

Red Ognita presents minimalism's main qualities of repeated patterns and large, open spaces by drawing the viewer to the arches while emphasizing the water's vastness.

Shot details: Canon EOS 5D, f16, 135 sec, ISO 50.

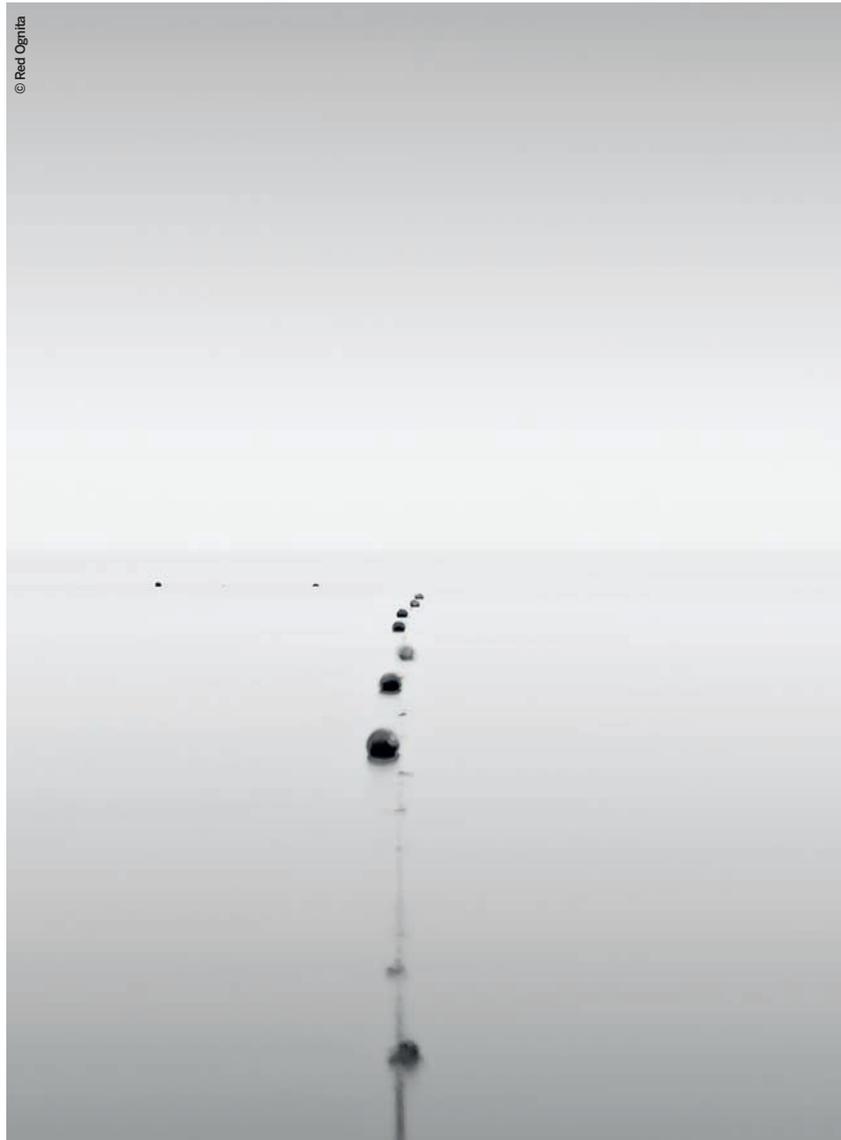


Minimalist Magic

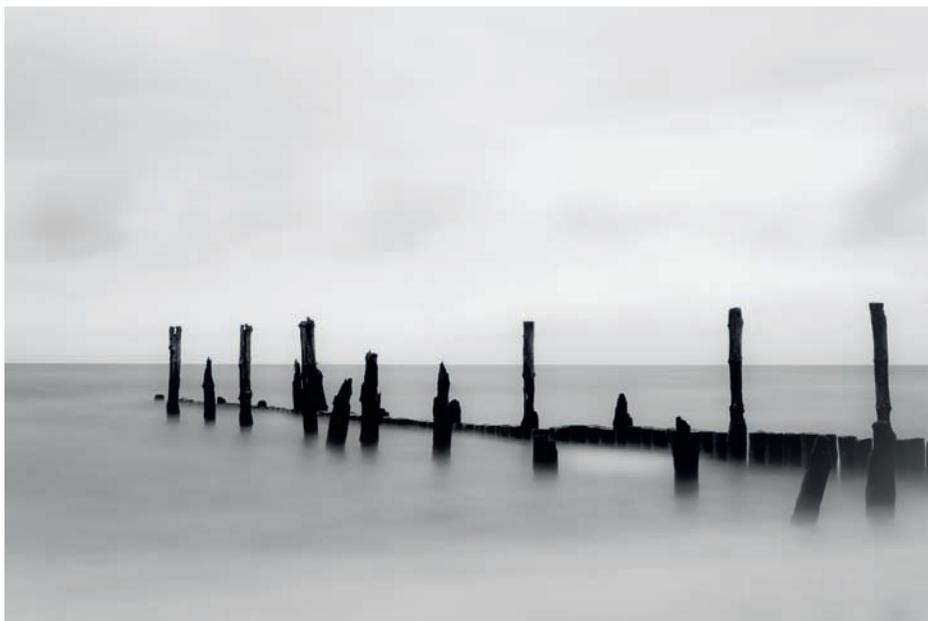
The historical art movement of minimalism has found its way into black and white photography, producing brilliant and unique landscape images. The editorial team, along with DPP reader Red Ognita, analyzes minimalism's artistic aspects and technical applications

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▲ Reducing the area to its basic elements allows the viewer to paint his/her own story into the photograph.
Shot details: Canon EOS 5D, f8, 25 sec, ISO 200.



In a world abundant in mountain ranges, beaches, and ocean horizons, how does a landscape photographer redefine his particular image, drawing the viewer to retell the story or at least stand back and discover a new place? Many landscape photographers prefer to present the panorama in color, which sometimes overwhelms the eye with nature's incredible detail. The powerful gravity of a waterfall or the infinity of a horizon can be quite striking—but it can look common—especially today, when popular techniques such as high dynamic range and infrared conversion are used to enhance the photo. How can you distinguish your landscape images among other photographers in today's digital world?

Minimalism is one art movement that has managed to apply itself in photography, particularly in the genre of black and white landscape. The movement reduces a particular object or several to their least number of colors, textures, shapes, and lines. Black and white images are minimalists in themselves, taking away color and vibrancy as distractions. There is a lot of room for minimalism in black and white landscape photography since dominant natural elements showcase the area's entirety, leaving the viewer to focus on the basic parts of the picture. Minimalism is usually not seen in landscape photographs taken by our digital countrymen; but thinking out of the box has its rewards, and an effortless minimalist landscape photograph can speak volumes to any kind of viewer.

