



Reflected boats

Reflecting on Reflections

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This is the fourth and last article in a series called “*Rust, Rubbish, and Reflections*.” The first three were about techniques for photographing details of rusty cars, found objects, decaying buildings, and equipment in harbors. These are all rewarding subjects, but often require a certain amount of searching. Reflections, on the other hand, can be found almost anywhere, from the kitchen counter at home to a canal in Amsterdam. One of the masters of photography of reflections is Eddie Soloway, and his work is well worth the effort to find and study.

Water

Perhaps the commonest places to find reflections are bodies of water of all sizes, from oceans to puddles. Generally it is easiest to find good reflections in sunny weather, and therefore they are good subjects to seek out in the middle of the day when the light is bad for subjects like flowers.

Colorful boats, especially houseboats, produce a wide selection of spectacular patterns, and so it is worthwhile to seek out harbors that provide interesting details for close-up photography, such

as fishing boat marinas. One can make pictures that show the boats themselves, or completely abstract images that give no hint of their source. Camera angle is always an important consideration when making photographs; it is particularly so working with reflections. Often the maker is free to stress vertical, horizontal, or diagonal to suit the most interesting features of the image, with no reference to their true orientation. But if the boats are too close together they will obscure or shade the reflections of neighboring boats, so if possible one should try to find marinas that are not too full.

Although patterns are usually easiest to understand when the water is still, moving water can sometimes add interest. It can be worthwhile to wait and make several exposures of the same subject as the wind moves the water.

Small bodies of water are also good sources. During the fall color season, creeks surrounded by colorful trees are ideal. Often garden ponds and streams have been designed to produce good reflections. Wandering through public gardens can provide both good exercise and good images. Again, when the light is too sunny to photograph



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Flowing flowers

flowers, it is good for their reflections. A perfect situation is a shaded stream passing through colorful, sunlit banks. Sometimes High Dynamic Range (HDR) can improve the image further by reducing contrast between reflection in the stream and features on the bank.

Cities with canals, like Venice or Amsterdam, are particularly prolific sources of fascinating images. As in the case of harbors, it is good to try to get images in both still and moving water.

Sunsets, especially over the ocean, also provide wonderful reflections. It is usually effective to have features besides a reflection of the sky in smooth water. Waves can add interest. Often by getting low one can get interesting patterns in wet sand that can be more interesting than those in the water itself. And of course things like rocks or trees in the foreground are always effective. If the sky is included then a neutral density filter or multiple exposures with HDR are useful to capture the entire range.

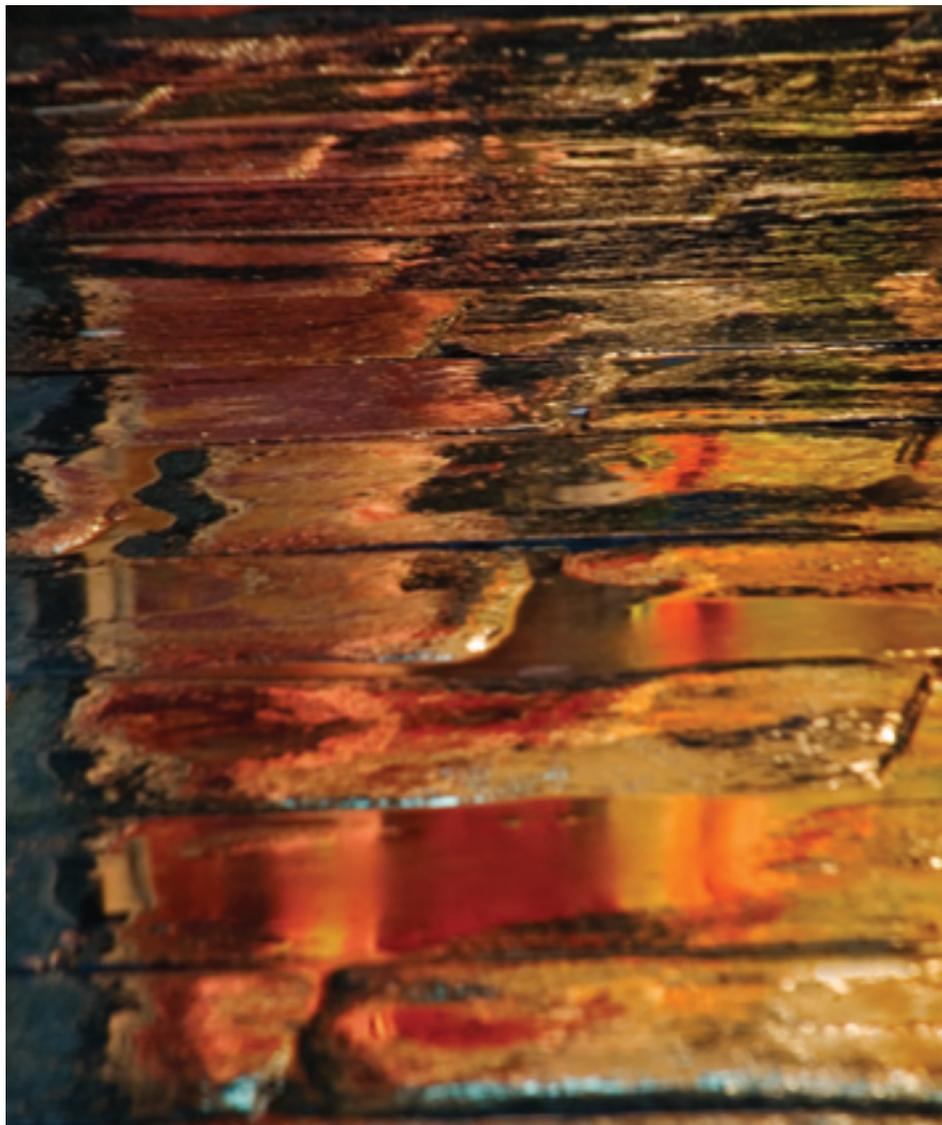
Wet pavement can supply a good combination of the texture of the pavement itself and



