

# ROOFTOPS

By Kent DuFault

When it comes to architectural photography, I have always had a personal infatuation with rooftops. I find their geometric shapes interesting, especially when grouped together to form an overall pattern.

**Key Thought:** You don't need a drone or to fly in an airplane to create stunning rooftop photos. You merely need a desire to explore the location thoroughly and search for the best rooftop angle.

Creating compelling images of rooftops can take many different forms, and in this Creativity Prompt we will explore several options to get you started.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/r3WAWU5Fi5Q>

Breno Assis - Sony ILCE-6000, 55mm lens, F/9, 1/640<sup>th</sup>, at ISO 640



<https://unsplash.com/photos/Ka6eRr5gZlE>

Annie Spratt – Nikon D4S, 200mm lens, f/2.8, 1/250<sup>th</sup>, ISO 280

### Let's start with an easy one.

When photographers go on vacation, we are drawn to photographing things that we don't see every day at home. Architectural imaging is one genre where this is very true.

If you live in the country, you will be driven to photograph the big city rooftops. If you live in the city, you'll be compelled by the often rustic and quaint nature of rooftops in the countryside.

**Critical Thought:** When encountering something new, we often get excited and forget the basics of our photography training. Slow down. Take a breath and think about what you're trying to say about the rooftop in front of you. An image with a story is always more interesting than a photo that conveys little beyond the obvious.

Do you like the rustic country rooftop depicted above in this Creativity Prompt?

I like certain aspects of it. However, I wish it told me more about the location and maybe even the history of this place.



### Assignment:

I would like you to photograph rooftops in your area and while on vacation (if possible). In every shot, make decisions that can help convey some type of story about the rooftop and the building that it covers or the area that the building resides in. In the example photo (above), including a person in the shot might have provided more context, e.g. "Oh, this is Eastern Europe or Western Montana." Stretch your imagination to fill in tiny holes of information. This photographer was attracted to the building's dilapidated state of being and the exciting surface textures represented in the example photo. But that's where the story ends. Work to build a better and more complete story!





<https://unsplash.com/photos/qrspZwxMU7A>

*Boris Milosevic – Sony NEX-7, 200mm lens, f/5.6, 1/125<sup>th</sup>, ISO 100*

Another fun adventure with rooftop imaging is to use a longer lens and turn multiple roofs into a graphic element.

This is one of my favorite techniques, and I've used it many times over the years.

Keep an eye on your lighting and look for roofing combinations that offer distinct and different shapes due to structure, lighting, and shadows.



### Assignment:

Photograph various roofs together in one shot and compose with an eye to graphic design. Try different lenses, angles, and elevations. You'll find that looking down onto an area of rooftops is often very productive.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/Jq-hqfjWgU>

*id23 – Nikon D3100, 18mm lens, f/3.5, 1/500<sup>th</sup>, ISO 200*

Photographing rooftops from an elevated camera position can lead to exciting opportunities.

**Critical Thought:** When shooting rooftops from an elevated position, you must compose in a manner that positions one rooftop or a section of rooftops as the 'subject.' If you don't compose in this manner, your viewers will feel unsettled and unsure of what they are supposed to be looking at.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/k7W1jtKouM4>

*Jordan – Canon EOS 5D Mark III, 70mm lens, f/2.8, 1/80<sup>th</sup>, ISO 100*

One way to create compelling visual interest in rooftops is to look for unusual objects that live on top of a roof and are rarely seen by the average person.

This example photo used contrast and shapes to create drama, visual interest, and story.

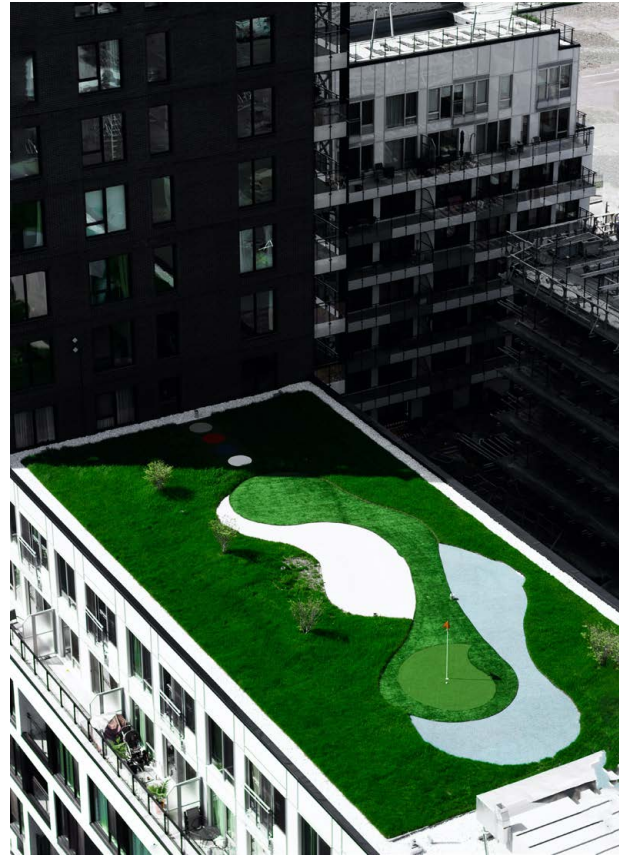




<https://unsplash.com/photos/evvaSEv1QIE>

Alice Pasqual – Nikon D3200, 21mm, f/4.5, 1/500<sup>th</sup>, ISO 100

Graffiti can often be used to add color and create a story element of a rooftop. This technique is instrumental in city environments.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/FXgHrOzWVh8>

Phil Desforjes – Canon EOS Rebel T3i,  
50mm lens, f/4, 1/1000<sup>th</sup>, ISO 100

When you diligently search for unusual activity on a rooftop, you are almost guaranteed to have a winning photo!



