

## 40 Give your shots THE PRO LOOK

### WHY THIS WORKS

- Shot from an unusual and interesting viewpoint
- Shooting into the light, Tom has managed to preserve vital detail in the trunks and canopy
- Low angle emphasises the height of the trees better than a head-on shot could
- Strong blue sky is the perfect plain background and complements the yellow leaves



## Composition for landscapes

Landscape pro **TOM MACKIE** explains how he interprets his environment

**P**hotography is about seeing. But it's also about what you don't see. For celebrated landscape photographer Tom Mackie, this is one of the most important points to remember when shooting scenes.

The first thing Tom does once he's ready to take a picture is scour the scene, looking for any patterns or geometric shapes he can make a feature of in his composition. "I really don't like cluttered landscapes, and composing for patterns is a good way of giving a sense of order to the natural world. This helps the viewer's eye navigate more easily through the frame." For Tom, composition is a

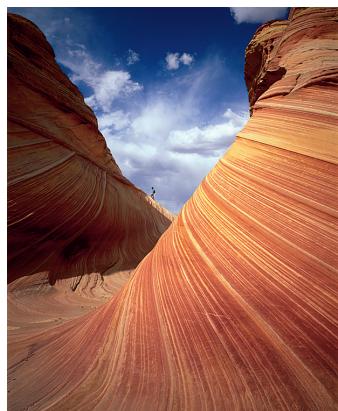
process of dissecting all the detail out of the landscape.

### FORGET THE DETAIL

"On my workshops, people always say they want to 'see' a scene like I do," Tom adds. "The best way I can think to describe my composition process is that before I put my camera to my eye I look at the scene and try to picture it as a pencil sketch with no detail whatsoever. I mentally strip those details away so I'm concentrating only on lines. Once you can do that, it's just a case of arranging those lines within your frame to form a pleasing composition. You then fine-tune this

**ABOVE**  
Towering aspen trees in Colorado. Tom sees his compositions as an arrangement of lines in the frame

**RIGHT**  
Tom uses the lines in the rocks to add depth, but also to lead your eye towards the hiker





arrangement by extracting details that detract from your main subject. What you don't include is often as important as what you do include in your frame."

## FOREGROUND BASICS

Strong foreground interest is probably the most important consideration at this point, something that the average amateur often forgets about. "The foreground is crucial because it adds depth to your pictures," Tom adds. "Another thing people forget is the effect of merging shapes. A lot of amateurs don't realise that their eye sees so much detail, but their SLR doesn't record it."

A camera will flatten out a scene, he says, which can ruin any attempt at pre-visualisation. Tom cites sea stacks (rocks) as an example. "Your eyes will see them as separate shapes, but your camera merges them

**ABOVE**  
Tom breaks the rules by framing this yellow tulip in the centre in order to fit his theme of independence

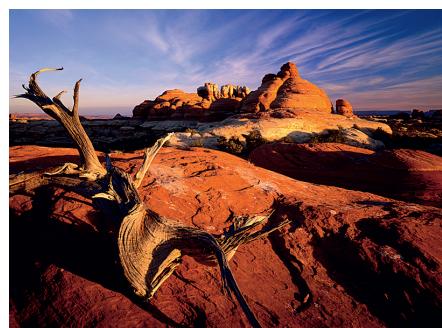
**TOP RIGHT**  
ND filters help to smooth out water and to capture much stronger reflections

**ABOVE RIGHT**  
Foreground interest is the first element Tom seeks when planning his compositions



## IN TOM'S BAG

Canon EOS 5D Mk II SLR, Canon EF 70-200mm f/4.0L USM, Canon EF 16-35mm f/2.8L II USM, Canon EF 100mm f/2.8 USM, Canon EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM and a Canon TS-E 24mm 3.5L. "I don't like carrying big lenses, let alone spending thousands on them. Rather than buying a 300mm lens, I use my 70-200mm optic with a 1.4x teleconverter, which gets me close to that mark at 280mm, and takes less space in my bag."



together, leaving a large blob as your subject. You need to make sure you're in the perfect position and check your LCD carefully to avoid this."

## BREAK THE RULES

Some locations allow for more compositional and creative freedom than others. Changing tides call for different framing, such as wide angles at low tide, while woodland scenes are harder to compose because the patterns and structure of the trees dictate the composition to an extent.

"And if the sky is flat and not doing anything for your picture, don't

include it... You need to know when to break the rules."

Knowing when is part of what separates the amateurs from the pros. You should always have a good reason why you're doing it. "If I notice in the middle of a field of red tulips there's one yellow one growing, I will break the rule of thirds and frame the yellow flower in the centre to convey a theme of independence," Tom explains. "This wouldn't have worked as strongly were it on the third."

To see more of Tom's pictures, visit [www.tommackie.com](http://www.tommackie.com)

## LANDSCAPE TIPS

**1** If you're using a leading line, a common mistake is that any line will do. It needs to be engaging.

**2** Before you mount your camera on your tripod, walk around with it and take a few sample shots to find the best position; this saves having to constantly readjust your tripod.

**3** Use contrasting colours. You may have a nice twilight scene, but without some balance to the cool, blue tones, its impact might be lost. You might try to

incorporate a warm glow of tungsten light from a cottage, for instance.

**4** Be selective and ruthless with the elements in a shot. If you're struggling to find a good way of framing an awkwardly shaped tree, why include it at all? It sounds obvious, but only include something if it looks good.

**5** Get yourself a Lee Big Stopper ND filter. They smooth out water to help you capture better reflections in your foreground.