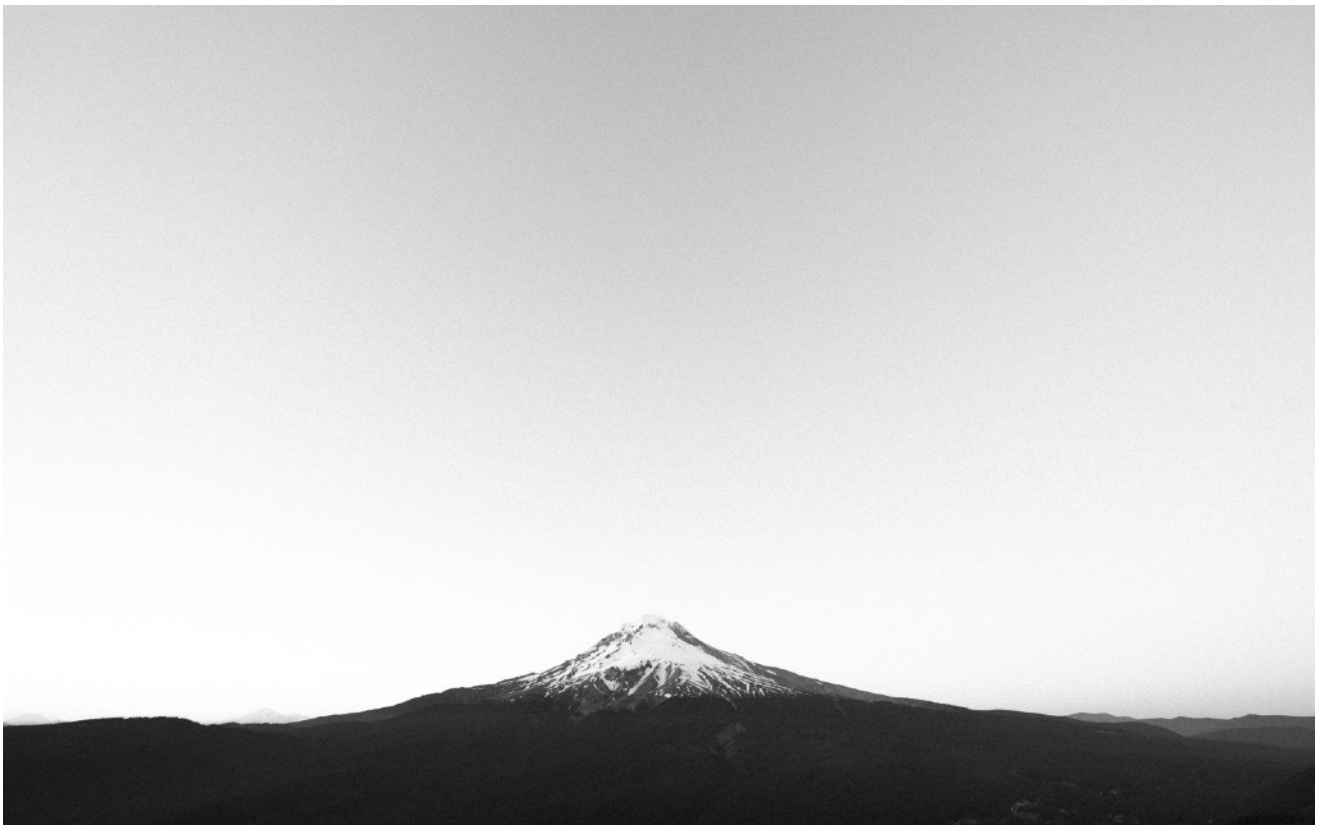

Examples of the PNW

how I made 15 digital images



adrian vila
aows

Examples of the PNW

Wikipedia has a very formal explanation for what the PNW is: "the Pacific Northwest (PNW), sometimes referred to as Cascadia, is a geographic region in western North America bounded by the Pacific Ocean to the west and (loosely) by the Cascade Mountain Range on the east".

I like to call it *home*.

For more than four years, I explored and enjoyed this picturesque region of North America. The landscapes I saw there changed my life.

It was then when I fell in love with photography and in this book, I'll show you how I made 15 of my favorite images in different parts of the PNW during the course of those amazing four years.

My hope is that you, too, if you haven't already, fall in love with the place and with photography.

January 2018

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About this book

Thanks for taking the time to read this book.

“*Examples of the PNW*” was first published in March, 2018, and is distributed as a free to download eBook, under a Creative Commons *Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs* (CC BY-NC-ND) license.

This means that you can (actually, you are encouraged to) share it with others as long as you attribute me and my site (<https://aows.co>), don't change the content of this book in any way and don't use it commercially.



About the author (me)

I'm Adrian Vila (***aows***), a Spanish-American film photographer currently based in the US.

Although the work I show in this book was all made with digital cameras, I currently use a medium format film camera as my main tool and black and white square format images as the medium to share how I see the world around me.

You can find a lot more information about me, articles about photography and the outdoors, along with much more educational material on my website: <https://aows.co>

I also have a YouTube channel where I try to bring you along on my adventures across the US and the world: <https://youtube.com/aowsphotos>

Find me everywhere else: [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#).

Contact me directly using my email: hi@aows.co

Introduction

I barely realize, but today is Thanksgiving day. It's hard to get a sense of time out here. I look at the car's clock, but I would've sworn it has stopped working a few hours ago.

There's nothing out here. We've been on this road for hours. I can't tell when was the last time I saw another human being. Or any being.

What am I doing here?

I've always loved maps. I remember how I used to get lost in them wondering what remote places would look like. Places where no towns were to be found, places that seemed to be disconnected from the rest of the world as there were no roads to be found on those maps.

My imagination ran wild, but I knew nothing about those places. *What's it like to be there?*

I wanted to see for myself.

Having lost service a long time ago, I'm starting to wonder if we'll have enough gas to get out of here.

We finally arrive, still plenty of daylight left in the day.

Days in the desert seem to last forever. Or you only wish that they do, before the dark and endless winter night falls.

There's one person here. The manager of this place is working on one of his "suites". They remind me of the containers where people live in remote bases, in places like Antarctica. This looks more like Mars, though.

Darkness is approaching and we hurry to have our Thanksgiving dinner. It's already well below freezing, but it will get much worse. Little do I know, but I believe that night I experienced *real* cold for the first time in my life.

Fire. We need to be close to the flames, so close that they scorch our clothes. But only a few inches further, the freezing desert is waiting.

What am I doing here?

So this is what all those empty and remote places on maps looked like.

There's nothing out here. Everything seems to be dead, if there was something that could die. It's dark, very dark. Thousands, if not millions of stars rein in the sky.

And then, it happened. We had no idea.

Surrounded by darkness, it didn't take us long to notice the red, glowing light coming from behind the mountains of the East. The desert is coming back from its sleep as a red beam of light starts to light it up.

