



the secret photographers guide  
to capturing

*pastel skies*



“..we take photos as  
a return ticket  
to a moment  
otherwise gone..”

- Katie Thurmes

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# Introduction

Hi! Welcome to The Secret Photographers Guide to Capturing Pastel Skies E-course. Firstly I want to say a big thankyou for signing up. After you are done reading through the content and watching the videos you will know exactly how the professional photographers capture those beautiful colours in the sky so easily! But first, how did I learn all this stuff?

Ever since I was a little girl I have loved cameras and taking pictures. My first camera was a pink Kodak Extralite 10 that I was given for Christmas when I was six. I used to take pictures of my little dog Benji, my annoying older brothers and anything that looked interesting to a six year old.

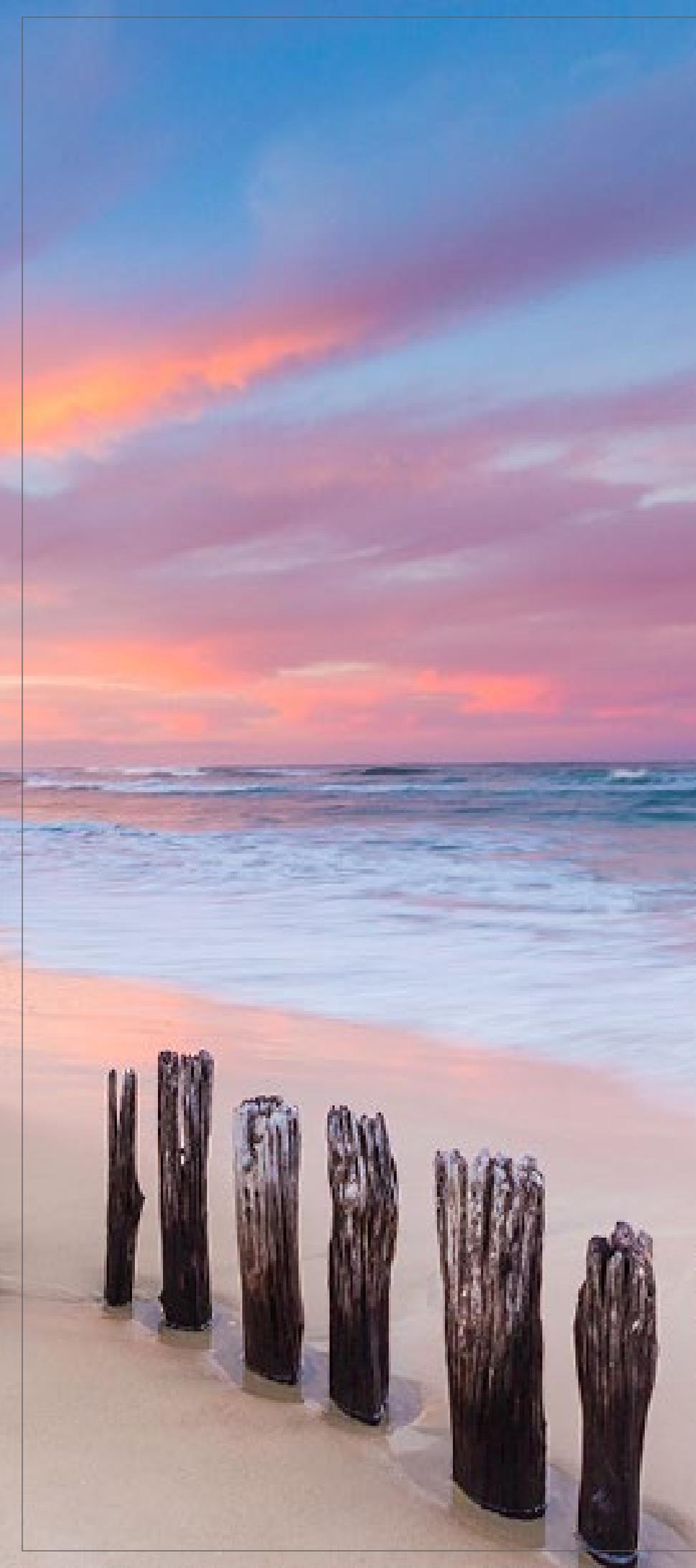
Through the years my cameras have changed but I have never been without one! It wasn't until

I moved overseas, seeing so many amazing places, that I really got back into photography. Once returning home to Australia I decided to do a photography course with a good friend of mine. I had always wondered how people would capture those beautiful photos of the soft fluffy water at the waterfalls rather than the harsh ugly photos I was taking. How did they captured the beautiful colours in the sky yet have the foreground so perfectly exposed? My attempt turned out to be the typical blown out sky with absolutely no colour in the picture whatsoever!

After my first lesson I was keen as mustard to put what I had learnt into place. So that weekend, I ventured into the City to do some photography of the buildings lit up at night. I set my camera up exactly how the teacher had explained and did my first ever long exposure. I was blown away. I couldn't believe how easy it was and I was immediately hooked and wanted to photograph everything. So that's what I did. Every chance I got I was out taking photos. That's what has shaped me into the photographer that I am today, the drive and passion and the persistence and practice.

Now that I have all this knowledge and skill, I'm so excited to share it all with you. All I ask is that you read through the content thoroughly, watch the videos and then get out there and practice. The only way to really cement something in your mind is to do it over and over again! So lets get started....





## Equipment needed:

- **DSLR Camera with Manual Mode:**

So that you can do long exposures or exposures long enough for the colours to be captured onto the sensor of the camera

- **Sturdy Tripod:**

A tripod will ensure there is no movement while you are taking a long exposure

- **Shutter Release Cable:**

This will also ensure there is no movement while taking a long exposure as even pressing the shutter button on the camera can cause camera shake and ruin an image

- **ND and Graduated ND Filters:**

These will help dull down the brightness of the rising or setting sun and help with saturation of colour onto the sensor.

- **Filter Holder & Adapter Ring:**

To hold your filters onto the front of the camera lens

“Light makes photography,  
embrace light. Admire it,  
love it. But above all,  
know light. Know it for  
all you are worth and you  
will know the key to photography.”

- George Eastman



# The perfect time of day..

If you have ever read any of my blog posts you will hear me banging on about “light” and how important it is when it comes to photography. Before I started photography, I thought the best time of day to take a photo was in the middle of the day when the sun is at its brightest and there is not a cloud in the sky. I was quite surprised to find out it's actually the opposite of this and especially if you want to capture the beautiful pastel colours. Have you ever seen the sky filled with pastels at midday?

