



Shooting Shadows

New York Shadows



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Many photographers use shadows in their compositions; to reveal form, show texture, add contrast, or direct the viewer's attention to the main subject. But not all of us make the shadow itself the subject. Ernst Haas, one of my favorite photographers, did. Shadows are ubiquitous. They can be found all over the world, and in all kinds of places. That's what makes them such convenient subjects. I have been shooting them for several years, and found that doing so is a lot of fun

For an interesting picture, one needs the shadow of an interesting subject on an interesting background. Outdoor lamps in places like San Miguel de Allende and Oaxaca in Mexico are great subjects, and the buildings on which they are placed are great backgrounds. I made *Oaxaca Lamps* with my Nikon D300 while walking on a street in Oaxaca one sunny afternoon.

Of course, one doesn't have to go all the way to Mexico for good lamps and backgrounds. When I was at the PSA Conference in Albuquerque, I left the meeting for a couple of hours with some friends one morning and, on

the advice of another friend, went to the civic center. There was a nice lamp there too, and after waiting a little while for the shadow to get into just the right position, I made *Civic Center Shadows* with my new Sony NEX-6.

In fact, one doesn't have to go far from home to make pleasant images of lamps. For example, I was on my way to lunch in San Francisco, about an hour from home, before going to the symphony. I wandered around the neighborhood looking at the buildings when I saw a really nice composition of yet another lamp shadow on a very colorful building. But the shadow of the lamp merged with the shadow of the post. It was close to a pleasant park. I waited a while, people-watching in the park, until the shadows separated and then made *Hayes Street Shadow*, again with the NEX-6. This illustrates an important thing about shooting shadows; if you see a good potential shot that isn't quite right, try to wait for the right time.

Nor does one have to use high-end cameras. I made *Three Lamps* with my iPhone 4S in a

small shopping center about a fifteen-minute walk from home, In this case, waiting a while didn't work; I had to go there a few times to get the shadows in just the right position. But since it was close to home and I take daily walks, it was easy to do.

Of course, sometimes we shoot shadows of moving objects rather than fixed ones. Then it's a good idea to follow Sam Abell's dictum: "Compose and wait." In Trinidad de Cuba I saw a lovely blue window cover in an almost complementary wall, but it needed something else of interest to finish the composition. So I framed it and waited for something to happen. A few not very interesting people walked by, and then suddenly I saw a perfectly placed shadow, and made what I call *Compose and Wait*.

When I was walking around Oaxaca with a group, we saw the shadow of a dog on the wall across the street. It was walking back and forth on the roof on our side. I made several shots while I waited for it to come into the right place, and indeed after a few minutes it did. *Dog on the Roof* is real—no manipulation except for removing shadows of some big wires.

On the other hand, in some situations manipulation is necessary. I was photographing a colorful multi-layered reflection in a window in Venice, and as I set up, suddenly a man walked into the picture. I really liked having him there, and so made the



Compose and Wait



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Dog on the Roof

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Man in Grate



Civic Center Shadows

shot with him in it. Then I decided to crop the image so that I just had the shadows. However, by the time I had actually made the exposure, he was almost out of the image. We all know that it is undesirable to have a person or animal exiting the frame, so with a little work in Photoshop I turned him around and made *Man in Grate*.



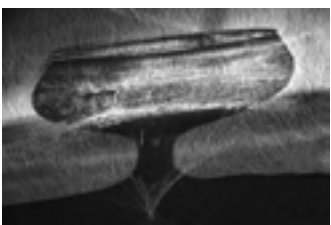
Three Lamps



Oaxaca Lamps

On a trip to New York, I was riding in a taxi when I suddenly saw a building with interesting shadows. I asked the driver to stop, got out and composed an image. The shadow kept coming and going so I had to wait for the right time. Since I was shooting up I had to correct the perspective, and then finished *New York Shadows* by cropping out most of the surrounding buildings to make a good composition.

It's not always necessary to be outdoors, or find colorful buildings as backgrounds. Most evenings I sit in my recliner before dinner and watch the news on TV. I usually enjoy a glass of wine in the process. The recliner is near a wall, with a small table between it and the wall. The wineglass is on the table. There's a big sliding glass door on the other side of the room, and sometimes the late-afternoon sun is at just the right angle to strike the



Neckline

wall and make an image that lasts for a few minutes. When I noticed that, I grabbed my camera and made *Neckline*.

When we start shooting shadows, we can find many new ways of looking at things, and a new set of pleasant challenges for our skills. ■



Hayes Street Shadow