

Photo Insight

Amateur
Photographer
Technique

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



TOM MACKIE EXPLAINS HOW HE USED A TELEPHOTO LENS TO COMPRESS SHAPE AND FORM IN THIS STRIKING VIEW OF THE CITY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES BUILDING IN VALENCIA, SPAIN

WHEN I first saw the City of Arts and Sciences building, I thought it was an incredible design. I knew straightaway I had to photograph it. The entertainment complex is a series of buildings situated at the end of the Turia riverbed in Valencia, Spain. Designed by Santiago Calatrava and Félix Candela, construction on the site began in 1996, and the entire complex was completed in 2005. This is a section of the El Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia opera house.

The first time I visited the complex, only part of the structure was finished and there were people working on the building. I came back a couple of years later when it was complete, and I've been back three or four times since.

The unique thing about the buildings, and this part of the site in particular, is that there are so many different things you can photograph. There are a number of interesting shapes that can be juxtaposed against each other.

My intention was to fill the frame with eye-catching graphical shapes. I wanted to bring the two buildings – the cone on the left and triangle roof on the right – close together to create a composition using only the abstract shapes. Rather than show the building in its entirety, I wanted to concentrate on the detail and produce an image that would be completely different from an image of the whole building. I walked around the complex, noting down shooting angles, and came back once I had decided the most suitable

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time of day to capture the shot I wanted. I decided to use my Canon EOS 5D with a 70-200mm lens to compress the shapes in the frame and create a sleek graphical design. I wouldn't have been able to get the same effect with a wideangle lens.

Deciding which shapes to include in the frame is like playing with building blocks when you were a child. Just as children put together different shaped building blocks – triangles, rectangles and cones, for example – the process of creating a composition with graphical shapes is exactly the same. Mentally, you select which shapes will fit together and then use your camera and lens to execute the composition.

I took this image early in the morning. I do most of my shoots first

thing in the morning and last thing in the evening when the light is at its most suitable. During the day, the light can be flat and you don't get the mottling effect on the buildings. I chose to take this image in the winter because the sun was lower in the sky. You get more mottling from the light at this time of year because it is not so bright and stark.

I was careful not to underexpose when the sunlight hit the white structure. I used my in-camera matrix metering to ensure my exposure was spot on (see *Talking technique*). I wanted to get both subjects sharp, so I used an aperture of f/13 and a shutter speed of 1/60sec. I always use a tripod, and for this image I used ISO 100 and auto white balance. **AP**

Tom Mackie is holding an architectural workshop in Norwich, Norfolk, on 24 August 2009. For more information visit www.tommackie.com/workshops/workshop.php?id=107. To see more images by Tom visit www.tommackie.com.

Talking technique

One of the benefits of digital SLRs is the in-camera metering. I've photographed this building in the past using a large-format camera and spot meter, but with digital imaging you don't have to rely on working out your exposure manually. The process of calculating exposure is taken away so you can concentrate on the actual composition.

In-camera matrix metering in digital cameras has become so good that the exposure is usually accurate. Occasionally, however, the images are underexposed or have burnt-out highlights, and in these instances you have to compensate.

For this image, I took an initial shot and looked at the histogram to check my exposure. I underexposed slightly to ensure I retained detail in the highlights.

The key is not to rely too much on what you see on the screen, but to look at your histogram instead. In bright sunlight it can be difficult to see highlight detail, so I check the histogram to make sure I haven't lost any detail.

I also used a polariser to bring out the deep blue of the sky, but you have to be careful not to over-polarise. A heavily polarised sky can become black, especially in clear, bright skies. When I'm using a polariser I check to see whether the sky is too dark and reduce the polarisation if necessary.