



The Image – Monthly NEWSLETTER

The Abertawe Photographic Society –

Based near the heart of Swansea, Abertawe Photographic Society is an established, friendly and welcoming club, who's members both amateur and professional all share a common interest, in all aspects of photography.

Whether you are a complete beginner or a seasoned snapper, interested in digital techniques or 35mm film, there is a warm welcome by a likeminded group of people sharing in the search for the perfect image.

By sharing, not only our enthusiasm but also our skills, techniques and knowledge, we all grow as a club and by trying new things we all get the opportunity to stretch our boundaries. All members are encouraged to take part in club events.

The Society meets every Tuesday at:
Greenhill Community Centre
Chapel Street, Dyfatty,
Swansea.SA1 1NB.

This Month's Events: August

- 1st Macro Evening
- 8th Photoshop Night
- 15th Print Show & Tell
- 22nd Splash Photography
- 29th Character Portrait Evening

This Month's Inspirations.....

A new series this month, which is a sort of aide memoire, that will help to give you ideas of what to photograph. You don't have to follow exactly, you maybe have ideas of your own, or thinking of something stemming from these ideas.

If you are anything like me, you are always looking for new ideas to photograph, away from the 'bird on a stick' images! Therefore, over the next few months I will show here are some ideas that may inspire you in shooting something different.

1. Photograph six circular objects.
2. Photograph something you find in your fridge.
3. Shoot six orange objects.
4. Shoot something found in your toolbox.
5. Walk 1 km north of your home and take a picture every 100m.
6. Go out after dark and make images. No flash. No Tripod. No blur. No orange pictures.

Go on, have a go and let's see what you have.

What's a Depth-of-Field Preview Button?

I bet if I were to ask most of you in the club if you had ever used the depth-of-field preview button, for many of you, you would answer no, in fact some may ask, "What is that?" It is probably the least used function of a DSLR camera, but important enough for manufacturers to keep including them on their various models. It's often referred to as the DOF button.

Check your cameras manual to find out where the button is; usually it's on the front left-hand side, looking towards the lens, and needs to be pressed to activate.

What is Depth-of-Field?

Depth of field is basically how much of the view is in focus ranging from nearest to the camera to furthest from your camera. In taking landscapes photographs you should have everything in sharp focus. Whereas, in most portrait photographs the subject in focus, but not the background.

What does the Depth-of-Field Button do?

According to my Canon User Manual the Depth-of-Field preview button operates thus: "The aperture opening (diaphragm) changes only at the moment when the picture is taken. Otherwise, the aperture remains fully open. Therefore, when you look at the scene through the viewfinder or on the LCD monitor, the depth of field will look narrow. Press the depth-of-field preview button to stop down the lens to the current aperture setting and check the depth of field (range of acceptable focus)."

Check your cameras manual for this function, but it should operate in the same way.

The diaphragm, mentioned above, is the ring of black metal blades inside a lens. It's often depicted as a hexagon inside a circle, which is in reality what the diaphragm looks like. Diaphragm blades close down partially to admit less light. By closing down the clear aperture through which light can pass it also brings some things into focus which otherwise would be blurry. Try squinting yourself and you will see exactly what happens when the diaphragm itself partially closes.

During this operation you may notice that the viewfinder gets darker as less light is allowed in when the diaphragm stops down. Allow your eyes to adapt a little to the darkness. Getting dark is a side effect; it's NOT the purpose of this button.

Obviously the smaller your aperture the darker it gets.

Having got used to the slightly darker image through the view finder it allows you to preview what will and will not be in focus. It's important to do this because, at anything other than the lens' widest aperture, there is always more in focus when you take the photo than when you see it through the finder. Without this preview you might be making portraits that look great through your DSLR viewfinder, but when you see your images on the PC screen or on the LCD you may have distracting objects behind your subject in perfect focus.

So you should always check your depth-of-field while out shooting images, it's how you find the best-looking aperture for portraits to blur backgrounds, and how you see which aperture gets all of your landscape in focus.

Practical Uses of the Depth-of-Field Button

This button has some practical uses and I'll try to explain here some of these uses.

