



Colourful frosted silver birch leaves beautifully backlit by the morning light. Canon EOS 5D Mark IV with 70-200mm f/2.8L II lens at 200mm, 1/1000sec, ISO 200, handheld.

Harness the beauty of winter colour

While it's tempting to see winter as a season of darkness and dormancy, it's also a time of muted colour palettes and enhanced atmospheres. Landscape specialist Emma Stokes guides us through the many and varied facets of winter's creative possibilities

Ever since I started photography, I have been drawn to the use of colour to portray atmosphere in a scene, and with winter offering some of the most atmospheric conditions, but arguably the least colour across the landscape, a different approach is sometimes required. While traditional landscape photography techniques still have their place, creative, minimalist or intimate styles can help us to get the best out of this time of the year. Of course, as with most forms of outdoor photography, the right conditions are important, and although getting up in the dark on a cold winter's morning may not appeal, the potential for mist and frost often make it worth it. Here I share some different approaches to capturing winter colour as well as some tips for increasing your chances for finding the best conditions.

WOODLAND TRANSITION

The meeting of two seasons is such a wonderful time of fusion, with the outgoing season often lingering long after the calendar tells us it is over. This period of change creates story-telling photo opportunities, and none more than when trees seem frozen in time as autumn leads into winter. With certain species such as the oak and beech losing their leaves later than others, and the chance of early frosts delaying leaf fall further, there are lots of opportunities to look out for.

Early on in winter, frost is often more localised, found in areas where ground temperature has started to edge below zero, so it is worth heading to exposed or elevated ground rather than urban areas to find these pockets of frost. A telephoto or macro lens will help you to focus in on intimate scenes, and use of a square crop can help draw the viewer's eye in further. Look out for colourful frost-edged leaves still hanging onto trees – with frost more likely on a clear morning, a chance of early morning sunlight can offer a striking rim-lighting effect. Alternatively, you can capture a crisp carpet of fallen leaves to fill the frame with texture and definition. Take time to look for relationships between the overlapping shapes or opt for frost-laden ferns and bracken for a more architectural feel.



This patch of bracken seemed frozen in time, perfect for some intimate photography. Canon EOS 6D Mark II, 24-105mm f/4 II lens at 93mm, 1.3sec, ISO 100, tripod mounted.



The frosted gritstone provided some striking foreground definition in the Peak District. Canon EOS 6D Mk II, 17-40mm f/4 lens at 17mm, f/11, 20sec, ISO 800 tripod mounted.

BLUE HOUR

With the sun rising at a more sociable hour and with a potential for frost and fog, winter is arguably the best season for capturing the blue hour. So called because of the blue light waves filtering through the atmosphere when the sun is a few degrees below the horizon, it can occur even in fairly overcast conditions, making it often more reliable for photographers than the often-favoured golden hour. To make the most of the changing light, aim to arrive at your planned

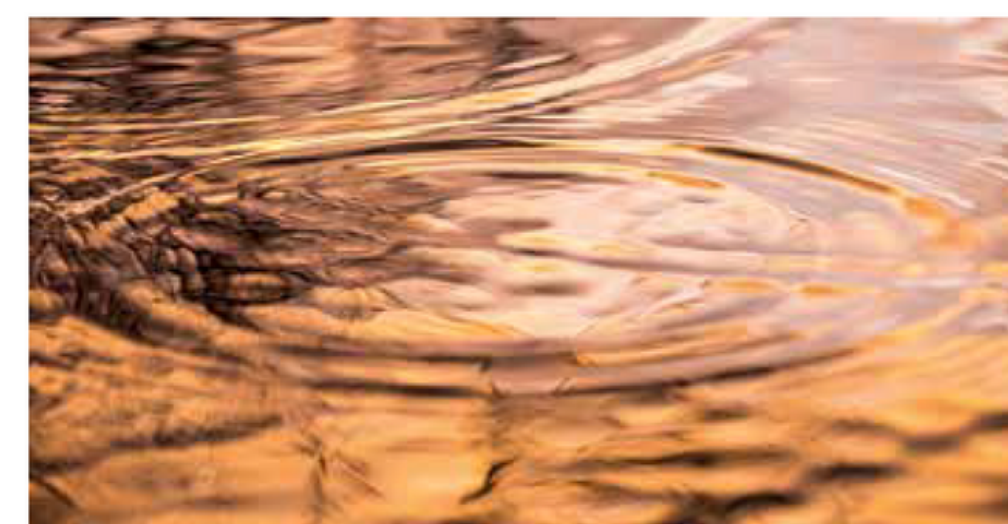
location in near darkness before the start of nautical twilight. Time spent in advance planning your composition, working out the route to your preferred location and preparing for the cold weather is essential to help you make the most of your time.

