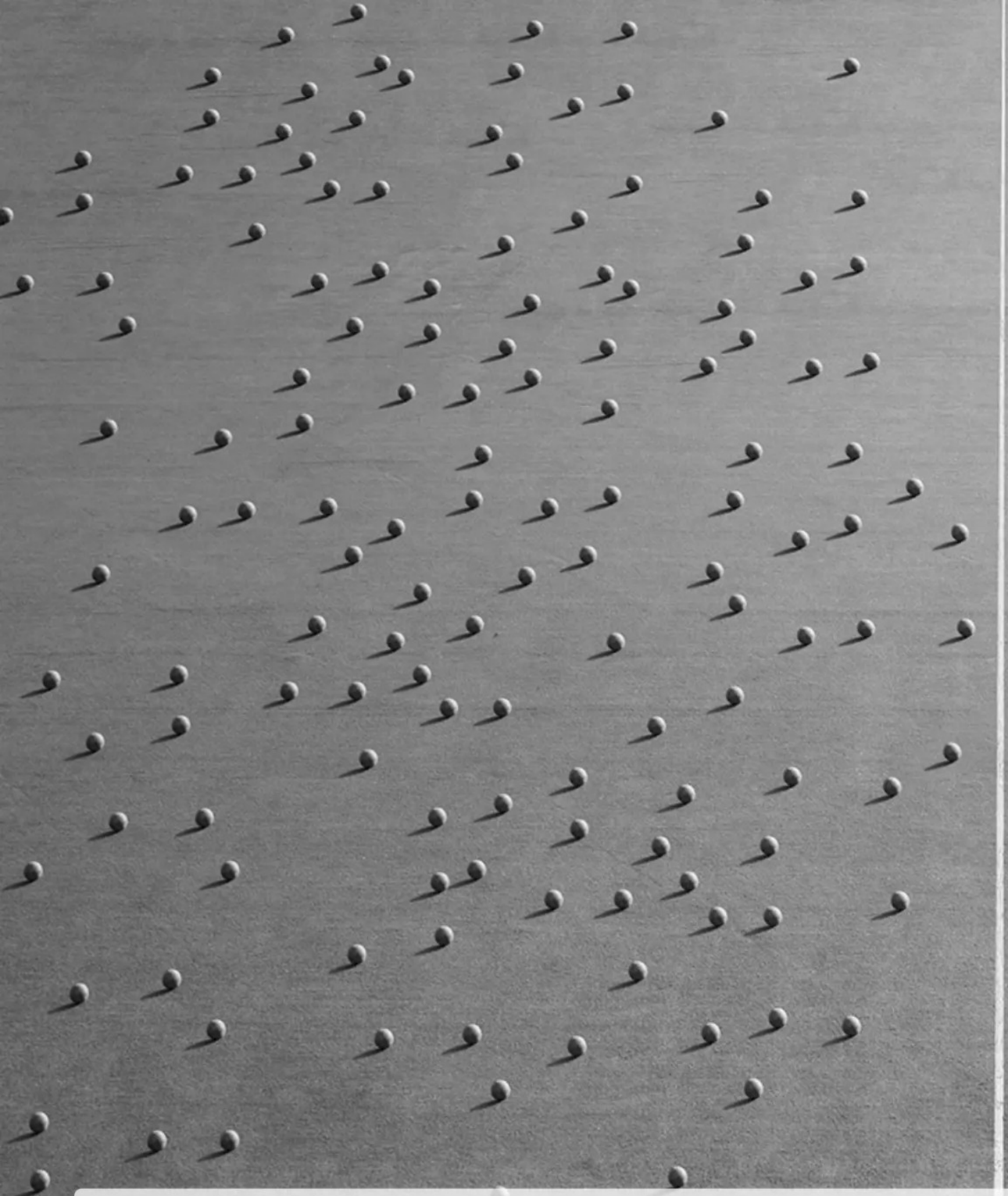
The second image I want to share is called “Astray.” It’s perhaps the most celebrated smartphone photograph I’ve ever taken.

I captured it at Istanbul Airport, entirely on my phone, while passing through. I wasn’t on a planned shoot. I looked up, saw the architecture—four vast, geometric sections converging at a single point—and in that intersection, a solitary figure walking alone. I raised my phone and took the shot.

What struck me immediately was the metaphor in the scene, without any intervention from me. A person standing at a crossroads—four paths, four directions, infinite possibilities—yet walking as though they know exactly where they’re going. But do they? The title “Astray” suggests otherwise. Perhaps they’re following a path that feels right but leads to an unintended destination. Perhaps they’ve already made the wrong turn without realizing it.

This is a crossroads we all recognize. In life, we arrive at these moments, four roads, no signs, no guarantees. Some of us choose correctly. Some of us don’t. And some of us never stop to question whether the path we’re on is truly the one we meant to take.

“Astray” went on to win First Place in the United States at the Minimalism Photography Competition and in France at the World Cup Photography Competition, both captured with nothing more than a smartphone. For me, this image is proof that vision finds its moment regardless of the tool in your hand.





CONFRONTATION

My third image, “Confrontation,” is one of the most awarded photographs of my career. And it’s the one whose creation taught me something important about the nature of my own process.

The image is a composite of two separate photographs, both taken with my camera on the same day. On one side of the frame, a field of footballs, arranged almost like an army—dozens of identical spheres casting identical shadows, moving as one mass toward a single boundary. On the other side, one man, alone, running. Just him and a single ball. And between these two worlds, a thin white line. A border. A confrontation.

What I love most about this image is that it arrived through instinct, not planning. I had brought a subject to a clean, open location to photograph a minimalist conceptual piece. But when I noticed the footballs on the other side of the field, something told me these two elements belonged in the same frame. I photographed both separately and brought them together in post-production, and only then did the full concept reveal itself.

One against many. The individual against the crowd. A single path chosen in the face of overwhelming pressure to go another way.

But like all my work, “Confrontation” refuses a single interpretation. Perhaps the man is brave. Perhaps he is lost. Perhaps the mass of balls represents expectation, conformity, the weight of what the world wants from us. Perhaps the lone figure is simply someone who decided to go his own way, and hasn’t looked back.

That ambiguity is exactly what I intended. The confrontation in this image is not just between a man and a crowd. It’s the confrontation we all face every day between who we are and who the world expects us to be.

I STOPPED USING THE RULE OF THIRDS - HERE'S WHY!!

Video Placeholder

Internet Connection Required

In this video, photographer and YouTuber Tim Northey explores composition in a simple and practical way, moving past memorized rules like the rule of thirds or leading lines. Instead of treating composition like a checklist, he focuses on balance and visual weight, asking what will draw the viewer's eye in and why.

Although this video isn't specifically about smartphone photography, Tim's advice is applicable to all forms of photography. He offers a clear and helpful guide for anyone who wants their photos to look more intentional and expressive, not just technically correct.

INTENTIONAL PORTRAITS: THE QUIET CRAFT OF PORTRAITURE WITH A SMARTPHONE

By Jack Hollingsworth

Every photographer I know, whether they use a phone, a DSLR, or an old camera, eventually develops their own set of tricks. These aren't flashy or attention-grabbing techniques. They're the quiet habits and small choices that, over time, shape how your portraits look and feel.

These aren't complicated, and they're not particularly glamorous. But they're the things I personally rely on every single day when I'm out photographing people with my iPhone. They help me work faster, stay present, and take portraits that feel intentional without feeling over-produced. Think of them as the small hinges that swing big doors.



WORK FAST AND KEEP THE ENERGY RIGHT

Most portraits aren't made in a studio. They happen in real life, with real people, in real moments. Real moments don't wait for you to adjust settings or search through menus.

I've learned to work in 60-second windows. If I can't take the portrait in a minute, I'm probably overthinking it. This approach helps you focus on the basics: light, the lens, distance, and expression. When you work like this, you stop looking for perfection and start focusing on being present in the moment. That's where the best portraits happen.

The energy you bring to the shoot matters as much as your camera settings. If you're stressed, your subject feels it. If you're distracted, they see it. Instead, shift the focus onto them. Ask questions, tell a joke, or give them a moment to relax. When people feel more comfortable, they'll open up. And when they open up, the portrait opens up with them. Your job isn't to perform. It's to pay attention.

One more thing: don't experiment when the moment matters. Save new apps, shooting modes, or new editing workflows for another time. When you see the right expression, use what you know and can do quickly. Boring is reliable, and reliable gets the shot.





GET YOUR SETTINGS RIGHT BEFORE YOU START

A few simple camera settings can improve your portraits without any extra effort. If your iPhone supports HEIF, use it. HEIF preserves colors better than JPEG, gives you more editing flexibility, and doesn't use as much storage. On newer iPhones, 24 megapixels is ideal for portraits. It gives you enough detail and space to crop, while the files remain easy to manage.

When using Portrait Mode, avoid the temptation to push the blur to the max. Setting the virtual aperture to about f/8 creates a natural separation between your subject and the background. It's subtle enough to feel natural rather than artificial. Also, shoot in color, even if you think the photo might look better in black and white. Make that call in post, once you can see the whole picture.

DISTANCE AND POSITION DO MOST OF THE WORK

Getting the distance right is one of the best ways to improve your portraits, and it doesn't cost anything. Keep at least an arm's length between you and your subject. If you get too close with a wide lens, faces can look distorted. Noses look bigger, foreheads stretch, and proportions change. If you want to fill the frame, use a longer lens instead of moving closer. Keeping your distance helps keep faces looking natural.

Try to have six to eight feet between your subject and the background. Even if you don't use Portrait Mode, this distance creates a natural separation and adds depth to your portrait. The background will look softer, your subject will stand out, and the whole image will feel more open.



For focal length, I usually use 24mm, 28mm, 35mm, or 48mm. These options give you natural proportions, clean lines, and a flattering perspective. Using these focal lengths helps your portraits look consistent, and over time, this can become your style.

Also, pay attention to how you position the body. Turn your subject about 45 degrees away from the camera, then have them turn their face back toward the lens. This creates shape and adds depth. Combine this with a head-and-shoulders crop, which is usually the most flattering, and you'll have a reliable foundation for a good portrait.

Finally, be careful where you crop your photo. If you cut the frame at elbows, wrists, knees, or ankles, the portrait can look awkward. Instead, crop between the joints so the image feels more natural and considered.



FIND GOOD LIGHT AND WORK WITH IT

Direct sunlight is the enemy of flattering portraits. It creates harsh shadows, makes people squint, and does unkind things to skin tones. Shade is much softer, more gentle, and forgiving. If you can, move your subject into the shade.

One thing to remember about shade is that it can make skin tones look slightly cooler or blue. When editing, use the Warmth slider in the Photos app to adjust the color and to bring everything back to life. It only takes a few seconds, and it can make a big difference.





When it comes to setting the exposure, it's better to adjust it yourself rather than letting the camera app decide. Lighter skin tones often look best with a slight bit of over-exposure, while darker skin tones often benefit from being slightly under-exposed. These are small adjustments—just a nudge of the exposure control—but they'll make the portrait feel more balanced and true to the person in front of you.

FOCUS, CAPTURE, AND SHARE

Always tap to focus on the eyes. The eyes are the anchor of any portrait. If they're sharp, the portrait feels alive. If they're not, something will feel off, even if the viewer doesn't know why. Make this a habit, and you'll rarely lose a portrait because of focus again.

If you're worried about getting the timing right, such as when your subject is moving or laughing, then use Burst mode. Burst mode takes a rapid series of photos in quick succession, giving you more options to choose from instead of just one. This technique has rescued more portraits than I can count.





It's also worth capturing two versions of any portrait: one with your subject looking directly at the camera, and one with them looking away. The first creates a sense of connection, while the second gives you mood. Together, they give you more options, and having more options is always good.

Finally, if you're photographing someone who has their own iPhone, use Airdrop to send them the portrait before you leave. It only takes a few seconds and makes the experience complete. People appreciate having the image right away.

SMALL DECISIONS, BIG DIFFERENCE

You don't have to remember everything I've outlined here all at once. Choose two or three of these habits, practice them until they become second nature, and then add more to your process. Over time, these small decisions stack up. They make your portraits cleaner, sharper, more flattering, and more intentional. It's the small things, done regularly, that make a big difference.



About the Author

Jack Hollingsworth is a photographer, educator, and author with more than 40 years behind the camera and over 14 years specializing in iPhone photography.

Known globally as "iPhoneJack," he has taught thousands through his books, workshops, and online platforms, helping everyday creators make more intentional, more beautiful, and more meaningful images with the camera they carry every day.

His teaching blends practical technique with real-world wisdom, demystifying the iPhone's technology and empowering people to see the world with fresh eyes.



SHOOTING STREET PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY – HOW TO GET MORE YES'S THAN NO'S!

Video Placeholder

Internet Connection Required

Asking a stranger if you can photograph them is uncomfortable. Until you learn how. Then it becomes one of the most rewarding things you can do with a camera. In this video, Jack Hollingsworth visits Provincetown, Cape Cod, one of the most cosmopolitan streets in the US, and asks strangers if he can take their portraits. Jack shares his approach step by step, and you'll see how he gets more people to say "yes" than "no".

