

**F**IFTY years ago, you wouldn't have wanted to linger in certain parts of Los Angeles, in the USA. Filled with derelict buildings and lacking inhabitants, there was little to captivate an eagle-eyed photographer. Yet over the years, LA City Council has invested in new building projects and the area has vastly improved. Downtown LA now has many impressive arts and sports facilities, so there are numerous opportunities to photograph eye-catching architecture if you know where to look. One key project was the construction of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in 1979. Built in three parts, it is the only museum in Los Angeles devoted to contemporary art. This is MOCA Grand Avenue.

The buildings, with their sharp-edged design and geometrical shapes, offer many photographic opportunities. On this occasion I was looking for interesting shapes that would blend in with the museum buildings. Scenes like this, where there are many shapes vying for attention, require a careful, precise approach. You have to ensure that every component sits in its right place, otherwise the composition will look cluttered and jumbled. Using my Wista 5x4in camera loaded with Fujichrome Velvia 50 film, I made it my goal to create a photograph that would bring together the most striking elements of the background and foreground to create a visually strong image.

As with all architectural photography, you have to be conscious of the background and how it relates to your main subject and the other elements in the scene. I wanted to hint at the buildings behind the water sculpture, but not try to squeeze them all into my shot. Doing this would have caused the image to look overcrowded. I didn't want the background to interject into the picture – rather, it had to be a natural part of the scene. I also chose my angle so I wouldn't include any sky in the frame, as this can be a distraction because of its lighter tone.

Cropping in close, I angled my camera to align the central pyramid-shaped fountain with the glass pyramid behind it. Doing this helps to cement the scene and creates a pleasing sense of balance and depth. This geometric combination not only draws your eye through the scene, but it also creates a powerful sense of upward movement. The eye follows each step of the fountain to the triangle and then the skyscraper behind. As the water flows downwards, the strong upward movement counterbalances it to create further tension and add to the dynamism of the image.

I didn't want to cause any distortion

# Photo Insight

Amateur Photographer Technique

USING A SHORT TELEPHOTO LENS TO COMPRESS SHAPE AND FORM, AND A LONG EXPOSURE TO CONVEY A SENSE OF MOVEMENT IN THE WATER, **TOM MACKIE** EXPLAINS HOW HE CREATED THIS IMAGE OF THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN LOS ANGELES

## 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



to the buildings – as you can see, the vertical lines in the background are straight – so a wideangle lens was not an option. Using a short telephoto lens instead creates a foreshortening effect, which compresses the components in the frame and helps to give the image its impact. I thought carefully about what lens to use: would a 90mm (a wideangle lens on a large format) or a 150mm (normal lens) achieve the effect I was after? I looked at the scene and thought a wideangle lens would include too much information in the picture, so I tried the 150mm optic, but it didn't achieve the end result I had in my mind. In the end, the 210mm optic was the perfect choice when shooting from this angle. As I was looking at the scene, I moved a little to the left or right to fine-tune my angle, thinking all the time about what I was including and excluding in the frame.

Photographing in cities is not as straightforward as many people think. Once you have chosen your subject and shooting angle you have to think about the best time of day to take the shot. An understanding of the way the light interacts with the scene is fundamental to a good composition. If there are lots of tall skyscrapers, for example, when will the light break through and illuminate the subject in the way you want? How long will it be lit in this way? If the sun is shining through two buildings, you may only have a short window of opportunity to

get the shot you want. There is a fair amount of planning to do before you can actually start taking any images.

I had visited the museum a couple of days before and watched how the light fell on the scene. I made a mental note of the best angles to use and time of day to come back. This meant that when I did return I could set up my camera immediately because I knew exactly where I wanted it to be. It is always important to do a recce to work out your shooting angle and lighting. Doing this saves a lot of time when you come to shoot and gives you a much better chance of achieving the images you are after.

I took this image late morning and the light is coming from the left-hand side of the frame. If I had waited another hour, the sun would have disappeared behind the buildings. It would have left these buildings dark and you wouldn't have the reflections you see on the left, for example, or the side lighting, which plays a key part in accentuating form.

I used a polarising filter to tone down the reflections in the windows slightly and change the way they appear on the buildings. The polariser doesn't eliminate the window reflections completely, but it does allow you to control their intensity. It also makes any reflections on the water more subtle and saturates the colours in the scene: you can see this in the bushes and edges of the water. Using the polariser increases the exposure time,



## Talking technique

Using a long exposure to blur water is a technique often seen in landscape photography, but less so in an urban context. Many major UK cities have fountain installations offering fantastic opportunities for experimenting with long exposures. Here are three locations you could explore:

### WILLIAMSON SQUARE, LIVERPOOL

Liverpool may have been named European Capital of Culture in 2008, but redevelopment of the city centre was already well underway before this. Constructed in 2004 as part of Liverpool's City Centre Movement, the Williamson Square fountain features 20 jets of water that are shot into the air twice each hour. At night, coloured lights illuminate the fountain providing even more opportunities to try creative images.

### ALBERT SQUARE, MANCHESTER

Situated outside Manchester town hall, the ornamental three-basin fountain at Albert Square was built to mark

Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Designed by architect Thomas Worthington, it was erected in 1897 and reinstalled in July 1997.

### TRAFALGAR SQUARE, LONDON

The iconic fountains in the heart of London were built in 1845 and originally powered by steam. Over the years they have undergone a considerable amount of restoration, including the installation of new pumps and, more recently, an LED coloured lighting system in anticipation of the 2012 Olympic celebrations. When AP spoke to the Greater London Authority to find out about its policy on tripods, we were told that photographers wishing to take pictures for commercial purposes require a permit. Using a tripod to take personal images is allowed, but it is a good idea to approach a warden first to explain what you are doing otherwise you are likely to be stopped and questioned. For more information visit [www.london.gov.uk/trafalgarsquare](http://www.london.gov.uk/trafalgarsquare).



To see more images by Tom and details of his workshops, visit [www.tommackie.com](http://www.tommackie.com)