When choosing your composition, this near-monochrome style of photography will benefit from strong elements, interesting textures and contrast, but the subtle presence of complementary or contrasting

colours such as urban lights can bring some visual interest. In near darkness, focusing can prove challenging, so take a torch to help to focus on foreground elements or try setting your manual focus ring to near infinity for a more distant view. With the deep blue tones of early dawn providing a key atmospheric element, it is a good idea to check your white balance, then enjoy capturing one of the most atmospheric parts of the day as the landscape emerges from the darkness.



A golden winter sunset turned my local lake into 'liquid gold'. Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, 70-200mm f/2.8L II at 200mm, f/4.5, 1/500sec, ISO 250, handheld.



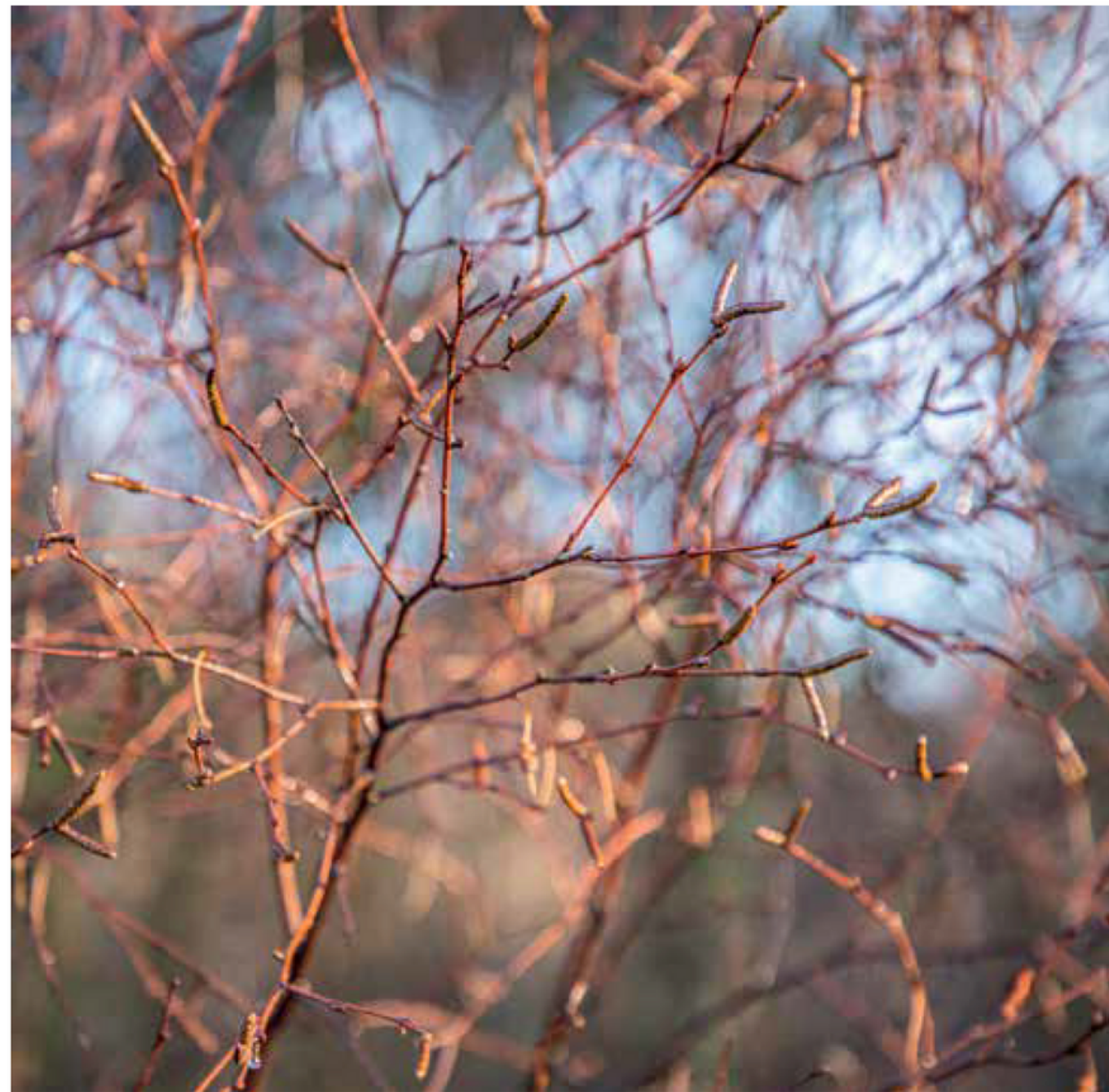
WATER ABSTRACTS

We don't need to travel far in the UK to reach a river, stream or lake, all of which can offer wonderful opportunities for abstract photography. I find the process of capturing this type of image can be just as rewarding, if not more so, than the end result, with colours dancing across the surface producing a mesmerising effect. Given the right conditions, intimate abstract images can

be created using just the ripples alone, with a gentle breeze of about 4-7mph providing enough friction to bring the surface to life, but if you want more interest in your image, fallen trees or reeds can create striking silhouettes where straight lines seem to liquify on contact.

After rainfall, even if conditions are still, water drops falling from overhanging branches can produce beautiful concentric

