



Darren Woolway ARPS, Ba(Hons)

How I judge and why I do it this way

Please stand if you are 25 or under

The answer to your question is

“Yes, I am old enough to hold a camera let alone judge a competition”

quote courtesy of West Wickham.

p.s. I wrote that extremely large so you old folks can read it better!

Pre-conceptions

- S/He isn't old enough to know enough about photography to judge a competition.
- S/He is too old, he is probably stuck in his ways and isn't up to scratch with today's technologies.
- S/He seems like the type of person who is only going to like landscapes.
- He didn't shave today if he can't present himself well I wonder what his images are like?!
- Did you ever ask yourself why you have these pre-conceptions?
Perhaps the guy hasn't shaved because he wants to look older to be taken more seriously, perhaps they not only have qualifications but shoot for publications that back up their suitability, perhaps he isn't too old to change his ways he just needs some guidance like you are all seeking today, perhaps that judge doesn't have a preference at all on what he enjoys to look at.

The importance of a good introduction and what to include in it.

- Thank everyone for inviting you to judge, or say it is an honour to be invited back.
- Ask the audience to raise a hand if they have not met you before, this will give you an idea how long to make your intro and in what direction to focus it.
- Tell them about your qualifications, if you have a distinction or a degree. This helps remove some pre-conceptions.
- Tell them what you do e.g. I am a commercial and editorial photographer shooting currently for 5 magazines and I specialise mainly in automotive and still life photography.
- **Tell them exactly how you are going to judge** their images this evening, what you are looking for, and how your marks may vary from your initial thoughts and why.
- **Educate them about judging...** Why do marks vary from competition to competition?

I love the word “**Competition**”

- Actually I **HATE** the word competition especially when it has to do with a club.
- I think we should change the name Competition to **CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM EVENING**.
- The point of competitions in clubs is to help the member **IMPROVE THEIR PHOTOGRAPHY**. This is not done by competing but by Constructive Criticism.

4 types of Judge, Which are you?

- Judge 1, **The “irrelevant” judge** – Hmm squirrels, I don’t like squirrels 4/10 let’s move on.
- Judge 2, **The “nice” judge** – This judge is too scared to say something negative so only says nice things.
- Judge 3, **The “well-rounded” judge** – This judge will say something positive about your image to make you feel good and will also point out areas which aren’t quite right and need improvement.
- Judge 4, **The “Darren Woolway” judge** – This judge will look at what you have done correct, look at what you have done wrong and then make suggestions which you can try in camera or in post production to improve your image.

A breath of Fresh Air

- I learnt Buzz Words
- Bokeh, Depth of Field, Fill in Flash, Fringing, Grad, Haloing, Perspective, Point of View, Chromatic Aberration, Converging Verticals, Dynamic Range, Tonal Range, Contrast, Framing, Cropping, Storyline, Follow through, Concept, Juxtaposition, barrel roll, vignette, saturation...
- Don't just learn the words, understand what they mean too!
- <http://www.whatdigitalcamera.com/what-digital-camera/specials/the-a-z-of-photography-a-6389>

Educate them about judging, “Why does the same image get 14 on one night and 18 on another?”

- 1) I will change my marking scale dependant on the number of entries e.g. on a competition with only 30-50 images I may choose to mark from 14-20 or 6.5-10 as there is enough latitude to separate the marks. On an evening when there is 80-140 images I will need a wider scale to separate the abilities so may mark from 11-20, or 4-10.
- The lowest I have ever marked is 8/20.
- 2) If the overall quality of the entries on the night is quite high then an image may score much lower in comparison to another evening when the overall quality of imagery is much lower, in which case it would score higher.
- 3) Photography is subjective, once you are past the technical ability the image becomes subjective and different judges will respond differently e.g. some judges are scared of frogs.

The importance of a good title

- I believe titles up to 10 words in length are fine.
- The title is the only communication the photographer has with the judge.
- Don't title it "The Red Box" if in the picture the most interesting thing is the old man.
- Don't title it with a Latin Name unless you want me to judge it as Natural History and not Pictorial.

How I judge and what I look for

- 1) I will look at the technical ability of the photographer of what has been achieved in camera. How has the image been lit and has it been lit well? Is the image sharp? Are there any distractions? Has the sky got detail? Has the highlights and shadows got detail? What interaction is there between photographer and subject?
- 2) Why did the photographer shoot this way? Why did they leave that negative space? How could this image be used? Is this method/finish suitable for this competition?
- 3) Post production – What are the club guidelines? Have they sufficiently removed distractions? Is their post production method suitable for the subject? Can I see the brush lines? Is there CA that could be removed? Have they over sharpened? What tonality is there? If it looks quite flat could it be improved with Dodge and Burn? These are just a few questions.
- 4) What story does the image tell or what is its intent? Does the strength of the story outweigh some of the technical abilities?
- 5) What atmosphere is created or what emotions are evoked from the viewer? Are these stronger than the technical aspects?
- 6) Now you have judged this you should have a good selection of images held back, and surprisingly they will not be of the same genre, unless it is a set subject competition. This is when personal preference will come in.
- I always ask to have a quick preview of all the images on the night, by the end of the preview I usually have a pretty good idea of what images will be held back but this is then backed up by my steps above.
- I always comment and mark directly after, this allows my comments to be inline with my marks.

