



Jim Zuckerman's

PHOTO INSIGHTS

August 2026

Drones and Wind
Changing Proportions
A Fun Thing to Try
Photo Tours
Photography quiz
Ask Jim
Student Showcase
The Story Behind the Picture
Back issues



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On the cover: White dunes in Lencois Maranhenses National Park, Brazil, from a drone.. *On this page:* Jaguar drinking in the Pantanal region of Brazil photographed from a boat.

You may download this issue [HERE](#).



Just a few years ago, Canon did something I thought was brilliant. They released two new long lenses that are very light weight and hand-holdable as well as very affordable. The lenses are the 600mm for \$800 and the 800mm for an amazing \$1000.

What's the catch? The lens aperture is fixed at f/11.

For decades, the problem for wildlife and bird photographers has been two fold. Super telephotos are super expensive – like \$13,000 for a 600mm f/4 – and super heavy. The weight makes them unwieldy and tough to travel with, and the cost puts them out of reach of most mortals.

Because we can now use ISO settings higher than ever before – 3200 ISO is now common because the results are so good – the rationale for an f/11 fixed focal length lens makes perfect sense. Both the 600mm and the 800mm are easy to hold and easy to carry in a backpack. I've used the 800mm and was impressed with how sharp it is.

True, in low light with moving subjects, a larger aperture would be ideal. Photography is all about compromise, though, and these two lenses fill a niche that needed filling for a long time. The low cost of these telephotos means pretty much any photographer can start filling the frame with wildlife and small birds.

If the light level is low, simply raise the ISO and then, in post-processing, deal with the noise by applying Topaz DeNoise AI.

It's true these are not zoom lenses. I prefer zooms for their compositional flexibility, but having the ability to reach into the distance and fill the frame with a wild animal is a game changer.

Jim Zuckerman
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DRONES AND WIND

On my recent trip to Brazil, I researched a new photo tour scheduled for next summer. I visited the beautiful Lencois Maranhenses National Park. The incredible white sand dunes and aquamarine lagoons are prime drone country, but every day I was there the wind was quite strong. According to a local weather site online, sometimes gusts of 30 miles per hour were common. At higher altitudes, of course, the wind can be even stronger. There were three other people in my small research group who had drones as

well, including one lady who had a DJI Mini 5. Much to my surprise, all of us had multiple successful flights with no adverse incidents due to wind velocity.

In addition, I was able to do several 5-frame HDR exposures (like the one below) while in flight as well as a few panoramas. The drone was able to remain stable enough for these composite images. However, there was one issue we had to deal with.



The dunes that comprise the alien-like landscape are made of very fine sand. The dunes are constantly moving due to the wind, and as you're standing on the sand you can see it being blown with great velocity. The sand clings to the ground, though, so it never impacts the upper parts of your body.

The problem, though, is that it's impossible to launch a drone from any kind of landing pad on the ground. The delicate electronics and moving parts of the drone would immediately be damaged by the blowing sand.

The only safe way to launch a drone was to hold it up in the air at arm's length. This prevented the blowing sand from causing a problem. Notice in the picture below that my hand is held down and out of the way of the

propellers. Once the props start up, the drone immediately goes vertical for a safe takeoff.

When the flight is finished and the drone is brought back -- either manually or by using the RTH (return to home) button -- the same problem exists. You can't land on the ground. So, once the drone is above you, switch to manual flying mode and choose 'S' mode (sport mode). This turns off the obstacle avoidance system so when the drone is lowered a person can reach up and grab it -- again being very careful to avoid the spinning propellers.

There are two ways to shut the props off once the drone is held firmly in your hand. You can turn the drone upside down, or pull the left joystick downward. Usually within a second or two the drone is turned off. §



