

# Passenger Seat

Creating a photographic project from conception  
through execution in Adobe Photoshop Lightroom

**JULIEANNE KOST**

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**Julianne Kost**

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Montana, 2008

# Introduction

*Passenger Seat*, the project, started as a purely personal one as I traveled through the north-eastern United States to view the leaves in fall. We drove all day looking for iconic New England landscapes, and between the small towns, I started taking images out the window of the car. At the end of the day, the images that I had made “in between” were the images that resonated with me. I found myself capturing a distinct yet ephemeral moment that was not entirely apparent or observable when the image was made, yet these photographs conveyed the mood, colors, and transient notion of fall better than anything that I had mindfully composed.

I instantly decided that this project was worthy of additional investigation. The discovery of something unseen, the serendipity of art and science coming together as one, and the contrast between chaos and order within a single frame, fueled the creative embers inside of me. Knowing that photography is the unity of the “left and right brain,” I tried to learn as much as I could about the technical process to increase the odds of capturing a successful image. At the same time, I needed to embrace and lose myself in the creative process. Planning, pre-visualization, and technique, combined with feeling, intuition, and perseverance, would be needed

to create this body of images. *Passenger Seat*, the book you hold in your hands, marks the completion of that personal project.

As photographers and artists, we can’t underestimate the need for personal time and creative time; I consider this to be our most valuable time. If you can’t find the space in your life for your projects, maybe it’s time to re-prioritize. We live in an incredibly fast-paced, hustling, and ever-changing world, but a full schedule doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re being productive. Make sure that being *busy* isn’t an excuse not to focus on what’s important to you.

We need to constantly explore different techniques and subjects in order to stay healthy and not atrophy. This project allowed me to stop and take a second look at the world that I *thought* I knew, broadening my vision to include a world that can be seen only by the camera, not the naked eye. It helped me continue to look at things with a new perspective, learn how to make technology work for me, and “let go” and lose myself in the process of making images.

No matter what journey your personal project takes you on, I hope that riding along with mine in *Passenger Seat* will provide inspiration and guidance. I’ll walk you through the conception and evolution of the project,

discuss capture and editing processes, provide toning and post-processing techniques, and examine delivery options for presenting and sharing projects. Along the way, we’ll explore how to balance intuition with technical know-how, define (and limit) the scope of a project, stay motivated in order to overcome the inevitable “bumps in the road,” discover the most efficient Lightroom and Photoshop workflow and image enhancement techniques, and realize the benefits of constructive criticism.

There is so much more to see, and an infinite number of ways to see what is there. As a photographer, it’s your willingness to experiment—to try something new without the fear of failure—that will set you apart. “It hasn’t all been done before,” because you have yet to make your image through your eye, with your voice, telling your story. You have to realize that the possibilities are endless.

The soul always starts a thought with an image.

—ARISTOTLE



Vermont, 2012

## CHAPTER 4 Finding Inspiration

If you can dream  
it, you can do it.

—WALT DISNEY

I am a firm believer that inspiration can be found almost anywhere if you are open to new ideas. Because of this, I try to expose myself to as many different experiences as I can. And anything that I see that catches my attention, sparks my imagination, or triggers a visceral emotive experience, I record in an idea bank for later reference.

Ever since I can remember, I have kept a journal (in fact, several at one time) to collect and store ideas. I'm an avid reader and books are one of my favorite sources of inspiration. I jot down words that I don't know and look up their definitions, and I keep track of quotes, notes, descriptions of places and people, lyrics, anything that triggers a visual that I feel is worth remembering. I don't know when I might use it, but I don't want to lose it. I keep a pencil and paper next to the bed at night so that when I have that artistic insight I can write it down so that I will remember it in the morning. I relish knowing that I have diaries of inspiring references that I can return to at any time.

