

Shooting Textures

in the Urban Environment

The devil is in the details; getting up close to a subject can open up a whole world of possibilities. There are an infinite number of photographs out there.

Over the course of a few months of travel in the UK, Europe and America I took thousands of photos while travelling. For the most part these were standard travel photos of landmarks, monuments and streetscapes but I was drawn to the textures that existed in the cities. On every city block there were an infinite amount of these amazing little abstracted compositions. I did get a few strange looks when shooting a close up image of a plain wall but hey, nothing out of the ordinary for photographers.

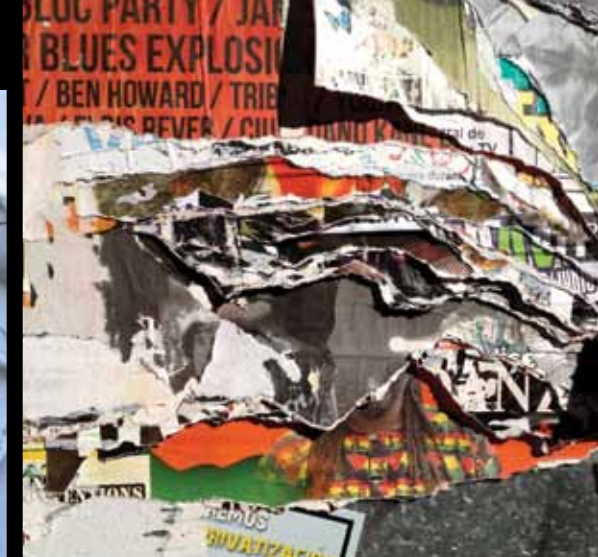
To shoot this type of thing you do not need a specific type of camera, for these images I shot mainly with an iPhone 4s as it was always on me and it had geotagging (GPS location). When looking at such a small selection of a scene it does become

impossible to identify a place by the image so the geotagging came in handy to connect a location to the image. This gave the image some context. Without that you are looking at an anonymous location, which alternatively could work to its favour. There is a universal nature to the textures and compositions, like they could appear anywhere around the world.

Some of the photos I shot with an Olympus micro four-thirds camera that was much better quality and handled the low-light better. If shooting with a more traditional camera it would be worth using a standard lens that was not too wide or telephoto to ensure a minimal amount of distortion.

When framing the image one important thing to do is to make sure that it is framed evenly and you are holding the camera straight to the wall, this is especially important when shooting patterns or straight lines as you may want these to be straight in the final image. As I wanted to display the images in a grid pattern I was mindful when shooting that I would crop them to a square format. I tried to work the composition around this. The square format is often overlooked especially with TVs and computer screen all offering a wide screen perspective but it has seen some increased popularity with Instagram and similar photo sharing apps using that format. The square can be an interesting frame for your images and compositionally it can be quite a challenge. There is a different way of framing with square format images but some of the same rules apply. The rule of thirds is a staple of composing images, lining up the key pieces of the frame at the third lines or in the one third sections.

If possible using a tripod is a good idea as this makes it easier to line up the shot that you want and contemplate exactly what elements you want to get in the shot. If you do not have access to a tripod hold the camera as steady as possible, take a breath in and shoot. One good tip to steady a shot is to brace yourself against an object like a wall, light post or street sign. Alternatively embrace the movement in the shot, sometimes blur can be a nice effect.



Image

Below right: Rule of thirds

Photography

This series forced me to take a more considered look at the everyday objects around me. Changing your perspective is good practice with photography and keeps things fresh. If you usually take a wide view, zoom in; if you are used to shooting landscapes, try photographing people. It is the constant challenges that you give to yourself, that help your photography to grow and develop.

Once you come upon an idea that you like why not flesh that idea out? Make a series out of it. You learn a lot about something when you photograph it again and again and photographing a series will enhance that learning. The act of creating and artistic investigation allows your creativity to flourish and new ideas will spark.

When moving around it is good practice for any artist to take in your surrounds and to inspect the finer details. For me I found a lot of interesting semi-abstract images amongst the hustle and bustle of these cities around the world. When traversing these

cities I was often quite taken by a poster covered wall at a construction site with it, Ås torn layers of paper and pieces of graffiti. These urban textures have a rather beautiful quality to them, a gritty charm. With some images you are able to get a sense of the place through this little snippet while others are more obscure.

I have continued my series in Australia and am always on the lookout for an interesting wall texture. I find by taking that close up view you are able to pick out intricate details that may normally go unnoticed.

How would you apply this to your surrounds? Nature has much to offer in terms of interesting organic textures. You could look at macro close up details, do a series of close up numbers you find or letters in signposts.

Challenge

Investigate your surrounds and shoot a series of images (up to 9) that focuses on the smaller details. Think of tight compositions and interesting textures. Can you tell a story of the space through the details?

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