So the best time of day to be doing any photography is an hour before sunset, which then turns into the blue hour about an hour after sunset and 45 minutes to an hour before sunrise. This is when you are going to see the sky turn all shades of colours from subtle pinks, purples and yellow to the iridescent hot pinks if you are lucky. I also thought that you saw these amazing colours every sunset and sunrise because I fluked an amazing sunset the first time I went out trying to capture one. I remember thinking to myself, wow, I can't believe I have been missing out on this every single day. Funnily enough, I soon realised that that was a particularly pretty sunset and I didn't see another one like it until a few weeks later. So don't assume that you are going to see amazing colours every time you go out. I will teach you how to predict whether you will or not a bit later on. But even I still get it wrong!

Don't be fooled by overcast or rainy days either. If you are a landscape photographer this is the best time to hit those waterfalls and rainforests. Cloud cover provides a natural diffuser from the harsh sunlight and can bring down the shutter speed on your camera by an F Stop or two, which is perfect for slowing down the fast movement of water.

## Lesson 1 – Seeing the light:

Take your camera outdoors with you, preferably to a landscape location where you can see a great distance around you. Get there an hour before sunset to scope out the best composition. Set up your camera on your tripod. Keep your aperture on the same number for the entire exercise i.e F8 and just change your shutter speed in accordance with what your light meter is telling you.

Take a photo every 10 minutes from the minute you are setup all the way through sunset to at least half an hour to an hour after sunset. Notice the change in colour of light. The light will be a lot softer and golden in colour the closer you get to sunset. After the sun has set the light will start to turn really blue until the night sky takes over. This is a great way of learning to “see the light”.

Phew! I have all the photography gear I could ever want said no photographer ever!



## Reading the weather....

So how do you know if there is going to be colour in the sky at sunset or sunrise? Well first things first, if it is a completely clear day or night, then you probably won't see any colour. You may see a pink or yellow haze on the horizon about 10 minutes before sunrise/sunset but there won't be any wild colours. You need cloud for that.

High thin cloud throughout the day is usually a good indicator. The thin stuff is usually always guaranteed to go pink.

Thick cloud can go either way. If the horizon is clear but there is thick cloud above you, there is a good chance that cloud will change colour because the sun rays are able to shine through that gap and reflect back up onto the cloud as it is dropping in the sky.

Thick cloud all over the sky can go either way. It's a bit of a lottery but you probably have more chance than if the sky is completely clear.

If it has rained during the day/overnight or there has been a storm then you are usually guaranteed a pretty cool sunset/sunrise. I'm not sure why this is - maybe it's the moisture in the clouds or something but I always try to get out there after these conditions.

I always notice that the clouds start to turn a soft shade of grey/purple about 10-15 minutes before they are going to turn pink too.

You tend to see more colours in the sky during Autumn and Winter too.

A cloudless sky doesn't always mean a boring picture either though. This picture of the Wanaka tree is one of my most popular and there is not one cloud in the sky!

## Lesson 2 – Watch the weather:

Over the next week, get outside as much as you can and look up at the sky. Keep an eye on what the cloud is doing. Notice if it is thick, thin, high, if there has been rain or storms or if it has been completely clear.

Take notice of whether you see any colour around sunrise/sunset and try to see if you can notice the clouds turning a purple/grey colour before they turn pink.



“The earth is art,  
the photographer is only a witness”

-Yann Arthus-Bertrand

# The Scene...

What is it that you are wanting to photograph? Is it a seascape? A massive mountain with a beautiful lake in front of it? A field of snow? Then you need to work out what the conditions are going to be. Things you need to consider are:

## Tides:

If you are planning on setting out to do some seascape photography then you need to check the tides before you go. A few good Apps you can get to check tides and sunrise/sunset times are [Tides Near Me](#), or [My Tide Times](#) which you can get from the itunes store. They gives you almost every location in the world. Like the image on page 19 that was taken at Beachmere which is a very tidal location. This was high tide for that particular week. I wanted to capture it when there was enough water to cover the sand and the base of the tree so I waited until I knew the tide was going to be right. Luckily the sky played along as well and produced some cloud on that particular morning! I also chose sunrise because the sun would be rising in front of me which always gives more vibrant colours.

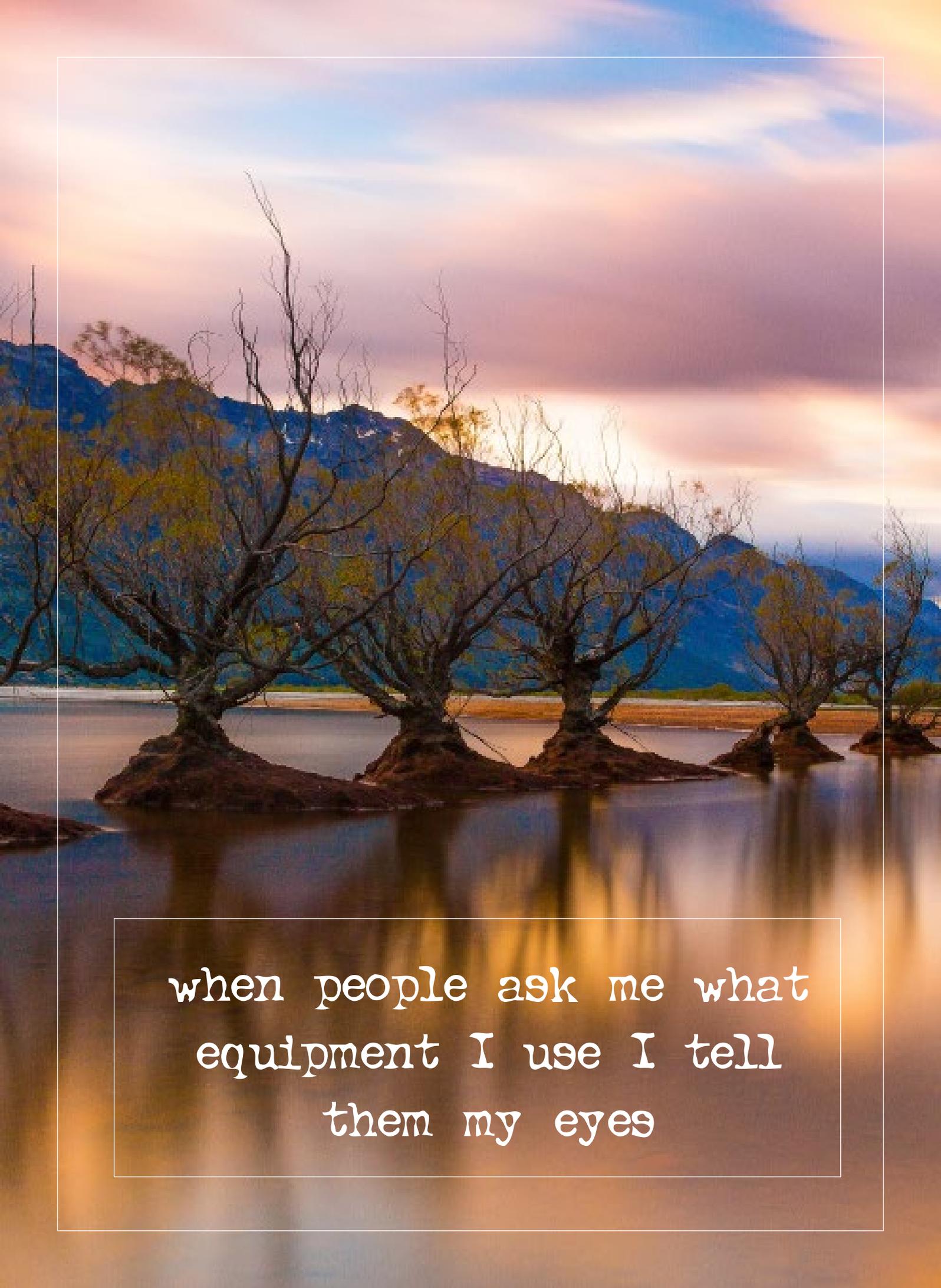
## Sun Placement:

