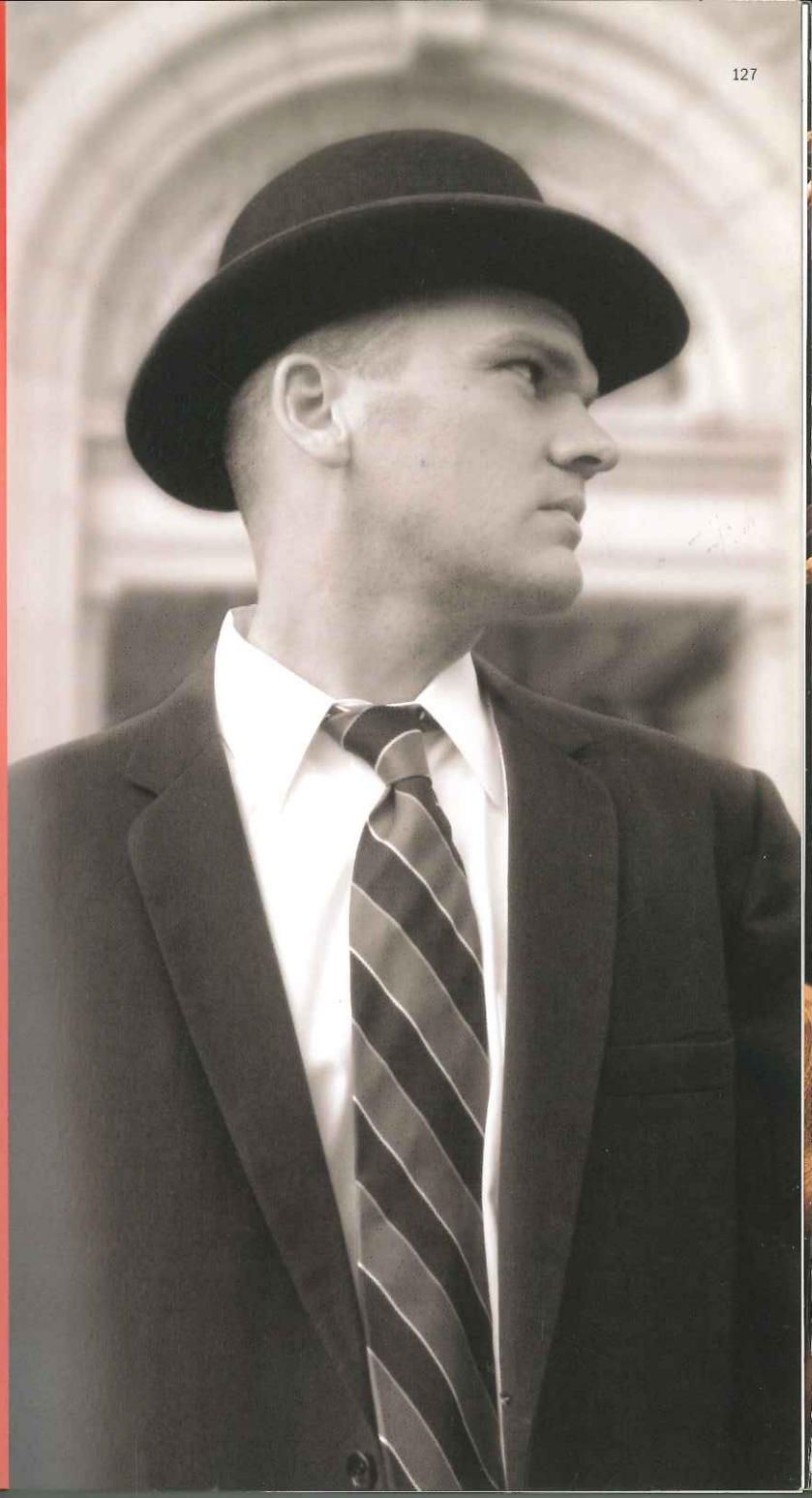
PICTURING PEOPLE

Klaus Kinski (renowned German actor, 1926-1991) once remarked that *"there is no landscape more fantastic than that of the human face."* Most people are irresistibly drawn to aesthetically intriguing and personally relevant images of other people. *When you capture an evocative photograph of a person, you have created an image that is bound to connect with viewers on many levels.* Humans are, by nature, extraordinarily observant of details in other people's faces, expressions, hair style (or lack thereof), body language and attire. As a photographer, take note of the visual and thematic significance of details such as these when you are taking pictures of people. Be aware, also, of the effects that the model's surroundings (and any props that are being used) are having on the shot. When taking pictures of a person or a group of people, look for camera angles and lighting solutions that allow your subject(s) to agreeably connect with their environment; result in a pleasing stylistic and structural presentation; and eliminate secondary elements that contradict either the stylistic or conceptual result you are after.



Take advantage of the fact that when you are photographing a person (as opposed to an object or landscape) you are dealing with a subject with whom you can interact. Communicate with, instruct, talk to, laugh and collaborate with your subject as you take photographs.

Even when the look of a portrait is meant to be very straightforward (such as with these examples), explore all kinds of different expressions and head positions with your subject. Take shots with the model looking at the camera, across the room, toward the floor or off into space. How about closed eyes?

