

cole thompson photography newsletter

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Harbinger No. 70

My Friend!

A new year begins, and what will it bring? Well, that's up to you.

I read the poem "Invictus" as a teen, and throughout the years, it has reminded me that I am the master of my fate and the captain of my soul.

I get to decide what my life will be like. I cannot control the external factors, but I can control how I react to them and what my attitude will be.

Here's the poem:

INVICTUS

By William Ernest Henley

*OUT of the night that covers me
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

Do you wish to improve your creative photography this year? The power to do so is yours. Being more creative is not about genetics, education, or experience.

It's about what you want and how badly you want it. You are in control.

Cole

In this issue:

- Quotes
- Out of Chicago LIVE! 2026 - February 6-8
- New Images
- Do these 10 things to be happier with your photography
- The Story Behind the Image
- Print Drawing

Quotes

"Committing oneself to a technique causes stagnation."

Kimon Nicolaides

"Work lovingly done is the secret of all order and all happiness."

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

"Art should never try to be popular."

Oscar Wilde

"Be sensitive to your mistakes. Observe your work. Put it on the wall for a couple of weeks. It may be that you can learn more from the study of your own work than from

others.”

John Sloan

"To describe and explain my ideas is to lose them."

Marino Marini

"What use is having a great depth of field, if there is not adequate depth of feeling?"

W. Eugene Smith

“The ideal art critic would not be one who would seek to discover the mistake, aberrations, ignorance, plagiarisms and so forth, but the one who would seek to feel how this or that form has an inner effect, and would then impart expressively his whole experience to the public.”

Wassily Kandinsky

“Photography is not all seeing in the sense that the eyes sees...Our Vision is in a constant state of flux, while the camera captures and fixes forever a single, isolated, condition of the moment.”

Edward Weston

"The first and last task required of genius is the love of truth."

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

“Technique does not exist in itself, it is only the substance of the creative machinery.”

Ansel Adams

Out of Chicago LIVE! 2026



This is the seventh year of Out of Chicago LIVE! and I think I've participated in every one of them. It is the BIG photography event of the year.

This is an online conference happening February 6–8, 2026.

This event brings together 50 professional photographers (well, 49, John Barclay will be there) from around the globe to lead 100+ live presentations and interactive sessions, including keynote talks, instructor presentations, image reviews, show and tell sessions, portfolio conversations, shooting demos, an attendee takeover, image celebrations, and more.

My main presentation will be about long exposures and my love for them. I'll cover every aspect including cameras, tripods, filters, setting exposures, and when you should not use them (and when you should).

Learn more and sign up here:

