

# EXPLORING UNIQUE ANGLES

By Kent DuFault

Landscape photography is so rewarding, and I look forward to my opportunities to create these beautiful works of art.

However, I do have one tiny problem. I live in the city, and so my landscape photo opportunities are quite limited and, for the most part, must be planned in advance.

Image 001 was taken in a fantastic natural area within three hours' drive from my home. Several times a year, I like to travel here and spend a long weekend taking pictures.

It's no secret that weather plays a crucial role in the landscape photography arena.

During my photo safari, where I created Image 001, the weather was uncooperative. I didn't have great lighting at all in four days.

In moments like these, you need to dig deep and practice other photography skills.

In this creativity prompt, we will explore the idea of using unique angles to capture an exciting landscape photograph.

This quest for a unique angle could combat lousy lighting. It can also lead to an impressive shot that is unlike one of any other photographers. These are both worthy goals.

Look at Image 001 again. Upon arrival, this was the first shot that I took.



Image 001 - Photograph by Kent DuFault





Image 002 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

You can see that my initial reaction was to create a reasonably standard landscape photograph. My use of space closely follows the Rule of Thirds. My division of the frame

is roughly 1/3 – 2/3 both horizontally and vertically. I placed a strong, recognizable foreground object to act as a focal point and help drive the viewer's eyes inward.





Image 003 – Screenshot and Photograph by Kent DuFault

I also placed the foreground rock on the crucial spot for the Golden Spiral, as dictated by the Fibonacci Sequence.

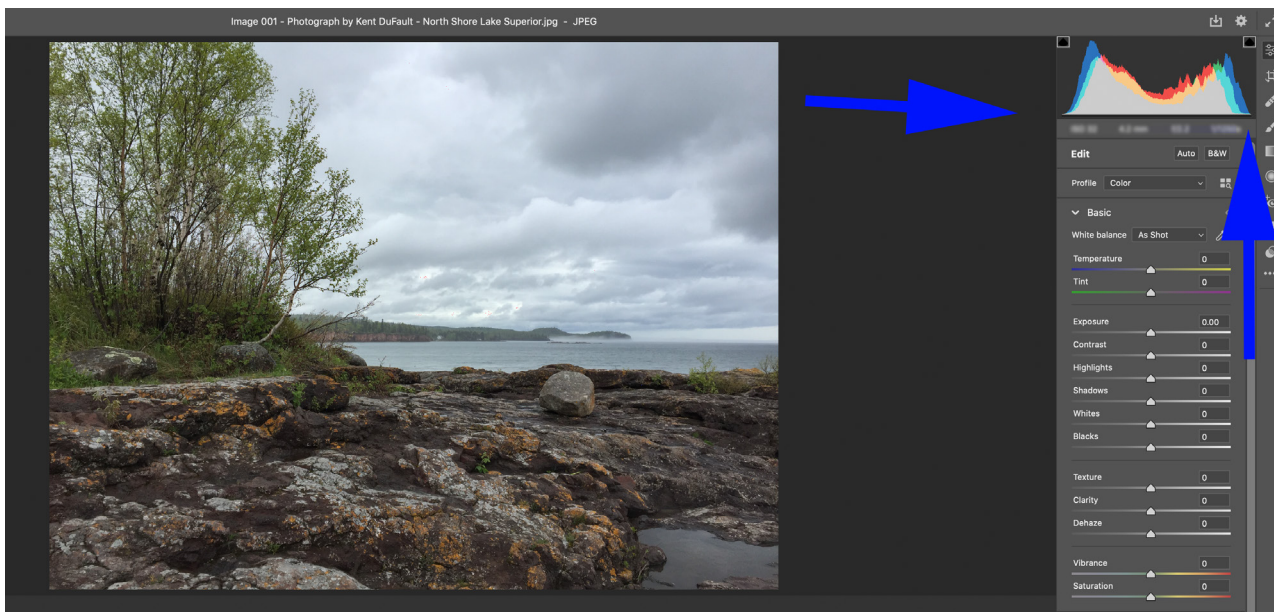


Image 004 – Screenshot and Photograph by Kent DuFault

Finally, looking at the histogram, even my exposure was spot-on coming right from the camera.

With all of those factors working in favor of this landscape photo, why is it still dull and uninteresting?

The lack of directional light has usurped all of my efforts.

It needs something else!

**That something else was a unique angle.**





Image 005 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

*I began my exploration for a unique angle by focusing my attention on the rock. After all, even in my initial composition, it was profiled as a critical element. Why not take that a step further?*

This unique angle was a significant improvement. Yes, the sunshine did break through for about ten seconds. But even without it, the massive rock in the foreground picked up the tempo for this shot. It created a centralized point of interest, which vastly improved the composition.

However, I wanted this final picture to be more about landscape photography and less about a rock sitting on a rocky shoreline. I needed the rock to boost visual interest. Still, I also needed something else to bring this image home as a good landscape photo.

**I continued to explore my angles.**





Image 006 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

My wife was with me, and she was walking around looking at the water when it struck me that she was the needed element for my landscape picture!