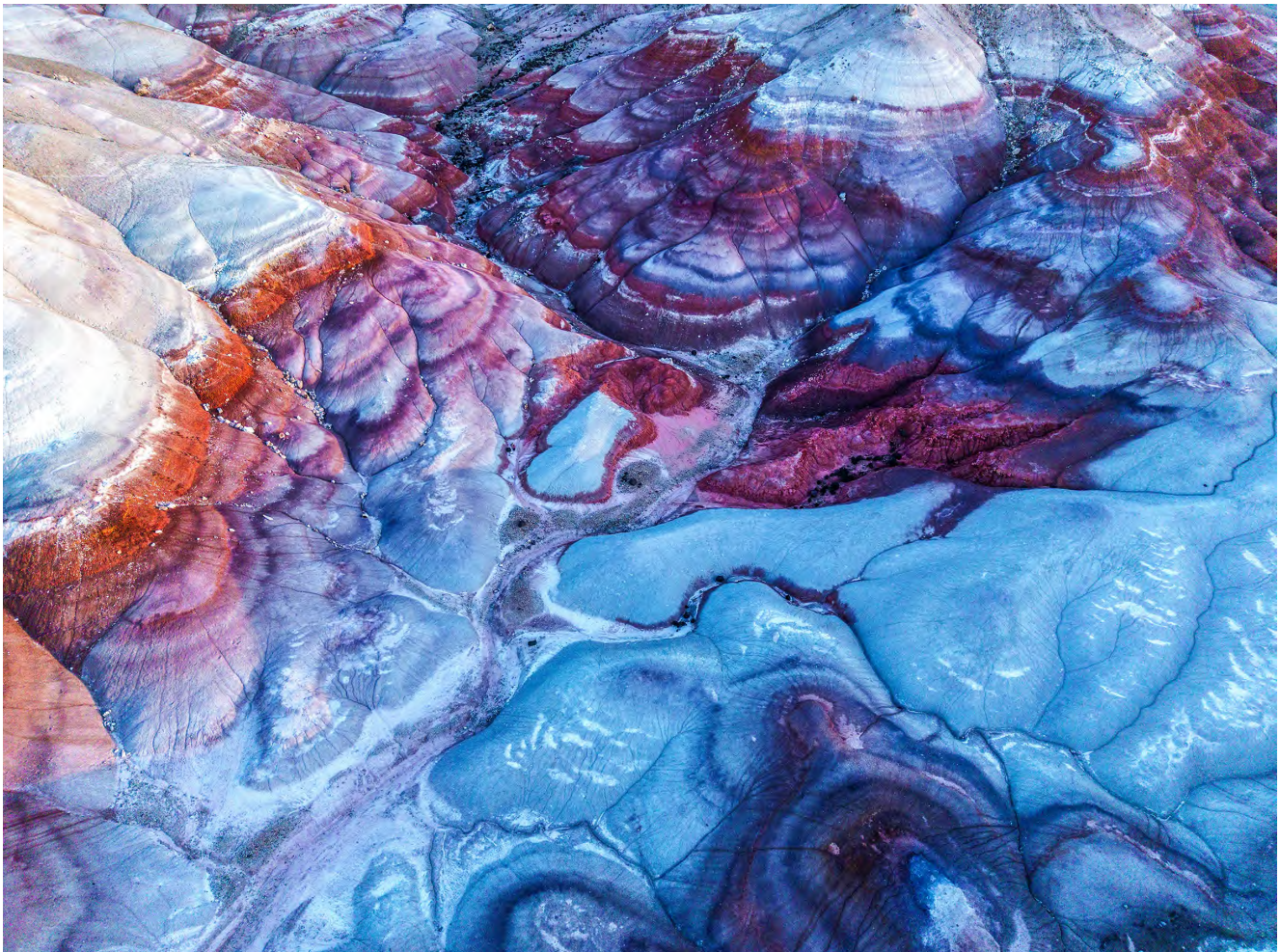
Changing Proportions

Over the years a photographer encounters several different types of rectangles in producing photographic images. What is considered 'full frame' proportion is based on the aspect ratio of 35mm film, which is 3:2.

The images produced by most drones are 4:3. The image below is an aerial shot of the Bentonite Hills in Utah from my DJI Air 3S drone, and you can see it is 'more square'

compared to the image of Factory Butte, also in Utah, on the bottom of the next page. This rectangle is longer and less like a square.

Panorama images are exceptionally long rectangles as shown on the top of page 7. These old cars were in Old Car City in White, Georgia. I shot this with my drone hovering about 10 feet from the ground, and while airborne it stitched several im-





ages together to form the unusual rectangular shape.

Traditional print sizes photographers have used for decades include 8x10 inches, 16x20, 30x40, and so on. These rectangles don't have the same aspect ratio of the full frame 2:3 pro-

portion that I happen to like. And this brings me to the point I'm making.

For 25 years, I shot medium format film cameras that offered the 6x7cm aspect ratio. At the time, I thought this particular proportion was the most pleasing rectangle for photographs,



and it also happened to be exactly proportional to 8x10 and 16x20 inches.

Today I prefer the 3:2 ratio that comes out of our full frame digital cameras. The images that come from my drone have the 4:3 aspect ratio, so in Photoshop I make the conversion from the more square image to the longer 3:2 rectangle.

There are two ways to do this.

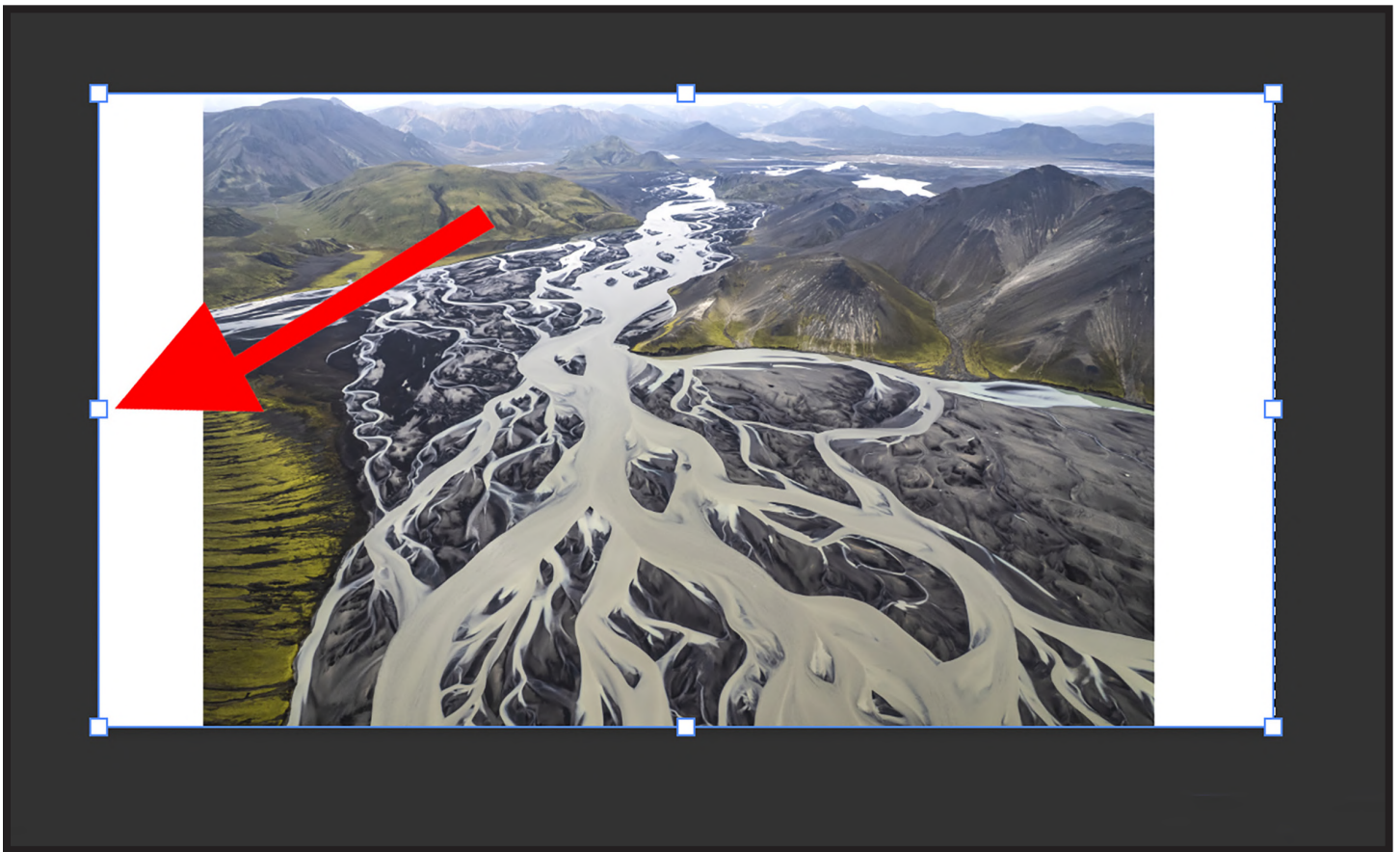
Stretch the image

1. Open the image in Photoshop and choose the crop tool
2. Pull the left and right handles to the left and right, respectively, until you are satisfied

with the aspect ratio. This is shown in the image below. Then hit the return or enter key.

