



Martin's Top Ten Photos for 2018

Following last week's article in which I shared my selection workflow and thought process, this week I share my personal top ten images for 2018.

January 14, 2019

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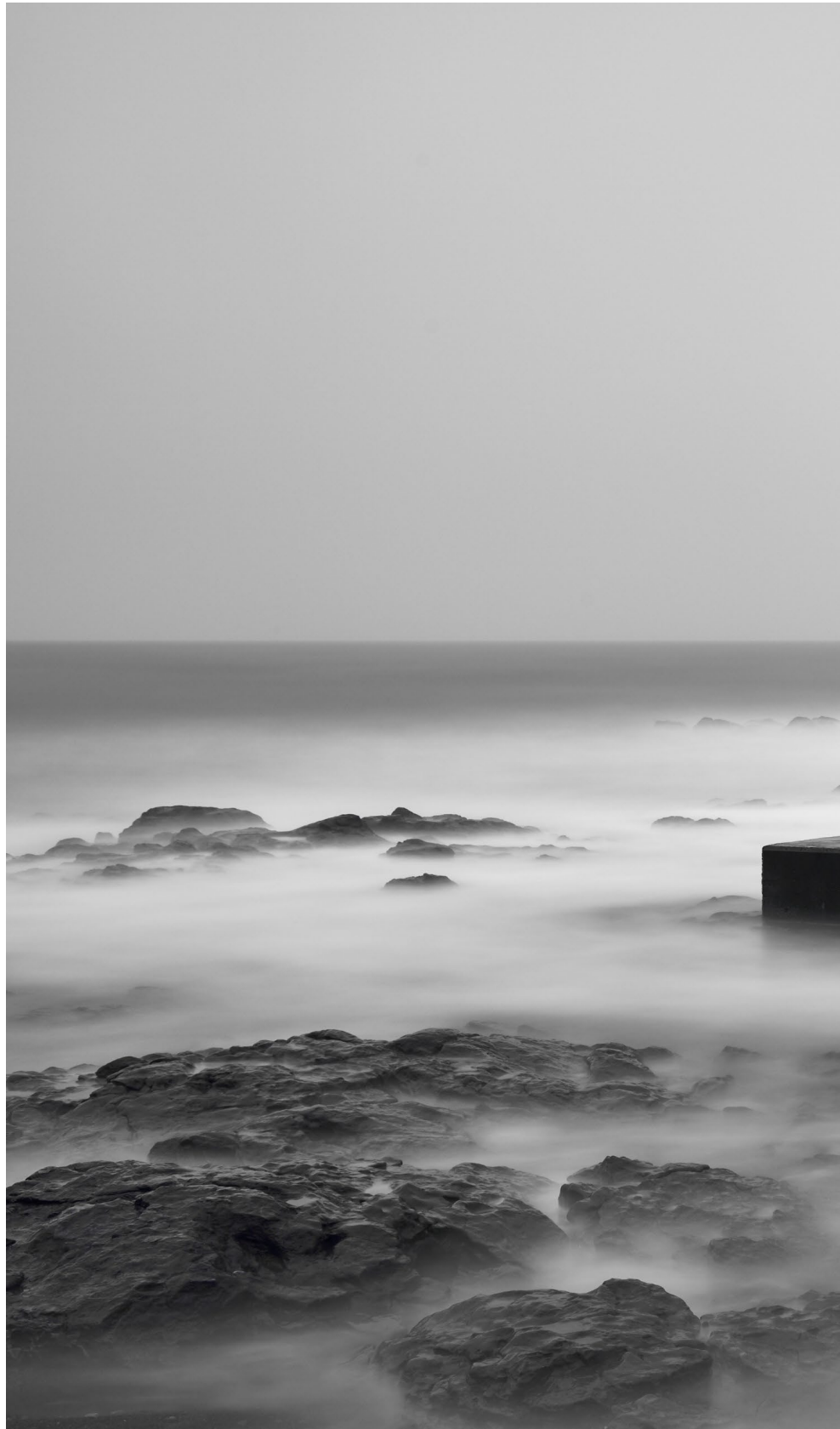
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I don't try to rank these images in any order, rather we'll just work through the year in chronological order, starting with this image from my [Hokkaido Landscape Photography Adventure tour](#) held sat the start of January each year.

Konpira Shrine Shinto Gate

I'm preparing this episode on January 4, but I will be releasing it around January the 14th, a few days after visiting this Shinto Gate or Torii with this year's group. I really hope we get some good conditions like we had last year again. The low pressure that lets the clouds roll in to form that beautiful grey sky also allows the sea level to rise, so that the water washes around the rocks surrounding the gate.



