

Pro-Photographer Guide

A journey in composition

with Christian Fletcher and Tony Hewitt



PHASEONE

what the world's best photography is made of

Inspiring the journey

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Shot with
XF IQ3 100MP,
Schneider Kreuznach 80mm LS f/2.8

Exposure time 1/640
Aperture f/8
ISO 100

Photographers Tony Hewitt and Christian Fletcher traveled across the western United States to re-master the iconic American works and compositional style of Stephen Shore and William Eggleston. Shore is renowned for his unerring eye for captivating composition, while Eggleston set a new standard in color photography in the 20th century.

Inspired by these legends, and other artists including Jeffrey Smart, Joel Meyerowitz, and Richard Misrach, this ebook will follow Christian and Tony's journey as they execute classic compositional techniques.



Composition techniques

This book will cover the fundamental aspects of composition, including color and interpreted composition techniques. Keeping in mind our two photographers' journey to pay homage to the techniques of the old masters, the analyses of their photography will highlight these tried-and-true "classic" techniques as executed by Christian and Tony.

The analysis is open to interpreted compositional techniques, i.e. the "feel" of an image and why it might have a particular effect on the viewer. This analysis will naturally have something of a subjective point of view, but we aim to broaden awareness of the many ways in which composition in art photography, and its success (or failure) to captivate a viewer, can be interpreted. Each photograph will have an analysis on specific compositional points, as well as an interpreted compositional technique where relevant.

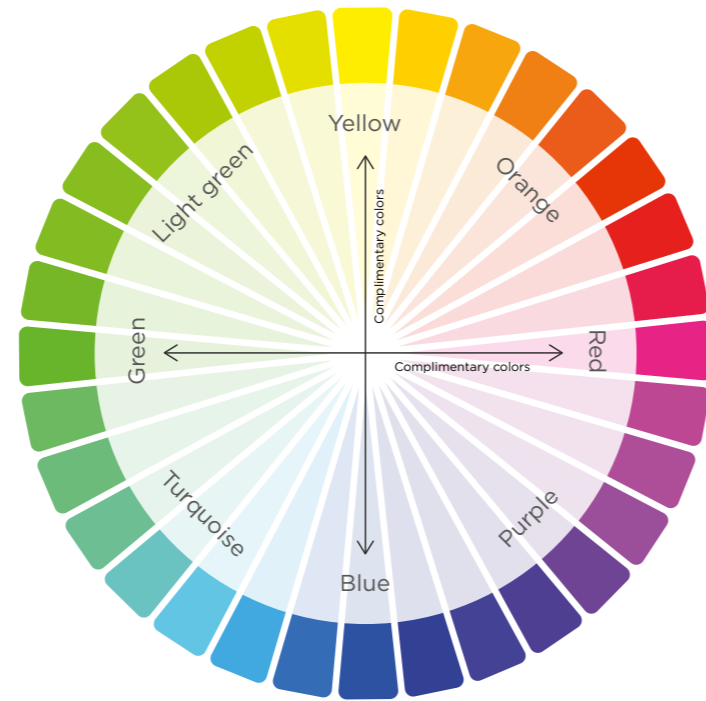
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Exposure time 1/250
Aperture f/7.1
ISO 100



Interpreted composition



Color principles

Color, as a compositional element, is described in terms of contrast, as well as the use of complementary colors, supplementary colors and/or analogous use of color.

Complementary colors are colors that work well together, and are useful for creating a pleasing contrast, such as a blue sky and yellow cornfield. Analogous colors combine shades of the same color in an image, such as the oranges and yellows found in a sunset.

The use of color in landscape images is important as compositions often lack control and therefore must be found, in addition to being accentuated in the post-processing step.

Gestalt principles

The gestalt principles, or principles of grouping, state that humans naturally perceive objects as organized patterns. There are five categories in the principles: proximity, similarity, continuity, closure, and connectedness. Simply put, it is an automatic self-organizing tendency that is triggered when faced with any sort of visual chaos; the mind naturally simplifies what it sees into an organized pattern, because the mind perceives an image as whole, rather than the sum of individual parts.

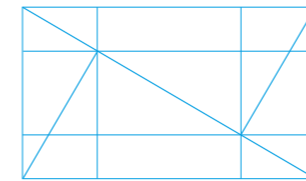
Applying color and gestalt principles

The compositional techniques explained here rely heavily on human nature and pseudo-psychological interpretation. The interpretation of elements such as the presence of identifiable text, identifiable objects that evoke gesture, repetition of complex shapes, interpreted leading lines, implied focal point based on recognition, and/or right to left scanning (western world reading) are all used to explain interest within an image.

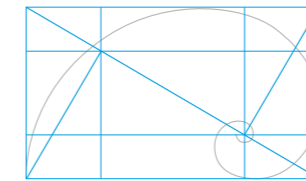
Therefore, it cannot be said that the interpretation as given is either correct or incorrect. Rather, the viewer is invited to apply the rules and draw personal interpretative conclusions on the photographs.