1. **Detecting Hotspots.** When doing close-up and portrait photography, one of the prime concerns is the background. Bright spots are very distracting but they can go unseen when viewing the image while the lens is wide open. When you push the preview button, the viewfinder will get dark. But that's OK; it makes it easier to detect any distracting hot spots that may end up in the final image.
2. **Detecting Dark Spots.** Just as hot spots can be distracting, dark spots, especially in the foreground of landscape images, can be just as distracting. To get the maximum depth of field, many landscape photos are made at an aperture of f/16 or f/22. When previewing with the lens set to f/22, the viewfinder will get dark, maybe too dark to tell what's really going on. By previewing at f/8 or so, the lighter areas stay relatively light, but the darker areas become readily apparent. You'll be able to see where shadow areas in your foreground might be too dark for the camera's sensor to record. You can then decide if fill-flash, a reflector, or perhaps a different composition is appropriate to eliminate these shadow areas.
3. **Detecting Unwanted Elements.** I'm sure you have found an out of focus branch or blade of grass sticking part way into your image, intruding if you like, into your image. You can prevent this from happening by using your preview button *before* you activate the shutter. When you preview the depth of field, run your eyes around the edges of the frame and look

for any unwanted elements or intrusions that will spoil your image, also look into the backgrounds. Just be aware, you may not notice these things while looking through the lens while it's wide open because of the shallow depth of field. Use your depth-of-field preview button and catch these intrusions. Again, the viewfinder will get dark but you're not trying to see all the detail in the image, you're just looking for the intrusions or unwanted elements. Of course, you may be able to clone them out later, but it takes less time to remove the intruder while in the field than it does to clone it out in Photoshop.

4. **Finding the Best Background.** In particular when doing close-up and portrait photography, hold down the preview button while changing the aperture until you get the best combination/compromise for a pleasing background and the focus needed for your subject.

5. **Using a Graduated Neutral Density Filter.** Grad ND filters are often essential to successful landscape photography but they need correct placement so that their use isn't obvious. Hold down the preview button while moving the filter in front of your lens. This will make placement easier and more precise.

6. **Optimize the Range of Focus for Your Main Subject.** Whether photographing wildlife or wildflowers you can use the preview button to see if everything you need to have in focus will be in focus, from the stamens and stigmas on flowers to the nose and eye of an animal.

7. **Visualise Underexposure.** By looking at a scene through your viewfinder and setting the lens one or two stops below the widest aperture on your lens, you can use the depth-of-field preview button to get an idea of what an image might look like if you underexpose it a little. You may want to underexpose to create a different mood and this will help you see what that might look like. Conversely, you can set your lens to around f/8 and push the button, let your eyes adjust, and then start opening the lens to get an idea of what overexposing a scene might look like.

8. **Detecting Lens Flare.** This is similar to detecting unwanted elements or intrusions. When photographing into the sun, especially when the sun is low in the sky, you run the risk of lens flare, which results from direct light bouncing around the elements of your lens. By previewing the scene, lens flare will become more apparent. You can then decide if you want to do something to mitigate it, like using a wider aperture, changing composition or shading your lens. You may find that you like the effect. You can also preview the "star burst" (Bokeh) effect that results from using small aperture openings with wide angle lenses while including the sun in the image.

9. **Detecting Vignetting from Stacking Filters and Lens Hoods.** With wide-angle lenses, there's a greater risk of vignetting, or cutting off the corners, while using filters, especially if you stack filters or put your lens hood on the filter. By previewing and paying special attention to the corners of the frames, you'll be able to know ahead of time if there will be a problem. (Be aware that most viewfinders only show about 90-95% of what will end up on your image. If in doubt, be sure to run tests with all combinations of filters you may wish to use. Photograph a

blank wall or the blank sky and evaluate the resulting images.)

10. **Use the Depth-of-Field Preview Button as a Compositional Aid.** This may just be the most valuable tip of the bunch. More and more you will find yourself using the depth-of-field preview button to aid in your compositions.

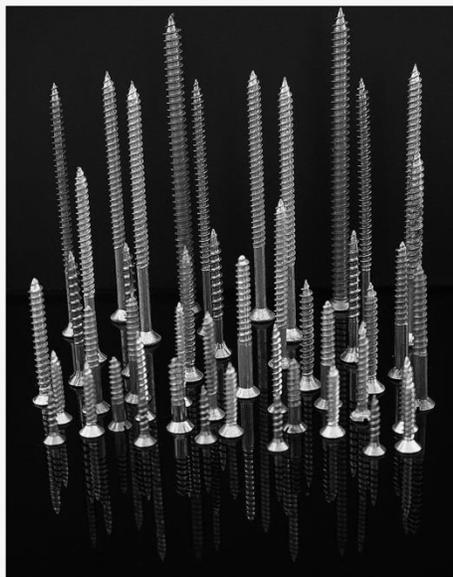
As a compositional aid, and regardless of what f/stop you use for the final image, set your aperture to f/16 or f/22. This makes the dark areas darker and yet the bright areas stay relatively bright. It also eliminates much of the detail, leaving behind only forms and shapes, light and shadow. In other words, it reduces everything to graphics. You can then arrange these graphics in a pleasing manner. This works especially well when you're working with light and shadow or moving water. It's hard to predict what moving water will look like in the final image. This technique gives you a better idea of how the white areas of moving water will flow through the image, allowing you to arrange lines, curves and other graphic elements.