I considered including a shot from a different angle where the sea was washing around the concrete base of the Torii instead of this one where the

base is solidly visible, but I went with this shot, as I prefer its simplicity. The even grey sky is unobtrusive and allows the red of the gate to stand out, but the



water washing around the rocks, made silky from my 4-second exposure helps to accentuate the detail in the rocks themselves.

To get the 4-second exposure I was probably using my 6-stop neutral density filter, and I'd set my aperture to f/11, which is wider my usual f/14, so



I was obviously trying to avoid going any longer than four seconds, because the water can start to look too smooth, and lose its texture if you go too long on waves like this.

As I prepare for this episode, I'm really looking forward to getting back up to Hokkaido with my guests and photographing these beautiful winter minimalist locations. I'm actually going



to be taking my [Canon EOS R](#), my first mirrorless camera, and my [RF 24-105mm lens](#), and using these really for the first time on this trip, so I'm excited about that too.



Moonlit Quiver Trees

The next three images are from my Complete Namibia Tour & Workshop, which started at the end of May last year.

We had a moonrise while we were in the Quiver Tree Forest, and although I'd spend most of my time trying to capture a telephoto shot of the moon rising through the trees, it wasn't really working because of the light cloud cover.

Then shortly before we had to leave, I figured it was worth trying my [11-24mm lens](#) for a wide shot, and I was surprised to see how good the clouds looked, but also how much the stars shone through the clouds. I honestly didn't expect this to balance out this well, and I even got a bit of moonlight hitting the trunks of the Quiver Trees, which adds a nice touch I thought.



This was a 25-second exposure, just with the moonlight. I didn't need any neutral density filters here of course. That's all the light we had, even with my aperture wide open at f/4 for this lens.

Fierce Yawn

Later in the tour, we visited the Etosha National Park, and I got one of my firm favorites for the year, as we visited a private game reserve, and were treated to a late afternoon male lion as he bathed in the last few minutes of sunlight for the day, and then gave a great big yawn, that to me almost looks like a fierce roar, hence the title that I gave this image, Fierce Yawn!

I'd opened up my aperture to f/8 for this shot, and set my shutter speed to an 1/800 of a second, and to get a good exposure this required an ISO of 1600. I manually tweaked my focus to keep it on the eyes of the lion, and that in turn helped me to keep the focus on the teeth of the lion as he yawned. Because I use



the back AF button to focus, and disable the autofocus mechanism on the shutter button, I was able to just not press the back AF button to avoid the camera trying to refocus as the lion flipped his



head back like this.

Had I been using the shutter button to focus it probably would have started to search for focus as the lion moved his

head, and might have even focussed on the grasses in front of him, and I definitely wanted to avoid that, although I like the fact that the grasses are there, keeping the lion firmly in his environment.

Zebra Soup

This next photo is what I call Zebra Soup, for obvious reasons. Again, from the Etosha National Park in Namibia, when I first shot this, I was much happier with the images that I'd got where I'd managed to crop the edges of the frame better, rather than cutting off the zebra's heads, or half a face, but as time passed, I started to become more attracted to this photo, just because of the sheer chaos as all of these zebra drank from a waterhole.

I think I learned or maybe relearned that the technical accuracy of the image isn't as important as how the image makes you feel. When I shared my final 44 images with my wife as I whittle down my top ten for 2018, we talked about this image and she didn't even notice the cropped off body parts, because her attention was focussed firmly on the mayhem in the middle of the frame.



That's not to say that I won't pay attention to the point at which I frame my photos moving forward, but I will probably go a little easier on myself when making



my final selection, especially when there is enough going on in the photo that the imperfections become almost completely insignificant. For this shot,

I was using my [100-400mm Mark II lens](#) at its full reach, and my shutter speed was 1/800 of a second at ISO 800, and an aperture of f/14.



Moroccan Man in Chefchaouen

It hasn't been that long since I talked about my Morocco work for this year, but we'll discuss these again, as the remaining six images of my selection for 2018 are from my Morocco trip.

That probably says something about how the images being fresh in our minds affects our ability to select a collection of images, but I actually really do think that this is some of my strongest work from the year, so it's hard to remove them from my best ten.

This gentleman was a real character. He was shouting out to me and my group as we walked towards him, and started to dress in these clothes, saying that we could photograph him for \$20 each! We get used to paying for photos in

Morocco, but 20 bucks is a little steep. Most of the guests just kept walking, but me another guy talked him down to \$10, and I was happy with the results.

When my guest asked for advice on his shot, and I told him that he didn't need



so much space over the top of this gentleman's head, and as soon as my guest went to photograph this guy again, he immediately asked for another ten bucks, but we managed to talk him into a freebie. With him though, time definitely was money, and I only got a handful of frames before he started asking for more money.