This is nothing like anything I've ever experienced, and I must confess that I'm both amazed and a bit scared. The already Martian looking landscape is being bathed with this incredible, bloody light coming from something raising behind the eastern mountains. Next to our little campfire, I feel smaller than ever.

And then we saw it. A full, gigantic red Moon emerged from behind the mountains. We were in awe.

We weren't the only ones. Behind us laid one of the highest peaks in the state. An empty, barren land. But there was something there. *Howling*. The coyotes were claiming this land as the mountain was swallowed by the red tint coming from our cosmic partner. I shiver.

What am I doing here? Now I had the answer.

It was during this trip that I made the first images I was proud of, and the beginning of an amazing adventure. But most importantly, it was this trip that shattered a shell I'd been in and opened my eyes and heart to the amazing, wild world we live in.

Since then, I can only think and dream of photographing it, all of it, to express my admiration and for my work to serve as an homage to this beautiful planet we have been gifted with.

The rest of this book will attempt to inspire you to take trips like this one, showing you easily and not that easily accessible places all along the Pacific Northwest that hopefully you'll fall in love with as well.

Photography is the excuse. Discovering the wild is the goal.

A few words about camera gear

To capture the world, you need a camera. There's no way around it. But to become a photographer, you need much more than that.

They say everyone is a photographer nowadays, because everyone has a camera in their pocket. As if everyone could be Picasso because we all have pencil and paper at home.

They say camera gear doesn't matter, because what you capture is more important. As if you could make images the same way no matter what camera you are using.

No, not everyone is a photographer. And yes, camera gear matters.

You need to change your attitude in order to become a photographer.

And you need the right tool for the job.

Forget about megapixels, full frame or bokeh. You need to find the camera that you enjoy using the most. Don't look for something that simply "gets out of the way": search for the one that will inspire and push you every time.

I fell in this trap, many times. I still do with some other gear I don't really need nor even like. But when it comes to my camera, I'm done, I've already found mine. [You can find all the camera gear I use on my website.](#)

Wake up and get out

It took moving 5,397 miles away from my hometown for me to discover nature. It's not that there aren't beautiful landscapes over there, I just wasn't interested. I also used to wake up really late in the morning.

But being in a new place makes you look at things in a different way, everything is new. You try and experiment with things you never thought about doing. One of those things, and the one that has changed my life, is *waking up early and getting out there*.

5 years ago, if I were to watch a sunrise, it'd be heading back home after partying all night or on my way to work from the car. Now, not a single week goes by without me watching at least one in nature, away from the city and all the noise.

Waking up before sunrise, driving somewhere and then hiking, all this in the dark, can be hard. But at the end, it's worth it. *Every. Single. Time.*

I've seen sunrises in the Canadian Rockies, in some of the most remote parts of the contiguous United States, in National Parks like Mt Rainier, Glacier or Yosemite, in the Eastern Sierras in California, next to frozen lakes in the middle of the winter in the Midwest. I've woken up and driven at 2 or 3 in the morning more times than I can count.

These are memories I will never forget, and they remind me how beautiful the world is and how little time we've got here to enjoy it. So wake up and get out, now!

How to find the time

Time is precious. Being a landscape photographer requires a lot of exclusive time but most people don't seem to have it.

Back in mid-October, 2017, I walked out of the office for the last time: I quit my job to hit the road and visit places that would take me years to see (and photograph) otherwise. And now that the road trip is over, I have a lot time to spend working on my passion. But for years, I'd been photographing the Pacific Northwest while having a day job.

Landscape photography can be hard because it requires a lot of time and dedication. The difference between a good and a great landscape photo is more often than not the light and the weather - "weekend photographers" have only 2 chances a week to catch those conditions. But it doesn't have to be that way.

These are some of the things I used to do while having a job that allowed me to get photographs even during the week.



1.- Treat your photography as a job

If you are serious about photography, take it seriously and treat it as a job even if you aren't making any money with it. That means saying no to some other "compromises" if there's a chance to get some great photography, allocating the time you need for it, and executing it even if you don't feel like doing it.

There has never been a time when I got out to take photos and said "it wasn't worth it". It always is.

2.- Optimize your time outside - "background scouting"

As it usually happens, it's not about spending a lot of time doing something but actually using that time wisely. That usually means **scouting** and **planning**.

But don't think I'm going to tell you you have to spend hours in a location looking for the perfect shot. I don't like to do that either. Enter what I like to call "*background scouting*".

Pay attention while you do other things during your day: while you drive, during your commute, when walking the dog or even browsing the internet, you will run into stuff you might want to photograph. Remember, you don't have to be in the wilderness to make a great landscape image.

Take the image on the right as an example: I found this path leading to the trees 100 feet away from the place where we spent this winter. It's been there all this time, but it was covered in snow and only this time I could see it. This is



a shot I want to take, but I need some fog to hide the houses in the background and, why not, add some mystery to the scene.

When the fog comes, I'll be ready to get out of the house and shoot the scene. It won't take me more than 5 minutes but you and I know that's not the whole story.

3.- Be always aware of the weather

Following up on the previous point: if something catches your eye but it doesn't quite have what you want to make a good photograph, try to imagine the same shot under different conditions. Would it be better if it was sunny? Or foggy? Maybe at night?

You can have a list of places to shoot under certain conditions, so when a day like that comes and you have some free time, you are ready to go and get great shots in no time.

They might say you got lucky being at the right place at the right time, but luck usually finds its way for those who know how to plan.

4.- Find your local go-to places

It's very important that you have a list of places where you can go to at a moment's notice to spend your unexpected free time.

For example, when I used to live in Portland I had a couple places in the city where I could shoot if I had 1 hour or so. Another whole set of spots to go to if I had some 2-3 hours. And so on.

5.- Look for inspiration everywhere

Books are a great source of inspiration. Some photography volumes are expensive, but you can always visit your local library or buy them used and sell them again afterwards.

Inspiration can be found online as well, but it's too dangerous - it can quickly become a rabbit hole. I recommend visiting photographers websites and looking at their portfolios, they don't have as much clutter and you can learn a lot about how they work when you see all of their photos. Avoid social networks.

But do more than look at photos: anything could inspire you. Try to perceive the world with different eyes. For example, if you are walking your dog, try to see the way they are seeing: not only the things they find interesting but also from their perspective. Or the squirrel's perspective. How do they see the landscape around them?

Be always looking for that spark that will ignite your inspiration.

6.- “Reverse engineer” someone else's work

If you like a piece from someone else's work, think about how to achieve something similar, where to do it, under what circumstances and even better, how to improve it. Don't be afraid of imitating others.

That's what happened to me after seeing one of Michael Kenna's long exposures of the moon in one of his books. "I have to try this!", I told myself. I figured out when the moon would be full and made a short list of 2-3 places where I could go to get a shot I'd like.