You also need to think about whether you want the sun to be in front of you or behind you. I always like it to be in front of me but I have also captured beautiful skies when the sun was behind me. You have to remember that if the sun is in front of you then any objects that you are photographing will be silhouettes unless you do a HDR, which is 3 or more exposures blended together in post processing to bring out the shadows and tone down the highlights. If you are photographing a mountain range, it's a good idea to have the sun behind or beside you so that it lights up the mountains.

## Long Exposure or Not:

Another thing to consider is whether to do a long exposure or not. Most of the time if I am photographing water I will do a long exposure so that it looks calm and smooth. But there are times that I want to see some movement in the water too, it's just personal preference. When deciding whether or not to do a long exposure consider the sky. A long exposure produces long sweeping clouds almost like streaks in the sky if there is some good wind about. It gives a feeling of movement against the calmness of the smooth ocean. This type of sky can look really good against any other type of scene too, not just water.

I find a long exposure produces more colour as well because the sensor of your camera has longer to concentrate the colours onto it!



when people ask me what  
equipment I use I tell  
them my eyes

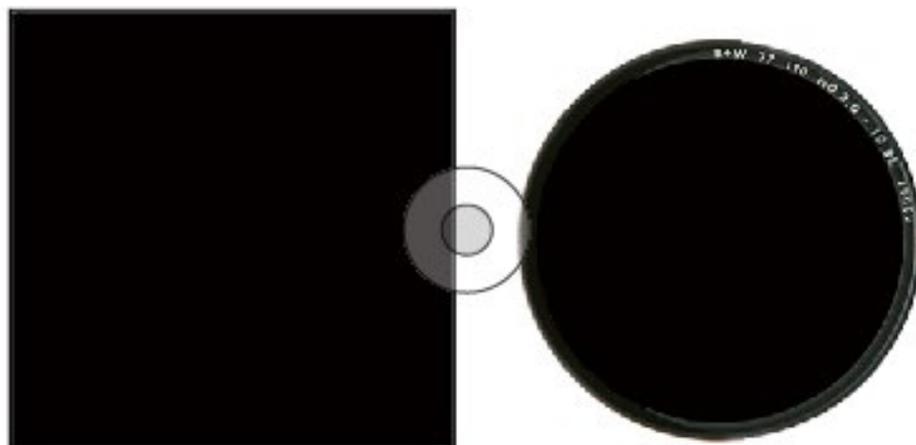
# Filters

When you are photographing a landscape scene with the sky in the photo, your camera is going to have to choose between correctly exposing for the sky or for the foreground, depending on where you are focusing. You could take two photos - one exposed correctly for the sky and one exposed correctly for the foreground and blend them together in Photoshop, but that just sounds like far too much hard work to me. I like to get my pictures nearly perfect in camera so that I am not wasting time processing them once I get home. So the easy way to help your camera out is to add some filters on the front of your lens. There are essentially two types of filters that you need for landscape photography and they are:

## ND Filters (Neutral Density Filters):

Neutral Density Filters reduce the amount of light coming into your camera. The reason that you would want to do this is to slow down your shutter speed, thereby causing a longer exposure. You would do this if you want to get great effects like silky smooth water if it's a windy day or when you are photographing a waterfall and you want that smooth water effect. They are also used to give the sky some movement with the clouds. Neutral Density Filters don't add colour in anyway. They are purely used to reduce light transmission and to give you a long exposure.

ND Filters are completely black or grey all the way through depending on their strength. The strength of each filter is measured in camera stops. The different strengths available are 1, 2, 3 or 6 stop ND Filter or if you want really long exposures, you can use a 9 or 10 stop filter. There is even a 16 stop filter that has been released recently. They come in a rectangle shape with a holder that you connect to the front of your lens, which you then slide the filter into the slot. You can use more than one filter with this system. Otherwise you can get ND filters that screw onto the front of your lens. You can also stack other filters in front of the screw on one too.