Principles of composition

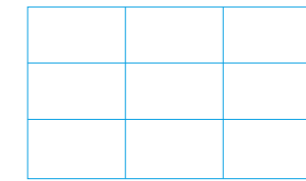
Angled Bisection with 90° Divisions



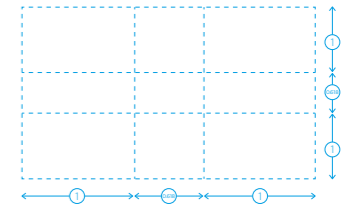
Angled Bisection & Golden Spiral



Rule of Thirds



Golden Section



Classic rules of composition

'Classic' composition analysis relies on traditional and well-known simple compositional rules.

These rules include:

Rule of thirds

This rule states that the frame can be split horizontally into three equal segments, and vertically into three equal segments, to make nine equally sized sections. In a correctly-executed rule of thirds landscape image, for example, the lower third would encompass the subject of least interest, separating it from the upper two thirds. The "sweet spots" in the frame are where the lines intersect.

Golden section

The golden section is also split into nine segments; however, unlike the rule of thirds, these are not equal. The middle portion of the golden section is half the size of the upper and lower portions. The idea is that the middle section is the "sweet spot" to where the eye is naturally drawn. By composing an image where the essential subjects fall within these sections, it can create a focused and harmonious image.

Golden spiral / golden ratio

The golden spiral or golden ratio is an age-old formula rooted in numbers that are said to have the perfect combination of harmony and balance. Calculated from the Fibonacci sequence, the proportion of the shape is 1:1.618, and is a natural phenomenon found in nature and architecture, as well as photography. Used correctly, this rule can naturally attract viewers to an image by creating a strong composition.

Golden triangle

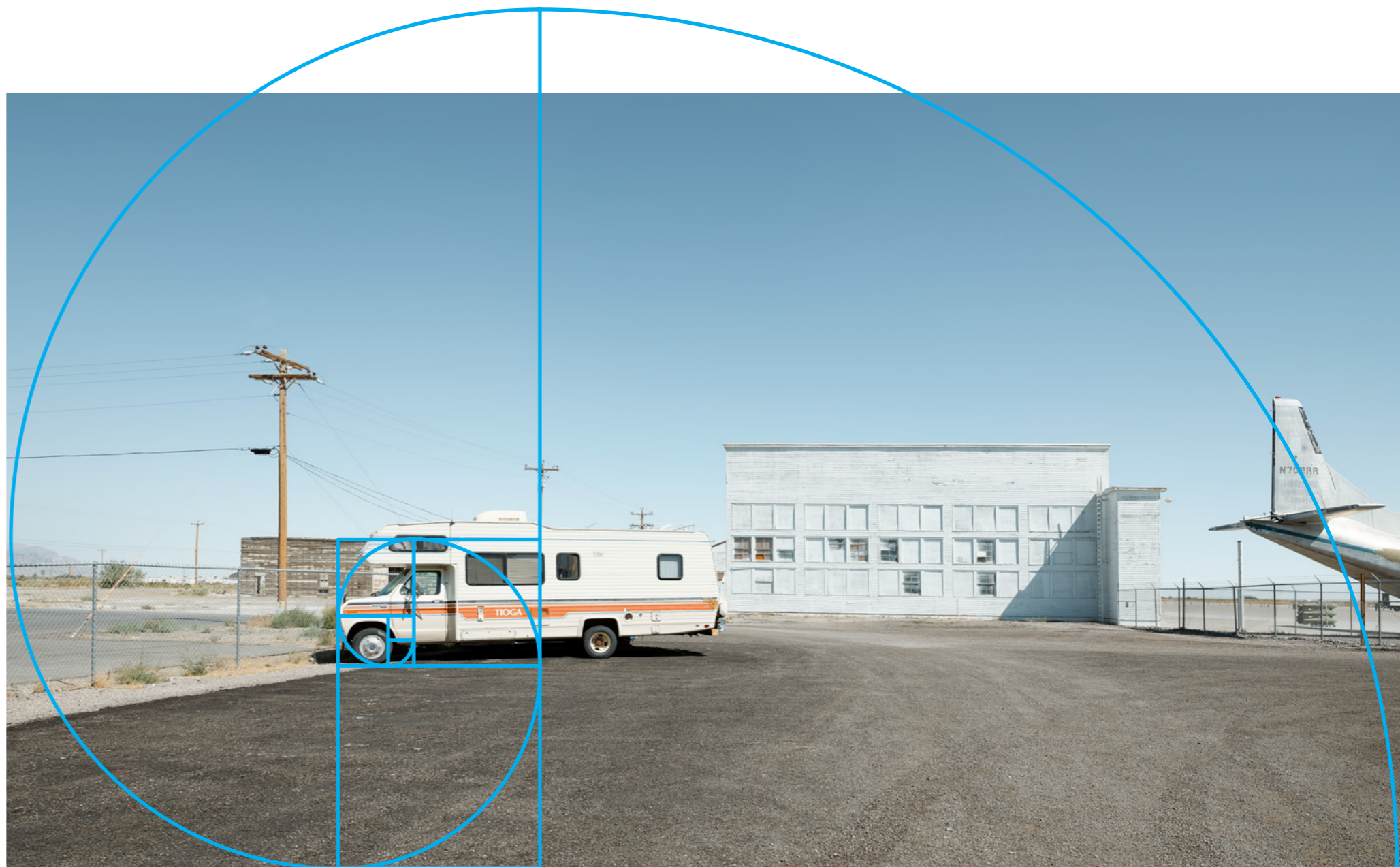
The golden triangle is said to create harmony in an image and has been used for centuries in paintings. The rule goes that the main subject of an image should have the shape of a triangle (three elements), two points of which should be positioned according to the golden ratio. The viewer's perception of such an image is of balanced structure and a sense of stability.

