



## THE VISION COLLECTIVE: WEEK NINETEEN.

### Intentional Colour Palettes

In Week Eighteen, I encouraged you toward looking at your images in black and white. Monochrome can be used as an evaluative tool to judge the strengths of your images in ways that have nothing to do with colour, which can be so seductive it's all we focus on. This week is the logical follow-up in that if you're going to use colour, use it intentionally. I have three thoughts I want to share with you.

1. **Be aware of the emotional and visual weight of colour.** We read colour in

different ways. We read blue/green hues on the spectrum to be cool, and red/orange hues to be warm. We know that. But we read them emotionally, too. Red tends to be an exciting, energetic colour. Green tends to be calming. A scene filled with red that you intend to be serene is going to take more intentional effort to pull off successfully (the sense of serenity will have to powerfully come from elsewhere). Red can signal danger, blood, or sensuality. And because we read these colours differently, they won't always work well together. Be aware of that. You might need to find ways to exclude certain colours from a scene, either by excluding those elements, or by reducing their impact in the digital darkroom through various means (for example, you could selectively and partially desaturate an area, or change the hue slightly).

*The image below isn't one of my best but is a good example. The image on the left is roughly as I shot it but I pushed the greens a little for the sake of the example. The green is too much for me, pulls my eye too much, and competes a little with the blues. But using the HSL panel in Lightroom, I pulled the green hue more towards yellow and desaturated it slightly, which to me is much more harmonious and pulls my eye less. (Remember, this is a lesson about colour, not about what we should or shouldn't do to images; some people feel strongly about this, but it's a whole other conversation.)*



**2. Understand that colour can be used as a unifying element.** Colour can be a repeating element in a single frame, creating echo or rhythm or emotional cues. It

can also work to tie several images together in a body of work or a short series of images. Knowing how to finesse these in the digital darkroom can be a powerful way to refine your images and bring greater unity to them. The images below were made on different trips to northern British Columbia, but tweaks to the colour palette allow me to unify the locations and times and bring them all together, much like Andrew Zuckerman did with his *Wisdom* project (see Week Seventeen) using a white backdrop to create cohesion.



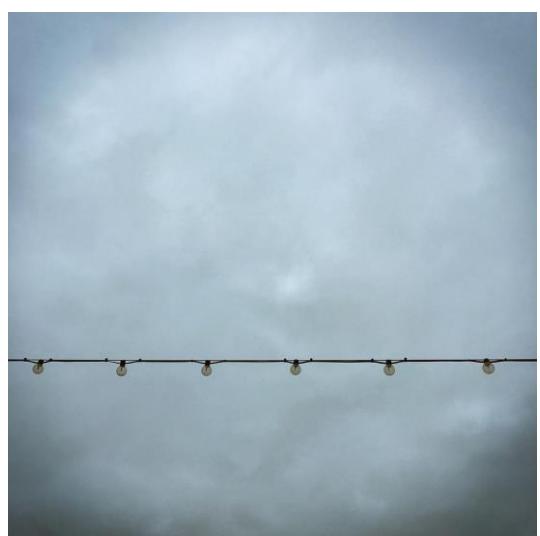


**3. Know that we see colours not only for what they are on their own but always in relation to the colours that they are surrounded by.** Which means you need to be aware of the whole picture. Not just one colour but the whole palette. Motion picture directors and directors of photography (DOPs) are extremely intentional about the use of whole colour palettes in their movies. Put blue next to orange, and both the blue and the orange look more intense: the blue looks bluer, the orange looks, well, more orange. This is one reason art is shown against white walls and why we choose neutral mats for framing our work: to preserve the colour purity that would be seen very differently if the work were shown on non-neutral surfaces. I know that seems like a digression (it was, though just a little) but what I'm trying to get at is that colour palettes matter for a reason. Be intentional about it.

I was going to make this part of the Further Study section below but I think it's too important, so wrap this lesson up by looking at [the Movies in Color website](#), and [this article in Esquire](#).

Like everything, these are just principles and ideas. How you incorporate them is the ongoing challenge of creativity. Play with it and see if it leads your work somewhere unexpected and interesting.

*The images below were shot over two days in London, wandering around and looking to do something different. I'm not sure these images are as interesting individually as they are together, but it's the uniformity of the palette that makes this work.*



## Creative Exercise

In the **Study the Masters** section below, I introduce you to Erik Almas. [Take some time on his website](#) to look not only at his composition, but also at how he uses colour to reinforce what his images are about; he is extremely intentional about every colour choice. Not all of us are going to colour grade our images the way he does, but you can still be intentional about the choice. One way I do this is with the film emulations available in my Fuji cameras. Each film has specific colour characteristics and sticking with one emulation (I like Velvia and Chrome) is one way to use colour to create cohesion.

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## Study the Masters

I have long admired [Erik Almas](#)' imagination and eye for colour. His work is more conceptual and staged than what I prefer, but that doesn't mean there's not a lot to learn from both his composition and his creativity. Take some time to look through his galleries and consider his intentional use of

colour both in single images and across a series. How do his colour choices reinforce the themes in his image? How do they make you feel?

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### **Further Study**

If you're looking for more inspiration, check out the websites of these photographers:

- [Brooke Shaden](#)
- [Nick Hall](#)
- [Vincent Munier](#)

Lastly, play with one of these colour palette generators for some ideas on colours that work together: [Colors](#), and [Adobe Color CC](#) (previously Adobe Kuler).

If you're looking for me, you can find me on [my blog](#), on [Facebook](#), and on [Instagram](#).

For the love of the photograph,  
David duChemin