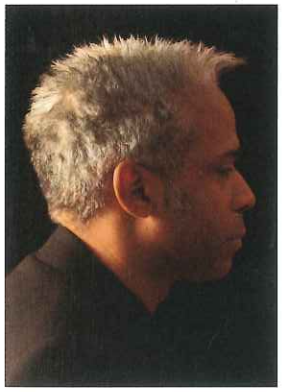
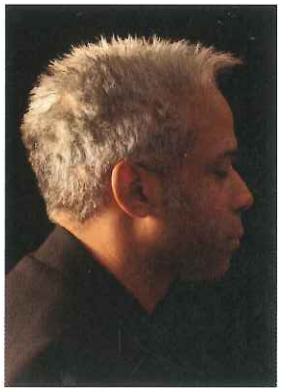
Subtle changes in your model's demeanor or physical posture can make big differences in the images that you are capturing. Take advantage of the free space on your media card and click away. Being able to choose winning shots from *many* candidates is an especially welcome bonus when it comes to catching elusive and photo-worthy expressions and emotional conveyances from your living and breathing subject.

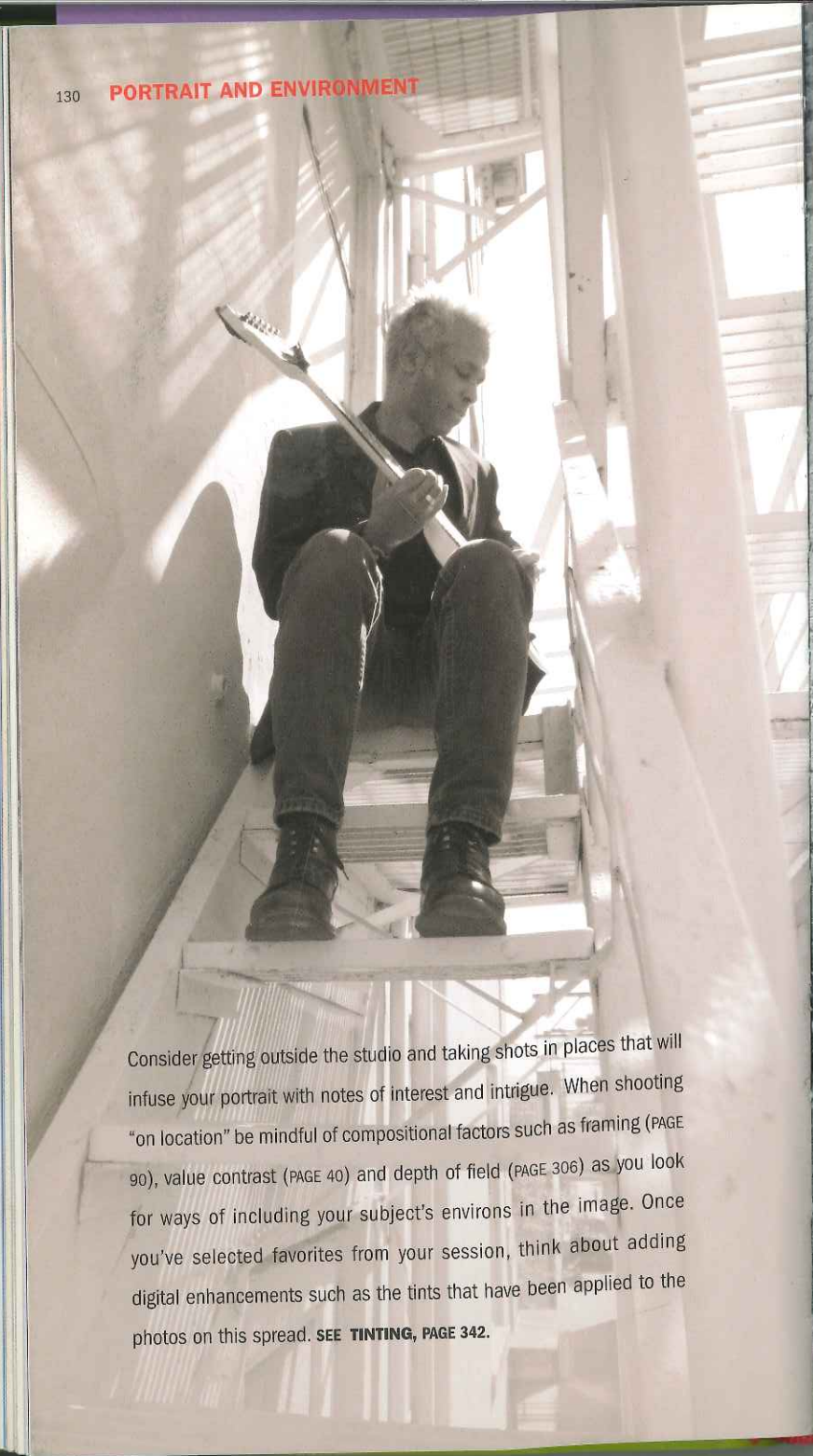
Engage with your model in conversation as you take pictures; this will (hopefully) help them relax and at the same time will give you the opportunity to catch photos of spontaneous smiles, bursts of laughter, moments of pensive thought and a variety of of other actions and expressions. Oftentimes, an unplanned instant of serendipitous expression results in the most rewarding image of a photo session.

As with any subject matter, investigate different points of view and lighting options when you are photographing a person. Consider a variety of backdrop ideas as well. Should the background be plain or busy? Should it add a theme of its own to the photograph? What colors would best complement the skin-tone and clothing of the model? SEE BACKDROPS AND ATTIRE, PAGE 132.

