

The Power Of Three

Reaching beyond the basics of the Rule of Thirds for more dynamic landscape photos

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2) THREE SIMILAR SHAPES

Double Arch at dawn, Arches National Park, Utah

In this fish-eye view of Double Arch, I believe having three openings in the scene is more powerful than two or four. Balance is achieved by the use of three that wouldn't be as easily accomplished by another number.

The Greeks, who worshipped the amazing properties of triangles, the number three has had a special relationship with human perception, art, music, science, religion and every other field. Pythagoras called it the perfect number. Landscape and nature photographers are also immersed in a world of threes. Our brains seem to respond more favorably to works of art with subjects based on odd numbers and placement of important forms on a grid created by dividing the scene in segments of three.

What is it about three that we like so much? It could be that gives our compositions stability, and as importantly, simplicity. It helps avoid three: too much bald, featureless sky, subjects that are bull's-eyed in the middle of the frame and compositions that include too much stuff.

Most photographers are attuned to shapes and ideas that can help compositions like the Rule of Thirds: S-curves, diagonal lines, lead-in lines, framing, perspective and balance.



TRIANGLE

Delta Pool, near Moab, Utah

Triangles are out there. There are lots of opportunities where more subtle shapes from several elements may come together as a triangle. This triangle also points and leads the eye up and along the line of cliffs. Other important elements in the image include sidelighting and some subtle, but interesting clouds.



ORDER OF THREE FROM CHAOS

Goegap Nature Reserve, South Africa

The three kokerboom trees add a solid, firm structure to the chaotic forest of agaves surrounding them in this African desert image. Use the power of three as a way to add stability to an image with other complicated elements. The perspective of the trees also creates a diagonal line, which gives the three trees more power. Anytime you can arrange to have your three subjects create a diagonal line is a

plus.

SPOTLIGHT ON ONE OF THREE

Monument Valley, Arizona

Nature provides lots of subjects in threes, like the three classic buttes of Monument Valley. The area also has the Three Sisters, three stunning spires, which carry the same name as three rock formations in Australia. Arches National Park has the Three Gossips, and the list goes on and on. Having just one of the Mittens lit by the dying sun makes a stronger statement.



THREE LIGHT VALUES

Ofu Beach, National Park of American Samoa

Just to show how every facet of an image can work in threes, this image contains deep blacks, bright highlights and midtones. The combination of the strong lights and darks is another example of chiaroscuro lighting. Here, the third element, the medium-toned water and forest, balances the very strong light-dark effect.