# Filters cont...

## Graduated Filters:

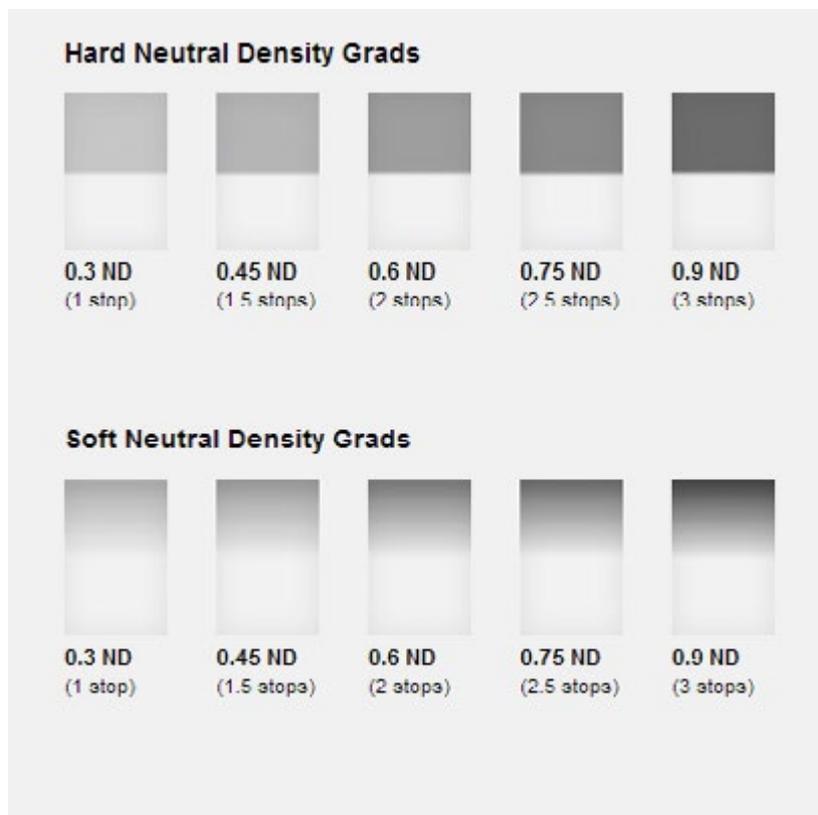
A graduated filter is needed at sunrise or sunset to darken down the brightness of the sky so that the foreground can be perfectly exposed. Otherwise, you would have a blown out sky if you were metering (focusing) to get the foreground correctly exposed or if you were metering (focusing) on the sky then the foreground would be almost black from being under exposed.

Sometimes you want to catch the movement of the water and not get completely smooth milky water like you do when you use a 10 stop ND Filter. This is when you would only use the graduated filters. The picture below was taken only using a graduated filter so that you can still see the movement of the ocean and the fluffiness of the clouds. Notice that the exposure is even the whole way through the photo. The sky isn't blown out and the foreground isn't dark.

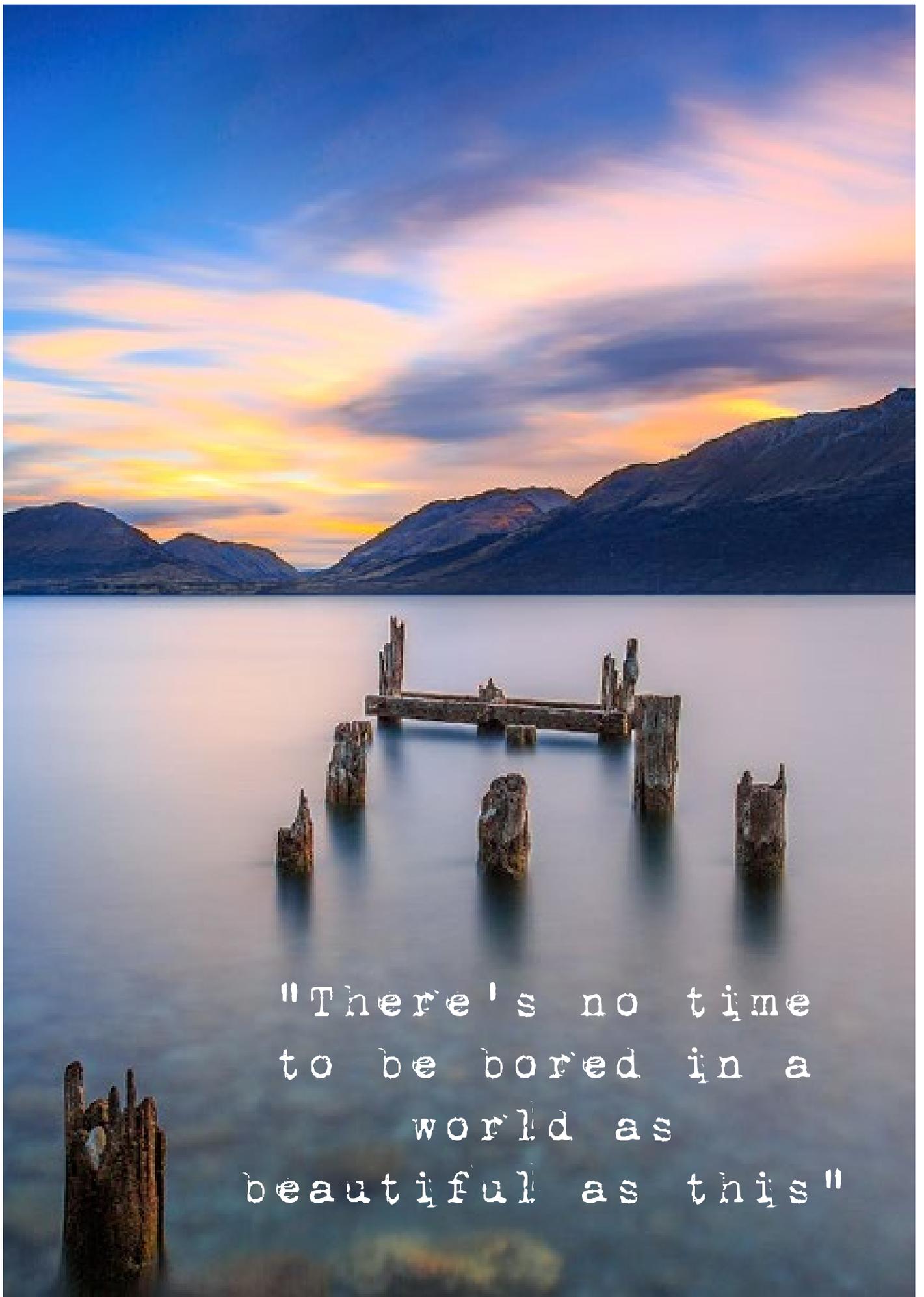


## Filters cont...

Graduated filters come as a rectangle shape and need to be slid into a holder that goes on the front of your lens. One end of the filter is clear and one end is grey. You slide the clear end into the holder first so that the grey area is covering the sky. You can get soft or hard graduated filters. The soft graduated filter softly graduates from grey to clear. The hard graduated filter is a block of grey on one end and a block of clear on the other end as seen in the example below.



The most commonly used graduated filters are the 0.3, 0.6 and 0.9 ND. Personally I like to use the soft grad filter in 0.6ND. I find that it gives a nice balance and I'm not left with a grey sky which can happen sometimes when using the 0.9ND. It is completely subjective though and you have to play around with a few different combinations to find out your own style and what you like best.



"There's no time  
to be bored in a  
world as  
beautiful as this"

# Long Exposure Photography

Long exposure photography is one of my favourite genres of photography. The fast flowing clouds and smooth smokey water just speaks to my soul for some reason. The anticipation of waiting for those long minutes while the camera is painting the scene before it onto the sensor and then seeing the image flash up on the LCD screen. It's a bit like playing an old fashioned pokie machine and waiting for all the numbers to finish rolling around to see if you hit the jackpot! Long Exposure photography has the potential to produce some amazing photographs. It is often associated with fine art photography due to the surreal effect it can bring to your photographs. So let's get started!

