

Dutch Angle Composition  
by Joe Holler

Since I started writing for Ultimate Photo Guide, I have become friends with a wonderful photographer and Managing Editor of the magazine, f-stop fitzgerald. He recently sent me a copy of a book he did in conjunction with Ken Follett entitled Pillars of the Almighty (1994). Ken Follett contributed excerpts from his novel, Pillars of the Earth, one of my all time favorite books, and f-stop contributed beautiful picture of churches from all over the world. They put together a stunningly beautiful book. To purchase the book click here. (make a link to: [http://www.amazon.com/Pillars-Almighty-A-Celebration-Cathedrals/dp/B0038Y8Q56/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1335282740&sr=8-3](http://www.amazon.com/Pillars-Almighty-A-Celebration-Cathedrals/dp/B0038Y8Q56/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1335282740&sr=8-3))

The first thing that caught my eye about f-stop's pictures is the unusual angles at which he took many of his images. I always have strived to get my images vertical and horizontal, and if I fail to do so with the camera, I will correct them with the computer. As you can see from this image, f-stop made no such attempt. One rule that I have always followed is to get the horizon line horizontal. Obviously, f-stop doesn't agree.



Our Lady of Chartres Cathedral; Chartres, France

At first I was puzzled by that composition, and, quite frankly, didn't care for it. But, after letting the idea sink in and marinate a bit, I have come to appreciate the technique and marvel at f-stop's use of it. If I were to edit this image, I would have straightened the

horizon line like this (I had to manipulate the picture quite a lot to even be able to straighten the horizon):



Make the horizon line horizontal

Or, maybe even distorted the image and not only straightened the horizon line but also straightened the building like this:



Make the building vertical

Which way is best? That can only be answered by each viewer. As for myself, I can say that f-stop's picture really got my attention, particularly because he broke the rules, and made a more dramatic image. I was so intrigued by the technique that I asked him about it and he told me the technique is called Dutch Angle Composition.

In reading up on it, I found many references about using the technique to enhance the feeling of motion in a picture. I have to agree that it does. I originally edited this image by straightening the buildings but I like much better this way:



Tilting the image gives a sense of motion.

Dutch Angle Composition can greatly enhance the drama of an image but when should you use it? One suggestion made by made by photographer Neil van Niekerk in his article “photographic composition – tilted composition / Dutch angle” (May 2007) is

“... when an image has certain elements that fall along a strong perpendicular line, then a tilted image has a **dynamic balance**.”

You can read the article here: <http://neilvn.com/tangents/2007/05/31/tilted-compositions/>

I think the next image is stronger because of the angle but when I first read that comment, I thought he was referring to tilting the strong black lines behind the model.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
*Norah Neri*

Reading further I saw that he was referring to the fact that her face, hand and foot are aligned and would be more dramatic if that line were vertical. He's got a point.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
*Norah Neri*

f-stop has really opened my eyes to a whole new world of photographic possibilities. I will certainly be using Dutch Angle Composition in the future.