### Assignment:

Practice shooting 'down' onto rooftops. This can be accomplished by going up to the top of other taller buildings or seeking an elevated landmass. Drones work well here as well. Keep an eye out for unusual activity, shapes, angles of light and shadow, or graphic groupings of different types of roofs.



[https://unsplash.com/photos/\\_9JVw\\_qR67o](https://unsplash.com/photos/_9JVw_qR67o)

*Connor Houtman – Canon EOS 80D, 38mm lens, f/5, 1/800<sup>th</sup>, ISO 100*



#### Key Point:

When looking up at rooftops, be sure to include foreground interest. If your photo is all sky and no rooftops, that's boring!





<https://unsplash.com/photos/xR7Mu7ZtADk>

*Ruta Celma – Canon EOS 5D, 50mm, f/1.8, 1/8000<sup>th</sup>, ISO 640*

Be cautious when composing for your subject. This shot looks up at a rooftop and the photographer found an interesting foreground element. The problem here is that the cat overwhelms the subject. If that's your intent, fine. Just remember, it is no longer a rooftop picture.

#### Think About This

Creativity Prompts are designed to help you achieve success in an area of photography

outside of what you usually find yourself doing. Setting goals for particular subjects and sticking to the assignment is a priceless way to improve your work because it forces you to think differently. If your goal is to create a portfolio of ten outstanding rooftop images for a section on your website, the cat photo is off topic!

