

# PRO ZONE



Learn the techniques and get tips from the professionals

## SPIRIT IN THE SKY

Scottish photographer **JOHN G MOORE** has had two dramatic events affect both his personal life and photographic career. Now with the launch of his Spirit project, he speaks to Grant Scott about his work and the inspiration behind these dramatic images.

### **JOHN G MOORE'S GRANDFATHER WAS A KEEN PHOTOGRAPHER**

and he was therefore exposed to photography from quite a young age, but he came to photography via two very separate paths and through two of his passions: music and the outdoors.

Starting out as part of the vibrant Scottish music scene in Edinburgh in the eighties, he naturally fell into photographing his fellow musicians and gigs while working in a music store and playing keyboards and guitar in a band. But it was the influence of an uncle that

lead him towards the great outdoors through long walks together along the rugged west coast of Scotland. As an enthusiastic photographer, Moore was happy for a while documenting his rock 'n' roll lifestyle and shooting landscapes for fun. ▶

*Half Dome, Yosemite*



## “SOMETHING LIKE THAT IS A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE. MY PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE CHANGED...”

However, his approach to and relationship with photography dramatically altered when, at 27, he saw his father killed in a road accident: “Something like that is a life-changing experience. My perspective on life changed and when an opportunity came up to take some pictures for a friend in a band, I decided to make photography my career and go freelance. I had friends in Tokyo, New York and Los Angeles via the music business who asked me to do pictures for them, and it just started from there. Nothing high level, but it was enough to keep me in funds.”

Based in Glasgow, John then worked for a mixture of different clients for the following nine or 10 years. He worked for a number of holiday companies, which got him travelling and photographing locations and landscapes seriously. It was a nomadic existence for him as a then-

single man, which provided lots of interesting and diverse opportunities to experiment with his photography across the areas of fashion, music, beauty and, of course, landscapes.

However, it was a second personal family tragedy that brought him to his his latest project: photographing landscapes within the stunning and much-photographed Yosemite National Park in California. “My wife’s cousin was born with special needs and required a major operation when still only a young girl. Initially, it seemed to be a success, but sadly she died after a month or so. I wanted to help because you feel so helpless in these situations. Anyway, the family started a trust fund associated with the hospital that treated her, so I started selling some prints of my work on eBay to help out.”

John then found himself working in Los Angeles for a fashion client and bands. It was here that he’d decided that the best way to help the trust would be to create a portfolio of his photographs to sell, and as he’d always wanted to photograph American landscapes that seemed to be the ideal combination. “Yosemite was the nearest national park, so I visited and found out that one of the founders of the park was a Scotsman called John Muir. I’d never heard of him, but in California he’s revered as a conservationist and even features on the \$5 bill. He also founded the Sierra Club, which is the biggest conservation club in the world. Muir was a friend of the great landscape photographer Ansel Adams, who was also a member of the Sierra Club.”

John G Moore



Clearing snowstorm, Inspiration Point

## SHOOT LOCATION

John G Moore is a portrait, fashion and landscape photographer based in Glasgow, Scotland. Having begun his career in the music industry, he now works for a variety of clients worldwide.

The combination of clients in Los Angeles and a personal tragedy led him to create the Spirit project in the Yosemite National Park in California over an 18-month period.

The home of landscape photography thanks to the legendary landscape photographer Ansel Adams, Yosemite provided Moore with a canvas on which to expand his photography and experiment with his collection of manual and automatic lenses.





Lone Pine, Olmstead Point



John also discovered that there was a trail that went through the park and Sierra Nevada Mountains for 200 miles ending at the top of Mount Whitney, the highest mountain in the US at 14,000ft, and decided to walk the trail to produce a portfolio of photographs.

