

Sensuous world

Rod Edwards uses a variety of techniques to create his wonderfully dream-like landscapes, including slow shutter speeds and that old favourite, Vaseline

PROFESSIONAL photographer Rod Edwards works in a variety of areas, including portraits, but what he refers to as his 'contemporary landscapes' particularly caught our attention.

He uses blur for creative effect, produced by a mixture of traditional and digital tools, and it's easy to repeat these techniques in your own photographs to give them bucketfuls of atmosphere.

Rod says: 'I'm looking for a strong composition, vibrant colours and nice lines. The subject matter is less important than the shapes in the picture.'

Having said that, this technique does lend itself to romantic, flowery subjects. Conventional shots of the landscape can sum up a place, but Rod's interpretations are more personal and he

says he's aiming to create 'images which do something to you spiritually. As a professional, I'm always trying to come up with something a bit different'.

Although he has larger format cameras, Rod chooses to shoot on 35mm for these images because he finds the format 'more intuitive' and it can be easier to handhold the camera for certain techniques (see below). He points out that you don't necessarily need the highest-quality lens, filter or scanner, especially when you are making use of all-over blur.

If Rod is controlling the colour as well as sharpness, he may end up needing to put three filters over the lens. Vignetting is a problem with wideangles and you can't necessarily spot it in the viewfinder, so instead of using a filter holder, he will hold the filters up to ▶



Rod says: 'I like to give the image a little more personality,' so he set a slow shutter speed of 1/4sec to blur motion. This image, shot in Brighton, is quite mysterious because the horses are riderless. Notice how the nearer ones are more blurred
Nikon F90X, 28-105mm, 35mm, 1/4sec at f/22, Fuji Velvia, polariser, 81A, tripod



PREVIOUS PAGE Rod smeared Vaseline over a skylight filter in a horizontal direction so he could get a vertical effect. He focused on the middle tree, setting a wide aperture so the blurring effect would be maximised. In Photoshop, he added grain and tweaked the colours so that the bluebells came out realistically

Nikon F90X, 28-105mm at 50-70mm, 1/3.5-4.5, Fuji Velvia, 81A, tripod

ABOVE Rod feels this image, where he deliberately shook the camera during the exposure, 'sums up the atmosphere of the place.' It is in Hunstanton, Norfolk

Nikon F90X, 28-105mm at 50-70mm, 1/22, Fuji Reala, blue grad, ND, handheld

◀ the lens and use tape or Blu-tack. You could also crop the edges of the shot if the effect is only minor.

IN-CAMERA TECHNIQUES

These are quick, easy and you don't have to manipulate the image after processing. The downside is that you can't tell exactly what the effect will be until after processing, so it's best to take several shots, varying each one slightly.

Slow shutter speeds used with a moving subject, such as the merry-go-round image (previous page), gives



Rod focused on the Happisburgh Lighthouse, Norfolk, using a narrow depth of field to throw the bright green crop out of focus. No other softening was used *Nikon F90X, 28-105mm at 70mm, blue grad, polariser, 81A, Fuji Velvia*



attractive blur which suggests rapid motion. The exact shutter speed depends on the effect you want and the speed of the subject.

For the merry-go-round picture, Rod set $1/4$ sec on his camera (which must be tripod-mounted) so the foreground horses are blurred and the ones further back are sharper. Too slow a speed and your picture is reduced to an unrecognisable blur. In very bright conditions, you may need to fit a filter to cut the amount of light reaching the lens. Rod

