

Low Angle Compositions



As a nature photographer and naturalist, I have long enjoyed putting my subject into context with its environment. I studied ecology along with plant and soil science in college. Early on, one of my favorite lenses was a 24mm wide-angle shot down low and up close.

Then, I often would lie down prostrate to the ground, even pushing my head into the ground so I could better capture a low-growing plant or a little critter and show off its surroundings, too. My camera had no waist level finder, and I found the right-angle finders to be a pain.

This is why I was so excited when digital cameras introduced rotating lenses or swiveling LCDs. I first used a little Sony camera that way a few years ago, putting it on the ground for a unique angle of an urban scene. I could still see what the lens saw on the LCD and I

Low-angle compositions bring the subject into a distinct relationship with its environment. The asters (Maine) above have a sense of place with the background that is very different than the owl clover (California) to the right. Strict close-ups of these flowers would not show that. Below, I used a wide-angle lens that was literally on the ground in this shot of a red eft in Vermont.



didn't have to lie on the ground! A Sony PR guy said until he saw my photo he thought the swivel lens was just a gimmick.

It isn't. I have used the Canon G-series of cameras quite extensively because I can add a wide-angle lens and get wide-angle close-ups from down low (such as the photo of owl's clover at the right). These cameras have a live swivel LCD. Their major disadvantage is the size

of the sensor...small. That has meant too much noise at anything above ISO 100 settings and less rich color.

I was very excited to see Olympus come out with a live LCD on a true digital SLR (E-330). The LCD tilts, allowing low-angle shooting, with the LCD acting like a waist-level viewfinder. In addition, you can change lenses, you get a very high-quality sensor, and if the light is really too bright for the

Tips to try:

1 SHOOTING TIP: Get low with a wide-angle lens. You can do this with any camera if you are willing to get your head on the ground, but a digital camera with a tilting LCD can be a great help. Canon even has one in their relatively inexpensive, yet full-featured PowerShot A620.

2 SHOOTING TIP: Put a high-quality, achromatic close-up lens on your wide-angle for dramatic, wide-angle close-ups. Nikon, Century Optics, Hoya and Canon make these lenses, though only Nikon and Canon make big ones likely to fit an SLR's wide-angle lens without vignetting. These lenses cost about \$100-200, but offer very high-quality close-ups. I am using a Canon 77mm 500D with my Zuiko 14-54mm on the Olympus E-330 (with 77mm-67mm step-down ring).

LCD, you can use the true optical viewfinder (in contrast to hard-to-use electronic viewfinders at this stage in their development).

I liked the E-330 design because it solved some problems I had with this type of photography, so I ordered one as soon as they became available. I have just started working with it, and I love it.

This style of photography can be used on more than nature photography. I have also used it with people, products and even architecture. It isn't for everyone, but give it a try sometime. You might find it offers a great bit of variety to your photography.

