

# Bokeh

The Art and Life of Photography

Volume 53

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# A Passion That Keeps Growing

Jon Blake

*Interview by Harris Lim*



*"For Whom the Bells Toll" : A lot of planning went into this shot and it looks nothing like it was planned. However, all things being equal I'm not complaining. The Maroon Bells is a special place and with a clear sky, a bit of moonlight, fresh fallen snow, and the right amount of golden Aspens it's magical. Nikon D800, 15 sec, f/1.4, ISO 800 © Jon Blake Photography, LLC*



Jon Blake

*Landscape Photography*





*"After the Storm" : On this morning I drove to Evergreen to shoot the recent snow fall. Our first stop was along Bear Creek and the recent 4 foot snow fall was picture perfect in the trees. Nikon D800, 1.6 sec, f/8.0, ISO 100 © Jon Blake Photography, LLC*

## About Jon Blake

My approach to landscape photography is a process. I immerse myself into a landscape scene and wait for the light to be perfect as time passes through. My hope is to present images which transport you – as though you were there with me when captured. I want my work to trigger all of your senses so that you not only see the scene, but are transformed into it; that you can hear the splash, smell the mud, feel the sting of cold on your face and taste the pollen on the back of your throat. If I've brought you along with me into another place, I've successfully done my job.

My love for photography began when my best friend and I took a photography course in middle school. It catalyzed a passion that I maintain to this day. I love learning new techniques and methods to express my creativity in my images; and I'm thrilled to share them with you. I'm continually amazed

at how well my photographs are received, and that positivity energizes my passion all over again.

Every photo I share with you has a story of its origin. Although you weren't there with me for the journey, my hope is that you'll feel transported back to the moment when it was captured. Thanks for considering my work, and for supporting the arts!

## Q&A Interview With Jon Blake

Q. How did you get into photography?

A. There are really two answers to this question, as there was a long hiatus between two separate endeavors. I was first exposed to photography when I was about 13; my best friend and I took a photography class in middle school as a "blow off" course. It turned out that I loved being behind a camera. The class taught me the mechanics of camera operation and darkroom techniques which lit a fire in me and before



the year was done I had a dark room in my basement and my first camera: an Argus C3. This portion of the journey continued until I was about 25 or so. By this time I was shooting a Nikon F with a bunch of lenses and about every accessory made. My wife and I would go on vacations and I would lug the bag with me for "The Shot", but it became a burden carrying everything around and worrying about it when I left it in my

the forum. So I bought a used Canon 30D on Craigslist, which marks the beginning of my second endeavor. It was like the flood gates reopened and all of the suppressed creativity and knowledge poured back into (and out of) me. Once those gates opened I was once again like a man possessed and haven't looked back since.



*"Dancing in the Fog" : My first sale! The Miller house guards the entrance to the Elk Refuge just outside of the Jackson, WY. On this morning the Tetons peak over the dancing fog. Canon EOS 30D, 1/6 sec, f/22.0, ISO 100 © Jon Blake Photography, LLC*

room. We bought my wife a small point and shoot, which soon became the family's camera and I sold all my gear which is the end of the first endeavor.

The second story begins about 20 years later when I bought a used a Mini Cooper, joined a Mini forum and found they had monthly photo contests which I took part in. For the first couple of months I shot with the family's (updated) PnS, which was woefully under equipped as compared to the folks on

Q. What was the journey like transitioning from being a photography enthusiast to a photography professional?

A. Slow. In fact I consider myself still transitioning. There is a constant battle for my time between business needs and the passion of creating. One day maybe I'll grow up, but until then I'm still having fun! The actual moment when I sold my first photo I was on a family vacation to Jackson Hole. I was shooting the Miller House in the National Elk Refuge Road at sunrise. Several



people use this road to run, walk and bike, and I was passed by them all. One of them, an older gentleman, stopped on his way back and we began talking. He told me that he was the caretaker of the Miller House for 35 years and had summered in Jackson every year since he was a boy. In all his time here he'd never once seen the fog pressed up against the butte behind the house such as it was, and if my photo came out he wanted to buy a copy. It did, and he did about a month later.

