ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY

FOR ALL LEVELS OF CAMERA AND EXPERIENCE
EQUIPMENT

- Equipment
  - Camera
    - Compact
    - DLSR
    - Large format (view) camera ($12,000)
  - Lenses
    - Wide Angle lens ($250 – $2,000)
    - Telephoto (zoom) lens
    - Fish-eye lens ($750)
    - Tilt-shift lens ($1,700 – $4,200)
  - Tripod: taller is better
  - Software: Photoshop or PaintShop
  - Filters: i.e. neutral density & UV
  - Lighting, for internal rooms if possible
Architectural Photography Issues

- Distortion in the lens
  - pin-cushion occurs at the upper limit of the zoom; telephoto
  - barrel effect occurs at the lower limit of the zoom; wide angle
  - tilt-shift lenses are complicated to operate
  - Loss of useable area in frame due to focus and depth of field
  - Correction is achieved by using a “primary lens”, with very narrow range of focus.
Architectural Photography Issues

- **Convergence** is the distortion caused by tilting the camera up in order to capture the top of the structure. It creates the impression that the subject is “falling away”.
  - Can be corrected by tilt-shift lens
  - Software can correct by changing the perspective and vertical tilt.
  - *Try taking a series of photos vertically, then using the panorama function to create a single image of the tall structure. Lastly, corrected for the barrel effect and convergence.*
Architectural Photography Issues

• Lighting
  – Glare – causes loss of contrast, usually caused when the sunlight is very high (noontime).
  – Shadows – obscures the details, can be distracting.
  – *Try using the bracketing function, taking two (or more) photos with varying exposure, then using software to merge the layers for the HDR.*
Know Your Subject
why to take the photo

• Essentials
  – It is about geometry, symmetry and repetition.
  – It is about balance, style and colour
Know Your Subject

• What is the purpose of the structure
  – Domestic; a patio, a home, an apartment, a palace, a hotel
  – Public space; a mall, a library, museum, garden
  – Functional; bridge, aqueduct, gate, ship
  – Natural
Know Your Subject

• Learn about the story and history of the subject. Things you can focus on to express the narrative?
• Try to see what the architect is conveying; Style & sophistication, power & wealth, etc.
Tips – The rules to keep

- Remember to check
  - White balance: it is different for interior vs. exterior
  - IS0: when using a tripod, low IS0 is better
- Use the widest angle of view as possible.
- Bright and well lighted buildings and rooms are better than darker ones. Ambient lighting is, more often than not, all that is available.
- Avoid clutter which will distract the eye.
Tips – The rules to keep

• Avoid having people in the photo. They detract from the purpose, which is the building. Having people will demand the focus of our attention away from the structure. *If you have unwanted people in the photo, take a second when they have gone, then clone, merge or blend the images.*

• Try stepping back and using a telephoto lens to avoid convergence. Raise the focal centre of the camera to a higher position, ideally half way the height of the subject. *Even a stepladder, for instance, can remove some unwanted convergence.*
Tips – The rules to keep

• Give older buildings some space; to set context with surroundings, to set an atmosphere or experience. Include other details to add interest (i.e. fence).
• Lead the eye. Make use of staircases, spirals, arches, laneways, and entrance ways great and small.
• Don’t ignore other special details.
Tips – The rules to break

• Not everything has to be outstanding, monumental or pretty. The photo just has to serve the purpose.
• Play with White Balance or Monochrome to change the atmosphere.
Tips – The rules to break

- On rare occasions including people can add information, such as scale, or interest to a structure.
- Shadows can be a friend. They can add atmosphere and contrast.
  - Sometimes a low sun (either sunrise or sunset) will cast long shadows on structure, but need more light.
Tips – The rules to break

• High sun can eliminate unwanted shadows, but and the price of contrast.
• Even a night shot of a structure can be impressive, using natural or other lighting. Many structures use repetition, symmetry and other detailing which adds interest as intended by the architect.
Tips – The rules to break

• Add convergence to your view.
  – A low position can add convergence giving the structure a grander sense of height.
  – Convergence can be horizontal to emphasize long features.

• Try using slow shutter speed to blur-out unwanted features, such as people. Using a neutral density filter can achieve this and other effects.
Difficult Structures

All these challenge the depth of field.

– Bridges and very tall buildings are very challenging, unless you have the right equipment such as wide angle or tilt-shift lenses. In trying to capture a bridge complete it can become “lost” in the rest of the environment. Some of the best perspectives are from aerial vantage points, not available to every photographer.

– Skyscrapers
– Domes

Very busy structures, with noisy backgrounds, too much repetition

– Churches, museums
– Bridges
– Narrow city streets with crowded buildings, windows, wire, people
PREPARATION

Advice to Crew:

“If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something.”
PREPARATION

• Check when the building is open, if you are going to photo the interior
• Check the weather, if you are shooting the exterior
• Do you need permission? Some sites, in many countries, do not allow casual photographing.
PREPARATION

• Plan to make several visits to the site.
  – Orient your self with the building.
  – Look for locations and select a point of view.
  – Look for light sources, windows; do you need extra.
  – Will the photos work better when the sun is low in the east (or west) with long shadows, or high over the subject.
  – Sometimes the winter season when trees and shrubs are without foliage will allow a better view.
• Make a list and don’t forget your equipment.
Think Local

• There is so much architecture locally to enjoy, too.
References and Links

- http://www.ephotozine.com/article/basic-architecture-photography-tips-4782
- http://www.lightstalking.com/architecture-tips
- http://photo.net/learn/architectural/exterior
- http://www.fotobblur.com/articles/1/architecture-photography-tips
- Local architecture styles
  - http://www.ontarioarchitecture.com/styleschronological1875.htm