Training your mind to think in black and white is the first step to understanding minimalism. Monochrome relies heavily on contrasting colors, textures and shadows, making the photo look more dramatic yet basic at the same time. Digital sees the world in color, so it takes practice to see the world in monochrome. Colors take on various tones, which are translated to extreme shades of dark to light. It's important to know how to distinguish these tones while shooting your image in color. ▶▶

◀◀ Keep an eye out for objects that subtly present themselves as patterns of shapes, as seen in this photo of wooden figures coming from the water.

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▶▶ Minimalism in landscape photography can be summarized in three words: less is more. It is defined in simplicity. Minimalist artists executed the idea by removing all kinds of distraction. Landscape photography applies the same principle by presenting an entire area—such as a mountain range or lake horizon—as one large, open space. The emptiness of this space allows the viewer to ‘paint’ their own personal story, without having to regard the photographer’s own interpretation. The encompassing and somewhat infinite nature of the landscape captures a sense of emptiness that gives the place a dramatic atmosphere.

To maximize the vast space provided by a landscape, it’s best to eliminate distracting elements such as crowds. These unnecessary aspects can be avoided by shooting at sunrise, late at night, or early morning. If these times are too inconvenient, it helps to set the camera at long exposure, which minimizes the clutter of a scene that would be otherwise filled with people. The overall look should be clean and free of unnecessary objects.