Q. Were there people who didn't believe in your passion or photography endeavors?

A. Not really, or at least not that I was aware of.

Q. Did you have mentors or any formal education in photography?

A. As I mentioned above, I began photography in middle school and was formally educated from the go. In my second (photography) life, I became friends with a couple local landscape photographers who

were kind enough to take me under their wings and show me what landscape shooting is all about. I've found that the photography community is exceptionally outgoing and friendly. Just about everyone I run into has a pay it forward attitude, which I've adopted and continue to share with everyone who's interested.

Q. How did you start "Jon Blake Photography"?

A. I originally wanted to come up with a creative name, which I assume most of us want to do, something with a cute play on words or a hook. After a couple weeks of finding everything I could think of was already taken, I decided to use my name as so many others do. But I'm ok with it. It's good for marketing.

Q. What makes your business unique?

A. I'm still working on this one. I think that as a photographer if you can find a niche you have a better ability to separate yourself from the masses. My passion is landscape

*"Goblet of Fire" : The sky burned bright and fiery on this winter morning as we scrambled up the switchbacks. We were late because we followed the wrong footprints in the snow and ended up back in the parking lot before we realized we'd messed up. Note to self, don't blindly follow the footprints. Fortunately, we were able to catch the second half of the sunrise. © Jon Blake Photography, LLC*







*"Needles in a Haystack" : The Needles mountain range over Molas Lake at night, complete with campfire. There may not be a nicer place to pitch a tent in all the world. Nikon D800, 241 sec, f/2.8, ISO 100 © Jon Blake Photography, LLC*

photography, which is about as unique as a blue sky. I try my best to separate myself from the masses by doing what I do as best as I can and never believing that I'm at the top of my game. I'm a firm believer that the answer lies in processing and am always looking to find a new way to present my work, which hopefully one day will find the niche I'm looking for.

Q. How did you grow your business back then?

A. I've been selling my photography 5 years, maybe a little more. I began hanging in restaurants where you get to show your work for a month or two. I moved into the Grace Gallery in the Denver Arts District about 3 years ago and still call it home, though I do hang in other business establishments as well.

Q. Were there any specific marketing strategies that have worked well for you?

A. This is a tough one and I still struggle with this. I'm continually trying to learn more

marketing strategies both old school techniques and new social media opportunities. The market is so flooded with photographers and equipment is so advanced that it's very hard to separate yourself from the masses. Ask me again in 5 years and let's see if my answer can be updated.

Q. Have you done any commercial work, and if so how did those opportunities come up?

A. In addition to various companies which have contacted me about using my images for commercial endeavors, I've been asked to shoot for different companies on a different occasions. In some cases it was through a friend of a friend and in others it was by word-of-mouth or the internet. Most recently, my hair stylist just remodeled her salon and asked me to put together a collage for her of historic buildings in her city. I'll probably put a page of this type of work on my website and possibly advertise on social media offering this type of work, but haven't done so yet.



Q. What do you do to keep yourself inspired?

A. Oh that's easy. A new piece of equipment can do it. Even non-photography related items like snow shoes or new tires. Seeing a fellow photographer's version of a shot I need to take. I have a lot of photographer friends and seeing them post something spectacular never ceases to make me want to get out and produce. Seeing a beautiful sunrise or sunset does it every time.

Q. Describe your photographic style and has it changed over the years?

A. I'm sure my style has changed over the years, but it's hard to quantify for you. Other than a few shots which stick in my mind from the first go round little remains from my first endeavor, so I'll answer this based on recent history. As a landscape shooter I try to put myself in the middle of nowhere, immersed in nature's beauty, in one of a kind conditions. If I can do that successfully, my goal is to capture that moment as



*"Paintbrush" : I was lucky enough to spend a weekend in Salida, CO a couple weeks ago. Having never been there before I was really taken in with the town and landscape. This shot is from a field nearby where we were staying. The dismal skies of the afternoon cleared minutes before sunset and turned into a fantastic show of color, complimenting the wildflower foreground. In the background Mt Princeton, Mt Antero and the edge of Mt White soak in the last of the sun's rays. Nikon D800, 15 sec, f/20.0, ISO 100 © Jon Blake Photography, LLC*