Golden Ratio

The focal point of this image lands squarely in the heart of the **golden ratio**. The caravan, with its contrasting orange color, stands out markedly as the point at which the eye naturally falls to rest within the composition. The crop of the plane's tail might otherwise give a sense of discord, but the strong positioning of the caravan in the composition supports the overall balance of the strongly composed image.

Classic composition

There is a subtle yet definite use of **complementary colors** in the blue upper third of the image and the orange stripe in the caravan (the focal point of the image), creating a pleasing contrast. While **leading lines** found in the **repetition** of the fence posts draw the eye to the already stand-out orange color of the image focal point, across the building, and back to the plane tail by following the additional repeating fence posts. This effect of drawing the eye around the image from left to right and back to the main focal point creates a sense of balance and harmony in the image.

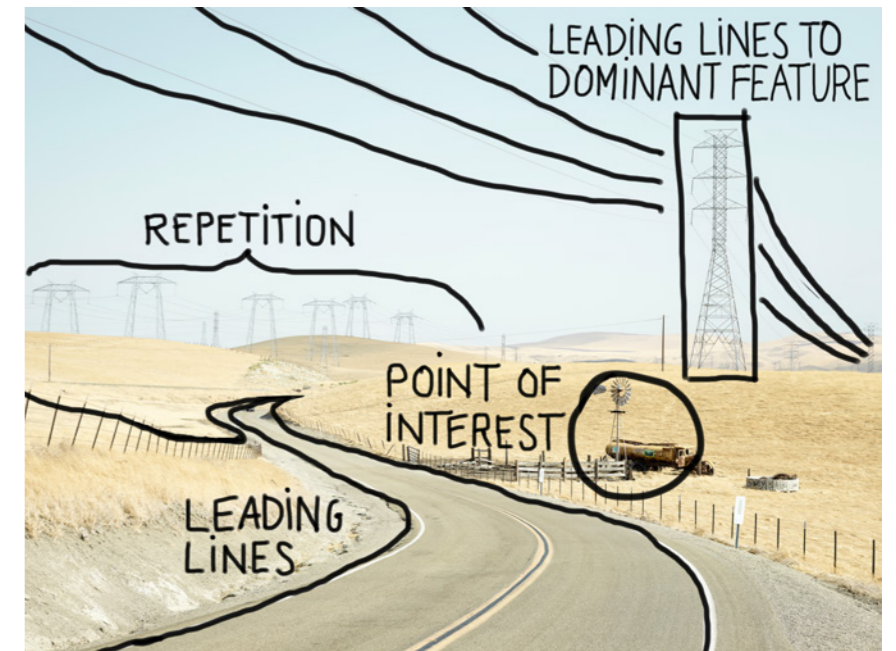




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Exposure time 1/125
Aperture f/11
ISO 50



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Shot with
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Schneider Kreuznach 80mm LS f/2.8

