

introduction in

ARCHITECTURAL  
PHOTOGRAPHY

# 1. history of Architectural Photography

“ it is not everyone who has the time to see a building in all its phases of beauty and effect, or has the power of isolating those beauties, and so realizing the more subtle and recondite charms a great building has, but gives up only to patient study and trained observation . . . ”

**Frederick H. Evans** (1853–1943)

architectural photographer, in the address he gave at the opening of his exhibition at the Royal Photographic Society in London, on 25 April 1900.

Architecture has provided primary subject matter throughout the history of photography and thus **architectural photography** has become a unique niche in the universe of image making.

When photographing a building, the **architectural photographer** is often facing a dilemma: do you add essence using composition, perspective or other techniques to produce a compelling and beautiful photograph? Or do you prefer to show the scene as it for authenticity or realism?

Since the beginnings of architectural photography **170 years ago** however, photographers have worked around the above aesthetic and technical issues, which have evolved through a succession of styles as the field advanced with developments of enterprise, technology and fashion.

## 2. composing the photograph

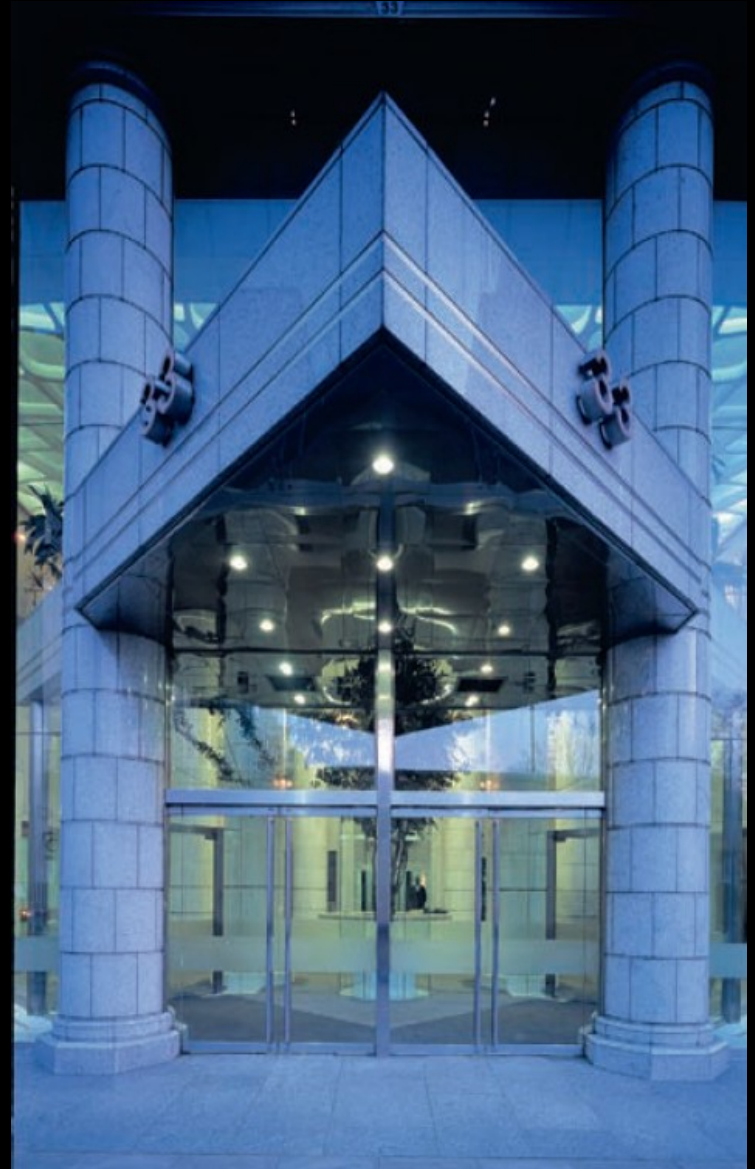
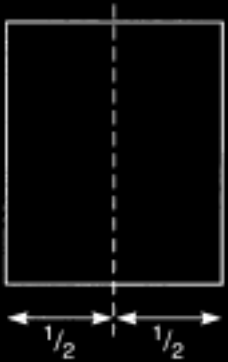
SYMMETRY

