



## The Light

The primary focus of any photographic image is to create a sense of light. An impression of light is what brings an image to life. After all, photography literally means 'drawing with light'. This is especially true for nighttime images. Even the darkest image is meant to recreate the light revealed by a scene, no matter how dramatic or subtle.

At night, the wide range of lighting possibilities is endless, certainly more so than during the daytime. Night light may take many forms. This allows us to capture uncommon perspectives. A pattern of light sources in an image can dictate how the viewer's eye dances across the image. Glowing light and beams of light are dramatic. Back-lighting, hidden light sources, and long shadows seem myste-



*Lighted One*

© Dana Foy  
f/16 @ 15 sec.

rious or secretive. Moonlight, ambient light, or alternative lighting can reveal details in the shadows and create a feeling of intimacy.

Different exposures create different images of the same subject. An average exposure may render a literal or realistic image. Underexposure may create a minimalist style image. Overexposure may yield a surrealist image with a strong sense of light.

The goal is not to reproduce a darker version of a daytime image, but to explore and invent something new by capturing the essence of the night. The goal is to take the common and make it uncommon. At night, you may have to look a little harder or dig a little deeper, but your efforts will be well worth it.

## The Practice

The night is a great time to play with light. Long exposures allow us to experiment by adding visual elements to a scene through the use of alternative lighting. We can use a flash or a lantern to 'fill' dark areas with light. We can use a flashlight to 'paint' specific areas of a scene we want to highlight. Candles or sparklers can be used to 'write' with light. Envisioning the possibilities and experimenting with alternative lighting is one way to create interesting and unique images.

Long exposures also create an opportunity for us to remove visual elements from an image while the film is being exposed. Often times changes occur during an exposure. If we anticipate unwanted momentary changes, such as an airplane entering the scene, we can prevent recording the event on film by blocking the lens with a dark card. When you block the lens, you are decreasing the effective exposure time. Keep track of the lost time and add it back into the overall

exposure.

Film sees differently than your eye. Your eye sees instantaneously, yet film sees collectively. What you see is NOT necessarily what you get. In time you will learn to see how your film sees, even when changes occur during exposure.

The practice of night photography asks us to go beyond the momentary glimpse our eye perceives and anticipate how changes will affect the final image. With experience we can learn to anticipate

the possibilities, foresee how changes will unfold as a single image, and capture the expanded moment we desire. The result will be a more personalized interpretation of a scene which is much more



*Lighthouse Study #12*

© Dana Foy  
f/8 @ 3 mins.

# The Art

Night photography is full of potential for creating expressive and artistic images. This raises the question, 'What is art?' Quite simply, 'Art is impact!' But, 'What is impact?' Impact is the spirit of an image. Impact is what touches us. It is what fills us. It is what makes the whole of an image greater than its parts. Impact is what connects the viewer to the ideas, thoughts, feelings, and experience of the artist. It is what makes the experience of seeing all worthwhile.

Impact is not just impact, any more than composition is just composition. There are different types of impact. In fact, there are as many kinds of impact as there are ways to respond to the world. And yet, it is hard to describe impact exactly. It is like a parable. You can talk about it, liken it to something, or detail the results of it, but you can't fully explain it. Since impact is a subjective result of experience, it is difficult to pinpoint what it is exactly. Impact is what speaks to the viewer and it is what the viewer remembers.

Photography is a form of visual communication. It is a way to share our personal perspective with others. It is our chance to show the world what we see and how we see it. When we communicate verbally, we want to articulate our ideas clearly. Likewise, when we create visual images, we want to articulate our ideas and experience to the viewer as clearly as possible. That is, we should strive to be *visually articulate*. If we do not, we run the risk of creating *visual babble*; an immature form of what we want to say visually. The best way to practice visual articulation is by consciously identifying the types of impact our images have on ourselves and others.

The great diversity of light that exists at night allows us to create great visual impact. Dramatic lighting gives nighttime images an expressionistic style that entices the senses beyond the visual. Nighttime images can conjure up memories and feelings of nostalgia. A dark scene can be presented as a minimalistic image inviting the viewer to interpret

the image based on personal experience. Subtle lighting can add a feeling of intimacy. Back-lighting creates curiosity. Commonplace subjects seem timeless. Beams of light create a feeling of inspiration.

Hidden light sources are dramatic. Long shadows can draw the viewer into the image as a participant. Diffuse or glowing light can create a feeling of enchantment. Houses with lit windows can convey a feeling of warmth and safety. These are but a few ideas (corresponding to the images seen here) about the types of impact that can be created by nighttime images.

Nighttime photography is about discovery, both technically and artistically. It is a chance to explore a different way of seeing, and a different way of sharing our visual experience. The best ideas about your own images will come from you. As you explore ideas about impact, your artistic vision and style will grow.



Pioneer Cabin

© Dana Foy  
f/8 @ 30 sec.



Light and Shadow

© Dana Foy  
f/8 @ 1 min.



Yosemite Cabin

© Dana Foy  
f/11 @ 1 min.

## About the Author: Dana Foy

Dana Foy is an award-winning fine art photographer with 25 years experience. Since 1990 he has photographed exclusively at night and is self-taught in the art and craft of night photog-

raphy. Dana teaches "The Art of Night Photography" at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. He also gives workshops and lectures on the same subject. He has exhibited his work

internationally in both solo and juried group shows. He is a member of the Texas Photographic Society and active in the Enchanted Lens Camera Club in Albuquerque, NM.