

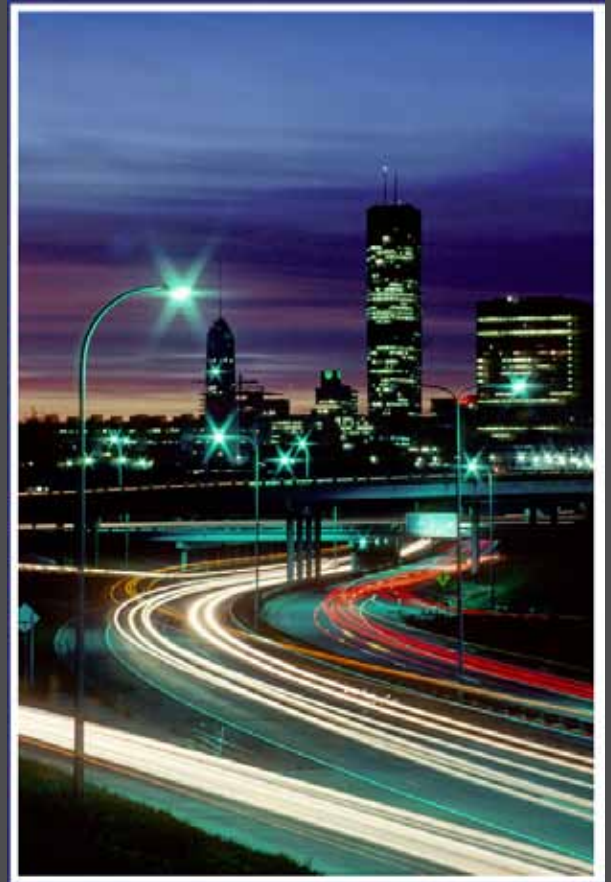
About “*Cityscapes At Twilight*”

This article began as an assignment for a class I took in the summer of 1979. It’s a “how-to” article, about creating time-exposure photos such as the one at right.

Of course, the techniques described in the article are obsolete now. Back then, all cameras used film.

In order to create this PDF file, I had to scan the pages of a copy of the magazine. The problem was, the pages of the magazine were a bit yellow, having been printed in 1980. So it took a bit of “clean-up” to get the scanned images looking reasonably presentable.

By the way, I added the big red arrows; wouldn’t want you to miss certain details.



I’ve put this online to show a few of the things I have done. I’ve been calling myself a writer in recent years, so I thought I would show everyone, including those who perhaps didn’t know me back then, that I’ve been writing for over thirty years.

~ Jan

Petersen's
Photographic

OCTOBER, 1980



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Petersen's PhotoGraphic Magazine Vol 9; No. 6; October 1980

32

PHOTOGRAPHING THE GREAT LIFE CHAIN

by Bill Hurter

50

ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAITS

by Loretta Ayeroff

56

KURT FISHBACK: CULTURAL DOCUMENTS

Portfolio

64

CITYSCAPES AT TWILIGHT

by Jan Smith

76

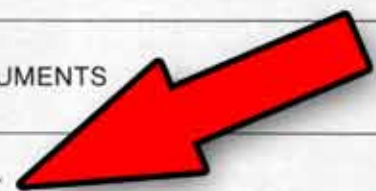
IMAGES FROM THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

by Aldo Panzani

94

THE BROMOIL PROCESS, PART II

by Daniel K. Weeks



DEPARTMENTS

4

OTHER VOICES

6

GUIDE LINES

11

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

12

PRO TALK

14

YOU CAN DO IT

16

SELF-ASSIGNMENT

21

SPEC SHEET

22

THE MEDIUM FORMAT

24

PRODUCT PROOF SHEET

26

SILVER DREAMS

COVER



Photographer Raiko Hartman utilizes a split background, positioning model Dorie Stevens at an angle to create a composition that rises above your usual shot. A good example of how one can introduce simple, basic elements to create a setting. Hartman used a Hasselblad camera with a 150mm lens. His film was 120 Kodak Ektachrome 64. The soft focus was achieved by a black stocking over the lens. For lighting, a soft box for key plus a fill was used.