Apart from working with a landscape’s infinite space, minimalist photography can do the opposite by focusing on a single subject, but still use the rest of nature as its background. The subject can dominate the landscape either from the center or ▶▶



Minimalism may require as little elements as possible, but one can still use dominant elements as the photo’s central subject. Ognita takes advantage of a nearby lakehouse, but still limits details shown from the lake and sky. **Shot details:** Canon EOS 5D, f11, 2 sec, ISO 50.

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◀◀ Shooting at long exposure is a popular method among minimalist landscape photographers. The technique removes the little details of the water and the sky, making them look almost blank.

▶▶ Ognita captures an otherwise unnoticed contrast between the land and the sky, inviting the viewer to further explore the landscape. **Shot details:** Canon EOS 5D, f8, 1/50 sec, ISO 50.



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Landscape photography applies minimalism by presenting an entire area—such as a mountain range or lake horizon—as one large, open space.

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Red Ognita guides the viewer's eye to feel as if he/she is walking toward the dock's other end, using hyperfocal distance to keep everything from the nearest to the farthest area clear and within focus.

Shot details: Canon EOS 5D, f16, 33 sec, ISO 50.

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◀◀ Ognita used a lighting meter to determine the snow's exposure value. Everything else that wasn't white was set at a lower exposure value.

Shot details: Canon EOS 5D, f8, 1/125 sec, ISO 200.

▶▶ from the farthest location. Zooming in can intensify the focus by eliminating possible distractions that can't be removed from the area you're shooting. If for example, you plan to take a picture of an ocean horizon but stumble upon a lighthouse nearby, you could zoom into it and then use the ocean and sky as the background. The opposite action of zooming out brings back a larger sense of space and also removes distractions by decreasing their size. Let's say you decide to shoot a mountain range home to an entire village. You could zoom out further to lessen the space occupied by the houses' roofs, therefore expanding the space occupied by the mountain range.

Applying depth of field is always used for landscapes, and is particularly helpful in achieving minimalism. Maximum depth of field is most effective when shooting at long exposure. But in order to keep both the background and foreground's objects sharp, set your lens at hyperfocal distance. In this setting, every object within half the distance until infinity falls under depth of field. Even the farthest tree or bush in the landscape can appear distinct and clear to the viewer's eyes. The clarity also invites your viewer to stare into the infinite space laid out by the landscape.

For aesthetic value, the subject should contrast with the surroundings, like a black sea under a clear sky or a solid, textured rock against smooth, silky waters. You could even create horizontal contrasts by shooting a clear body of water against weather that appears dark at long exposure, or vice-versa. To ensure the lighting complements your intended contrasts, meter specific points in your image before shooting then place your chosen subject at its respective exposure value. For example, if snow gets a +2EV, anything else that isn't white should go lower.

But these extremes will also depend on the day's weather conditions. Plan ahead by researching and visiting your location's terrain in advance, then check if the weather will cooperate with your preferences. Cold conditions ▶▶



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Zooming into the far away dock would leave the viewer looking at various points, but taking it from a distance showcases the ocean's infinite nature, reducing the area to a bare minimum.

▲ Although both parts of the horizon seem blank, the contrast gives it dramatic and striking character.
Shot details: Canon EOS 5D, f8, 25 sec, ISO 200.

◀▲ Ognita shows how a landscape photo can still have a central focus without compromising the large space minimalism asks for.
Shot details: Canon EOS 5D, f16, 66 sec, ISO 50.

▶▶ such as fog, frost and shorter days can provide a standard minimalist setting. Since these are uncommon conditions, every shot you take must count. Practice always makes perfect, so familiarize yourself with the mood the special weather brings and how it will appear before and after processing.

Other influences from minimalist art that can be translated to photographs are geometric shapes and patterns. Watch out for basic outlines from a mountain range, rocks resting within the ocean, or a bridge with an interesting design. You could even use a whole area's overall shape to show simplicity and unity. Patterns that are already present also make suitable subjects. They can be anything from repetitive slopes of several hills to a row of poles emerging from the ocean.

Like the vast space nature provides, the emerging genre of minimalist landscape photography contains endless possibilities. The artistic influence may have begun in the early 1900s but its full impact has yet to make a mark in digital photography. All it takes is a sharp eye to make a strong statement of simplicity.

DPP