PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS OF CALIFORNIA

12 Elements of a Merit Image

1. Impact

Viewing an image for the first time always evokes some kind of feeling. Sometimes they can make us sad, happy or angry. Sometimes they force us to look inward at ourselves. That's called an impact, and the more powerful the image, the more powerful the emotional response of the viewer.

2. Technical Excellence

This is the print quality of the actual image itself as it's presented for viewing. There are a lot of aspects that speak to the qualities of the physical print. These can include:

- Retouching
- Manipulation
- Sharpness
- Exposure
- Printing
- Mounting
- Color correction

3. Creativity

Your point of view is exactly that– yours. And it's unlike anyone else's. This element speaks directly to that perspective. It shows your imagination and how you used the medium to convey an idea, a message or a thought to the viewer. This is how you differentiate yourself from others.

4. Style

There are many, many ways to apply this element to your work. Maybe you use light in a specific way on a subject, or maybe you make a technical decision for the express purpose of underscoring desired impact. When subject matter and style come together in an appropriate manner, the effects on an image can be spectacular. But remember, when subject matter and style don't work together, the results can be, well, less-than-spectacular.

PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS OF CALIFORNIA

12 Elements of a Merit Image

5. Composition

When all the visual elements of an image come together to express intent, that's when the magic of composition happens. Good composition captures a viewer's attention and directs it where you, the artist, want it to be. Depending on your intent, you can make something that pleases the viewer– or disturbs them.

6. Presentation

How you showcase an image is just as important as how you compose it. Everything in the presentation should work to enhance your image and not distract from it. Keep this in mind when choosing mats, borders and everything in between.

7. Color Balance

Proper color balance can bring a sense of harmony to an image. When the tones all work together to support an image, the emotional appeal is that much greater. But color balance doesn't have to be used to bring harmony to an image. You can use color balance to evoke any number of feelings from a viewer. The choice in how to take advantage is entirely up to you, but no matter what, be sure your choice enhances rather than distracts.

8. Center of Interest

This is where an image's creator wants a viewer's attention focused. Sometimes there can be a primary and a secondary center of interest. Sometimes everything in an image will work together to create that center of interest.

9. Lighting

The use and control of light has an effect on every aspect of an image. It informs dimensions and shape, it sets tone and mood, and, like every other technique, proper lighting can be used to enhance your image while improper lighting can detract from it.

10. Subject Matter

Even though it lacks words, your image is still telling a story, and your subject matter is central to that. Make sure that your subject matter is right for the story that you're trying to tell.

PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS OF CALIFORNIA

12 Elements of a Merit Image

11. Technique

How you choose to execute your image is key. It's also a holistic decision. Technique informs everything in the creation of your image. From lighting and posing to printing and presentation, it all works to show off the techniques that you've mastered and applied to your craft.

12. Story Telling

What does your image evoke in a viewer's imagination? What do you want your image to evoke in a viewer's imagination? Keep in mind: You are creating art. And while the act of creating is a personal thing, so too is the act of viewing. Your image is a story, and the one it tells your viewer may be one you never knew you were telling.