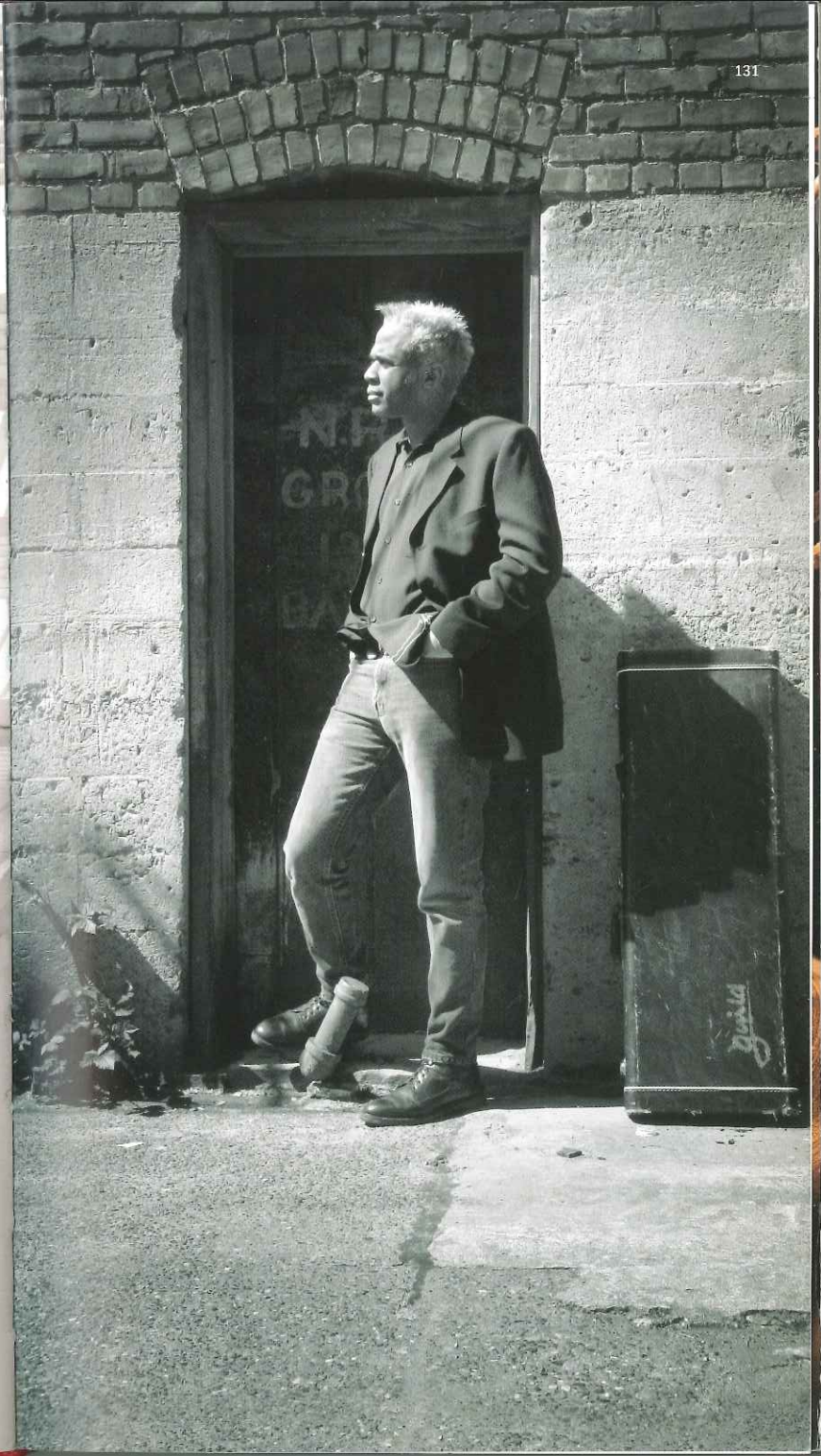






Consider getting outside the studio and taking shots in places that will infuse your portrait with notes of interest and intrigue. When shooting "on location" be mindful of compositional factors such as framing (PAGE 90), value contrast (PAGE 40) and depth of field (PAGE 306) as you look for ways of including your subject's environs in the image. Once you've selected favorites from your session, think about adding digital enhancements such as the tints that have been applied to the photos on this spread. **SEE TINTING, PAGE 342.**



Whenever possible, have your model bring several changes of clothes to a photoshoot. Hold the various items up to different backdrop choices as well as the model's skin. What works best visually? What works best thematically? Should different sets of pictures be taken using different attire/backdrop combinations?

Hint: Attach a few metal clips or clothespins to a wall behind the model so that you can quickly change between different fabric and paper backdrops during the session.

When taking pictures of people, consider the same kinds of variables that you would if you were shooting images of inanimate objects or scenes: composition, backdrop, accessory use, lighting, point of view, depth of field, etc.

For the series of pictures, opposite, the model was asked to bring some fabrics from home for potential backdrop use as well as a variety of clothing options. During the session, several attire/backdrop combinations were explored. Deciding which combo is "right" for portraits such as these depends on the artistic, thematic and stylistic goals you are after.

In this photo, a visually active backdrop and shirt combine to create an energetic setting around the model's face and form.

Here, a plain backdrop adds a quieting influence and allows the woman's shirt to claim uniqueness as the only decorative element in the scene.

Wearing plain, dark clothing for this shot, the model stands out cleanly against the active backdrop.

The featureless backdrop and plain attire claim little attention in this photo: The model's smile and at-ease posture are clearly the center of attention.

For a dramatic presentation, consider backdrop and clothing choices that put everything but the model's skin tones into near darkness.

And don't forget to consider using a prop or two to add thematic notes to an image...

If you are taking portraits to make a thematic or stylistic statement, or to accompany a piece of writing, consider using props to add conceptual meaning and visual interest to your your image.

Props, attire, backdrop, a model's expression and posture can be combined to deliver thematic messages in both subtle and overt ways. Props can complement other visual elements or contrast with them to add a sense of irony, tension or mystery.

When you are going to take a person's portrait, consider asking them to bring an object of personal significance to the photoshoot. Experiment with creative ways of incorporating this object into the photos being taken.

