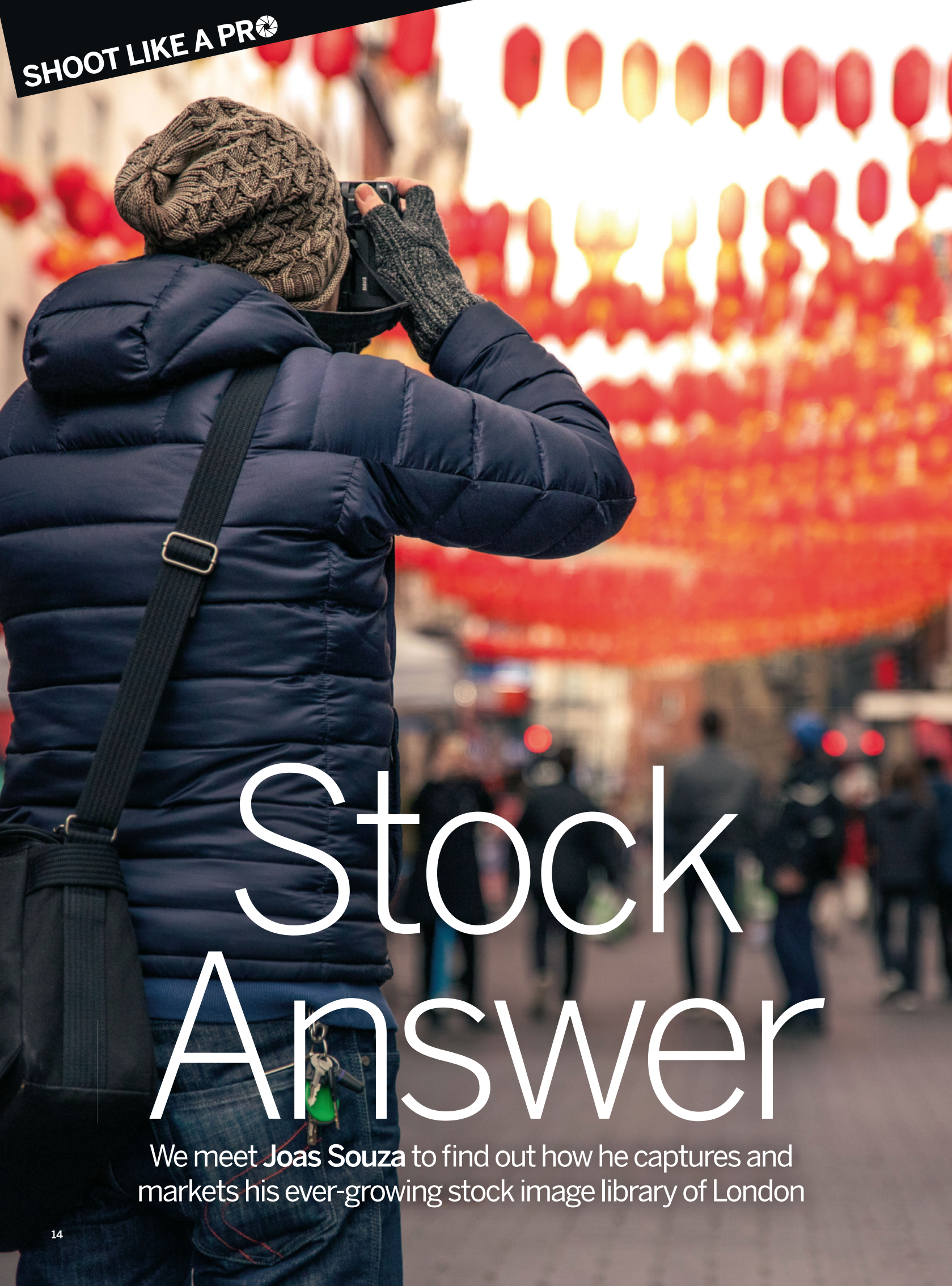


SHOOT LIKE A PRO 



# Stock Answer

We meet **Joas Souza** to find out how he captures and markets his ever-growing stock image library of London



## Joas Souza



Brazilian-born Joas Souza is an expert in architectural, aerial and stock image photography, with decades of experience behind him.

During his career, Joas has worked for some of the biggest names in the world of architecture and interior

design, including Savills, Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners and Candy & Candy, amongst others.

[www.londonstockphotos.co.uk](http://www.londonstockphotos.co.uk)

📷 @joasphoto



I've never described myself as a 'people watcher'. While others have professed an appreciation for observing the behaviour of people on the street, I've never been naturally drawn to this as a source of photographic inspiration. That said, I have always understood and admired the divide between amateur and professional street photography. Not everyone can do it well!