Exposure time 1/200
Aperture f/8
ISO 50

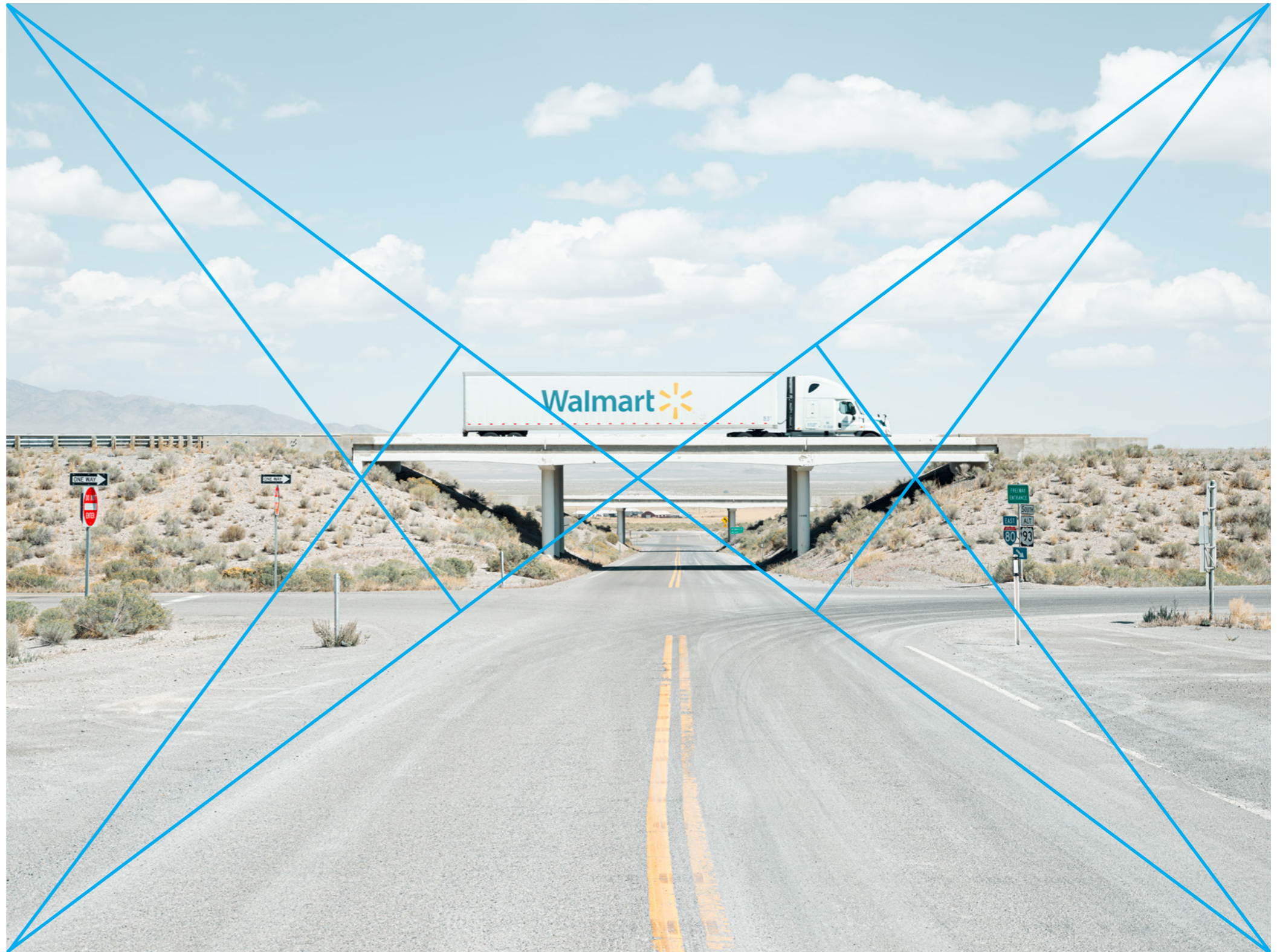
Golden ratio

Applying the **golden ratio** to this image places the subjects - the truck and windmill - as the main points of interest, and therefore as the balancing point, which creates a natural sense of harmony in the image.

Interpreted composition

The soft blues and yellows in this image, which are **complementary colors**, make for a pleasing **contrast** in general. **Leading lines** are visible right through the image, with the fence posts and the road itself taking the viewer on a journey through the scene.

Starting with the fence posts on the left, the eyes are invited up through the middle of the image where they meet the repeating towers that again lead the eye to the main (largest) tower on the right side of the image. Additional leading lines from the top right bring the main tower back to attention. These effects of **repetition** and leading lines bring to the scene a strong sense of interest to explore.



