

Monthly Theme: Architectural Details – Seeing Beyond the Building

When we visit a historic town, city skyline, or impressive landmark, our first instinct is often to photograph the entire building. This month's assignment asks us to do just the opposite.

Instead of capturing the whole structure, your challenge is to isolate a **small architectural detail** that reveals the beauty of the design through texture, pattern, shape, form, craftsmanship, or light. Success comes not from photographing a famous building, but from discovering an interesting composition hidden within it.

This assignment is about learning to see differently.

Think Small

One of the biggest challenges is resisting the temptation to include too much.

Rather than photographing the entire church, courthouse, lighthouse, or home, look for a small section that stands on its own.

Examples include:

- An ornate doorway
- Decorative window frames
- Brick or stone patterns
- Columns and capitals
- Stair railings
- Arches
- Balconies
- Ironwork
- Rooflines
- Shutters
- Door knockers
- Weathered wood
- Masonry textures
- Architectural trim

Sometimes the smallest detail tells the greatest story.

Light Reveals Texture

Architectural details often depend on light to reveal their character.

Side lighting creates shadows that emphasize texture.

Early morning and late afternoon sunlight can transform ordinary brick, wood, or stone into dramatic subjects.

Cloudy days produce soft, even illumination that works well for colorful architectural details.

Before photographing, walk around the structure and observe how the light changes the appearance of the detail you're considering.

Look for Patterns and Repetition

Architecture is filled with rhythm.

Rows of windows.

Repeating columns.

Brickwork.

Roof tiles.

Decorative iron fences.

Patterns naturally attract the viewer's eye and often become even stronger when framed tightly.

Sometimes breaking an otherwise perfect pattern with a single contrasting element creates additional visual interest.

Simplicity Strengthens the Image

One advantage of photographing details is that you have greater control over distractions.

Fill the frame with your subject.

Watch for modern signs, utility boxes, parked vehicles, security cameras, and other elements that compete for attention.

A slight change in camera position is often all that's needed to simplify the composition.

Explore Shape and Geometry

Architectural photography offers wonderful opportunities to work with geometric design.

Look for:

- Circles
- Squares
- Triangles
- Curves
- Repeating rectangles
- Symmetry
- Diagonal lines

Strong geometric compositions often create bold, graphic images that are both simple and visually striking.

Change Your Perspective

Many architectural details reveal themselves only after changing your viewpoint.

Try:

- Looking straight up beneath an archway.
- Photographing from ground level.
- Standing directly in front of a doorway for symmetry.
- Moving closer to eliminate distractions.
- Using a telephoto lens to isolate distant details.
- Using a wide-angle lens when perspective enhances the composition.

Don't settle for the first view you see.

Color—or Monochrome?

Architectural details often work beautifully in either color or black and white.

Choose color when paint, stained glass, or decorative materials contribute to the image.

Consider monochrome when texture, light, shape, and contrast become the primary visual elements.

Try processing both versions before deciding which better expresses your vision.

Slow Down and Observe

One of the greatest lessons this assignment teaches is observation.

Instead of immediately photographing an entire building, spend a few minutes simply looking.

Notice how light changes across a wall.

How shadows fall beneath an arch.

How repeating windows create rhythm.

How weather has shaped the surface over time.

The longer you observe, the more photographs you'll begin to see.

Five Ways to Find Great Architectural Details

If you're searching for ideas, look for buildings that feature interesting craftsmanship or distinctive design.

- Historic homes with decorative trim and porches
- Churches with stained glass, arches, or steeples
- Lighthouses with weathered textures and railings
- Barns featuring aged wood and rustic hardware
- Industrial buildings with rivets, pipes, and metalwork
- Courthouses and public buildings with columns and stone carvings
- Covered bridges with repeating beams and timbers
- Modern architecture with glass, steel, and bold geometric forms

Remember to focus on a limited portion of the structure rather than the entire building.

Challenge Yourself

When you've found an interesting detail, ask yourself:

"Would someone recognize this as a compelling photograph even if they didn't know what building it came from?"

If the answer is yes, you've succeeded in creating more than a record photograph—you've created an image that stands on its own through composition, light, and design.

This month's assignment reminds us that photography isn't always about finding spectacular subjects. Sometimes it's about discovering extraordinary images hidden within ordinary scenes. By learning to isolate architectural details, you'll strengthen your powers of observation and develop a more thoughtful approach to composition that will benefit every genre of photography.

Happy shooting!

By ChatGPT