

Traverse Area Camera Club

WHERE PEOPLE CLICK



Hi Members,

These are the minutes from TACC Discussion Group session of November 10. The topic was Night Photography.

FYI, Mary MacDowell was out of town and not able to attend this meeting so I am afraid you are stuck with my recollections as opposed to the great notes Mary takes ;-)

A number of members brought in samples of night photographs that they had taken. For each photo, the photographer told us how the image was captured (usually including the camera, lens and settings). A variety of subjects were presented. While settings and techniques vary depending on the subject, there are a few common considerations for most night shots. These include:

- 1) In most cases a tripod provides much better results since the exposures are usually relatively long (greater than small fractions of a second)
- 2) It is best to use manual settings at night. If you let the camera pick the settings the photo will not look like a night shot since the camera will try set the exposure assuming you are taking a daylight shot - the resulting photo will be too light. It is also important to experiment with your settings. At a minimum take bracketed exposures, but ideally you should review each shot after it is taken, make any required adjustments, and take another shot. Repeat until you are happy with the results.
- 3) Since long exposures are often required, it is useful to have a remote shutter. Many cameras will only let you set exposure times up to 30 seconds. For

longer exposures it is helpful to have a remote shutter that allows you to specify the exposure time from seconds to many minutes or even hours.

4) In some scenarios you may want to take multiple exposures in the same shot. For example, if you are shooting fireworks and want to get several bursts in the same shot. A good way to do this is to set a relatively long exposure time (say 30 seconds), but cover the lens with a piece of cardboard between bursts. This way your overall effective exposure time can be much less than 30 seconds. This will keep the background dark but it will still let you get several firework explosions in the same image.

Here are a couple more considerations that we did not talk about at the meeting, but they may be useful for those new to night photography

5) If you are taking shots of stars at night, be aware that star trails will appear even with modestly long exposures. There is a useful rule of thumb about predicting when star trails will appear. Star trails will show up if the exposure time in seconds is longer than 600 divided by the lens focal length. For example, with a 50mm lens, star trails will appear with exposure longer than 12 seconds (this rule applies for any aperture and ISO setting).

6) If you want to take a long exposure, you can first take a short test exposure with a higher ISO setting. The test exposure will likely be quite noisy, but it will give you a good rendition of the composition and exposure you can expect with the long exposure. You can do the test exposure by shortening the exposure time by the same number of stops as you increase the ISO setting. If you don't want to figure this out exactly, it turns out that shooting for 1 second at ISO 6400 gives about the same exposure as 1 minute at ISO 100 (and 2 seconds is like 2 minutes, etc.).

7) Many newer cameras can link via wifi to tablets like iPads. This can be very helpful in setting up and evaluating night shots. I use this approach when I am shooting fireworks since viewing the images on the iPad screen is a lot easier than trying to view them on the camera's small display. With many systems you can

also control the camera's focus and other settings from the tablet, including using the tablet as a remote shutter control.

Of course there are many resources on the internet about all kinds of night shooting. Just Google "night photography" to get more links that you could ever look at. There are also real books (remember them?) devoted to night shooting. I have three in my library that I have acquired over the years and still use as references. Here are the titles and authors:

"Night Photography - From Snapshots to Great Shots" by Gabriel Biderman: This is a good, basic overview of night photography equipment and techniques for a variety of scenarios. It also includes some material on Lightroom post processing of night shots.

"Night Photography" by Lance Keimig: Another overview book, but with more of a fine art focus. It also has a nice section on the history of night photography.

"Photography - Night Sky" by Jennifer Wu and James Martin: All about shooting the moon, stars, and celestial phenomena. Like the Keimig book, it has a fine art emphasis.

If anyone would like to borrow one of these books from me, send me an email and I will bring it to an upcoming program meeting or discussion group.

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