



Every issue we arrange for a pro photographer to take one of our readers out for a one-on-one masterclass

READER SHOOTING SCHOOL

Meet the reader

An enthusiast wanting to build on his portfolio



Evan Roberts

"Being brought up in Australia, I've always had a love of sports and the outdoors. I bought my first SLR camera in 1997, just before heading off to Asia for an extended holiday. I knew very little about photography then, and it wasn't until five years later that it turned into a more serious hobby when I started reading photography magazines, books and taking more photos. A teacher by profession, I'm totally self-taught in photography. I like to shoot close-up detail and landscapes in colour and black and white."

Improve my DSLR skills

A DP reader learns some insightful location lighting techniques in beautiful Lanzarote

Avisuali photography workshops are set on the breathtaking Spanish Canary island, Lanzarote. Run by successful award-winning international photographer John Hicks, he describes the location as "A photographer's paradise – a place to dream, to define your vision and to refine your craft." Having worked in the photography industry for the past 15 years, John now lives and works in Lanzarote and runs Avisuali photography workshops on the island.

Avisuali offers over five different workshops, varying from bespoke one-day courses to one week. Each is designed with a range of photographers and abilities in mind, whether you're a beginner, enthusiast or pro. John enjoys sharing his passion, experiences and skills with those that participate in the workshops, and remarks: "I like to offer advice but not to impose my vision on someone else – these workshops are

as much of an enlightening experience for me as anyone else." John hopes that participants like our reader Evan Roberts learn to experiment more with their own work and build on their own individual shooting style. As John points out, "The emphasis of all the workshops is on crafting your visual eye and on the understanding, appreciation and enhancement of light. For me this is an absolute fundamental of photography and it is all too often overlooked in the rush to get the image on the computer."

John likes to maintain a relaxed atmosphere in all of the workshops, and is dedicated to ensuring that all who attend enjoy themselves and learn something. With some excellent organisation behind the workshop, Evan was able to get stuck into the assignments straightaway. He was able to build upon his photographic portfolio and technical abilities on the course, and produce some fantastic photographs as a result.

Behind the scenes...

A rundown of how the workshop progressed throughout the day

COMPOSING PORTRAITS

For the first shot of the day, Evan was keen to produce a reportage-style portrait. Conveying a story or message in your images will make them more visually interesting, and shooting your subject in the right location is a great way to show who they are and what they do. Lighting was a challenge as ambient light levels were low, and as John explained it was important not to overflash the subject – getting the right balance between ambient and flash lighting was key. To avoid frontal flash John talked Evan through the importance of setting up a backlight as the main light, as it helps to create a three-dimensional effect. As the setup took shape, Evan was beginning to create professional-looking portraits that wouldn't look out of place in a pro's portfolio.



WORKING WITH YOUR MODEL

Evan slowly began building his confidence in working with a model during the first portrait setup. He worked hard to make Pepe feel relaxed and found sharing the shots he had captured with him was a great way to build a rapport and give Pepe some guidance on poses and facial expressions. John always encourages photographers to stand in front of the camera as well as behind it, to give them more of an idea of what it feels like to be on the other side of the camera. He believes this helps when photographing real people.



Meet the expert

A commercial photographer, keen to share his skills



John Hicks

John Hicks has been a leading editorial, sports, fashion and advertising photographer for over 15 years, working worldwide on international magazines and global advertising campaigns. Renowned for his cinematic eye and distinctive style, he's recently moved into HD DSLR filmmaking and short audio visual presentations. With a lifelong passion for photography and a commitment to share his knowledge with others, John has recently set up a workshop base in Lanzarote in the Canaries, where he has a beach house overlooking the Atlantic.

Website: www.johnhicks.co.uk, www.avisuali.com

ADDING ENERGY

As the day continued, the lighting setups, location and subjects changed so that Evan could experiment with varying techniques. In this setup, Evan was encouraged to pick up on movement and infuse energy into his images. Shooting your subject on location can be a great way to bring out and capture their personality.



THE LEARNING PROCESS

John supported Evan throughout the workshop, teaching him new lighting techniques and giving pro tips and advice along the way. John took the time to talk Evan through his strengths and weaknesses, and what he can do to improve.



PUTTING IT ALL INTO ACTION

As the workshop progressed the lighting setups became more complex, building upon what Evan had learnt. The final shoot encouraged him to try compositions and angles with Laura and find more flattering ways to light a female model.

John's thoughts on the day

DP: How did the course go?