Educate yourself!

- To judge better you need to try shooting stuff you don't usually shoot.
- How can you comment that something should be done differently without having first hand experience of the difficulties involved.
- Try photographing a landscape, a motor car on a race track, a bird in flight, a butterfly, an ant or a bee, a personal portrait and a conceptual portrait.
- Try using ambient light, artificial strobes and a combination of the two.
- Try lighting different surfaces such as skin and metal or reflective surfaces and see what issues you have.
- Try retouching these subjects too and perhaps give compositing a go.

What do these 3 pictures have in common?

They are all forms of **PORTRAITURE**



Commercial/Conceptual

Personal

Documentary

What is different between each of them?

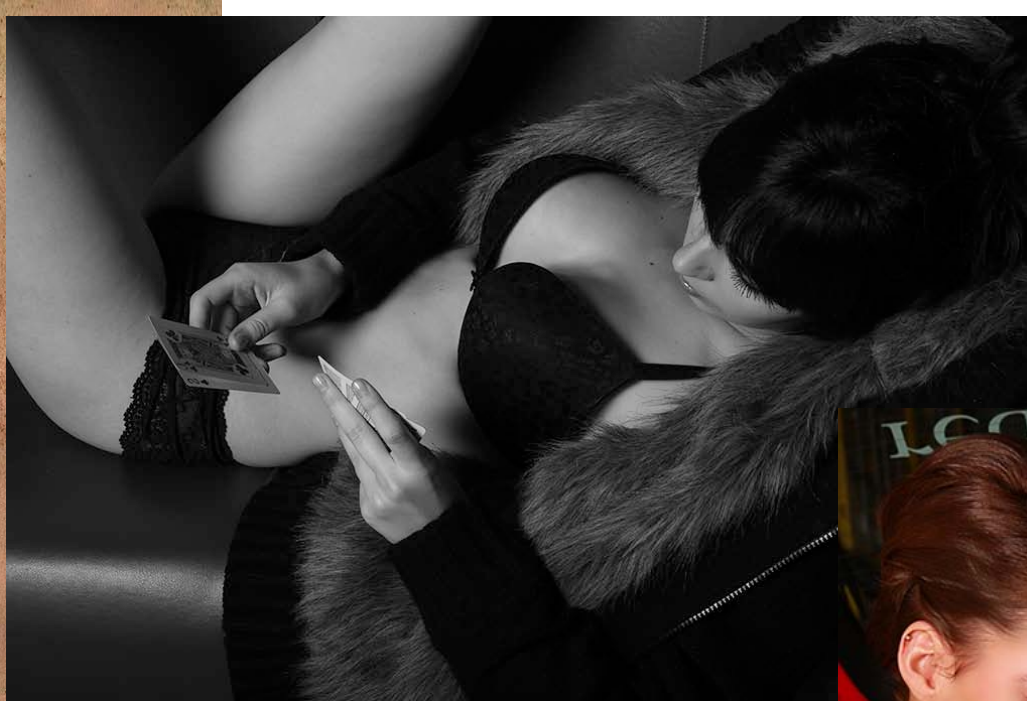
Their **STYLE**



“This is a fantastic image, really creative and well executed but this is a portrait competition and this isn’t really a portrait so would score higher in an open round”



“Technically this image is perfect but it is more like an advertisement the kind of thing you might see in a magazine so I can’t score it so high”