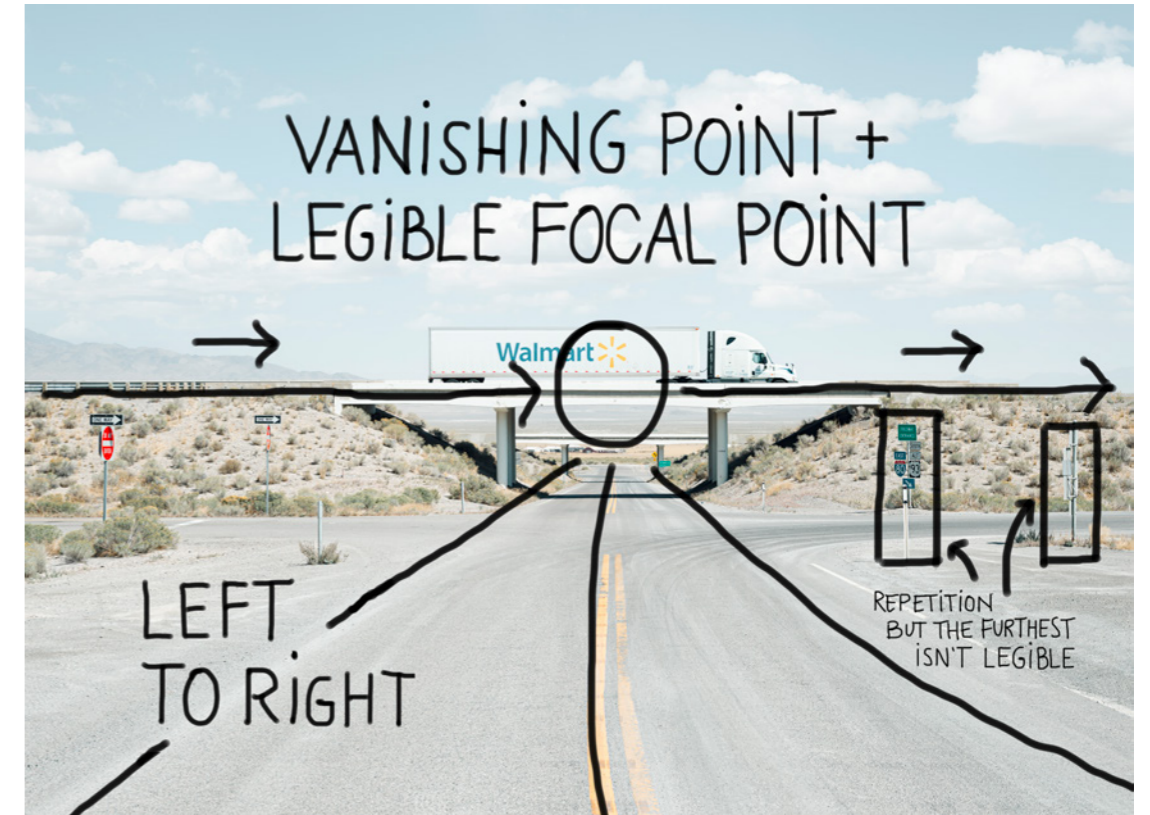
Golden triangle

Used as an example of how the **golden triangle** rule works, in this image, the road leads to the main subject of the image (Walmart truck and vanishing point) and makes an almost-perfect triangle. The triangle's uppermost point rests somewhere between the vanishing point of the road and the Walmart truck at the center of the image. The sense of balance that this photograph exudes is likely created by the golden triangle's pleasing effect.

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XF IQ3 100MP,
Schneider Kreuznach 80mm LS f/2.8

Exposure time 1/500
Aperture f/8
ISO 100



Interpreted composition

The central point of this image is a **legible word**, which in the context of an American-themed series, makes for a strong compositional element.

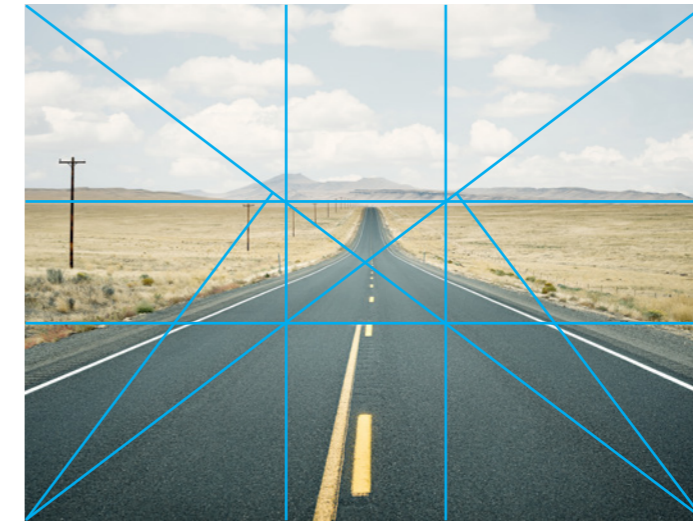
The logo itself is of the same color palette as the image - **complementary colors** of blues and yellows. The yellow of the road markings **repeats** in the yellow of the Walmart logo, and the blue of the sky **repeats** in the blue of the logo's letters. Additional elements of repetition are visible in the many road signs on either side of the intersection and in the two bridges on the road.

It is worth noting that the **direction** of the arrow road sign is pointing in the same direction as the truck is driving, thus creating a sense of harmony and the impression of flowing movement.

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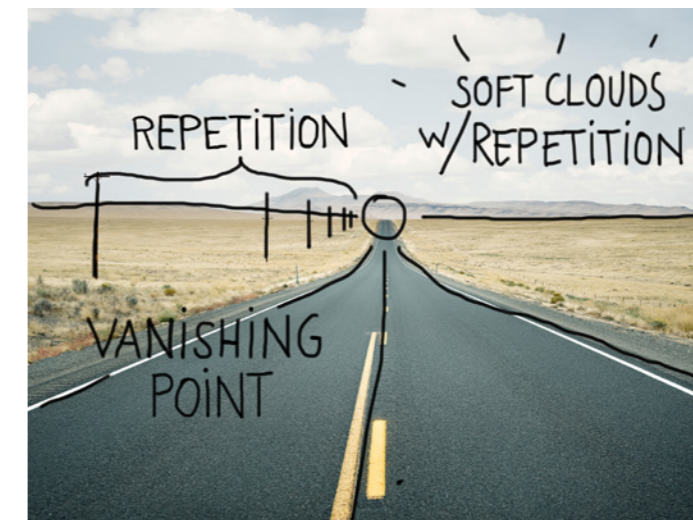
Exposure time 1/400
Aperture f/7.1
ISO 200



Golden triangle & golden section

While the dark road keeps the weight of the image at the center, applying the **golden triangle** puts the vanishing point close to where its upper point should rest. While the vanishing point is of little interest to the viewer, it does draw the eye up to the dark, sharp-edged mountains and contrasting upper quadrant of soft clouds and blue skies.

Viewed through the **golden section**, it's also possible to see that the mid-section of this photograph is where the eye is naturally drawn. The alignment of the mountains and vanishing point of the road where the eye naturally rests, lends to the balanced feel this image exudes.