DEPARTMENTS

28

INSIGHT

30

HIGH TECH

49

PHOTO/CONTEST NEWS

72

FAR EAST JOURNAL

86

PRACTICAL OPTICS

90

GALLERY

98

TALKING TECH

100

ADVERTISING INDEX

101

BLUEPRINT

103

ONE TO ONE

Have you ever wanted to photograph a city skyline at night, but didn't know how to go about it? For sheer impact, try shooting time exposures of traffic against the silhouette of a city skyline. It's a winning combination, yet one that's not hard to photograph. I've devised an easy method of producing these time exposures, using relatively basic camera equipment. The method is so effective, it'll work every time!

I have 35mm single-lens reflex equipment, but any camera with an adjustable lens and a time-exposure setting will work as well.

Of course, you'll need a tripod and a cable release for your skyline shots. Also, you must have a watch that shows the seconds, and flashlight is handy, too. Finally, be sure to bring a pad and pencil to record exposure data and other useful facts on which I'll elaborate later.

I've used Kodak Kodachrome 64 Film for my skyline photographs. If you're shooting skylines for the first time, use a film with an ASA 64 rating, such as Kodachrome 64 or Kodak Ektachrome 64 Film. That way, your results should be similar to mine.

PLANNING AND SHOOTING FOR SUCCESS

An important factor in your success is advance planning. Scout a location and choose a good vantage point well ahead of time. Otherwise, you will waste valuable time deciding where to go. Be sure you know what time the sun will set (check in your local newspaper) and allow enough

CITYSCAPES AT TWILIGHT

USING TIME EXPOSURES TO PRESERVE LIGHT PATTERNS

BY JAN SMITH

time for traveling and setting up your equipment.

The actual photographing is a simple procedure. After mounting your camera on the tripod, with the cable release attached, set the lens to f/16. Next, set the shutter-speed dial to the "B" setting for time exposures.

While waiting for the sky to darken, there will be time to jot a few things in your notebook. I always record the date, the time of sunset, the type of film used, and the lens focal length. Remember, it will be days, perhaps weeks, before you see these photographs. By then, you'll need the notes to help you recall how each shot was made.

From experience, I've found the best shots are those taken about 45 minutes after the sun has set. But, just to make sure you catch the best lighting, start a bit earlier. Wait until the sun has been down for 30 minutes, then make your first time exposure, for one minute. Record the time you begin each exposure. Continue making one-minute exposures, at two- to four-minute intervals, for half an hour. The exact interval between exposures will be

dictated by the movement of traffic. Wait until there is a steady stream of vehicle headlights approaching before starting an exposure.

The key to my procedure is to use the same exposure time and lens setting for all photographs. One minute is usually sufficient time to allow traffic on streets or highways to drive by and "paint" lines of light on each photograph. Following these steps, what results can you expect?

EVALUATING RESULTS

The first shots will be a little too light. But gradually, as the skylight wanes, the next photographs will begin to have the proper exposure. The last shots, as you might expect, will be too dark. But in the middle of the set there will be several very good shots, and probably one outstanding one—at least in terms of proper exposure. Photos No. 1 through 7 show what a typical sequence looks like. As you can see, photos No. 3 through 5 all have good exposure. My favorite, though, is photo No. 4, taken 47 minutes after sunset.

By now, you've no doubt correctly deduced that this is

nothing more than a thinly disguised form of exposure bracketing. But instead of re-setting the camera for each shot, you keep the camera settings the same, and let the earth's rotation gradually dim the light for you.

Incidentally, you can reverse the procedure and photograph a skyline against the eastern sky before sunrise. Just begin an hour before sunrise, and shoot for half an hour. You're sure to get some properly exposed pictures.

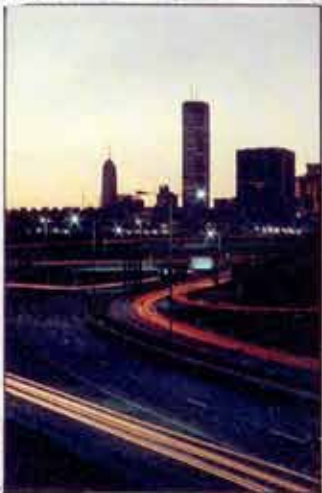
COMPOSITION HINTS

Now that you know the procedure for skyline photography, I'd like to add a few suggestions to help in your composition. First, choose a high vantage point, such as a bridge, a hill, or a tall building. Photos No. 8 and 9 show why a high vantage point is better. In photo No. 8, I photographed the St. Paul skyline from right beside the highway. The exposure is nice, but the highway and buildings are compressed into about 1/3 of the frame. Photo No. 9 shows the same skyline, but from a high bluff. The higher angle expands the foreground, transforming the highway into a sweeping curve of light. Now the foreground and background are well separated, creating the illusion of distance in the photo.