<https://www.outofchicago.com/conference/out-of-chicago-live-2026/>

New Images



Where Lava Meets the Sea No. 1



Where Lava Meets the Sea No. 2



Where Lava Meets the Sea No. 3



Where Lava Meets the Sea No. 5



Where Lava Meets the Sea No. 7



Where Lava Meets the Sea No. 8



Where Lava Meets the Sea No. 9



Where Lava Meets the Sea No. 10



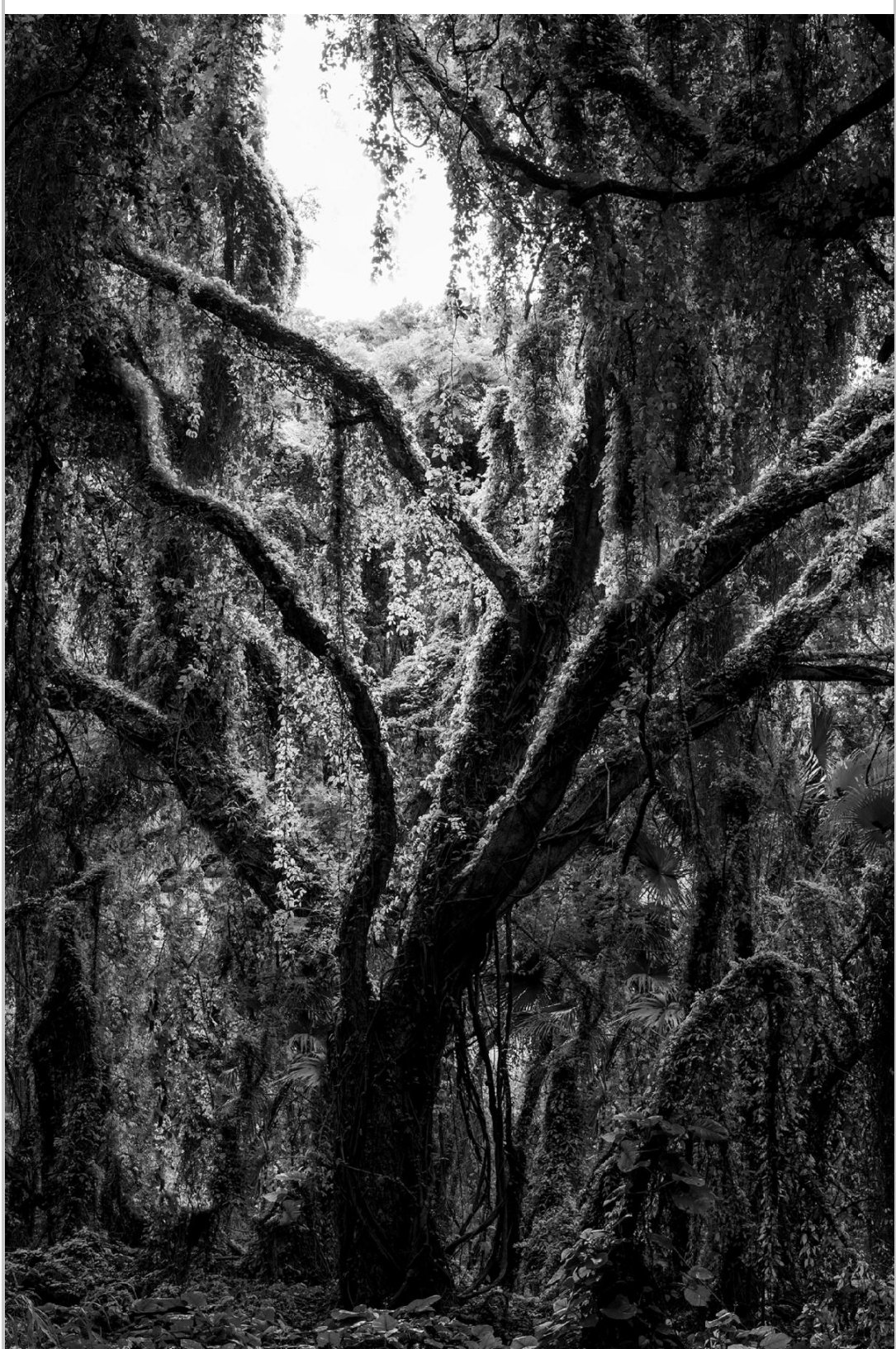
Beauty in Death No. 23



Beauty in Death No. 24



Beauty in Death No. 25



Maui Forest



Forest Canopy

Do These 10 Things to be Happier with Your Photography



Recently, a woman from Australia wrote me and said, "Here I am, almost 84, and still have neither time nor respect for silly restrictive rules of any description."

She made me think about how, when you get older, you have less tolerance for distractions and silliness, or "noise" as I call it. I've found that as I've aged, so many things don't matter to me anymore. For example, I have no desire to have thousands of followers so I can call myself an "Internet Influencer." I don't care if someone doesn't like my work. And if I'm never recognized by the art establishment, who cares?

Today I'm feeling brutally honest, and I thought I'd give you my tips on how to be happier with your photography, and it's pretty simple: just follow these 10 steps:

1) Quit reading articles that promise that you can be happy if you do these ten things! There are no easy answers, and almost everyone is trying to lure you in with headlines like this so that they can make money in some way.

2) Find your Vision! If you've been putting it off because the concept seems too vague or because doing the work is too hard, please commit to starting today. Nothing good comes easy, and finding your Vision is very hard...but nothing will improve your photography or your happiness more than finding and following your Vision.

3) Take a break from social media. Looking at other people's photography isn't going to make yours any better. Social media breeds imitation, jealousy, and discontent. "Likes" are not a gauge of how good your work is. The temporary dopamine rush you get from them will quickly diminish, and you'll soon be looking for your next high. Social media is addictive, it shortens our attention span, and it homogenizes us into this giant, uninteresting lump of photographic goo.