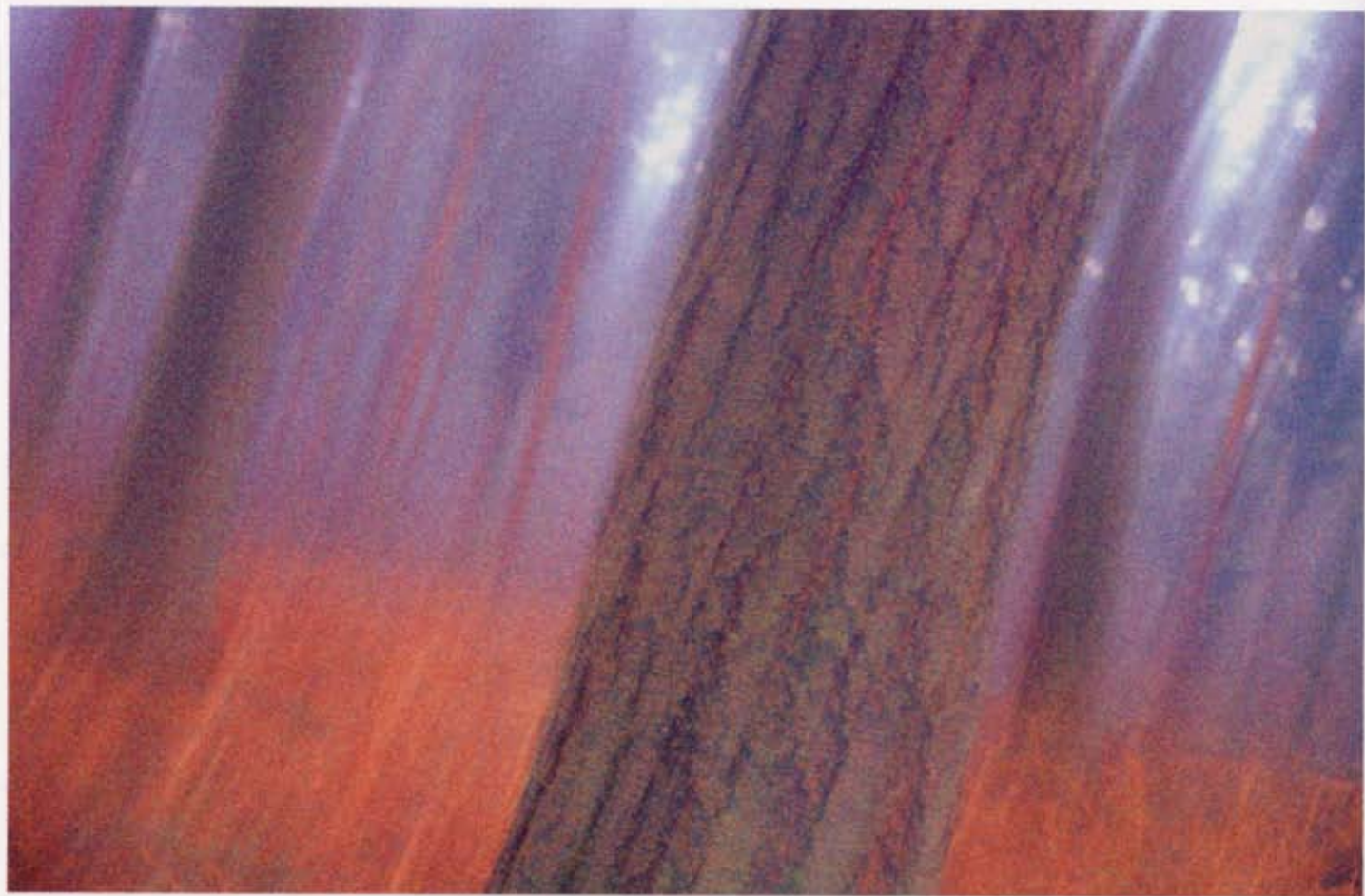
has had a six-stop neutral density filter specially made for this purpose.

Rod's picture of a bench (previous page) uses the technique of deliberate camera shake. He took his camera off its tripod and set a speed of 1sec – slower than you can feasibly handhold without the camera moving. In fact, he purposely introduced even more blur into the image by jerking the camera during exposure. The image is livelier as a result. You can also achieve this kind of effect by shooting through the ►

TOP On location in Northleach in the Cotswolds, Rod had been intending to take the quintessential shot of pretty cottages, but as he drove past this scene, he knew it would make a good shot because of its strong, bold composition. He smeared Vaseline in all directions for a more diffuse look, helped by the misty weather conditions
Nikon F90X, 28-105mm at 50mm, 81A, blue grad, Fuji Velvia

ABOVE Rod used Vaseline for an atmospheric shot of Norfolk poppies. Also, try shooting fields of flowers on a windy day with a slow shutter speed
Nikon F90X, 18-35mm at 21-24mm, polariser, 81A, blue grad, 1/22, Fuji Velvia, tripod

ABOVE LEFT Get a swirly effect by smearing Vaseline in a circular motion over a skylight filter
Nikon F90X, 28-35mm, 1/4sec at 1/22, Fuji Velvia, tripod



Both these shots were taken using Vaseline applied to a skylight filter. The colours were enhanced in Photoshop using the Hue and Brightness filter, and grain was also added after scanning

Nikon F90X, 28-105mm at 40-50mm, blue grad, polariser, B1A, f/5.6, Fuji Velvia

bluebells, tree trunks and the Cotswolds scene. Rod has found that when he applies the Vaseline in a horizontal direction he gets vertical effects in the final image, and vice versa. The more you stop the lens down, the less the effect, so try a fairly wide aperture of around f/4.5.

DIGITAL TECHNIQUES

Although Rod normally uses in-camera techniques, he often tweaks the image afterwards in Photoshop. You can add grain by using the Grain, Film Grain or Noise filters.

An alternative is to load up with ultra-fast film (and perhaps push it), but Rod prefers to shoot on the slow speed Fuji Velvia because of the super-saturated colours it gives, which are essential to the success of his pictures. He sometimes boosts colours even more on the computer, using the Hue and Saturation filter. Also, if you add grain on the computer, you have more control over the eventual look. **AP**

◀ windscreen of a moving car (or anything else that moves). This can work well with neon-lit night images. Set a shutter speed of 1/4sec or slower.

If you want to blur objects on one plane of focus but not another, set a narrow depth of field by using a wide aperture (say, f/2.8) and using a

telephoto lens. Then focus on the subject you wish to be sharp. The lighthouse picture (page 36) was captured using a focal length of 70mm, focused on the lighthouse, and since the crop growing in the foreground was near the photographer, it came out blurred. Often a colour contrast works well, as it has here.

Similarly coloured objects, some blurred and some not, tend to blend in, which can look a little confusing.

Applying Vaseline to a skylight filter (not directly onto the lens) is a very old technique, but still worth trying for the wonderful effects you can achieve. It is used here in the pictures of poppies,

■ To see other pictures by Rod, visit his website at: www.rodwards.com.