

Long Exposure Case Study #8

WATER MOTION

by Kent DuFault

You might assume that water motion and cloud motion would be similar. To some degree, that is true. However, water motion adds a factor.

- Cloud motion tends to be direct from point A to point B

- Water motion is much more erratic (in most cases).

Due to the erratic nature of water in motion, it requires more considerable skill and thoughtfulness as to the camera position and exposure time.





In this image, the water has a basic motion of in toward the camera, and then back outward. There is some erratic movement in the lower half of the picture as the water swirls around the rocks.

In this case, the unpredictable movement helps the photograph by adding exciting shapes and patterns.



If you've dabbled in long exposure photography at a beach location, and after many minutes of waiting, you finally were able to look at your completed exposure, only to feel disappointment, because there is little or no visible effect, **you're not alone.**

If water has erratic movement, and the exposure time is too long, then the effect of motion wipes itself out. The water will often take on a milky or misty appearance, as demonstrated in the image above.



At times, photographers are seeking that pearl effect on the water. In this case, you need to set your exposure time to a length that is long enough, without causing areas that you wish to remain sharp from becoming fuzzy or out of focus from camera blur.



Fast-moving water is much easier to work with. Watch the patterns created by the water movement. Use these patterns within your composition.

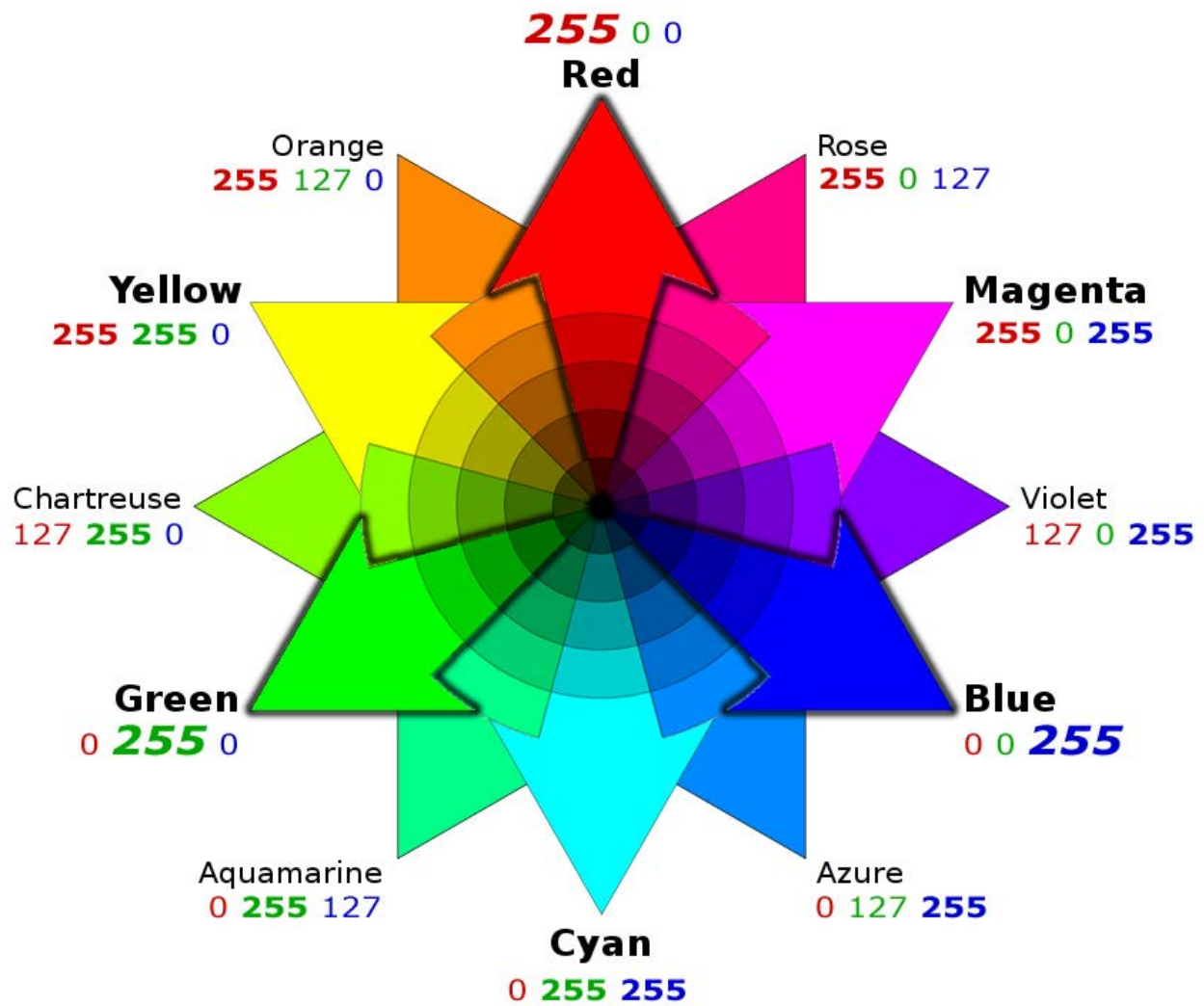


When there is a lot of water movement, it is conducive to put static unmovable objects scattered throughout your photograph. These objects help to solidify the landscape so that your picture doesn't appear completely blurry.



Pro Tip: The viewing public almost always reacts positively to long exposure photographs of water scenes that have a deliberate blue color hue. You can create this effect with a color filter on your lens or in post-production. If the shot includes moving

water and sunrise or a sunset, accentuating the color blue along with the colors yellow, red, or orange is also very favorable. Blue and yellow are complementary colors, which creates a subtle visual tension in a photograph.



This color wheel shows you the complementary color combinations. Blue and yellow, azure and orange, and cyan and red are all pleasing color schemes for a long exposure water scene.

Your Challenge

Find some beautiful water scenes. It can be at the beach, or a stream, or even a public water fountain. Study the patterns of water movement. Use your extended exposure techniques to capture your chosen location in both a realistic and abstract photograph. Vary your shutter speed lengths, and perhaps go back several times at different times of the day. Try front lighting, side lighting, and backlighting.

Evaluation

Which lighting scheme gave you the best results? What time of day worked out best for you? Did you prefer the realistic or abstract version of your work? What would you do differently- if you attempted this Challenge again?