JH: I was really pleased with Evan's progress. He understood how to balance the natural light with the added flash and quickly got to grips with a variety of lighting setups on location. Throughout the day he was able to work on his confidence and build rapport with his models to produce some great shots.

DP: How was Evan as a student?

JH: Evan has a real love of photography and a great eye for detail, but he lacks a bit of experience in shooting real people. Taking portraits can be very daunting, but it was good to watch Evan working outside his creative comfort zone.

DP: What was your personal highlight of the course?

JH: For me it was seeing the look on Evan's face when he saw his sunset surfer image appear on the back of the camera. It's a great feeling when you know everything has come together to create a great image, and I hope it will inspire Evan to do more.

DP: What does Evan most need to work on?

JH: Evan would do well to work a little on his confidence and thereafter his speed when shooting real people because they don't always give you much time.

JOHN'S TOP THREE TIPS:

1 Plan your shoot. Try to plan your

shoot in advance, by deciding on what lighting setup you will use and the mood you are trying to create on set. Having said that, when shooting on location you often need to think fast on your feet and react to changing light conditions, so always be prepared to improvise.

2 Do it for the love of photography. Technique is important, but great photography is fundamentally about a feeling, an emotion, a moment and a vision.

3 Experiment, and don't be afraid to challenge yourself. The best photographers are always moving forward, so don't just stay in your comfort zone and repeat what you already know you can do. Keep your visual eye fresh and don't be afraid to experiment and make mistakes.

Go online

Want to see all the action? View the videos of this issue's Shooting School at www.dphotographer.co.uk



▶▶ IN THE GAME

Evan's comment: "Once I had my flash light set up, ready and tested, John encouraged me to get Javi moving about to create more energy and emotion in the shot, and I think this works really well here."
John's critique: "Here I like the dynamics of the shot and the way Javi totally commands your attention. Evan has done well to keep a fast-moving subject sharp, and his composition and cropping is excellent."

◀◀ PAPAYA PLANTATION

Evan's comment: "Shooting real people with short lenses was a real test as you really have to direct them, but I like the relaxed feel of this photo."
John's critique: "At first Evan struggled to engage his subject, but he quickly got to grips with directing Pepe. Using a backlight he was able to create dimension in the shot and give it a glossy, advertising feel."



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Evan's thoughts on the day

DP: Have you undertaken any training before?
ER: No, I'm totally self-taught and just learnt what I know from reading photo magazines, researching on the internet and going out and about with the camera.
DP: How did it feel to be chosen for this experience?
ER: It was great to be given the opportunity to try out an area of photography that I have never attempted before, and to be able to do it in such an amazing environment made it really special.
DP: What's the best piece of advice you received on the day?
ER: Learning how to get the right balance of flash and ambient light for that perfect exposure and not getting frustrated when I make mistakes, because photography is all about the creative learning process.
DP: Do you feel this experience has improved your photography? How?
ER: Absolutely, I now have a better understanding of how using lights can dramatically improve your images in a variety of different situations, and it's given me the confidence to be more experimental with my shots.
DP: What was your favourite moment of the day?
ER: Each setup brought about different problems to solve. It was fun shooting people rather than objects and because I do love sports and played basketball at school, I was most able to relate to Javi, so I'd say that was my highlight of the day.



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Evan's favourite shot of the day
 ▶▶ SUNSET SURFER

Evan's comment: "This was my final shot of the day and everything just fell perfectly into place – the lighting, the setting and Laura. It's really boosted my confidence and inspired me to take more portraits on location."
John's critique: "Although the best light is often around sunset, the ambient is falling quickly and the need to shoot fast is important. Evan worked well here under pressure and by photographing Laura on profile and from a low angle, he has created a really heroic portrait."
 © Evan Roberts

▲ PAPAYA

Evan's comment: "I love the colours here and the way Pepe's hands frame the shot. I was trying to show the years of work that have gone into his plantation, and I like the way the flash highlights the details."
John's critique: "I like the way this detail shot tells as much of a story as the main image, and is very symbolic. By choosing a wide aperture and creating a shallow depth of field, Evan has added emphasis to the main focus of the image."

▲ ON THE SIDELINE

Evan's comment: "I like the isolated feel of this shot, and wanted to convey the feeling of anticipation before the game starts. I was pleased with the graphic colours and the light."
John's critique: "Evan kept this clean and made use of the strong light to create a powerful image."

◀◀ GOLDEN GODDESS

Evan's comment: "I was really pleased with the subtlety of the colours, and the way Laura stands out against the backdrop."
John's critique: "Photographing into backlight is a difficult technique to master, and here Evan has done a great job of balancing the flash."



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