

Winter Garden Photography Workshop at Long Hill

By Kim Smith

Recently our daughter asked if I would teach her what I know about the basics of digital photography. At the same time Beth Zschau, the horticultural educator at Long Hill, discussed the possibility of teaching a winter garden photo workshop at the Sedgwick Gardens. Readers have often written seeking advice about photographing flora and fauna in their gardens. I leaped at this opportunity to organize ideas and demonstrate techniques for photographing in the garden, translating what is intuitive into helpful advice. And, as I had recently been spending a great deal of time investigating digital single-lens reflex cameras, I was happy for the opportunity to share what I have learned.

Although I studied 35mm film photography at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, classroom time was primarily devoted to developing the images and learning about the darkroom. The long periods of time spent in the musty subterranean darkroom at the school, located in the bowels of the basement, along with extended exposure to the darkroom chemicals made me very ill. One of the many benefits of working with digital photography over film photography is the ability to edit images from a computer and from that same computer, send images worldwide. There are no fancy tricks to taking great photos. Composing the image and understanding light metering to obtain the correct exposure comes with learning about and understanding intimately your individual camera, learning from those less-than-perfect shots, along with practice, practice, and more practice.

Digital single-lens reflex cameras have advanced technologically with lightning speed since they were first introduced. For example, take the development of the Canon digital SLR. In 1995, the first Canon digital '1' series married the body of a Canon EOS-1N with a six megapixel Kodak chip and cost approximately *thirty thousand dollars*. Six years later, in 2001, Canon released the EOS-1D, which was made entirely in house, but only had four megapixels. The cost had come down dramatically, selling for roughly \$7,000. Today Canon offers a variety of digital SLRs in a range of prices. An excellent, moderately priced digital SLR kit (the Canon 450D kit includes the body and an 18-55mm EFS lens), with 12.2 megapixels, is currently available for approximately \$700.00.

One elementary tool at your fingertips is that you can learn much more quickly working with digital medium, as opposed to shooting with 35mm film, where you must consider the cost of film, time and cost of developing the images, and the time spent between shooting and viewing. With editing tools available on the computer and the information encoded on every digital image, we learn by examining frame by frame the results of the reciprocity between shutter speed, aperture, ISO, and focal length, and by bracketing and comparing the digital images side.

Perhaps you may not be aware that there are companion books independently written by industry photography experts, available for many camera models manufactured by both Canon and Nikon. The manuals supplied by the manufacturers that are packaged with new cameras are, for the most part, rudimentary and only adequate for learning the most basic of your camera's functions. Reading one or more of these companion books will most assuredly assist in more fully understanding the basics of your camera, as well as provide guidance in advanced exposure and specialty shooting techniques, which in turn affords greater creative freedom.

I purchase my cameras and equipment at Hunt's Photo and Video in Melrose. I do not wish to sound as though I am advertising Hunt's, however, I have found it helpful to examine equipment prior to purchasing and ask questions of their staff of dedicated professional photographers. Ray Levesque at Hunt's teaches evening workshops about digital camera basics; the classes are designed to help you with your individual camera model.

The two photos provided show an example of just one of the techniques I'll be demonstrating at the workshop—that of recomposing an image. The beautiful peeling bark of *Stewartia pseudocamellia* becomes more clearly visible during the winter months after the surrounding shrubs and trees lose their foliage. I wanted the background in soft focus and to highlight the bark by clearly putting that in focus, but also found intriguing the repeating pattern of the branching limbs. To recompose a shot, focus on the fixed point of interest, and while continuously holding the shutter release down halfway to maintain the object focus, reframe, or recompose the shot. Neither image is right or wrong. I find more interesting of the two is the photo where the main trunk is not dead center.

In our winter garden photo workshop, we'll be covering some digital camera basics, reviewing helpful reading material including books and websites, and composing and shooting landscapes and close-ups working with the stunning backdrop of the Sedgwick Gardens winter scapes. Long Hill is the former summer home of *Atlantic Monthly* magazine publisher and editor Ellery Sedgwick and his first wife Mabel, author of *The Garden Month by Month*. The gardens are the rare combination of a series of cultivated "rooms," surrounded by over one hundred acres of woodlands, wetlands, fields, and orchards, all accessible by two miles of well-marked trails.

Please join me for the winter garden photography workshop on Wednesday January 14th from 10:00 to 11:30am at the Sedgwick Gardens at Long Hill in Beverly. We'll cover as much ground as possible in the scheduled hour and a half. Cost for Trustees members is \$28.00, non-members is \$35. Please pre-register as early as possible as class size is limited. To register and for directions call 978.921.1944 x 4018 or visit the website of The Trustees of Reservations at thetrustees.org.

Kim Smith is an author, illustrator, photographer, and designer. *Oh Garden of Fresh Possibilities! ~ Notes from a Gloucester Garden* is available from your local bookseller, Toad Hall Bookstore at www.toadhallbooks.org, and David R. Godine, Publisher, at www.godine.com. Kim will be happy to respond to readers' questions and comments at kimsmithdesigns@hotmail.com. For more information about *Oh Garden!* please visit my website at www.kimsmithdesigns.com.