How to Shoot Beautiful Portraits of People That Get Attention



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BECAUSE A GREAT PORTRAIT
DOES MORE THAN LOOK GOOD

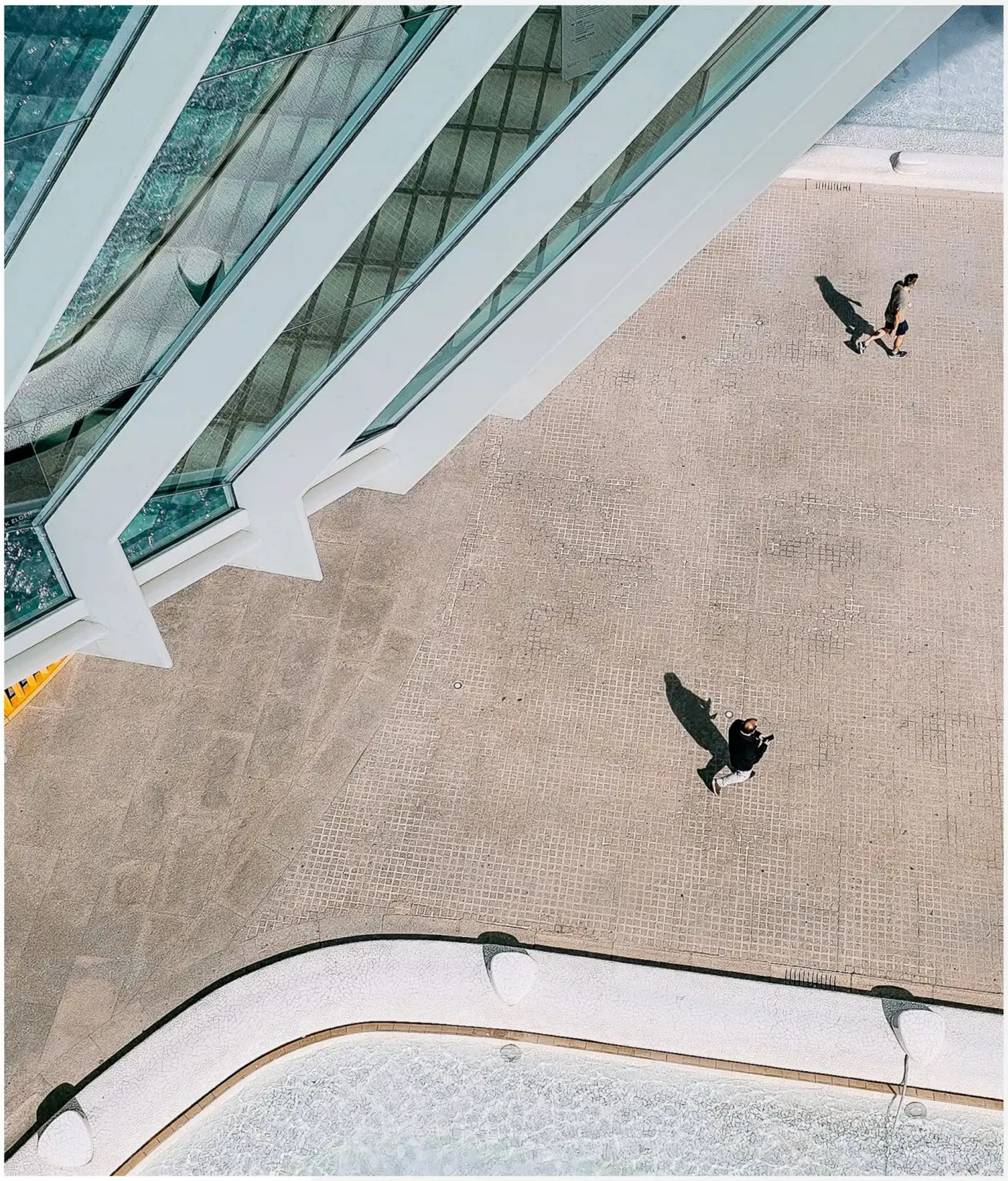
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HOW TO EXPLORE NEW ANGLES IN YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY

By Mark Myerson

The human mind is drawn to anything out of the ordinary. This psychological trait isn't a modern development. In fact, it's a leftover from our hunter-gatherer past. Investing attention in that unusual pattern in the grass is what allowed our ancestors to detect prowling predators.

Today, the same mental model plays a significant role in our appreciation of art. The pieces that most attract our attention provide novelty. Artists who earn acclaim avoid the mundane. Even when their primary subject might be considered humdrum, they strive to produce a unique body of work.



We see this in photography. Whether it's light and shade, patterns, shapes, symmetry, color, or an evocative human scene, the best photographs show us something we don't see every day.

Finding an endless stream of newness can be challenging, of course. But there are ways to introduce novelty into any composition. Perhaps the easiest is a change of perspective.

To discover how a different viewpoint can transform your images for the better, I spoke to top mobile photographer, Barbara Januszewska-Piróg.

BEYOND THE NORM

The National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra building is an imposing, modern structure situated in the city of Katowice. It's been photographed many times, usually by visitors standing in the surrounding green space.



The vast majority of these images simply frame the building from a normal, human perspective. It's literally point and shoot. The resulting photos are competently composed, but lacking any creative spark.

Barbara Januszewska-Piróg wanted to produce something more distinctive. Her solution? Look up. Rather than trying to frame the entire building, she placed the lens of her Galaxy S23 Ultra between the bold red struts of the fascia and aimed for the sky. The resulting image is pretty compelling.

This is just one example of how Januszewska-Piróg plays with perspective to elevate her work. An award-winning architectural and travel photographer based in Zielona Góra, Poland, she has a portfolio filled with eye-catching angles and unusual framing.

"In the beginning, I photographed almost everything: streets, buildings, plants, and I even did creative self-portraits," she tells me.

"Over time, I realized that architecture and the urban landscape were the subjects I feel most comfortable with. That passion evolved into a conscious search for unique frames."



A DELIBERATE SEARCH

On a practical level, the search for originality involves covering more ground than the average photographer does. "When I approach a location, I'm rarely satisfied with the first, most obvious shot," explains Januszewska-Piróg.

"I allow myself a moment of mindfulness to notice what's hidden on the sidelines. I intentionally change my position, crouch down, look through obstacles, and search for reflections."

In other words, Januszewska-Piróg is specifically avoiding the obvious. Rather than simply walking up to a scene and hitting the shutter, she explores the environment in search of her own angle.

This is a technique that photographers in every genre can embrace. As she notes, "A smartphone is a tool that offers incredible freedom; it's lightweight, discreet, and you can place it almost anywhere."

"...When I approach a location, I'm rarely satisfied with the first, most obvious shot...."

NARROWING YOUR FOCUS

Of course, there's more to composition than wandering around. I ask how she eventually decides where to stop and take a picture.

"I really enjoy building images layer by layer. Often, it's an element in the foreground, an unexpected frame, or the play of light that catches my eye first," she tells me. "Then, the main subject complements that space and gives it its ultimate meaning."

This is a good mental model to adopt. In most cases, we know what our primary subject will be. The creative test is to find the right framing.

Here's an exercise to try: the next time you take a picture, immediately look for an alternative angle. Go low, go high, move closer, shoot upwards, or zoom in. Whatever you do, avoid taking a picture that mirrors your normal eye-level view.

Because that's what everyone else will shoot.

LEARN THE RULES, SO YOU CAN BREAK THEM

Not all of your experimental angles will work. This is where an education in composition can help. Not because you should always follow the guidelines, but because the key principles provide a strong foundation for your experimentation.

"My most important advice is to combine two things: theory and practice," says Januszewska-Piróg. "It's truly worth reading about composition and learning its rules. Get to know the rule of thirds, geometry, leading lines, or the golden ratio. Books and photo albums by other photographers build our visual library."

"And then, go out and start breaking those rules! Understanding the principles of composition, combined with the courage to experiment, is the ultimate way to find your own unique voice."

Remember, that is the ultimate goal here. Difference alone won't make you a great photographer. Neither will perfect adherence to the rules of composition. The middle ground is where the magic happens.

Or to quote Januszewska-Piróg: "It's a balance between order and chaos."

EXPLORING WITHIN YOUR GENRE

While Barbara Januszewska-Piróg mostly works within architecture and travel, we can all apply the same ideas to our own niche. The only variance is in how much ground you have to cover.

Enjoy taking landscapes? You might need to strap up your hiking boots and find a lesser-known viewpoint. Street photographers have it easier. Simply moving your phone to your hip or finding a balcony to shoot from can be sufficient.

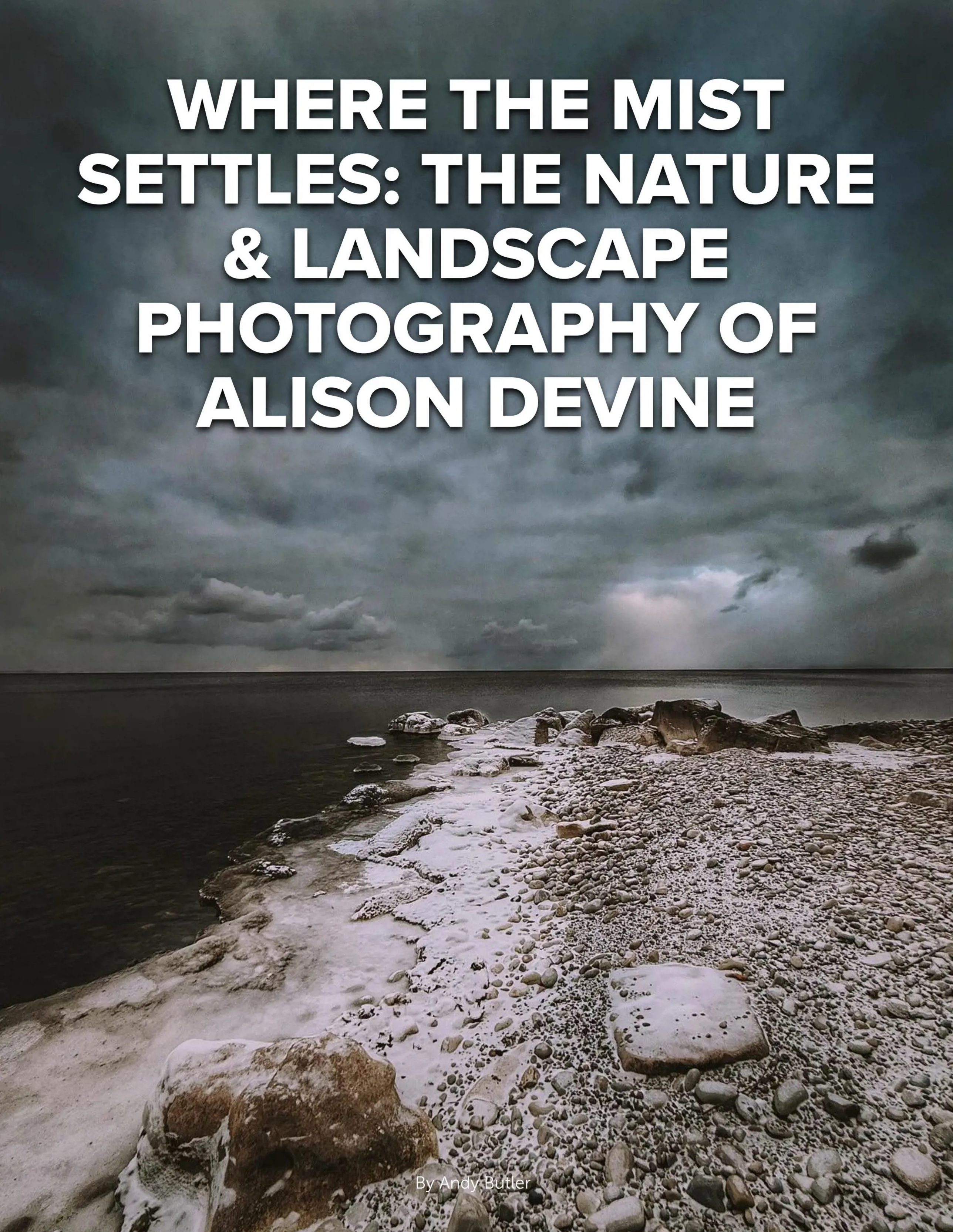
In portraiture, moving closer to or further from your subject can have a similar effect. Nature images are usually taken head-on, but what about shooting from the underside of a flower, as the sunlight streams through the petals? Shooting vertically down from a vantage point can also reveal stunning organic patterns.



And travel photographers have even more possibilities to work with, whether it's using a window as a frame, market produce as foreground interest, or getting down low to capture reflections on the surface of a puddle.

Remember, extraordinary images are rarely served on a plate. It's up to you, the photographer, to forage for raw ingredients and prepare a visual feast.

WHERE THE MIST SETTLES: THE NATURE & LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY OF ALISON DEVINE



By Andy Butler

Alison Devine is a smartphone photographer from Hamilton, Ontario. Her images capture the quiet corners of the natural world, from misty forests and still lakes to flowers caught in the soft light of dawn or dusk. There's a beautiful stillness and sense of calm in Alison's work, and an atmosphere that invites the viewer to linger for a short while. That emotional pull is at the heart of all her work.

Alison's photographic journey began with photos of the busy streets of her home city. When the Covid pandemic hit, Alison's direction changed to capturing quieter, more thoughtful landscapes away from the hustle and bustle of city life. While her subject matter has changed, her main focus hasn't, as Alison's aim has always been to draw viewers into the images she takes.



I've been a fan of Alison's photography for some time now and was eager to learn more about her photographic journey, her creative process, and the stories behind some of her most personal photos.

COULD YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY AND HOW YOU DISCOVERED SMARTPHONE PHOTOGRAPHY?

My photographic journey began about 9 years ago when I found myself looking for a creative outlet after nearly 2 decades away from artistic pursuits. I started using an iPhone 5 and quickly discovered how expressive mobile photography could be.

At first, I spent a lot of time experimenting with different subjects, compositions, and editing styles as I tried to develop my own style. There was a lot of trial and error, but looking back, that period of uncertainty was an important process to go through. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was laying the foundation for my style, taking small but meaningful steps in its evolution.



Early on, I focused on showcasing my home city, Hamilton, Ontario, in my work. I was drawn to the urban environment, and my very early photos reflect this with architecture, street scenes, and especially graffiti. I tried to present these familiar spaces in unexpected or slightly reimagined ways, offering viewers a fresh perspective on the urban everyday.

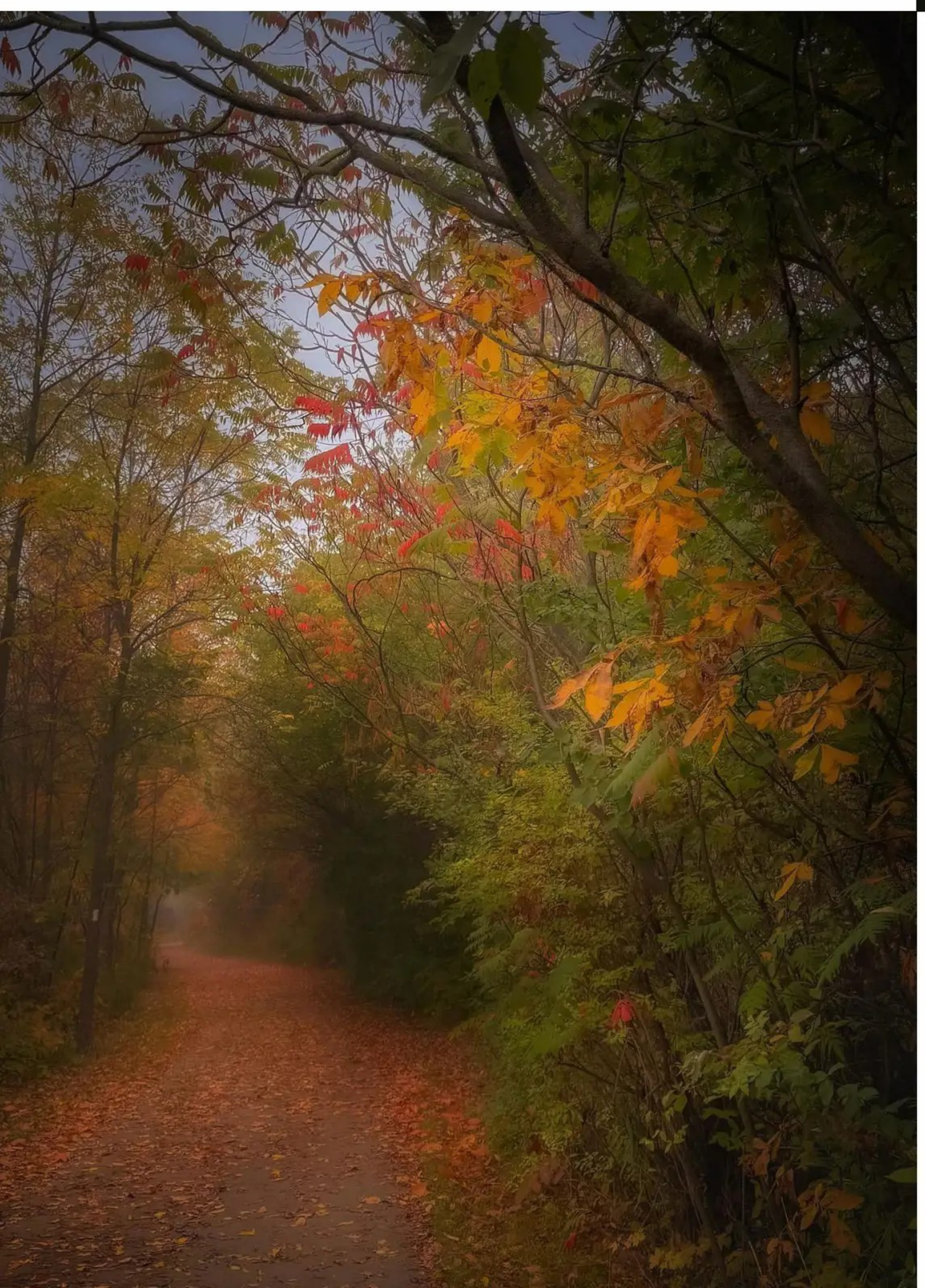
From the start, I wasn't interested in making strictly documentary photos. I wanted to capture fleeting moments—those quiet, often overlooked scenes—and fill them with emotion. My goal was to invite viewers in, encouraging them to connect with the mood, atmosphere, and story in each image.

