

Amateur
Photographer
Technique

Photo Insight

THE Gherkin in London, like many landmark buildings, is difficult to photograph because it is so iconic. The familiar triangle shapes of the windows and the conical structure are so well known you can spot them a mile off. Because the Gherkin has been photographed many times and from numerous angles, it requires a bit of thought to come up with something original. I'd photographed the London skyline with the Gherkin in the distance before, but I thought it would be interesting

to juxtapose a contrasting building in front of it. The building in front is much older looking, although I'm not sure if it is genuinely old or has just been made to look this way.

I always take time to study a scene rather than immediately starting to shoot. I look at the way the shapes interlock until I find out how to make one shape work within the other. Here I tried to find a way to combine the triangular shape of the arched window in the older-looking building with the interlocking triangular shapes

of the Gherkin's glass panels. If I had stood further to the left or right, the triangular shapes would not be aligned and the composition would not have worked so well.

Some people might be wary of combining different shapes and textures in the frame, but keeping things simple and not contrasting too many different types ensures you don't end up with lots of clashing forms that lead to a cluttered composition. There always needs to be a thought process when

composing an image, but even more so when you are combining contrasting shapes to ensure your composition hangs together.

The textures of the two buildings are contrasting: on one hand there is the smooth, sandy-coloured stone of the foreground building, and on the other the sheer, highly reflective surfaces of the triangular glass panes. It was a case of trying to compose the image so that the two surfaces contrasted, yet remained in harmony. Photographing a scene like this would

be a good opportunity to use a cloudy white balance in order to bring out the warmth of the stone.

It's not just the interplay of shape that makes this image work as a whole, though. Light and shadow combine to give the image a three-dimensional quality. The shadows on the front of the older building are very strong, and when combined with the bright light they make the building stand out from its Gherkin companion.

When I first arrived, the building in front wasn't in sunlight. I came back

an hour later to find the sunlight falling directly upon it. I took this image around midday. Landscape 'rules' about not shooting during the day do not apply with architectural photography – you can easily shoot at this time and come away with some great shots. Sometimes it is even preferable to shoot during the day to ensure that the light properly illuminates the building. This was a difficult scene to photograph, though, because there are only certain times of the day

TOM MACKIE EXPLAINS HOW HE JUXTAPOSED OLD AND NEW ARCHITECTURE TO CREATE THIS UNUSUAL IMAGE OF THE FAMOUS GHERKIN BUILDING IN LONDON

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



Talking technique

You don't always have to include the whole subject in the frame. It's easy to assume that because a subject is long and tall it is necessary to photograph it in a vertical format. Yet by thinking about subject placement and camera orientation, it is possible to come up with novel ways of presenting a familiar subject. Why not zoom in on part of a tall building, photographing it in landscape format, for example? Tom's image shows how rethinking your approach can lead to some interesting results. The horizontal frame accentuates the interlocking shapes, creating an abstract-looking image. Shooting in landscape format has removed some of the realism (not showing the familiar conical structure of the Gherkin makes it less obvious what the building is), but this causes the viewer to question what it is they are looking at and so heightens the sense of interest.



Both subjects are compressed by the telephoto lens to the extent that you can't see anything else around them

when the light hits the buildings in the 'correct' way.

The light moves round quickly here, so you have to act fast. On this occasion, I knew I had to capture the scene before the sun disappeared. I used a polariser with my Canon EOS 5D and 70–200mm lens to subdue the reflections from the glass. I took this image at approximately 1/4sec. By using a telephoto lens to juxtapose the two structures, I was able to keep the verticals of the building in the foreground straight.

I left no space around the subjects, and the buildings extend right up to the edges of the frame. Both subjects are compressed by the telephoto lens to the extent that you can't see anything else around them – everything has been crammed into the frame. This allows the viewer to concentrate entirely on the detail in the two structures. In my photography I'm always trying to exclude extraneous details that don't directly enhance what I'm trying to convey.

The contrast between old and new buildings makes for unique architectural images. City Hall with Tower Bridge in London is another great 'old-and-new' combination. Overall, it's about training your eye to notice smaller scenes within a scene and patterns that will contrast but not jar. Your choice of camera orientation is important. I often shoot a scene in both portrait and landscape format because clients have different preferences, but even if you aren't intending to sell your images it's still worth experimenting. **AP**

To see more images by Tom Mackie visit www.tommackie.com