



Olympus C-5050 ZOOM, 1/650 sec, f/4, ISO 64

WITH A LITTLE THOUGHT, SHADOWS CAN PLAY A STARRING ROLE IN OUR PHOTOGRAPHS. SO HOW DO WE MAKE THE MOST OF THEM AND WHEN THEY ARE NOT WANTED, HOW CAN WE REDUCE THEIR EFFECT? **RICHARD LANE** HAS SOME SUGGESTIONS...

SHADOWS SURROUND US every day and play an important part in helping to describe the shape and texture of the objects that we see. They show us which surfaces are rough and which are smooth and give us the opportunity to depict our subjects twice in the same photograph, once in their natural state and, for a second time, silhouetted as a shadow.

Understandably, shadows are often thought of as things of darkness, they are after all caused by an object interrupting light, preventing it from hitting a surface. The types of shadows that we see are governed by the nature of the light source, or sources, creating them. A single point source, such as the sun, will produce a clearly defined shadow with a sharp edge; a diffused light source, such as an overcast sky will give weak soft shadows; and multiple light sources, such as those on a theatre stage will give objects more than one shadow.

**Shape**

Shadows help to describe the shapes of objects. In the uniformly grey picture of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin shown below, it is only the shadows of the concrete blocks that give them volume and show us what shape they are. Shadows can also show us the shape of things that aren't even in the photo. Who could mistake the shape of the iconic Empire State Building cast across its neighbouring New York sky scrapers, the bright sun clearly defining its shadow?



Olympus C-5050 ZOOM, 1/800 sec, f/4, ISO 64



Olympus E-420, 1/4-42mm lens, 1/125 sec, f/8, ISO 100



Olympus E-500, 40-150mm lens, 1/320 sec, f/5.6, ISO 100



Olympus μ[mju:] 830, Beach and Snow mode

**Texture**

Similar to the way that shadows define shape, but on a much smaller scale, shadows can also be used to describe texture. Here (top right) each of the shadows cast by tiny grains of sand emphasise the grainy texture of the lion's paw print. And, as the photo of donkey in Morocco (above) and the Swiss snow scene (above right) show, shadows created by light passing through broken material – the slats in a roof or the branches of a tree – can add a veneer of texture to otherwise featureless surfaces such as snow.

**Time**

Shadows change shape as the light source creating them moves, a characteristic that makes them great indicators of time. Clearly, our shot of the Empire State Building was taken late in the day, and the woman walking her poodle (right) chose to do so in the early evening, the setting sun lengthening her shadow and that of her pet.

**Controlling shadows**

It would be virtually impossible to eliminate all the shadows from a picture, even if you wanted to, however it is possible to reduce their intensity. And here's how...



Olympus E-400, 1/4-42mm lens, 1/800 sec, f/4.5, ISO 100

**Shadow Adjustment Technology**

Recent Olympus cameras, including the E-420, E-520, SP-570 UZ and μ[mju:] 840, feature Shadow Adjustment Technology (SAT), designed to improve the exposure of dark shadows. Once activated, SAT scans the picture to identify the shadows. The camera then selectively adjusts the exposure settings for those areas alone, bringing out details that would otherwise be lost.

**Flash**

One of the most effective ways to achieve 'shadow less' lighting is to use a ring flash, such as the Olympus RF11, used in conjunction with the Macro Flash Controller FS-FC1. This features a circular flash head that surrounds the camera's lens. When the flash is fired this creates very even, 'shadow less', lighting. The shadow is still there, but it is less noticeable as it is immediately behind the subject.

If conventional flash is your main source of illumination, then it needs to be used with care. If fired directly at the subject it can result in nasty, hard shadows that make them look as if they are caught in the headlights of a car. Flash fired upwards and bounced down off a white ceiling gives more attractive, natural-looking illumination – a kind of artificial overcast sky effect – with diffused shadows

Bounce flash




Direct flash



Ring flash



that are cast on the floor and much less noticeable than hard shadows associated with direct flash.

Low intensity flash fired directly at the subject can be useful to boost the light in dark shadows. This is called fill-in flash, but care must be taken not to use too much; otherwise you'll end up with hard shadows behind the subject. If you are using an E-System DSLR, pop up the flash and select fill-in, the symbol for this is the zigzag arrow . This forces the flash to fire whatever the brightness of the subject. Check the results and if the flash illumination is overpowering the natural light its intensity can be reduced, refer to your camera's manual for instructions on how to do this.

### Reflected light

Reflecting light into shadow areas using purpose-made reflectors or large pieces of white board or polystyrene, is another way to lift shadows. It works the same way as fill-in flash, but gives a much gentler effect and, as you are using ambient light, you can see the results you'll get through the viewfinder.

In some ways reflections could be thought of as the opposite of shadows. Reflections are made of light and shadows are the absence of light. If shadows are good at showing us the shape of objects, then reflections allow us to rearrange our subject in interesting and unexpected ways. We'll take a closer look at this in the next issue of *Olympus User*.

## toptips

- 1** The winter months are a great time for dramatic shadows, shoot either early in the morning or towards the end of the day for best effects.
- 2** If you have a photo that is spoilt by shadows that are too dark, don't give up on it. Open it in Olympus Master 2 and try using the Auto Tone Correction function, or dragging the Tone curve up slightly. Or in Photoshop, go to Enhance → Adjust Lighting → Shadows/Highlights and move the Lighten Shadows slide control.
- 3** Don't forget that transparent objects cast shadows too. Bottles, wine glasses and cut glass decanters, even water (as shown right) cast very interesting shadows, shot through with refracted light and great subjects for still life photos.
- 4** If shooting a portrait and your subject has a strong shadow under their chin, or a hat is casting a shadow across their face, ask them to hold a white card at shoulder level, just out of shot. This should reflect enough light to lift the shadow.
- 5** If you fancy experimenting with shadows in portraits or still lifes but don't have access to studio lighting, improvise. Table lamps, reading lamps and candles all cast shadows, and modern White Balance functions mean that digital cameras can automatically adjust to different types of lighting.



Olympus E-410, 11-22mm lens, 1/160 sec, f11, ISO 100