You can also shoot from tall buildings. I wanted to take some shots from an upper floor of a particular high-rise apartment building. I didn't know anyone living there, so I put a card on the bulletin board in the lobby, promising a free print to anybody willing



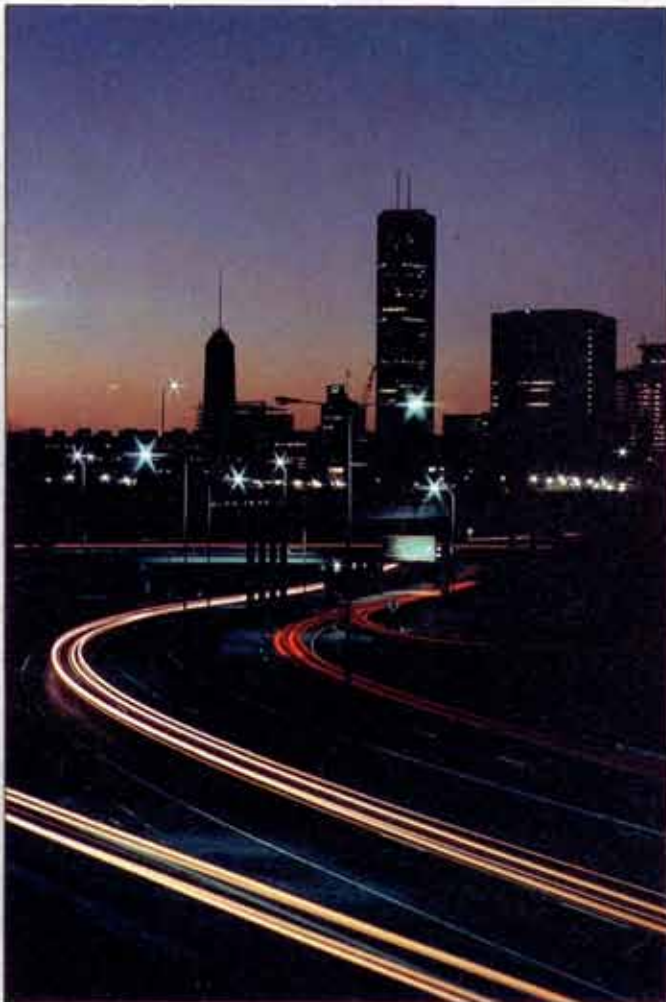
SUNSET



35 MINUTES PAST SUNSET



42 MINUTES PAST SUNSET



47 MINUTES PAST SUNSET

1-7. Selection of photos from sequence of Minneapolis skyline illustrates author's time-exposure technique for twilight photography. Photo No. 1 was taken just after sun had set, at exposure of 1/60 at f/3.5 (all shots made on Kodak Kodachrome 64 film); all other shots were exposed for one

to let me come up to photograph. That same day, I got an invitation from a resident on the 14th floor!

A word of caution about choosing a vantage point from bridges: Avoid those that carry heavy vehicles. A few

minute at 1/16. Photo No. 2 was shot at 35 minutes past sunset; photo No. 3 was shot at 42 minutes past sunset; photo No. 4 was shot at 47 minutes past; photo No. 5 was shot at 50 minutes past; photo No. 6 was shot at 57 minutes past; photo No. 7 was shot at 60 minutes past sunset.

cars are no problem; a parade of buses and semis will cause the bridge—and your camera—to jiggle intolerably. Finally, in choosing your vantage point, try to find one with streets or highways that will produce a strong lead-in line.