Some people might not see the financial value in street shooting – how do you make a living by capturing spontaneous and amusing moments outside a Starbucks coffee shop or by focusing on people eating at a street food market, for example?

Armed with these questions, I arrive outside Covent Garden underground station to meet Joas Souza, the founder of London Stock Photos ([londonstockphotos.co.uk](http://londonstockphotos.co.uk)). Over the course of 16 years, Joas has built up an impressive archive of images of Britain's capital city, which is unrivalled in its complexity and specificity.

Having only communicated by email up to this point, we amusingly both approach the same man carrying a large video camera, on arrival. Upon correctly identifying each other, we set off on a photowalk of this atmospheric area of London.

"My father, who is also a photographer ([niltonsouza.com.br](http://niltonsouza.com.br)), offered me my first camera," Joas says. "After every film roll used, we'd sit down to discuss my choices of composition

and lighting conditions, so that I would improve. My father specialises in architectural and aerial photography and, after assisting him, I embraced the same field with passion and dedication."

So how did street photography become a significant part of Joas's business model?

"Street photography came to me much later, when I moved to London and became an in-house photographer for a large property marketing agency. My everyday consisted of shooting the designated property and also getting a good range of location photos around it. Sometimes an entire day was reserved only for capturing locations and this task became something that I really enjoyed. In a city like London, I became fascinated with the diversity in all aspects, from architectural styles to people's ethnicity and the rich history."

With that, Joas gets to work scoping the streets for interesting characters. At various times during our conversation, he dives off to capture a subject that has caught his eye, with his Sony Alpha 7R IV and 24-70mm Sigma lens. These subjects may not be the first thing many photographers would think to focus on for commercial or editorial use, but they include such things as interesting doorways, passers-by engaged in deep conversation, buses navigating the streets and even a dog relieving itself on a nearby lamp post. What do they all have in common? They all convey the



# SHOOT LIKE A PRO



## The shooting gear Joas uses

**1 Sony A7R IV**  
This high-resolution mirrorless camera offers Joas the flexibility to remain inconspicuous when shooting on the street. Joas mostly keeps the compatible vertical grip attached for easy portrait shooting.

**2 Sigma 24-70mm DG DN**  
Joas uses this as his main standard lens. The constant f/2.8 aperture allows the blurring of backgrounds, while the focal length is ideal for street photography and some architecture.

**3 Sony FE 70-200mm f/4 G OSS**  
Joas uses this lens when he needs to capture his subjects from a distance, for candid shots, or to compress perspective.

**4 Canon TS-E 24mm f/3.5L**  
Joas owns both this and the TS-E 17mm Canon shift optic. These specialist lenses enable him to capture architecture without converging verticals, which is essential for his commercial work.

**5 Hoya PRO1 Digital filters**  
A circular polariser is a common item in many photographers' kitbags and Joas's is no different. This filter helps cut reflections in buildings and deepen colour and contrast of blue skies.

**6 Fujifilm GFX50**  
Joas also uses the Fujifilm medium format system for some commercial work, including GF 23mm f/4 and GF 32-64mm f/4 lenses.  
**\*Not featured in image**

In a city like London, I became fascinated with the diversity in people's ethnicity and rich history

flavour of the environment and paint a picture of everyday life in London. So, how does Joas approach his subjects creatively?

"The first thing I do is study the environment around the subject, to understand what sort of challenges I will encounter. Secondly, I analyse the lighting conditions (in and out) to calculate the right time or even the right season to get the best light to photograph the project, place or area."

However, in a city that is photographed as much as London, how can Joas be certain that he is capturing something unique and, importantly, sellable?

"I research whether somebody else has already shot the same subject, as it is often interesting to observe what has been done to overcome the previous results. This method works for both architectural photography and stock street photography. When preparing to shoot stock street photography, I normally define the area where I will work – that

could be a street or a postcode – then I research on Google and Wikipedia about all the historical and trendy sites around."