The equipment that you need is all listed on Page 4. A camera with Manual Mode or preferably Bulb Mode, a tripod, a shutter release cable, ND and Grad ND Filters.

1. First thing you need to do is compose your image. Before putting your filters on, setup your camera on your tripod. Put your camera into Manual Mode, choose the aperture that you want, look through the shutter and make sure you are happy with the scene in front of you. Press the shutter button halfway down so that your camera focuses automatically and takes an exposure reading. (Try to focus on something in the foreground rather than the sky) See where the needle is sitting on the light meter and adjust it so that it is sitting back at zero or the middle.

-3..2..1..0..1..2..+3

Take note of what your shutterspeed is telling you at this point. Then turn your focus from Automatic back to manual on the lens. There should be a switch on the side:



# Long Exposure Photography

2. To get a picture like the one below you need to do a fairly long exposure, somewhere around 5 minutes to get the real movement of cloud and smooth water, especially if its quite windy. For this shot I put on my trusty 10 stop ND Filter plus a 0.6 ND graduated filter to stop the sky being blown out.

Once you have your camera setup up, composed and taken a meter reading, then you can add your filters.

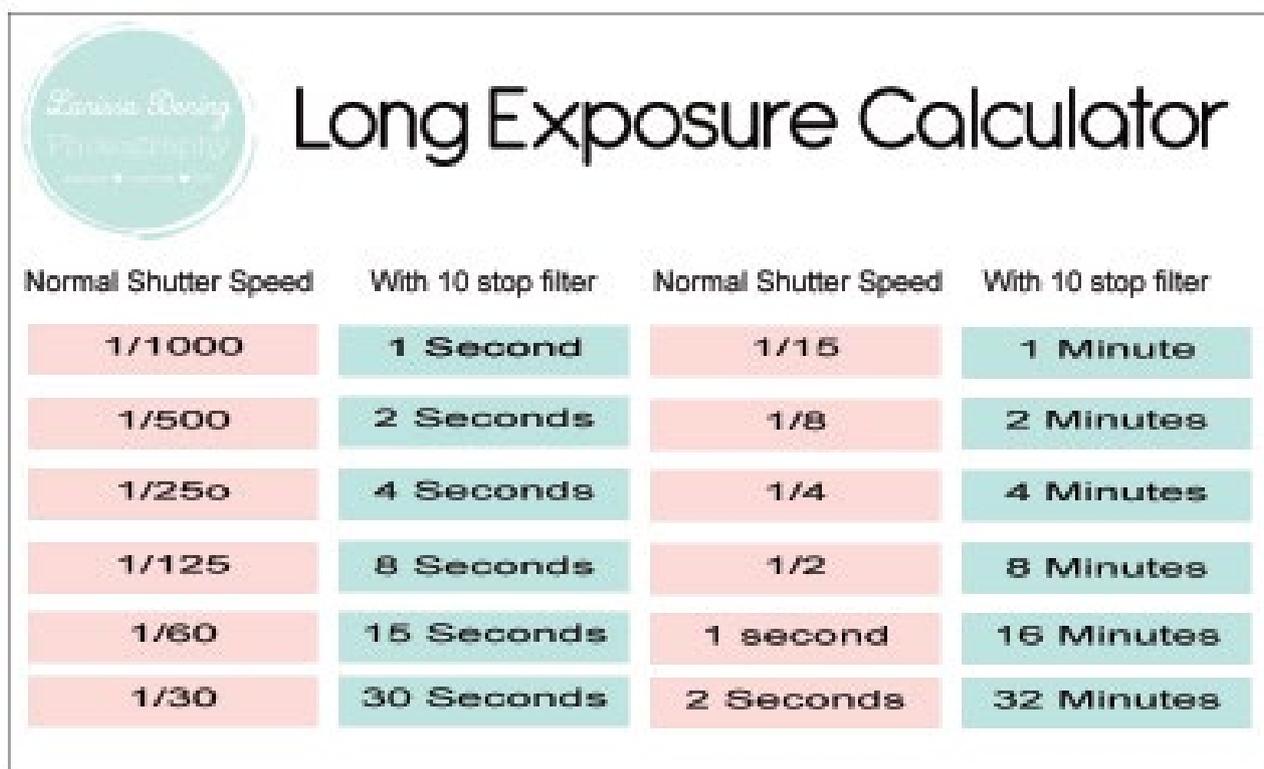
3. Next you need to work out what your shutter speed is going to be so that your photo comes out correctly exposed. To do this you can use a long exposure app called [Slower Shutter](#). Remember that if you are using a 9 or 10 stop ND Filter plus a grad filter, you need to add another stop for the grad filter. So if your camera is exposing for 1/8 and you are adding a grad filter then you need to work out the exposure time for 1/4 because you are adding another stop.



# Long Exposure Photography

A little trick is to take a meter reading (focusing) while holding the grad filter in front of the lens to find out what the shutterspeed is going to be. That way you dont have to worry about adding an extra stop.

I have created this little Long Exposure Calculator that you can print off and carry with you in your camera bag for quick reference.



Normal Shutter Speed	With 10 stop filter	Normal Shutter Speed	With 10 stop filter
1/1000	1 Second	1/15	1 Minute
1/500	2 Seconds	1/8	2 Minutes
1/250	4 Seconds	1/4	4 Minutes
1/125	8 Seconds	1/2	8 Minutes
1/60	15 Seconds	1 second	16 Minutes
1/30	30 Seconds	2 Seconds	32 Minutes

If you are doing a particularly long exposure, then you also need to account for the fading light in the afternoon or the rising light in the morning. For example, if you are photographing the sunset then the light can fade quite quickly. You may need to add extra time onto your exposure to compensate for this so that your image isnt under exposed. Same goes for sunrise, you may need to shorten the exposure time as the rising sun gives off more light. It's kind of tricky to calculate the exposure exactly because the light is constantly changing but you will start to get the hang of it with practice.

4. Make sure your shutter release cable is plugged in, put your camera into Bulb Mode and make sure the aperture is still the same as what you were metering for in manual mode, change from Auto Focus back to Manual Focus by flicking the switch on the lens, click the shutter and wait. Once the time is up, unclick the button on your shutter release cable and the image will be displayed on your LCD screen. Hopefully it will be exposed correctly and all that will be left to do is post process it.

