

# THE LANDSCAPE AS SHAPE

By Kent DuFault

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of using shapes to elevate your photography.

Recognizing shape is a primal undertaking for the human brain. It takes precedence over almost all other visual cues to the mind.

Recognizing this fact can mold you into a stellar award-winning photographer, and that's no joke.

It can also help you to create landscape photography when the weather just isn't cooperating. You know what I mean – a lack of the Golden Hour.

Image 001 was taken on just such a day. On this day it was foggy and raining. There was no visible sunlight whatsoever.

I had traveled hours and hours to get to the spot where I took Image 001. I had

booked time to be there for four days taking landscape photographs, and the weather was not going to bring me down. (Although Mother Nature certainly tried – I had solid rain for four days.)



## Key Point:

Key Point: Study Image 001 for a moment. It is quite simple in its design. However, as a landscape photograph, it gets quite a bit of attention. Why? It makes use of a very defined and recognizable shape. In fact, it's the shape of the tree in the foreground that completely anchors the composition of this shot.



Image 001 - Photograph by Kent DuFault





Image 002 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Here is a second example where the shape of an object within the landscape scene provides the subject.

In the first example, the shape was created by a silhouetted form against the sky. For Image 002, the shape was provided by a patch of sunlight streaming through a forested area; it essentially created a spotlight effect against the darker background.

**Critical Point:** Locating and isolating a strong shape within the scenery in front of you can lead to dramatic landscape photography. The shapes will often be either a silhouette or some object that contrasts against the background.



### Assignment:

It's time to create some landscape pictures. Look for shapes that are apparent against the scenery behind the shape. Pay particular attention to silhouettes or the formation of spot lighting illuminating an object.





Image 003 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

*Discovering the use of shape in landscape photography can lead to the development of an excellent artistic skill called 'segmenting and anchoring.'*

When we are about to create a landscape picture, we all have a process – our workflow, if you will.

This process starts by seeing something that we think is worth taking a picture of. It's after that point that experience and training can kick in.



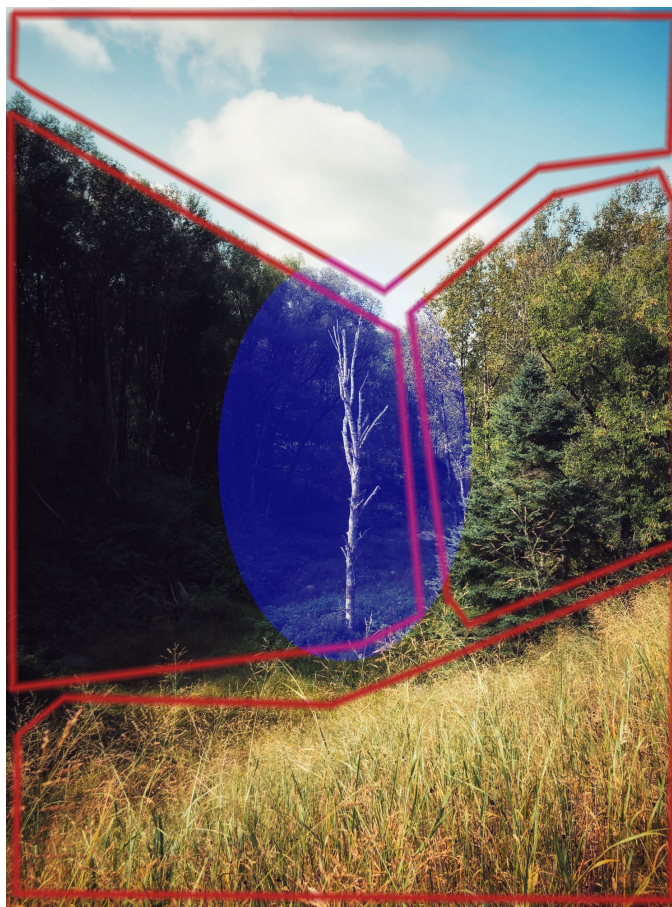


Image 004 – Photograph and Illustration by Kent DuFault

In Image 004, I have outlined the segments and placed an oval over the anchor that I identified at the point of taking the picture.

Practicing segmenting and anchoring leads to better composition in landscape photos.



#### Pro Tip:

The second step in my landscape photography workflow process is called 'Segmenting and Anchoring.' This occurs by dissecting the scenery as you stand there and look at it. Ask the question, "Can you create a layered puzzle piece effect (segmenting) with one outstanding feature to serve as your subject area (the anchor)?"



#### Assignment:

Take some time for yourself to create landscape photos. Stop at each scene that interests you. Try to segment the scene in your mind. Also identify the object that would be the anchor for your landscape shot. An anchor is very important in landscape photography, as it becomes the stopping point for a viewer when they are looking at your landscape vistas. Don't take a photo until you've fully segmented, anchored, and organized your composition.





Image 005 – Photographs by Kent DuFault

*A shape doesn't have to be prominent to be dominant!*

Let's examine Image 005.

