



HUMPHREY
& GRACE

ON FINDING YOUR
PHOTOGRAPHIC VOICE

So far, in my first two eBooks, we have looked at basic principles of photography and editing photos. The practicalities in brief. What next? Well, how about finding and tuning your photographic voice? The signature style that will make your photographs recognisable as yours and - if you are really lucky - will stir emotion in others.

I know many of us use Instagram, and for this eBook it's perhaps the easiest reference to use as there are thousands of galleries filled with photos to demonstrate the concept of voice, all under the same 'roof'. It is easy to use them as reference points. If you are unsure of the concept of voice, open any gallery and describe it. What do you see, how does it make you feel?

Finding your own voice will be something you can apply to and use across any and all channels. Whether you share photos on social media and websites or just capture moments for personal memory keeping, learning how to make the very best of what you photograph is something I encourage you to do.

This is not a straightforward set of instructions though and it is certainly not quick to learn because good photography will not only capture moments, it will evoke emotions too. And capturing them is partly intuitive, the chances are if a scene makes you *feel* something, it will do the same for others.

The art, therefore, is in capturing those feelings. Taking a pretty, technically good photo is straightforward enough to learn, stirring emotion is not so easy. To help you (if you need help) understand the concept of voice, I am going to start with a little look at the end...

A PHOTOGRAPHIC VOICE

The very easiest way to describe what is essentially a subjective concept to you is to use my own photography as an example. So that is exactly what I will do.

Have a look at my Instagram gallery, or even just the few photos on these pages. But have a proper look rather than a glance then describe them to yourself.

THREE WAYS TO SEE A PHOTO

In my experience, when others describe my Instagram gallery to me there are several words that are often used - though not necessarily all at once. Those words fall into three categories. When grouped together, they look a little like this.

The first collection is literal and relates to subject - flowers, flat lay, scenery, houses, coffee etc.

The second collection of words relate more to technical details - light, bright, soft colours, white and so on.

And the third collection represents how the viewer feels, these words often include - calm, gentle, thoughtful, serene.

All of these descriptions are right and true (and I am beyond happy with them). Indeed they are some of what defines my photography. But no one, single word can encapsulate my style. To properly describe my photographs, you would need to use several descriptive words at once.

My point is this, that your voice will cover a range of notes, there will be lilts and tones to it. You will not just be defined by one single word, more likely with a song. Your style will be a collection of things all of which are integral to it. Colour, edit, mood, subject, light, tone and so on.

It is a variable combination of elements that will define your style as *you*.



THE SONG OF YOU

How, then, do you find your own voice with so many changing elements? Well let's go back and start at the beginning...

YOU

I have said this before and will most likely say it again, the best place to start is with yourself. The only place to start is with yourself.

Photograph what interests you and think about what it is you want those photographs to say. The subject may vary and develop over time, and that's ok, because your interests may change or become more finely tuned. But if you are photographing subjects that interest you, you are part way there and it is much easier to sing your own song.

Of course there may well be times when you will photograph subjects you like less well and that's alright too. You can use these times as opportunities to try something different and learn. Even if the lesson is that you don't like to photograph them.

Sometimes though, stepping outside of your comfort zone will lead to a whole new creative road.

WRITING YOUR TUNE

I have a couple of quotes I would like to share with you. While trying to find the tune you want to sing, in moments of doubt, they are pieces of advice I half wish I had been given much earlier on. I hope you find them helpful to remember too.

*"Comparison is the thief of joy" **

Try not to compare your work with that of others. It is most likely that you won't know where along their journey they are nor how they got there and to compare yourself is therefore irrelevant. Just start where you are and strive to be the best that you can be. Being inspired by people you think are better than you is brilliant, comparison often leads to self doubt.

*"chasing after stories that have already been told" ***

One of my favourite lyrics, relevant because it is so perfectly true. And really it's all any of us are doing.

Nothing is truly original. No photographic style, no subject, no angle, no edit. It has all been done before and often done exceptionally well. Put simply, we are really just telling the same old stories in our own, unique way. I find that a comforting thought. What sets us apart as individuals is actually our interpretation of the same.