## Lesson 3 – A long exposure with smooth water and streaky clouds:

For lesson 3, I want you to take your camera somewhere where there is water, say the beach, or a lake. If you don't live near water, find something interesting in nature and focus on getting the streaky clouds. It's time to put the first two lessons into practice along with the 4 steps above for taking a long exposure. I want you to use an ND filter and a grad filter and try and do an exposure for 2 minutes or longer depending on what you have metered for. Have fun with the lesson, it's all about practice and putting the steps into place so that they become second nature. You don't have to get it perfect the first time. I know I sure didn't! Let me know how you go with it. Tag your pics to the facebook group 'Pastel Skies Love' so I can see your results. Also make sure you tag your pics with #ld\_pastelskies in Instagram and each week I will feature my favourite shot from all the pics.





## Lesson 4 – A not so long exposure:

With this lesson I want you to take off the ND filter and just use the graduated filter like I have written about above so that you are getting some movement in the water and the clouds are still puffy. Make sure you are metering correctly to get a perfect exposure and again, have fun. Just practice doing these exercises so that you get the hang of it and you will be a pro in no time!

# Brands of Filters

There are all different kinds of brands of filters out there on the market but which ones are the best? The four brands that I have used have been Cokin, B+W, Lee & Nisi filters.

Lee filters are known to be pretty high up there in the photography world and I have used them for about 6 years until recently switching to Nisi. Up until then I was using Cokin graduated filters and a B+W neutral density filter. I was always happy with the results I was getting with this combination until I started using Nisi which in my opinion is far superior to other filters but they are expensive. I still use the Lee 10 Stop and sometimes the B+W 10 stop depending on what I am wanting to achieve. So what's the difference between the B+W and Lee Big Stopper? Well you may have heard that some filters can throw off a colour cast. These two filters definitely do!

## B + W 10 Stop ND Filter

This was my first ever ND Filter and I still love it today. It has served me well over the years. The B+W is a screw on filter which is completely black glass. You cannot see through it. It is a 10 stop filter which I use for really long exposures and most of the time combined with a grad filter. The B+W 10 Stop has a purple colour cast and is the reason why I am so easily able to pick up the magenta colours that are in the sky at sunrise and sunset. You have to be careful though because in some situations it can make your photos look a bit off colour, but if you are shooting in raw (which you should be anyway) you can correct the colour cast by adjusting your white balance in post processing.



# Brands of Filters

## Lee Big Stopper ND Filter

The Lee Big Stopper is the big daddy of filters. Most photographers I know use this one. I found there to be such a difference between this and the B+W that I kept going back to the B+W 10 stop. Slowly the Big Stopper grew on me and I found myself leaning more towards that one than the B+W. The Lee Big Stopper has a definite blue colour cast too it. Of course, if you are shooting in raw the blue colour cast is easily corrected in post processing.



## Hoya 9 Stop

The other ND filter that you can get is the Hoya 9 Stop. The Hoya has a blue colour cast also. I have never used this one, but I have seen images from other photographers that have used it and it looks great. It is also a lot cheaper than a Lee Big Stopper.

# Brands of Filters

## NiSi Filters

The latest newcomer to the filter market is NiSi and they have definitely made an impact. Their filters are made from glass which is a bit scary when you are handling them but the quality is amazing compared to other brands. NiSi filters are Nano coated and offer true to life colour through IR technology. They are low reflection, are made from high definition Optical glass and offers double sided water proofing. NiSi Filters have an added infrared protection coating layer to eliminate the infrared light through the lens to bring back the True to Life Colour.



You can purchase single ND or graduated filters, or they have a range of kits that you can purchase. The thing I love about the NiSi system is the V5 PRO system. This includes a circular polariser that you leave on your lens and just add your filters to the front. You are able to turn the polariser on or off without having to remove your filters. I never used to use a polariser at sunset or sunrise but using this system has definitely given me greater depth of colours and contrast and I love having the option of using it or not.



# Brands of Filters

## Hoya 9 Stop



## Hitech Firecrest 16 Stop

Released onto the market in August 2014 was the first ever 16 stop ND filter from Hitech. I haven't tried this one yet but I am very keen too. This ND filter solves the problem of stacking and vignetting that you get when you stack an ND filter with grad filters which I will talk about shortly. The 16 stop filter would allow you to do extremely long exposures if the conditions were bright which is a style used by a lot of Fine Art photographers seen in the example below:



Image by: [www.bwvision.com](http://www.bwvision.com)

# Colour Cast from Filters

Here is the difference in colour cast between the B+W and the Lee filter. You can see the Lee Big Stopper is very cool and the B+W is very warm. These pictures are straight out of the camera.

SOOC - Lee Big Stopper + O.6 Grad Filter



SOOC - B+W ND filter + O.6 Grad Filter



“birth certificates show that you were born,  
death certificates show that you died,  
photographs show that you really lived”  
- author unknown