Common Faults



Chromatic Aberration

Common Faults



Background brighter than subject

Common Faults



Hard Light = Shiny Skin & Dark Eyes

Common Faults



OTT Skin-smoothing without replacing texture

Common Faults



Awkward and Un-natural posing

Tom Miles

Common Faults



Oversaturation/Vibrancy

Common Faults



Over Sharpening

Common Faults



Converging Verticals

Common Faults



HDR Ghosting

Common Faults



Pulling Highlights and Shadows

Common Faults

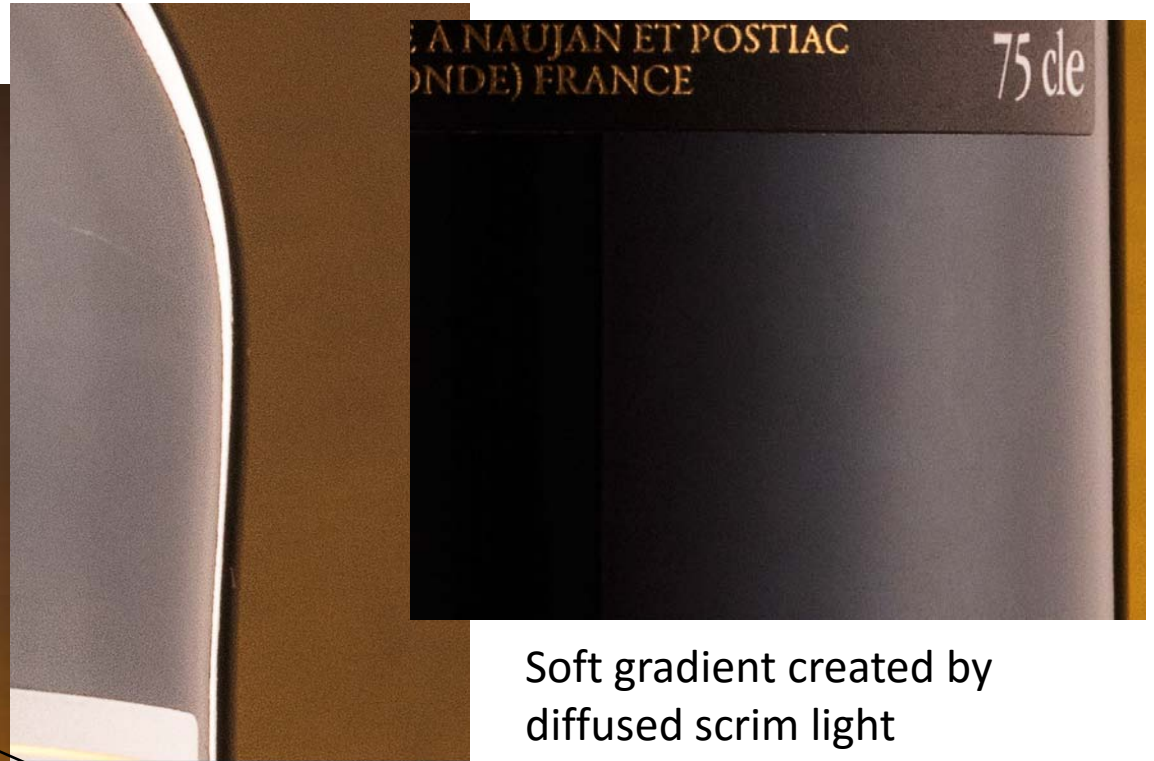


Light Modifiers

Common Faults

- HDR – Why HDR? Outline between building and sky, black splodges in-between shapes, ghosting, unnatural colours, does it need to be applied across whole image? Is there a better alternative such as layers and masking?
- Portraits – Is the lighting suitable for the subject e.g. soft light ladies and hard light men. Is there keylights in the eyes? What shape are the keylights? Has it been shot above 50mm minimum to reduce stretching. Has the skin texture been retained? Does the sitter look natural and comfortable? What does the expression tell me? Is it important to see the eyes? What kind of portrait is it? Have the eyes been over retouched?
- Landscapes – Has a tripod been used so they are sharp? Is there detail in the sky? Has a suitable shutter-speed been selected. Is the DOF suitable? Have they over-saturated the grass? Have they used any dodging and burning to emphasise the shapes of the landscape? Is the lighting optimum? How does one object interact with another, is there enough or equal gap? Do any distractions need removing?
- Natural History – Can I replicate this creature properly so it has the right amount of arms, legs and heads in the correct place? Is DOF sufficient? Can I see enough of the environment?

Recognise Techniques



Soft gradient created by diffused scrim light

Highlight on bottle by a snoot

Glow on background by background light which has gel

Reflection from polished wood

Final Thoughts

- I judge for fun
- I judge to make myself a better photographer
- I judge to meet people
- I understand everyone's views will not always match my own
- I understand sometimes I will be wrong but am amicable when enlightened
- I judge with empathy, I have been there, I know what they are thinking and feeling therefore I will try my best to understand the image from the photographers point of view
- I always ask the club for guidance e.g. do they have a preference for the minimum mark, do they have specific rules on retouching, what have they defined a set subject competition as. Work within their guidelines as it is their club.
- Try new ways of judging if you are asked such as the new way at Folkestone, whether you think it is correct or not we cannot reach an educated decision without trialling first.
- Talk to the members

“The Best Part of Judging for me is at the end of the season, at this time I receive calls from different members thanking me for the suggestions that I put forward and by following through on them they have managed to win the trophy for the year!”