People and props can be combined to artfully illustrate conceptual messages or to accompany text that explains the image's meaning. Here, a model delicately holds a thorny collection of beheaded rose stems while sitting in a meditative posture. An image such as this might be appropriate within an editorial piece about interpersonal difficulties, for instance—or as an image in an ad for a skin care product. Brainstorm for ideas when it comes to combining models, props, environment and shooting techniques for images that are meant to deliver conceptual messages. Look through magazines, books and web sites for ideas and inspiration. SEE **IMPLYING STORY,** PAGE 244.

Photoshop's HUE AND SATURATION controls were used to give this image a tint that enforced the undercurrent of tense energy evident in its content. SEE **HUE AND SATURATION,** PAGE 336.

Many people have a tendency to center their subject within the viewfinder or LCD when composing a shot. This is understandable since it's only natural to look directly at people and things that have caught our attention.

However, when it comes to composing a photograph that will have pleasing compositional qualities, it's important to question this natural tendency and consider asymmetric alternatives.

Unless a static presentation is being sought for an image, seek an off-center placement for your model. Asymmetrical compositions give the viewer's eyes and mind more to consider and contemplate than static, symmetrical arrangements. SEE THE COMPOSITION PRIMER BEGINNING ON PAGE 76.

An off-center placement of your center-of-interest can be achieved when the camera is aimed or when the final image is cropped. SEE CROPPING FOR COMPOSITION, PAGE 82.

Be mindful of the model's body language and where they are looking within a scene: Both factors can direct the viewer's attention to other areas of a photograph or to graphic elements that surround the image (if the photo is part of a layout, for instance).

In this scene, clouds frame the subject and point to her off-center position within the landscape. The open areas around the model enforce thematic and visual conveyances of wide open spaces. SEE **FRAMING,** PAGE 90.

Here, the woman's gaze and pointing hand hint at the world outside the photo's boundaries while leading the viewer's eye to this very block of descriptive text. The dynamic spacing around the subject encourages these connotations of direction and movement.

The model's off-center position in this photo grants plenty of room for her gaze to travel within—and beyond—the edges of the image. Conveyances of distance, depth and contemplation are the product of both the image's environment and its composition.

Portraits are context sensitive! Consider your options in relation to the stylistic and communicative result(s) you are after.

If you have a camera whose depth of field can be manually controlled (a function of more advanced cameras and lenses—not usually available on pocket digital cameras), be sure to experiment with both deep and shallow ranges of focus when you are taking pictures of people. SEE DEPTH OF FIELD, PAGE 306.

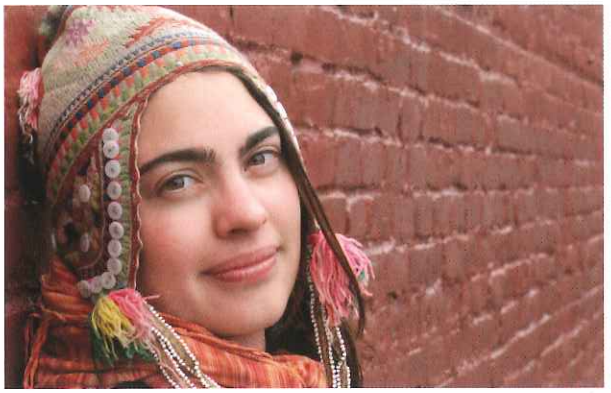
A deep depth of field (d.o.f.) keeps larger portions of the image in focus and may be preferable when the model's surroundings are compositionally, informationally or thematically essential to the image's presentation. (FYI: The default d.o.f. of most pocket digital cameras is relatively deep.)

On the other hand, a shallow d.o.f. means that only a narrow band of the image's range of view is seen in sharp focus. Many photographers enjoy taking pictures of people using a shallow d.o.f. because it allows them to clearly focus on the model while blurring elements that are both nearer to, and farther from, the camera. This technique can be used to minimize the distracting effects of a model's surroundings.

The deep depth of field used for this shot keeps most of the background in focus. This effect adds a note of visual texture to the image and takes advantage of the lines on the wall that direct attention to the model's face.

Here, a shallow d.o.f. blurs the diminishing perspective of the background. The focus (literally and figuratively) is now contained more strongly within the model's face. Which image is "right"? That depends on the stylistic effect that the photographer is seeking.

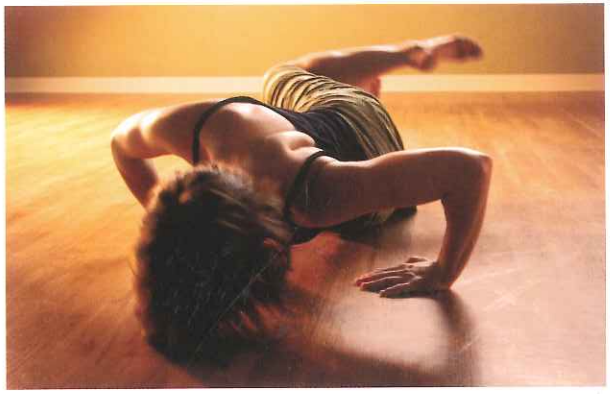
One of these portraits was taken with a deep d.o.f.; the other, shallow. Note the differences between the look and feel of each. If you are using a camera with d.o.f. control, consider your options! Which approach best suits the conditions of the shot and the outcome you are after?