3. Choose Select > all. You will now see the marching ants surrounding the picture.
4. Choose Edit > transform > scale, or use the short cut Command/Ctrl T. Eight handles now appear.
5. Pull the middle left handle (red arrow, next page) to the left and the image stretches until the picture area goes all the way to the left border. Do the same thing with the right handle, but pull to the right.
6. The 4:3 ratio has not been changed to approximately 2:3, although the image itself has been stretched. With many images like landscapes,





clouds, cityscapes, architecture, and nature closeups, stretching a subject isn't a problem.

However, you can't stretch people photos because their faces would look distorted, and the same would be true for most shots of animals.

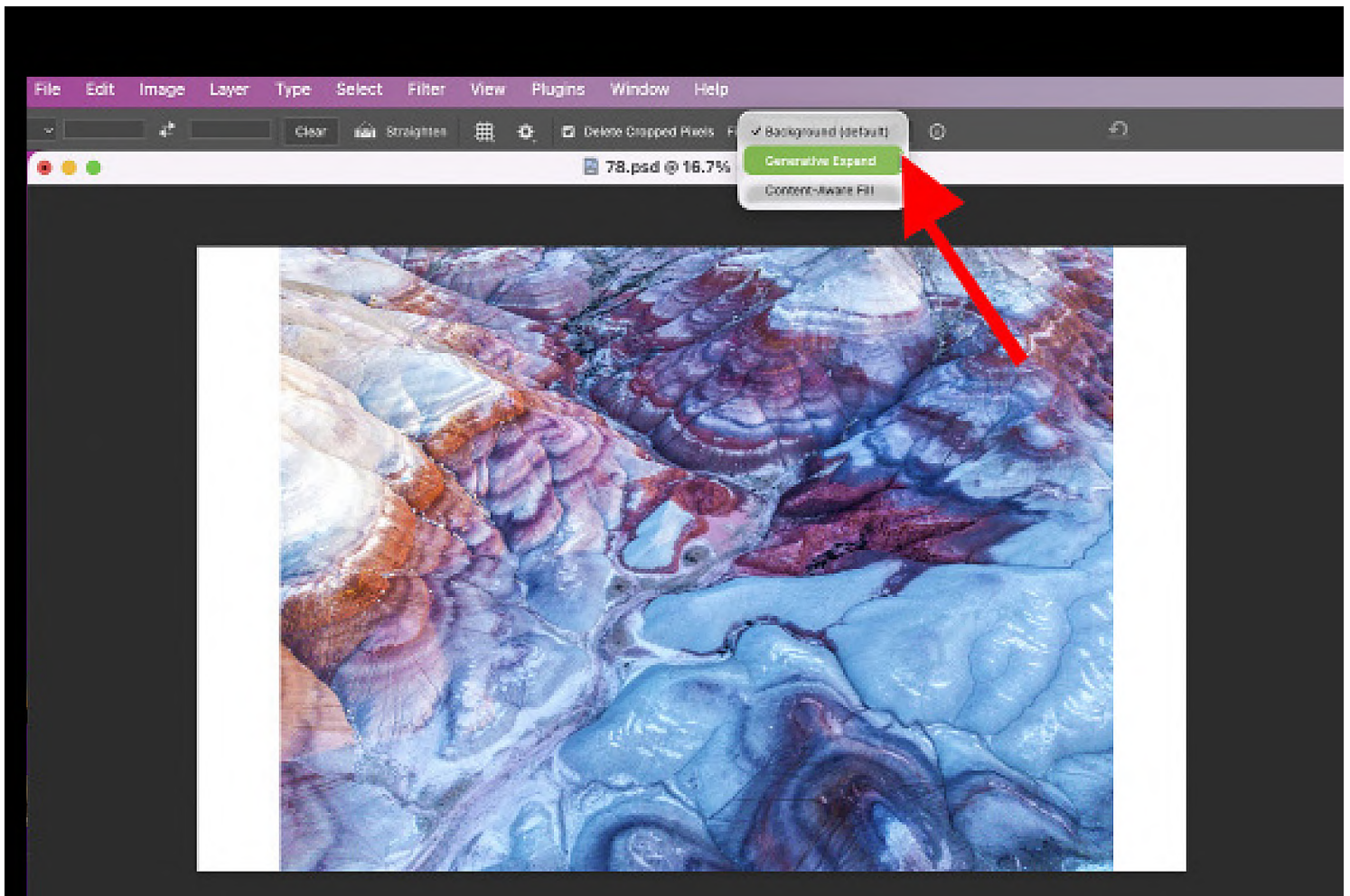
Generative Expand

Instead of stretching the image to achieve a desired aspect ratio, you can use the Generative Expand feature to add picture area.

1. Open the image in Photoshop and choose the crop tool.
2. Pull the left and right handles to the left and right, respectively, until you are satisfied with the aspect ratio.

3. In the options bar at the top of your screen, there is a small box that says **Background (Default)**. See the photo on the next page. Click this, and you'll see **Generative Expand**. Choose this option, and then hit the return or enter key twice. In a few seconds, Photoshop fills in the blank areas in such a way that the image is expanded horizontally with all the appropriate detail..

Photoshop provides three variations to filling in the blank areas, and this is shown in the **Properties palette**. If this palette doesn't automatically appear -- and it should -- you can open it using the pulldown menu command, **Window > properties**. Here you'll see the three different options. If you want three additional choices, and then three more after that, simply click the button that says **Generate**. §



Tunisia Photo Tour

April 25 – May 3, 2028



Something Fun to Try

For just a few dollars, you can create beautiful abstract images right in your kitchen or garage. The image below is simply various colors of paint mixed together and photographed.