- She brought the human aspect into the picture. Virtually any photograph that can seamlessly include the human element will garner more attention. We are human, and we like looking at other humans.
- By adding her, I changed my shooting angle to include more shoreline that was much further away. This unique angle pushed me back to a more 'landscape' photo.
- Including the rock, placing my wife mid-shot, and including the distant shoreline created a leading line effect.

- As my wife is an object of approximate known size (which the rock was not – it could easily have been a trick of perspective), the resulting photo has an excellent sense of depth and scale. Even in this final shot, you cannot accurately tell how big that rock is.
- My wife added an interesting shape and some much-needed darker tones for a better-balanced range of contrast throughout the picture.



#### Key Point:

When your landscape scene lacks the pizzazz you seek, try exploring a unique angle first, and then think about how changing your angle could include or exclude various other objects.





Image 007 – Photographs by Kent DuFault

*Looking at these two photos side by side, I'm beyond confident that my final landscape shot far exceeds my initial attempt in both composition and storytelling!*



### Assignment:

Travel to a favorite landscape location. It might be wise to select one close to home so that you can visit it multiple times. On your first day, photograph the landscape areas as you normally would. At the end of the day, review your pictures. Identify the ones that are lacking the 'wow' factor to you. Study your initial compositions. Now go back the next day to those same spots and spend time finding a unique angle that better creates your initial ideas. Think about Images 1-7. The final shot embodies the spirit of the first one – it is just better organized!

## Using a Unique Angle for a Minimalist View in Landscape Photography



Image 008 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

*Using a unique angle to capture a landscape photograph with minimalism can have a mega-impact on viewers.*

Looking at Image 008, some might argue that this isn't a landscape photo; it's a sky and cloud photo, they'd say.

I would argue against that point. Here is my reasoning: I bet when you look at this image, your eyes come to rest on the little peninsula of land, and that ultimately you can't stop looking at that spot!

Why? This minimalist composition forces the eyes down to that left side by using expansive negative space and a frame break. Is that bad, pushing the eyes to the edge of the frame? Many would argue that it is a bad idea. In most cases, I would agree.

However, framing this landscape image as it is provides the following visual traits:

- The photographed area appears expansive and broad. This visual effect is a good perspective that many

landscape photos lack. The visual impact from the vast area of the sky serves as a negative space in the frame.

- The landscape is the subject of this image because the eyes can't help but go there and stop there. This shot truly demonstrates the visual power of a frame break. For those who don't know, a frame break is an object placed within the frame that causes the eyes to migrate to the frame's edge. Typically, it is considered flawed. But it doesn't always have to be, and in this case it works perfectly – perfectly enough to be selected as a double-page spread in a publication.
- Using this unique angle provides a mystery factor that would be absent with a more normalized composition.





Image 009 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

*This landscape photo also makes use of minimalism. The technique used to create the minimalistic composition was low-key lighting.*

Image 009 uses low-key lighting to create a minimalist composition. The repetition of the angled trees provides visual interest and forms a leading line into the scene.



#### Key Point:

When struggling to find a landscape scene that is interesting for a photo, start by introducing a unique angle and then look to other techniques such as minimalism, low-key lighting, or the human element to bring visual interest to the moment.



#### Assignment:

Travel to a nature area that you enjoy photographing. Use this opportunity for unique angles only. If possible, incorporate some shots using minimalism. Remember, though, any technique (including minimalism) needs a purpose to exist. Plan your photos with purpose. For example, Image 008 was planned to provide a sense of expansiveness. Image 009 was intended to create a dark, almost mystical, and somewhat blocked entryway into the woods. Have a visual, compositional, and storytelling plan.

## Post-Processing Fun



Image 010 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Why am I talking about post-processing in a creativity prompt geared toward exploring unique angles?

**Key Point:**

Very rarely will a singular technique create the type of eye-catching landscape photography that you wish to make.

- 1 In my workflow, finding a unique angle is step one.
- 2 Considering alternative composition techniques such as the previously discussed use of minimalism or low-key lighting is step two.
- 3 Step three is post-processing. When I get home with my pictures, I edit through them and then I ask, what can I do to make these more attractive? For Image 010, I applied some grunge overlays. For Image 009, I lightened the two logs in the foreground using the Adjustment Brush within the Adobe ACR window. However, both pictures relied on the use of a unique angle to get started.



**Assignment:**

Create some landscape photographs with unique angles and also cull some from your existing collection. Pour a drink of your choice and sit down at your editing station. Post-process these photos with special effects in mind. This assignment is the time to play. You don't need realism. Create images that evoke feelings and stories through any post-processing technique that suits you.

Let's take a look at the power of exploring unique angles in a crowded, competitive, and often photographed location.

I am about to share with you one of the most critical points in this creativity prompt. I hope that you grasp onto it.

Trying something new can often feel overwhelming, especially in photography. Many of us are new and uncertain about the myriad of options related to creating a picture.

**Remember:**

What makes this prompt special is that it doesn't require anything other than your time. I've created many successful photos using nothing but the unique angle approach and my iPhone.

