

## Be Yourself

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**If you're a frequenter of this web site, I assume that, like me, you love nature.** There's a beauty and openness in nature that easily pulls me in. My mind becomes quieter. My body becomes more relaxed and the problems plaguing my thoughts don't seem so insurmountable anymore. I'm sure your stories are different from mine, but I'm also sure that nature, and probably photography, are a refuge for you. This may no longer apply for those of you who make a living with nature photography because there are also financial reasons for you to seek out nature, and those generate their own problems.

For most of us, a refuge in nature is not a national park, an ocean, or mountaintop. It might be a back yard, a botanical garden, a local forest or watershed, or even a bench in a local park. Wherever it is - we can go there to relax, take it all in and be transported.

So, why is it when we want to take photographs of our natural world to show how wonderful it is, most of us feel that we have to go to the same places: Yosemite National Park, Grand Teton National Park, Zion National Park, and Arches National Park, to name a few. And, though the photographs that we take may be striking and pleasing, very often they are very similar to the photos taken by all the other photographers and tourists at these places. After seeing the same photograph over and over again, they lose their impact.

I'll be the first to admit that it's easier to take a striking photograph of Half Dome, or a beautiful red sandstone arch at sunset, than it is to take one of your local lake or meadow. If you're content with that, read no further.

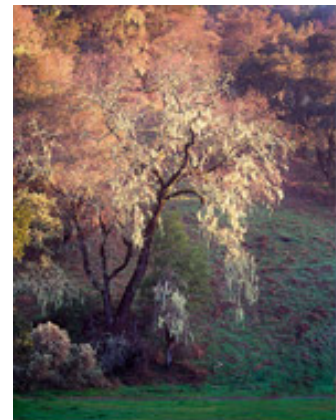
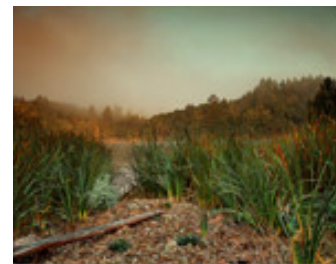
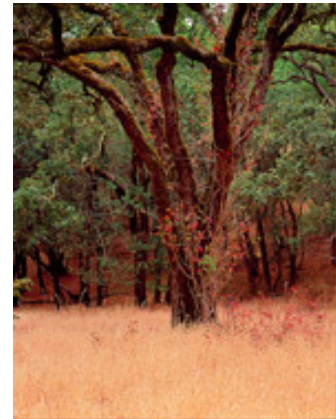
How many of you, when you try to photograph your mate or lover, get the complaint: "Please don't take pictures of me, I don't photograph well." They're probably right. If you just pose them somewhere and point a camera at them, the photos never do them justice. My wife is blond with very fair skin. A casual photo of her will never be a keeper. You people with fair skin know how blotchy it can come out in photos. When I photograph my wife, I see that she puts on some foundation and adds makeup to emphasize features that don't seem apparent in a casual photo. Then, I carefully select the light, the clothes, and the background and I'm able to take photos of her that she actually likes. All I've accomplished here is taking the beauty that I'm able to see in her and capturing it in a photograph. It may be a lot easier to photograph a fashion model, but I don't love a fashion model. I love my wife and I want to capture her beauty.

It's the same with photographing our local nature refuges. I remember once complaining to Guy Tal after wasting a lot of film photographing my local watershed and not having much to show for it, that some locations - like people - were more photogenic than others. But that doesn't mean great photographs can't be taken of them.

Where's the artistry in standing with everyone else at Valley View in Yosemite and waiting for the sun to go down to put a golden glow on El Capitan, and taking a bunch of pictures. Maybe your neighbors will be impressed, but you'll know there's no particular skill in it, particularly with today's digital cameras where you can keep shooting until you see you got your shot.

If you spend some time scrolling through the [Earth, Sea, and Sky forum](#), in between the well-known places you'll often see some amazing images of places you never saw before and probably will never go to on vacation. Yet, they can move you as much as any arch or mountain or sea photo.

Go over to the [Earth, Sea, and Sky forum](#) and take some time to enjoy Tristan Campbell's stark

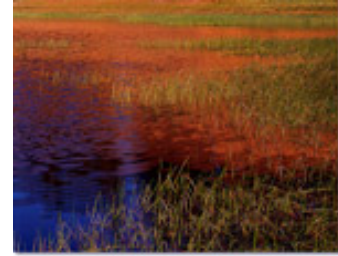


photos of the English landscape or Mary Dennis' work in Illinois, or Anil Rao's images of California beaches, or Stephen Weaver's images of grasses, or Christopher Jordan's photos of Midwest landscapes, and there are many more than these. What stands out from these and others images is that they as beautiful and moving as images from Zion or Yosemite, and they have their own unique look to them. They don't remind you of another photograph of the same location or another photographer's work. No one else has probably photographed that location.



So, does the world need another photograph of Schwabacher's Landing, or does it need your vision of your back yard? I think it needs to see your vision of your world.

Yes, it might be harder to take a moving image of your local nature preserve. In Utah you have this wonderful red sandstone background to frame your photos, and in Yosemite you have a nice gray granite background. But we're not taking snapshots - we're looking for lasting images. Take some time and see what moves you. What is it about this spot that makes it special for you? Can you point a camera at it and capture it? Most of the time the answer will be no. Try a different way of framing the image. Add some detail, take some away. Maybe you need better light, or a different perspective. This sounds like much more fun than just waiting for the sun to set, hoping that it puts on a good show.



It may be hard and you might not get anything right away. I was regularly photographing my local landscape for six months, and got only one keeper before things started to click. And, I was shooting 4x5 film, which is very expensive. Most of you are shooting digital. Go ahead and shoot till you know what "make-up, clothes and lighting" your subject needs so that she show her beauty.

Show me your world and make me think twice before the planned trip to Yosemite. Make me long to go to Ohio or Oklahoma or New York.

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**Dan Baumbach** was born in New York City. As a teenager he took his love of photography and started taking candid photographs of people on the streets. After graduating college, he got into advertising and commercial photography for a short time. Now living in California, 30 minutes from San Francisco, Dan is drawn to capturing the beauty of the area in which he lives.

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