Q. Who do you look up to?

A. I look up to all those folks who've made it big in this business. They've been able to figure out how to rise up above the masses leaving hope for those of us who haven't made it out yet. I have many friends who inspire me all the time. Social media is wonderful for this. I have a bunch of friends and acquaintances who've been able to take their game to the next level with sponsors and travel. That's where I ultimately would like to see myself.

witnessed. My ability to do that continues to morph as technology and techniques grow, so I feel as though I'm in the middle of my adventure. For example, one of my more recent accomplishments (over the last several years) is shooting night landscapes, which is becoming easier and easier as camera technology continues to grow. You asked before about keeping inspired. One way is to change my style. Choosing a new way to present is one way to keep my inspiration, but also leads to a new style of presentation.



Q. What are some of your favorite photography related websites?

A. FB has become the latest trend in social media and I use it more than any other for keeping up with my photography colleagues and advertising, but POTN (photography-on-the.net) is probably my favorite photography website. It's an enormous resource of many thousands of photographers with knowledge of every aspect of photography. I've been a member for many years and it's my go to site with any questions about anything photography, critiques on my photography, or looking at what others are doing.

Q. What is the most rewarding part of your job?

A. I find many things rewarding about photography. Sometimes conditions are such that you don't know how a photograph is going to turn out until you're done with it, and occasionally some of those really shine when you finish polishing them up. When I leave the house on an overnight expedition and the weather conditions are forecasted poor only to get rewarded with overwhelming conditions. Here in Denver we have monthly First Friday Art Walks where the public comes to the art district and

gallery in masses. I get to meet many folks and watch them as they come into the gallery and are exposed to my photography for the first time. Every now and then I get to see someone round the corner and gaze at my work for the first time and watch as they are deeply moved by my work. That is always a great ego boost!

Q. What is the most difficult part of your job and how do you deal with it?

A. I've had several occasions where I missed a shot for various reasons. Those are always very tough to deal with. No memory card, dead battery, etc. Sometimes getting into the right position is challenging and life threatening. Slow sales also ranks up there too.

Q. Have you ever said no to a job assignment, and if so why?

A. This is not really applicable to the type of photography I shoot, but I can see it happening. Money is always at issue whether a person is negotiating a print or your service. A potential buyer has a budget and I have minimum expectations; if those don't align then we don't have a deal. I've been approached many times with offers

*"Silver Jack Sunrise" : A full day of work, First Friday in the Gallery, 8 hour drive and 2 hour nap were the predecessor to this sunrise shot of Silver Jack Reservoir last fall. It seems well worth it to me! Nikon D800, 1/25 sec, f/8.0, ISO 100 © Jon Blake Photography, LLC*







*"True or False" : False Kiva is one of the best kept secrets in Canyonlands. It's legal to go there, but due to its unadvertised and poorly documented route it is very challenging to locate. Unless you have going with someone who's been, you may be in for a long walk. Nikon D800, 1/13 sec, f/8.0, ISO 100 © Jon Blake Photography, LLC*

less than I feel is minimum. I'll cut anyone a deal, but am not interested in giving things away.

Q. What are some of the greatest hurdles you've faced and how did you overcome them?

A. I feel like my biggest hurdles are yet to come. When I began to get serious about photography my first big goal was to be good enough to sell my work in a gallery in the arts district. Now that I've been hanging there for a few years I'm ready to up my game. I need to branch out and diversify. I consider reaching the point where I can live off my sales the biggest hurdle of all.

I've had some very difficult conditions or subjects to shoot and have had to get very creative in both shooting and processing. My most difficult shots to process so far was a night time panorama called Cast Away, which is a 6 shot x 2 row panorama with each camera setup consisting of 8 individual

shots. That's almost 100 separate exposures that went into the one scene, which took me almost a week to put together. The worst part was up until it was complete I didn't know if the effort was going to work out or just be a learning experience.