Searching for the unique angles that everyone else misses will make your images stand out and be uniquely a part of you.

Let's look at a real-life example!

## Multnomah Falls – Portland, Oregon



Image 011 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Outside of some of the waterfall features in Iceland, I would claim there is no other more widely known, recognized, and photographed waterfall landscape than the Multnomah Waterfall located just outside Portland, Oregon.

Image 011 is a capture, created by me, of the Multnomah Waterfall. If one could assign a standard angle to photograph this location, this is it. Everyone takes some variation of this picture.





Image 012 – Photographs by various photographers from Unsplash

*I went to a popular free stock photography website and searched for Multnomah Falls. These six images are the first shots that popped up. Notice the similarity of angle?*



### Assignment:

Do an online search for Multnomah Falls. Do the same search on a photography website such as Flickr. You'll discover that almost all photographers create some variation of this same point of view (POV).



### Key Point:

There is nothing wrong with photographing a landscape from the known and accepted angle. Heck, I did it in Image 011. But go beyond that!

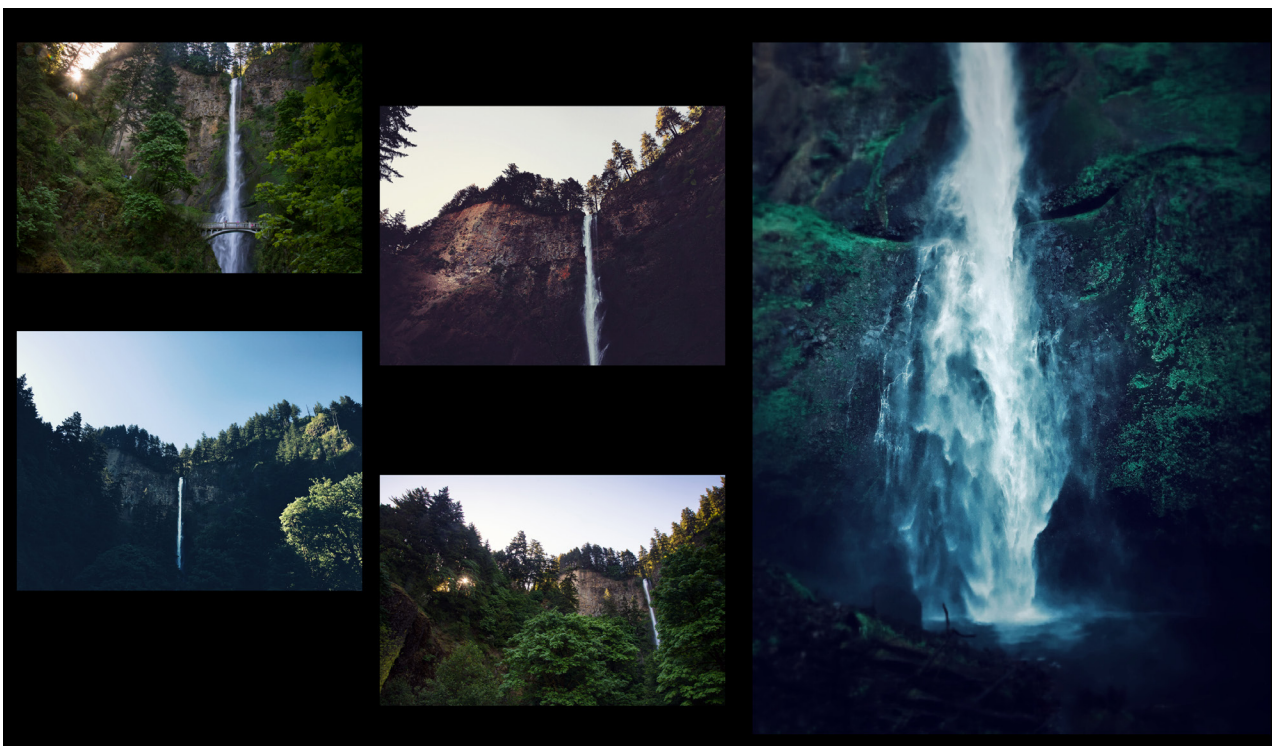


Image 013 – All photographs by Kent DuFault

After securing the standard shot, I then explored this famous landmark while looking for an unusual angle.

In the montage of photos above, the center-bottom shot has been an all-star in my stock photography portfolio. It is truly a unique angle of Multnomah Falls.

Keep this in mind about the shots in Image 013:

- Capturing these unique angles only took an hour or so. That hour was well spent and quite enjoyable.
- While taking these pictures, I was surrounded by other photographers, probably about sixty or so. All of them were taking the standard angle. I didn't see one that experimented with different angles as I was.
- If you do the online search assignment, you will see how unique these photos are.



### Final Challenge – Getting Out of the Norm

Photograph a well-known landscape in your area. Shoot the standard shot you've seen everyone create. Now, spend one hour exploring unique angles. Try to get as many different photos as you can. Don't be afraid to preplan some post-processing shenanigans. This final challenge is about getting outside your norm!