

FAVORITE SUBJECTS

By Lee Agnew

I seem to have a lot of favorite subjects when it comes to photography. I've written about using tripods, keeping your camera clean, protecting your camera and even how to take pictures in the rain without ruining your camera. This month I want to talk about "composition." I can hear some you groan already, but the proof is in the winning. It's no accident that Joni wins a lot of our contests. It has little to do with the equipment she uses. After years of using high end film cameras from View cameras to medium format to 35mm, she's used them all. Now she uses a "point-and-shoot" camera. It is admittedly a high end camera, but it does not have interchangeable lenses or through the lens viewing. She studied photography at a college in Illinois and attended the Professional Photographers School. But the winning isn't in schooling either. It's much simpler than that. It goes all the way back to the Greeks and how they designed their buildings. They figured out that certain designs were more pleasing and acceptable to the general public. Once the scholars and architects had proved their theories by building all those beautiful buildings, they proceeded to extend their knowledge to the field of art. They created the first rules for artists that have since been further developed to a very high degree. But the fact remains that the basic rules are very simple.

The rule of thirds is first. In your mind divide your viewfinder into a "Tic-Tac-Toe" layout. Then when you compose your picture, the center of interest should be positioned at one of the four places where the lines intersect. If you are shooting a portrait, the eyes should be on the upper line.

The next rule is that when shooting a photo of a moving subject like a car or a boat, not only should it be at one of the intersections, it should also have room to move into the picture. In other words there should be more room in front of the object than behind it. If you are shooting a photo of a person facing sideways, there should be more room in front of them than behind them. They should be looking into the picture. A horizon line should either be at the top line of the "Tic-Tac-Toe" layout or the bottom, but never in the center.

In a professional contest, the judges would take away points if, for example, you photographed a sailboat and cut off the top of the mast. Unless you are photographing something occurring on the deck, never submit an "incomplete" image.

Three objects in a picture are better than two. The three objects should be arranged in a rough triangle. When you are shooting formal portraits of groups one of the most successful poses is the triangle, where the tallest person is at one of those intersecting line places and everyone else is positioned so they form a loose triangle.

If you are standing next to a river, include a "Stopper" on each side of the picture. A tree or a bush will do nicely. Otherwise the tendency is for the viewer to follow the line of the river and look right off the edge of the page, at which point they lose interest and look for something else.

There are lots more, but the rest of the rules are based on the ones mentioned above. You have probably heard of most of them; "Framing" a shot, "S Curves", "Leading Lines", and using "Color" as the center of interest. I'll try to mention a few more in future newsletters if you don't complain too much.