I had to wait almost 3 months for the *right conditions* -clear or partly cloudy skies, full moon- to happen at the *right time* -not only the time of the day, but when I was able to go there- and the result was a fantastic evening at Mt St Helens and an image I'm proud of.

7.- Wake up early

Once again, I recommend that you to wake up early. I find it the easiest to shoot before and during sunrise since it's not likely you'll have many compromises at that time. Sunset and even night time are much more complicated: dinners, meeting friends, family or coworkers, having to sleep...

Examples of the PNW

1

Fall colors in the Willamette Forest



You'd be forgiven if you don't even know how to pronounce the name of this forest. Someone gave us a useful tip once, just think: *"Willamette, damn it"*.

But jokes aside, this is a big national forest laying just west of the Cascades. It can be accessed from Salem, where Detroit is the gateway, or from Eugene following the McKenzie river.

Not only does the forest contain some incredible peaks like Mt Jefferson and the Three Sisters, but it's also home to massive waterfalls and beautiful hot springs.

It's also the perfect place to find fall colors. That's why I headed there in the dark, rainy and cold Sunday morning of October 30th, 2016.

It was one of my last attempts (the fall colors were starting to fade) at finding one of the shots I'd been pursuing for a couple weeks: a lone yellow tree surrounded by evergreen. This isn't something you can plan, so I just drove around the forest searching for this shot, or whatever else I could find.

It was getting late and it was almost time to head back (it takes around 2 and a half hours from there to Portland), but I decided to give yet another forest road a try. NF-730 was the road that led me to one of my favorite photos I've taken in the PNW.

Taking the exit from the McKenzie Highway, you have to go through a power plant and a campground (it was closed at that time) and drive for a few miles until you get to Smith Reservoir. Road is paved and in good conditions.

Plenty of good shots can be taken at the reservoir: the fog is very intense over there in rainy days and that will give your photos some mood.

But it was on the way there and along this narrow road that I found my shot. NF-730 follows the Smith River. It's a bit of a canyon and you have these somewhat steep hills on both sides. The clouds were very low that day but not too low that they would've obstructed my shot.

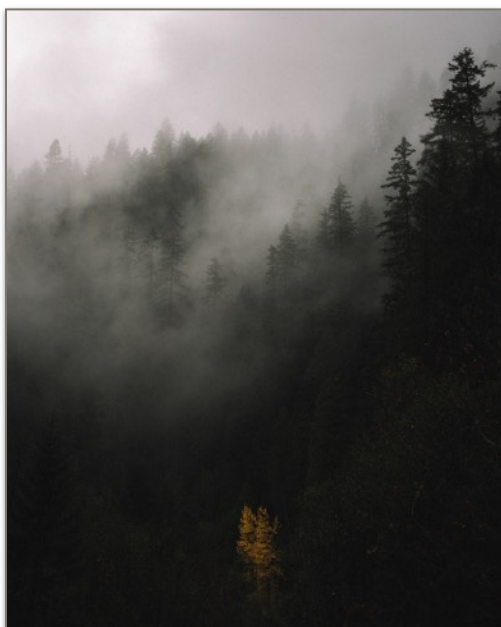
I was on my way back to the highway when I saw it, *the lone yellow tree*. Of course, there were more in the area, but that one was exactly what I was looking for. The hills made the green Douglas Fir look even taller than they actually were, and the clouds were that added bonus I wasn't even expecting to find.

Just below the tree, in that photo, flowed the river. I decided not to include it to give the image a feeling of isolation. The only yellow tree, surrounded by dark, strange fellows.

Since the subject and background were on the same focal plane and relatively far away, I went with the widest aperture available to me with the kit lens to avoid blur (as I said it was a canyon and it was getting late, so light was pretty low).

This photo still needed some post-processing to make the effect I was looking for even more accentuated.

If you look at the RAW file, you'll see detail in the shadows. I didn't want distractions from the main subject, so I removed as much as I could, darkening the whole area and removing some big branches that were still present. Then I made the tree lighter using the HSL tool (luminance of yellow and orange to around +50).



RAW file

Camera	Sony A7II
Focal length	70mm
Lens	Sony 28-70mm f/3.5-5.6
Settings	1/160sec, f/5.6, ISO 200

2

The Blast Zone from above



Mt St Helens erupted 2 years before I was born. I guess the eruption was still very recent during the next years because I recollect seeing footage of the incident on the TV when I was growing up, a few years later. It might have inspired some volcano-themed movies in the 90s too, but that's just a wild guess on my part.

Anyway, this mountain is a good reminder of how powerful nature is, and how small we are. It's not only a great place to visit, but also a phenomenal area to photograph.

And while drones aren't allowed in the National Monument itself, I flew this one just at the beginning of the "Blast Zone", a few miles away from the mountain.

There, you'll find a bridge built in 1991: Hoffstadt Creek Bridge. It happens to be the highest bridge in Washington (open to traffic, you might know of others that are higher and more popular, like Vance Creek). Just before the bridge, there's a parking lot where you can park and read some informational signs with info about it. You can also walk under the bridge or, as I did, fly your drone.

This was my first time flying the DJI Mavic Pro, and I still wasn't sure of all the features it had. It wasn't my first drone though, so I knew what to expect from aerial shots and where to place the device to get a good shot.

I saw the creek and I let the drone hover up there until a car passed by. I took a few shots and this was the strongest, in my opinion.

The bridge on the left leaves enough space for the background in this photo. It also creates a line that the eye will naturally follow. The car just adds some motion -and emotion- to the image.

Everything else, and what makes this photo work well, is provided by the beautiful trees, the ones with leaves, the ones without them, and the dead ones resting on the river bed.

Shooting with a drone is different than shooting with a DSLR: the focal length and aperture are fixed (unless you have a very high-end drone), you usually want to use higher shutter speeds (to avoid blur if it's windy) and the small size of the sensor will result in grainy pictures when shooting in low light.

This photo was taken right after noon, so light was not a problem.

I usually let the drone do the job and shoot in “P mode”.

I worked quite a bit on this photo in post-processing. I darkened the bridge and brightened the creek. I worked with the colors as well (see RAW file).



Camera	DJI Mavic Pro
Settings	1/430sec, f/2.2, ISO 100

RAW file

3

The Vista House



A sunrise in the Columbia River Gorge. Always, always a good idea and a perfect way to start the day!

If you are lucky enough to have a day job that doesn't start before the Sun rises, then you should be making more trips out to the Gorge first thing in the morning. Traffic can get a little bit crazy on the way back, but it's always worth it.

There are a few spots that don't require any physical effort to get to. Most of them will give you an amazing view of the Sun bathing the mighty Columbia River and the Gorge with those golden rays of a clear morning. Don't fear if you see clouds, the best sunrises I've seen in the Gorge happened when they were present. Clouds can get crazy, both in shape and colors!