Interpreted composition

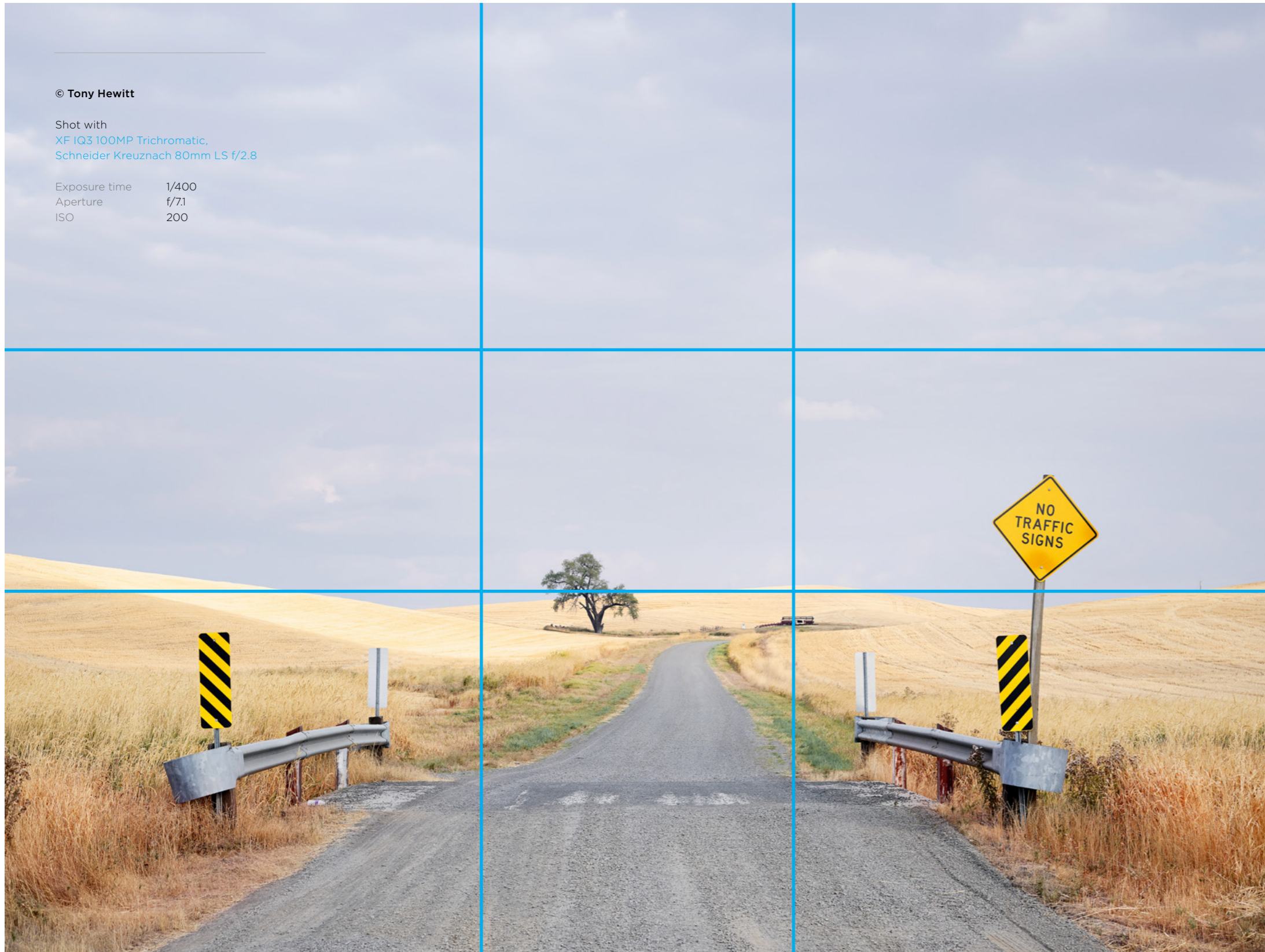
The **repetition** of the utility poles creates a **leading line** with the road that naturally leads the eye to the vanishing point of the road where mountains meet sky. The soft clouds also provide an element of repetition.

The eye is drawn as one reads (in the western world), from the left side of the picture to the vanishing point, where the viewer can explore the mountains. Then the viewer can continue to follow the leading lines in the repeating fence posts up the right side of the road, creating a balanced journey through the entire image.

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Shot with
XF IQ3 100MP Trichromatic,
Schneider Kreuznach 80mm LS f/2.8

Exposure time 1/400
Aperture f/7.1
ISO 200



Golden section

The main point of interest in this image is a legible traffic sign which reads, "No traffic signs." The sign is within the boundaries of the **golden section**, while the vanishing point of the road aligns quite precisely at the mark where the golden section's horizontal and vertical lines intersect. The alignment of the essential subjects in this otherwise uncluttered image creates a sense of focus and harmony throughout.

