

Taking Better Photos with Your Smart Phone

Recently I had the opportunity to look through some old snapshots from when I was a kid and couldn't help to think how much photography has changed in a relatively short time. My mother used a Kodak Disc camera. If you remember it, you'll also remember how small the negative was that was used to print those "Precious Pictures that documented our childhood." When flipping through some of those pics taken by my mother (never my father) and processed as well as printed through Mystic color labs, 1 cent sale, usually a year or two after that trip to Mountain Park or Bensons Wild Animal Farm, I learned a lot of things about my childhood that I guess I had forgotten. I realized my childhood was out of focus, maybe that's why I don't remember large portions of it! I realized that my brother and I possessed a strange orange skin tone and I realized that we experienced most of our childhood years without heads. I also realized we wore some pretty dorky outfits!

Well, we have come a long way since that Kodak disc camera and in order to create a clearer photo history of you and your loved ones I have created 11 tips for taking better photos with your smart phone!

#1 Have Your Camera Ready

Most missed EPIC photographs are simply a result of not having a camera when you need one. With today's smart phones, it has never been easier to have your camera with you at all times. Not only should you have your phone with you but it needs to be charged! How many times have you thought, "Wow, what a beautiful sunset! Damn my phone is dead!"

#2 Turn Your Phone Sideways

We are conditioned to viewing the world in horizontal format. We watch television horizontally as well as every movie was filmed horizontally! Even though we are used to holding our phones vertically, capturing photographs horizontally many times creates more appealing images.

#3 Clean Your Lens

Our phones get thrown loosely into pockets, backpacks and purses, along with all kinds of things such as makeup, chapstick, and chocolate bars! With the lens on most smartphones being so small, it's very easy to overlook the fact that a little grime can greatly alter the clarity and overall quality of the captured image. Professionally, I have to suggest wiping your smartphone lens with a good quality lens cloth but to be honest I usually use my tee shirt!

#4 Lock Your Focus

I know my iPhone and most newer phones offer this feature. As you compose your photograph simply TAP on the the area of the screen that you want to be sharp.

[#5 Don't Use The Zoom](#)

This one can be a bit more difficult, but unlike true cameras such as DSLR's, which use a true zoom system, many smart phone cameras simply crop and enlarge the image. What does that mean? You will lose image quality by cropping in and enlarging a piece of the overall scene. This is not always possible but the best zoom you have is your ability to simply move closer to your subject. Zooming with your phone should only be used when physically moving closer is prohibitive.

[#6 It's All About The Light](#)

The way light reacts to our physical space can transform a normally boring or dull scene into a breathtaking photograph! The cool thing is that light is always changing. Challenge yourself to take multiple photographs of the same space in multiple lighting situations over the course of a day, a week, a month, or even a year. You'll be amazed at the differences.

[#7 Try to Ignore The Color](#)

We are certainly drawn to great and beautiful color, but sometimes that same element can create distraction. Some of the most powerful and beautiful black and white photographs hanging in museums just wouldn't have the same mood if shown in color! Look for scenes that represent themselves great as black and white photographs. It might just open up a whole new photographic world to you.

[#8 Use The Trash](#)

What good are all these photographs if we can't find them? It's so easy to fill your phone up with mediocre pictures when all you really need is that one great photo. I have been fortunate to work as a professional photographer and teacher for years, and I can guarantee you there isn't a professional out there that doesn't trash the mediocre but captures it takes to get to the Epic photographs!

[#9 Add Some Psychology To It](#)

In the world of all living things, as human, we are all about the same size and 99.9% of all picture taking takes place at about the same height and angle. We simply hold that phone in front of our face at about the same height, every time. Try to start thinking about the world differently. What if you were an ant? How would the world look to you? What about a giant? Some of the world's most intriguing photographs are of very normal everyday subjects simply just viewed in a different way.

#10 Mood Changes The Story

Its human nature to want to take pictures on beautiful sunny days, but taking a walk in the rain on a quite foggy morning can result in moody photographs that everyone else wishes they captured instead of you!

#11 Take The Other Road

We are creatures of habit and usually will take the same path day after day resulting in our surroundings becoming expected. It's normal to take the small world we create for ourselves for granted. Instead of walking the dog on the same route you have taken a thousand times, change it up. Simply changing your direction and choosing a different path can open up a whole new world visually.

There are millions of amazing photographs just waiting to be made right outside your door. You just have to get out there!

***Richard Barnes** is an Awarding Winning Photographer and Teacher. He has written multiple articles for the Professional Photographer magazine. His portrait sessions have brought him all over the country. As a Teacher and Lecturer, he has lectured around the U.S. as well as to Brisbane, Australia.*