Amsterdam Church

Photos © Joe Hearst, APSA, PPSA

Wet pavement



reflections of nearby objects. In some towns with cobblestoned streets and colorful buildings the inhabitants like to wash the streets in the morning, and then the reflections of the buildings in the resulting puddles can be very effective. If there is sun after rain then there can often be good reflections in many different types of pavement.

Newton's rings (the colorful patterns seen frequently in oil slicks) are also actually the result of multiple reflections of light passing back and forth through the thickness of the slick, and with a little imagination can be seen to have delightful patterns.

At night, lights of all kinds reflected in wet pavement do a very good job of producing effective patterns. It is worthwhile to venture out during the rain if there is a convenient source of colorful lights available. Under ideal conditions one might find an awning across a street from a group of neon lights.

Even the smallest bodies of water, like raindrops, provide some photographers with delightful images though, technically, it may not be clear whether they are of reflections or refractions. From the point of view of our art the distinction is irrelevant.

Glass

Glass reflectors are available in a wide range of sizes, from glass-walled skyscrapers to eyeglasses or even marbles. One of the great virtues of glass reflectors is their curvature.

Whereas a bathroom mirror is intended to provide an accurate rendition of the

reflected object, many modern buildings have

curved surfaces and windows, which, although they may each be flat, are arranged in patterns that are not. The distortions caused by the curvature can make the reflected image of a subject much more interesting than a simple depiction of it.

Many photographers enjoy using reflections to show the contrast between different styles or eras of architecture: for example an old rectangular brick building seen reflected in the windows of a modernistic office building. It can also be effective to combine the reflection in windows of a building with the details of the building itself.

Car windows have wonderful curvatures, and cars are often parked in places that provide excellent subjects for reflection. It is worthwhile when wandering through a city to pay attention to the parked cars and observe the reflections of buildings, signs, or even people in the windows. The curvature of car windows is often so strong that a slight change in camera position or angle can produce a major change in the reflection, so it is a good idea to try many versions of the image if the reflected object is interesting enough.

Neon signs reflected in car windows at night can be very rewarding. Sometimes setting up a tripod near a stoplight in a shopping or nightclub district and making exposures of slowly moving cars can give good results.

Metal, wood, and other reflectors

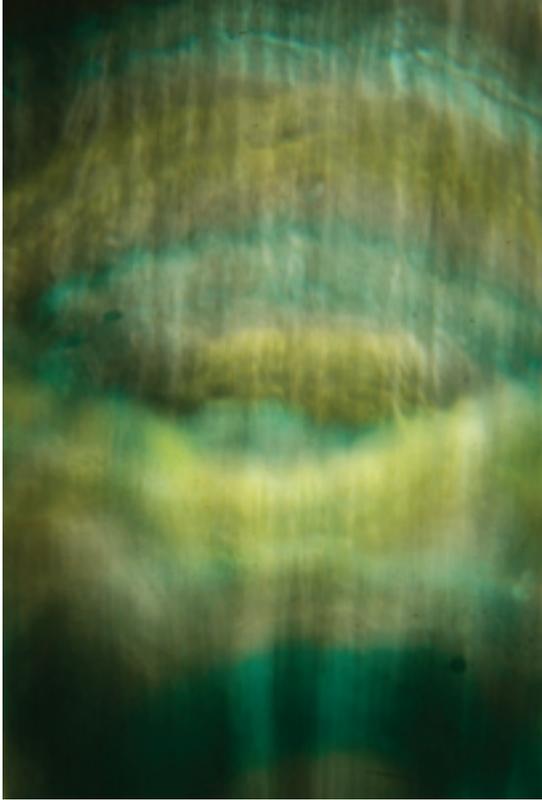
As soon as one starts shooting reflections in car windows one realizes that the metal surfaces of the cars are almost as effective reflectors as the windows themselves. Moreover, combinations of reflections in the windows and metal can result in particularly effective images. One problem with reflections in the sides of a car, however, is the wheel well, which can often produce a black hole in the middle of an otherwise interesting reflection. A little work with Photoshop® can often be used to fill in the hole.