The shape of the tree off in the distance (on the left of Image 005) is very small within the space of the frame. Yet, through careful placement within the boundaries of the space and the use of its highly defined shape, it is

the dominant feature in the photograph! That treetop off in the distance is the anchor.

For the photo on the right, I picked up a rock that was a little larger than a melon. It had an interesting shape, so I placed it on the rocky beach and used forced perspective to make the rock appear large.



### Remember:

Using shape in landscape photography doesn't have to be an object that is large. Using your photographic skills, you can take virtually any shape and compose it into an anchor or a segment.



### Assignment:

Create landscape photographs where the anchor is either a small or distant object within the frame. Think of Image 005 as your inspiration. Use perspective to drive the composition and segment the frame.

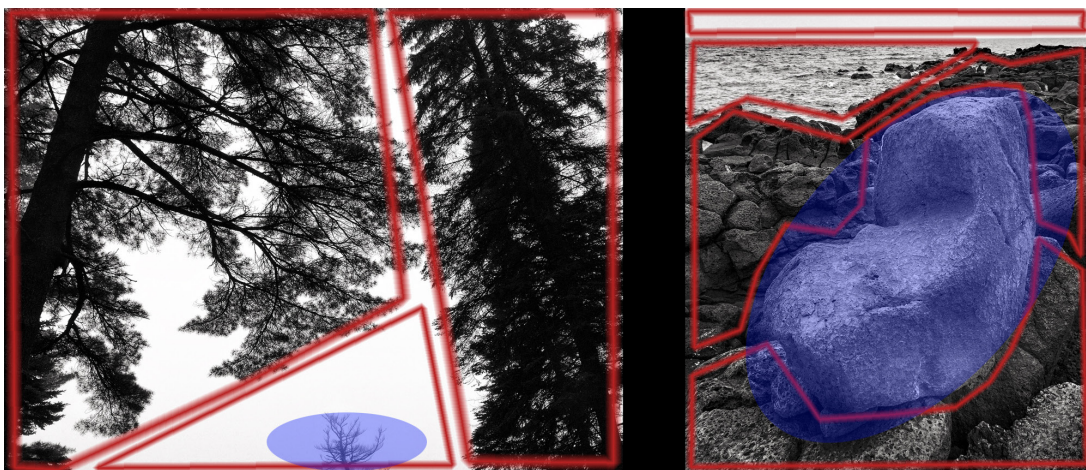


Image 006 – Photographs and Illustrations by Kent DuFault

*Segment and anchor shapes within landscape photos for increased visual impact!*

Post-processing helps with landscape shapes!





Image 007 – All Photographs by Kent DuFault

Post-processing can help you use shapes in your landscape photography. Each of the four photographs above had their anchors solidified by strengthening the shapes using a simple technique in post-processing.





Image 008 – Photographs and Illustrations by Kent DuFault

In all four cases, the shapes of the areas located within the red ovals were highlighted using the Adjustment Brush in the Adobe ACR window.

Virtually any photo editing program now makes use of a brush for localized adjustments; even Snapseed (a FREE editing software app) has a Brush feature. In Adobe Lightroom it is simply called the Brush Tool. In the Photoshop ACR Window, it's called the Adjustment Brush.

In each of the examples in Image 008, I lightened the area within the red oval (the anchor) and darkened the other areas of each image (the segments). This increase in contrast created strong shapes within the landscape scenery.

This post-processing step created dynamic and exciting shapes within the landscapes.



### Assignment:

Select several of your existing photographs that display a vibrant anchoring shape. Using a Brush Tool in your editing software, try to enhance that anchoring shape by making it lighter, darker, or giving it more tonal contrast against the surrounding segmented areas.





Image 009 – Photographs by Kent DuFault

The final shape defining tool that we will discuss in this landscape creativity prompt is color.

In landscape photography, color is influenced by the time of the year, weather conditions, and the ambient lighting.

The three sample photos in Image 009 were created because I identified colored shapes within the scenery that I found interesting. However, then I took it a step further and created color schemes using Snapseed and Photoshop.



## Enhancing Color Schemes in Shooting and Post-Processing



Image 010 – Photographs by Kent DuFault

**Assignment:**

First identify blocks of color within the scenery you're going to photograph. Let's take Image 009 as an example.



- 1 Find the block of color in the landscape scenery.
- 2 Find the segments of landscape surrounding the block of color.
- 3 Choose a lens and camera point-of-view (POV) that composes your shot with the segments supporting your block of color, which will become your anchor.
- 4 Use a post-processing Brush Tool to further enhance your efforts.

Practice this both at the point of pressing the shutter button and in your post-processing

phase. Try it on new pictures and older existing pictures.

Once again, the Brush Tool is your friend. Play with your block of color (your anchor) until it completely dominates the composition. Avoid using over-saturated colors.

All three of the landscape photos in Image 009 have wonderful vibrant color. However, the color doesn't take over. The landscape scene is the subject, not the color of the landscape scene. This is a huge point to grasp. Vibrant color is good as long as it doesn't dominate the subject! Over-saturated color is too dominant.