



LEARN FROM THE EXPERTS

British seaside

The Amateur Photographer Masterclass with **Tom Mackie**

Where better to take pictures in the summer than a seaside town? **Tom Mackie** meets five AP readers in Southwold quay, while **Gill Mullins** puts down her candyfloss to take notes

Play with lenses

Experimenting with different lenses can reap dividends, as Sue's punchy fisheye shot (above) shows. An alternative composition could include the entire handrail in the foreground
 Canon EOS 5D Mark III, 15mm fisheye, 1/800sec at f/8, ISO 100

THERE are some things Britain does with world-class élan – cream teas, self-deprecation, the breezy co-option of foreign words – but we're in a league of our own when it comes to seaside resorts. They started to flourish in the 18th century when 'sea-bathing' first became a fashionable health treatment, and came of age with the Victorians, who added Punch and Judy, buckets and spades, piers and promenades. Even the beach hut is a direct descendent of their horse-drawn, modesty-protecting bathing machines.

So where better to go for our first landscape *Masterclass* of the summer than that most quintessential of seaside towns, Southwold? Perched on the Suffolk coast, it's got everything you could wish to point your lens at – pristine sands, a lovingly refurbished pier, row upon row of brightly painted beach huts, a characterful quayside and a working lighthouse standing

somewhat incongruous sentinel over the sea from the middle of the town.

It's a favourite haunt of our expert, Tom Mackie. 'The nice thing about Southwold is that it has everything,' he says. 'There is plenty of scope, from those little beach huts on the sand that go for six figures, to quaint cottages and colour-washed houses, fishing boats in the harbour, even canons on the green overlooking the sea. It's simply the classic seaside resort.'

We meet the readers – who are all from Great Yarmouth & District Photographic Society just up the coast – in the pier café. 'Think of the day in photojournalism terms,' says Tom. 'How are you going to sum up the whole place in, say, six images? You can do this by concentrating on the iconic "big" themes – the pier, beach huts, lighthouse, quayside – and then on little details, using a range of lenses and filters. Even on overcast days like this you can work an area and

come up with compelling images by playing around with composition and experimenting with different shutter speeds.'

LONG DAYLIGHT EXPOSURES

On the beach next to the pier, we're aiming to smooth out the movement of the waves with a long exposure to create interest in a dull scene. 'This can be tricky,' Tom says. 'Even if you stop down to f/22, you'll still be shooting at 1/4sec, whereas to smooth the waves you probably want around 30secs. So to cut down the amount of light hitting the sensor, you're going to need a neutral density (ND) filter to increase your exposure.'

This can be achieved by using several 2 or 3-stop ND filters together, or a whopping 10-stop filter, such as the Lee Filters Big Stopper. Tom suggests shooting in aperture priority mode, using f/8 and starting at ISO 100, to see what the longest shutter speed possible is with this combination, although it might be necessary to shoot up to ISO 400 to get the right exposure.

With such long exposures, it's vital to steady the camera on a tripod and use a cable release. And always switch off image stabilisation when your camera is tripod-mounted,



About the readers

Terry Lewis



'I've been taking pictures for a couple of years and really want to improve my landscapes,' explains Terry. 'I'm learning a great deal from today, which I'll find useful for future shoots.' Terry was using a Canon EOS 7D with 10-20mm and 18-250mm lenses.

Pat Newman



Pat, who was using a Canon EOS 7D with 17-55mm, 70-200mm and 100-400mm lenses, says: 'I want to widen my range to landscapes, so I'll be practising composition and using filters. It's the first time I've used ND filters and they'll now be on my birthday wish list!'

Sue Nuttall



'Most of the time I shoot weddings and portraits through my business, sknphotographics.com,' says Sue, 'so today is my R&R – it's like a refresher course in landscapes!' Sue was using a Canon EOS 5D Mark III with 15mm fisheye, 24-105mm and 28-300mm lenses.

Bill Richmond



Bill was using a Canon EOS 60D with 10-24mm and 18-200mm lenses and says: 'My main interest is wildlife, so my aim today is to improve my landscapes – something I've done but not to the standard I want to achieve.'

Richard Roberts



'I took up photography last year. Today I'm concentrating on learning more about composition and using the right settings to get great results – and with more than 300 pictures taken, I'm more than pleased with the results.' Richard was using a Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ100 with 24x zoom lens.



otherwise the system's gyros will 'hunt' in an attempt to stabilise an already rock-steady camera.

EXPOSURE COMPENSATION

In the early afternoon the sun breaks through, bringing the blue skies we need to effectively frame the white lighthouse – it simply wouldn't work against a bland grey backdrop – and the sidelighting is perfect for using a polarising filter to maximise colour saturation in the sky.