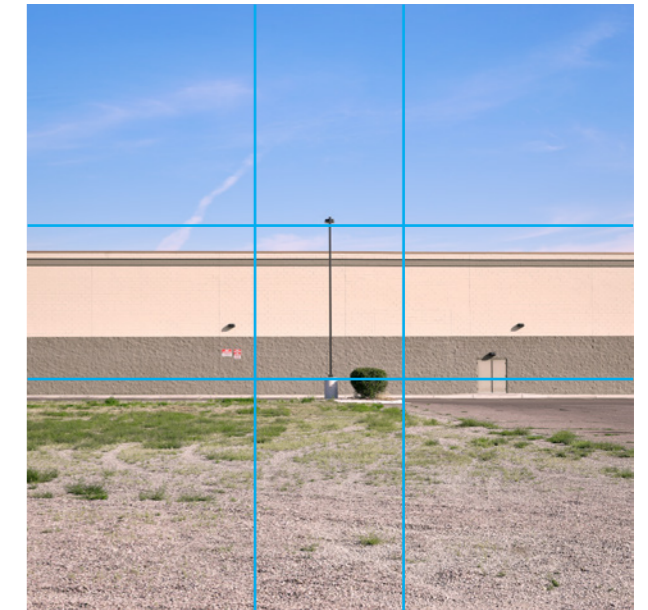
Golden section

The building falls almost precisely within the rules for the **golden section**. It keeps the viewer's eye absorbed fully in the intended subject of this image: the simple composition of the lamppost and bush against the building. One strong vertical line in the dead center of the image cuts against rows of horizontal lines in this very balanced and focused composition.

Interpreted composition

There are several repeating elements in this image which lend to the success of the composition. **Repetition** of the horizontal lines throughout the composition create an infinite sense of flow across the image. In stark **contrast** to this, a strong black horizontal line cuts through the harmonious vertical lines, creating a **disrupting interest** at the center of the image.

Another **contrast** is visible in the rough gravel of the foreground against the soft wispy clouds in the blue sky.



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Shot with
XF IQ3 100MP Trichromatic,
Schneider Kreuznach 80mm LS f/2.8

| | |
|---------------|--------|
| Exposure time | 1/1000 |
| Aperture | f/8 |
| ISO | 200 |

Proximity & similarity

“The photograph was shot at f/11. ISO 50 and an exposure of 1/100 sec. The way I got the light to look like it does was simple. As there were clouds, I wanted till the sun came in and out. So I created an exposure for the scene in full sun, then created exposures for full shade and everything in between (I love to shoot like this as you are using actual images to create lighting effects not photoshop.)

By layering one or more images together in Photoshop, I was able to paint in the light areas over the shaded areas. Of course the tripod kept the camera from moving so everything lined up perfectly. Again, I used various techniques to give the image a washed out vintage look. By stylising the image it can make it unique to you. It is your vision and defines you and your work.”

Interpreted composition

The use of **repetition** is an obvious technique used in this striking image. The repetition is seen in the two houses, in the number of upper windows, the matching curves over many of the windows and doors, and the simple rectangular shapes in both structures.

The unusual lighting technique contrasts the buildings even more so against the duller buildings in the distance, focusing the viewer on the boldly-lit facades of these almost two-dimensional looking houses.



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Exposure time 1/100
Aperture f/11
ISO 50

Interpreted composition

Repetition of **vertical lines** and similar shapes throughout this industrial image is the key to understanding its interest. The containers and truck end are ridged with vertical lines, reflecting the most prominent vertical in the image - the large, dark lamppost that towers high in the background, contrasted by the blue sky and soft light clouds. **Similar shapes** are repeated in the rectangular ends and sides of the truck and containers in different sizes and colors.

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Exposure time 1/250
Aperture f/8
ISO 200





Rule of thirds

The **rule of thirds** fits well for this image, as the structural elements of the road and bridge divide the image into three sections. The diagonal line that cuts from upper left to lower right helps to tie the sections together while creating tension - and therefore interest - within the image.

Interpreted composition

The color of this image remains quite muted, yet the sections of color are nicely separated by the cross in the road. The areas of highest color interest are peppered throughout the image in a slightly chaotic manner, but stand out strongly against their respective backgrounds, making them appear more saturated than they perhaps are.

The direction of the image is clearly left to right, emphasized by various legible street signs and small graphical elements. The crossing intersection and S-shaped curve of the road play a large part in the compositional success of this image, providing significant engagement, while the house in the distance serves as a focal point at the end of the road's leading lines.

