

LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

by LAURA GILPIN

Landscape photography, particularly in the West, has many problems. Design is of utmost importance in this, as in all types of photography. Call it design, organization, composition, or what you will, but it is the fundamental element in all pictures. Achieving this in landscape photography is truly difficult, because you cannot rearrange the component parts of the photograph.

It is by means of design, the scale of tone values used, and their relationship to one another that the idea can be expressed. The design must interpret the character, the lighting, the form and the texture. Thus, we work with the two fundamentals in photography -- design or composition, lighting or tone values. Many people, in the mistaken idea that it is easy, turn to landscape photography with their first cameras. They have the impulse to "take a picture" of a pretty scene. They fail to realize that what they really want to do is to record the emotional impact ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ which the scene had on them. A mere snapping of the shutter, without regard for lighting, form and texture, may produce a record of the scene, but it will in no way reflect the feelings of the photographer.

One must learn to disassociate the reality from one's interpretation of that reality, in order to be creative in landscape photography. The ground glass, or the viewer, must be used as an artist uses his drawing board -- to

arrange and harmonize the elements of his picture to fit the plan he has in his mind. Then, the camera becomes a tool with which the creative photographer can express his thoughts and feelings. The photographer uses rays of light, instead of drawing pencils, which he controls through the camera lens. This kind of work is what I call creative selection.

Foregrounds are of the utmost importance, for they can make or break a landscape. Everything in the foreground must be used to lead the eye into the picture. To coordinate all of these elements means that the subject must be studied-- sometimes for a long time before all the elements fall into place. The right lighting, one which separates the planes, creating distance, is of utmost importance. Sometimes one comes on such conditions unexpectedly, and must work very fast to catch the effect. Image quality, too, must be considered and contemplated. This image quality, in landscape work, is almost impossible with a miniature camera.

I prefer to use an 8x10 view camera with a long focal length lens, especially here in the West, where distances are great. Sometimes, I use smaller cameras, like a 5x7 or 4x5 view. The choice of camera really depends on the subject, the weather (wind) conditions and the location.

The light of the Southwest has a special quality of its own, and to make photographs that do not give this intense feeling of sunlight is to leave out an integral part of the country. There are, of course, some gray days

which have their own value, but the essence is sunlight.

What I consider really fine landscapes are very few and far between. I consider this field, however, as one of the greatest challenges. It is the principal reason why I live and work in the West. I am willing to drive many miles, expose a great quantity of film, and wait for untold hours-- in order to translate my feelings into a visual image. I have many times camped out, just to be in a particular spot for the sunrise. And, I have made many return trips, to specific locations, to explore the subject matter under varied conditions, until the right picture is found.

Photography, because of its ability to record unusual and fleeting effects is more capable than any other medium of interpreting the natural beauties of our land. The photographer should strive to use this wonderful medium to the utmost with a combination of skill and vision. The way the equipment is used is determined by the photographer's attitude, which in turn determines his selection of material for his pictures. And, while the photographer cannot rearrange his subject matter, he can change the size and the placement of objects by either changing ~~XXXX~~
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ the position of the camera or by lowering or raising the lens. It will be found that by study and practice, a great deal can be done in regard to the selection of a composition in landscape photography.