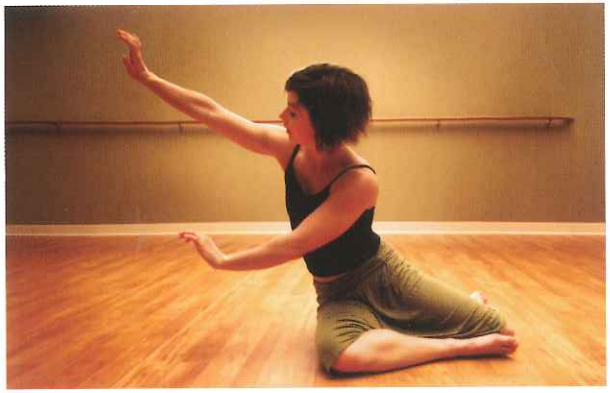
Try this: Think of the person you are photographing as a noun, and what they are doing as a verb. In these terms, a photo of a person *doing something* becomes a complete "visual sentence." And depending on how your image is captured, this pseudo-sentence might be delivered with an exclamation point or whispered within a set of parentheses.

Experiment with the different kinds of visual sentences you can compose while taking pictures of an active subject. Note the different ways in which you can deliver messages of kinetics and movement through your images.

Motion-blur within an image conveys inferences of action and movement, as do the dynamic angles of a photo taken from a skewed perspective. Freeze-frame images of certain postures can also deliver strong or subtle impressions that an action is either happening or imminent. SEE TILT, PAGE 32; STOPPING TIME, PAGE 170; CONVEYING ACTION, PAGE 166; AND MOTION BLUR, PAGE 318.



Strength and a sense of impending movement are both apparent in the posture of the dancer in this photo. From this point of view, the aesthetically complex and intriguing form of her body contrasts nicely with the emptiness surrounding it.



This image–caught just as the dancer was beginning to fall toward the floor–is infused with a feeling of suspended action. Her body is has been frozen in a moment of beautiful composition. SEE **STOPPING TIME**, PAGE 170.

In this photo, a tilted frame, blurred figure, off-center composition and flying fabric combine to convey an expressive sense of action.

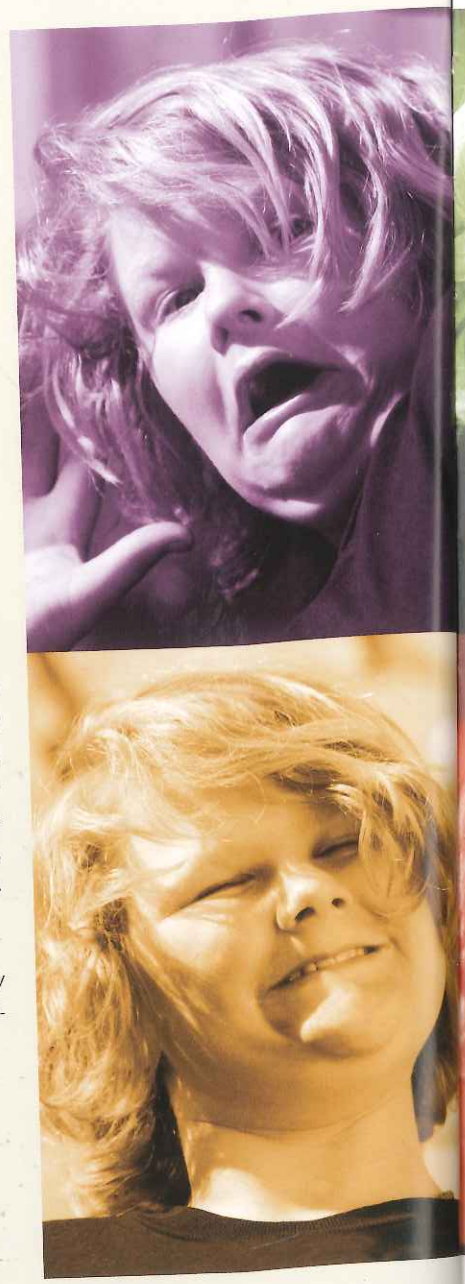
In this scene, the dancer's blurred arms and hands impart a subtle note of movement to an otherwise still setting.

I wanted to capture a sense of both the stillness and action inherent in the dancer's routine during this session. To do this, I used a digital SLR so that the shutter speed could be manually selected. After some trial-and-error, I settled on an exposure of 1/20th sec.

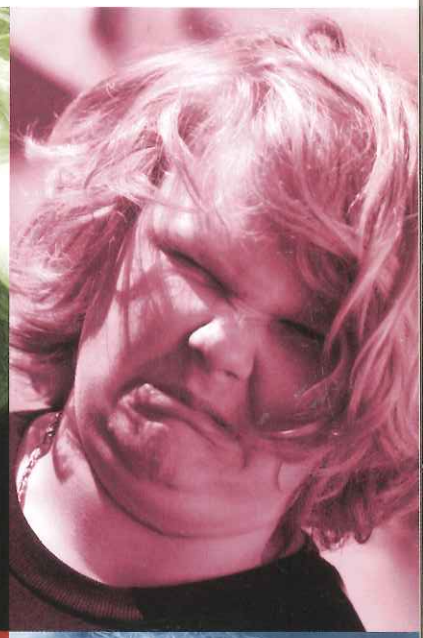
SEE EXPLORING EXPOSURE, PAGE 314, AND MOTION BLUR, PAGE 318.

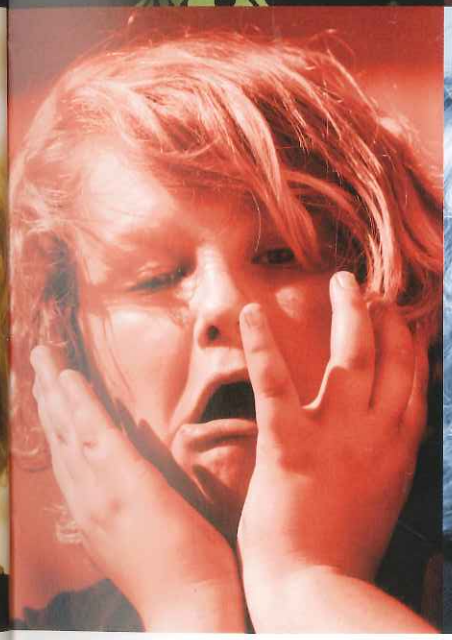
Think beyond "say cheese" when taking pictures of a friend or model—especially if you are photographing someone who has a wide range of facial expressions and no fear of the camera.