As my journey progressed, so did my tools. And now I use the iPhone 16 Pro Max. People often ask why I haven't switched to a traditional camera. For me, it's simple: how I take the photo isn't as important as what I create. What matters most is the ability to create images that resonate, evoke emotion, and foster a connection between the photograph and the viewer.

YOUR WORK SHIFTED TOWARD NATURE DURING THE PANDEMIC. HOW DID THAT CHANGE IN ENVIRONMENT RESHAPE NOT JUST YOUR SUBJECT MATTER, BUT THE WAY YOU APPROACH MAKING AN IMAGE? WHAT NOW COMPELS YOU TO RAISE THE CAMERA AND TAKE A PHOTO?

Before the pandemic, my photography was rooted in the urban environment. I worked full-time in the city and was deeply inspired by its bustling energy. That rhythm, tension, movement, and the constant motion naturally found their way into my images and shaped how I approached the photographs I took.





Then, in March 2020, like so many others, my perspective shifted dramatically. My physical world changed almost overnight as I transitioned to working full-time from home, removed from the bustling of city life. As a result, I began exploring the outdoors, hiking trails, waterfalls, and spending time immersed in nature. Where there had once been steel, noise, and urgency, I found trees, pathways, sunrises, and sunsets. I'm so fortunate to live in such a beautiful and scenic city.

That change in environment had a big impact on my work. I traded the city's energy and tension for something quieter and more thoughtful. My process slowed down, and I learned to be more patient and notice small details. This shift felt connected to what many people were experiencing at the time. A move toward solitude, reflection, and healing.

My images became more introspective, more subdued, but my core intention remained unchanged. I've always aimed to imbue my photographs with emotion and to narrow the distance between the image and the viewer. That goal carried forward, even as the subject matter evolved.

What surprised me most was how natural the change felt. I thought leaving the city's energy would be hard, but it actually felt right, like something I needed. The change matched what was happening all over the world and in my own life. Nature became a place for me to escape stress, find quiet, and reconnect.



What compels me to raise the camera now is often that same sense of connection. I'm always searching for something distinctive—an angle, a moment, a quality of light that feels slightly outside the ordinary. Whether in the city or in nature, I'm driven by the desire to create images that resonate emotionally, that invite the viewer in, and that offer a perspective they may not have noticed on their own.

During the pandemic, I also became more active on social media, particularly Instagram. At that time, it felt like a genuinely supportive space for photographers, and I found myself both encouraged and inspired by the work I was seeing. Engaging with that community opened my eyes to new perspectives, styles, and approaches to storytelling through images. Their creativity challenged me to think differently, to refine my own vision, and to push beyond what felt familiar. That sense of shared inspiration truly became an important part of my growth during that period. I've developed wonderful connections that have truly influenced how I photograph, edit, and produce the final work.



COMPOSITION FORMS A STRONG ELEMENT IN YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY, PARTICULARLY THROUGH FRAMING AND LAYERING. WHAT'S YOUR APPROACH TO COMPOSITION WHEN MAKING A PHOTOGRAPH? WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE OTHERS WHO WANT TO STRENGTHEN THE STRUCTURE AND DEPTH OF THEIR IMAGES?

Composition plays a central role in how I approach an image. Creating depth is about softening the boundary between the photograph and the viewer, blurring the line between where their space ends and the image begins. When depth works well, it pulls the viewer in and makes them feel part of the scene, not just an observer. I often use leading lines to help with this.

Framing adds another dimension. I think of it as a way of introducing a sense of mystery, almost voyeuristic in nature, as though the viewer is quietly peeking into a moment that wasn't necessarily meant for them. It creates a kind of invitation, encouraging curiosity and engagement, while still holding something back.



When I'm composing an image, I'm aware of layers—foreground, midground, and background—and how they interact. I look for natural elements or structures that can guide the eye, build depth, and create a sense of balance, while still leaving room for interpretation. Like depth, this draws the viewer in, helps build the connection, and tells the story.

For those looking to strengthen the structure and depth of their images, my advice would be to slow down and be intentional, while still maximizing the spontaneity the mobile device allows.

Pay attention to what's happening at the edges of your frame just as much as the center. Look for opportunities to shoot through or around elements rather than directly at a subject. Even small shifts in position can dramatically change how an image feels.

Most importantly, think about how you want the viewer to experience the photograph. Composition isn't just about arrangement—it's about engagement. When you approach it with that in mind, depth and structure begin to emerge more naturally.



LIGHT PLAYS A CENTRAL ROLE IN YOUR WORK, ESPECIALLY ON MISTY MORNINGS AND AT SUNRISE. HOW IMPORTANT IS LIGHT TO YOU WHEN PHOTOGRAPHING? AND WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE LOOK FOR IF THEY WANT TO IMPROVE THEIR USE OF LIGHT?

Light is an important component in my work. It's not just an element of the photograph. It sets the mood. It shapes how a scene is felt just as much as how it's seen.

I'm particularly drawn to the softness of early morning light, especially when it filters through mist. There's a quietness to it, a kind of still, diffused glow that feels almost suspended in time. Similarly, a moody setting sun can introduce depth and emotion in a completely different way, with longer shadows and a more dramatic tonal range. Both conditions allow me to move beyond simply capturing a scene and instead interpret it emotionally.

When I'm photographing, I'm always paying attention to how light interacts with the environment, how it falls across a subject, what it reveals, and, maybe even more importantly, what it conceals. In misty conditions, light becomes even more expressive. It softens contrasts, creates layers, and adds that sense of atmosphere that I'm constantly drawn to.



For those looking to improve their use of light, I'd suggest starting with observation. Watch how light changes throughout the day and how it transforms even the most familiar scenes. I enjoy taking photos during the quieter times, such as early morning or late evening, when the light is less harsh and more directional.

I don't look for "good" light, but for "interesting" light. Backlighting, diffused light, or even light that's partly hidden can add much more emotion and depth than perfect lighting. Sometimes, what you leave in shadow can be just as powerful as what you show, helping viewers connect and engage.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE TIME OF DAY, YEAR, OR SEASON, OR A FAVORITE WEATHER TYPE THAT YOU LIKE TO PHOTOGRAPH YOUR LANDSCAPES IN?

Absolutely. I'm especially drawn to misty, fog-laden atmospheres, ideally paired with a muted sunrise or sunset. When I reflect on the images that feel most successful to me, the ones that best capture the emotion I'm trying to convey and truly engage the viewer, they almost always exist within those conditions.

For me, the weather is a powerful driver of mood. I've taken images on bright summer days with blue skies or dramatic sunsets, but I often find it harder to create a deeper emotion in those scenes. There's a clarity to them that can feel almost too complete, as if there's no need to further the connection; the engagement is done.

Fog and mist, on the other hand, bring in mystery and leave things open to interpretation. They soften edges and hide details. Instead of just watching, the viewer becomes part of the scene. They're invited to step in, fill in shapes, figure out what's hidden, and use their imagination.

That act of participation amplifies the emotional impact. It creates space for contemplation and allows the viewer to project their own feelings into the scene, whether that's a sense of solitude, quiet tension, or even something more personal and reflective. In many ways, those conditions help me create images that are less about what is seen and more about what is felt.



WHICH APPS DO YOU USE TO SHOOT AND EDIT YOUR PHOTOS? IS THERE A PROCESS OR APPROACH YOU TEND TO FOLLOW WHEN EDITING YOUR IMAGES?

I keep my process intentionally simple and entirely mobile. I shoot and edit everything on my phone, primarily using Snapseed and Adobe Lightroom Mobile.



Each app serves a slightly different purpose in my process. Snapseed is often where I begin as it allows me to make subtle, selective adjustments that help shape the image. Lightroom gives me more control over tonal range, color grading, and fine-tuning, especially when I want to bring consistency to a series of images.

My overall approach to editing is two-fold. I want to maintain the spirit of the image, remembering what drew me to it in the first place, but I also want to enhance the mood by tweaking exposure, clarity, and tones. I tend to do this gradually, building the image step by step, questioning whether each change strengthens the emotional impact—or perhaps starting again, going back to the photo, remembering what I was trying to capture, and editing to align with that.

I also try to stay consistent with my aesthetic. Lately, I've been leaning into softer tones, controlled contrast, and a slightly subdued palette, especially in the atmospheric photos. The goal is always the same: to support the feeling of the image, not overpower it.

In the end, editing is less about applying a formula and more about responding to the image itself. Quite frankly, it's a trial-and-error process with me.

MANY OF YOUR IMAGES SUGGEST A SLOWNESS AND STILL TRANQUILITY. HOW IMPORTANT IS TAKING YOUR TIME WHEN MAKING PHOTOGRAPHS?

There are certainly times when my photographs happen very spontaneously, and others when it's a much more contemplative process. When I reflect on my photos, the ones that really speak to me personally are when I'm moving more slowly, attuned to the quieter details of the scene.

Slowing down helps me look beyond the first impression and notice the natural elements that appear, letting me capture them in a unique way. I begin to notice how light moves across a surface, how different elements of the scene connect, a splash of color in an otherwise muted landscape, or how a moment changes if I wait. This is especially important when shooting in mist. It takes patience—not just waiting for the right composition, but letting the scene settle on its own.

It happens rarely, but occasionally, I'll take a photo and feel the completeness of the shot. And it's in those moments where I realize it was because I was being "present" enough to feel and to capture that emotion. Those times feel especially gratifying.

YOU HAVE A SECOND INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT THAT'S DEDICATED TO FLOWER PHOTOGRAPHY. TELL US MORE ABOUT THIS.

I've always tried to make my flower photos feel closer to "fine art." While it's rooted in photography, my intention is to create images that feel more interpretive and expressive.



Flowers, to me, are the embodiment of beauty in all its stages. I'm naturally drawn to them. I enjoy living with them in my space, observing how they change day by day. What fascinates me the most is that their character doesn't diminish as they age. I find just as much, if not more, beauty in their final, withering states as I do when they're in full bloom.

By isolating one or two flowers against a black background, I aim to create a quiet sense of drama and focus. I want to show them from a unique angle, maybe even with some vulnerability. Without any distractions, the viewer is invited to look closer, notice the texture, shape, and small changes that might be missed otherwise. It's simply their moment to shine.

At its core, this work reflects my thoughts on time and impermanence. The images speak to the idea of loss, but also to the possibility of finding beauty within that process. Aging, in this sense, isn't something that diminishes value. It reveals a different kind of presence. It's something to be acknowledged, even celebrated.

DO YOU HAVE ANY INCREDIBLE ENCOUNTERS OR A STORY THAT REALLY IS PART OF YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO TELL US?

Reviewing my photos in response to this question has been an interesting exercise. Not only do I see the evolution of my photographic style, but I can trace how my own journey has influenced those changes and moments of development. I can almost look at my photos as a kind of personal visual journal.

The past six years have been very challenging for me personally. I think part of the reason I turned to mobile photography was to find myself again, to carve out small moments where I could remember who I am, and to take a few quiet breaths away from the sadness in my life. Photography became both an escape and a way to return to myself.



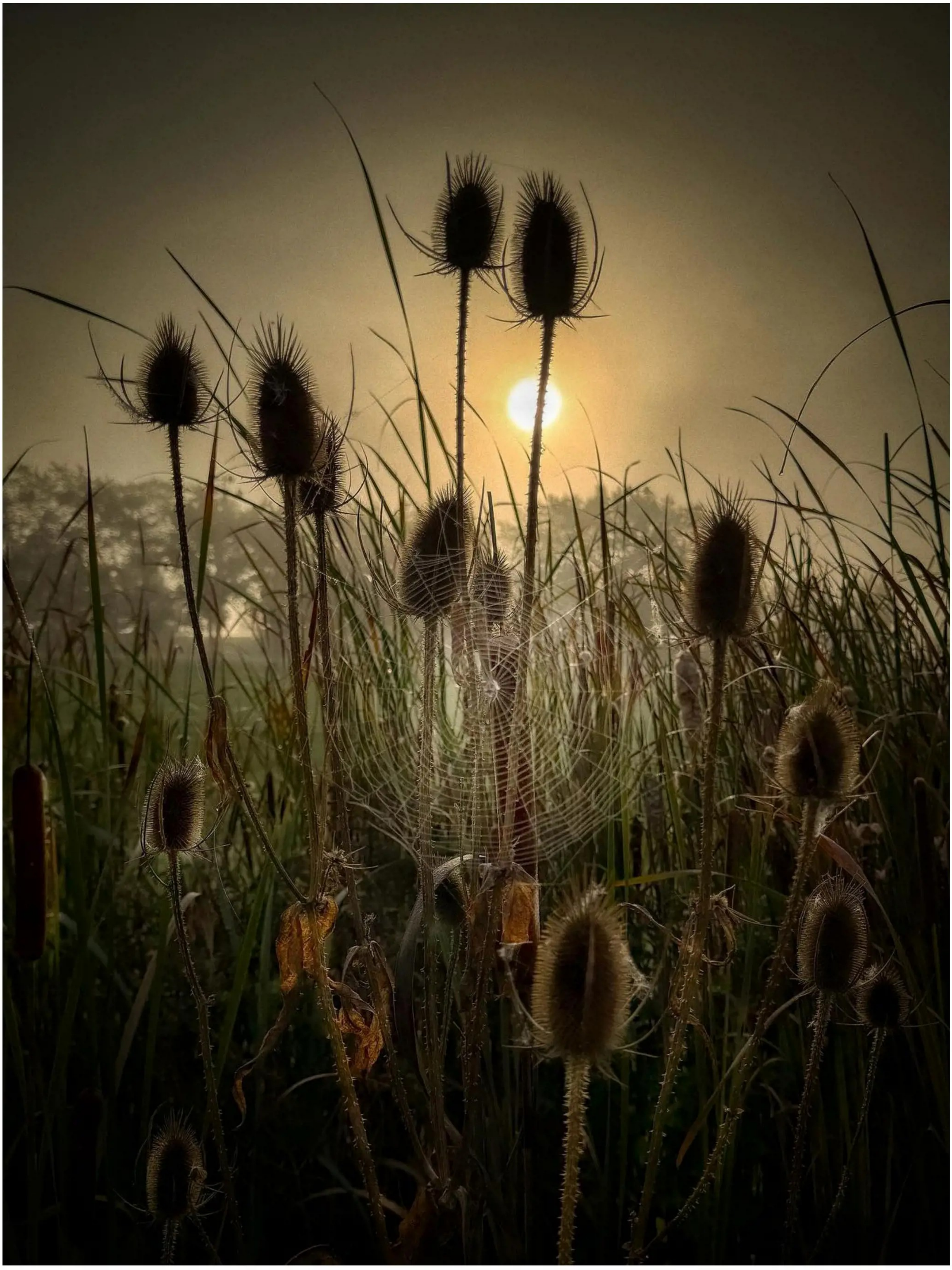
During that time, I played a role in caring for my parents who had entered life's final chapter. Over the past two years in particular, I've felt myself drawn increasingly to atmospheric, moody scenes, capturing fleeting moments like mist rolling over a field, trees dissolving into bands of fog, or a sunrise struggling to break through the haze. Looking back, I can see there's meaning in that shift. Those images reflect the ambiguity of time, the fragility of love, and the quiet, often indescribable weight of grief. They hold a sense of impermanence, but also of presence, of noticing what is still here, even as so much has changed.