In many ways you can't blame the Moroccans. Many of them don't have a lot, and this is a great way to make money from the tourists that otherwise don't really buy a lot, and that unstandably frustrates the Moroccans.

I used my [85mm f/1.4 portrait lens](#) for this shot (left) although I did close the aperture down to f/4.5 for this, to maintain a little bit of texture in that beautiful blue wall from Chefchaouen.

Public Bath Furnace

Our amazing guide in Morocco constantly came up with hidden gems for us to photograph, and after being whisked down a back alley in Fes, this next shot was a real treat. This gentleman





is stoking the fire in a furnace to heat the local public bath.

I can't find a reference to this online, so my memory might be playing tricks on me here, but our guide told us that for a community to thrive in Morocco, they need five things; A market, a mosque, a Koranic school, a well, and a public bath. And sure enough, as we visited the various medinas throughout the trip, these things were always there, and always thriving.

I was using my EF 24-105mm lens for this shot at 41mm, and the aperture was set to f/5.6 for a 1/160 of a second shutter speed, at an ISO of 2000. The man was throwing plenty of wood shavings into the fire, and stoking it to make the flames higher, so it wasn't a difficult shot, but It was nice to be able to capture it.

For my exposure, I was using aperture priority, as I try to do for this kind of photography, but I'd dialed in minus one stop of exposure compensation to stop



the fire from over-exposing too much, then I lightened up the rest of the room with the Shadows slider in Capture One Pro.

Distant Figure in Fes Alleyway

Another favorite shot from Fes is this image from down an incredibly narrow





alleyway, again, a gem presented to us by our guide. I had just composed my shot, and as I hoped for someone to walk into the scene, this lady in a red Djellaba appeared in the distance, just long enough for me to use her as a nice color contrast and splash of detail to focus the attention of an attentive viewer of the image.

I know the figure is very small, but when viewed large she makes a nice easter egg, which is what I call this kind of tiny detail in a photo that you have to work a little to find and comprehend. My settings for this image (previous page) were f/8 for a 1/20 of a second at ISO 6400 and a focal length of 24mm.

The Turban and the Cloud

The next image was from the Sahara Desert in Morocco, when we had a little time to photograph our camel handlers before

the sunset, and with the high winds, it was a great opportunity to get them with their turban blowing in the wind like this. We couldn't resist asking this guy to go to the brow of the sand dune to get



him against the sky with this beautiful big cloud that had rolled across the background.

I really struggled with the decision to not

include one of the camel's in the sunset images, as they were pretty nice, but I risked having my 2018 top ten looking just like my 2017 top ten, so I had to make some sacrifices.





I also have found that six of my top ten for this year have people in them, which is a little out of character for a predominantly wildlife and landscape photographer, but cultural travel photography has


played a large part of the last few years, so I decided to just roll with it. My settings for this photo (previous page) were a 1/320 of a second shutter speed at ISO 250, and an aperture of f/10 at 300mm.



Man in Well

It was just two weeks ago when I spoke about the final two images, but here goes. This man is Karim, and he watches

over an irrigation channel in Morocco, ensuring that it doesn't get blocked, and he's found himself a nice niche job posing for photographers beneath the well hole in the channel.



I also took this photo out of my selection for a while because I had this and the next gentleman in my 2017 top ten, but I just could not bring myself to leave them out. The set felt empty without these two images. I also mentioned recently that I have extended this image out from a portrait orientation image by increasing the size of the canvas in Photoshop then using content aware fill on the sides.

It's a very narrow space, but because I darken down the surrounding a bit, you can't really tell that it's been changed, and I like the idea that he is in a larger space here than he actually was. It feels more of



an abyss like this. My settings were f/2 for a 1/20 of a second, at ISO 6400, with my 85mm lens. There is hardly any grain in this image because Karim is beautifully lit from the light of the well, and the shadows are so dark that grain is just not visible.

Moroccan Man in Adobe Building

Our final image from my 2018 Top Ten set is Mr. Mohammed, another Moroccan gentleman that I had the good fortune to photograph again on last year's tour. This man has been an extra in many movies, as the town where he lives, Ait Benhaddou, has been the location of countless movies over the years.

Not at all camera shy, we asked him to pose for us inside an adobe building next to his own home, and with these dust-covered tajine pots and again, just a single open ceiling window, this makes for a stunning environment to photograph people in. It's dark in here too though, so this is



another 6400 ISO shot, this time at f/4, again for 1/20 of a second, at 35mm.

Share Your Work!

As I mentioned last week, please do share your own Top Ten images for 2018



if you also do this each year. If you haven't been doing it, I really believe it's an invaluable exercise to help us grow as photographers. If you want more information on the process, and haven't

caught up on last week's episode yet, do [check that out here](#), and by all means share a link to your top ten [on the blog](#), along with details of anything that you learned from doing this.



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