



What are the essential elements of visual style?


Here we present four brilliant images drawn from a brand new book, *Through the Lens: National Geographic Greatest Photographs*, each of which offers an insight into what makes a picture truly memorable.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MASTER CLASS

GESTURE seems an exclusively human property, but Tim Laman's photo of snow monkeys suggests otherwise. The two animals appear to be acting out a drama of Shakespearean magnitude—one in existential agony, the other offering consolation (though more likely just grooming her Liar). It wasn't the photographer's patience and good timing alone that gave such power to this photograph. Laman got as close as he dared with a wide-angle focal length, which not only puts the viewer in the middle of the drama but also attenuates the arms—emphasizing the way the ape seems to be clinging to life itself. —RUSSELL HART

When Japanese macaques, or snow monkeys, living in a wildlife preserve started to find their way into outdoor hot tubs at nearby resorts, resourceful innkeepers built "pools" for the animals to keep them away from customers. **Tim Laman** captured these two females grooming each other in one of the pools. "Most animals I shoot are difficult to approach, but these monkeys were all around me," says Laman, who made the photo for a 2003 *National Geographic* feature on Japanese wildlife surviving the winter. He shot with a Canon EOS-1V, 17-35mm zoom, and Fujichrome Velvia film. "It was almost like doing street photography—trying to capture the moment that shows the personality of your subject." —JUDITH GELMAN MYERS




An aerial photograph of the Great Wall of China at sunset. The wall, constructed from grey stone and brick, winds its way across a lush, green mountainous landscape. In the foreground, a large, traditional Chinese gatehouse with a dark, tiled roof stands prominently. The wall continues to rise and curve through the hills, eventually disappearing into the distance where it meets a range of jagged, misty mountains. The sky is a brilliant, warm orange, with the low sun casting a golden glow over the entire scene. The lighting creates long, soft shadows and highlights the textures of the stone and the dense foliage of the trees.

LIGHT has no richer filter than air itself, and as the sun rises and sets, light is warmed by the extra atmosphere its slanting rays must penetrate. The effect gives this view of China's Great Wall a golden glow befitting such an ancient treasure. Michael S. Yamashita's landscape also shows that early and late-day light's low angle is unmatched in the way it defines textures and surfaces, creating small and large shadows that contribute to a sense of depth. That depth is augmented by the receding line of the wall itself, as it undulates from the bottom to the top of the frame. —R.H.



"This is the touristy section of the Great Wall—the part that everyone recognizes," says photographer **Michael S. Yamashita**. "But most of the wall is built of mud and is no higher than ten feet tall." To get this sunrise shot, made well before the tourist site's opening hours, Yamashita had to jump a security fence and scale the wall itself. He made this image with a Canon EOS-1V, 16-35mm zoom, and Fujichrome Velvia film during a yearlong assignment to shoot the mythic structure, published in *Geographic* in 2003.—J.G.M.

An underwater photograph featuring several sharks and smaller fish. A large shark is prominent in the upper right, swimming towards the left. Another large shark is in the lower right, also swimming left. In the center, a smaller shark is visible. Several smaller fish, possibly yellow-striped snappers, are scattered throughout the scene. The water is a deep, vibrant blue, with some light rays visible. The sharks' skin appears smooth and slightly reflective. The overall composition is dynamic, capturing a moment of movement in the ocean.

COLOR can be a problem when you're shooting underwater because water drinks up red light. The deeper you go, the more it makes everything a monochromatic, red-less blue. But if anyone knows how to take artistic advantage of this effect, it's David Doubilet. Here the photographer used a long exposure to "burn in" the luminous blue of the background, which would otherwise have gone dark, and also to make shimmering streaks of the more distant sharks at the water's surface. A pop of flash, with its fuller-spectrum light, put the subtle color back into sharkskin and created the highlights that show its shininess. The combination of flash and a slow shutter speed also caused dramatic dark outlines where moving shark covered blue background during the exposure. —R.H.



If **David Doubilet** had his druthers, he would only shoot black and white underwater. "With black and white, you're dealing with gradations of light falling into the sea, and you can react in real time," Doubilet says. "But with a blue sea, you have a single dimension of light falling in, like a great umbrella falling on something—you need to add light from below artificially." That means swimming with both camera and flash, an operation he deems "very difficult to coordinate." In Cuba for a *Geographic* story published in 2002, Doubilet used two Sea & Sea strobes with a Nikon F4, 16mm f/2.8 fisheye lens, and Fujichrome Velvia film to get this shot of sharks and yellowtail snappers feeding on scraps washed into the lee of his boat by the tide.—J.G.M.

"I was in the water, leaning out of a dugout canoe and getting wet," says *National Geographic* contract photographer **Randy Olson** of this shot. "I was in a remote part of Pakistan, doing a story on the Indus River valley. These indigenous people are descendants of one of the three or four earliest civilizations on the planet. The hunter is wearing a decoy made from a bird, and they also tie dead birds on hoops and wiggle them back and forth to attract other birds. It's an age-old practice. This was an archaeological story with a heavy human element." Olson shot with a Nikon F100 and a 20-35mm f/2.8 zoom, "with fill-flash so you can see the eye inside the mask." —JACK CRAGER



COMPOSITION is the key to

Randy Olson's image of what looks like yet another animal environment in the *National Geographic* tradition. His photograph is not what it first appears to be, though, as you look more closely and realize that the bird in the foreground is a human in disguise. Abetted by a wide-angle lens, Olson's high position puts the hunter in the lower portion of the frame so that he doesn't break the horizon line. That task is left to the real bird roosting on a more distant mangrove. Olson placed the latter at the top left of the frame, creating a diagonal high-tension line—and proving the abiding effectiveness of what photographers like to call near-far composition. —R.H.

