

TOM MACKIE EXPLAINS HOW HE USED A LONG EXPOSURE TO CAPTURE THIS MAGICAL NIGHT SHOT OF DUBAI'S OPULENT AND LUXURIOUS SEVEN-STAR HOTEL

I TOOK this image in Dubai in 2005 during a photography workshop in the United Arab Emirates. The building is the Burj Al Arab or 'Tower of the Arabs', which is 321 metres high and built on an artificial island near Jumeirah Beach. Designed to resemble a billowing sail, the building has become a striking landmark in its own right.

I wanted to get a night shot of this building using a long exposure to show the lingering clouds and the glassy reflections in the water. The moving clouds, as they streak across the sky, create a pleasing effect. I used a tripod because of my 20-30sec exposure and set up my Pentax 6x7 camera and 75mm shift lens, making sure the tripod legs were firmly fixed in the sand to stop the tripod sinking and blurring the exposure. I checked that my camera was level and adjusted the shift of the lens to make sure the verticals were straight.

The light in Dubai changes frequently and in summer there is a constant haze in the sky. The best time to photograph the architecture is in winter when the light is less hazy. I took this image on a February evening when the sun had just set. Carefully co-ordinated lighting on the structure lent an interesting glow, and this, combined with the natural light in the sky, led to mixed lighting conditions. You have about 20 minutes after the sun has gone down until the afterglow appears and traces of colour – pinks, oranges and violets – are visible in the fading light.

The difficulty with shooting at this time of day is that you only have a small window of opportunity before the light disappears completely. Although in general it is good to experiment with different shooting angles, when time is of the essence you don't want to keep repositioning your tripod and setting up new shots. When I am out shooting, I tend to go with a shot in mind, set up my camera and stay in that position until I have achieved what I set out to do. I may only vary the composition slightly while I'm there. I probably took only four or five exposures on this occasion.

I was using Fujichrome Velvia

50 film, which gives very saturated colours, especially in the sky. I could use this to my advantage to accentuate the colours in this scene. Using the film at ISO 50 underexposed the image so I rated it at 32. This allowed me to overexpose slightly to create an accurate exposure. It is interesting because when I'm shooting digitally I find myself trying to recreate that 'Velvia saturated colour look'. When I used Velvia film and exhibited my prints, people would sometimes ask if I had altered the saturation. When making a print with film you can use the original transparencies as a guide, but with digital imaging it's not always easy to know when to stop adjusting the saturation. I do have parameters I try to stick to, such as trying not to go over '25' on the Saturation slider. Ultimately, how much you boost the saturation is down to personal choice.

It took me a few minutes to evaluate this scene and set my exposure. I took spot-meter readings from the immediate foreground and the top of the sky using a lightmeter. If I had taken readings from the light parts of the building, the camera would have underexposed the image. By exposing for the sky and the foreground, I could correctly expose the whole scene, including the building.

If I were to shoot this image again digitally I would work in aperture priority mode, decide how much depth of field I wanted and set my aperture accordingly. I'd then let the camera work out my exposure and look at the image to see if I was happy with the result. If I felt the scene was under or overexposed I would compensate by one or two stops. At this point I might decide if I wanted to use any filters, which I didn't for this image, but I could have used a soft grad filter to subtly bring out the tones in the foreground if I'd been shooting digitally. Matrix metering and auto white balance modes would have handled these mixed lighting conditions well. Using a cloudy white balance might have slightly warmed this scene and brought out the colours in the sky, but the likelihood is if you are shooting in raw you will alter the

The AP experts

Each week, one of our team of experts of Steve Bloom, David Clapp, Tom Mackie and Clive Nichols will reveal the secrets behind one of their great images. This week it's Tom Mackie

TOM MACKIE Architecture
As an internationally respected architectural photographer, Tom brings a wealth of experience to AP



white balance during post-processing so the white balance setting is really only for viewing at the time.

I was looking for an interesting foreground – I wanted to use the textured detail in the tide pools and pockets of wet sand to add interest – so I wandered around until I found a pool that vividly reflected the building. I kept an eye on where the reflections were and how they were changing as the light changed.

I included the smaller building on the right to balance the composition. For commercial reasons I made sure I left enough space around the building for text. I always shoot a scene several ways in case I want to sell it as a magazine cover or use it in a calendar.

The Burj Al Arab has been photographed many times so I had to think about how I could present it in a new way. You can do this by varying the shooting conditions, your camera angle or the way you arrange the different elements in the frame. So, for example, even if someone has photographed the building from this angle, they may not have used reflections as I have or made a feature of the twinkling lights at the base of the building. **AP**

To see more images by Tom, visit www.tommackie.com. Tom is holding an architectural workshop in Valencia, Spain, on 2-6 February. For more information go to www.tommackie.com/workshops.

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Photo Insight

Amateur Photographer technique



Talking technique

The battle between photographers and police or security guards regarding photographers' rights to take pictures in public places is an ongoing one wherever you are in the world. It is a debate that rages strongly and one that is frequently covered in AP. See the news item 'Police: Photographers should carry identification' at www.amateurphotographer.co.uk/news, where AP news editor Chris Cheesman and photographer Grant Smith discuss the subject on *Mare4 News*. There is no fundamental law against photographing buildings in the UK so long as you are on publicly owned land. In Dubai you have to have permission to photograph any hotels on-site and, as in the UK, it is acceptable to take pictures in public places on public land. The beach where I took this image is a public beach, which anyone can shoot on. There is a private beach on the other side and it's difficult to get permission to shoot from there. I managed to get permission for an hour before sunrise one day during my visit, but just as the clouds were starting to form interesting shapes I was ushered away. Photographing in Dubai, as in any foreign country, requires a certain amount of tact and care.