#### Let's Close with a Gallery of Shots and Talk About What Works and What Doesn't

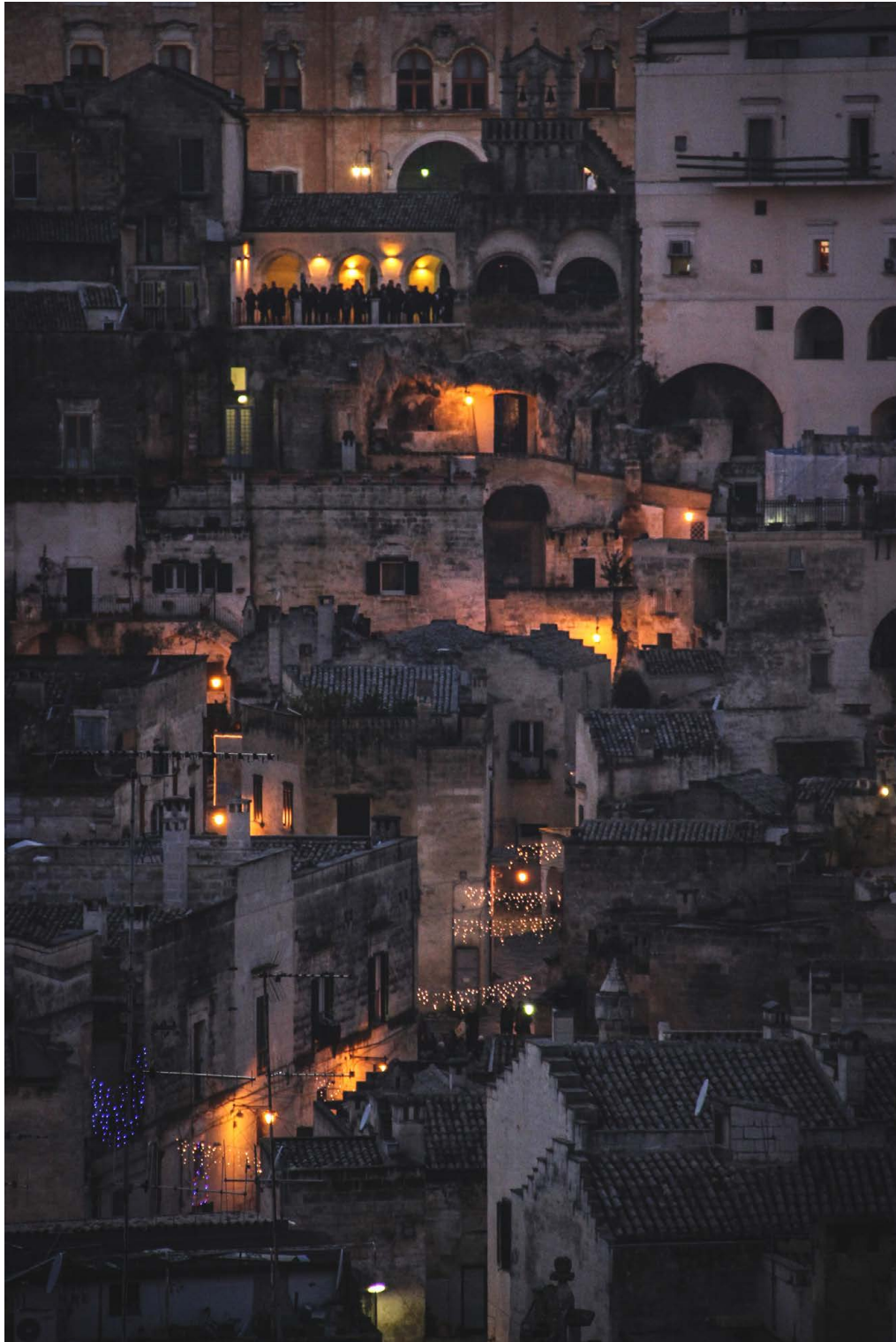




<https://unsplash.com/photos/adQ47SDzEzU>

*Sebastian Pantosin – No EXIF*

This shot has an excellent color scheme and lovely lighting. However, the composition is muddled. Where are we supposed to look and let our eyes come to rest? This is a pretty picture but not a well-composed picture.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/2ug-Ov2Q-lo>

*Massimo Garanzelli – Canon EOS 60D, 120mm lens, f/5.6, 1/60<sup>th</sup>, ISO 1000*

I rather like this shot. This style of photo requires a longer focal length lens. The compression of a telephoto lens brings the rooftops together and creates geometry. The group of people is a perfect focal point, and they also add mood and story!





<https://unsplash.com/photos/CKiPrybl5Lg>

*Shane Rounce – Nikon D7000, 50mm lens, f/5, 1/500<sup>th</sup>, ISO 320*

I love semi-abstract rooftop pictures that boil all of the included elements down to a simple puzzle-like image. Spotting these requires a particular type of 'eye' on your part. Once you develop this skill, you will likely be interested in shooting rooftops for the rest of your life!

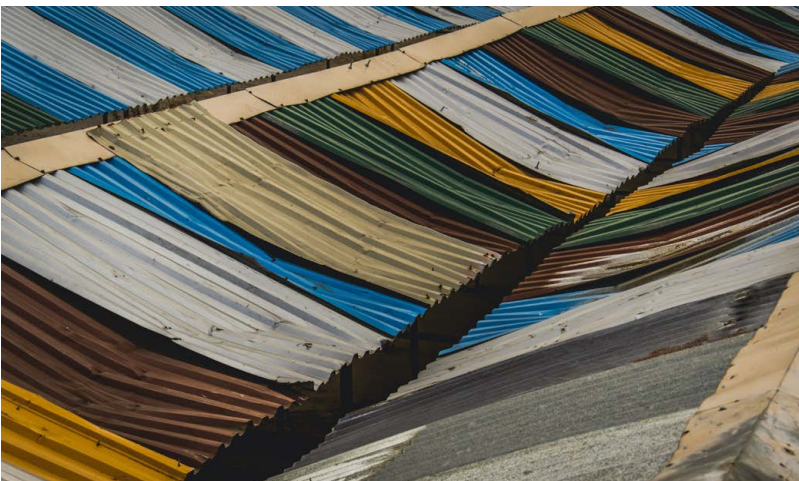




[https://unsplash.com/photos/oes\\_4xMdWBQ](https://unsplash.com/photos/oes_4xMdWBQ)

*Thana Gu – No EXIF*

This shot has an attractive color scheme and beautiful textures. To create pictures similar to this, you need to get up high and look straight down.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/g2qUB2R3tQw>

*Shane Rounce – Nikon D7000, 52mm lens, f/5, 1/2500<sup>th</sup>, ISO 320*

Keep your eyes peeled for color combinations. A set of multicolored rooftops is guaranteed to get noticed and receive social media likes!



## Make It About the Story



<https://unsplash.com/photos/qit0ufNiEYU>

Yip Vick – Google PRA-AL00, 3.8mm lens, f/2.2, 1/1217<sup>th</sup>, ISO 50

In conclusion, a rooftop image doesn't have to show much of a roof to tell a great story. Believe it or not, a lot of stuff goes on up on a roof. We, as photographers, simply need to go hunting for those amazing pictures!

### Evaluation

- 1 Were you able to tell some exciting rooftop stories?
- 2 Did you try shooting both city and rural rooftops? Did the different locations present different issues to be solved?
- 3 Were you able to create a body of work using rooftops as graphic elements?
- 4 Did you try different lenses from the wide-angle to the telephoto?
- 5 Did you shoot under different lighting conditions? How did that affect your color schemes and textures?
- 6 Did you find it easy or challenging to compose in a manner that pushed a viewer's eyes to one particular spot in your shots (the subject)?
- 7 Did you try black and white?
- 8 Did you shoot up and down? Did one point of view work better for you?
- 9 Did you try including some graffiti or another unusual rooftop element?
- 10 Did you stay focused on rooftops as the subject of your series of work?