



Clouds

A Presentation Prepared by Marc du Plessis
On behalf of Gansbaai Photography Club
November 2020

Clouds

The Brief:

This theme is open to the photographers interpretation of what they see and want to present. These photo's can be clouds taken with long exposure at night/moving clouds/shapes in clouds/colourful clouds - just about anything that depicts the beauty of clouds (Cloudscapes).

Post editing on the highlights and shadows/blacks and whites/sharpness and noise, is recommended.



Clouds

How to Photograph clouds

Clouds are quite often the “glue” in land and seascapes, it’s the one component that adds volume, emotion and drama and quite often the element most ignored or the least likely to be a focal point of the image.

Clouds on their own are going to be a hard image to keep the viewers attention but not impossible, it is recommended to have other elements in the cloud photography image but for this brief the cloud/clouds need to be the focal point.



Clouds

.. clouds can be so beautiful, that they could become the main element of composition in your photographs.

Clouds as we know have many shapes and forms and very seldom, if ever, take the same shape.

Here are a few TIPS to assist in taking cloud photos:

1. Weather Conditions

Don't wait for a sunny day to take cloud photos or any photos for that matter, the best images can be found when the conditions are stormy and less than perfect.

2. Exposure Length

Clouds often move quite fast, to slow your camera's shutter down, can give your foreground clarity and the sky a silky look. For this theme be careful to not include too much foreground and keep your clouds as the focal point - this is the challenge.

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2. Exposure Length (continued)

- However, if you want to bring out the clouds as separate elements, then it is best to use shorter exposure times.
- There is no magic formula for the shutter speed, as it all depends on what you are trying to do and how dark the scene is, so take a shot and zoom in to see if you are blurring the clouds or not.
- Obviously, if you are dealing with a low light situation and long exposure times, you will need to use a tripod.



Clouds

3. Composition

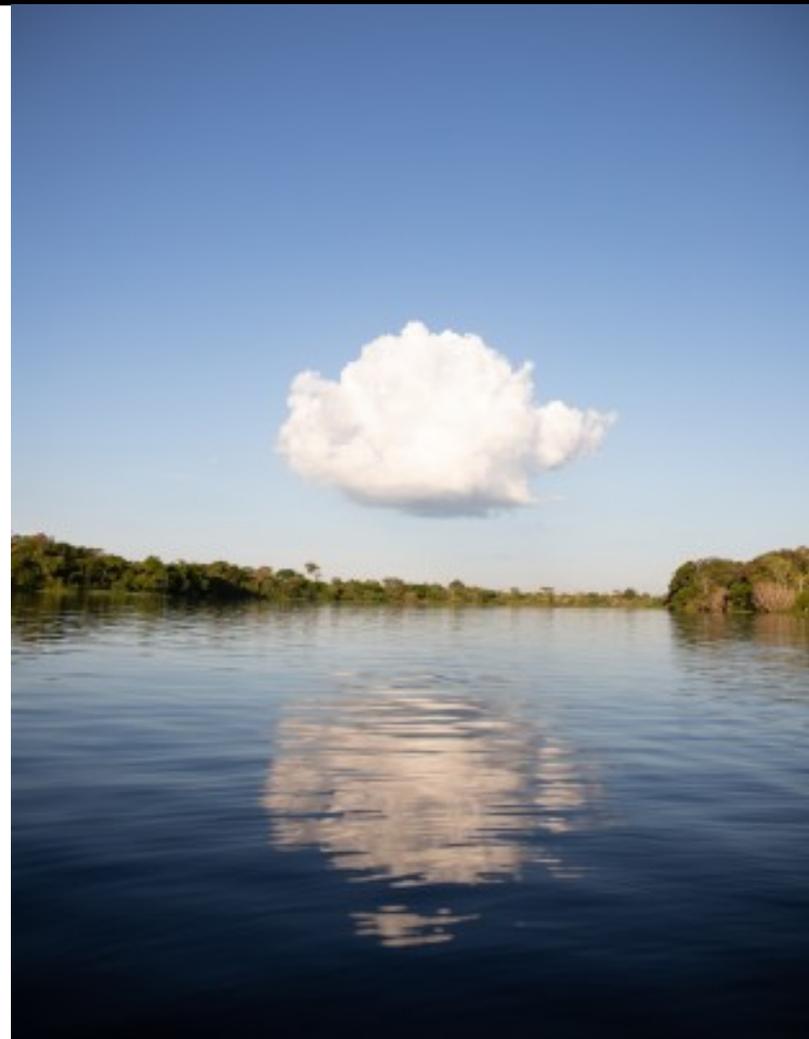
- Clouds form in such a way that they might look interesting and engaging on their own.
- However, despite the temptation to capture just the clouds, try including some foreground elements to the scene.
- While clouds certainly can be the key element of the scene (and for this theme they need to be), they often serve better as backdrops instead.
- We tend to look at them as sky “fillers”, so before resorting to capturing them alone, look around and try to include something interesting.
- And if you have absolutely nothing around you and you are looking at an empty field, even including a very small portion of that field will often make a difference and give the scene a scale.



