

Finding time and colour in Venice

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When thinking of Venice, probably the most common images are of canals, gondoliers, the Rialto Bridge or St Marcos Square. But for the photographer, artist and cultural historian there is much more to the city that can be found in the streets that lie just beyond the tourists.



The quiet and colors of the back streets of Venice. May 2013, Nikon D600, Nikon 24-85mm at 24mm at f/4.5 hand-held at 1/80 at ISO 400. Away from the tourist sites you can begin to appreciate a world without the dull, continuous hum of road traffic. This is one of my favourite shots from my trip to Venice and one I have printed many times - the best result has been to print on a textured watercolour inkjet paper (I use Canson papers, which I can highly recommend). To me it is about the colours, the light and the architecture. That is the joy of photographing in Venice.

Venice is a place that lives up to expectations. It is a beautiful city. As a photographer, it seems that no matter in which direction you look, there is another great picture. As such, it is too easy to forget that people live and work here, locals for whom visitors such as me must be both a boon and a bane.

Thankfully, for all concerned, most tourists tend to stick to well-mapped routes as they rush from one selfie to the next, and it is surprisingly easy to slip into the back streets where you can take time to absorb the history, colour and beauty of the city, enjoy a quiet moment or two over an espresso (surely one of the greatest contributions to the culture of the world since afternoon tea), and most of all appreciate a world without that dull, continuous hum of road traffic.

My last visit to Venice came after a series of business meetings in Milan and a need to take a couple days off to relax. Relaxing is not what I do, so this meant either hiking in the Alps or something cultural. A two-and-a-half-hour train journey from central Milan and I found myself caught up in a torrent of tourists as they rushed from the station to St. Marco's Square, via the Rialto Bridge and then straight back home, the sound of roller trolleys rumbling in anything but unison. Thankfully my hotel was on the way and I could peel off onto a back street, and away from the turisti, of whom I was desperate not to be considered a part – wishful thinking.



A quiet evening on the Grand Canal, Venice, May 2013, Nikon D600, Nikon 24-85mm at 24mm at f/4.0 hand-held at 1/400 at ISO 400. Photographic clichés abound in Venice, and all are worthy of numerous frames, and few will disappoint. Here the view north along the Grand Canal from the Rialto Bridge.



Character born of age and weather in Venice. May 2013, Nikon D600, Nikon 24-85mm at 24mm at f/6.3 hand-held at 1/160 at ISO 200. The details of many of the buildings make interesting compositions with a story. These are people's homes, so do be respectful.



A rainy evening in Venice, May 2013, Nikon D600, Nikon 24-85mm at 85mm at f/4.5 hand-held at 1/30 at ISO 1100. Photographing in the rain never quite captures the moment or the damp, but here in Venice, the mix of light, water and buildings makes the attempt a little easier. Helped in no small way by the presence of umbrellas. Next time I will take a tripod!



The colors of Venice, May 2013, Nikon D600, Nikon 24-85mm at 32mm at f/8.0 hand-held at 1/250 at ISO 125. The canals are central to what Venice is, and the reflections in the water on a clear day make for a great colour palette to experiment with. But, be careful since canals are canals, so keep an eye open for interesting colours, textures and reflections. This may mean zooming into an area rather than a general canal shot as here.



Light and contrast in Venice, May 2013, Nikon D600, Nikon 24-85mm at 24mm at f/5.6 hand-held at 1/125 at ISO 320. The light and contrast in Venice, like so much of Italy and Spain, plays directly to photography. But in Venice the addition of water gives an added dimension as here. In programs such as Adobe's Lightroom you can readily experiment with contrast levels. Here I have kept the interior quite dark to emphasize the light beyond. Black and white can work quite well in such circumstances.

Photographic clichés abound in Venice, and all are worthy of capture and I am sure that few pictures you take will disappoint you. But it is the quiet, the colours and the textures of the back streets that photographically caught my attention. This is not a pristine city. The perpetual damp of the lagoon takes its toll, but that is part of its charm, photographically at least; I am sure it is less than 'charming' to try and maintain. The results are building whose walls are not one single colour, or finish, but where hues change on a single building, paint peels back to reveal a depth, and stonework varies as plaster gives way to the underlying building fabric. There is a story and history here at every turn, but also a

recognition of city living through a perpetual battle against nature. I know that that is a cliché, but none the less true.

So, do take your photos of the Grand Canal, the Rialto Bridge and St Mark's Square, and the obligatory gondola. They all make great pictures. But, consider taking time to wander. This will help you find some interesting photographic compositions, but it will also allow you to absorb the atmosphere and history of Venice, and a world less hectic. And you will quickly realise why: the dull hum of traffic is absent, and that is wonderful.

Further Information

Photos were taken using a Nikon D600 with a standard 24-85mm lens.

Data management and post-production was using Adobe Lightroom

Printed copies were made using an Epson R3000 A3+ inkjet printer and Canson papers: <http://www.canson-infinity.com/en>

I do have a photo book from this trip which I can make available for purchase via Blurb if there is interest.



Venice, May 2013, Nikon D600, Nikon 24-85mm at 75mm at f/8.0 hand-held at 1/250 at ISO 100. There is so much going in any scene here. The mix of colours, shapes and textures and behind each a story.



Gondolas. May 2013, Nikon D600, Nikon 24-85mm at 24mm at f/8.0 hand-held at 1/250 at ISO 140. Who can resist a cliché! Abb..., Venice...



About the author

Paul is CEO of Knowing Earth Limited, as well as a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Leeds and Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Bristol. He graduated from St. Edmund Hall, Oxford University in 1987 and received his Ph.D. from The University of Chicago in 1996.

He worked for two years at BP's Research Centre in Sunbury-on-Thames before moving to Chicago, where Paul studied with Professor Fred Zeigler's oil industry-sponsored Paleogeographic Atlas Project. This was followed by a post-doctorate at the University of Reading researching the exploration significance of the paleoclimatic and drainage evolution of southern Africa using computer-based climate models with Professor Paul Valdes. He then moved to Robertson Research International Limited, now part of CGG, as a Staff Petroleum Geologist, where he developed global predictive models of source and reservoir facies. In 2004 Paul moved to Getech Group plc, to set-up the Petroleum Systems Evaluation Group with Dr. John Jacques. From 2006 to 2017 Paul served on the Getech board overseeing the strategic technical direction, which saw the business transition and grow from an academic research group to a multi-million-pound company with four offices, 120 staff and an international client base.

His active research interests include global tectonics, palaeogeography, palaeoclimatology, the history of geology and depositional modelling. Paul is the author of over 100 published scientific papers and articles.

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