In many ways, photography has helped me process what cannot easily be put into words. It's given me a way to hold onto moments, to sit with emotion, and to move through it—one image at a time.

FOLLOW ALISON DEVINE

Instagram: @hd_ally69

Instagram: @hd_ally_flowers



THE STORY BEHIND MY FAVORITE PHOTOS...

FIELD WITH MIST

The first photograph was taken in early fall, when the landscape had shifted into its quieter season. In the foreground, some vegetation had already surrendered its color, leaving behind shapes that felt almost sculptural. Beyond, a low band of mist stretched across the farmer's field, softening the horizon and blurring the line between earth and sky.

What held me in that moment was the light. The rising sun, just out of frame, cast an orange glow that illuminated the mist from behind, giving the scene a gentle warmth despite the coolness of the air. Above, the silhouettes of distant trees emerged, faint but present, like memories coming into focus. The scene felt caught between seasons, between night and day. It's the kind of moment where viewers can bring their own feelings: nostalgia, calm, or hope.

SUNRISE WITH TREES

The second image was taken on a foggy morning when the world felt unusually muted. The two trees, stripped of branches, almost skeletal, stood against the rising sun. The fog softened everything except its silhouette, and the warm glow behind it felt both ghostly and comforting. When I edited it to be darker, the contrast became even more pronounced: the starkness of the tree against a light that seemed to be trying to break through.

What stayed with me wasn't the tree itself, but the atmosphere around it. It felt like a moment suspended between endings and beginnings. The scene had a quiet emotional tension that I hoped viewers could step into. Some might see solitude, others resilience, others a kind of quiet rebirth. That ambiguity was what made me pick up my phone.

WINTER BENCH

Winter has always been my most challenging season — its starkness, its silence, and, to me, its lack of visual appeal. Maybe that's why this photograph stayed with me. It was taken on a snow-covered forest trail lined by a simple wooden fence, the kind of place that feels both familiar and slightly otherworldly when winter settles in. The light was dark and moody, the snow an eerie white-blue, almost glowing against the shadows.

What drew me in was the small pocket of light in the distance, filtering through the trees and landing directly on a bench, as if the forest had chosen that one spot to reveal.

What stayed with me was the contrast: the way a single touch of light can shift the emotional temperature of an entire scene — a reminder that even in the harshest landscapes, light still finds a way through.

5 AI-FREE EDITING APPS TO TRY IN 2026

By Nicki Fitz-Gerald

Over the last couple of years, it seems that every new photo editing app has arrived with the letters “AI” attached somewhere. AI sky replacements, AI portrait enhancement, AI image generation, AI object removal, and AI assistants that promise to edit your photos for you with a single tap.

For some photographers and artists, this is exciting. For others, myself included, it raises an interesting question. If the software is making all the creative decisions, where does that leave the artist?



Don’t get me wrong, artificial intelligence can be a useful tool. But as someone who loves creating painterly images, digital collage, and expressive artwork from my photographs, I still find myself returning to apps that put me firmly in control of the process. I love to experiment with color, texture, layering and composition, and part of the enjoyment is making mistakes and discovering unexpected possibilities along the way.

For me, that’s where the real creativity happens.

Before looking at my favorite AI-free apps, it’s worth considering what we actually mean when we talk about “AI.”

For me, an AI app is one that analyses an image and begins making creative decisions on my behalf. It might generate entirely new content, replace a background, invent a sky, remove objects automatically, or create artwork from a text prompt. The software becomes an active and dominant participant in the creative process and the end result, rather than simply providing tools.

Traditional editing apps work differently. They provide brushes, sliders, layers, masks, and adjustments, but the decisions remain mine. If an image succeeds or fails, the responsibility sits squarely with me.

Perhaps that is why I continue to enjoy working without AI.

When I create an image manually, I feel that I'm developing my eye as an artist. Every color adjustment teaches me something. Every texture placement forces me to think about balance and mood. Every brushstroke becomes part of the conversation between myself and the image. I enjoy the process... I don't just want to race to the finish.

Another reason I enjoy non-AI workflows is that they often lead to happy accidents. Some of my favorite images have emerged from experiments that went slightly wrong. A texture that was too strong. A color palette I wasn't expecting. A blend mode that transformed the entire picture. These discoveries rarely happen when everything is automated.

Most importantly, working this way allows me to develop a personal style. In a world where many AI-generated images are beginning to look surprisingly similar, like the "AI slop" posters advertising local events, individuality becomes increasingly valuable.

So here are five apps that I continue to enjoy using in 2026, where I feel very much in the driving seat when it comes to creativity.





PROCREATE

If I could only keep one creative app on my iPad, it would probably be Procreate.

Although it was designed primarily for illustration, it's become the center of my creative workflow. What I love about Procreate is that it allows photographs to become something else entirely. A simple street scene can evolve into a painterly illustration. A handful of unrelated photographs can be reimagined into a digital collage. And a texture captured on a wall during a daily walk can find its way into one of my portraits, landscapes, or abstracts.

The brushes are simply wonderful. Whether I want loose painterly marks, subtle texture, expressive sketching, or detailed finishing work, Procreate gives me complete control.

I also appreciate the way it encourages experimentation. Layers can be duplicated, masks can be adjusted, and colors can be changed without fear of ruining the original image. It feels less like editing and more like play—reminiscent of my days spent experimenting in the print room at art college.

ICOLORAMA

Although it’s no longer actively developed, iColorama remains one of the most creative apps I’ve ever used, and I still use it on my iPad. I also use iColorama S, the iPhone version, on my phone.

There are moments when I open it with no idea where I’m going and simply start exploring. A photograph can become a painting, a sketch, an abstract image, or something entirely unexpected.

What continues to impress me is the sheer depth of creative possibilities. There are countless filters, textures, painterly effects, and blending options. Even after years of using the app, I still stumble across combinations that surprise me.

Unlike many modern apps that focus on speed and simplicity, iColorama encourages exploration and rewards curiosity. Sometimes the results are unsuccessful, but occasionally something magical happens.

Those moments keep me coming back.



This app is available for iPhone as iColorama S ($1.99) and for iPad as iColorama ($2.99).

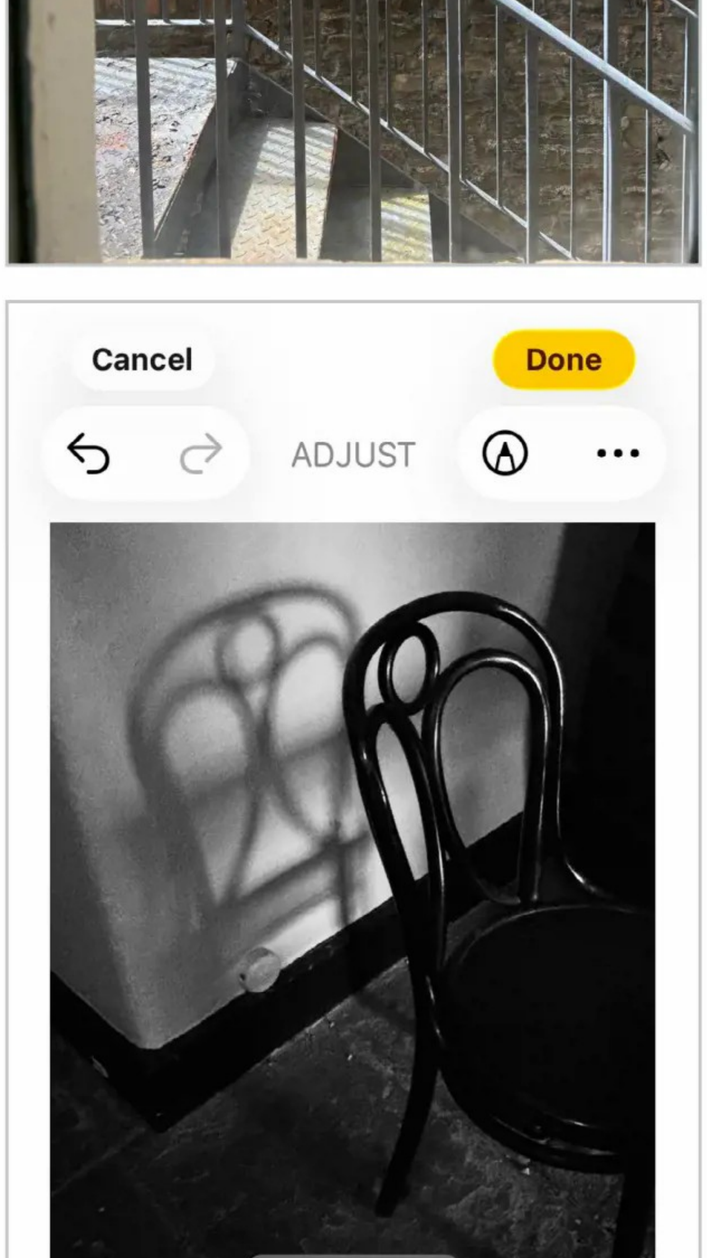


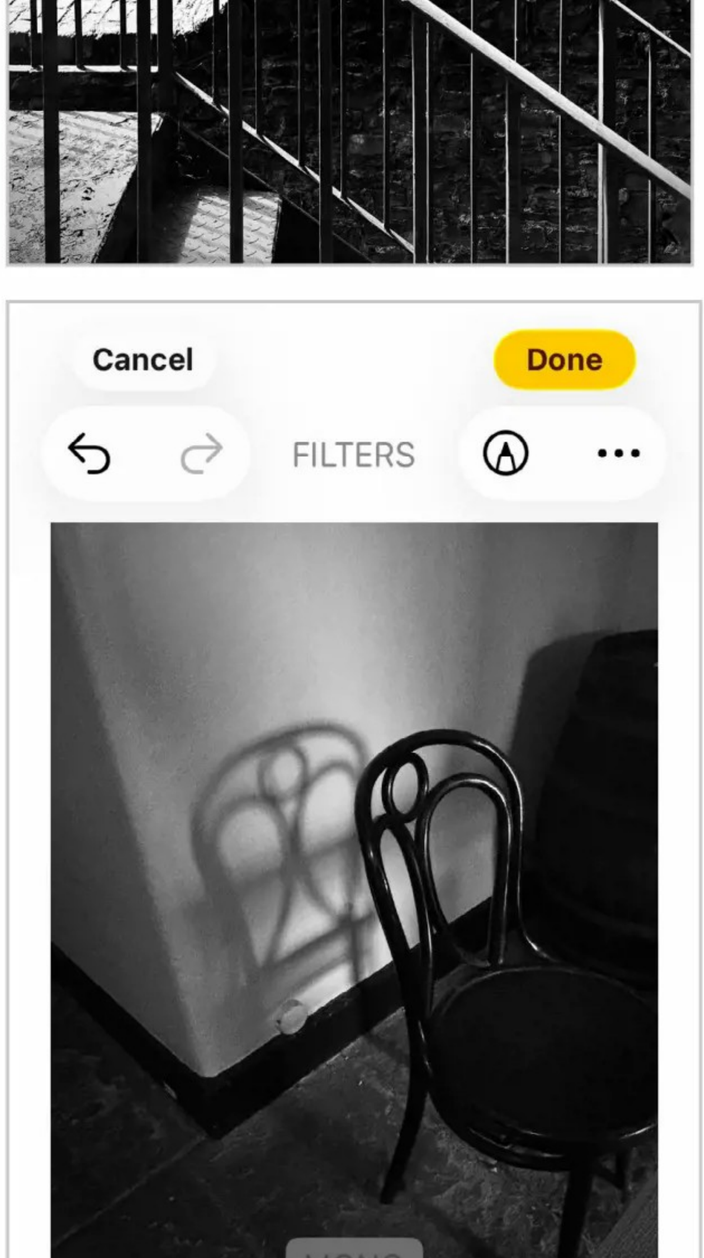


APPLE PHOTOS (AND YOUR PHONE'S BUILT-IN EDITOR)

Sometimes the best editing app is the one that's already sitting on your phone. And Apple's native Photos app is one of those. It's excellent, and I use it far more often than people might expect.

I use it frequently to make small edits like adjusting contrast, increasing saturation, and adding a vignette. There's also a magic automatic adjustment tool ("ooh, that's AI," I hear you shout) - however, although I occasionally use it as a starting point, I rarely leave the image there. What I appreciate is that every adjustment remains fully editable. I can see exactly what changes have been made, and I'm able to refine them to suit my own vision.