LAW OF THIRDS

LINE DYNAMICS

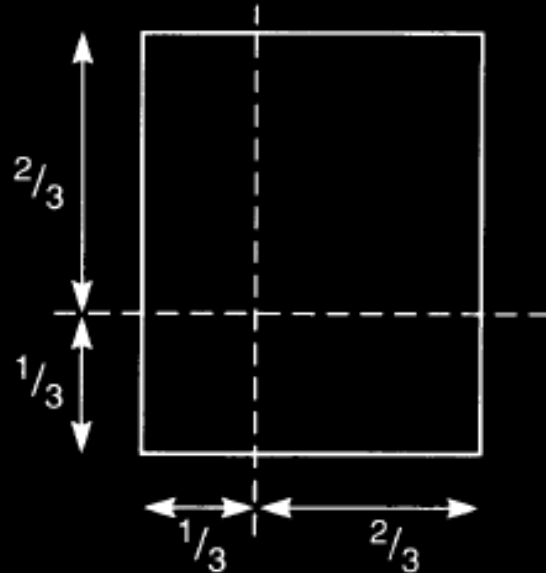
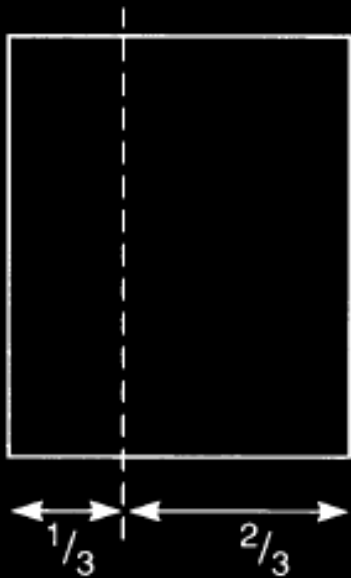
# Symmetry

The simplest form of compositional structure is symmetry whereby both sides of the image are identical, but opposite, around a vertical central axis. The simple, clean perfection of this type of composition is both its strength and its corresponding weakness. Unless a building demands such treatment through the perfect symmetry of its own structure, symmetrical images can appear dull and unimaginative.



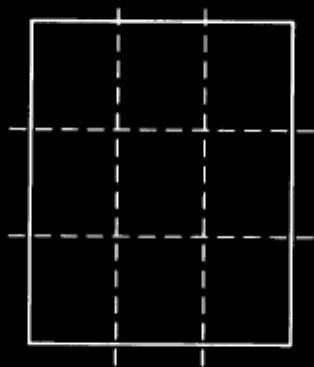
## Law of Thirds

A more interesting framework for composition is a division away from the centre, typically dividing the rectangle or square into one-third and two thirds.

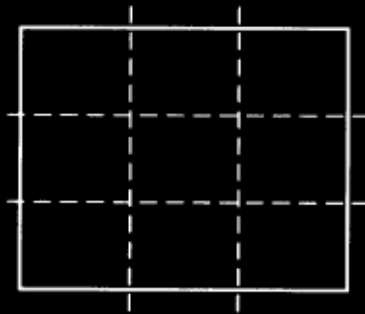


With general exterior views, the skyline and sometimes the road line can lie approximately on the horizontal thirds, with the corner of the building lying close to a vertical third.

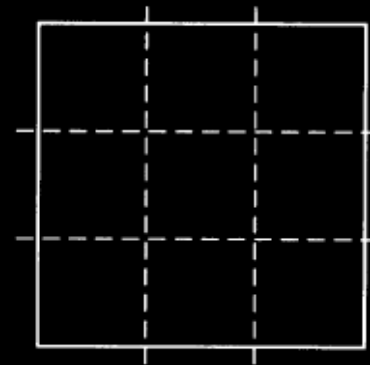
In a general view interior, the perspective can lead the eye to the far wall, the centre of which can be at the junction of a vertical and horizontal third



Portrait



Landscape



Square

Having intersected the frame along the thirds, in both directions, the Law of Thirds states:

