

ABSTRACT IMAGES

After taking pains to make your photographs look realistic, it is refreshing to look at things in a different light and out of their usual context.

Photographers usually spend most of their time trying to achieve the best lighting conditions and angle of view to make three-dimensional subjects look as realistic as possible in a two dimensional format. The attraction of abstract photography is that you can forget about conventions and the experience of the 'expert' on matters such as scale, depth, lighting and viewpoint and, for once, let your imagination run riot on virtually any subject. You have the freedom to take a familiar object out of its normal context and completely disguise its identity, turning it into a two-dimensional pattern of shapes and colours. In this type of photographic exercise, there are no strict rules for you to follow because abstracts are not pictures of subjects as you normally see them. They rely purely on the strength of the design within the picture frame to be successful. They are pictures in their own right and, as the subject itself is irrelevant, provide the photographer with an inexhaustible source of material. They do not rely on interesting subjects for impact - instead presentation is the key, and this relies on your own ability to see and arrange things within the frame. The picture is entirely the photographer's creation and the real world simply acts as a quarry for material.

Squinting through nearly closed eyes may help you see your subjects in a different way and help you find abstract shots.

SHAPES

Simple shapes make good abstract pictures. Look for geometric lines, perfect spheres, ovals and so on, and reveal them best by a soft directional light source. Keep the composition as simple as possible by avoiding too many different shapes appearing in the same picture, and avoid confusing shadows which may result if your lighting is too strong and direct. Outdoors, look for interesting shapes silhouetted against the sky. By moving in closer, you may be able to isolate the subject well enough to conceal its identity but retain a pleasing abstract shape - a mass of chimney pots, for example, or the strong angles of a crane. By using telephoto lenses you will find it easy to isolate small details.

TEXTURE

The material from which an object is made can be of more interest than its shape and depicted on its own, can form an abstract image. A small section of tree bark, the swell of a rough sea, the smooth sheen of polished metal, jagged rocks or crumpled paper, rough, or smooth textures and everything in between. Try strong side lighting and use a low ISO setting to make the most of a really interesting texture.

PATTERN

Patterns, whether created by man or nature, are ideal subjects for abstract photography. By changing your viewpoint and camera angle, you may see patterns of which you were not aware previously. Looking down on a crate of bottles is a good example, or an upward view of the keys of an old typewriter. Avoid a **too** directional light or you will lose the pattern in a blur of shadows. However you may be able to use the shadows to enhance the abstract nature of the picture.

COLOUR

Bright areas of colour on sunny days make good abstracts, e.g. painted wood on the side of a boat, flaking paint, shiny coloured plastic outside a supermarket. Look for blocks of colour that taken away from their context become abstracts.

LIGHTING

Lighting abstract shots is extremely important. The brighter light of midday shining head-on to a subject can give a completely flat, two-dimensional effect, useful to reveal shape, but not depth. The shadows themselves may form an abstract arrangement, and reveal the texture of an object. In low lighting there may be no details showing in the subject at all. An object lacks real shape and form in such light and may only be suitable where patterns of light and shade are the key factors.

In an Abstract Image, it is **not important** for the viewer to recognise the subject. The main thing is that the fine lines, colour and texture are attractive.

Very ordinary objects can make abstract photographs. All you need is imagination to compose your image in an effective way

Text amended from "The Photo" with thanks.

Images by Fran Cross

