



A Visit to the Lubéron

Any photographer who enjoys creating images in picturesque villages will be delighted by a visit to the Lubéron. It is one of France's 45 Regional Natural Parks, which are "inhabited rural areas, recognized at the national level as being of major value in terms of heritage and landscape, yet fragile." The important historic and cultural heritage could come from villages, historic monuments, traditions, agricultural and artisanal activities, local produce etc. The heritage of the Lubéron is primarily its historic villages. It covers about 600 square km (230 square miles) and many of the streets in the villages have been preserved as they were decades ago, without modern buildings to spoil the effect. It is located in the southeastern part of France, in the region known as Provence, and has been lovingly described in the book *A Year in Provence* by Peter Mayle.

Because of this preservation, each village is still unique, and each provides different opportunities for the photographer. Many of them have narrow streets that make excellent leading lines through colorful walls to other colorful walls, or perhaps a church. Attractive windows, shutters, and doorways abound, and are close enough together that one can make effective compositions by combining them. Each village seems to have different kinds of stone stairways. There are plenty of interesting architectural details for those who like them, and with a little effort one can find many colorful examples of peeling paint.

Bonnieux is built on a hill, as are many of the villages in the area. It is one of the largest villages in the Lubéron, and is more up-to-date than some of the others. Many of its stonewalls are not covered in stucco, and so the details of the construction are still visible. But it does not seem to have as many colorful features as many of the other villages.

Céreste is not quite as impressive as some of the other villages on a large scale, but it is full of fascinating details that lend themselves to close-up work. A stroll around the central plaza will reward those who like to make compositions using colorful

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Photo above: *Roussillon wedding*

Lourmarin stairway



doors with peeling paint and convoluted hardware. As in many of the villages, some of the side alleys are well worth exploring with a fairly wide-angle lens to make leading-line views.

Cucuron is notable for the large pond in its central square and the lovely avenue of plane trees, or big old sycamores, that border the pond and extends into the distance beyond it.

There are markets every day of the week in the Lubéron. The Monday market in Forcalquier extends over the entire center of town, and while there is an amazing number of fascinating food stalls there are also plenty of well-designed displays of clothing, household goods, and personal items. One can create colorful pattern shots from these displays. It is worth the better part of a day shooting there, and there are many pleasant cafes and snack bars to fill up the time when the light is less than optimal. There are lots of rustic-looking merchants and shoppers, and one may even be lucky enough to encounter a wandering minstrel.

Gordes is too steep for some photographers to wander in, but a view of the town from the main road to Avignon is well worth a long shot and even a panorama.

Lourmarin, the former home of Albert Camus,



Latch in Céreste



Céreste alley

is full of delightful winding streets and attractive stairways, doors and colorful shutters. The central square is a pleasant place for lunch.

More stone houses with colorful shutters and doorways can be found in Reilanne, and the church steeple provides an attractive background for street pictures. There is a pretty park with plane trees (*Platanus*), which have developed some interesting shapes like a pig or a face.

Roussillon has everything. It is located next to an ochre quarry, which has provided colorful materials for artists for centuries. The walls of the buildings are covered in red, orange, and yellow, with matching or contrasting doors and shutters. The photographer can spend many hours making images of the buildings and streets, and it is useful to do them over and over in different light. There are also splendid rustic stairways that lend themselves to both vertical and horizontal views.



Gordes #1



Saignon street

It is full of colorful doorways and interesting windows that can be made into effective patterns. The town will repay spending an entire day.

The tiny town of Saignon is in the center of it all, and a popular stopping place for hikers. There is a famous view from its “rock” a prominence with a decayed fortress on the top. The town square is attractive, and there are nice little side streets. On many afternoons the inhabitants play at boules, and photographers are welcome to watch.

The countryside also provides many opportunities. In early summer poppies abound, and contrast with vineyards and wild mustard. Later in the summer lavender fields show up well. Plane trees line many of the roads, and many of

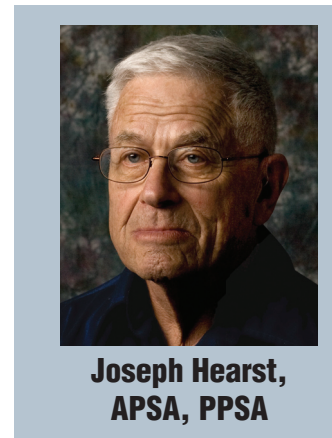
them have wonderful shapes and details. There is even a well-preserved Roman bridge.

It seems that everyone is friendly, and *bon jour* or *bon soir* will almost certainly result in a welcome. Of course, even photographers have to eat, and the food and wine in the Lubéron have a reputation for excellence. There are pleasant cafes for lunch stops in all of the towns, and there are plenty of good restaurants for ending the photographic day.

The Lubéron is easily reached by car from Avignon, which is on the TGV line from Paris, or from Marseille, which has an international airport. An advantage of going via Marseille is that it is quite worthwhile to spend the better part of a day shooting in the Vieux Port district of Marseille itself, before or after the trip to the Lubéron. Many of the narrow streets of the Vieux Port are lined with torn posters and colorful walls, doors and shutters, and some are stairways. These are also good sites for photographing the wide variety of inhabitants of this maritime town. And the port itself is a great source of boats, nets, and rusty bollards. If one does not arrive via Marseille, it is well worth a one-day excursion.

A Nikon D300 was used to make the pictures in this article. The 18-200mm lens was all that was needed for most of them, although a 12-24mm was useful occasionally in narrow alleys. There was no need at all for a longer lens. A tripod helped to keep the walls straight, though Photoshop CS5 made it possible to handhold when the tripod was not convenient to use, since slight tilts can be corrected during processing. The tripod was much more important for HDR and panoramic shots.

All in all, the photographer who loves rustic villages will have a wonderful time in the Lubéron, and will want go back as soon as possible. ■



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Plane tree avenue