And if you prefer to get your exercise outdoors instead of going to the gym, you'll find plenty of hikes with, of course, amazing views at the end. I lost count of how many times I hiked to Angel's Rest before going to work - moderate hike to an incredible viewpoint. Unfortunately, the trail burnt in the 2017 forest fires so I can't tell you the current conditions or if it's even open at the time you are reading this. Dog Mountain is a good alternative, but it's further away from Portland and a harder hike as well.

Anyway, going back to the shot: the Vista House is one of those spots I mentioned before that require no effort to get to. And while this place can... no, *will* be crowded later in the day and for sunset, I hardly found anyone there at sunrise during the week. Odds of being alone there are even greater if you go there in the winter as I did in this photo.

I'd taken so many shots of the Vista House, that this morning I wasn't planning on taking yet another one. But on my way back to the car from a quick walk to some viewpoints nearby, I saw it. The light was starting to hit the building, creating a nice gradient that went from a dark road (foreground), to a partially lit Vista House (subject), to a brighter background (mountains and river) and finally, to an almost white sky.

The day was Monday, February the 13th, 2017. The time was 7:50am.

Post-processing was all about correcting the white balance, making the photo warmer. Not only because it looked like that in person, but also to add a warm feeling to it. I also increased the exposure. Other than that, not too much else was done.



RAW file

Camera	Sony A7II
Focal length	65mm
Lens	Sony 24-70mm f/4
Settings	1/160sec, f/7.1, ISO 100

4

Mt Hood (from Tom, Dick and Harry Mountain)



The Mt Hood National Forest was my playground during my “Portland years”. After all, how many people have an easily accessible volcano just one hour away?

The forest has so much to offer: countless “postcardlike” forest roads, lakes, numerous hiking trails, and of course access to alpine landscape and beyond (glaciers and climbing).

One of my favorite hikes is Tom, Dick and Harry Mountain. The trailhead is just off Highway 26, which makes it a very, very popular hike. The odds are you won’t be alone there... ever. But this is for a reason: this hike is a terrific one no matter the time of the year.

In the winter, it makes for a great snowshoe adventure; if you can find the trail, that is. I tried twice and both times I ended up losing it, as people make their own paths. It’s relatively easy to find your way back to the car even if you get “lost” there, but you should be careful if you don’t know the area.

In the summer, you can camp at Mirror Lake, a beautiful spot if you can get past all the mosquitoes that will try to eat you alive. Some people camp at the top as well, but it’s a rocky exposed surface, so you better be prepared for it if you want to spend the night up there.

Or, do what I did many times if you still want to catch a sunrise from up there: get up early and drive before the Sun rises. The hike to the top takes around one hour (some 3 miles and ~1,300 feet elevation gain). You can watch [this video of one of those times I made the trip to the mountain.](#)

You can shoot at dusk too, but be advised: you might not be able to find a spot to park your car in the small parking lot. In that case, you can always drive to the Skibowl parking lot a bit further on Hwy 26, but that will add some distance to your hike. Not fun to walk that stretch in the winter, either.

But let’s talk about the photo. This one was taken in the summer and just before sunset. We were quite a few people up there but the top had enough room for all of us.

On a clear summer day like that one was, you can see the Cascades in all their glory: Mt Hood, Mt St Helens and Mt Rainier to the north, and Mt Jefferson and the Three Sisters to the south. Don't forget to look down since you can see Mirror Lake from up there. Quite a view!

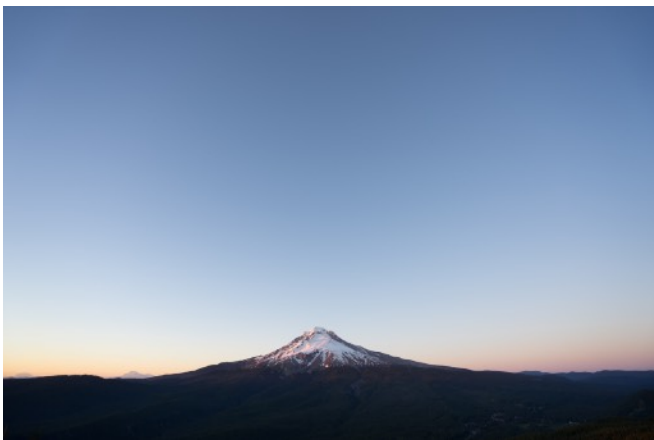
Taking good shots here isn't hard. While it's tempting to only use a wide angle lens to capture as much as you can of the scene, you should play with long lenses too. With all the people up there taking their own shots as well, it's hard to be original.

Here I tried to be minimalist, completely ignoring the foreground and the other mountains (you can still see them on the left though) and focusing on Mt Hood. In order to do this, I used the widest focal length on the widest lens I had: 16mm. I also darkened the slopes of the mountain to hide any details, like Timberline Lodge. A snow-covered cap helps to keep the focus on the subject.

I think this photo captures what you feel up there: the majesty of the mountain and its surroundings.

It wasn't always the case, but here I captured this photo with black and white in mind. I thought it'd help to make it even simpler. But I'm still showing the RAW file below so you can see how the landscape looked like when I saw it.

RAW file



Camera	Sony A7II
Focal length	16mm
Lens	Carl Zeiss 16-35mm f/4
Settings	1/40sec, f/4.5, ISO 100

5

Falls Creek Falls



Back to the Columbia River Gorge, land of waterfalls. And while the Oregon side is more popular, the Washington side hides a couple gems of its own: Panther Creek Falls and Falls Creeks Falls, one of the most impressive waterfalls in the Gorge.

It takes some effort to get here, about an hour and a half drive from Portland and a 6+ miles round-trip hike (1,000 feet elevation gain). But all worth it for a good reason.

Winter warning: the road to the trailhead closes in winter and it doesn't open until April - May. You can still go and snowshoe there, but that will add another 6 miles to your total.

The waterfall is powerful, impressive and second to none in beauty. It drops more than 300 feet in three steps, which makes this waterfall unique in the Gorge. You can't really see the three at the same time for the viewpoint though.

There are plenty of photos to be taken here, like the one you can see in the previous page. At the time, I didn't have a wide enough lens to take it all, so I stitched multiple photos I took with my Sigma 19mm (APS-C lens, so it's like a 28mm full frame equivalent). A 16mm would work much better here.

Another good shot is the tree on the edge of the first platform. If you get here around noon you might get incredible light if it's not overcast. Check the position of the Sun, because it can create some impressive light beams from the right, lighting up the whole waterfall.

You can also experiment with long exposures, although I'm not a huge fan of silky waterfall shots. Everyone is doing it nowadays! But to each their own. That's why I used a fast shutter speed here, to capture the power of the waterfall.

Camera	Sony a6000
Focal length	19mm (28mm FF equivalent)
Lens	Sigma 19mm f/2.8
Settings	8 shots, 1/200sec, f/7.1, ISO 400

6

Blue Lake



It's really hard to recommend just a few places in the PNW to the people who ask me where they should go. You can't really go wrong! But, and there's always a but: if I had to choose one and only one, that'd be the North Cascades National Park.