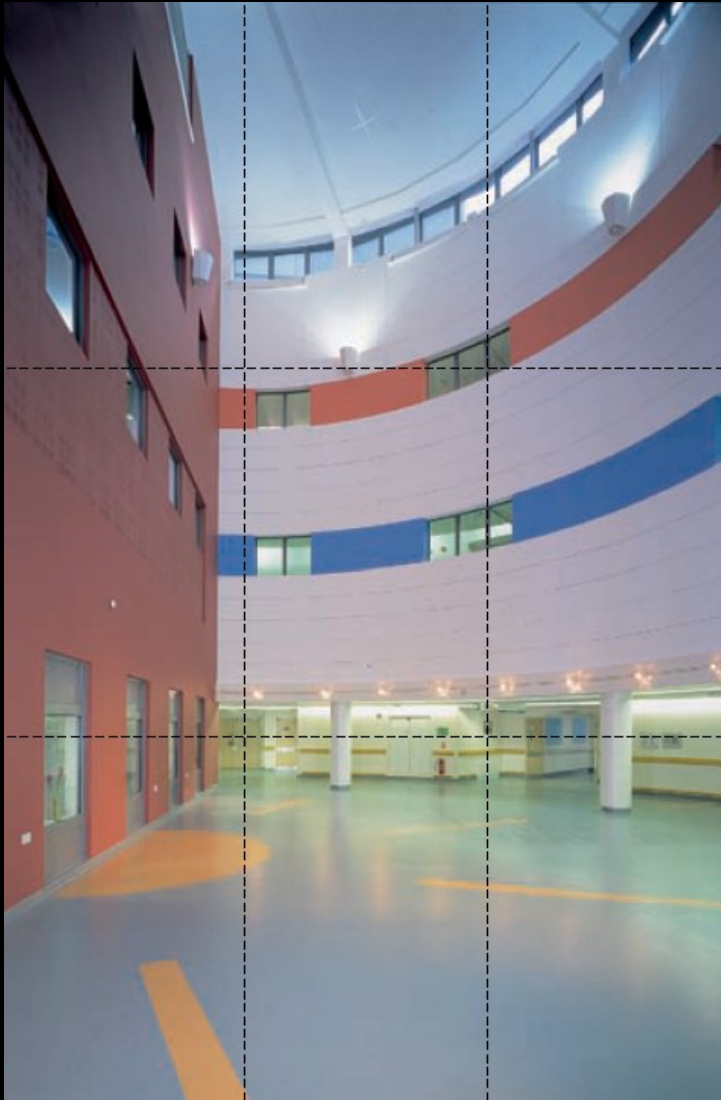
**a** The main subject(s) should be positioned on or near an intersection of the thirds.

**b** Some other element of the picture should lead the eye towards the main subject.

**c** The main subject should contrast with the background, either in tone or colour.







The Law does not have to be adhered to **strictly**. In fact, the most interesting shots often deviate from it quite dramatically, and it is this deviation that puts the photographer's individual stamp on an image.

Whatever the deviation, however, the photographer should be aware of the Law in order to understand how it can be successfully adjusted to his or her preferred individual approach.

# Line Dynamics

When a composition is viewed in a purely two-dimensional abstract linear way, those lines in the picture that are out of parallel with the edges of the frame are considered dynamic.

The closer their angles are to  $45^\circ$  (i.e. half-way between vertical and horizontal), and the more dramatic their juxtaposition at opposing and unequal angles, the greater the sense of excitement generated within the image, and therefore the more powerful its impact. If the camera is tilted  $45^\circ$  for deliberate dynamic abstract effect on a detail shot, the sight of brickwork or a street lamp, for example, at a  $45^\circ$  angle disturbs our sense of gravitational normality and at the same time stimulates our creative thirst for an alternative approach.

