



## The Art of the Image Critique II: Landscapes and Scenics

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It's no secret that having your work critiqued is one of the fastest ways to improve your portfolio. Learning what our colleagues like and dislike about our hard earned images can have a tremendous impact on us as artists, which makes the critique process one of the most effective learning tools available to photographers today.

In [The Art of Image Critique](#), Jim Erhardt explains the details, responsibilities and etiquette of giving and receiving a photographic critique. In this second part of the series, we explore several popular specialties of nature photography and the considerations that images of these specialties may warrant when being critiqued.

### Landscapes and Scenics

A grand scale landscape can be one of the most engaging photographs to study and critique. They often involve many areas of interest from foreground to background, and usually require an understanding of composition for effective design. Intimate scenics, on the other hand, often focus on a smaller, more defined scale. Unlike a landscape, they often have a main subject such as a cabin, tree, or waterfall.

Whether the photo is of a single subject or an entire mountain range, a critiquing photographer should look for and be aware of the following:

**Impact and Impressions:** In addition to being technically good and compositionally sound, a photograph should carry some measure of impact and interest for a viewer. There are millions of perfectly boring photographs out there and a way to stand above the crowd is to make your viewer feel something. Whether it's a brilliant shock of color, a lightening filled sky, or a single raindrop on a beautifully rendered flower, I look for something in the image that moves me and holds my interest.

**Angle and Perspective:** Dramatic angles and perspectives are often used to create unique views of common scenes. They are also used in subtle ways such as when emphasizing a certain area of the image without actually focusing on it.

Because we are accustomed to seeing the world at eye level, a different view of a common scene will almost always carry more interest for our viewers. When critiquing all photographs, I try to see if the image could have benefited from a higher or lower vantage point, or different angle.

**Light:** Light is important to every specialty of photography. Because it can be unpredictable when falling on varied surfaces like leaves, grasses and trees, it is critical that a photographer understand how light will affect all the objects in their image.

When evaluating a photograph, I look to see if the light is complimentary to the main subjects in the image and if it is of adequate intensity. I look for bright spots in the image that may have been overexposed and I check to see that details in the dark areas of the image are adequately visible and not "blocked up." I also look for direction of light and if it best suits the scene.

**Depth:** Some landscapes have a very limited depth of field for artistic purposes, and some images show the entire scene in razor



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Aspen Fall Tapestry - copyright Guy Tal. Quaking Aspens, Wasatch Mountains, Northern Utah. October 2002. Wista VX 4x5 Field Camera, 240mm lens, Fuji Provia 100F.

sharp focus. When evaluating the depth of field in a photograph, look to see if it is adequate for the scene and subject matter, and if the selected aperture does a good job of emphasizing and blurring the appropriate parts of the image.

**Lines:** Lines act as visual paths from one area of the photograph to another. When evaluating the lines in a landscape or scenic I look to see if they act as helpful guides or if they lead my eye away from the subject. I also look for implied lines, which are not real lines such as a fence or tree, but subtle shapes and intangibles which are effective in guiding us from one point in the image to another.

**Focal Points:** The two main uses of focal points are as main subjects and visual rest stops. As main subjects, they can be situated in the frame in a way that is visually pleasing and spatially interesting. As secondary subjects or visual rest stops, they can be used to cleverly guide the eye around the various areas in a photograph. When evaluating the focal points in an image, I note whether my eye jumps abruptly from one focal point to another or if it flows smoothly, taking in all the important parts of the image. I also look to see if they serve as effective attention getters or annoying distractions.

**Color and Mood:** Color can set the mood for your photograph. A bright and colorful image will cause a different emotional reaction in a viewer than will a monotone seascape photographed on an overcast day. In scenics and landscapes of nature I make note of the overall color scheme and if it is helpful or harmful to the scene and intended message or mood.

**Cropping and Framing:** Deciding how to frame a scene is one of the most important parts of the image making process. When evaluating the orientation and crop of an image, look to see if the subject has enough room to breathe both horizontally and vertically, if the orientation is complimentary to the subject matter and that the eye can move fluidly throughout the image without being abruptly stopped by the edge of a frame.

So far we have covered etiquette, the critiquing process and the considerations of the landscape and scenic photograph. Be sure to look for the next article in the series: The Art of Image Critique III: Birds and Wildlife.

The author would like to extend a special thanks to Guy Tal for his assistance and the use of Aspen Fall Tapestry. To see more of Guy's beautiful landscapes please visit [www.scenicwild.com](http://www.scenicwild.com).

*Editor's Note* - View Gloria's photography, artwork and compositional tutorials on her website at [www.naturesglory.net](http://www.naturesglory.net).

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