Start a Photography Project for the New Year

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2017 is here – so what better time to set yourself some new photo challenges for the New Year? If you're short on inspiration, try our ideas for size.

Time-based projects

365 days

This is a hardy perennial – take a photograph every day for a whole year. To keep it fresh and interesting, vary what you shoot, from landscapes to street scenes, portraits to details, pets to abstracts. To keep you focused, pledge to upload each day's image to social media, so you build up a gallery of your work. Not only will it be great to get feedback, but you'll also be able to see at a glance how you improve over the year with so much practice.

52 weeks

This is similar, but you take one image a week instead. You might choose to have a different theme each week or month, perhaps tied in with the season. You'll still get to track your progress over the year, but you don't have to commit quite as much time to it, so if you're a

busy person, this could be perfect for you.

1 day

Pick a particular day, and make an image every hour between getting up and going to bed. This is ideal for a holiday or weekend away, but if your place of work is amenable it could also be a great project for a weekday, too, capturing your journey to and from work, and what goes on in between, as your surroundings and light situations change.

Calendars

Why not use some of your time images to create a calendar for next Christmas? All you need is 12 of your best images from your selection, and there are plenty of online companies which can then turn them into professional-looking calendars for you.

Subject-based projects

1 thing

How about focusing on one particular object for a year? This could be a local tree or landscape, your street, a plant, someone in your life, your pet, a view on your way to work, even your dinner… the possibilities are endless. You could even turn the series of pictures into a time-lapse sequence if you shoot them from the same position with the same lens.

A-Z

Look out for either images of letters of the alphabet, or items that resemble them, such as iron railings, tree branches and so on. You could do this in a day walking round where you live, and the beauty of it is that it will help you develop a more creative eye.

Colour

Concentrate on just one colour, for a project that can last as long as you want it to. You can choose any subject; just keep to the same colour. You can run this project on its own or as part of one of your other projects.

Yourself

Take a self-portrait for a set period – this could be every day, once a week, once a month. You could document just your face, or take a full-length to show what you're wearing. This can be

an extremely interesting project as it will give you the chance to observe yourself and how you change over time – the imaging equivalent of a diary.

Location

Your home, your street, your village, town or city, where you work… build up a record in different lighting, different seasons, using different lenses. It will really open your eyes to the photo opportunities on your doorstep.

Photo road trip

Take the previous idea one step further; plan a photo holiday where it's all about what you want to shoot. This might be a couple of days or a couple of weeks, but the key thing is that it's all about imaging. You might do it on your own, or with a supportive family member or friend, or you could book onto a photo workshop. However you do it, it will be a great opportunity to really indulge your photography and push your creativity.

Technique projects

Go manual

If you've not yet ventured further than program or aperture/shutter priority, set yourself the challenge of going manual, where the focus, shutter speed and aperture choices are down to you – giving you complete control over your imaging. It's a great way to explore your creativity. We'd strongly advise shooting manual images in RAW (NEF), as this gives you full details of the shooting data for each image file, enabling you to see what worked and what didn't, which will help you decide which settings to select next time around. Also, because RAW captures so much data, it also gives you the opportunity to make more corrections on the computer than does a JPEG file, so it's perfect when you're experimenting.

Nifty 50

Calling all zoom fans – take up the challenge to shoot with a 50mm lens. Nikon's 50mm f/1.8 is fast, affordable and pin-sharp (check out what Nikon pro George Turner has to say about it). The discipline of using just a 50mm lens will give you a whole new outlook on your imaging. Plus, it's excellent for candids as it's so small and neat that people won't tend to notice you photographing them with it, so if you're into street photography this could really help.

Shoot from the hip

Yes, this is essentially shooting blind, because you're not using the viewfinder, but it can give you really interesting results that help you recalibrate what is possible in a scene. It also frees you up from the 'tyranny' of composition guidelines, so you can start to think outside the box rather than always on the rule of thirds lines that intersect it.

Black & white

For classic, timeless images, you can't beat black & white, so give yourself a monochrome project and see what a difference it makes. While you can shoot in colour and convert to black and white in camera or on your computer for this project, we recommend you setting a monochrome picture control so you are shooting straight off in black and white. Go to the shooting menu, select 'set picture control' and then 'monochrome', and away you go. By removing the distractions of colour, it's a great way of revealing texture, tone and form, and it is also perfect for creating timeless portraits.

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