circles and overlapping patterns which can be captured with great effect. A telephoto lens is needed here, and handholding the camera or using a monopod will give you greater versatility. Manual settings to control shutter speed and aperture is essential and you can try shutter speeds to either add sharpness and definition or slow down the motion for a more impressionistic feel.



TREE COLOUR

After the vibrant reds and golds of trees in autumn, the dormant period can seem devoid of colour. However, you don't have to look far to find some subtle tones in trees as they prepare for spring. The silver birch can display a reddish haze above striking white trunks, and the weeping willow with its arching golden branches is another prime example.

One perhaps lesser known is the alder, a native tree distinguishable throughout winter by its distinctive purple catkins and cones. Often found growing along riverbanks and lake edges, this cone-shaped tree can offer serene reflection opportunities, and as with any tree or vegetation, damp conditions can help to enhance its tones. With purples, reds and golds to choose from, look out for conditions best suited to their colour. Complementary tones help to add further tranquillity to a scene, with the golden hour bringing out the golds of the arching willow, and the pink hues of a misty winter's sunrise or the cool blue of early morning frost creating synergy for the alder's purple tones.

Winter tree colour such as this birch can provide close-up opportunities. Canon EOS 6D Mark II, 24-105mm f/4L II lens at 105mm, f/4, 1/80sec, ISO 100, handheld.

The purple tones of this alder tree were complemented perfectly by the pastel colours of this cold February morning. Canon EOS 6D Mark II, 70-200mm f/4 lens at 110mm, f/11, 1/5sec, ISO 100, tripod mounted.



