

# Photo Insight

Amateur Photographer Technique

**TOM MACKIE** EXPLAINS HOW HE MADE A FEATURE OF CONVERGING VERTICALS TO CREATE DRAMA IN HIS IMAGE OF ONE OF THE KIO TOWERS IN MADRID, SPAIN

## 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



**A**LL too often, converging verticals get a bad reputation. In a bid to replicate reality, many photographers try to prevent this optical occurrence either by photographing from a high vantage point, or positioning themselves further away and using a shorter focal length to reduce the amount the camera needs to be tilted.

Sometimes, though, embracing the very thing you are trying to avoid reaps huge rewards, as I discovered when photographing Madrid's famous KIO Towers, also known as the Puerta de Europa towers or Gate of Europe. The two identical buildings face each other and were commissioned by the Kuwait Investment Office (KIO) in the mid-1990s. You can see the reflection of the other building in the glass.

Designed by American architects Philip Johnson and John Burgee, the buildings, each more than 100 metres tall and tilting at a 15° angle, are positioned at the northern end of the Castellana Avenue, either side of the Plaza Castilla in Madrid.

I wanted to make use of the early evening light, so I took this shot at around 5pm. The metal struts across the front of the building reflected the sunlight in a dramatic way and I wanted to capture this. Waiting until the sun was low in the sky meant the light was softer and the overall effect less stark. I used a polarising filter to darken the sky and reduce the reflections on the dark glass. You can still see a certain amount of reflection, but the glare is markedly reduced. The polariser also helps to emphasise the intensity of the red that contrasts with the darker blue sky. The building, with its striking metallic cross and vivid red lines, has a slightly austere look and it was this sense of dominance I wanted to bring out in my image.

There were swarms of people all

around and keeping out of their way was one of the most difficult things about taking this image. Standing in front of the main entrance to this office building, I set up my Canon EOS 5D Mark II camera with a 24-105mm lens on a tripod and angled my camera until the verticals were converging in the way I wanted. I had my camera tilted quite far back for this shot. You have to use a tripod for an image like this because if you shoot handheld, it is more difficult to achieve a precise camera angle. If the angle is slightly wrong the entire image will be spoilt. Using a tripod allowed me to fine-tune my shooting angle to avoid this happening.

I was trying to bring out the converging verticals rather than attempt to get rid of them, which I could have done if I had used a tilt-and-shift lens. Converging verticals are also known as keystone distortion

and occur when you tilt the camera and is especially noticeable in architectural photography where there are strong vertical lines. The distortion occurs because the film plane is tilted at an angle away from the building, so any verticals will appear to converge at the top. Sometimes converging verticals detract from an image and weaken the composition, but it is possible to use them as I have done here to create a dramatic sense of scale.

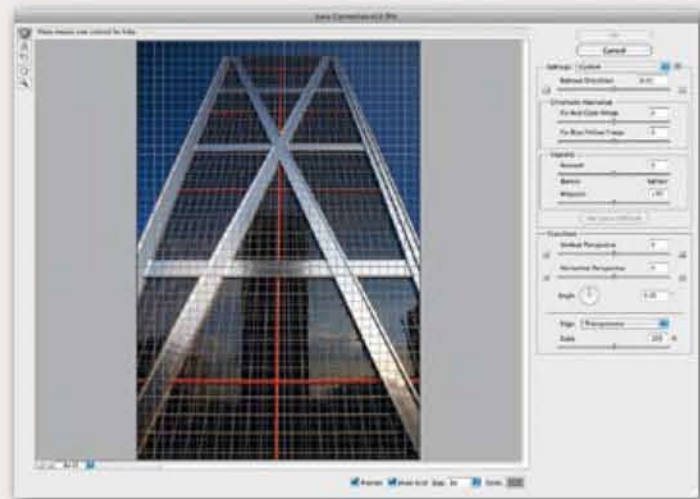
When I was framing this scene I thought carefully about how the various shapes and intricate parts of the structure would fit together in my composition. I was trying to create a symmetrical-looking image and I had to be at a very specific spot to do this, which was why I was standing outside the main door. I took this at 1/60sec at f/8 with my camera set to ISO 100.