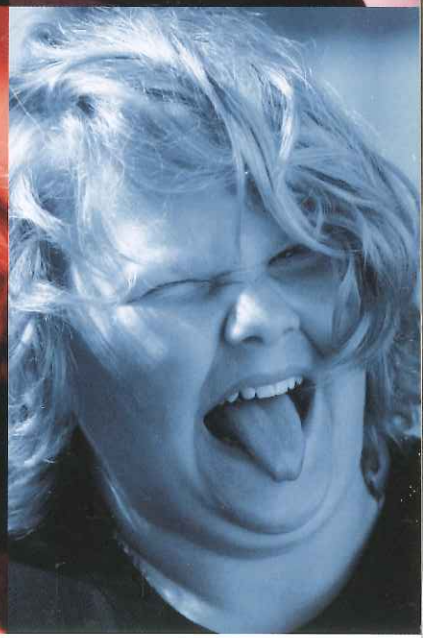
Once you've caught an eye-catching photo of emotional display, think about using software to digitally amplify the image's look and feel. Explore colorization and tinting options; try out the effects of software filters; investigate cropping alternatives that bring maximum attention to your subject. SEE THE CHAPTER ON DIGITAL EFFECTS, BEGINNING ON PAGE 330.



Meet my buddy Alex—endlessly animated and without a camera-shy bone in his body.







A "selfie" is one of those images that is taken by aiming the camera at yourself. The guesswork that goes into taking selfies often results in serendipitous photographic surprises.

If you enjoy self-portraits, playing around, and don't mind losing a bit of control in the artistic process, then digital cameras are your perfect ally for this kind of creative venture. Shoot away: Save the good stuff and clear the disk of unsuccessful shots to make room for more attempts.

With a little practice it's possible to hold your picture-taking hand and arm in such a way that it's almost impossible to tell that the image's model is also its photographer. (That's not to imply that it's "wrong" for your arm or hand to show up in a selfie. In fact, the "rules" of photography are largely thrown out the window given the inherently inventive nature of this kind of shooting. If a selfie makes you smile, captures the essence of a fleeting moment or records a meaningful time and place in your life, then it's a keeper.)

Also experiment using mirrors or other reflective surfaces as a means of capturing selfies.

Some selfies are hard to tell apart from photos taken in more traditional ways.

One of the best things about selfies is that they can be taken just about anywhere, anytime.

This image is a perfect illustration of the creative photographer's credo of keeping a camera within reach at all times.

Go ahead, point that lens right at your face and take a flash photo from point-blank range. Bend the rules of photography to the breaking point when you are both the shooter and the subject!

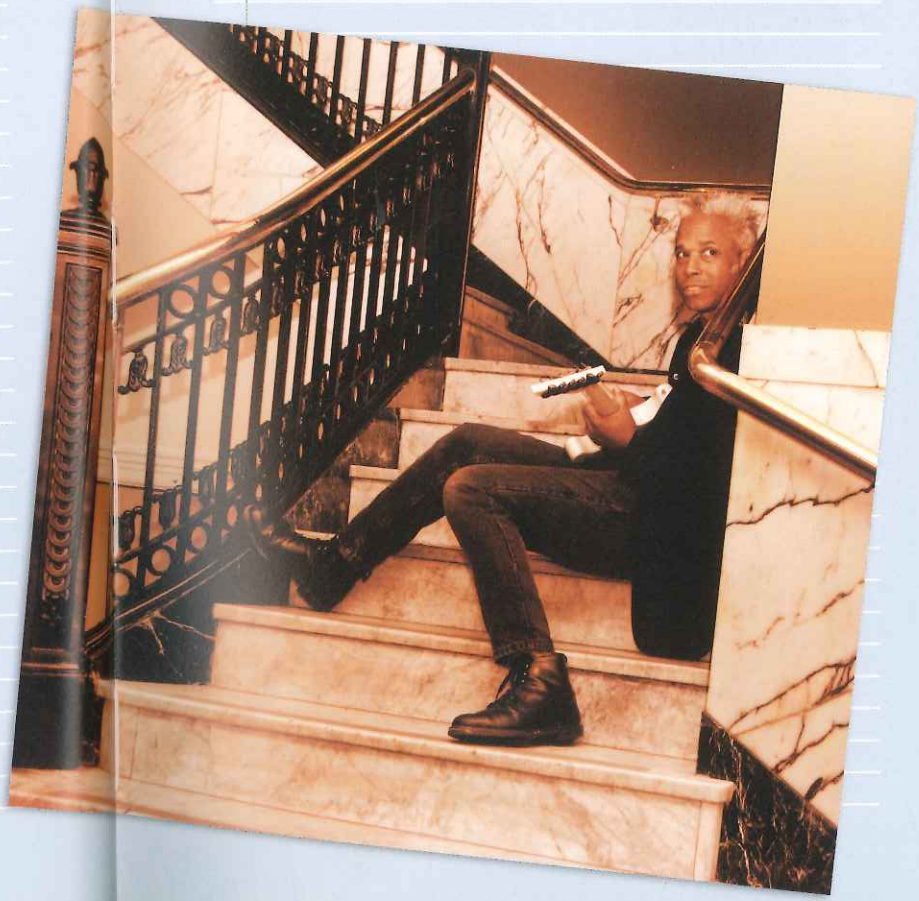
You and the model.