50 MINUTES PAST SUNSET



57 MINUTES PAST SUNSET



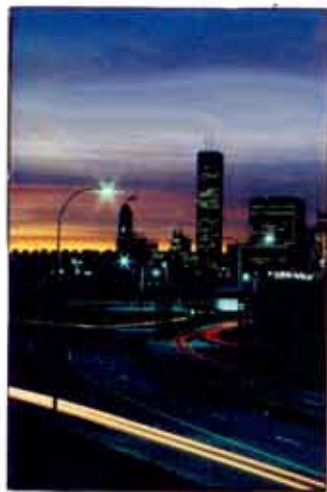
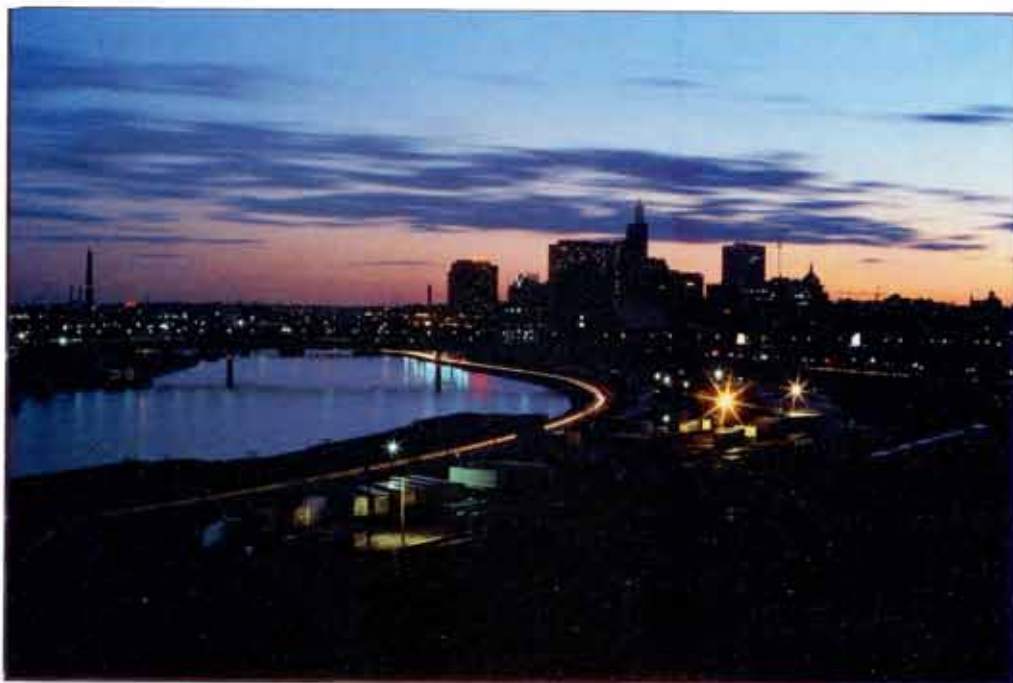
60 MINUTES PAST SUNSET

CITYSCAPES AT TWILIGHT



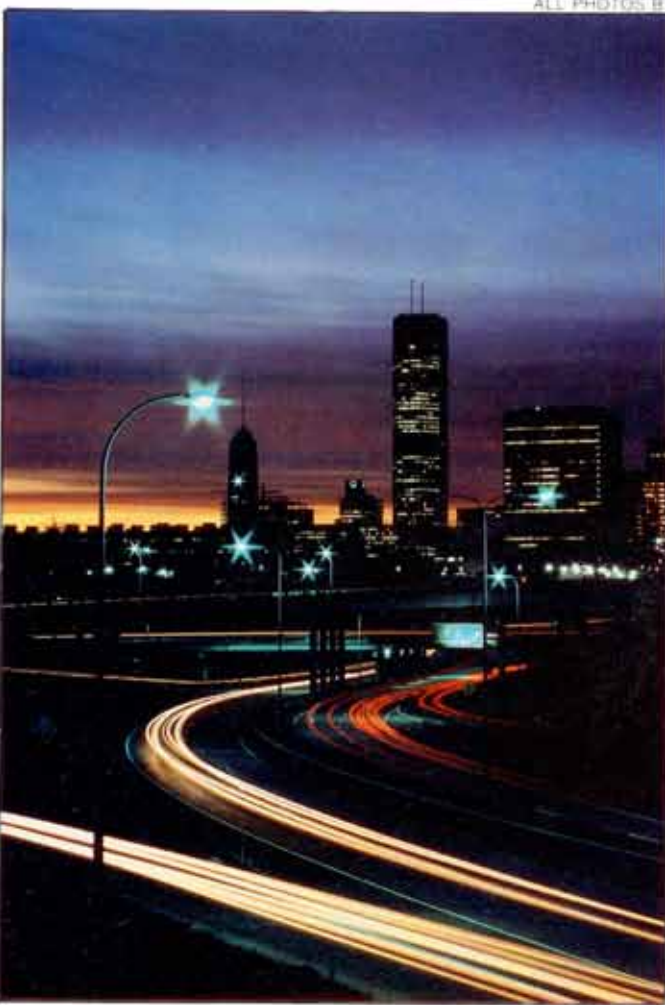
Compare photos No. 10 and 11. See how the lines made by headlights coming around the curve have made photo No. 11 into a much more interesting photograph than photo No. 10.