Having secured some corporate sponsorship in the UK to undertake the journey, he returned to the park with the idea of doing a reconnaissance trip before beginning the project. Unfortunately, with the onset of the credit crunch, getting sponsorship became increasingly difficult, and where he had planned for the trip to be one long five to six-week journey, he had to complete the project in a number of trips over a number of months. Photographically, however, this turned out to be a better plan. "The photography ended up reflecting different seasons which is great," he says.

The most famous photographer of Yosemite National Park is the great Ansel Adams, who spent most of his life photographing the park, but John claims that Adams' work was not an influence on this project. "I'm a little embarrassed to admit that I didn't know much about

Adams. I've always believed my photographs shouldn't be derivative and can only be taken with my eyes, and I try to convey what I see." John walked the trail and stayed under canvas each evening, taking his pictures as he

**"JOHN WALKED THE TRAIL AND STAYED UNDER CANVAS EACH EVENING, TAKING HIS PICTURES AS HE TRAVELLED WITHOUT THE USUAL LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHER'S CONSTRAINTS OF THE 'MAGIC HOURS'..."**

travelled without the usual landscape photographer's constraints of the 'magic hours' at the beginning and end of the day. "I was aware of where I was, the time of day and year, but I don't like to be hemmed in by rules; I like to break the rules."

John began working with a medium-format set-up comprising a Hasselblad H3D50 with Phase One backs and a 35-90mm and a 100mm lens, but over the 18 months the project took to complete, he also worked with his trusty Canon EOS 5D, an EOS 5D MkII and an EOS 1Ds MkIII with a whole series of old Contact Zeiss lenses. "I have a huge arsenal of lenses,

many of which are manual focus.

I prefer the old Pentacon Zeiss lenses for landscape work, because unlike Japanese lenses, which are very smooth and great for bokeh, the German lenses are sharper with better contrast. Not everyone likes them, but I do. When I'm taking pictures, I chop and change lenses quite a bit to get a different look for the picture"

It's very obvious from speaking with John that he is something of a lens obsessive, but definitely not a lens snob. He's just as happy working with a top-of-the-range lens as a cheap one he's had for years. For him, the choice of lens is part of his creative process and he's a

John G Moore

Dead Tree near Badger Pass




big fan of lens experimentation. "I'm as happy working with an old Olympus 50mm 1.4 as I am with a cheap Canon 85mm 1.8 or a Canon 70-200mm 4.IS."

John describes his way of taking photographs as simplistic and relaxed ("Almost Zen like") and, apart from his varied lenses, works with very little extra kit. "I sometimes use some Cokin ND grad filters because I like to get the picture right 'in camera' rather than try to approximate it in Photoshop or Lightroom, but that's because I have a traditional background in photography. I only use Lightroom for my workflow production, which is brilliant as I take so many images. I used to use Capture 1 and then Raw Shooter, but Lightroom allows me to deal with my photographs far more efficiently. It would just be great if you could network with it as well but it's a wonderful programme: it's never crashed on me or gone wrong."

John's attitude to how he takes his pictures may be relaxed and open to creativity, but his drive and passion for his photography brought on by family tragedies has led him to create powerful and very personal projects and images.

The first edition of the *Spirit* books has already sold out via Amazon, and he is working on an exhibition of the work. John didn't follow the traditional route to get the book published, and instead worked closely with digital book producer Blurb. Each copy of the book is printed only when an order comes in, making the production of the book not only cost efficient (ensuring that the charities receive maximum funds), but also an extension of the personal approach he brings to all his work.

*Spirit* is not only the title of Moore's latest and most personal project; it is also a fitting word to be associated with his approach to photography. 



Signed copies of *Spirit* by John G Moore are available to *Photography Monthly* readers who contact him via his website [www.johnmooretrail.com](http://www.johnmooretrail.com) quoting *Photography Monthly Spirit*. The 160-page book costs £30 for the softcover and £40 for the hardback and are printed to order by Blurb.

All profits from the sales are donated to two nominated charities: Yorkhill Children's Foundation in Glasgow and Access Adventure in Fairfield, California.