

# Stephen Bay's Photography Newsletter

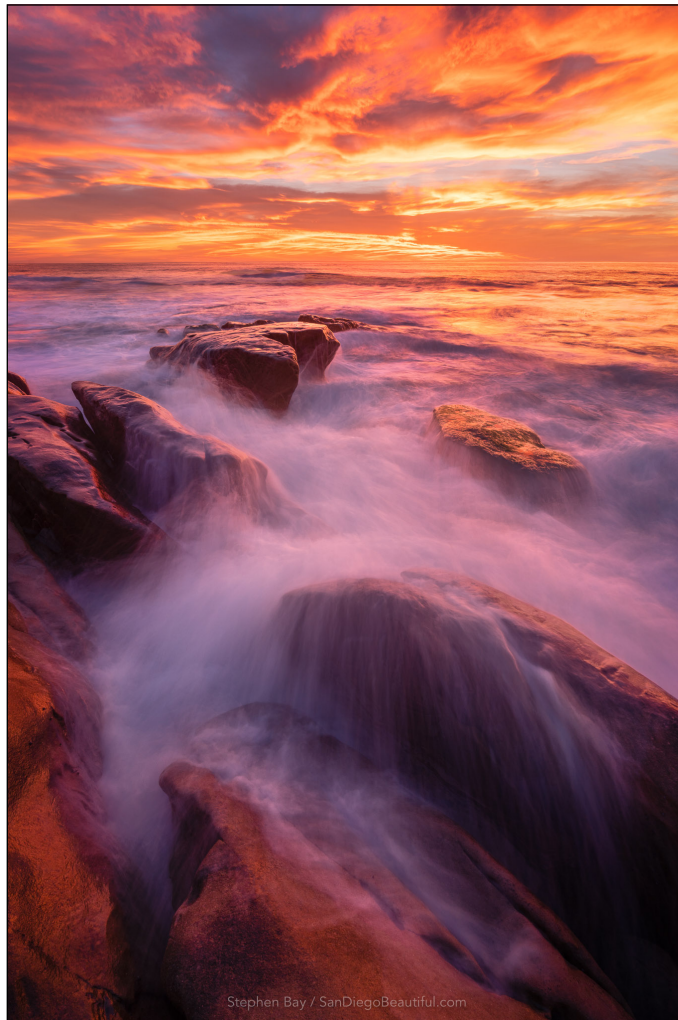
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Welcome to my newsletter. In this publication, I share my photographic adventures and provide news and tips for landscape photographers and San Diego residents who might like to explore some of the off-beat places I visit.

Please feel free to share and forward this newsletter. If you are not already subscribed, you may [sign up with this link](#).

## What's Happening

The fall and winter are sunset season in San Diego. As the weather turns colder the marine layer dissipates (or greatly lessens) and we often get storms moving into the area leaving precious clouds that results in the most stunning sunsets and sunrises of the year. To me, it always seems to me like November is the best month although perhaps other photographers might argue for December or January.



*The best sunset of the year: Windansea Beach, La Jolla, 11/1/18.*



*A spectacular sunrise over the Coronado Bridge as seen from Tidelands Park, 11/14/18.*

## **Favorite Photos from 2018**

Here are some of my favorite images from 2018 that I haven't shared in previous newsletters.



*Windansea Beach, 1/15/18*





*Super, blue, blood moon on 1/31/18 as viewed from Balboa Park. The blue means it's the second full moon of the month. It's called a blood moon because of the red color due to a lunar eclipse.*



*Bioluminescent algae at Torrey Pines Beach, 5/7/18.*





*The iconic boulder and juniper in Joshua Tree National Park, 5/17/18.*



*Stonewall Peak in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, 7/28/18.*





*Fog rolling in over downtown on the evening of 11/4/18.*

## Photography Stats

I often like to go through my catalog of photos and see how many times I got out to photograph during the year and how many pictures I took. If you are using Lightroom this is easy to lookup: in the menus go to View >> Show Filter Bar, then select Metadata and choose Date as a filter.

There's still a few days left in the year, but here are my numbers as of December 20th:

- I got outside and photographed on 142 different days
- During the year I took about 14k photos, deleted 6k, and kept 8k
- This resulted in 54 images that I'm reasonably happy with
- My files take up ~980 GB of data

These numbers are slight underestimates. Sometimes I go to a spot intending to photograph but never pull out my camera. This is because I've already been here before, figured out my composition, and I'm just waiting for the right light that never materialized. I might also delete every photo I took on an outing removing that day from my database.

