

Composition Case Study #15

ADVANCED COMPOSITION

I wanted to share this image as part of the collection of case studies for two reasons.

First of all, it has done very well for me, from repeated sales to winning a photography award on Instagram. It's attracted a lot of attention.

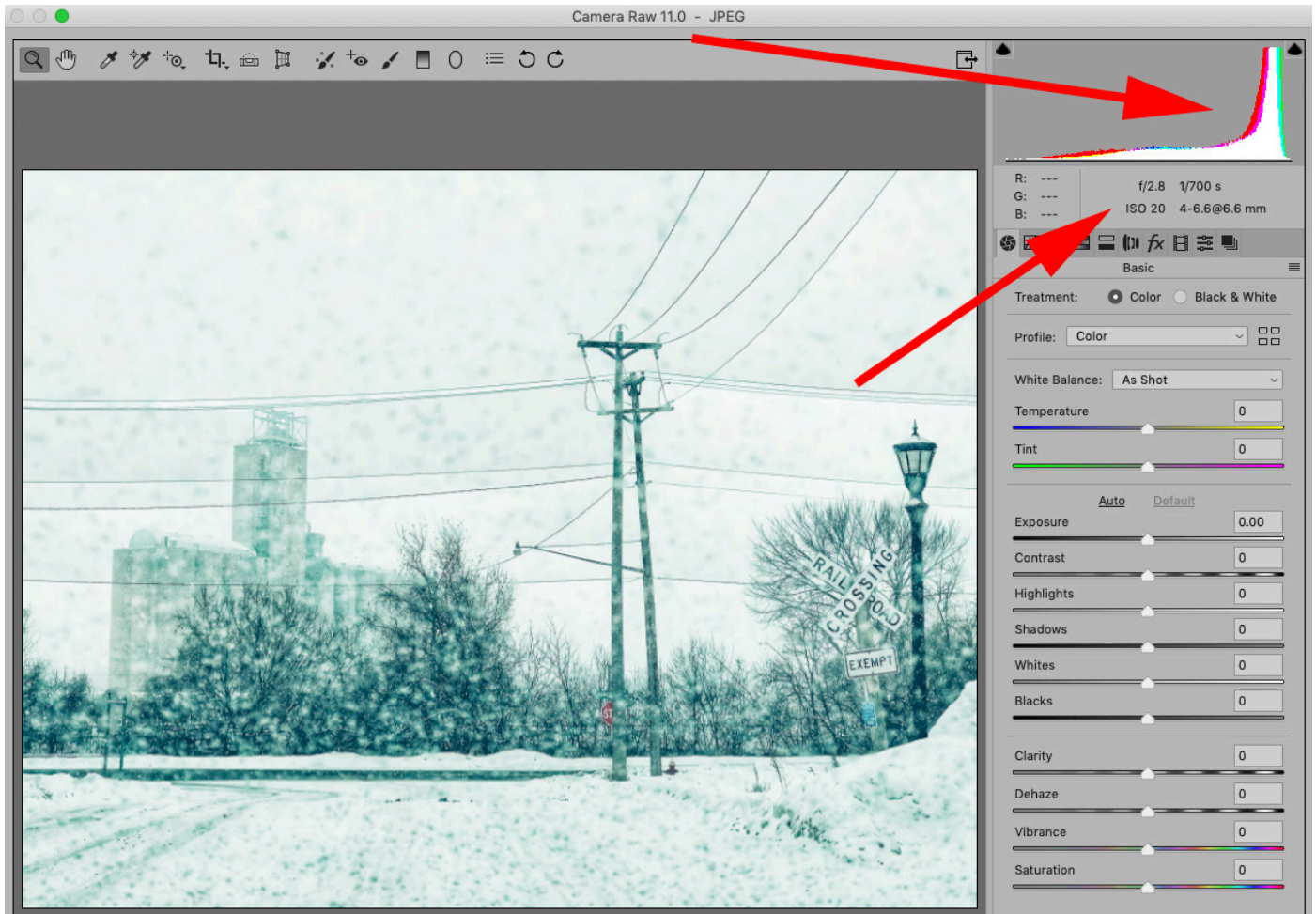
Second of all, this image breaks a lot of the established rules of photography.

It's important to learn the rules so that you can break them effectively! In my 40-something years in photography, I've noticed that the shots that break the rules are often the ones that get the most attention.

The key is to break them in a way that doesn't look like a mistake, and that is easier said than done.



Photograph by Kent DuFault



Looking at the histogram, a beginner may think that the exposure is off here. We are taught that the histogram should extend from end to end with a mountain range of tones in between.

However, that's not always the case.

When the tones are all bunched up at the right side of the scale, you may be looking at a high-key photograph. That's the case here. Most of the tones in this photograph are located on the white end of the scale.

I want you to notice something. Even though most of the tones are bunched up to the right, there is a shallow tail that extends all the way to the left of the histogram.

This tail is essential if you want to try high-key photography. There must be some black tone somewhere in the shot to create a true high-key image!

If all of the histogram was all bunched up on the left, then that could be a low-key photograph, which has a preponderance of dark tones. And yes, a tail of tone should extend all of the way to the right.

You may also have noticed that there is a color cast in the first image. That color cast is intentional; it is truly part of the composition.



In this image, the colorcast has been removed. What has also been removed as a result?

The mood has been removed!

Photography is about creating a response within a viewer. It's this response that makes a photograph memorable.

If a viewer looks at a photograph and feels no change of emotional response, they will forget the image immediately.

Bear in mind that you can never please everyone. Not everyone will have an emotional response to your photograph, no matter how compelling the subject matter or how perfectly it's composed.

Be true to your own vision and you will find an audience.



In composing this shot, my intended stopping point for the composition is within the red circle.

I wanted to create a triangulated composition that moves between the railroad sign, the building in

the background, and the stop sign, with the stop sign being the final resting spot.

Why is the stop sign the final resting spot, when it is so small within the space? It has the power color red.



Again, because my photography is often used for commercial applications, I plan areas for copy to be inserted (the purple rectangles).

Take note that my planned copy areas always lie outside of my main composition. They are always on the periphery.