Clouds

3. **Composition** (continued)

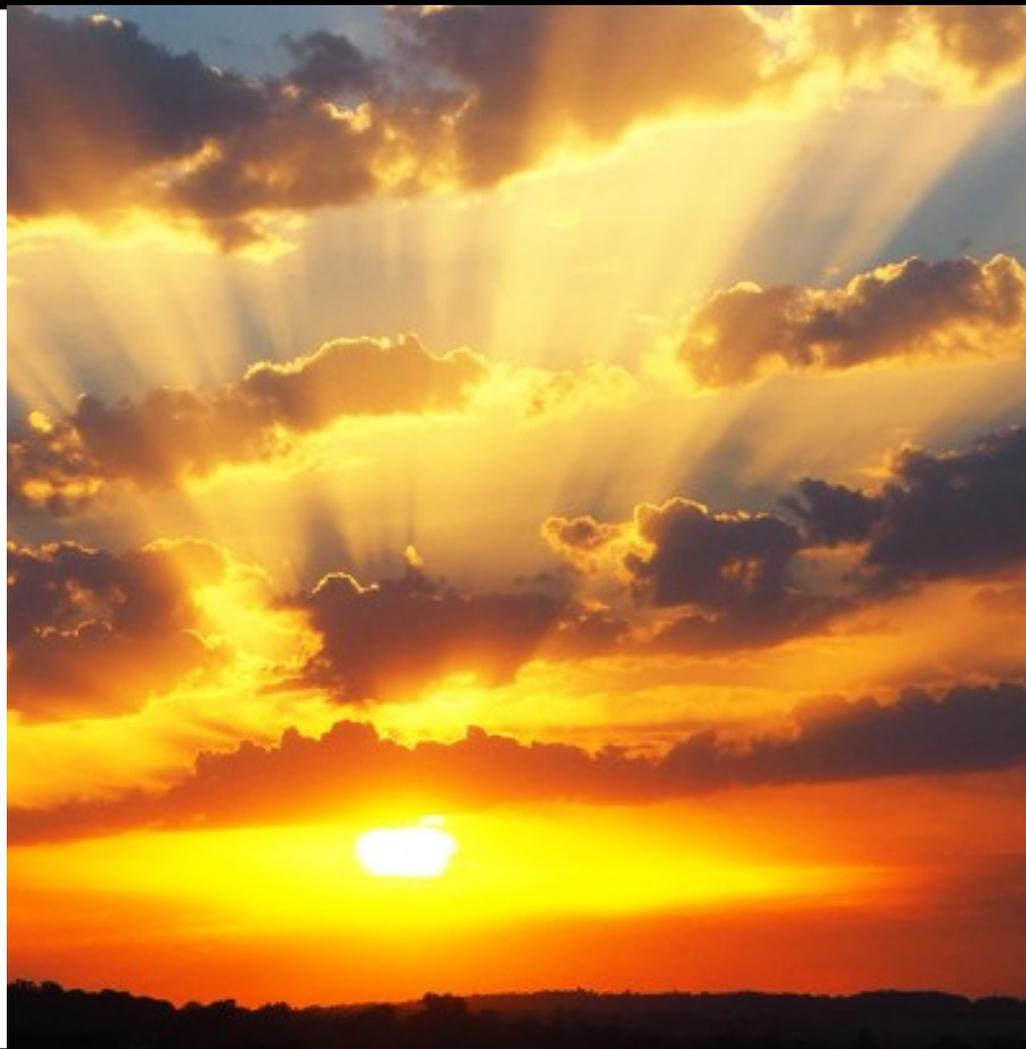
- When the clouds are patchy and separated, it is important to properly frame your shot so that you are not chopping anything off.
- If there is a big patch of clouds, try to fit it in your scene without cutting it – zoom out or step back,
- Give a scene some “breathing” space.
- Try not to place those patchy clouds too close to the edge of the frame.