How do I get out so many days? I make it a priority and try my best not to miss any opportunities. For example, if I have to drop my wife off at the airport for an early morning flight, I might stop by Harbor Island afterwards because I'm there anyways. I'll rearrange my schedule, meetings, workouts, errands, etc. to free up the best times for photography. I'm reminded of the quote from Galen Rowell:

*"You only get one sunrise and one sunset a day, and you only get so many days on the planet. A good photographer does the math and doesn't waste either."*

Needless to say I spend very little time watching television, reading news, playing video games, etc.

## Setting Goals to Improve Your Photography

*Note: I originally wrote this as a blog post which you can find [here](#).*

For many years I focused on travel photography which I practiced in a largely documentary style. I was quite comfortable with it but about two years ago, I decided to shift into landscapes and cityscapes. My initial work was OK, I occasionally had some good images, but more often I found my photos lacking in some respect and I decided I wanted to create better images. To push myself, I gave myself photographic goals to direct my efforts.

In my first year, I started with the goal of making one good photo a week that I would share and put on my website (there's a big difference between an image that looks good on a cell phone versus one that can be sold as a large print). I can't remember if I met the goal and it actually doesn't matter. What's important was pushing myself every week to come up with a good picture. Along the way I learned a lot about planning my shots, different shooting techniques, and post-processing my images. Coming from travel photography, it was a different mindset and set of skills. Looking back at my work, I can easily see the difference between then and now.

Another goal I've been working on is getting better at predicting sunsets (and sunrises). To this end, I check the sky, webcams, and weather reports in the late afternoon and make a prediction regardless of whether I can actually get out and shoot that day. Later I will check to see if I was right or wrong. I'm still not very good at predicting sunset color, but I'm better than before.

Recently I noticed that I've been making too many vertical images. In part, I did this because I was good at it but also because it was easy for me. I found an effective formula that I could replicate consistently: set my zoom to 16mm, set my focus to the hyperfocal distance, find a close foreground subject with leading lines, and then wait for a colorful sunset. To break out, I've given myself a goal of mastering horizontal images. Now whenever I go out and shoot I'm going to try and find a horizontal composition even if I know there's a vertical option that would work well. Frankly, I've been finding it a bit of a challenge because I have less foreground depth and I also have to watch the edges for unnecessary visual junk.

In addition to broad goals, I think it's important to set goals that help you learn specific techniques. For example, make it a goal to learn and use the hyperfocal distance. Go out and practice during the middle of the day, not when you're under pressure during the most gorgeous sunset of the year. Double check your results at 100% on the computer screen when you get home. If you want to learn exposure blending, seek out shots that require it. Start with

simple blends such as coastal seascapes with a level horizon and then move on to more complex cases such as those involving irregular transition lines.

Regardless of what genre you practice, find a photographer (or perhaps even a painter) whose work is at level you aspire to reach. Study their processes and break it down into the skills you need to achieve and set yourself a goal of mastering each one.

I think my next goal will be to make landscape images that don't depend on a colorful sunset. I will still be shooting in the golden hour, but I want to come up with compositions that don't need a dominant red-orange sky to work. I do love the colors but I think there's room for other images.

What goals are you working toward? Write them down on a post-it note and put in on your desk, laptop, or somewhere in your workspace. Look at it first thing every morning and ask yourself what can I do today to advance?

## Back Up Your Photos

We're coming up to the end of the year and so this a good time to make sure all your backups are current. My process is quite simple:

- I keep three copies of my data on separate hard disks.
- I store one copy offsite in a safety deposit box at my bank
- I have an additional copy stored in the cloud using an online backup provider (CrashPlan)

To make things easier, I bought a hard drive toaster and use bare drives which I just pop in and out. I store them unpowered in anti-static bags and I rotate the drive stored offsite every two to three months.

You can also use a standalone external drives that come in powered cases. I prefer internal drives to avoid dealing with all the extra AC adapter plugs and cables.



## What's Upcoming in 2019

Here are a few things I'm really looking forward to in 2019:

- I'll be giving several talks on photography that include Milky Way and Astrophotography, Landscape Photography, and a Camera Basics lecture. These will be local in San Diego. Follow my [facebook page](#) or check [here](#) for dates and locations.

- In San Diego, we will have a lunar eclipse which will peak around 9pm on Jan 20th, 2019. The moon will be high in the sky so you might have to get creative to get a shot. I will probably try to shoot the moon downtown using a skyscraper as a foreground.
- The Milky Way core should become visible just before dawn starting in late January. It can be tricky to find a spot where the core isn't blocked by terrain or light pollution on the horizon but it is possible.
- We already had a big storm in early December that brought 1/2 to 1 inch of rain to the desert. I'm hoping we get a few more storms so that we get a better wild flower bloom in Anza Borrego. This year was incredibly poor and I'm hoping for a repeat of the glory we had during the 2017 super bloom.

I wish everyone happy holidays and thanks for reading!

Stephen