



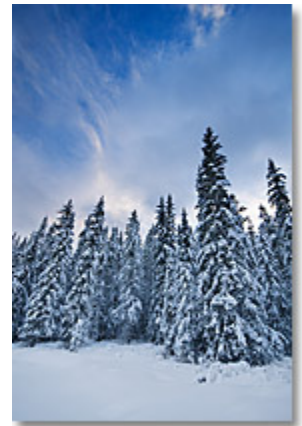
Winter Musings: Getting Into the Rhythm of Winter Photography

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For many creatures, winter is a time of dormancy. However, it seems for humans in the western world that winter is just as busy as any other season, especially during the holidays. Well, with those holidays passing in a smeary blur of rum eggnog, we can settle in for the long dark of winter. The subdued tones of nature's winter colours suggest a contemplative approach to photography. We can use this time to reflect on and consider what is important to us in life and art. All that is required is a shift in your mindset into the conserving rhythms of this frosty season.



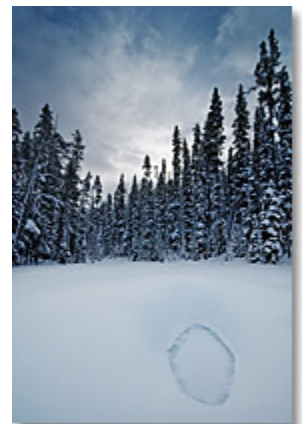
While the numbing cold and extra swaddling of clothes make winter shoots daunting, I happen to love the stark lines and cool hues that winter offers. The painful, quiet clarity of a rimy morning or the brooding, contemplative duskiness of evening suggest the struggle for life itself that plays out in the snow during these short, dark days. Generally, urban living isolates me from this struggle being cocooned as I am in my house, my car, the mall - but when I drive out to the country or the mountains, I can sense the slow pulse of the world, sluggish from the chill.



The shoot often starts slow as well. I get to sleep in a little longer than any other time of year. Where I live, clouds often obscure the sunrise and the dawn takes its time turning the sleeping face of the earth reluctantly toward the sun. I feel no pressure to dash out only to sit in my vehicle in the dark, and I find that some of the best winter photography comes not from sunrise or sunset but the small times at the belly and shoulders of the day: between sunrise and noon, and between late afternoon to sunset. It is at these short hours that some of the freshest imagery can be made when approached from a relaxed, contemplative attitude.



In fact, if I do not set out with an open, receptive attitude, the struggles with icy gear and inclement winter can get the better of my desire to shoot! There is a paradox inherent in starting a photo trip with a pre-conceived image in mind: constraining our imagination and pre-setting our creative sensor can blind us to the numerous opportunities around us. I try and live by a simple creed: if I see something, I stop and shoot no matter what or where I was originally headed. This lesson has been hard learned as I have arrived at my destination only to realize that the beauty of the day was back at the place where I refused to stop. The extra time it takes to dress, get to a destination and even work the camera should be seen not as obstacles but as clues to slow down, take a few breaths, and look around before racing to the first thing that caught the eye. In other words, to cultivate a state of open readiness will infuse your winter work with fresh light.



When I do this, I soon start to see all kinds of things - some for the camera and some just for me on that day. Shooting in snow is liberating. Finally! All those distracting details of grass and rocks and colors are silenced under a layer of soft whiteness. With fewer elements to contend with, I concentrate on stark, simple compositions. Line, shape and form begin to dominate. Strong diagonals divide the picture space into long triangles, emphasizing depth and perspective. Instead of separating the world into sky and earth, the grey skies blend into the horizon, placing in relief small parts of the scene. The effect is a simplified but powerful image.

On sunny winter days, blue and white tones dominate. The deep-ocean blues and early twilight inkiness imply a surreal world. Ice reveals the changeling nature of water finally frozen in its tracks. Or I encounter a black creek, warmed by its source deep in the earth, silently sliding by and as impenetrable as obsidian stone.

A trick of winter photography is being unafraid to work with negative space. Since there is so much snow or ice or grey sky, it is better to work with 'blank' space and incorporate it into your image. After all, this is what is given to you! By generously including white in your image, you can create an open, unobstructed feel to your work, which mirrors the calm expansiveness of this chilly season.

So, do not hibernate in your office looking longingly at summer images when the mercury plummets. Have that second cup of tea, then dress warmly and set out for short jaunts into the pale wilderness. Cultivate an open mind and quiet heart. By following the impulse to slow it down and work with the rhythms of the season, the gelid wonders of winter will quietly reveal themselves to you.

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Samantha Chrysanthou was born in Lethbridge, Alberta. After moving for a period of time to northern Alberta, she returned in 2000 to southern Alberta to pursue a law degree in Calgary. After becoming a lawyer, Samantha began to realize her heart was more engaged in capturing the beauty of the landscape around her than debating the nuances of legal arguments in court. She has since left law to pursue writing and photography full-time. She particularly enjoys shooting the prairies, foothills and Rocky Mountains within an hour or so of her home in Cochrane, Alberta. Visit Samantha's website to view more of her work at www.chrysalizz.smugmug.com



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