When you start taking portraits of people, a realization occurs: Most of the people you are taking pictures of are reacting to **YOU** first, and the camera second. A "model" who feels at ease with their photographer will feel encouraged to **relax** and **act naturally** as the photoshoot progresses. On the other hand, if the photographer seems unfriendly, distracted or indecisive about what they want, the model may (understandably) become tense in front of the camera. When this happens, the full potential of the photoshoot will be in jeopardy and the resulting images will likely reflect the prevailing undercurrent of discomfort.

So, in addition to becoming competent with your camera's operation and issues of lighting, composition and theme, there's at least one other set of things a portrait photographer needs to work on in order to capture effective images: **people skills.**

If you've never been in **front** of a camera for a photoshoot, think about giving it a try. Ask a friend or fellow-photographer to take a series of portraits of YOU. Take note of how it feels to have the lifeless eye of a lens pointing at your face and body and try to imagine ways of making this experience more comfortable to the people that you want to photograph.

On the practical side of things, as the photographer, you can improve **your** chances of being relaxed during a portrait session by making sure all of the technical details of the photoshoot are in order before you begin. If you are working in a studio, set up as much of the shot as you can before the model arrives: have the camera angle somewhat figured out; backdrop in place; lighting ready to go; props on hand; batteries charged and all equipment in working order. This way, when the model shows up, you can use their (and your) time efficiently and concentrate on the more communicative and artful aspects of the process.

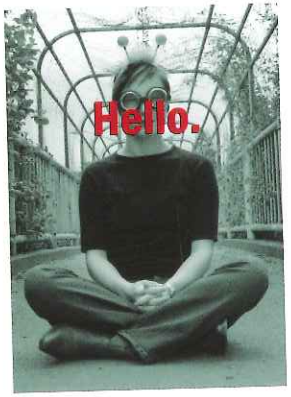


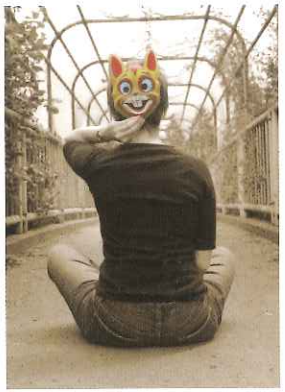
In addition to the usual types of portraits, consider ways of capturing pictures of your subject that mask their identity.

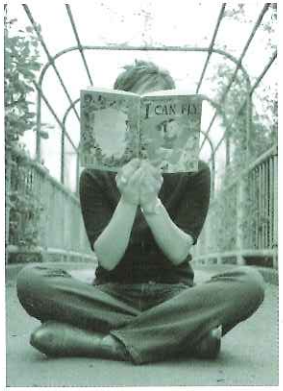
Images such as these could be taken for playful, conceptual or purely aesthetic purposes.

The motivation for this kind of "hidden identity" portrait could also be practical: In advertising and design, it's sometimes considered risky to feature a specific kind of person too clearly in a layout for fear of alienating viewers who do not identify with this particular demographic representative.

Brainstorm for different ways of using props, graphic elements (digitally added), or the model's hands or posture to hide their identity. How about blurring the subject's entire figure beyond recognition or cropping all but one portion of their body from the image?







Even the most basic digital effects can transform an identifiable portrait into a humanesque representation. Photoshop's INVERT command was applied to the image on this page to produce its identity-hiding counterpart, opposite.

Once you've caught a successful image of a person or group of people, consider taking the image into new visual territory through digital enhancements.

These effects could be applied to strengthen or alter the existing mood of an image; display its content in a surreal or artful way; electronically layer its subject(s) over another backdrop; remove or add other visual elements to the image; or to pursue an endless number of alternative presentations for the shot.

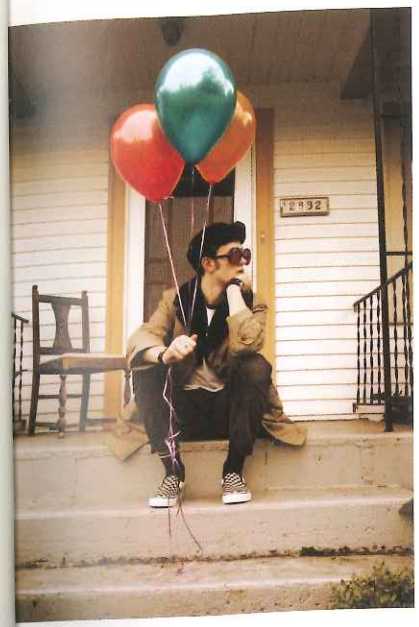
Save multiple versions of your photograph as you work if you are coming up with more than one potential winner.

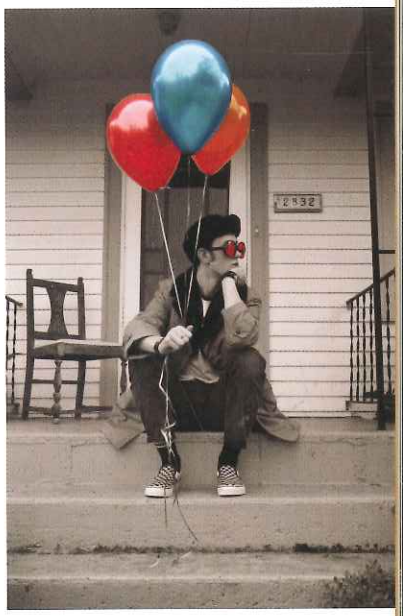
See the chapter on Digital Effects (PAGES 330-351) for how-to tips and ideas related to electronic image enhancements.

