

Your Guide to taking Better Cemetery Pictures



My Name is Chico Tauschel. I am the owner of C.Schel Photography in Toronto. I have been providing images to Arbor Memorial of their various properties in Ontario for several years. I've been asked to give advise to photographers in other parts of the country that are shooting

Arbor cemeteries. I'll keep it brief and simple, I promise... getting a good shot need not be complicated. Actually, most of what I say here is just common sense, so forgive me if at times I sound like I'm stating the obvious.

Let's get started.

The single most important word of advice I can give is:

Timing

The day, and time of day you take the picture will dramatically change the way your subject will look. Obviously the day makes a difference, if it's cloudy or sunny, but just as important is the *time* of day. In most cases, you will want the sun's light to fall on, or at least partially fall on, the front of the garden or structure you're trying to capture. Try and get the early morning or late day light- the sun is often less intense, the light is warmer, and the shadows are longer which tends to make things look more dramatic.

Nice early light, great sky





Early early morning light on a north facing structure. This was the only time of day to get a good shot of this building



Late day light. No blue sky but nice soft golden tones

Same structure, different days



Sometimes shooting “into the light” can work, and trying artistic shots like that is fine, but you’ll lose detail in your subject.



An overcast day can be an *advantage*, especially when there is not a lot of sky in the shot and/or you’re shooting something in the shade that has some sun filtering through the trees and is creating blotches of sunlight. Light from an overcast sky reduces, or eliminates, the contrast of sun and shade that is typical of a sunny day.



Work It

Taking a good picture requires work. One can't simply stand in one spot, point their camera, push the button and expect to have a great shot. Like anything in life, it just doesn't work like that. It takes exceptional effort to get exceptional results.

Shoot often. You're probably using a digital camera so it costs nothing to take pictures. Shoot now, edit and delete later.

If possible, visit the garden/structure on different days and at different times of the day.

Move around. Try different angles and /or positions.

Again, effort goes a long way.



Get Down

I have found shooting from a low angle often works best. It will decrease any poor grass conditions in the foreground and can eliminate unwanted background items such as houses, roads, other garden features, etc. You'd be amazed at what can be hidden by shooting low to the ground. I'm often lying on my stomach to get a shot.



OR





Here's what I had to deal with



Here's what I ended up with. No more highway or buildings in the background.



See, I practice what I preach

Make it Right

Many things can be fixed in computer, but try to get the picture right when taking it, rather than having to spend time with the image later. Try not to be lazy here (I often have to remind myself of this point). Walk over and pick up that broken branch, plastic wrap, or whatever that is in the grass over there.

- If there are dead flowers in the shot, change them.
- If there is a stake in the ground, remove it (but remember to put it back).
- If the monument is dirty, clean it with the towel you brought (you brought a towel, right?).
- Some monuments are adorned with many trinkets so try to respectfully remove them for the picture. Of course, don't forget to put them back when you are done. As a tip, with a digital camera, take a picture of the monument before you move anything, that way you'll be able to put things back just like they were by referencing the image on the camera's LCD screen.



Clean when needed

Equipment is important, but not the most important Factor

We all know having a great camera and lens is nice, but in reality it's down on the priority list for taking good pictures. Believe me I know. I spend thousands of dollars on gear every year and I'm always reminded of this fact.

“Photography is the power of observation, not the application of technology”
-Ken Rockwell