4) Answer the question: Why do I photograph? Are you photographing to become famous? To make money? As a hobby? To express yourself? Be brutally honest about your motives, because only then can you move to the next step.

5) Define what success means to you. Once you understand why you create, then you can decide what success looks like for you. For years, I chased the unspoken definition of photographic success: To be famous, to have my work in a big-name gallery, to sell my prints for big dollars, and to have a book published. As I started to achieve some of that "success," I realized that it wasn't fulfilling or lasting, and that's when I defined success for myself.

6) Quit reading and watching "how-to" articles and videos. Instead, use your time to photograph more. If you want to be a better photographer, then you must photograph more often; it's a pretty simple formula.

7) Photograph where you're at. You don't have to photograph famous locations, National Parks, or foreign lands; your backyard will do just fine. I regret that I have contributed to the subtle and pervasive social media message that great images come from great locations.

I think of Paul Caponigro's series of fruit in a bowl, photographed in his kitchen...simple and sublime. Edward Weston, in his final years and confined to a chair with Parkinson's, said that he ought to be able to look down at his feet and find something interesting to photograph.

8) Learn to critique your work for yourself, spend time with your images, and analyze them. What do you love about the image, and how can you emphasize that? What don't you like about the image, and how can you minimize that? Let it sit for a week, and then ask yourself those same questions again. And do it again in another week. And

again and again. Keep repeating this cycle until no more changes are made; that's when you know it's done.

Sure, it's easy to ask someone what you could've done better or differently, but that's just their opinion, and you really don't learn by listening to others' opinions. If your images are a form of self-expression, then someone else's opinion is irrelevant. Your opinion is the important one.

9) Learn not to care what others think about your work! (both the criticism and the praise). My continual goal is to be like Georgia O'Keeffe, who said, *"I decided to accept as true my own thinking. I have already settled it for myself, so flattery and criticism go down the same drain, and I am quite free."*

Yes, it's a hard thing to do, but as you find and follow your Vision, you will gain confidence in what you've created and can withstand the fickle winds of public opinion.

10) Photograph what you love and how you love to photograph it. Don't let rules, common wisdom, judges, teachers, mentors, and social media determine your course. Find and follow your Vision and create what you love.

And here's a bonus tip for those of you who have a paid subscription to my newsletter: (fyi: there is no paid subscription)

11) Create honest work. I define that as work that was created from my Vision; the idea was mine (not borrowed or stolen). It is work I created with no thought of how others would receive it, and it is work I love regardless of how others feel about it.

Do you want to be happier with your photography? Quit reading articles like this one and go out and photograph!

The Story Behind the Image



Isolated No. 15

I was in Newfoundland creating the "Melting Giants" series when I learned that I was near the spot that had the highest tides in the world, over 54 feet!

It's hard to fathom what a 54-foot tide looks like and what it would do to a place like Florida.

And so off I went to see the Bay of Fundy in New Brunswick.



Unfortunately, when I got there, the tide was out, and people were walking far out into the bay. But I wanted to photograph the "Hopewell Rocks" at high tide, and so what to

do?

I waited 12 hours for the tide to come in, and the photo above is from when it was about halfway there.

It was 10 pm when the tide finally came in, and it was very, very dark, which required a very, very long exposure. But even with a long exposure, I couldn't get much detail in the rocks, and so I used a flashlight as a fill light.

My Vision, along with an eight-minute exposure, a flashlight, and extensive post-processing, created this image. I was happy with it!



A few years later, I saw that the Hopewell Rocks had finally eroded and succumbed to the sea; everything changes.

I was glad to have seen it before it was gone.

Print Drawing



For this month's print drawing I'll be giving away a print of "Dunes of Nude No. 66."

To enter: send an email to Cole@ColeThompsonPhotography.com and put "Dunes of Nude" in the subject line.

Thanks for entering!

[Email Cole and Enter the Drawing!](mailto:Cole@ColeThompsonPhotography.com)

The winner of my last print drawing is Marty Cutrone, who will be receiving a print of Windsurfing.

Marty thought he was entering the previous print drawing (choose a print) but instead won this one. Marty, please email me and arrange for your print to be delivered.

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