

Putting Myself on Assignment: Maine at 300mm

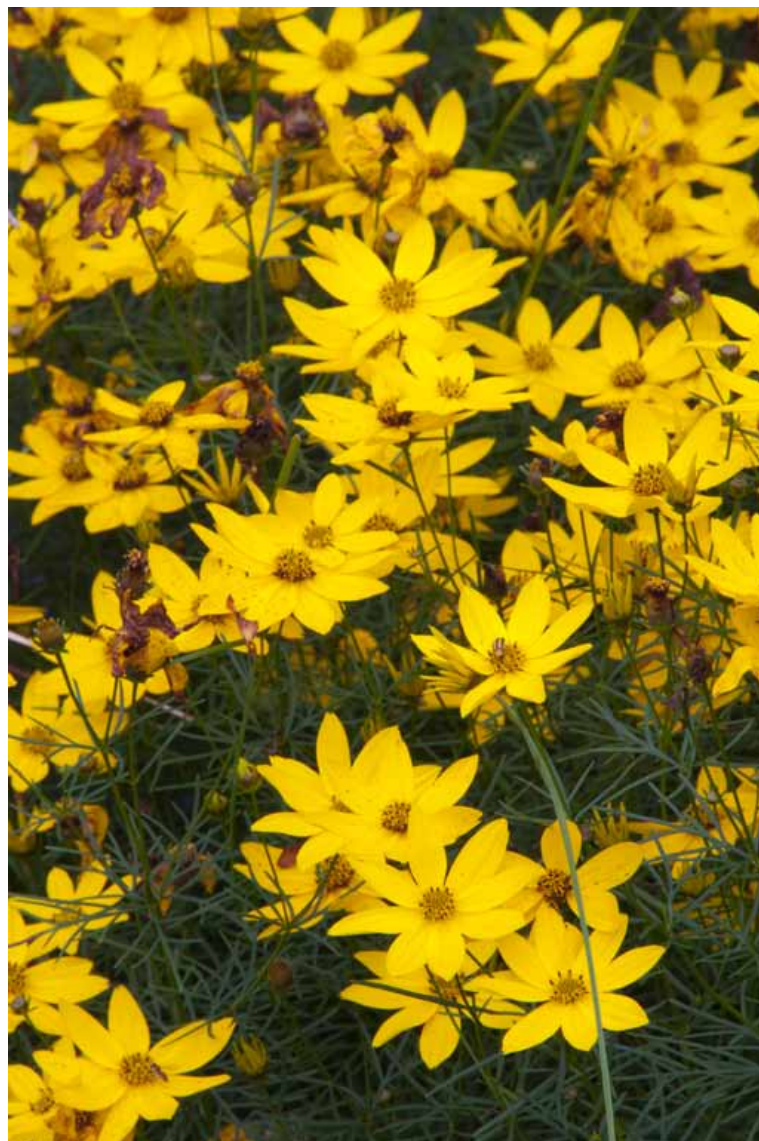
by Photographer Raymond Klass

In my last newsletter I introduced an assignment that I occasionally use in my workshops. Just to review the assignment, students are limited to a single focal length for a one-hour shoot. This means that they need to choose a fixed focal length lens, or zoom their lens to one spot and stop there.

One of the goals of this assignment is to promote creative compositions, as students learn to turn their perceived limitation into an opportunity to produce images at a focal length and perspective that they wouldn't otherwise gravitate too. I asked you – the newsletter subscribers, to suggest a focal length for me to try out this assignment while I was in Maine this past week. Sarina Cook from Pennsylvania was first to suggest a focal length of 300mm.

I must say that I was not particularly excited about the focal length of 300mm – not that I don't like the lens, but on the digital it becomes a 450mm lens, which sort of limits the type of images one can create. But, after thinking about it – and procrastinating just a bit, I decided that the whole point of the assignment was to be creative despite being handed an awkward focal length to use.

At first, all I could think about were the images I could create if I just had some other lens – some other focal length. I saw great wide-angle images, good medium telephoto and macro images. I saw pictures that worked with any other focal length. It's not that the location I had was particularly challenging for a longer lens, and it's not even about the lens I had on. It's perfectly natural to begin by looking at our limitations – at the idea that we cannot use some of the tools we have become accustomed to.



It takes a certain amount of time to get over this negative reaction – this idea that if I had any other lens, I would be making great images. The truth is that when you force yourself to look through the lens – to explore that perspective, there are just as many good images to be found at that focal length.





As photographers, we're not always able to control everything about our situation – we've got to deal with unpredictable lighting, wild subjects, the weather, and a myriad of other factors. The lesson here is that the eye is what we truly need to develop. When we're thrown into a new situation, into an unfamiliar set of circumstances, there's always an image to be made if we can stay positive.

All too often, we as photographers fall back on what was successful in our other images – repeating the same compositional techniques. This can be a good way to start photographing, but it rarely leads to capturing what is truly unique about a specific location. After all, art is about interpretation, and if you're just repeating what worked somewhere else, you're not interpreting the world around you. The essence of a scene lies within your interpretation of the elements. It is a reaction and connection you develop with the subject. The most important

lesson here is that we never stop exploring – that we never rely on past successes or on familiar lenses. Rather we need to start with a fresh canvas and a full palette when we photograph.

These are some of the images I took during my hour long assignment with a 300mm lens and a Nikon D300 digital SLR.