# 3. technical details

**PERSPECTIVE AND THREE-DIMENSIONAL  
STRUCTURE**

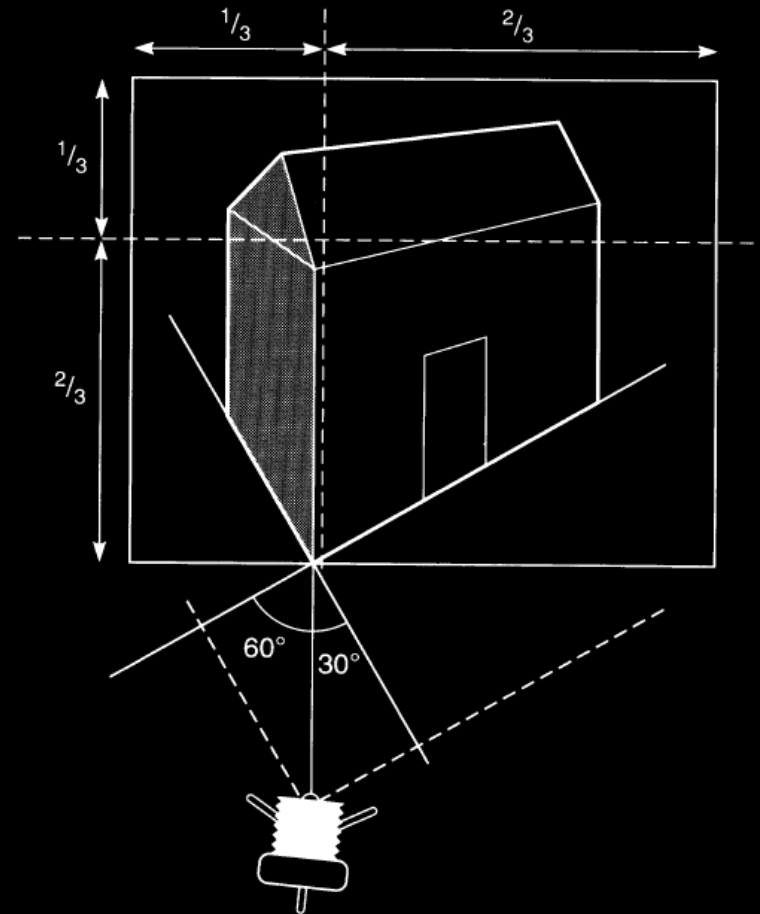
**FOCAL LENGTH VARIATIONS**

# Perspective and three-dimensional structure

In the photography of **architecture**, line dynamics are the most significant mechanism by which perspective produces the illusion of depth on a two-dimensional surface. Lines converging to one or more vanishing points cause the subject to get smaller as it recedes into the distance. Thus linear perspective is the primary factor that demonstrates the three dimensional structure of a building when reproduced as a two-dimensional image, along with contrast and tone that naturally also play their part.

When approaching a building for purposes of photography, it is important, where possible, to be thinking of representing it as a solid structure and not just a facade.

For a general view, concentrate on the front elevation, but also allow a more oblique view of the side elevation to appear in the shot where possible, typically a  $60^\circ/30^\circ$  perspective. The frame can be divided roughly into thirds: two-thirds for the front elevation, and one-third for the side elevation.

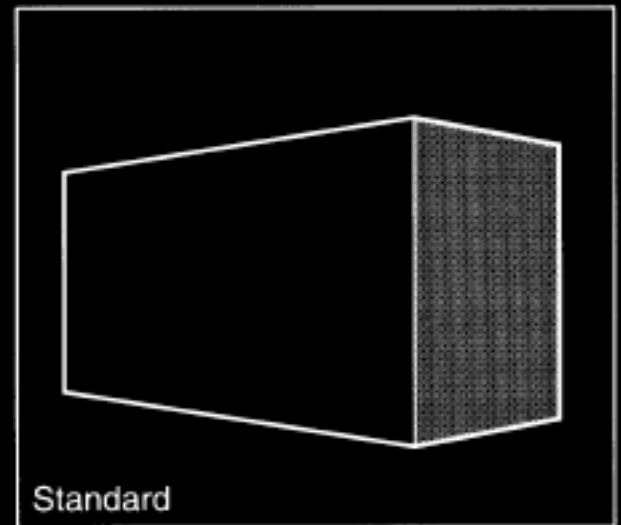


# Focal length variations for alternative visual interpretations

The visual effects of lenses with different focal lengths vary enormously from the dramatic perspective enhancement of a wide-angle lens, to the compressed image produced by a long-focus lens. Both effects actually come about as a result of changing the distance of the viewpoint from the building.