Q. What are the top 5 things that you attribute to your current success?

A. Perseverance, luck, paying things forward, networking, and enjoying every moment of what I do.

Q. What are the 3 most important areas of your business right now?

A. The most important areas of my business are the ones I'm weakest at and need to work on the most at any given time. Marketing is a constant effort and fought on many fronts, which require attention 24/7. Finding new ways to get my work seen is the forefront of my business. Of course continually improving my capability is always one of my most important goals.



Q. What initiatives are you working on to improve those 3 areas?

A. I try to read up and watch videos on whatever void I'm wanting to fill. It's a continuous process. Unfortunately, life continues to get in the way and I'm seemingly in perpetual catch up mode.

Q. How important is having goals to you and what are some that you have at the moment?

A. I hope that one day I'm able to be featured in galleries around the country and be a household name in the business. But

Q. What equipment do you use?

A. Right now I'm in the Nikon camp, though I began with Canon. It amazes me how photographers can have so much loyalty to the brand of camera they use, to the point where they will be abrasive and hurtful defending their choice. These things are tools and the better the tool you use the more you can accomplish all things. Of course how you define better is personal and different for each of us depending on how you're using it. That said, changing platforms is not easy and takes a lot of patience and effort....not to mention money.



*"Twist and Shout" : The Colorado National Monument: A remarkable part of the country and the turning point when heading west where the land begins to turn from the rocky mountains of Colorado to the red rock formations of Arizona. Nikon D800, 1/8sec, f/20.0, ISO 100 © Jon Blake Photography, LLC*

with that said, this is more about the journey than the destination. It's far more important to me that I love what I'm doing than to be recognized for doing it.

Q. How important is networking in your specific photography niche?

A. The jury is still out on this one. I'm not a good networker. It's just not in my DNA like it is in others. Time will tell what impact this has on my capacity to excel.

Q. What do you recommend to someone getting started in the photography business?

A. Find a niche, love what you do and go for it with all the passion you have to offer.

The main reason I'm currently using Nikon is the Sony sensor is superior to the other choices for signal to noise ratio, which translates to better night landscape performance. All that means is I can produce larger prints with less effort by using Nikon right now as compared to Canon. When I chose Nikon, Sony wasn't as good an option but now they may be a better choice. I'm getting close to upgrading my gear again and we'll see where I end up. A lot of my Nikon friends are switching to Sony, so we'll see.

Currently in my bag is a Nikon D800, Rokinon 14mm 2.8, Rokinon 24mm 1.4,



Nikon 50mm 1.4, Nikon 24-70 2.8 and Nikon 70-200mm 2.8. I also have a bunch of accessories like a Nikon 2X III, Lee Filter kit, Gitzo Tripod, knock off intervalometer, etc. I'm also in the process of buying a Sigma 20mm 1.4, which may replace both Rokinons.

Q. How do you plan and setup for a shoot?

A. First, let me say that as a landscape photographer there are things which you can control and things you can't, so the planning which goes into a shot goes only so far. You have to be able to change gears in the field and be ready for the unexpected. I personally have a rule of thumb I have named the 10% rule, which is 10% of the time things will go as planned and the rest is adaptation to the conditions. Going into a shoot I account for everything I can. If I'm shooting a night shot, I know where and when the night sky will be specifically. Where's the Milky Way, where and how big (in percent) is the moon and relative to the subject foreground and shot location. Hopefully, I've been to the location before

and know exactly where I need to be, which is especially important at night where you often don't have the ability to scope out locations in the dark. Fortunately, most of these issues can be planned from my computer and phone with various applications and programs. Unfortunately, weather is still mostly unpredictable and more often than not differs from that forecasted. As a landscape photographer, we want clouds and structured sky, but not so much that it kills the shot.

