

LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY: SHOOTING TO WIN AWARDS

With the right camera, practical lens, tripod, and a few tips, you can back up your landscape award entries with near-professional photography.

by JAMES E. TRIGG



Rocks were dampened to reduce glare and to let the plants dominate the photo.

"You have to play to win" says the T.V. commercial for our State Lottery. Likewise you must submit an entry to the various Landscape Design Competitions such as those sponsored by NLA, ALCA, and IPA. I wonder how many contractors do not enter because they discovered that to hire a commercial photographer to take the required pictures costs \$500 per day and up plus expenses. Fortunately with today's automatic cameras you can do a pretty good job yourself, and that's what this article is all about.

To do any job well you must have the proper tools. For landscape photography, I recommend a 35 mm single lens reflex (SLR) camera with automatic exposure controls, either aperture or shutter speed priority. That is, you set the lens opening (aperture) and the camera automatically sets the proper shutter speed. Other cameras require you to set the shutter speed and the camera sets the lens opening (shutter priority). Either is fine.

If you are going to buy a camera for your business (tax deductible), don't accept the lens that normally comes with it. Buy the body only or insist on full credit for omitting the lens. Now purchase a short zoom lens with macro capabilities. This will permit you to take medium wide angle shots of about 35 to 39 mm and short telephotos of about 85 to 100 mm. This one lens will also allow you to take closeups down to about one third life size.

Now you can take pictures in narrow places which prevent you from backing up sufficiently to take your picture as well as distant and closeup pictures without changing lenses.

With this one lens you should handle at least 90% of all your photographic situations. Stick to the well known makes such as Canon, Pentax, Minolta, etc. However, the short zoom lens need not be of the same manufacturer as your camera. There are many fine independent lens makers on the market — your friendly camera

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Before picture doesn't have to be a work of art, but it should pinpoint flaws in the landscape, such as the distracting contrast between the brick wall and the plant material and the condition of the plants.

shop dealer will advise you a lot better than those discount merchandise marts.

Buy a sturdy tripod — not one of those light duty jobs. You may wonder, why a tripod? After all there are fast films available. This is true, but the best quality of pictures is produced by fine grain films which are slow with ASA ratings of 25 to 64 such as Agfachrome and Kodachrome. Also if you want everything in your picture to be sharp, you will stop down your lens to f-11 or f-16. This will result in shutter speed of 1/60th of a second or longer, depending on the ambient light. If you were to hand hold your camera your photographic image will suffer due to camera shake (however slight), and after all, we're trying to show the world our prize landscape job in all its glory with the sharpest possible picture. Furthermore, any macro (closeup) shots you take absolutely require a steady platform as only a good tripod can provide. While we are on the subject of tripods, did you know that using a tripod forces you to slow down and compose a picture more pictorially instead of taking indiscriminate "grab shots" when your camera is hand held.

As you carefully compose and take your pictures, why not take two or more identical exposures so that you will have duplicates to show prospective clients and also to submit to other contests.

I have already mentioned several color slide films. Some competitions require between 6 and 20

color slides per entry. Remember to use outdoor film for your outdoor photography and indoor film for any indoor pictures. Because the color of the available outdoor light is different than that indoors, you must match your color film to the available light. For example, if you use outdoor film indoors your pictures will have an unreal overall reddish cast. If you are taking indoor pictures under fluorescent lighting, you have a very difficult lighting problem which you should avoid if possible. Because there are so many different types of fluorescent lamps, even professional photographers find it difficult to take a satisfactory picture with color film.

Some competitions require at least one 8"×10" black and white photograph. Fortunately, any type of lighting will suffice. Just choose a medium speed film of about 125 ASA for outdoor use and 400 ASA for indoor use.

Other competitions require 8" × 10" color prints. These require color print film such as Kodacolor II or Kodacolor 400. Use the Kodacolor II outdoors with ASA 100. For indoor use with tungsten lighting use Kodacolor 400 with an 80A filter (see your dealer), and then you must derate it to 100 ASA.

Photography tips

A camera is just a tool. A "better" camera does not take "better" pictures any more than an electric typewriter will write a better short story or a best selling novel than a manual typewriter.