# Stacking filters and vignetting

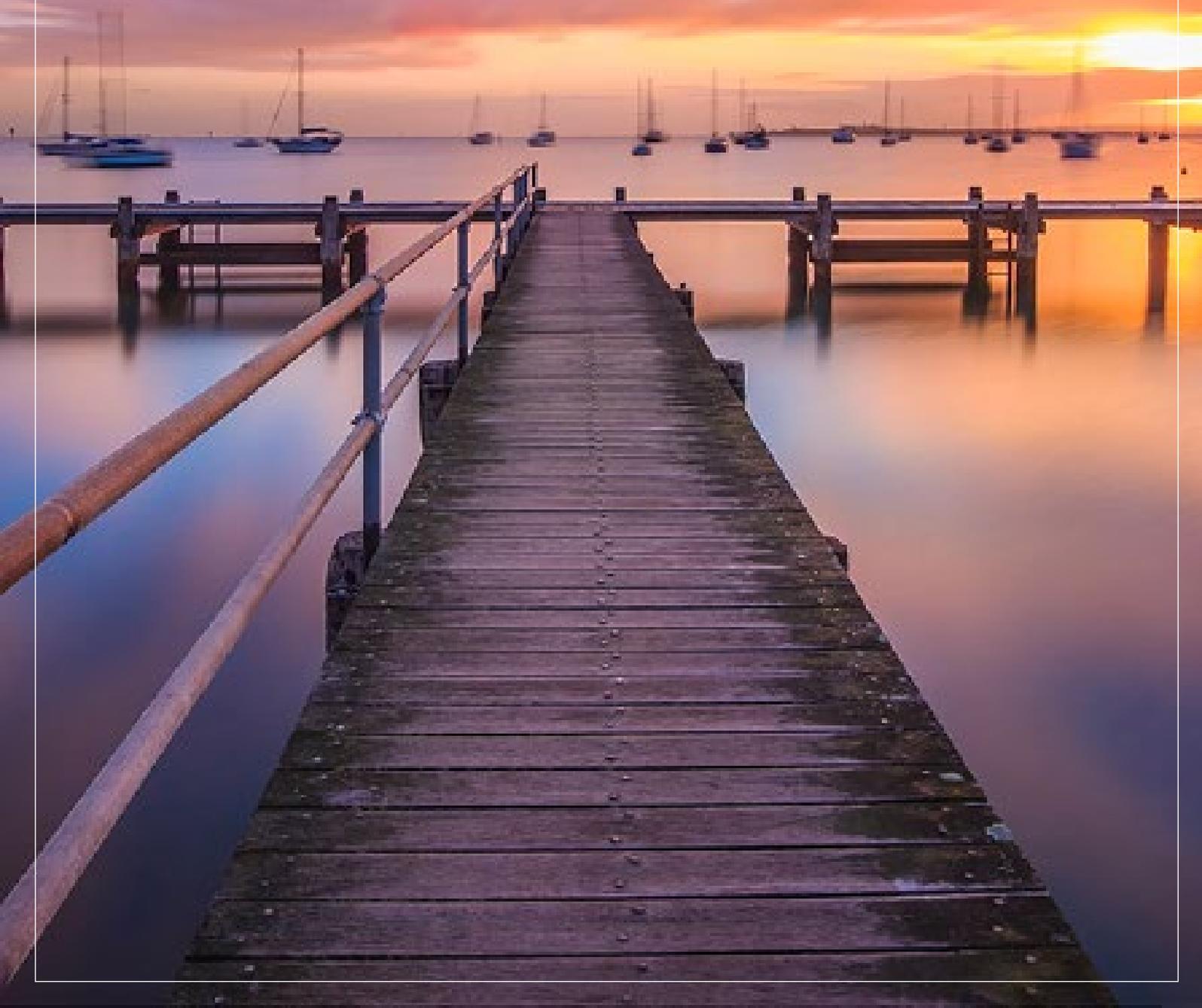
When you are stacking a few filters onto the front of your lens you have to be aware that you can get vignetting in the photo. Vignetting is when your camera picks up the edges of the filters that you have put on the front of your lens. They show up like a black ring like in the photo below that I took at Cradle Mountain.



This usually occurs when you are using a wide angle lens and have the lens set to the widest length. For example a 10-20mm lens that is set to 10mm because you want to capture as much of the scene as you can. To counteract this, bring your focal length in until you can't see the filters in your viewfinder anymore. Its usually only a couple of mm that you need to compensate. So on a 10-20mm lens you would bring it in to 12mm. Otherwise you can just crop the image in post processing.

Note: I havent noticed this happening with the NiSi V5 Pro System with two filters stacked on the front.

sometimes I arrive just  
when the universe is ready  
for someone to click the  
shutter

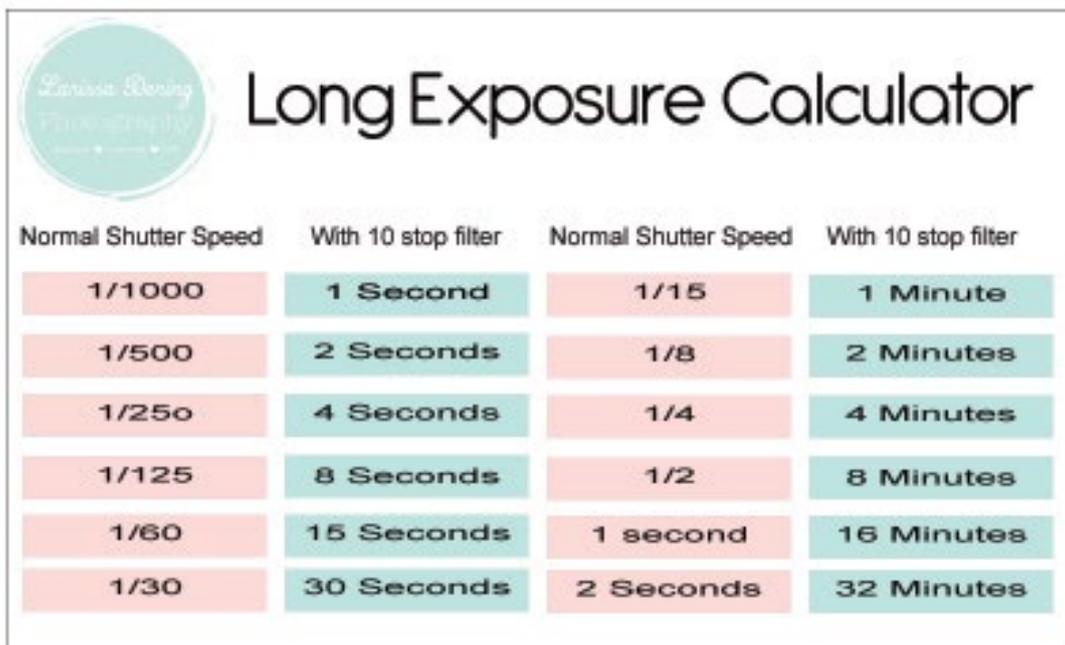


# Pastel Skies Cheat Sheet

1. Setup your camera on the tripod, plug in your shutter release cable, turn on your camera.
2. Put camera into Manual Mode, switch to Auto Focus on your lens
3. Choose your apperture i.e F8 or F11
4. Look through your viewfinder and compose your shot
5. Half press the shutter to get an exposure reading and adjust to get the needle back to zero
6. If you are using a graduated filter, hold it in front of the lens while taking an exposure reading
7. Lock in tripod, so that it doesn't move, switch focus back to Manual Focus on the lens
8. If you are using a 9 or 10 stop ND filter change to Bulb Mode and make sure your aperture is the same as it was when you were in Manual Mode
9. Calculate what your exposure is going to be in the calculator below
10. Put on your filters carefully without bumping anything otherwise you will have to refocus
11. Press the shutter release button and wait until the exposure time is up
12. Once the time is up, unpress the shutter release button and you should hopefully have a perfectly exposed long exposure photo!

