



500px

Finding unique shots in a saturated city

By: David Perry



Introduction.

I was always interested in architecture and urban landscapes, however – I grew up in a tiny town of 250 people that is about an hour drive away from Toronto. This meant I had to take a lot of day trips to the city to take photos of what I was most interested in.

I want to help people get the most out of day or weekend trips by giving a new perspective on being a wayfarer in new cities, or even a city you find yourself in constantly. The perfect shot is out there, but you have to be there to find it.

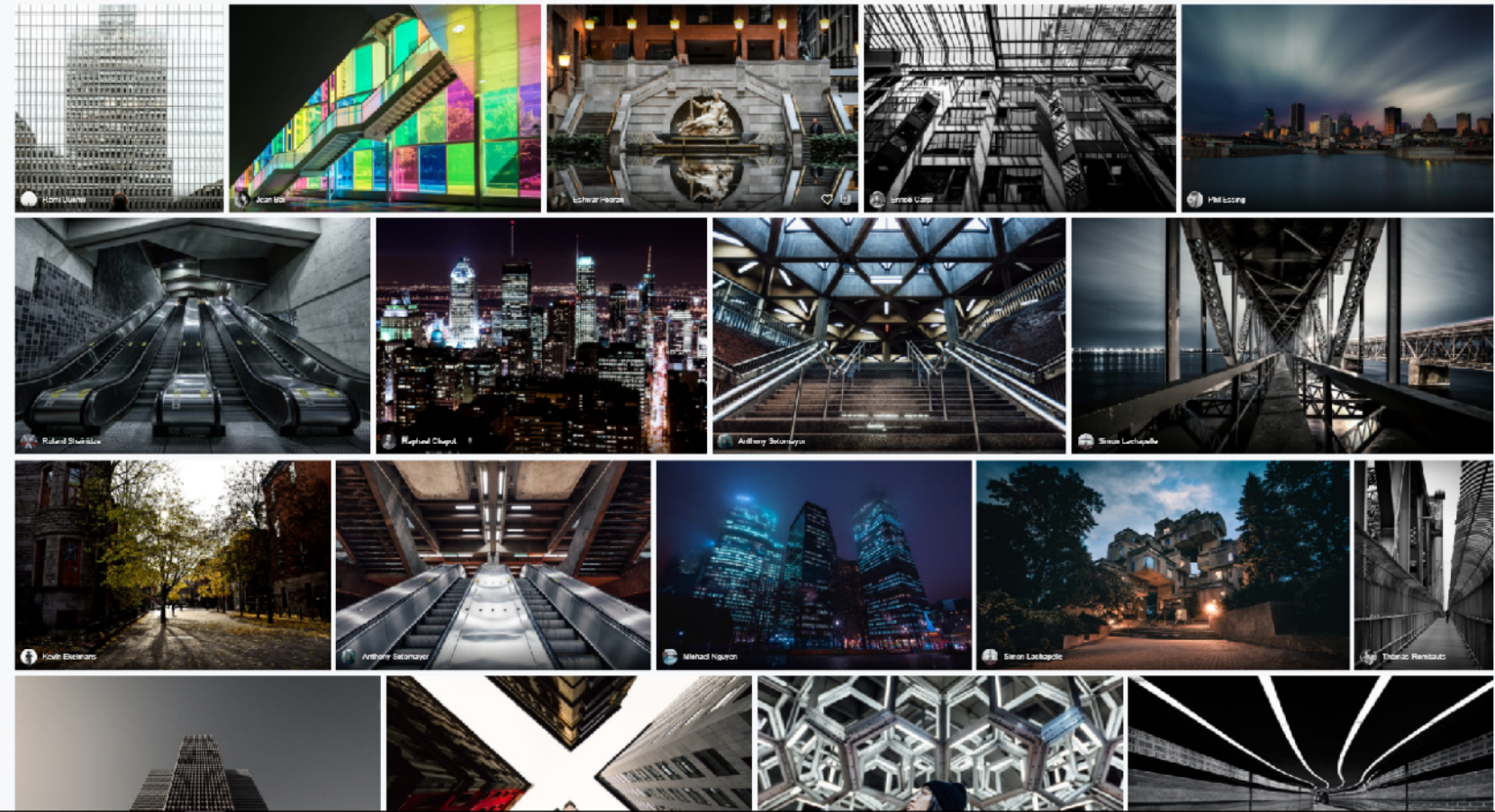


Let's go!