'With a bright subject like a white lighthouse, your meter can be fooled into underexposing,' Tom reminds us, 'so you'll need to add some exposure compensation. To get this right, experiment by adding it incrementally – 1/3EV, 2/3EV and so on.' When doing this, it's important not to get caught up by what you see on the camera screen, but rather to go by what the histogram shows. Your histogram indicates the distribution of exposure across the image: lighter pixels (highlights) on the right and darker pixels (including shadows) to the left. The more even its display, the more information you'll have in your image and the better the exposure will be, so look for a smooth, centrally peaking bell curve. The trick is to expose as far to the right as possible without blowing out the highlights.

SELECTING THE OPTIMUM APERTURE

For images like the lighthouse, with a relatively flat subject field, Tom recommends shooting at an aperture around f/5.6-8 for optimal sharpness. 'You don't need lots of

Your AP expert... Tom Mackie



A former contributor to AP's *Photo Insight* series, Tom Mackie is one of the world's leading photographers.

He has spent many years as an architectural,

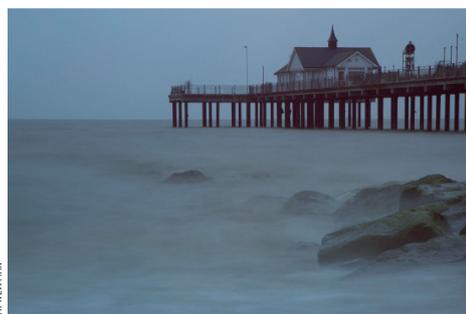
industrial and landscape photographer, and has a penchant for panoramic photography. Tom has published several books and written numerous articles for photography magazines. He also lectures on photography and regularly holds workshops in the UK and abroad. www.tommackie.com

depth of field with this type of subject – all f/16 will do is soften the image,' he says. Conversely, for the beach huts on the sand dunes, we want to include the marram grass in the foreground, which means choosing a narrower aperture such as f/16 or f/22 to increase the depth of field, and therefore softening the image slightly.

To get the most out of your lenses, Tom recommends testing each one for its optimum aperture. Simply take test shots at each aperture and check them on the computer to see which aperture gives the sharpest results – look carefully at both centre and edge sharpness. You'll usually find it's around f/8.



PAT NEWMAN



PAT NEWMAN

Top tip

When shooting this close to the sea, it's a good idea to cover the camera and lens with a waterproof cover in between shots, to protect them from the salt spray.

Long exposures

◆ For this photograph, Pat has used a 10-stop ND filter to create an exposure long enough to smooth out the wave motion. By slightly shifting her position on the beach for the main shot she has added far more depth and foreground interest and colour, to lead the eye in, while minimising the amount of bland sky in the frame. This type of scene can look particularly effective in black & white.

Canon EOS 7D, 17-55mm, 15secs at f/14, ISO 100, 10-stop ND filter

TERRY LEWIS

The right angle

Clean lines are key: here, the horizon cuts distractingly across the beach huts when you shoot standing up, but by crouching down, Terry has been able to omit the sea completely for a clean composition. The foreground marram grass adds texture and detail, and using a polariser to boost the colour saturation has created an evocative 1970s Polaroid feel.

Canon EOS 7D, 18-250mm, 1/250sec at f/14, ISO 100



‘Think of the day in photojournalism terms – how are you going to sum up the whole place in, say, six images?’



BILL RICHMOND

Context

♣ By including the cannon and the Victorian cottages at the foot of the lighthouse, Bill has given this image some context, explicitly referencing its location and history in a way that a tightly cropped shot of the tower alone could not have done. Cropping slightly from the right would create an even stronger composition. Canon EOS 60D, 18-200mm, 1/125sec at f/20, ISO 250

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Patterns

Here, Bill has captured lots of different triangles within the frame for an eye-catching composition, using a telephoto lens to compress the patterns and peaks of the huts. Including their entire structures gives a nicely balanced result with strong leading lines to draw the eye in. Without a blue sky, it can be helpful to use an ND grad filter over the sky area to darken it for more drama – this could also be achieved in Photoshop. Canon EOS 60D, 18-200mm, 1/250sec at f/9, ISO 100

BILL RICHMOND



RICHARD ROBERTS

‘With a bright subject, your meter can be fooled into underexposing, so you’ll need to add exposure compensation’

MORE TO EXPLORE

THERE’S no shortage of interesting seaside towns in the UK. If you’re keen on beach huts, try Ventnor on the Isle of Wight or Mablethorpe in Lincolnshire, which sports traditional and ultra-modern designs, while for bustling harbours head to Stonehaven near Aberdeen or Whitby in North Yorkshire.

To shoot piers, visit Llandudno in Wales, Cromer in Norfolk, or Brighton, where the remains of the fire-ravaged West Pier contrast with the glitz of the Palace Pier. Southend-on-Sea, the world’s longest pier at 1.3 miles, has its own railway line.

For the classic ‘kiss-me-quick’ resort, head to Blackpool, with its Pleasure Beach, iconic trams and Eiffel-inspired tower.

Crop tight

◆ Be prepared to change your shooting position to exclude any distracting elements. For instance, here, Richard moved closer to the huts to crop out the bushes, windbreak, sky and concrete that appeared in his first shot. By doing so he was able to create a much stronger composition that emphasises the lines and graphic structures. Including the person towards the end of the promenade also helps lead the eye into the picture.