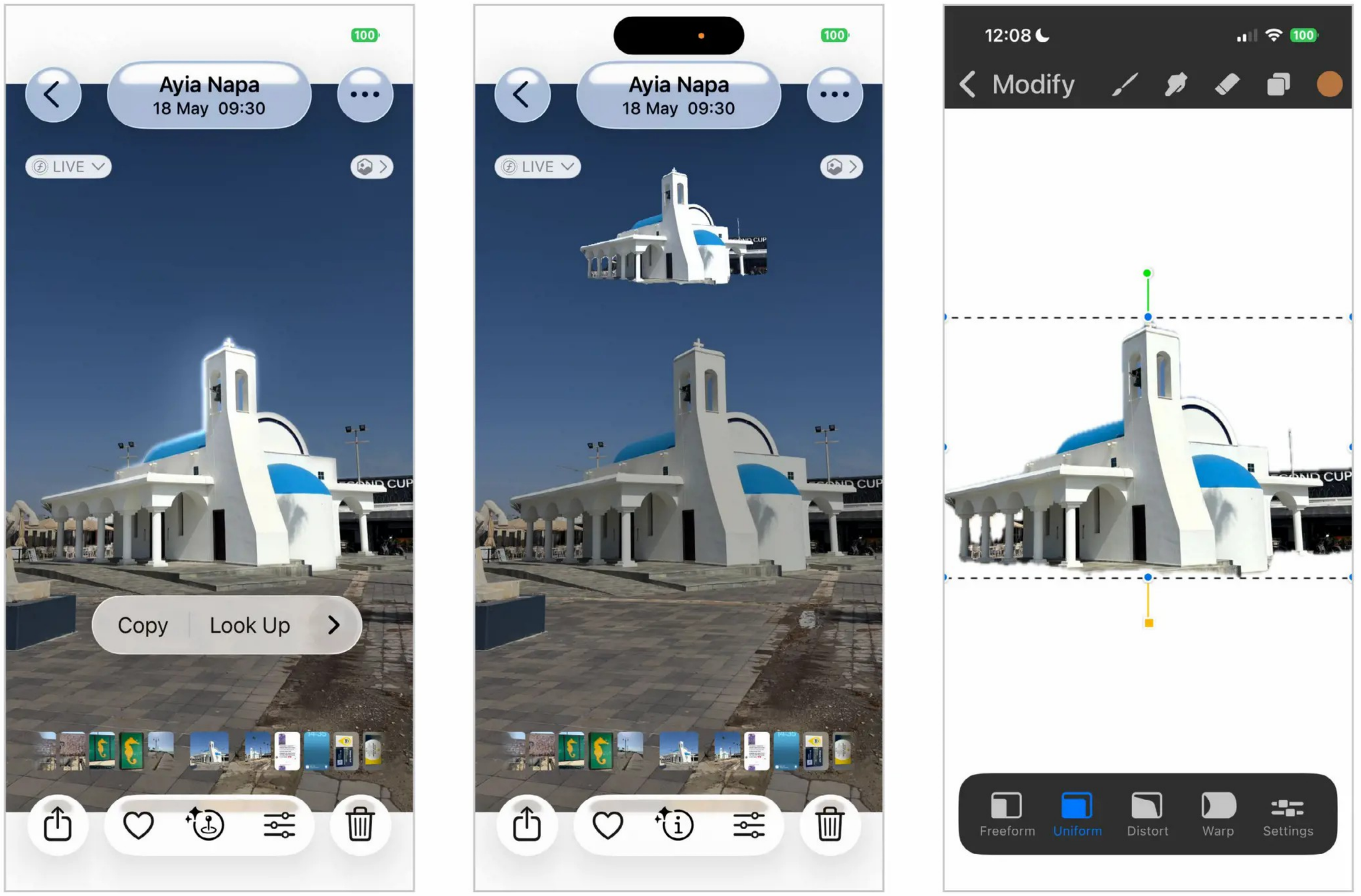




I also use the Photos app as a quick way to convert color photos to black and white, which allows me to study tonal values for my collage work. Removing color allows me to concentrate purely on tone, contrast, and composition, which helps me decide whether the composition has enough tonal variation to be visually interesting.

In this image of the view outside a window, I wanted to draw attention to the brick pattern and the lines cutting diagonally across the scene. So I used Apple's native photo editor to convert it to black and white, then crop and straighten it. I then increased contrast and sharpness to emphasize the textures and lines. This look also created a timeless feel to the image.

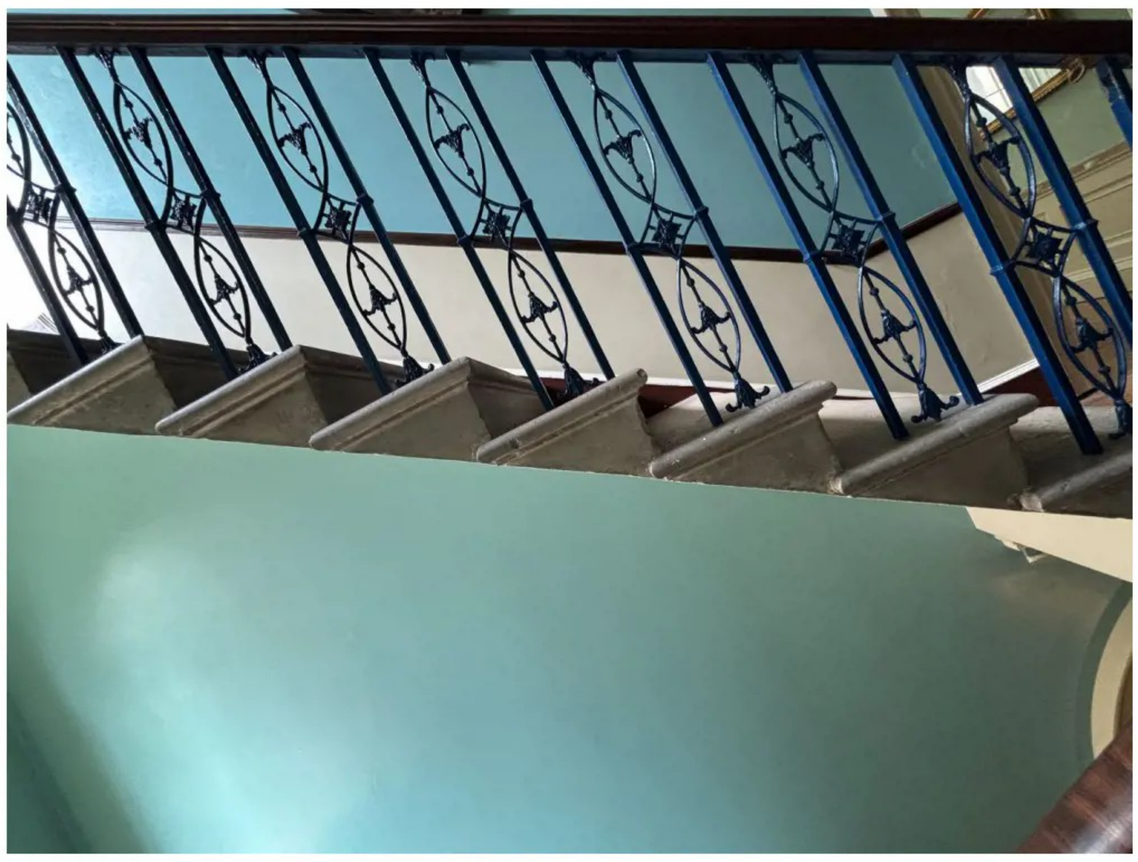
Removing backgrounds from subjects in photos is usually a breeze in the Apple Photos app, especially when the background is clean, as in this image with a blue sky. Sometimes I'll use this feature to copy and paste parts of an image into a collage I'm making in Procreate. Simply tap and hold your finger on the main subject (in this case, the building) and tap the pop-up word "Copy" when it appears. The software keeps the cutout in memory (the clipboard) so you can open your editing app, like Procreate, and paste straight into it.



Android users shouldn't feel left out either. Most modern Android phones include surprisingly capable editing tools built into Google Photos or the manufacturer's own gallery app. Many offer similar controls for exposure, color, contrast, cropping, and monochrome conversion.

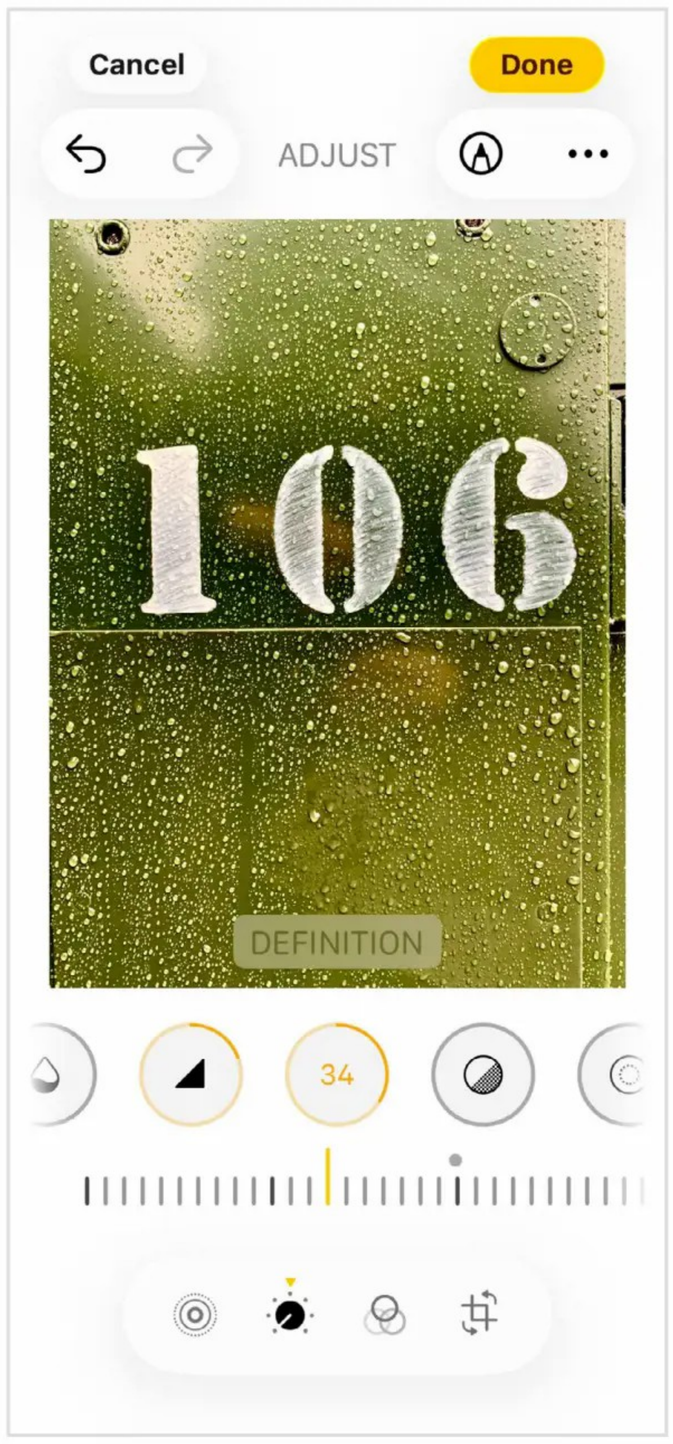
Sometimes the simplest tools are all you need to get an image heading in the right direction.

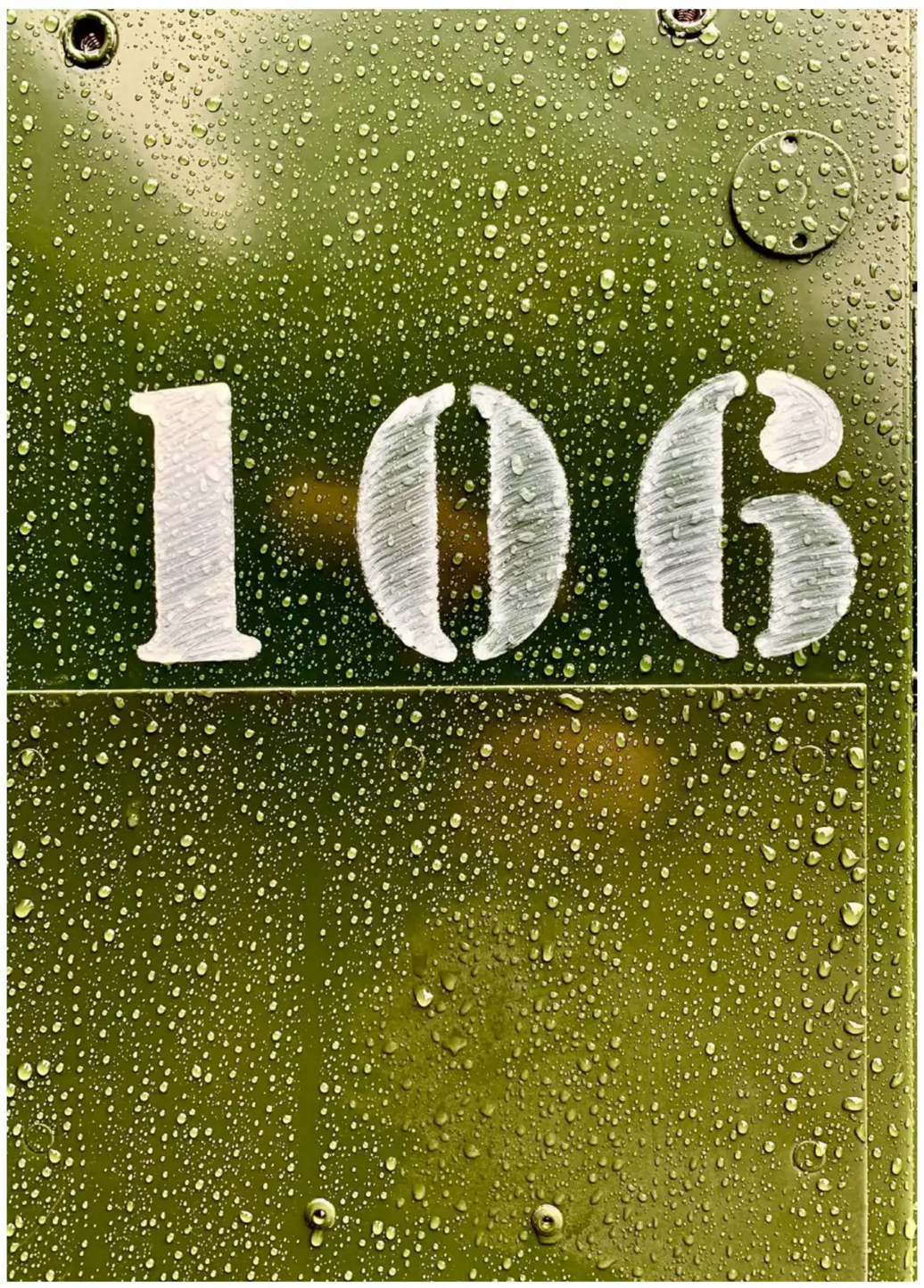
In this example, I used the Apple Photos app to crop, focusing on shape and color in a photograph of a staircase in an old Georgian house.



