PHOTO INSIGHT

Tom Mackie recalls how he used to visit the St Louis Arch in Missouri as a child and why, when photographing this impressive structure years later, he resolved to find a viewpoint with a difference

TOM MACKIE

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

THIS is the famous Gateway Arch in St Louis, in the US state of Missouri. It's a place that has a lot of meaning for me, because I grew up in nearby Iowa and we used to go to St Louis to watch the Cardinals baseball team play. I remember standing under the arch as a kid, holding a camera and taking pictures of the structure in 1966. I took this image in 2000, and returning as a professional photographer brought back many memories.

The arch is known as the 'Gateway to the West' because of its location in mid-west America. It's an iconic image of the city of St Louis. As it's so large and the structure is so unusual, you can photograph the arch from different places around the city to show its various aspects. The view people often photograph is from the river on the other side, but I wanted to find something that was a bit more unusual.

I found this picturesque park just behind the arch. There was a beautiful lake and the water was crystal clear and still, so it was perfect for reflections. I liked how there was no city skyline to clutter the horizon and swamp the arch; it towered majestically above the water, unencumbered by buildings that might jostle for attention, and its reflection was reproduced perfectly in the dark inky water. Stripping away the other buildings creates a more minimalist scene, allowing the arch to slice cleanly through the clear-blue sky. Looking at this scene, you wouldn't guess you were in the heart of a bustling metropolis.

At the heart of this image is the tension between nature and man-made elements. By framing my composition so the arch is surrounded by trees and greenery, I was able to accentuate the sense of contrast between man-made objects and nature. I always try to incorporate contrast in my images either through colour contrast, exposure contrast or by creating contrast between elements within the frame. I think including contrast creates a stronger image (see *Talking Technique*, left).

This image is about design. It's less about the manipulation of light and more about how the structure fits into the landscape. I didn't want to photograph a 'section', as so many people do. The focal point of the image is the reflection in the water and the elliptical shape it creates when combined with the arch. I had to adjust my shooting position to ensure the arch and reflection were neatly aligned within the rest of the scene. The arch itself has a highly reflective metallic surface and reflects the remnants of the late-afternoon light beautifully. The result is a soft, golden, ring-like shape that cuts through the sky and water. I like the sidelighting here and the way it subtly illuminates the orange edge of the water.

Shooting late in the afternoon not only allowed me to make the most of the soft light, but it was also the ideal time to shoot a reflection shot. There was little wind so there were few ripples on the water's surface.

I used my Pentax 6x7 camera with a 75mm shift lens for this shot. The 75mm optic is the 'normal' lens for this camera. Although there are no straight verticals as such, it was vital to ensure that the cylinder shape was upright and not slanted. I wanted to fill the frame with the arch and its reflection, and using a wideangle lens would have made the arch smaller in the frame. I haven't cropped this image in any way.

I took a couple of shots from the left of this scene, but the compositions were less dynamic. When you look at the arch from this angle, the balance between the light on the outside edge and shadows is what gives the arch its unique imposing shape. A good depth of field was important, as I wanted the scene to be sharply focused to the horizon. I set my camera to f/16.
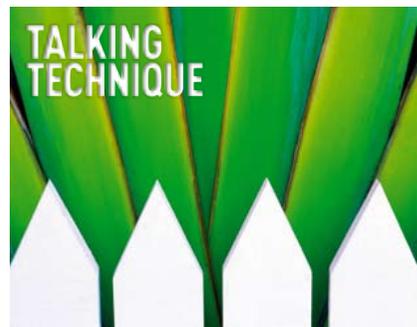
I used Fujichrome Velvia film and I love the way this film brings out the green colours. If I had worked digitally, I may have been able to capture more detail in the trees on the left-hand side as there is more exposure latitude with DSLR cameras. When using film you have to be especially aware of contrast in light and dark areas and compose your shot accordingly. For instance, if you can see detail in the shadows when looking through the viewfinder, these areas are likely to be less detailed on the actual film. You would need to compose your shot so the dark clumps of trees were not overpowering. It may be helpful to think about the distribution of 'positive' and 'negative' space when composing your shots. Sometimes you may want an area without much detail – if you are creating a more minimalist image, for example. Ultimately, it's how you control the contrast that counts.

I took a spot meter reading from the grass on the right-hand side. If I had exposed for the sky, the water would have gone so dark you wouldn't be able to see the reflection. Likewise, if I had metered from the water the sky would have been completely burnt out. I was looking for a midtone – a happy medium between the sky and water, and I used that as the basis for my exposure. **AP**

To see more images by Tom visit **www.tommackie.com** For more on capturing reflections see next week's AP

Tom Mackie was talking to Gemma Padley

TALKING TECHNIQUE

Photography is all about contrast. If you look at any photographic image, more often than not it is contrast that has made a composition powerful. The colour contrast between a bright yellow sunflower and a brilliant blue sky, for example, will create impact – the sunflower will jump out at the viewer. Likewise, combining natural elements with constructed objects as I have done in the main image also creates contrast. The contrast comes from the tension between two very different elements that don't sit naturally together.

Spotting two interesting objects or features in a scene is one thing, but being able to balance the two skilfully to create a seamless whole is another. The challenge is to combine the elements in a way that is not jarring to the eye. Think about where the objects are positioned in the frame. What is the effect of placing one object in the foreground and the other in the background? How can you use perspective to create tension and balance? Asking these kinds of questions should help when thinking about using contrast effectively in your images.

In the image above, contrast comes from both colour and pattern. Here the tops of a white picket fence look bold and graphic against the luminous green palm leaves. Look for contrasting objects when you're photographing a scene and think about how you can angle your camera to make the most of them in your composition