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4. Post-Processing

- Photographing clouds does not end with your camera – you can make clouds appear far more dramatic if you are willing to put some time in post-processing your shots.
- If you are struggling to make your cloudscape / landscape photographs appear more interesting, you probably need post-processing!
- While there are many ways to enhance clouds in your photographs, you can increase the drama of the scene and make clouds “pop” by working the highlights, shadows and contrasts in Lightroom or similar post software.

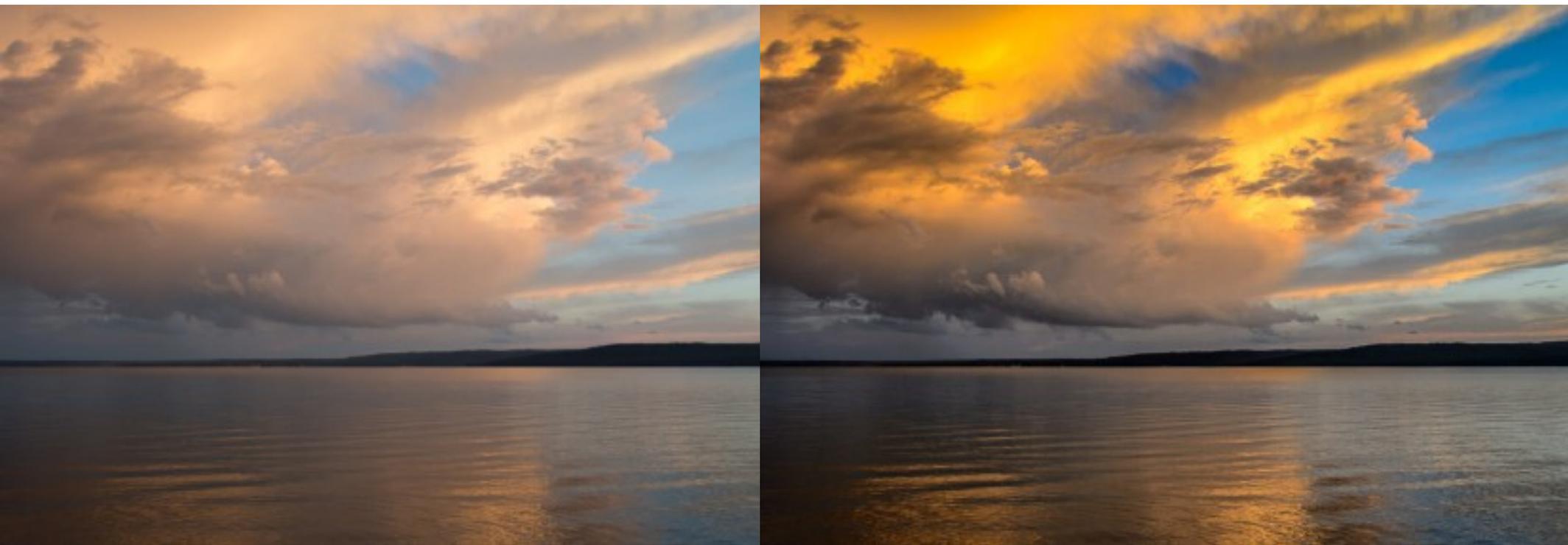


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4. **Post-Processing** (continued)

As you can see, the image looks pretty flat. A hint of colour is there in the clouds and there is some definition, but not enough to make an impact.

Now there is much more definition, colours and contrast, making the scene appear more alive. The best part is that it only took very little to make these adjustments! The graduated filter in Lightroom was used. Contrast, Clarity and Saturation was added to the clouds. The “Clarity” setting is the key component here.



Clouds

Some General Tips on Cloud Photography

- Make sure that you shoot more of the sky than you need. It is easy to crop in later if necessary.
- Slightly underexpose the image. The sky is notoriously bright during the day. Overexposed clouds tend to look goofy. You can always fix up the exposure later in post processing.
- Get creative, clouds are very abstract try interesting things with them. Long exposure times.
- Watch out for things in the sky. While they can always be removed later it is annoying when a bird or plane is in the middle of your frame.
- Even though the sky is almost always interesting to a degree, sometimes you want to make it that much more compelling. This can easily be done in Photoshop.



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Credits:

<https://photographylife.com/landscapes/how-to-photograph-clouds>

<https://digital-photography-school.com/cloud-photography/>

Assorted Google Images