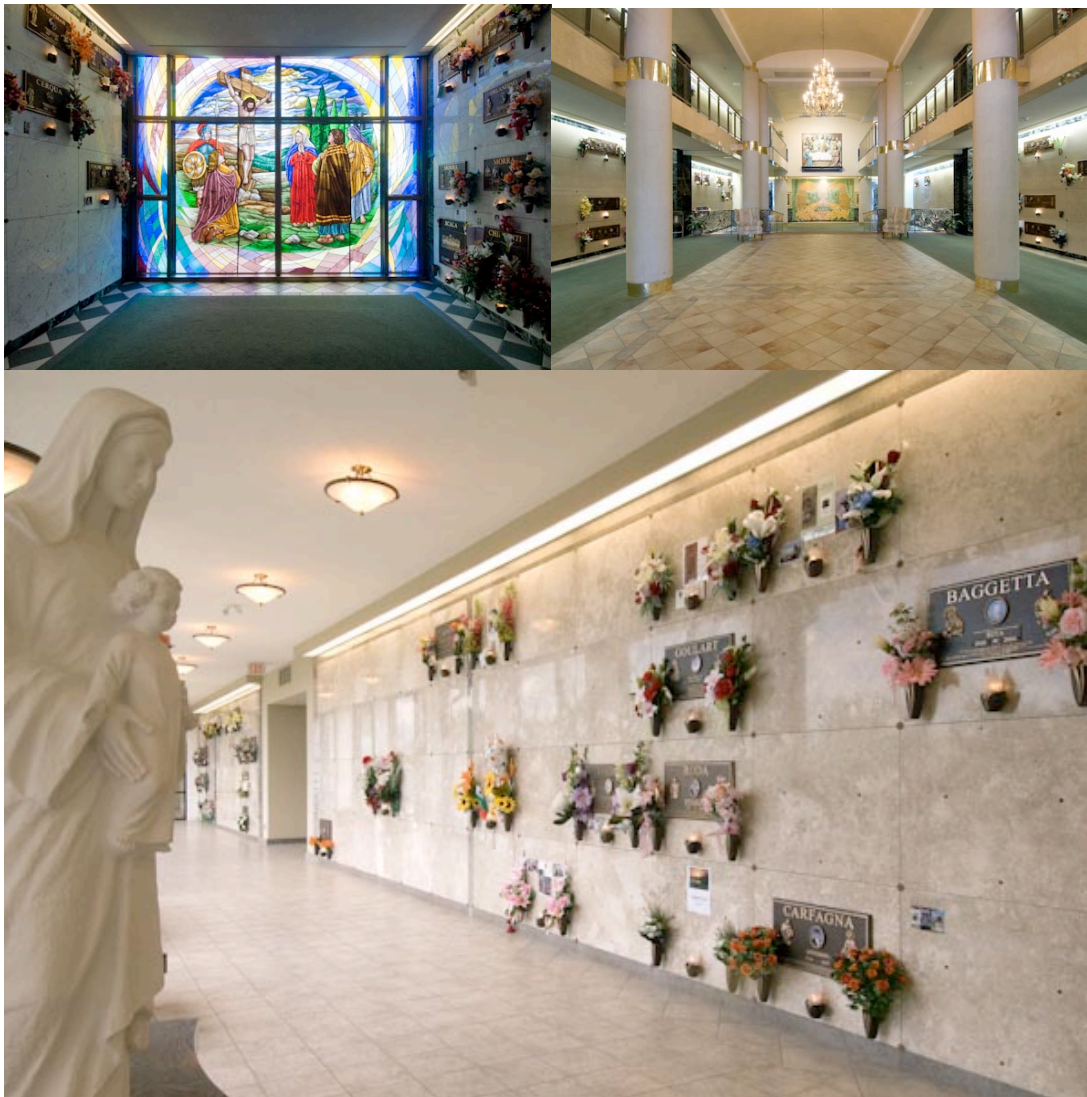
Here are some technical points:

- Shoot horizontal (landscape). The images will most likely be used in that way.
- Consider using a tripod. Having a camera on a tripod encourages one to slow down and study the shot. However, don't let the use of a tripod hinder you from moving around trying different positions.
- When shooting interiors, don't use direct flash. Instead, mount your camera on a tripod and use the existing light. It's amazing how well digital cameras work with ambient light.
- Make sure you provide images at their original highest resolution.
- Please don't have the camera's ISO setting higher than 400 unless absolutely necessary. 400 or LOWER is expected.
- I have found a polarizing filter essential. Enhances skies and reduces reflections. Overall increases saturation. Use it indoors too.
- Please provide the images in Jpeg, Tiff, or PSD format
- A little post production work is certainly encouraged, but don't overdo it with vibrance, saturation, or sharpening.

Things to bring with you:

- A towel (there will be water stations at the cemeteries).
- A broom to sweep away grass clippings on various things.
- Patience. A cemetery is a terrific place to relax, take your time.
- Flowers if you want, but I normally “borrow” flowers from another plot/location.
- Lunch & refreshments (I'm not kidding).

These interior images were taken using completely automatic camera settings with the camera mounted on a tripod (NO flash)



Keep your camera **level** when shooting interiors

Framing the Shot

So you've timed it so it's the right time of day, with good light. There are perfect fluffy clouds in a blue sky. You've cleaned up all the monuments and fixed all the flowers. You've executed all the most important factors. Great, take a shot. Now look to see if there's a leafy branch, or flowers that you can place at the top or bottom of the frame as a border in the shot. It's best if these 'framing elements' are close to your lens so they'll appear out of focus. Always look for something

extra like that if you see it and take a shot, but remember to take one without framing elements in case it doesn't work out as well as expected. As I said earlier, shoot horizontally, but if you see a shot that looks better as a vertical, take one like that too.

Here's what I mean by framing elements;



Foliage at the top



Flowers at the bottom



Bending down to the right position puts the flagpole in an excellent spot... wait for that flag to wave!



Low with excellent foreground

More samples:



Beautiful Colours



Good composition



I had to wait 15 minutes for these swans to find their way to a good position in the shot



In this case, I was on a 6' ladder (whatever it takes)



The early bird catches the best light (and usually blue sky)



Shooting low makes things seem grander



This is one of the few vertical shots I took. I was lying on my back looking up using a wide-angle lens. I must have shot 25 frames trying to get one with the flag to wave just right (thank goodness for digital photography)



A wonderful morning in Windsor

So, there you go. I hope you find my advice useful, but above all else I hope I've left you with a little inspiration, for that's the one factor, above all others, that helps me get my best shots.

Happy Shooting!

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments. My e-mail address is; info@cschelpphoto.com
To see my work, go to my web-site; cschelpphoto.com

Note: If some of you are wondering who took the shots of me, my son Max has accompanied me on many assignments.