Balancing my exposure wasn't overly difficult. I had to be careful not to burn out highlight detail in the brightest metallic areas and not underexpose too much so the sky went black, but by looking at my camera's histogram I made sure my image was correctly exposed. I also knew that I could pull back any detail afterwards during post-processing if I needed to. I used Capture One Pro to convert the raw file and the Curves tool to ensure there was a decent amount of contrast in the image. I also increased the saturation slightly to further accentuate the contrast between the red and the blue. **AP**

**Tom Mackie** is holding a workshop in Valencia, Spain, on 2-6 February 2010. For more information visit [www.tommackie.com/workshops/workshop.php?id=40](http://www.tommackie.com/workshops/workshop.php?id=40)

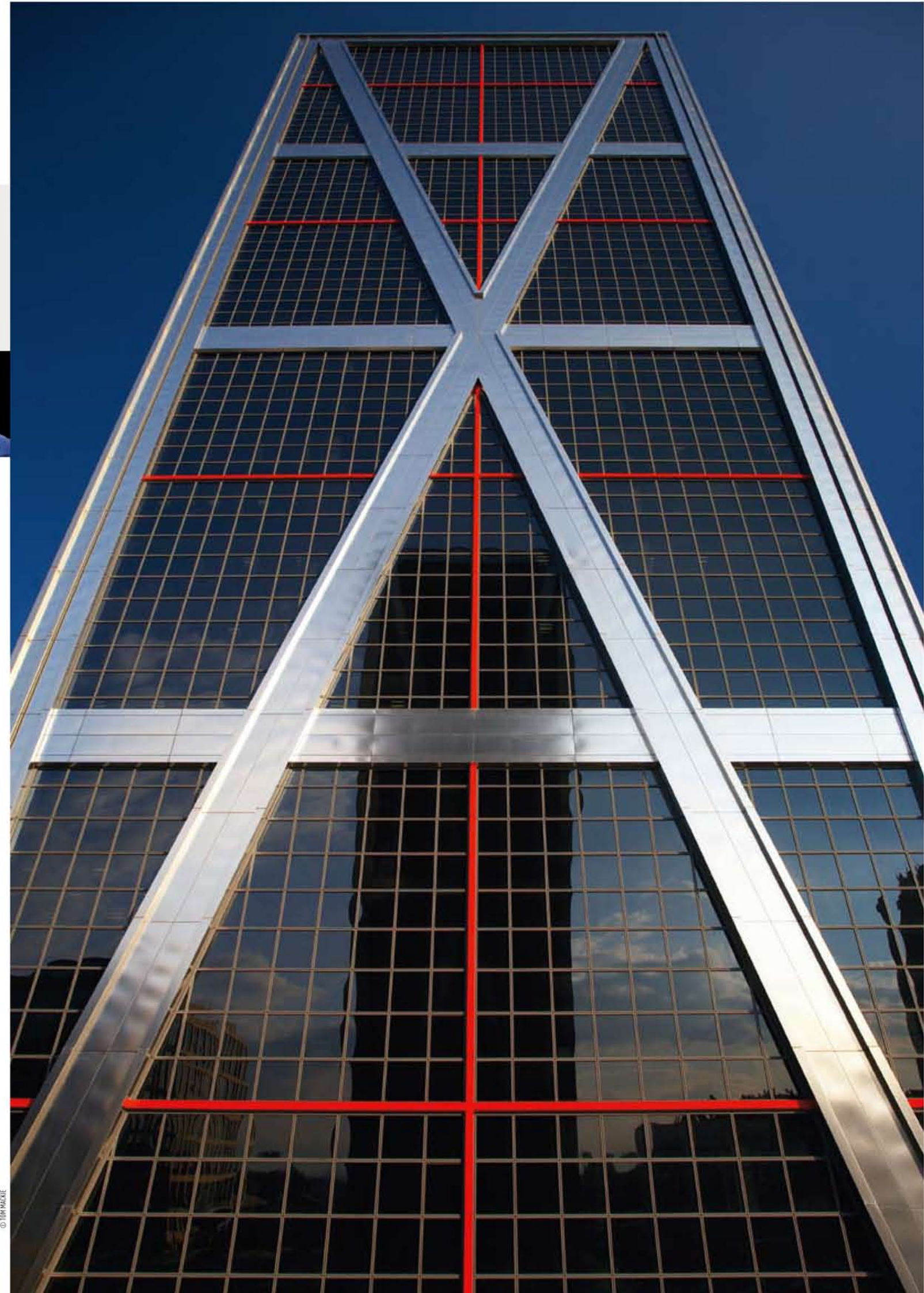
## Talking technique

There will undoubtedly be occasions when you want to correct converging verticals in an image, but don't automatically rush to do this in software. Take time to look at how the verticals converge and notice the effect they have on the overall composition. Are the converging lines distracting and overpowering, or do they actually add something to the image? If they are distracting, you may be better off using the lens correction filter function in your software to correct them, but the converging lines may add an extra dimension to your image. The next time you are photographing architecture, think about how you can use converging verticals to create a sense of drama and scale. Try using a wideangle lens to accentuate the keystone distortion,



and the wider the lens, the more noticeable this effect will be. If you position the building in the centre of the frame there should be an equal amount of convergence on each

side. When used with prior thought and care, converging verticals can become a feature in an architectural composition in their own right.



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