Weather and sky conditions will affect final results, as well. The thin, lavender clouds helped in photos No. 10 and 11, too. However, a heavily overcast sky thwarts the desired silhouette effect, as you can see in photo No. 12.



The type of traffic you're photographing will influence your results, too. For example, cars with blinking turn signals, clearance lights on trucks, flashing lights on emergency vehicles, and lights on trains, boats, and aircraft all will leave distinctive trails of light on your slides or negatives. Photo No. 13 shows trails left by turn signals and clearance lights.

To illustrate the importance traffic plays in your composition, compare photos No. 14 and 15. In photo No. 14, the



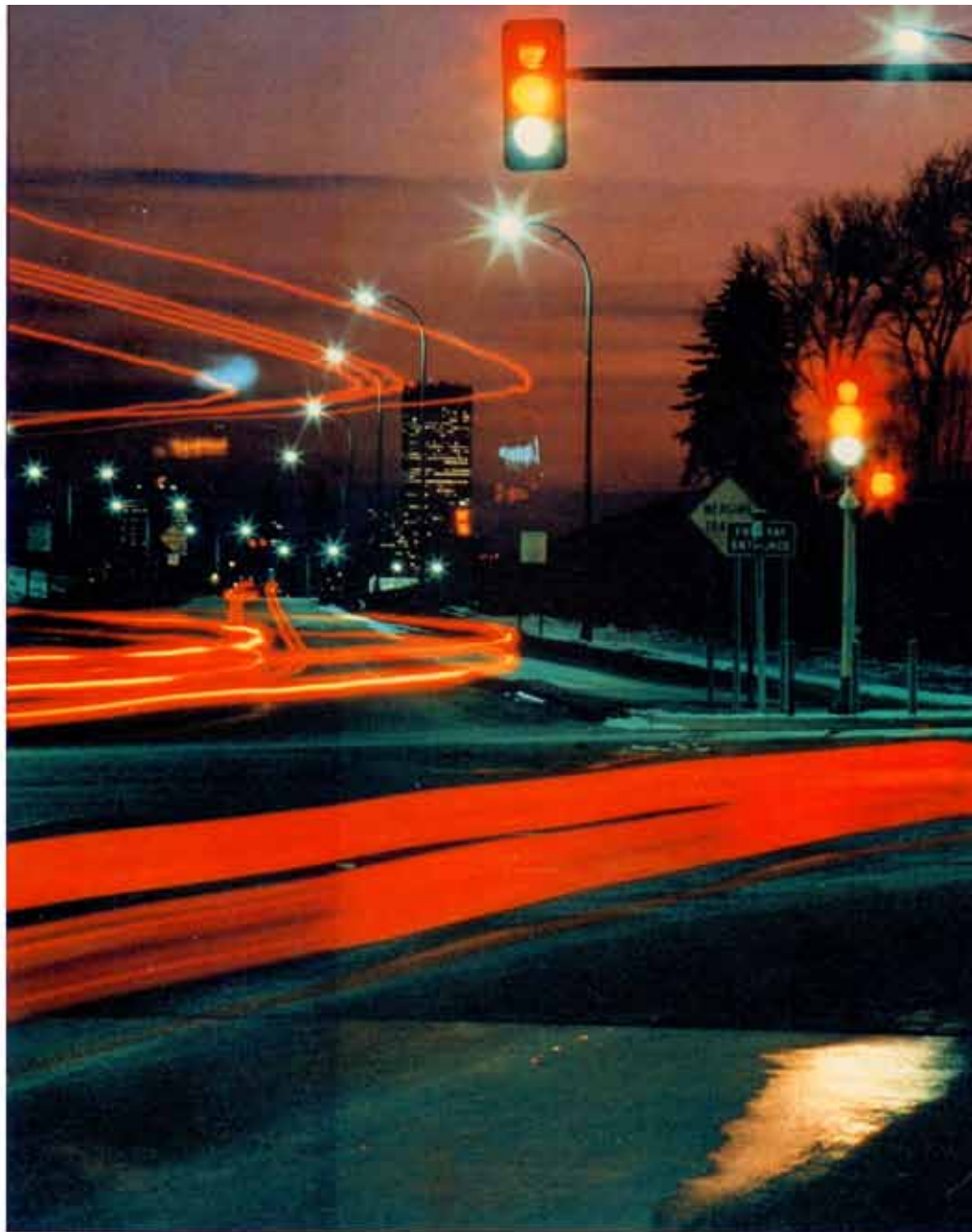
8. St. Paul skyline was photographed from beside highway, using 58mm lens.