Go to Home Depot or Lowe's, and in their paint department you can purchase small samples of any water-based color for just four dollars. When I did this, I bought six colors to start with. Of course, in Photoshop, the color palettes can be changed easily, but buy color combinations that appeal to you.

Then, get a shallow Tupperware container with a large opening. Pour the paint into the container in varying quantities, mixing the colors as you go. At any point, stop and photograph the abstraction you've created. Mix the colors with anything handy.

The abstract on the next page was actually a mistake. I was using, unbeknownst to my wife, one of our forks to mix the paint and it slipped out of my hand and fell into the color. The tines of the fork were covered in paint, and I thought it looked really cool.





To photograph the abstractions in paint, make the back of the camera as parallel as possible with the color. This maximizes depth of field. If the camera is oblique to the paint, you'll need to use $f/22$ or $f/32$ to insure the images you take are sharp from the foreground to the background. This is essential in my opinion.

The easiest approach to lighting is to use a uniform, diffused light source. This could be shade outdoors or overhead kitchen or garage light fixtures. You want even light over the surface of the paint, and it's also important to avoid any kind of reflections. Wet paint is highly reflective.

Experiment also with pouring paint on non-porous subjects like the porcelain mask, left. \$



Brazil Untamed

June 19 - 27, 2027

Drones welcome



Frog and Reptile Workshop

June 5 - 6, 2027



Exotic Birds of Colombia

Sept. 23 to Oct. 3, 2026



The Pantanal, Brazil

Nov. 11 - 19, 2027



Photography Quiz

1. A lens hood is only effective when shooting directly into the sun.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. The Inverse Square Law states that as the distance between light source and subject is doubled, say from 10 feet to 20 feet, the intensity of the light is reduced by:
 - a. Half
 - b. 4 times
 - c. 3 times
 - d. 5 times
3. By reducing the power of a flash, two things happen. One of them is the light output is diminished. The other one is:
 - a. The flash duration is shortened
 - b. The white balance is changed
 - c. The light beam narrows
 - d. All of the above
4. In black and white photography, which filters produce a black sky?
 - a. Green and yellow filters
 - b. Neutral density and UV filter
 - c. Red and yellow filters
 - d. UV filter and green filter
5. If you see a speck of dust in the viewfinder, it will definitely show up in your pictures.
 - a. True
 - b. False
6. The biggest challenge for macro photographers is:
 - a. Direct sunlight
 - b. Shallow depth of field
 - c. The wind
 - d. All of the above
7. With film view cameras for formats 4x5 and 8x10 inches, photographers would take two identical exposures. They would then develop one and hold one. This addressed the issue of:
 - a. Achieving the ideal depth of field
 - b. Insuring a good exposure
 - c. Preventing unwanted contrast gain
 - d. Critical focus
8. Back in the day, color infrared film with a red filter turned vegetation what color?
 - a. Yellow
 - b. Blue
 - c. Magenta
 - d. Black
9. When developing slide film in the darkroom, what color safelight could be used?
 - a. Red
 - b. Amber
 - c. Midnight blue
 - d. A safelight couldn't be used for slide film development
10. Photographing wildlife is often best done from a low perspective. If your perspective is too high, this can be fixed in Photoshop.
 - a. True
 - b. False

Answers on page 50

UPCOMING PHOTO WORKSHOPS



GREAT GRAY OWLS, CANADA

Get up close and personal with these spectacular birds flying with their magnificent wing spans. The slow flying owls are easy to photograph, even for beginners, and you will absolutely love your pictures!

February 13 - 18, 2027



TEXAS BIRDS

Get up close and personal to many species of exotic and colorful birds. We shoot from a blind and get frame-filling shots of cardinals, green jays, crested caracaras, painted buntings, and more. Based in McAllen, Texas.

May 12 -15, 2027



FROG & REPTILE WORKSHOP in Kansas City

This is an exciting macro workshop in which you will be able to photograph about 40 species of colorful dart frogs and exotic reptiles. Held in a hotel conference room, Jim sets up natural backgrounds for outstanding photos. The photo at left shows a Jackson chameleon with the background replaced in Photoshop.

June 5 - 6, 2027

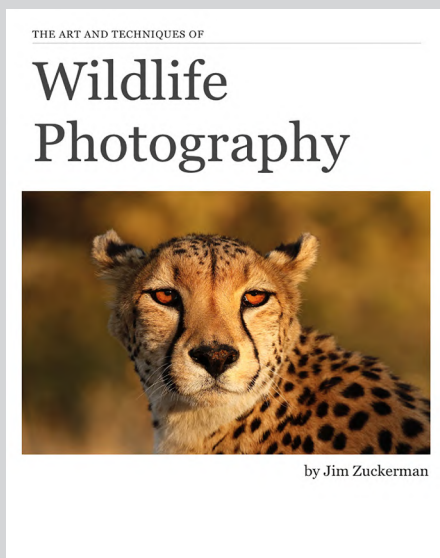
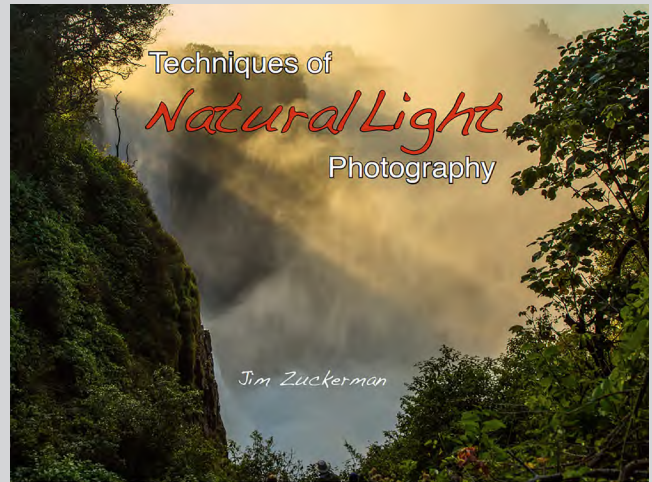
Expand your photographic artistry with *eBooks*

