



Photographically Speaking: A Deeper Look at Creating Stronger Images

David duChemin

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When looking at a photograph, too often a conversation starts—and, unfortunately, ends—with a statement such as, “I like it.” The logical next question, “Why?”, often goes unasked and unanswered. As photographers, we frequently have difficulty speaking about images because, frankly, we don’t know how to think about them. And if we don’t know how to think about a photograph and its “visual language”—how an image is constructed, how it works, and why it works—then, when we’re behind the camera, are we really making images that best communicate our vision, our original intent? Vision—crucial as it is—is not the ultimate goal of photography; expression is the goal. And to best express ourselves, it is necessary to learn and use the grammar and vocabulary of the visual language.

Photographically Speaking is about learning photography’s visual language to better speak to why and how a photograph succeeds, and in turn to consciously use that visual language in the creation of our own photographs, making us stronger photographers who are able to fully express and communicate our vision. By breaking up the visual language into two main components—“elements” make up its vocabulary, and “decisions” are its grammar—David duChemin transforms what has traditionally been esoteric and difficult subject matter into an accessible and practical discussion that photographers can immediately use to improve their craft. Elements are the “words” of the image, what we place within the frame—lines, curves, light, color, contrast. Decisions are the choices we make in assembling those elements to best express and communicate our vision—the use of framing, perspective, point of view, balance, focus, exposure.

All content within the frame has meaning, and duChemin establishes that photographers must consciously and deliberately choose the elements that go within their frame and make the decisions about how that frame is constructed and presented. In the second half of the book, duChemin applies this methodology to his own craft, as he explores the visual language in 20 of his own images, discussing how the intentional choices of elements and decisions that went into their creation contribute to their success.

Photographically Speaking: A Deeper Look at Creating Stronger Images Details

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Charles Black says

Good, but not great writing is compensated for by the excellent photographic sample and the fact he is writing on a topic that needed this book.

Barbara says

Within the Frame was such a strong book that my expectations were high for this one. First, this book needed far, far better editing. Regarding one photograph he said "there's hardly a horizontal line" and two paragraphs later, he notes, "there are plenty of horizontal lines." While I can certainly see for myself it's an error, paying \$45 for a book with as many errors as this one has is simply unacceptable. My frustration peaked at the end. I don't have the patience to go back and quote what he noted was important at the beginning, but in the conclusion he writes that whether something is an element or a decision is 'totally irrelevant.' OK, so why did he waste the time with that vehicle to teach and I waste my time trying to understand and incorporate it in working to advance my ability level? That said, I still love his photography and learned from the book. It just won't become a recommendation or a gift from me.

Lesli Cohan says

David duChemin is an incredible photographer, and this book makes you look at how one creates images and how to help make them stronger. He adds information on how he got to the end point on his work, and some really good pointers. For any level of photographer, it's a great tool and good reference.

Deigh says

Overall I think this book could use some serious editing. If you have read any of his previous books or follow the postings on his blog this book will seem like a repeat. He makes good points that all photographers should keep aware of and then instead of a simple example and a short sentence he goes on and on page after page repeating what he said at the beginning and often times things from a previous example. Very tiresome and it felt like he was padding the writing so he could get a book out of it and charge more. Sorry to be negative because I normally really like the author but this book failed to do much for me.

Simeon says

Intellectualising photography ...

This is my third book by David duChemin and I found a lot - ideas, photoes etc - repeating themselves and from quite an early point in the bookd struggled to find the added value from all those words. The first part is a [sometimes] perfunctory run through basic concepts that are found in much bigger details and better explained elsewhere (viz Michael Freeman). It is not quite clear who the target audience of this book is - the amateur, the advanced enthusiast, or the non-photographer.

Jessica Nguyen says

I don't really like the book. I scanned and skimmed most of the time as there aren't many useful things for my improvement. Or is it because of my limited ability of understanding of what the author is trying to say?

Paul Deveaux says

This is a book about how to critique photographs. Although not as extensive as other works on the subject it presents a sound methodology and vocabulary for talking about images. This is. Of meant to be the only source for photographic criticism but merely one voice that will be a guide on the journey. David talks about lens choice, point of view, light, and moment as elements that convey the photographer's vision. Written in a very approachable style the casual photographer will easily glean a great deal from this book. Conversely those that have been formally trained and more familiar with art history and the elements and principles of design may find it wanting. I for one enjoyed reading David's methodology and find it extremely useful.

Bill Bangham says

Not as good as his previous books, but still a very good read and worth perusing.

Irene B. says

The images presented in this book are useful for stimulating the photographic imagination.

Andrea Paterson says

excellent. great exercises and fascinating exploration of composition. while this is a text book style read the prose was never boring. tons of example images in full color.

Rajiv Chopra says

This is a good book, but not for one who is setting out in the world of photography for the first time. Some knowledge of photography is required to understand what he is talking about, else much of what he says will

indeed fly over the reader's head.

Having said that, there is good material in the book, to make a person think while taking photographs. Discussions around elements of composition, and thoughts around them are well thought through, and the exercises at the end of the chapters are good

I like that he analyses 20 photographs at the end of the book. This is indeed interesting indeed.

Steve says

I really like this author. This book has some great ideas for how to improve your photos. He talks about having vision and feeling as guides to what you shoot. He also covers techniques that are just right for what I am interested in learning. I renewed it twice until I had to return it to the library.

Natasha says

I learned a lot from this book about taking great photos. I think that as a result of reading this book my photos will get better because I will be more mindful of the meaning and story I am trying to express and convey w/my photos as opposed to just shooting something because I think it looks cool. I will pay more attention to the aspects of a scene and how the lighting, lines, POV and balance can help or hurt what I want to say with my pictures. The author and photographer also has many amazing photos that he shares in this book, so along w/getting to read and learn there is also a large variety of photos to enjoy that were taken from around the world. I would recommend to those that have an interest in the art of photography!

Sean says

If you've read The Photographer's Eye: Composition and Design for Better Digital Photos by Michael Freeman, you will probably not find too much more here that will improve your composition skills. If you only want to read one book on composition I'd go with Freeman's volume.

If you want a general intro to photography plus some composition tips this is an ok book. But for anyone with more working knowledge of photography this book is highly skippable.

Osner says

I wouldn't pay \$45 for it because this book is more words than facts. I think it's too fat for teaching you how to speak through a photography and I'm no saying that it doesn't have good points but I think I needs deeper information.