The wider the angle of view, the more you can see of the lines that are converging to one or more vanishing points. The narrower the angle of view, the less you can see of these lines.

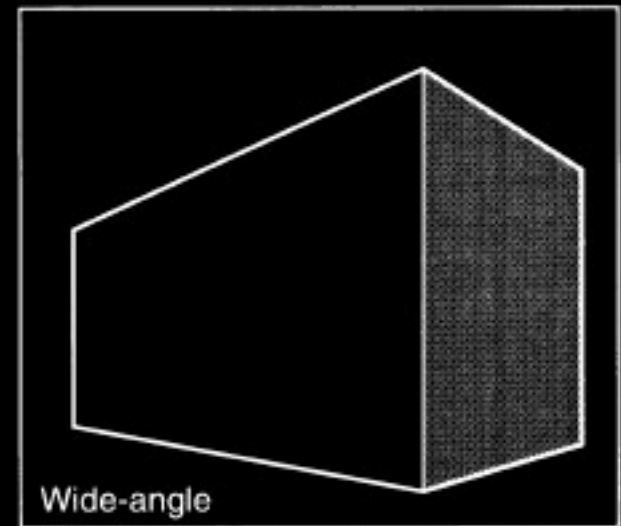
The **focal length** of the standard lens, and hence field angle of view, relates to that of the human eye and so the images it produces appear to have the most natural perspective.



In order to include the same amount of the building with a wide-angle lens as with the standard, you would have to move closer to it. The effect of this is exaggerated perspective that both enhances the dominance of the building and the dynamic structure of the image.

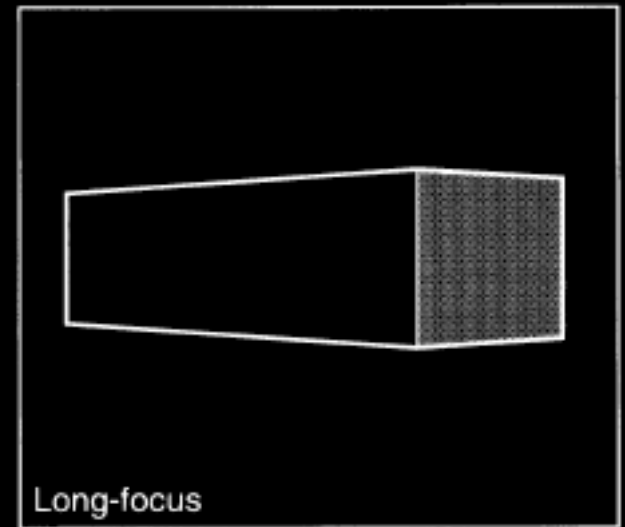
It creates a more punchy and exciting shot that is well suited to the linear nature of much modern architecture.

A wide-angle lens is also a popular choice when space is restricted, as in city streets, for example. The use of a wide-angle lens is, however, limited when the roof structure of a building is an important element to include in the photograph.



Conversely, to maintain the same amount of the building with a long-focus lens, the camera has to be moved further from the subject. This has the effect of flattening the perspective, compressing the space between the subject and its background.

This lens is useful for showing a tall building within its context of a city skyline, for example, although its use is most often restricted because of lack of space or suitable vantage point. It is also useful for selectively isolating a building within its landscape.





# 4. creating a set of photographs for a building

**EXTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY**

**INTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY**

**ABSTRACT DETAILS SHOTS**

# Exterior photography

The first impression we have of a building is often its semidistant appearance in the landscape. This can either be favourable or unfavourable, depending on how comfortably the building sits within its environment. At this range, the distances between potential accessible vantage points in a wide radius around the site can be considerable, and therefore time-consuming to explore. As a result, it is usually best to leave such photographs till later, when you have the major shots under your belt, and your time feels at less of a premium. It is not worth spending a couple of valuable hours at the start of the day locating the perfect vantage point for a situational shot. You could end up finding the sun disappearing fast from the more important on-site general-view shots, with your time under undue pressure.



The angle at which the building lies relative to the movement of the sun will determine whether you start with the exterior or interior of the building. Assuming the sun is correctly positioned on your arrival, it is best to start with the on-site general exterior views. While interiors are often much improved with direct sunlight, it is usually quite acceptable to shoot them without, so sunshine priority should always be given to the external shots. Diffuse natural light internally from an overcast sky is always preferable to a grey, lifeless exterior on a cloudy day.



