

Artist's Perspective...

## Subject Matters

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Well here it is the month of January and a whole new year is right before us and our cameras. Traditionally, this seems to be a time of year where we have difficulty finding subjects in nature. The dull skies are filled with gray clouds, the light is flat, the landscape colorless and featureless. So what do we do during these "dull" months - put away the photographic gear and wait until spring? No way, at least not me!

This is a great time to hone our "seeing" skills and to build on our photographic craft. Out here in California, the winter provides terrific color in the sky. The dew laden foggy mornings reveal moisture twinkles on plant life, and the cool brisk air is terrific for our souls. With the sun lower in the southern sky, sunrise arrives later so that we don't have to drag ourselves out of the cozy comforts of bed in the middle of the night. One of the things I like about winter photography is that the vivid colors of dawn seem to come and go more quickly. This forces the photographer to work more quickly, and learning to work quickly is a valuable lesson to learn in building our photographic craft. If you can't get the job done quickly due to fumbling of equipment or indecision, then you need more practice. Those images we do capture successfully are due more to our skill, planning and "being there." I like that.

The same holds true with the sunsets of winter. With less time to contemplate, it's a good idea to more carefully plan your subject and shooting location. I find that scouting for possible locations during the day light hours, without bringing any camera gear with me, allows to me to focus entirely on the task at hand. Knowing where the sun will drop below the horizon helps me to previsualize the scenes I find. Using your creativity to previsualize is a very valuable skill to develop, regardless of what the subject may be. I also try to be as optimistic as possible, and that seems to help as well.

Just recently we had a nice storm here on the coast of Southern California. I went to location for photographing sunsets that I had found recently during one of my scouting excursions. I decided it would be a nice place to visit when it looked like we were going to have a brilliant sunset, and was I ever right! With a clear view out to the coast and ocean, the sun dropped right into the Pacific with reflections of intense color on the surface of the water.

Many photographers meter the sky away from the sun. The reason I prefer to meter the hotter areas closer to the sun is simple - slide film will only tolerate so much in the bright areas. I don't want to lose any of the fine detail, which is in the lighter areas, especially in the subtle transitions of color in the sky. This is a method that works well for me but by all means test, test, and test again to see if it works for you.

Always remember that with photography, especially photography, it's that we arrive at the results we seek, and not the means we



While waiting for the morning light and sunrise, I try to make good use of the time. I found these Valley Oak leaves in grass with frost and ice under the canopy of a big Valley Oak tree. Nikon N90s, Nikkor 105mm 2.8 Macro, Velvia @50, Bogen 3021 w/3047, electronic release, F22.0 1 sec.



Sunset view out over the Pacific Coast from the Santa Monica Mountains. Metering? Switch on the camera spot meter in manual mode, place the spot pattern on the brightest part of the sunset and place the reading 2 stops over. Nikon N90s, Nikkor 70-300mm 4.0-5.6 ED, Velvia @50, Bogen 3021 w/3047, electronic release, F8.0 1/2-1 sec.

take to get there that truly matters. There are many ways to get where you want to go, but the best thing is knowing where that is!

*Editor's Note* - Visit Dales web site at [www.californiapictures.com](http://www.californiapictures.com) to view more of his work.

DP - NPN 368

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