Starting your day before your day is started; A few minutes of research, google maps hunting, or searching photos of cities on 500px helps you not waste any time the day of location scouting and you can spend more time capturing moments.

The easiest ways I find to track down spots are to save photos in a gallery beforehand, if they're geo-tagged Great, if not that's when the mapping / planning comes in.

Here's a what a few minutes of research on the 500px hashtag of Montreal got me. This gave me some brief insight of what I'm after without diving too into detail. For example, I see a lot of tunnels which happen to all be metro stations. A quick google search gives me all the names of the aesthetically friendly stations in Montreal, this gives me a good skeleton to start mapping a day out.



The next, tougher part, is the filling pieces and finding spots along the way. You can make a guide by searching for popular landmarks or you can look for spots and interesting things in between your mapped-out locations which I prefer. Personally, I enjoy vanishing points, symmetry and look up shots so am naturally drawn to corners of buildings, intersections and alleyways.

A very good way to find spots is usually in city's financial districts. Pick a location to base yourself and do a couple circles in different directions to find hidden gems that may not be easy to pick up on a map. Places like libraries, courtyards, etc. are all really good spots to find beautiful architecture.





Now, photography isn't about scouting locations via other people's photos and copying the exact composition. How do you put your own spin on the location?

A few things I like to do in cliché areas; include reflections, shooting photos off axis so things seem like a totally new location, and using tighter focal lengths in smaller spaces to get some detail out.

Here's an example of a very off axis photo at a very popular spot for similar shots like this in Toronto. I set my camera on that bottom left frame and using that line to shape the vanishing point.

When out taking photos, and looking for shots on the go, try and have as clear a mind as possible. Don't go looking for one specific photo, keep your eyes open and you can find all sorts of little gems. Find a puddle in an alleyway? Try using it as a reflection to make the alley seem much larger than it is.

Gear

The camera you use doesn't matter too much, sure there are benefits to full frame bodies that shoot 14fps and can have 50mp but that's overkill for the layman. Personally, I go out with a full frame body and try to have my bases covered (in prime lenses) but I normally walk around with a 24mm. I would suggest a 14mm for ultra wide city photos, this is great for lookups and panning shots. A 24mm or 35mm for the more all-round lens and a longer lens like a 70-200mm or 85mm. I prefer shooting handheld so I try and use the fastest lenses possible.