Curve in curve



Houseboats



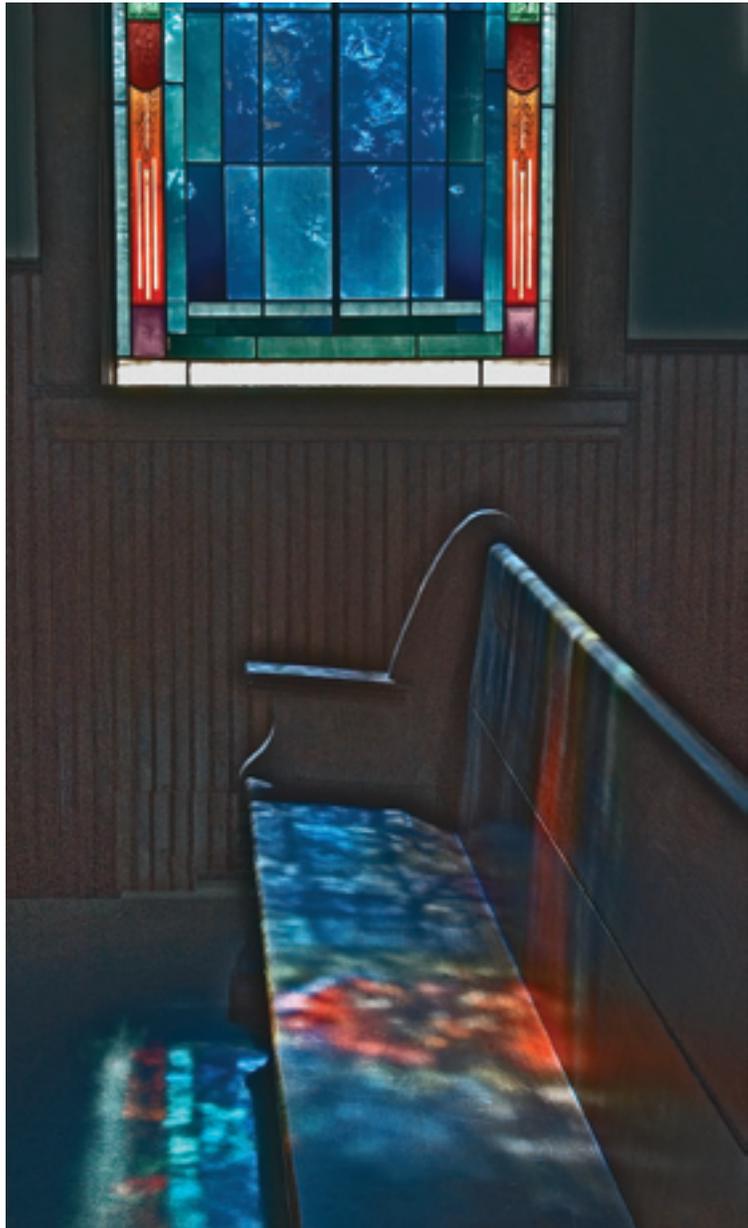


Tumbler on kitchen counter

Some modern buildings have reflective metal sides. The Experience Music Project in Seattle, by Frank Gehry, is a marvelous example of such a building. It is next to an amusement park that has many neon signs and other spectacular subjects for reflection. Several of his other buildings are also worth seeing.

Polished wood can also reflect lights, and can sometimes be used quite effectively. The pattern from a stained glass window reflecting from a church pew is well worth studying.

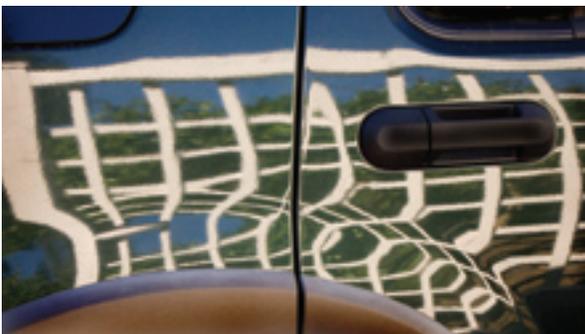
Even a kitchen counter covered with Formica may work: light shining through a colorful tumbler on a windowsill can make an interesting pattern on the counter.



Church window

Finally

Reflections can be found in so many different places, and can be photographed under so many different conditions, that it is wise for photographers to develop the habit of constantly scanning the world for them. The scrutiny will often pay off with effective images. ■



Fence in side of car



Hotrod