# Interior photography

Note how the main interiors lie relative to the angle of the sun, and schedule your interior work accordingly to make the best use of it. With commercial buildings there is usually a reception area that will need to be photographed; often a boardroom as the smartest room in the building; sometimes an attractive stairwell; and then the open-plan floors that, if unfurnished, can benefit enormously from direct sunshine creating abstract patterns across the empty floor space. There may also be other interesting rooms, features or details that need to be covered.





Where you can, shoot as much as possible on one floor of the building to be economical with your time. As you take the main interior shots, do not forget to photograph any interesting features that could make useful interior detail images. Dramatic shots of stairwells – either looking up or down – are certainly more easily taken with an SLR camera than a view camera, for example.





Ancient crypt cellars in Provence, France  
1910



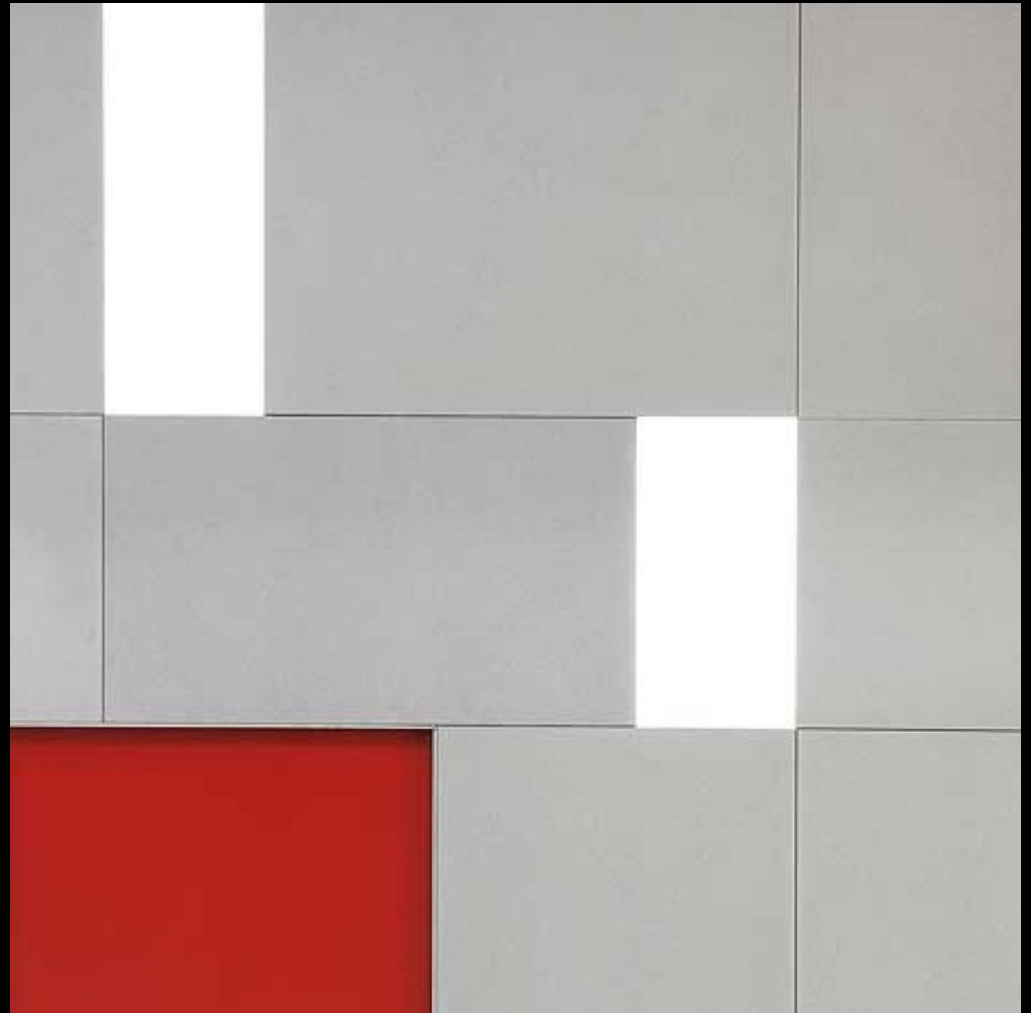
"A sea of steps" stairs to  
chapter house wells cathedral  
1903