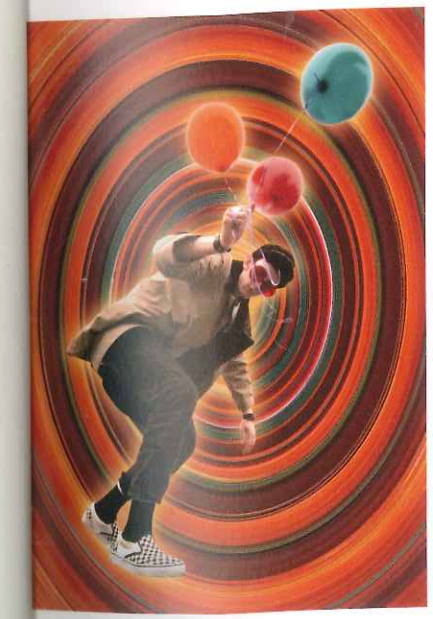
Photoshop's HUE AND SATURATION controls have been used to give this image a deeply saturated, retrospective look. SEE **HUE AND SATURATION,** PAGE 336.

Artistic whims can be explored endlessly using software. Here, the colors of the subject's glasses and the balloons he's holding have been amplified while all other hues have been turned to grays. SEE **CUSTOM COLORIZATION,** PAGE 338.

The subject in both of these images was removed from its original photographic environment using Photoshop's POLYGON LASSO TOOL. Consider placing your free-floating model over nothing-ness (as in the far sample) or on top of a digitally-generated backdrop (as in the near image. Note: This backdrop was borrowed from the demonstration on page 350). SEE **BACKDROP-LESS,** PAGE 44; **CLIPPING PATHS,** PAGE 346; AND **IMAGE LAYERING DEMO,** PAGE 348.







Next to the face, the hand is probably the most expressive and telling part of a human being.

How about starting your own collection of hand images? Collect hands of workers, artists, friends, children, adults and the elderly.

Take pictures of hands doing things and hands doing nothing.

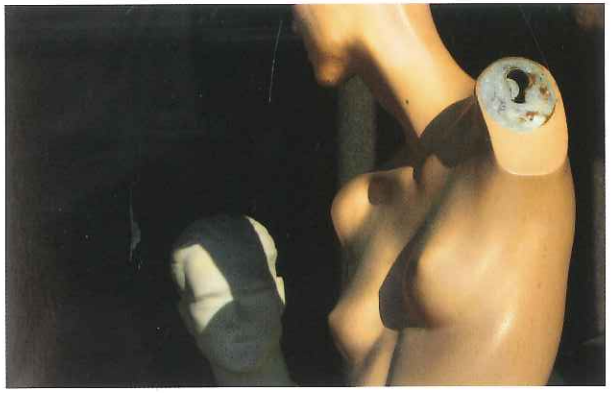
You don't have to include actual people in your photographs to make direct references to humans and human behavior.

Statues, for instance, can be used in place of warm bodies when you want to capture images that make references to human emotions and experiences. People-less people pictures can make powerful (and sometimes ironic or humorous substitutes) for images of the real thing.

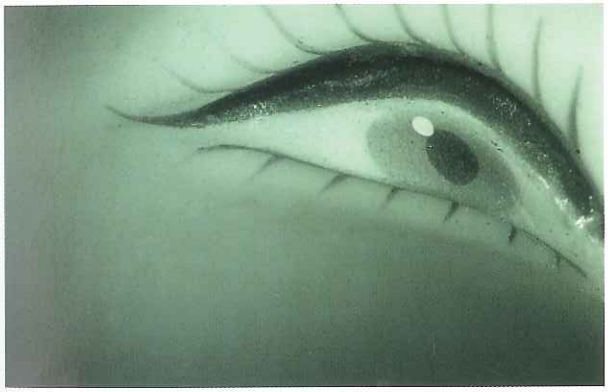
Just as you are naturally on the lookout for photo-ops with actual people, keep your eyes open to sights and scenes that feature statues, dolls, mannequins and all kinds of human likenesses. It's not uncommon to find these people substitutes in out-of-the-ordinary places or peculiar situations where real people would never hope to find themselves.

If you work with digital images professionally or as an artistic pastime, a collection of this sort of image makes a strong and versatile asset for all kinds of potential projects.

The face of a moss-covered statue offers solid conveyances of ageless and serene humanity.



I came across these mannequins in an under-contruction window display. Their interaction seemed all too human. The great thing about taking pictures of faux humans is that they hold perfectly still while you search for good camera angles and are never self-conscious.



This close-up of a mannequin's face appears human until you notice that the features you are seeing—even the sparkle in its eye—are painted on.

Be on the lookout for conveyances of humanity that are obvious, oblique, obscure, ironic and humorous. Given the right context, images such as this can make statements about humans and society just as effectively as peopled pictures.

Once again, a collection of images such as these make powerful additions to the visual arsenal of a multi-media designer, writer, illustrator or fine artist. SEE BANKING IMAGES, PAGE 240.

The images on the opposite page make clear references to humans—even though none contain a living subject.

Clothing and accessories naturally carry strong conveyances of culture and humanity. Images that contain this kind of subject matter can be used as inventive substitutes for pictures of people in works of design and illustration.

Keep your eyes open to photo opportunities that include words that refer to people. Human- or gender-based images often come in handy as part of a digital collage or composition. SEE **WORD PLAY,** PAGE 252.

This may look like the grill of an old Land Rover to some, but to others it's the wizened face of an old truck telling stories of its heyday. How about starting a collection of face-like images and showing them together once you have accumulated a good-sized collection?