

Landscape photography



Southwold, Suffolk.



Badwater, Death Valley, California.

ROD EDWARDS

Landscape has always held a special attraction for Rod Edwards, and his website, www.rod-edwards.com, is packed with images that reflect this interest. There are separate sections dealing with traditional and contemporary landscape, together with a further link to a comprehensive picture library that he operates, covering the East Anglia region.

From the strong landscape bias on his website, it's plainly where he's aiming to specialise. But he's the first to admit that it's not an easy specialisation for generating income. Commissions are few and far between, and there is always strong competition to land them. Stock photography, in which he is heavily involved through his own and outside libraries, is also undergoing fundamental

changes that are putting on the squeeze.

"I suppose the problem revolves around there being a lot of photographers who shoot landscape as part of what they do," he says, "coupled with the move by picture libraries towards supplying royalty-free images. In landscape terms, this has made a huge difference, because there is now some excellent royalty-free work available that features the most famous areas. It's difficult to visit these places now and to come back with anything saleable.

"I completed a trip to the US last October, photographing in places such as Bryce Canyon and Death Valley, and I've found it difficult to market the work to date because the market is so saturated. A lot of libraries won't even look at pictures from the US National Parks because they already have so much material."



A rural scene at Thorney, Cambridgeshire, shot on Kodak high-speed infrared film. It's from Rod Edwards' contemporary landscape collection and selling well in the photo art market.

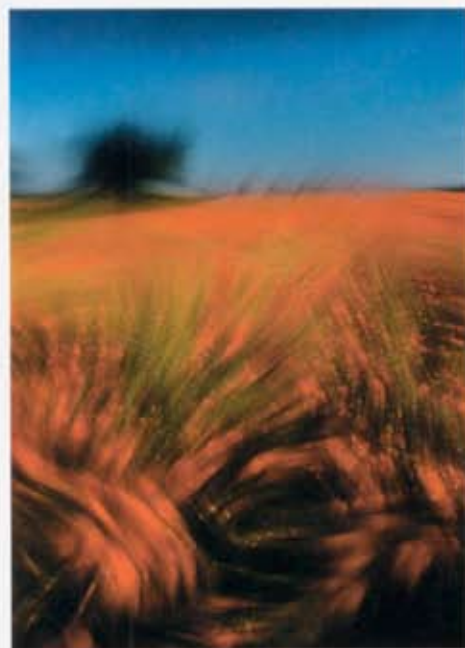


Thornham, Norfolk coast.

When the big libraries such as Getty Images or Digital Vision do bite, there's a price to pay – they now take a 70 and 75 per cent commission respectively, ostensibly to help to meet the bill of digitising their picture files. This has hit stock photographers hard. The alternative, selling pictures outright to one of the royalty free →



Howe Hill, Norfolk Broads.



Norfolk poppy field, from Rod Edwards' contemporary collection.

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IMAGE © ROD EDWARDS

The Fens, Cambridgeshire.

libraries, is against the natural instincts of those trying to make an income from stock – ultimately it will simply help to devalue their market still further. But Rod concedes that there may eventually be no alternative, even though the typical rates of £25-50 per image don't make a lot of economic sense.

Rod already knows the answer to his quandary, and it lies close to home. There is more of a market, certainly in the UK, for British and European landscapes, particularly those that have

an individual feel about them.

"One of my most popular recent images features a classic French hill village," he says. "The reason that it's done well is because it's everyone's idea of what a village in a region such as Provence should look like. It's the same with all sorts of other subjects: if I shoot a picture of a castle in such a way that it's not recognisable as a record of a specific location, then it becomes a generic picture of a castle that can sell to anyone wanting

to illustrate this theme. To depict somewhere like the Yorkshire Dales, I'll shoot pictures of drystone walls, rolling hills and little hay barns, and that will convey the atmosphere of the place, and will give me the widest possible market.

"Clients such as Forte Hotels, English Country Cottages and Hoseasons will pay reasonably well for pictures like these for their brochures, to illustrate an area without tying it in to one location." Images such as these can be sold directly through a good quality website: Rod has designed his own and has equipped it with a powerful search engine that allows browsers to locate anything they require within the shortest possible time.

The dwindling rates that big libraries will pay for images, and the fact that UK locations are easier to market in this country, means that Rod is now promoting his British images himself, allowing him to keep all of his fees. He has also established a strong section of his website that is devoted to contemporary landscape images, which are starting to attract interest from those involved in the photo art market.

Concentrating on Britain means he is at the mercy of our weather, which can be a problem. A recent week-long expedition to the Lake District yielded just one-and-a-half days of sunshine.

"I do love shooting landscape, and that's what makes it worthwhile," says Rod. "It's not easy because the pictures are always undervalued by clients who underestimate the time it all takes. But I enjoy it, and if I do happen to get one particularly stunning shot it can pay for a whole trip on its own."