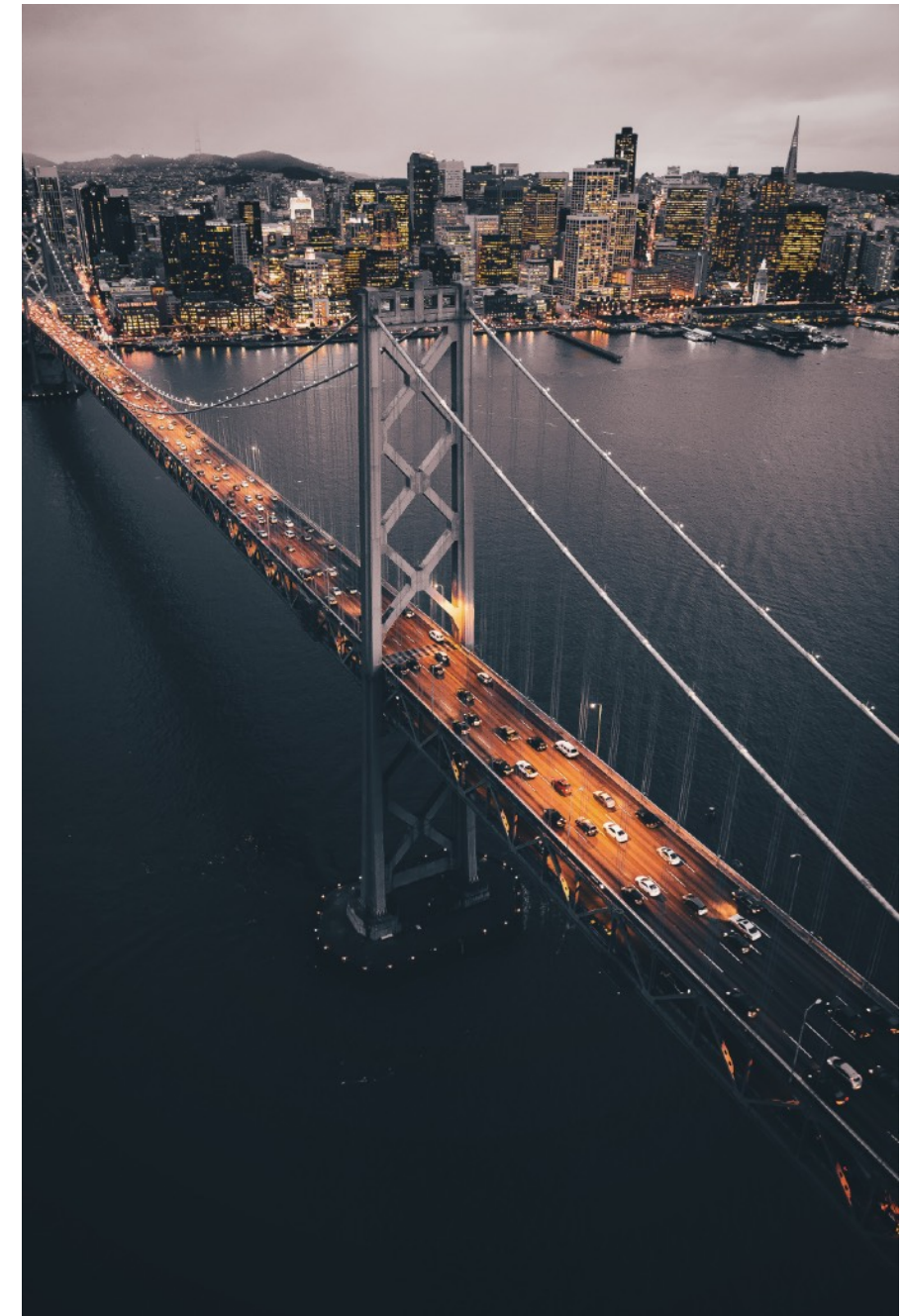


Lighting and Shooting.

There's no definitive answer for what the best light for shooting urban is. I prefer when there is a slight overcast, as I tend to take most of the blues out of my photos anyways. Plus, overcast sky is light a giant soft box, so shadows aren't too hard and most things are evenly lit.

When shooting, I overexpose my photos for shadows as I like to have bright white skies in my daytime photos, or bright highlights in night. When using the exposure meter on my camera I'll usually aim to be a stop or two bright, this makes the post production easier for me. If you're shooting very wide I'd recommend being about f5.6 so the edges aren't soft even if it means having to bump ISO.

Another trick I learned on the way is to change your built-in camera profile to have more saturation, more contrast, and sharpness. This only changes the in-camera preview if you're shooting in RAW so you can have a better idea what your photo will look like once you're done with post production.



Finishing touches.

Pick whatever favourite editing program you have (mine is Lightroom), and tinker with sliders to get a feel of what each does to your selected photos. For starters, I'll usually rate my photos and then edit only the rated ones first.

Hopefully, with overexposing / underexposing your photo will be close to where you want it and most of the changes will be colour corrections or selective desaturation. I'll give a more detailed post production tutorial in the video seminar.

Talk soon!