Panasonic Lumix DMG-FZ100, 1/80sec at f/8, ISO 100



RICHARD ROBERTS



RICHARD ROBERTS



RICHARD ROBERTS

Frames within frames

◆ Make use of any frames you can find – a classic beach-hut approach is to use a telephoto lens with a narrow aperture to shoot through their porches, bringing the frames into sharp focus. However, without a focal point within the frames the shot will lack interest (far left). Using a carefully placed (if precariously balanced) model gives the eye something to settle on. Canon EOS 7D, 70–200mm, 1/60sec at f/16, ISO 100



GILL MOLLINS

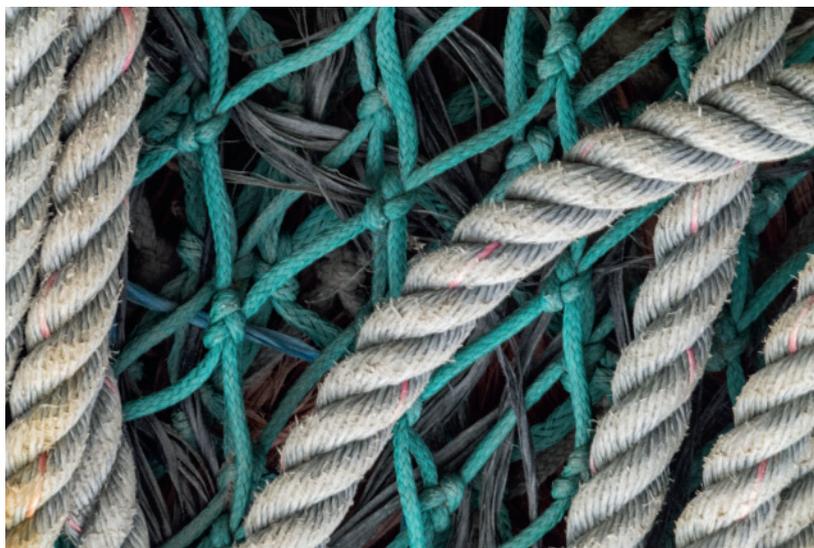


TERRY LEWIS

Details

Southwold quayside is an ideal spot for shooting details – look for colour, design, frames and lines. And think tight cropping, as with Richard's graphic rope shot, and Terry's boat wheel – his post-processing also adds to the vintage feel. Gill's boat-wheel alternative (above) shows the original colours and the contrasting effect that a different crop creates.

Terry's boat wheel: Canon EOS 7D, 18–250mm, 1/40sec at f/8, ISO 100
Richard's old rope: Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ100, 1/15sec at f/8, ISO 100



RICHARD ROBERTS

Top tip

Try reader Bill Richmond's 5p alternative to ND filters. Cut a reel of aluminium-coated foil (as used for shielding windows) into several discs to fit a UV filter, then place sheets of it between the filter and lens. For a recent eclipse, Bill used five sheets, equating to around 4 stops. It creates a milky, softening effect that's perfect for experimenting with.

BILL RICHMOND



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Southwold, Suffolk

Location	Southwold is at the end of the A1095, just off the A12 and roughly halfway between Lowestoft and Aldeburgh (worth a visit itself for its quaint architecture, shingle beach and world-famous fish-and-chip shop).
Parking	There's free parking in Ferry Road and by the pier, or try the pay-and-display car park just north of the pier or at Harbour Quay. Be warned that parking is at a premium on a hot summer's day.
Lighthouse	The lighthouse is open to visitors most of the year, depending on the weather and operational requirements (adults: £3.50). For details, visit www.trinityhouse.co.uk or call 01502 724 729.
Harbour	Southwold Harbour is just a mile south of the town, from where you can walk over the Bailey bridge or, for the princely sum of 90p, take the ferry rowboat across the narrow River Blyth to the photogenic hamlet of Walberswick (otherwise it's a 16-mile road trip).

EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

Zoom lenses: The classic landscape photography pairing of 24–70mm and 70–200mm lenses covers everything from wideangle landscapes to telephoto details.

Tripod: Essential for steadying the camera and giving you time and space to compose your shot.

Cable release: Prevents camera shake ruining long exposures.

ND grad filter: Enables you to easily balance a bright sky with a darker foreground.

Polarising filter: Boosts colour saturation – ideal for brightly coloured beach huts.



SHUTTER TIP

Taking part

EVERY month we invite three to five AP readers to join one of our experts on a free day's assignment. The experts are **Tom Mackie** (landscapes), **Cathal McNaughton** (documentary and photo essays), **Annabel Williams** (location portraiture) and **Luke Massey** (wildlife). Our next confirmed *Masterclass* will be with Tom Mackie in Jersey. If you would like to take part, visit www.amateurphotographer.co.uk/masterclass. Please state which *Masterclass* you would like to attend and include your name, address, email address, daytime telephone number, some words about your work and three or four images.