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Learning to "See" with Our Other Senses

by Noella Ballenger

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the subject and he said that he would be very sorry when he was blind, but that it wasn't the end of the world. As his vision worsened, he noticed that his other senses improved. I really thought about his words and wondered if I could have just a moment or two when I emphasized not my vision, but my other senses. If I did that, I wondered too what effect it would have on my photography.

So, from that conversation, I came up with a photographic exercise that I like to ask my students to try and I did just that with my students in my Elements of Design class for Apogeephoto.com.

I want to share one student's experience with you, but first I want you to try the exercise for yourselves.

Learning to see photographically is very important. But, our eyes tend to dominate our other senses and that takes away from our photography.

Let me explain...

Years ago I had a friend whose vision was badly impaired and getting worse. We had a discussion around

Here is what I would like you to do.

1. Go into your yard and find a patch of sunlight. Get comfortable--sit down. Take your camera with you and



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shoot 4-5 images. They can be of anything, *but they need to be taken from the exact spot on which you are sitting--no moving around is allowed here.*

2. Now set your camera down and shut your eyes. Sit quietly for several minutes with your eyes closed. During this time I want you to think about the sun. Is it warm or hot? What direction

is it coming from? How does it feel as it hits the side of your face? Now think about your toes. Are the shoes you are wearing comfortable? *What* does the inside of your shoe feel like to your big toe--to the other toes? Now think about the jeans or slacks you are wearing. Are your fingers resting on top of the material? Is it soft or hard? What does it feel like? How does it feel on the top of your thighs? Is it the same feeling that your fingers are feeling or is it different? How does the sun feel on your back or front through your shirt? What does that material feel like? Can you hear any birds--any insects? What does that sound like? What direction are they coming from? How many can you hear? Now open your eyes and look around you. What do you see?

3. Pick your camera up and make 4-5 images again without moving from that spot.



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One of my students, Cathy Pinder did this exercise and here is what she said about it:

"This is so far my favorite assignment yet! I got up early this morning hoping to catch different lighting patterns on subjects for the next assignment, but the sun was already nearly above my head, so instead I went to the park close by my place in Florida and gazed about. It

is so beautiful there-- little streams, fountains, lots of trees and flowering bushes. It is a very well maintained park--nothing wild about it, but non-the-less beautiful.

I started snapping and as the sweat was running down my body, I stopped in my tracks and said to myself, "Hey, let me do what Noella suggested."

So I sat in a little gazebo in the park grounds and closed my eyes. My first thought was, "Oh my gosh, it's hot!!" But once I relaxed a little and settled in, I was in a "mental zone". And suddenly out of the blue came a soft breeze, soaking up my heat. I could feel it lifting the wet hair from around my face. I could hear all sorts of noises--lizards running through the foliage surrounding me, a person jogging on the rocky path, a gardener using a weed eater, cars zooming past on the hot pavement, and oops, someone's cell phone ringing. It smelled green! Now I know that sounds weird, but green from the outdoors has a smell-- kind of a moldy, fresh scent? The grass smells fresh and the moss and earth smell moldy. Ok, time to wake up. Oh wow! There is a lizard right in front of me, no more than a foot away and it's watching me" zone". It's funny! I felt connected to him--like we were sharing this peaceful moment amid all of the action around us."



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Cathy had a wonderful time with this exercise and I was delighted that she allowed us to share not only her experience with that wonderful lizard, but with her general love of nature.

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A common practice for many photographers, when arriving at a special place that you want to photograph, is to jump out of the car, knock off a couple of shots ... yes, if you are more serious, you do a couple of more ... and then hop back into the car and dash off to the next location.

You never know how much you are missing until you stop and really study what is around you.



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You can discover so much through your other senses and being in the "zone"--that feeling of calm that comes over you that may attract all sorts of critters that will stay hidden if you aren't deeply quiet. But even if you aren't into photographing critters, learning to use all of your senses to appreciate what is around you is important, both as a photographer and as a student of life.

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Would you like to learn more and become an even better photographer? Be sure to join Noella in one of her online classes presented through Apogee Photo. You'll want to get signed up today - [just click here](#).

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