And each song certainly deserves a listen...

WHAT HOLDS YOUR STYLE TOGETHER

COLOUR & EDITING

Actually I think this is key in many ways. You can shoot diverse subjects if your colour palette and editing style stays fairly consistent. That is not to be confused with limited as the limit is set by no one but yourself.

I like soft colours, you wont often find bright, strong, bold colours in my photographs and straight away, there we have a note on which my photographs all make sense together. Just look at the four photographs below, the subjects are very different, they were taken over three seasons, but still they coordinate well with each other don't you think?



Look a little closer and we can understand how and why. The lines in each frame are straight. Whether horizontal or vertical, 3/4 of the photos have a straight reference point.

But the colour palette is similar, in fact there is a colour in each frame that matches at least one other and an element of white appears in all frames.

It may seem like a small thing here, so imagine creating an Instagram gallery or website full of images? These subtle similarities and nuances add up and flow like a song through your photos.

WHAT SETS YOUR STYLE APART

SUBJECT

I mentioned above that editing and colour palette will allow you to photograph a variety of subjects and still present a cohesive whole. That is great news! How diverse your choice of subjects to photograph can be is entirely flexible.

You will have a collection of subjects you want to photograph and some you don't fancy so much. What is in that collection is you. Your voice. The things you want to talk about.

You can talk about a wide range of subjects or just a handful, it doesn't matter, what you have to say will be interesting to the right people either way. (the right people - a concept I will cover later as finding your audience online is a topic I'd like expand upon).

THINK CREATIVELY

How comfortable are you sitting inside of a box? Some of us are, very much so. We make it cosy and comfortable and its a happy place. And then some of us want to see how flexible the sides are, because why should a box be square...? Me? I like to have one foot outside of the box half the time, testing the water. I'm not quite brave enough to stand outside the box but admire those who do!

And therein lies the creativity for me. Thinking a little outside the box to share the odd concept that is a perhaps different to my usual style. Some of those tests have failed miserably but some have gone on to become my signature.

You do not 'need' a signature photo style but they are a great way to define yourself as different and, if standing out from the crowd is what you seek, it is worth considering finding one.

Often the 'thing' starts by accident, develops over time, and becomes an integral part of your style. Whether it be a subject, pattern or a particular way of framing a photo. Anything in fact that you can repeat regularly.

A signature photo set up that you can modify and repeat is a very useful thing for an Instagrammer in particular. And is a concept to perhaps explore further if Instagram is your platform of choice. My advice would be this, find something that isn't being done already. Think outside of the box...



A PARTING THOUGHT

On a personal note, I would say that I want at least some of my photographs to have a meaning. For example, I want my children to have snapshots of their lives that they want to keep.

And if I am really honest, I want others stop to take my photos in, not just to scroll past or disregard them as the same as everyone else's. To perhaps be able to imagine themselves as a part of the scene rather than just an observer. Bt at the vey least to be interested in my visual stories.

I see this as something of a continuous work in progress, not an area in which I often succeed (you should see my cutting room floor!) and something I am refining all the time. It would be unrealistic to expect every photo to convey emotion if, like me, you are sharing content several times a week.

The art of arranging an Instagram gallery like mine necessitates spacers and there is absolutely nothing wrong with sharing some photos that are simply pretty photos. As long as there is a meaning in the mix too.

There really is a lot to learn and it won't happen quickly, but I know I want to keep exploring the possibilities with photography because it interests me.

How about you? Are you willing to join me and put in the time and effort to improve? Don't be discouraged by how imperfectly you feel it may be going right now, be encouraged. We all start somewhere and it's usually not that great for any of us for a long while. It's simply part of the journey and is exactly how we learn along the way.

But there will always be someone who will tune in to your song.

FURTHER READING

On finding your Instagram voice - <http://www.humphreyandgrace.co.uk/finding-your-instagram-voice/>

I am launching more eBooks and eCourses over the summer so be sure to check back - <http://www.humphreyandgrace.co.uk/learn/>

* Theodore Roosevelt ** lyric from Rhythm & Blues Alibi - Gomez

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