



The Quiet Type

*Jacob Hessler shares his advice for
creating modern & minimalist outdoor images.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JACOB HESSLER

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Rising each morning before dawn at his farmhouse on the coast of Maine, Jacob Hessler assesses the day's shooting possibilities. Fog thick as pea soup is Jacob's ideal forecast. He carries an ever-evolving list of locations for landscape photography on his phone, along with notes on the optimal weather and light for each. Being a fine-art landscape photographer requires syncing with the endless variables Mother Nature can throw at you.

Jacob's work, primarily large-scale, has been variously described as introspective, nostalgic, meditative and spiritual. Whatever the descriptor, it has the power to connect viewers with the vastness of the human experience. Jacob's images feel both expansive and serene, but there's a whispering tension between the familiar and the deeply mysterious.

Jacob took his first photography class at age 10 and immediately fell in love with it. He graduated from the Brooks Institute of Photography at the top of his class, and landed a sought-after internship with celebrity photographer Jill Greenberg. "When I was at Brooks, all I wanted to photograph were people. I loved shiny, hyper-real, high-produced portraiture and was thrilled to work for my idol," says Jacob.

That interest began to change. Jacob moved to New York to study graphic design at Parsons School of Design; that's when his photographic style began to take shape, as he studied the power of negative space in a two-dimensional plane. On weekends, feeling hemmed in and overwhelmed by the chaos of the city, Jacob would rove the open countryside [of upstate NY?] and photograph the places where he felt calm and meditative.

After six years in the city, he returned to the peace of his native coastal Maine, "the perfect backdrop for my work," says Jacob. "The spastic weather and constantly changing seasons transform the landscape, revealing endless photographic possibilities."





Click: How would you describe your visual approach to landscape images?
Jacob: A lot of negative space. I try to remove everything unnecessary; less is more.

Click: What artists have influenced your own work?
Jacob: I've always been drawn to the work of Michael Kenna and Hiro [Yasuhiro Wakabayashi]. Their images are captivating in their complex simplicity. Their ability to subtract everything that isn't necessary in the frame and to capture ordinary scenes in an extraordinary way has been a constant inspiration.

Click: How does the sky figure in your imagery?
Jacob: Growing up, I observed how Maine's clouds have their own personalities, are constantly changing and evolving. I pay attention to the sky in my work — it isn't just a background element. I like to have the sky and the clouds converse [with] and compliment the landscape. And I use the sky to

give my work a sense of scale. I'll find myself waiting for clouds to drift into the perfect position before taking the shot.

Click: Can you talk about the use of lines, pattern and movement in landscapes?
Jacob: These elements can add drama and interest to your image, but aren't always necessary. I begin my workshops with the fundamentals of composition and then remind my students that rules are meant to be broken.

Click: What elements do you look for when scouting locations?
Jacob: I usually shoot for a body of works. I think it's important to have direction and intention behind your work. I'm currently working on four collections. I factor those into the trips I'm planning, places I'm going to be teaching. I scout many locations on Google Maps before I head out. It really saves a lot of time and energy to do a bit of research beforehand. Once I'm in a location, I let the creativity take over and the producer fade away.



Click: Do you explore locations ahead of the shoot?
Jacob: Absolutely, but occasionally the shot finds me. I do a lot of hiking and trekking around in the middle hours of the day. I'm constantly dropping pins on my phone so I can return to spots in the evening or the next morning. Sometimes I add details like "would be best here in fog." Morning plus fog equals perfection.

Click: What gear do you use?
Jacob: My go-to these days is my Nikon D800. It's an all-round workhorse and I'm not afraid to shoot in inclement weather. As for lenses, I travel with a Nikkor 70-200mm and a 50mm fixed. I love to compress space with a long telephoto, i.e., 200- or 400mm). It helps to further abstract a landscape. I like to shoot with a 50mm fixed, as it forces me to move and really study and be present in the environment.

Click: How much of your creative process happens post-capture?
Jacob: I prefer to do most of my editing in camera at the time of capture. I make a point of not relying on post-processing or manipulation; I strive for authenticity in my work.

Click: What's your advice for photographers looking to master landscape photography?
Jacob: Get up super early. Constantly explore. Don't get disappointed if you don't immediately start creating compelling work. If you're taking a photo of the first thing your eye is drawn to, that probably isn't the most interesting image. It's important to curate your frame for your viewer and be intentional. The natural world is one of the most challenging things to photograph in a unique way. Go out there and study it, make mistakes, get muddy and soaking wet and find your singular voice.



7 FUNDAMENTALS IN CAPTURING SERENE LANDSCAPES

BY JACOB HESSLER

Foul weather's your friend. Many people are afraid of fog and rain, but it's the ultimate abstractor and diffuser of light. If there's something you want to photograph but the background is too busy, wait for the fog to roll in. Interesting photos are photos come from situations the masses don't see. Be the only one there in a rainstorm or thick fog. Always hike with plastic garbage bags in case of heavy rain.

Let it breathe. Give your subject some space and breathing room. Don't crop in too tight. Don't crop trees halfway unless it's an intentional effect. Everything in your frame should be intentional. If not, get rid of it. Don't be afraid of negative space; use it to your advantage. Sometimes the emptiest images have the most power.

Magic hour. I usually shoot right before dawn. There is honestly no point going out in the middle of the day to photograph the landscape; your images will look like everyone else's. Photographing at night or in the early morning hours will help to better control your light and add interest to your captures.

Explore further. Most of the best landscape photographers are also great explorers. It takes hiking beyond the vistas to create compelling work. Like a documentary photographer studies her subjects beforehand, the landscape photographer should study the earth and the atmosphere.

React. Those moments of serendipity come only to those ready to react to them. Sometimes it means finding your frame and waiting for something interesting to happen, whether it's a shadow, mist, a flock of birds, etc. Be familiar enough with your camera and gear that you can react quickly before the moment passes without fumbling for the proper shutter speed or f/stop.

Shoot for bodies of work. Research and plan your shoots. Write an artist statement and photograph for several bodies of work at one time. This discipline will reflect in your images. Intentional work is compelling work.

Make it S.A.D.: *Subtract* all that isn't necessary from your frame. *Abstract* the ordinary into something interesting; look for the space between the familiar and unfamiliar. Always be thinking about how you could photograph something in a unique way so that it's not immediately recognizable to the viewer. Play with scale, perspective and texture. Abstractions force the viewer to spend time on an image, thus creating that stopping power that sets your work apart. *Distill* the essence, the feeling of the place without giving away too much.



📷 **Jacob Hessler** and his wife, Alissa, an art director, teach his modern approach to landscape photography at the Maine Media Workshops (Sept. 20-26), Sante Fe Photographic Workshops and Photo Field Trip, among other venues. jacobhessler.com