WINTER IMPRESSIONS

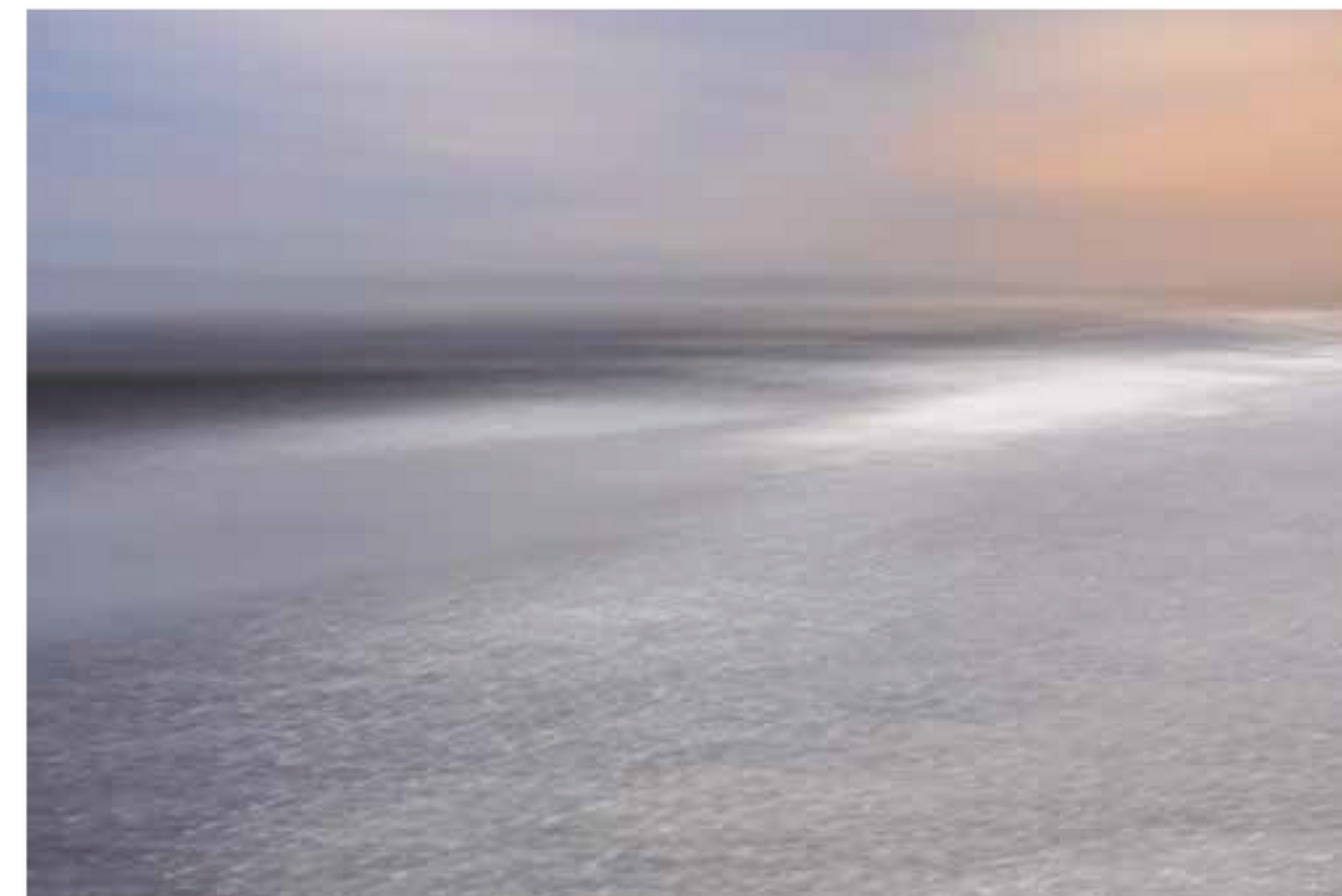
Creative ICM photography can be an acquired taste, but whichever side of the fence you fall, there is no denying that it is the most impressionistic of genres, encapsulating the essence of a scene and leaving the viewer with a sense of mystique. Larger areas of differing tone, light and colour are often

enough to create such an image, and in winter, there are few better places to capture this than on the coast where light is reflected in abundance and wide-open coastal vistas provide larger compositional elements.

If you are new to ICM photography and want to try it, consider the conditions and

light, as these will naturally influence the look and feel of the resulting image. You may wish to capture the pastels of a cold winter sunrise or the slate greys and blues of an incoming weather front depending on your preferred photographic style. Shooting towards the light will provide more contrast to your image, which can add some depth to your winter scene. Plus, at low tide, wet sand not only acts like a large mirror for the tones above, it can also help create lagoons and ripples, adding tonal variation to the scene.

Depending on the time of day, neutral density filters will be required to slow your shutter speed, and a shutter speed of between a quarter of a second to a few seconds with a variety of different movements and pausing techniques will start to bring results. Trial and error are par for the course with ICM photography, but once you have found a look you like, its rewards can be many.



Winter Impressions at the Coast. Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, 70-200mm f/2.8L II lens at 135mm, f/9, 1.6sec, ISO 160, handheld.

TShooting towards the light can introduce a more dynamic feel to the image. Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, 70-200mm f/2.8L II lens at 70mm, f/10, 2sec, ISO 160, handheld.



