

Ansel Easton Adams

In 1902, a great American photographer of the mid-twentieth century was born. Ansel Easton Adams was greatly influenced by Edward Weston, Paul Strand and Alfred Stieglitz. Adams starting point was straight photography, and then branched off to landscape photography. Adams was known for his black and white photographs of Yosemite National Park, the California coast, and other wilderness areas of the American West. Adams spent a lot of time photographing in the national parks. He preferred black and white film to color, because he thought, “black and white ‘saw’ the earth more accurately than color.” Adams work makes us think about the beauty of the landscape compared to other’s work which may make us contemplate life and its meaning.

One of Adam’s legacies to photography was his elaboration of the technical aspect of exposure and development. Adams invented a method called the *zone system*. This system was relatively simple to apply and made it easy to “visualize the results that would be obtained from different regimes of exposure and development.” He used this to divide the gradations of light in a scene into ten zones from black to white. By doing this, he was able to visualize the amount of gray in the final photograph with great accuracy. By using this system, he was able to capture very subtle changes that allowed him to return to the same scene and produce images that were never repetitive.

Together with Imogen Cunningham, Willard Van Dyke and others Adams became one of the informal groups founded in San Francisco in 1930 as 'f64'. Five years later, he published *Making a Photograph*, the first of a series of technical manuals. The *Ansel Adams Basic Photo* series of books was the starting point for many photographers. In this book they began to learn the basics. The updated form as *The New Ansel Adams Photography Series* also remain as a useful reference. Other books that Adams published are: *My Camera in the National Parks* (1950), *Ansel Adams: Images 1923-1974* (1974), *Photographs of the Southwest* (1976), and *Yosemite and the Range of Light* (1979). One other book; which gives a rare and readable insight into the technical problems in the making of some of his best-known photographs, as well as some of his thinking on his pictures, is *Examples - The Making of 40 Photographs*.

Adams served as an official photographer for the Sierra Club, a conservation organization. In 1940, Adams helped found the photography department of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Six years later, he helped establish the first academic department to teach photography, at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. Adams also taught at the Art Center School in Los Angeles. In 1967, Adams helped to contribute the founding of Friends in Photography.

In 1984 Ansel Easton Adams died. That year, the United States Congress established the Ansel Adams Wilderness Area in the Sierra Nevada Mountains after him. In 1985 Mount Ansel Adams was also named for him. In 1985, shortly after his death, *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography* was published. The Ansel Adams Center in San Francisco opened in 1989.

Ansel Adam's photography especially interests me because I love taking landscape and nature pictures. I live in the Adirondack Mountains so I always see so many great scenes. I feel I could take a picture of the same scene a million times until I got the perfect print, and also just to get the many different views. Since we go through all four seasons each year, one scene can make four great prints that are not repetitive. I also like his work compared to other's because he focuses mainly on the beauty of the landscape. I find so much fascinating in the natural world and believe it can make beautiful prints. Shooting black and white film can sometimes be tough, or may leave behind beautiful colors, but when exposed and developed correctly, black and white film can make totally different effects than color film can.

Shooting pictures, developing the film, and then making prints can sometimes be very frustrating, and I have learned this the hard way. Sometimes I think it is just impossible, but when I look at Adam's work I just think to myself: "Wow, someday I hope I am that good." I know that perfection takes practice, practice and more practice. Then hopefully someday it won't be so many headaches and I will be able to enjoy it that much more.

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