Using an eye cup may help you in getting over the darkened viewfinder, letting your eye adjust is probably the first thing you should try.

After reading this I hope you find the depth-of-field preview button an essential tool, as I told you earlier, camera manufacturers keep including them on their models, so they must be useful to have.

Photography with a Soft-box or Custom Background

I wanted to take photographs in the house using a reflective surface, so I purchased an A3 size black Perspex sheet from eBay, for all of £3. My first photograph was called screws, which I have shown below.



I wanted to take this further by using my iPad as either a light-box or a back drop. I wanted to do this by having various effects and colours to show on the screen, so I searched for any Apps that I could use with this idea in mind. I found a few and decided to try them out, namely:

- Soft Box Color App (Free)



- Photo Light HD App (\$1.99)



As you can see there is not a great deal of cost here, with one Free to download and the other only costing \$1.99, that's about £1.50 in 'real money'. Maybe I should explain some jargon first, for those not wholly familiar with such.

What's a Soft-Box? - A soft-box is really only a light source or in photography parlance a light modifier, it's quite similar to an umbrella or any reflector. However, a soft-box controls the shape and direction of light more so than an umbrella or reflector does. A soft-box has the flash or light source enclosed behind a diffuser, which prevents harsh light or light-spill from occurring. They come in different shapes and sizes. The more common ones are square, rectangular and octagonal. One advantage of a soft-box is that it is able to produce natural-looking light by mimicking the shape of a window. As the name suggests, they produce a soft light for all types of shooting, be it food, product, portraiture, and so forth.

My iPad has 9.7 inch (1536 x 2048 pixels) display, and most soft-boxes range from small (12") to quite large (four by six feet). Therefore, an iPad is a very small soft-box in comparison, but it suites very well what I wanted to achieve.

A good rule of thumb is the bigger the light source relative to distance to the subject, the softer the light.

Using your iPad as a Background - There are a couple of ways you can do this; but remember you should be shooting in a darkened room for best results. One is to use iPad as coloured back drop, the Soft Box Color App will help you here as it will give you a selection of coloured screens, it's a fairly basic app; well what do you expect for free! Below is an example using this method that I shot below of a wine glass filled with water, not the greatest of examples, but at least it does show you what can be done.



You can also use it by moving it behind your subject, with your camera set on bulb. With three dots showing on your iPad screen, all one colour or three different colours, move the iPad behind your subject, this will create three lines. Obviously, your subject needs to be small, such as a toy car, Lego figure, tool, etc.

You can add the dots as a photograph to iPad image library by creating it in Photoshop. First develop a black background in Photoshop, and then add the three circles, using either one colour or a mixture of three colours. Size your image to suite the iPad and download into the iPad's image library. You can use small tripod clamps for an iPad, they cost from around £6.00.

Using your iPad as a Light-Box – The Photo Light HD app is useful for this activity. It comes with 24 preset patterns and you can adjust the colours as you wish by using the three colour sliders. You can also add your patterns by creating them in Photoshop as I have described above.

Again, take your photographs in a darkened room, set up your subject, using something small as described above. Use a black backdrop of paper or cloth, or even a reflective surface, such as a black Perspex A3 sheet.

Try to use a good composition of colours, blue and yellow always works well and are deemed aesthetically pleasing. Again below are a couple of images that I took using this method.



Creating a silhouette – is another method you can use with an iPad, and is simple to do. Use either of the Apps mentioned above, and set either to white. Ensure your brightness level on your iPad is set all the way to the right (brightest) in Settings.

Most Apps come with a limited selection of shapes, but you can also create your own shapes in Photoshop, which is very easy to do. Maybe I will leave that for another day, but I'm sure some of you can do this yourselves.

..... and finally

A photographer took a self-portrait in a park. Due to lighting conditions he used the built in flash on the camera. He quickly got arrested for flashing and exposing himself in the park.