Q. What type of post processing do you do?

A. I'm a bit surprised that you only have one question on processing as I believe it's the most important aspect of professional photography, perhaps more important than the shot itself, and what separates the men from the boys. No matter your specific photography niche, you need to present your material at its best and great processing is what this takes. Unfortunately, the answer to your question is different for every photo and therefore hard to answer. While nearly every photo has some similar techniques applied

*"Whales Mouth" : Backlight icicles hang from within a cave to give the impression of a whale's mouth closing on its victim, while a full moon lights the outside escape to freedom. Nikon D800, 25 sec, f/4.0, ISO 200 © Jon Blake Photography, LLC*







*"The Calm After the Storm" : I took my first trip to 11 Mile Reservoir last week on one of those spring days where you go through a year's worth of weather in about 5 minutes. I literally drove and walked through rain, snow, sleet, squalls, calm, sun, fog, wind, and 40 degree temp shifts. In other words a perfect day to head into the mountains! Nikon D800, 1/160 sec, f/14.0, ISO 100 © Jon Blake Photography, LLC*

such as basic RAW adjustments, different types of photos required different processing techniques. The process for night shots differs vastly from sunrise/sunsets for example. Night shots are all about capturing the most light possible from the stars and foreground vs sunrise/sunset which often involve exposure blending to counter the large differences between light and shadow.

Q. Do you see any trends developing in your field of photography?

A. It seems that the industry is becoming more and more challenging as technology continues to grow. It's becoming easier for the masses to own and use a camera and produce great images. The most challenging part of being a landscape photographer involves being in the right place at the right time. With the numbers of photographers out there increasing exponentially the ability to capture images above the masses is increasing in difficulty. In addition, everyone is using social media to promote their work,

which is also a saturated market. It's very challenging to separate yourself from the masses.

Q. What can we expect to see from you in the future?

A. I said earlier, who knows what the future holds. I'm constantly trying to find new ways to separate myself from the masses. I've toyed with the idea of running workshops, starting a blog, etc. This year my focus is to find new places to show my photography and increase sales.

Q. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

A. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss my work and insights.

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To see more of Jon's work or to contact him click on the following links.

[Website](#)

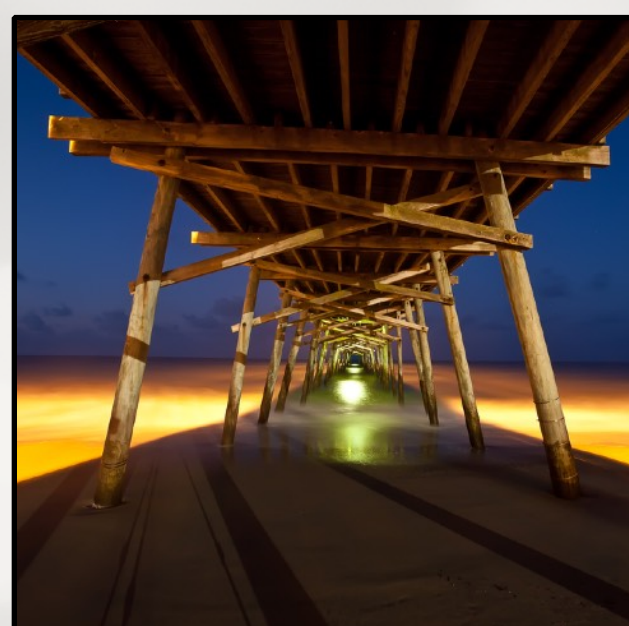
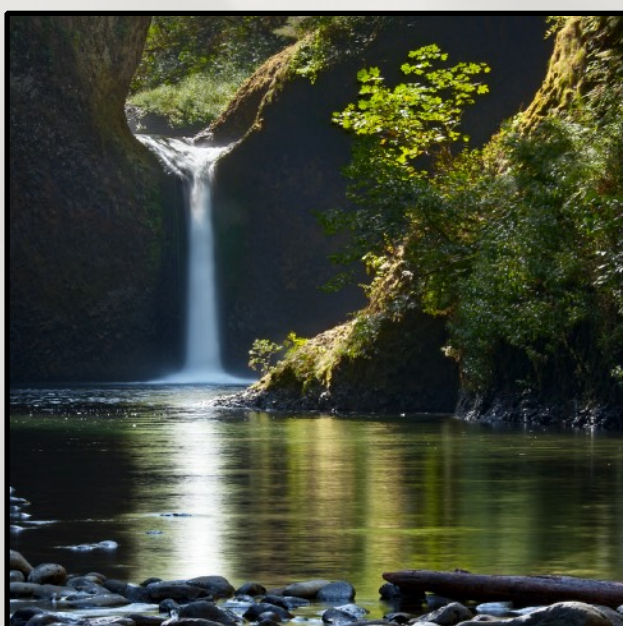
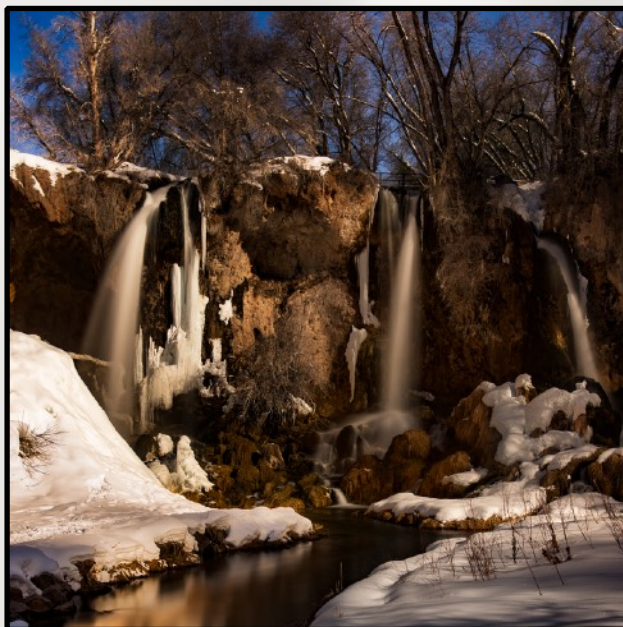
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# Image Gallery: Tap to Enlarge