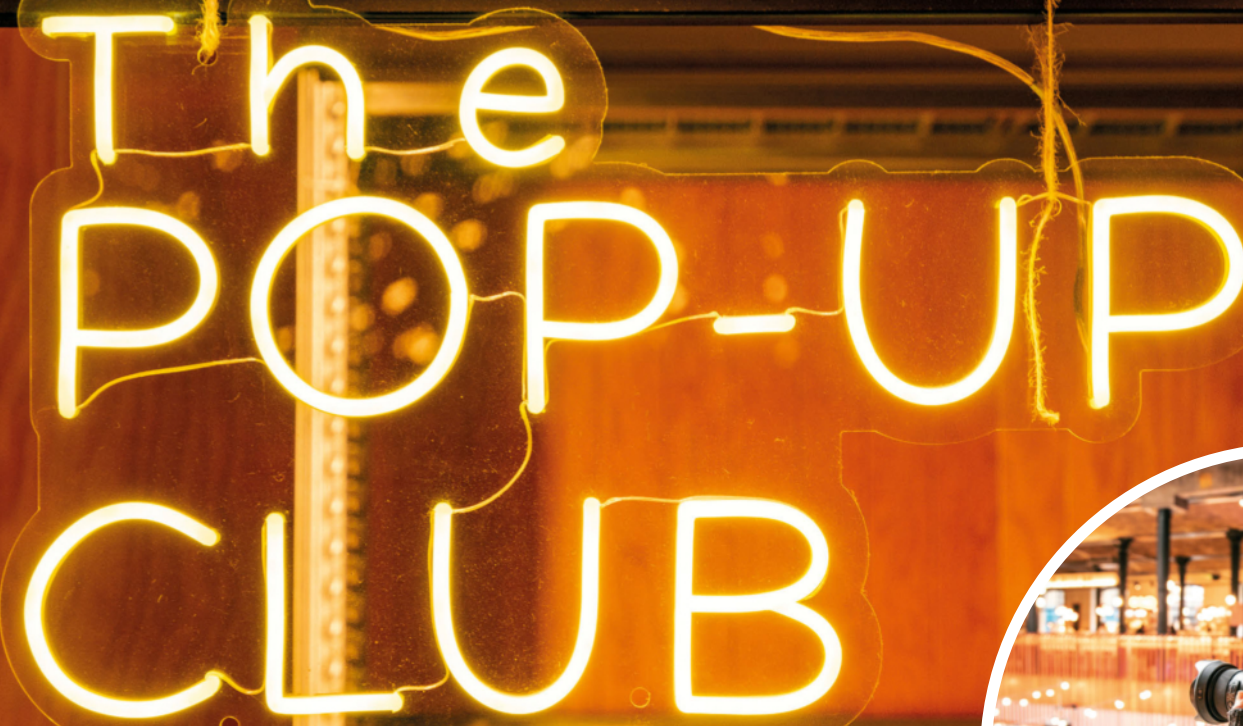
With his camera still to his eye, I ask Joas what kind of subjects he chooses. Many people shoot street scenes, but what makes his work a source of income?

"I look for historical sites, places and signs, also trendy places and well-established brands, from clothes shops to restaurants. The most sellable shots are the ones where I can get a nice interaction between the right profile people for the place and that brand (such as business professionals walking down Cornhill in the City) – something that is almost staged, but which is, in fact, a result of a lot of time spent waiting just for the right moment."

We round the corner into Chinatown and Joas immediately captures a shot of two girls eating in a noodle bar across the street. They notice him and he waves, so they smile and strike a pose. With people, how does Joas








## PHOTOJOURNALISM

© Joas Souza

control expressions and manage interactions such as these, while trying to remain inconspicuous?

“My main strategy is to blend into the crowd and be as unobtrusive as possible. I get some distance, using a telephoto lens, find the spot and wait for the right moment to capture. Depending on the situation and the environment, I choose a more photo-journalistic approach, playing the tourist using my little, but powerful, Fuji X100V to shoot around without being noticed. Patience and speed are key.”

The next challenge concerns rights and legal obligations. Where and how can his images be used?

“Most of my everyday street stock shots are for editorial usage, otherwise, I would need a model and property release from every single person and property in the shot, which is unrealistic. The biggest challenges of shooting commercial street images are exactly that, releases. That is why my commercial street shots are confined to commissioned jobs where I work with models in a selected background. I normally use a shallow depth of field to

blur the background enough so I don't need a property release.”

We explore the vibrant Seven Dials market, where I'd been a couple of weeks earlier but hadn't thought to bring a camera, and then head south again, towards Trafalgar Square. At this point, Joas stops to switch lenses from his 24-70mm to an adapted Canon 24mm Tilt/Shift optic. This allows him to capture the architecture of the world-famous plaza, free from distortions.

“For street stock photography, I normally carry three lenses in my bag, the Canon 17mm or the 24mm TS-E to capture houses, churches and buildings without vertical distortions, the Sigma 24-70mm F2.8 DG DN Art Lens and the Sony FE 70-200mm f/4 G OSS. Those are enough to cover all my needs,” he explains.

