

How to Get the Shot

Revealing the Secrets
Behind Unforgettable Photography

Blog #112: Mesmerizing Ceiling

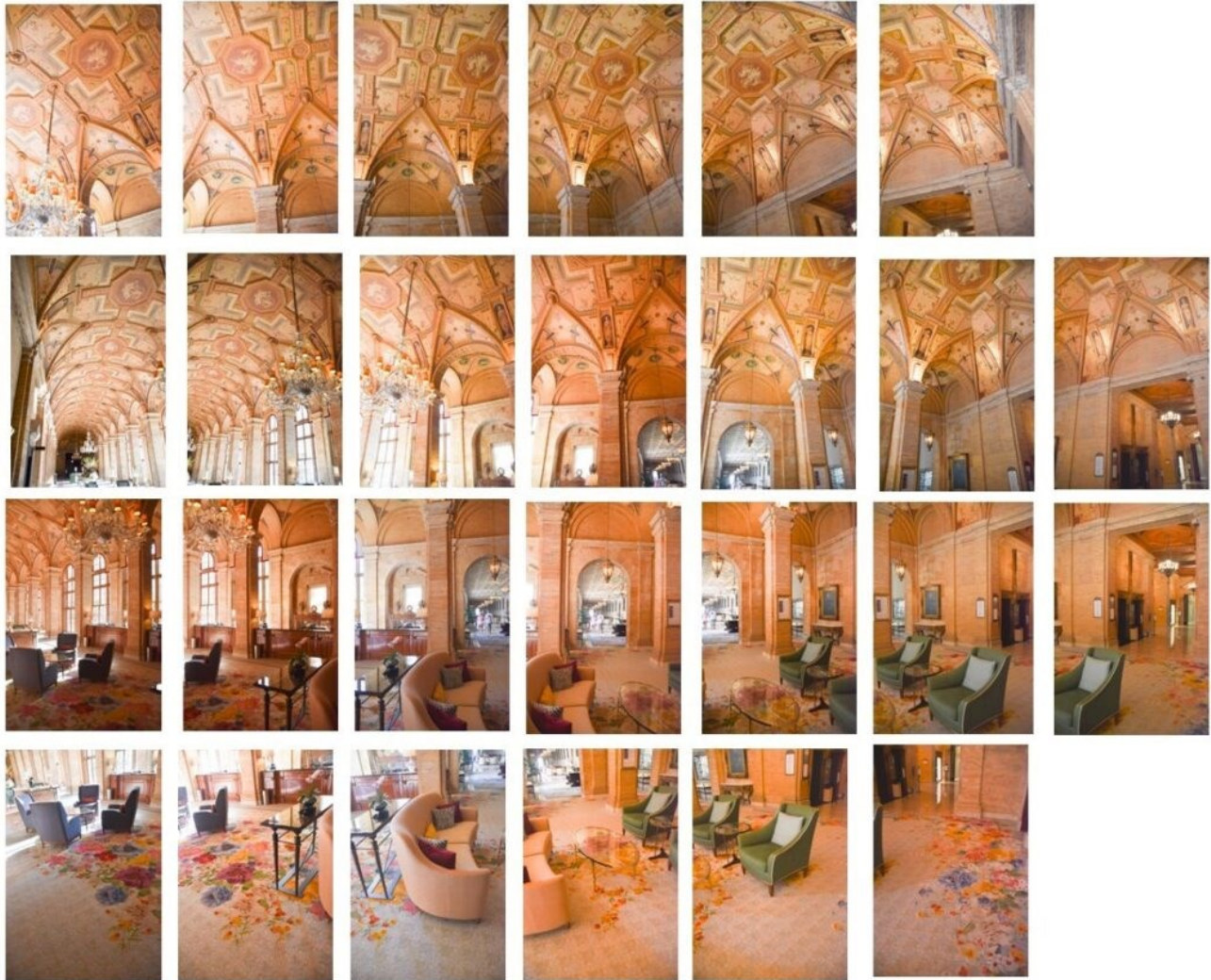


The Lobby of the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach

Breathtaking is not a work that I use regularly, but that is the precisely the word I would use to describe the first time I walked into the lobby of the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach and looked up. Carved into the ceiling were detailed images of Greek gods in chariots with horses, surrounded by symmetrical panels in peach and beige. The pattern repeated, starting down at the end of 200-foot-long lobby that carries the look of the Italian Renaissance into the Florida landmark. As the pattern approached the center of the lobby, the ceiling curved before emptying into another hallway. On the side walls there are detailed alcoves rising from columns to hand-painted vaulted ceilings that are reminiscent of the vaulted ceilings in Rome's Sistine Chapel. Recently refreshed by designer Adam D. Tihany, it is indeed a breathtaking great room.

The re-design included a new, custom-designed, hand-tufted carpet. The hotel's website reports that the rug was inspired by the vivid paintings of French Symbolist, Odilon Redon. The rug's design looks like a garden with lilies, irises and other flowers running over 160 feet in length.

Capturing this room with a camera is a different thing, and different things call for inventive solutions. A total of 33 individual overlapping photos were taken of the room – four rows high and seven photos across.



By using individual photos, I was able to deliver detailed reproduction of the ceiling, while the multiple images followed the curve of the ceiling, so the resulting panoramic image gives a true representation of looking down the lobby in one direction and then looking across the lobby into the chamber in an adjoining room.

When you are doing this process, it's important to overlap photos by one quarter to one-third of the photo so the software had enough information to match images. A tripod can help, but in a setting like this with a curved image, I use a hand-held process, making sure to use the same focus and exposure for every shot so they could be merged consistently.

I also took about five full sets of these shots, so I had back-ups to use with the photo-stitching software. Sometimes the merging process is unsuccessful, or an insufficient overlap of photos leaves gaps and imperfections in the merged image. Having a few complete sets of images to work with is a smart plan.



Ceiling Detail

There are a number of wonderful photo software programs that can combine individual images into one merged image. I like Microsoft's ICE (Image Composite Editor) a free program that is intuitive and easy to use, but you can find a wide array of programs at a wide price range by Googling "Photo Stitching".

TAKEAWAYS

1. Enjoy the scene. Sometimes we're so preoccupied with getting a shot we forget to enjoy a beautiful setting. Soak it in.
1. Don't rush. If you're on your own, give yourself the luxury of your own time to take all the alternative shots you want to consider for editing.
2. Take lots of shot with different angles and exposure, including with and without a polarizing filter.
1. If you can't capture the whole view in a single shot, experiment with photo stitching. Take multiple sets of photos so you have a back-up in case one set can't be merged.
2. Consider returning to a photo site. A second trip can provide great perspective and shots you missed. The same building in full daylight is completely different at sunset or when lit by evening lighting. How you see the image tells the story you choose to convey.