

How to Get the Shot

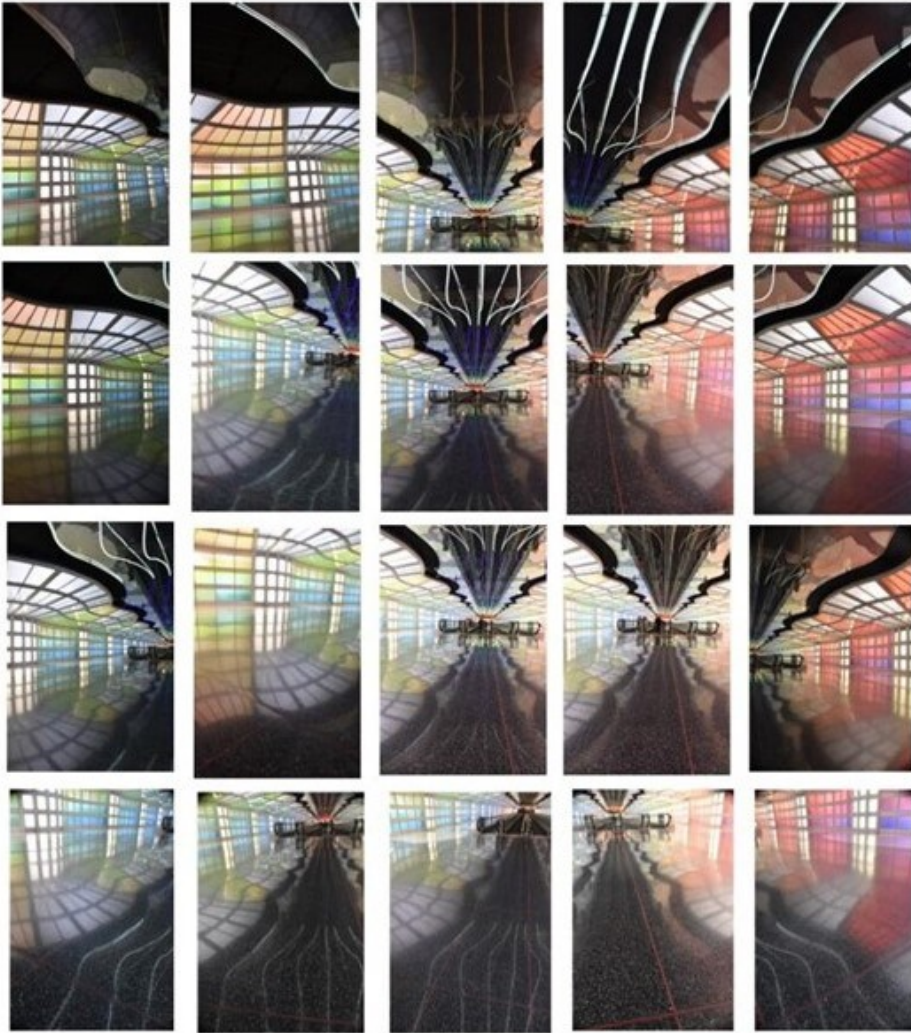
Revealing the secrets behind
unforgettable photography

Blog #101: Still Night at O'Hare



Do you have a ‘bucket list’? Places you’d like to go? I have a “photo bucket list”. I’ve got a visual image in my head of a place I’ve been to, or seen in media, or thought about and know there’s an interesting shot to compose there. For me, the United Terminal at O’Hare Airport in Chicago was on that list. It’s colorful, oddly engaging, full of textures and the neon lights called out for a modern photo.

The only issue is that the hallway is inside the airport, so you can’t just drop in to take photos, so it was on my “next time I’m on a plane trip, I’ll get the shot” agenda. And then, returning to Chicago on the night of a huge snowstorm, I hit gold. My flight arrived in a different airport terminal, but I remember you could walk from terminal to terminal and I had my camera with me. Outbound flights had been cancelled, and there were just a few sparse soles arriving at the airport from sunnier destinations. When I got to the United terminal, there was not a person there. Anywhere. In fact, for the hour I sat there (I know) taking photos and 500 shots later (yes, I know) only three people walked by. At one point, I saw two Chicago police officers and thought they’d ask me to move along, but instead they said, “Hey-take our picture!”



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Knowing this would be a panoramic, I fell into a routine of taking a series of photos for a stitching technique that has produced amazing results. In effect, I take a series of side-by-side photos, each slightly overlapping, and then overlapping top-to-bottom, row after row. For this shot it meant 25 photos (see images below). When this technique is successful, and the spacing/overlap is good, a standard photo software program will merge the individual shots into a merged photo. The quality reproduction of the individual 35 mm shots result in a vivid image.

Because you are following the angle of the room as you collect photos, you are capturing the sweep of the room – like you’re watching a TV show on a curved TV set. In some cases where I’ve used this technique to capture a large room panoramic, I can even capture multiple angles so you can look down two directions in the final photo!

As you take more photos and see that options in lighting and exposure create entirely different editing options, there is a strange satisfaction in having the luxury of time to experiment with angles and exposures so you have the maximum options in editing. It wasn’t until I got into photo editing stage that I fully realized how beautifully the terminal floor reflected the fluorescent lights in the hallway. Selecting a series taken with a polarizing lens (thankfully, I repeated capturing the series with the polarizing lens off and then on) and then adjusting the contrast control revealed the brilliant colors reflected in the mirror image of the walls.

Still Night at O'Hare Photo Stats

Dimensions:	12946 x 9343
Cropped:	9773 x 5431
Exposure:	1.6 sec at f/14
Focal Length:	18mm
ISO:	100
Camera:	Nikon D3500
Lens:	18.0-300.0mm f 3.5

TAKEAWAYS

1. Have your camera with you.
2. Have some "photo bucket list" locations in mind so you can jump on opportunities when they happen.
3. 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.
4. Take lots of shots with different angles and exposure, including with and without a polarizing filter.
5. Take wide perspectives. You can always crop.
6. Experiment with photo stitching software.
7. Take multiple sets of photo groups (see image at left) so you have back-up options if a set can't be merged.