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eBooks continued

Click on any ebook to see inside

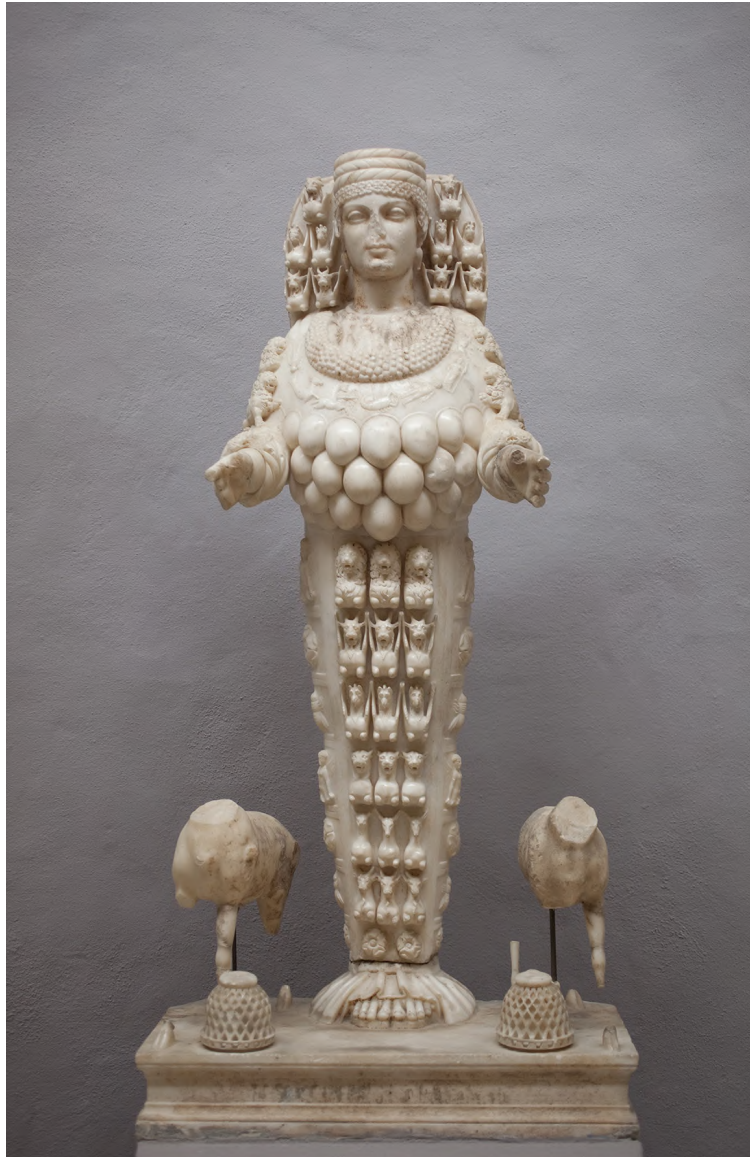


Carnival in Venice

January 30 - February 5, 2027



What's Wrong with this Picture?



There is really nothing wrong with this picture per se. This is the famous Goddess Artemis statue found in the 10th century B.C. ruins of Ephesus in Turkey. The background is plain, and while it doesn't dramatize the figure in any way, it's not distracting. So many museum environments are distracting to the artwork you want to photograph, so it was nice to encounter a museum display so easy to shoot.

However, I thought I could make it better. The version on the next page is, in my opinion, significantly more visually impactful. The dark border, the added color, and the gradient dramatize the image and force our attention on the ancient statue.



To make these changes, first I used **Select > subject** to select the marble statue. Then I selected only the background and not the statue by using **Select > inverse**. Next, I clicked on the foreground color at the bottom of the tool palette and chose 'red' and then clicked on the background color box and selected 'black'.

After this, I clicked on the **gradient tool**. When this tool is active, five small icons appear at the top left of the screen. See the screen capture below. Click the second icon from the left (red arrow); this is the **circular gradient tool**. I dragged the cursor from the center of the statue to the upper right, and that created the circular color gradient simulating a spotlight on the background. §



Indonesia Wildlife

October 29 - November 8, 2027



SHORT AND SWEET

1. When photographing foggy conditions, be careful not to underexpose the images. The whiteness in the air deceives the meter. Use either the exposure compensation feature in the camera to lighten the images or shoot in manual. How much you overexpose the image depends on atmospheric conditions, but I would consider one f/stop.



2. The best way to capture detail in very dark subjects, like this black bear, is to photograph in diffused light. Direct sunlight creates too much contrast; the shadows go very dark or black, thus detail is lost. Post-processing techniques won't, in many cases, be able to recover that lost detail. Only a cloud cover will make it possible to hold detail in the dark shadows.



3. The best time to photograph city skylines, and architecture in general, is twilight, i.e. the Blue Hour. When there is still a little light in the sky so it takes on a cobalt blue color, and many lights are on in the buildings, the city takes on a magical, ethereal look. This shot is the skyline of Dubai.



4. This is Schwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, Myanmar (Burma). I photographed it at twilight from a balcony in my hotel when I was there last time. When I travel, I try to find hotels with great views of the city for photographic purposes. Thanks to the Internet, we can now do extensive visual research. §



Ethiopia photo tour

Go back in time 20,000 years

January 5 - 18, 2027



Surma tribe



Dallol Depression

ASK JIM

Every month, Jim answers a question from his online students, from people who participate in his tours and workshops, or from subscribers to this magazine. If you have a question you'd like Jim to answer, please drop him a note at photos@jimzuckerman.com.

Q: Jim . . .What is the highest ISO you'll use, knowing you can mitigate the noise with Topaz DeNoise AI in post processing?

Lance Collins, Savannah, Georgia

A: Good question, Lance. Before my last trip to South Africa, the highest ISO I used was 12,800. And this was by mistake. I was using auto ISO in Canada during the winter and hadn't realized how dark it had become. My ISO crept up to 12,800, but in post when I applied Topaz, the noise disappeared. I was amazed.

Then, in 2022 I was shooting from a blind in South Africa through one way glass (about one f/stop light loss) at dawn. There were two lights on the animals that came to drink, but it was very, very dark. In order for me to maintain a shutter speed of 1/125 (at f/4) to insure sharp pictures, I had no choice but to use 40,000 ISO! I had never done that before (or since). The image in question is below. I ran it through Topaz DeNoise AI twice and then Topaz Sharpen AI twice. Much to my surprise, it looks as if I'd used 800 ISO when I enlarge the image on my computer.



