Photographing Themes
by Ronald Kness

Many of us fall into photographing themes of one sort or another. I love to photograph waterfalls and cascades, mountains, desert scenes, flower close-ups, lighthouses, water-powered mills, covered bridges, and sunrises and sunsets.

I find myself constantly looking for these themes wherever I go regardless of the purpose of the trip or photo shoot.   Consequently, over many trips, I have built up a large stock file of these themes. Without really thinking about it, it created a good base for my stock photography.

With theme photography, you develop an eye for seeing theme topics. Along with the knack for seeing, you develop a procedure specific for photographing each type of theme. I try to photograph the subject of each theme the same way each time in different places.

For example, when I photograph water-powered mills, I photograph the device driving the main driveshaft whether it is an overshot wheel or vortex turbine. I also photograph the crown wheel coming off of the main driveshaft. Before I leave, I also photograph the mill race, mill pond and outside of the structure.   By photographing these same subjects in each mill, I have built up a library of several different water powered mills each with photos of the aforementioned subjects. The various miscellaneous shots varying from mill to mill as I do not want to overlook the uniqueness of each mill as each one is unique in its own way.

With the photography also comes learning about each theme. The learning acquired through research, along with the photographs taken over a number of years, creates a knowledge base defining you as an expert of that theme which can result in a niche market for you. Eventually, through networking and other sources, you will be known as one of the go-to persons when someone has a photo need in one of your theme categories.

Themes can be general or more specific. For example, one of my themes is flower close-ups. One of my sub-themes within flower close-ups is orchids. Another sub-theme is wild cactus flower close-ups, so you can see you can get as specific as you want.

Themes can also be about the format of the photo. Some photographers have a theme titled panoramics. This theme is more about the format of the photo being long and narrow and not so much about the subject matter.

Still another theme category may be the format orientation of the photograph. Some photographers shoot certain themes as verticals. Some theme topics look better when shot in a horizontal format. A flower photographed from the side at the level of the flower, including the stem of the flower, not only falls into the flower category, but also into the vertical format theme.

Some themes focus on photographs shot in black and white. Some photographers shoot only certain subjects in black and white and other subjects in color. Many of the subjects having

texture look better when photographed in black and white as the lack of color focuses the eyes of the viewer on the texture of the subject without the interference of color.

Themes do not have to be of just the natural world. Some photographers shoot themes of subjects resulting from the hand of man. These themes range from architecture, to pottery, to machines in addition to many other subjects. Themes can also be of topics undesirable to look at, such as damage to the environment, air or water pollution, global warming, erosion, wrath of Nature and many others.

Some photos cross into other theme topics. A desert sunrise or sunset not only falls into the sunrises/sunsets theme, but it also fall into landscapes or into the sub-theme of deserts within the landscape theme. It is all in how specific you want to get as a photographer. The larger number of specific themes can lead to a larger opportunity for niche marketing of your photos.

As you can see, the possibilities are endless. You are bound only by how much time you have to photograph your themes and then marketing them.

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