When I think of mountains, I think of the massive peaks in Northern Washington. Only a few places I've been to made me feel so small as the Cascades did in this breathtaking part of the PNW.

Just driving around the place will change how you look at nature, but if you have time and are in enough good shape to hike a bit, then you'll be in for a huge reward.

Maple Pass and Cascade Pass are, no doubt, some of the best hikes you can do over there. But they are not easy walks precisely. If you still want to get a glimpse of what the North Cascades have to offer and have no time or don't want to kick your butt up there, look no further than Blue Lake.

The best time of the year to be in the park and do any of the hikes is the fall. The maple trees put on a show that you will not forget any time soon, as you can see in this chapter's photo. Combined with the evergreen trees, the white snow and the pale rocks, this is a dream come true for photographers who work in color.

The hike to Blue Lake is an easy one: just over 2 miles each way and about 1,000 feet of elevation gain.

Plan on spending some time up there because you will find plenty of compositions. But of all the shots I took there, this one is my favorite.

Once you get to the lake, you'll see you can "climb" to the top of some rocks to get an even better view. We were up there when I saw Rachel approaching the edge of the cliff to take a photo with her iPhone. And then it hit me: her clothes, her backpack... everything matched the colors of the landscape! Having the camera app open on her phone was just the icing on the cake.

I was using the 16-35mm lens at the moment, so I went with the really wide angle of 16mm. I would've loved to try a shot at 35mm or even 50mm, from further again, to compress the background and make the peaks surrounding the lake look bigger. Wide angles make backgrounds look much smaller than they really are.

Focus was on her, as she was the main subject, and despite using a wide aperture (f/4) everything was sharp enough.

Post-processing was about making the scene lighter and just a bit warmer. Everything else was there!



RAW file

Camera	Sony A7II
Focal length	16mm
Lens	Carl Zeiss 16-35mm f/4
Settings	1/200sec, f/4, ISO 100

7

Alvord Desert



Our first real adventure was a trip to the Owyhees and the Alvord Desert, in Southeast Oregon. We were a bit naive then, we weren't prepared at all and didn't even check the forecast.

We got caught in a snowstorm near Leslie Gulch, about 25 miles away from the nearest paved road, there was no cell phone service and no one to be found in miles. Not happy with that, we drove to the Alvord Desert where we spent Thanksgiving eating beans on a frozen picnic table. Temperatures got to -12F that night (-25C) and we slept in the car with the distant howling of coyotes reminding us this was their home.

To this day, this was one of our best and most memorable trips. I still remember some of those moments like they happened yesterday.

So a few years later, we went back. But this time, in September. We drove the highest road in Oregon (in the Steens Mountain) and spent the day in the playa of the Alvord Desert.

That's what you can see in the photo: Rachel and Luna walking, our car far in the background, and even further, the Steens Mountain.

You'll find more people camping there, driving all kinds of vehicles and even landing planes.

As you can imagine, I'm going to recommend this place. Be aware that the towns are very small and far away from each other. Be conservative with the gas, you don't want to run out of it there.

Time to talk about the photo now. The playa is a flat place with the Steens serving as backdrop on one side, and some minor mountains on the other side. Sunrises and sunsets are what you are aiming for here, when the light can get really dramatic.

Look for a cool pattern on the ground or try to shoot a subject (person, car) and make it fit in the vastness of the desert. Pay attention to the long shadows as the Sun goes down. Find car tracks.

Or wait until the darkness comes and shoot the stars. Light pollution is not a thing down there, so it's a good place for night photography.

I cropped this photo and made it warmer. I shot it at f/9, if you want a more defined starburst you'll need a narrower aperture, like f/16.



Camera	Sony A7II
Focal length	18mm
Lens	Carl Zeiss 16-35mm f/4
Settings	1/200sec, f/9, ISO 160

8

God's Thumb



With a name like that, you must visit this place, right?

The Oregon Coast is home to many incredible spots, and this one rightfully qualifies as one of them. It's a very short hike - 1 mile to God's Thumb, with practically no elevation gain until the very end.

The trail can get very muddy though, and you'll likely find some fallen trees you'll have to avoid. You might find some people picking mushrooms. The trail isn't crowded but it's not an unknown place either.

You can get some shots in on your way there, but the best is at the end: an oddly thumb-shaped and very steep hill. Be very, very careful if you make the trip to the top because people have fallen from there. Everything should be fine if you stay away from the edge, but remember that this is the coast, it's windy and there can be strong gusts.

Also, don't go up there if you think you can't make it back down. As I said, it's very steep, and slippery when wet. You can always use your butt, as I did the two times I went there. No shame if that's the safest way to do it!

Now, photographically speaking, it's easy to see the potential of this place. Not only of the hill itself but the view that you get from up there will make for great shots. And if you are lucky enough to find strangers on the top, then it's even better.

That's of course what I did here, to give the photo a sense of scale.

I processed this photo more than I usually do, removing some distracting elements (one person and bushes) and slightly changing the hue of some colors. I liked the way the "palette" of colors looked this way.

Post-processing should be kept to a minimum, but I don't see any problems in using it to your advantage.

Since I didn't have a proper foreground, I used a wide aperture (everything would be in focus) to get a fast shutter speed (it was very windy) while keeping a low ISO.



Camera	Sony A7II
Focal length	50mm
Lens	Carl Zeiss 24-70mm f/4
Settings	1/500sec, f/4, ISO 100

9

Goat Rocks Wilderness



As you might have guessed, goats roam free in this wilderness area situated in between the Mt Rainier and Mt St Helens volcanoes, in Washington. And while not as popular for photography as the surrounding areas (its secrets are harder to access), it's visited by a lot of hikers and backpackers.

Goat Lake is the most common destination, but we decided to turn the other way and head towards Cispus Pass, a trail that is part of the Pacific Crest Trail (you'll see quite a few PCT hikers passing by from your campsite). We found what we were looking for: a beautiful landscape and not too many people to share it with.

The total length of the hike is some 14+ miles round-trip, and it's not easy if you are carrying a lot of weight. I recommend a light pack. We stayed there just one night but I wish we'd stayed another. There are plenty of trails to take there once you are settled, and you'll enjoy them more if you can get some rest after the hike in.

I took this photo of my friend Ben when taking one of those trails after we set our tent up for the night. We were hiking to Cispus Pass, where you'll find an awesome view of both Goat Rocks and Indian Heaven Wilderness.

This is another example of "heavier-than-usual editing". Once again, I recommend keeping post-processing to a minimum, but it's more important to achieve the result you were looking for than sticking with "reality". It's your interpretation that counts. This particular editing didn't really fit my style at the time but I like it as an individual shot.