9. Same skyline and same lens were used here and for photo No. 8, but here higher vantage point (on bluff) provided much better composition.

10. & 11. Notice how headlights coming around curve in photo No. 11 make composition more interesting than photo No. 10, which is same scene without headlights.

12. Despite strip of clear sky at horizon, the heavy clouds have ruined the desired silhouette effect here.

ALL PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR EXCEPT AS INDICATED.



13

PHOTO BY JOANNE SMITH

nearly horizontal lines in the foreground have produced a static, uninteresting composition. (Also, the green signs are much too prominent.) In photo No. 15, the curved lines leading into downtown Minneapolis make a superior composition. This photograph best expresses, for me, all of the beauty, the grandeur, and the excitement I felt when I was there!

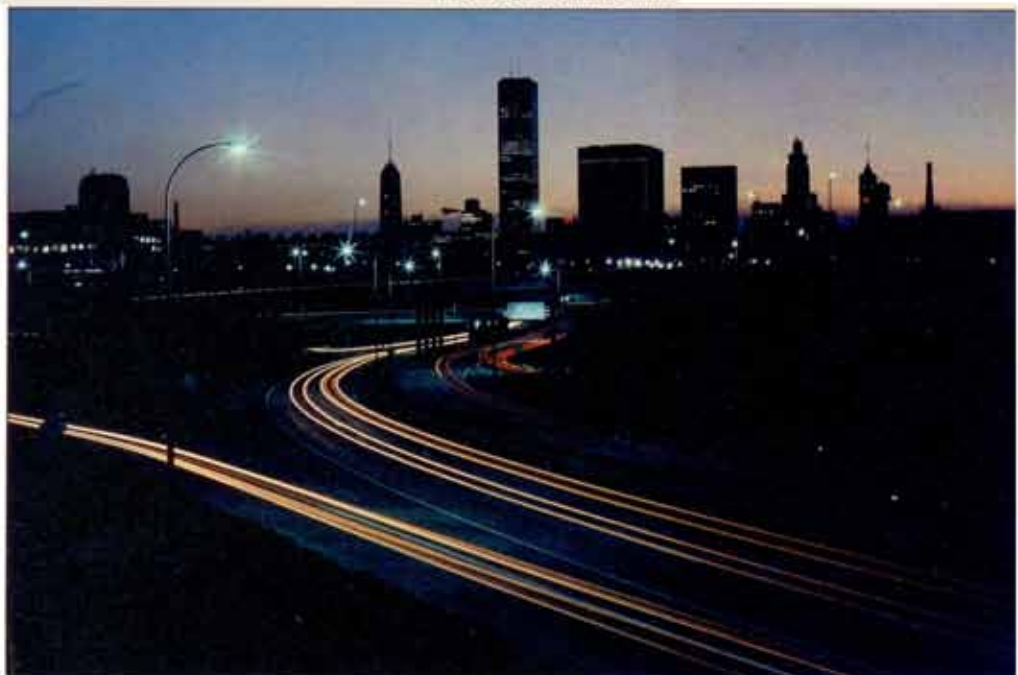
The transformation from the steel-and-concrete world of the daytime city to one of lights and silhouettes at night is truly metamorphosis on a grand scale. Lights begin to appear everywhere, some stationary, others in motion. In time exposure, the latter become ribbons of light, curving gracefully through the photograph. The effect, like that of a spectacular sunset, is transient, lingering but a moment, then giving way to darkness. Nevertheless, the camera—guided by an artistic eye—can capture and preserve these beautiful patterns of light woven into the jeweled silhouette of a city skyline. □



14

13. Flashing turn signals, tail-lights, and clearance lights produced light patterns here. Notice that camera recorded all three colors of traffic signal lights during one-minute exposure.

14. & 15. These shots of Minneapolis skyline show how important strong lead-in line is.



15