Partial List of Photography Tours 2026 - 2027

EXOTIC COLOMBIA BIRDS
Sept/Oct 2026



DUBAI & ABU DHABI
Nov 2026



WINTER WILDLIFE WORKSHOP
Dec 2026



ETHIOPIA
Jan 2027



CARNIVAL in VENICE
Jan/Feb 2027



TEXAS BIRDS WORKSHOP
May 2027



LAVENDER FIELDS, FRANCE
July 2027



CHILE: THE DESERT to the SEA
Sep 2027



POLAR BEARS
Oct 2027



INDONESIA WILDLIFE
Oct/Nov 2027



THE PANTANAL, BRAZIL
Nov 2027



TUNISIA
April/May 2028



WINTER WILDLIFE WORKSHOP

December 16 - 20, 2026



Mountain lion



Arctic fox

STUDENT SHOWCASE

Each month, Jim features one student who took beautiful and inspiring images on one or more of his photography tours or workshops. It's really fascinating how photographers see and compose such different images even though we may go to the same places. Everyone takes great photographs on Jim's trips.

Robert Ortiz, Las Cruces, New Mexico. [Botswana photo tour](#), [Pantanal photo tour](#), [Frog and Reptile workshop](#).



© Robert Ortiz

Student Showcase, continued



© Robert Ortiz

Student Showcase, continued



© Robert Ortiz



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The Story Behi



nd the Picture



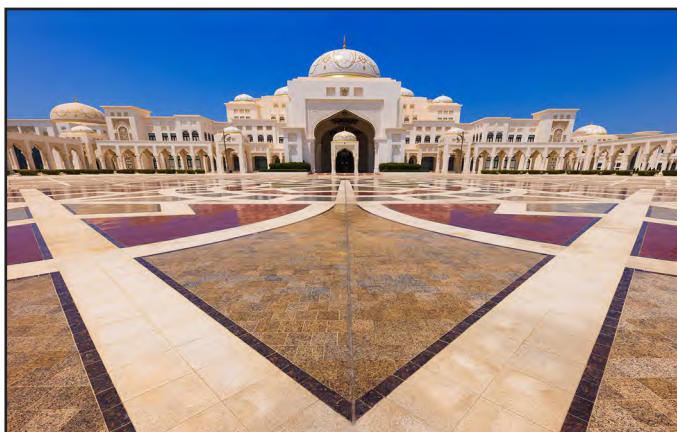
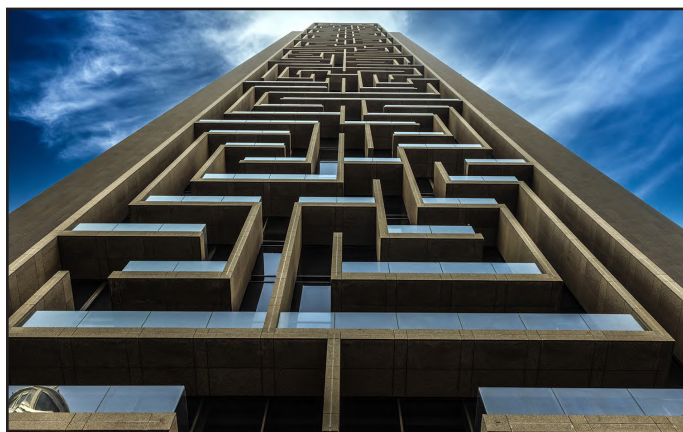
I took this uncropped picture of a red fox about to pounce on a rodent in Churchill, Manitoba, Canada, during one of my polar bear tours.

If you observe animal behavior and photograph animals over the course of many years, you get pretty good at predicting what they will do. In this case, I saw the fox digging in the ground and tensing its body, so I told my photo tour group participants to get ready for the pounce. I set my shutter speed -- and told my group to do the same -- at a fast enough setting to freeze the action.

I was shooting with a 700mm focal length (500mm plus a 1.4x teleconverter), hand held, and my settings were 1/1250, f/10, and 400 ISO. When the fox finally made its attack, I captured the action with 20 frames per second so every nuance was recorded. Usually in a sequence of action shots, there is one that stands out as the peak of the action. For me, this was the shot. \$

DUBAI & ABU DHABI TOUR

November 14 - 22, 2026



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PHOTO INSIGHTS
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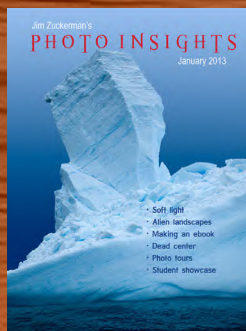
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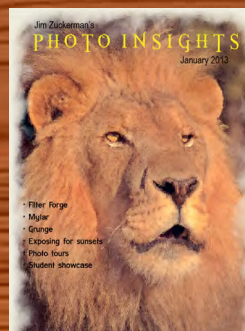
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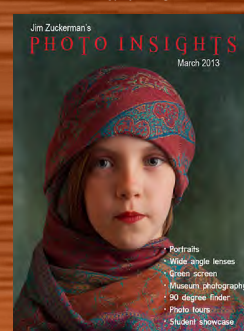
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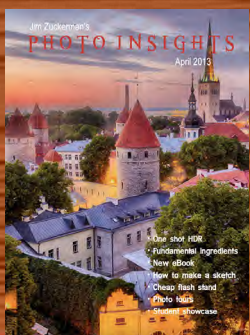
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Mar. '13



Apr. '13



May '13



Jun. '13



Jul. 13



Aug. '13



Sept. '13



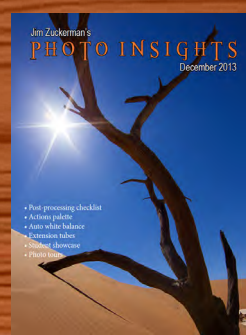
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Mar. '14