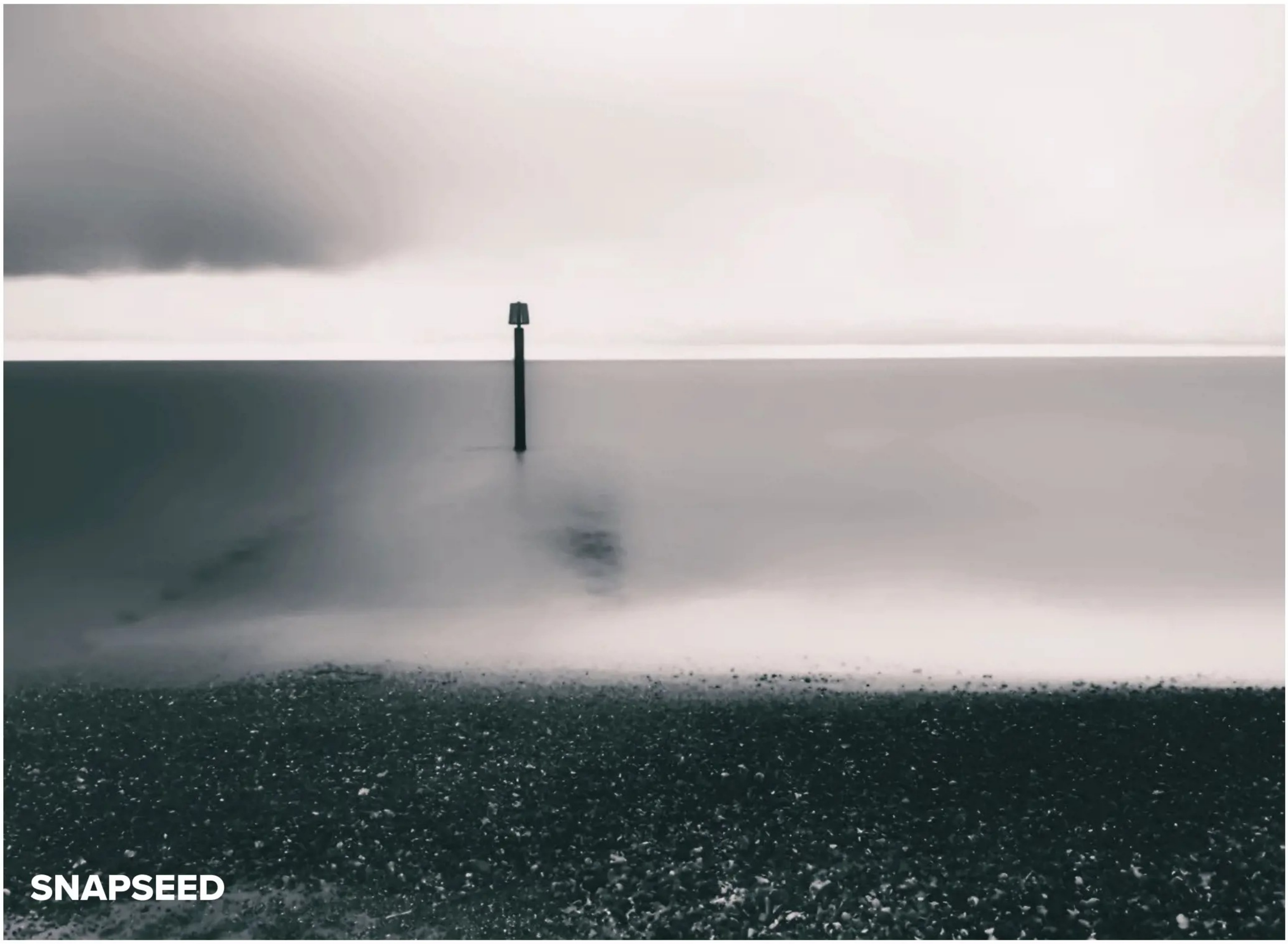


In this photo of raindrops on a public electricity box, I used Apple's sharpening tool to emphasize the raindrops and the texture within the painted numbers.



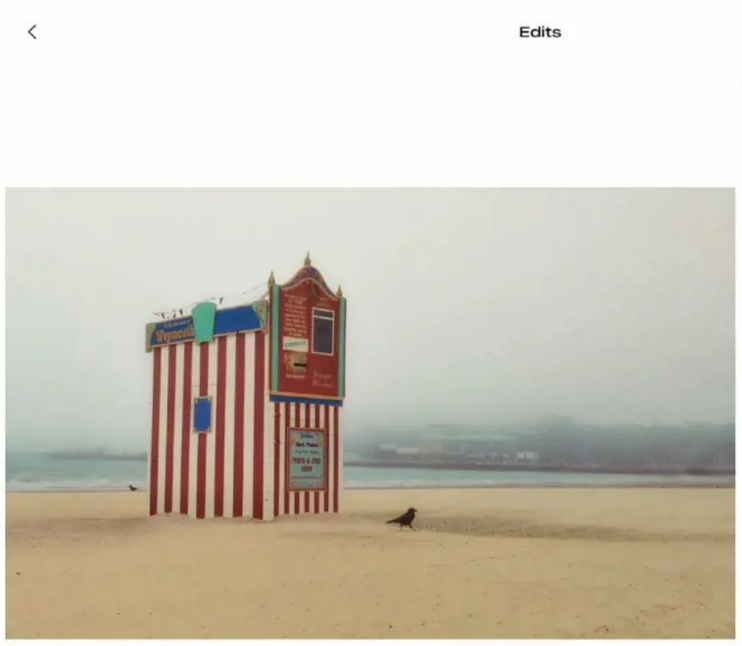


Although you could argue that some of these automations are AI-driven (converting to black and white), the point is that I intended to create a look and feel and draw attention to certain elements of the photo. I am using automation as a tool, but I am the one driving the creativity, rather than the AI.



Snapseed is perhaps the least glamorous app on this list, but it remains one of the most useful and powerful.

Before I begin adding textures, overlays, or painterly treatments, I usually want a strong foundation. Snapseed excels at preparing an image before the more creative work begins. It also features one of my favorite effects, Glow, for softening an image, which I use to give some of my photos a gorgeous dreamy feel.

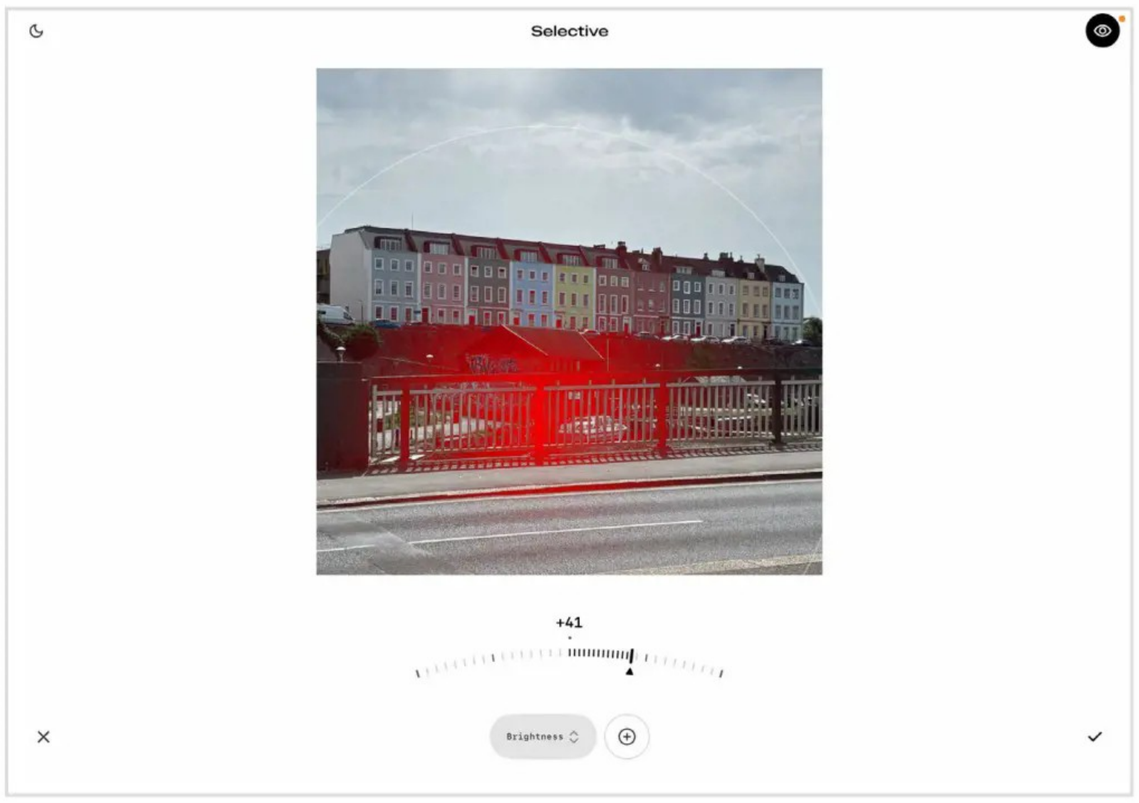




In addition to photos, I use the Glow effect to soften my digital paintings before adding texture.

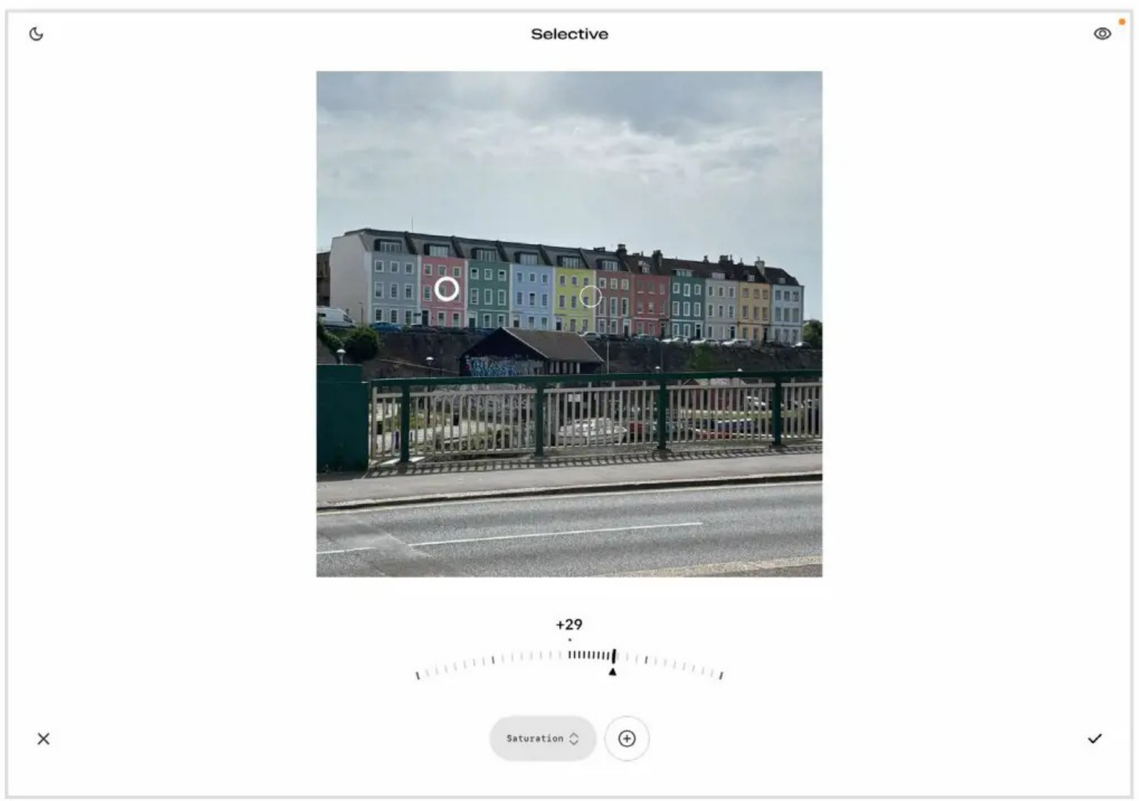






Its color controls are superb! The selective adjustment tools allow me to work on specific areas of an image. Curves provide precise tonal control. White balance adjustments help establish mood before I move into more artistic territory.

In these examples, I used Snapseed to crop the image. Then I used the Selective tool to increase the saturation on the houses and decrease the saturation in the foreground to emphasize the colored houses.





The selective adjustment tool isn't just great for color; you can also blur and sharpen areas too. In this example, I applied sharpening to the flower and blurred the surroundings to bring attention to the main subject: the flower.

I often think of Snapseed as the darkroom stage of my workflow. It's where I refine the photograph before transforming it into something more expressive.

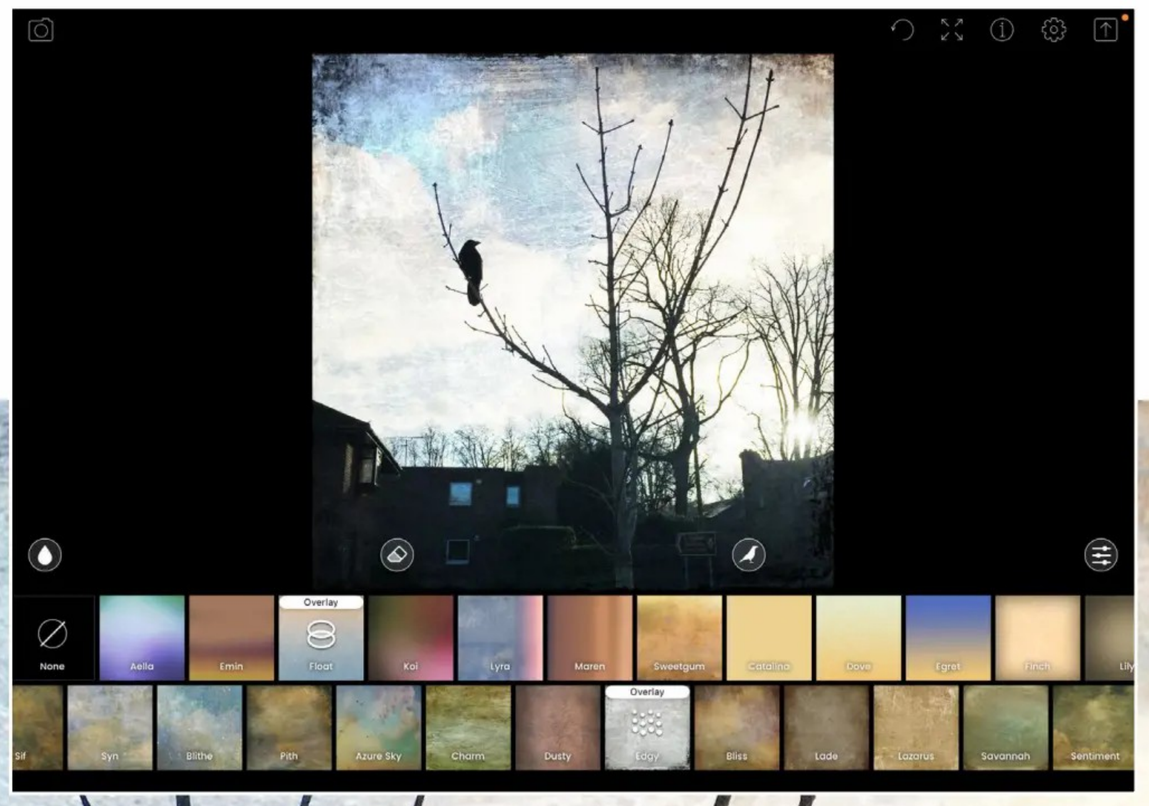
Even after all these years, I still find it difficult to beat.

DISTRESSED FX PLUS

If color establishes mood, texture often provides emotion. You may have seen my article in the October 2025 issue of Mobiography, where I give many examples of how this app can be used to express mood through color and texture. It's also a great app for harmonizing the colors in an image, much like an artist might apply a glaze to give a painting an overall tint.