Camera	Sony A7II
Focal length	28mm
Lens	Sony 28-70mm f/3.5-5.6
Settings	1/125sec, f/9, ISO 100

10

Bench and Snow Lakes



Mt Rainier National Park is one of my favorite spots in the PNW. No matter if you are planning on just driving around, or going on a hike, or backpacking, or even climbing, there is a plan for everyone. And you can't go wrong with any of them.

The hike to Bench and Snow Lakes is one you should take as a "sunrise mission". It's a short hike -2 miles round-trip- and the total elevation gain is minimal, but be aware that you will be gaining and dropping elevation the whole time. We were expecting a flat hike and to be back in less than one hour, so we did it before having any breakfast. Big mistake.

Otherwise, it's not a hard hike at all. Snow Lake is your final destination and it won't disappoint, but photography wise, I think Bench Lake is the money shot.

Within the first hour of the morning you'll get this amazing light coming from the east. On a clear day, of course. The top of the trees will light up and create long shadows. The lake will reflect some of the trees. And of course, you have some mountains in the background to complete the composition.

This vantage point is pretty easy to find, it's on the very own trail to Snow Lake so you won't miss it. On the way back you can also take cool shots of Mt Rainier.

All in all, I think this is a good place to photograph sunrise if you have a couple days in Mt Rainier. Don't forget about the famous, popular spot everyone chooses: Reflection Lakes.

Editing this photo, I increased the warmth and made the sky even lighter than it was, almost to a pure white. Both trying to accentuate the morning light.



Camera	Sony A7II
Focal length	24mm
Lens	Carl Zeiss 24-70mm f/4
Settings	1/80sec, f/4.5, ISO 100

11

Mt Hood (from Pittock Mansion)



The Pittock Mansion is one of the most popular spots in Portland, probably second only to Voodoo Doughnuts and Multnomah Falls.

If you do what most people do, and it's to visit this place during the day or even worse, at sunset, you will struggle to find a spot for you and your camera. The solution, as usual, is to go at sunrise. But try to be there well before that, or the same will happen. That's not only because of how popular this place is, but also because the "viewpoint" is pretty small.

You might even get lucky and go there when the Sun rises just behind Mt Hood. Quite a view!

Anyway, this was a very accessible and easy spot for me to visit from where I lived at the time. Having been there quite a few times, I already knew on my way there that the conditions on this morning of February were special. A dense fog was covering the city, and I started to visualize the shot I was after: buildings peaking through a sea of clouds.

Unfortunately, that didn't happen. The fog wasn't low enough. Fortunately, that didn't happen. The fog was low enough to show just some of the buttes around Portland, like islands in that cloudy ocean.

But then, and well after the Sun had risen, my patience -we were only two by that time, everyone else had left already- paid off big time. The clouds far in the horizon that had been obstructing the view of Mt Hood went partially away, letting us see just the top of the 11,000+ foot volcano.

That was *the* photo.

The lens I used isn't the sharpest, but much worse than unsharpness is the lack of contrast and the muted colors it produces. That's what I had to fix in post-processing in order to create an even more compelling image.

To this day, this is still one of my favorite photos I've taken of Mt Hood (and I have quite a few of that mountain, believe me). It may be one of my favorite photos, period.



Camera	Sony a6000
Focal length	210mm (315mm FF equivalent)
Lens	Sony 55-210 f/5.6
Settings	1/500sec, f/7.1, ISO 100

12

Skier, White River



The White River is born at the White River Glacier in Mt Hood. It's a short lived river, just 50 miles, but what a life. Draining the east side of the mountain, featuring spots like the White River Falls before ending in the Deschutes River, it's a stream of water not to be missed.

One of my favorite spots is the first easily accessible place to visit the White River, just a few miles from its birthplace, still in Mt Hood. The White River Sno-Park is a popular place among people who like snowshoeing and skiing, but also photographers due to the great view of Mt Hood you get from there.

I wasn't there to capture the mountain this time. It was a cold February afternoon, and I was flying my drone trying to capture the crazy shape of the river as it flows through the winter snow. There were very few people there, unusual for this spot, and that was fine with me.

Then, I saw a skier coming down the slope, heading to the parking lot. I thought that including them in an aerial shot next to the river would make the image much better... but they were gone by the time I was ready to take the picture.

A few minutes later, almost ready to pack and leave, I saw another skier, and without wasting any time I pushed my drone up in the sky again and took 3 or 4 shots before they were gone too.

The result is a dramatic image that shows the scale of nature versus humans, even when we are dealing with a small river like this one. The orientation of the skier helps amplify the drama, since it looks like they are heading towards the river.

The RAW file shows how fast I had to act to get this image: I didn't have time to place the drone where I wanted, so I focused on getting the right angle instead and started taking shots while the skier was still at the right place for the composition I saw at that moment.

I had to aggressively crop the image, along with some cleaning of dark spots in the snow and brightening.