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Jun. '14

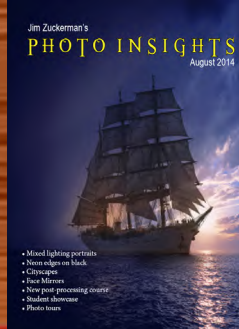


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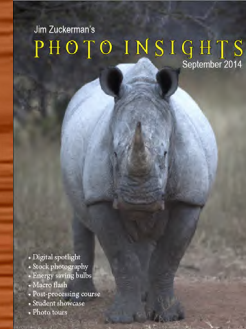
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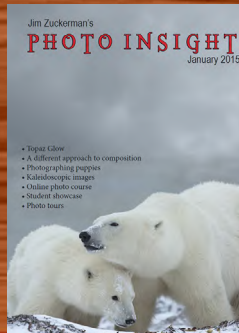
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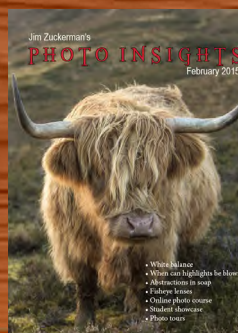
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Feb. '15



Mar. '15



Apr. '15



May '15



Jun '15



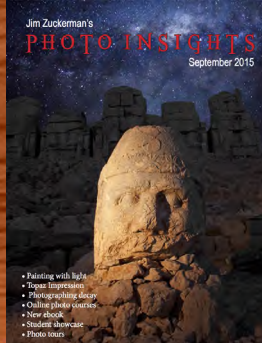
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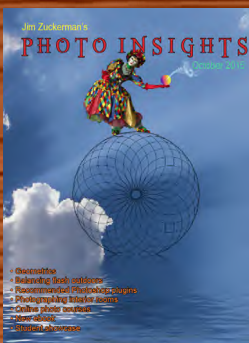
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Nov. '15



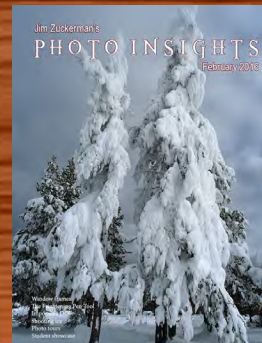
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Jan. '16



Feb. '16



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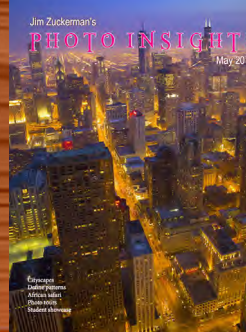
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Jun '16



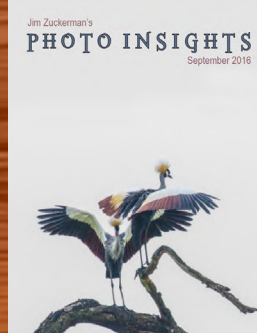
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Sept. '16



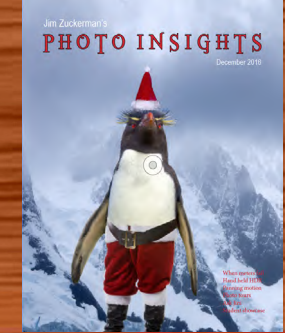
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Dec. '16



Jan. '17



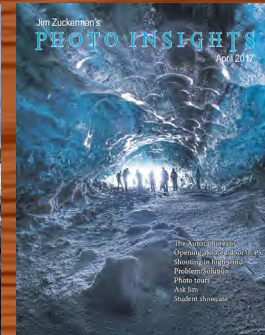
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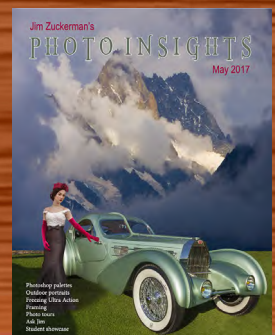
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May '17



Jun '17



Jul. '17



Aug. '17



Sept. '17

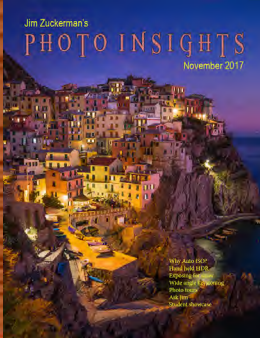


Oct. '17



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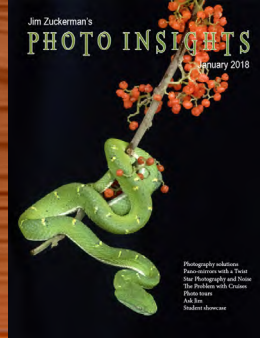
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Dec. '17



Jan. '18



Feb. '18



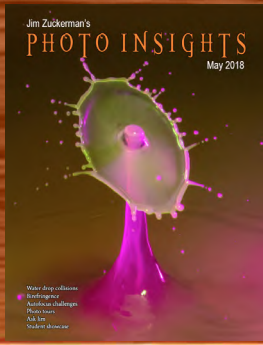
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Apr. '18



May '18



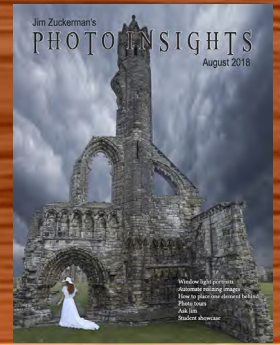
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Jul '18



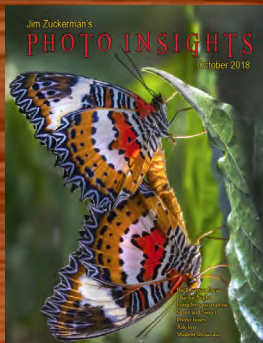
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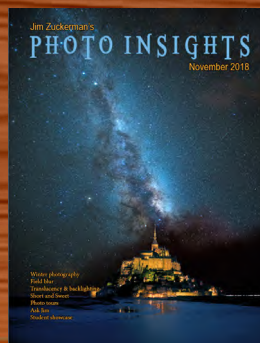
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Oct. '18