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"Converging Elements" : Mountains....check. Waterfront.....check. Peak foliage.....check. Sunset sky.....check. Yup, this scene has just about everything you could want in a landscape photograph. The only thing I can think of that's missing is the pink elephant!  
© Jon Blake Photography, LLC





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"The Edge of Time" : Trail Ridge Road in Rocky Mountain National Park is the highest continuous paved road in the country and home to many amazing views along its 40 miles. From this vantage (left to right) Long's Peak, Stones Peak, and Terra Tomah Mountain adorn the foreground underneath the edge of the heavens. The steep ridge in front of us drops down 2000' to the big Thompson River making up Forest Canyon.

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"Drifting Through the Shades" : Woods Lake is a little known sliver of paradise in the Mount Wilson Wilderness and it's easy to see why. Stunning views of the surrounding mountains and fantastic fishing and boating opportunities.  
© Jon Blake Photography, LLC





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"Bonfire of the Stars" : The Milky poses behind the perfect foreground of Lake Irene in Rocky Mountain National Park. A crystal clear night which had me spell bound to how clean the air was and to this date I have never seen the stars look so vibrant and clear.

© Jon Blake Photography, LLC





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"Chutes and Roots" : Rifle Falls is a beautiful Colorado Waterfall, especially when presented in winter and lit up by the cresting moonlight.  
© Jon Blake Photography, LLC





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"Rock Lobster" : Cathedral Rock may be the most photographed land form in the photogenic state of Arizona, with good reason. Views like this one are seemingly around every bend. Note to self, spend more time in this treasure chest.

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"Light Show" : I met a nice couple up at Delicate Arch who hung around with us after it got dark. Tyler got a crash course in night shooting, but Neven was kind enough to head down to the arch and light paint for us while we hung out on the top of the rim and shot. Thanks Neven!

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"Whispering Flows" : One of Oregon's most popular hiking destinations, Punchbowl Falls is about a 2 mile easy hike in the Columbia River Gorge. The biggest challenge to shooting this location is getting a shot without people in it.

© Jon Blake Photography, LLC





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"Pier Pressure" : The underbelly of the Bogue Pier at 5 AM has to be the best view of this marvelous structure seen to date. The lights from the top of the pier light up the waves, but the long exposure gives a ghostly feel.  
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