

A Hidden Gem

Nature has yet to lead me to that one perfect image no one else has ever captured. Instead, I hear her whispering, “Look and see the myriad, endless possibilities I offer to you on a daily basis.” She beckons, I respond; she displays, I record; she dazzles, I am in awe.

Morse Park Landing lies in at the southern end of a small, hidden inlet, covering approximately 15 square miles, nestled along the South Carolina coast between Pawleys Island and Myrtle Beach in the town of Murrells Inlet. Over time this area has slowly evolved into a salt marsh filled with islands of smooth cordgrass.

The high tide at full moon engulfs the marsh, while at low tide the water all but disappears leaving mud-lined avenues running among the grasses. However, it is in between these tides the magic happens. At just the right water level, these smooth cordgrass islands offer a fitting foreground highlighting and reflecting the varying degrees of morning light.



I have visited Morse Park numerous times over the past six years, and she has yet to duplicate her charm. The ebb and flow of the water in the many tiny inlets surrounding the green/brown islands keep this landscape forever changing.

With any new location, I try first to vision what I want to create by spending considerable time on site with no camera trying to really see without the distraction of f/stops and shutter speeds. After all, my camera does not compose the shots, I do. Composition to me is a mixture of both my vision and my emotional response to the scene.

Once an idea takes root, I further refine it by revisiting and shooting the area as much as possible in every different light. My recurring trips, along with all my research, serve to sharpen my vision while moving me ever closer to producing exactly what I want. My camera sees objectively; I see and feel subjectively; the marriage of both births my art.

When the ocean is involved, as it is here, tide tables along with sunrise/sunset & moonrise/moonset charts including compass positions prove an invaluable asset. Knowing where on the horizon the sun or moon will eventually appear can be quite valuable when planning a shoot. Then there is always Venus, the Morning Star, adding her magic to many a dawn.



On location, I adjust my camera to take its very best image; however, we share only one sense — we both see the subject, albeit somewhat differently. My camera does not feel the sand give way under its feet, hear the birds in early morning flight, smell the freshness of the salt air, or taste the excitement of a new day dawning.

This is where the gift of post-processing allows me to take all I felt, all I heard, all I tasted, all I smelt, along with everything I and my camera saw and create an image reflecting my whole experience. The composition I begin in the field continues in my studio via Camera Raw, Photoshop, & Lightroom using light, color, contrast, and cropping to reproduce visually the emotions I experienced at that scene.

Many sunrises fill my lens with wonderful reds and oranges, while others remain much cooler. One particular morning a 92-second exposure captured the heavy blue colorcast with which nature so often paints our world. The softness of the ebbing tide flowing below the pinkish glow of the rising sun perfectly captured my blue mood.

Dawn marks the advent of morning twilight spanning the period between first light and actual sunrise. With a clear sky to the east, the 'blue hour' (l'heure bleue) produces its orange/purple hue illuminating the horizon – a truly magical event. Completing the scene, our sister planet Venus, the Morning Star, hovers above in her blue velvet sky.

'Red sky at morn, sailors take warn...' reads the sailor's rule of thumb dating back some 2000 years. How many mariners float between me and the magnificently colored horizon highlighted by the sun's early morning rays.

I captured this sunrise via a combination of seven images all shot at the same f/stop varying the shutter speed from high to low. A Photoshop script then maps all the files to the brightest one resulting in an image reflecting excellent detail in both the shadows and the highlights. Were there not a script that could give us greater details in both the shadows and the highlights of our own lives.

In addition to all its charm, Morse Park is also home to the "Lost at Sea" Memorial – a fitting tribute to those brave souls both military and civilian who lost their lives at sea from the early 19th Century to the present. The inscription from Isaiah 29 on



the granite monument reads in part: “and the eyes of the blind will see through the mist and the dark.” Our world is filled with little hidden gems like this small inlet; they help us all to better see.

Bill Jordan is a fine art landscape photographer who consults in all phases of the Digital Workflow while also leading photo workshops throughout the Carolinas and in many National Parks throughout Tennessee, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, and Western Canada. This fall he is teaching a number of courses at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Coastal Carolina University in Pawleys Island, Myrtle Beach, and Conway.

Bill’s website is www.darkness-to-light.com at which you will find his full schedule of courses/workshops along with his image galleries.