For cloudy, bright days you have ideal lighting for outdoor pictures. If the sun is very bright, I suggest that you take your pictures in the early morning or late afternoon. The sun being low will cast interesting shadows which will bring out textures. This is especially important in Arizona, New Mexico and other areas where pebbles and stones are used extensively in landscaping.

Lighting can help create mood in your picture and mood influences people (judges). You can create this mood only when the sun is low and near the horizon. Your pictures can take on an ethereal quality which gives your pictures the added dimension of mystery, somberness, or even gaiety. In some situations it pays to study the effect of the rising or setting sun on your subject, that is, if you have the patience and time to wait.

There are many books available on photographic composition. They all give certain design "rules" which can serve as guidelines for picture taking. The most frequently quoted rule is to keep your composition simple and uncluttered. Do not include much of the sky, as its brightness can detract and pull the viewer's eye away from your center of interest.

Avoid having any horizontal lines cut your picture in half or place a figure dead center. Your figures should be located about one third of the way in from any corner of your picture and should not dominate it. The person should be involved in something — anything that is believable. This not only lends credibility to your picture but also scale.

Your landscape should be tidy with no scraps of paper, cans, toys, etc. visible, although a lived in appearance can give credibility.

Try to shoot your picture from an angle and, where possible, frame your landscaping by a tree trunk and overhanging branch.

To enhance the color in your color slide pictures, I recommend the use of the 1-A filter used together with a polarizing filter. Remember that a polarizer only works when you are shooting at right angles to the sun. It will not have any effect if the sun is either directly in

front or behind you. The polarizer can remove the shine from a lawn and give you a deeper green. However, you can go too far and end up with a dead effect. In any case you can study your view through your camera's viewfinder as you rotate the filter.

Of the 10 to 20 slides which you make, two or three should be of the whole project and the rest used to illustrate construction and planting details. This is where the short macro zoom lens allows you to do the job without requiring another lens in most cases.

Sometimes a driveway will appear so bright in a picture as to distract the viewer's eye away from the planting. All that you have to do is hose down the driveway and walkway and your picture will improve. This is also true of closeups of rock garden plantings. A wet rock looks darker in a picture and allows the plant colors to dominate.

It takes imagination to see in an artistic way. In fact imagination

and creativity should be involved every time you press the shutter button. But we are not all blessed with these qualities. So we look for contrasting elements in our pictures such as large and small, bright and subtle color, near and far, old and new, etc. You could dramatize your pictures through your choice of tricky camera angles, extreme wide angle lenses, etc. Distortion created this way may be pictorially exciting to some viewers, but the judges will find them awkward, distracting and misleading in your presentation. Your photographic technique must not call attention to itself.

Finally, you must follow all of the contest rules exactly. Secure your mailed entry with stiff cardboard. Your color slides should be identified with your name and address, numbered in the sequence that you want the judges to view them and "spot" them. Spotting means that as you hold up a slide and view it normally, place a large dot with a felt pen at the lower left hand corner of

the cardboard mount. This is a universally accepted standard which tells the projectionist how your slide is to be projected.

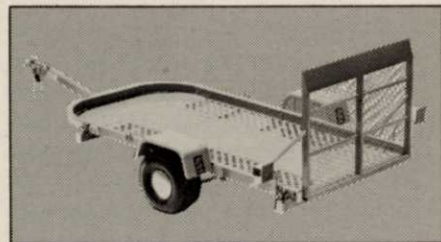
Remember to take your time in taking your pictures. Study your project through the viewfinder carefully because with a SLR camera, what you see is what you get. Always use a tripod for sharp pictures and focus carefully. The lighting can make or break your picture. Use the early morning or late afternoon light.

Possibly, the only exception to the aforementioned rules is the "before" picture. It could be black and white, and it need not be an example of your very best photographic effort. The contrast between the "before" and "after" pictures would be enhanced. Also remember that you have to enter a competition if you are to win. **WTT**

Special thanks to Don Horowitz of Plantscape, Inc., of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for his assistance with this article.

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