Here could be your advertisement



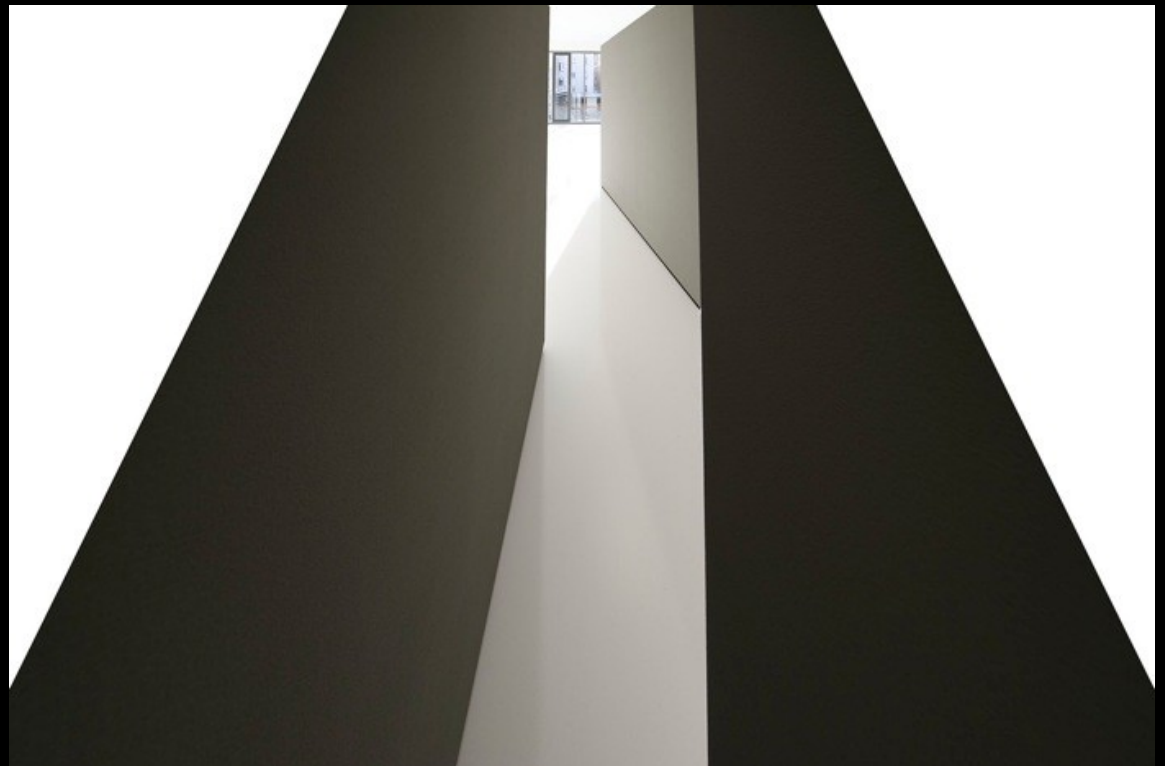
# Abstract detail shots

Abstract detail shots enable a client to present the style and quality of a building by isolating representative features of it. They can also add a dynamic impact to a brochure of otherwise perfect, but straightforward, general elevation and interior photographs.



Most abstract detail photographs are taken in one of three ways. First, they can be taken with the camera parallel with the elevation of the building, with the full abstraction lying within the structure of the building itself. This could be a small or large section of the building, isolated out of context to create an abstract arrangement in its own right. Second, they can be photographed from an oblique angle to the building (either vertically or horizontally), preferably with a wide-angle lens to enhance the perspective impact.

Or third, the camera can be tilted at an angle, often facing the building with a standard lens. This has the effect of converting the vertical and horizontal lines of the building into angular ones, thereby creating a dynamism in the image that is not inherent within the structure of the building as it stands.



# Credits

Frederick H. Evans

David Franck

25 Taschen

focal press