

BRINGING
YOU ESSENTIAL
EXPERT ADVICE
EVERY WEEK

PHOTO INSIGHT



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

When light, shape and perspective come together it is possible to produce fantastic images. Tom Mackie explains how, when he saw these towering skyscrapers, he knew there was a shot to be had

I HAD been on a shoot in New England in the USA and had stopped in Boston when I saw this scene. I'd been looking for skyline shots and the clear reflection in the water caught my eye. When I'm searching for architectural scenes to photograph, I tend to look for buildings that are lit in interesting ways or areas with strong foregrounds that I can include in my shot, such as sculptures, pools of water, fountains and bridges. In fact, I look for anything that leads the eye to the buildings behind or that enhances the overall composition.

When you're confronted with a scene with many different elements – vertical lines, diagonal lines, intersecting lines, rectangular blocks – you have to think carefully about what you are trying to achieve. What do you want to make the most of in the frame, and what do you have to include and exclude to achieve this? Are you shooting a skyline, a cluster of buildings or focusing on a single structure? If there is lots going on, it may be better to isolate one building rather than photograph the entire skyline.

It is tempting to try to fit everything into the frame, especially if there are lots of interesting things going on, but it's better not to include too much in a composition, otherwise an image can look overcrowded.

When I arrived at this location, I walked down the length of the pool to see where the most interesting features were. When I got to this end I thought, 'That's it; that's the shot'.

I took this image on a Hasselblad medium-format camera, the system I was using at the time. Now that I am predominantly using a digital system, I'm selling a lot of my old equipment because I get the same quality from my Canon EOS 5D Mark II digital camera. I don't want to carry around excess weight if I don't have to, and I find this camera convenient to transport.

I didn't have a shift lens to help me keep the verticals straight, so I had to keep the camera level. With a shift lens you can adjust it to fit all a building in the frame and it helps to avoid converging verticals caused by angling the camera upwards. Although I was using a 50mm optic all was not lost. The pool of water created a strong foreground, so I decided to make the most of it in my shot.

On a medium-format camera, a 50mm lens is fairly wide, so setting my camera on a tripod on the edge of the pool, I made the reflection a prominent feature in the composition. It was crucial to ensure the reflections were completely still, otherwise the composition wouldn't have been as strong. The pool enhances perspective here, drawing the eye into the centre and up the sides of the skyscrapers. The people on the left provide a sense of scale and the buildings look even more imposing when you notice the tiny figures sauntering below.

The lighting is also important. The shadows on the buildings created by this contrasty light make the structures look three-dimensional. I took this shot late morning and the sky was really crisp and the clouds fluffy and white. The period between 10am and noon is a great time to shoot architecture, and if the light is right and you are in the right position you can get perfect polarisation.

The sun is to my right in this shot, and the light hits the buildings at a right angle – it's almost a front sidelight. Usually, I'll pinpoint an area I want to photograph beforehand and work out where I need to stand so the light falls on the subject in the way I want. I tend to position myself so my shots are side-lit – this helps polarisation, but I also used a polarising filter to bring out the clouds and sky. The Fujichrome Velvia film I was using helped to make the colours more vivid. **AP**

Tom Mackie was talking to Gemma Padley

When you use a tripod to photograph a scene where there is water or fast-moving clouds, try using ND filters and a longer exposure to capture some of the movement. For scenes with a lot of cloud, you could use a 10 or 13-stop ND filter with a polariser to give an exposure of several minutes, which will allow you to show the clouds rushing through the sky. If you can slow down your exposure you can create a velvety quality in the water and still any surface ripples. On this occasion, even though I was using a small aperture, my exposure wouldn't have been slower than 1/4sec, so I was limited in the amount of movement I could show. Consequently, this technique is most effective in the late evening or early morning when light levels are lower. Nevertheless, it is a technique you can experiment with in an urban setting if there is water or a dramatic sky.



STOWMAN ©

To see more images
by Tom visit [www.
tommackie.com](http://www.tommackie.com)