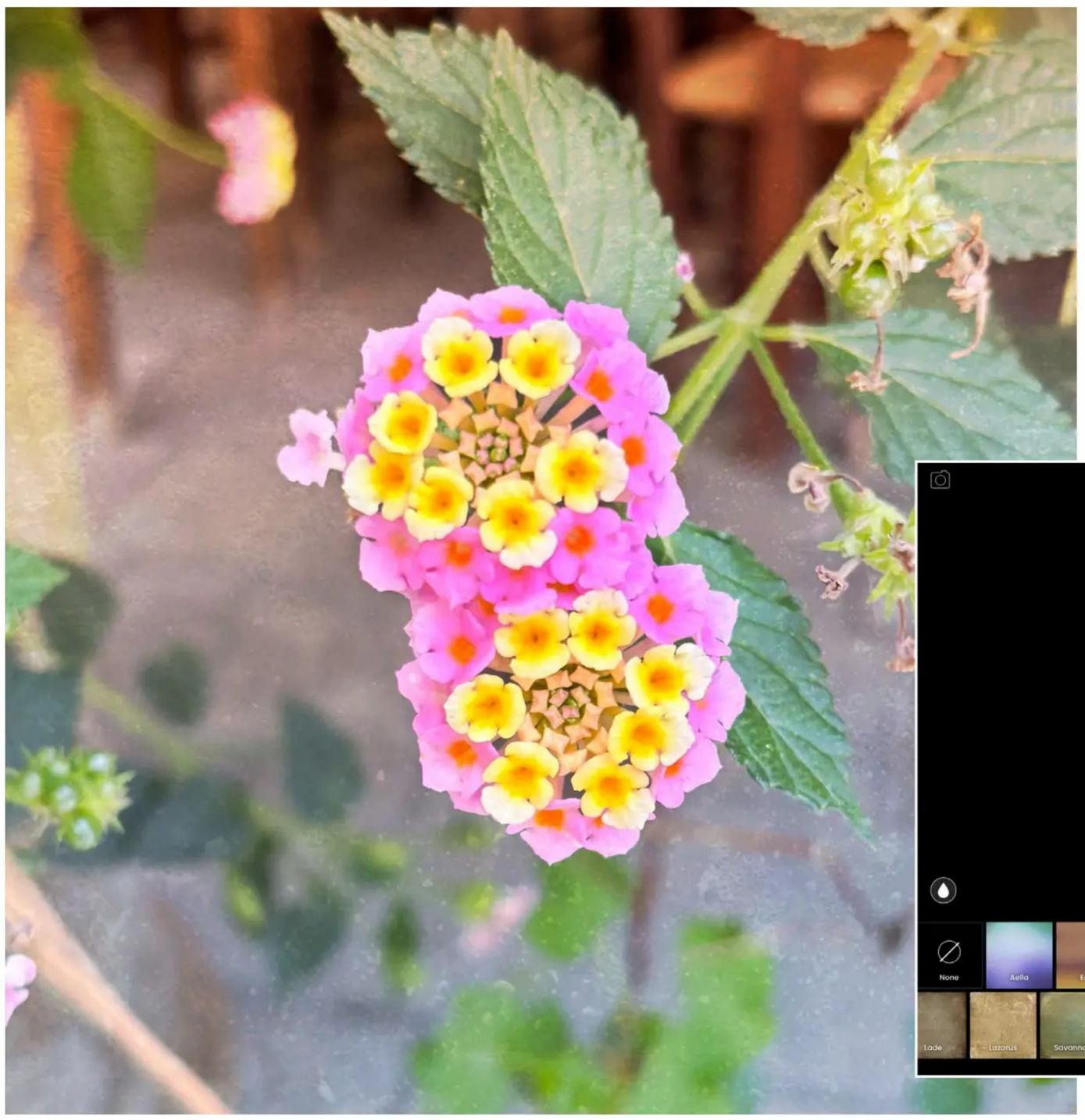
That's why I continue to enjoy using Distressed FX Plus.

The app specializes in textures, overlays, and atmospheric effects. Used subtly, these can transform an ordinary photograph into something far more evocative.

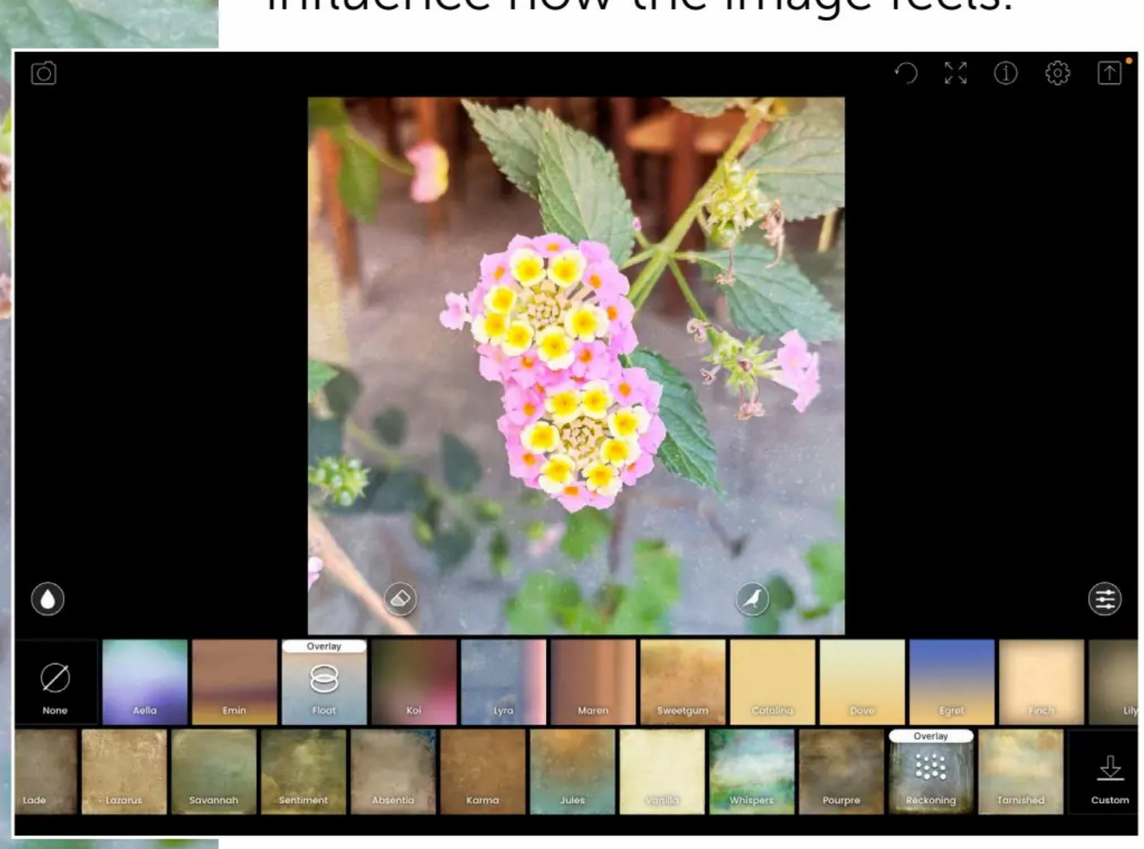


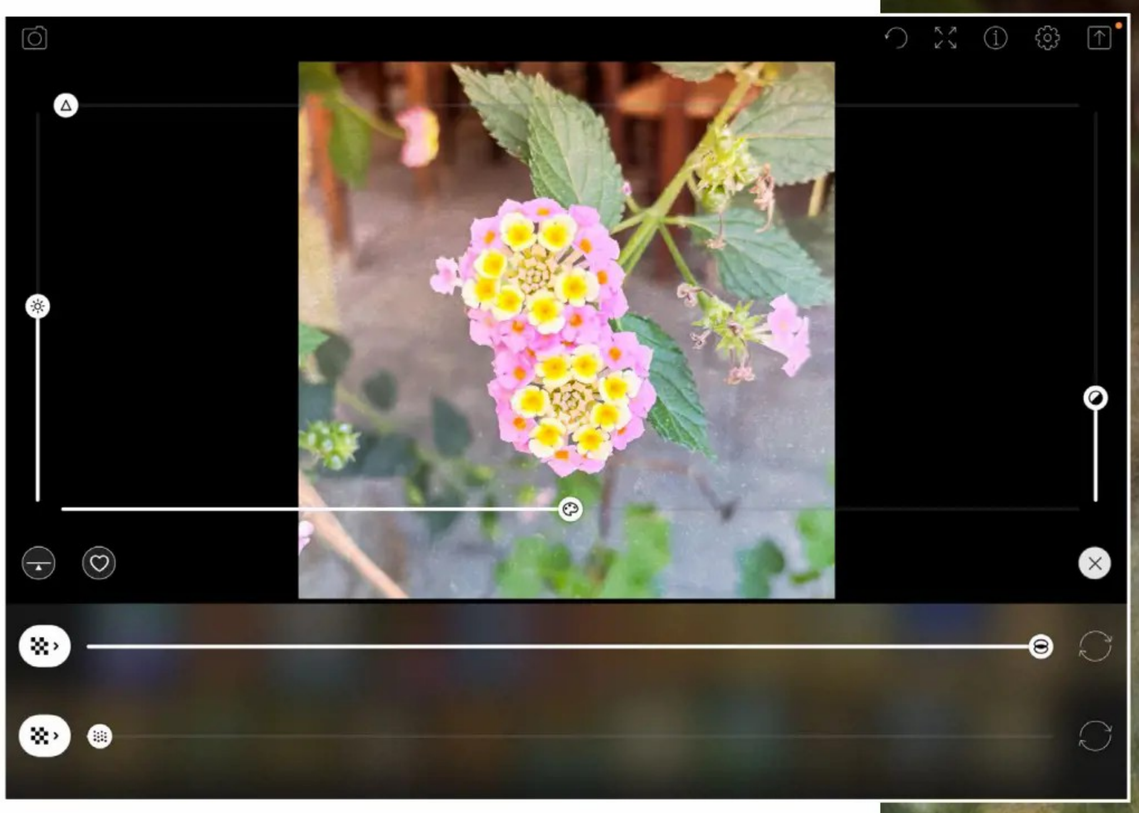


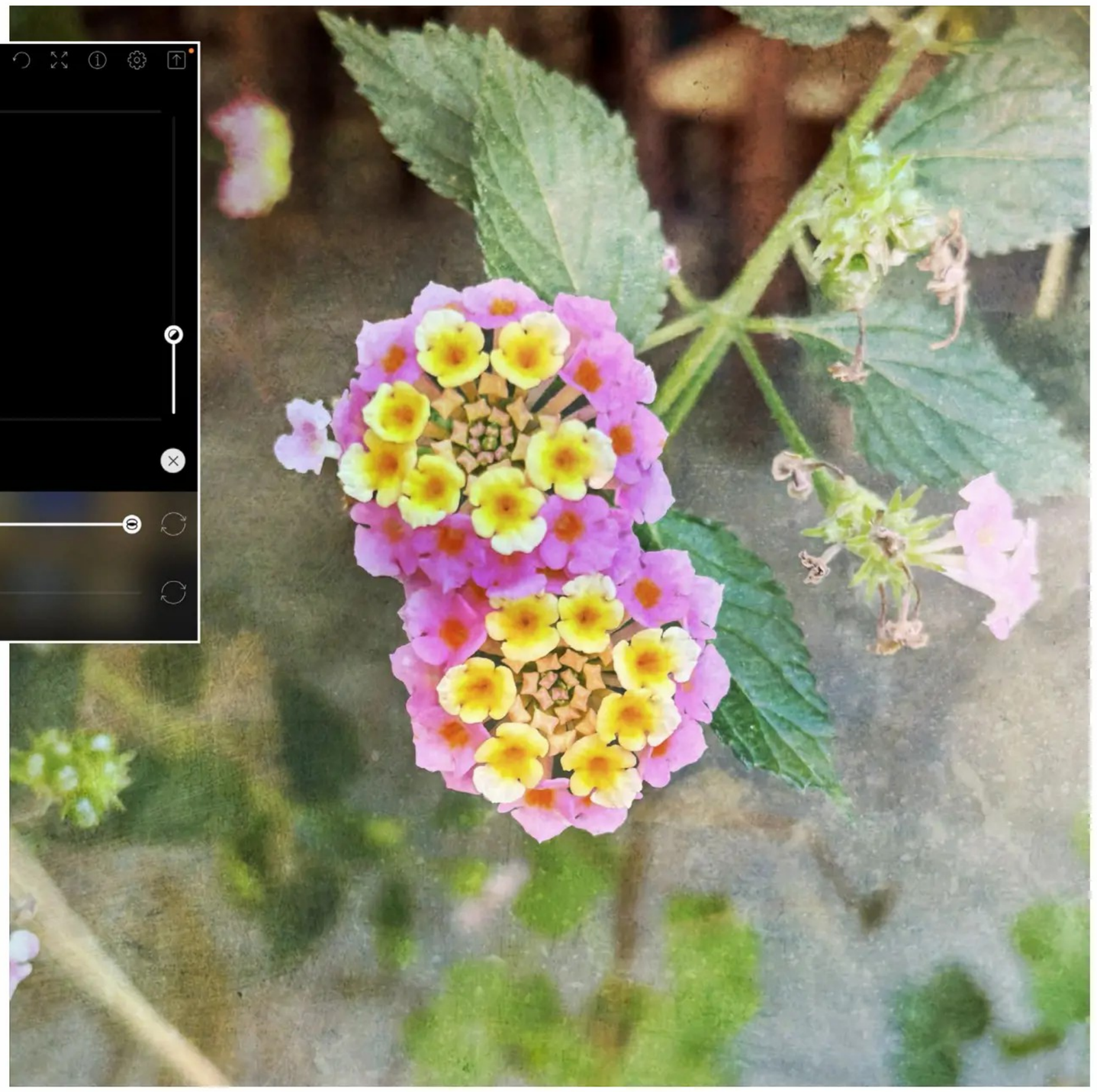
A rough paper texture can introduce nostalgia. A distressed surface can suggest age and memory. Soft painterly overlays can add warmth and atmosphere.