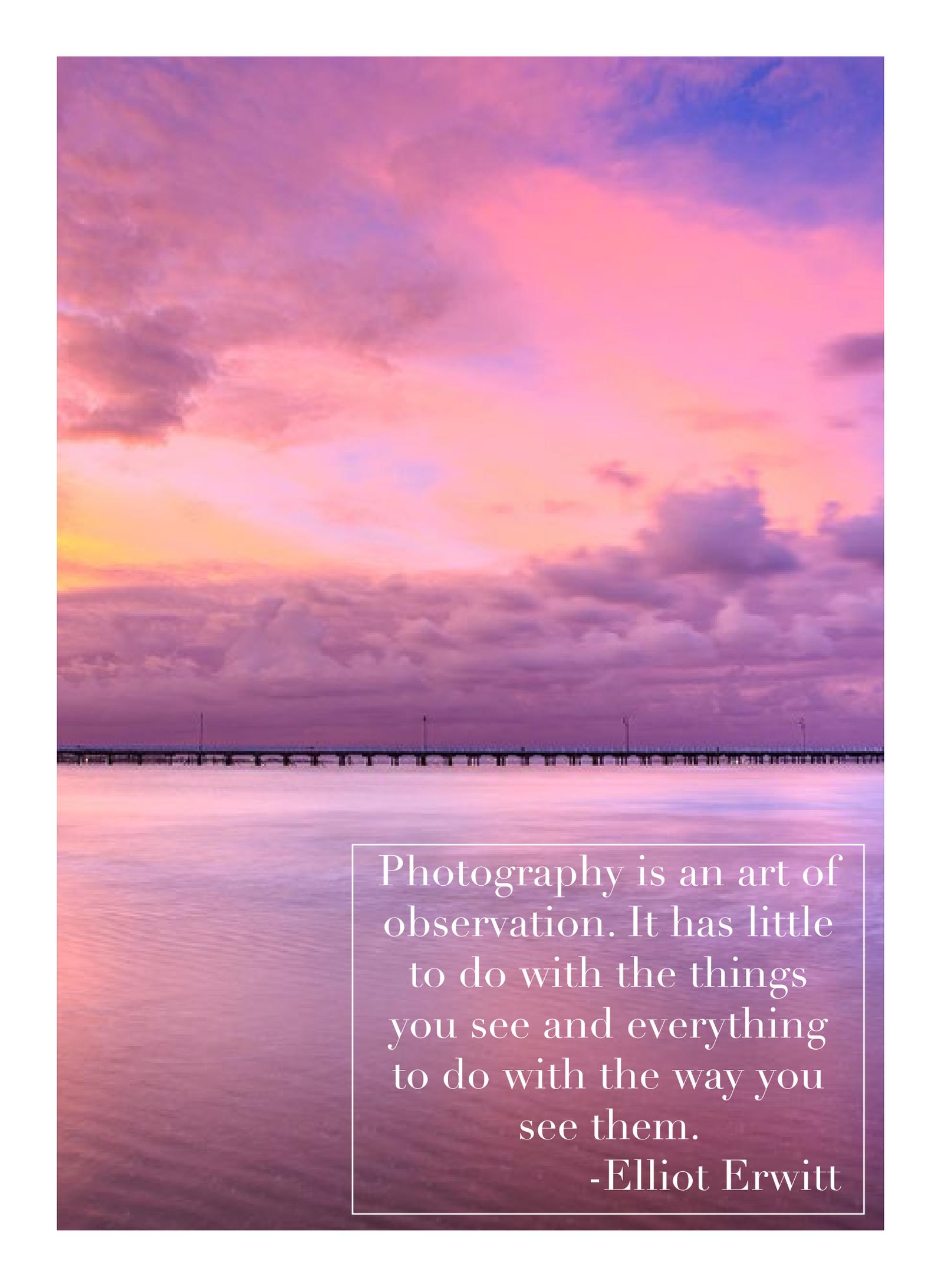
If you aren't using a 9 or 10 stop filter and you are just going to use a graduated filter so that you are still capturing movement, you may not need to go into Bulb Mode. Follow the steps below:

1. Complete steps 1 to 4 above
2. Put your graduated filter on the lens, you can leave your lens in Auto Focus because it will be able see through the grad filter
3. Press the shutter button halfway down to get an exposure reading
4. Adjust the needle to the middle and then press the shutter button the whole way.



**Long Exposure Calculator**

Normal Shutter Speed	With 10 stop filter	Normal Shutter Speed	With 10 stop filter
1/1000	1 Second	1/15	1 Minute
1/500	2 Seconds	1/8	2 Minutes
1/250	4 Seconds	1/4	4 Minutes
1/125	8 Seconds	1/2	8 Minutes
1/60	15 Seconds	1 second	16 Minutes
1/30	30 Seconds	2 Seconds	32 Minutes

A photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of pink, purple, and blue. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm glow. In the distance, a long pier or bridge structure extends across the water. The water in the foreground is calm, reflecting the colors of the sky.

Photography is an art of  
observation. It has little  
to do with the things  
you see and everything  
to do with the way you  
see them.

-Elliot Erwitt

# Post Processing Videos

So now you should have completed Lesson 1 to 4, been out in nature taking some amazing photos and your'e ready to polish up those babies so they sparkle and shine. I have created 3 videos for you to watch and follow along with to see exactly how I process my images. I basically do the same process each time so you will be able to get a good grasp on how to do it!

Before we get into it though, let's have a quick chat about the stigma of post-processing. There are lots of for and against debates about this topic. My thoughts on it are that Lightroom and Photoshop are just the digital version of a photo lab. You used to get your film processed in a lab and if you did it yourself you could choose how much saturation, contrast and exposure to give each image, so digital post processing is no different.

How much you want to push your image is completely up to you. You may like really saturated images or you may like them to look really natural. Its completely subjective so you need to find your own voice and style when it comes to processing.

I love colour and I love to polish an image up to the way I remember seeing it on the day. Your camera isn't capable of capturing a scene 100% as you saw it. It doesn't have the complicated vision that we humans have and thats why there are programs like Lightroom and PS to take the image to that next level. So play around with your editing program and get a feel for what you think looks good and what you are comfortable with. Have fun with it. Lifes not meant to be serious!

Another thing to remember is if you shoot in raw (which is a good idea to do), then your images will look dull and lifeless on the screen. There is a huge difference between a raw file and a jpeg file. The reason you would shoot in raw is because you capture so much more detail than you do in Jpeg. You can also choose your white balance after you have taken the photo, whereas with jpeg you are stuck with the white balance from the camera.

So dont be scared if you see a perfectly exposed colourful image on your LCD screen but once you upload it to your computer it looks a bit dull and dark. This is quite normal.

That is the reason that processing is a part of this whole process. You need to bring out all the beautiful colours and detail that you saw on the day and the only way to do that is to process your image to the best of your ability!

## HAPPY EDITING!!

## Acknowledgements:

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