Once again, the choice of subject might seem counter-intuitive, as Joas focuses on shooting London's famous red buses as they pass in front of St Martin-in-the-Fields church. This might appear contrary to his previous statement about finding unique images, but he also

## Build your network

### Get yourself connected with the right people

The third challenge to cracking the stock industry (after finding subjects and managing rights) is connecting yourself to potential clients. Joas emphasises the need for SEO for online promotion but also prepares for face-to-face networking. He adds a QR code to his gear, so prospective customers can directly access his work. This actually occurred during our shoot, when someone enquired about Joas's specialisms and was able to scan and view his portfolio immediately. Even if it takes a while, this could lead to a commission in the future, as Joas is keen to point out.



Pre-empting client requirements and directly contacting companies who might benefit from his large stock collection allows Joas to build up a network of connections



## Stock photo tips

- 📍 **Relevant story** Capture images that are specific to an area and say something about its atmosphere.
- 🔍 **SEO** Make sure you apply appropriate captions and keywords to your images when archiving to make them searchable.
- 📐 **Strong composition** Make sure your subject is very clear in the frame and is easy to see.
- 👶 **Children in frame** Avoid incorporating children into your stock images as this can complicate their usability.
- ⚖️ **Avoid licencing issues** Don't shoot in restricted or private locations as this can infringe property rights. It may create legal trouble later on and limit editorial usage of images.



EDITORIAL IMAGES



CANDID SHOTS



aims to capture shots that typify London as a destination or brand.

Joas's images are original in their composition and focal point, yet they are ideal for any business looking for editorial images that show off the immediate, iconic environment.

"I'm quite technical," he says when asked to describe his style. "I'm always looking for strong compositions to draw the eye towards the centre of attention, such as the use of lines. I'm also naturally curious, so I love walking around London looking for interesting stories that I may be able to visually tell."

I notice that Joas always shoots his images in both orientations, to cover his client bases. He makes sure he will capture exactly what a customer needs.

As we head back towards Covent Garden Market, completing our lengthy circular walk, our conversation turns to the type of processing he does.

"Post production of my street stock photos is straightforward," says Joas. "It is divided into four steps. First, I select the best shots. Then I organise the shots by lens used, opening each group in batches to remove chromatic aberrations and lens distortions. Next, I apply a specific preset that suits the season. I tend to warm up the images taken during the spring and summer and cool down the ones shot in autumn and winter, adjusting the shadows and highlights. Finally, I export JPEGs with compression at 10."

We settle in for a well-earned coffee at the Market, as the sun

begins to set. I have to admit that my view of street photography has been refreshed somewhat.

It seems the actual subject is only half of the potential of an image. The key to success is less to do with why someone might want to buy a photo and more with who might benefit from the content, now or in the future.

As we're enjoying our coffee, Joas's phone pings. Somebody has bought a photo of a squirrel. Why, who knows? We laugh but it illustrates the focus of today's shoot. Someone, somewhere, has found a use for what might seem to many like a mundane scene.

"It's all about what you need it for," says Joas as we part ways. As for me, I find myself paying more attention to my fellow passengers on the tube back to Heathrow.



#### Location, location

Joas researches the characteristics of each area he photographs, picking out features that might appeal to editorial clients looking to promote local businesses

## Joas's pro steps to effective street stock imagery



**1 Research the area** Start by using freely available resources, such as Google Maps and Apple's Maps app, to find ideal subject material. Research the history and current land use of properties and the surrounding environment to identify the correct styling for your shots.



**2 Choose your lens** With your choice of subject identified, select an optic that will create the impression you're after. For candid shots, a longer lens will allow you to focus in unnoticed from further away, but a wider focal length could make your shots feel more immersive to the viewer.



**3 Set exposure** I set my cameras with a fixed shutter speed and aperture and ISO on auto. Common settings are 1/125sec at f/11, but thanks to the modern IBIS, I can dial down the speed to 1/10 and use an ND filter to blur people for effect.



**4 Vary aspect ratio** Presetting the aspect ratio in-camera prevents mistakes when shooting for a specific purpose, such as for a client's social media platforms. With the frame shape preselected, you can compose your shots correctly straight out of the camera.



**5 Wait for the moment** With the camera set up and ready, position yourself at an engaging location and wait for the right composition to come together naturally. Shoot multiple frames to boost the chance of capturing passers-by in the perfect pose, for example.



**6 Shoot both orientations** When shooting a commission, always bear the client's brief in mind. Remember that, unless there are compositional restrictions at the location, shooting in both landscape and portrait orientation maximises the usability of your photos.