Nov. '18



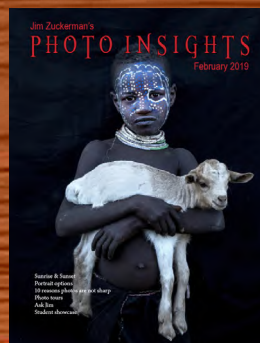
Dec. '18



Jan. '19



Feb. '19



Mar. '19



Apr. '19



May '19



Jun '19



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Jul. '19



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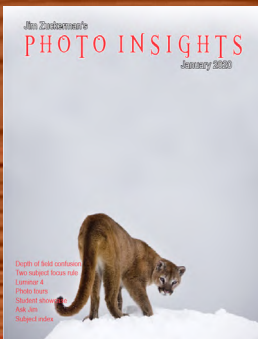
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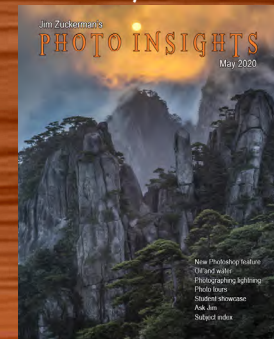
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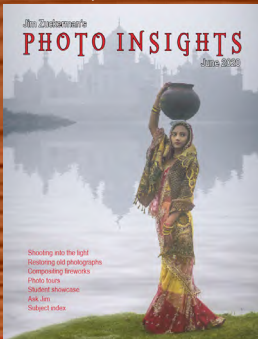
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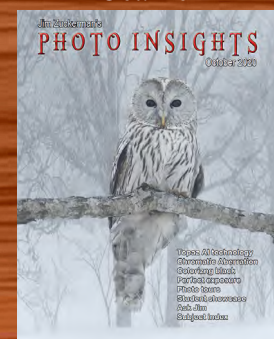
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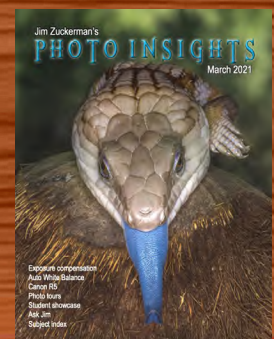
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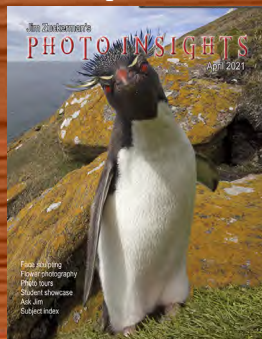
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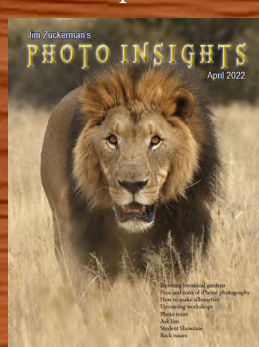
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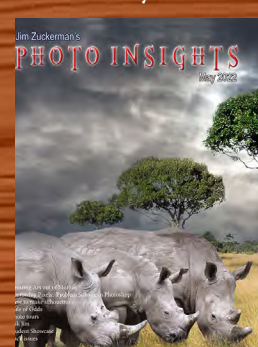
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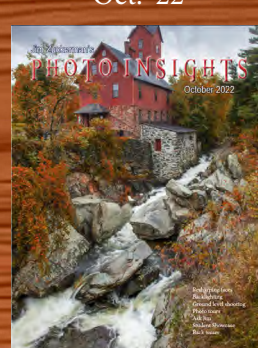
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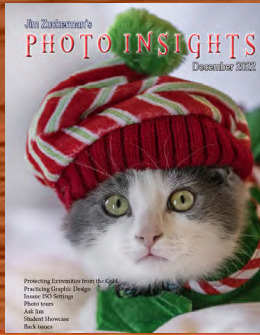
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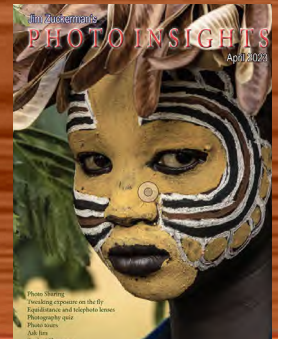
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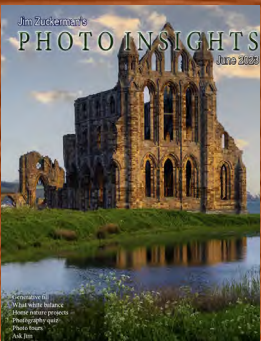
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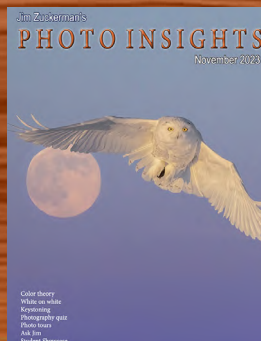
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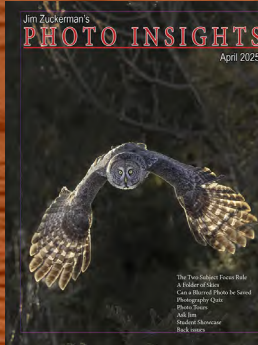
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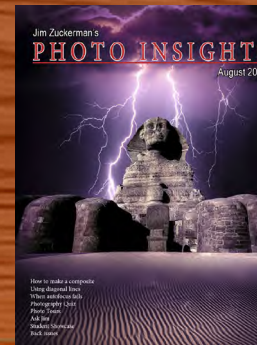
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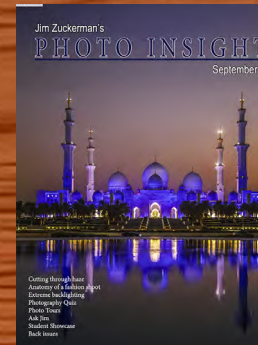
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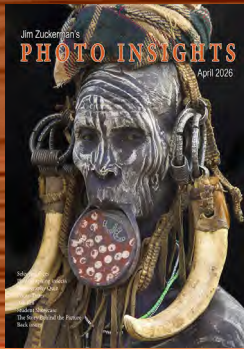
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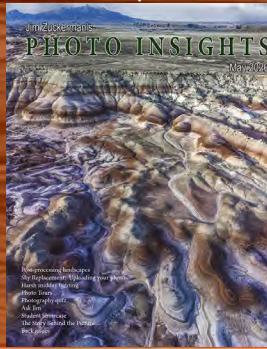
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Quiz answers

1. b
2. b
3. a
4. c
5. b
6. d
7. b
8. a
9. d
10. b

Your score

90% - 100%: You could have been a pro

80% - 89%: Your glasses probably need a new prescription

70% - 79%: Just don't quit your day job

< 70%: You should really be using an iPhone

CHILE: THE DESERT to the SEA

The Atacama and Beyond

SEPTEMBER 14 -24, 2027



Atacama Desert



Marble Caves



PHOTO INSIGHTS

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