Camera

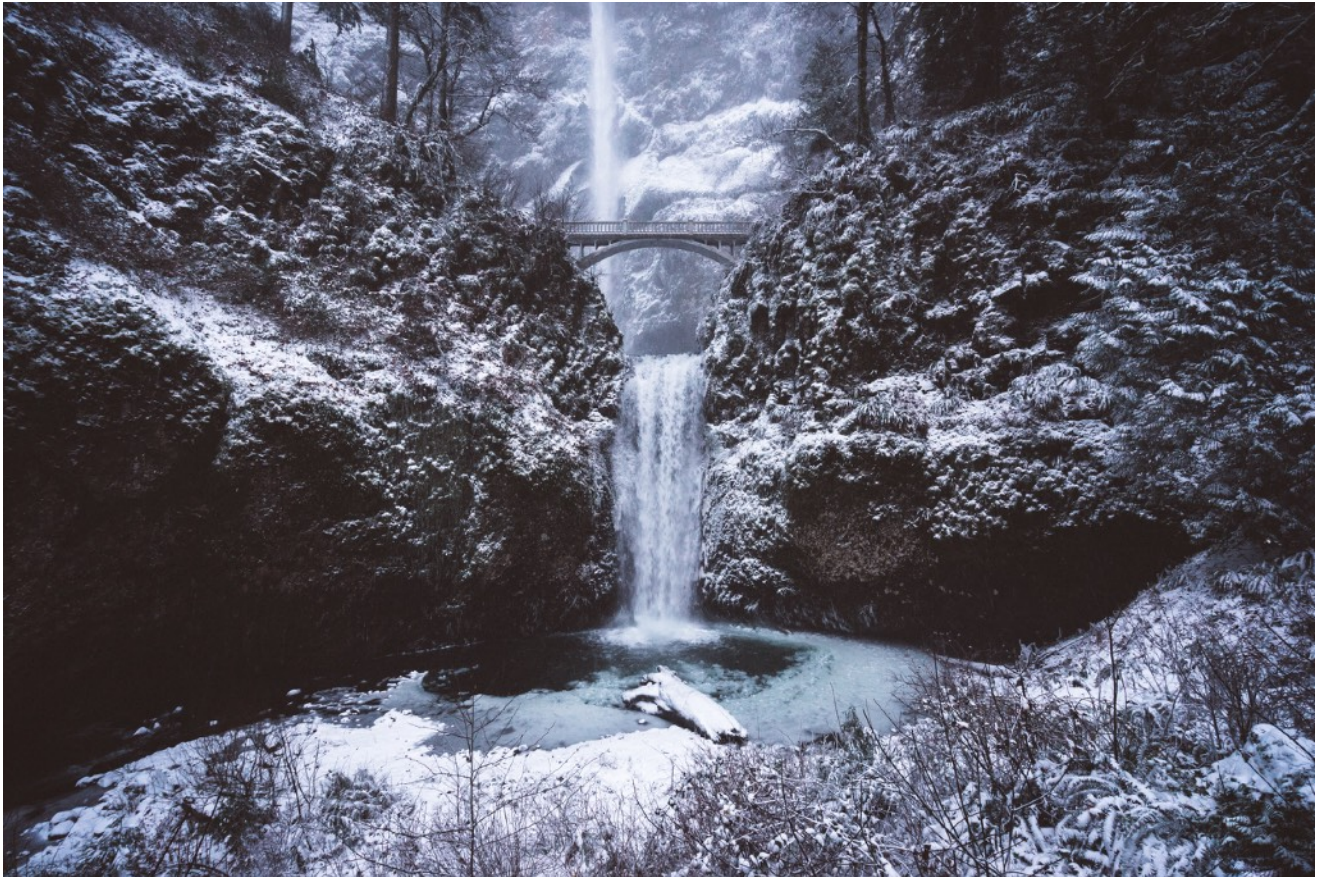
DJI Mavic Pro

Settings

1/450sec, f/2.2, ISO 100

13

Frozen Multnomah Falls



When you have an extremely popular spot, one that has been photographed to exhaustion for years and known by every photographer in a radius of hundreds of miles, there's not much you can do to get a unique shot. Or maybe there is.

As I mentioned many times in [my blog](#), [social media](#) and on [my YouTube channel](#), extraordinary conditions can make an ordinary place look... you know, extraordinary. But when you have extraordinary conditions and an extraordinary place... then, you hit the jackpot.

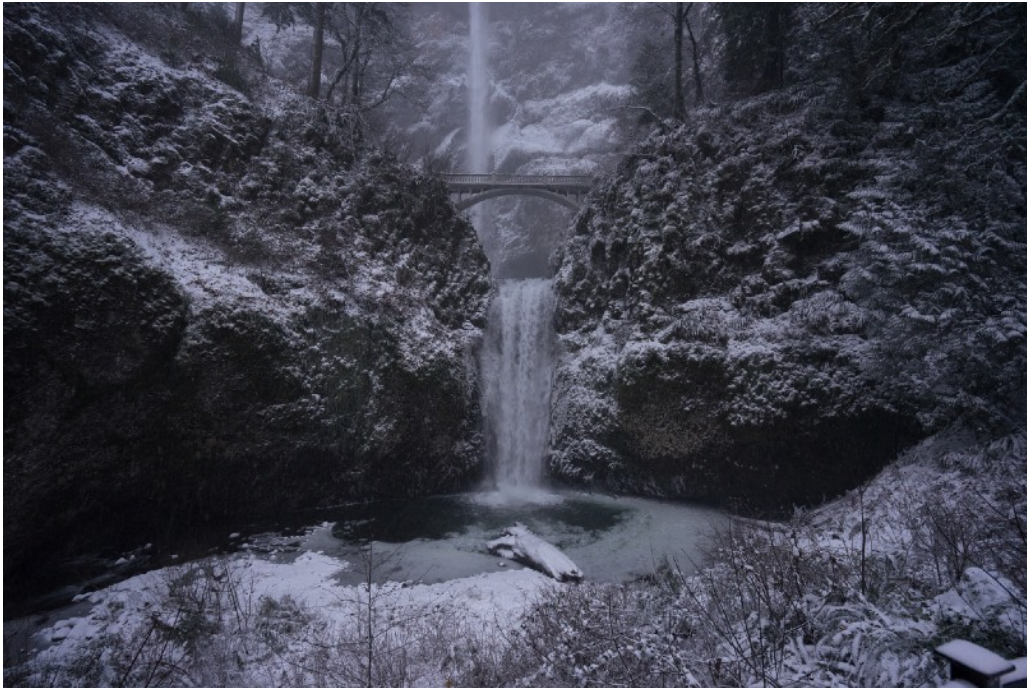
Of course, I wasn't the first one to photograph a partially frozen, snow covered Multnomah Falls. But these are somewhat rare conditions for the place - only happened once during my four years living in Portland. Probably not many photographers (even local photographers) have this image in their portfolios.

Remember to always be aware of the weather, and have a list of places to go to depending on the conditions. Fog, snow, storms, night photography... those times and weather conditions are the ones you need to look for. Avoid the boring sunny, mid-day shots as much as you can.

That's what I did that night of December 8th, 2016. I went to work earlier than usual to be able to leave earlier as well, and to have time to drive those 20 miles to the falls before dark. I knew the conditions were going to be much worse the next day, and I didn't want to risk it.

It was a Thursday, it was cold and the roads were getting very icy (the car even slid a bit on my way back home). You can imagine: it was us (I had to convince her, but Rachel came with me), a couple taking selfies and two people from the local TV channel - that's what I call a "unique shot" that pretty much no one else has.