Afternoon light at Camber Sands. Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, 70-200mm f/2.8L II lens at 70mm, f/6.3, 1/640sec, ISO 100, handheld.

Soft winter light at Beachy Head, taken late afternoon with a long exposure to smooth the water to mirror the softness of the clouds above. Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, 70-200mm f/2.8L II lens at 70mm, f/16, 0.8sec, ISO 100, tripod mounted.

WINTER LIGHT ON THE COAST

With the sun lower in the sky throughout the shorter days and sunset colours often lasting longer in the winter months, heading to the coast will help you make the most of the unique light. In all but the clearest of days, there are photographic opportunities to be found, with the skies changing throughout the day. High clouds will create diffused light, bringing subtle winter tones to a scene, but if it is vibrant colour you are after, look out for a combination of different cloud layers, which will light up with an array of colour as the sun sets.

The skies found ahead of a warm front or on the edges of a slow-moving high pressure can often bring the best results. Wideangle lenses can help to capture the sense of open space at the coast, with sand, water ripples or streaks of cloud all providing lead-in lines to draw the eye into the image. Alternatively, opt for a telephoto lens to create a more minimalist feel. Neutral density filters can be used to slow down the water movement to create a softer look, with half a second of exposure being enough to transform a scene or to introduce lead-in lines as the waves ebb and flow.

10 TIPS FOR WINTER COLOUR SUCCESS

1 Invest in good-quality winter clothing, especially for your extremities. There is nothing worse than feeling the cold in your fingers while trying to get your camera settings right. A pair of hand warmers are also a great addition to your bag, especially if going out at dawn.

2 Batteries can lose power quickly in cold weather so take plenty of spares and keep them in a warm inside pocket to ensure they last as long as possible in the cold weather.

3 Try to put textbook compositions and techniques to one side and instead go with your instinct. Absorb yourself in your work to capture the feeling of a scene and spend time working out what it is that has drawn you to photograph it.

4 Lighten your kit bag by taking just one lens with you. A telephoto lens is a great option and will encourage you to think creatively.

5 Try out different aspect ratios – we are so used to fitting the landscape into a 3:2 aspect ratio, we sometimes forget to try alternatives. A panoramic crop can eliminate dead space while a square crop can help to focus the image in an intimate woodland scene.

6 Check your white balance. While auto white balance can work well most of the time, in certain conditions such as the blue hour it will overcompensate so spend a few moments getting it right in camera.

7 If venturing out at dawn or dusk, always make sure someone knows where you are heading, and take a fully charged phone, torch and provisions.

8 Get up and out. Even if the conditions are not looking favourable and the cold outside is not appealing, there is often something to photograph and it is one of the best ways to start the day.

9 Protect your gear. Condensation can wreak havoc on your camera gear so avoid exposing your camera and lenses to sudden temperature changes when you get back home by leaving your camera bag closed while it warms up to room temperature.

10 Manual mode can be essential if the conditions and light are changing quickly, or you just want to take your creative photography to the next level. Spend time learning how to change settings quickly when time is not of the essence to ensure you don't miss that shot when the conditions are right.



MIST

With colder nights in winter bringing a greater chance of early mist, we are often blessed with a natural filter which diffuses any morning colour and adds to the tranquil atmosphere of a scene. With mist often forming locally, typically along valley floors and over bodies of water, it is not always mentioned on the regional weather forecasts, so it is worth spending time getting to know your local area and learning what weather conditions to look out for. Cold, still nights, high humidity and air temperature close to dew point all contribute, and with some weather apps such as Clear Outside providing helpful colour coding for some of these elements,

A frosty January morning brought about some perfect conditions for an elevated view over the Sevenoaks Weald. Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, 70-200mm f/2.8L II lens at 200mm, f/11, 1/100sec, ISO 100, tripod mounted.

you can carry out your own mist forecast.

Search for an elevated view and use a telephoto lens to capture the tonal layering along a valley, or you can consider a minimalist approach along the valley floor to make the most of the already simplified scene. Atmospheric silhouettes or rays of sunlight breaking through a group of trees all create eye-catching images and if shooting into the sun, be sure to underexpose your images, bracketing if necessary, to capture its outline.