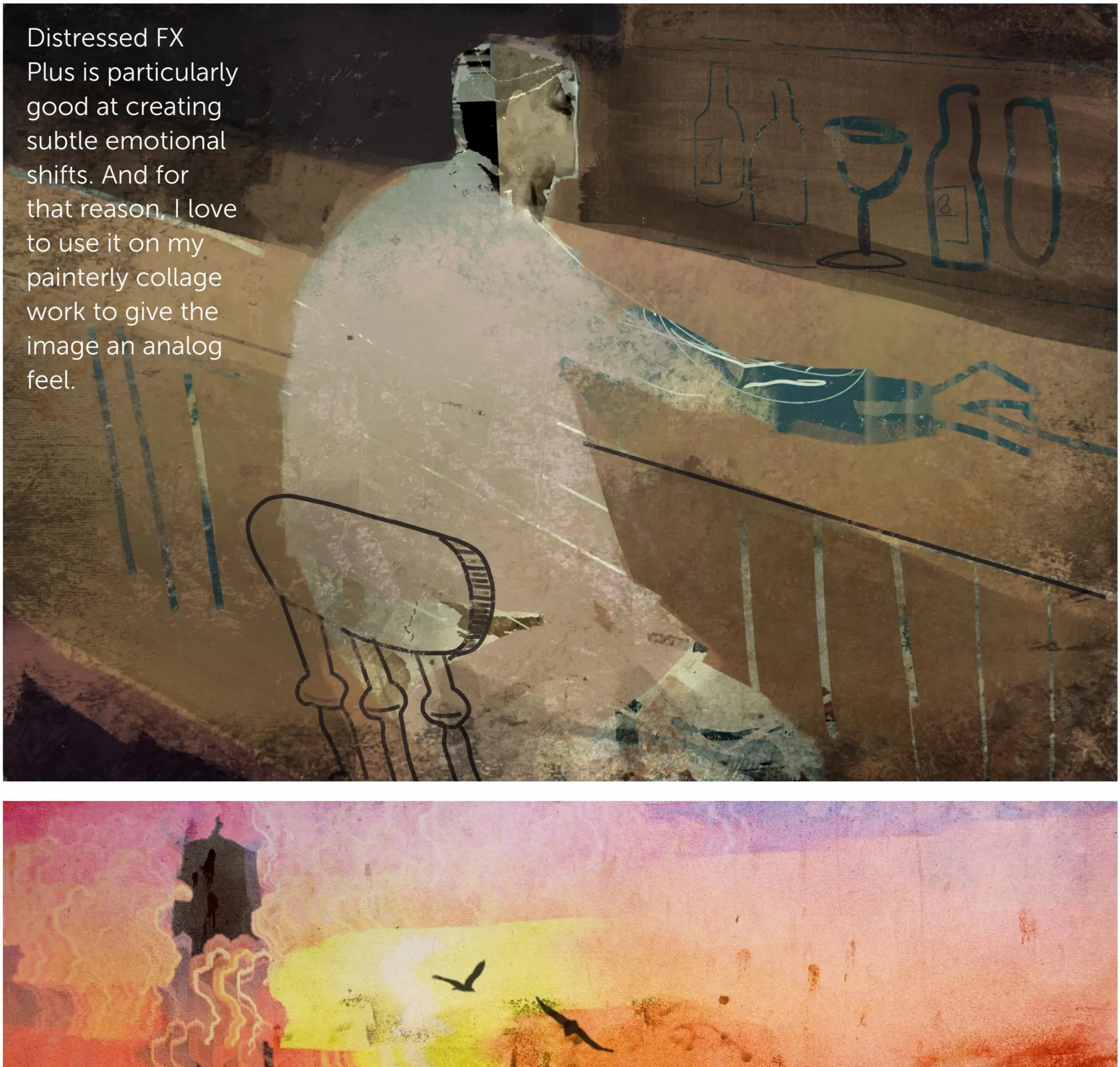


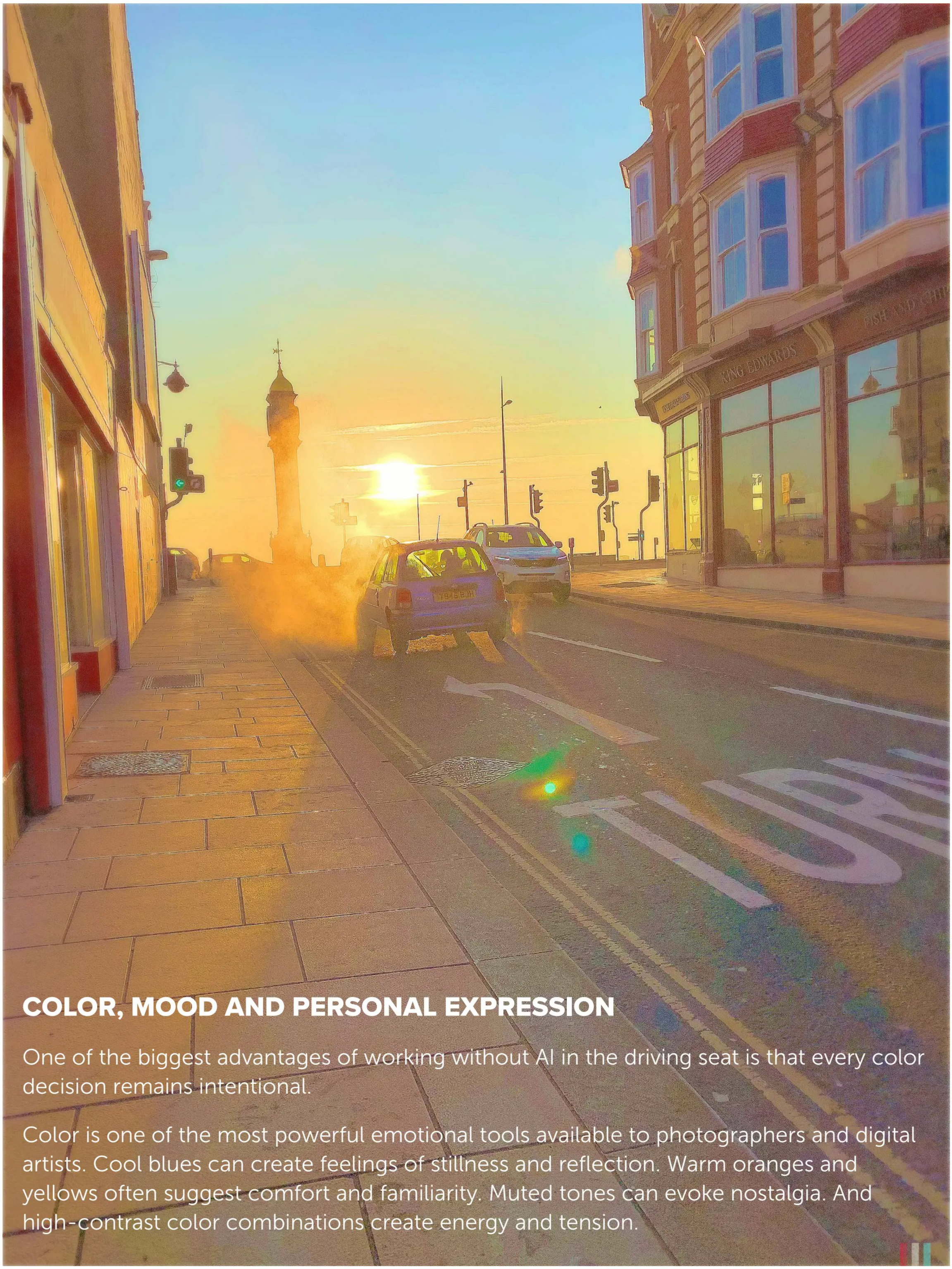
One of the mistakes many photographers make is assuming that texture should be obvious. In reality, the most effective textures are often the ones viewers barely notice. They don't dominate the image. Instead, they quietly influence how the image feels.








Distressed FX Plus is particularly good at creating subtle emotional shifts. And for that reason, I love to use it on my painterly collage work to give the image an analog feel.



COLOR, MOOD AND PERSONAL EXPRESSION

One of the biggest advantages of working without AI in the driving seat is that every color decision remains intentional.

Color is one of the most powerful emotional tools available to photographers and digital artists. Cool blues can create feelings of stillness and reflection. Warm oranges and yellows often suggest comfort and familiarity. Muted tones can evoke nostalgia. And high-contrast color combinations create energy and tension.



When I edit an image, I’m constantly asking myself a simple question: how do I want this picture to feel?

The answer influences every subsequent decision.

Texture works in much the same way. Different surfaces create different emotional responses. A smooth image feels contemporary and clean. A rough texture can feel aged, tactile, and human. Paper textures often introduce warmth, while scratches and distressed surfaces can suggest history or memory.

Together, color and texture become the emotional language of the image.



WHY I STILL ENJOY WORKING THIS WAY

Technology will continue to evolve. AI tools will become increasingly sophisticated and, undoubtedly, more impressive. But I'm pretty certain there will always be artists who enjoy taking the slower route—like me.

The route where colors are chosen rather than generated, where textures are layered by hand, where mistakes become discoveries, and where the process itself remains enjoyable. For me, photography and digital art have always been about more than recording reality. It's about interpretation and expressing how I see and feel the world around me.

These five apps will continue to provide everything I need to do exactly that - not because they're the newest tools out there, but because they leave the most important part of the creative process exactly where it belongs... in my hands.

About the Author

Nicki Fitz-Gerald is an artist, author, and teacher who uses her iPhone and iPad to explore the world around her, blending traditional and digital image-making methods to create rich, textured works, both figurative and abstract. She is the author of two Rocky Nook titles: "Digital Collage with Procreate," soon to be reprinted, and "The Art of iPhoneography" (co-authored with Bob Weil). Nicki just launched her 10th online class, "Digital Collage Made Simple, designed for Digital Collage beginners.

You can find out more about this course on the Courses section of her website at www.nickifitzgerald.com



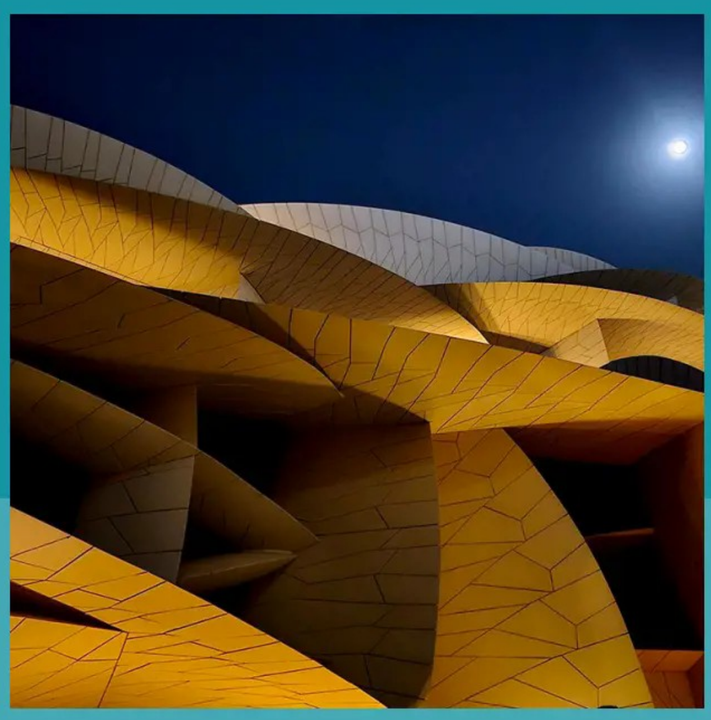
Turn your mobile photos into Art.

Digital Art Classes for the Creative Photograper.

WITH NICKI FITZ-GERALD

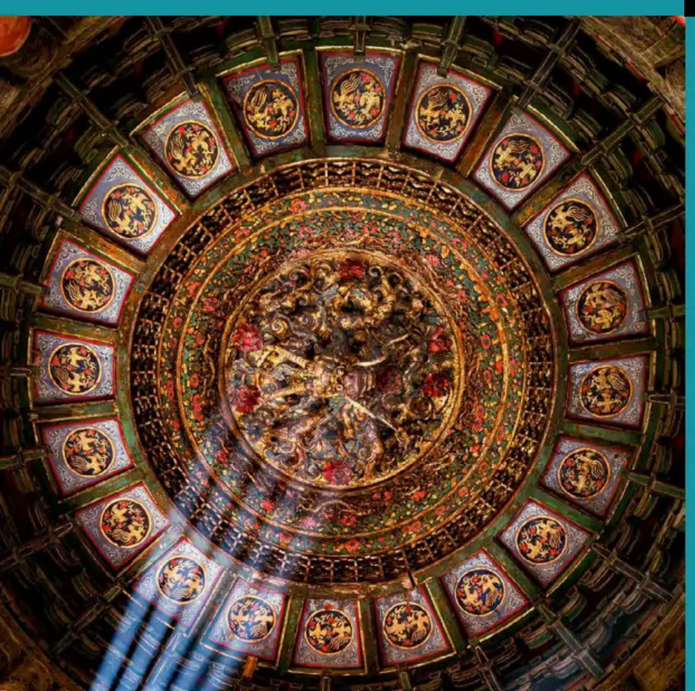






Five Inspirational Photographers To Follow on Instagram









DOROTA QAID - @DOROTAQAID

Dorota Qaid is an award-winning photographer who specializes in abstract architectural photography. When shooting contemporary buildings, Dorota focuses on patterns, lines, curves, and reflections to create striking minimal compositions. For older structures, Dorota leans into highlighting vibrant colors to add mood and character. The results are clean, considered images that invite you to look at the buildings around you in a completely different way. For inspiration in architectural photography, check out Dorota's work on Instagram.



KUANGLONG ZHANG - @KUANGLONGZHANG

Kuanglong Zhang is an award-winning travel photographer whose work spans the rural landscapes and urban streets of Asia. This year, he was crowned the grand prize winner in the 2025 Mobile Photography Awards. And in the past, he achieved a third-place finish at the iPPAs in 2017. Using a variety of cameras, including Oppo, Huawei, and iPhone, Zhang draws on color, light and shadow, and a documentary-style approach to create images that feel both considered and culturally rich. If travel photography is your thing, check out Zhang's work on Instagram.









JENNIFER NEWITT - @JNEWPHOTO

Jennifer Newitt is a smartphone photographer based on the North Shore of Long Island, New York. Her Instagram portfolio spans urban scenes, nature, and travel photography. What ties it all together is a strong instinct for composition and light. Whether she's shooting a city street or a quiet stretch of coastline, Jen has a way of finding the angle that makes a familiar scene feel worth a second look. If you're looking for a feed that covers a wide range of subjects without losing a consistent eye, check out Jen's work on Instagram.







MAURICE BAKLEY - @MAURICEBAKLEYPHOTO

Maurice Bakley is an iPhone photographer based in the Washington DC area whose work ranges from city streets and architecture to macro details and star trails. His feed on Instagram captures a wide mix of subjects, from snapshots of everyday life to light bouncing off buildings, shadows stretching across sidewalks, foggy countryside mornings, and breathtaking night skies. What ties his images all together is a thoughtful approach to composition and a genuine curiosity about the world around him.





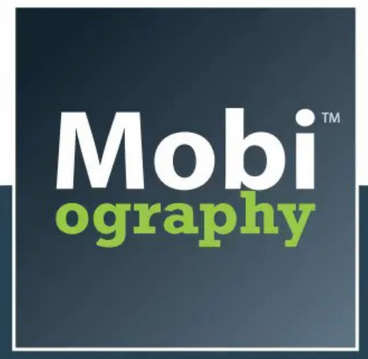

BULFINCH
ENTRANCE

DOMINIC DÄHNCKE - @DODAFOTO

Dominic Dähncke aka @dodafoto on Instagram, is a smartphone photographer with a very distinctive approach to shooting everyday objects. Using vibrant colors and strong shadows, he creates compositions that are playful and often tongue-in-cheek, finding humor in the simplest of scenes. The results are images that make you smile as much as they make you look twice. If you're looking for creative inspiration for shadow photography, check out Dominic's work on Instagram.







Mobiography

INSPIRING YOU TO BETTER SMARTPHONE PHOTOGRAPHY