### **Don't Get Too Comfortable**

To make work that tells a compelling story, we need to look closely at the things that

surround us, which can be very difficult to do when we're merely going through the motions of our lives. Habits in and of themselves are not bad, but we need to avoid the mind-numbing routines that form when we set our lives on auto-pilot. I try to constantly push myself to break out of the comfortable cocoon that I find I am predisposed to spin around myself. If I'm not paying attention, I will drive to work by the same roads, eat the same foods, and solve problems in the same way, time after time. Instead, open yourself to new experiences—explore a new neighborhood, try a new food, play a new sport. Try to do something new every day. Challenge yourself to constantly evolve.

Learn how to do something unique every year. Be a beginner and ask questions. Flip on your "learning switch" to expand your mind in new directions. Keep your brain exercised. Take an active part in the world. Be a creator as often as possible; don't be satisfied with merely being a bystander. Do interesting things, and chances are you will become a more interesting person. It's far more gratifying to generate your own content and tell your own stories than it is to simply watch and consume other people's take on life.



Pennsylvania, 2012

Visit other places; seek out other cultures. Traveling is one of the easiest ways to alter your consciousness. Changing your environment can instantly expose you to different customs, divergent architecture, distinctive fashion, and diverse behaviors. As Arthur Schopenhauer said, “Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world.” These predetermined views prevent us from exploring things. Trying to understand other people’s point of view and seeing the world through their eyes can help us overcome some of our own fears. Don’t fight it. Open yourself up to others’ ideas and ways of life. Don’t judge; just be a part of it. Be in the moment and experience the situation, and see where it takes you.

### **Look, Then Look Deeper**

Of course, we don’t have to travel to change perspective. The key is to make sure that you continuously view the world around you with fresh eyes. Try looking from a different point of view. Get down low or climb up high. Get close to a subject, then back away. Look at the quality and quantity of light and study the shadows. Look for reflections; notice where lights converge and subjects overlap. Pay attention to negative and positive space. Scrutinize your surroundings and take note of the details. The more “present” you are, the more you will see.

Try staying at one location for one hour and make ten photographs of different things. Then make ten different photographs of the same thing. Forcing ourselves to slow down and analyze the world around us provides new insights and opens new doors.

I have a habit of walking around my neighborhood in the morning. I collect things that I see on my journey—interesting twigs, seedpods, even metal coat hangers (I’m astonished at how many of the twisted hanger tops I have found over the years). I don’t typically know exactly how I will use them when I find them, but over the years I’ve photographed many of the objects, incorporated others in my encaustic paintings, and even decorated the planting beds in my gardens with them.

Sometimes I give myself assignments for the morning walk. I’ll look in my journal for ideas, and then try to find examples of those concepts when I walk. I might choose a word, like “resilient,” and then try to find examples of how resilient nature can be and photograph them—weeds growing up through the sidewalks, trees overtaking a side-yard, and insects building their homes within an abandoned structure. When I encourage myself to look at things more closely as I walk by an empty lot, I find myself wondering what world is contained in that space that I walk by every day and don’t even notice. If I really look, how much life would I find in a



Queensland, Australia, 2012

The more one looks, the more one sees. And the more one sees, the better one knows where to look.

—TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

shovelful of earth or the branch of a tree? Nature is a source of infinite variation and inspiration. Make the time to study and take in its beauty.

I constantly observe the way other people capture the world around them, as well. I look at photographs anywhere I can—in books, online, in museums and galleries. By studying other photographers' work, I have learned a great deal about what I feel makes a successful image, from content to composition to lighting. I look at other sources of imaging, such as alternative light sources (infra-red and ultraviolet), chemical-based

processes, scanning microscopy, and molecular science. They all have the potential to influence my photography and generate new ideas.

I try to stay well rounded by looking at other mediums of art—sculpture, painting, fiber, installation—from different cultures around the world, today and throughout history. Inspiration can come from anything—a piece of music that kindles the imagination, the beauty of a well-built piece of furniture that brings us joy, or a simple, thoughtfully prepared home-cooked meal that comforts our soul.

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