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Schneider Kreuznach 80mm LS f/2.8

Exposure time 1/50
Aperture f/8
ISO 50

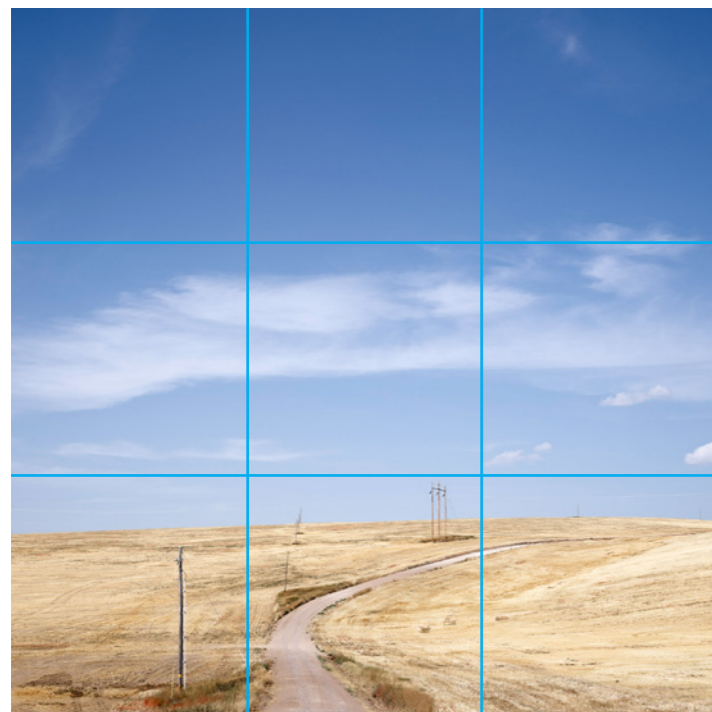
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Schneider Kreuznach 80mm LS f/2.8

Exposure time 1/1000
Aperture f/8
ISO 100

Interpreted composition

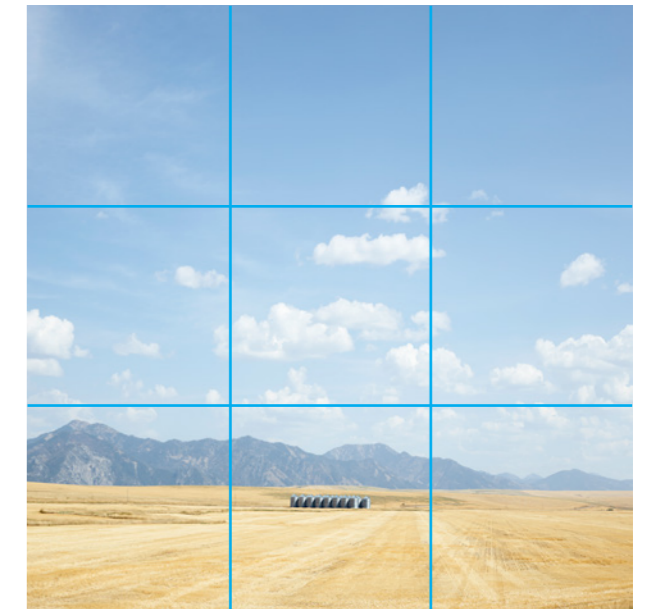
In landscape photography, use of color can become the most important factor in controlling the composition. This image of a road curving up a muted, grassy hill that meets the sky is simple in that there are very few elements present. **Repetition** of pylons mark the way and lead the eyes up the snaking road, where the muted tones of the horizon meet in stark contrast to the complementary blue color of the sky. This meeting of **complementary colors** with no central element to bridge the split means the **color contrast** becomes in itself a point of strong interest within the image. It could also be said that a lack of any other color reinforces the composition.



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Exposure time 1/640
Aperture f/8
ISO 100



Classic composition: the rule of thirds

Within the simple **rule of thirds**, there are three elements (and a focal point) that mirror the composition. In this case, sky, mountains, and foreground. The mountains act as a transition from the bright foreground to the bright sky. As the mountains are the darkest element of the composition, they successfully keep the weight of the image towards the center. The focal point is of little interest, but given its placement and location within the foreground, it pulls the viewer back to the bottom of the image.

Color composition

This image neatly fits into the **rule of thirds**. Having the focal point in the hay bales at the center of the image reinforces the simplicity of the composition. This image, consisting of foreground, sky and hay bales, would not likely qualify as interesting without the strong use of color. The yellows and browns in the foreground meet a **complementary color** purple sky that bleeds softly through a range of hues up to the blue in the upper section of the image. While the darker components of the image keep the weight in the central part of the image where the focal point lies, the overall **color contrast** sets the tone for the image, and is what lends complexity and interest to this otherwise simple composition.

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Shot with
XF IQ3 100MP Trichromatic,
Schneider Kreuznach 80mm LS f/2.8

Exposure time 1/50
Aperture f/8
ISO 50



About Tony Hewitt

Tony Hewitt is a Grand Master of Photography of the Australian Institute of Professional Photography. He is also an Honorary Fellow and a Fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Professional Photography. Tony has won more than 200 national and international photography awards. Over his career, he has explored the genres of fine art, landscape, portrait and commercial photography. His work has been widely exhibited around the world.

You can see more of Tony's work on his website:

www.tonyhewitt.com





About Christian Fletcher

Christian Fletcher is a multi-award-winning landscape photographer with nearly three decades of experience. The philosophy behind his photography is to reinforce connections to our natural environment. His awards include the Western Australian Landscape Photographer of the Year (2011 & 2014), the Australian Professional Landscape Photographer of the Year (2011), the International Landscape Photographer of the Year (2014), and the AIPP West Australian Travel Photographer of the Year (2015).

You can see more of Christian's work on his website:

www.christianfletcher.com.au

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