

Four ways to find good ideas

by Michael O'Brien

Good ideas set in motion keep us engaged with our photography. It's now known that of all the skills that keep highly creative people going the ability to find inspiration and then act on it ranks very high. Here are some tips that may help.

1.) Open yourself to the possibility of creating something a bit different than you have done in the past; or to go deeper. Acknowledge your desire to do so. Put the intention out there.

2.) Next identify what you're are attracted to. It doesn't have to be forever....what interests you right now? Is it people, bugs, mountains, or cats? What are you drawn to photograph? Some people say 'everything' and while that's possible it's not helpful to the cause. Many aren't sure. That's ok - just look at earlier photographs you've made or images by others that you like. Is there something that keeps showing up? Ask someone who knows you. Look for the hidden themes in your work - some people find writing about them helps. You are in the exploratory phase - there is no such thing as a mistake.

“Start planning, organizing, researching, and inspiring yourself”

Try looking at images you see in magazines. You may say 'I'm drawn to Bali' - then put off working on your idea right now because you have neither time nor money to get to Bali. Remember, you are trying to find something you can work on now, not when you have the right equipment, the planets are in alignment etc. etc. To do that ask what it is about Bali that draws you. Is it the ocean, the lifestyle, or is it the creative spirit that flourishes there. Is it the fact it is far you're your daily grind? Whatever it is try to find those qualities in subjects near to you now so you can start working right away. Start planning, organizing, researching, and inspiring yourself with examples of photos you love. Find and study the masters. Some people find movies to be a wellspring of ideas for their still photography - allow yourself to be moved....cont.

“Immerse yourself in your subject”

If you are truly called to go to half way around the world, make a plan, then get going on it. In the meantime find something close to home that you can work on. Keep using your camera all the time so that, in this instance, you aren't rusty when you get to Bali. Keep the juices flowing; research books, online resources etc and *immerse yourself* in your subject. Research possible locations, events, people or landmarks that are a must for you to work on. If traveling, why not try to be more than a tourist? Volunteering to help in your host country deepens the experience and your pictures....all of a sudden, doors open.

“At first you carry the idea, then the idea carries you...”

3.) Give yourself permission to start and to make whatever it is you'd like to create. Give yourself the green light. Commit to action and keeping moving ahead so you gain momentum. At first you carry the idea, then the idea carries you. If you have to start by making straight imitations of images that inspire you, just do it with passion – don't worry no one does anything completely original. Just keep making pictures without being too critical of them – do your best. At first, only share the resulting images with people who encourage you to make more photos. No 'helpful critics'.

“..at this point you may be flooded with many fresh ideas”

4.) Finally, enjoy the images you've made, *print the images*, hang them on your walls, make a Blurb or iBook, then share them online with whomever you wish. Now that you are finished go ahead and evaluate the work. Interestingly enough, at this point you may be flooded with many fresh ideas and inspirations – write them down and act on the one's that feel right to you.