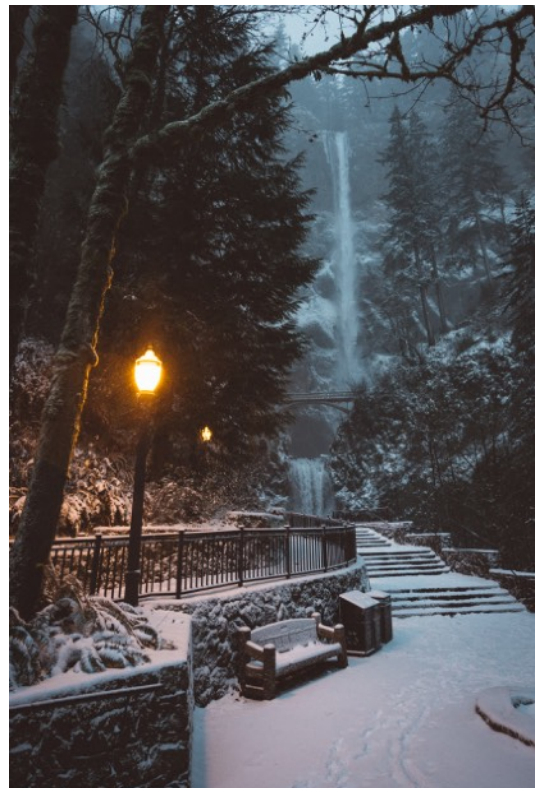
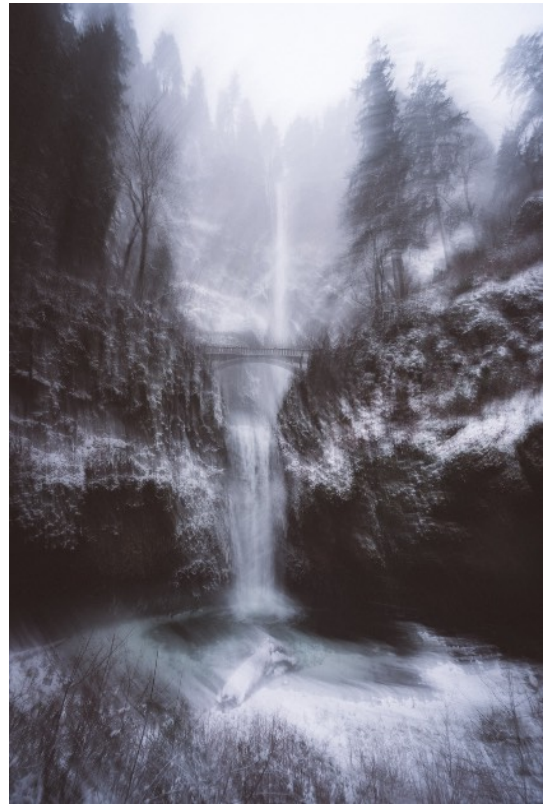
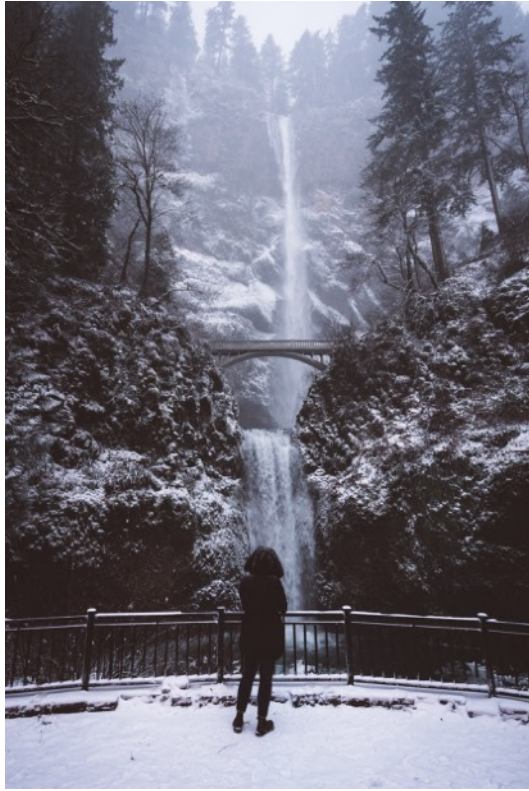
It's not my favorite image and it won't win any awards. But I included it here because it's the perfect example of what a landscape photographer should aim for: to be ready when the right conditions come. The rewards are immense.



Camera	Sony a7II
Focal length	16mm (315mm FF equivalent)
Lens	Carl Zeiss 16-35mm f/4
Settings	1/60sec, f/4, ISO 1600

I underexposed the image, but I was already shooting wide open with a relatively high ISO, I didn't have a tripod with me (this is why I come back to my advice "be ready" over and over, because I fail at this too), the shutter speed was already 1/60th (I like to shoot waterfalls at 1/125th and above, otherwise the water starts to look smooth like in a long exposure), so I thought it'd be ok to underexpose it and add some brightness later in post.

Some more images from that day on the next page.



14

Jumping in No Name Lake, Broken Top



Broken Top is one of my favorite places, if not my favorite, in Oregon. The whole Three Sisters Wilderness area is just breathtaking, but this mountain stole my heart from the very first moment I stepped foot on it.

There are very few hikes as beautiful as this one. The drive to the trailhead is a bit bumpy (you must have a high clearance car), but the hike itself is not too bad. Of course it gets worse the more gear you bring with you.

You can camp overnight at the top, next to (but more than 100 feet away of) No Name Lake or pretty much anywhere along the trail. Spending the night at the top is surely an experience, but be aware: it's very exposed, it can get really windy and, well, cold. Setting camp under the tree line will offer you more protection for a better night.

I've done this hike a few times ([watch the video of my last time there](#)) and I have dozens of shots from and of Broken Top. Actually, one of my favorite images I've ever taken, showcasing most of the Cascade Mountains, was made here. But I'm including a different one here.

I like this one because, of course, the two people in it. Not only does it show scale, but that's glacial water right there. It's not very common that you see people making that jump - I was lucky enough to be at right place at the right time to take this shot.

Although not something I really photograph anymore, this action shot makes me think about what could possibly be going through that guy's mind at that very time, seeing that freezing water approaching. He was probably getting ready for the shock.

It helped me that it was a bright, sunny day. I shot this at Aperture Priority (I choose the aperture of the lens and the camera selects the best shutter speed), at f/11, and I was still able to get 1/320th of a second at ISO 100. That was more than enough to freeze the jump.

The RAW file shows that, once again, I barely made it. I wasn't thinking about the composition or the settings, since it was something that was happening really quick in front of me.

It was afterwards and already in front of the computer when I saw that the right composition was a vertical one, just hinting the mountain and cropped on the two guys.



Camera	Sony a7II
Focal length	28mm
Lens	Sony 28-70mm f/3.5-5.6
Settings	1/320sec, f/11, ISO 100

15

Sea of clouds at Saddle Mountain



Sometimes, you just get “lucky”. This is what happened to me this April evening when I hiked to the top of Saddle Mountain, a few miles from the Oregon Coast.

I quote lucky because I still had to push myself to leave the couch and the book I was reading to drive for hour and a half, and then hike a somewhat demanding trail to the top of a mountain to, maybe, get a good shot. And good thing I did!

I don't know if you can predict a temperature inversion like the one I witnessed that night. I had no idea that was going to happen. But I was there. And that sunset is one that I'll remember for many years to come.

The hike started like any other hike, there was nothing different that could hint an inversion was about to happen. I ran into many hikers going down on my way up. And then it happened.

I was near the top when the Sun went down and the clouds started to roll in. There were other two people up there, but that was it: the scene was all for us to enjoy. And while I was envious of the blanket they were wrapped in to keep them warm, I was busy trying to make a compelling image.

Today, I would've tried my luck with a long exposure, or bracketing shots to get a higher dynamic range if still using the digital camera. I didn't do any of those things back then. But I'm still happy with what I got: a blanket of clouds and the silhouette of the mountain fading in it.



Camera	Sony a6000
Focal length	19mm (28mm equivalent)
Lens	Sigma 19mm f/2.8
Settings	1/250sec, f/3.2, ISO 100

